

# Research on the Post-graduate Course on Korean Studies under the Perspective of Area Studies

Guoxian Jin<sup>1</sup>, Le Zhang<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Center for DPRK and ROK Studies, Yanbian University, Yanji 133002, China

<sup>2</sup>School of Art, Northwest University, Xi'an 710127, China

## Abstract

**With the need for more talented people in area studies, the Chinese Ministry of Education promotes area studies. This paper talks about the post-graduate course on Korean Studies under the perspective of Area studies and it considers three parts. First, it talks about the history and current trend of area studies in China, the U.S., and South Korea. Second, it talks about the development of Korean language education and Korean studies in China. Third, it talks about Yanbian University's Korean studies program as an example to illustrate the current situation of Korean studies in the post-graduate education.**

## Keywords

**Area Studies; Korean Studies; Yanbian University.**

## 1. Introduction

In recent years area studies have become popular knowledge, and more and more universities opened research institutes or graduate schools on area studies. Korean studies are one aspect of this new trend of area studies that focus on the Korean peninsula. Before this new trend, the studies on the Korean peninsula mainly focus on the language, but these days the research has broadened to Korean politics, economics, society, and even Korean science and engineering. The graduate course aims to educate research talent through deepening knowledge, so it needs to provide comprehensive knowledge to master certain subjects or areas. This paper talks about the the postgraduate study of Korean studies from the perspective of the trend of area studies.

## 2. The area studies in China and other country

### 2.1. The development of area studies in China

In China, area studies started in the 1960s, and during that period three universities opened the major of international politics. Among them, Renmin University focuses on the socialist movement and soviet areas, Peking University focuses on the Asia and Africa area, and Fudan University focuses on the America and Europe part. Later few universities established research institutes on international studies, but the area studies still has not boomed like these days. Before implementing reform and opening policy, the needs of international politics are not very strong.

With the beginning of the 21st century, China entered WTO, and more and more products are sold to the world, the need to understand different regions has increased rapidly. In 1999, with the Chinese Ministry of Education pointed out some key research institutes of international and area studies, more and more universities established related research institutes. In 2011, the Chinese Ministry of Education started the project of cultivating the institution of international and area studies and selected the first 37 institutions.

Under the Belt and Road initiative, more and more talented international and area personnel are needed. President Xi proposed the Belt and Road initiative in 2013, and this boomed another need to strengthen the need of area studies. President Xi also pointed out that, "Participating in global governance requires a large number of professional talents who are familiar with Party and state policies, understand China's national conditions, have global perspective, have language skills, familiar with international rules and the ability of international negotiations." [1] The area studies in China should be different from the model of the Western version and develop a study that has Chinese characters.

In current China, under the push of political and practical needs, the area studies generated great impact and became a first-level discipline. However, the exact definition about what means area studies is not clearly defined, so there are some similar terms to indicate area studies. The Chinese Ministry of Education uses the translation of "international and regional studies", Peking University established the "Institute of Area Studies" and Tsinghua University established the Institute for International and Area Studies, those naming are all represent area studies in China. Besides this, some scholars advocate "peripheral studies" or "global studies" to emphasize the importance of certain area.

## 2.2. The development of area studies in the U.S.

The area studies in the U.S. vitalized after the Second World War under the political and economic needs. From then on, the research tendency of area studies in the U.S. changed from time to time. In the Cold War period, to fulfill the need to collect information from the "enemy", the government pushed research on the area studies. In this context, the area studies are mainly focused on the USSR and other communist regions. So, the Asia studies in the U.S. focuses on communist China and related areas through the eyes of Orientalism and modernist theory in the 1960s. The Social Science Research Council and National Education Defense Act and research funds from the federation level or private, are pushing major institutions to establish area studies.

From 1980, with the ease of the Cold War and the move of globalism, generated the theory of post-modernism and post-colonialism. This new tendency reject euro-centralism and embraces multiculturalism, which also causes some changes in area studies in the U.S. After the end of the Cold War and the improvement of Sino-U.S. relations, Asia studies also changed from "red China" to "Pacific Rim" and emphasized the "world economy". In this new trend, the area studies also tried to transfer to a study that focuses on a certain area itself, not from the eyes of the West.

Statistics point out that each year, there will be more than 2,000 doctor level researchers and 6,000 master-level language and area studies researchers will be produced in the U.S., [2] which means nowadays there are more than 140,000 doctor-level and 420, 000 master-level area studies in the U.S. There are two perspectives on the area studies in the U.S., Cumings still think the area studies are still serving America's hegemony, but Wallerstein thought that the area studies accidentally weakened America's hegemony, it doesn't follow the aim which it established.

## 2.3. The development of area studies in South Korea

There are two different origins of Korean Studies in South Korea. One is from the history of national study which is based on Japan's colonial period, and the other is from the area studies introduced after Korea getting liberation. Both knowledge are studying about the Korean peninsula and translated as "Korean Studies" in English, but they have big differences. The first Korean study has the aim to improve the national pride and compete with the counterpart Japan through the research. The second type of Korean studies wants to observe Korea under the scope of area studies to overcome nationalism and with the global and local perspective.

The latest booming of area studies in South Korea started in the 1990s. In 1987, South Korea transformed to a democratic state and after this time, the academic circle started to rethink the discourse of development and their past. Before that period, the main focus in the academic arena is how to prove the legitimacy of the liberation, how to achieve economic development to build a modern state, and accomplish democratization. Under the long year of economic development which was later named “the miracle of Han River”, South Korea’s economy developed rapidly and entered the OECD in 1996.

When achieved economic development and political stability, they started to think about expanding their global influence. At the time the Ministry of Education of South Korea selected a few universities to open graduate schools of area studies to educate global talent in and abroad. However, the area studies is an inter-disciplinary learning, it needs to link sociology and humanities to produce comprehensive understanding, so how to design the course and how to teach still uncertain. So, some scholars in South Korea advocate East Asian Studies or Global Studies to produce an area studies with the Korean character.[3] They try to formulate a local study with a global perspective or find universality in the personality. This new trend on the Korean Studies under the area studies became the mainstream in these days.

Today there are still few universities provide graduate programs in the name of Korean Studies. This program aims to attract international students who want to be an area researcher specifying on Korean or Korean students who have the ambition to work in a more global environment. In this program students can get lectures on politics, history, literature, economy, and society, and also have some field trips to understand real society but to finish the dissertation must choose a specific field and advisor. However, some universities allow students can write a dissertations in English, so, some students lose the chance to master the Korean language.

### **3. The history of Korean studies in China**

#### **3.1. The start of Korean language education**

In China Korean studies started from Korean language education in 1946. With liberation, the department of Korean language program converted into the Peking University in 1949. before 1992, China has an official relationship with the DPRK, and little contact with the ROK. In this period, only six universities opened Korean language programs in China. Among them, Peking University and Yanbian University are the two most influential institutions.

With the end of the Cold War, China established an official relationship with the ROK in August 1992. From this time to 1995, another 14 universities opened Korean language programs, six of them from Shandong Province.[4] Compared with other area, Shandong peninsula is more advanced in geographical proximity. With the deepening economic ties with South Korea and China, the supply of personnel who can speak the Korean language could not be adequate for the demand.

#### **3.2. The great development of Korean language education**

The expansion of university enrollment in 1999 gave chance to some universities to open some new majors, so more and more universities opened Korean language programs. In 2005, the amount of universities that opened Korean language programs achieved 53, and more the 7,000 students enrolled in the Korean language programs. Since then, this trend continued, and today, more than 100 universities opened Korean language programs, and more than 35,000 students enrolled.

Although at the undergraduate level, the Korean language program developed very rapidly, the post-graduate education has not flourished. At present, there are 50 universities that can provide master program on Korean language and among them 15 universities can provide

doctor-level program. [5] However, Korean language education has big regional differences, those graduate programs are mostly located in Beijing, the Northeast part of China and Shandong province.

The Korean language program has achieved many accomplishments, but it also faces some problems. First, most of the Korean programs just focus on the language. Korean Studies or Area Studies focus on the Korean peninsula, not only containing the Korean language, but also including politics, economics, history, culture, etc. In area studies, the learner needs to integrate different disciplines, to achieve a comprehensive understanding of a certain area. Especially in the post-graduate program, the education program should pay attention to integrating relevant knowledge. Second, the ability of teaching staff needs to be improved. To improve the teaching quality breaking down the discipline barrier is needed. For example, universities should allow students to attend a history course while he or she is majoring in economics. Also, the advisor should be encouraged to refresh his or her knowledge through continuing education.

### **3.3. The trend from the Korean language to Korean studies**

In China, the name of Korean studies was proposed by Professor Zheng Panlong in the mid of 1980s. However, in later time, this name just meant a general name on Korea, not meaning a specific discipline. In 2020, the conference on graduate education decided to establish interdisciplinary studies, and Korean studies became a subject belonging to this branch. Right now the research covers all kinds of problems related to the Korean peninsula, such as economics, politics, law, culture, science, education, physics, history, geography, literature, linguistics, art, philosophy, and religion.

From the perspective of area studies the research on Korean studies found a new way of problem-based method. Like to solve the peace and security problem-related Korean peninsula, researchers need to comprehensively use the knowledge of politics, history, economics, military, culture, etc. Also, the Chinese researcher pays more attention to the practical area than the pure academic area. There are more and more research projects related to politics, economics, law, science, and education, in history, philosophy, and religion area few research projects are funded.

## **4. The Strength of the Graduate Program on Korean Studies at Yanbian University**

### **4.1. Yanbian University has long a history of Korean language program**

Being one of the oldest institutions to provide a Korean language program, students could get both university-level degree programs and post-graduate degree programs. Furthermore, Yanbian University has the most Doctor program advisers on Korean related programs in China and they have different research directions. Besides, the Korean language course is named one of the best programs in China and it affiliate state level of a key research center on the Korean peninsula.

Besides this, Yanbian University has a strong faculty member, they educated most of the Korean language teachers' in China and many of them got degrees from Korea. They have an international link with Korea and know the new research trend in Korea and transform this into China.

### **4.2. It has strength in geographically**

It is located Yanbian autonomous prefecture which is the biggest settlement of ethnic Koreans in China. This advantage helps the learners and researchers enjoy the Korean language environment without going abroad. In the city of Yanji, 50% of the citizens use Korean as their

daily communication language, all the billboards of the city are written in both Korean and Chinese, so learners can easily immersed in the Korean spoken environment.

Also, it is located on the border with DPRK, and the Hunchun campus of Yanbian University is just beside the border. Under these advantages, it has an exchange program with both Korea. Students can go to both North and South Korea through exchange programs easily. The University also uses these advantages to organize some international forums to provide a meeting arena for scholars from all over the world, include the two Korea.

#### **4.3. The university has a tradition of integration**

One of the motto's of the university is integration and it opened a graduation school named Integration. In this program, five interdisciplinary subjects are recruiting students at the graduate level including Korean studies. In this program students are taught by professors from different departments such as economics, history, politics, law, philosophy, and arts. Although professors came from different backgrounds, their research area is the Korean peninsula, so students can choose one research direction under one or two advisors. Furthermore, to acquire cutting-edge research, students can connect their advisors from other universities, such as Kim Il-Sung University.

Yanbian University encourages students to master language of Korean, have international experience, and have broad knowledge of related countries. Also, when teaching are studies, university asks the lecturer to integrate the current situation and its history to have a comprehensive understanding. Last, it emphasizes the integration of overseas knowledge and the current situation of China, to produce research that has Chinese characters.

### **5. Summary**

This paper talks about Korean studies in post-graduate level at Yanbian University from the perspective of area studies. Nowadays, China has more connections with other countries, so it needs area studies, and Korean studies developed rapidly with this new trend. Yanbian University has a long history of Korean language program, geographic advantages and traditions of integration to promote its lead in Korean studies in postgraduate-level education.

### **Acknowledgments**

Yanbian University Research Fund.(2024XBS24)

### **References**

- [1] Information on: <https://www.rmzxb.com.cn/c/2023-10-25/3431930.shtml>.
- [2] Chae Ou-byung, Cold War and Area Studies: The US Hegemonic project and its rupture, The Journal of Korea Social History Association, Vol.104,2014, p.297-333.
- [3] Baik Young-seo, The Im/possibility of Korean Studies as Glocalogy, The Journal of Korea Studies, Vol.147, 2009, p.1-25.
- [4] Zhang Qianying, Li Yang, Research on the High-end Talents Cultivation of Korean Studies under the Background of Area Studies-Focusing on Postgraduate Education, Journal of Educational Institute of Jilin Province, Vol.36(1), 2020, p.111-116.
- [5] Cai Meihua, Song Xuemei, The Disciplinary Development of Korean Studies and Its Significance in China, Dongjiang Journal, Vol.38(3), 2021, p.9-15.