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## MAPPING THE HUMANITIES TOPOGRAPHY OF KOREAN STUDIES IN TAJIKISTAN: CURRENT LANDSCAPE AND PROSPECTS

**Abstract.** The article provides a thorough examination of the current academic terrain of Korean Studies within the humanities in Tajikistan, focusing on institutional frameworks, thematic orientations, and future development prospects. Although Korean Studies is a nascent discipline in Tajik academia, it is progressively gaining traction through language education programs, scholarly research, and cultural exchange initiatives fostered by partnerships between Tajik and Korean institutions. This study systematically maps the local academic infrastructure, including universities and research centers, alongside government-supported cultural projects that influence the discipline's growth. It further investigates prevailing challenges such as limited access to Korean-language materials, a shortage of specialists trained in Korean humanities, and insufficient interdisciplinary approaches to enrich research. Nevertheless, supportive factors like enhanced bilateral relations, active Korean cultural outreach, and growing enthusiasm among students and scholars underpin promising opportunities for expansion and diversification of the field. Emphasizing the role of digital humanities, the article reflects current trends in Korean Studies that leverage online repositories and virtual collaborations to transcend geographical limitations, as seen in broader global Korean Studies contexts. By situating Korean Studies in Tajikistan within a broader Central Asian and international scholarly framework, this research reveals how local contexts contribute unique perspectives while echoing global disciplinary developments. Ultimately, this study aims to inform academic policy, foster collaborative networks, and encourage sustainable growth of Korean humanities scholarship in Tajikistan, thus enriching both regional and transnational understandings of Korea's cultural, historical, and social dimensions.

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**Keywords:** Korean Studies, Tajikistan, academic landscape, digital scholarship, cross-cultural research

### Introduction

Korean Studies has expanded significantly over the past several decades, transitioning from a specialized academic niche into a multidisciplinary field encompassing history, language, literature, philosophy, and cultural studies (Kim, 2025; Kim, 2003). While the discipline traditionally concentrated in regions with established diplomatic and academic relations with Korea, such as the United States, China, and Japan, recent trends reveal its growing presence in regions previously peripheral to Korean Studies, notably Central Asia (Lee, 2019). Among these emerging locales, Tajikistan offers a unique case for investigation due to its geopolitical relevance, evolving academic institutions, and increasing interest in Korea-related scholarship and cultural exchange (Cha, Wall, 2023). Despite emerging enthusiasm, the development of Korean Studies in Tajikistan remains in its

infancy and lacks a systematic humanities-focused analysis that accounts for local academic, cultural, and institutional dynamics (Kim, 2025).

This article aims to map the humanities topography of Korean Studies in Tajikistan by assessing existing educational programs, institutional frameworks, scholarly output, and cultural initiatives, while exploring future prospects for the discipline's establishment and growth. The purpose is twofold: firstly, to provide a comprehensive overview of the current landscape of Korean Studies in a largely underexplored academic environment; secondly, to identify challenges impeding development and recommend strategic pathways for sustainable expansion (Kim, 2025; Lee, 2019). By integrating quantitative data such as curricular offerings and research publications with qualitative insights gathered from interviews with faculty, students, and cultural liaison officers, the study constructs a nuanced representation of Korean Studies' localized manifestations and intersections with broader global and regional scholarly currents (Kim, 2025; Shin, 2003). Methodologically, this research employs a mixed-methods approach combining document analysis, including university curricula, institutional agreements, and government cultural programs, with semi-structured interviews involving key stakeholders from Tajik academic and cultural sectors (Cha, Wall, 2023). This framework enables capturing both structural configurations and experiential perspectives, facilitating an understanding of how Korean Studies adapts to and interacts with Tajikistan's socio-cultural milieu and institutional capacities. The study's lens is further enhanced by a review of digital humanities resources that increasingly support the discipline's growth worldwide, offering opportunities to transcend traditional limitations posed by resource scarcity and geographical distance.

The investigation is timely and relevant given the expanding interest in Korea's global cultural diplomacy and educational outreach, especially through government-sponsored programs and digital platforms (Kwon, Kim, 2014). While Korean Studies enjoys robust institutional support and scholarly activity in many parts of the world, Central Asian countries like Tajikistan remain under researched, despite their growing strategic and cultural linkages with Korea (Kim, 2003; Shin, 2003). Addressing this gap contributes to understanding how Korean humanities evolve in contexts marked by nascent institutional frameworks, limited human and material resources, and complex linguistic and curricular challenges (Kim, 2003; Shin, 2003). Notably, Tajikistan's academic ecosystem reflects broader issues encountered by emerging Korean Studies locales, such as a shortage of specialized faculty, limited access to Korean-language primary sources, and the absence of integrated humanities curricula that move beyond language acquisition to critical cultural, historical, and philosophical engagement (Shin, 2003).

The study also highlights the dual role of Korean cultural policies and the Korean Wave (hallyu) in shaping local interest and academic agendas by fostering transnational networks and digital resource accessibility (Jin, Yoon, 2017). These developments align with shifts outlined in recent research emphasizing digital Korean Studies as a transformative force enabling peripheral institutions to access archival data and scholarly communities worldwide, which could be particularly impactful for Tajikistan's emerging programs (Cha, Wall, 2023). In addition, the research situates Tajikistan's Korean Studies within a broader discursive framework that critically interrogates how peripheral academic spaces negotiate identity, knowledge production, and epistemic frameworks vis-à-vis established centers of Korean scholarship (Kang, 2007; Logie, 2024).

The necessity of this study is underscored by the lack of a coordinated national strategy in Tajikistan for area or Korean Studies, which complicates program scalability and depth (Kim, 2025; Kim, 2003). Furthermore, it addresses the opportunity for deeper regional cooperation, institutional partnerships, and enhanced curricular innovation responsive to local needs and global scholarly advances. The expected results include a detailed mapping of the current institutional landscape, identification of critical barriers and enablers, and formulation of recommendations oriented toward amplifying Tajikistan's capacity for Korean humanities scholarship (Kim, 2025; Yoon, 2016). Such outcomes aim to inform academics, policymakers, cultural institutions, and international partners

seeking to foster sustainable, contextually grounded expansion of Korean Studies in Central Asia and beyond (King, 2020).

In sum, this study contributes original empirical knowledge on an understudied context, links local dynamics to global Korean Studies trajectories, and promotes a strategic understanding of how Korean humanities can be effectively cultivated in emerging academic environments like Tajikistan (Kim, 2025; Lee, 2019). By capturing both the challenges and transformative potential grounded in digital innovation and cultural diplomacy, the research advances scholarly discourse on the diversification and decentralization of Korean Studies worldwide.

### Discussion

The findings of this study illuminate a complex and evolving humanities topography for Korean Studies in Tajikistan, marked by significant progress alongside persistent structural and epistemological hurdles. The current landscape is shaped not only by institutional capacities and curricular offerings but also by the broader dynamics of cultural influence, digital engagement, and regional academic integration. This layered complexity invites a discussion that situates Tajikistan's Korean Studies within larger global and regional frameworks, while proposing actionable avenues for academic consolidation and growth.

Firstly, the predominant reliance on Korean popular culture as the principal entry point for Korean Studies in Tajikistan reflects global trends but also generates critical tension in disciplinary depth and diversification. As noted in the research, the Korean Wave has acted as a powerful soft power mechanism that has significantly enhanced Korea's cultural visibility worldwide, including in Central Asia (Kwon, Kim, 2014; Jin, Yoon, 2017). While this phenomenon attracts broad-based interest, overemphasis on K-pop and television dramas risks reducing Korean Studies to a narrow cultural consumption model, potentially marginalizing core humanities disciplines such as literature, historical research, and philosophy. This limitation echoes concerns documented in various Korean Studies contexts, where popular culture often overshadows scholarly discourses and impedes the development of nuanced, historically grounded curricula (Kang, 2007; Shim, 2006).

To counterbalance this tendency, an important recommendation emerges: Tajik academic institutions should consciously integrate critical humanities scholarship alongside popular culture studies. This includes embedding foundational coursework on Korean historiography, traditional arts, and critical theory frameworks that encourage rigorous source analysis. Recognizing the challenges posed by pseudohistorical narratives prevalent in certain Korean popular domains – narratives which nationalist politics have sometimes amplified – there is an urgent need to foster critical literacy. Engaging with methodologies such as discourse analysis can help Tajik scholars differentiate academic narratives from pseudohistorical or politically motivated constructions, thereby strengthening intellectual rigor and scholarly integrity (Logie, 2024). This approach not only promotes critical thinking but also protects the field from ideological distortions, catering to Tajikistan's own complex sociopolitical environment where academic inquiry must negotiate sensitivities around identity and historical interpretation (Fumagalli, 2007).

Secondly, the role of digital humanities (DH) as both a methodological tool and a facilitator of academic connectivity stands out as a transformative prospect for Korean Studies in resource-constrained environments like Tajikistan. Given limited physical archives and library infrastructures, the utilization of digital platforms, online databases, and virtual scholarly networks broadens access to Korean humanities materials and global research communities (Luhmann, Burghardt, 2021). The interdisciplinary nature of DH – with its intersections across computational linguistics, information science, and humanities disciplines – offers fertile ground for innovative research strategies that can enrich and diversify Korean Studies scholarship locally. The strategic prioritization of DH-related capacity building – training educators and students in digital research techniques and data literacy – will be crucial to maximizing these benefits. Partnerships with Korean universities and institutions to

enhance digital resource availability and co-develop digital humanities curricula could further accelerate scholarly engagement (Brügger, Finnemann, 2013).

Thirdly, the theoretical proposition of employing “Asia as method” lends a compelling epistemic framework for Tajik Korean Studies to transcend peripheral academic positioning and engage more assertively in global knowledge production (Lee, 2019). This approach encourages scholars to reframe Korean Studies not as a passive reception of Western-centric models but as an active participant in inter-Asian dialogues, profoundly shaped by shared histories, cross-border cultural flows, and comparative postcolonial experiences. By situating Korea within broader Asian and Central Asian interrelations – such as Silk Road exchanges or parallel colonial legacies – Tajik scholarship can develop unique research agendas that resonate with regional realities while contributing original insights to Korean humanities globally.

Institutional cooperation is a linchpin in addressing many of these challenges. The current limited scale and brevity of academic exchanges between Tajik and Korean institutions warrant expansion into long-term, structurally supported partnerships encompassing joint research projects, faculty exchange, curriculum development, and bilingual publication avenues. Facilitating Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) that support comprehensive academic cooperation can create sustainable frameworks for knowledge transfer and capacity building. Crucially, such partnerships can be augmented by the active involvement of Korea’s cultural diplomacy apparatuses, such as the Korea Foundation, which have demonstrated success in other global regions by offering scholarships, funding, and cultural programming (Kwon, Kim, 2014; Jin, Yoon, 2017).

Moreover, national policy recognition and support for Korean Studies as a strategic academic area would fortify institutional commitment and resource allocation. Integration of Korean humanities into national higher education priorities and competitive research funding processes would elevate the field’s profile domestically. This alignment with state educational and cultural policies, supported by international donors and cultural diplomacy networks, can catalyze much-needed infrastructure investment, from library acquisitions to research grants, and nurture environments conducive to sustained scholarly inquiry.

Finally, prioritizing human capital development is essential. The cultivation of a new generation of Korean Studies scholars through graduate programs, interdisciplinary seminars, and regionally connected junior researcher networks will ensure intellectual continuity and innovation. Initiatives such as mentorship programs and workshops on academic publishing and research methodologies will empower emerging scholars to engage critically and contribute original perspectives to Korean Studies discourse. This grassroots scholarly empowerment, combined with strategic institutional and policy advances, forms the foundation for a resilient and vibrant humanities topography.

The humanities topography of Korean Studies in Tajikistan displays both promise and pronounced challenges. Anchored by cultural enthusiasm and digital opportunities yet confronted by infrastructural, methodological, and epistemological constraints, the field requires multifaceted, context-sensitive strategies. By diversifying thematic focus beyond pop culture, investing in critical methodological training and digital humanities, embracing alternative epistemologies like “Asia as method,” and enhancing institutional partnerships and policy support, Korean Studies in Tajikistan can mature into a robust scholarly domain. This growth will not only enrich local intellectual ecosystems but also contribute distinctive Central Asian insights to global Korean humanities scholarship, underscoring the dynamic, interconnected nature of contemporary area studies.

### ***Theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches to conceptualizing the humanities topography in Korean Studies***

In the scholarly endeavor to delineate the humanities topography within Korean Studies, particularly as it unfolds in contexts like Tajikistan, a nuanced theoretical and methodological framework is indispensable (Kim, 2025; Lee, 2019). The humanities topography encompasses not only the spatial and institutional distribution of Korean Studies but also its epistemological contours,



disciplinary intersections, and socio-cultural dynamics. Therefore, conceptualizing this topography requires articulation through multiple theoretical lenses and robust methodological pluralism (Kim, 2025).

A foundational theoretical approach draws from the socio-spatial perspective, which underscores how Korean Studies is geographically and institutionally stratified across the globe (Kim, 2025). This spatial stratification leads to uneven academic ecosystems where certain sites – such as Korea, the United States, China, or Japan – serve as knowledge hubs, whereas peripheral regions like Tajikistan represent emergent or peripheral nodes within the global Korean Studies network. The notion of “profstudents” in Southeast Asia exemplifies how individual researchers occupy liminal roles that both reinforce and challenge established hierarchies, demonstrating the fluid positionality within this disciplinary landscape (Kim, 2025). Applying this insight to Tajikistan elucidates its institutional configuration, constrained by limited human and material resources but energized by local scholars’ agency and transnational networks.

Complementing the spatial paradigm, postcolonial and decolonial theories, particularly the conceptual framework of “Asia as method” formulated by Kuan-Hsing Chen and critically examined in Korean educational contexts, invite a reorientation of Korean Studies away from Western-centric epistemologies (Lee, 2019). This approach advocates for the regional inter-referencing of histories and cultural imaginaries, facilitating a decentering of dominant Western paradigms and enabling scholarship that is both locally grounded and transnationally connected (Lee, 2019). For Korean Studies in Tajikistan, employing “Asia as method” inspires methodologies that acknowledge Central Asia’s own historical and cultural specificities while linking them to broader East Asian scholarly dialogues. In this sense, the humanities topography is not simply a static map but a dynamic interplay of knowledge flows and epistemic repositioning.

Furthermore, theories of cultural policy and soft power provide critical frameworks to understand the humanities topography as shaped by Korea’s domestic and international cultural strategies (Kwon, Kim, 2014; Jin, Yoon, 2017). The Korean government’s cultural industry policies since the 1990s, coupled with the proliferation of the Korean Wave or hallyu, have been pivotal in establishing new avenues for cultural diffusion and academic interest globally (Kwon, Kim, 2014). These phenomena function both as enablers of Korean Studies’ territorial expansion and as influencers of content and disciplinary focus within humanities curricula. For Tajikistan, where exposure to Korean popular culture and state-backed cultural diplomacy is growing, the topography reflects these global-local interactions, inviting methodological attention to the cultural dynamics that shape academic interests and institutional development.

Regarding methodological approaches, embracing mixed methods allows the complex humanities topography to be captured with both breadth and depth (Kim, 2025). Quantitative mapping of educational programs, institutional collaborations, and scholarly output offers measurable indicators of the field’s scale and distribution. Such data-driven approaches align with socio-spatial analyses that reveal structural patterns and stratification (Kim, 2025). Simultaneously, qualitative methods – such as semi-structured interviews with faculty, students, and cultural attachés – capture subjective experiences, local challenges, and aspirations that statistical data alone cannot reveal. This dual strategy reveals how local agency negotiates with structural constraints and global influences.

Digital humanities methodologies further expand the toolkit available for mapping humanities topography, particularly relevant in resource-limited settings like Tajikistan (Cha, Wall, 2023; Luhmann, Burghardt, 2021). The digitization of Korean cultural, linguistic, and historical collections, alongside the growth of online repositories and virtual academic platforms, redefines access paradigms, enabling scholars in geographically distant locales to engage with rich primary and secondary materials (Cha, Wall, 2023). This digital turn challenges conventional bibliographic and archival constraints and supports innovative comparative analyses that link Central Asian Korean Studies with the broader corpus of global scholarship. Methodological concerns on digital materiality

and Web-based sources also necessitate reflexivity in handling evolving digital archives and cultural data streams (Brügger, Finnemann, 2013).

Furthermore, critical discourse analysis emerges as an important method for addressing contested narratives and epistemic debates within Korean Studies’ humanities domain, especially regarding historiography and cultural representation (Logie, 2024; Shin, 2003). This approach is crucial for disentangling official, popular, and pseudohistorical discourses surrounding Korean history, which influence local academic environments. In Tajikistan, awareness of such discursive currents is vital to cultivate rigor and interdisciplinarity in humanities scholarship, facilitating critical engagements that transcend narrow nationalist or romanticized narratives (Logie, 2024).

The conceptualization of the humanities topography in Korean Studies, as applied to Tajikistan, demands a multi-layered theoretical engagement integrating socio-spatial frameworks, postcolonial epistemologies, cultural policy analysis, and digital humanities perspectives (Kim, 2025; Lee, 2019; Cha, Wall, 2023). Methodologically, employing an integrative mixed-methods design enriched with critical discourse analysis and digital tools allows a comprehensive mapping of the field’s current landscape and developmental trajectories. This integrative framework acknowledges the global-local dialectic, enabling nuanced assessments that respect local specificity while connecting to the broader international Korean Studies discourse.

#### *Current situation of Korean Studies and language education in Tajikistan*

Korean Studies in Tajikistan is an emerging academic field shaped by expanding bilateral relations, cultural diplomacy, and educational cooperation with the Republic of Korea. While still in a formative stage, the discipline reflects a combination of institutional initiatives, public cultural engagement, and the geopolitical context of Central Asia’s interaction with South Korea. Its current trajectory illustrates both notable achievements in language education and the continuing need for structural and academic consolidation. The institutionalization of Korean language education in Tajikistan began in 2008, when Kemyong University (Republic of Korea) and the State Institute of Languages of Tajikistan named after Sotim Ulughzoda, with the endorsement of the Ministry of Education of Tajikistan, founded the Kemyong Korean Language and Culture Center (agreement signed 16 June 2008). This marked the first formalized platform for Korean linguistic and cultural instruction in the country.

In 2012, following an agreement dated 1 March 2011, the center was restructured and renamed the King Sejong Language Learning Center, integrating it into the international network of King Sejong Institutes. This transformation symbolized a shift toward standardized curriculum frameworks, increased institutional support, and alignment with Korea’s global cultural outreach strategies. Since 2015, the center has conducted three-month language courses twice annually (spring and autumn). In 2018, under License AU № 0002515 and per Order № 1327 of the Ministry of Education and Science (3 April 2018), Korean language instruction expanded to the university’s Lingopark (Technology Park). The current program includes both introductory alphabet courses and TOPIK (Test of Proficiency in Korean) preparation courses. In the spring semester of 2024, enrollment reached 234 students, with 158 in TOPIK preparation (11 groups: 8 elementary, 3 advanced) and 76 in alphabet acquisition courses. Instruction is delivered by native Korean lecturers – Shin Nag-Kyun, Choi Mi-Hee, Lee Jong-Suk, and Chong Yong-Hee – alongside locally trained graduates.<sup>1</sup>

Table 1. Student enrollment and outcomes (2017–2024)

Year	Semester	Students	Total per Year
2017	Spring	219	329
	Autumn	110	
2018	Spring	105	239

<sup>1</sup> materials from the official website of the Korean Language and Culture Center (<https://dbz.tj/en/korean-language-and-culture-center/>, date of access: 05.07.2025).

	Autumn	134	
2019	Spring	189	327
	Autumn	139	
2020	Spring	79	166
	Autumn	87	
2021	Spring	107	194
	Autumn	136	
2022	Spring	134	134
2023	Spring	196	444
	Autumn	248	
2024	Spring	234	234

Source: official website of the Korean Language and Culture Center (<https://dbz.tj/en/korean-language-and-culture-center/>, date of access: 05.07.2025).

Over the last five years and six months, 1,800 students have completed training at the King Sejong Center. Educational materials follow the standardized King Sejong Institute series, progressing through eight proficiency levels (Books 1–8). In parallel with the activities of the King Sejong Center, Korean Studies has expanded into broader academic structures.

Table 2. Institutions Offering Korean Studies in Tajikistan

Name of University	Type of Institution	Degree Level	Format of Korean Studies Provision	Year of Establishment
<i>Tajik State Pedagogical University</i>	Other	Bachelor	Language/Short-Term Academic Courses	2014
Tajik State University of Commerce	Public	Bachelor	Language/Short-Term Academic Courses	—
Tajik State University of Foreign Languages	Public	Bachelor	King Sejong Institute	2004

Source: official website of the Korean Foundation (<https://www.kf.or.kr/koreanstudies/koreaStudiesList.do#>, date of access: 13.07.2025).

The institutional presence of Korean Studies in Tajikistan, as documented by the Korea Foundation database, demonstrates a modest yet strategically distributed network within the country's higher education sector. The three institutions listed – *Tajik State Pedagogical University*, Tajik State University of Commerce, and Tajik State University of Foreign Languages – represent a mixture of specialized and broad-based academic profiles. While all three institutions offer Korean language instruction at the undergraduate level, the modalities differ in scope and affiliation. The King Sejong Institute, located within the Tajik State University of Foreign Languages, operates under the Republic of Korea's global cultural outreach program, providing structured curricular materials and pedagogical frameworks standardized across participating countries. In contrast, the other two institutions primarily integrate Korean language and culture through faculty-led courses or short-term programs, often supported by visiting instructors or cultural exchange agreements. The absence of recorded founding years in this dataset reflects a gap in localized statistical reporting, which complicates longitudinal analysis of program development. Nevertheless, the institutional typology suggests that Korean Studies in Tajikistan is predominantly embedded within language departments, lacking yet the broader interdisciplinary infrastructure seen in more established academic hubs. This

pattern underlines both the nascent state of the field and the potential for expansion through targeted investment in faculty development, research capacity, and curriculum diversification.

Formal instruction is complemented by cultural diplomacy initiatives. Events such as Korea Week, Korean Film Festivals, K-Pop Dance Contests, and the Korean Language Olympiad attract large audiences, often translating into increased enrollment in academic programs. For instance, Korea Week 2022 hosted over 1,500 participants, while the 2023 K-Pop Dance Contest drew an audience exceeding 800 (Homidov, 2024). These events, frequently organized in collaboration with the Embassy of Korea, KOICA, and local cultural clubs, embed Korean cultural elements into Tajikistan's academic and social life, stimulating interest and awareness.

Despite these advances, Korean Studies in Tajikistan faces structural limitations. The shortage of qualified instructors, both native and locally trained, affects program sustainability. Reliance on visiting scholars supports authenticity but raises concerns about long-term continuity. Moreover, there is a lack of localized academic resources tailored to the Tajik educational context. Most teaching materials are imported, limiting opportunities for contextual adaptation and diminishing the integration of Korean Studies into Central Asian cultural perspectives. Graduate-level programs and dedicated research centers remain absent, resulting in a reliance on foreign institutions for advanced study.

Korean language and Korean Studies in Tajikistan have evolved from a single bilateral initiative in 2008 into a multi-institutional field that combines formal academic programs, public cultural events, and international partnerships. While the King Sejong Language Learning Center has played a central role in expanding linguistic capacity, the institutionalization of Korean Studies at *Tajik State Pedagogical University* and other venues has broadened the discipline's reach. However, the field's transition from a primarily linguistic discipline to a multidisciplinary area of study will require targeted investments, localized academic production, and sustainable faculty development. With continued cooperation between Tajik and Korean institutions, the prospects for Korean Studies in Tajikistan remain strong, positioning it as a growing component of the country's academic and cultural engagement with East Asia.

### **Research results**

This study offers an analytical overview of the current configuration of Korean Studies in the humanities domain in Tajikistan, addressing the institutional framework, thematic focus, cultural drivers, and developmental perspectives. The research identifies a discipline in the early stages of formalization, marked by a gradual expansion of academic infrastructure, an intensifying interest among younger scholars, and the significant influence of Korea's cultural diplomacy and global cultural industries. While the availability of Korean Studies within Tajik higher education remains limited, evidence from institutional mapping shows a steady increase in Korean language and culture modules, primarily concentrated in universities in Dushanbe and Khujand. Fully specialized degree programs are still rare; however, elective courses, short-term language offerings, and humanities subjects with Korean cultural components are becoming more common. Faculty members attribute the modest scale of provision to resource constraints, including restricted access to Korean-language academic literature and insufficient institutional funding, which together hinder the creation of comprehensive programs (Interview, senior lecturer, TSNU, 14.03.2025). Notably, cooperation agreements with South Korean universities and cultural organizations – frequently facilitated through official cultural diplomacy – have enabled workshops, visiting lectureships, and academic exchanges, thereby incrementally enhancing local scholarly capacity.

Respondents within academia note a growing motivation among early-career researchers to engage with Korean Studies, driven by Korea's technological achievements and cultural prominence, but stress the absence of robust research frameworks and the challenge of obtaining primary materials in Korean (Interview, lecturer, Khujand State University, 18.03.2025). A review of recent publications in Tajik academic outlets indicates a strong concentration on Korean language



acquisition, contemporary South Korean popular culture – especially K-pop and television dramas – and comparative East Asian cultural analysis. This thematic concentration mirrors the influence of the Korean Wave, which, underpinned by targeted cultural policy initiatives (Kwon, Kim, 2014; Jin, Yoon, 2017), continues to serve as the principal entry point for student engagement. At the same time, traditional and historical dimensions of Korean Studies – such as historiography, classical literature, philosophy, and the arts – remain peripheral, a situation largely attributable to the shortage of field-specific experts (Interview, junior researcher, Academy of Sciences, 21.03.2025).

Digital resources and methods have emerged as a critical tool for overcoming these structural limitations. Increasingly, Tajik researchers employ digital humanities approaches, including access to digitized Korean primary sources, participation in online conferences, and involvement in transnational scholarly networks. This adoption reflects broader global trends in Korean Studies that emphasize the integration of digital scholarship as both a methodological and infrastructural solution (Luhmann, Burghardt, 2021; Brügger, Finnemann, 2013). Interviewees report that open-access databases, virtual workshops, and collaborative platforms have substantially widened their capacity to conduct research, despite limitations in local library holdings and budgetary allocations (Interview, doctoral candidate, TSNU, 27.03.2025).

Nevertheless, the developmental trajectory of Korean Studies in Tajikistan is shaped by several systemic constraints. The country's marginal position within the global Korean Studies network (Kim, 2025) results in limited visibility and reduced opportunities for publication in high-impact journals. Socio-economic and political realities – such as the prioritization of state funding for other sectors and the complex multilingual environment of Tajikistan – further restrict the capacity to establish new fields of study. Moreover, without critical academic engagement, there is a tangible risk of reproducing oversimplified or pseudohistorical interpretations of Korea, an issue already noted in other national contexts within the discipline (Logie, 2024).

Looking ahead, the strengthening of Korean Studies in Tajikistan will depend on the establishment of specialized centers or research institutes with targeted funding to enable faculty training, curriculum development, and sustained scholarly exchange. Strategic use of South Korea's cultural diplomacy infrastructure – rooted in its long-term cultural industry policies (Kwon, Kim, 2014) – could provide the necessary stability for program growth. Integrating interdisciplinary perspectives that combine historical, cultural, and digital humanities methodologies would align local scholarship with global best practices (Luhmann, Burghardt, 2021; Lee, 2019). Furthermore, developing analytical frameworks capable of critically engaging with popular and pseudohistorical narratives would strengthen the discipline's intellectual rigor. Collaborative research projects, international conferences, and co-authored publications with peers in Asia and beyond would significantly enhance the visibility and quality of Tajik contributions to Korean Studies. As one academic involved in cultural exchange projects stated, “Our path forward lies in drawing on Korea's cultural prominence while building local scholarly capacity that is critically informed and globally connected” (Interview, cultural diplomacy project coordinator, Dushanbe, 02.04.2025).

The current survey of Korean Studies in Tajikistan underscores the pivotal role of the Korean Wave as a cultural catalyst shaping academic interest and institutional priorities. According to Kwon and Kim, the Korean government's sustained cultural industry policies since the 1990s have effectively transformed Korea's cultural products into globally competitive exports, integrating them within broader information and communication technology developments and aligning with a strategic economic vision (Kwon, 2014). This multifaceted state support has not only amplified the international reach of Korean popular culture but has indirectly stimulated academic curiosity in receiving countries, including Tajikistan, where growing middle-class aspirations facilitate demand for higher quality cultural and educational materials. Thus, the rise of Korean Studies in Tajikistan is inseparable from these government-driven cultural flows that deliver hallyu's visibility and appeal (Jin, Yoon, 2017).

Survey respondents emphasized the transformational effect of hallyu, especially K-pop and television dramas, in attracting younger audiences to Korean language and humanities courses. However, this popularity-driven engagement risks perpetuating an imbalanced curricular emphasis, which several interlocutors acknowledged. They expressed a collective ambition to advance scholarly rigor by integrating a wider range of humanities disciplines, such as Korean historiography, traditional arts, and philosophy, which remain underexplored in the local context. The limitation is compounded by restricted access to specialized Korean-language primary sources and a paucity of faculty with comprehensive training in these domains, which aligns with findings on resource constraints in peripheral Korean Studies locales.

Complementing these institutional and thematic observations, the role of digital humanities emerges as a critical strategic asset. The digital humanities, positioned at the intersection of computational linguistics and information science, both constitute a distinct discipline and a methodological bridge to other humanities fields (Luhmann, Burghardt, 2021). Tajik scholars interviewed are increasingly leveraging online archives, open-access databases, and virtual academic networks to compensate for limited local resources, enabling participation in global scholarly conversations. This adoption of digital tools parallels global transformations in Korean Studies research frameworks and supports more interdisciplinary and technologically informed investigations (Brügger, Finnemann, 2013).

Nevertheless, respondents identified challenges that transcend logistical barriers. A notable obstacle is the prevalence of pseudohistorical narratives within popular Korean discourse, which risks contaminating local academic inquiry if not critically addressed. Logie's research warns of the continued vitality of pseudohistory in Korean popular culture, often entwined with nationalist impulses, which undermines scholarly rigor when uncritically absorbed (Logie, 2024). Tajik scholars recognize the urgency of incorporating critical discourse analysis to differentiate scholarly narratives from popular or pseudohistorical ones, fostering a more nuanced understanding of Korea's history and culture. This insight is particularly important given Tajikistan's own complex ethnopolitical environment, where academic fields must navigate sensitive ideological terrains (Fumagalli, 2007).

In terms of broader regional epistemological frameworks, the 'Asia as method' approach, advocated by Chen and critically examined by Lee, provides a valuable theoretical lens for Tajik Korean Studies to decolonize knowledge production and counter Western-dominated paradigms (Lee, 2019). This approach encourages scholars to situate Korean Studies within inter-Asian historical and cultural entanglements, promoting epistemic pluralism and enriching interpretation from a Central Asian vantage point. Incorporating such frameworks could enhance the intellectual depth of Tajik scholarship and foster cross-regional dialogues within Asian humanities.

Finally, strengthening institutional collaboration remains essential. Interviewees stressed the potential benefits of enhanced transnational partnerships – not only with Korean universities but also with peer institutions in Northeast and Southeast Asia. Such networks can facilitate faculty exchanges, joint research projects, and co-publications, thereby mitigating Tajikistan's peripheral academic status. The Korean government's cultural diplomacy initiatives, which have proven effective in other regions, could serve as a foundation for sustained institutional support, providing resources for research infrastructure and scholarly development. Collectively, these expanded insights portray Korean Studies in Tajikistan as a field poised for growth but currently constrained by resource limitations, curricular imbalances, and local contextual factors. Targeted investments in diversifying research themes, embracing digital methodologies, critically engaging popular discourses, and fostering transnational academic collaborations represent critical avenues toward a robust humanities topography that is both localized and globally integrated.

### **Conclusion**

The comprehensive mapping of the humanities topography of Korean Studies in Tajikistan reveals a nascent yet progressively expanding academic field shaped by unique local dynamics and

broader transnational influences. This study's findings illustrate how Korean Studies, especially in the humanities, currently occupies an emergent niche within Tajikistan's scholarly landscape, characterized by limited institutional infrastructure but buoyed by increasing interest among students and researchers. Importantly, this growing engagement is largely facilitated by the parallel rise of Korean cultural influence globally, often conceptualized as the Korean Wave, which has permeated the region through media, popular culture, and government-supported cultural diplomacy initiatives. However, this expansion simultaneously foregrounds challenges inherent to the durability and depth of humanities scholarship in a context marked by resource constraints and epistemological gaps.

One critical insight is the predominance of Korean popular culture as the entry point for Korean Studies within Tajik academic settings. While the popularity of K-pop, dramas, and other media products has successfully sparked widespread enthusiasm, an overreliance on these elements risks narrowing the field's scope, marginalizing essential humanities disciplines such as history, literature, and philosophy. This tendency echoes broader discourses within Korean Studies internationally, where the allure of popular culture sometimes overshadows scholarly rigor. Addressing this imbalance requires systematic curriculum diversification prioritizing critical engagement with Korea's long historical narratives and cultural production beyond entertainment. In doing so, it also becomes necessary to confront the proliferation of Korean pseudohistorical narratives, which have been shown to resonate with nationalist sentiments and occasionally impact public discourse and government funding decisions. Incorporating critical discourse analysis and fostering scholarly literacy on historical methodology will be vital for Tajik scholars to navigate and resist such distortions, thereby reinforcing academic integrity and nuanced interpretation.

Moreover, the study points to digital humanities (DH) as a transformative methodological avenue particularly suited to overcoming material and infrastructural limitations in Tajikistan. The digital turn in humanities research provides enhanced access to Korean archives, textual corpora, and multimedia resources unavailable locally, facilitating interdisciplinary scholarship that straddles computational techniques and traditional humanities inquiry. Adoption of DH practices enables the Tajik academic community to participate more fully in global Korean Studies networks and allows scholars to produce innovative, collaboratively enriched research outputs. Nonetheless, capacity building regarding DH methodologies, software literacy, and digital resource management remains an urgent need to harness these potential benefits effectively.

The theoretical contribution of employing "Asia as method" offers promising intellectual reorientation for Korean Studies in Tajikistan, challenging the dominant Western epistemic frameworks and promoting inter-Asian knowledge production that is both contextualized and decolonial. This framework encourages situating Korean Studies within broader regional histories and cultural dialogues, linking Korean cultural and historical experiences with those of Central Asia and neighboring Asian spaces. By embracing this pluralistic and dialogic approach, Tajik scholars can augment their scholarship's originality and relevance while aligning with emergent trends in postcolonial and area studies. This strategy also supports reframing Korean Studies beyond national borders and expanding its thematic and conceptual horizons in line with calls for 'regionalization' in humanities research.

Institutional and policy-level enhancements stand out as necessary conditions for sustained growth. Current university offerings related to Korean Studies in Tajikistan remain fragmented and limited; establishing dedicated Korean Studies centers, supported by both domestic academic policies and Korean cultural diplomacy bodies such as the Korea Foundation, would provide structural backbone and resources for research and pedagogy. Expanding long-term institutional partnerships through joint research projects, faculty exchanges, and bilingual academic publishing can further embed Korean Studies in Tajik academic culture while fostering transnational scholarly communities. National educational policies recognizing Korean Studies as a strategic area, accompanied by targeted funding and infrastructural support, would elevate the discipline's status and encourage institutional investment.

Finally, human capital development is a cornerstone for future prospects. Creating graduate-level programs, interdisciplinary seminars, and mentoring schemes focused on comprehensive Korean humanities education will nurture skilled scholars capable of innovative research and critical inquiry. Special attention to training in digital humanities, critical discourse analysis, and regional epistemologies will equip emergent academics to contribute meaningfully both locally and internationally. Mobilizing young scholars and establishing academic networks, both within Tajikistan and across Central Asia and Korea, will underpin the field's vitality and responsiveness to evolving intellectual challenges.

Korean Studies in Tajikistan's humanities is at a critical juncture, shaped by enthusiasm grounded in cultural affinity and global connectivity but tempered by structural limitations and epistemic vulnerabilities. This article's exploration affirms that by diversifying disciplinary focus beyond popular culture, embracing digital and interdisciplinary methodologies, adopting transformative regional theories like "Asia as method," and strengthening institutional and human resources, the field can mature into a recognized and influential academic domain. Such development will not only enrich Tajikistan's scholarly landscape but also contribute to a more regionally nuanced and globally responsive Korean humanities discourse.

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## ТӘЖІКСТАН КОРЕЙТАНУЫНЫҢ ГУМАНИТАРЛЫҚ КАРТОГРАФИЯСЫ: ҚАЗІРГІ ЖАҒДАЙЫ МЕН БОЛАШАҒЫ

**Аңдатпа.** Мақалада Тәжікстандағы гуманитарлық ғылымдар аясындағы корейтанудың қазіргі жағдайына жан-жақты талдау жасалған. Негізгі назар институционалдық құрылымдарға, тақырыптық бағыттарға және болашақтағы даму мүмкіндіктеріне аударылған. Корейтану Тәжікстан академиялық кеңістігінде салыстырмалы түрде жаңа бағыт болғанымен, ол тілдік дайындық бағдарламалары, ғылыми зерттеулер және тәжік және корей мекемелері арасындағы әріптестік шеңберінде жүзеге асырылатын мәдени алмасу бастамалары арқылы біртіндеп қарқын алуда. Зерттеу барысында жергілікті академиялық инфрақұрылым – университеттер, зерттеу орталықтары және мемлекеттік қолдауға ие мәдени жобалар жүйелі түрде картаға түсірілген. Сондай-ақ, корей тіліндегі материалдардың шектеулі қолжетімділігі, корей гуманитарлық ғылымдары бойынша мамандар тапшылығы және зерттеулердің жеткіліксіз пәнаралық сипаты сияқты негізгі қиындықтар да қарастырылады. Сонымен қатар, екіжақты қатынастардың нығаюы, Корея Республикасының белсенді мәдени дипломатиясы және студенттер мен ғалымдардың өсіп келе жатқан қызығушылығы секілді оң факторлар бұл саланы кеңейту мен әртараптандыруға мүмкіндік береді. Мақалада сандық гуманитарлық ғылымдардың рөлі ерекше аталып, географиялық шектеулерді еңсеру үшін онлайн-ресурстар мен виртуалды әріптестікті қолдану секілді қазіргі корейтанудағы жаһандық үрдістер бейнеленеді. Тәжікстандағы корейтану Орталық Азия мен халықаралық ғылыми кеңістіктің контекстінде қарастырылып, жергілікті ерекшеліктердің жаһандық даму бағыттарымен үндес ерекше көзқарастар қалыптастыратыны анықталады. Ақырында, бұл зерттеу академиялық саясатты жетілдіруге, ғылыми ынтымақтастық желілерін дамытуға және Тәжікстандағы корей гуманитарлық зерттеулерінің тұрақты өсуіне ықпал етуге бағытталған, бұл өз кезегінде Кореяның мәдени, тарихи және әлеуметтік қырларын аймақтық және трансұлттық деңгейде түсінуді тереңдетеді.

**Алғыс:** бұл зерттеу Корейтану академиясының гранттық қолдауымен, корейтану саласын дамыту бағдарламасы және AKS-2025-INC-2250002 «Орталық Азиядағы корейтану белдеуі гуманитарлық топографиясының деректер базасы мен пайдалану платформасын құру» ғылыми жобасы аясында жүзеге асырылды.

**Кілт сөздер:** корейтану, Тәжікстан, академиялық ландшафт, сандық зерттеулер, мәдениетаралық зерттеулер.

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## КАРТОГРАФИРОВАНИЕ ГУМАНИТАРНОГО ЛАНДШАФТА КОРЕЕВЕДЕНИЯ В ТАДЖИКИСТАНЕ: СОВРЕМЕННОЕ СОСТОЯНИЕ И ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ

**Аннотация.** В статье представлен детальный анализ современного состояния корееведения в гуманитарных науках Таджикистана с акцентом на институциональные структуры, тематические направления и перспективы дальнейшего развития. Несмотря на то, что корееведение является относительно молодой дисциплиной в таджикской академической среде, оно постепенно набирает популярность благодаря программам языковой подготовки, научным исследованиям и инициативам культурного обмена, реализуемым в рамках сотрудничества таджикских и корейских учреждений. В исследовании системно отображена локальная академическая инфраструктура, включая университеты и исследовательские центры, а также государственные культурные проекты, влияющие на развитие дисциплины. Особое внимание уделено ключевым проблемам: ограниченному доступу к материалам на корейском языке, нехватке специалистов в области корейских гуманитарных наук и недостаточной междисциплинарности исследований. Вместе с тем, отмечены и позитивные факторы: укрепление двусторонних связей, активная культурная дипломатия Республики Корея и растущий интерес студентов и ученых, создающие условия для расширения и диверсификации направления. Подчеркивая значение цифровых гуманитарных наук, статья отражает современные тенденции корееведения, использующие онлайн-ресурсы и виртуальное сотрудничество для преодоления географических барьеров, что соответствует глобальным процессам в данной области. Рассматривая корееведение в Таджикистане в контексте Центральной Азии и международного научного сообщества, автор выявляет, каким образом локальные условия формируют уникальные подходы при сохранении связи с мировыми трендами. В итоге работа призвана способствовать формированию академической политики, развитию сетей научного взаимодействия и обеспечению устойчивого роста гуманитарных корейских исследований в Таджикистане, что обогащает как региональное, так и транснациональное понимание культурных, исторических и социальных аспектов Кореи.

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**Ключевые слова:** корееведение, Таджикистан, академический ландшафт, цифровые исследования, межкультурные исследования.

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