



2024 - 2025

CKS NEWSLETTER

2024 - 2025 Overview

The Center for Korean Studies entered a pivotal new phase in its mission and vision this year. While remaining committed to research, education, and cultural programming—including guest lectures and field trips—the Center secured a multiyear major grant from the Academy of Korean Studies to establish a new M.A. track in Premodern Studies of Korean Humanism. After extensive preparation, we are now ready to recruit the inaugural cohort for Fall 2026, offering three full-tuition scholarships. This initiative is expected to bring new momentum to Korean Studies not only at Stony Brook but across North America.

With this development, Dr. Hongkyung Kim stepped down after 13 years as Director to focus on the Korean Humanism project, and Dr. Heejeong Sohn, formerly Assistant Director, assumed the directorship. This leadership transition marks an exciting new chapter for the Center, promising expanded programs and fresh opportunities for engagement.

CKS History

The Center for Korean Studies at Stony Brook University was established in 1989, building on Korean Studies courses offered since 1982—among the earliest in the United States. Since then, it has served as a dynamic academic and cultural hub dedicated to advancing education, research, and global understanding of Korea.

The Center promotes excellence in teaching and scholarship while fostering intercultural communication through the study of Korea's language, culture, history, and philosophy. Central to this mission is the advancement of Korean Humanism, with a strong emphasis on premodern Korean intellectual traditions. By highlighting Korea's humanistic heritage and linking it to modern and contemporary developments, the Center seeks to bring deeper balance and perspective to Korean Studies in North America.

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New Director's Message

DR. HEEJEONG SOHN

*Director, Center for Korean Studies
Advanced Senior Lecturer, Department of Asian and
Asian American Studies*

As the third Director of the Center for Korean Studies, I'm honored to continue the legacy of Dr. Sungbae Park and Dr. Hongkyung Kim, whose leadership built the Center's strong foundation. Their vision made it a vital hub of research and academic exchange at Stony Brook.

Looking ahead, I aim to open a new chapter that highlights Korea's humanistic traditions and strengthens premodern studies—fields essential to understanding Korea's ethical, literary, and philosophical heritage. At the same time, the Center will remain a bridge connecting past and present, Korea and the world, through collaboration, outreach, and dialogue. Together with our students, faculty, alumni, and partners, we will continue to foster a vibrant and evolving Korean Studies community at Stony Brook.

Biography

Heejeong Sohn, PhD, is an Advanced Senior Lecturer in Asian & Asian American Studies and Director of the Korean Studies Program. A historian of modern Korea, her work examines late Chosŏn and early modern visual culture, gender, and the cultural politics of North–South division. Before entering academia, she worked at the Korea Foundation, a grant-making organization that supports global educational initiatives in Korean studies. Since joining the Center for Korean Studies at Stony Brook in 2011, she has expanded Korean Studies through new curricula, study-abroad pathways, and multimillion-dollar grant funding that has supported faculty hires and program development.



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DR. HEEJEONG SOHN

DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR
KOREAN STUDIES



Program & Academic Highlights

Undergraduate and Graduate Scholarship Opportunities

Thanks to the generosity of our donors, the Center for Korean Studies has awarded Korean Studies undergraduate and graduate scholarships for more than two decades. These awards support undergraduate minors and graduate researchers who demonstrate strong academic achievement and leadership. Recipients receive \$1,000 (undergraduate) and \$3,000 (graduate).

2024-25 Scholarship Awardees: **Anastasia Kim (undergraduate), Na Young Yang (graduate)**



2025 CKS Colloquium Series

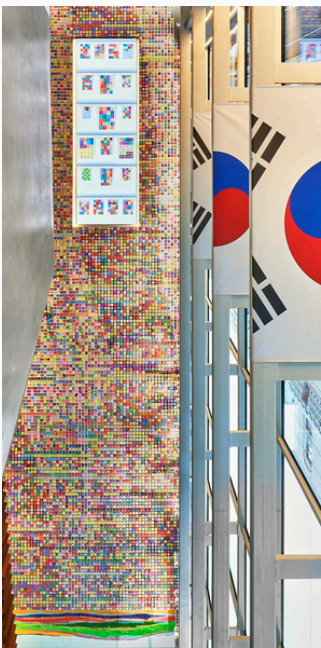
Around Korea in N Kinds of Different Expressions

Guest speaker Colin Marshall led students on a linguistic tour of Korea, showing how regional satura (dialects) express local culture and identity. He highlighted features like Chungcheong-do’s -shu, Jeolla-do’s geoshigi, and Jeju’s honjeopseoye, illustrating the country’s vibrant diversity. The talk also examined how Seoul speech shapes national trends—such as the spread of neomu—and compared language practices across borders, from South Korea’s “Konglish” to North Korea’s purism and the Korean-Spanish mix in L.A.’s Koreatown.



Summer Study Abroad in Korea

Students from the University of Utah, George Mason University, University of Wisconsin–Madison, and Stony Brook University spent the summer of 2025 in South Korea as part of the third annual Faculty-led Summer in Korea program. Over four and a half weeks, participants immersed themselves in Korean culture, history, and society while studying at the Incheon Global Campus in Songdo and Jeju National University.



NYC Field Trip: Friday Afternoon in Korean Culture Center

Students spent an engaging Friday afternoon exploring Korean culture on a field trip to the Korean Cultural Center. The visit offered students a deeper appreciation of Korea’s rich heritage and a chance to engage with peers who share their interest in Korean studies.



Global Engagement: Study Abroad & Exchange

Learn more about study abroad programs from our program participants!



Kevin Yu - English Major, Korean Studies Minor;

Expected Graduation Date: Fall 2026

Faculty-led Summer Study Abroad Program; Songdo, Seoul, Jeju Island - Summer of 2025

Click here to read an [article](#) by Kevin on Jeju shamanism from the trip!

A memorable journey

Kevin Yu described that it was an unforgettable experience studying abroad in South Korea— it was an amazing opportunity to meet new people, many of whom have remained close friends even after returning home. His favorite activity was haenyeo diving and collecting seashells on Jeju Island. While the trip was exciting, public transportation was challenging at first since he didn't have a SIM card or Wi-Fi, and sometimes got off at the wrong station.

What made you want to go?

Kevin was inspired by his brother, who had once studied abroad in Indonesia. After visiting a study abroad fair, the Korea program caught his attention with its language immersion and cultural activities. He calls the moment “full-circle,” since his brother once promoted study abroad at a similar fair.

Would you go again or recommend it to others?

“Definitely,” Kevin says. He highlights the warm, welcoming people and the chance to explore Korea’s culture and history. One of the most impactful lessons for him was learning about the *April 3rd Jeju Massacre*, which gave him a deeper understanding of the country’s past. He also improved his Korean skills, going from no prior knowledge to reading signs, menus, and holding basic conversations.

Any cultural differences you experienced?

Kevin also enjoyed observing everyday details, like Korea’s recycling culture and a surprising door etiquette: “Once you hold the door, you might be holding it for a while,” he joked.



Amber McLeod - International Relations Major, Korean Studies Minor;

Expected Graduation Date: Spring 2027

Study Abroad in South Korea at Chungnam National University - Spring 2025 (3/1-6/21)

A memorable semester

Amber McLeod describes her time at Chungnam Nat’l University as amazing and unforgettable. She appreciated the scholarship that covered her tuition and housing, and she enjoyed meeting both Korean and international students. She loved the campus atmosphere and noticed how different the university system felt compared to the U.S. Although she wished she had more opportunities to interact with local students, she says the experience helped her learn how to connect across cultures and adapt to new environments.

What made you want to go?

Amber discovered the program through Stony Brook’s partner universities and decided to study abroad for the spring semester. It was her first time living abroad, and although her family was surprised she would travel to Korea alone, she handled everything herself, including applying for the scholarship that made her trip possible.

Would you go again or recommend it to others?

Absolutely. Amber says she would love to go again and could even imagine living in Korea or attending graduate school there. She encourages others to study abroad because it opens perspectives beyond what she describes as the “small bubble” of American culture.

Any cultural differences you experienced?

Amber arrived already familiar with many Korean etiquette norms, such as bowing or using two hands when exchanging items. What surprised her most was the fast-paced rhythm of everyday life in Seoul. People lined up neatly, moved quickly, and valued efficiency—something she admired and found refreshingly different from her experiences in the U.S.

Interviews by Ellie Kwak, CKS Student Staff



Meet the Faculty & Staff

An Interview with Dr. Hongkyung Kim

Hongkyung Kim

Professor, Department of Asian and Asian American Studies

Director, Center for Korean Studies (2012-2025)



Could you describe your experience serving as the Director of the Center for Korean Studies over the past 13 years?

“When I became the director of the center, Korean Studies at Stony Brook was undergoing a transition. It was a period when Korean Studies, which had previously focused primarily on graduate programs and the research and teaching of Korean humanities, was shifting its focus to undergraduate education. It was evolving to meet the changing environment of Korean Studies, paying attention not only to the humanities but also to topics students desired, such as Korean popular culture and modern history. Accordingly, I, who specialized in Korean philosophy, also taught Korean culture, Korean literature, and Korean history. Coinciding with the growing international popularity and public appreciation of Korean popular culture, Korean Studies at Stony Brook also flourished. At its peak, over 100 students minored in Korean Studies. Looking back, it was fortunate that I was able to work as the director of the center at such a transitional period, and it became a significant experience in my life.”

What have you found most meaningful or rewarding in that role, and what key insights or lessons have you gained from the experience?

“If I were to name the most rewarding aspects of my work as the center’s director, they would include establishing the first undergraduate major program in the United States for training Korean language teachers at Stony Brook, and as a researcher,

undertaking the publication project *The Analects of Dasan*, which has resulted in volumes 1-5 being published by Oxford University Press to date. But above all, the most rewarding part was meeting many outstanding students, teaching them, learning from them, and sharing good times together. Occasionally, meeting Korean Studies alumni and hearing them say they enjoyed their time with the Korean Studies program is the greatest reward of all. I believe that by sincerely doing one’s work, one can live a joyful life. One of my favorite sayings is, “If I look back on myself and feel no shame, I can stand tall before millions.” While I may regret things I could have done but didn’t, I don’t recall any major shameful acts. Humans, unlike animals, are beings capable of self-reflection, and intellectuals study to cultivate that ability further. I hope everyone finds time to look back on themselves and smile.”

May I ask what led to your decision to step down from the directorship, and what your plans or focus areas will be moving forward?

“Korean Studies at Stony Brook is now entering another turning point. We have recently secured a major grant, providing us with the opportunity to educate and support MA students studying topics related to Korean humanism. I have stepped down from my position as Director of the Center to dedicate my full efforts to ensuring the successful operation of this graduate program. This master’s program focuses on equipping future researchers of Korea’s humanistic tradition with the ability to understand and analyze premodern materials written in hanmun. As all educational materials are excerpted from Korea’s own traditions, this program will likely be unique in the United States for cultivating the next generation of Korean humanism scholars. I hope this initiative will contribute in some way to the continued growth of Korean Studies at Stony Brook under the guidance of Professor Heejeong Sohn.”



Community News & Events

Building Community through Korean language and culture - Campus K-Connect

by Dr. Jungmin Kang

Campus K-Connect (hereafter K-Connect) is a welcoming gathering that brings together Korean faculty and students who are learning Korean or simply interested in Korean culture. We launched K-Connect in Fall 2024 as a trial gathering to create a stronger sense of community among students and faculty engaged in Korean Studies. We have met three to five times each semester and offered engaging activities, including traditional Korean games and craft projects.

The gatherings were a great success. Students had the opportunity to meet peers from other sections, share favorite learning resources, and form friendships centered on their shared interest in the Korean language and culture. For faculty, these sessions provided a valuable opportunity to engage with students in a more personal, informal setting. Looking ahead, we hope to continue developing K-Connect as a welcoming and inclusive community where students can feel connected and supported while deepening their understanding of Korean culture and its values. Our goal is to create a warm and engaging space that fosters friendship, cultural appreciation, and meaningful connections within the broader Korean Studies community.



SBU NSLI-Y Marks 12 Years *by Dr. Heejeong Sohn*

SBU NSLI-Y (National Strategic Language Initiative for Youth) for Korean Language and Culture celebrated its 12th year of implementation in 2025, with a total of 245 participants to date.

Sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, the NSLI-Y program promotes early immersion of American high school students in strategically important world languages and cultures.

In 2025, twenty students from sixteen different states across the country gathered at Stony Brook University before traveling to Korea for an unforgettable six-week journey of language learning and cultural exploration. They studied Korean daily, lived with local host families, and traveled across the country to experience Korea's past, present, and future.

Here are a few reflections shared by the participants.

"I think I've definitely gained more confidence, an entirely different perspective on Korea, and a major interest in learning the language. I also feel that I gained valuable experience for my future career endeavors."

"I gained a lot of maturity, responsibility, and cultural awareness from the program."

"Not only did I gain knowledge of the Korean culture and language, but I learned lots of independence, which makes me feel more prepared for college next year."



Alumni Voices

An Interview with an Alum - Jaisy Kim



Jaisy Kim

*Psychology Major, Korean Studies Minor
Administrative Law Attorney in the U.S. Army
JAG Corps (Graduated in 2015)*

What inspired you to choose a minor in Korean Studies?

Jaisy Kim shared that her interest began after taking her first Korean history and culture class with Professor Hongkyung Kim. Growing up, she felt disconnected from her Korean identity and often pressured to minimize it. Professor Kim's course helped her rediscover pride in her heritage, and his encouragement motivated her to think more critically. Inspired, she continued taking additional courses—including language and culture classes with Professor Heejeong Sohn—and eventually declared the minor.

How would you describe your overall experience in the Korean Studies courses you took, and what key insights or skills did you gain from them that have helped shape your future career path?

Jaisy described the program as both intellectually engaging and personally meaningful. Professor Sohn's classes encouraged teamwork and creativity, helping her build lasting friendships. Studying Korean culture also strengthened her relationship with her mother, giving them a shared bond. Professionally, her background in Korean Studies proved valuable when she served in the U.S. Army—she once escorted a visiting Korean general and was able to communicate with him and make him feel welcome thanks to her cultural knowledge.

How can students effectively connect Korean Studies to different career fields?

Jaisy emphasized that understanding Korean culture is beneficial in many fields. As South Korea continues to shape global technology, business, and media, students who study Korea gain strong cross-cultural communication skills and a deeper understanding of a key global partner. She believes this perspective helps students stand out in areas such as government, education, law, and international business.

Interview by Ellie Kwak, CKS Student Staff



Acknowledgments & Support

Our appreciation goes to our faculty and instructors whose teaching, mentorship, and programming sustain a thriving Korean Studies community. We also extend our thanks to our student assistants, Ahror Temirov and Sophia Yoon, for their dedicated service over many years, and to the administrative staff in our department for their continual support behind the scenes.

We are especially grateful to Dr. Hongkyung Kim for his 13 years of leadership and for guiding the development of the new M.A. track in Premodern Studies of Korean Humanism. We further thank our donors for their generous support, which makes all CKS programs possible.

Thank you for your continued support.