

The State of the Field in Premodern Korean Studies in North America¹

Sun Joo Kim, Harvard University

As John Duncan observed in his report on the status of the field in premodern Korean studies in North American universities and colleges for the 2011 Korea Foundation Assembly, a few decades ago the field of Korean studies was dominated by political scientists in the social sciences and by premodern historians in the humanities.² The field has changed quite a lot over the years. The number of scholars in anthropology and sociology has grown substantially. The field of Korean literature has become quite strong thanks to strategic support for the field. In history, while the field of premodern history has maintained its status quo, the modern field has experienced a marked growth.

In this report, I show some data I have gathered on the field of premodern Korean studies and discuss its status in comparison to some of the data and observations made in John Duncan's 2011 report. Toward the end, I discuss recent trends and future directions and challenges. I would like to note at the outset that the data I am presenting cover up to fall 2018 and have flaws. Because this report is based on unscientific data-gathering, it is missing some facts and some of the data may be erroneous.

1. Faculty in Premodern Korea

Table 1 presents some rough data on the numbers of premodern Korean studies faculty members at North American institutions as of 2011, showing 26 all together: 13 in the field of history; 5 in literature and language; 6 in religion and thought; 1 in musicology; and 1 in art history. Table 2 presents 2018 data, which show that the total number of faculty has grown slightly, to 32. To break it down, in 2018 there were:

- 14 in history, which maintains status quo;
- 9 in literature, which displays a significant and welcome increase;
- 4 in religion/thought, which shows a decrease compared to 2011;
- a growth in art history and archaeology; and
- the addition of the new field of history of science, while a musicologist has been lost.

The 2011 report noted the serious concern that the population of premodernists was aging because 19 of the 26 were over 50 years old. The 2011 report therefore predicted that the number of premodernists, historians in particular, would shrink substantially. Although we see in Table 2 that by 2018 some institutions had lost their premodern faculty due to relocation

¹ This report was originally prepared for the conference "Future Visions: Challenges and Possibilities of Korean Studies in North America" organized by Stanford University, Nov. 1–2, 2018, and was updated May 10, 2019.

² John B. Duncan, "The State of the Field in Pre-modern Korean Studies in North America," presented at the 2011 Korea Foundation Assembly, June 6–9, 2011, in Seoul, Korea. I would like to thank John Duncan for allowing me to use some of his presentation materials in this report.

or retirement, we also see some institutions (in blue) that have newly hired premodernists, and other institutions where retirees have been successfully replaced. As of 2018, out of 32 premodernists, only 3 or 4 scholars seem to be over 60 years old. The field is composed of younger faculty than it was in 2011.

Table 1. Premodern Korean Studies Faculty at North American Universities and Colleges, 2011

	History	Language/Literature	Religion/Thought	Other
Arizona State		1		
Binghamton		1		
Bridgeport			1	
British Columbia	1	1		
BYU	1			
BYU Hawaii			1	
Columbia	1			
George Washington	1			
Harvard	1	1		
Hawaii	1			
Illinois	1			
Maryland		1		1 (Musicology)
Michigan			1	
Pennsylvania	1			
Prince Edward			1	
Princeton	1			
Roanoke	1			
Sweet Briar			1	
Trinity (Texas)	1			
UCLA	1		1	1 (Art History)
Wesleyan	1			

	13	5	6	2

Total: 26

The extremely small number of scholars working on premodern literature was a concern in 2011. It still is, though the situation has improved. Nevertheless, premodern literature is a field in which we may want to make more investment. In addition, a decrease in the number of faculty working on Buddhism and Confucianism is a serious concern. The field of art history also requires attention. For example, the sole senior art historian at UCLA, who ran a graduate program, has recently retired. This Korea Foundation–endowed position is expected to be replaced, but most likely at the level of assistant professor. Today there are two art historians,

at Dartmouth College and the University of Kansas. Overall, one can say that the faculty position of art history has grown, though it will take a while for graduate training to resume.

Table 2. Premodern Korean Studies Faculty at North American Universities and Colleges, 2018

	History	Language/Literature	Religion/Thought	Other
Arizona State		3		
Binghamton		1		
Bridgeport			1	
British Columbia	2	1		
BYU	2			
Columbia	1		1	
George Washington	1			
Harvard	1	1		
Hawaii				1 (archaeology)
Maryland		1		
Michigan			1	
Pennsylvania	1			
Princeton		1		
Roanoke	1			
UCLA	2		1	
Dartmouth				2*
Emory	1			
Kansas				1 (Art History)
King's University College	1			
La Grange College	1			
Utah		1		
Oregon				1 (archaeology)
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	14	9	4	5

Total: 32

(* art history and history of science)

Table 3 reveals that there are now 19 institutions that have a Korean studies center or program with a dedicated faculty director. We can assume that these are the institutions that run graduate programs. Among these 19 institutions, 9 have premodernists. The trend that the Korean studies field is heavily focused on the modern period was observed in 2011, and it still is true. The absence of premodern specialists raises various concerns. First, courses on premodern Korea are not offered at all; if offered, a faculty member who does not have any training in premodern Korea needs to spend a lot of time and energy preparing to teach premodern content. Second, graduate students tend to lack proper training in the premodern

history of Korea, which can lead them to base their scholarship on often incorrect and incomplete assumptions.

Table 3. Premodern Faculty at Universities with Korean Studies Center

With Premodernists	Without Premodernists
Binghamton	Chicago
British Columbia	Indiana
Columbia	Iowa
Harvard	Stanford
Hawaii	Toronto
George Washington	UC Berkeley
Michigan	UC Irvine
Princeton	UC San Diego
UCLA	USC
	U of Washington

2. Graduate Students

Table 4. 2011 Preliminary Survey of North American Graduate Students in Premodern Korea

(*Indicates students formally affiliated with Chinese programs whose work focuses largely on Korea. The numbers include both Ph.D. and M.A. students.)

University	History	Lang/Lit.	Art His.	Thought/Rel	Archaeology	Total
Binghamton	1					1
British Columbia	5	1		2		8
Columbia	4	1		1		6
Harvard	4	1		1*		6
Hawaii	1	1				2
Johns Hopkins	1*					1
Illinois	1					1
Penn. State	1*					1
Toronto		1			1	2
UCLA	2	3	5	4	1	15
Washington	1	1*				2
	21	9	5	8	2	45

Table 4 presents 2011 data, which show 45 graduate students being trained in 11 schools. Table 5 shows that there were only 29 doctoral students in 9 institutions as of fall 2018. Because this

number represents only doctoral level students, a comparison to the 2011 data is problematic. However, assuming that there are not many M.A. level students in various programs whose work focus on premodern Korea, this significant decrease is alarming because this number seems to predict a weakening status of the premodern field in the near future. Most concerning is the subfield of religion/thought, for the number of faculty in this area has decreased from 6 in 2011 to 4 in 2018. More disturbingly, there seems to be no doctoral-level student in this field, although some students in other disciplines, such as history, do work on religious aspects or thought. Faculty retirement, funding issues, and difficulties in job placement have contributed to more selective doctoral admissions at a number of institutions. While universities such as Columbia, Princeton, and UCLA are expected to resume more robust doctoral programs as their junior faculty get tenure, the long-term sustainability, let alone growth, of graduate training is a serious issue.

Table 5. 2018 Preliminary Survey of North American Graduate Students in Premodern Korea

(*Indicates students who work on both modern and pre-modern Korea.)

University	History	Lang/Lit.	Art His.	Thought/Rel	Archaeology	Total
Arizona State		1+3*				4
British Columbia	5	2*				7
Columbia	2					2
Harvard	6					6
NYU			1			1
Oregon					2	2
Penn	1					1
Princeton	1		2			3
UCLA	1		2			3

Total	16	6	5	0	2	29

3. Publications

Publication data on the subject of premodern Korean studies, ranging from archeology to the period up to 1910, have been collected from two of the most prestigious peer-reviewed journals, the *Journal of Asian Studies* (JAS) and *Journal of Korean Studies* (JKS).

For the time period of 1995–2018, 61 articles on Korea were published in JAS out of a total of 676 articles—or less than 8% of the total (Table 6 and 7). From year to year, there was a huge fluctuation in the number of Korea-focused articles, ranging from 0 in some years to 8 articles on Korea in 2018, thanks to a special JAS issue on “War and Environment on the Korean Peninsula.” As shown in Table 7 (blue bar at the bottom for Korea), the number of Korea articles has been growing over the years. In the period of 1995–2006, there were only 14 Korea

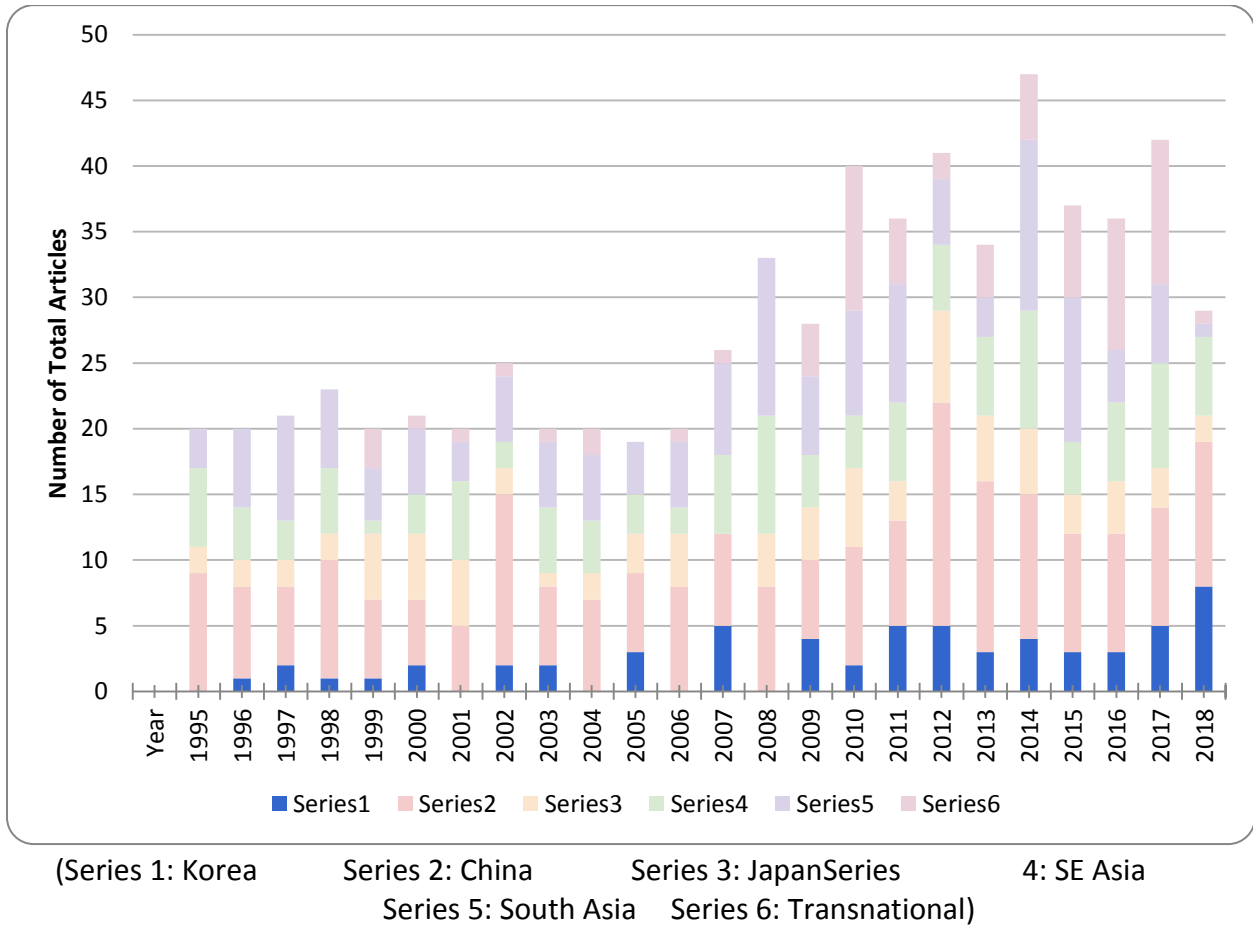
articles out of a total of 249 articles (6% of the total). In the period of 2007–2018, there were 47 Korea articles out of a total of 427 articles (11% of the total). Yet when the 8 articles from 2018 are excluded because this unusually high number was due to publication of a special issue, the percentage of Korea articles in 2007–2018 drops to 8.5%. Nevertheless, in comparison to earlier years when not a single Korea article appeared in JAS, such articles are now published every year, if not in every issue. Of the total of 61 articles over the entire period 1995–2018, 10 articles are on premodern subjects (16%).³ These premodern articles are dominated by the discipline of history.

Table 6. Articles published in *Journal of Asian Studies* by Country / Region, 1995-2018

Year	Countries						Total
Year	Korea	China	Japan	SE Asia	South Asia	Transnational	
1995	0	9	2	6	3	0	20
1996	1	7	2	4	6	0	20
1997	2	6	2	3	8	0	21
1998	1	9	2	5	6	0	23
1999	1	6	5	1	4	3	20
2000	2	5	5	3	5	1	21
2001	0	5	5	6	3	1	20
2002	2	13	2	2	5	1	25
2003	2	6	1	5	5	1	20
2004	0	7	2	4	5	2	20
2005	3	6	3	3	4	0	19
2006	0	8	4	2	5	1	20
2007	5	7	0	6	7	1	26
2008	0	8	4	9	12	0	33
2009	4	6	4	4	6	4	28
2010	2	9	6	4	8	11	40
2011	5	8	3	6	9	5	36
2012	5	17	7	5	5	2	39
2013	3	13	5	6	3	4	34
2014	4	11	5	9	13	5	47
2015	3	9	3	4	11	7	37
2016	3	9	4	6	4	10	36
2017	5	9	3	8	6	11	42
2018	8	11	2	6	1	1	29

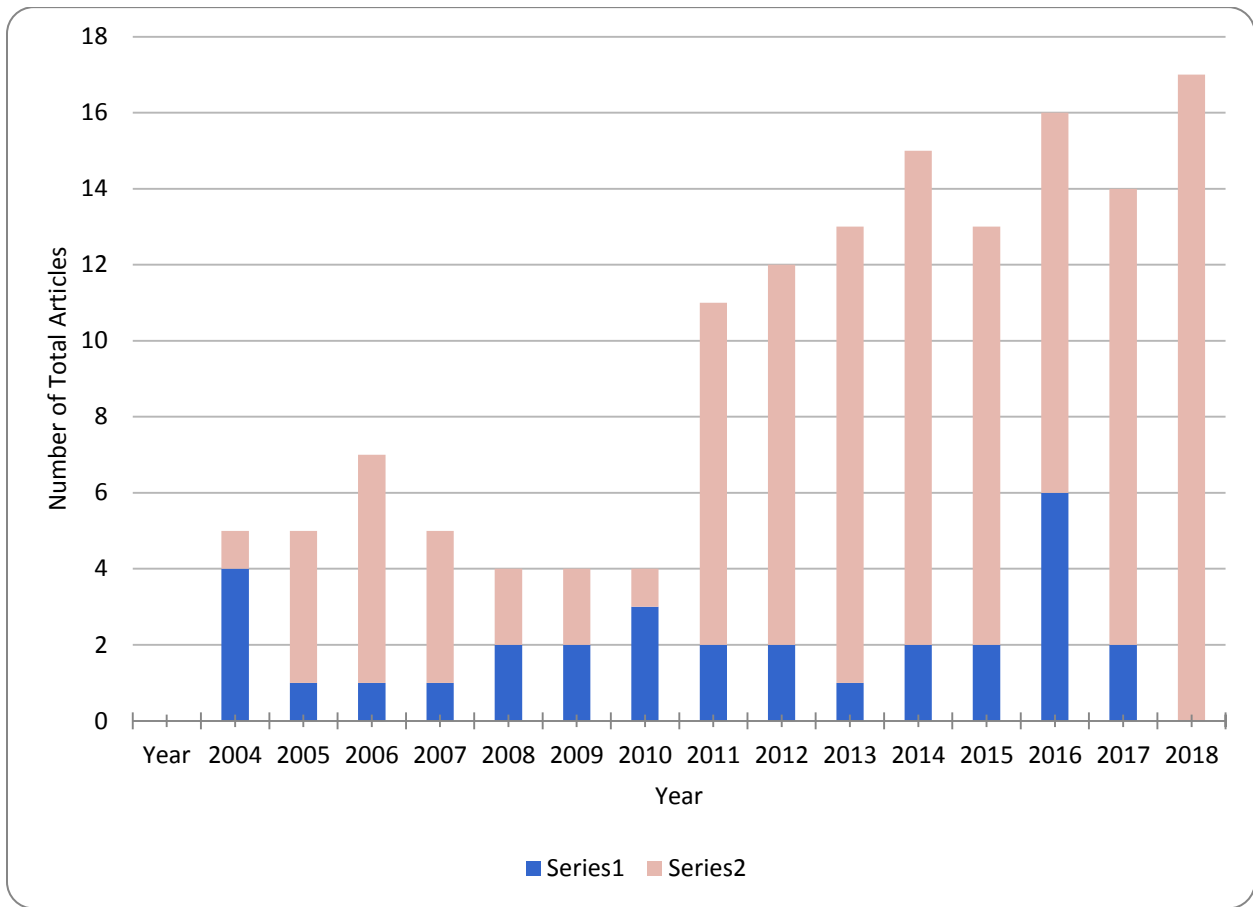
³ These JAS articles on premodern subjects are by Kenneth Robinson (2000), JaHyun Kim Haboush (2003), Sun Joo Kim (2007), Robert Buswell (2009), Jae-hoon Shim (2012), Gregory Evon (2014), Jisoo Kim (2015), Ksenia Chizova (2018), Maya Stiller (2018), and John Lee (2018).

Table 7. JAS Articles on Countries per Year, 1995-2018



For the time period of 2004–2018, JKS published 145 Korea articles, 31 of which were on premodern topics—or 21% of the total (Table 8). In general, premodern articles have been increasing, though not by a large margin. The fact that no premodern article was published in JKS in 2018 is alarming. Disciplinary distribution within the field of premodern Korea between 2004 and 2018 shows the domination of 18 articles on history—plus 5 articles on religion, 5 on literature, 2 on anthropology, and 1 on history of science.

Table 8. JKS Articles on Premodern and Modern Korea per Year, 2004-2018



Series 1: Premodern / Series 2: Modern

4. Premodern Studies in Europe

Scholars working in Europe on premodern Korea began to have a regular biannual gathering in 2016: the first was hosted by EHESS in France, and the second, in 2018, was hosted by the University of Bucharest in Romania. Each meeting has been attended by more than 30 scholars, including graduate students (Table 9). Most scholars work on history and literature, and many teach Korean language in addition to content courses. A number of faculty members reported the growing number of students interested in studying Korea, and Korean language in particular. Some years ago, there were serious concerns over the collapse of Korean studies in Europe. We may have overcome such a danger now because many institutions almost all over Europe offer courses on Korea. Yet there are relatively few institutions (Bochum, SOAS, Oxford, etc.) that offer doctoral-level premodern studies. In addition, although the field of premodern studies looks strong in Europe, its publications often do not reach North American audiences because of language differences.

Table 9. Premodern Korean Studies Scholars in Europe (Based on two workshop programs, 2016 and 2018)

Germany	8
France	6
UK	6
Russia	3
Czech	2
Netherlands	2
Romania	2
Denmark	1
Finland	1
Hungary	1
Spain	1
Sweden	1
Total	34

5. Future Challenges

The overall status of the premodern field in terms of faculty positions has improved since 2011 because retired positions have been successfully replaced by new PhDs and some new positions have been created. Although disciplinary representations have become more diverse, the decline in the field of religion/thought is concerning. The biggest concern is the substantial drop in the number of doctoral students and decreased number of institutions that train graduate students.

We continue to have issues in training doctoral-level students for the following reasons. First, training takes longer due to heavy language requirements. Second, at the same time and paradoxically, the funding structure pushes students to finish the program within a shorter time period. Third, one faculty member often covers all areas and periods of premodern Korea in graduate training, which creates huge burden on her/him and a lack of expert guidance for the student. One solution is to foster academic exchanges with Korean universities. Fourth, the job market often targets the hiring of scholars in modern Korea. This tendency discourages premodern studies. Somewhat related to the nature of the job market, there are almost no doctoral students working on the pre-Chosŏn period (except archaeology).

Those scholars who are trained in premodern studies are therefore potentially unproductive due to the nature of the job market, which requires them to teach modern Korea as well as non-Korea topics and areas. Finally, the need for diversification of disciplinary fields is urgent. In terms of numbers of faculty, doctoral students, and publications, the discipline of history is dominating the field of Korean studies. We need to continue to support literature and language, and particularly religion and thought. In addition to supporting the field of early Korea, emerging fields such as the history of science and technology, environmental studies, and art history deserve strong support for a healthy, balanced development of Korean studies.