

Berlin becomes hub of Korean studies in Europe

Free University educates German experts in Korean social sciences

Culture Power KOREA

By Oh Kyu-wook
Korea Herald correspondent

BERLIN — After speaking with Hannes Mosler for five minutes, one might wonder whether he is German or Korean.

Although he has no Korean background, Mosler not only speaks flawless Korean, but also perfectly understands its culture and customs.

"I first got interested in Korea in 1994, when I visited the country during my backpacking trip. Since then I started to learn the language, and now I visit Korea almost every year," he said.

Mosler joined Free University in 2009 as a research fellow at the Institute of Korean Studies after completing his doctoral degree at Seoul National University.

"I studied Korean politics, and found it really fascinating," Mosler said in his office.

Korea, in fact, has much value in social science, the German researcher said.

"Korea is of great interest to students and scholars. For instance, the rapid development of Korean democracy is a fascinating subject to study," he said.

Mosler, however, feels there is still a lack of interest from overseas academia.



Hannes Mosler, research fellow in Korean studies at Free University

"Some universities in Europe teach Korean language and literature, but only a few teach Korean politics," Mosler said.

"But that's why our university is so special," he added.

Korean Studies at Free University, he said, is not only focused on providing a language course, but also lectures on Korea's politics, economy and society.

Korean Studies was first taught at Free University in 1980 as a subsidiary subject



Students outside the Institute of Korean Studies building.

Oh Kyu-wook/The Korea Herald

of the Japanese and Chinese Studies Departments. It took more than two decades until the Institute of Korean Studies finally became an independent division.

The Institute of Korean Studies offered its first undergraduate courses in 2005 and graduate school courses in 2009.

Despite its relatively short history, the institute has seen rapid growth both quantitatively and qualitatively, said the German researcher.

In 2008, there were around 10 students in the Korean Studies program, but the number jumped to 132 in 2010, according to Mosler.

The department has also conducted various research projects, and held numerous seminars and workshops over the past five years.

In 2010, in particular, marking the 20th anniversary of German reunification, the institute launched a special project called "Twenty Years of Reunification

in Germany and its Lesson for Korea."

The one-year research project, which was co-managed by Lee Eun-jung, director of the Institute of Korean Studies and Werner Pfennig, an East Asian foreign policy expert at Free University, produced a great body of work that totaled 22 volumes with 14,500 pages in both German and Korean.

In November 2010, the Institute of Korean Studies also held a special workshop for school

teachers in Germany with support from the Korea Foundation. Ten lectures were given to social studies teachers to give them a better understanding of Korea's history, politics, society and culture.

Also, since 2009, the institute has been conducting a five-year research project titled "Circulation of Knowledge and Dynamics of Transformation," with the Ruhr University in Bochum, with support from the Academy of Korean Studies.

One good sign for Korean Studies at Free University, claimed Mosler, is that there are now more German students than ethnic Korean students.

"At the beginning, we had more Korean-German students than German students, but the situation has reversed now," he said, noting that the recent Korean culture boom helped attract more local students.

Vincent Kreuzel, 21, said he decided to learn Korean after playing Korean computer games.

"I loved playing StarCraft. I watched a lot of Korean game programs. And when I started to learn about the country I got more interested in it. I found that Korea has very interesting history which is very similar to German history in some ways," he said.

Daniela Claus, 29, a master's degree candidate, said: "My mother is Korean, so I always wanted to learn the language. When I was in Korea I was unable to talk to my family, and that made me really sad. So I started to learn Korean."

"But right now I have deeper interests in its culture and society and politics. Now I'm interested in minority rights and civil movement," she added.

The main objective of the Korean Studies program at Free University is to become a hub of Korean social science in central Europe, said Mosler.

"The number of foreign experts on Korea is quite small, compared to that of China and Japan. But it also means there are a lot of opportunities for new studies. I believe the importance of Korean studies will continue to grow," he added.

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Learning Korean in London

SOAS attracts students with broad exchange programs

By Oh Kyu-wook
Korea Herald correspondent

LONDON — Majoring in Korean might sound a little intimidating to most Europeans, but Kevin Fry, a senior at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, was up to the challenge.

"I tried to learn Chinese, but didn't find it particularly enjoyable. So I started to learn Korean, and initially got interested in it," he said.

Kevin noted that the student exchange program of SOAS, in particular, helped broaden his interest in Korean Studies.

"I stayed one year in Korea. I really enjoyed the time, and the more I studied, the more I got interested in Korea," he said.

Located in central London, just a few meters from the British Museum, SOAS is the only higher education institute in the U.K. specializing in the study of Asia, Africa and Middle East studies.

The Center of Korean Studies first opened its door at SOAS in 1987 with support from the Korea Foundation. And since its establishment, the center has been a leading institution of Korean studies in Europe, accord-

ing to Yeon Jae-hoon, professor at the Center of Korean Studies of SOAS.

"Korean language is currently taught in 25 different European countries. But SOAS has by far the largest number of students and professors in Europe," claimed Yeon.

There are around 25-30 students in each year group, and currently seven professors teach them.

"This number will continue to rise. Each year more and more students come to study Korean, so we're hiring one more professor this year," he said.

SOAS has intensive language training. Students in their first year must take a minimum 10 hours of Korean language a week, explained Yeon.

In their second year, they must spend one year at Korea University in Seoul as part of a student exchange program between the two universities.

"The student exchange program is one of the main strengths of our university," said Dr. Grace Koh, a lecturer in Korean literature at SOAS.

"Students take my course once after they spend a year in Korea. And it's really helpful when students come in with a



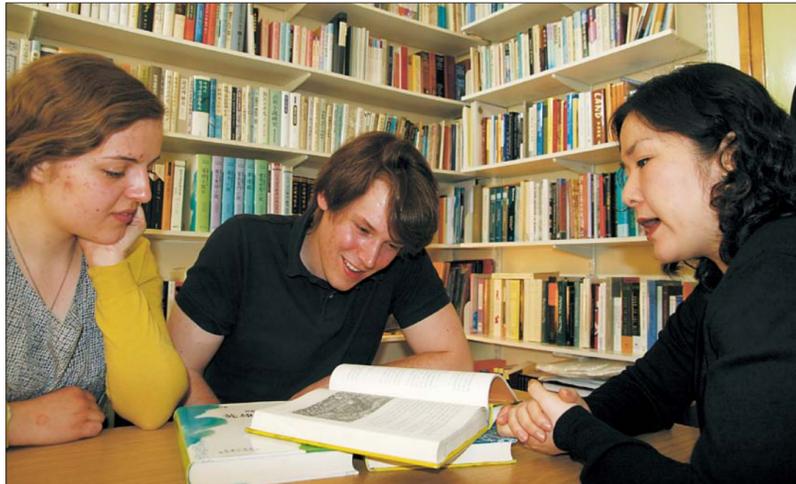
Yeon Jae-hoon, professor in Korean studies at SOAS

certain level of knowledge of Korean culture," she said.

Sophie Bowman, an MA student at SOAS, picked the library as another strong point of SOAS.

"I think the library here is better than anywhere else, they have four or five stacks of books in Korean," she said.

The library has a vast selection of books in Korean Studies — there are now more than 50,000 books in Korean and 30,000 books in English



Grace Koh (right), a lecturer in Korean literature at SOAS, holds a tutorial with her students.

Oh Kyu-wook/The Korea Herald

— which are believed to be the largest in Europe, said Fujiko Kobayashi, a librarian at SOAS.

"SOAS is the only university in the U.K. which has an online database of Korean books and newspapers," she added.

One of the main activities of the Center of Korean Studies, Yeon said, is its extensive seminar series. Since 2005, with support from the Academy of Korean Studies, SOAS has been organizing a special lecture

series and workshops for the British Association of Korean Studies and the Association of Korean Studies in Europe.

In March 2010, in particular, the Center of Korean Studies held a workshop on Korean court paintings. This one-day workshop explored different themes and aspects of Korean court paintings of Joseon Dynasty.

In April 2010, the center also held a workshop of the European Association for Korean

language education. Fifty-eight Korean language lecturers from 17 different countries participated in the annual workshop, looking at ways to cooperate to develop curriculum materials and teaching resources.

"Most of all, SOAS is in London, an international city. Near the university there are four Korean restaurants and lots of Korean supermarkets. It's quite a unique environment," Sophie said.

"The atmosphere here is re-

ally great because there are a lot of different people from different backgrounds. For instance, I study Korean and my friend studies Persian, and we can talk about two different cultures, share similarity and differences," she added.

Grace Koh, who oversees the university's administration, said that the recent Korean culture boom has also helped increase the popularity of Korean studies here.

"This year we have received one of the highest numbers of applications. And surprisingly K-pop has been mentioned in almost all the applications I've seen," said Koh.

Still, Yeon admitted that Korean Studies lag behind Chinese and Japanese studies in terms of numbers of students.

"The size of Korean Studies is now about the size of Japanese Studies in the '80s," he said.

However, Yeon added that he believes Korean Studies at SOAS will grow rapidly and soon catch up with other popular studies.

"I hope and believe that in less than ten years Korean Studies will become as popular as Japanese Studies," he added.

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- Social Change in Korea** represents the first attempt by more than two dozen leading Korean sociology professors to co-author an in-depth study of contemporary Korean society.
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