

## In Memoriam: Hugh H. W. Kang, Trailblazing Historian of Korea and Visionary Builder of Korean Studies



Hugh H. W. Kang, Emeritus Professor at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, a trailblazing Korea historian in the United States, a visionary builder of the Korean studies discipline, and a loving partner and father, died on Tuesday, July 16, 2024, at the age of 92, in South Korea.

With his magnanimous spirit and boundless energy, Hugh Kang helped to establish the discipline of Korean studies in the United States. As a scholar of ancient and medieval Korea, he was one of the first Korea historians to become a faculty member in a history department in the United States, when he joined the University of Hawai‘i’s Department of History in 1965. With Yongho Ch’oe, who joined the History faculty in 1970, the University of Hawai‘i became the first university in the United States to grant a Ph.D. in Korean history.

Hugh Kang’s work was impactful from the beginning. In 1971, he organized a historic international conference on Korean studies in Honolulu, the earliest conference of its kind in the world and an event reported widely in Hawai‘i and South Korea. He was also a principal figure in the founding of the Center for Korean Studies at the university in 1972, the first Korean studies center outside of South Korea. In 1990, he helped to establish the International Society for Korean Studies, the only global Korean studies organization in the world that is regularly attended by scholars from both South Korea and North Korea. Even after retirement in 2003, Hugh Kang remained committed to building Korean studies globally.

Hugh Kang penned and translated some of the most important foundational books in premodern Korean history, including *The Silla Annals of the Samguk Sagi*, *The Koguryō Annals of the Samguk Sagi*, *The Essentials of Koryō History*, *Sources of Korean Tradition*, and his monograph *Institutional Borrowing: The Case of the Chinese Civil Service System in Early Koryō*.

Born in 1931 in Jinju, a city in South Korea’s South Gyeongsang Province, Hugh Kang started his college education in 1951 at the Wartime Union University, a coalition institution of thirty-one colleges formed during the Korean War. He continued his college education at Seoul National University after the war. He also began to work as a translator during the war. In 1955, Hugh Kang left the war-torn South Korea to pursue further education in the United States. Hugh Kang went on to receive a B.A. from Berea College in 1956, an M.A. from the University of Chicago in 1958, and a Ph.D. from the University of Washington in 1964.

In an interview with South Korea's daily *The Kyunghyang Shinmun* in 2012, Hugh Kang spoke about the role of scholars in the expansion of Korean studies. "Our role is to discover how Korean culture and history are connected to universal values of truth, goodness, and aesthetics and to explain the connections in a systematic way. If we can find the universal values from our culture, then our culture can resonate anywhere in the world," he said.

Hugh Kang's assessment has been prescient. The field of Korean studies that he helped to start six decades ago has now become an important discipline firmly established across the United States. Furthermore, his vision of searching for universal values is consistently reflected in the Center for Korean Studies' mission to foster dialogue and engagement among people around the world.

Hugh Kang's brilliance, generosity, and friendship will be dearly missed. He is survived by his two daughters, Haeran and Anita, and their families. A memorial will be held at the Center for Korean Studies in the fall.



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[Prepared by the Center for Korean Studies at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa]