Stanford



Hongmin Ahn

Ph.D. Student in Religious Studies, admitted Autumn 2026

Bio

BIO

Hongmin Ahn is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Religious Studies at Stanford University, where he studies modern Korean and Japanese religions. As an interdisciplinary scholar, he connects religion, history, and anthropology by examining how the memories of colonization, war, and national division have shaped the lives of Korean religious communities, both in Korea and in diaspora (most prominently Japan).

Unified by an underlying focus on the body — one living, one dead — his research interests stretch across two seemingly disparate areas. The first turns to the living body in its most kinetic, yet monotonous, devotional form: prostration. He examines the emergence of prostration as a popular practice — often performed in sets of 108, 1,080, and 3,000 — in modern South Korea, asking how this bodily devotion rose to prominence as a means of coping with contemporary challenges that lay members face. Focused on sensorial, emotional, and spatial experience, he looks at how lay practitioners construct selfhood and subjectivity through this repetitive somatic movement.

The second turns to the dead body: the remains of Koreans who died in Japan during the colonial and post-colonial eras. Unfolding the layered historical traumas left by the Japanese Empire, he explores the contested belonging of these bodies (both physical and spiritual) between the unwelcoming hostland and the divided homeland. He examines three types of posthumous care extended to them: ethnic care by fellow Korean religious communities, civic care by Japanese faith communities, and lastly, what he terms "violent care" by nationalistic Shinto institutions, most prominently Yasukuni Shrine.

Before Stanford, Hongmin was an IAFOR Global Fellow at the Osaka School of International Public Policy (OSIPP), The University of Osaka, and completed a year of Japanese-language study at the Inter-University Center for Japanese Language Studies in Yokohama. He holds a Master of Theological Studies from Harvard Divinity School and a Bachelor of Arts in the Interdisciplinary Study of Religions from Bard College.

HONORS AND AWARDS

- IAFOR Global Fellowship, International Academic Forum (IAFOR) (2024)

EDUCATION AND CERTIFICATIONS

- M.T.S., Harvard University, The Divinity School (2024)
- B.A., Bard College (2022)