



COSB60: Contemporary Korean Society, 7.5 Credits

Fall Semester 2024
2024-10-02 – 2024-12-03

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Course Outline (as of 27 August 2024; subject to further change)

COURSE CONTENT

The course provides students with a basic understanding of key issues in contemporary Korean society. It focuses on post-Cold War Korea. The course covers topics such as popular culture, gender, and demographic issues. The course also includes Korean politics, domestic politics in both North and South Korea, and inter-Korean relations. Finally, the course covers Korea's growing presence in regional and international arenas.

MODE OF INSTRUCTION

This course is conducted entirely online, with all class activities taking place via Zoom and Canvas.

All lectures will be held live on Zoom. Lectures will include various visual aids such as YouTube videos or news clips and provide discussion questions. For optimal learning, it is highly recommended that you attend the live sessions. For those unable to attend, recordings of the live sessions will be uploaded to Canvas shortly after each session.

In addition to lectures, the course includes two online seminars. These seminars will be conducted on the Canvas Discussion Board, where you will engage in discussions with other students over three days. Failure to participate in seminar discussions will result in a make-up task that must be submitted to me. The course cannot be passed without either attending the seminars or completing the make-up tasks.

Finally, there will be two office hours during which you can drop in to discuss any questions or concerns you might have. If you are unable to attend during these times but wish to speak with me, please contact me via email to arrange a meeting.

All meeting times are in Central European Time (CET).

READINGS

All readings must be completed prior to class. Lectures will not summarize the readings but will instead build on them and explore new directions.

ASSESSMENT

- Seminar paper (3 credits): 1,500 words, deadline 8 November 2024, submission via Canvas
- Written, take-home assignment (4.5 credits): 2,000 words, deadline 3 December 2024, submission via Canvas

More detailed information will be provided in class.

Marking Scale: Fail, Pass, and High Pass.

RE-EXAMINATION

An opportunity for re-examination will be offered after the end of the course. A second re-examination will be arranged at a later date.

SEMINARS

More detailed information will be provided in class.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Participants in this course are expected to uphold academic integrity by adhering to the scholarly standards of accurate source attribution, appropriate data collection and usage, and transparent acknowledgment of others' contributions to their ideas, discoveries, interpretations, and conclusions. Acts such as cheating on exams, plagiarizing or misrepresenting someone else's ideas or language as one's own, falsifying data, or any other forms of academic dishonesty violate the standards of Lund University and the broader academic community.

The use of AI assistance software for graded assignments is not permitted.

If a student is found to have intentionally deceived the examiner, they will be reported to Lund University's Disciplinary Board and may face disciplinary actions.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Part I: The Making of the Two Koreas

Lecture 1 (Thu 3 Oct, 12:00-14:00) – State Making and Politics in the Korean Peninsula

It would be an understatement to say that the Korean Peninsula has undergone dramatic political changes since the turn of the 20th century. These include the fall of a long-standing dynasty, Japanese colonization, liberation, national division, the emergence of two distinct political systems, authoritarianism, and a transition to liberal democracy in the South, alongside the development of a totalitarian and highly secretive state in the North. The first session will focus on the political development of the two Koreas and their defining characteristics. To set the stage for subsequent sessions, it will also provide a brief overview of the peninsula's history during the 20th and 21st centuries.

Required Readings:

- Hwang, Kyung Moon. (2021). *A History of Korea: An Episodic Narrative*. 3rd edition. Red Globe Press, Chapters 20-26, pp.160-225.
- Choi, Jang Jip. (1993). "Political Cleavages in South Korea." In Hagen Koo, ed. *State and Society in Contemporary Korea*. Cornell University Press, pp.13-50.
- Armstrong, Charles K. (2009). "Socialism, Sovereignty, and the North Korean Exception." In Sonia Ryang, ed. *North Korea: Toward a Better Understanding*. Lexington Books, pp.41-55.

Lecture 2 (Tue 8 Oct, 12:00-14:00) – Modernity and Religion in the Korean Peninsula

While religion may not initially seem the most obvious lens through which to explore contemporary Korean society, this session will reveal its profound connection with the peninsula's political, economic, and social evolution. Our discussion will specifically focus on Christianity and Shamanism, examining how each has intertwined with the nation-building processes in North and South Korea. This exploration will not only demonstrate the intimate ties between religion and Korean modernity, but also highlight the divergent paths of the two Koreas.

Required Readings:

- Baker, Don. (2016). "Religion in Twenty-First Century Korean Lives." In Youna Kim, ed. *Routledge Handbook of Korean Culture and Society*. Routledge, pp. 91-104.
- Kwon, Heonik. (2024). "Popular Religion in North Korea." In Byung-Yeon Kim, ed. *The North Korean Regime under Kim Jong-Un*. Springer, pp.123-138.
- Mellquist Lehto, Heather. (2020). "Designing Secularity at Sarang Church," *Journal of Korean Studies*, 25(2), pp.429-454.
- Kendall, Laurel. (2009). *Shamans, Nostalgias, and The IMF: South Korean Popular Religion in Motion*. University of Hawaii Press, Chapter 1, pp.1-33.

Lecture 3 (Tue 15 Oct, 12:00-14:00) – "Which" Patriarchy? Gender in South Korea

The influence of patriarchal values and practices in South Korea is often attributed to a persistent adherence to Confucianism. This session will critically examine this oversimplified

narrative through the lens of the women's movement in South Korea. We will focus on family law reform—the central issue of women's rights in the 20th century—as well as digital feminism's response to the recent surge in misogyny among young Korean men. This discussion will highlight how gender remains a critical issue in contemporary South Korean society.

Required Readings:

- Shin, Ki-young. (2006). "The Politics of the Family Law Reform Movement in Contemporary Korea: A Contentious Space for Gender and the Nation," *Journal of Korean Studies*, 11(1), pp.93-125.
- Lim, Sungyun. (2018). *Rules of the House: Family Law and Domestic Disputes in Colonial Korea*. University of California Press, Introduction, pp.1-15.
- Kim, Jinsook. (2017). "#iamafeminist as the 'Mother Tag': Feminist Identification and Activism against Misogyny on Twitter in South Korea," *Feminist Media Studies*, 17(5), pp.804-820.
- Koo, JiHae. (2020). "South Korean Cyberfeminism and Trolling: The Limitation of Online Feminist Community Womad as Counterpublic," *Feminist Media Studies* 20(6), pp.831-846.

Seminar Discussion 1 (Wed 16 - Fri 18 Oct)

Lecture 4 (Tue 22 Oct, 12:00-14:00) – Gender and Everyday Lives in North Korea

Rogue State, Totalitarian Regime, and Kim's Hermit Kingdom—these are some of the keywords used in both media and academia to label North Korea as a dangerous and backward society that marginalizes its people, especially women. Building on the previous session, this meeting continues to use gender as a lens to explore North Korean society, particularly focusing on the lives of ordinary North Korean women. We will discuss the more complex reality on the ground and how the North Korean experience can broaden our understanding of gender, masculinity, and femininity.

Required Readings:

- Ryang, Sonia. (2009). "Introduction." In Sonia Ryang, ed. *North Korea: Toward a Better Understanding*. Lexington Books, pp.1-16 (Read up to the section titled "In This Book").
- Kim, Suzy. (2010). "Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the North Korean Revolution, 1945-1950." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 52(4), pp.742-762.
- Park, Kyung-Ae. (2011). "Economic Crisis, Women's Changing Economic Roles, and Their Implications for Women's Status in North Korea," *The Pacific Review*, 24(2), pp.159-177.
- Chae, Kyeong-weon and Bae In-yeong. (2006). *The Sea Girl & the Prince*. Gold Star Children's Press. Available at <https://wordswithoutborders.org/read/article/2016-02/february-2016-graphic-novel-the-sea-girl-the-prince/>
- Demick, Barbara. (2009). *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea*. Spiegel and Grau, Chapters 1-3, pp. 3-56.

Part II: Korea in the Regional and Global Orders: A Critical Approach

Lecture 5 (Tue 29 Oct, 12:00-14:00) – The Korea Question in the “Post-Cold War” Era?

This session considers inter-Korean relations. A quick glance at their historical unfolding reveals that the relationship between the two Koreas is not confined to the peninsula but encompasses several regional and global superpowers, including Japan, China, Russia, and the United States, to name a few. We will particularly hone in on one of the most controversial issues—human rights violations and refugees from the North. Although these are often presented as issues of universal value, our exploration will reveal a deeply ideological power struggle behind them, leading us to question the validity of the term “post-Cold War” used today.

Required Readings:

- Agov, Avram. (2016). “Inter-Korean Relations, 1945–2013.” In Michael Seth, ed. *Routledge Handbook of Modern Korean History*, Routledge, pp.368-389.
- Cha, Victor D. (2018). *The Impossible State: North Korea, Past and Future*. HarperCollins, Chapter 5, pp.162-211.
- Park, Hyun Ok. (2009). “The Politics of Unification and Neoliberal Democracy: Economic Cooperation and North Korean Human Rights.” In Sonia Ryang, ed. *North Korea: Toward a Better Understanding*. Lexington Books, pp.109-128.
- Morris-Suzuki, Tessa. (2009). “Refugees, Abductees, ‘Returnees’: Human Rights in Japan-North Korea Relations,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, 13(3), pp.1-22.

Online Office Hours 1 (Wed 30 Oct, 16:00-17:00) via Zoom

Lecture 6 (Tue 5 Nov, 12:00-14:00) – The Dynamics of K-Pop: Soft Power and Fandom in a Globalizing World

The popularity of South Korean popular culture, particularly K-pop, has captivated the world, leading to a surge in scholarly and journalistic writings in Western societies that attempt to answer the question, “Why Korea?” This session will critically assess the underlying assumptions about this fascination and situate the K-pop phenomenon within the broader contexts of postcolonial nation-building, neoliberal capitalism, and the rise of new media technologies. We will explore K-pop from state, management company, and fan perspectives to understand the complex dynamics between power and culture in global cultural production.

Required Readings:

- Seabrook, John. (2012) “Factory Girls: Cultural Technology and the Making of K-Pop,” *New Yorker* (October 8), Available at <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/10/08/factory-girls-2>
- Choi, JungBong, and Roald Maliangkay. (2014). “Introduction: Why Fandom Matters to the International Rise of K-Pop.” In JungBong Choi and Roald Maliangkay, eds. *K-Pop: The International Rise of the Korean Music Industry*. Routledge, pp. 1-18.
- Kang, Inkyu. (2014). “The Political Economy of Idols: South Korea’s Neoliberal Restructuring and Its Impact on the Entertainment Labour Force.” In JungBong Choi

and Roald Maliangkay, eds. *K-Pop: The International Rise of the Korean Music Industry*. Routledge, pp.51-65

- Elfving-Hwang, Joanna. (2018). "K-Pop Idols, Artificial Beauty and Affective Fan Relationships in South Korea." In Anthony Elliott, ed. *Routledge Handbook of Celebrity Studies*. Routledge, pp. 190-201.
- Cho, Michelle. (2022). "BTS for BLM: K-Pop, Race, and Transcultural Fandom," *Celebrity Studies*, 13(2), pp.270-279.

Seminar Paper Deadline (Fri 8 Nov)

Part III: What Lies Ahead

Lecture 7 (Tue 12 Nov, 12:00-14:00) – Welfare and the Demographic “Meltdown” in South Korea

South Korea, the world’s 13th largest economy, continually presents startling demographic statistics: it has the world’s lowest fertility rate at 0.78 in 2022 (expected to further drop to 0.68 in 2024), coupled with the highest elderly poverty rate among OECD member states. This session will explore this issue within the context of the country’s long-term socio-economic transformations, including developmentalism and neoliberal restructuring. By centering on the lived experiences of both young and elderly populations, we will reflect on the lessons about welfare, particularly in relation to class and gender, that we can learn from South Korea’s experiences.

Required Readings:

- Song, Jesook. (2006). “Family Breakdown and Invisible Homeless Women: Neoliberal Governance during the Asian Debt Crisis in South Korea, 1997-2001,” *positions: east asia cultures critique*, 14(1), pp. 37-65.
- Brinton, Mary C, and Eunsil Oh. (2019). “Babies, Work, or Both? Highly Educated Women’s Employment and Fertility in East Asia,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 125(1), pp.105-140.
- Park, Gum-Ryeong. and Bo Kyong Seo. (2021). “Mental Health Among the Korean Older Population: How is it Related to Asset-based Welfare?” *Journal of Applied Gerontology*, 40(2), pp.142-151.
- Kim, Sunil. (2023). “The Political Origins of Persistent Elderly Poverty in South Korea.” *Pacific Affairs*, 96(1), pp.35-59.

Lecture 8 (Tue 19 Nov, 12:00-14:00) – Global Koreas: “Multiculturalism” and the Korean Diaspora

Throughout the sessions covering topics from religion to popular culture, we have seen how Korea has been shaped by transnational exchanges. This final session focuses on those who most corporally and symbolically exemplify this phenomenon. In recent years, South Korea has experienced a significant increase in the number of migrants and refugees, challenging the longstanding claim to the nation’s ethnic homogeneity. Furthermore, the conception of “Korea” itself has expanded beyond the peninsula’s borders, with over 7 million people

recognized as overseas Koreans, many of whom maintain active connections with both Koreas. This session will examine how newcomers who have made South Korea their home, along with overseas Koreans, are redefining what it means to be “Korean.”

Required Readings:

- Kim, Minjeong. (2013). “Citizenship Projects for Marriage Migrants in South Korea: Intersecting Motherhood with Ethnicity and Class,” *Social Politics*, 20(4), pp.455-481.
- Park, Jung-Sun, and Paul Y. Chang. (2005). “Contention in the Construction of a Global Korean Community: The Case of the Overseas Korean Act,” *Journal of Korean Studies*, 10(1), pp.1-27.
- Kim, Eleana. (2007). “Our Adoptee, Our Alien: Transnational Adoptees as Specters of Foreignness and Family in South Korea,” *Anthropological Quarterly*, 80(2), pp. 497-531.

Seminar Discussion 2 (Wed 20- Fri 22 Nov)

Online Office Hours 3 (Wed 27 Nov, 16:00-17:00) via Zoom

Written Home Exam Deadline (Tue 3 Dec)