

## Life in Contemporary Korea

Summer 2018

MWTh: 09:00-12:00

Sangjun Jeong

sangjunjeong@gmail.com

Office hours: by appointment

South Korea has achieved both industrialization and democratization at a pace and scale that is unprecedented. South Korea's economy is the 13<sup>th</sup> largest in the world, and its GDP per capita is over US \$30,000 today. This is an astounding achievement, considering that in the mid-1950s half of the Korean government's budget came from US aid, and that the GDP per capita was far less than \$100 in 1960, much lower than those of North Korea and most Southeast Asian countries. For conservatives in South Korea, the past seventy years are the proud history of success. To South Korean progressives, it is the history of failure and accumulated injustice to be purged now by the light of the candle revolution. Both sides see the other as armed savages. It is not simply a political division between conservatives and progressives or between Right and Left. The struggle between North and South somehow metonymically underwrites every political battle within the South. It is the total power struggle for legitimacy in the writing of Korean history for the past hundred years and over what is and should be the Korean way of life.

This course examines how South Korea has come to this by looking into important issues that have shaped contemporary Korean culture and society since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. It explores a diversity of themes as represented in literary works, historical writings, shopping malls, cafes, fast food restaurants as well as films, TV dramas and other forms of popular culture. A particular emphasis is placed on the war over history—the wall that is rising between Koreans in the South, which seems to get higher and stronger with no possibility of lowering or mending. Students will have an opportunity to make a presentation on the topic of their choice up to thirty minutes. We will finalize the course schedule in the first session

Schedule:

Session 1: How to study Korean culture and Koreans

Ray B. Browne, "Popular Culture: Notes towards a Definition"

Session 2: Cultural change in Korea

Godwin C. Chu and others, "Introduction," *Modernization vs. Revolution: Cultural Change in Korea and China*.

Session 3: History dispute with China: Northeast Asia project

Song Ki-Ho, "China's Attempt at 'Stealing' Parts of Ancient Korean History"

Session 4: History disputes with Japan: *Dokdo* and comfort woman

From Richard Kim, *Lost Names*

Session 5: US presence in South Korea

Lee Hong-Koo, "Reflections on a Century of Korean-American Relations,"

Session 6: Localizing globalization

From James Watson, *Golden Arches East: McDonald's in East Asia*

Session 7: Korean wave

John Seabrook, "Factory Girls: Cultural technology and the making of K-pop"

John Lie, "What Is the K in K-pop?: South Korean Popular Music, the Culture Industry, and National Identity"

Session 8: Korean identity represented in the LA "riots"

Screening: *Saigu* (documentary)

From Chang-rae Lee, *Native Speake*

Edward Taehan Chang, "Confronting Sa-i-gu: Twenty Years after the Los Angeles Riots"

Session 9: The people who leave North Korea

Judy Han, "Beyond safe haven: a critique of Christian custody of North Korean migrants in China"

Kongdan Oh, "Defectors: sometimes running away is the best option"

Session 10: Inter-Korea relations: North Korea's nuclear program

H.S Park, "Inter-Korean relations: A legitimacy war," "The unconventional wisdom in negotiating behavior: The weapons controversy and beyond"

Session 11: War over history in South Korea I

*Ode to My Father* (film)

*The Attorney* (film)

Session 12: War over history in South Korea II

President Trump's speeches at UN General Assembly, South Korea's National Assembly

President Moon's speeches on Liberation Day and at UN General Assembly

Han Kang, "While the US Talks of War, South Korea Shudders," *The New York Times*

Session 13: Presenting students projects

Session 14: Wrap-up session: Cultural Values and national identity

Chu and others, "Divergent Cultural Patterns in Korea and China,"  
*Modernization vs. Revolution*

Session 15: Final

Grading:

Class participation (30%), Project report (20%), Final (50%)