

Ewha International Summer School 2026

Contemporary Korean Cinema

Instructor: Dr. Yung Bin Kwak (PhD, U. of Iowa/ Visiting Professor @Ewha Womans Univ.)

Class time: Mon thru Thur

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This class is designed to introduce students to contemporary Korean culture and history thru cinema. By watching and discussing various films, it seeks to provide a broad purview of Korea at its most historical, helping you better grasp how South Korea has arrived the present. Rather than offering a mere compilation of factual knowledge, however, it seeks to challenge common assumptions about Korean Culture being ‘Totally Unique’ or ‘Absolutely Other.’ To that end, it will engage with key aspects of modern Korean history such as the Korean War, the Gwangju Massacre, legacies of (Post)Colonialism, gender politics, class antagonism, multiculturalism, and last but not least, return of shamanism, focusing on heated debates and recent controversies about them. Set against this backdrop, your understanding of contemporary Korea and Korean Cinema, I hope, will never be the same. (Class is conducted in English. No prior knowledge of Korea or the Korean language is expected)

Class Format and Requirements

Attendance (25%) + Participation (25%)

One Research Paper (25%)

Final Presentation (25%)

Textbook: There is no main textbook. Readings will be provided in PDF or via internet links.

Class Policy: You are expected to complete the assigned readings in advance and to *bring those readings to class*, prepared to think aloud and participate in discussion. Your engaged presence beyond physical one is *essential* to the success of the course. Attendance is mandatory —your *chronic lateness or three unexcused absences* could potentially result in *F*. If for any reason you cannot attend class, you should inform me in advance. In the case of absences, only documented excuses (doctor's note, jury duty, and so on) will be accepted.

Classroom Expectations and Academic Integrity: Use of mobile phones and laptops in class, except as note-taking devices, is *strictly prohibited*. Repeated provocations (however unintentional) could lead to an irreparable damage to the final grade. The work you turn in should be your own original work. Defined as the submission or presentation of work, in any form, that is not a student's own, without candid acknowledgment of the sources including AI, plagiarism is a serious offense and could result in disciplinary action.

Religious Observances Policy: Some students may wish to take part in religious observances that occur during this academic term. If you have a religious observance which conflicts with your participation in the course, please contact me in person to discuss appropriate accommodations.

COURSE SCHEDULE*

(*Schedule and materials are subject to change)

M Introduction to the Course and (New) Korean Cinema

Sangjoon Lee, "Rediscovering Korean Cinema", in *Rediscovering Korean Cinema*, Ann Arbor, MI, U. of Michigan Press, 2019, 1-12.

Heonik Kwon, *The Other Cold War*, Intro. Columbia University Press, 2010.

T The Korean War & the Division System of Two Koreas I

Assigned Viewing: *JSA* (Park Chan-wook, 2000)

Paik Nak chung, Ch.1 'Making the Movement for Overcoming the Division System a Daily Practice,' In *The Division System in Crisis: Essays on Contemporary Korea*, Berkeley & LA: U. of California Press, 2011, 3-11. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0n74x461>

Heonik Kwon, *The Other Cold War*, Ch.1, Columbia University Press, 2010.

W The Korean War & the Division System of Two Koreas II

Assigned Viewing: *Ode to My Father* (Yoon Je-kyoon, 2014)

Bruce Cummings, "Epilogue to (De)Memorializing the Korean War: A Critical Intervention." (2015)
https://escholarship.org/content/qt6gr3d6xq/qt6gr3d6xq_noSplash_637103f78a790c842d_299cbe0958efca.pdf

Kyung Hyun Kim, "*Ode to My Father* (2014): Korean War through Cinema," in *Rediscovering Korean Cinema*, 502-513.

Th The Korean War & the Division System of Two Koreas III

Assigned viewing: *12.12 The Day* (Kim Sung-su, 2023)

"The bereaved mothers who were painted as North Korean spies," *Hankyoreh* 5.19.2016
http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_national/744574.html

Hun Joon Kim, "What Is Transitional Justice and Why Is It Relevant to South Korea?" *SSK Human Rights Brief* 1.4 (Dec. 2013) http://sskhumanrights.org/brief/2013_04.pdf

M (Compelled Return of) Gwangju

Assigned Viewing: *A Taxi Driver* (Jang Hoon, 2017)

Tim Shorrocks, 'The Lasting Significance of Kwangju,' *FPIF* 6.10.2010
http://fpif.org/the_lasting_significance_of_kwangju/

'Dying for democracy: 1980 Gwangju Uprising Transformed South Korea,' *Japan Times* 5.17.2014 <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/05/17/asia-pacific/politics-diplomacy-asia-pacific/dying-democracy-1980-gwangju-uprising-transformed-south-korea/>

T (Im)Memory of Colonialism

Assigned Viewing: *I Can Speak* (Kim Hyeon-Seok, 2017)

Pyong Gap Min, "Controversies over Park Yu-ha's Book. Another Twist in the Comfort Women Redress Movement," *Georgetown Journal of Asian Affairs* (Spring 2017): 58-65.
https://asianstudies.georgetown.edu/sites/asianstudies/files/documents/gjaa_3.2_min.pdf

"Reexamining the "Comfort Women" Issue: An Interview with Yoshimi Yoshiaki," *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 13, Issue 1, No. 1, January 5, 2015.
<http://japanfocus.org/-Yoshimi-Yoshiaki/4247>

W APT is Where the Heart is

Assigned Viewing: *Concrete Utopia* (Um Taehwa, 2023)

Naeun Gu, "Korean Apartment Complexes and Social Relationships of the Residents," *Housing Studies*, 35(8), (2020) 1362-1389.

Sara Merican, "Concrete Utopia review: a moralising disaster movie," BFI Sep.22, 2023.
<https://www.bfi.org.uk/sight-and-sound/reviews/concrete-utopia-moralising-disaster-movie>

Th 'Are You Korean (Enough)'?

Assigned Viewing: *Ode to the Goose* (Zhang Lu, 2018)

Iain Watson, "Paradoxical Multiculturalism in South Korea," *Asian Politics & Policy* 4.2 (2012): 233-258.

'Definition of K-pop evolves as it embraces diversity', *The Korea Times*, 1.2.2024
<https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/entertainment/k-pop/20240102/definition-of-k-pop-evolves-as-it-embraces-diversity>

M Unworking Work(ers)

Assigned Viewing: *Factory Complex* (Im Heungsoon, 2015)

Heonik Kwon, *The Other Cold War*, Ch.2, Columbia University Press, 2010.

Se-woong Koo, "What Happened at Samsung Factory in Vietnam?" *Korea Exposé* Mar.2, 2017. <https://www.koreaexpose.com/riot-report-samsung-factory-vietnam/>

T (Re)Booting Feminism

Assigned Viewing: *The World of Love* (Yoon Ga-eun, 2025)

Anat Schwartz, 'Cloud Backlash: Digital Sex Crimes and Anti-Feminism in South Korea,' *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice Issue* 46.1 (2025) <https://atlantisjournal.ca/index.php/atlantis/article/view/5730/4848>

W Is Shamanism (Un)Dead?

Assigned Viewing: *Exhuma* (Jang Jae-hyun, 2024)

Alwyn Lau , "Dark Nuns and Bright Lights: Korean Shamanism and Adapting to the Capitalist Unconscious," *International Journal of Žižek Studies* 19 (1), 2025. <http://www.zizekstudies.org/index.php/IJZS/article/view/1280>

Th ReCasting Korean Cinema ?

Assigned Viewing: *Past Lives* (Celine Song, 2023)

Hyunseon Lee, "Past Lives: a luxurious and lingering portrayal of lost love and identity in the Korean diaspora", *The Conversation*, Sep. 8, 2023. <https://theconversation.com/past-lives-a-luxurious-and-lingering-portrayal-of-lost-love-and-identity-in-the-korean-diaspora-213162>

M Global Korea Cinema?

Assigned Viewing: *Culinary Class Wars* Season II or *No Other Choice* (Park Chan-wook, 2025)

Hyejung Ju, "Deterritorialisation of Korean TV dramas in "Netflix Originals" *Critical Studies in Television*, 19(4), 2024, 429-449.

T Presentation I

W Presentation II & Class Wrap-Up