

Transnational Korea (Mini-Course)

Time: Sep 9-23, 5:30-8:10PM

Location: Room 318

Instructor: Dr. Minwoo Jung (Loyola University Chicago)

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Office Hours: Available by appointment

Course Description

This intensive five-module mini-course introduces students to South Korea's dramatic social, political, and cultural transformations through a transnational sociological lens. Over the past several decades, South Korea has shifted from a war-torn agrarian society into a global economic and cultural powerhouse—while continuing to grapple with unresolved colonial legacies, new social divisions, and competing visions of modernity. Drawing on scholarship from sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, and gender studies, the course situates South Korea's trajectory within broader debates on globalization, neoliberalism, migration, postcoloniality, and transnational social movements. Topics include: the ongoing reverberations of the Korean War, South Korea's "compressed modernity," the Asian Financial Crisis and neoliberal experiments, migration and diasporic returns across Asia and the Pacific, and the contested redefinition of "Koreanness" through K-pop, diasporic enclaves, feminist activism, and multiculturalism. Each session combines lecture, close engagement with assigned readings, and structured discussion. Students are expected to prepare short questions and reflections in advance, which will guide in-class dialogue. A brief final reflection and a group presentation will allow students to synthesize key insights. The course is designed for advanced undergraduates and MA students interested in globalization and East Asia. Prior knowledge of Korea is helpful but not required.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Identify and summarize key debates in sociology and related fields about South Korea's social, political, and cultural transformations from a transnational perspective.
2. Apply theoretical concepts such as globalization, compressed modernity, neoliberalism, and postcoloniality to Korea's historical and contemporary contexts.
3. Compare and connect Korea's experiences of globalization and social change with those of Taiwan and other parts of East Asia.

Assignments and Evaluation

This course is designed as an intensive seminar that combines lectures with structured discussions. Final grades will be based on active participation and the completion of all assignments.

1. **Reading Questions (30%)**: Before each class, submit **one** discussion question or short reflection (2-3 sentences) on at least **one** assigned reading via NTU COOL. These should highlight a key idea, tension, or question you find compelling. At the beginning of class, we will use these submissions to help launch the discussion.
2. **Group Presentation (30%)**: Presentation groups (2-3 students) will be formed during the first class session (**9/9, Tue**). I will help students form relevant groups based on their interests. Each group will give a 7-8 minute presentation in the final meeting (**9/23, Tue**), connecting a course theme or reading to a cultural or social example from Korea (e.g. historical/contemporary events, debates/controversies, films, TV shows, music, memes, games, or activist movements). During the third class session (**9/16, Tue**), I will meet with each group to discuss their progress and challenges in order to help them prepare the presentation.
3. **Final Reflection (40%)**: Submit a 2-3 page (single-spaced) reflection on NTU COOL by **9/26 (Fri)**. Your reflection should synthesize readings/themes from at least **one module** (or compare two modules) and reflect on their broader significance, particularly in relation to understanding Taiwanese society, politics, or culture from a transnational perspective.

Schedule and Readings

Module 1 (9/9, Tue) Understanding Korea from a Transnational Perspective

Discussion focus: How does adopting a transnational lens change our understanding of Korean history, politics, and society? What does a transnational approach reveal that a purely domestic perspective might obscure?

Recommended Readings:

- Chen, Kuan-Hsing. 2010. "Introduction: Globalization and Deimperialization." In *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization*. Duke University Press, pp. 1-16.
- Hong, Christine. 2015. "The Unending Korean War." *positions: asia critique* 23.4: 597-617.
- Lee, Jin-kyung. 2009. "Surrogate Military, Subimperialism, and Masculinity: South Korea in the Vietnam War, 1965-73." *positions: asia critique* 17.3: 655-682.

Module 2 (9/11, Thu) South Korea's Postwar Modernity and Its Others

Discussion focus: What does "compressed modernity" reveal about postwar South Korea, and how do marginalized figures complicate national narratives of modernity? Can we think of "compressed modernity" as uniquely Korean, or does it resonate with other East Asian contexts?

Core Reading:

- Chang, Kyung-Sup. 1999. "Compressed Modernity and its Discontents: South Korean Society in Transition." *Economy and Society* 28.1: 30-55.

Choose One Reading:

- Cho, Grace. 2006. "Diaspora of Camptown: The Forgotten War's Monstrous Family." *Women's Studies Quarterly* 34.1/2: 309-331.
- Kim, Eleana. 2007. "Our Adoptee, Our Alien: Transnational Adoptees as Specters of Foreignness and Family in South Korea." *Anthropological Quarterly* 80.2: 497-531.
- Lee, Na-Young. 2014. "The Korean Women's Movement of Japanese Military "Comfort Women": Navigating between Nationalism and Feminism." *The Review of Korean Studies* 17.1: 71-92.

Module 3 (9/16, Tue) Asian Financial Crisis and Neoliberal Experiments

Discussion focus: How do financial crises and neoliberalization reshape everyday life and subjectivities in South Korea and beyond? How do these Korean cases connect to global experiences of financialization and precarity?

Core Reading:

- Song, Jesook. 2006. "Family Breakdown and Invisible Homeless Women: Neoliberal Governance during the Asian Debt Crisis in South Korea, 1997-2001." *positions: asia critique* 14.1: 37-65.

Choose One Reading:

- Nam, Sylvia. 2017. "Urban Speculation, Economic Openness, and Market Experiments in Phnom Penh." *positions: asia critique* 25.4: 645-667.
- Lee, Seung Cheol. 2022. "Magical Capitalism, Gambler Subjects: South Korea's Bitcoin Investment Frenzy." *Cultural Studies* 36.1: 96-119.
- Kim, Bohyeong. 2025. "Feminist Economicus: Popular Feminism, Popular Finance, and the Making of the Economic Woman in South Korea." *Cultural Studies* (online first).

Module 4 (9/18, Thu) Transpacific/Transregional Migration and Mobility

Discussion focus: How do migration and mobility across the Pacific and within Asia complicate categories of race, class, gender, and sexuality? How are categories like "Korean," "Asian," and "Western" unsettled by these cross-border movements?

Choose One Reading:

- Choo, Hae Yeon. 2006. "Gendered Modernity and Ethnicized Citizenship: North Korean Settlers in Contemporary South Korea." *Gender & Society* 20.5: 576-604.
- Suh, Stephen Cho. 2020. "Racing "Return": The Diasporic Return of US-raised Korean Americans in Racial and Ethnic Perspective." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 43.6: 1072-1090.

Choose One Reading:

- Kang, Dredge Byung'chu. 2017. "Eastern Orientations: Thai Middle-class Gay Desire for 'White Asians'." *Culture, Theory and Critique* 58.2: 182-208.
- Choi, Carolyn Areum. 2022. "Transperipheral Educational Mobility: Less Privileged South Korean Young Adults Pursuing English Language Study in a Peripheral City in the Philippines." *positions* 30.2: 377-407.

Module 5 (9/23, Tue) Transnationalizing Koreanness From Within and Beyond

Discussion focus: How is “Koreanness” being redefined, contested, and reimagined within transnational flows of culture, migration, and activism? What happens when boundaries of nation, ethnicity, and identity are challenged by global circulations of people, culture, and media?

Core Reading:

- Kim, Jinsook. 2025. “[The Return of Global Sisterhood? The Transnational Journey of the 4B Movement on TikTok.](#)” *Flow: A Critical Forum on Media and Culture* 31.4.

Choose One Reading:

- Kim, Jinwon. 2018. “Manhattan’s Koreatown as a Transclave: The Emergence of a New Ethnic Enclave in a Global City.” *City & Community* 17.1 (2018): 276-295.
- Ahn, Ji-Hyun. 2023. “K-Pop Without Koreans: Racial Imagination and Boundary Making in K-Pop.” *International Journal of Communication* 17.
- Chung, Ga Young, and Hee Jung Choi. 2025. “Incomplete or Extraordinary Koreans? “Multicultural Soldiers” and the Racialized Reconstruction of Authentic Koreanness.” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 84.2: 484-496.

Extra Module (Optional Readings): Competing Visions of Global Transformation

Discussion focus: How do feminist, queer, and activist movements in and beyond Korea reimagine global justice and transformation? What alternative visions of democracy, equality, and global solidarity emerge from these Korean struggles?

Recommended Readings:

- Kim, Hieyoon. 2024. “Standing with Myanmar: The Limits and Possibilities of South Korean Art Activism.” *Critical Times* 7.3: 377-401.
- Yang, Myungji. 2025. “Camouflaged Extremism: Authoritarian Legacies and the Far Right in South Korea.” *Critical Asian Studies* 57.3: 392-412.
- Lee, Youngrong. 2025. “Class Identity vs Intersectional Solidarities: Divergent Models for Organizing Gig Workers in Seoul and Toronto.” *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* (online first).
- Jung, Minwoo. 2025. “Decolonizing the Global: Contested Cosmopolitanisms in Global Queer Activism.” *British Journal of Sociology* 76.4: 790-799.