

Sophia University –Summer Session 2026

July 1 – July 22, 2026 *July 1: Orientation, *July 3: No class day

Date: December 2025

Course Title	Exploring Korean Contemporary Society: Popular Culture, Creative Industries, and Beyond
Course Code	No entry required.
Instructor	Wonjung Min
Class Period	1st Period 9:00-10:40
Course Format	In-Person
Language of Instruction	English
Maximum class size	50
Course Description	<p>This course provides an interdisciplinary introduction to contemporary Korean society through the lens of its dynamic popular culture and rapidly expanding creative industries. Students will examine how cultural forms such as K-pop, K-drama, film, fashion, and digital media reflect and transform Korea's social realities, including issues of gender, generation, class, and globalization.</p> <p>In addition to exploring the role of cultural industries in shaping Korea's global image, the course highlights everyday practices, civic debates, and the negotiation between tradition and modernity in a rapidly changing society. By engaging with case studies, media analysis, and critical discussion, students will develop a nuanced understanding of how Korea's cultural and social landscapes intersect with broader global flows of culture, power, and identity.</p>
Course Objectives	<p>By the end of this course, students will be able to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Understand the major social, cultural, and economic transformations in contemporary Korean society.2. Analyze how popular culture (K-pop, K-drama, film, fashion, digital media) reflects and reshapes issues of identity, gender, generation, and globalization.3. Examine the development of Korea's creative industries and their role in projecting soft power and shaping the country's global image.4. Critically evaluate everyday practices and civic debates in Korea as sites where tradition and modernity intersect.

	<p>5. Develop comparative perspectives by relating Korean cultural and social dynamics to broader global flows of culture, industry, and identity.</p>
Expected work outside of class	<p>Students are expected to complete assigned readings and media viewings, prepare short reflections, and work collaboratively on group projects and a final essay outside of class.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assigned Readings and Media Viewing: Complete weekly readings (articles, book chapters) and view assigned media clips (K-pop, films, dramas). ● Short Reflection Papers: Submit brief reflections (1–2 pages) on assigned materials, highlighting critical insights. ● Group Project Preparation: Dedicate time to research, coordination, and rehearsal for group presentations. ● Independent Research: Conduct additional research for the final essay/project (approx. 5–7 pages). ● Cultural Engagement: Explore Korean cultural materials (music, film, digital media) independently and integrate observations into class discussions.
Course Materials	<p>Class 1 – Introduction: What is Korean Contemporary Society? Seth, Michael J. <i>A Concise History of Modern Korea: From the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present</i>. Rowman & Littlefield, 2019 (3rd ed.).</p> <p>Appadurai, Arjun. <i>Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization</i>. University of Minnesota Press, 1996. (Ch. 2 “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy.”)</p> <p>Class 2 – Historical Background: From War to Democracy Eckert, Carter J. et al. <i>Korea Old and New: A History</i>. Harvard University Press, 1990. (Ch. 15–17)</p> <p>Robinson, Michael Edson. <i>Korea's Twentieth-Century Odyssey: A Short History</i>. University of Hawaii Press, 2007. (Ch. 1–2)</p> <p>Class 3 – Media & Digital Society Jin, Dal Yong. <i>Smartland Korea: Mobile Communication, Culture, and Society</i>. University of Michigan Press, 2017.</p> <p>Castells, Manuel. <i>The Rise of the Network Society</i>. Edward Elgar, 2004. selected sections.</p>

Class 4 – K-pop and Music Industry

Lie, John. *K-Pop: Popular Music, Cultural Amnesia, and Economic Innovation in South Korea*. 1st ed. University of California Press, 2015.

Choi, JungBong, and Roald Maliangkay, eds. *K-Pop: The International Rise of the Korean Music Industry*. Routledge, 2015.

Class 5 – K-drama and Film

Kim, Youna. *Women, Television and Everyday Life in Korea: Journeys of Hope*. Routledge, 2005. Ch. 4.

Lee, S. (2015). From diaspora TV to social media : Korean TV dramas in America. In S. Lee, & A. M. Nornes (Eds.), *Hallyu 2.0 : The Korean Wave in the Age of Social Media* (pp. 172-192).

doi:10.3998/mpub.7651262

Class 6 – Fashion and Beauty

Elfving-Hwang, Joanna. 2020. "Competency as an Embodied Social Practice: Clothing, Presentation of Self and Corporate Masculinity in South Korea." In *Men, Masculinities and the Modern Career: Contemporary and Historical Perspectives*, edited by Kadri Aavik, Clarice Bland, Josephine Hoegaerts, and Janne Salminen, 133-152. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg.

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110651874-008>.

Holliday, Ruth, and Joanna Elfving-Hwang. "Gender, Globalization and Aesthetic Surgery in South Korea." *Body & Society* 18:2 (2012).

Class 7 – Food and Everyday Culture

Cwiertka, Katarzyna. *Cuisine, Colonialism and Cold War: Food in Twentieth-Century Korea*. Reaktion, 2013.

Washington Post. "How Korea's kimbap went from comfort food to global sensation." March 17, 2025.

Class 8 – Creative Industries and Soft Power

Jin, Dal Yong. *New Korean Wave: Transnational Cultural Power in the Age of Social Media*. UI Press, 2016.

Nye, Joseph S. "Soft Power." *Foreign Policy*, no. 80 (1990): 153–71.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/1148580>.

Class 9 – Gender and Generation

Laura C. Nelson and Haejoang Cho, "Women, Gender, and Social Change in South Korea since 1945," in *Routledge Handbook of Modern Korean History*, ed. Michael J. Seth (London: Routledge, 2016), chap. 23, 17 pp.

Kim, Youna. *Women, Television and Everyday Life in Korea*. Routledge, 2005.

Class 10 – Migration and Multiculturalism

Kim, Ilju, and Zoua M. Vang. 2021. "Beyond Political Citizenship: Marriage Migrant Women's Voting Practices in South Korea." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 48 (17): 4191–4209. doi:10.1080/1369183X.2021.1973390.

Zulueta, J.O., 2024. Negotiating Gender and Kinship within Multicultural Families in Non-Highly Urbanised Areas of South Korea. *Genealogy* 8, 76. <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy8020076>

Darcie Draudt, "Multiculturalism as State Developmental Policy in Global Korea," in *The Political Economy of South Korea: Economic Growth, Democratization, and Financial Crisis*, ed. Joon Nak Choi and Thomas Kalinowski (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2022), 151–172.

Class 11 – Global Audiences

Dal Yong Jin, Kyong Yoon, and Wonjung Min. *Transnational Hallyu: The Globalization of Korean Digital and Popular Culture*. London: Routledge, 2021.

Javiera Reyes-Navarro and Wonjung Min, "Is That Your Kei or My K? Bodily Performance of Fandom in Visual Kei and K-pop Dance Parties in Santiago, Chile," *East Asian Journal of Popular Culture* 2025, https://doi.org/10.1386/eapc_00151_1

Class 12 – Civic Debates in Everyday Life

Chang, Kyung-Sup. *South Korea under Compressed Modernity*. Routledge, 2010.

Kim, Minhyoung. 2025. "Revolutionary Things: The Making of South Korea's Candlelight Protests." *Social Semiotics*, June, 1–21. doi:10.1080/10350330.2025.2519461.

Class 13 – Student Presentations

No assigned readings (group research projects).

Class 14 – Conclusion & Final Reflection

	<p>Cumings, Bruce. <i>Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History</i>, Epilogue.</p> <p>Toby Miller, "Cultural Citizenship," <i>MATRIZes</i> 4, no. 2 (2011): 57–74</p>
	<p>Purchase of textbook: mandatory / optional</p>
	<p>e-book: acceptable</p>
Moodle	
Contact Instructor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • via Moodle message • via Email <p>*The email address will be informed by the instructor in the first class if needed.</p>
Evaluation (Attendance, Class participation, in-class assignments, final exam, quizzes, etc.)	<p>Class Participation and Attendance – 20% Active engagement in discussions, group activities, and lectures.</p> <p>Reading/Media Response Papers – 25% Short written reflections on assigned readings or media, focusing on critical insights into Korean society and culture.</p> <p>Group Presentation – 25% Collaborative presentation analyzing a specific aspect of Korean contemporary society through popular culture or creative industries.</p> <p>Final Essay/Project – 30% Individual paper or project (approx. 5–7 pages) integrating course concepts and independent research.</p>
Other comments	
Class schedule	<p>*July 1: Orientation *July 3: No-Class Day</p>
	<p>[DAY 1] Introduction: What is Korean Contemporary Society? This session introduces the course themes and approaches, outlining how contemporary Korean society can be understood through the lens of history, culture, and globalization. Students will explore key concepts and frameworks for analyzing modern Korea.</p>
	<p>[DAY 2] Historical Background: From War to Democracy An overview of Korea's turbulent 20th-century history, focusing on colonialism, war, authoritarian rule, democratization, and their lasting impact on society and culture.</p>
	<p>[DAY 3] Media & Digital Society Examines South Korea's transformation into a hyper-connected society through mobile technologies, digital media, and the rise of platform capitalism. Discussions will highlight both opportunities and challenges of digital life.</p>

<p>[DAY 4] K-pop and Music Industry</p> <p>A deep dive into K-pop as a global phenomenon. We analyze its industrial structure, cultural meanings, and fan practices, considering K-pop's role in reshaping Korea's global image.</p>	
<p>[DAY 5] K-drama and Film</p> <p>Explores the global popularity of Korean dramas and cinema, from melodramas to Netflix hits. The class will explore how narratives of modernity, family, and identity transcend borders.</p>	
<p>[DAY 6] Fashion and Beauty</p> <p>Investigates South Korea's vibrant fashion and beauty industries, their links to consumer culture, gender norms, and global trends such as K-beauty.</p>	
<p>[DAY 7] Food and Everyday Culture</p> <p>Looks at Korean food culture as both a local tradition and a global trend. The session considers food as a medium of cultural identity, diplomacy, and everyday social practice.</p>	
<p>[DAY 8] Creative Industries and Soft Power</p> <p>Analyzes South Korea's creative industries (film, music, games, design) and their role in national branding. The concept of soft power is used to examine Korea's cultural diplomacy.</p>	
<p>[DAY 9] Gender and Generation</p> <p>Discusses how gender and generational changes shape contemporary Korean society, from women's roles and feminist debates to the lifestyles of younger generations.</p>	
<p>[DAY 10] Migration and Multiculturalism</p> <p>Explores Korea's transformation into a multicultural society. Topics include labor migration, marriage migration, multicultural policies, and debates on identity and citizenship.</p>	
<p>[DAY 11] Global Audiences</p> <p>Focuses on how international audiences receive, reinterpret, and localize Korean popular culture, with case studies from Latin America, North America, and Europe.</p>	
<p>[DAY 12] Civic Debates in Everyday Life</p> <p>Analyzes how Koreans engage in civic debates in everyday contexts, including social protests, digital activism, and struggles over democracy and social justice.</p>	
<p>[DAY 13] Student Presentations</p> <p>Students present group projects analyzing specific aspects of Korean society and culture. Presentations will combine theoretical</p>	

	frameworks with empirical examples to illustrate key concepts.
	[DAY 14] Conclusion & Final Reflection A concluding session reflecting on key themes of the course. Students will discuss their learning outcomes, future research directions, and the broader significance of Korea in global cultural flows.

*Course format, evaluation methods and class schedule may be subject to change.

[Important Note Regarding Class Capacity]

Course enrollment in each course is on a first-come, first-served basis. Please be aware that once the maximum capacity is reached, you will no longer be able to select that course.

If you plan to transfer the credits to your home university, please consider alternative courses as well when making your study plan, in case the courses you want to take are full.