



서울대학교 현대한국종합연구단
SNU Contemporary Korean Studies

Seoul National University Contemporary Korean Studies





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Seoul National University Contemporary Korean Studies is the leading research center for the study of contemporary Korea. *Seoul National University Contemporary Korean Studies* conducts interdisciplinary research across politics, economics, technology, and culture, and collaborates with scholars both in Korea and abroad to expand knowledge sharing and academic exchange.



Professor Kwon Hyeong-Ki

Department of Political Science and International Relations,
Seoul National University

Recipient of the Karl Deutsch Award
of the International Political Science Association
— the only recipient in Asia

Seoul National University Contemporary Korean Studies was established with the goal of becoming a global hub for comprehensive research and education on contemporary Korea. As global interest in Korea has increased in recent years, demand for academic research and education on contemporary Korea has also grown rapidly. However, institutional infrastructure has not yet developed in a systematic way to meet this demand.

To address this challenge, the Center organized ten specialized research teams encompassing a wide range of fields, including Korean politics, economy, society, culture, and technology. Each team conducts research within its respective discipline while also pursuing interdisciplinary approaches to provide more comprehensive and integrated insights.

Through these research activities, the Center seeks to strengthen networks among Korean Studies scholars in Korea and abroad and to provide platforms for international academic exchange. At the same time, by establishing a synergy between research and education, the Center aims to cultivate the next generation of scholars in Korean Studies.

To build on the academic activities of the research teams, the Center hosts an international conference annually and publishes the outcomes with Palgrave Macmillan in the Palgrave Series in Contemporary Korean Studies. The Center also maintains a website that archives these activities and makes them accessible to audiences in Korea and abroad.

We hope that this journey with *Seoul National University Contemporary Korean Studies* will become a meaningful partnership in expanding the horizons of Korean Studies.

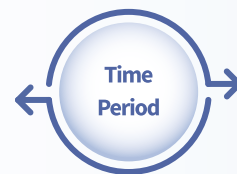
Sincerely,
Kwon Hyeong-Ki

권형기

Why Contemporary Korean Studies?

New Demand for Korean Studies

Growing Global Interest
in **Contemporary Korea**



Current Landscape of Korean Studies Research

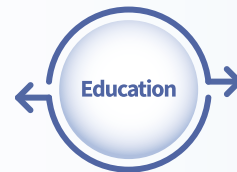
Existing research remains
heavily concentrated on
premodern and early modern Korea

Increasing Demand
for **Interdisciplinary Research**
Spanning Across Topics
Such as Culture, Economy, and Politics



An overemphasis
on **historical research**
and **limited interdisciplinary research**

Rising Number of Students
Majoring in **Korean Studies**
and Expanding
Educational Demand



Need of expansion of educational infrastructure,
including faculty and teaching materials,
for Korean Studies

Strategic Direction of Seoul National University Contemporary Korean Studies

Toward a Global Hub for Comprehensive Research on Contemporary Korea

Focus on contemporary Korea

Time Period

**SNU
Contemporary
Korean
Studies**

Disciplinary Scope

Multidimensional and
interdisciplinary research

Education

Integration of research
and education

Time Period

**Focus on
contemporary Korea**

Shifting the focus
from historical studies
to contemporary Korea.

Disciplinary Scope

**Multidimensional and
interdisciplinary research**

Through research
across diverse fields
and interdisciplinary collaboration,
we examine the complex
and evolving dimensions
of contemporary Korea.

Education

**Integration of research
and education**

By linking research
and education,
we seek to build
a sustainable
academic ecosystem.

01. Changes in Global Demand

Growing Demand for Korean Studies

With the global rise of K-pop, K-dramas, and other aspects of Hallyu, along with attention to Korea’s economic development and democratization experience, demand for research on Korean politics, economy, society, culture, and history has increased significantly.

According to the publication from the Korea Foundation, the number of universities offering Korean Studies courses abroad has expanded dramatically over the past two decades. In 2007, approximately 632 institutions in 55 countries offered Korean language and Korean Studies courses (Korea Foundation, 2025). However, as of 2026, that figure has grown to around 1,421 institutions in 106 countries, and among these, 115 universities offer full Korean Studies degree programs (undergraduate, master’s, and doctoral). This trend reflects the rapid global expansion of academic interest in Korea. This trend reflects the rapid global expansion of academic interest in Korea.

Number of Universities Teaching Korean Language and Korean Studies



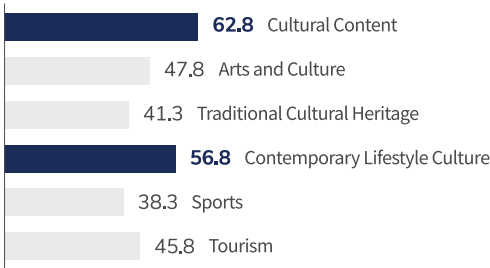
Interest in Contemporary Korea

According to the National Image Report published by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism in 2025, Korea enjoys a high level of international recognition in the areas of cultural content, contemporary lifestyle and culture, and economic development. In particular, global interest in Korea is concentrated primarily on contemporary Korean culture, society, and economic dimensions.

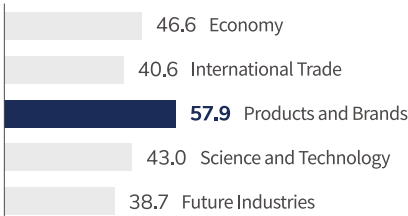
Percentage of Respondents Who Say They Are Familiar with Each Area of Korea



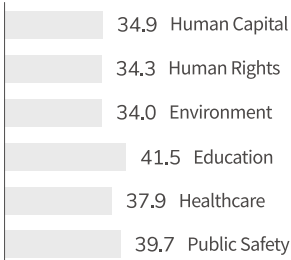
Cultural Dimension



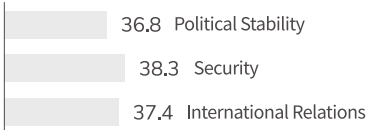
Economic Dimension



Social Dimension



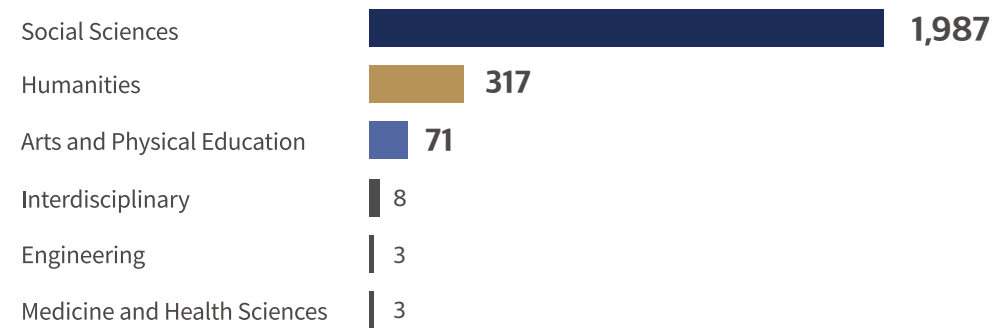
Economic Dimension



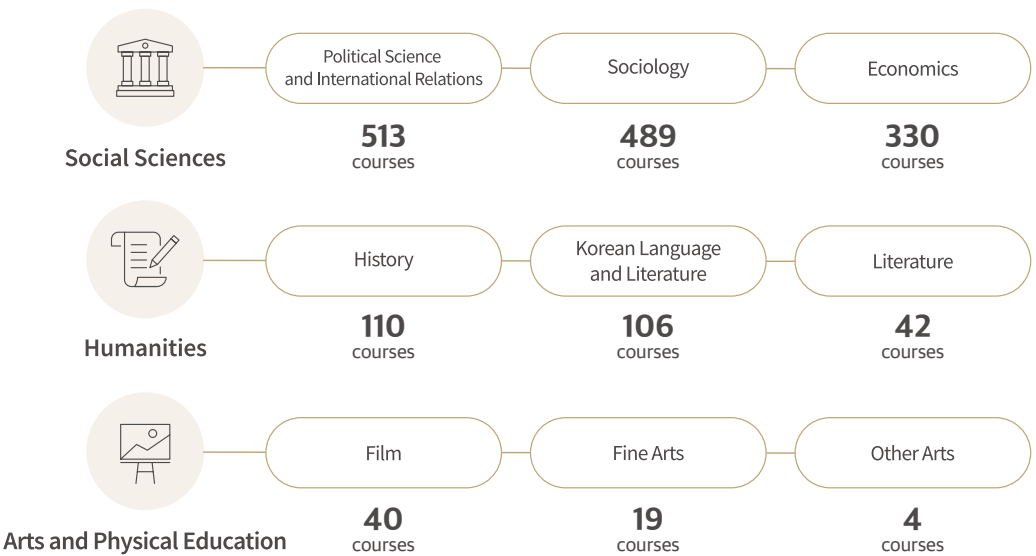
Broad and Varied Interest

In addition, statistics from the Korea Foundation’s Global E-School course offerings show that within Korean Studies, a particularly large share of courses are in the social sciences. Within the social sciences, there are 513 courses in political science and international relations, 489 courses in sociology, and 330 courses in economics. Within the field of arts and physical education, film studies alone accounts for 40 courses. These figures demonstrate that interest in Korean Studies spans a wide range of academic fields, rather than being concentrated in a single discipline.

Number of Korean Studies Courses by Field

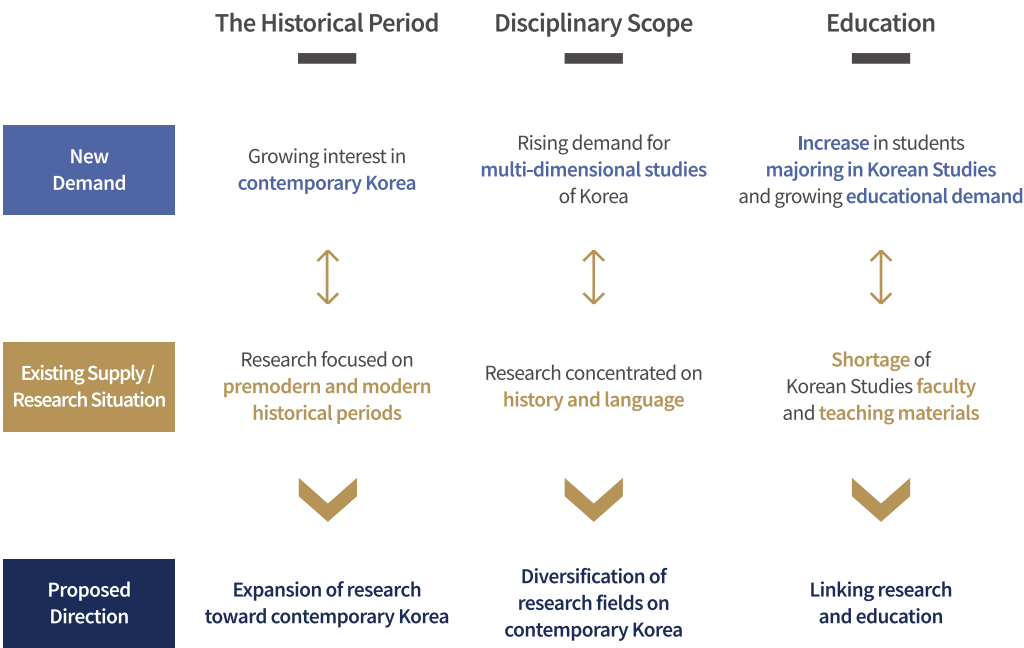


Major Subfields by Number of Courses

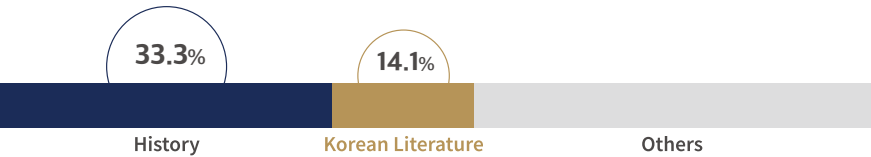


02. The Current State of Korean Studies: Three Mismatches in Korean Studies Research

Despite the rapid growth of global interest in contemporary Korea across multiple disciplines, existing Korean Studies research remains heavily concentrated on history or language, and the time scope is largely confined to the premodern and early modern periods. As a result, there is a mismatch between the global demands on Korean Studies and the current supply of research and educational resources.



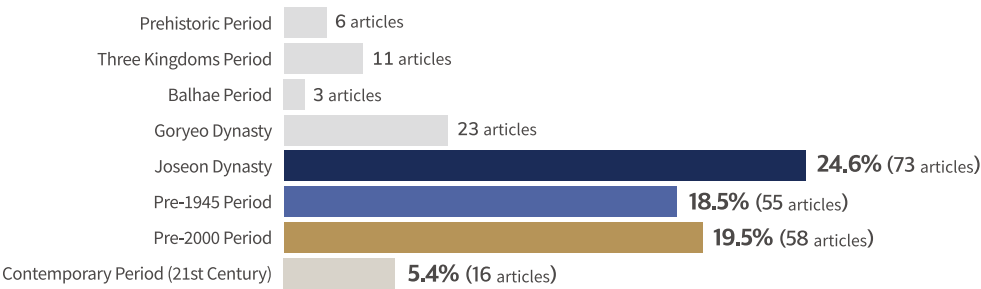
Among academic journals related to Korean Studies and research on Korea, the journal that has received the highest level of international recognition is the Seoul Journal of Korean Studies (hereafter *SJKS*), published by the Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies at Seoul National University. According to the KCI classification, the primary related research fields of *SJKS* are history (33.3%) and Korean literature (14.1%), indicating a strong concentration on Korean history and language.



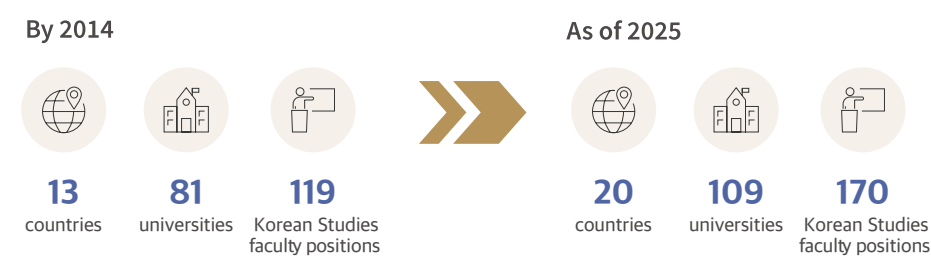
Moreover, keyword analysis of *SJKS* in the KCI database reveals a strong concentration on historical topics, including Buddhism, Goryeo, Joseon, and Confucianism.



In terms of the historical period, most articles published in *SJKS* focus on the premodern and early modern periods. Of the 297 articles analyzed, the most frequently addressed periods were the Joseon dynasty (73 articles, 24.58%), the period from liberation to before the 2000s (“pre-2000s”) (58 articles, 19.53%), and the late nineteenth century to the Japanese colonial period (“pre-1945”) (55 articles, 18.52%). By contrast, the periods of Balhae and the Later Three Kingdoms (3 articles), the prehistoric period (6 articles), and the Three Kingdoms period (11 articles) were discussed relatively infrequently. The 21st century was also underrepresented, with only 16 articles (5.39%).

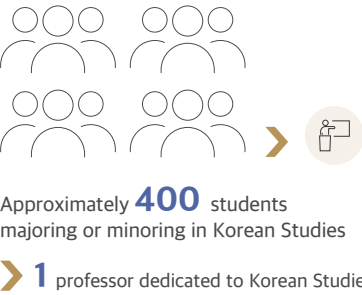


There is also a **mismatch at the educational level**. The number of students studying Korean Studies is increasing rapidly worldwide, and Korean Studies education is expanding accordingly. According to the Korea Foundation (KF), by 2014 it had allocated a total of 119 Korean Studies faculty positions to 81 universities in 13 countries, and by 2025 this had expanded to 170 positions at 109 universities in 20 countries.

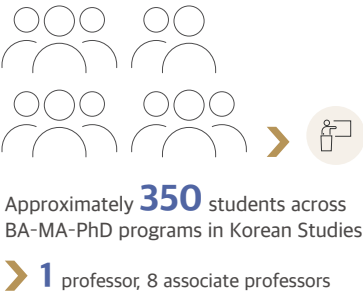


However, institutional responses vary considerably. While some universities have expanded faculty capacity to accommodate growing demand, others continue to face faculty shortages. For example, in 2026 at Goethe University Frankfurt in Germany, approximately 400 students were majoring or minoring in Korean Studies, while only one full-time professor was employed in the field. By contrast, at Université Paris Cité in France, approximately 350 students were enrolled in Korean Studies across the bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral levels, where teaching was provided by one full professor and eight associate professors, supported by additional instructors in Korean language, history, anthropology, and political science. In other words, this university has made considerable efforts in response to student demand by offering a wide range of courses on contemporary Korean history and various other aspects of Korean society.

Goethe University Frankfurt



Université Paris Cité



Nevertheless, despite the rapid growth in demand for education in contemporary Korean Studies, existing programs remain fragmented across departments and colleges, making it difficult to respond effectively. This situation points to the need for an integrated and systematic educational program capable of training specialists in contemporary Korean Studies.

03. Vision of Seoul National University Contemporary Korean Studies

The reason **Seoul National University Contemporary Korean Studies** undertakes the study of contemporary Korea is that, despite a mismatch among the three pillars of demand-research-education across Korean Studies, the field has failed to respond effectively to this challenge. Comprehensive research on contemporary Korea is essential to address this mismatch.

Accordingly, the Center aims to serve as a global hub for the comprehensive study of contemporary Korea, responding systematically and holistically to intellectual and academic demand across a wide range of fields, including language, literature, history, and philosophy, as well as politics, economics, society, and culture. Furthermore, through the integration of research and education, the Center seeks to ensure the sustainability and continued reproduction of scholarship in contemporary Korean Studies.



Focused research on contemporary Korea

The Center focuses not only on Korea's history but also on contemporary Korea.

Diversification of research fields and interdisciplinary approaches

It examines a wide range of domains in contemporary Korean society and, through interdisciplinary research, seeks to capture and analyze its diverse dimensions.

A synergy through the integration of research and education

By linking research and education, the Center aims to ensure the sustainability and reproduction of scholarly knowledge.

Vision of Seoul National University Contemporary Korean Studies

- Regular Research Presentations**
Strengthening interdisciplinary and comprehensive research capacity through regular research presentations by each team throughout the year
- Online Meetings with International Scholars**
Building a global research network through regular Zoom meetings with overseas scholars organized by each research team
- Annual International Conference (Every August)**
Cultivating the next generation of scholars leading contemporary Korean Studies and establishing the foundation for a global hub in the field
- Publication of Palgrave Series in Contemporary Korean Studies**
Publishing monographs with the internationally renowned publisher Palgrave Macmillan to lead global academic discussions on contemporary Korea
- Official Website & Brochure**
Building and sharing a database of research outputs and resources to promote the dissemination of contemporary Korean Studies
- Publication of General Audience Books on Contemporary Korean Studies**
Planning to publish books for general readers to expand domestic and international interest in Contemporary Korean Studies and to enhance public awareness
- Educational Programs Integrating Research and Education**
Planning to establish a Global Foreign Advisory Board to strengthen partnerships with overseas universities, and develop an interdisciplinary joint-degree program in Korean Studies focused on contemporary Korea

Key Timeline and Future Plans

2023

April

Launch of the research survey on strategies for developing Seoul National University Contemporary Korean Studies

September

Internal university forum on strategies for developing contemporary Korean Studies

2024

March

Official launch of the Contemporary Korean Studies Center as a research team

August

The 1st International Conference of the Contemporary Korean Studies Center

September

Addition of the Statehood and Civil Society Research Team

2025

May

Addition of the Democracy and Democratization Research Team

July

Publication of the first volume in the *Palgrave Series in Contemporary Korean Studies, Reimagining Korea*

August

The 2nd International Conference of the Contemporary Korean Studies Center

2026

April

Publication of the second volume in the *Palgrave Series in Contemporary Korean Studies, Contemporary Korean Music in Context*

August

The 3rd International Conference of the Contemporary Korean Studies Center (scheduled)

Publication of the third volume in the *Palgrave Series in Contemporary Korean Studies, Global Perspectives on Hallyu: History, Theory, and Postcoloniality* (scheduled)

Publication of the fourth volume in the *Palgrave Series in Contemporary Korean Studies, Korean Political Economy from a Comparative-Historical Perspective* (scheduled)

2027

August

The 4th International Conference of the Contemporary Korean Studies Center (scheduled)

-

Publication of the fifth volume in the *Palgrave Series in Contemporary Korean Studies, Narrating Contemporary Korea* (scheduled)

-

Publication of the sixth volume in the *Palgrave Series in Contemporary Korean Studies, Towards a Symptomatology of K-Futurity* (scheduled)

-

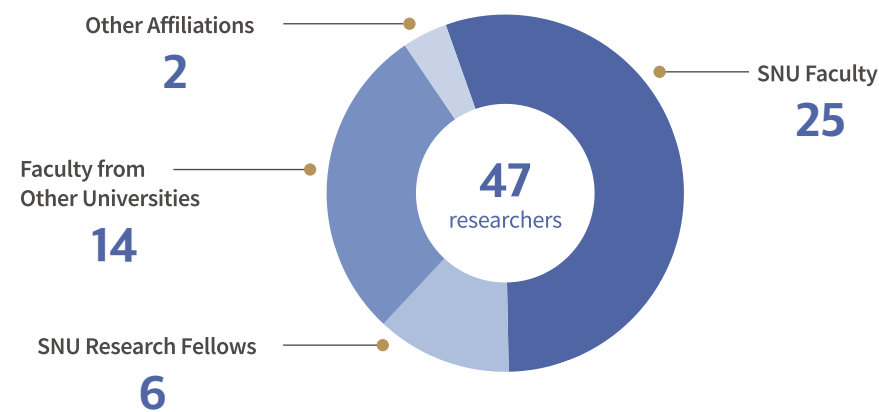
Publication of the seventh volume in the *Palgrave Series in Contemporary Korean Studies, The Statehood in Modern and Contemporary Korea* (scheduled)

Research Center Composition



Seoul National University Contemporary Korean Studies is composed of ten thematically organized research teams, each of which conducts comprehensive research on topics such as Korea’s political economy, Hallyu, narratives, values and identity, music, developmental history, civil society, and democratization and democracy. In addition, the Center has established two special committees responsible for organizing the annual international conference and for overseeing the publication of the Palgrave Series in Contemporary Korean Studies.

Seoul National University Contemporary Korean Studies consists of a total of 47 researchers. Among them, 25 are faculty members affiliated with Seoul National University, 14 are affiliated with other universities, 6 are affiliated with research institutes within Seoul National University, and 2 have other institutional affiliations.



In addition, the Center seeks to diversify research on contemporary Korea by recruiting scholars from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds. Among the faculty members, 24 are in the social sciences, 14 in the humanities, 5 in the arts, and 2 in engineering. A further 2 members are affiliated with professional graduate schools or other institutions, reflecting a deliberate effort to ensure disciplinary diversity.

Faculty Composition by Field



Research Team Introductions

- Political Economy
- K-Future
- Values & Identity
- Global Hallyu Studies
- K-Narratives
- Modernity & Developmental History
- Contemporary Korean Music
- K-Tech
- Statehood & Civil Society
- Democracy & Democratization

Political Economy

We study the structure of Korea’s politics and economy to suggest directions for change

The Political Economy Research Team conducts in-depth research on the political and economic structures of contemporary Korean society and their transformations from historical and comparative perspectives. Our team analyzes the institutional transitions, the restructuring of industrial and financial systems, and Korea’s responses and adaptations within the global economic order. On this basis, the research examines the pathways toward sustainable development and democratic governance in Korean society.

Our team’s primary research focuses on government policies, industrial and financial systems, and international economic relations. It also examines the political, institutional, and socioeconomic changes that emerge in the process of economic development. Particular attention is paid to how these changes intersect with key societal issues such as values, identity, inequality, and democracy.

Additionally, our team seeks to disseminate research findings through collaboration and scholarly exchange with academic communities both domestically and internationally. Through these collaborations and exchanges, our team aims to make substantive contributions that extend beyond academic discourse to include policy recommendations. Our team provides researchers and students with data and analyses that enable a deeper understanding of the structures and dynamics of contemporary Korean political economy. It also seeks to enhance the reach and impact of its research through collaboration with international academic networks.



Kwon HyunJi
Seoul National University

Members	Affiliation	Research Field
Kwon HyunJi	Seoul National University	Sociology of labor, employment relations, and inequality
Kwon Hyeong-Ki	Seoul National University	Political Theory, Comparative Politics
Kim KyungMi	Sapienza University of Rome	Korean Political Economy, East Asian Political Economy
Park Hyeon Seok	National Assembly Futures Institute	Political Economy, Legislative Politics
Song Jiyeoun	Seoul National University	Comparative Political Economy, Social Welfare Policy, East Asian Studies
Shin Jin Wook	Chung-Ang University	Political Sociology, Social Movements, Civil Society

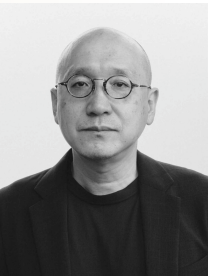
K-Future

Traversing theory and symptom, reflection and lived realities—we experiment with the futures of Korean studies.

At the K-Future Team, our work revolves around two central research objectives. The first is to explore new theoretical resources essential for 21st-century Korean studies. The second is to analyze diverse signs or symptoms that point toward the emerging futures of social realities in Korea.

To further our theoretical inquiry, we organize a ‘Theory Atelier (이론아틀리에)’ in collaboration with scholars engaged in diverse intellectual traditions. This setting seeks to foster dynamic interfaces between theory and Korean studies. To conduct future-oriented research, our team members identify pivotal cases that may shape Korea’s multiple futures. These cases are examined through a combination of field-based investigations and interpretive case studies grounded in close readings of texts that employ methods rooted in the hermeneutics of signs and symptoms.

The overarching goal of the K-Future Team’s collective research is twofold. First, it aims to integrate a wide array of intellectual and theoretical experiments developed across the humanities and social sciences over the past four decades into the field of Korean studies. Secondly, it seeks to expand the horizon of Korean studies—long centered on the past and national identity—so as to delve into questions of present relevance and future possibility.

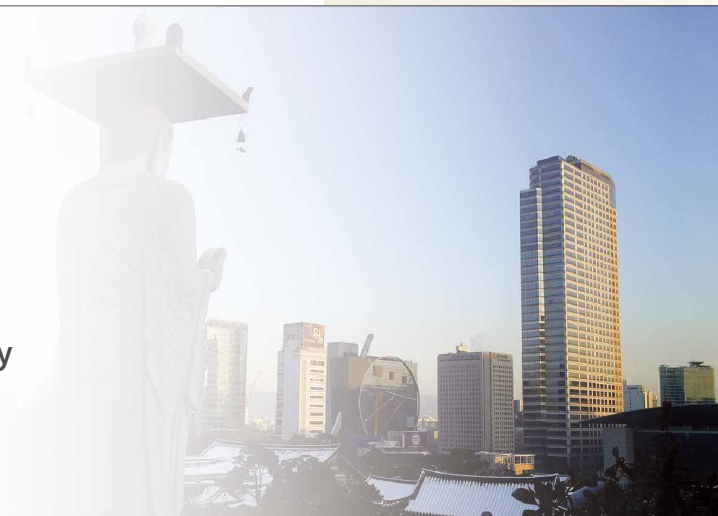


Dongshin Yi
Seoul National University

Members	Affiliation	Research Field
Hong Jung KIM	Seoul National University	Social Theory, Sociology of the Future
Jaeho Kang	Seoul National University	Critical Theory, Media Theory
Jungha Kim	Seoul National University	Contemporary American Literature
Dongshin Yi	Seoul National University	Contemporary American Fiction
Seung Cheol LEE	Seoul National University	Economic Anthropology, Critical Theory
Munyoung Cho	Yonsei University	Cultural Anthropology, Poverty Studies

Values & Identity

Exploring the new values and identities emerging in 21st-century Korean society



The Values & Identity Research Team focuses on the new patterns of values and identities emerging in twenty-first-century Korean society. Korea entered the twenty-first century after experiencing rapid economic growth and compressed modernization over the five decades following liberation. Throughout this historical process, values and identities were formed in complex and layered ways. In the twenty-first century, however, a diverse set of new values and identities has become increasingly visible. Multiple values and identities structured around religion, generation, region, gender, and social class have long coexisted in Korean society. Yet as Korea has rapidly become a multicultural society in the twenty-first century, social diversification has accelerated, and conflicts among different values and identities have become more pronounced.

Our team seeks to analyze phenomena related to values and identities in contemporary Korea through a wide range of disciplinary perspectives, including religious studies, geography, women’s and gender studies, sociology, migration studies, and cultural studies. Our team aims in particular to contribute to the development of general theoretical frameworks for understanding multilayered identities and their dynamic relationships under the conditions of multiculturalism and religious pluralism in the twenty-first century.

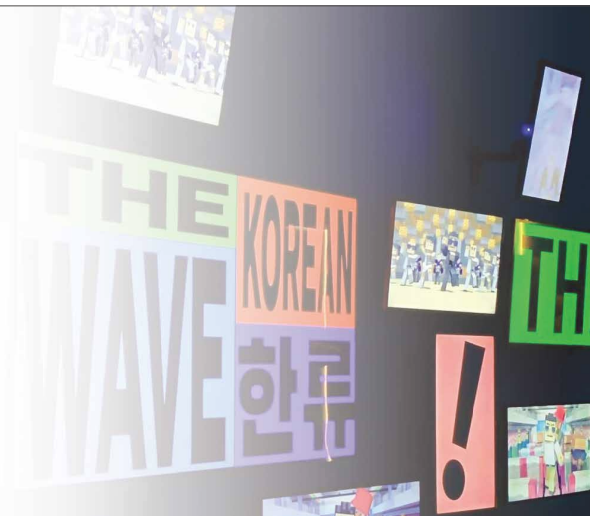


Song Chong Lee
Seoul National University

Members	Affiliation	Research Field
Yohan Yoo	Seoul National University	Comparative Studies of Religions
Hyunjoo Jung	Seoul National University	Migration and Multiculturalism, Urban Studies and Gender
Hae-young Seong	Seoul National University	Psychology of Religion, Mysticism
Soo-Ah Kim	Seoul National University	Women’s Studies, Popular Culture Studies
Song Chong Lee	Seoul National University	Religion and Society
Minah Kim	Incheon National University	Contemporary Religion, Sociology of Religion

Global Hallyu Studies

Exploring Korea in the world through Hallyu as a transnational cultural phenomenon



Hallyu emerged in the late 1990s as a phenomenon of cultural identification and fan-based subcultures in Asia, and has since expanded into a global cultural phenomenon. This expansion reflects both Korea’s changing global standing and the universal relevance of the social issues represented and generated by Hallyu content. Reassessing the significance of Hallyu and recognizing the need for new approaches to Hallyu Studies, the Global Hallyu Studies Team pursues the following research directions:

First of all, our team seeks to contribute theoretically by examining how Hallyu, as a transnational cultural phenomenon, reshapes and reconfigures existing theories of global culture. As a form of globally mediated cultural reception, Hallyu is context-sensitive and has generated a substantial body of case-based research. Moving beyond the accumulation of case studies, our team aims to theorize Hallyu in ways that contribute to general knowledge about global cultural production and reception. Through this process, our team seeks to analyze academically how intersubjective knowledge about Korea’s position and meaning in the world is produced through Hallyu. To support this agenda, our team aims to build global scholarly networks, promote collaborative research, and cultivate the next generation of scholars in the field.

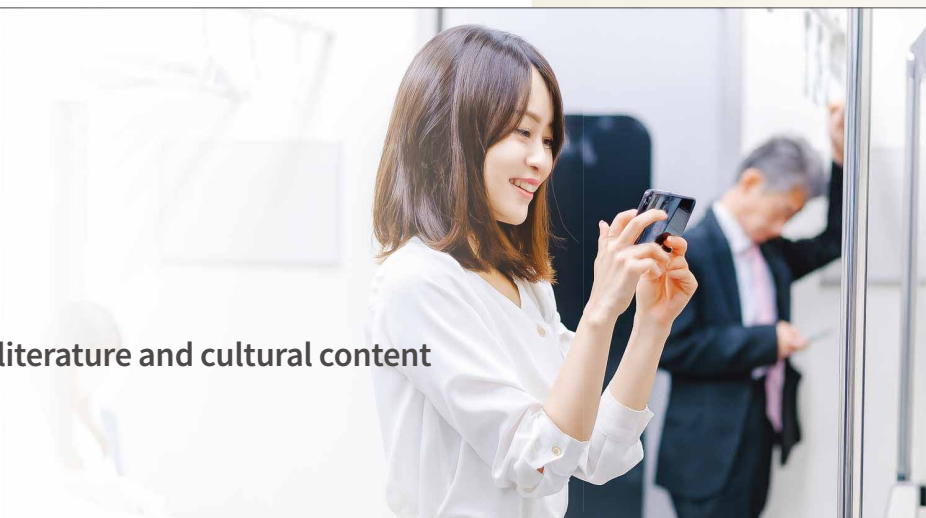


Seok-Kyeong Hong
Seoul National University

Members	Affiliation	Research Field
Seok-Kyeong Hong	Seoul National University	Cultural Studies and Visual Communication
Sojeong Park	Hanyang University	Popular Culture and Cultural Studies
Jiyoung Suh	Seoul National University Asia Center	Popular Arts and Popular Culture History
Younghan Cho	Hankuk University of Foreign Studies	Cultural Studies and East Asian Popular Culture

K-Narratives

Exploring narratives
in contemporary Korean literature and cultural content



To understand contemporary Korea, the K-Narrative Research Team examines current literary and cultural texts and explores two key questions. First, can we identify meaningful commonalities across the worldviews of the diverse narrative genres produced in Korea today (i.e. does a “master plot” exist?) Second, if such a common structure can be identified, can we discern within it a form of national specificity that justifies the qualifier “Korean” (i.e. does a distinct “K-narrative” exist)?

To address these questions, our team collaborates with scholars and critics from Korea and abroad to analyze internationally recognized Korean films, literature, television dramas, and webtoons. The results of this research will be published in a forthcoming volume tentatively titled Narrating Contemporary Korea. Through this work, our team hopes to contribute not only to a deeper understanding of Korean literature and culture, but also to a broader and more nuanced understanding of contemporary Korean society.



Kyung Hee Yoon
Korea National University of Arts

Members	Affiliation	Research Field
Hyoung Cheol Shin	Seoul National University	Comparative Literature
Youkyung Son	Seoul National University	Modern Korean Literature
Hyeongguk Song	KBS	Film Criticism
Kyung Hee Yoon	Seoul National University	Comparative Literature, Creative Writing

Modernity & Developmental History

Exploring Korean modernity
beyond colonial modernity and the developmental state



In existing studies of contemporary Korea, the discourse on colonial modernity emerged as one of the most prominent efforts to theorize the uniqueness of the Korean experience. Colonial modernity discourse represents an attempt to reconstruct the experience of national history in the universal language of human history or global history. However, due to discontinuities in scholarship during the colonial and post-liberation periods, ambiguities surrounding the relationship between modernity and developmentalism and the developmental state, theoretical discussions of Korean modernity have diversified into multiple approaches, including compressed modernity, Manchurian modernity, militarized modernity, and Confucian modernity.

Our team seeks to undertake a historicist reflection on the formation of contemporary Korea by examining theoretical discussions from fields such as history and economic history, focusing on topics including aid, development, and developmental narratives. To achieve this, our team focuses on understanding the structure and character of Korean modernity as a long-term objective, while initially pursuing interdisciplinary research on Korea’s aid, development, and developmental history.



Lee Dongwon
Seoul National University

Members	Affiliation	Research Field
Lee Dongwon	Seoul National University	East Asian Cold War History and Economic History
Han Bongseok	Pukyong National University	Modern Korean History
Lee Jung-Eun	Sunchon National University	Modern Korean History
Lee Jongwook	Seoul National University	Development Economics and International Development Cooperation
Lee Changkeun	KDI School of Public Policy and Management	Economic History and Labor Economics

Contemporary Korean Music

Exploring the sensibilities of Korean society and culture through music and generate discourse oriented toward the future

The Contemporary Korean Music Research Team examines the meanings of music within society and culture, with a particular focus on the continuities and transformations linking tradition and modernity in Korean music. We analyze how traditions are reinterpreted within contemporary musical worlds — including classical art music, K-pop, and contemporary composition — from aesthetic and historical perspectives. In doing so, our team raises questions about the relationships between music, society, identity, and sensibility, and seeks to develop musical discourses that move across periods and genres.

Through seminars, research presentations, interviews, and the viewing and analysis of performances, our team promotes interdisciplinary dialogue and reflects on both the present of Korean music and its historical foundations in collaboration with scholars from Korea and abroad. We seek to discover new musical meanings at the intersections of tradition and modernity, and of locality and globality.



Anna Yates-Lu
Seoul National University

Members	Affiliation	Research Field
Anna Yates-Lu	Seoul National University	Ethnomusicology
Oh Hee-sook	Seoul National University	Music Aesthetics and Contemporary Music
Kim Hee-Sun	Seoul Women's University	Music Aesthetics and East Asian Contemporary Music
Hyejin Lee	Kookmin University	Ethnomusicology
Jiyoung Yi	Seoul National University	Gayageum Performance

K-Tech

Exploring Korean pathways of technological development in the age of AI and robots

The K-Tech Research Team analyzes the multilayered impacts of artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics on Korea’s rapidly aging society and investigates the distinctive trajectory of Korea’s technological development as a late-industrializing economy. our team’s primary research focuses include senior-oriented healthcare systems and cases of state-led industrial innovation, employing an interdisciplinary approach that integrates soft robotics, technology policy analysis, and industrial and economic history.

Through this work, our team seeks to develop a theoretical framework for a Korean model of technological development, to build a multidisciplinary research and education infrastructure centered at Seoul National University as a coordinating hub, and to contribute to the establishment of international standards for contemporary Korean Studies by expanding global research networks.



Park Yong-Lae
Seoul National University

Members	Affiliation	Research Field
Park Yong-Lae	Seoul National University	Robotics Engineering
Koo Yoon-Mo	Seoul National University	Energy and Environmental Policy

Statehood & Civil Society

Exploring the transformations of Korean statehood within the modern and contemporary international order



The Statehood and Civil Society Research Team aims to offer a comprehensive review of domestic and international theoretical debates on Korean statehood and to clarify the distinctive historical and politico-social character of the Korean state. Due to the unique geopolitical conditions of the Korean Peninsula, international politics has not simply influenced Korea’s modern history; it has been one of the decisive forces that shaped its trajectory.

From this perspective, our team analyzes the formation and transformation of Korean statehood within the changing East Asian international order—from the traditional Sinocentric order, through modern imperialism, to the Cold War and post-Cold War periods. Using concepts such as the tributary state, colonial state, resistant nationalism, divided state, anti-communist state, and patriarchal state, our team seeks to develop new theoretical reconstructions of Korean statehood and its historical origins.



Jong-Hak Kim
Seoul National University

Members	Affiliation	Research Field
Jong-Hak Kim	Seoul National University	Modern Korean Diplomatic History
Joon Young Jung	Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies, Seoul National University	Historical Sociology and Social History of Knowledge
Hong Jong-Uk	Institute of Humanities, Seoul National University	History of Social Thought and North Korean History
Jeanhyoung Soh	Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies, Seoul National University	Historical Sociology and Social History of Knowledge
Choongyeol Kim	Institute of Social Sciences, Seoul National University	East Asian Political Thought and Modern Political Thought History
Jeeye Song	Institute for International Studies, Seoul National University	History of International Relations and International Relations Theory

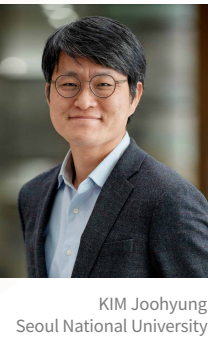
Democracy & Democratization

Comprehensively analyzing the characteristics and development of Korean democracy through theoretical, historical, and comparative perspectives

Since the founding of modern Korea, Korean democracy has evolved along a distinctive and uneven trajectory. During the latter half of the twentieth century, the compressed processes of state-building, economic development, and system competition were accompanied by periods of authoritarian rule. Yet the institutional and actor-level forces driving democratization were never fully extinguished. Following democratization in 1987, democracy appeared to become institutionally consolidated, but in recent years concerns about democratic backsliding have intensified. The ongoing constitutional crisis and political instability following the declaration of emergency martial law have underscored the need for a comprehensive understanding of both the historical evolution and the current challenges facing Korean democracy.

Against this backdrop, the Democracy & Democratization Research Team seeks to analyze the distinctive features, developmental trajectory, institutional character, and political habits of Korean democracy in a comprehensive manner. Whereas existing scholarship has tended to focus heavily on political institutions and voter behavior, our team actively incorporates theoretical, historical, and comparative perspectives that have been relatively underexplored.

To this end, our team adopts an interdisciplinary approach that cuts across political science, sociology, history, and anthropology, and aims to develop analytical frameworks that enable a more multidimensional and in-depth understanding of Korean democracy.



KIM Joohyung
Seoul National University

Members	Affiliation	Research Field
KIM Joohyung	Seoul National University	Political Thought and Democratic Theory
Hong Taiyoung	Korea National Defense University	Political Thought and European Politics
Hannes Mosler	University of Duisburg-Essen	East Asian Politics and Korean Politics

Overview of Research Achievements

- Publications

- Palgrave Macmillan Series in Contemporary Korean Studies
- Publication in an Academic Journal

- Research Achievements by Research Team

- Political Economy
- K-Future
- Values & Identity
- Global Hallyu Studies
- K-Narratives
- Modernity & Developmental History
- Contemporary Korean Music
- Statehood & Civil Society

- Organization of International Academic Conferences

- The 1st International Conference (2024)
- The 2nd International Conference (2025)

Publications

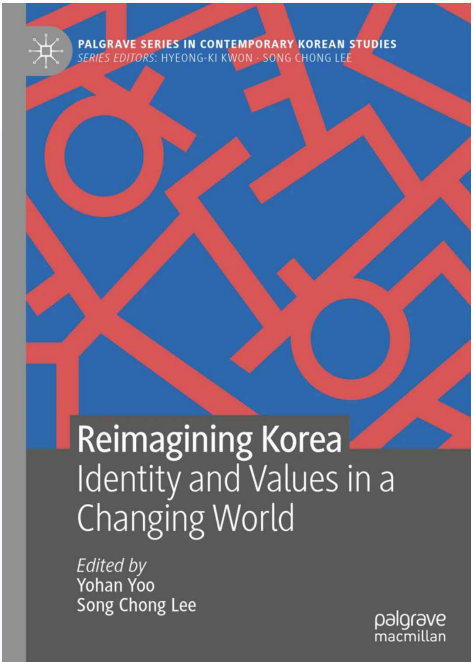
Palgrave Macmillan Series in Contemporary Korean Studies

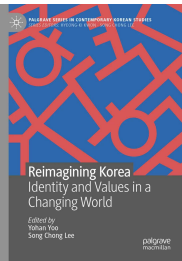
A publication agreement has been concluded with the internationally renowned publisher Palgrave Macmillan for the Palgrave Series in Contemporary Korean Studies, under which a total of eight monographs on contemporary Korea will be published.

This initiative aims to publish the research outcomes of each research team in order to present and promote the achievements of the Comprehensive Research on Contemporary Korea, particularly in identifying and advancing key research agendas, while also seeking to lead scholarly discussions on contemporary Korea.

In the long term, this series is expected to serve as a foundation for enhancing both the academic and societal level of discourse and the degree of interest in contemporary Korea.

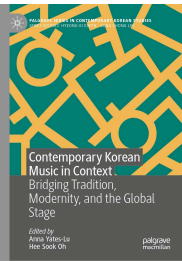
The First Series
Reimagining Korea
(Edited by) Yohan Yoo, Song Chong Lee





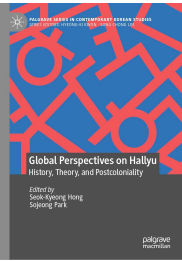
Reimagining Korea
(Edited by) Yohan Yoo, Song Chong Lee

This volume project explores how evolving values and identities in contemporary Korean society are interpreted, particularly through the lens of religion, positioning it as a window into Korea’s dynamic cultural and social landscape. As Korea grapples with rapid modernization, shifting religious beliefs and expressions reflect new aspects of the Korean people’s values and identity, in both personal and communal dimensions. We believe that this dynamic backdrop creates a complex web of tensions as Koreans negotiate between established norms and newly infused or internally emerging global ideas, inspiring and provoking efforts to navigate and advocate for future directions both within and beyond the country.



Contemporary Korean Music in Context
(Edited by) Anna Yates-Lu, Hee Sook Oh

This book encloses an interdisciplinary examination of Korean music’s evolution, contextual interactions, and global positioning from historical, sociocultural, and aesthetic perspectives. It brings together various scholarly contributions to analyse Korean music’s transformations, innovations, and cultural suggestions, with a focus on its historical roots and contemporary manifestations. This book captures the multifaceted dynamics in Korean music, showcasing its adaptability and global importance while addressing cultural identity, tradition, and innovation.



Global Perspectives on Hallyu: History, Theory, and Postcoloniality
(Edited by) Seok-Kyeong Hong, Sojeong Park

This volume offers an in-depth examination of Hallyu (the Korean Wave), foregrounding its significance as a critical site for cultural, theoretical, and decolonial inquiry. With the emergence of globally recognized phenomena such as BTS and Squid Game, Hallyu has transitioned from a fan-based subculture in Asia to a global cultural phenomenon. This transformation necessitates a reevaluation of the phenomenon and its significance. The volume is divided into three main parts—historicizing, theorizing, and decolonizing—each offering distinct yet interconnected approaches to interpreting Hallyu. By bringing together historical analysis, theoretical innovation, and decolonial critique, this volume demonstrates that Hallyu is a dynamic framework for understanding the shifting dynamics of global culture in the twenty-first century.



Korean Political Economy from a Comparative-Historical Perspective
(Edited by) Hyeong-Ki Kwon

This edited volume explores the evolution of Korean political economy from a comparative and historical perspective. Exploring what the Korean model of its political economic evolution means in the context of theoretical debate on the political-economic development, this book compares characteristics of Korean political economy model not only from the Western models but more importantly from other East-Asian countries including Japan and Taiwan. Our project examines not only the recent performance of Korean political economy in terms of its technology strategies in the firm-level and Korean chaebols’ transformation and adaptation but also traces historically the evolution of Korean political, social and economic system. This study will offer thought provoking insights to scholars of Korean society.

- **The 5th Series ‘Narrating Contemporary Korea’**
Edited by Hyoung Cheol Shin, Hyeongguk Song, Kyung Hee Youn (scheduled for publication in the first half of 2027)
- **The 6th Series ‘Towards a Symptomatology of K-Futurity’**
Edited by Hong Jung KIM (scheduled for publication in the second half of 2027)
- **The 7th Series ‘The Statehood in Modern and Contemporary Korea’**
Edited by Jong-Hak Kim (scheduled for publication in the second half of 2027)

Publication in an Academic Journal

Society and Theory, 52nd, November 2025, pp.83-124

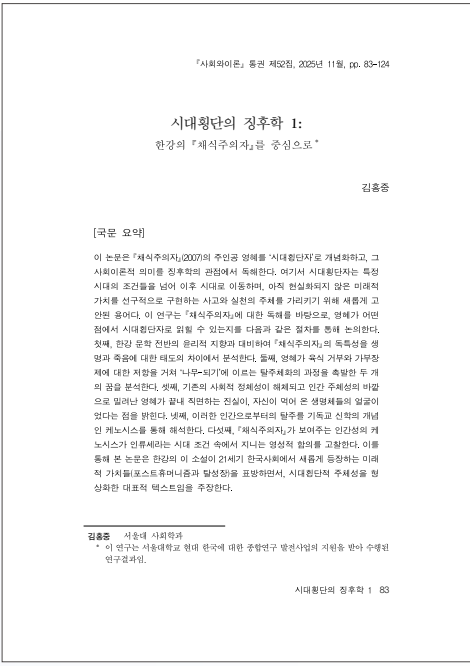
Symptomatology of Epoch-traverser: Centering on Han Kang’s *The Vegetarian*

Hong Jung KIM

This paper conceptualizes the protagonist Yeong-hye in Han Kang’s *The Vegetarian* (2007) as an ‘epoch-traverser’ and reflects on the sociological significance of this figure from the perspective of the symptomatology. The term epoch-traverser designates a subject of thought and practice that moves beyond the conditions of a given historical period into the time that follows, pioneering the enactment of values of the future that have not yet been realized. On the basis of a close reading of *The Vegetarian*, this study explores in what sense Yeong-hye can be understood as an epoch-traverser through following five lines of inquiry.

Key Words: Han Kang, *The Vegetarian*, epoch-traversing, symptomatology, kenosis, patieny, Anthropocene

Society and Theory, 52nd, November 2025, pp.83-124
**Symptomatology of Epoch-traverser:
Centering on Han Kang’s *The Vegetarian***
Hong Jung KIM



Research Achievements by Research Teams

Political Economy

Regular Open Seminar Series

The open seminar series brings together scholars from Korea and abroad to foster in-depth understanding of contemporary Korean society and to promote academic exchange



- **Post-crisis Restructuring and Development of Chaebols**
Analysis of the structural transformation and leadership transition of South Korea's major business groups (chaebol) since the Asian Financial Crisis
#Chaebol #Asia #Financial Crisis #Leadership Transition #Korean Economic Transformation
- **Korea and the New International Political Economy**
Recent changes in international political economy, including the weakening of multilateral norms, the growing role of security considerations in trade policy, strategic trade policy, supply chain resilience, export and investment controls, and the resurgence of industrial policy
#Multilateral Norms #Trade Policy #Security #Supply Chain Resilience #International Political Economy
- **Divergent Evolution of Statist Coordination Models: A Comparison of Japan and Korea**
Analysis of differences between state-led coordination models in South Korea and Japan
#StateLedCoordination #SouthKorea #Japan
- **The Developmental States of South Korea and Taiwan: Core features and divergent trajectories**
Comparative analysis of the developmental state models of South Korea and Taiwan and their core characteristics
#South Korea #Taiwan #Developmental State
- **Evolution of Technology Sourcing Strategies of Korean Electronics Companies: The case of Samsung Electronics**
A comparative analysis of how Korean electronics firms pursue sustainable strategies under global competition with a focus on Samsung Electronics
#Samsung Electronics #Technological Autonomy #Global Supply Chains #Research And Development

Distributive Politics in the Post-Industrial Era: South Korea from a Macro-Historical Perspective
Analysis of how changes in Korea's economic and industrial structure have affected its distributive politics, and an examination of Korea's policy responses and their implications
#Deindustrialization #Distributive Politics #Macro Historical Perspective #Industrial Structure

- **What Developed Countries Can Learn from South Korea**
An analysis of the impact of Korea's economic development experience on developed and developing countries
#Economic Development #Developed Countries #Developing Countries

The Failure of Social Partnership in Korea
An examination of structural change in Korean political economy, focusing on technological and industrial transitions and cases of failed social partnership
#Social Partnership #Technology #Industry #Policy

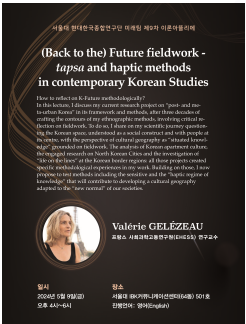
- **Durability of Legislation in Unified vs. Divided Government: Evidence from the 21st Korean National Assembly**
A comparative political analysis of legislative processes and the durability of legislative outcomes under unified and divided government, based on an analysis of the 21st National Assembly
#Korean Presidential System #Strong Party Discipline #Post Legislative Volatility #Legislative Outcomes #Government Type #Interparty Cooperation
- **The Postdevelopmental State: Dilemmas of Economic Democratization in Contemporary South Korea**
An analysis of structural transformation in Korean political economy through the concept of "economic democratization," and an exploration of the characteristics of the post-developmental state
#Developmental State #Inequality #Instability #Economic Democratization #Structural Transformation
- **Compressed Modernity and Its Risks: The Normal Crisis of South Korea**
An analysis of compressed modernity in Korean society and its structural risks, focusing on the notion of a "normalized crisis" and examining the order of Korean democracy and capitalism
#Compressed Modernity #Normalized Crisis #Korean Democracy #Korean Capitalism
- **How Inequality Leads to Social Polarization and Democratic Backsliding**
An analysis of the relationship between inequality, polarization, and democratic decline in Korea, centered on recent socio-political shifts
#Inequality #Social Polarization #Democratic Backsliding

K-Future

Theory Atelier

A forum for academic exchange and dialogue that brings together leading theorists from Korea and abroad, creating a space for new theoretical experimentation within Korean Studies

- Deconstructing the Idea of Korea (as Nation)**
A reflection on modes of understanding reality grounded in the concepts of nationalism and the nation-state, and a discussion of epochal transformations in the era of (post-)modernity and post-Marxism
#post discourse #uncertainty of modernity #historicity #social configurations
- Global Korean Studies: Prospects and a Practice**
The possibility of interdisciplinary research in which creative interpretation and analytical rigor coexist
#post-disciplinary approach #global Korean Studies #interdisciplinary research #area studies #integrative approach
- Korean Literature and Comparative Studies: The Possibility of a Centerless Periphery or an Existing Absence**
An exploration of how knowledge systems in modern Korea were reconfigured through the formation and reception of translated terms
#translation and knowledge power #de-imperial knowledge production #global Korean Studies #reconfiguration of knowledge
- Civil War and Hygiene: Horizons of Critique on Capitalist Colonialism**
An analysis of the civil war-like political logic that excludes heterogeneity and the resulting obsession with hygiene, examined through the Korean case
#civil war and hygiene #the political #critique of capital colonialism #violence and exclusion #capital-colonialism
- The Unencumbered Self: Probability, Space-Time, and the Modern Myth of Freedom**
An argument that the “unencumbered self,” which underlies traditional interpretations of freedom, rests on a fictional myth of modernity, and that a de-Westernized understanding of the human offers new theoretical implications
#materialism #unencumbered self # materiality and politics #body and society



- How I Learned to Stop Doing ‘Theory’ and to Love the Soviet**
An examination of a Soviet scholar’s personal intellectual trajectory and a reflection on the possibilities and meanings of theory
#personal intellectual history #theory studies #Soviet studies
- (Back to the) Future Fieldwork – Tapsa and Haptic Methods in Contemporary Korean Studies**
An exploration of new forms of spatiality and modes of knowledge production in Korea through fieldwork conducted along urban and non-urban boundaries.
#new normal #Korean Studies methodology #fieldwork #on-site research #cultural geography #tactile methodologies
- Moishe Postone: A Critical Theory that Critiques Critical Theory**
An analysis of Moishe Postone’s critical theory as a response to the discourse on the “crisis of critique,” focusing on its contemporary questions and reconstructive efforts
#Moishe Postone #reconstruction of critical theory #treadmill effect # contradictions of capital
- Dialogue Between Eastern and Western Civilizations through Habermas’s 2019 Study on Confucianism**
A reflection on the possibility of an East Asian modernity inspired by Habermas’s Confucianism research
#Habermas #Confucian studies #East Asian modernity #learning
- The Queer Politics of the Wounded: Reparation Work and Queer Youth Activism in Korea**
An analysis of how Korean LGBTQ student movements transform social trauma into spaces of recovery amid structural harm, and how queer students become political subjects
#recovery work #LGBTQ student movements #queer politics #restorative communities
- Surviving an Apocalyptic World as Non-Human: Neoliberal Co-mix Storytelling and the Art of “relational survivance”**
An analysis of monster and zombie webtoons popular during the COVID-19 pandemic through the lens of “worm-time,” and a reflection on the art of “relational survivance”
#zombie apocalypse #COVID-19 #posthumanist critique
- The Testimony of Emotion, the Montage of Symptoms**
An examination of the “dictatorship of affects” in totalitarianism and the testimony of emotion through the lens of Georges Didi-Huberman’s *Le Témoin jusqu’au bout*, connecting it to discourses on language, image, and montage
#Emotional Dictatorship #Testimony Of Emotion #Totalitarianism And Language #Image And Montage

Invited Lecture by International Scholar

A forum for scholarly exchange that draws on the research and theoretical perspectives of an invited international scholar to shed new light on cultural, religious, and economic transformations in Korean society

●

Believing

An explanation of how the three layers of cultural, religious, and economic contexts, beliefs, and practices interact and are reconfigured through a “believing system.”

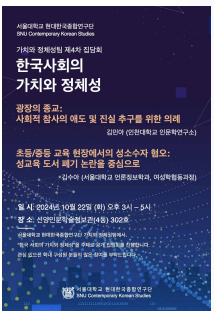
#Korean religion #belief systems #mechanisms of social control
#neoliberal behavioral patterns



Values & Identity

Values and Identity in Korean Society Colloquium

A colloquium addressing key issues surrounding values and identity in Korean society



- Samboilbae and Ochetuji in the 10.29 Itaewon Disaster Movement: Affirmations of the Value of Life and the Establishment of New Identity**

An analysis of the impact of religious rituals on bereaved family solidarity and civic responses in the aftermath of social disasters

#bereaved families' solidarity #civic responses #religious rituals
- Anti-LGBTQIA+ Discourse and Hate Speech in Korean Protestant Organizations: Focusing on Sexuality Education Discourse in Schools**

An analysis of the institutionalization of anti-LGBTQ sentiment through the discourses of “healthy sexuality” and “defending the family”

#anti-LGBTQ sentiment #disposal of sex education books #discourse analysis
- Korean Political Scandals and Shamanism Rhetoric: The Shadow of the 20th Century ‘Musok’**

An analysis of the political instrumentalization of shamanism in contemporary Korean society, and an examination of how shamanism uniquely engages with human desire

#shamanism #human desire #political instrumentalization

A Study on Media Reports of Alleged Connections between Celebrities and Protestant NRMs

An analysis of media coverage, tone, and strategies in reports addressing allegations of connections between celebrities and new religious movements

#celebrities #allegations involving new religions #media coverage
- Stigma and Charisma: The Political Theology of Shincheonji Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic Crisis**

An analysis of how Shincheonji strengthened its self-legitimation and internal cohesion in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis

#Shincheonji #COVID-19 #self-legitimation, cohesion

Fear, Hatred, and Anger: The Affective Politics of Far-Right Protestantism in South Korea

An analysis of the political voice of far-right Protestant groups through the lens of affective politics

#affective politics #far-right Protestantism #fear #hatred #anger

- The Construction of “Korean-ness” and Cultural Politics:
Reading Religious and Racial Symbols in *K-Pop Demon Hunters*
An analysis of the religious symbols within *K-Pop Demon Hunters*
to examine the context through which “Korean-ness” is constructed
#Kpop Demon Hunters #Cultural Politics #Religion
- Towards a Sociology of Korean Buddhism: What Comes after Purification?
An analysis of the relationship between Buddhism, politics, and society,
complemented by a historical review of Korean Buddhism
#Korean Buddhism #Sociology #History

Global Hallyu Studies

Active voice related to ongoing research projects and collaborations
with scholars based at overseas universities

Reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of Global Hallyu Studies, we are building a global research network,
sharing information on educational practices, and developing diverse forms of academic activities
to identify emerging global research agendas.

- NETFLIX AND SOUTH KOREAN MEDIA
IN A GLOBALIZING WORLD
A conference examining the impact of Netflix, a leading online
streaming platform in the global media market, on the production,
distribution, and consumption of Korean cultural industries
 - Reading Netflix
 - Cinema and cinematic TV in the age of Netflix
 - Pandemic, gender, and youth



- 2024 CHS International Conference:
Mapping and Theorizing Hallyu
An international conference reflecting on the discursive geography,
production, distribution, and texts of Hallyu at a meta-level, and
rethinking existing cultural theories and theories of transnational
cultural flows
 - Discursive geography of Hallyu
 - Mapping global impacts of Hallyu, digital Hallyu, negative Hallyu
 - Reframing transnational cultural flow theories and creative industries



- Global Hallyu Research Workshop
A three-day international workshop aimed at sharing the current
state and challenges of Hallyu research and education across
regions, and exploring interdisciplinary expansion and global
collaboration in Hallyu Studies
 - Institutionalizing Hallyu
 - Translating Hallyu
 - Theorizing Hallyu beyond borders



Between Game and Martial Law:
The Political Shift in the Series

A special lecture series held as part of a project
to share and discuss research findings on Hallyu

- Power and play: a critical political analysis of Korean society and global capitalism through game structures and narratives in television drama
- Global narratives and locality: the global reception of Korean content and its political reframing
- Content and institutions: the expansion of television drama in the context of Korean capitalism and production and distribution structures



The 1st Hallyu Student Day

A student paper competition designed to identify and cultivate
the next generation of Hallyu scholars by encouraging
undergraduate and graduate students across disciplines
to produce academic work on Korean popular culture
and the Hallyu phenomenon

#Korean popular culture #K-culture phenomena #cultural industries
#fandom #soft power #public diplomacy #Hallyu and anti-Hallyu



The 1st SNU Graduate Workshop on Hallyu Studies

An intensive pre-conference workshop for doctoral students in
Hallyu Studies from around the world, held as a pre-program of
the International Conference on Contemporary Korean Studies

- Expanding the research foundation in Korean Studies and Hallyu research
- Building a research ecosystem through networking the next generation of scholars



The 2nd Hallyu Student Day

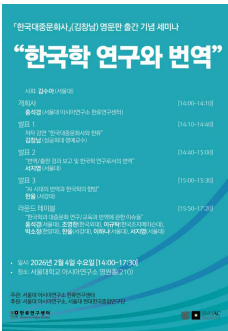
#popular songs #political participation of K-pop fans
#audience studies #mental health #globalizations of K-pop
#adaptive strategies of Hallyu
#effects of Hallyu on global pop music industry



Seminar Commemorating the Publication of the English Edition
of The History of Korean Popular Culture (Chang-nam Kim):
Korean Studies Research and Translation

A comprehensive academic seminar commemorating
the English publication of A History of Korean Popular Culture,
discussing the historical significance of K-pop/media,
the cultural foundations of democratization,
the process of Korean Studies translation,
and the challenges of human agency in knowledge representation
within the AI-driven translation paradigm

#History Of Korean Pop Culture #Korean Studies Translation
#Democratization And Culture #AI Translation



K-Narratives

Narrating Contemporary Korea

A colloquium series critically exploring the symptoms of narratives in contemporary Korea

- The Philosophy of Fiction and Translation
 - Fiction without Mimesis: A Comparative Philosophy of Fiction
 - An exploration of how different cultures understand “fiction” in different ways, and an examination of how fiction is contextually formed within each culture’s metaphysical assumptions
 - #fiction #mimesis #Plato #the novel #Dream of the Red Chamber
 - Untranslatability, Linguistic Relativity, and Linguistic Essentialism in Korean-English Translation
 - A critical examination of linguistic essentialism through the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and Emily Apter’s concepts of the “translation zone” and the “Dictionary of Untranslatables”
 - #untranslatability #Han(恨) #Jeong(情) #we/us
- K-Drama and Hallyu Dramas
 - An analysis of how issues such as violence, inequality, and educational pressure in Korean society are transformed into spectacles within Korean television dramas
 - #K-drama #Hallyu drama #webtoon generation #globalization #digital media #global brands
- Rewriting Romantic Utopias
 - An examination of the rise of romance fantasy webtoons, the social meanings of regression and reincarnation narratives, and the cultural significance of romance fantasy as a genre
 - #This Life, I Will Be the Lord #The Remarried Empress #noble comics
 - #female-centered narratives #romantic utopia
- Korean Literature and Translation after Han Kang’s Nobel Prize in Literature
 - A historical review of the translation of Korean literature — from missionary translators to contemporary translators — and an examination of how Korean literature has been received by global readers
 - #The Vegetarian #We Do Not Part #Cursed Bunny #Love in the Big City
- Masterplots of Reliance, Return, and Escape: Narrative Choices in the Double-Bind Worlds of Korean Film
 - An analysis of how Korean cinema employs dependence, return, and escape within double-bind situations, with a focus on the concept of the master plot
 - #dependence #return #escape



- Survivalism, Meritocracy, Retributivism – The Vicious Cycles of Contemporary K-Narratives
 - A discussion of whether master plots exist in Korean literature and cultural content, and whether such master plots exhibit forms of national specificity
 - #master plot #cyclical structures #survivalism #meritocracy #retributivism
- Accompanying the Specters: Fictional Narratives about the Sewol Ferry Disaster
 - An analysis of how literary works dealing with the Sewol ferry disaster reflect on national identity and collective memory
 - #Sewol ferry disaster #collective memory #cultural narratives
- “When Korean Literature Encounters ‘K’:
On the (Dis)Harmony between Korean Literature and ‘K’-Literature”
 - An analysis of the gap between “K-literature” and “Korean literature,” and a discussion of how K-literature as translated literature can be reconfigured from the perspective of Korean Studies
 - #K-literature #Korean literature #translated literature #Korean narratives
- The Post-Novel Novel and Re-magicalization: A Reading of Han Kang’s Fiction
 - An exploration of contemporary Korean fiction trends and the narrative characteristics of Han Kang’s work, centered on the keyword “re-enchantment”
 - #ReEnchantment #Korean Fiction #Han Kang
- Self-Perception in Korean Narrative: The Hidden Sides of Success Narratives
 - A critical examination of contemporary Korean narratives, contemplating the self-awareness embedded in Korean storytelling and the hidden facets of success narratives
 - #Korean Narratives #Self-Awareness #Success Narratives

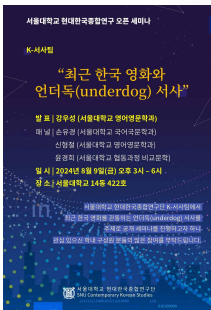
Open Seminar

Irregular open seminars inviting domestic and international researchers to foster understanding and engagement with contemporary phenomena in Korea

Recent Korean Films and the Underdog Narrative

An examination of the significance of underdog narratives Korean Cinema and an analysis of Korean society and the global context through the social vulnerabilities revealed by these Narratives

#The Land of Seonghye #A Little Princess #Nomadland #Squid Game #Concrete Utopia



Modernity & Developmental History

Korean Modernity and Developmental History: Aporia of the Formation of Korean Modernity and Development

A continuing lecture series examining the formation and characteristics of Korean modernity from multiple disciplinary perspectives, and critically reflecting on the meaning of “development” in the context of modern Korean history



- Changes in Population Censuses after Liberation and in the 1950s and Their Historical Significance
An exploration of the formation of early “modernity” in contemporary Korean history through an analysis of population censuses conducted before the establishment of the government and in the 1950s
#population census #establishment of the government #1950s #formation of modernity
- The Emergence of the “Koreanization” Discourse in the Social Sciences in the Mid-to-Late 1960s and the Re-recognition of Tradition
An analysis of how modernity was conceptualized within social science discourse in Korea in the late 1960s
#1960s #social sciences #meaning of modernity #“Koreanization” discourse #re-recognition of tradition
- From National Self-Reliant Economy to “Jaju Gengsaeng”: The Influence of the Korean War and Foreign Relations on the Formation of North Korea’s Development Strategy
A historical analysis of the formation of North Korea’s economic development strategy and foreign relations strategies
#development history #North Korean development strategy #North Korean foreign relations #economic development
- The Model Debtor: Korea and the Eurocurrency Market, 1969–1985
An analysis of how Korea overcame its external debt crisis through entry into the Eurocurrency market
#Eurocurrency #1969–1985 #overcoming the external debt crisis

- How Has Democracy Been Undermined by Developmentalism? The Obsession with “Development” in Korean Intellectual Circles in the 1960s
A critical reflection on developmentalism and development ideology among Korean intellectuals and their intellectual-historical impact on contemporary Korean society
#1960s #developmentalism #development ideology #democracy #intellectual circles
- The Lowest-Tier Workers of Subcontracted Firms: A Study of Home-Based Labor among Married Women in Seoul
A Reexamination of Women’s Invisible Labor Behind Development and Growth: A Study of Home-Based Labor Among Married Women in Seoul
#subcontracted firms #women workers #home-based labor #women’s labor #invisible labor
- The 1950s Exhibition Masterpieces of Korean Art and the Formation of Korean “Tradition”
An analysis of the cultural impact of development and growth through the case of the Masterpieces of Korean Art exhibition in the 1950s
#1950s #Masterpieces of Korean Art exhibition #cultural impact #development and growth #Korean artifacts
- Prostitution and What Is Not Prostitution: The South Korean Government’s Tourist Promotion Strategies and Sexualized Face-to-Face Service in the 1950s–60s
An exploration of how sexualized face-to-face service was implemented as part of South Korea’s development policies in the 1950s and 1960s
#prostitution #sexualized strategies #tourist promotion strategies #development and growth

Cold War and Development in East Asia: Traversing Militarism, Science, Technology, and Local Communities

A doctoral dissertation lecture series exploring Cold War and development in East Asia through the intersections of militarism, science and technology, and local communities

- Making the High-Mountain Frontier in South Korea, 1945–1972: A Modern History of the Taebaek Mountains through a Transpacific Environmental Lens
An analysis of the formation of the “Highland Frontier” in South Korea from 1945 to 1972 through the lens of Transpacific environmental history, shedding new light on the modern history of Mt. Taebaek
#Modern History Of MtTaebaek #Highland Frontier #Transpacific Environmental History #Post-Liberation Development



- The Implementation and Characteristics of Population Dispersion Policies under the Park Chung-Hee Administration

An analysis of the background, implementation process, and structural characteristics of state-led population decentralization policies during the Park Chung-Hee regime

#Park Chung-Hee Regime #Population Decentralization #Developmental State
- Networking for Development: Interpersonal Relationships and Technical Cooperation in Cold War Taiwan and South Korea

A comparative analysis of the formation and operation of interpersonal networks and technical cooperation that mediated development in Cold War Taiwan and South Korea

#Cold War Development #Technical Cooperation #Interpersonal Networks #Korea Taiwan Comparison
- Origins and Formation of South Korean Military Doctrine, 1945–1963

An analysis of the historical background and ideological origins underlying the formation of the South Korean military’s national defense thought between 1945 and 1963

#Korean Buddhism #Sociology #History
- Social Development Discourse and Community Health Projects in South Korea, 1960s–1980s

An analysis of the discourse on social development and the implementation process of community health projects in Korea from the 1960s to the 1980s, exploring their interconnections

#Social Development Discourse #Community Health #Developmental State #1960s-80s
- The Korean People’s Army’s Participation in Socialist Rural Construction and the Formation of a ‘Gun-Min Il-chi’ (Unity of Army and People) Society, 1945–1972

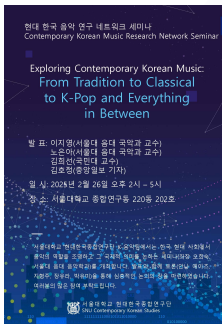
An analysis of the Korean People’s Army’s participation in socialist rural construction in North Korea and the subsequent formation of a “Unity between the Army and the People” (*Gun-Min Il-chi*) society

#KPA #Socialist Rural Construction #Unity Of Army And People #North Korean Society

Contemporary Korean Music

Contemporary Korean Music Research Network Seminar

A seminar examining the role of music in contemporary Korean society and highlighting its international significance



- Exploring Contemporary Korean Music: From Tradition to Classical to K-pop and Everything in Between

Addressing the historical traditions and global influence of Korean music, and examining the past and present of Korean music

 - The Gayageum: Performance Techniques and Their Contemporary Significance
 - The World of the Haegeum
 - The Origins of Global Korean Music:
 - Overseas Performances of South Korean Traditional Music during the Cold War
 - Are Korean Musicians Highly Competitive?
 - The History of Participation in International Music Competitions and New Pathways
- Where Does It Stand Today? Voices of Emerging Researchers

An exploration of the directions and possibilities of contemporary music research, featuring presentations and discussions by emerging scholars on diverse perspectives ranging from the world of modern composition to the creation and performance of traditional Korean music (*Gugak*)

 - Analytical Perspectives and the Compositional World of Contemporary Korean Music
 - Sounds, Methodologies, and Performances of Traditional Music

Contemporary Korean Music Research Colloquium

A monthly colloquium bringing together scholars from Korea and abroad to discuss diverse musical discourses at the intersection of tradition and innovation



- The Aesthetics of Collaboration between Korean Traditional Performers and American Contemporary Music in the Global Age
Exploring possibilities for collaboration between different musical genres at the intersection of Korean traditional music and American contemporary music
#global age #Korean traditional music #American contemporary music
- Rereading Opera - Encounters Between Western Opera and Korean Stage Interpretation
An analysis of Regietheater-style opera productions, focusing on works directed by Soo-dong Jang, and a presentation of their conceptual definition, historical background, and typology
#Soo-dong Jang's productions #Regietheater #Korean opera directors
- From Geomungo to Squid Game - The Diversity and Expansion of Contemporary Korean Music
 - An examination of the historical transformations of the geomungo and its performance practices within twenty-first-century musical styles
#geomungo #Korean traditional music #global age
 - An analysis of class-based sound hierarchies in popular culture through the case of the television series Squid Game
#Squid Game #popular culture #class #hierarchy
- The Case of Han Jeongsun: Song in the Fabric of Everyday Life
An exploration of how everyday singing shapes the lives of individuals and communities
#Jeong-seon Han #music and everyday life #individuals and communities

- Global Mega-Events and Gugak Fandom – The (Re)Invention of Traditional Performance and Histories of Reception
An analysis of the symbolic role of Gugak(Korean traditional music) within global mega-events and the process of modernizing traditional performances, focusing on the opening and closing ceremonies of the 1988 Seoul Olympics and the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics
#Reinterpretation Of Tradition #Olympic Cultural Politics #National Symbols #Tradition And Modernity
- The History and Development of Gugak Fandom: Focusing on Yeoseong Gukgeuk and Changgeuk
An exploration of the formation and evolution of Gugakfandom through the cases of Yeoseong Gukgeuk(all-female traditional opera) and Changgeuk, examining expanding modes of reception within participatory culture and digital environments
#Gugak Fandom #Yeoseong Gukgeuk #Changgeuk #Participatory Culture
- Aspects of Gayageum Works by Global Composers in Collaboration with Lee Ji-young
An analysis of how traditional instruments have been reinterpreted and their sonic possibilities expanded within contemporary international composition discourses through *Gayageumworks*
#Gayageum Composition #Modernization Of Traditional Instruments
- Contemporary Korean Music Utilizing Technology: Centered on Computer and AI Music
An exploration of the intersection between technology and musical thought, highlighting the trends and major works of contemporary Korean music centered on computer-aided and AI-generated music
#Contemporary Composition #Computer Music #AI Music
- On Bicultural Instrumentation in Contemporary Korean Creative Music
An exploration of bicultural instrumentation in contemporary Korean creative music, analyzing the methods of combining different musical traditions and their aesthetic significance
#Bicultural Instrumentation #Korean Creative Music #Transculturality #Music Aesthetics
- Visible Voices, Hidden Histories: A Transcultural Study of Women in Composition – Comparing Germany and South Korea
A transcultural study comparing female composers in Germany and South Korea, shedding light on the previously invisible voices of women and their historical contexts within the field of composition
#Women Composers #Transcultural Study #Music And Gender

Statehood & Civil Society

Theoretical Studies on Modern and Contemporary Korean Statehood

- **Tributary State**
A study of premodern Sino–Korean relations and the East Asian regional order centered on the institutions and ideology of the tributary system
- **Colonial Korea**
A synthesis of social-science theories of colonial regimes and an analysis of the political and socio-historical impact of the colonial legacy on the statehood of the Republic of Korea
- **Legal Status of the Republic of Korea**
A study of the legal status of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea and the question of legal continuity between the provisional government and the post-liberation Republic of Korea
- **North–South Division System**
An analysis of the specificity of the Korean division system and its interrelation with the global Cold War structure
- **Anti-Communist State**
An analysis of South Korean society in the 1960s and 1970s centered on anti-communism

Studies on Ideology, Thought, and Discourse in Modern and Contemporary Korea

- **Acceptance of Western Civilization and Knowledge in the 19th Century**
An analysis of the reception and Korean reinterpretation of Western political ideas such as liberty, independence, and republicanism
- **Nationalism**
An exploration of the historical origins and characteristics of Korean nationalism and the ideological roots of contemporary conflicts in Korean society
- **Patriarchalism**
A micro-level study of the origins and mechanisms of oppressive social structures in modern and contemporary Korea, centered on patriarchy

Japan-Korea Modern Korean History International Seminar

A comparative exploration of historical understanding in Korea and Japan through an international seminar on modern Korean history

- Lyuh Woon-hyung as an agent of decolonization
- The division of the Korean Peninsula and the issues of Okinawa’s status and U.S. military bases
- Japanese debates on turning Korea into a protectorate in the 1900s and the Eulsa Protectorate Treaty



Organization of International Academic Conferences

2024 SNU International Conference for Contemporary Korean Studies

The 1st International Conference in 2024 marked the official launch of Seoul National University Contemporary Korean Studies and introduced its individual research teams. The conference also provided a forum for dialogue with the audience on the future direction of the Center, including what role Seoul National University should play as a global hub and the appropriate orientation of contemporary Korean Studies.

The 1st International Conference (2024)

SNU Contemporary Korean Studies

2024 1st International Conference for Contemporary Korean Studies

• Date: August 23 (Friday), 2024, 9:30 am–6:50 pm
August 24 (Saturday), 2024, 10:00 am–6:10 pm
• Venue: Youngwon Hall, Seoul National University Asia Center

Welcome Address, August 23, 9:30-10:00 am
Honglim Ryu, President, Seoul National University

Session 1 Reimagining Korea: Identity and Values in a Changing World and Korea in Transition, August 23, 10:00-11:50 am

Session 2 Political Economy from a Comparative-Historical Perspective, August 23, 1:00-3:00 pm

Session 3 The Masterplots of K-Narrative, August 23, 3:10-5:00 pm

Session 4 K-Future, August 23, 5:10-6:50 pm

Session 5 Korean Modernity and the History of Development, August 24, 10:00-11:50 am

Session 6 Global Perspectives on Hallyu, August 24, 1:00-3:00 pm

Session 7 Exploring Contemporary Korean Music: From Traditional to Classical to K-Pop and Everything in Between, August 24, 3:10-4:40 pm

Roundtable Discussion, August 24, 4:50-6:20 pm

Contact: SNU Contemporary Korean Studies (snucks@snu.ac.kr)

The 2nd International Conference (2025)

2025
SNU International Conference
for Contemporary Korean Studies

Korea as Symptom
Perspectives on the Future

August 22–23, 2025 (Fri–Sat)
Asia Center (Building 101) 2F
Seoul National University

The 2025 SNU International Conference for Contemporary Korean Studies (ICCKS) explores the diverse phenomena of contemporary South Korea under the theme **Korea as Symptom: Perspectives on the Future**. By reading South Korea's current issues—from democratic crisis to cultural innovation—as interconnected symptoms of broader historical and global processes, the conference invites critical reflection and seeks to develop new perspectives on Korea's past, present, and future.

Conference Program and Proceedings
snucks2025@gmail.com

서울대학교
Seoul National University

서울대학교 현대한국문화연구원
SNU Contemporary Korean Studies

2025 SNU International Conference for Contemporary Korean Studies

From August 22 to 23, 2025, Seoul National University Contemporary Korean Studies hosted the 2nd International Conference on Contemporary Korean Studies under the theme “Korea as Symptom.” The conference consisted of a total of 22 sessions, including a roundtable, and brought together 236 scholars from 15 countries, including Korea, the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, China, and India.

Participants

236 researchers from **15** countries
(including Korea, USA, Canada, the UK, Germany, France, China, and India)

Program

68 presentation in **22** sessions
(including roundtables)

The closing roundtable of the conference offered a comprehensive theoretical and philosophical reflection on the theme “Korea as Symptom.” Rather than reducing contemporary Korea to a single explanatory framework, participants engaged in a symptom-oriented reading to identify the multilayered and contradictory signs of contemporary Korean society. On this basis, the Center articulated the need for future research that is both multilayered and interdisciplinary.

Session Highlights

Korean Political Economy



The session examined and discussed key issues in Korean political economy — including gender, labor, and digitalization — from an international perspective.

- Gendered Polarization among Young Koreans: Young Men’s Conservative Turn in the 2022 Presidential Election
- Tripartism and the Politics of Social Pacts in South Korea: Institutional Evolution and Strategic Dilemmas
- Capitalism vs. Capitalism - India and Korean Experiences in the Comparative Perspective
- Digitalization in Japan and Korea

Korean Democracy at a Crossroads: Historical and Comparative Perspectives



The session examined how Korean democracy has been formed and developed, and by assessing its current condition, drew out its political implications.

- How Liberal Democracy Became the “Founding Doctrine” of South Korea: A Conceptual History of Chayuminjujuui from 1945 to 1963
- Liberal Transition of Korean Democracy after 1987
- Democratic Backsliding by Invitation: The People Power Party and South Korea’s Constitutional Crisis
- Dissensual Citizenship in Contemporary Korea

South Korea and Post-Cold War Geopolitics

The session presented changes within and beyond Korea in the post-Cold War geopolitical order and analyzed Korea’s political position in a global context.

- Promoting Human Rights and Democracy in Today’s World: Digital Activism, Popular Culture and Environmental Advocacy Among South Korean Youth
- Korean Peninsula and Romania in the Context of Collapse of Communist Bloc and the Reshaping of New Geopolitical Order
- From War to Cultural Exchange: The Evolution of Korea-Vietnam Relations as Symptom of Geopolitical Transformation

Walking as Object-Method in Korean Studies: Modeling Future Trends for Conducting Fieldwork in the Social Sciences



The session introduced an “object-method” approach that blurs the boundary between research objects and research methods through the everyday practice of walking, and proposed a social-scientific methodology for exploring the landscapes, technologies, and communities of Korean society.

- Walking along the DMZ Peace Trail as Object-Method to Reconsider Post-Traumatic Space in the South Korean Border Zone
- Walking Empowerment: Civil Society and the Making of Paths
- Summoning Pre-Technological Technologies: The Politics of Walking in South Korea, 1960s and 1970s
- Walking with the Moving Fieldsite: Doing Mobile Ethnography in Digital Nomad Research

Reading Cultural Symptoms of Korea



Under the theme “Reading Korea’s Cultural Symptoms,” the session examined signs of Korean society across three distinct domains through the lenses of affect, assemblage, and neoliberal adaptation.

- Sympathy as Symptom: K-Drama Mediation and Communal Affect
- Behind and Beyond the Logic of Imitation: From Assemblage of Chips to the K in Action
- The Rise of Neoliberalism in South Korea: Success or Failure, Dream or Nightmare?

Religion, Culture, and Political Identity in Korea I



By analyzing the intersections of religion, culture, and politics in Korean society through the perspectives of religious nationalism, media representation, and political myth, the session offered a multilayered view of the complex dimensions of Korean identity.

- Sacralizing the Nation: New Religions and Korea’s Place in the World
- Evolving Representation of Mudang in Korean Television
- A Short Critique of Korea’s Political Mythology in the Post-Park Chung Hee Era

Religion, Culture, and Political Identity in Korea II



The session explored the intersection of religion and Korean politics and proposed a new analytical framework for understanding contemporary Korean politics through religion.

- Korean Political Scandals and Shamanism Rhetoric
- Stigma and Charisma: The Political Theology of Shincheonji Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic Crisis
- Fear, Hatred, and Anger: The Affective Politics of Far-Right Protestantism in South Korea

Queer Representation in Contemporary Korean Fiction



Focusing on representations of queerness in Korean literature, the session examined their social and cultural meanings and reflected on the contemporary position and social implications of Korean queer literature.

- The Utopia of Male Homosexuality in Contemporary Korean Fictions
- Geopolitical Configurations of Korean Queer Narratives and the Stalemate of Global Queer Discourse

Korean Narrative Today I: Inventing a Way of Living in Margin



By examining marginal identities in Korean society through diverse cultural and theoretical frameworks, the session offered a multilayered analysis encompassing trauma, gender, and queerness, and explored the processes through which social narratives are constructed in Korea.

- Trauma and the Monstrous-Feminine in Korean On-Screen Media
- Queer Future in Worn-Out Stories: A Queer Reading of Love in the Big City

Korean Narrative Today II: Gleaning the Shards of History



Through the contrasting cases of the “true crime” genre and K-romance music, the session explored how Korean narratives are being reconfigured through digital culture and popular music.

- Korea as a Narrative: Digital Mediation Through True Crime
- In Perfect Harmony? Constructing Complex Female Characters and Their Relationships Through Music in K-Dramas

Narrative Alternatives Imagining the Post-1987 System



The session examined post-democratization Korean society through literary works and analyzed contemporary Korea by addressing the political meaning of public squares through alternative narratives and the representation of law in artistic works.

- The Square Changes Words; Words Change the Square
- Justice and Community Beyond the Law: Questions and Responses in Korean Literature and Film after 1987

Migration Issues and Gender Inequality in Korea



By analyzing the oral histories of adoptees with disabilities, the generational experiences of Korean migrants in Germany, and the realities of migrant workers in Korea, the session examined the intersections of migration, gender, disability, generation, and race.

- Disability, Migration, and (Non) Labor
- You Have to Be Better Than the Germans: Discrimination Experiences of Korean Labor Migrants in Germany
- Global Labor Mobility: The Lives of Migrant Workers in South Korea and Their Families in Origin Countries

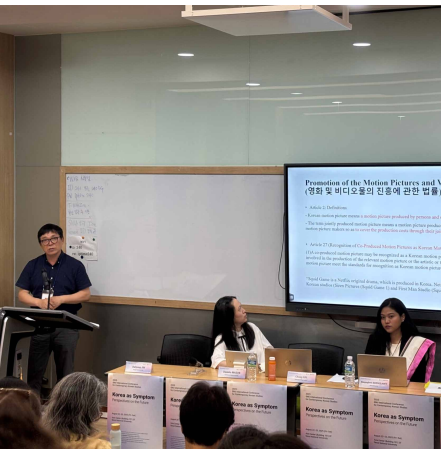
The Political and Social Landscape of Korea



By addressing diverse topics such as protest culture and ultra-low fertility, the session offered a comprehensive overview of multiple discourses shaping contemporary Korean society.

- Cultural Productions of Resistance: The Gwangju Uprising and Its Legacy in South Korean Protest Culture
- The Legacy of Population Control: How Cold War Politics Shaped South Korea's Fertility Crisis

Hallyu in Global Context



By examining Hallyu in an international context, the session analyzed how Korean popular culture generates diverse cultural discourses as it is received abroad and is subsequently reinterpreted through its interaction with local cultures.

- A Full-Package Production Model: The Development of New Runaway Production in the Netflix Era
- South Korea and Hallyu: An Alternative Globalization in the Multipolar World
- Imagining 'Han Nü': Discursive Construction of Contemporary Korean Womanhood on a Chinese Digital Platform
- Globalising Masculinities: When Traditional Mizo Pasaltha (War Heroes) Meets South Korea's Soft Masculinity

K-pop, Fandom and Cultural Practices

Focusing on K-pop fandom, the session demonstrated how K-pop has evolved beyond popular music into a form of cultural practice across the world, and explored social change mediated through music.

- Anything to Say to Your Fans?: Gendered Fandom and Labor in Korean Esports
- Self-Made K-pop Photocards in South Africa: Local Fan Practices as a Way of Dealing with South Korean Popular Culture
- Performing Korea: K-pop Cover Dance and the Transformation of Public Space in France
- K-poppers and Hip Hoppers in Beijing: Dance, Professions, and Mobilities

K-pop and Activism

Focusing on K-pop fandom, the session demonstrated how K-pop has evolved beyond popular music into a form of cultural practice across the world, and explored social change mediated through music.

- Music and Activism: Historical Perspectives
- Repurposing K-pop Fandom Infrastructure in Social Activism
- K-pop Fandom, Gender, Queer, and Resistance
- Relation between K-pop Fan Activism and Consumer Rights
- K-pop and Political Mobilization
- K-pop, Anti-Korean Sentiment, and Fan Resistance

Foreign Policy Narratives toward South Korea

The session analyzed strategic narratives surrounding Japan’s, China’s, and the United States’ policies toward Korea and explored Korea’s position in international politics, contributing to an understanding of the structural context of Korean Peninsula diplomacy.

- Japan’s Strategic Narrative towards South Korea
- China’s Korean Diplomacy Narratives in the Xi Jinping Era
- US Strategic Narratives on East Asian Allies under Retrenchment
- Elite Victim or Elite Power? Korea’s Victimhood Narratives and Status-Seeking in the World

Telling the Stories of Other Korea



By introducing narratives based on diverse perspectives on Korean history, the session revealed alternative images of Korea that have remained largely overlooked.

- Strange Politics in Early Modern East Asia: The Objective Value of Fictionalized History
- Revisiting Historical East Asia: A Reflection on and from Ancient Korea
- Trust in the Digital Age? Digital CBMs, Track II Diplomacy, and North Korea’s Cyber Challenge

Perspectives on the Statehood of Modern and Contemporary Korea



The session explored the formation of the modern Korean state from multiple perspectives and offered a comprehensive account of the complexity and historical trajectories of Korean statehood.

- The Protestant Work Ethic and the Origin of Korean Enlightenment Nationalism, 1896-1900
- Education as an Instrument of Colonial Rule?: Hegemonic Competition and the Educational System in Colonial Korea
- Decolonization and Dependent Development in Korea
- Hetero-Authoritarianism: Toward Embodied Histories of State and Society in ‘Hot War’ South Korea

SNUCKS

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Contemporary Korean Studies**

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Official Website

<https://cks.snu.ac.kr>

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