Contemporary Korean Culture and Society

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Course Description:

The goal of this course is to introduce students to the significant questions and issues shaping Korea's history, culture, and society, from beginning of the 20th century to our day. Our approach will be comprehensive and interdisciplinary. We will examine various cultural texts, including films, television dramas, short stories, novels, and popular music (k-pop and Korean hip-hop/rap). We will look at how key events in Korea's dramatic and turbulent 20th and 21st centuries, such as colonialism (1910-1945), the Korean War (1950-53), rapid economic transformation (1960s and 70s), the pro-democracy movement (1980s), the IMF crisis, globalization, etc, have affected Korean ideas concerning identity, nation, history, gender, class, and race. It is hoped through our discussions that students will develop a thoughtful and critical understanding of the complex questions affecting Korea today.

Materials/Text:

Textbooks:

3. Other references materials to be determined.
4. Films, such as Stray Bullet (오발탄), Taeguk-ki: The Brotherhood of War (태극기 휘날리며), Joint Security Area, The Host (괴물), Roaring Currents (명량), Ode to My Father (국제시장)
5. Television dramas: Sandglass (모래시계)
6. Examples from K-pop and Korean hip-hop/rap

Requirements:

There are no special prerequisites for this course. Classes will be conducted in English. Knowledge of Korean, although helpful, is not required. Students are expected to complete their readings before class and come to class prepared to actively participate in discussions.
Schedule:

This schedule is tentative and is subject to change.

Class 1: Introduction. The opening of Korea (1890s-1900s)
Class 2: The colonial period. “Mujong” (Heartless) by Yi Kwang-su
Class 3: The colonial period. “My Innocent Uncle” by Chae Manshik
Class 4: “A Day in the Life of Kubo the Novelist” by Pak Taewon
Class 5: Film: Roaring Currents
Class 6: Film: Taegeuk-ki: The Brotherhood of War; “Mother's Hitching Post” by Pak Wanso
Class 7: Film: “Stray Bullet”
Class 8: “Chinatown” by Oh Jeonghee Mid-Term Exam
Class 9: “Five Bandits” by Kim Chiha
Class 10: Joint Security Area
Class 11: Short Stories by Kim Young-ha
Class 12: The Host
Class 13: Ode to My Father
Class 14: K-pop (Psy’s “Gangnam Style”; Girls’ Generation); “Sampoong Department Store” by Jung I-hyon
Class 15: Final Exam

Assignments:

Attendance and participation in discussion: 15%
Group presentations/project: 25%
Mid-Term Exam: 30%
Final Exam: 30%

Evaluation:

Please see “assignments” above.