Sungkyunkwan University (SKKU) International Summer Semester (ISS) 2026

Living History: Everyday Life in 20th Century Korea

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SHORT COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces the study of history from below with a particular focus on Korea, emphasizing the lives and experiences of ordinary people. By examining everyday life, the course highlights both the possibilities and limits of human agency within historical contexts. Focusing on twentieth-century Korea, students will explore the cultural and social worlds of ordinary people during the colonial period, national division, and the Cold War. A key component of the course is a series of guided field trips in Seoul, where historical sites, neighborhoods, and memorial spaces serve as living archives of modern Korean history. These visits allow students to directly engage with the material traces of the past and reflect on how power, hierarchy, and memory are embedded in urban spaces. Through these on-site experiences and classroom analysis, the course rethinks traditional approaches to history centered on political events or elite figures. Using diverse methodological tools—such as interviews, films, visual materials, cartoons, and field observations—the course deepens students' understanding of history as lived and experienced by ordinary people.

READING MATERIALS

The readings and primary sources are assigned for each session and uploaded as pdf-files on iCampus; a detailed citation is indicated in the course schedule below.

Students with a wider interest in modern Korean history can refer to the following introduction readings:

- Ramon Pacheco Pardo / Victor Cha, *Korea: A New History of South and North*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2024.
- Michael Seth, *A Concise History of Korea*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2024.
- Theodore Jun Yoo, *The Koreas: The Birth of Two Nations Divided*, Berkeley: UC Press, 2022.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

All ISS classes are pass/fail based on the student's academic achievement evaluated by grades on a scale of 100 points (a grade of 60 or above is a Pass). SKKU regulations require students to attend at least 80% of all classes.

The final grade is based on the following requirements:

1) Attendance and Participation (20%)

Regular attendance and participation in our class discussions is essential during this short summer semester. Attendance will be recorded for each session; students can earn credit for attending each class, but repeated and unexcused absences will result in a deduction from their overall grade. PowerPoint slides will be uploaded before each class lecture on i-Campus.

2) Short Essays on the Field Trips (30%)
The field trips are an important component of the class. Through the short essays, students can reflect on the experiences made during the trip, focusing on the everyday life history and its representation in the exhibitions. Each essay should be minimum 300 words; submission for all essays in one file is Sunday, 19 July 2026.

3) Reading Discussion – Short Summary and Questions
Starting from Week II, small groups of students will be in charge of discussion moderation. This consists of a short introduction and summary of the reading and author, as well as discussion questions on the topic. The instructor will support the groups with moderation if needed.

4) Final Exam (30%) on Wednesday, 22 July 2026
short essay questions that ask students to explain significant historical events and competing theories; students' answers should be no more than five sentences each. A list of exam questions will be given a few days before the exam, so as long as you prepare for the test, you will have no problem answering them. The final exam aims to ensure students review what they have learned in this course. Thirty minutes are enough to complete the test.

COURSE SCHEDULE

– WEEK I –

Monday (29 June) Introduction - History of Everyday Life in 20th Century Korea
* Discussion of course, syllabus, and expectations
* Introduction to the history of everyday life / Korean history

Reading: Alf Lüdtke, "Introduction: What is the History of Everyday Life and Who are its Practitioners?" in: Alf Lüdtke (ed.), *The History of Everyday Life*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989, pp. 3–30.

Tuesday (30 June) Everyday Life in Late Joseon and Hybrid Modernity
* Society and economy in early modern Korea
* Understanding Joseon class and gender hierarchies

Reading: Michael D. Shin, "The Intimate Past: An Introduction to the Joseon Period", in: Michael D. Shin (ed.), *Everyday Life in Joseon-Era Korea*, Leiden: Brill, 2014, pp. 1–33.

Wednesday (1 July) Field Trip I
Jeong-dong (Deoksugung Palace, Jungmyeongjeon, Road of King Gojong, Old Russian Legation and Ewha Museum)

Reading: Sinwoo Lee, "Blurring Boundaries: Mixed Residence, Extraterritoriality, and Citizenship in Seoul, 1876–1910", *Journal of Korean Studies* 21.1, 2016, pp. 71–100.

Thursday (2 July) Ambiguities of Colonial Modernity
* Everyday life in urban culture

* Colonial modernity in Korea

Reading: Michael Kim, "Staging Images of Everyday Life in Late Colonial Korea: Colonial Visuality and the Proliferation of Amateur Photography", *Asian Studies Review* 45.3, 2021, pp. 381–99.

– WEEK II –

Monday (6 July) Consumer Culture and Gender in Colonial Korea
* Changing gender norms in colonial Korea
* Links to capitalist modernity

Reading: Theodore Jun Yoo, *The Politics of Gender in Colonial Korea: Education, Labor, and Health, 1910-1945*, Berkeley: UC Press, 2014, Chapter 2: "The 'New Woman' and the Politics of Love, Marriage, and Divorce in Colonial Korea", pp. 58–94.

Tuesday (7 July) Field Trip II
Independence Gate, Seodaemun Prison and National Memorial of Korean Provisional Government

Reading: Jin Woong Kang, "The Prison and Power in Colonial Korea", *Asian Studies Review* 40.3, 2016, pp. 413–426.

Wednesday (8 July) From Liberation to Division and (Anti-)Communism
* Social changes through the Socialist revolution in North Korea
* Anti-communist policies in South Korea

Reading: Suzy Kim, *Everyday Life in the North Korean Revolution, 1945–50*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016, Chapter 3: "Three Reforms: Initiating the Revolution", pp. 71–104.

Thursday (9 July) Korean War and the Everyday Life
* Lives of soldiers, war widows & children
* Refugees and civilian massacres

Reading: Taewoo Kim, "Overturned Time and Space: Drastic Changes in the Daily Lives of North Koreans during the Korean War", *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding* 2.2, 2014, pp. 241–262.

– WEEK III –

Monday (13 July) Rural Modernization and Changing Food Culture
* Changes in South Korean Agriculture and Farming Lives
* Meat, wheat and milk consumption / McDonaldization of Korean cuisine?

Reading: Katarzyna Cwiertka, *Cuisine, Colonialism and Cold War: Food in Twentieth-Century Korea*, London: Reaktion Books, 2012, Chapter 5: "South Korea: From Food Aid to the Revival of Royal Cuisine", pp. 114–140.

Tuesday (14 July) South Korean Economic Growth and Worker's Movement
* Compressed modernization and economic growth in South Korea
* Working conditions and democratization movement

Reading: Won Kim, "Between Autonomy and Productivity: The Everyday Lives of Korean Women Workers during the Park Chung-hee Era", in: Alf Lüdtke (ed.) *Everyday Life in Mass Dictatorship: Mass Dictatorship in the Twentieth Century*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 202–217

Wednesday (15 July) Field Trip III
Dongdaemun Pyeonghwa Market, Jeon Tae-il Memorial Hall and Cheonggyecheon Museum

Reading: Chihyung Jeon / Yeonsil Kang, "Restoring and Re-Restoring the Cheonggyecheon: Nature, Technology, and History in Seoul, South Korea", in: *Environmental History* 24, 2019, pp. 736–765.

Thursday (16 July) Anthropocene and Post-Development Ideas
* Anthropocene history in East Asia
* Pollution issues and environmental movement in Korea

Reading: Do-Wan Ku, "The Emergence of Ecological Alternative Movement in Korea", *Korean Social Science Journal*, 36.2, 2009, pp. 35–66.

– WEEK IV–

Monday (20 July) Korean Diaspora and their Everyday Lives
* Experiences of Korean migrants abroad
* Discrimination and questions of identity

Reading: Won Kim, "Memories of Migrant Labor: Stories of Two Korean Nurses Dispatched to West Germany", *The Review of Korean Studies* 12.4, 2009, pp. 111–151.

Tuesday (21 July) Perspectives on Everyday Lives Today
* Militarism and roles of masculinity
* Emergence of feminism and Hell Joseon discourse

Reading: Seungsook Moon, "Trouble with Conscription, Entertaining Soldiers: Popular Culture and the Politics of Militarized Masculinity in South Korea", *Men and Masculinities* 8.1, 2005, pp. 64-92.

Wednesday (22 July) Conclusions & Final Exam