

DRAFT VERSION: Minor changes will be made to this syllabus.

HIST 335-ASIAN 335
The Koreas—The Korean War to the 21st Century
UW-Madison Department of History
*CourseShare with Michigan State University (KOR 491),
University of Minnesota (LANG 3506), and University of Nebraska (MODL 391-980)*
Professor Charles Kim/Spring 2026
Tuesdays 1:20-3:15 pm CT/2:20-4:15 pm ET
Synchronous online ([Zoom](#))/3 credits

Email: charles.kim@wisc.edu

Student hours (in-person/[Zoom](#)): Thursdays 2:30-4:00 pm CT & by appointment

Course Description:

Korea has shaped, and has been shaped by, key trends and phenomena in East Asian and history. Students who take this course will explore the primary transformations in post-1945 South Korea and North Korea, with a focus on: national division and the Korean War (1945-1953), Cold War “late” development (1950s-1980s); and the global/“post” cold war era (1980s-recent times). We will also examine the colonial era (1910-1945) to gain a better understanding of the historical background of the Koreas and decolonization movements on the Korean peninsula.

Learning Objectives:

1. Demonstrate a nuanced and inclusive understanding of Korean experiences from a grassroots perspective, including representations of these experiences in recent works of cultural memory.
2. Demonstrate a sound understanding of the historical factors behind the formation of two competing nation states (North Korea and South Korea) on the Korean peninsula.
3. Demonstrate a knowledge of how the two Koreas fit within major processes of post-1945 global history, especially Cold War decolonization and post-Cold War globalization.
4. Identify the primary arguments of secondary sources and evaluate their significance.
5. Contextualize, identify, and interpret historically significant information in primary sources.
6. (Graduate only) Demonstrate how you will apply your knowledge of modern Korean history is relevant to your graduate studies and career path.

Required Materials:

- Most readings and visual materials will be available electronically on UW Canvas [LINK].
- You will need to purchase a copy of Keum Suk Gendry- Kim’s graphic novel *The Waiting*. It will also be made available for reserve at your university’s library.
- If I’m not able to make a reading or film available for no-cost viewing—and it is not available at your university’s library, then you may have to rent or purchase it online. This will probably come into play for a number of students for the final project.

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Course Requirements

- 1) Participation (10): 16% (8 x 2%)
- 2) Homework assignments (8): 40% (8 x 5%)
- 3) Project prep work (3): 15% (3 x 5%)
- 4) Final project - Research zine (min. 10-12 pages), 29%

Course Policies:

- This syllabus is a road map to the course. Please read through it carefully. Don't hesitate to email me or set up a meeting [LINK] if you have any questions.
- Come to our weekly sessions on Tuesday prepared (having read/viewed assigned materials and done the homework assignment) so that you can interact constructively in the seminar.
- Please use a laptop or device with a camera; it is expected that everyone has their cameras on throughout our class meetings.
- Attend our sessions in a quiet, no-/low-traffic location that has sufficient internet bandwidth.
- If anything comes up (illness, family emergency, etc.), please contact me as soon as you can to fill me in. I am receptive to making accommodations, especially when I'm contacted early.
- Late assignments will receive a deduction of half a letter grade for each late day.
- AI products can be a useful tool, but they often provide superficial and inaccurate content. For this class, I ask that you not use AI-generated content (including content from writing assistant platforms, such as Grammarly) for any of the required work—i.e., homework/project prep assignments or the final project. The process of writing is part of the process of analysis, interpretation, and independent, creative thinking. I want to read your own words and thoughts. As long as your writing is clear and understandable, I will not grade down on grammar, style, or spelling.

Academic Honesty Policy

Please submit your own work. Plagiarism—that is, the use of another's words or ideas (including AI-generated ones) or copying the work of others without proper acknowledgement—will not be tolerated for any assignment in this class. If plagiarism is found in an assignment, the assignment will receive a score of 0 and will be considered academic misconduct.

What constitutes plagiarism may not always feel clear. *If you are ever in doubt, cite your source! Also, you're always welcome to check with me about proper use of another's words or ideas.*

Academic Accommodations

The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy require the university to provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities to access and participate in its academic programs and educational

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services. Faculty and students share responsibility in the accommodation process. Students are expected to inform faculty of their need for instructional accommodations during the beginning of the semester, or as soon as possible after being approved for accommodations. Faculty will work either directly with the student or in coordination with the McBurney Center or the disability resource center on your campus to provide reasonable instructional and course-related accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA.

Please let me know at the start of the semester if you need any accommodations for this course. I am happy to work with you and the [McBurney Disability Resource Center](#) (UW), [Disability Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities](#) (MSU), [Disability Resource Center](#) (U of M), or [Services for Students with Disabilities](#) (UNL) to implement them.

UW Grading Scale

A = 93-100%; AB = 88-92.9%; B = 83-87.9%; BC = 78-82.9%; C = 70-77.9%; D = 60-69.9%; F = below 60%

Michigan/Minnesota/Nebraska Grading Scale

93-100%	A	80-82.9%	B-	67-69.9%	D+
90-92.9%	A-	77-79.9%	C+	63-66.9%	D
87-89.9%	B+	73-76.9%	C	60-62.9%	D-
83-86.9%	B	70-72.9%	C-	Below 60	F

Course Credits

This is a 3-credit course. The credit standard for this course is met by an expectation of a total of 135 hours of student engagement with course learning activities (at least 45 hours per credit), which include: reading/viewing class materials; doing homework assignments; and journaling and putting together your final project. Please plan to allot an average of 7 hours per week for the above, as well as 2 hours per week for our synchronous sessions.

Course Rhythm (standard week)

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday - Sunday
Class Session		Weekly Zoom session (1:20-3:15 pm CT/2:20-4:15 pm ET)	
Learning Materials			For the following week's class, view/read, assigned materials, work on homework assignment, and (in certain weeks) thinking/working on your final project.
Activity	Homework Assignment due on Canvas	Discuss assigned materials and homework in class.	

Course Schedule:

Preliminaries

January 13 (MSU, UNL)/**January 20** (UMN/UW): Course Introduction

- Read this syllabus and come to class with any questions you might have.
- View Deann Borshay Liem (dir.), [Memory of Forgotten War](#) (39 min.)
 - For MSU, U of M, and UNL students: [Memory of Forgotten War](#)

Unit 1: Korean War/Transwar Memories

January 26: Homework 1 due on Canvas

January 27: The Korean War as a NE Asian Transwar

Questions: What are the different dimensions of the Korean War that have been brought out by historians (Wada)? What is transwar NE Asian history, and why is it significant (Wada, Morris-Suzuki)? What are some of the salient ways in which ordinary Korean people experienced the transwar period (Morris-Suzuki, Kang)?

- Wada Haruki, *The Korean War: An International History*, "Preface," xxiii-xxxv
- Tessa Morris-Suzuki, "Prisoner Number 600,001: Rethinking Japan, China, and the Korean War," 411-432
- Kang Sangjung, "Memories of a Zainichi Childhood," 267-281

February 2: Homework 2 due on Canvas

February 3: Dominant and Silenced Memories of the Korean War in South Korea

Questions: In SK, what was the dominant memory of the Korean War—and of the postwar period (from the perspective of the 1970s-80s)? What are some of the ways in which the dominant memory was disseminated and enforced? What are some of the silenced memories from the war that emerged in 1980s SK?

- Theodore Yoo, "Sex, Hair, and Flower Power: The 1970s," 94-101, 106-112, 119-120
- Korea Overseas Culture & Information Service (Haeoe Kongbogwan), [Korea](#), 42-45, 119-131
- Heonik Kwon, "Guilt By Association," 187-206
- Kim Min-suk, "Scarlet Fingernails, 79-114
- Korean Diaspora KBS: ["Finding Dispersed Families October 1, 1983"](#) (38 min.)

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February 9: Homework 3 due on Canvas

February 10: Mourning the Deceased and Permanent Separation in SK

Questions: Why has there been a “proscription on mourning” with regard to personal losses from the Korean War? How has the Jeju April 3 Peace Park helped to mitigate this proscription among survivors and bereaved family members in Jeju? In what ways does The Waiting support Suhi Choi’s notion of “empathic mourning”?

- Suhi Choi, *Right to Mourn: Trauma, Empathy, and Korean War Memorials*, 17-68
- Keumsuk Gendry-Kim, *The Waiting*
- Optional (for context on 2015 reunions): [“Separated in an instant, 70 years of waiting”](#) (Sungan ui ibyeol, gidarim 70-nyeon), 2015 KBS documentary on separated families and reunions (43 min.)

February 16: Homework 4 due on Canvas

February 17: Memories of the Colonial Era/Korean War in Revolutionary/Postcolonial NK

Questions: How were personal and collective experiences from the colonial era narrated in revolutionary North Korea (1945-48)? How were these experiences narrated in postcolonial North Korea of the 1960s-70s)? How did these narratives shape people’s actions? How do personal narratives relate to NK’s national narrative?

- Suzy Kim, “Autobiographies: Narrating the Revolution,” 140-156
- Benjamin Silberstein, “Social (Im)mobility and Bureaucratic Failings: Family Background and the *Songbun* System in North Korea,” 111-131
- Kim Yong-ho (dir.), [When We Pick Apples](#) (102 min.)

February 23: Homework 5 due on Canvas

February 24: Zainichi Korean Memories of the Transwar Period

Questions: In what ways did the transition from pre-1945 imperialism/colonialism to the postwar era have an impact on Zainichi Koreans? What challenges did Zainichi women encounter in postwar Japan? How did they navigate them? From the perspective of the contemporary era, how do they look back on their past?

- Deokhyo Choi, “Rethinking Imperial Legacies and the Cold War in Allied Occupied Japan,” 3-15
- Sayaka Chatani, “Revisiting Korean Slums in Postwar Japan,” 587-607
- Jackie W. Kim-Watchutka, *Zainichi Korean Women in Japan: Voices*, chapter 1 (7-22), chapter 6 (138-162)

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February 27 Project prep 1 (project proposal) due on Canvas

Unit 2: Post-Cold War/Global Korea

March 3: Final Project Prep Session - MSU students will be on spring break and will have a make-up session on March 10.

- Readings/videos TBD

March 10: Make-up of March 3 Session for MSU students; UMN on spring break; UW and UNL students will do 1:1 consultations for the final project with me.

March 16: Homework 6 due for all campuses but UNL

March 17: Memories of the Transition to the Post-Cold War/Global Era in South Korea; final project consultations continue; UNL on spring break - make up class for UNL students on March 31.

- Myungji Yang, "The State, Development, and the (Un)Making of the Middle Class," 1-8, 18-27
 - Optional reading (for more background on the 1980s-90s): Theodore Jun Yoo, [The Koreas](#), chapters 4-5
- Kyoung-Lae Kang, "Archaeological Narrative; or, Nostalgic Fascination with the Obsolete in the South Korean TV Drama *Reply 1988*," 60-84
- Shin Won-ho (dir.), *Reply 1988*, ep. 1 (88 min.)
- Reddit and other viewer reflections on *Reply 1988*

March 23: Homework 7 due for all campuses

March 24 (all campuses): Post-Cold War North Korea; final project consultations continue

Questions: How has North Korea transitioned into the post-Cold War era? What approach has the state implemented in the 21st century? What are some of the ways in which ordinary people have adapted to changing circumstances? How can you find actual social realities in NK state propaganda works, such as The Story of Our Home)?

- Suk-Young Kim, *Millennial North Korea*, 1-20
- Byung-ho Chung, *Suffering and Smiling: Daily Life in North Korea*, 87-117
- Ruediger Frank, "[Authoritarian Leisure](#)"
- Ri Yun Ho & Ha Yong Ki (dirs.), [The Story of Our Home](#) (100 min.)

March 30: Homework 6 due - UNL students only

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March 31: UNL students - make-up of Memories of the Transition to the Post-Cold War/Global Era (see March 17 class for readings/videos); final project consultations continue; *no class on March 31*

April 6: Homework 7 due on Canvas

April 7: NK Defectors: Navigating SK society

- Kyung Hyo Chun, “Representation and Self-Presentation of NK Defectors in SK” 93-108
- BBC, “[North Korea’s celebrity defectors](#)” (23 min.)
- Asian Boss, “[What North Koreans Think of SK](#)” (22 min.) and “[What Happened to the Very First NK Defector We Interviewed?](#)”

April 10: Project prep 2 (outline + bibliography) due on Canvas

April 13: Homework 8 due on Canvas

April 14: Open Topic - Class Choice

April 21: Project prep 3 - Student presentations

April 28: Project prep 3 - Student presentations

May 1: Final Project due on Canvas for MSU students

May 7: Final Project due on Canvas for U of M, UNL, UW students