

**JSIS 469A/569A**  
**North Korean Society**  
**Winter 2019**

Professor Sorensen

TuThu 1:30-3:20

MGH 251

Office: 421 Thomson

Wed 3:30-5:00, Thurs 10:30-12:00

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In this course we will take an intensive and critical look at the literature on North Korea society with an eye to answering the question “what kind of society is North Korea?” and “What is life like for the North Korean people?” We will also deal with DPRK foreign policy issues, nuclear proliferation, and so forth, but these will not be central foci of the course. Historically there have been a number of answers proposed to the question of what kind of society North Korea is—Soviet puppet state, independent revolutionary communist society, totalitarian state, “Kim family dictatorship”, rogue state, and so forth—and this is only a sample of the labels that have been used in the US. The North and South Koreans, not to mention the other former socialist states, and countries of the non-aligned movement such as India have yet other ways of describing North Korea. In addition, we need to take seriously the notion that North Korea may have gone through several different types of society during its 70 years of existence.

I have tried this year to concentrate on the most recent high-quality publications on North Korea. In the first half of the course we will be going through North Korean history emphasizing the institutional and other changes that have occurred despite continued Kim family leadership. In the second half of the course we will take a more detailed look at North Korean current institutions in order to understand how they function, and to consider whether the North Korean state can continue to function in the future. I have translated some first-person accounts of life in North Korea, and we will view a couple of North Korean films in order to get a feel for what life is like there. We will pay particular attention throughout the course to the nature of the North Korean economy. The last two weeks of the course will be devoted to current changes in North Korea including the spread of private markets, opening up of information channels from outside, and semi-privatization of the economy.

Course Objectives:

- a) To describe the historical development of North Korean institutions,
- b) To introduce intellectual concepts students can use to understand how North Korean authorities obtain compliance in the North Korean population,
- c) To demonstrate the internal and external reasons for the North Korean famine of the 1990s, and

d) To provide up-to-date information on current developments in North Korean society.

By the end of the course, students will have the ability to critically evaluate news reports and policy initiatives regarding North Korea, and to make informed judgments about the future viability of an independent North Korea.

North Korean issues are always controversial, so it is appropriate that we have ample time to discuss them. *Of our two-hour lecture sessions the second hour of each Thursday lecture will normally be devoted to discussion of the readings for that week. Students should attend these discussions and be prepared to answer the study questions for each day listed in the syllabus or distributed by other means. I will be handing out “response chits” to students so I will be able to record those students who have contributed to class discussion. At least some participation in class discussion is a requirement of the course.* Group study with your friends can be a very effective technique to prepare for class discussion.

The following books have been ordered for you and will be available at the University Bookstore. Notice that all the textbooks are also available as Kindle editions. I have put the books on reserve at the East Asia library as well. Gause is available as a free electronic download, and I have put one printed out and bound issue on reserve at the East Asia library.

- (1) Charles Armstrong, *Tyranny of the Weak: North Korea and the World, 1950-1992*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 2013)

Starting in 1950 as the Korean War breaks out, Armstrong shows how internal developments within North Korean society interacted with, or sometimes reacted to, international events. Using many newly available Eastern European documents he outlines how North Korea reached out to other socialist countries and the non-aligned movement while keeping a strictly defense-oriented policy at home that has consistently hindered economic development.

- (2) Byung-Yeon Kim, *Unveiling the North Korean Economy: Collapse and Transition*. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017).

Studying the North Korean economy is extremely difficult since North Korea has not published statistics on its economy since the early 1960s. Existing studies focus on government policy. B. Y. Kim is almost unique in focusing on the interaction of the government with households and firms, and uses comparison with the better known economies of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union to highlight how the actual operation of the North Korean economy doesn't correspond exactly to government policy. This puts him in a good position to judge how North Korea is currently changing.

- (3) Sandra Fahy, *Marching through Suffering: Loss and Survival in North Korea*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015)

Based on interviews with survivors of the North Korean famine currently living in Tokyo and Seoul, the anthropologist Fahy focuses on the details of language—how people were able to talk about the famine (or not), and how limitations on talk and information affected how people perceived and reacted to the famine. Gives one insight on how North Korean residents thought about and negotiated their lives.

- (4) Ken Gause, *North Korean House of Cards: Leadership Dynamics under Kim Jong-un*, (Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 2015).

In contrast to Armstrong and Lankov, historians who base their works on documents, Gause is a Kremlinologist who analyzes leadership and power relations as related to policy choice, basing his analysis on close readings of North Korean sources and on interviews with defectors. This is one of the best works trying to analyze the internal politics of the Kim Jongun regime (2011-2015), though the details can be daunting. This is available as a free download from the Committee for Human Rights in North Korea at [https://www.hrnk.org/uploads/pdfs/HRNK\\_Gause\\_NKHOC\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.hrnk.org/uploads/pdfs/HRNK_Gause_NKHOC_FINAL.pdf)

- (5) Daniel Tudor and James Pearson, *North Korean Confidential: Private Markets, Fashion Trends, Prison Camps, Dissenters and Defectors*. (Tokyo, Tuttle Publishing, 2015)

Written by a couple of Seoul-based British journalists, this book gives an accessible and up-to-date account of daily life in North Korea. As Britain has diplomatic relations with North Korea, British journalists have better access to North Korea than US journalists, but they also interview travellers to North Korea, defectors, and read published reports.

There will be additional short readings notated in the syllabus below that will be available on the course website.

As this course has both an undergraduate (JSISA 484E) and graduate (JSISA 584D) section, you will notice that there are some differences in the requirements for undergraduates and graduates. The lectures and discussion will be the same for both sections. However, the graduate students will have extra readings labeled “Graduate Readings” that the undergraduates will not be responsible for. Graduates should be prepared to answer questions on *all* the readings while undergraduates need only master the *basic* readings. Both graduates and undergraduates will be responsible for a research paper due **March 8<sup>th</sup>** in the penultimate week of class, but the undergraduate paper will be 5-7 pages, and the graduate paper 10-15. Graduates will be expected to dig more deeply into primary sources than undergraduates.

### **Grading;**

For **Undergraduates** the grades will be based on an in-class essay midterm, an in-class essay final, six weekly response papers **due each Thursday before class** (except in the first and fifth weeks when they are due on Friday by 5:00 pm), and a research paper. The midterm, final, and research paper will be weighted 1/3 each. The response papers will not affect your grade so long as you have turned in **six** satisfactory ones. If you turn in fewer than six your grade will be

lowered up to 0.3 (depending how many you turn it), but if you turn in more than 7 your grade will go up one or two tenths.

For **Graduate Students** the midterm and final will be weighted 30% each, and the paper 40%. Graduate students will not be responsible for weekly response papers.

The required books will also be available on reserve in the East Asia library. Reading outside the main textbooks listed above (whether for graduates or undergraduates) will be available at the course web site <http://faculty.washington.edu/sangok/NorthKorea>. The films will be on reserve in OUGL media center.

**There will be a Midterm on Tuesday February 5<sup>th</sup>, and an in-class Final on Tuesday, Friday March 22<sup>nd</sup> both in MGH 251. As the final is on the last day of finals week please plan your trips home taking this into account. I will not give early finals or make-up finals for anything but valid medical excuses.**

**Some interesting websites on North Korea for those interested in current events are the following (other interesting websites are listed in Tudor and Pearson p13):**

38 North is a website devoted to informed analysis of North Korea run by long-term observers of North Korean foreign relations: <https://www.38north.org>

The Nautilus Institute for Security and Development in Berkeley, CA has good information on NK energy and nuclear issues: <http://www.nautilus.org>

For those of you with good Korean, Chosun Ilbo (conservative) has a website devoted to news on North Korea: <http://www.nkchosun.com/Main/Main.html>

The US Committee for Human Rights in North Korea is the group behind the North Korean Human Rights Act passed in Congress in 2005: <http://www.hrnk.org/>

Daily North Korea is a conservative site on North Korean news: <http://www.dailynk.com/english/>

International Crisis Group is an organization that issues periodic and interesting reports on North Korea: <http://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/north-east-asia/korean-peninsula/>

South Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade gives current South Korean policy statements and other Information about North Korea: <http://www.mofat.go.kr/index.html>

# Syllabus

## Week I: January 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>: The Establishment of North Korea

Tuesday, January 8<sup>th</sup>: The Establishment of the DPRK

Thursday, January 10<sup>th</sup>: The Korean War

### Reading:

- Hwang Chang-yŏp (1999) *I Witnessed History's Truth*. Hanul, Seoul. "Chapter 2: In a Liberated Fatherland." (on course website)
- Armstrong, Introduction and chapter 1
  - Lankov, Commentary on Armstrong (on course website)
- Kim Sŏng-ch'il, "July 26, 1950" from *Yŏksa ap esŏ: han sahakcha ũi 6.25 ilgi* [Before History: A Historian's Korean War Diary] (on course website).
- Ch'oe Ŭnhŭi, "Chapter 4: An Actress's Sad War" In Glennys Young, ed. *The Communist Experience in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford University Press: 2012) pp270-77. (on course website)

### Graduate Reading

- Bruce Cumings (1981) *The Origins of the Korean War: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes 1945-47*. Princeton University Press. Chap 11 "The North Wind"

## Week II: January 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>: Heyday of Kim Il Sung

Tuesday, January 15<sup>th</sup>: Purges and the Transition to Socialism

Wednesday, January 17<sup>th</sup>: Mobilizational Industrialization and "Dual Advance" Policy

### Reading:

- Armstrong, chaps 2, 3 and 4.
- Takahashi Sakai (1996) "The Power Base of Kim Jong Il: Focusing on Its Formation Process," In Han S. Park, ed. *North Korea: Ideology, Politics, Economy*. Prentice-Hall. Pp 105-122. (on course web site)

- Brian Myers (2006) “The Watershed that Wasn’t: Re-evaluating Kim Il Sung’s “Juche Speech” of 1955” *Acta Koreana* Vol. 9 No. 1 (search for electronic version through UW libraries)

**Graduate Reading:**

- Kim Il Sung (1965) “Socialist Construction.” In *Revolution and Socialist Construction in Korea: Selected Writings of Kim Il Sung* (New York: International Publishers, 1971). This is a selection from the so-called “April Theses.”
- Kongdan Oh and Ralph C. Hassig (2000) “The Power and Poverty of Ideology” In Oh and Hassig, *North Korea Through the Looking Glass*. Brookings Institution Press pp 12-40 (especially 12-21)

**Week III: January 22<sup>nd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>: The Son Takes Command**

Tuesday, January 22<sup>nd</sup>: The Rise of Kim Jong Il and Kim-centered Chuch’e Thought

Thursday, January 24<sup>th</sup>: The Non-aligned Movement and the 1972 Constitution

**Reading:**

- Armstrong, chapters 5-6
- Cheehyung Harrison Kim, “North Korea’s Vinalon City: Industrialization as Socialist Everyday Life.” *Positions: east asia cultures critique*, Vol 11, No. 4, Fall 2014 pp 809-836. (search UW library to find the electronic version of the journal).
- Suzy Kim, “Mothers and Maidens: Gendered Formation of Revolutionary Heroes in North Korea,” *Journal of Korean Studies* 19(2): 257-89. (search UW library for electronic journal).

**Week IV: January 29<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup>: DPRK and the Collapse of the Soviet Block**

Tuesday, January 29<sup>th</sup>: Understanding the North Korean

Thursday, January 31<sup>st</sup>: Collapse of the Soviet Block & South Korean Nordpolitik

**Reading:**

- Byung-Yeon Kim, chaps 1 & 2
- Armstrong, chapter 7

**Week V: February 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>: The North Korean Famine**

Tuesday, February 5<sup>th</sup>: **In-Class Midterm**

Thursday, February 7<sup>th</sup> : Causes of the North Korean Famine

**Reading:**

- Fahy, "Appendix: A Short History of the North Korean Famine"  
Pp183-201, Chapters 1-3

**Graduate Reading**

- Chong-Ae Yu, "The Rise and Demise of Industrial Agriculture in North Korea,"  
*Journal of Korean Studies*, Vol. 12 No. 1 pp75-109.

**Week VI: February 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>: The Subjectivity of Famine in North Korea**

Tuesday, February 12<sup>th</sup>: Social Cohesion, and What Can be Named

Thursday, February 14<sup>th</sup>: Life and Disillusion

**Reading:**

- Fahy, chaps 4-6, and Conclusion
- Andrei Lankov, In-ok Kwak, and Choong-Bin Cho, "The Organizational Life: Daily Surveillance and Daily Resistance in North Korea," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 12 (2012) pp 193-214 (search the UW library for electronic journal)

**Graduate Reading:**

- Cheehyung Kim, "Total, Thus Broken: Chuch'e Sasang and North Korea's Terrain of Subjectivity," *Journal of Korean Studies* Vol 17, No 1 pp 69-96. (search UW library for electronic journal)

**Week VII: February 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>: The Third Succession**

Tuesday, February 19<sup>th</sup>: The Selection and Succession of Kim Jongun

Thursday, February 21<sup>st</sup>: The Kim Jong Un Purges

**Reading:**

- Gause, *House of Cards*, Section One: pp 20-99
- T'ae Yŏngho, *T'ae Yŏngho's Testimony* chapter 6 pp 14-22 (available on course website)

**Graduate Reading**

- Andrei Lankov, *The Real North Korea: Life and politics in the failed Stalinist utopia*. (Oxford Press, 2013). Chapter 4 pp139-77. (available electronically through the UW libraries).

### **Week VIII: February 26<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>: The Apparatus of Kim Jong-un's Power**

Tuesday, February 26<sup>th</sup>: The Kim Family Apparatus

Thursday, February 28<sup>th</sup>: Internal Security Apparatus

#### **Reading:**

- Gause, *House of Cards* Section Two: Kim Jong-un's Apparatus of Power pp 119-279
- T'ae Yŏngho, *T'ae Yŏngho's Testimony*, chapter 6, pp 1-14, 22-42.

### **Week IX: March 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>: Marketization from Below**

Tuesday, March 5<sup>th</sup>: Stumbling Toward the Market

Thursday, March 7<sup>th</sup>: 1:30-2:20 Guest Speaker: Linda Lewis, American Friends Service Committee

2:30-3:20: Who is in Charge?

#### **Reading:**

- Tudor and Pearson, chaps 1-3
- Byung-yeon Kim, chapter 3

#### **Graduate Reading:**

- Andrei Lankov, Peter Ward, Ho-yeol Yoo and Ji-young Kim, "Making Money in the State: North Korea Pseudo-State Enterprises in the early 2000s", *Journal of East Asian Studies* 17 (2017): 51-67 (find electronic version on UW library web site).

**Paper due Friday, March 8<sup>th</sup>, 11:59PM.**

### **Week X: March 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>: What's Happening Lately?**

Tuesday, March 12<sup>th</sup>: Life in North Korea Today

Thursday, March 14<sup>th</sup>: Nuclear Issue?

#### **Reading:**



- Tudor and Pearson, chaps 4 through conclusion.

**Graduate Reading:**

- Sandra Fahy, "Family, Mobile Phones, and Money: Contemporary Practices of Unification on the Korean Peninsula," In *Joint U.S.-Korea Academic Studies* Vol. 26 (2015), Korea Economic Institute pp81-96 (on course website)
- Kim Jiyeon, "Ethnic Brothers or Migrants: North Korean Defectors in South Korea," In *Joint U.S.-Korea Academic Studies* Vol. 26 (2015), Korea Economic Institute pp 97-112. (on course website)
- Siegfried Hecker, "Lessons learning from the North Korean Nuclear Crisis," *Daedalus* 139 (Winter 2010) (on course website)

**Final Exam: Friday, March 22: 2:30-4:20 PM.**