

# **Ewha International Winter School 2025**

## **Cultural Politics in East Asia**

Instructor: JungBong Choi

Class Meeting: M~F 12:30-3:00pm

Venue: TBA

Office Hours: F 3:00-4:30pm

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### **Course Overview**

This course examines notable trends, key structures, and shifting value landscapes in the cultural configurations of East Asian societies. Topics range from nationalism and xenophobia to questions of body, intimacy, and lifestyle such as plastic surgery, foreign brides, loneliness, and veganism. Rather than centering on media representations or industrialized popular cultures, the course foregrounds lived experiences, symptoms of social crises, and the material conditions of contemporary cultural life in East Asia. By the end of the semester, students are expected to grasp the overall sociocultural issues common to East Asian societies, while also developing a comparative awareness that allows them to discern heterogeneous social formations unique to each society.

### **Methods & Class Structure**

Resisting a simple "regional studies" approach, it integrates concepts and methods from anthropology, sociology, and cultural and media studies. While focusing primarily on the interconnectivity, rivalry, and unevenness across South Korea, Japan, China, and Taiwan, it also extends a comparative gaze to Southeast Asian, "Western", and global trends. Experimental in nature, the class is designed to center students' on-site research, debates, group discussions, and presentations instead of one-way lectures. The instructor's role is that of a questioner, gadfly, facilitator, myth-breaker, and devil's advocate. The purpose of this arrangement is to maximize educational effectiveness in the age of universal AI and the plethora of info-data, where the human ability to think and judge autonomously becomes a renewed top priority.

### **Evaluation**

There are no exams or essays in this course. Your final grade will be based purely on your in-class activities and performance, as follows:

1. Active Participation (20%): This includes your responses and questions during class.
2. Instant Research Proficiency (20%): You will be evaluated on your ability to quickly research keywords provided by the instructor.
3. Leadership and Contribution to Group Discussions (20%): This grade reflects your engagement and leadership in group activities.
4. Presentation/Debate (40%): This is a two-part evaluation, with each part worth 20%. You will choose between:
  - (a) Data Research Presentation: A 10-minute presentation with slides, accompanied by a 10-20 minute long news coverage/documentary film from online sources.
  - (b) Leading a Debate: A 3-minute statement from each side, followed by a main discussion on key issues.

Depending on the class enrollment, each student may be responsible for two total presentation/debate sessions. Please refer to the presentation schedule at the bottom.

1)	2)	3)	4)	Total
20%	20%	20%	40%	100%

### Proposed Schedule

	Main Subject	Key Issues
S 1 12/26	Intro	1) Cultural uniqueness vs. mimesis, 2) Nationalized culture and difference-making, 3) Cultural ownership and hybridity
S 2 12/27	Pop culture in Contrast	1) Overlaps and divergences, 2) National branding & soft power, 3) Mapping global influence, 4) What happened to Hong Kong?, 5) Why is China lagging?
S 3 12/30	Media and social influence	1) Why Netflix (OTTs) and SNS?, 2) Dominant values/ideologies in dramas, 3) Do news and journalism matter?, 4) Idols, influencers, and celebs, 5) Many faces of fandom
S 4 12/31	Distraught	1) Competition-hell: cram school, college entrance, and job

	Youth	market, 2) Bullying and suicide, 3) Housing & debt issues, 4) YOLO/Carpe Diem, "flexing," and small happiness
S 5 1/2	Gender Relations	1) Why is gender equality in EA so low?, 2) How is the gender pay gap justified?, 3) Are feminism and Confucianism compatible?, 4) Misogyny and misandry, 5) LGBTQ+ status
S 6 1/3	Body and Sexuality	1) Capitalizing beauty or self-satisfaction?, 2) How has Korea become a mecca of plastic surgery?, 3) Gym culture and SNS, 4) Incels vs. sexual crime/violence
S 7 1/6	Marriage and family	1) Are marriage and family obsolete?, 2) Domestic and care labor, 3) Fertility rate and population crisis, 4) 4B movement, 5) "Imported" foreign brides and domestic workers
S 8 1/7	Singlehood, loneliness, and diversity	1) Single life: a new normal?, 2) Solitude and entertainment, 3) Digital communities?, 4) Pets, AI, and non-human substitutes, 5) Aesthetic monotony: individualism and diversity in East Asia
S 9 1/8	Polarization and Ethics	1) Urban concentration vs. regional extinction, 2) The right vs. the left, 3) The old vs. the young, 4) Gangnam vs. Gangbuk, 5) Imagining the Global South
S 10 1/9	Foreigners and Othering	1) West-philia and privileged "white expats", 2) "Asiatic" racism, 3) Migrant workers, 4) Chinese diaspora, 5) Politico-cultural Sinophobia

### Presentation Schedule

	Research & Data	Debate/Discussion
S 1 12/26	1) Sushi cop, 2) Kimchi war, 3) Twisting stories of Ramen across East Asia	Will/should the colonial past and postcolonial nationalism live forever?
S 2 12/27	1) China's film industry, 2) Main tropes in K drama, 3) State's involvement in culture industry	Are J-pop & K-pop different genres? Why have J drama and music waned?
S 3 12/30	1) Mapping TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram, 2) Historical evolution of Netflix, 3) TV and online media	Will A.I. deteriorate human creativity and dominate art and culture?
S 4 12/31	1) Housing/rent troubles, 2) Kangaroo	Will cryptocurrency narrow the wealth

	tribes and hikikomiri, 3) Addictions: game, gamble, drugs	gap between the young and the old?
S 5 1/2	1) Megalia, DC Inside, 2) OECD gender equality, 3) Feminism in China and Japan	Should women be subject to military draft?
S 6 1/3	1) Plastic surgery statistics, 2) LGBTQ+ in Taiwan's and SEA, 3) Dating apps in East Asia	Should pornography and prostitution be liberalized?
S 7 1/6	1) Nannies in SG HK, 2) 4B movement, 3) 'multicultural' family in Japan and Korea	Should family be blood-bound, and does it require children?
S 8 1/7	1) Single household stats, 2) Pet culture & laws, 3) Neoliberalism and anthropophobia	Should loneliness be problematized?
S 9 1/8	1) NGOs and activism, 2) Power/corruption of religion/church, 3) Material wealth vs. Happiness	1) Why so stingy in giving"? 2) Can the Sate save the day"?
S 10 1/9	1) Chinese diaspora in EA, 2) Media representation of Chinese, 3) Multiculturalism in East Asia	1) What does the U.S. mean to East Asia? 2) What "global standards" is East Asia following?