**Draft Syllabus South Korea's Decade of Democratization July 2025 Proposal**

**Description**

The 1980's in South Korea was the culmination of the democratization movement. This decade began with the assassination in October, 1979 of the dictator who assumed power in 1963, Park Chung-hee, followed by the military coup and subsequent series of uprisings, including the Gwangju Uprising of May 1980, which was violently suppressed by the military. In 1987 this movement was ultimately successful in establishing an electoral process controlled by the people.

Class sessions will involve discussions covering the background leading up to specific events, Korean films covering this period, and discussion of how these events and movement have shaped Korean society, including the recent impeachment of President Yoon Suk Yeol.

**Learning Objectives**

1. To gain knowledge of the background, events, and economic, social, and political forces that ultimately resulted in the end of the dictatorship;
2. To learn about Korean cinema examining key events in this period;
3. To examine current events and views within South Korea involving the declaration of martial law in December 2024 and subsequent impeachment and trials of President Yoon Suk Yeol.

**Syllabus**

* **Session 1: The Assassination of Park Chung-hee and Subsequent Military Coup**

Background covering major periods of the 20th century and leading up to Park Chung-hee’s rule:

* Japanese Occupation ending in 1945
* Division of Korea by Russia and United States and subsequent hostilities (the not-so-cold-war)
* The First Republic of Korea (1945 – 1961)

Film excerpts:

*Road to Boston* (scenes depicting status of South Korea in 1947)

*The Man Standing Next (*15 minutes at the end showing the assassination and aftermath)

Why did Kim Jae-gyu do what he did, when he did it?

What was the relation between United States and Park Chung-hee (publicly and privately), and how did this change from 1963 to 1979?

**Recommended at home viewing:** *12:12 The Day* (available on Apple TV and Amazon)

* **Session 2: The Protest Movement - Film**

Film (to be shown in class)

#### *Kim-Gun*: KANG Sang-woo | 2018 ｜ Documentary ｜ Color+B&W ｜ DCP ｜ 89min

SYNOPSIS

*KIM-GUN searches for the whereabouts of a young man whose identity has sparked a national controversy over the 1980 May 18 Gwangju Uprising. Starting with the vague memories of those who had crossed paths with him during that time, the film tracks down those who participated in the Uprising as “Citizen Soldiers.” It also traces KIM’s final steps, based on photographic clues found in the firearms he carried and the “Surveillance Truck No. 10” in which he rode. By identifying KIM-GUN, we believe that we can find valuable leads to resolving the ongoing controversy over May 18. Why did a nameless young man join the Uprising? Why did he take up arms? Where has he gone afterwards? It is the answers to these questions that the film seeks.*

* **Session 3: The Protest Movement - Discussion**

Discussion session; questions to explore include:

* Park’s reign saw a period of tremendous economic growth in South Korea. What impact did that have on the drive for democracy?
* Protest, uprising, riot, rebellion – what do the terms used to describe these events convey?
* What was the role of the Catholic Church in supporting the protest movement?
* How is the Gwangju Uprising viewed today? Why does Gwangju hold such an important place among the protests that occurred before and after?

Film excerpts (to be shown in class):

*1987: When The Day Comes* (beginning with the cover-up of Park Jong-chul’s torture and murder by the police; some early scenes introducing Lee Han-yeol and the ending demonstration leading to his death)

* **Session 4: The Road to Democracy – Understanding the Role of the Police and Judiciary**

Film: To be shown in class

*The Attorney*

* **Session 5: The Road to Democracy - Discussion**

Discussion session; questions to explore include:

* What comes next? After elections, what other reforms were needed to establish an effective, lasting democracy? To what extent have these reforms succeeded?
* What happened on December 3, 2024? How did the public respond then and over the next few months through the impeachment, arrest, and trials of President Yoon Suk Yeol?