

Teaching Korean Politics through Cinema in an American State University:

Students' changing perception about South Korea and North Korea

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1. Introduction

Korean studies in the United States have experienced a tremendous growth over the last decade. The numerical surge of Korean heritage students in college interested in learning their cultural background, the rising popularity of pop culture originating from South Korea, the frequency of North Korea appearing in the media headlines, and the aggressive expansion of funding by the Korean government may have all contributed to enlarged visibility of Korean studies in American academia. Along with a rising number of Korean studies faculty members and universities with a Korean studies center, the number of Korea-related course offerings has also increased.

As a scholar trained as a political scientist, not an education or language specialist, I taught an undergraduate course entitled "Korean Politics through Cinema" three times over the last six years at a state university in the United States. However, teaching Korean politics to college students with little prior exposure to the complexities of the peninsula's modern history can be a pedagogically daunting task. Thus, as a method of facilitating students' understanding of turbulent Korean politics in the post-1945 decades, the course design took advantage of the rising popularity of Korean cinematography and combined politics and cinema. The course covered both South Korea (about 2/3 of course materials) and North Korea (1/3 of course

materials) and incorporated several featured and documentary films with political/historical content. Perhaps due to the “through Cinema” in the course title, the class attracted diverse undergraduate students to the full capacity of its class size (forty seats) every time it was offered.

This paper examines the learning experience of students who enrolled in this Korean politics class based on interesting observations generated from student surveys (113 students in total) undertaken before and after class.<sup>1</sup> Education intends to generate change, however diversely it is defined, among students and expects this change is eventually reflected in students’ choices and decisions for their future career as well as their everyday lives. This Korean politics class was obviously designed to enhance students’ understanding of contemporary politics in and between the two Koreas. With student survey results, this paper aims to analyze two aspects of teaching about Korea. First, the paper traces how students’ perception about South Korea and North Korea respectively underwent change after taking the course. Second, the paper examines the effectiveness of two pedagogical interventions made in the course structure. The first intervention was the incorporation of audiovisual materials, especially featured and documentary films in this case, and the second was the juxtaposition of the “master narrative” and “counter narrative” regarding major political events. Through this examination, this study intends to make suggestions for how (Korean) politics courses can better meet the intellectual needs of college students in the US and ultimately achieve both conveying knowledge and encouraging critical thinking in a college classroom.

To discuss these themes, this paper proceeds as follows. The first section describes how the course was designed and taught (class size, enrolled students, course content and assignments,

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, these surveys are referenced as Student Surveys when the results from all three surveys are presented or as Student Pre-Class Survey 2007 or Student Post-Class Survey 2011 when a specific section of the surveys is presented.

etc). In the second section, a comparison of students' pre-class perception and post-class perception about the two Koreas is presented and discussed. The third section evaluates the effectiveness of two specific interventions made in the course materials in terms of deepening students' understanding of Korean politics. The last section concludes by contemplating the important implications of teaching a relatively unknown subject to undergraduate students and possible pedagogical contributions made by incorporating reasoned engagement and active learning methods in such course offering.

## 2. The course: Korean Politics through Cinema

This course was offered in Fall 2007, Spring 2010, and Fall 2011 over the last six years of my employment (Fall 2006-Spring 2012) in a state university in the US. During this period, Korean studies program in the university also went through significant changes. A formal Korean Studies program began in 2000 when a tenure-track position in Korean was established. The Asian and Asian-American Studies program that berthed Korean studies turned into a department in 2009 and it now consists of 26 faculty members (including full-time language instructors). Korean studies became an undergraduate major from Fall 2011 while Korean studies tenure-line faculty members (excluding language instructors) increased from 2 to 6. Korean Studies has been offering full-fledged language courses from the beginning level to the fourth-year as well as Korea-related content courses in history, literature, linguistics, pedagogy, sociology and the Korean American diaspora. In the academic year of Fall 2010 and Spring 2011, for instance, 10 language courses were offered with 177 students registered and 17 content courses with 372 students registered (University's Course Registration Information).

In this period of burgeoning Korean studies on campus, the Korean Politics (KP

hereafter) class attracted many students including Korean international, Korean-American, other Asian, and American students. Table 1 below summarizes the KP course regarding the class size and enrolled students.

Table 1 about here

The class was almost full every time it was offered but the national background of enrolled students varied from one semester to another. The ratio between students with a Korean ethnic lineage (combining Korean international and Korean-American students) and those with no Korean lineage (Asian international and American students) varied from 68: 32 to 57: 43, and to 70: 30 for the three semesters the course was offered. Yet, these numbers reveal that it is predominantly ethnic Korean students who are drawn into these classes. This is obviously associated with the fact that there are a large number of Korean international students and in-state Korean-American students on campus who comprise about 8 percent of the 12,000 undergraduate students.<sup>2</sup>

When students were asked of their motivation for enrolling in the KP class, the most frequent response for Korean heritage students was their desire to learn more about Korea from where they and their parents had come. Their responses included statements such as “Although I grew up in Korea, I never had a chance to learn about Korean politics” and “Because I was born in Korea, I want to know about Korean politics.” (Student Pre-class Survey 2011). Asian or American students came with different motivation like “As a political science major, I want to

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<sup>2</sup> The University’s international office reports that there are about 461 students from South Korea (with the international student visa status). A similar number of Korean-American students are assumed to attend the university.

broaden my understanding of world politics” and “My best friends are Koreans and I want to understand their culture better.” (ibid)

Table 2 summarizes and compares the course’s key themes, major readings, screened films, and assignments across the three semesters it was offered. The class begins from the legacies of Japanese colonialism in post-1945 Korean peninsula and proceeds chronologically and thematically all the way to the contemporary period. The class is obviously skewed towards understanding South Korea (10-11 weeks out of 15 weeks) than North Korea (3-4 weeks).<sup>3</sup> In addition to various readings on KP, the course incorporated various audio-visual materials such as pictures, recorded sound, music, You-Tube clips, and films. From various featured and documentary films that set the story against political/historical events, the ones used in class include “Welcome to Dongmakgol” (directed by Gwang-hyun Park, 2005), “The President’s Barber” (directed by Chan-sang Im, 2004), and “Peppermint Candy” (directed by Chang-dong Lee, 2000). The first two films were most popularly received by students, whereas the last one generated pain-taking in-depth thoughts from students’ reviews. Students showed a high level of curiosity and interest in any audiovisual materials on North Korea, including “North Korea Beyond the DMZ” (directed by J. T. Takagi and Hye-jung Park, 2003) and “A State of Mind” (directed by Daniel Gordon, 2002). A more detailed discussion on the effectiveness of incorporating these films in the KP class will appear in Section 3.

Table 2 about here

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<sup>3</sup> This is simply because my area of expertise lies more in contemporary South Korean politics than North Korean politics and because there are more readily available academic materials on South Korea than on North Korea.

Compared to other usual evaluation items, the presentation and paper turned out to be the most engaging assignments for students. Students were asked to write a case study paper (and present it in class) that connects a Korean politics topic to an individual's personal experience and discuss how politics and individuals shape each other. Students with a Korean lineage would often interview their parents or grandparents and connect their stories to the political events/issues discussed in class. Students without a Korean lineage would interview their (Asian or American) friends and acquaintances and examine how limited or distorted understanding of Korea is still prevalent in the minds of the general public. The process of completing this assignment provided an opportunity for students to talk to their parents and gain a better understanding of their family background. Many students spoke in class that they heard the personal stories of their parents or grandparents for the first time and were thrilled to learn, for instance, that their grandparents were large landowners during Japanese colonialism, or their mother was the first daughter in the family who had worked in a manufacturing factory to support her brother's college education, or their father was a participant in the student protest in the 1980s. The process of completing this assignment enabled students to recognize that the course materials are not limited to something written in an academic language but include the stories of individuals' lives that are more often than not intricately intertwined with political history.

### 3. Students' pre-and post-class perceptions about South Korea and North Korea

Anyone who has taught a KP or Korean history class to students who have not yet declared major in Korea-related fields will know how little they know about Korea. If the student received secondary education in the US, perhaps the only thing he/she learned about Korea in

school before advancing to college was the Korean War. Students' exposure to Korean affairs then suddenly jumps to the contemporary period leaving several decades blank. So usually what students know about Korea other than the Korean War is either South Korea's international brand name like Samsung or K-pop or North Korea's nuclear ambition. Korean international students who had a longer experience in the Korean educational system were more exposed to Korean history and current affairs but their knowledge was often limited to raw memorization of key political leaders and historical events. Such discrete and selective knowledge of enrolled students requires a careful decision regarding the breadth and depth of course materials because not every aspect of KP can be included in the course.

As a way of gauging students' basic knowledge of KP and making adjustments in the organization of course materials, I asked students to write down three words that come to their mind when they think of South Korea and North Korea, respectively, during the very first class of the semester (Student Pre-Class Surveys). The same survey was taken in the last class to detect what perceptual changes students experience by taking the KP class (Student Post-Class Surveys). Table 3 provides a general description of the surveys where the first number represents the total number of student response words<sup>4</sup> and the second number the number of different descriptors that appeared in the student responses.

Table 3 about here

At the very beginning of the class, students use a higher number of descriptors for South

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<sup>4</sup> Because not all of the enrolled students were present and because not all of the present students provided three words, the total number of responses does not equal the number of enrolled students multiplied by three.

Korea than North Korea. The gap ranges from 11 (42 words for South Korea and 31 words for North Korea in Spring 2010) to 24 (57 words for South Korea and 33 words for North Korea in Fall 2011). This gap reflects that students have familiarity with much diverse aspects of South Korea than North Korea. One obvious and common trend in student responses over the three offerings is that the number of descriptors for South Korea decreases while the one for North Korea increases after taking the KP class. By the end of the semester, students describe two Koreas with almost an equal number of descriptors: 26 for South Korea and 27 for North Korea in Fall 2007, and 36 for South Korea and 40 for North Korea in Fall 2011. This convergence might be reflecting that students' understanding of South Korea became structured along the topics learned in class while their view of North Korea became diversified due to their exposure to the country's unknown facts.

Table 4 summarizes the top five most frequently appearing words for South Korea before and after the class and Table 5 does the same for North Korea. Students' pre-class perceptions about South Korea are more diverse as the words they use range from political (democracy and freedom), economic (developed economy and rapid growth), cultural (sports, food, dramas, and Seoul), to ascriptive terms (home country). Among the less frequent words, students mostly use positive qualifiers such as "diligent" and "trendy", or words that show economic power such as "Samsung" and "cell phones", or pop-culture related words such as "K-pop" and "movies," or words that reveal nationalist sentiments such as "Dokdo" and "national unity." (Student Surveys)

In post-class surveys, "democracy and freedom" and "economic affluence" most frequently appear as common words to describe South Korea. Cultural descriptions disappear and other words that speak to political aspects appear in the top five frequencies. There is also an



interesting change in how students describe democracy in South Korea. Students before taking the class seem to take freedom and democratic rights as granted but after the class, they use qualifiers such as “hard-won,” “achieved by its own citizens,” and “people’s democratization” to acknowledge the turbulent path that preceded the current democratic system in South Korea (Student Surveys). Students found it surprising to learn the extent of repression and lack of freedom under military dictatorships before 1987 as indicated in the words of “military dictatorship” in post-class surveys.

The fact that the number of students’ reaction words for South Korea shrinks and words related to politics appear a greater frequency in post-class surveys reflects the learning effects from semester-long class discussions. As a KP class, students are exposed to political history and debates while discussions on other aspects such as Korean dramas and sports matches are dealt only marginally.

Table 4 about here

Table 5 about here

The survey for North Korea shows different results from those for South Korea. Before class, the same five terms appear as the most frequent words to represent students’ perception about North Korea throughout the three semesters. For most students, North Korea is a “communist” country under the “dictatorship” of “Kim Jong Il” who attempts to develop “nuclear weapons” while leaving the people under “poverty.” Even the words about North Korea that appear in a less frequency are mostly political and negative. Students wrote down terms such

as “refugees,” “espionage,” “brain washed,” “crazy,” “cruel,” and “darkness.” Such a monolithic understanding coincides with how the media has most often portrayed the country. Approaches to North Korea have been exclusively guided by Cold-War-oriented, security concerns both in the media reporting and academic writings (Armstrong 2011, Ryang 2009, Smith 2000). Because students might have been exposed to the same repeated information about North Korea, it is not surprising that their perceptions are unified and fixated.

Post-class surveys about North Korea do not differ significantly from the pre-class surveys but as mentioned earlier the number of words to describe the country increases and the words become slightly more varied at least. It is interesting to note that students find “Juche or self reliance” (the guiding ideology of North Korea) as one of the most determining characteristics of the country. While almost the same words such as “nuclear weapons,” “communist,” and “dictatorship,” register as the most frequent words, terms such as “misunderstood” also appear in the top five words. In the less frequent words, while negative terms prevail, students also wrote down “enemy rhetoric,” “same people,” “not recognized by the US,” “special economic zones,” and “the North Korean brand of coke.” These words can be interpreted as students’ more engaging approach to North Korea compared to their monolithic understanding at the beginning of the semester.

The comparison of pre-class and post-class surveys shows that students see democracy and economic growth as the most characteristic aspects of South Korea. After taking the course, students seem to be able to put these aspects into perspective by acknowledging South Korea’s authoritarian past, industrial workers’ sacrifice for the present affluence, and its intricate relations with North Korea as well as the US. For the North Korean part, students reveal mixed responses. Their preoccupation with security-oriented descriptions about North Korea seem to remain

fixated but with some possible openness to learn other aspects of its society. Students showed raw curiosity about the country and were eager to know more especially when the presented materials in class were beyond the usual repetitive information about North Korea. The following section discusses two specific interventions made in class to enhance students' grasp of the historical processes that have shaped contemporary Korean politics.

#### 4. Incorporating films and juxtaposing the master narrative versus counter narrative

First, the incorporation of films as part of class materials was made to facilitate students' understanding of the complexities of Korean politics. Audio-visual materials provide powerful storytelling in addition to concrete images and sound to students who are more accustomed to this kind of media than print materials. Using audio-visual materials was considered instrumental and imperative in the KP class because the enrolled students had extremely limited familiarity with the subject. Relying on text materials only would have not succeeded in bringing students closer to the various themes of KP that they had little exposure to prior to the class. There were two factors that made the incorporation of Korean films possible. With the growing popularity of Korean cinematography, students were more exposed to various films made by Korean producers. Also, with political democratization, Korean film makers were less restricted in choosing their topic and as such feature and documentary films with political stories or political themes increased in number and diversity (Kim 2011).

The course usually used 4-6 films by choosing one film with direct reference to one theme among several themes covered in the course. Table 6 below summarizes the choice of films for each theme. Students found "Welcome to Dongmakgol" most entertaining and relevant for the understanding of the Korean War. In the film reaction papers, students indicated that the

film directed them to see a human face of the combating forces (including the North Korean soldiers) and pushed them to raise a fundamental question about the war and for whom the war was fought. Through the films such as “Peppermint Candy,” “A Single Spark,” and “The Night before the Strike,” students expressed that they were appalled to witness the extent of various forms of violence that was exercised not only against political dissidents but also in everyday lives of factory workers and lay people. They also found it troubling to digest the fact that South Korean democracy was achieved after such a prolonged period of political oppression that accompanied traumatic sacrifices of so many ordinary Koreans.

Table 6 about here

Documentary films on North Korea were chosen to deliver images and stories that would show something underneath the surface of a “rogue” state, instead of merely reinforcing the negative images of North Korea. Except for a small minority, it was the first time for many students to watch documentaries such as “North Korea Beyond the DMZ”, “A State on Mind,” and “The Game of Their Lives.” Students demonstrated great interest in viewing alternative images of North Korea and were in a sense shocked to find that North Koreans, too, had personal lives! With the incorporation of visual materials on North Korea, students seem to have gained broadened views about the “seclusive” country by questioning some of the usual stereotypes.

By the end of the semester, students expressed that the films were highly helpful in enhancing their understanding of Korean politics especially in making a connection to what they read and discussed in class. The films offered the visualization and dramatization of some of the course topics into powerful stories of individuals. Students indicated that “Welcome to

Dongmakgol” and “The President’s Barber” were the most empathizable films due to the humanistic and humorous touch. They also responded that “Peppermint Candy” was the most “difficult” film to watch but obviously the most thought-provoking cinema.

One caveat associated with using films in class is a possibility that students take the stories in the film as non-fiction or a matter of historical fact. That is, for some students President Park Chung-Hee is imaged as the actor who played Park in “The President’s Barber” or the Kwangju Massacre is fixated to what they see in “Peppermint Candy.” Therefore, it is important that the instructors constantly remind students of the fictionality of these media and make comparisons with actual historical materials.

In addition to the films, another method explicitly used in these classes was to contrast the master narratives to the counter narratives of a given topic. Master narratives are understood as pre-existing forms of interpretation that legitimate the status quo with regard to power relations and difference, while counter narratives refer to alternative sociopolitical interpretation to resist the dominant master narratives (Bamberg and Andrews 2004). In the context of teaching, instructors, students, and course materials can each possibly repeat and reinforce the master narratives of a given subject. To promote a critical engagement with debates of Korean politics in class, a strategic comparison of master narratives and counter narratives regarding specific course subjects was presented to students. The comparison proceeded by first presenting the content of the master narrative, juxtaposing it with materials that suggest alternative interpretations, and opening discussions with students to engage in critical examinations of conflicting viewpoints. For instance, when the topic was how the Korean War has shaped politics in South Korea, students were first asked to share what they knew about the Korean War. Their prior knowledge about the War mostly overlapped with the master narrative of the Korean War,

such as “North Koreans stealthily and shockingly invaded South Koreans who were peacefully unprepared for war,” “Americans came to save the freedom of South Koreans from vicious communists from the North,” “all atrocities during the war were committed by North Koreans.” Then, students were exposed to readings and historical evidence that present counter narratives (such as Rhee Syngman’s aggressive ambition for unification by military means and the civilian massacre in Nogun-ri by the American military) to balance against one-sided understanding of the Korean War.<sup>5</sup> This was followed by small-group or class discussions to make connections to the issues of contemporary South Korean politics such as the persistence of anti-communist hysteria, the absence of left parties, and the sources of anti-American protest in recent years.

A similar format was used to discuss the rapid economic development of South Korea. The section would start from what students knew about the prideful record of South Korea’s economic growth and global brand-name products made in South Korea and proceeded to understand the origins of government-chaebol (large conglomerates) collusions, economic concentration and inequality, and political repression of labor. The evaluation of the Park Chung-Hee regime, the role of American involvement in Korean affairs, or approaches to North Korean politics was examined through an equivalent examination of the master and counter narratives.

In the final response paper, one of the course assignments in Fall 2011, students wrote their learning was greatly stimulated by the juxtaposition of the competing master and counter narratives. Many students also indicated that they were able to learn much more beyond what they had previously known on the surface through the presentation of facts and interpretations from counter perspectives. The contrast between the dominant narrative and alternative counter

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<sup>5</sup> For detailed information, see Cumings’ *Korea’s Place in the Sun* (1997) and “Occurrence at Nongu-ri” (*Critical Asian Studies*, 2001).

points seems to have “troubled” students’ minds and this troubling contributed to drawing students’ interest and a better understanding of course materials.

## 5. Conclusion

Based on Student Surveys taken when the KP course was offered three times over the last six years, this paper reported how the class was taught and what learning experience students gained. Of particular interest were the changes in students’ perceptions regarding South Korea and North Korea as reflected in the pre- and post-class surveys. The surveys revealed that before taking the class, students’ understanding of South Korea is more diversified whereas their perception about North Korea align closely with fixed security-driven perspective. Students’ responses after taking the class demonstrate that their view of South Korea becomes more contextualized with their learning of historical origins and debates while their approach to North Korea shows a slight sign of mellowing. The course incorporated two specific pedagogical interventions to facilitate students’ grasp of the complexities associated with Korean politics. One was to combine textual materials with films that contained political content and the other was to present class materials by contrasting master narratives to counter narratives of each theme. Yet, since the KP class was not structured as an experiment to systematically trace the effects of these interventions on changing students’ perceptions, the findings presented in this paper remain as only suggestive, if not tentative.

The discussions laid out in this paper lead to several implications for teaching new subjects to undergraduate students. While the majority of students who enrolled in the KP class were students with a Korean lineage, they still came to class with little prior knowledge of Korean politics. The same can be said for other international or American students. As a method

to facilitate their exposure to and understanding of the complexities of the course subject, the incorporation of featured and documentary films turned out to be an effective tool. The nature of audio-visual materials with vivid images, sound, and powerful storytelling did not only increase students' interest in the class subject but also drew students closer to the complex realities of Korean politics. It was in a sense a form of active learning where students are thinking about the subject matter as they interact with the medium, the instructor and each other (McKiechie 1999). This type of learning is suggested to stimulate inquiry and interest as students participate in class, compared to the traditional format in which the instructor relies primarily on the lecture (McCarthy and Anderson 2000). The incorporation of audio-visual materials further seems to be an imperative for the current generation of college students who have grown up with greater familiarity with instantaneously transmittable images and sound than with processing a large amount of written text.

Another implication that can be drawn from the KP class is the strategic incorporation of master versus counter narratives. The presentation of class materials through this clear contrast has also contributed to increasing students' interest and inquisitiveness. This juxtaposition of conflicting interpretations of political events/issues serves to present diverse approaches to the given topic to students. With such exposure, students are drawn to critically examine the opposing views and to ask more fundamental questions than unconditionally accepting the course material or memorizing superficial knowledge. Since the class discussion following the presentation of the master and counter narratives was largely open-ended with no instructor's overt directing to one way or the other, students were able to generate their own understanding and positioning.

Moreover, the acknowledgement of the tension between the master and counter



narratives in historical and everyday politics enabled students to approach new subjects outside of course materials with a skeptical and critical view.<sup>6</sup> Pushed to see the hidden power relations in historiography, everyday discourse, and political debates, students became increasingly hesitant to take things as granted or without a large pinch of salt. In this sense, the KP class did not just convey content knowledge on Korean politics but equipped students a critical tool with which they can investigate other subjects in and out of their college classroom.

Teaching Korean Politics through Cinema three times and assessing students' responses has offered some valuable lessons regarding how to organize and present course materials especially when the course subject is new to the majority of students. This paper discussed two specific interventions made in the class to increase students' interest and critical learning beyond the simple acquisition of factual knowledge. With more advanced and accessible technologies becoming increasingly available, university teachers can incorporate more diverse and creative pedagogical methods to turn the classroom into an active learning place.

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<sup>6</sup> Several students mentioned this in their final response paper.

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Table 1. KP Class: Student Enrollment

Semester	Class size	Gender (M:F)	Background
Fall 2007	37	13: 24	KI 13, KA 12, AS 5, AM 7
Spr 2010	39	14: 25	KI 6, KA 16, AS 9, AM 8
Fall 2011	37	20: 17	KI 15, KA 11, AS 4, AM 7

Note: KI for Korean international students, KA for Korean-American students, AS for Asian international students other than Koreans, and AM for American students other than the three categories. Discerning KI from KA can be an arbitrary division. In this paper, students who came to the US after their completion of primary education in Korea and who find the Korean language more comfortable for their communication are regarded as KI. Those who do not meet these criteria are considered KA.

Source: Student Surveys

Table 2. Course content, materials, and evaluation

	Fall 2007	Spring 2010	Fall 2011
Themes	Japanese colonialism The Korean War National division Military dictatorship Economic development Kwangju massacre Democratization North Korean politics Korea-US relations	Japanese colonialism The Korean War National division Military dictatorship Economic development Kwangju massacre Democratization North Korean politics	Japanese colonialism The Korean War National division Military dictatorship Economic development Kwangju massacre Democratization North Korean politics
SK: NK	11: 4 weeks	12: 3 weeks	11: 4 weeks
Textbook	B. Cumings, <i>Korea's Place in the Sun</i>	B. Cumings, <i>Korea's Place in the Sun</i>	U. Heo & T. Roehrig, <i>South Korea Since 1980</i>
Films	Their Stories Are Still Going On Welcome to Dongmakgol A Single Spark Peppermint Candy A State of Mind	Annyong Sayonara Welcome to Dongmakgol The President's Barber Peppermint Candy The Night before the Strike North Korea Beyond the DMZ	Welcome to Dongmakgol The President's Barber Peppermint Candy North Korea Beyond the DMZ
Assignments	Film review Presentation and paper Reading response Exams (2)	Film review Presentation and paper Exam	Film review Presentation and paper Reading quizzes (3) Final response

Table 3. Number of Descriptive Words for South Korea and North Korea

	South Korea		North Korea	
	Before	After	Before	After
Fall 2007	106: 36	80: 26	113: 22	77: 27
Spring 2010	92: 42	104: 41	92: 31	107: 42
Fall 2011	105: 57	98: 36	107: 33	98: 40

Source: Student Surveys

Table 4. Descriptive Words for South Korea

	Fall 2007	Spring 2010	Fall 2011
Before	<p><b>Democracy (13)</b></p> <p>Rich, fast growth (11)</p> <p>World Cup, Olympics (9)</p> <p>Home country (7)</p> <p>Food (7)</p>	<p>K-pop, dramas (7)</p> <p><b>Democracy, freedom (6)</b></p> <p>Wealthy, industrialized (5)</p> <p>World Cup, soccer (5)</p> <p>Seoul (5)</p>	<p>Home country (15)</p> <p>Food, kimchi (9)</p> <p><b>Democracy, freedom (7)</b></p> <p>Seoul (6)</p> <p>Divided nation (6)</p>
After	<p><b>Capitalism, high tech (14)</b></p> <p><b>Democracy, freedom (13)</b></p> <p>Sunshine policy (7)</p> <p>Dynamic (5)</p> <p>DMZ (4)</p>	<p><b>Democracy, freedom (13)</b></p> <p>Military dictatorship (13)</p> <p><b>Developed economy (13)</b></p> <p>Sunshine policy (6)</p> <p>Labor rights abuses (4)</p>	<p><b>Democracy, freedom (23)</b></p> <p><b>Economic affluence (7)</b></p> <p>US, intervention (6)</p> <p>Nationalism (5)</p> <p>Military dictatorship (5)</p>

Note: The number in the parenthesis indicates the frequency of the descriptive word.

Terms that commonly appear in the tops five frequency throughout the three surveys are shaded.

Source: Student Surveys

Table 5. Descriptive Words for North Korea

	Fall 2007	Spring 2010	Fall 2011
Before	Communist (25) Poverty (16) Kim Jong Il (15) Dictatorship (11) Nuclear weapons (8)	Kim Jong Il (11) Communist (11) Nuclear weapons (11) Poverty (7) Dictatorship (7)	Communist (15) Dictatorship (13) Poverty (13) Kim Jong Il (11) Nuclear weapons (9)
After	Nuclear weapons (12) Juche, self-reliance (12) Poverty, famine (5) Dictatorship (4) Kim Jong Il (4)	Juche, self-reliance (17) Nuclear weapons (12) Kim Jong Il (15) Communist (10) DMZ (5)	Juche, self-reliance (15) Misunderstood (8) Communist (7) Isolated, closed (6) Kim Il Sung (5)

Note: The number in the parenthesis indicates the frequency of the descriptive word.

Terms that commonly appear throughout three surveys are shaded.

Source: Student Surveys

Table 6. The Course Themes and Films

Theme	Films
Legacies of Japanese colonialism	“Their Stories Are Still Going On” (The Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan) “Annyong Sayonara” (Tae-il Kim, 2007)
The Korean War	“Welcome to Dongmakgol” (Gwang-hyun Park, 2005)
Military dictatorship	“The President’s Barber” (Chan-sang Im, 2004)
Economic growth and labor issues	“A Single Spark” (Kwangsu Park, 1995) “The Night before the Strike” (Eun-gi Lee, 1990)
Kwangju massacre and its trauma	“Peppermint Candy” (Chang-dong Lee, 2000)
Democratization	“The Dynamic Development of Korean Democracy” (The Korea Democracy Foundation)
North Korea	“North Korea Beyond the DMZ” (J. T. Takagi and Hye-jung Park, 2003) “A State on Mind” (Daniel Gordon, 2004) “The Game of their Lives” (Daniel Gordon, 2002)