

Traditional Korean Culture and Society in Korean Movies

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Class time	Afternoon

Course Description:

This course will use Korean movies set in traditional times as a starting point for discussing and learning about Korean history and traditional culture and society. We will watch a Korean movie each week (four movies in total) and will spend time before each screening looking into the history of the period the film is set in, and the features of the culture and society reflected in it, and after the screening we will discuss the film in depth together. Themes that will be discussed include social structure and values, family values and relationships, gender, education, national identity, the creation of the Korean alphabet, science and technology, court culture, crime and punishment, criminal and forensic investigations, food and material culture etc. The structure is mainly thematic, but the movies will be screened in a historically chronological order and the larger historical developments that is the context of these movies will also be discussed.

Materials/Text:

We will use the book *Fate and Freedom in Korean Historical Films* by Hwang Kyung Moon (open access), covering one chapter each week. In addition to this we will read a selection of academic articles and book chapters that deal with the specific aspects of traditional Korean culture and society discussed.

Requirements:

No requirements apart from a love for Korean movies and an interest in traditional Korean culture and society.

Schedule:

In week one we will watch the movie *Forbidden Dream* (천문: 하늘에 묻는다, 2019). This movie is set in the fifteenth century during the reign of King Sejong (r. 1418-1450). We will of course discuss the many accomplishments of Sejong (the creation of the Korean alphabet one of them), but since we are dealing with the beginning of the Joseon dynasty, we will also investigate how the establishment of the new dynasty, and the fact that Confucianism was adopted as state ideology, changed many aspects of traditional culture and society in terms of family structure, gender norms etc.

In week two we will watch *The Fortress* (남한산성, 2017) set in the seventeenth century when Korea was invaded from the north by the Manchus. This had been preceded by the Japanese invasion in the late sixteenth century and we will discuss the impact these two invasions had on the country. Korea twice being invaded by neighbours they considered to be 'barbarians', this movie will give us an opportunity to look into issues of national self-identity and how Koreans at that time viewed the role of their country in the larger East Asian region. The movie also contains social commentary, and this will enable us to discuss the cultural and social patterns that by this time had been settled after the reform efforts in the early part of the dynasty.

Week 3 will be dedicated to the movie *The Throne* (사도, 2015) set in the eighteenth century. This movie tells the story of King Yeongjo (r. 1724-1776) and his son, Crown Prince Sado. We follow the deterioration in the relationship between the two, in the end leading to Yeongjo locking his son up in a rice chest to starve to death. In class we will discuss the political culture that brought such a tragedy about. We will also look into many other aspects of court culture at the time such as the role of education, married life in the royal family, and what roles women had at court.

Finally, in week 4 we will watch the movie *Blood Rain* (혈의 누, 2005) set in the beginning of the nineteenth century. This is a crime thriller that enables us to discuss topics of crime and punishment, criminal investigations and forensic science. We will also look at issues of gender and how women were treated in the legal system. One theme of the film is the spread of Catholicism in Korea at the time, and we will look at religion in traditional Korea and the historical background of the growth of Catholicism.

Assignments:

The assignments for this module will be student presentations and a 2500-word essay.

Evaluation:

Attendance 10%
Presentation 40%
Essay 50%

Grading will be according to Dankook University's grading scale.

A+	A	B+	B	C+	C	D+	D	F
95 – 100	90 – 94.99	85 – 89.99	80 – 84.99	75 – 79.99	70 – 74.99	65 – 69.99	60 – 64.99	0 – 59.99