

## Korea and the World

ASIA-3000 (3 credits)

### South Korea: International Relations and Security

*This syllabus is representative of a typical semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.*

#### Course Description

This course introduces South Korea's role in global and regional affairs, examining how the country has transformed from a divided post-war state to a major democratic and technological power. Students will analyze Korea's strategic positioning as a middle power navigating complex relationships with major powers (United States, China, Japan) while advancing its own interests through economic diplomacy, development cooperation, and cultural influence. The course combines theoretical frameworks from international relations with experiential learning through field visits to ministries, think tanks, cultural institutions, and civil society organizations.

Students will also go on a multi-day excursion to Japan, where students will examine Korea-Japan relations firsthand and compare how these neighboring countries approach regional security, historical reconciliation, and alliance management. Through lectures, discussions, simulations, and field experiences, students will develop skills in policy analysis, stakeholder mapping, diplomatic communication, and cross-cultural engagement. The course emphasizes how diplomacy operates across political, economic, and cultural spheres, and explores often-overlooked dimensions including civil society's role in shaping international relations.

#### Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- **Analyze** South Korea's transformation from post-war state to major power using theoretical frameworks of middle power diplomacy, hedging strategies, and alliance politics
- **Evaluate** the evolution of Korea's key bilateral relationships (US, China, Japan) and assess how historical legacies, security imperatives, and economic interdependence shape contemporary foreign policy choices

- **Assess** Korea's regional and global engagement strategies, including the New Southern Policy, development cooperation, peacekeeping contributions, and cultural diplomacy
- **Design** evidence-based policy recommendations for Korea's role in specific regional or global challenges using stakeholder analysis and diplomatic communication frameworks
- **Demonstrate** cross-cultural communication skills and reflexivity through respectful engagement with diverse Korean and Japanese perspectives on contested political issues

## Language of Instruction

This course is taught in English.

## Instructional Methods

This course is designed around the principle that learning is an active, holistic process that extends well beyond the classroom. Seminars introduce key concepts and interpretive frameworks that are then examined, complicated, and enriched through direct engagement with people, places, and contexts — field visits, expert briefings, guided observation, and community-based learning. Field-based learning is integrated into course design rather than treated as enrichment: faculty prepare students for each engagement, guide interpretation on location, and facilitate the reflection that connects experience to course themes. Students move through cycles of experience, observation, and analysis, progressively taking greater ownership of their own inquiry. This process is not always linear, and that is by design — developing the capacity to learn from unpredictable, context-dependent situations is itself a transferable skill and a foundation for lifelong learning.

## Assignment Descriptions and Grading Criteria

Evaluation is based on successful completion of multiple components designed to build analytical, creative, and communication skills progressively throughout the program. Assignments combine visual ethnography, diplomatic engagement, and policy analysis to develop well-rounded international relations practitioners.

### Assignment Overview

- In-Class Participation and Field Engagement: 10%
- Alliance Identity Digital Story Project: 25%
- Korean Foreign Policy News Analysis Portfolio: 25%
- Diplomatic Simulation and Reflection Paper: 40%

### 1. In-Class Participation and Field Engagement (10%)

Active participation is essential for learning in this course. Students are expected to engage meaningfully in class discussions, field activities, and interactions with guest speakers and local organizations. Students will be evaluated on the quality of their contributions, critical thinking skills, respectful engagement with diverse perspectives, and ability to connect field

experiences to theoretical concepts. This includes coming prepared with completed readings, asking thoughtful questions of guest lecturers, and participating constructively in simulations and role-play exercises.

## **2. Alliance Identity Digital Story Project (25%)**

Inspired by visual ethnography methods, students will create a digital photo-story documenting how Korea's international identity and foreign policy relationships are expressed in everyday life. This project combines observational skills, ethnographic analysis, and creative storytelling to understand how diplomacy and international relations manifest in public spaces, popular culture, and daily interactions.

Requirements:

- Take 12-15 original photographs showing how Korea's international relationships appear in Seoul (and potentially during Japan excursion)
- Focus areas could include: alliance symbolism (US military presence, flags, memorials), cultural diplomacy (Korean Wave imagery, cultural centers), historical memory (comfort women memorials, war monuments), China/Japan relations markers, diaspora connections, or soft power manifestations
- Write 150-200 word analytical captions for each photo connecting observations to course concepts about alliance politics, identity, soft power, or historical memory
- Include 3-4 brief interviews (3-5 questions each) with Koreans about what these symbols/spaces mean to them
- Create a 7-10 minute digital presentation (video, interactive slideshow, or web-based story) combining photos, interview audio clips, and your analysis
- Submit a 600-800 word reflection comparing Korean expressions of alliance/international identity with one other country studied in class (Japan, US perspective on the alliance, or an ASEAN partner)

Example Focus Areas:

- Document the physical landscape of the US-Korea alliance in Itaewon or near Yongsan
- Trace Korean Wave soft power through cafes, shops, and public advertising
- Capture sites of contested historical memory (comfort women statues, war memorials, peace parks)
- Show how China's presence appears in Myeongdong or university districts

## **3. Korean Foreign Policy News Analysis Portfolio (25%)**

Students will create a portfolio tracking major political and diplomatic developments in Korea throughout the semester, analyzing how events unfold and connect to course theories. This assignment develops media literacy, pattern recognition, and the ability to apply scholarly frameworks to current events.

Requirements:

- Weekly collection of 2-3 news articles from Korean and international media on alliance issues, regional security, economic diplomacy, or Korea's global role

- Write 300-400 word analysis for each week applying course concepts to current events. What theoretical framework helps explain this development? Which stakeholders are involved? What are the competing interests?
- Maintain a visual timeline of major events throughout the semester with brief explanations (can be digital or physical poster)
- Submit mid-semester progress report (Week 5, 2 pages) identifying emerging patterns and trends
- Final portfolio includes 1,200-1,500 word synthesis essay connecting the semester's events to major course themes (alliance management, hedging strategies, soft power, historical memory, etc.)

#### Topics to Watch:

- ROK-US alliance developments (cost-sharing negotiations, OPCON transfer debates, joint exercises)
- Korea-China-Japan trilateral dynamics and summit diplomacy
- North Korea policy and inter-Korean relations
- Korean Wave cultural diplomacy and BTS/K-pop diplomatic moments
- Korea's role in global issues (climate, UN Security Council, development aid)

#### **4. Diplomatic Role-Play Simulation and Reflection (40%)**

Working in small teams, students will participate in a one-day diplomatic simulation where they role-play key stakeholders negotiating a contemporary Korean foreign policy challenge. Following the simulation, each student writes an individual reflection paper analyzing the experience.

#### Simulation Scenario (one of the following):

- Korea-Japan-US trilateral summit on regional security cooperation
- Managing economic ties with China while maintaining US alliance
- Korea's response to a North Korean provocation

#### Student Roles (examples):

- Korean Foreign Ministry officials
- US State Department representatives
- Chinese or Japanese diplomats
- Korean opposition politicians
- Civil society representatives or media

#### Assignment Components:

- Preparation (Week 7): Each team researches their stakeholder position and prepares a 2-page briefing memo outlining interests, constraints, and negotiation goals
- Simulation Day (Week 8): Full-day role-play with opening statements, negotiations, and final agreements
- Individual Reflection Paper (Week 9, 1,500 words): Analyze what you learned about foreign policy complexity, connect the experience to course readings, and propose alternative solutions

### Reflection Paper Should Address:

- How did your role's interests shape your strategy?
- What surprised you about the negotiation process?
- Connect to at least 3 course readings/theories
- What real-world solutions might work better?

### Grading Scale

|         |    |          |    |
|---------|----|----------|----|
| 94-100% | A  | 74-76%   | C  |
| 90-93%  | A- | 70-73%   | C- |
| 87-89%  | B+ | 67-69%   | D+ |
| 84-86%  | B  | 64-66%   | D  |
| 80-83%  | B- | Below 64 | F  |
| 77-79%  | C+ |          |    |

**Note on Attendance and Participation:** Consistent participation in classes, site visits, and required program activities is essential to the academic experience. Students are expected to participate fully and may not opt out of required components, as these activities are integral to course learning and collective discussion. If circumstances such as illness affect attendance, students must communicate promptly with the Center Director or a designated staff member. Absences may affect academic performance and course grades, and repeated or unexcused absences may result in additional academic or programmatic consequences. When absences are unavoidable, alternative academic work may be required.

### **Program Expectations**

To support a respectful, engaging, and academically rigorous learning environment, students are expected to approach this program with professionalism, preparation, and openness. Because this is an intensive, field-based program, individual conduct directly shapes the quality of the shared academic experience.

- **Learning Community:** Students are expected to engage respectfully with differing perspectives, including those of classmates, guest speakers, and local partners. Agreement is not required, but attentive listening, intellectual openness, and respectful dialogue are essential.
- **Content Considerations:** Course materials and activities may engage sensitive or challenging topics. The classroom is a space for thoughtful, respectful engagement with complex ideas. When possible, faculty will flag particularly intense content in advance. Students who find that course content affects their ability to participate or keep up with coursework are encouraged to communicate with faculty and seek appropriate support.
- **Participation and Engagement:** Students are expected to come prepared and to engage actively in classes, discussions, and site-based learning. This includes contributing thoughtfully to discussion, asking questions, and engaging respectfully with

faculty, peers, and guest speakers. Meaningful participation supports collective learning and is an essential part of the program experience.

- **Flexibility and Adaptability:** Because this is a multi-country, field-based program, schedules and activities may change in response to local conditions or logistical realities. Students are expected to approach such adjustments with flexibility and professionalism. Adaptability is considered part of meaningful engagement in the program.
- **Academic Integrity:** Students are expected to complete all work honestly and ethically, in accordance with academic integrity standards outlined in course and program policies.
- **Managing Academic Work:** Students are responsible for maintaining reliable access to their academic work by keeping multiple copies using secure storage methods (e.g., cloud-based platforms or the learning management system). Technical issues such as lost files or device failures do not excuse late or missing work.
- **Personal Technology Use:** Personal devices may be used for note-taking and course-related activities. Off-task use is not acceptable, particularly during discussions, site visits, or guest presentations, as it detracts from collective engagement.
- **Course Communication:** Course materials, assignments, and updates will be posted on Canvas. While the course calendar provides a general structure, adjustments may occur based on program flow or site-based learning opportunities. Students are responsible for checking the course site regularly and communicating promptly about access issues.
- **Recording Policy:** To support open discussion, recording of classes or program activities is not permitted without prior written approval from the instructor. Approved recordings are for personal academic use only. Documented academic accommodations may supersede this policy.

## SIT Policies and Resources

Please refer to the [SIT Study Abroad Handbook](#) and the [Policies](#) section of the SIT website for all academic and student affairs policies. Students are accountable for complying with all published policies. Of particular relevance to this course are the policies regarding: academic integrity, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), research and ethics in field study and internships, late assignments, academic status, academic appeals, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and misconduct, and the student code of conduct.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and SIT website for information on important resources and services provided through our central administration in Vermont, such as [Library resources and research support](#), [Accessibility Services](#), [Counseling Services](#), [Title IX information](#), and [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#) resources.

**Credit Hours:** SIT adheres to the standard that 1 credit hour equals no less than 45 hours of coursework. The calculation is based on the standard 50-minute academic hour. The number of credits each course carries determines how many total hours each course involves in a

semester. Of the 45-hours for 1-credit hour, one third is designated for direct faculty instruction. Direct faculty instruction includes all learning activities led by the faculty whether in the classroom or in the field — lectures, guest speakers, site visits, hands-on field activities, etc.

**Note on Late Assignments:** Because this program integrates classroom learning with site visits and debriefs, assignments are designed to build on one another and connect directly to learning on location. *Timely submission is therefore important for maintaining continuity and full participation in the academic experience.* Extensions may be granted *in limited circumstances and on a case-by-case basis* with approval from the Program Director or a designated staff member. Requests should be made in writing as early as possible and no later than 12 hours before the posted due date. Students are expected to communicate proactively if challenges arise. Work submitted after an approved extension period may receive a reduced or failing grade, depending on the circumstances.

**Note on the Use of Generative AI Tools:** In this course, students may use generative AI tools only in ways that support their own intellectual work. Acceptable uses may include brainstorming questions, organizing notes, clarifying concepts, or supporting revision at the sentence or structure level. Students may not use AI tools to generate substantive analysis, strategic arguments, written sections, or oral responses that are presented as their own work. Because assignments emphasize applied reasoning, comparative judgment, and place-based analysis, students are expected to remain the primary source of ideas, interpretation, and decision-making.

Expectations for AI use may vary by assignment and will be discussed explicitly with faculty. In some cases, students and faculty may collaboratively establish guidelines for appropriate AI use for a particular task. Students are responsible for following the agreed-upon expectations and for seeking clarification if boundaries are unclear.

When generative AI tools are used in the preparation of an assignment, students are expected to acknowledge their use clearly and transparently, noting the tool used and the nature of its contribution (e.g., brainstorming, outlining, or language revision). This acknowledgment supports academic transparency and does not, on its own, imply inappropriate use. Policies on AI use may differ across courses and instructors within the program. Students should attend carefully to course-specific guidance and understand that responsible AI use is defined at the course level.

**Sample AI Acknowledgment Statement:** I used [tool name] for [purpose, e.g., brainstorming or sentence-level revision]. All analysis, interpretation, and conclusions are my own.

## Course Schedule

*\*Please be aware that topics and excursions may vary to take advantage of any emerging events, to accommodate changes in our lecturers' availability, and to respect any changes that would affect student safety. Students will be notified if this occurs*

## **Module 1: Historical Foundations and Identity Formation**

This module establishes the historical and theoretical foundation for understanding Korea's contemporary international relations. Beginning with the late nineteenth century — when Korea found itself caught between competing imperial powers and intellectuals first grappled with questions of national identity and sovereignty — students will trace the peninsula's transformation from colony to divided nation to global player. The module examines how colonial-era struggles over national knowledge shaped modern Korean nationalism, how the Korean War created the security architecture that still defines the peninsula today, and how alliance politics evolved from asymmetry toward partnership.

### **Required Reading:**

Robinson, M. E. (2007). *Korea's twentieth-century odyssey: A short history* (Introduction & Chapter 1). University of Hawai'i Press.

Schmid, A. (2002). *Korea between empires, 1895–1919* (Introduction: A monumental story, pp. 1–22). Columbia University Press.

## **Session 2: The Korean War and Alliance Formation**

### **Possible topics covered:**

- Origins and conduct of the Korean War
- Formation of the ROK-US alliance
- Legacy of division on contemporary foreign policy
- Case study: How the war shapes current security architecture

### **Required Readings:**

- Cumings, Bruce. *The Korean War: A History*. New York: Modern Library, 2010. (Introduction and Chapter 1)
- Moon, Katharine H.S. "Korean Nationalism, Anti-Americanism, and Democratic Consolidation." In *Korea's Democratization*, edited by Samuel S. Kim, 2003, pp. 135-157.
- Cha, V. D. (2010). Powerplay: Origins of the US alliance system in Asia. *International Security*, 34(3), 158-196.

## **Session 3: Korea-US Relations: Alliance Management**

- Evolution of the alliance from asymmetric to partnership
- Contemporary issues: cost-sharing, OPCON transfer, extended deterrence
- Guest speaker: Former diplomat or defense official
- Exercise: Analyzing alliance dilemmas through recent policy debates

#### Required Readings:

Snyder, S. (2023). The United States-South Korea-North Korea strategic triangle in the Indo-Pacific. *Korea Policy*, 2023, 94-109.

Kim, S.-M. (2016). *South Korea's middle-power diplomacy: Changes and challenges* (Research Paper). Chatham House. <https://www.chathamhouse.org>

## **Module 2: Regional Relations and Strategic Hedging**

This module examines Korea's complex relationships with its neighbors, focusing on how economic interdependence, historical grievances, and security imperatives create difficult trade-offs. Students will analyze Korea's hedging strategies between major powers and explore how civil society actors influence foreign policy on contentious historical issues.

### **Session 4: Korea-China Relations: Economic Opportunity, Strategic Challenge**

Possible topics include:

- Historical normalization and rapid economic integration
- THAAD crisis as turning point
- Managing economic dependence and security tensions
- Debate: Should Korea prioritize economic ties or security alignment?

#### Required Readings:

- da Silva Viana, T., Camoça Gonçalves de Oliveira, A., & Silveira Nummer, M. (2025). South Korea's leaders' perceptions and the decision of hedging: Assessing China, the US and North Korea's role. *Oasis*, 41, 43–67. <https://doi.org/10.18601/16577558.n41.04>

### **Session 5: Korea-Japan Relations: History, Economics, and Security**

Possible topics include:

- Historical grievances and reconciliation efforts
- Economic interdependence and technological competition
- Security cooperation in trilateral context
- Activity: Role-play of trilateral security dialogue

#### Required Readings:

- Lind, J. (2009). The perils of apology: What Japan shouldn't learn from Germany. *Foreign Affairs*, 88(3), 132–146.
- Jonsson, G. (2015). Can the Japan-Korea dispute on "comfort women" be resolved? *Korea Observer*, 46(3), 489–513.
- Teraoka, A. (2025, December 19). Are Japan and South Korea Poised for a Historic Breakthrough? Foreign Affairs. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/japan/are-japan-and-south-korea-poised-historic-breakthrough>

- Jo, E. A. (2022, November 28). Japan and South Korea Are Still Haunted by the Past. Foreign Affairs. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/japan/japan-and-south-korea-are-still-haunted-past>

### **Module 3: Japan Excursion - Comparative Perspectives**

This module consists of a multi-day excursion to Japan where students compare Japanese and Korean approaches to alliance management, historical memory, regional security, and cultural diplomacy. Students will meet with Japanese policymakers, academics, and civil society organizations to understand Japanese perspectives on shared challenges. The excursion includes structured reflection sessions connecting field observations to course concepts.

#### ***Session 6: Excursion to Japan - Preparation and Context***

##### **Possible class sessions include:**

- Korea's role in Northeast Asian dynamics
- Briefing on Japan visit objectives
- Comparing Korean and Japanese approaches to regional security
- Preparation: Research assignments for Japan visits

##### **Required Readings:**

Koga, K. (2023). Struggle for coalition-building: Japan, South Korea, and the Indo-Pacific. *Asian Politics & Policy*, 15(1), 63-82.

Ratner, E. (2025, May 27). *The Case for a Pacific Defense Pact*. Foreign Affairs. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/case-pacific-defense-pact-ely-ratner>

#### ***Session 7: Korea and ASEAN: The New Southern Policy***

- Rationale and evolution of the New Southern Policy
- Economic diversification and strategic hedging
- Comparing NSP with other Korean regional initiatives
- Case studies: Vietnam, Japan Indonesia partnerships

##### **Required Readings:**

Lee, J., & Ko, Y. (2025, November 13). Korea's new ASEAN policy: Pragmatic partnership for a shared future. *FULCRUM: Analysis on Southeast Asia*. ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute. <https://fulcrum.sg/aseanfocus/koreas-new-asean-policy-pragmatic-partnership-for-a-shared-future/>

## Module 4: Global Engagement and Soft Power

This module explores how Korea projects influence globally beyond traditional security concerns, examining development cooperation, peacekeeping, climate diplomacy, and cultural diplomacy. Students will analyze the effectiveness of Korea's soft power strategies and consider whose voices and interests are represented in these initiatives.

**Session 8: Korea's Development Cooperation and Soft Power** – From aid recipient to donor: ODA policy

- Public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy strategies
- Korean Wave as foreign policy tool

### Required Readings:

Jang, G., & Paik, W. K. (2012). Korean Wave as Tool for Korea's New Cultural Diplomacy. *Advances in Applied Sociology*, 2(3), 196-202. <https://doi.org/10.4236/aasoci.2012.23026>

Terry, S. M. (2021, October 22). The Korean Invasion: Can Cultural Exports Give South Korea a Geopolitical Boost? *Foreign Affairs*. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/south-korea/2021-10-14/korean-invasion>

Kim, Y., & Nye, J. (2020). Soft power and the Korean wave. In *South Korean Popular Culture and North Korea*. Routledge.

### Session 9: Korea in Global Governance

- UN peacekeeping contributions
- Middle power diplomacy in multilateral forums
- Climate diplomacy and green growth initiatives

### Required Readings:

Dauvergne, P and Paik R (2025). Ambiguous ambition: The politics of South Korea and the global plastics treaty. *Cambridge Prisms: Plastics*, 3, e38, 1–8  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/plc.2025.10032>

Roehrig, T. (2013). South Korea, foreign aid, and UN peacekeeping: contributing to international peace and security as a middle power. *Korea Observer*, 44(4), 623-645.

Cha, V., Hamre, J., & Ikenberry, G. J. (2025, June 11). How Global Governance Can Survive. *Foreign Affairs*. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/how-global-governance-can-survive>

## Module 5: Future Scenarios and Synthesis

This final module brings together course themes to examine Korea's future strategic choices in an evolving regional and global order. Students present their final projects to community

partners and local experts, demonstrating their ability to analyze complex foreign policy challenges and communicate findings to diverse audiences.

### ***Session 10: Future Scenarios and Student Presentations***

#### **Possible class topics include:**

- Unification scenarios and implications
- Korea's evolving role in Indo-Pacific competition
- Student presentations: Korea's optimal strategy for [specific issue]
- Synthesis: Integrating course themes

#### **Required Readings:**

Yeo A (2023) South Korea as a Global Pivotal State. Washington, DC: Brookings. Available at <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/south-korea-as-a-global-pivotal-state/> (accessed 3 July 2025).

Jiyeon, K., Friedhoff, K., Chungku, K., & Euicheol, L. (2022). *South Korean Attitudes toward North Korea and Reunification*. Asan Institute for Policy Studies..

Cha, V. (2026, January 21). *South Korea Can Stand Up to China*. Foreign Affairs. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/south-korea-can-stand-china>