New Perspectives on the Cultural History of 1980s South Korea  
Social Sciences Building 250  
University Park Campus of the University of Southern California  
Friday-Saturday, November 6-7, 2015

This conference aims to explore and generate new critical perspectives on the cultural history of 1980s South Korea through a transnational intellectual dialogue among some of the most distinguished international experts on the period. The decade of the 1980s is rightly celebrated by Koreans today as the era of minjung (people’s) culture, a time when a collective effort by ordinary citizens and intellectuals alike led to upheaval and the democratization of the country within the space of a few years. Previous representations of the era, however, have tended to privilege a political narrative of liberation over many complexities and contradictions. On the one hand, the focus on democratization has left in the shadow other coeval processes such as rapid economic expansion, the rise of a middle class as a social subject, and the opening up of culture through new media and technology. On the other hand, the persistent centering of minjung intellectuals as the agents of democratization has led to a neglect of the contributions of workers, women, and common Koreans as well as the downplaying of the international aspects of the movement.

Bringing together Korean, American, and Australian scholars, this conference encourages presenters and participants alike to engage in a broadening and contextualizing reflection on the significance of the 1980s for Korean culture then and today. Some of the major issues to be raised in panels are the extent and significance of internationalism both inside and outside the minjung movement, the agency of working-class masses in the decade’s cultural production, the impact of new media and technologies on 1980s cultural imaginations, the affinity and variances between different media cultures, and the ruptures and continuities that characterized Korean culture as the 1980s gave way to the democratic 1990s. As a closing event, a round table forum will attempt to take a new and enriched look at 1980s Korean culture from a transnational and interdisciplinary perspective.

The conference is generously supported by the Northeast Council of the Association for Asian Studies and by the Center for Feminist Studies, the Department of History, the East Asian Studies Center, the Korean Heritage Library, the Korean Studies Institute, and the School of Cinema Studies at USC. It is organized jointly by the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures at USC and the Academy of East Asian Studies and the Department of Korean Language and Literature at Sungkyunkwan University.

For further information, please contact Sunyoung Park at sunyounp@usc.edu.

Conference Program and Schedule

Friday, November 6

8:00-9:00 am  Breakfast

9:00-9:10 am  WELCOMING ADDRESS  
Kyung Moon Hwang, USC
9:10-10:40 am PANEL I. Locating the 1980s in Korean History and Memory

Namhee Lee, University of California, Los Angeles
Popular Memory of the 1980s and Unpacking the Regime of Discontinuity

Kyung Moon Hwang, USC
The Irrepressibility of Teleology: The 1980s as Historiography

Discussant: Jennifer Jung-Kim, UCLA

10:40-11:00 am Coffee Break

11:00-1:00 pm PANEL II. Internationalizing the 1980s Democratization Movement

Ruth Barraclough, Australian National University
Mobile Activism and Political Tourism:
South Korean and Australian Student Exchanges in the 1980s

Jae-Yong Kim, Wonkwang University
Overcoming Colonial Modernity:
An Intellectual Journey from 1980s Anti-imperialism to 1990s Transnationalism

Kyunghoe Sabina Eo, USC
Queering the Dreams of a Third-World Brotherhood:
Black Women in 1980s South Korean Literature and Film

Discussant: Viet Thanh Nguyen, USC Center for Transpacific Studies

1:00-3:00 pm Lunch

3:00-5:00 pm PANEL III. Laboring and Gendering National Culture

Jin-kyung Lee, University of California, San Diego
Re-tracing the Political:
the State, Leftist Nationalism and Aesthetics in Authoritarian South Korea

Jung-hwan Cheon, Sungkyunkwan University
Where have all the “Shouting Stones” Gone?:
A History of Korean Workers’ Literary Clubs in the 1980s

Hye-Ryoung Lee, Sungkyunkwan University
Bright Constellation:
The Birth and Significance of South Korean Women’s Literature in the 1980s

Discussant: Ruth Barraclough, ANU
6:00-8:00 pm Dinner in Koreatown

Saturday, November 7

8:00-9:00 am Breakfast

9:00-9:10 am OPENING REMARK
Sunyoung Park, USC

9:10-11:10 am PANEL IV. Rethinking 1980s Mass Culture

Inyoung Nam, Dongseo University
Screening Minjung: South Korean Independent Documentary Film-Making in the 1980s

Yun-Jong Lee, Dong-a University
Between Progression and Regression: Ero Film as Cinema of Retreat

Sunyoung Park, USC
In Other Times: Science Fiction and Democratization in 1980s Korea

Discussant: Alice Echols, USC Gender Studies Program

11:10 am-11:30 pm Coffee Break

11:30-1:00 pm ROUND TABLE FORUM
Publishing New Perspectives in 1980s Korean Cultural History