KOREAN LITERATURE

(1) Approaches to reading Korean literature;
(2) Korean literature from the Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910)

We begin our Korean literature workshop by discussing general approaches to teaching Korean literature in the U.S. classroom. We also go over materials currently available for classroom use, reviewing a list of translations of literary works, internet resources, and films. We then begin a survey of pre-twentieth century Korean literature and focus on the vernacular forms of poetry and fiction. We will engage in a discussion of sijo, the three-line elastic form of vernacular poetry often expressing the worldview of the class of learned Confucian gentlemen; we will then spend the remainder of our time focusing on the representative fictional work of the dynastic era, “The Song of a Faithful Wife, Ch’unhyang,” set during the reign of King Sukchong (1671–1720). Special attention will be given to the traditional relationship between poetry and prose, as well as the thematic overlaps found in the two forms, such as loyalty within the context of a given social hierarchy.


In this lecture we discuss the different ways in which Korean colonial writers deal with the changing historical and sociopolitical situation during which they are writing. Examining two works of short fiction published in the mid-thirties, Yi Sang’s “Wings” and Chu Yosŏp’s “Momma and the Boarder,” we relate the political predicament of colonialism with the rise of the theme of romantic love. We also discuss how the argument for individual choice found in the idea of freedom associated with romantic love lay in tension with the political realities of the time.
Korean literature in the postliberation period (1945–present)

This lecture focuses on some recurring themes which appear in literature written after the war. With a close reading of “Winter Outing,” we discuss literary representations of the Korean War and the subsequent national division. In this story, the reconstruction of a nation is told through the story of a family being reconstructed after the war. The trauma of war and the recovery from its ruins will be discussed in light of South Korea’s growing prosperity and the increasing global awareness and belonging of its citizens.


