



a letter from the director

JUHN YOUNG AHN



Nam Center for Korean Studies

Dear friends of the Nam Center, what an exciting year it has been! Thanks to the tireless work and dedication of the Center staff, student fellows, Korean Studies faculty, visitors, institutional partners, and our dear alumni the Center was able to continue its amazing programs and develop new ones. The Center is extremely proud of the many colloquium talks, conferences, performances, and outreach activities that form the core of our annual events calendar.

We began this eventful year with our famous alumnus Kim Kwangjin's Kpop concert hosted by KISA. With support from the Korean Performing Arts Initiative, the Center also sponsored other exciting performance events such as King's Orchestra performed by the Korean Traditional Music Orchestra of the Blind, the Nonan jam session, Sangjaru, Korean Art Song by Moonsook Park and Matt Thompson, Sunhong Kim's Landfill listening party, and a jazz interpretation of Han Kang's novel *The Vegetarian* by Lisa Sung. During the summer, the Center also welcomed special guests from Yuhan Technical High School founded by our illustrious alumnus Il Han New. It is, no doubt, the convivial atmosphere that the Nam Center community brings to all of its wonderful commitments that makes this long list of events not only possible but thoroughly enjoyable. Although the Center was unable to host its ever popular Chuseok celebration due to ongoing construction on campus, we hope to quickly bring back this tradition by organizing what we call Chuseok week. This will be a weeklong celebration that we will coordinate in partnership with the Ann Arbor District Library. The celebration will conclude with a special event arranged by Prof. Matt Thompson: the SeAH Korean Art Song Gala with the world-renown soprano Sumi Jo.

In addition to this summary of Center events, it is also with great pleasure that I share news of our revamped newsletter. Rather than continue the practice of using the newsletter as an annual report, our plan is to feature new content that our readers will hopefully find interesting and perhaps even inspirational. The newsletter will now begin with some pages featuring alumni who have welcomed students participating in a new Nam Center program named Camp Nam to their workplaces in South Korea. Our inaugural camp visit took us to SeAH tower in Mapo-gu and the DAC factory in Incheon. We thank Taesung Lee and Jake Lah for their incredible hospitality! Last but not least, I'd like to thank all of you for your ongoing support and interest in the Center. As always, we will continue to do our best to serve our students, faculty, friends, and Korean Studies community here in Ann Arbor and elsewhere. Hail to Michigan the leaders and best!

TABLE OF

01	Letter From the Director
03	About Us
04	What's New
05	Alumni Spotlights
09	Student Spotlights
11	Postdoc Spotlight
12	Faculty Spotlights
14	Staff Spotlight
15	Nam Center Fellows Programs
21	MiKSSI
24	Events and Programming
27	Colloquiums & Talks
32	Korea Cinema NOW
34	SYN Memorial Lecture & Award
35	Fellowships & Awards
36	Korean Language Program and Asia Library

CONTENTS

about us.

The Nam Center for Korean Studies (NCKS) is the seat of Korea-related research, education, and public outreach at the University of Michigan. Established in 2007 with a gift from Elder Sang-Yong Nam (M.U.P. '66) and Mrs. Moon-Sook Nam, NCKS became the first named Korean Studies center in the US in 2010.

At NCKS, we provide research support for faculty, award scholarships and fellowships for students, and host leading experts in the field as guest lecturers and visiting scholars. We also oversee a wide range of innovative programs tailored for different audiences and sponsor public events in Korean culture and the arts, including exhibitions, film festivals, and performances. We coordinate collaborations with other on-campus departments, schools, and academic units. NCKS' external collaborations include the Big Ten Academic Alliance Korean Studies e-School. The center's initiatives are supported in part by major external grants from the Korea Foundation and the Academy of Korean Studies.

By facilitating cutting-edge interdisciplinary research and historically situated knowledge, NCKS promotes a deeper understanding of Korea, past and present, in the U-M community and beyond.



What's New?

The Nam Center Mascot

Meet Mi Nam-i

By Jane Haeun Lee · third-year PhD student, Asian Languages & Cultures



Hello! My name is Jane Haeun Lee, and I am a third-year PhD student in Asian Languages and Cultures. This year, I had the great honor of having my imaginary little creature, Mi Nam-i, chosen as the Nam Center's mascot. I think this will forever remain one of the happiest, sweetest, and most unexpected highlights of my PhD journey. I have always loved crafting, making little things, and adding small bits of color to everyday life. But since having my son, Eden, most of my free time has been devoted to chasing after one very energetic little human. Somewhere between PhD student mode and mom mode, my creative self seemed to disappear under a pile of books, toys, and unfinished coffee. Then the mascot contest appeared at just the right moment. I temporarily closed my many reading tabs—temporarily, I promise!—and began writing down ideas that had quietly been living in my heart for a long time.

Mi Nam-i came together almost as if he had been waiting for his chance to jump out and say hello. In many ways, he is a haetae-inspired version of Eden: energetic, sweet, mischievous, and full of just the right amount of fire. Eden's squirrel-chasing adventures around the Diag, his love of Korean sweets and bedtime folktales, my own love of the haetae and traditional Korean clothing, and, of course, Michigan's maize and blue all found their way into the character. Creating Mi Nam-i was joyful and unexpectedly healing. It reminded me that the messy, tiring, and beautiful parts of life—the studying, parenting, worrying, laughing, and occasional crying—can return to us in the most delightful ways. In my case, they came back as a little maize-and-blue haetae named Mi Nam-i. Thank you so much for choosing Mi Nam-i and me! And next time you see a little boy running across campus, followed five seconds later by a petite Asian mom running after him, that is probably us. Please say hi!

Featured Project · Inclusive History Project (IHP)

Michigan & the Making of Modern Korea

What role did the University of Michigan play in building world-changing international relationships and human networks?

What role did the University of Michigan play in building world-changing international relationships and human networks? In the early twentieth century, the University of Michigan was an important destination for Korean students seeking education not only for individual advancement but as a patriotic endeavor connected to the liberation of their colonized homeland. These men and women went on to design and build Korea's infrastructure as a modern nation and society.

Their endeavors were aided by other U-M alumni who had earlier made their way to Korea to engage in missionary work, education, and healthcare. Our project explores the place and meaning of the University of Michigan to ask within the trailblazing lives of these U-M alumni who created new possibilities for social action and engagement in the world. The collaborative research will result in an academic conference, special exhibits in Ann Arbor and Korea, a musical concert, and a website.



Sunhong Kim, Graduate Student Researcher for the IHP project



Rachael Kim, Undergraduate Student Researcher and UX Design Assistant

Alumni Spotlights

JAKE LAH AND TAESUNG LEE

Jake Lah, a successful entrepreneur and designer, shared his journey from Yonsei University to founding three companies, including DAC and Helinox. Chairman Lah discussed his goal to become the best in the world, inspired by his experiences in Ann Arbor. He highlighted his innovative designs, such as the 15-meter dome tent used in the 2008 Beijing Olympics torch relay and the collapsible canoe. He emphasized the importance of manufacturing, sustainability, and community service, including volunteer programs that combine camping and community building. Chairman Lah also reflected on the value of helping others and the joy it brings to his life.

Jake Lah: "The most frequently asked question about me is: **how did you become the world's number one?** Actually, when I started school in Ann Arbor, I set a goal to become the best in the world. Whatever it is, no matter how small it is, I wanted to be the best because the Korea I was raised in, the 1950s and 60s, was such a poor country, and there was nothing much we could do. One day I was surprised to hear from my American friends that Ann Arbor is located right next to Detroit. So, that's the auto industry area. In the 1980s, people spoke of the invasion of the Japanese car industry. So, everybody was very nervous about car, car, car. One day I mentioned that there is one Korean car maker, and they were so surprised. Wow, Koreans make cars! So that made me think, okay, ... wonderful ... I can be number one. So, I started looking at many areas, but it's very difficult to argue that I'm the number one, right? So many cars—which one is number one? So many banks—which one is number one? But it's easier to say I'm number one now because among the top level brands more than 95% of the brands use our polls. Most of the tents in the last 30 to 40 years have been developed by myself. But where I started was just manufacturing aluminum tubes. So, it's only a component of tent frames. Tent brands start at the market where consumers find the product. That's mostly where the brand starts. Where I started was just the component of the tent. ... So anyway, that's the story of becoming the world's best."

Jake Lah



Juhn Ahn: [Pointing to drawings on the powerpoint] "Did you do these drawings yourself?"

Jake Lah: "Yeah, the reason is I couldn't imagine a 3d image of a new structure, so I try to draw it and try to see. So at night, if one pole goes here, the other pole goes there ... those are some samples of the drawings, and I have about roughly 3,000 drawings."

Juhn Ahn: "Chairman Lah, did you learn how to do industrial drawing and design?"

Jake Lah: "No."

Juhn Ahn: "So you just taught yourself to do the drawings?" (Students murmur in awe.)

Jake Lah: "Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah. So, if you are the designer, you will see right away that the touch of the pen is not the right way or the trained way. (Pointing to images of tents on the powerpoint) These are some of the tents that I designed. There are so many different tents, but actually many tents look alike. So, it's not easy to make something that is different enough. But you can argue that this is Jake's original design. ...

(Pointing to an image of the Helinox camping chair) This is the lightest chair, which is about 1.2 pounds. In Germany there is a museum called the Vitra Museum. There are all kinds of chairs there. So, I'm still thinking that my chair should go there. (Students laugh in response.)

(Pointing to an image of Helinox chairs arranged neatly in the courtyard of the Louvre) This one is in front of the Louvre Museum in Paris. (Students respond in awe.)."

Juhn Ahn: "Chairman Lah, what's the biggest tent you've ever designed?"

Jake Lah: "Good question! Thank you for asking. Actually, last month I built a large dome that is 45 feet in diameter. (Students murmur in awe.), We are now building one that is 65 feet. When I develop a tent, always, my goal is that the tent can be set up within an hour ... four people can set it up within one hour. (Students murmur in awe.)

(Pointing to an image of a large tent) This tent was for the 2008 Beijing Olympics. The Beijing Olympic Committee wanted a tent for their torch relay at the Everest base camp, and they wanted one that was eight meters, 27 feet, or something like that."

Jake Lah: "We are a serious manufacturer. I still believe in manufacturing. We are now living in an era of AI, right?"

"Seems like AI does everything, but AI cannot make any of these tables and your clothes, your food, or your shoes. Somebody has to make it, right?"

So, one of the reasons why I could develop tents better than most brands like North Face or REI or whoever is because we have a manufacturing facility. They don't, right? I have so many tools to play with, and so I still believe in the power of manufacturing."



"I have so many tools to play with, and so I still believe in the power of manufacturing."





TAESUNG LEE

Taesung Lee, president and CEO of SeAH Holdings, recounts the experience of studying abroad, which he found to be both challenging and extremely rewarding. A turning point came at the University of Michigan, where he found a sense of community and involvement in various student associations. Taesung emphasized the importance of the many values he learned at Michigan, and explained how these values enabled him to navigate and meet the many expectations of work and life when he returned to Korea. Taesung advises students to look for opportunities to cultivate these and other enduring values since this can prove to be as important as knowledge accumulation and academic success.

Taesung Lee: "At the University of Michigan, I learned a lot from school, like majors and everything. But, I think, the people I was surrounded by, met, and all my friends—all these experiences taught me. I think one very important lesson, which was integrity and leadership. That's where the values are. It's not the academics; it's the values I learned from school ... I really feel like the community has given me a lot over the years. That's why I'm still committed to the school, right? I'm still willing to do something for the school. It means a lot to me. ... Michigan provided me with a very valuable experience, and, really, I found myself finding my place. And in Michigan, people ask where you're from. I said, 'I'm from South Korea. I'm Korean.' I felt a sense of identity and tradition. ... If you're living your life there, hopefully your majors are important. But I hope you make good, great friends and learn great values from there."

Juhn Ahn: "What's the most important lesson that you took away from your experience as a DJ?"

Taesung Lee: "You guys think DJing is fun, right? People think DJing is, basically, you put two records on and go back and forth and back and forth. Now, everything's done with the computer. Back then, it was either turntables or CDs. You work with both. Oh, there are two turntables and the CD player, right? So you have to basically switch everything. You have to get your deck ready. You have to switch this, and then you mix it with this. It's constant moving. Now, you do it with the computer, kind of with a set. But, back then, it was like, physically, you have to move your stuff. So, basically, if you think DJs are cool, looking at the scene on the floor ... No, [while DJing] you're trying to really not mess up. But, at one point, there was, like, a lunar ball or something like that.

It was a big event and I was DJing there, and I pressed the wrong button. I still remember the music that played. I don't know if you guys probably even know this, but it's called House of Pain. ... I still remember that time that I stopped the whole music. Completely broke the mood. So, if your image of DJing was, like, he's really cool, smooth, looking at the floor, and watching people No, once the party's over, you have to get your stuff and clean up and all that. So, you get back home at five in the morning. It's hard work actually. One hour to prepare for all the sets. You do really have to concentrate. And, you know, friends try to talk to me [while I'm DJing]—hey, how are you doing?—I was, like, don't talk. Please go away. And then for a couple hours, I really concentrate, and then get off. It's really hard."

Neha Gundala: "I was wondering if you had any one piece of advice for students and what that would be."

Taesung Lee: "Go to class. Going to class, I think, is about discipline, right? It's not about really learning because you're gonna forget. (Students laugh) It's about discipline, right? Sometimes I'm late, sometimes I like it, but my goal is to do this and it's about discipline. I think, the company, when we're hiring, we don't look at [the name of] schools as much anymore. You look at how much discipline this person has. That's why your grades are important because it shows that you have some discipline, right? But there are not that many ways to check how disciplined someone is and that's why they look at your grades. It's not really about the information you learn. It's about your attitude. One thing I learned in a professional career of more than 20 years, is that it's a journey. For example, this company, right?

“

It's not really about the information you learn. It's about your attitude and it only is possible when you win the minds of people, hearts of people. And how do you win the hearts of people? Being humble, humility. These are all things I learned in Michigan.

”

We have 6,000 employees, 10,000 people related working for this company at different companies. We have 15-16 different subsidiaries in different locations. And as a third generation [owner], when I came into this company, I moved up from team leader to the executive office. It took me 20 years to climb up the ladder, and nothing was given for free. ... I had to prove it to the others who were there before me and build a foundation—that I'm capable enough. So, I had to fight against the bias. Just like my friends challenged me back in college. ... People want a leader. They don't want anybody to be given the freedom of excuse.

All these people working in this country too. So, it actually took a lot longer than I thought to get a grasp of this and then get leadership of this company. In the beginning, I was very frustrated because I had so much passion. I was trying to do a lot, but nothing worked. ... Some people say it's politics. It's not politics. It's actually winning the minds of people, and winning the minds of people takes time. It takes a good attitude. At least 10 years. I basically waited 10 years to do one thing and start doing something I wanted to do. It took me 20 years to transform the culture, whatever it is. I wanted to make that happen. It took a long time. So, basically, to do something, to achieve something, it takes time, and it only is possible when you win the minds of people, hearts of people. And how do you win the hearts of people? Being humble, humility. These are all things I learned in Michigan. ... I think this is a very important lesson for you guys that I learned over the years, and also learned from my father, and I really believe it to be true. ... I want you guys to be givers.

You know, there are give-and-takers, and there are takers. Usually, takers succeed in the beginning because you take everything. Eventually, these people fall at the end dramatically, in a very weird way, in a very strange way, at a time that you can't really imagine. Because there's so much energy pulling them down. ... Givers are really rare. Givers are kind. Sometimes, it looks like they are being taken advantage of by takers. But, over time—10 years, 20 years—there's so much energy trying to help them. When the critical time comes, who do you want your leaders to be? Often, the givers are chosen because they've been helping so much. But only time will tell. In a way you cannot imagine. So, be kind. Be generous. Help people out of pure goodness. ... Please remember humility, humbleness, kindness—this integrity.

These things really do matter. I wish, after you graduate, these are the things you take. ... As you know, knowledge is a commodity now. What differentiates you when knowledge becomes a commodity? It's your character. It's your intention. It's about who you are. In the AI era people are wondering what's going to happen. I think human quality will be even more important. Creativity will be more important. Art will be more important. All these things that involve human emotions and personal character will be important. Because everything else can be replaced by knowledge, including knowledge. So, please keep that in mind and be kind and humble.”

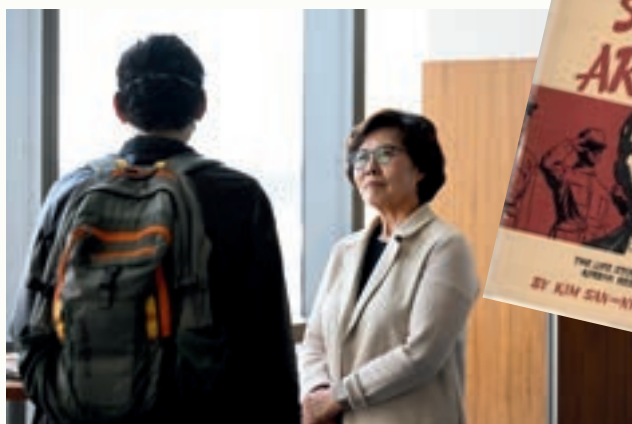


STUDENT SPOTLIGHTS

JAMES KISELIK, GRADUATE FELLOWS
CHAIR

I am a graduate student in the English department, where I study US literature. My academic interest in Korea began during an undergraduate course studying how Japanese censorship policies affected colonial-era Korean literature. I'm still interested in how critical editions and translations interact with their historical contexts and I've been thinking especially about twentieth-century, trans-Pacific cases. For instance, in 1941, US journalist Nym Wales published *The Song of Ariran*, her biography of the Korean anticolonial revolutionary Kim San; in 1972, the US magazine *Ramparts* reissued her book, newly presenting it through their anti-Vietnam War values.

I'm lucky to study at Michigan, where we have access to amazing resources like a rare 1941 first edition of *The Song of Ariran*. In my free time, some books I like rereading include Carolyn Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman*, Jean Toomer's *Cane*, and Ibn Tufayl's *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*. Recently, I've been listening to music by Leonard Cohen, Kim Choo Ja, and Balen Shah.



STUDENT SPOTLIGHTS

TOBY BUCKFIRE, SYN MEMORIAL AWARD AWARDEE

Two days before my freshman year started, I was registered for French rather than Korean. I studied French for four years in high school and planned to continue it in college, but an interest in Korean culture, sparked by movies and K-dramas, made me reconsider at the last minute. I switched, expecting to fulfill my two-year language requirement and move on. Though after four years of language courses, two years of fellowships, serving as a cultural liaison, studying abroad, and many Nam Center events, I can say that the decision shaped my entire college experience. My Korean professors first told me about a summer study abroad program at Yonsei University, which I attended in 2023. Beyond strengthening my language skills, the program gave me lifelong friends from Korea and around the world, time after class to explore Seoul, and weekends to visit Busan, Suwon, the Philippines, the DMZ, and more. A Korean Cinema course later that year deepened a love for Korean film I'd carried since high school, this time through the lens of Korean political history.

The Nam Center gave structure to these interests. I started as an Outreach Fellow and later became a Research Fellow, where I spent a school year studying the KBO, Korea's highest level of professional baseball, combining sports and Korean culture into a research project that took our group to USC for a conference in Los Angeles, which is one of the highlights of my fellowship. I also spent two summers as a cultural liaison for the Gyeonggi-do youth ladder program, helping Korean students navigate their own study abroad experience at Michigan. Those friendships became some of the most meaningful of my time here and some of my most memorable summer experiences. Weekly language exchanges with Seoul National University students, half in English and half in Korean, helped improve my language skills. Furthermore, a Nam Center film screening introduced me to one of my closest college friends. I returned to Korea again last year for three weeks, meeting with many of my Gyeonggi-do youth ladder friends for exploring Seoul and traveling to Jeju Island, Jeonju, Gyeongju, Gwangju, Daejeon, and a glamping trip in Gangwon, also at one point bringing fifteen of us together for a KBO game. I could not have predicted this journey when I swapped out of French two days before classes began, which is what makes this journey so special. A small last-minute decision turned into four years of friendships, travel, and learning, which I would not have found otherwise. I feel very fortunate for my path and grateful to the Nam Center for making it possible.

"Those friendships became some of the most meaningful of my time here and some of my most memorable summer experiences"



postdoc spotlight

JOHN G. GRISAFI

John G. Grisafi has spent the 2025–2026 year at the Nam Center as Korea Foundation Postdoctoral Research Fellow. John is originally from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and served in the U.S. Army, including in South Korea, before beginning his academic career. He came to Michigan, with his wife Yunmi, from Yale University in Connecticut, where he earned his PhD in Religious Studies with an Asian Religions concentration and a dissertation on religion and empire in Korea. John's research is on narratives and ideas of religion in modern and contemporary Korea, and his interests in the subject cover all religions in Korea including Buddhism, Confucianism, Shamanism, Christianity, and others, and address such topics as how religion is shaped by public discourse, laws and regulations, popular culture, and memory and historiography.

At the Nam Center this past year, John has done research and writing, teaching and mentoring, and participated in and supported Nam Center programming. He has worked on his book project, which is a revision of his PhD dissertation, and on papers for journals and conferences. These include an assessment of the history of religion-state relations in Korea for the journal *Religion Compass*, a paper on the Korean historical and religious cultural influences in *KPop Demon Hunters*, a paper on the subjectivity of liberation and oppression in modern Korean religious history for the American Academy of Religion conference, and a paper on media narratives of religion in connection with legacies of Japanese colonialism for the Association for Asian Studies conference.

He has also provided peer reviews of works by other scholars on Korean religion. Within the Nam Center, John assisted with teaching the Undergraduate Fellows Research Seminar and served as chaperone and faculty mentor for the Undergraduate Exchange Conference at the University of Southern California with the University of Michigan research fellows. He also aided and mentored the undergraduate outreach fellows and helped mentor the graduate fellows. In coordination with the Nam Center, John gave a public lecture on “The History Behind KPop Demon Hunters” at the Ann Arbor District Library. Separately, he taught a course on “Religion in Korea” for primary and secondary school educators through the Program for Teaching East Asia, out of the University of Colorado Boulder.

John's hobbies include classic video games, the boardgames baduk (go) and chess, going for walks in nature, and photography. He has enjoyed living in Ann Arbor, where he attends a local Korean church, has visited numerous parks, and kayaked multiple times on the Huron River. He will be staying at the University of Michigan and the Nam Center for another year as an NCKS Postdoctoral Fellow and looks forward to his second year in Michigan.



JUNGAH HAN

faculty spotlight

My journey in the United States began in Hawai'i, where my family first immigrated. From there, my path carried me across the country—from San Diego and Los Angeles to New Haven, Connecticut, where I earned my terminal degree from the Yale School of Drama. Looking back, each place has shaped my perspective as an artist, educator, and immigrant, teaching me that identity is often formed through movement, adaptation, and the communities we build along the way.

Before joining the University of Michigan in 2022, I spent nearly a decade in New York City working as a scenic designer and associate designer for theater, television, and film. What first drew me to scenic design was its ability to bring together visual art, performance, architecture, and storytelling. I enjoy creating environments that support performers while inviting audiences into imaginative worlds. For me, scenic design is ultimately about creating spaces where stories, cultures, and people can meet.

Since arriving at the University of Michigan, I have also become involved with the Nam Center for Korean Studies. The Nam Center has become an invisible mentor in both my professional and personal journey, encouraging me to explore new

connections between my artistic practice and Korean culture. With the support of Professor Ryu, the dedicated staff of the Nam Center, and SMTD Associate Dean Christi-Anne Castro, I have found opportunities to promote Korean performance arts in Michigan and internationally.

One of the most meaningful outcomes of this support has been the opportunity to collaborate more closely with artists and institutions in Korea. Most recently, I served as the scenic designer for Home at the National Dance Company of Korea in Seoul. These collaborations have deepened my interest in Korean literature, dance, and performance traditions, and in how they can inform contemporary scenic design. I am continually fascinated by the ways artistic works can be deeply rooted in a particular culture while still speaking to universal human experiences. That intersection between the particular and the universal continues to inspire both my creative work and my teaching. Outside of the studio and classroom, dance has always been an important source of joy and curiosity. Although my formal training included modern and

Korean dance, I have always approached dance as a passionate student rather than a professional performer. During my years in New York City, I regularly attended adult ballet classes, and since moving to Michigan I have been exploring Pilates. I am still hoping to find a local dance studio where I can continue challenging my somewhat stiff body through ballet and movement exploration.

I also enjoy working with my hands. As a scenic designer, I spend much of my time building three-dimensional paper models and transforming ideas into tangible forms.



One skill I have never mastered, however, is cooking. As a lifelong vegetarian, being a bad cook is fortunately less of a problem than it might otherwise be.

Although I am naturally introverted, I become surprisingly extroverted when collaborating on artistic projects. Curiosity, creativity, and community continue to guide my journey, and I am grateful to be part of both the University of Michigan and the Nam Center for Korean Studies.



faculty spotlight special event

BORDER-RIDING:
THE WORKS OF
DAVID CHUNG,
APR 8, 2026



Born in Bonn, Germany, and educated in the United States, Y. David Chung has established himself as a preeminent figure in contemporary art by bridging the gap between traditional craftsmanship and digital innovation. He began his professional journey in the fields of animation and filmmaking—foundational experiences that remain the heartbeat of his current practice. Today, Prof. Chung is renowned for his immersive multimedia installations that seamlessly synthesize new digital imaging technologies with the tactile, labor-intensive nuances of drawing and printmaking. His work has been celebrated on a global stage, featured in prestigious solo and group exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow.

Prof. Chung's creative output is matched by an extensive record of academic prestige and a commitment to public accessibility. He has shared his expertise as an artist-in-residence at world-class institutions, including Duke University, Williams College, and UC Berkeley, and notably served as the Kim Koo Visiting Professor at Harvard University. Furthermore, his leadership in the academic community is underscored by his service as the Director of the Center for Korean Studies at the University of Michigan, where he contributed to the advancement of Korean scholarship.

Beyond the confines of traditional galleries, Prof. Chung has left an indelible mark on the urban landscape through major public art commissions for the Washington Metropolitan Area Transportation Authority and the New York City Public Art Program. His career, supported by fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, represents a profound synthesis of global perspective and multidisciplinary mastery.

In celebration of his profound ability to tackle complex cultural narratives, the Center screened his award-winning documentary, "Koryo Saram: The Unreliable People," at a special event hosted to celebrate Prof. Chung's amazing career on Apr 8, 2026. Co-directed by Matt Dibble and produced by Meredith Woo, and also the recipient of the Best Documentary Award from the National Film Board of Canada, "Koryo Saram" documents the 1937 forced deportation of 180,000 ethnic Koreans by Joseph Stalin, who relocated them 3,700 miles from Far East Russia to the unsettled steppes of Central Asia. Branded "enemies of the state," this community was thrust into the brutal landscape of Kazakhstan, a region that functioned as a massive concentration camp for the Soviet Union's displaced populations.

Through a blend of rare archival footage and moving contemporary testimonies, the film explores how these deportees survived under punishing conditions to forge a unique, multi-ethnic identity. Their story of assimilation and cultural survival resonates deeply today, offering a poignant look at the universal experience of displaced peoples.



On Apr 8, 2026, Prof. Chung received this small token of appreciation for his many decades of tireless service to the Nam Center and the Korean Studies community in Ann Arbor. Thank you Prof. Chung!

staff spotlight

HYEWON NAM

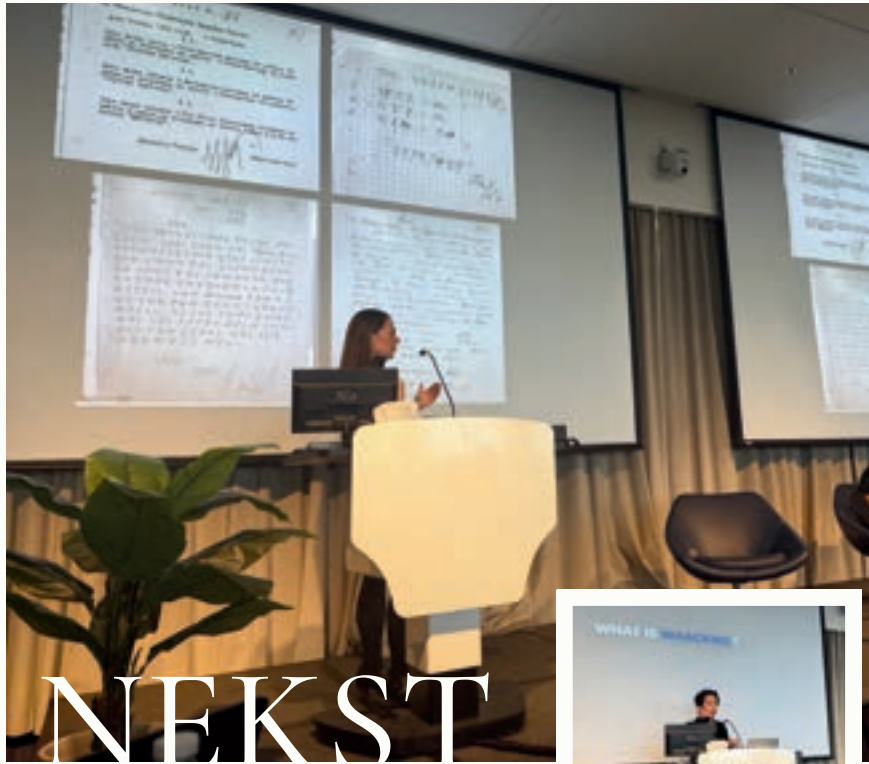
I start most mornings with an iced coffee and end most evenings with a book. In between, I get to spend time helping students build community at the Nam Center, which is easily one of the most rewarding parts of my day. I didn't expect to end up in the Midwest, especially coming from a part of Texas with very few Asian folks or people of color in general, but the opportunity to help build something here is part of what makes this work so meaningful to me. Michigan may not have the same visibility of Korean culture as places like Atlanta or Los Angeles, but there's a tangible sense of possibility here.

Educational equity and diversity have been a consistent focus of my work, and it continues to shape how I think about student programming. I want to continue looking for ways to make higher ed spaces more accessible and welcoming, especially for students who might not see themselves represented or who are still figuring out where they belong.

Outside of work, I'm usually cross-stitching, exploring new coffee shops, or wandering a local trail. Lately I've been getting really into modern Korean literature. Earlier this year I buddy read *Cursed Bunny* by Bora Chung with my mom, and I'm currently reading *No One Writes Back* by Jang Eun-Jin. It's made me think a lot about translation as an act of curation; there are so many incredible Korean books that never make it into English. One I'm hoping to see translated someday is *Honmono* (혼모노) by Seong Haena.

I'm excited to continue learning from our students and supporting programming that grows with their stories and experiences. **Go Blue!**





In May 2026, the Nam Center's team of eleven graduate fellows welcomed their peers—upcoming scholars in Korean studies from around the world—to our campus for the 13th International Conference of NextGen Korean Studies Scholars (NEKST). Organizing the conference gives University of Michigan students valuable opportunities to get hands-on experience with core academic tasks they would otherwise be unlikely to encounter at this stage in their careers, such as drafting a call for papers, reviewing abstract submissions, and brainstorming how individual submissions could be paired around common throughlines into conference panels. Further, throughout the collaborative process of bringing the conference to life, the Nam Center's graduate fellows were able to take up pressing questions about the nature of Korean Studies and what this field might mean for coming generations of scholars.

This year, the graduate fellows were especially curious about the exciting areas of interdisciplinary agreement and contestation at the heart of Korean Studies. That is, Korean Studies is an academic field that is apparently organized around Korea as a common site of interest and yet is a field that welcomes disciplinary methods ranging from close reading to machine learning models. What, then, can emerge from recognizing not only a deeply held commitment to collaborating around our common interests but also a commitment to contesting the disputed implications of various methods that each productively informs our inquiry? As this question is practically indistinguishable from the question of what it means for Korean Studies to be an academic community, a conference is the ideal setting through which to explore these values.



Graduate fellows

NAM CENTER FELLOWS PROGRAMS

In keeping with the aim of the graduate fellows program, this year's cohort built lasting friendships and engaged in lively and *extremely* rewarding intellectual exchange opportunities. They learned about each other's research and shared ideas about how to shape and reshape Korean Studies.

The cohort came from a wide variety of fields and disciplines but shared common research or personal interests that revolved around Korea and Korean Studies.

Many thanks to Prof. Jean Hong and our postdoc John Grisafi for leading the grad fellows program!

2025-26 Nam Center Graduate Fellows:

Yuyao Cheng (Asian Languages and Cultures)
 Elizabeth Jeffery (Microbiology and Immunology)
 Jace Jung (English Language and Literature)
 Seohyung Kim (Anthropology)
 James Kiselik (English Language and Literature) - Chair
 Kunwoo Kwon (International and Regional Studies)
 Hanna Lee (Political Science)
 Remi Lee (Comparative Literature)
 Subin Min (Social Work and Sociology)
 Sonia Singh (Asian Languages and Cultures) - Vice Chair
 Gerald Sutton (Asian Languages and Cultures)



NEKST

CONTINUED

The conference brought this question to life through both a series of panels organized around themes identified by our graduate fellows and also workshop sessions of dissertation chapters drafted by advanced graduate students. The first panel, “Imbalancing Acts,” featured presentations by quantitative social scientists studying social equity and inequity in cases ranging from far-right media to educational reform. The second panel, “Control. Alter. Delete.,” involved both quantitative and qualitative social science work on coercion and revisionism, including studies of South Korea’s Civilian Control Zone and the spatial layout of coercive colonial apparatuses in 1919. Presenters in the third panel, “History in a Sense,” asked how sensory perception can illuminate historical materials anew, offering literary analyses of blindness in the Chosŏn era and postwar histories narrated through the sensory experiences of commodities smuggled from PX markets.

The final panel, “Mistaken-Identity Politics,” included literary and cultural studies papers concerned with trans-Pacific scenes of state misrecognition, such as the history of queer black US dance styles taken up in postwar Korea and the possibility of relating Zainichi Korean and Korean American experiences without recourse to citizenship. During the dissertation chapter workshops, advanced graduate students shared work on topics including postwar rerecordings of colonial Korean music and the strict disciplinary apparatuses of a Korean theater troupe in the 1930s Soviet Union.

This year, the Nam Center’s graduate fellows also shared their own work more briefly during flash talk panels, which gave them an opportunity to spark new conversations and forge meaningful long-term friendships with visiting scholars. This new initiative was grounded in the values of the conference’s core inquiry into thinking about disciplinary collaborations and contestations within Korean Studies and of thinking about Korean Studies as a community that appreciates its many diverse possibilities.

Faculty discussants this year were professors Juhn Ahn (U-M), Jean Hong (U-M), Hayana Kim (Ohio State University), Chungjae Lee (Bucknell University), Namhee Lee (UCLA), Yumi Moon (Stanford University), Tyler Simko (U-M), and Emily Wilcox (College of William and Mary)

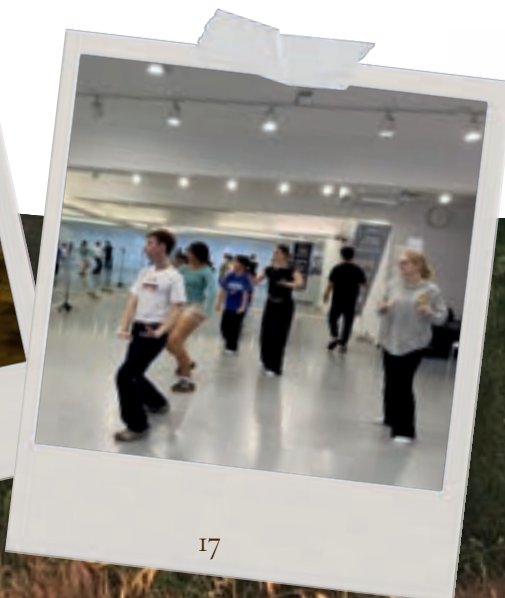


UNDERGRADUATE FELLOWS PROGRAM

The Nam Center for Korean Studies Undergraduate Fellows Program provides experiential learning opportunities to undergraduate students interested in conducting outreach and research on Korea. Fellows join a tightly knit community of students committed to advancing their understanding of Korean history, society, and culture while gaining firsthand experience as intercultural ambassadors and global citizens within the university and beyond.

Research fellows participate in a two-semester seminar (KRSTD 471 & KRSTD 472) through which they learn about the field of Korean Studies and conduct their own research on Korea. Research fellows select research topics of their own interest, develop a roadmap for that project with the instructor, write research papers, and learn how to present these papers at an Undergraduate Exchange Conference (UGX). This year the UGX conference took place at USC's Ahn House in Los Angeles, CA.

Outreach fellows have continued to provide the Nam Center with critical support and passionate optimism. Despite their incredibly busy schedules, fellows assisted the director and Center staff with everything from promoting the Center to designing Center merchandise, spreading knowledge of Korean traditions at the Full Moon Festival, welcoming guests at the KCN film series, volunteering at local elementary school cultural festivals, documenting life and work at the Center, and producing memorabilia to share with the Nam Family. Outreach fellows are perhaps most famous for their continued involvement in the Center's famous Chuseok celebration. Thank you fellows!



Research fellows

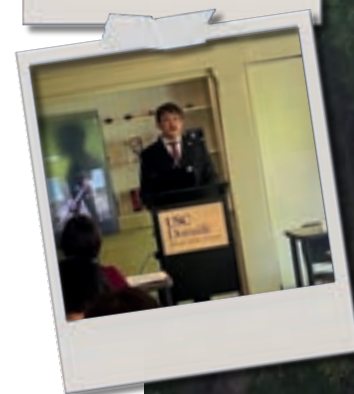
This year, the research fellows participated in the 13th Annual Korean Studies Undergraduate Exchange (UGX) Conference at USC in Los Angeles, CA. There were 13 total participants from USC, U-M, and the University of Pennsylvania.

Alex Kim presented his paper, "Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained? Competing Visions for the Future of 14th-Century Korea"

Spencer Lynn presented his paper, "Reading the Tea Leaves of Jeju Island: Colonialism, Land Practices, and Capitalism in Post-War Korea"

Lydia King presented her paper, "Ajossi Justice: The Blindsides of South Korea's Democratic Journey"

Leah Philips presented her paper, "Manufacturing for the Globe: South Korea and COVID Vaccines"



See you next year in Ann Arbor!

Outreach fellows

The Nam Center undergraduate outreach fellows were actively involved in virtually all of the Center's many outreach programs.

To celebrate their incredible contributions and accomplishments, the Center organized a field trip on Apr 11, 2026, for the fellows to the great Windy City. The field trip's main attraction was the special exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago (Korean National Treasures: 2,000 Years of Art) where the private collection of late Samsung chairman Lee Kun-Hee was on display.

The 2025-26 fellows were: Madison Beekman, Iyannah Hatcher, Alyssa Bird, Amelia Chiu, Kathleen Fleming, Nicole Pappas, and Rebekah Cheong.

Many thanks to Kaeun Park, PhD candidate in the Department of Asian Languages and Cultures and currently serving as the Daniel F. and Ada L. Rice Curatorial Fellow at the Art Institute of Chicago, for giving us a special tour of the collection!



camp nam.

Camp Nam, which launched in the summer of 2026, provides opportunities for U-M undergraduate students participating in the Nam Center's Summer in Korea program, the Pungmul Camp for Sinaboro members, and the Yonsei International Summer School (YISS) to connect with Korean alumni and engage in a three-day immersion learning experience in South Korea. The inaugural camp took students to the Dongah Aluminium Corporation (DAC) factory in Incheon, the headquarters of SeAH Holdings in Mapo-gu, and Yuhan Corporation's new Willow House in Dongjak-gu Seoul where they got the chance to interview and learn more about the founder of Yuhan Corporation Il Han New (Class of 1919), the founder of DAC Poles and co-founder of Helinox Jake Lah (MBA '84), and CEO of SeAH Holdings Taesung Lee (LSA '00). The camp concluded with an exciting K-Pop dance class in Gangnam.



"I really appreciated the opportunity to connect with alumni and ask them questions. While neither were involved in the sectors that I am interested in, I had the opportunity to learn how they are actually connected to other areas that aren't just "business" or "manufacturing." I also loved the food and gifts ^^ Lastly, the K-Pop experience was so much fun for me since I am already a K-Pop fan, and I am happy that we all got to participate in something a bit more "out there." Thank you for allowing me to participate in Camp Nam!!"

Camp Nam was the perfect mix of Korea and home that made such a fun week of activities!"

"I believe that the opportunities we were given in Korea would not have been possible without Camp Nam! I will never forget it."



The **Michigan Korean Studies Summer Institute (MiKSSI)** launched in 2023 with support from the Strategic Research Institute Program for Korean Studies of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the Korean Studies Promotion Service at the Academy of Korean Studies.

This year's workshop theme was **Confucianism in Korean history**. The workshop addressed various questions about the place and role of Confucianism in Korean history in order to gain a better understanding of the historical evolution of Confucianism and its context in China and Korea, as well as exploring the following topics: how (un)Confucian premodern Korea was and how tensions between Confucian values and indigenous Korean traditions informed Korean identities; the impact of Confucian teachings on historical developments in Korea; and how such historical uses and abuses shaped Korean history.

The aim of the workshop was not only to familiarize the participants with scholarship on premodern Korea, but also to encourage students to think beyond existing works in a provocative way by asking unconventional questions.



This year's workshop was led by two eminent faculty leaders who specialize in premodern Korean history:

Professor John B. Duncan from UCLA & Professor Sun Joo Kim from Harvard University

Special guest lectures were provided by Prof. Sixiang Wang (UCLA), Prof. Juhn Ahn (U-M), and Prof. Kim Dohyung (Yonsei University)



놀자!

Word Search



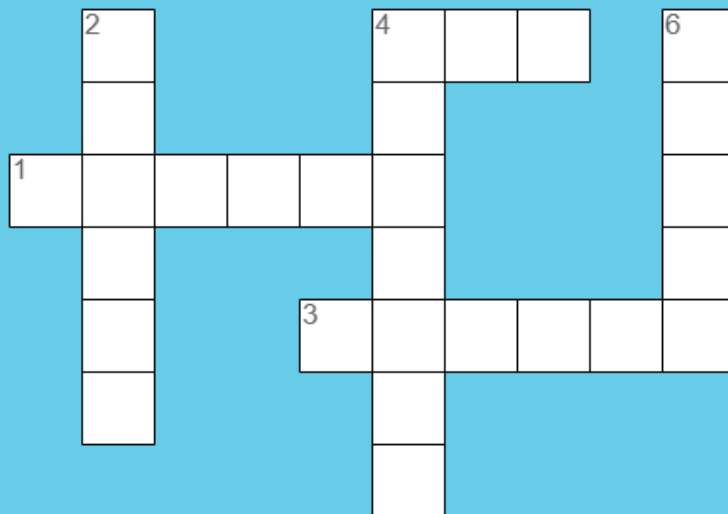
Directions: ↑ →

김시
방탄소년단
한복

신구
제주도
세종대왕

미역국
추석

Crossword Puzzle



ACROSS

1. Mascot of the Nam Center
3. Korean alphabet
4. Director of the Nam Center

DOWN

2. University building the Nam Center is located in
4. Traditional Korean song
5. Capital of South Korea



Please enjoy this
wonderful page
created by our
outreach fellows!



Events and Programming



Kim Kwangjin with KISA

On Sep 19, K-ONNECT—a cultural exchange project that connects K-culture and the Ann Arbor community—hosted a concert featuring U-M Business School alumnus Kim Kwangjin (MBA '88) at the Lydia Mendelssohn Theatre. The concert also included performances by the U-M Korean student band Seoul Juice and Sinaboro. Performing to a packed concert hall, Kim Kwangjin shared his legendary hits “The Letter,” “Magic Castle,” and “Tokyo Girl.” The concert was co-sponsored by the creative agency Yeeyaakee (thank you Andy HJ Kim!).

Sangjaru: Sounding Korea Outside the Box

Sponsored by the Korean Performing Arts Initiative, the folk fusion band Sangjaru visited Ann Arbor and delivered an exciting and engaging performance at the Keen Theater on Feb 11. Sangjaru's concert featured a collaborative performance with U-M's Prof. Michael Gould of the School of Music, Theatre & Dance and the Residential College.

King's Orchestra: The Sound of the Korean Royal Court

Rooted in the “blind musicians skilled in wind and string instruments” (Gwanhyeonmaengin) tradition established by King Sejong (r. 1418-1450), the Traditional Music Orchestra of the Blind provided the U-M community with an inspiring and captivating performance of *jeongak* (court music), folk melodies, and fusion arrangements. Much to the audience's delight, at the end of the concert the audience was treated to a special performance of “Golden” from Kpop Demon Hunters! (A special thanks to Prof. Jungah Han for her help with the set design)



In the 2026–27 academic year the **Big Ten Academic Alliance (BTAA) Korean Studies e-school program** entered its thirteenth year and the first year of Phase VI with continued support from the Korea Foundation (KF). The program currently enables thirteen member universities of the Big Ten Consortium to share Korea-related courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels through video conferencing technology.

In Fall 2025, the following courses were offered as part of the e-school program: “Cultural Fusion: Korean Pop Culture in a Globalized World” (Sang-Seok Yoon, Iowa), “Korean War: Local and Global History” (Alyssa Park, Iowa), “English in South Korea: Globalization, Symbolic Values, Policies, Discourse, and Teaching Opportunities/Techniques” (Susan Strauss, Penn State), “Seoul: History and Places” (Se-Mi Oh, U-M), “Language and Society of the Two Koreas” (Hangtae Cho, Minnesota)

In Winter 2026, “From Sijo to K-Pop: Song Lyrics as a Literary Genre” (Youngmee Yu Cho, Rutgers), “Korean Dramatic Tradition: Performing Korea and Performing Korean Diaspora” (Hayana Kim, Ohio State), “Introduction to Korean History” (Charles Kim, Wisconsin), “Korean Politics” (Jean Hong, U-M), “Performing Resistance: Cultural Expressions of Political Protest in Modern Korea” (Pil Ho Kim, Ohio State)

In 2026, in cooperation with Yonsei University, the Nam Center held the second Korean Studies Research Symposium and Competition on July 11. From U-M, Lydia King (International Studies), Neha Gundala (Ross and Korean Studies), and Kristen Pikaart (International Studies, Korean Studies, Translation Studies) participated. On Oct 31, 2025, faculty liaisons gathered for the annual BTAA e-school meeting in Atlanta. The meeting was hosted by Georgia State University who arranged a special visit to Parsons Elementary School, which runs an English-Korean dual language immersion (DLI) program—the only one of its kind outside the two US coastal regions.



Korean Art Song: The Enduring Voice of a Culture, Moon-Sook Park (soprano) and Matthew Thompson (piano), Britton Recital Hall, Mar. 23, 2026. Prof. Moon-Sook Park provided a short lecture followed by a performance of 12 Korean art songs that helped the audience discover the richness of Korean art songs through poetry, language, and cultural memory. This lecture recital was co-sponsored by the SMTD Voice & Opera Department and the Nam Center as part of its Korean Performing Arts Initiative.



Transfigurations: Han Kang’s “The Vegetarian” in Music and Words, Lisa Sung ensemble, Kerrytown Concert House, Mar. 21, 2026. Lisa Sung (piano, curator), Eva Rosenwald (reader), Brynn Hillker (bass), Marcus Elliot Miller (saxophone), Andrew Bishop (sax & flute), Max Welterlen (drums), Tae Hoon Yoo (reader), and special guest lecturer Prof. Youngju Ryu. As part of our Korean Performing Arts Initiative, the Nam Center sponsored the Korean American Jazz pianist Lisa Sung who presented an original song cycle inspired by Han Kang’s Nobel Prize-winning 2007 novel, *The Vegetarian* at the Kerrytown Concert House to a sold-out audience.



Landscapes of the Heart: Korean Art Song Recital, Yooncho Cho (soprano) and Matthew Thompson (piano), Britton Recital Hall, Apr 25, 2026. Prof. Cho shared the evocative world of art song, where memories of home, love, longing, and hope come to life. This Korean art song recital was co-sponsored by the SMTD Voice & Opera Department and the Nam Center as part of its Korean Performing Arts Initiative.

Korea from a Single Shard



"Korea from a Single Shard" program is based on the novel *A Single Shard* by Linda Sue Park. the program provides Michigan teachers with the opportunity to expose their students to Korean culture through literature and art. Students take a field trip to the umma for a docent guided tour focused on Korean celadon located throughout the Woon-Hyung Lee and Korea

Foundation Gallery. The trip also features a hands-on Shipwreck dig activity, where students work in teams to excavate model shipwrecks, putting together clues to track the ancient trading routes of celadon. the activity brings the locale and travel of tree-ear, the main character of the book, into reality for the students. This year, thirty 5th grade students in Mrs. Spain's class came from Our Lady Queen of Martyrs Catholic School in Beverly Hills, MI.

Nam June Paik: The Moon is the Oldest TV followed by a Q&A with Chien-An Yuan



On May 22, 2026, the Nam Center sponsored the screening of "Nam June Paik: Moon is the Oldest TV" by the Ann Arbor-based interdisciplinary artist Chien-An Yuan. Known as the "Father of Video Art," Nam June Paik was a visionary who predicted our hyper-connected world decades before the internet existed. His work blended deep philosophy with playful mischief, famously using everything from magnets to ancient statues to redefine how we interact with screens.

Did you know?

U-M's football team acquired its first ever national championship in 1901 under head coach Fielding H. Yost. The team's amazing record that year was 11-0. The Wolverines outscored its opponents by a combined total of 550 to 0. U-M prevailed over Stanford in the inaugural Rose Bowl game with a score of 49 to 0.



Book talk, "Buddhism: A Journey Through History" with Prof. Donald S. Lopez Jr.

Nominated for the Pulitzer Prize in Nonfiction, Prof. Lopez's new book *Buddhism: A Journey Through History* tells the story of the dramatic journey of Buddhism around the globe, from 2,500 years ago the present day. On Nov 5, 2025, the Nam Center co-hosted this wonderful book talk to celebrate the illustrious career of our dearest colleague, Prof. Lopez.

Did you know?

The history of the Nam Center can be traced back to 1984 when students, faculty, and members of the Korean-American community started organizing to establish formal instruction in Korean Studies at U-M. Through their efforts, LSA established a series of Korean languages courses in 1990 and the Korean Studies program was officially founded in 1995. A generous gift from Elder Nam and Mrs. Nam made it possible to upgrade the program into the Center for Korean Studies in 2007. We're almost 20!



How Did You Get Here?

This season's episode include interviews with:

Jinyoung Jin, Jayoung Song, Christopher Bae, Ha Kyoung Lee, Michelle Cho, Moon-Sook Park

Colloquiums & Talks



“Beyond the Page and Across Realities: Rethinking Korean Language Learning with Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality in the Digital Age,” colloquium talk by Dr. Jayoung Song (Penn State), Nov 18, 2025



“Critically Capitalis: Teh Spirit of Asset Capitalism in South Korea,” colloquium talk by Prof. Bohyeong Kim (Vanderbilt University), Oct 7, 2025



“Private Violence and the Law in Late Chosŏn Korea,” colloquium talk by Prof. Ha Kyoung Lee (Academy of Korean Studies), Jan 25, 2025



“Murals Speak: Lee Qoede and the Mexican Muralists’ Vision for National Art,” colloquium talk by Dr. Jinyoung Jin (Stony Brook University), Nov 4, 2025



“Reply 1997: K-Dramas and Conjecuntural Analysis,” colloquium talk by Prof. Michelle Cho (University of Toronto), Feb 10, 2026



“The Efficacy of Using Singing as a Learning Tool in Foreign Language Acquisition,” colloquium talk by Prof. Moon-Sook Park (University of Arkansas), Mar 24, 2026



Public Lectures

Public Lectures, "The History Behind KPop Demon Hunters," John Grisafi, at the Downtown Ann Arbor District Library. Feb. 3, 2026

Did you know?

U-M's Women's League was formed in 1890. Its first president was Ethel Fountain Hussey, wife of astronomy professor and U-M alum William J Hussey. In 1904 the first meeting of the Michigan Union, an all-male student organization, took place. Construction of the Union began in 1916, which was originally former law school dean Thomas M. Cooley's home on State St. The Union opened in 1919, the year our illustrious alum Il Han New graduated from U-M. The Union was designed by Pond and Pond, an architecture firm in Chicago established by Irving K Pond and Allen B Pond, both U-M alumni. It is Irving Pond's image as athlete and scholar that stands tall above the Union's front doors. These statues represent the ideal U-M student. When Michigan football earned varsity status in 1879 Irving Pond scored U-M's first official touchdown against Racine College. Pond and Pond also designed the League, completed in 1929. U-M students did their own fundraising to finance the construction of both structures!



"Homo juluensis: A Pan-Eastern Asian Middle Pleistocene Hominin," colloquium talk by Prof. Christopher Bae (University of Hawai'i), Dec 2, 2025

Did you know?

U-M's Alumni Association was established in 1897. There are currently over 700,000 alumni around the globe, making us one of the largest, and certainly the proudest, alumni bases of any university on Earth.



Faculty Maru

The Nam Center offers affiliation to scholars and fellows visiting U-M for an extended period. Visiting scholars and fellows participate in various Nam Center events and present their research at **Faculty Maru**, a monthly luncheon attended by a community of scholars at U-M interested in Korea. This year Ha Kyoung Lee (Academy of Korean Studies), Yeonna Lee (Daegu Metropolitan City Government), Jaeyong Moon (Maeil Business Newspaper), and Youngmyung Yoo (Silla University). This year's Faculty Maru presentations: Jaeyong Moon (Oct 8, 2025), Youngmyung Yoo (Nov 12, 2025), Ha Kyoung Lee (Dec 10, 2025), John Grisafi (Jan 14, 2026), Hyun Joon Lee (Feb 18, 2026), Yooncho Cho (Mar 18, 2026)



Mid-Autumn Moon Celebration

Mid-Autumn Moon Celebration @ Judy & Stanley Frankel Detroit Observatory, Oct. 6, 2025. Co-hosted by the Lieberthal-Rogel Center for Chinese Studies, U-M Astronomy, Nam Center, and Center for Japanese Studies.

Lunar Love with Danny Koo



The Nam Center supported this unique holiday celebration, featuring the internationally acclaimed violinist, vocalist, TV star, and radio host Danny Koo. This festive concert brought together the traditions of Lunar New Year and Valentine's

Day in an enchanting evening of music—including Tchaikovsky's *Romeo & Juliet*, Li Huanzhi's *Spring Festival Overture*, and original arrangements by Danny Koo.



Did you know?

The James Beard-nominated chef and owner of Miss Kim, chef Ji Hye Kim (LSA '02), is a U-M alumna who studied political science and economics.



Dinner & A Movie: Parasite

Nam Center director, Juhn Ahn, spoke to a crowd of Ann Arbor residents about the Korean movie *Parasite* on Sep 11, 2025. This event was co-hosted by the Michigan & State Theaters and Ann Arbor's newest culinary gem Little Kim



Did you know?

The men's basketball team won its first NCAA national championship in 1989. Senior Forward Glen Rice set the all-time NCAA tournament scoring record with 184 points and won the Most Outstanding Player award. More recently, the men's team defeated UConn 69-63 and won the national championship in 2026. Guard Elliot Cadeau was named Most Outstanding Player. U-M played its first basketball varsity game against Michigan Agricultural College (now Michigan State) in 1909. The women's varsity basketball program was established in the 1973-74 academic year. The women's team reached the Elite Eight in 2022 and again in 2026.



Dedication to Diplomacy: Lives & Legacies in the Foreign Service

With support from the Korean Economic Institute (KEI), the Nam Center hosted a talk by Henry Haggard, Former Minister Counselor of Political Affairs, U.S. Embassy Seoul, on Sep 29.



Seollal Party, Feb 21, 2026. For more photos please see our last page!



The Nam Center and its community have benefitted immensely from the tireless dedication and expertise of the Center's talented staff. We are especially lucky to have had Eva Fall and Jinny Kim.



SUMMER IN MICHIGAN



Summer in Michigan

The Summer in Michigan program in English language (Su:m) ran for the fourth year under a partnership with the Youth ladder program of the Gyeonggi provincial government. The program provided an intensive four-week academic English and American cultural experience to 18 Gyeonggi-do youth residents. The program was enriched by the participation of 8 U-M students (Shyam Pandey, Jana Ka, Prince Ukomadu, Ji Hoon Choi, Michael Park, Ella McIntyre, Mia Viles, Ixchel Ceballos) who served as cultural liaisons and offered peer mentoring in language practice and university life. The program featured a curriculum focusing on developing students' communication skills, art and performance, and culminates in a performance by students. In addition, students experienced student life at the University of Michigan, while participating in cultural activities in and around Ann Arbor and Detroit.

Korean Cinema NOW (KCN)

This year's screenings:

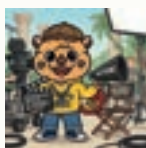
장손/House of the Seasons (Jan 10)
소주전쟁/Big Deal (Jan 24)
딸에 대하여/Concerning my Daughter (Feb 7)
막걸리가 알려줄거야/FAQ (Feb 28)
여행자의 필요/A Traveler's Needs (Mar 7)
어쩔수가 없다/No Other Choice (Mar 28)
목소리들/Voices (Apr 4)
좀비딸/My Daughter is a Zombie (Apr 18)

As usual, KCN screenings feature a wide variety of genres from melodrama and comedy to blockbusters and documentaries.

목소리들/Voices (2024) was a particularly memorable screening. This documentary by filmmaker Jee Hyewon covers the important topic of the Jeju 4.3 massacre, which continued from 1948 to 1954. The documentary features testimonies from the women who witnessed the chilling events that unfolded during this period. The documentary won the Documentary Award in the Special Awards category at the 25th Jeonju International Film Festival in 2024. This is a documentary that you can't watch without a box of Kleenex.

Special thanks goes to Miss Kim for sharing wonderful Korean food with the audience!

The Center also thanks the good folks at Michigan & State Theaters for making the KCN series possible.



What Makes Democracy Erode or Resilient:
Scholars Gather at Michigan to Ask

“One Year After the Martial Law Declaration:
Democratic Backsliding and Resilience in
Korea and Beyond”

The 2025 Perspective on Contemporary Korea
Conference, hosted by the Nam Center for
Korean Studies, sponsored by U-M's Year of
Democracy and Civic Engagement

On the night of December 3, 2024, South Koreans
watched their president declare martial law
for the first time since democratization nearly 40
years ago. A year after that night, a dozen scholars
gathered in Weiser Hall to ask questions that no
longer feel just academic: what did we learn from
the political crisis in South Korea? What makes a
democracy bend, and what makes it break?

Across three panels, participants discussed many
issues, but one vivid thread held: democratic
breakdown is rarely one villain's doing. It grows
from historical legacies, weakened oversight, blind
partisanship, socio-economic inequality, and
eroding trust within the society. By convening
Koreanists alongside comparativists, the conference
made the case that studying Korea teaches us
crucial lessons about democracy everywhere.

*PCK: Perspectives on
Contemporary Korea*

Conference participants shared cautious but hopeful predictions for democracy in Korea and beyond and discussed, among other things, how to tackle suspicions about election integrity (e.g. letting skeptics into the counting room to observe the vote-counting process), how danger comes not only from democracy's disillusioned losers but from its winners, how opposition parties that emerge from negotiated transitions tend to become stronger than those through conflictual transitions, how democracies are more likely to survive with economic prosperity, how international “naming and shaming” works best when done by friendly bystanders rather than victims, how Korea's democratic backsliding reshapes the way Americans see the alliance with South Korea, how democratic erosion is sometimes orchestrated by prosecutors or legislators, how conservative and progressive outlets have used the same photographs of Park Chung-hee from the past in opposite ways, why the triumph of former pro-democracy activists failed to deepen democracy in Korea and Taiwan, how the degree to which the authoritarian ruling party and state once fused in a dictatorship explains whether authoritarian successor parties keep their democratic promises, and how the conservative bloc in South Korea swapped military officers for prosecutors at its core after democratization but never shed its narrow, elite-centered orientation, which limits the party's success as democracy consolidates in the country.

Conference Participants: Jenna Bednar (Co-chair of the Year of Democracy and Civic Engagement), Juhn Ahn, Inbok Rhee (Underwood College, Yonsei), Brandon Beomseob Park (Chung-Ang), Yeilim Cheong (Missouri), Lucan Way (Toronto), Joshua Byun (Boston College & MIT), Eun A Jo (William & Mary), Yusaku Horiuchi (FSU), Laura Gamboa (Notre Dame), Ji Yeon Hong (Michigan), Sanghoon Kim-Leffingwell (North Texas), Joan Cho (Wesleyan), and Myunghee Lee (MSU).



2026 Sang-Yong Nam Memorial Lecture and Award

The **Sang-Yong Nam Award** is a \$3,000 scholarship given each year to a graduating senior. The award honors students whose academic achievement, citizenship, service to the community, and commitment to Korean Studies exemplify the values to which Elder Sang-Yong Nam dedicated his life. The recipient of the 2025 Sang-Yong Nam Award was Toby Buckfire.

Toby is a Data Science and Computer Science major with a minor in Korean Language. He completed 4 years of Korean language study, including a summer program at Yonsei University. As a 2024-25 Nam Center research fellow, he researched the Korean Baseball Organization (KBO) and presented his work at the UGX conference at USC where he received the Best Presentation Award. Toby served as community director for Michigan Esports and captain of the varsity Overwatch team. He was also a member of the Michigan Data Science Team and Camping Club. In the fall, Toby will begin his pursuit of a Master's degree in Computer Science at U-M. A true Wolverine. Go Blue!

This year's **Sang-Yong Nam Memorial Lecture** was given on Apr 8, 2026, by Professor Meredith Woo, a political scientist who teaches at Arizona State University. She served as President of Sweet Briar College, and directed Global Higher Education for Open Society Foundations. She was the Dean of Arts & Sciences at the University of Virginia, and before that, Associate Dean for Social Sciences at LSA and the Director of the Nam Center for Korean Studies. Her teaching and research interests span international political economy, economic development, East Asian politics, and U.S.-East Asian relations. The title of Prof. Woo's beautifully written and witty lecture was "Elder Sang-Yong Nam & Korea's True Miracle." Welcome back to Ann Arbor Prof. Woo!

Fellowships and Awards

2026 Pungmul Fellowship and Camp

The Nam Center established the Pungmul Fellowship a few years ago to nurture student leaders and contribute directly to the development and growth of a flourishing pungmul/samulnori culture on campus here at U-M. This year, the fellowship provided selected students in Sinaboro with an opportunity to participate in a week-long training camp at the Jindo National Gugak Center on Jindo Island in South Jeolla Province. Sunhong Kim, a PhD candidate in ethnomusicology, played a critical role in making this life-changing experience possible. Participants were all eager to go back and learn more about the amazing world of traditional Korean folk music! Pungmul fellowship recipients received extra support from the Center to also participate in Camp Nam. The 2026 recipients are: Nicole Pappas, Kathleen Fleming, Amelia Chiu, and Andrea Bustillo.

SeAH Haiam Arts & Sciences Scholarship

The SeAh Haiam Arts and Sciences Scholarship provides awards each year to support graduate student research projects for academic purposes. This scholarship can be used to fund research travel, data collection, or fieldwork related to Korean Studies. The 2026 recipients are: Seohyung Kim, Yuyao Cheng, Jenny Dun, and Remi Lee.

Summer in Korea

A gift from alumnus Chairman Dae-Won Moon (MBA, '78) provides annual awards on behalf of the Nam Center to support travel to Korea to attend Yonsei international Summer School. Students spend six weeks in the heart of Seoul to improve their fluency in Korean and deepen their knowledge of Korea. The scholarship also funds tuition, fees, field trips, and travel expenses, making a summer in Korea possible for any U-M undergraduate. In 2026, five students were selected to receive this prestigious award: Madison Beeckman, Zoie Tuinstra, Jordan Lilly, Aniq Rahman, and Ari Roth.

Photo courtesy of Bo-yeong Jeong



안녕하세요, 한국어 프로그램입니다!

2025-26년에도 저희 프로그램은 5명의 교원과 2명의 학생 조교가 한 팀이 되어 300여 명의 수강생을 위한 다양한 수업과 수업 외 활동을 마련하고 운영하였습니다. 수업 측면에서는 “Korean in Context: Language and Culture through Places, Food, and Traditions” (ASIANLAN 242), “Korean for Academic and Professional Purposes” (ASIANLAN 444)와 같은 미니코스를 신설하여 기존의 초급, 중급, 고급 한국어 수업에서 깊이 있게 다루기 어려운 주제들을 보다 집중적으로 학습할 수 있는 기회를 제공했습니다. 수업 외적으로는 추석과 설날 같은 한국의 전통 명절을 기념하는 반별 파티를 열기도 하고, Jeopardy Night, Noraebang Night, Library Day 등 다양한 행사를 개최하여 학생들이 한국어와 한국 문화를 좀 더 즐겁게 경험하고 이해할 수 있도록 노력했습니다. 남센터의 후원금으로 개최되는 교내 한국어 말하기 대회는 올해에도 성공적으로 운영되었으며, 일부 수상 학생들은 중서부 말하기 대회에서도 수상하는 쾌거를 이루었습니다. 올해에도 이 모든 활동이 가능하도록 수업 안팎에서 애써 주시고 학생 한 명 한 명에게 진심을 다해 관심을 기울여 주신 선생님들의 노고에 깊이 감사드립니다. 그리고 무엇보다 한국어와 한국 문화를 배우고자 짧게는 한 학기, 길게는 재학 기간 내내 저희 프로그램과 함께해 주는 학생들에게도 감사의 마음을 전합니다. 고맙습니다!



2026 Nam Speech Contest

The Nam Speech Contest continued to honor the legacy of Elder Sang-Yong Nam (1934-2011), whose generosity and leadership were instrumental in establishing Korean Studies at the University of Michigan. Originally founded as an essay contest, the competition transitioned to a speech format in 2024 and was held successfully for the third consecutive year in 2026. All KLP students across beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels participated in the contest. The contest highlighted students' creativity, language growth, and confidence in Korean public speaking. The following students were recognized at the KLP End-of-Year Celebration: Beginning Level (Excellence Award: Yana Chamiso, Honorable Mention: Destiny Barrow, Uswa Sial). Intermediate Level (Excellence Award: Aniq Rahman, Honorable Mention: Akshayapriya Saravanan). Advanced Level (Excellence Award: Mateo Diaz). Special Award (Connor Olesen)



KOREAN LANGUAGE PROGRAM

7th Midwest Speech Contest

KLP students participated in the 2026 Midwest Korean Speech Contest held in Chicago. Student representatives included: Beginner Level (Yana Chamiso), Intermediate Level: Akshayapriya Saravanan), Advanced Level: Mateo Diaz).

105th Test of Proficiency in Korean (TOPIK)

The Nam Center generously supported KLP students' test fees, enabling 12 students to take the test free of charge.

Student Staff

During the 2025-26 academic year, KLP was supported by student staff members Grace Park and Yongha Cho, who served as tutors and assisted with language tables, community-building activities, and student support initiatives.

K-Library Collection Exhibition

In collaboration with the Asia Library, KLP participated in the K-Library Collection Exhibition, “The Roots of Blossoming Korean Culture.” Students explored rare artifacts, historical materials, and literary works related to Korean history and culture. Participants submitted written reflections on the exhibition, several of which were recognized for their insight and engagement. The exhibition provided students with a meaningful opportunity to connect language learning with Korean history, literature, and cultural heritage.



ASIA LIBRARY

Asia Library Staff Updates

Yunah organized several exhibitions showcasing the library's Korean collections of more than 100,000 volumes, including Nobel Laureates in Literature from East Asia featuring Han Kang's works (Nov. 2025), K-Library Collections: The Roots of Blossoming Korean Culture (Mar. 2026), and Korea's Sound Through the Centuries: From King Sejong to Folksongs and BTS (Apr. 2026). The exhibitions drew enthusiastic responses from students, faculty, and community members, who were inspired by the remarkable depth and breadth of the curated collections.

Myung Hee recently completed her three-year term on the Committee on Korean Materials of the Council on East Asian Libraries, Association for Asian Studies. In June, she presented on the University Library's testing project for the Alma Metadata AI Assistant tool at the 2026 European Network of Korean Resources Specialists (ENKRS) conference in Berlin, Germany.

The Acquisitions Assistant position became vacant in June 2025 and has not yet been posted due to financial constraints limiting the library's hiring capacity. In the interim, the Korean Studies Librarian and the Korean Cataloger, with support from student employees, have assumed the position's responsibilities and continue to advocate for filling the role.

Korean Language Learner Collection

In collaboration with faculty from the Korean Language Program, the Asia Library is developing the Korean Language Learner

Collection. This collection includes over 800 Kyobo ebooks and 2,400 print volumes, strategically located in the Oka Tadoku Room and on designated shelves in the book stacks. Organized by reading levels from Level 1 to Level 5, the collection supports students in enhancing their Korean language skills and understanding Korean culture.

Korea related materials from the Radio Free Asia (RFA)

Following the U.S. administration's March 15 termination of funding for Radio Free Asia (RFA; <https://www.rfa.org/>), which prompted staff reductions and a potential shutdown by late September 2025, the Asia Library has partnered with RFA to preserve Korea-related program content. This initiative will preserve and provide continued access to RFA's news articles, interviews, and audio files, particularly those pertaining to North Korea.

Book Purchase Requests Are Just One Click Away

We are pleased to offer expedited service for purchase requests and newly released books published in Korea. Please submit your requests through the Books on Korea site: <https://lib.booksonkorea.com>. Requested titles will be available within approximately one month.

Did you know?



The Harlan Hatcher Graduate Library (so named in 1968) was built between 1916 and 1920 on the site of the old 1883 library. It was designed by Detroit architect Albert Kahn in the Prairie and Arts and Crafts styles. This was a key period in US and U-M history. The US declared war on Germany in 1917. The Union was temporarily used as a barracks and mess hall by the newly established Student Army Training Corps, and regent Levi Lewis Barbour endowed U-M with the Barbour Scholarships.

DIRECTORY

Director

Juhn Young Ahn, Associate Professor, Asian Languages and Cultures (ALC)

Nam Center Core Faculty

YuhJoo byun, Lecturer, ALC

David Chung, Professor, Art and Design

Jeehyae Chung, Lecturer, ALC

Jungah han, Assistant Professor of Theatre & Drama

Ji Yeon (Jean) Hong, Associate Professor, Political Science

Hunjin Jung, Lecturer, ALC

Hwa-Jin Kim, Professor, Law

Jaeeun Kim, Associate Professor, Sociology

Jiyoung Kim, Lecturer, ALC

Jong-Jin Kim, Associate Professor, Architecture and Urban Planning

Soyeon Kim, Director, Korean Language Program, ALC

Dae Hee Kwak, Professor, Kinesiology

Se-Mi Oh, Associate Professor, ALC

Doo Jae Park, Lecturer, Kinesiology

Youngju Ryu, Professor, ALC

Na Ri Shin, Assistant Professor, Kinesiology

Jordan Siegel, Professor, Ross School of Business

Matthew Thompson, Clinical Assistant Professor, Music

Affiliated Faculty

Barbara Anderson, Professor, Sociology

Micah Auerback, Associate Professor, ALC

Benjamin Brose, Professor, ALC

Scott Campbell, Professor, Communication & Media

Kevin Carr, Associate Professor, History of Art

Pär Cassel, Associate Professor, History

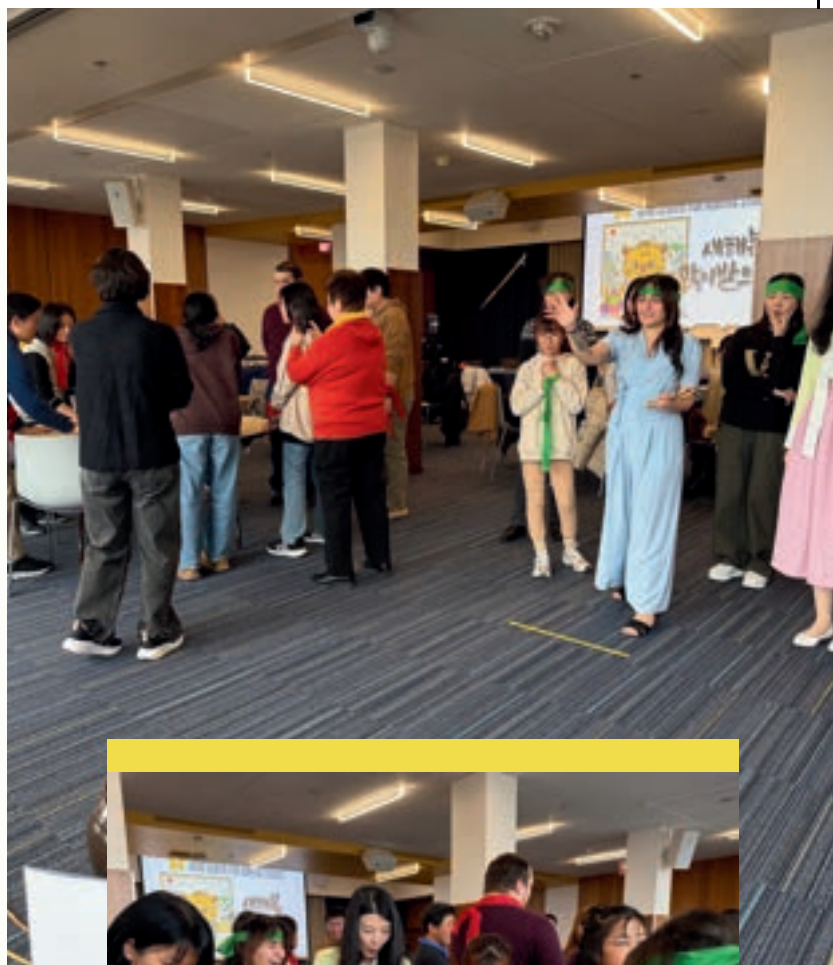
Joseph Lam, Professor, School of Music, Theatre & Dance

Donald Lopez, Professor, ALC

Julie Ma, Associate Professor, Social Work

Ramaswami Mahalingam, Professor, Psychology, Women's Studies

Abé Markus Nornes, Professor Emeritus, ALC & Film, Television & Media



Library & museum Affiliates

Myung Hee Kim, Korean Cataloger

Liangyu Fu, Director of Asia Library

Natsu Oyobe, UMMA

Yunah Sung, Korean Studies Librarian

Jungwon Yang, Stephen S. Clark Library

Juwon Yeo, Korea Foundation Library Intern

Staff

Suyun Lee, Center Administrator

Minyoung Song, Outreach Coordinator

Hyewon Nam, Academic Program Specialist

Peggy Rudberg, Administrative Assistant

Tina Griffith, Asia Centers Manager

Podcast Host

Rory Walsh

Student Assistants

Jinny Kim, Office Assistant

Rachael Kim, Office Assistant & Newsletter Designer

Jaeeun Lee, Graphic Designer



You Can Help!

Gifts to the Nam Center for Korean Studies help support research, teaching, the Korean language Program, and the Korean Collection in the Asia Library. The Center also helps student organizations, provides graduate fellowships, and sponsors visiting scholars, public lectures, our film series and many other special events. Your gift will also help us recruit and retain the finest students and faculty.

Find out how to donate:

<https://ii.umich.edu/ncks/donate.html>

See You Next Year!

Weiser Hall

500 Church Street, Suite 400

Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1042

T:734-764-1825

F:734-764-2252

ncks.info@umich.edu / www.ii.umich.edu/ncks

