



Tübingen Korean Studies Lecture Series

Summer Semester 2025, Wednesdays 18:00 c.t., Wilhelmstraße 133, R. 30

Inter-Korean Relations and the End of Peaceful Reunification: A Social Conflict Approach

Kevin Gray
University of Sussex

June 18th, 2025

Kevin Gray is a Professor in International Relations at the School of Global Studies, University of Sussex. His research expertise relates to the political economy of East Asian development. He is co-author (with Jong-Woon Lee) of *North Korea and the Geopolitics of Development* (Cambridge University Press, 2021), as well as author of *Korean Workers and Neoliberal Globalisation* (Routledge, 2008), *Labour and Development in East Asia: Social Forces and Passive Revolution* (Routledge, 2015).



In late 2023, Kim Jong Un announced that North Korea would abandon its longstanding policy of peaceful reunification with the South and would no longer regard the southern half of the peninsula as within the territorial boundaries of its own state. In South Korea too, peaceful unification has become an increasingly contentious as the emergence of a new specifically South Korean rather than pan-Korean nationalism has emerged. In this paper, I critically engage with constructivist accounts of inter-Korean relations that seek to explain outcomes through the causative role of divergent national identities. Deploying a social conflict analysis approach, I argue that national identities should be understood in terms of competing hegemonic projects and thus subject to contestation.

