Singing Beyond the Ivory Tower: 
South Korean Song Movement in the 1980s

04/22 Friday, 3 pm
GA2067 & Zoom

In the 1980s, campus song clubs operated at the vanguard of writing, performing, and disseminating popular protest songs referred to as “people’s songs” (minjung kayo). Through their collective singing of socially conscious songs at such diverse venues as seasonal campus concerts, labor union meetings, and street protests, the amateur singer-songwriters spearheaded the expansion of student activism by transforming those events into key sites of praxis. In popularizing their songs, the singer-songwriters actively incorporated a diverse range of musical styles and protest repertoire. Situating their performance in the broader context of South Korea’s democratization, on the one hand, and relevant trends in popular music, on the other, this talk reflects upon the competing ethos of resistance and aesthetic sensibilities that shaped the song movement.

Registration link & QR:
https://go.iu.edu/4glW

Professor Susan Hwang (Indiana University)

Susan Hwang is an assistant professor of Korean literature and cultural studies at Indiana University. She specializes in modern Korean literature, Korean cultural history, and translation studies. Her current research interests lie in cultural activism during social movements in modern Korea with an emphasis on the shifting relations between aesthetics and politics. She is currently working on a monograph titled, Uncaged Songs: Culture and Politics of Protest Music in South Korea. It is a cultural history of South Korea’s song movement that charts how songs became a powerful component of the struggle for democracy in South Korea during two of the nation’s darkest decades—the 1970s and the 1980s. Her latest publications are “Radicalizing Against Polarities: Poetry and Print Culture in 1980s Literary Topography” in The Routledge Handbook of Modern Korean Literature and the forthcoming article, “From Victimhood to Martyrdom: ‘March for the Beloved’ and the Cultural Politics of Resistance in 1980s’ South Korea” in Korean Studies.