

Chong-Sik Lee, Political Science

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DEATHS

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Chong-Sik Lee

Chong-Sik Lee, an emeritus professor in political science in Penn's School of Arts and Sciences and a prominent scholar of East Asian politics, died on August 17 from complications from myelodysplastic syndrome (MDS). He was 90.

Born in Anju, North Korea, in 1931, Dr. Lee escaped Japanese rule and fled to South Korea, where he supported his family after his father disappeared under mysterious circumstances. During the Korean War, he served the South Korean army and the U.N., translating between Korean, Chinese and Japanese. During this military service, Dr. Lee learned English, and after the war, American officers helped him to move to the U.S. He earned an undergraduate degree from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), one of the first Korean Americans to do so. He later also earned a master's degree in political science from UCLA and a PhD in political science from UC Berkeley.

Famed academic Robert Scalapino persuaded Dr. Lee to learn about the history of Korea, and inspired by Dr. Scalapino, Dr. Lee launched a career in East Asian studies. In 1963, he came to Penn as an assistant professor of political science, a department that at the time was housed in the Wharton School. A decade later in 1973, Dr. Lee was promoted to a full professor of political science. During his time at Penn, Dr. Lee also taught in the College of General Studies in the School of Arts and Sciences (the precursor to today's College of Liberal and Professional Studies) and in SAS's department of international relations. He retired in 1999, taking emeritus status.

In the 1960s, Dr. Lee taught the first course on Korean studies at Penn. This class eventually led to the formation of a Korean studies program at Penn (*Almanac* February 11, 1997 (<https://almanac.upenn.edu/archive/v43/n21/korean.html>)); after the formation of the program, Dr. Lee was an active participant. He was also active elsewhere at Penn, serving on University Council committees and leading a conference in Yanji, China. In 1982, he wrote a *Speaking Out* letter in *Almanac* advocating for Penn to pay tuition for the children of faculty members (*Almanac* December 14, 1982 (<https://almanac.upenn.edu/archive/v29pdf/n15/121482.pdf>)).

In 1969, Dr. Lee received a Ford Foundation Faculty Research Fellowship. Four years later, he co-authored (with Dr. Scalapino) *Communism in Korea*, and the year after that, he received the Woodrow Wilson Foundation Award from the American Political Science Association for the best book on government, politics, or international affairs. He later wrote books about several major figures in Korean history, like Seo Jae-Pil, Syngman Rhee, Lyuh Woon-Hyung, and Park Chung-Hee. He also wrote books about the international relations of East Asia, particularly Korea-Japan relations, books that are now considered pioneering academic works in the field. In 2020, he published an autobiography in Korean that covered his life up to 1974 but "left out the rest of the stories for next time." He continued to delve into questions about Korean history up until his death.

Dr. Lee was an avid tennis player in his free time, and six of his former tennis partners visited him shortly before his death, sharing colorful anecdotes. Dr. Lee also enjoyed learning the Russian language.

Dr. Lee is survived by his wife, the former Myungsook Woo; their daughters, Sharon and Gina Lee; and three grandchildren. A memorial service was held on August 28. In lieu of flowers, donations may be sent in Dr. Lee's memory to the Professor Chong-Sik Lee scholarship fund, c/o and payable to the Philip Jaisohn Memorial Foundation, 6705 Old York Road, Philadelphia, PA 19126.