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**London Asia Pacific Centre for Social Science (SOAS/KCL)
& Centre for Korean Studies (SOAS)**

Guest Lecture 2016-17

Son in Law of a Political Theocracy: The Rise and Fall of Jang Seongtaek



Amb. Ra Jong-Yil

Former Republic of Korea Ambassador to UK and Japan
Distinguished Professor
Hanyang and Gachon University, Korea

Date: 2 November 2016, 6.15-7.30pm

Venue: Djam Lecture Theatre, Main Building SOAS

No registration required

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Contemporary Korea Speaker Series

Hosted by the London Asia Pacific Centre for Social Science
& Centre for Korean Studies (SOAS)

Date/Time/Venue: 2 November 2016 / 6:15 PM/ Djam Lecture Theatre, SOAS

Presenter: Professor Ra Jong-Yil (Hanyang and Gachon University)

Son in Law of a Political Theocracy: the Rise and Fall of Jang Seongtaek



The presenter discussed the life of Jang Seongtaek, Kim Il-sung's son-in-law and the uncle of present leader Kim Jong-un. The professor described Jang as an exceptionally able man, gregarious and popular among his associates. However, in the inner circle of the regime, he was always a liminal existence. He belonged firmly in the centre of the ruling system but at the same time had one foot outside it, which allowed a partly critical perspective of the realities at hand. He was instrumental in dealing with the crisis that erupted after Kim Jong-il was laid lame due to illness. Jang helped train Kim Jong-un, and was once again a leading figure until he was put under house arrest, condemned to death and summarily executed.

During the Q&A, one member of audience questioned the regime's intention of a dynastic succession of power. The presenter believes that a dynastic succession of power was a last resort and gave an anecdote of how Kim Jong-il had consulted with associates including Jang and Kim Kyong-hui about who would be the best candidate. Jang had allegedly pointed to Kim Jong-un and helped smooth Kim's path to third-generation rule. Other questions included the reaction of the North Korean public and the extent of China's involvement. The

professor answered that the North Korean public accepted the propaganda that Jang was a traitor, but some had reservations about a nephew killing his own uncle. In terms of China's involvement, when Jang led a large group of business people on a visit to China, Jang was given a reception equal to the head of a state, which may have triggered the execution. The professor shared an anecdote in which a Chinese official privately commented that the execution was interpreted as a means of eliminating China's intervention in North Korea's domestic affairs.