

Call for Papers

Abstract Deadline: December 14, 2019

Seoul Under Construction:
Politics, Memory, and Urbanism in Korea

May 3, 2019 (Friday)
University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia

Over the last 600 years, Seoul has undergone tremendous transformations. These include transitions from a royal capital of the Confucian Chosŏn state (1394–1897) through a short-lived capital of the Korean Empire (1897–1910) to a colonial city of the Japanese Empire (1910–1945). After liberation, while grappling with its colonial past, the same space was restructured into a capital city of a divided nation where Cold War urbanism was prominent in both cityscape and everyday life. Seoul in the twenty-first century is experiencing another dramatic transformation, being one of the world's fastest-changing megacities with growing diversities.

These historical transformations, however, have not been seamless. Multiple processes of construction, destruction, and reconstruction took place at difference paces, involving multiple actors and different ideas. As a result, Seoul today is a city of spatial and temporal montages, a place of seeming contradictions.

The James Joo-Jin Kim Program in Korean Studies at the University of Pennsylvania is hosting its fourth annual conference to bring together scholars and graduate students across various disciplines to explore how Seoul has become what it is today. The conference seeks to investigate varied meanings of the construction of Seoul from interdisciplinary, thematic, and methodological approaches. How did the constant construction, destruction, and reconstruction shape the uneven landscape of the city today? How did collective memories and social relations reflect and recreate the city's unique urbanism? Furthermore, how did these multiple layers of construction intersect with changing politics in and surrounding Korea?

The conference invites papers that explore these questions through the lens of construction from various angles. Possible topics include, but are not limited to, Seoul's urbanization under colonial and authoritarian regimes and their legacies; contested memory, historic preservation, and museumification of the city; Seoul's incorporation into the Cold war order, its mirroring competition with P'yŏngyang, and the creation of the DMZ in between the two capital cities; and the construction of social and cultural space through art, film, and literature.

Interested participants should submit a paper abstract of no more than 300 words to Sinwoo Lee (sinwlee@sas.upenn.edu) by December 14 (Friday), with the subject line "Paper abstract for the Seoul Conference at Penn." Abstracts should include interested participant's name, institutional affiliation, and a short biography. Notification of proposal acceptance will be sent by late January. Participants will be asked a few weeks in advance to pre-circulate their papers. Travel and accommodation will be provided for accepted participants, but the exact scope will be contingent upon final budget approval. Questions about the conference may be directed to Sinwoo Lee.

Contact: sinwlee@sas.upenn.edu