

CKS Speaker Series:

Emerging Directions in Korean/American Cultural Studies

American Han



Via Zoom

This event is part of the Center for Korean Studies speaker series, *Emerging Directions in Korean/American Cultural Studies*, curated by IDEA Fellow Dr. Sandra So Hee Chi Kim and co-sponsored by the Asian American Justice + Innovation Lab. The slash at the center of "Korean/American" is inspired by David Palumbo-Liu's theorization of "Asian/American," in which the solidus inserts an "and/or" register of meaning that indexes the simultaneously inclusionary and exclusionary relation between "Asian" and "American." Korean/American falls within the rubric of Asian/American in important ways while also encompassing its own rich sphere of histories, geographies, experiences, and cultures. How can we think of the slash as signifying the distinction between the two terms— "Korean" and "American"— and, at the same time, the complex ways they slide one into the other from historical, material, social, psychological, and cultural perspectives? As such, this series not only highlights exciting emerging work in Korean American studies and cultural productions, but also new directions in Asian American studies of relevance to those of Korean descent, and critical Korean studies of relevance to Asian American studies.



There are not many substantial studies of han and no studies that explain the features of the uncanny and melancholy intrinsic to han.

—Meera Lee

Autobiography is at once an autotestimony and an autoceremony that reenacts trauma and narrates our historical death—how we have died and how we remain living. —Kim Hyesoon

E.J. KOH

Poet, Writer



E. J. Koh is the author of the memoir *The Magical Language of Others* (Tin House Books, 2020), Washington State Book Award Winner, Pacific Northwest Book Award Winner, Association of Asian American Studies Book Award Winner, and PEN Open Book Award Longlist. Her poems, stories, and translations have appeared in *AGNI*, *The Atlantic*, *Boston Review*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *Poetry*, *Slate*, *World Literature Today*, and elsewhere. Koh is the recipient of the 2022 Artistic Achievement Award from the Korean American Coalition. Her debut novel *The Liberators* is forthcoming fall 2023.

When I was twelve, my mother's hand enclosed around the handle of a kitchen knife she used to slice our sandwiches that morning. My mother lifted the blade to her neck as if it were a violin bow. In that second, I stole the weapon and aimed it at my throat. Later I learned she did the same thing as a girl to save her own mother in Daejeon. My mother explained the events, Han. Because she'd seized the knife, she already had han. But watching me do the same, my mother confessed it must now also reside in me. There was no understanding. Only that han lied within us. Like Korean Catholic families in the Bay Area, our family gathered with others every month to pray. I prayed to take the han out of my mother and father, my brother and me. Poet Sung Yung Shin says, *Bodies fertilized the ground so well the trees grow / bright and tall*. Looking at decay, han got bright and tall. Even today I can't point to a singular meaning of han, but there is no doubt that a feeling of irresolvable pain ought to be understood if it must be uttered as some final word in my throat. I ask of han, who hardly trembles at my question, how could I build my childhood home for you to enter?



Scan/click the QR code to register!

Online/Zoom

Wednesday April 19, 2023

1 PM – 2:30 PM

