

KOREA LECTURE SERIES

**With or Without Walls:***The Politics of Walls and Japanese Colonialism in Seoul, 1897-1910***Monday February 11, 2019****4:30 - 6:00 PM****Brower Commons A**

The predominant narrative of the disappearance of city walls, which was once fundamental to the definition of a city, is that the transition from a walled to an open city was a “natural” outcome resulting from urban expansion and advances in military technology in the modern era. However, through an analysis of Seoul’s experience, this talk shows how this transformation was a contested political and social process with major consequences not only for the city but also for Korea’s troubled transition into a modern nation-state. More specifically, I explore varied meanings of the capital’s walls of the Korean Empire (1897-1910) emerging against the rise of open cities globally and the imminent loss of national sovereignty nationally. The city walls ultimately came to an end when the Japanese colonial power tore them down as both literal and symbolic representations of its deterritorialization of Seoul and colonization of Korea. By examining this process, this talk suggests that the demolition of Seoul’s walls was far from a self-evident transformation in urban development; rather it was the battlefield over which changing notions of cities and national sovereignty were fought.

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Sinwoo Lee is a scholar of modern Korea whose research interests lie in the fields of urban history, memory studies, and environmental history. Lee is currently working on a book manuscript that explores Seoul’s transition into a modern city by looking at the destruction of the city’s walls—both as physical and symbolic boundaries—from the late Chosŏn to the early colonial period. Lee has taught at Claremont McKenna College and Yonsei University after receiving her Ph.D. at the University of California, Los Angeles.