

The Korean Studies Lecture/Performer Series Presents

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Humanities & Social Sciences Room 2150
4:30-6:00 pm

*Ecological Exceptionalism at the Border:
The Nature of the Korean Demilitarized Zone*



The demilitarized zone between North and South Korea has been a virtual no-man's land for more than sixty years, making it a haven for endangered species, which reportedly thrive in the space between the environmentally ravaged north and the overdeveloped south. President Lee Myung-bak's signature "Green Growth" initiative, which promotes South Korea as a world leader in sustainable development, has made the rebranding of the DMZ – from a scar of war and national division into a green belt symbolizing peace and life – a key part of its eco-friendly vision. Based

on ethnographic research with ecologists, scientists, and activists in the South Korean border area, this paper examines the production of what I call the DMZ's "ecological exceptionalism" and the ways in which Korea's biodiversity is simultaneously a neoliberal economic project and a post-national conservation project, grounded in natural capital, nationalist sentiments, and ecological visions of the future.

Eleana Kim is an assistant professor in the Department of Anthropology and the Program in Visual and Cultural Studies at the University of Rochester. She is the author of *Adopted Territory: Transnational Korean Adoption and the Politics of Belonging* (Duke University Press, 2010), which received the James B. Palais Prize in Korean Studies from the Association of Asian Studies and the Social Science Book Award from the Association of Asian American Studies. Her current book project is "Making Peace with Nature: The Greening of the Korean Demilitarized Zone." Her past and current research has been supported by the Fulbright Commission, SSRC, NEH, and ACLS, and articles have appeared or are forthcoming in *Anthropological Quarterly*, *Social Text*, and the *Journal of Korean Studies*.

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