



Tübingen Korean Studies Lecture Series

Winter Semester 2023/24, Wednesdays 18:00 C.T., Wilhelmstraße 133, Room 30

The politics of resettlement: selective formalization and precarity among Nanjido waste pickers

December 13, 2023

Hyojin Pak is a doctoral candidate at Leiden University's Institute of Area Studies. Her dissertation, *Taking up space: Waste and Waste Labor in Developing South Korea*, examines the South Korean development experience through its remnants, focusing on the management of waste and the organization/regulation of informal waste labor. Her work situates modern Korean history at the intersection of waste studies and development studies to understand the social and environmental costs and consequences of development.



This talk unpacks the history of Nanjido, which is commonly known as the World Cup Park in western Seoul. Examining its past as a landfill and a lived space, it asks how their labor and their dwelling relate to two types of informality and precarity. Firstly, it begins with the labor organization of waste pickers, which is characterized by hierarchical structure and intergroup competition. It then discusses their housing history, focusing particularly on the temporary resettlement process in 1984. Waste pickers achieved a provisional agreement for resettlement after they demonstrated their presence and contribution through self-enumeration surveys, self-drafted community maps, and their income data. These strategies formalized their dwelling and established their citizenship status. But it nonetheless left their labor unrecognized; rather, based on their income data, the state sought to effectively extract their labor. This demonstrates that 1) although one type of precarity (e.g., living conditions) is alleviated, other types of precarity (e.g., precarious labor) may not be entirely mitigated, and 2) informal people's strategies to alleviate their precarious circumstances are susceptible to state appropriation, which may conversely exacerbate their precarity.

