

# Premodern Korea Lecture Series

Warding Off Woes: Epidemic Talismans  
in Chosŏn Buddhism

With Dr. Sujung Kim

Institute for  
Korean Studies

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

GW한국학연구소



*“Warding Off Woes: Epidemic Talismans in Chosŏn Buddhism”*

**Dr. Sujung Kim**

**Associate Professor of Religious Studies, DePauw University**

Thursday, February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024

10:00 A.M. – 11:30 A.M. Eastern Standard Time (EST)

Virtual Event via Zoom

## ◇ Event Description

Buddhist temples served as hubs for printing in the Chosŏn era, producing a diverse array of Buddhist woodblocks and prints. Despite their prevalence and abundance, printed talismans have often been overlooked by Buddhist historians, dismissed as artifacts of commoner’s interest in worldly benefits and superstitious beliefs. However, a closer examination reveals that talismans transcend the surface appearance of illegible inscriptions on paper strips; instead, they emerge as miniaturized cosmic conduits channeling sacred knowledge for healing and offer a lens into everyday Chosŏn life. This talk, informed by William McNeil’s insights into the interplay between epidemics and religion, focuses on talismans employed as protective measures against epidemics. By integrating Buddhist doctrines, medical concepts, visual analyses, and firsthand accounts from Western visitors to Chosŏn, it offers a comprehensive exploration of the Buddhist epidemic talismans. The presentation ultimately aims to illustrate the multiple layers of social connections and coping mechanisms, forged and fostered by the rich talismanic culture and ritual healing in Chosŏn.

◇ Speaker



**Sujung Kim** is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at DePauw University. She received her Ph.D. in East Asian Languages and Cultures from Columbia University in 2014 and her M.A. in Buddhist Philosophy from Korea University in 2007. Sujung specializes in Japanese and Korean Buddhism and is interested in tracing the interaction between Buddhist cultures using textual and material sources. After her first monograph, *Shinra Myojin and Buddhist Networks of the East Asian “Mediterranean”* (University of Hawai‘i Press, 2019), she is currently

working on her second book project, titled *Korean Magical Medicine: Healing Talismans in Chosŏn Korea*, which explores socio-cultural, religious, and medicinal roles that paper talismans played in the everyday life of ordinary people in Chosŏn. This project is supported by the ACLS/Robert H.N. Ho Family Foundation (AY 2021–2022).

◇ Moderator



**Jisoo M. Kim** is Korea Foundation Associate Professor of History, International Affairs, and East Asian Languages and Literatures at George Washington University. She is Founding Director of the GW Institute for Korean Studies (2017-Present) and Founding Co-Director of the East Asia National Resource Center (2018-Present). She also serves as Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Korean Studies*. She specializes in gender, sexuality, law, emotions, and affect in Korean history. She is the author of *The Emotions of Justice: Gender, Status, and Legal Performance in Chosŏn Korea* (University of Washington Press, 2016), which was awarded the 2017 James

Palais Prize of the Association for Asian Studies. She is also the co-editor of *The Great East Asian War and the Birth of the Korean Nation* by JaHyun Kim Haboush (Columbia University Press, 2016). She is currently working on a book project tentatively entitled *Criminalizing Intimacy: Marriage, Concubinage, and Illicit Sex in Chosŏn Korea*. She received her M.A., M.Phil., and Ph.D. in East Asian Languages and Cultures from Columbia University.

*This event is on the record and open to the public.*