

Abstract and Bio

Sonja Kim

“Contested Economies of Compassion and Medicine in Colonial Korea”

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Sweeping transformations in the realms of medicine and public health in Korea at the turn of the twentieth century are generally understood as a teleological and inherently hierarchical narrative of progress or revealing of insidious and even violent workings of Japanese imperialist biopolitics. Both are premised on the professionalization of medicine as a modern practice. Drawing from Sara Ahmed’s analysis of emotions as social and cultural practices and literature on economies of compassion, this presentation explores affective operations of love and benevolent charity in shaping the medical profession. Focusing on three cases—that of female nurses, medical missionaries, and student health investigators—I demonstrate fraught tensions in articulations of professional ethics to suggest the contingent nature of medical compassion.

Sonja M. Kim is Associate Professor of Asian and Asian American Studies at the State University of New York at Binghamton where she researches and teaches on Korea and East Asia. She is the author of the forthcoming book *Imperatives of Care: Women and Medicine in Colonial Korea* (University of Hawai'i Press).