



Center for Korea Studies
University of Washington

The Origins of Social Inequality and Political Hierarchy in Korea

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Until the Mumun Pottery Period (ca. 1500-100 B.C.), Korean society was primarily organized as small egalitarian groups with no centralized political system. This was the pattern for millennia, persisting until a suite of important changes occurred in several regions of the peninsula. This presentation examines the archaeological evidence from one such region—the Jinju area in Gyeongnam Province. Here, archaeologists excavated a number of Mumun village settlements containing hundreds of pithouses, megalithic burials, and utilitarian to prestigious artifacts. I discuss the implications of these discoveries as well as the context that led to the emergence of social inequality and political hierarchy, which was foundational for the subsequent development of the first Korean states.

Rachel Lee graduated with a Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of Michigan. As an anthropological archaeologist, her research focuses on sociopolitical changes in the villages and households of prehistoric and early Korea. She has been excavating in Korea for almost a decade and has also conducted fieldwork in China. This year, she is a Korea Foundation postdoctoral fellow at the Center for Korea Studies at UW.

3:30-5:00 PM, Thomson Hall 317

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