"Unfinished Business: Transgression and Moral Agency in Park Chan-wook’s Vengeance Trilogy"

a talk by

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Wednesday, March 26
009 Ramseyer Hall
29 West Woodruff Ave.
2:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.

This talk argues that the transgressive elements of the Korean film maker Park Chan-wook’s vengeance trilogy (Oldboy, Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance, and Lady Vengeance) are not senseless, superficial, or meaningless gimmicks as movie critics tend to suggest. On the contrary, Park’s vengeance trilogy consistently relies on these elements to reflect critically on the neoliberal restructuring of post-IMF Korea and raise important questions about moral agency. The three films that comprise the vengeance trilogy are, Ahn argues, stories about individuals who, with the help of transgressive acts, transform from “ignorant,” naïve, and passive victims to shrewd, cunning, and cruel moral agents.

Dr. Juhn Ahn is assistant professor of Buddhist and Korean Studies at the University of Michigan. He is currently investigating the intricate relation between the transformation of the Koryo elite and the new forms of Buddhism that developed in Korea during the fourteenth century. This research is being developed into a book-length study on the history of medieval Korean Buddhism and its relation to the question of identity among the Koryo elite. In addition to the history of Korean Buddhism, his publications cover such topics as Zen illness, koans, Chan/Zen learning in Song dynasty China, and the history of medicine and sword-fighting in early modern Japan.