There is a peculiar prevalence of dramas featuring the incest scare trope in South Korean popular culture. Autumn Tale (가을동화, 2000) and Winter Sonata (겨울연가, 2002), the television serials that ostensibly launched the “Korean Wave” in broader Asia, as well the cult classic and critically acclaimed film Oldboy (올드보이, 2003), are among the numerous television dramas and films in which key characters who at one point or another are thought to be biologically related fall in love. This talk traces how the now familiar incest scare trope in South Korean cultural productions has roots in the historical traumas of the Korean War and national division, which literally disrupted genealogical lines of descent on the Korean peninsula. My analysis centers on a literary precursor to these more recent incest scare dramas: The Other Side of Dark Remembrance (어두운 기억의 저편), an award-winning 1983 novella by Lee Kyun-Young which demonstrates how the contemporary iteration of the incest scare trope, and the anxiety about biological kinship that it provokes, corresponds to psychosocial effects stemming from the collective trauma of broken kinship relations.

Guest Speaker: Dr. Sandra So Hee Chi Kim (she/her) is a postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Asian and Asian American Studies at Stony Brook University. A transnational cultural studies scholar with specializations in transpacific Asian American studies, critical Korean studies, and the study of modern empire.