

**2022 ANNUAL ROBERT C. STALEY  
DISTINGUISHED LECTURE  
IN EAST ASIAN STUDIES**

**Postornamentality:  
Ajumma Fabulosity and the Art of  
Wearing A Visor with Ferocity**



**Professor Suk-Young Kim**  
Head of Theater &  
Performance Studies (UCLA)

**Keynote Lecture**

**Thursday, March 17  
4:30 PM  
Memorial Union 242 (La  
Paz) & Zoom**



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2022 Annual Robert C. Staley Distinguished Lecture in East Asian Studies

**Postornamentality: Ajumma Fabulosity and the Art of Wearing a Visor with Ferocity**

by SUK-YOUNG KIM, Professor, Head of Theater and Performance Studies (UCLA)

March 17, 2022

**Abstract**

Lotus blossoms, dragon ladies, K-pop beauty queens, and crazy rich Asians . . . these are the jaded stereotypes distilled by the prevalent popular imaginary surrounding Asian and Asian-American women. Despite their varying temperaments, these stereotypes tend to focus on the particular decorative sensibilities and ornateness of Asian and Asian-American female bodies. Among multiple scholarly efforts to wrestle with these enduring perceptions of "yellow women," Ann Anlin Cheng's concept of "ornamentalism" is arguably the most significant theoretical perspective to have emerged in recent years. And yet, in the wake of the 2021 shootings in Atlanta, Georgia, which primarily targeted women of Asian descent, the notion of ornamentalism is rendered nearly irrelevant in the face of ghastly violence against the hard-working, nonornamental bodies of Asian and Asian-American women. Navigating through the debris of colonial intimacies, ornamentalism, and techno-orientalism, this talk relies on the figure of the visor-wearing ajumma, a Korean word referencing a middle-aged woman. As a transnational and transhistorical framework emerging from the messy interstitial spaces between theory and reality, the figure of the ajumma stands at a crossroads marked by the suffocating weight of the American empire and the precarity of Asian and Asian-American lives facing the persistent forces of racism, sexism, classism, and ageism.