

The Socialist Modern at Rest and Play: Spaces of Leisure in North Korea



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June 24 2015 / 18:30-20:00

Room 301, 3F, Building 10, Sophia University

Conventionally conceived of as entirely lacking in frivolity or playfulness, its' citizens time and energy and its' geographic spaces harnessed only to the prerogatives and processes of political, industrial and military production, North Korea is regarded as the 'terra nullis' of leisure activity. However in the light of the Korean peninsula's forceful encounter with Japanese Imperialist modernity, this paper examines unexpected connections between the introduction of sporting, leisurely and non-productive modes of production and relation at the behest of colonialism and the practices and spaces of North Korea today.

Far from a blank leisure canvas, Pyongyang's political and cultural repertoire of praxis has required and supported an extensive network of leisure and entertainment facilities.

Following its consideration of the pre-history of North Korean entertainment and leisure practice, with its birth in political meetings and ideological cinema, the paper considers the re-emergence of sporting endeavour and physical practice in fulfilment of Pyongyang's political and diplomatic goals. Finally the paper encounters the water parks and amusement fairs on the banks of the River Taedong, terrains which ultimately embed and enmesh leisure at the heart of Pyongyang's acutely charismatic and theatric political form.

Robert Winstanley-Chesters is a Post-Doctoral Fellow of Cambridge University (Beyond the Korean War) and Visiting Research Fellow at the University of Leeds (School of Geography) and Director of Research at SinoNK.com. He obtained his doctorate from Leeds' with the Thesis



"Ideology and the Production of Landscape in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea", published as "Environment, Politics and Ideology in North Korea: Landscape as Political Project" in 2014. Robert's second monograph "New Goddesses of Mt Paektu: Gender, Violence, Myth and Transformation in Korean Landscapes" has also been accepted for publication in 2016 by Rowman and Littlefield. Robert is currently researching Pyongyang's leisure landscapes, historical geographies of Korean forestry, colonial mineralogical inheritances on the peninsula and animal/creaturely Geographies of North Korea.

Lecture in English / No prior registration necessary