Writing North Korean social history workshop
11 September 2015

Paper titles, abstracts and bios

Andre Schmid (University of Toronto):
‘Towards a Social History of (Self) – Criticism and Class in Postwar North Korea’

Abstract:
What happened to class after the revolution? Using publications from the General Federation of Trade Unions, this paper examines the use of criticism – what came to be called “comradely advice” – as a tool for ideological cultivation and the promotion of “proletarian consciousness.” In postwar Korea, there were numerous ways of writing about class. Mutual criticisms written by workers as well as letters to newspaper editors show how one of the most common means of discussing class moved away from structural definitions, i.e. in relation to the means of production. Accusations of “bourgeois” and “feudal” were reserved for higher levels of politics within the Party-state. In published cases of workers’ mutual criticisms, such terminology was displaced by a moralizing emphasis on the decisions and conduct of individuals. Coming drunk to work or fighting with the quality inspector, to name just two examples, led to criticisms framed in the terms of an individual’s “cultural level.” A wayward comrade’s low cultural level explained both the problematic behavior and offered a remedy. This shift in the ideological underpinnings of class was markedly different than in contemporary PRC. As put into practice through criticism as opposed to that explained in dictionary definitions or high-level show trials, this form of treating class ultimately contributed to a conservative politics in the name of furthering the revolution.


Bio:
My research and teaching focus on 19th and 20th century Korea, as seen against the broader context of East Asian and world history. I am currently working on a book dealing with the cultural history of the Cold War. By focusing on dominant ideologies of domesticity in north and south Korea, this project comparatively explores postwar reconstruction efforts during the 1950s on both sides of the demilitarized zone. This means reading a range of materials – from child rearing manuals, to government housing reports and from newspaper advertisements to family magazines – that allow me to investigate how two populations could be variously mobilized toward different yet parallel political and economic enterprises: capitalism in the south and socialism in the north. A second study investigates one of my longstanding interests in the problems causality presents historians. Using case studies in the historiographical literature on 19th century peasant uprisings, this project explores the ways the rhetorical strategies of historians enable, direct, and hinder the many decisions that go into the act of writing historical explanations.

Carl Young (University of Western Ontario):
‘The Friendly Party: The Ch’ondogyo Young Friends Party in Early North Korea’

Bio:
Carl Young's research interests focus on religious social movements, nationalism, and imperialism in modern Asia, centering especially on Korea and Japan. He also has a strong interest in comparative world history and cross-cultural interaction between different world regions, focusing on Asia as a case study. His previous research has dealt with a comparison of South Korean minjung (popular) theology and Latin American liberation theology in the 1970's and 1980's and an investigation of the Tonghak (Eastern Learning) and Ch’ondogyo (Religion of the Heavenly Way) movements in Korea between 1895 and 1910. His teaching interests include East and Southeast Asian history, and the history of religion, nationalism, imperialism, and international relations in Asia.
Cheehyung Harrison Kim (University of Missouri):

'Surplus and Solidarity: Migration of North Korea’s War Orphans’

Abstract:
In early 1951, as war raged on the peninsula, the North Korean government began sending war orphans abroad. During the decade, around ten thousand orphans were sent to East Germany, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Mongolia. They were to receive care and education, eventually to return to North Korea in the 1960s. The global context highlights an interesting pattern in which the countries that received North Korean orphans were also sending their children as adoptees to North America. At the same time, North Korea was paying back over 5 billion rubles borrowed from these very socialist countries. In order to pay the debt and yet keep on receiving aid, there was a tremendous demand for surplus production as well as building solidarity. The production regime, influenced by the dual need for surplus and solidarity, carved a rational pathway for the orphans’ traumatizing and tragic beginning. They were the unspoken human collateral for the loans. As much as the care for the orphans by brotherly countries was publicized, they were carried to these places by the force of debt.

Bio:
Cheehyung Harrison Kim is an assistant professor in the Department of History at the University of Missouri. He does research on everyday life, industrial work, socialism, and cities in the context of East Asia and North Korea. He is currently writing a book, titled The Furnace is Breathing: Work, Everyday Life, and Industrial Modernity in North Korea, 1953-1961.

Suzy Kim (Rutgers University)

'Historicizing North Korea: Socialist Modernity, Everyday Life, and Intimate Archives’

Bio:
Suzy Kim is Associate Professor in the Department of Asian Languages and Cultures at Rutgers University. She received her Ph.D. in History from the University of Chicago. Her book Everyday Life in the North Korean Revolution, 1945-1950 (Cornell University Press, 2013) was awarded the 2015 James Palais Book Prize. She is currently preparing a monograph on a cultural history of gender formations in North Korea during the Cold War. Her teaching and research interests focus on modern Korean history with particular attention to social and cultural history, gender studies, and critical theory.

Adam Cathcart (University of Leeds)

'Neighbor, Perpetrator: Sinchon and Transborder Violence in South Hwanghae Province, 1945-1950’

Bio:
Adam Cathcart holds a Ph.D. in contemporary history from Ohio University. After several years of teaching in the United States, China, and Northern Ireland, he joined the School of History at the University of Leeds in September 2013. With primary research interest in Chinese-North Korean relations and the Korean War, Dr. Cathcart has published peer-reviewed articles in Journal of Cold War Studies, Journal of Korean Studies, Korean Studies, North Korean Review, Acta Koreana, and Review of Korean Studies. His doctoral dissertation focused on Sino-Japanese relations from 1945-1952, and he remains active in symposia on war crimes trials after World War II. Adam Cathcart is the editor of the Papers of the British Association of Korean Studies, and is the founder and co-editor of Sino-NK, an online scholarly collective.