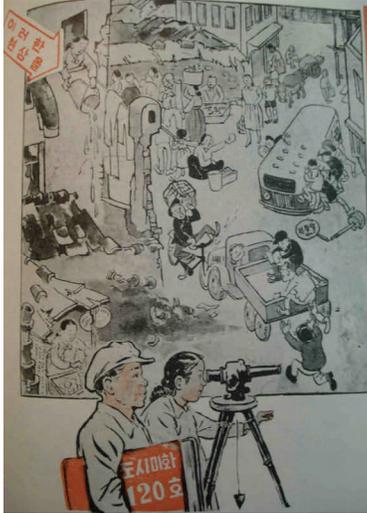




Center for Korea Studies
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Jesters on the Streets: Satire in North Korea



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As the Soviet state was going through the process of de-Stalinization at home and trying to implement the same policies abroad in its satellite countries, it brought the public in close contact with a rich body of satire, both contemporary and classic. The impact of this campaign on the North Korean society at large was profound as much as it was unexpected in its outcome. A call for an all-out satirical offensive was not too enthusiastically embraced by professional writers, but found a welcome audience with ordinary people who were also invited to participate in the nationwide process of satirizing their fellows. The working masses took to the new fad of self-made satire, finding in it the justification for their own tricks and pranks, much to the chagrin of cultural officials, as their productions quickly began to take them outside the boundaries set by the new policy. As a result, we see an explosion of street play during this period, with the street itself emerging as a site of play in the absence of a well-developed infrastructure of leisure and entertainment. This paper describes the genesis of the North Korean jester, first, as an object of official representation and, later, as an object of self-representation and the main protagonist of everyday shows of comic disobedience, which lay at the foundation of an emerging pervasive culture of antidisциплиne.

Dima Mironenko received his B.A. in Diplomacy/Korean Studies from Moscow State University of International Relations in 2005 and his M.A. and Ph.D. in Korean History and Film and Visual Studies from Harvard University in 2007 and 2014, respectively. Dima's research interests encompass cultural history, cinema and visual studies, humor, and the study of gender and sexuality. His dissertation "A Jester with Chameleon Faces: Laughter and Comedy in North Korea, 1954-1969" explores the question of agency within the realm of everyday living by looking at the emergence of a laughing subject in North Korea in the wake of the Korean War (1950-53) and the state's efforts to discipline this subject through cinema. Dima is the founder of the Korean Cinémathèque at Harvard which he curated from 2009 to 2012. He is currently a Korea Foundation Postdoctoral Fellow at the Weatherhead East Asian Institute at Columbia University. In 2000, Dima spent a semester as an exchange student at Kim Il Sung University in Pyongyang.

3:30-5:00 PM, Thomson Hall 317

Thursday, Feb. 5, 2015



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