REVOLUTIONIZING SPORTS:
THE CONSTRUCTION OF SPORTS CULTURE IN THE DEMOCRATIC

BY

SHIN HYUNG CHOI

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By Shin Hyung Choi

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Department of East Asian Studies
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the construction of sports culture in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea’s (DPRK) in the late 1950s. Specifically, it focuses on the north’s sports spectacles and sports programs in factories in the historical context of the DPRK’s post-Korean War reconstruction efforts. Through the close examination of the state’s official discourse and imagery in the media, it is clear that the Workers Party of Korea (WPK) considered sports to be an important cultural practice that needed to be revolutionized for the masses. By examining the state’s efforts to “revolutionize” sports in the name of socialism, this thesis attempts to illustrate the numerous challenges of interpreting and implementing the WPK’s centralized sports policies in the 1950s. In particular, the state’s various sports organs were non-uniform and inconsistent in their interpretation and implementation of the Party’s sports policies. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to demonstrate that the DPRK’s state-controlled sports enterprise was a system that was ultimately centralized, but not necessarily unified, consistent, or exclusively limited to the control of the state.
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S.D.G
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FIGURE 3 - 1. Photograph. “Sports [association] members that are good at sports and work.” Ch’eyukkwa Sūp’och’ū, no. 5 (1957).


INTRODUCTION

Observing foreign diplomats running and perspiring in a game of tennis, Prince Sunjong of Korea commented, “It is really pitiable for them to for them do such herculean jobs for themselves, those kind of things are assignable only to servants.” 1 To most Koreans before the turn of the nineteenth century, modern sports were considered to be an alien, unnecessary, and ignoble activity. Roughly fifty-years later in 1948, the issue of sports still continued to disconcert Korea’s leaders in Pyöngyang, but this time, their concerns were centered on the fact that not enough Koreans were engaging in sports. The leaders of the (then) Marxist-Leninist state of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) thought that sports needed to be rid of its “old ideas” (nalgun sasang) such as its bourgeois legacies, and be revolutionized for the masses to become a vehicle of the socialist revolution. Indeed, sport was a crucial, if not central part of the state’s efforts to construct socialism. Through sports, it attempted to foster discipline, health, economic development, and patriotism. However, to their great disappointment, the state was often unable to control or use sports in the manner that it desired.

Common incidents of poor sportsmanship, for instance, exhibited rude and undisciplined conduct in front of large audiences – thereby negating the state’s efforts to use sports to instill discipline. In other cases, sports programs in factories tired and inhibited labourers instead of energizing them. Some labour unions therefore argued that sports should be limited in factories to increase production (one of the country’s highest priorities in the 1950s), but confusingly, local sports associations promoted factory-sports as part of the state’s efforts to boost labour

strength. Interestingly, the high importance of production in the DPRK led to both supporters and opponents of sports upholding the case of production to support their opposing interests. Consideration of the DPRK’s nascent sports enterprise in the 1950s thus offers a unique opportunity to examine some of the challenges that the state’s various organs faced in interpreting and implementing the Party’s central and sometimes conflicting policies.

To represent the DPRK’s sports enterprise as an important component of the socialist revolution, the state’s numerous media outlets included important symbols and imagery in its representation of sports. In the 1950s, some of the media’s most important symbols included the Korean War and Ch’ŏllima, a legendary horse in Korean folklore that became a central image in representing the spirit of the DPRK’s rapid economic development campaigns. Images of Ch’ŏllima were therefore especially prominent in the media’s representation of sports as an important facilitator of strong labour and high production. Such symbols, no doubt, were constructed and appropriated by the state. However, this thesis argues that these high-importance symbols were also co-constructed and co-appropriated by different state and non-state groups to push their individual, and sometimes conflicting agendas.

To see sports as something that the state needed to constantly and completely control, on the other hand, is another notion that this thesis challenges. The power of sports (in terms of the Party’s ability to use it for their desired purposes) was not limited to direct forms of indoctrination or mobilization, such as waving banners or singing songs in honour of the Party at sports spectacles. Sports – although technically monopolized by the state in terms of its formal, institutional organization – were still a largely voluntary and self-determined activity in the 1940s and 1950s that often needed little or no encouragement to elicit people’s enthusiastic involvement in sports. Sports offered real forms of leisure, rest, entertainment, and socialization
to participants during a difficult and intense time of reconstruction. That being said, however, this project ultimately highlights the extensiveness of the state’s reach in people’s everyday cultural practices, as their only means of becoming involved in organized sports or gaining access to adequate facilities was through the state’s centralized sports system – even as early as the 1950s.

Throughout, this thesis relies primarily on state-produced media sources, including journals, newspapers, and magazines to examine the DPRK’s sports culture. Considering that there are currently little (available) secondary sources on DPRK sports that were not created by the state, it is of course necessary to handle the content of these sources cautiously, as its accuracy cannot be guaranteed. Therefore, this thesis derives much of its arguments by tracing patterns and noting inconsistencies or shifts in the media’s representation of sports, rather than on its content alone. One particular area of focus is the inability of some media outlets (e.g. local newspapers or subject-specific journals) to adequately understand or convey the central Party’s newest and most pressing sports policies. In 1957, for example, the Party enacted specific policies to promote and popularize skiing; but to the frustration of the state, many newspapers failed to notice and reflect this in the content of their reports and stories. By examining such (attempted) shifts in the media’s representation of sports culture in the 1950s, this project tries to demonstrate that the state’s various sports organs were non-uniform in their interpretation and presentation of the Party’s sports policies; highlighting some of the challenges of a centrally administered sports system.

To date, little research has focused on the construction and representation of state sources from the DPRK – an ironic fact, considering that it continues to be the most important, abundant,
and relied upon source of information on the country.² The fact that the DPRK’s state sources are excessively propagandistic in nature, it seems, has deterred most scholars from seeing them as something more than just a fabrication of the Worker’s Party of Korea (WKP) to consolidate and maintain its dominance. Consequently, existing studies on the DPRK has mostly focused on the north’s leadership, its bureaucratic system, and its institutions rather than on north’s media representations of everyday culture.

Research on the state’s media, however, is hardly original. In fact, it has been especially prominent in recent scholarship on the DPRK. Suk-Young Kim’s monograph Illusive Utopia: Theatre, Film and Everyday Performance in North Korea (2010), Heonik Kwon and Byung-Ho Chung’s North Korea: Beyond Charismatic Politics (2012), and Brian R. Myers’ The Cleaning Race: How North Koreans See Themselves and Why It Matters (2011) are all notable examples that examine the state’s production of theatre, literature, film, and art.³ Unfortunately, all three monographs share the same critical limitation by ultimately presenting “the state” as the sole constructor and appropriator of the media. Technically, it is true that virtually all of the north’s publications and performances were created and/or monitored by some organ of the state. However, this does not necessarily mean that the state’s media representations were completely isolated from people’s everyday experiences that could, in some circumstances, reinforce and appropriate them.

² By “state sources,” this thesis refers to sources produced by one of the north’s state-controlled media outlets. This includes virtually every newspaper, magazine, journal, film, and document from the DPRK produced after 1953 that is currently accessible to the public.
To engage in this form of research, it is thus critical to reconsider the notion of the state’s sports enterprise by seeing it a system that was ultimately centralized, but not necessarily unified, consistent, or exclusively limited to the state.

Chapter One includes a brief history of the DPRK’s sports administration system and traces the gradual discursive shift in press’ presentation of the WPK as the most important and central figure in the DPRK’s sports culture. By historicizing the media’s discourse, it is possible to see that references to the WPK started to gain prominence non-uniformly, in different sectors of the media at different times. Chapter Two examines the media’s representation of sports spectacles in the late 1950s. Existing scholarship generally subscribe to the interpretation that sports spectacles in the DPRK were used by the state to indoctrinate, mobilize, and discipline its citizens – an argument that is certainly not untrue. However, this interpretation is essentially a re-representation of the media’s official discourse, and is thus problematic because of its confinement to the state’s terms and its interpretation of sports’ significance. Upon closer examination of the state’s sources, examples of the “non-dominant narrative” can be found, which illustrate some of the challenges and imperfections of the DPRK’s centralized sports enterprise. Chapter Three examines the media’s representation of sports programs in factories and highlights its consistent presentation of “good athletes” as inherently “good workers.” The centrality of “production symbols” in the media’s coverage of factory-sports supports one of this thesis’ overall arguments that the WPK’s system of indoctrination was pervasive, extensive, and real (though, by no means complete) as early as 1958. This leads to Chapter Three’s final section on sports journalism in the DPRK, and attempts to reconsider and problematize the concept of “state media” as a direct representation of the Party’s most pressing interests. On the contrary,
this essay argues that the Party’s policies were sometimes open to interpretation and re-
represented by press based on their understanding of them.

The arguments in Chapters Two and Three are heavily influenced by Alf Lüdtke’s concept of simultaneity. His ideas are central to this thesis because it allows us to consider how representations in the state-media were co-constructed, co-facilitated, and co-appropriated by individual persons/groups, not just the state. In addition, it permits us to examine the DPRK’s media as not just propaganda, but as an encapsulation of specific (and sometimes conflicting) state and non-state agendas. The importance of symbols in the state’s media, and their adaptability to multiple or simultaneous meanings is another central theme throughout this thesis that can be attributed to his ideas. Lüdtke, a historian Germany under the rule of the Third Reich, argues that people’s compliant and oftentimes enthusiastic participation in the difficult and strict circumstances of Nazi’s regime can be understood by their appropriation of the state’s conditions. Crucially, he maintains that this form of appropriation cannot occur out of one’s own free will, but that “appropriation works through symbols, and simultaneously has a formative impact in shaping those symbols.”

Revisionist historians of the Soviet Union and East Germany generally challenge the notion that a centralized state can completely anticipate and control every realm of society. Revisionism in this context essentially meant challenging the totalitarian model, and endorsing a “bottom-up” approach to history that considered the role of people’s “calculated” subjectivity.

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and the existence of social mobility through the acceptance of the regime’s system and ideals.\(^5\) The appeal of “bottom-up” approaches was significantly strengthened by Michel De Certeau’s ideas in *The Practice of Everyday Life*.\(^6\) His concept of everyday “tactics” and “strategies,” notably, creatively illustrated the existence of people’s subjectivity in the setting of established systems, institutions, and mass culture – and, to be sure, his influence is felt throughout this thesis. The problem, nonetheless, is that these approaches ultimately adhere to the dichotomy of coercion versus resistance – something that this thesis tries to problematize.

Therefore, Lüdtke’s notion of *simultaneity* is a compelling model because it effectively sheds this dichotomy by considering the ability of individuals to not just navigate, but also negotiate the state’s conditions through the co-construction and co-appropriation of meaningful symbols. He suggests that scholars must assess more than just economic, social, and ideological motivations, or, as he calls it, “calculated interests,” and insists that one must also consider the influence of “personal experiences.”\(^7\) He notes:

> [Scholarship] that stress the system of rule, ideology, and calculated interests, tend to ignore the patchwork of practices and orientations which people co-produce and in which they themselves live and operate. It is the dynamic of *simultaneity* [emphasis added] of dependence and independent or self-willed action that people act out as compliant acceptance and active complicity.\(^8\)

The real strength of Lüdtke’s notion of *simultaneity* is that it does not need to deny the state’s extensive and powerful influence – something that is especially appropriate in the case of the


\(^8\) Lüdtke, 90.
DPRK. In fact, it ultimately highlights the fact that the state’s system of indoctrination and control were both *pervasive* and *persuasive*. Examples of symbolic co-appropriation in the DPRK, notably, virtually only existed inside the parameters of state’s official discourse.
CHAPTER ONE:


CHAPTER ONE contains a short history of the DPRK’s sports culture and system from 1945 to the end 1950s in order to introduce and contextualize the major themes of this thesis. The first section briefly examines Korea’s pre-1945 history of modern sports to demonstrate that the utilization of sports as a means of fostering patriotism, militarism, and discipline was a common and established practice prior to Korea’s division. However, despite the cultural and cultural elite’s best efforts to use sports in this manner, it was impossible for a single party to completely control the realm of sports – a phenomenon that is also true of sports in the DPRK. The second section then examines the beginnings of the north’s sports system, and demonstrates that its earliest sports programs were coordinated mostly by grassroots, non-government organizations up until around 1947. Since then, the Worker’s Party of Korea’s (WPK) increasing dominance and consolidation of authority in the north led to the gradual disbandment of all non-government sports organizations and the formation of a centralized, sports administration system. However, despite the state’s monopolization of sports, sports culture in the north still remained a largely voluntary and self-organized activity at the local, everyday level. Only after the end of the Korean War in 1953 was the state’s influence in everyday sports systematically felt. Significantly, the state’s central sports system was organized at the local level through the enterprise – namely, in local labourer and farmer’s unions. The late 1950s (the focus time-period of this thesis) was therefore the end of a transitional phase from locally organized sports to a completely centralized sports system. Consequently, this is an interesting time in the DPRK’s history that includes examples of both government-central and non-government central aspects.
of sports culture in the press. The last section examines the process of gaining membership to a local sports association, and demonstrates that by the late 1950s, the only means of becoming involved in organized sports was through state-run programs and facilities. Simultaneously, this suggests that citizens had real incentives to be actively involved in state-run sports programs. The ultimate aim of this essay is therefore to trace the gradual discursive shift in the press’ representation of the WPK as the most important and central figure in the DPRK’s sports culture.

CONCERNING THE TERM “CH’EYUK”

Before this essay delves into the history of North Korea’s sports system, it is first crucial to distinguish the terms “sports” and “ch’eyuk” from one another, since both are often used interchangeably, but can carry different connotations depending on the context of their use. In fact, the multidimensional meaning of ch’eyuk is essential to understanding the DPRK’s sports culture. Technically, the exact term for “sports” is sŭp’och’ŭ ("sports" pronounced in Korean), and it carries the same meaning as it does in English. On the other hand, the term ch’eyuk is more complex. The underlying Chinese characters of ch’eyuk (體育) translates to “physical education.” However, this is not an exclusive definition because ch’eyuk is also a synonym for “sports,” “exercise,” and “athletics.” Generally, as rule of thumb, sŭp’och’ŭ is used to describe competitive sports (e.g. soccer, volleyball, handball), whereas “ch’eyuk” is more often used to describe forms of exercise (e.g. jogging, stretching…etc.). Perhaps most importantly, the term ch’eyuk is also used to connote a sort of life principle in the DPRK, as it is often used as an adjective to describe a form of culture (ch’eyuk munhwa) or lifestyle (ch’eyuk saenghwal). One article titled “Ch’eyuk Knowledge: What is Ch’eyuk?” in a 1949 issue of Inmin Ch’eyuk (People’s Ch’eyuk) tries to address this issue of definition. The article strongly asserts that ch’eyuk is by definition, intentional, and incudes several examples to clarify this point:
An athlete that exercises for leisure cannot be called *ch’eyuk* – even if he/she gains better [bodily] results than someone that exercises for the sake of *ch’eyuk*. In addition, if someone happens to gain bodily benefits from the labour they contribute to earn clothing, food, and shelter, this also cannot be called *ch’eyuk*... Only if someone has the intent of developing his/her body can something be called *ch’eyuk*. Therefore, the mailman that develops strong legs and arms from his delivery labour cannot be considered *ch’eyuk*.

Therefore, the term does not just describe all activities that involve some sort of exercise. Rather, it is the *intent* of exercise. Although this article’s definition is certainly not definitive, it demonstrates that the term cannot be reduced to a type of activity; it must also be considered an ideal. *Ch’eyuk* is a fluid and broad term that can represent a set of different meanings or ideals depending on the context of its use.

**SPORTS IN KOREA PRE-1945**

Examining the history of Korea’s pre-1945 sports culture is outside the scope of this project. Still, a number of important points should be noted to better contextualize the DPRK’s sports culture in the 1950s. The use of sports as a nurturer of discipline, national defense, and patriotism was an established and common practice prior to Korea’s division. Perhaps the earliest example of this can be found in the Christian missionaries that first introduced modern forms of sport to Korea in the late nineteenth century. Heavily influenced by Darwin and Spencer’s theories on natural selection and “survival of the fittest,” (respectively) the notion of the “Christian gentleman” and “muscular Christianity” became popular in Victorian Britain around the mid-1850s in an attempt to create faithful, disciplined, and healthy men capable of combating the vices of a dirty, industrialized society.⁹ Christian missionaries and Japanese imperialists

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⁹ John Hargreaves, *Sport, Power, and Culture: A Social and Historical Analysis of Popular Sports in Britain* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986), 41. Thomas Hughes and Charles Kingsley pioneered the notion of “muscular Christianity” in the mid-1850s. Hughes and Kingsley were one of the first Christians to embrace Charles Darwin’s book, *On the Origins of Species* alongside Herbert Spencer’s adaptation of Darwin’s ideas. Spencer’s theories, in particular, were critically important to Christians’ belief that “the first requisite of life [was] to be a good
eventually brought similar ideas to Korea and as a component of the Kabo Reforms beginning in 1984, the introduction of a modern education system (including sports) was controversially implemented. Reformists argued that “stronger” countries were threatening Korea’s sovereignty because of the nation’s imbedded indifference to a modern sports education curriculum, and that sports should be pursued to defend Korea’s independence. Therefore, the concept of disciplining and strengthening the nation to fight imperial forces through sports was something that the DPRK adopted rather than created.

Similar to the case of the DPRK, the ruling and cultural elite of Korea’s colonial era attempted to attach social and cultural significances to sports. Some notable examples include Christianity, nationalism, modernization, and the justification of imperialism in Korea. However, as an article by Koen De Ceuster demonstrates, the mass popularization of sports (especially beginning in the 1930s) in Korea ultimately resulted in the elite’s loss of control of the social and cultural significance of sports. Similar cases of the DPRK government’s inability to completely control or instill the social significance of sports in the 1950s represent one of this thesis’ central and reoccurring themes.

animal…[and that] all breaches of the laws of health [were] physical sins.” Historian John Hargreaves notes, “evolutionism provided a way of moralizing about human conduct as if it were a matter of obeying natural laws,” and that to obey these laws, muscular Christians thought that they had to “curb the beast in man,” which, paradoxically, meant that they had to “cultivate the animal.” Essentially, “muscular Christianity” embodied the belief that the cultivation of one’s body was central to the development of one’s spirituality and faith, and this idea was thoroughly integrated into Britain’s education curriculum in the form of sports programmes.


On October 10, 1945, shortly after the Korea’s liberation from colonial rule, Kim Il Sung orated a speech to a mass of students. The speech, titled: “To Popularize Sports,” voiced Kim’s desire for the newly liberated Korea to grant its citizens the freedom and liberty to pursue meaningful livelihoods. Kim maintained that throughout Korea’s annexation period, ch’eyuk and sports was only accessible to the privileged class and used to serve the colonial government’s military interests. The notion of ch’eyuk for the masses was thus juxtaposed to ch’eyuk for the elite (or bourgeoisie), which was characterized as the antithesis of liberty, freedom, and leisure. The highlight of Kim’s speech was his emphasis on the crucial role of ch’eyuk in the reestablishment of a “democratic” and “independent” nation. Kim cautioned the audience of the South’s imminent threat and stressed that citizens should be nurtured – through ch’eyuk – to be physically and mentally prepared to unify and rebuild Korea (Chosŏn). The speech’s conclusion encourages everyone to pursue a “sports lifestyle” (ch’eyuk saenghwal); another reminder that ch’eyuk was not limited to just isolated to athletics.

However, the content of Kim Il Sung’s oration must be thoroughly scrutinized, as it was published by the WPK’s official press in 1979. By then, Kim’s cult of personality had already dominated virtually every aspect of the DPRK’s press, and therefore, the accuracy of Kim’s dramatic speech must be read cautiously. The publication portrays Kim as the pioneer of the

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14 The omission of references to the Soviet Union’s role in Korea’s liberation is particularly suspicious, especially since this speech was supposedly orated in 1945. The government’s earlier texts often credited the progression of the nation’s ch’eyuk efforts to the Soviet Union. Kim Moon Kwan, for instance, an official of the WPK’s ch’eyuk administration, wrote in 1954: “today, a countless number of our nation’s laborers and youth are participating in ch’eyuk and sports, which was made possible because of the Soviet Union’s heroic army that ended the Japanese Empire’s savage colonial rule.” Kim Moon Gwan, “Imminch’eryŏkkŏmjŏngŭn Konghwaguk Yukch’egyoyangch’egyee Issŏsŏŭi Kibonida,” 1956, in Yi Hang-nae and Kim
DPRK’s *ch’eyuk* initiatives just two months after Korea’s liberation, an improbable and certainly exaggerated fact, since the north’s earliest *ch’eyuk* initiatives emerged out of non-government and grassroots organizations.

The pioneer of *ch’eyuk* initiatives in the DPRK was actually the North Korean Ch’eyuk Alliance (NKCA), established on November 1, 1945. The NKCA was a civilian organization whose mandate was to popularize *ch’eyuk* as a collective and all-inclusive form of exercise and leisure. Soon after, similar grassroots sports organizations emerged in the north’s Workers Alliance, Farmers Alliance, and Youth Alliance. Indeed, the earliest forms of organized sports and athletic programs were non-government enterprises and not government organs. The predominance of non-government athletic organizations from 1945 to 1947 was largely due to the north’s nascent and unconsolidated government system. Until about 1950, the DPRK (then called the Provisional People’s Committee of North Korea until 1948) was governed by a coalition between the WPK, the Korean Democratic Party and the Ch’ongdogyo Young Friends’ Party. By the spring of 1947, however, the WPK had largely out-maneuvered it rivals in a series of aggressive central committee plenums to become the dominant party. The WPK’s gradual monopolization of authority was reflected in the government’s tightened control over sports organizations. On the January of 1947, the government disbanded the NKCA and other non-

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17 Scholarship on subjects other than sports, however, notes the prominence of the north’s grassroots and locally autonomous organizations in the time immediately after liberation (1945 – 1947), such as the “People Committees” (*inmin wiwŏnhoe*). See Charles Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution: 1945 – 1950* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2004), 48 – 49.

government-based athletic organizations, and the official administration of *ch’eyuk* was

dele gated to the newly created Physical Education Department (PED) and the North Korean

Ch’eyuk Commission (NKCC). However, both organs were soon deemed to be ineffective, and

the government established another administrative organ called the Central Physical Culture and

Sports Guidance Committee (CSGC) on May 19, 1948. The CSGC was more extensive and

systematic than former *ch’eyuk* administration organizations, establishing offices in every city

and country region. Since athletic programs in DPRK never reached professional or world-class

levels until after the Korean War, the CSGC’s core responsibilities included the administration of

amateur sports and athletic programs in labour alliances, farmer alliances, youth alliances, and

“people’s” schools.

By the end of the 1940s, the state’s extensive sports system was essentially established;

technically eradicating all non-government sports organizations in the DPRK. However, prior to

the Korean War, the influence or reach of state-run sports programs were not particularly strong

at the local, everyday level. Sources from this time suggest that everyday sports (i.e. leisure/non-

professional sports) continued to be a predominantly voluntary and self-directed activity rather

something that was made obligatory or directly administered by the government. One article

titled “The Life Stories of Exemplary Athletes [*che’yugin*]” in a 1950 issue of *Inmin Ch’eyuk*
demonstrates this point by telling the stories of people’s everyday sports lifestyle (*ch’eyuk*

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21 ibid.
22 Suzy Kim’s recent monograph *Everyday Life in the North Korean Revolution, 1945 – 1950*
(Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014) demonstrates the extremely fluid and unconsolidated

nature of people’s alliances in this time. Her research demonstrates that 1945 – 1950 was a

period of dramatic and constant transition in the north’s government system (both central and

local), and that the government’s exertion of influence in the realm of the everyday occurred

gradually and non-uniformly.
The article first profiles the daily life (ilssang) of comrade Kim Kong Song, a career soldier in People’s Army and family man. Chronicling Kim’s methodical daily routine, the article commends his regimented military schedule that he carries over into family life. His daily routine in the military consists of formal Marxist-Leninist and military education classes. There, he also educates other soldiers on sports and health throughout the day. Upon returning home, comrade Kim sets aside time for independent refinement/education (chach’egyoyang) and ensures that he gets at least seven hours of sleep everyday “for his health.” He is especially meticulous about his children’s education at home, being mindful of teaching them about health and sanitization (pogŏnwisang), such as sending his children out to exercise after dinner and setting regular bedtime hours. The article attributes his children’s success at school to Kim’s fine-tuned education and sports regiment at home, noting that his son, Kim Su Am (a fourth grader), is the “best athlete at school, following his father’s example as an superb footballer.” Finally, it notes that “at home, [the son] continues his regimented learning. He and his sisters enjoy sports in front of their house… occasionally the parents coach certain aspects [of their sports]…” Interestingly, this article mentions nothing about the family’s reliance on state-run organizations or the state’s guidance. Instead, it depicts Kim as the central figure of his and his family’s “model sports lifestyle,” and it is he, rather than the Party, that ultimately determines and enforces his household’s sports life. In fact, it is exactly because of Kim’s self-determined dedication to create and foster a sports lifestyle that he is featured in this article as a “model” athlete.

23 The term “athlete” in this context is not a completely accurate translation because the exact meaning of “che’yugin” is “someone that enjoys/participates in sports.”
Comrade Kim’s story was, for the most part, about this sports lifestyle at home. However, this article’s next “model athlete” suggests that sports programs in the office were also conducted in an informal and voluntary manner. The second profile is of comrade Rim Sŏn Ok, a telephone operator for the Pyongyang Railway Commission (p’yŏngyangch’ŏldogwalliguk). Similar to the account of Kim’s life, Rim’s story recounts her daily routines that she herself decides and sets. Here, the highlight of Kim’s profile is her leadership role in fostering sports among her female colleagues:

“In order to be healthy and fit, she instructs numerous sports members and encourages everyone [at the Railway Commission] to participate in the morning People’s Aerobics [inmin pogan ch’ejo] that occurs everyday. By doing so, she helps other female colleagues release stress, brighten their mood, and boost their concentration. In addition, during rest time, she brings together [her colleagues] to do nölttwigi [a traditional Korean jumping game] and jump rope – creating the equipment together to do so. Sometimes, she coaches volleyball competitions, and teaches the beneficial effects of sports to labour. On top of all this, she promotes the benefits of sports through posters [around the office]…”

Comrade Rim’s numerous efforts to encourage her colleagues to participate in sports suggests that the activity was a relatively casual affair, rather than something that was systematically enforced. Indeed, the fact that Rim ran around the office everyday encouraging it suggests that the majority of her colleagues were not consistently engaging in sports. Rim’s story is an especially telling example considering that the Pyongyang Railway Commission was a government enterprise located in the capital city. Therefore, the defining characteristic of “model athletes” such as comrade Kim and Rim was not their athletic abilities, but their determination to foster and encourage sports. This is another sign of the state’s efforts to boost the adoption of sports in the DPRK and the state’s inability to extend its sports system to effectively reach local families/enterprises. Prior to Korean War, formal sports associations or clubs were still not

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25 Here, it is incorrect to conclusively assume that the opinions and content of Inmin Ch’eyuk was synonymous to that of “the state” (the issue of journalism vis-à-vis the state is addressed in
established in many offices and farms, and consequently, sports programs were hardly standardized or uniform across in the north. Significantly, it is rather astonishing that the *Inmin Pogon*’s depiction of “model athletes” and their accomplishments are not once credited to the guidance or support of the government, Party, or nation – something that is simply unimaginable by the end of the 1950s.

To better understand the dramatic shift in the DRPK’s sports literature, it might be useful to examine a similar article from 1959. One example, titled, “Sports Lifestyle in Hwanggeumpyong is Blossoming,” appears in an issue of *Ch’eyukkwa Sūp’och’ü* and presents a similar profile of sports culture at the local, everyday level. The story is about a journalist’s short trip to the island of Hwanggeumpyong to report on its “sports lifestyle.” By the time he lands on the island early in the morning, locals are already engaging in their morning aerobics. Shortly thereafter, a teenager runs to the journalist to greet him and be his guide. The teen is introduced as the class president of the “Running Masters Work Unit” (*talligi myŏngsu chagŏppan*), a subgroup of “Work Unit No. 17.” Guided by him, the reporter heads to the sports field in front of the administration committee (*kwalli wiwŏnhoe*) building. The teen explains that every morning, a bell is rung that signals members of the farmers cooperation union [*nongŏp hyŏptong chohap*] to meet and exercise. Clearly impressed by the island’s sports lifestyle, the reporter then meets Ri Min Ch’ŏng, chairman of the island’s Party Committee and leader of the “beginners-level sports group.” Ultimately, the reporter presents the island’s sports enterprise as a humble but admirable one, stating:

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Chapter Three). The *Inmin Che’yuk* was, however, a direct branch of the government’s press; officially printed by the DPRK’s State Printing House (*Kugyŏnginswaeso*).


Under the guidance of the Ri’s Party Committee [tang wiwinhoe], enthusiastic laborers meet to learn our Party’s sports policies… Sports enthusiasts especially embrace the responsibility of promoting and spreading the Party’s sports policies… The core of this [community’s] enthusiastic sports [enterprise] rests in the hands of the each village and labour-unit… using the union members’ free and rest times to concretely promote the Party’s sports policies…

The article’s profile of Hwanggeumpyong Island clearly suggests that the DPRK’s “sports lifestyle” was a more systematic and formal affair in 1959 than it was in 1950. Especially noticeable is the fact that virtually every aspect of sports is tied to some branch of the enterprise. The teenage boy’s “master runners” class, for instance, was connected to a specific “work unit,” and the island’s morning aerobics was a mandatory activity for every member of the farmers cooperation union. In addition, the Party’s direct influence in local, everyday sports can be seen through chairman Ri’s leadership post in the beginners sports group. The article’s constant emphasis on the importance of learning and implementing the Party’s sports policies firmly establishes the state as the main source of guidance; eclipsing the role of individual “model athlete” figures.  

The most significant development to the DPRK’s ch’eyuk administration system prior to the Korean War was the introduction of the People’s Fitness Examination (PFE) on July 8, 1948. The purpose of the annual state-run examination system was threefold: (1) to encourage the mass adoption of sports and athletics; (2) to mobilize the nation for production and national defense;  

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28 Indeed, although “model athlete” profiles continued to appear in the press through the late 1950s, credit for the athlete’s accomplishments was almost always ultimately conferred to the Party. To cite one example, an article from 1958 titled, “Hero of the Republic Produced by Sports: [The Story of] Hard-Working Hero Ch’oe Tŏk Su” presents a profile of “model athlete” Ch’oe Tŏk Su. In spite of the fact that Ch’oe is the main character of this article, his accomplishments are ultimately credited to the Party, made especially clear by the article’s closing sentence: “Birthed by the Party, we continue to see the hard-working hero Ch’oe Tŏk Su brilliantly combine sports and labour [in his life].” Kim In Su, “Ch’eyugin taeryŏreso paech’uldokkong vasūng: roryōgyōzgyōng ch’oe’oedsŏksu,” Ch’eyukkwa Sūp’och’u, no. 5 (1958): 30 – 31.
and (3) to collect information about the nation’s athletes and the population’s overall fitness level. Historian Michael E. Robinson notes, “[the government] comprehensively organized, studied, and classified the population of the North to an extent perhaps unprecedented in modern history.”

Indeed, the PFE was an essential component of the state’s organizational endeavor and its most important, unifying aim was to create a state-controlled system to manage, categorize, and oversee the nation’s athletes and ch’eyuk programs. Prior to the Korean War, the PFE was a relatively simple examination system. However, throughout the 1950s, the PFE was frequently modified, and became an intricate system of athletic accreditation and social classification.

The increasingly government-controlled realm of sports in the DPRK was, in many ways, paradoxical to the Party’s vision of the nation’s sports program. Sport, according the Party’s media outlets, was formerly a tool of feudal, colonial, and capitalist enterprises to exploit citizens. The Party’s claims were, of course, not entirely untrue. Indeed, as noted earlier, Korea’s colonial government tightly controlled sports in order to impede the formation of nationalist groups, and sports were often used as a means of mobilization and militarization. Therefore, the Party’s media outlets in the 1950s continually emphasize that sport was liberalized for the people – no longer a feudal or capitalist enterprise, and finally accessible to the masses.

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30 Worker’s Party of Korea, Chosŏnjungangnyŏn'gam (P’yŏngyang, 1995) in Yi Hang-nae and Kim Tong-sŏn, Pukhan Ch’eyuk Charyojipp, 24. The PFE was extensively modified in 1955 under the mantra: “Regulation of Athletes’ Class (Sŭp’och’ŭ Sŏnsu Tănggăpchee Kwanhan’gyujŏng). Before 1955, the examination was simply organized into “basic” and “special” levels. However, from 1955 onwards, the PFE was divided into “youth” and “regular” categories, which were subdivided by “first class,” “second class,” and “third class.” Yi Hang Nae and Kim Tong-sŏn assert that higher-class athletes received some form of social preference (sahoejŏk udae), but do not elaborate further on this point. Pukhanŭi Ch’eyuk, 180.

The next excerpt is an example of the state’s self-assessment of the DPRK’s development of sports culture in the last decade (1948 to 1958):

Since liberation [1945], the Party set clear regulations to ensure that sports were in the hands of the people (*inminjŏk*), and encouraged them to adopt sports initiatives as their own. Throughout the colonial period, sport was monopolized by the minority class and restricted to puppets [of the colonial government]. However, since liberation, the Northern Committee, under the guidance of the Party, ensured that sports were for the masses including labourers and youth – whereas under the former colonial government, sports were an intimate part of the capitalist enterprise, and a means of exploiting people’s strength for the empire.\(^{32}\)

The majority of the state’s columns on the DPRK’s sports culture in the 1950s were formulated in this manner. Sport was touted by the Party as a realm of liberation – no longer a feudal or capitalist enterprise, and now finally accessible to the masses. Interestingly, the literature rarely describes the north’s sports enterprise as something that is controlled by the government, and instead, uses the term “guidance” or “instruction” (*chido*) to describe the Party’s role in the DPRK’s sports culture. Emphasizing that sport belongs to the people, it states that citizens are the “complete owners” (*wanjŏnhan chuin*) of sports in the factories, schools, farms, and offices.\(^{33}\)

Contrary to the claims of the press, nonetheless, the Party’s influence in the realm of sports was far more pervasive in the DPRK than it was in Korea’s colonial or pre-modern times. Scalapino and Lee’s monumental two-part monograph, *Communism in North Korea* (1972) includes numerous details of the Party’s increasingly powerful system of control. Significantly, the duo states that one of the Party’s most important objectives in the 1950s was “tapping into” the country’s “local units,” so that the Party’s central guidance was brought “close to the lower Party

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\(^{33}\) ibid.
organs, with the individual member regarded as the first and most essential target of all guidance work.”

Scalapino and Lee’s argument is a classic example of the period’s Cold-War rhetoric against communist and allegedly totalitarian regimes, and their presentation of a monolithic system is unable to scrutinize the complex nature of people’s voluntary and often enthusiastic involvement in state-led projects (the subject of Chapters Two and Three). However, Scalapino and Lee’s analysis does offer a useful insight into the state’s conception of “guidance.” Their interpretation of the term implicates an immensely ‘hands-on’ form of guidance that is intended to reach the smallest units of organization (e.g. a factory sports club). Using the term “guidance” can thus be misleading, as it is more similar to a form of centralized, micro-management. Indeed, the DPRK’s press often boasts about the unification and centralization of the nation’s sports organizations under a single system. In 1956, an article in the Rodongja (Worker’s Journal) describes the numerous challenges of the country’s formerly non-centralized sports system:

… despite the existence of numerous sports clubs in our nation’s [past]… most of them were not organized by people’s occupation and not unified. Consequently, our country’s sports and ch’eyuk initiatives were unable to undergo the appropriate form of specialized and systematic development, and were limited in scale. However, after the founding of our sports association, we were able to unite the dispersed sports clubs and create a system that enables our ch’eyuk enterprise to bloom strongly.

Similar to the case of the Soviet Union and East Germany, virtually all sports organs in the DRPK were organized through an enterprise, especially after 1953. In factories, it was the responsibility of every labourers’ union to execute the decisions of the Central Sports

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34 Robert A. Scalapino and Chong-Sik Lee, Communism in Korea (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 569.
35 “Sŭp'och'ú hyŏphoeran muŏsimyŏ ŏttŏk'e kaiphanŭn'ga,” Rodongja, no. 5 (1956).
Association (CSA)\textsuperscript{37} and in turn, the CSA was accountable to the Central Physical Culture and Sports Guidance Committee (CSGC) – the Party’s highest sports administration. Therefore, until 1958, the state’s most local sports organ was the labour union. However, after the Party’s Central Cabinet Decision no. 15 on December 30, 1958, every factory’s Party Committee (\textit{kongjang}\textit{ tang wiwŏnhoe}) was now directly in charge of implementing the state’s sports programs at both the factory and community level.\textsuperscript{38} Some of the committee’s responsibilities included the construction and maintenance of sports facilities, the organization of inner and inter-factory tournaments, and assisting labourers to apply to their local sports association. The interconnectedness of state-led sports programs and the factory was deliberate, effectively allowing the WPK to extend its existing mechanisms of centralization and mass mobilization through the sports enterprise. The Party’s concept of “guidance” must therefore not be misunderstood as a “hands-off” form of government, but rather a direct one, intended to reach the smallest units of organization.

The Party’s continuous efforts to monopolize the realm of sports are also evident in the DPRK’s Constitution. Sport – from the onset of the DRPK’s foundation – was a fundamental right of citizens. The original 1948 constitution states:

\begin{quote}
Citizens of the DPRK have freedom of speech, the press, association, assembly, mass meetings and demonstration. Citizens are guaranteed the right to organize and unite in democratic political parties, trade unions, cooperative organizations, sports, cultural [sic], technical, scientific and other societies (article 63).\textsuperscript{39}
\end{quote}

Of course, none of these guarantees of freedom reflect the actual situation in the DPRK in 1948. However, it is notable that the constitution maintains a liberal approach to sports in the DPRK, in

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{37}“Sŭp'och’u hyŏphoeran muŏsimyŏ òttŏk'e kaiphanŭn'ga,” \textit{Rodongja}, no. 5 (1956).
\end{flushright}
which sport (or more precisely, *ch’eyuk*) is a fundamental and democratic right of citizens.

Interestingly, the DPRK’s next iteration of the constitution in 1972 reflects a much different approach to sports:

> The State shall thoroughly prepare the people for work and national defense by popularizing physical culture and sport and making it their daily regime [sic], and augment sporting skills to meet our country’s reality and the trend in modern sporting skills [sic] (article 55).\(^{40}\)

In 1972, the constitution displaces *ch’eyuk* as a civil right and instead, treats it as a utilitarian responsibility of the state. The fact that the issue of sports is listed in an independent clause is also an indicator of its increasingly important function in the country. Indeed, from 1948 to 1972, the state enacted considerable reforms in the DPRK’s sports system.

The DPRK’s official newspaper, *Rodong Sinmun*, can offer some information on the dramatic expansion of the state’s sports system. In 1958, an article titled “Naro Paljŏnhanŭn Uri Nara Ch’eyuk, Sŭp’och’û” (The Development Of Our Nation’s Ch’eyuk and Sports Through Me) includes detailed statistical information from 1949 to 1958. In 1958, the number of “accredited” athletes in the DPRK was 248,137; a 444.8% increase from 1949. In addition, the number of official “athletic organizations” (exclusively in the factories, farms, and schools)\(^{41}\) totaled 8,694 and membership was 614,838; a 150% and 149.5% increase from 1955, respectively. The state’s ability to note such exact statistics is comparable to its seemingly meticulous statistics on industry or agriculture. Of course, the state’s statistical information is not completely reliable, and oftentimes, numbers can be inflated to either encourage citizens or impress upper-level WPK supervisors. However, the listed statistics on the nation’s dramatic development in sports can be


\(^{41}\) “Kongwaguk ch’eyuk munhwa paljŏnŭi 10nyŏn,” *Ch’eyukkwa Sŭp’och’û*, no. 5 (1958).
confirmed through the country’s other outlets, and despite some minor inconsistencies, the indication of triple-digit development rates from 1953 to 1958 is consistent throughout.\textsuperscript{42}

By the end of the 1950s, the only means of participating in formal sports or gaining access to adequate sport facilities were through the state’s sports system. Consequently, citizens’ involvement in the state’s sports system offered real benefits in terms of their opportunity to engage in sports – be it for exercise, leisure, or professional purposes. Each member of a sports association (\textit{süp'ot'ũ saõp}), notably, was granted preferential and free access to the association’s equipment and sports facilities. In addition, all members could freely access the association’s sports education materials and enroll in training sessions for the PFE. Significantly, one’s access to specific sports clubs and competitions were all organized through the local sports association.\textsuperscript{43} The exclusive benefits of joining a sports association offset the hassle of earning and maintaining membership to an association. Indeed, the affair of earning membership to a local sports association was tedious. To join, members started out by filling out an application form and submitting it to the association. Then, all applicants had to attend the association’s next general assembly, and pass the association’s entrance requirements to finally become a member. Once registered, it became mandatory for all members to attend the association’s numerous meetings and functions to maintain their membership.\textsuperscript{44} The state’s sports enterprise was therefore extensive and effectively consolidated by 1950, often reaching the smallest units organization at the local level. But, as Chapters Two and Three tries to demonstrate, this did not

\textsuperscript{42} Detailed statistical information on the DPRK’s sports initiatives in the 1950s is extremely common in the pages of \textit{Rodonja} (The Worker’s Newspaper), \textit{Ch'eyukkwa Süp'och'ũ} (Ch’eyuk and Sports), \textit{Ch’eyuk} (in issues from 1960 onwards), and \textit{Chollima}. Perhaps the most reliable source of information comes from the WPK’s annual North Korean Central Yearbook’s (NKCY) and its \textit{ch’eyuk} report (CR). Both are internal government reports that mostly draw its statistics from the nation’s PFE and the DPRK’s sports association system.

\textsuperscript{43} “Süp'och'ũ hyöphoeuran muõsimyö öttõk'e kaiphanûn'ga,” \textit{Rodongja}, no. 5 (1956).

\textsuperscript{44} ibid.
necessarily mean that the state’s control over various aspects of the DPRK’s sports culture was complete and/or exclusive.
CHAPTER TWO:


CHAPTER TWO examines the representation of sports spectacles in the late 1950s. By this time, the DPRK’s state-press was thoroughly pro-Party in nature; as expressions of gratefulness to the Worker’s Party of Korea (WPK), for instance, were consistently incorporated into the content of the text. Sources on the nation’s sports spectacles were especially described in this manner by often highlighting its “revolutionary” atmosphere. Because of this, existing scholarship generally subscribe to the interpretation that sports spectacles in the DPRK were realms of ideological indoctrination, loyalty-building, disciplining – an argument that is certainly not untrue. Still, this interpretation is problematic because it essentially reproduces the state’s discourse on sports’ significance and its “purpose.” The representation of sports spectacles as a noble and revolutionary activity is a part of the of the state’s “dominant narrative.” However, upon closer examination of the state’s sources, examples of the state’s “non-dominant narrative” can also be found, and are often in contrast to the usually ‘picture-perfect’ presentation of the DPRK’s sports enterprise. One example of this was the state’s inability to completely control the realm of sports spectacles. Cases of poor sportsmanship, notably, left spectators in situations that conflicted the state’s (desired) image of sports as a “revolutionary,” “disciplined,” and “socialism-building” activity.

However, the encouragement of loyalty to the WPK was not government’s only important concern in regards to spectator sports; this is another misconception. Beginning in the mid-1950s,

45 The concept of “dominant narrative” is explained in more detail in the next section.
one of the state’s highest priorities was to increase the nation’s sports “technique” *(kisul)*,\(^{46}\) and the role of spectator sports was crucially important to this end. Through spectator sports, the state tried to teach and inspire its audience to become better athletes. The advancement of the nation’s athletic “technique” was so important, in fact, that the state encouraged sports journalists to focus less on political matters and include more, “technical” sports commentary and analysis that can instruct readers on sports “technique.” Indeed, spectators too were eager to learn and enhance their abilities. In fact, some spectators were so enthralled in examining sports “technique” that considerations about the “Party” or sports’ revolutionary significance were forgotten or ignored entirely – at least momentarily. Therefore, this essay attempts to reconsider the common and simplistic interpretation that exclusively sees sports spectacles in the DPRK as a realm of ideological indoctrination and/or mobilization. To be sure, this did occur, but it did so alongside spectators’ enthusiastic interest in sports that was not necessarily non-voluntary or non-genuine; suggesting that although the DPRK’s sports system was virtually monopolized by the state, citizens’ reasons for participating in sports (and their interpretation of its significance) were not necessarily aligned to that of the state’s. The last section then examines the media’s consistent depiction of athletes as patriotic, and heroic soldiers. Considering that the memories and experiences of the Korean War were fresh in minds of North Koreans in the late 1950s, this essay suggests that both the state’s dominant and non-dominant narratives were not entirely constructed by the state, but possibly supplemented and reinforced by people’s everyday experiences. The aim of this essay is therefore to demonstrate that an overreliance on the state’s “dominant narrative” (DN) leads to an incomplete and inaccurate assessment of the north’s sports spectacles in the 1950s, and argues that researchers must examine the state’s DN more

carefully by being more attuned to its use of images and symbols that reflected and resonated in the everyday experiences of North Koreans.

The official newspaper of the WKP, the Rodong Sinmun, consistently uses a charismatic tone in its description of sports spectacles by depicting them as a sign of the nation’s successful ongoing efforts to construct socialism. One article, titled, “Tenth Anniversary of the Republic’s Foundation Sports Festival” in 1958 exemplifies this form of rhetoric clearly. The article triumphantly announces that the DPRK has successfully brought about the “mass adoption” of sports, and points to the nation’s grandiose “mass games” as proof of this. Throughout, the column describes the mass games as an important branch of the north’s ongoing revolution, and claims, “the mass games strongly unite our nation’s revolutionary heritage and powerfully depicts our Chollima people’s struggling efforts to pave the path to socialism.” However, despite the press’ dramatic descriptions, the “revolutionary” atmosphere of sports spectacles was not entirely made-up or imagined by journalists. Indeed, sports spectacles in the DPRK were one of the most literal examples of mass-mobilization in the name of the WPK. Virtually always accompanied by charismatic propaganda banners, songs, and military-style parades, the “mass games” in the DPRK were not dissimilar to the charismatic spectacles that can found in other socialist societies.

Some characteristics of the north’s sports spectacles, nevertheless, were distinct to the DPRK. One example is the “Letter-Delivery Relay (LDR)” (p'yŏnji chŏndal kyeju), an

49 Chollima (a legendary horse in Korean folklore) became the central symbol of the DPRK’s various industrial, agricultural, and cultural development campaigns in the second-half of the 1950s and 1960s.
indigenous event similar to the Olympic Torch ceremony. The LDR was a cross-national event that launched the north’s largest and most important mass sports event in the 1950s: the “8.15 [Liberation] Anniversary Sports Tournament.” Instead of a single torch, though, athletes transferred hundreds of hand-written letters into Morangbong Stadium in P’yŏngyang. The letters of adoration (addressed specifically to Kim Il Sung and the Soviet Union) typically started their journey in multiple regions and entered its final destination (the stadium) in sensational fashion. Sports spectacles such as the LDR suggest that the “revolutionary” nature – or, the spectactularity of mass games were not entirely imagined by the press. On the contrary, it consisted of direct and deliberate performances of mass participation.


Because of the charismatic tone of DPRK’s press, scholars often describe the north’s sport enterprise as an instrument of surveillance, discipline, and/or indoctrination. Of course,


51 In 1958, the “Letter-Relay” was simultaneously launched in Sinŭiju, Kaesŏng, and Pojeonbo.
this description is not entirely untrue. Scholars Jung Woo Lee and Alan Bairner correctly note that the state encouraged sports in an attempt to increase the nation’s labour strength in the 1950s and indeed, the notion of sports, strong-labour, and economic development were closely connected in the DPRK’s literature on its (first) Five-Year Plan. However, the duo does not consider the numerous inherent challenges and conflicts involved in the implementation of sports initiatives – issues that often directly threatened the pursuit of high-productivity (see Chapter Three). Unfortunately, this duo’s line of interpretation continues to be common for three reasons. The first reason is that the “non-dominant narrative” in DPRK sources is underrepresented or unrepresented at all. By “dominant” narrative (DN), this essay refers to the optimistic narrative of success and progress that fills the majority of the DPRK’s press. Or, in other words, it is self-congratulatory. The DN can be further characterized as something that focuses its attention on the Party, its policies, and its central influence and ultimately attributes the nation’s various successes to it. On the other hand, sources that describe some of the nation’s struggles or failures is part of the ‘non-dominant’ narrative (NDN) that offers important insights, such as the challenges of implementing the state’s policies or cases of “undisciplined” behaviour that do not meet the Party’s expectations. Sources that contain no or little references to the Party are another example of NDN. Remarkably, examples of the “non-dominant narrative” are not that uncommon in the 1950s, but examples of them are still tremendously underrepresented. Consequently, discrepancies and/or inconsistencies that exist in the DPRK’s press are left unaddressed or unnoticed, and is the second reason why the state’s dominant narrative is often uncritically reproduced in the field of DPRK studies. Thirdly, not enough consideration is

dedicated to the representation of sources. Consider Charles Armstrong’s monograph *The North Korean Revolution* that also subscribes to the interpretation that sports spectacles were a means of discipline and control as early as the 1940s:

The state [through sports spectacles] seemed to be attempting to create a sense of unity and political cohesion in part through the active involvement of the individual in public, physical displays of bodily conformity…. The well-trained individual body was a synecdoche of, and a prerequisite for, a well-functioning body politic. Both had to be disciplined, strong, and determined.54

Here, Armstrong’s observations are correct in the sense that it encapsulates the general tone of north’s literature on sports. Terms such as “discipline,” “strength,” and “unity” through patriotism are, indeed, often found in the state’s literature on sports.55 The problem, nonetheless, is that his conclusions are simultaneously restricted precisely because of their confinement to the state’s discourse and *its* interpretation of sports’ significance. However, this is not to imply that state sources are not useful, or that this investigation does not use them. On the contrary, this essay contends that this popular interpretation of sports merely captures the state’s dominant or desired narrative of sports, rather than the full spectrum of the press’ stories on sports, and is therefore more representative of the state’s *ideal*. Closer examination of DPRK sources actually

55 The notion of sports being used to instill discipline, foster patriotism, and offer utilitarian benefits (e.g. better health) is commonly and directly stated in the DPRK’s literature. Consider the Party’s official report on sports in the “North Korean Central Yearbook” (*Chosŏnjungangnyŏn'gam*) in 1949: “…The north’s *ch' eyuk* program is becoming stronger to protect the homeland, nurturing our younger generation by instilling strong character and skills. Through *ch' eyuk*, the Republic Government [i.e. the WPK] intends to prepare the people for the protection of the homeland and foster good health and patriotism.” To note another example, this excerpt is from an article in the *Rodongja*: “Each member must diligently adhere to the requirements of the sports association to improve their fitness and discipline (*kyuyul*) in order to support the culturally and morally refined Worker’s Party and the Republic Government’s [sports initiatives].” “Sŭp'och'ū hyŏphoeran muŏsimyŏ ŏttŏk'e kaiphanŭn'ga,” *Rodonja*, no. 5 (1956).
suggests that the state often struggled to control the realm of spectator sports in the manner that it
desired in the late 1950s, let alone the 1940s.

The WPK’s inability to control the conditions of spectator sports was a challenge shared by
governments in other socialist societies.56 Molly W. Johnson’s monograph, *Training New
Socialist Citizens Through Sports*, examines this issue in East Germany. Specifically, her
investigation uncovers the existence of discrepancies in the state’s (desired) presentation of
sports spectacles and athletes’ perceptions of them. Since 1945, the Socialist Unity Party of
Germany (SED) used sports to strengthen the Party’s legitimacy and socialist solidarity – not
dissimilar to the DPRK in the late 1950s. But, interestingly, Johnson’s interview of cyclist Heinz
Ruhlricke reveals that sports spectacles were not necessarily seen by athletes as a politically, or
ideologically significant function:

…[Ruhlricke] showed and described photographs from the East German artistic cycling
championships that featured very large political slogans in the background – so
prominent that they almost dwarfed the photographs – he did not acknowledge these
slogans, he seemed almost puzzled by the question [about propaganda in sports] and
answered: “We wanted to win. It was our goal to win.” …It was clear that for him the
seriousness of the athletic competition at hand far outweighed the presence of political
slogans.57

The former athlete’s comments suggest that he remembers the competition as a sport function
first and foremost, rather than as a realm of indoctrination, since the athlete’s most important and
central concern was *winning* the competition.

Similar to the case of East Germany, the DPRK’s largest sports tournaments often fell on
the dates of important observances (namely, Liberation Day, Independence Day, Party

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56 Cases of poor sportsmanship and unruly behaviour in sports stadiums were a cause of great
concern to the state in the Soviet Union and East Germany. See Mike O’Mahony, *Sports in the
Communism: Behind the East German ‘Miracle’* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 149.
57 Molly Wilkinson Johnson, *Training Socialist Citizens: Sports and the State in East Germany*
Foundation Day… etc.), and served as the centerpiece of the state’s numerous celebratory occasions. However, despite this fact, sources indicate that incidents of inappropriate and unruly conduct in stadiums were – to the great dismay of the state – not uncommon. Therefore, spectators often encountered scenes that directly contradicted the state’s desire to instill discipline (kyuyul) and cultural refinement (munhwajŏgin kosanghan) through sports. Understandably, the most common cause of trouble and disorder was indecent sportsmanship.

Cases of poor sportsmanship were so common, in fact, that some teams earned a reputation for it. One issue of *Ch'eyukkwâ Sŭp'och'ŭ* includes an entire article on this problem. Singling out one especially notorious team, it criticizes the Hannamdo Handball Team’s inappropriate actions at the Haeju Regional Sports Competition in 1959:

One member of the Hannamdo Team (HT), after being defeated by the February Eighth Team (FET)58 in handball, deliberately kicked a ball at a member of the FET and hit him. Because of this unacceptable act, the official ejected them from the stadium. However, as they were leaving, the leader of the HT, comrade Hong Yong Sŏn, blurted out: “The FET is just a minor team, why are we the ones being sent off?” He acted angrily in front of the other athletes. Soon after, other members of the HT joined in and created an unruly scene at the stadium… and after numerous attempts to subdue comrade Hong’s inappropriate actions, he grumbled: “The leadership [sports officials] should treat our team more conscientiously!” He continued to create a disturbance instead of conducting self-reflection and criticism [pansŏng]. The HB maintains a notorious record of indecent conduct at tournaments, such as at last spring’s “Tier Two Federation Tournament” in Sariwŏn and also at the “Laborers’ Sports Competition [in Pyongyang].”59

Evidently, not everyone at the Haeju Regional Sports Competition in 1959 was an exemplary “socialism-building” athlete. Some of them (such as the members of the Hannamdo Team) were consistently crude, disobedient, and uninterested in becoming “model athletes.” The team’s actions do, nonetheless, clearly tell us one thing: winning was their highest priority. Similar to

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Johnson’s profile of the East German cyclist, the Hannamdo Team’s desire to emerge victorious overrode all other considerations – even official rules and expectations. The fact that the Hannamdo team behaved so crudely to the symbolically important February Eighth Team (FET) reveals their indifference to the lofty ideals tied to sports. Established in 1959, the FET is named after the foundation of the Korean People’s Army (KPA) on February 8, 1948 and directly managed by the KPA. Considering the FET’s close connections to the military and its legacy, the team represented one of the centerpieces of the nation’s state-sponsored sports enterprise. Therefore, the Hannamdo Team’s rudeness to the FET can be seen as an act of discontent, disregard, and/or defiance of the nation’s sports system. However, this interpretation assumes that the Hannamdo Team consciously thought of the FET as a symbolically significant team at the time of the incident. On the contrary, if the Hannamdo Team considered the FET as just an ordinary sports team – if only at the time of the incident – this interpretation becomes less justifiable, and in this case, it is more appropriate to see their actions as a response to the outcome of the game. Regardless of their exact thoughts, both cases suggest that the spirit of sports (that the state tried to foster) was sometimes ignored, forgotten, or deliberately undermined because of an athlete or team’s desire to succeed in sports. Consequently, spectators often encountered situations that conflicted the state’s (desired) image of sports as a “disciplined” and “socialism-building” activity. This article clearly represents a departure from the state’s “dominant narrative.” However, it must be noted that the author’s moralizing tone, telling readers that members of the Hannamdo Team should have conducted self-reflection and criticism

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60 The February Eighth Team is not be confused with the April Twenty-Fifth Team, a similar sports club named after the Korean People’s Army’s other (and older) foundation date, April 25, 1932. The older date of the April Twenty-Fifth Team is meant to trace the KPA’s lineage back to Kim Il Sung’s guerrilla activities in Manchuria.
61 Yi, Hang Nae and Kim Tong Sonyon, 188.
(pansŏng) represents a form of the “dominant narrative” that is imbedded in the frame of the text, indicating that examples of both narratives can co-exist in the same text, and do not necessarily manifest as separate entities.

It is incorrect to assume that the encouragement of socialism or loyalty to the WPK through mass participation were the government’s only important concerns regarding spectator sports. The fact is, sports itself, or more precisely, the advancement of the nation’s sports “technique” (kisul) was one of their highest priorities.\(^6\) One of the most direct and clear indicators of this can be found in the WPK’s official collection of progress reports, the Chosŏn (North Korean) Central Yearbook (NKCY). Since at least 1949, each issue of the annual NKCY includes a specific section on the status of sports in the DPRK. Reports between 1949 to the mid 1950s undoubtedly indicate that, initially, mass participation (i.e. accessibility of sports to the masses) and mass mobilization (e.g. military defense/health strengthening through sports) were the most important priorities.\(^6\) However, beginning in 1955, the government steadily shifts the focus of its sports enterprise to the improvement of the nation’s sports technique. The NKCY reports that on November 11, 1955, the Sports Training Department (sŭp’och’uḥullyŏnbu) was established specifically to train leaders and disperse them throughout the country to increase the DPRK’s sports standards. Signs of significant developments in sports-instruction can be found in the 1957 issue, as it reports the creation of seventeen “sports schools” enrolling 4,305 students, alongside the enactment of Central Cabinet Decision no. 14; another legislation described as an

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\(^6\) The advancement of the nation’s sports “technique” was important because of the DPRK’s increasing participation in international sports competitions in the 1950s. Notably, the DPRK was first granted permission to participate in the Olympics by the International Olympic Committee in 1957.

\(^6\) The numerous editions of the annual NKCY (Chosŏnjungangnyŏn'gam) that are referenced in this essay can be found in Yi Hang-nae and Kim Tong-sŏn kongjŏ, Pukhan ch’eyuk charyojip. (Kyŏnggi-do P’aju-si: Han’guk Haksul Chŏngbo, 2004).
effort to “increase [the country’s] sports level.” Reports on “sports technique” increase dramatically after 1957 as it clearly becomes a dominant and central concern of the government’s sports enterprise, and notes concerning this issue can be found in all post-1957 NKCY reports. Interestingly, despite the overwhelming number of sources that indicate the government’s significant investment and interest in the improvement of “sports technique,” this is seldom regarded by existing scholarship as a central concern of the DPRK’s sports enterprise.

Crucial, if not central, to the state’s efforts to improve the nation’s “sports technique” were spectator sports and sports journalism. By showcasing examples of high-caliber sports to spectators and the press, the government sought to raise the nation’s sports standards. To do this, both spectators and journalists were encouraged to observe sports in a manner that was “objective” (kaekkwanjŏk). In fact, the government sometimes discouraged spectators and journalists to consume sports spectacles as a just confirmation of the Party’s achievements or the nation’s progress. On the contrary, spectators were encouraged to observe sports performances carefully and critically in order to learn “technique” and “strategy.” One article in the Chosŏn Kisa (North Korean Journalism) demonstrates this clearly. The article, titled, “More Stories, More Substance: Thoughts on Sports Journalism in Newspapers,” is a thorough and generally harsh criticism of the nation’s press. Wŏn Chong Yŏng, the article’s author, begins in a normal manner, reminding readers of the most recent Central Committee Decision in December 1958 to “further supplement the nation’s sports and ch’eyuk enterprise in order to increase [sports] technique.” However, soon after his obligatory nod to the Party, Wŏn gets to the crux of the

64 Korean Worker’s Party, Chosŏnjungangnyŏn’gam (P’yŏngyang, 1957).
65 See footnote no. 62.
matter: journalism’s contribution to sports. He notes: “… our reporters’ increasingly scientific coverage of sports is directly contributing to the [DPRK’s sports] enterprise. 67 By “scientific coverage,” Wŏn is referring specifically to a reporter’s ability to capture the technical aspects of sports in a manner that enables readers to learn and improve their own athletic abilities. He commends the reportage of the Rodong Sinmun and Pyongyang Sinmun as staple examples, and notes, “Pyongyang Sinmun offers more specialty columns on sports and employs more sports commenters that offer excellent commentaries – consequently, it raises the nation’s interest and abilities in sports. Pyongyang Sinmun is the most professional and sports-specific newspaper; other newspapers should imitate its example.”

However, the column’s enthusiastic tone ends abruptly after the introduction, and the remainder of Wŏn’s article is a lengthy and unabashedly critical condemnation of the state of sports journalism in the DPRK. Throughout, the critic’s central message is clear: reporters should focus far less on the nature of the sports event (such as participation numbers, stadium atmosphere, results) and instead, report more specifically on sports itself (such as technique, team strategies, play-by-play commentary). He includes a direct passage from an October 15 issue of the Kangwŏn Ilbo as an example of unacceptable sports journalism, and states: “…although this passage is a little long, it is an exact reprint of the original.” The sample excerpt reads:

[Kangwŏn Ilbo:] The [“letter”] relay that started the competition demonstrated the brilliant and enlightening progression of our nation’s sports-ch’eyuk enterprise – all due to our Party’s precise sports-policies. The competition especially demonstrated the mass-popularization of sports culture [che’yuk munhwa] and collectivist [chiptanjuūijŏk] vitality amongst labourers; all of this clearly reflects the integration of sports into the labourers’ everyday lifestyle. Therefore, the Party’s sensible leadership is a demonstration of the magnificent spirit of Chollima that leads us towards the high

67 The exact translation for “scientific coverage” is actually “quantitative and qualitative.”
This excerpt is a classic example of the DPRK’s self-congratulatory discourse, full of flowery adjectives that describe the Party’s numerous accomplishments. Significantly, this short passage manages to plug-in almost all of the state’s most important expressions of the time, including references to “mass-popularization,” “Chollima,” “labourer-lifestyle” and “collectivist lifestyle.” However, despite this textbook example of pro-Party journalism, Comrade Wŏn criticizes it entirely, and states: “… If sports journalism is to be conducted in this manner, then reporters don’t need to go to the sports stadium. He can simply use a telephone to obtain information on the competitors… and easily obtain statistical information… Sports reporters are unable to capture the distinct, technical aspects of sports.” Thus, Wŏn is essentially telling reporters – albeit indirectly – to reduce their use of non-sports-specific rhetoric. Of course, he does not directly assert that enthusiastic references to the WPK are unnecessary or undesirable. But, it is clear that focusing exclusively on this was indirectly discouraged. He therefore directs reporters to include more “technical” sports commentary that can inform and assist athletes to improve their “technique.” Wŏn’s suggestion that journalists reduce their emphasis on non-sports related content is reiterated in different section. Beginning in the mid-1950s, morning jogs at factories, farms, and schools were heavily encouraged by the state. Jogging to “revolutionary historic battlefields” (hyŏngmyŏng chŏnjikchi) and other significant locations to educate laborers and students on the “Party’s revolutionary heritage” was especially common at this time – an activity that Wŏn acknowledges as being important and constructive. Regardless of this fact, he still

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68 (Chapter Three examines the popularity of morning jogs at length.)
69 Some of the “revolutionary” locations noted by Comrade Wŏn are Pochŏnbo Battlefield (location of anti-Japanese combat on June 6, 1937, led by Kim Il Sung and Ch'oe Hyŏn) and Man'gyŏngdae, the alleged birthplace of Kim Il Sung.
tells reporters that focusing solely on the ‘pilgrimage’ aspect of sports is an unacceptable and
tired trend in sports journalism. Wŏn’s article therefore demonstrates that beginning in the
second-half of the 1950s onwards, increasing the DPRK’s “sports technique” was a crucial if not
central concern of the state’s sports enterprise – and to do this, the state sometimes tried to
redirect the audience’s attention to sports itself.

FIGURE 2 – 2. “Exercise (ch’eyuk) Trip to Poch’ŏnbo Battlefield.” Images depicting
‘pilgrimage jogs’ to historic battlefields (see footnote no. 23). Ch’eyukkwa Süp’och’ũ no. 7
(1959).

Because Comrade Wŏn’s article is an assessment of the DPRK’s press and its
presentation of spectator sports, it should not be read as commentary on the experiences of
spectators. Journalists were undoubtedly influenced by direct and indirect expectations to include
pro-WPK content in their columns. Spectators (i.e. non-members of the press), on the other hand,
did not necessarily interpret or describe sports in this manner. In fact, the ideologically charged
atmosphere of sports spectacles (in the form of sports anthems, letter-relays, banners,
commemorative tournaments) hardly distracted or interfered in spectators’ capacity to focus on sports itself.

One example of this can be found in a guest-contributed column in a 1958 issue of *Ch’eyukkwa Sǔp’och’ŭ*. Submitted by Chŏng Tae Chin, then a student of Kim Chaek University of Technology in P’yŏngyang, the column is a recollection of his experiences at the Sixth World Festival of Youth and Students (WFYS) in Moscow in 1957. The WFYS was undoubtedly one of the world’s largest and most grandiose spectacles of its time. One of the WFYS’s most important aims, to be sure, was to dazzle and impress its attendants, in large due to the fact that the Soviet Union and the U.S. were in the middle of a cultural Cold War. Russia’s Komsomol was therefore determined to use the WFYS to demonstrate “the superiority of socialist culture over [that of] the bourgeoisie.” Surprisingly though, despite the fact that Chŏng and his teammates were completely surrounded by the celebration of socialism, the column does not reflect this atmosphere. On the contrary, it appears that Chŏng’s memory of the WFYS is completely dominated by sports. His reflection column, titled, “The Pursuit of Becoming a Master,” recounts his experience at an unforgettable basketball game at the WFYS:

Because of one influential moment in my life, I’ve decided to become a [sports] master. This moment took place at the Sixth WFYS in Moscow in 1957… There, I exhilaratingly

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71 The WFYS hosted roughly around 30,000 delegates (excluding Russian attendees) from 130 different countries. To contextualize the WFYS’s scale at the time, the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne only hosted about 3,300 participants from 67 countries.
72 Roughly 100 DPRK athletes attended the WFYS. “Hwansong kyŏnggi taehoe,” *Rodong Sinmun*, July 9, 1957, 4.
73 Margaret Peacock, “The Perils of Building Cold War Consensus at the 1957 Moscow World Festival of Youth and Students,” *Cold War History* 12, no. 3 (2012): 520. Specific details of the WFYS’s scale and its cultural significance can be found in this article. One section notes: “The Komsomol…and the [Young] Pioneers planted 250,000 trees and 2,000,000 shrubs around the city. They repaired 2500 sports grounds, set up 12,000 ice cream booths, and bred 10,000 doves (or pigeons depending on the source) to be released on opening day.” The capital’s cityscape and architecture were also significantly overhauled and remodeled in anticipation of the WFYS.
witnessed the Soviet Team’s ingenuity and dexterity. Amongst them was one particular athlete that stands out in my memory, and I’ll never forget him… Throughout the entire game, I couldn’t take my eyes off of him. I carefully observed each and every one of his movements. He was a master that could score anywhere the ball was thrown to him… and although he wasn’t very tall, his body was extremely agile. His greatest strength was his long-range offensive abilities; he could assess the situation in a short time, find an opening and score… [During] tip-offs, he was a high jumper, remaining in the air for a long time and reacting right before he landed… Remembering this athlete’s acrobatic movements, I imagine the immense determination needed to reach his degree of skillfulness.

Chŏng’s reflection of the WFYS demonstrates his complete engrossment in sports. His article’s specific encapsulation of the athlete’s “techniques” is exactly the sort of “good” sports journalism that the Chosŏn Kisa article (referenced earlier) endorses. However, the most interesting thing about Chŏng’s column is its complete absence of references to socialism or the WPK – an almost unimaginable fact considering the atmosphere of the WFYS. His column also does not endorse the superiority of socialist sports, nor does it express the slightest sign of gratitude to the Party, despite the almost certain fact that Chŏng’s trip to the USSR was funded by the state. Instead, the column focuses exclusively on the athlete’s “technique” and Chŏng’s self-designed training regiment. The only hint of patriotism is the author’s pledge to become the nation’s best, “master” athlete.

74 In fact, on the same day of the WFYS’s opening ceremony on July 28, 1957, the Rodong Sinmun includes an article titled, “The Great Strength of the Socialist Bloc’s Economic Cooperation” that proudly praises the Soviet Union as the “leader” of the Socialist Bloc.
Compared to Chŏng’s personal narrative, the Rodong Sinmun’s coverage of the WFYS is markedly more patriotic, describing the DPRK athletes as “… Representatives of our nation’s people that defended our country’s freedom and independence…” 75 According to this column, one of the festival’s highlights was Nikolai Romanov’s (the chairman of the WFYS in 1957) statement to the press, in which he welcomes the DPRK team by stating: “I still remember the incredible courage that our North Korean comrades demonstrated during the National Liberation War [The Korean War]. Today, however, I’ve seen a different side of them as happy, life-enjoying, and song-loving people.” The column also recounts the DPRK team’s dramatic performance at the WFYS’s opening ceremony that included dancing and singing in their colorful chosŏnot. 76 Under the same title, the Rodong Sinmun features another article on the WFYS in its next issue that is no less dramatic. Here, the column describes the WFYS as a

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75 “Che6ch'a sege ch'öngnyŏn haksaengch'ukchŏnjeō” [At The Sixth World Festival of Youth and Students] Rodong Sinmun, August 1, 1957, 4.
76 Chosŏnot (literally translated as “Chosŏn clothes”) is traditional Korean clothing, referred to as hankok by South Koreans.
gathering of “socialist families” that “longs for the reunification of Korea.” The column also notes some of the slogans shouted aloud, such as, “Korea Hurrah!” [chosŏn manse] and “Triumph of Socialism Hurrah!” In this manner, the Rodong Sinmun’s patriotic depiction of the WFYS is in contrast to Comrade Chŏng’s description of the event, which focuses exclusively on sports. His entirely non-political column is, of course, an uncommon example of the DPRK’s press. However, Chŏng’s reflection article nonetheless demonstrates that the political and patriotic atmosphere of the WFYS did not necessarily distract him from focusing on sports, nor did it necessarily dominate his thoughts during the game. In fact, in this case, it appears that political considerations were entirely overshadowed or ignored by Chŏng’s enthrallment in sports. Spectators thus did not always interpret sports in the patriotic or political manner that was characteristic of the press, suggesting that sports spectacles were more than a just a realm of political indoctrination.

That being said, this essay does not assert that political indoctrination did not occur at sports spectacles. Nor does it contend that spectators’ experiences were in complete isolation of political influences. On the contrary, as noted earlier, some of the most literal and elaborate examples of pro-Party propaganda and participation can be found in sports. Furthermore, even if sports spectacles were “purely” consumed (theoretically) in a non-political manner, they still served a beneficial purpose for the Party. In the same manner that people’s enthrallment in sports left them little time to ponder on politics, it also distracted them from the country’s numerous struggles and challenges. The DPRK’s post-Korean War reconstruction period in the 1950s was undoubtedly a labour-intensive and stressful time, especially considering the heavy loss of lives

77 “Che6ch'a sege ch’ŏngnyŏn hakaengch'ukchŏnjeŏ,” Rodong Sinmun, August 8, 1957.
during the Korean War.\textsuperscript{78} However, we rarely consider the existence of stress outlets and/or distractions that cater to the difficult lives of North Koreans. The Republic of Korea’s Ministry of Reunification, for instance, released a report on DPRK sports in 2008 that states: “In regards to sports in the DPRK… the enhancement of health or leisure is not its primary aim; its main purpose is to accomplish political and ideological objectives.”\textsuperscript{79} Here, the “leisure” or entertainment component of sports in the DPRK is made distinct from its “political” and “ideological” ones, and it is because of this that sports continues to be seen in a strictly utilitarian sense. To see people’s consumption of sports spectacles as just a distraction or stress outlet, nonetheless, is also incorrect, as it cannot sufficiently scrutinize the complex and dynamic role of sports in the creation and reinforcement of a collective identity.

Despite the consistent inclusion of socialist and pro-Party discourse in the press’ representation of sports, the instilment and reinforcement of patriotism was perhaps the most central characteristic of the DPRK’s representations of sports spectacles and athletes in the late 1950s. Benedict Anderson, among others, was certainly correct in noting that the end of nationalism was “not remotely in sight,” despite the dramatic rise of Marxist and/or Leninist societies throughout the twentieth-century that directly condemned it.\textsuperscript{80} Indeed, for societies that based itself on Marxist theory, nationalism was an “uncomfortable anomaly.”\textsuperscript{81} The DPRK is a classic example of this, condemning nationalism as a remnant of bourgeois ideology, preferring


\textsuperscript{79} Sŏng Mun Chŏng, \textit{Pukhanŭi ch'eyuksil't'ae}, (Sôul: Tongilbu T'ongilgyoyugwin, 2008), 7.


instead to use the term “socialistic patriotism” to describe its collective identity-building practices.\textsuperscript{82} One thing that is for certain is that sports spectacles (and the athletes that appeared in them) in the DPRK were a crucial component of the state’s efforts to foster mass patriotism for the “homeland” (\textit{choguk}). Of course, the notion that sports spectacles were utilized to rally supporters and reinforce the concept of a national, collective identity is hardly original. Walter Benjamin’s notion of the ‘aesthetization of politics,’ in particular, has strengthened the allure of this interpretation.\textsuperscript{83} However, this mode of analysis cannot sufficiently account for people’s subjectivity. Therefore, it might be more fruitful to consider the construction and appropriation of specific symbols in the state’s representation of sports spectacles and that were, in turn, co-constructed and confirmed through people’s personal, everyday experiences.\textsuperscript{84}

Specifically, the DPRK’s representations of sports spectacles consistently included symbols and sentiments of the Korean War – an emotional occurrence that was undoubtedly fresh in the minds and surroundings of North Koreans in the 1950s. Representations of DPRK athletes as heroic “soldiers” that embody the same sort of courageous “fighting” spirit were especially common in the late 1950s. In an article titled, “The Development of Our Republic’s Sports Culture in the Past Decade” from 1959, the reporter proudly reminds readers of the DPRK


athletes that continued to attend international sports competitions in the middle of the Korean War. He notes:

…During a time of life and death in the Homeland Liberation War [Korean War] against our enemies, the fact that our nation’s athletes competed in the World Festival of Youth and Students on two different occasions\textsuperscript{85} is proof [of the nation’s dedication to sports]. There, our Chosŏn homeland’s athletes demonstrated our people’s heroic spirit and great sports technique…\textsuperscript{86}

By depicting these athletes’ as heroic figures for representing the DPRK throughout the Korean War, it appears that their responsibilities as athletes were no less important or noble than that of soldiers fighting on the front.

The DPRK’s highest military decoration, “Hero of the Republic” (konghwaguk yŏngung), was frequently presented to athletes, suggesting once again that athletes were considered in the same line as courageous and patriotic soldiers. Representations of this can be found a running series of articles in Ch’eyukkwa Sūp’och’ŭ called, “Hero of the Republic Produced From Line of Athletes.” One example from this series, titled, “The Homeland’s Faithful Son, Cho Kun Sil,” details an athlete’s heroism in the Korean War.\textsuperscript{87} This article profiles a teenager named Cho Kun Sil from Wŏnsan. Cho is presented as a model student and talented footballer in middle and high school. However, after the sudden destruction of his school by an American bomb near the beginning of the war, he enlisted in the People’s Army to “avenge” his community. The story then jumps to the famous battle of Hill 902.4. Cho, a member of 236\textsuperscript{th} heavy-machine gun regiment, was positioned on top of the hill, defending an almost impossible assault from U.S. soldiers. Because of his critical injuries, Cho’s commander ordered him to retire from the front, but he courageously refused. Resuming his machine-gun post on the top of the hill, he continued

\textsuperscript{85} (Once in 1951 in East Berlin, East Germany and again in 1953 in Bucharest, Romania.)
to fend off incoming soldiers and in the end, dies doing so. The article’s closing sentence reads:

“Cho, the homeland’s faithful son, died heroically defending the homeland. However, Cho, who selflessly sacrificed his life for the homeland, continues to exist eternally in our hearts. Our [nation’s] athletes continue to endlessly honour him and proudly remember soldier Cho’s immortal heroism.” Of course, nothing can confirm the accuracy of the article’s account of Cho’s heroism, but nonetheless, it is a clear and common example of the press’ presentation of the heroic, ‘athlete-soldier.’ Ironically, considering the fact that this article is featured in a sports journal, its account of Cho’s tale contains almost nothing on sports. The article’s sole reference to sports is its mention of Cho being a talented footballer in school – the rest is about the allegedly epic battle of Hill 902.4. Nonetheless, the title of the series implies that he is a “Hero of the Republic Produced From The Line of Athletes;” suggesting that his heroism as a solider is, by some means, connected to sports.
Returning to this essay’s initial discussion on “dominant narratives” in the DPRK’s literature, representations of athletes as being heroic, patriotic soldiers is undoubtedly a part of the state’s “dominant narrative.” Thus far, this essay has argued that the “dominant narrative” does not capture the full spectrum of the north’s sports culture – mainly because most of it is non-informative, and repetitive propaganda. However, in spite of this, it is important to be mindful of the simultaneity of representations that are especially present in the “dominant narrative.” In regards to the subject of this essay, the phenomenon of the ‘athlete-solider’ can be interpreted as the state’s effort to instill patriotism by dramatically recreating the image or ‘aura’ of heroic soldiers in the realm of sports spectacles. Considering the fact that people’s personal
experiences of the Korean War were undoubtedly vivid and perhaps still being experienced in the late 1950s, it is important to think about how depictions of the “soldier-athlete” might not have been entirely constructed or reinforced by the state. How many participants of the DPRK’s numerous sports spectacles (in the 1950s) had lost a family member in the Korean War? How many were veterans? Considering the fact that the DPRK’s cityscape was completely incinerated by U.S. carpet-bombing, how many participants continued to see and experience post-war reconstruction efforts in their daily, everyday lives? Though it is almost certain that the state occupied a leading role in fanning the flame of patriotism, the populace’s recent and ongoing experiences of the recent Korean War ensured that the state’s patriotic presentation of sports spectacles and athletes were reinforced by their everyday experiences.

Unfortunately, this project is unable to fully engage in an analysis of people’s personal experiences vis-à-vis the state’s media representation of important symbols and imagery, mainly because it requires access to personal sources from the late 1950s that was not published or monitored by the state (e.g. letters, interviews, diaries…etc.). However, considering that this thesis is limited to the examination of state sources, this essay has tried to demonstrate that the state’s numerous media outlets were not unitary and/or synchronized at all times. The current scholarship’s overreliance on the state’s “dominant narrative” (DN) has led to an incomplete and inaccurate assessment of the north’s sports spectacles in the 1950s. Consequently, existing studies are often confined to the state’s official discourse, and tend to reproduce the state’s ideal. Examples of the state’s “non-dominant narrative” (NDN) were not uncommon in the late 1950s, and they demonstrate that sports spectacles in the DPRK were not just venues of mass

88 See footnote no. 78.
indoctrination. Sports spectacles were a crucial component of the state’s desire to increase the DPRK’s sports “technique,” which was a central concern of the state’s sports enterprise. In order to do this, it was sometimes necessary for the state to redirect the audience’s (and the media’s) attention to sports itself, rather than on its socio-cultural or political significance. Overall, this essay has maintained the necessity of being of more attuned to simultaneous representations in the state’s DM. By examining the media’s consistent presentation of the heroic “athlete-soldier” and the Korean War vis-à-vis sports spectacles, this essay suggests that the state’s DM’s (or propaganda) was not entirely constructed by the state, but also supplemented and reinforced by people’s everyday experiences. This calls for a reconsideration of our approach to the state’s DM and its role in the scholarship on the DPRK.
CHAPTER THREE:

“IF YOU’RE GOOD AT SPORTS, YOU’RE GOOD AT WORK:”

CHAPTER THREE examines the organization and representation of factory-sports in the context of the north’s intense Stakhanovist culture in 1958 and 1959. The first section provides a brief historical survey of the north’s ambitious economic development campaigns in the 1950s, and then moves on to examine the organization of sports programs in factories. Specifically, this section focuses on the factory’s rather competitive sports system and its bestowment of social prestige to talented factory-athletes. Since one’s social prestige in the factory was closely dependent on his/her reputation as a “good laborer,” literature on factory-sports often contain indirect and direct correlations that “good athletes” are also inherently “good laborers.” The second section then examines the challenges of implementing the state’s ambitious factory-sports initiatives. One of the most common causes of tension was the debate on the actual benefits of factory-sports to productivity, as some thought that it actually hindered it. Specifically, the issue of a factory’s daily/weekly allocation of time to sports was a particularly common cause of contestation. Some felt that less time should be dedicated to factory-sports. However, contrary to such concerns, sources in the 1950s explicitly present “production” as the ultimate aim of factory-sports, and clearly includes the activity as an important element of the country’s numerous production campaigns. Representations of sports, in particular, fell under the large symbolic umbrella of the Ch’ollima Campaign; undoubtedly one of the DPRK’s most important production and political movements of the 1950s. Therefore, the overall objective of this section is to illustrate the centrality of production symbols in the media’s coverage of factory sports. The ultra-prevalence of state-sponsored symbols (such as Ch’ollima) in the realm of sport supports
one of this thesis’ overall arguments that the WPK’s system of indoctrination was pervasive, extensive, and real (though, by no means complete) – even as early as 1958. However, the appropriation and construction of symbols were not limited to the highest levels of the WPK. This essay maintains that state-sponsored symbols were also co-constructed and co-appropriated by lower-level state organs and citizens (via journalism, banners, and factory leaflets) to advance their own agendas in factories. This leads to this essay’s final section on the issue of sports journalism in the DPRK, and attempts to reconsider and problematize the concept of “state media” as a direct outlet of the Party’s interests. Contrary to this, it argues that the Party’s policies were sometimes open to interpretation and re-represented by press based on their understanding of them.

The late 1950s was an intense but relatively productive time of economic development in the DPRK. It is important to remember that during this period, the north’s inhabitants only recently emerged out of a bloody civil war defending the DPRK, and moreover, many of the most stringent opponents of socialism and/or the Party already left to the south shortly before or after the war. By the end of the decade, the DPRK’s basic infrastructure was largely rebuilt, literacy rates rose, and nation’s overall production levels exceeded that of pre-war period for the

The seemingly intense boost in productivity was largely due to the nation’s numerous economic development campaigns. The DPRK’s first “Five-Year Plan,” modeled largely on the Soviet Union’s, was launched in 1956, and around the same time, images of the legendary horse, *Ch'ŏllima*, gradually became the north’s icon of the decade; symbolizing its desire to launch a miraculous economical leap into socialism. Research on the DRPK’s numerous economic movements, *Stakhanovism* in the factories, and the state’s promotion of “labour heroes” in the 1950s has already been conducted. But, so far, little scholarship has focused on the symbolic aspects of the north’s economic development initiatives.

Indeed, the majority of the DPRK’s journal articles are on serious subjects about the nation’s revolutionary developments. However, many light-hearted and even humorous pieces can also be found. One column in the *Rodongja* (The Worker’s Journal), for instance, features a short comedy about a factory man’s attempts to woo a female colleague. The comedy, titled, “Kŭnŭn Yumyŏnghan Sŏnsuida” (He’s a Famous Athlete), takes place outside of the factory; a man grudgingly braves the winter elements as he waits to flirt with a certain woman once she comes outside. When she finally appears, the two engage in a light conversation about sports,

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91 The adverse, long-term economic repercussions felt in the 1960s due to the north’s aggressive production campaigns is a separate issue of consideration.
93 *Ch'ŏllima*, seemingly first mentioned by Kim Il Sung in December 1956, did not become a full-fledged economic “movement” until about 1958. China’s economic movement, “The Great Leap Forward,” launched by Mao Zedong in 1958, was certainly a large influence in the symbol’s transformation into one of the DPRK’s most important symbol of economic development.
and the woman comments: “I’m really envious of athletes and they have my respect.” The man, in response, puffs out his chest and states that he is actually a professional footballer. His statements initially impress the woman. Humourously, however, she soon discovers that he is lying, and identifies him as one of the factory’s most lazy and irresponsible men. She then condescendingly reminds him of his numerous excuses to escape his duties, such as going home because of a headache, or skipping-out on the factory’s “study sessions” (haksūphoe) in order to be at his sister or brother’s wedding. Consequently, he is harshly rejected because of his infamously poor discipline. The article, as humorous as it is, nonetheless indicates the attractiveness of an (real) athlete to the opposite sex, and clearly demonstrates the social implications of people’s involvement in factory sports. Furthermore, it is important to note the article’s insinuation that one cannot be a “good athlete” unless he/she is not also a “good laborer” (il charhanŭn rodongja), since the text itself never directly discloses that the man is an imposter.

The female protagonist only discovers that the man is not professional footballer by recognizing him as the factory’s most “lazy” underachiever – which was, as the next section demonstrates, a common logical correlation in the state’s numerous articles on factory sports.

Indeed, one’s active involvement in factory sports was closely tied to his/her reputation as a “good laborer.” Oftentimes, factories ran their own in-house sports system to recognize the achievements of exceptional athletes. An example of this system can be found in one of DPRK’s oldest and largest factories, the Pon'gung Chemicals Factory in South Hamgyong Province; first established in 1935 under the colonial government. The chair of the factory’s sports team (ch'eyuktan), comrade Kim Byŏng Min, details the dramatic growth of the factory’s sports and
cultural lifestyle (*munhwa saenghwal*) in a 1958 issue of *Ch'eyukkwa Sŭp'och'ū*.96 The Pon’gung Factory’s impressive sports facilities included sixty-six exercise courts,97 thirty chin-up bars, and twenty parallel bars. In addition, the factory’s sports committee oversaw the organization of an inner-factory tournament in which each department entered as a team. The quarterly tournament was not only a form of recreation, but also an important event to officially determine the factory’s top-tier athletes, since each department only selected their best athletes to compete in the tournament. Simultaneously, the event also served as a type of try-out session for the factory’s elite “A” and “B” teams.98 The chemical factory’s internal sports system was therefore largely hierarchal: beginning in the intra-department recreational level, then the competitive inter-department level, and finally the factory’s elite “A” and “B” levels. Interestingly, this is in contrast to the Party’s official emphasis on ‘sports for the masses,’ as this particular factory’s internal sports system was often competitive, and increasingly exclusive towards the upper tiers.

Comrade Chu Jae Gil, a member of the Pon'gung factory’s sports team, notes that its elite athletes are “well-known” throughout the factory as “model laborers.” The presentation of factory-athletes in this manner was undoubtedly largely due to the promotion efforts of the sports committee. One of the committee’s responsibilities, notably, was to install and maintain a “sports cabinet” on the premises of the factory – a sort of hall of fame to showcase the names, pictures, and stories of the factory’s notable athletes. However, to be included in the cabinet, athleticism alone was insufficient; as comrade Chu states: “No matter how good an athlete is, if he/she does not excel in the factory’s production enterprise (*saengsan saŏp*), their pictures or stories cannot

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97 The term “exercise courts” (*undongjang*) can refer to various types of venues, from a simple gym to a full-size basketball court or football field.
98 The “A” and “B” teams represented the factory in regional, provincial, and national inter-factory competitions.
be included in the sports cabinet.” The cabinet featured model “worker-athletes” such as 
comrade Yi Tong-Suk; a member of the volleyball team and consistent achiever of over 110% of 
his production quota, and comrade Sŏn Su-In; a member of the basketball team and “model 
laborer” to all her female colleagues. Sports cabinets existed in other factories and functioned in 
a similar manner. Comrade Pak Ki-Sŏk, the chair of the Pyongyang Textile Machinery Plant’s 
sports committee, similarly notes that its cabinet includes the “stories and images of comrades 
that set new records at the factory’s sports tournaments and also excel in their respective jobs.”

Therefore, the Stakhanovite ethic of overachievement was encouraged on both sports courts and 
the factory floor. Unsurprisingly then, one of the Pon’gung Factory’s motivational mottos was: 
“If you’re good at sports, you’re also good at work.” Factory-sports was thus often idealized as a 
demonstration of productivity, and as such, one’s active involvement in sports was apparently an 
important element of his/her overall reputation on the factory floor.

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99 Chu Chae Kil, “Uri kongjang ch’eyugūi kwagōwa onŭl,” Ch’eyukkwawŏn’gok, no. 5 (1958): 
10 – 11.
The articles in the *Rodongja* on factory sports offer some useful information about the DPRK’s factory-sports culture. However, the challenge is that our analysis of this information might be limited to the same terms and conceptions that are laid out in state sources.  

So far, our sources can inform us about the existence of an in-house sports system that oversaw various aspects of a factory’s sports culture, such as the organization of tournaments, division of sports tiers, and the promotion of high-caliber athletes. In addition, it suggests that elite athletes were bestowed a certain degree of professional and social prestige in the factory. Consequently, this information conveys the image of a factory-sports environment that offers members tangible incentives and opportunities to voluntarily involve themselves in sports, rather than an environment that might be driven by coercion or strong obligation. However, sports in the factory might not have been as successful, desirable, or as important as our sources suggest. That said, instead of delving into a common (and tired) debate about genuine support versus coercion,

it might be more productive to consider the co-existence of both factors in the north’s factories, and moreover, rather than to concentrate on the reliability of state sources, it might be more fruitful to further examine the press’ consistent correlation of sports and productivity vis-à-vis the historical context of the DPRK’s economic development initiatives.

Scholarship on the Soviet Union can offer some insights on the intricate culture of socialist factories. Stephan Kotkin’s *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization*, set in 1930s Stalinist Soviet Union, considers the influence of one’s occupational history, family background, and a variety of other factors that influence his/her socio-economic status. To essentialize one of his most important points, Kotkin demonstrates that a spectrum of unique, socialist identities existed in the Soviet Union, despite everyone’s outwardly egalitarian title of “comrade.” He therefore argues that people’s participation in the factory’s socialist system was not driven primarily by fear or coercion, nor did it offer participants diverse and free opportunities. Rejecting both extremes, Kotkin claims that a more dynamic phenomenon was involved, and argues that Russians in the Soviet Union consciously navigated through the customs of the state’s socialist system to negotiate their limited, but not completely restricted opportunities. He therefore asserts that people’s participation in Stalinism in the 1930s was driven largely by their desire to seize new (but limited) opportunities to define own identity and life, since the alternative was to openly resist the state – a choice that usually offered grim prospects.

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102 Kotkin, 220 – 237. Kotkin uses the concept “speaking Bolshevik” to describe citizens’ compliant, rule-abiding practices that created a culture of social identification based on the state’s official language and expectations. Because of this practice, he notes, “the state was able to appropriate the basis for social solidarity…” However, the practice of social identification by “speaking Bolshevik” also permitted some citizens to negotiate and appropriate the terms of the state (in limited ways).

103 The terms and conditions of one’s identity were, however, ultimately controlled and defined by the state, and therefore “render[ed] opposition impossible.” Kotkin, 236.
Similarly, historian Alf Lüdtke also considers opportunistic factors vis-à-vis people’s behavior in the factory. However, he suggests that scholars must assess more than just economic, social, and ideological motivations, or, as he calls it, “calculated interests,” and insists that one must also consider the influence of “personal experiences.” He asserts:

[Scholarship] that stress the system of rule, ideology, and calculated interests, tend to ignore the patchwork of practices and orientations which people co-produce and in which they themselves live and operate. It is the dynamic of simultaneity [emphasis added] of dependence and independent or self-willed action that people act out as compliant acceptance and active complicity.  

Lüdtke’s notion of simultaneity is critical because it not only broadens the multiplicity of factors that can influence people’s behaviors, but also combines them into multi-significant ones. He exemplifies the notion of simultaneity in his analysis of people’s active and often enthusiastic participation in factories in Nazi Germany. Similar to Stephan Kotkin’s observation of Soviet factories, Lüdtke notes that, despite the factory’s limited opportunities and stringent demands, “people [in Germany] appropriate[d] the conditions of their life and survival” and made those conditions their own. Crucially, he maintains that this form of appropriation cannot occur out of one’s own free will. Rather, in reference to Karl Marx, he maintains “appropriation works through symbols, and simultaneously has a formative impact in shaping those symbols.”

Lüdtke uses Germany’s patriotic notion of deutsche Qualitätsarbeit (the belief in the superiority of German labour and industry) as an example of co-construction and co-appropriation of state-endorsed symbols. The Third Reich’s propaganda campaigns on deutsche Qualitätsarbeit gave Germans a sense of pride in their difficult labour situations. Simultaneously, the same ideas of

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105 Lüdtke, 90.
106 Lüdtke, 85.
107 Lüdtke, 85.
"Deutsche Qualitätsarbeit" also found refuge in the advancement of laborers’ own interests, such as the installation of new shower facilities at the factory, or an increase in performance-based wages.\(^{108}\) Therefore, the consideration of both one’s “calculated” as well as “experienced” motives are both involved in the confirmation and construction of symbols endorsed by the state. Lüdtke’s notion of simultaneity therefore distills the influence of both state-led indoctrination and self-interested motives through the personal experience.\(^{109}\) Returning our focus to the DPRK, this approach is useful because it can demonstrate that the DPRK’s system of indoctrination was not only pervasive, but also largely persuasive. Simultaneously, it enables us to consider people’s involvement in the co-construction and co-appropriation of the state’s symbols of indoctrination. However, to employ this form of analysis, we must first consider some of the inherent challenges of the DPRK’s factory-sports system.

DPRK factories in the 1950s often struggled to implement the state’s numerous and ambitious initiatives. Chee Hyung Kim’s dissertation focuses specifically on the north’s factories in the 1950s, and examines this issue in-depth.\(^{110}\) Relying heavily on the theories of Henri Lefebvre, Kim suggests that the “totality” of everyday life can best illustrate the inherent challenges of socialist factories.\(^{111}\) He notes that “totality” contains two entities, the “ideological field of symbolic construction” (i.e. the state’s expectations) and the “practical field of production and administration” (i.e. the actual implementation of the state’s expectations). However, the essence of totality is inherently incomplete because it is always “tested” in the

\(^{108}\) Lüdtke, 90.


\(^{111}\) By “totality,” Kim refers to the state’s expectations about virtually every aspect of society that “play out” in the realm of the “everyday.”
realm of the “everyday,” and here, the needs of the state and social needs confront each other.\textsuperscript{112} Therefore, Kim argues that ‘everyday life’ in the DPRK was ultimately characterized by struggle, since a factory’s realistic capabilities never met the state’s ambitious production expectations. He points specifically to the north’s various economic development campaigns in the 1950s as an example of this form of struggle, and demonstrates that their overtly aggressive nature was, at times, counterproductive.\textsuperscript{113} Competitive campaigns, for instance, often wore down the factory’s equipment and exhausted its human resources, and in other cases, better technologies and techniques were not transferred to underperforming firms.\textsuperscript{114}

Similar types of struggle, or discrepancies between the state’s idealistic expectations and the realities on the factory floor can also be found in the realm of sports. One article in the \textit{Rodongja} tells a common story about the Pyongyang Textile Machinery Plant’s efforts to increase people’s participation in the state’s Personal Fitness Examination (PFE). Since its introduction in 1948, one of the state’s most important sports-related priorities was to raise the nation’s involvement in the PFE, and since at least 1955, the government disbursed its “sports leaders” (\textit{ch'eyuk chidoja}) throughout the country to factories, schools, and farms to promote it.\textsuperscript{115} The effort to raise PFE performance in factories was therefore a direct and centrally administered state initiative. However, such efforts often faced numerous challenges. One of the goals of the textile plant’s “athletics team” (\textit{sŏnsudan}), for instance, was to ensure that everyone

\textsuperscript{112} Kim, 176.  
\textsuperscript{113} Kim lists some of the north’s numerous production campaigns in the 1950s on pages 164 – 5.  
\textsuperscript{114} Kim, 175.  
\textsuperscript{115} Worker’s Party of Korea, \textit{Chosŏnjungangnyŏn'gam} (P’yŏngyang, 1955). Since the PFE’s conception, the NKCY includes a detailed report on the annual development of the PFE. The NKCY’s emphasis on the continual improvement of this examination exceeds all other sports initiatives; almost certainly indicating that the PFE was one of the state’s most important means of measuring the nation’s overall developments in sports.
engaged in at least one hour of PFE training per day. Specifically, this factory’s PFE participation rate was 86.4% in 1958, but the association’s target was to achieve 100% participation by the end of the next year. The problem was that training sessions were only offered in the morning, and as a result, afternoon and nightshift labourers could not participate in them. To rectify this conflict, the athletics team sent a delegation to the factory’s Workplace Party Association (WPA) (chikchang tang tanch'e) and the Worker’s Alliance (WA) (chigöptongmaeng) to negotiate a more flexible exercise schedule. The article unfortunately does not disclose if an agreement or solution was eventually found. Still, we can start to see some of the complexities of the state’s command-hierarchy at the factory level. In this case, the complexity was the overlapping of state interests between different state organs in the same factory. The athletic teams’ job was to increase people’s participation in the PFE – an important, state-led national initiative. But, simultaneously, the WPA and WA’s job was to pursue other important initiatives in the factory, such as conducting ‘political refinement’ sessions (chŏngch'i kyoyang) and enacting measures to achieve high production levels (an especially important assignment in the midst of the country’s intense economic development campaigns in the late 1950s). In some cases, people’s involvement in sports hindered their productivity in factories. Yi Kŭmnyŏ of the Kaesŏng Women’s Fabrics Factory, for instance, “… felt heavy after her morning jogs, and worried that she might be unable to lift her hands at the factory.” In a different article in Chosŏnnyŏsŏng (Korean Women) titled, “Sports and Rest Time,” it notes: “Exercise must be properly adjusted to one’s work. Some people decide to go outside to hit the

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116 Sources are unclear about the relationship (or differences) between the factory’s “athletics team” (sŏnsudan), “sports team” (ch’eyuktan), “sports association” (ch’eyukhyŏphoe), and “sports committee” (ch’eyugwiwŏn), and the technical translation of each term is not specific or distinct enough to distinguish its respective commission (relative to the others).

ball immediately after eating, and some people exercise early in the morning. However, both can cause fatigue and thus hinder production and learning.” The article therefore suggests that “Exercise must be selected carefully” and that heavy labourers should steer clear of “strenuous” exercise.\textsuperscript{118} Because of sports’ potential threat to productivity, the WPA and WA’s reluctant stance towards extra exercise sessions is understandable. Essentially, this is a case of lateral conflict in the state’s command-hierarchy, as different state organs in the same factory confronted the challenge of negotiating a balance of each other’s (theoretically) mutually important assignments.

The implementation of sports initiatives in the factory was particularly confusing because, technically, they were a part of both the state’s ideological (sasang) refinement \textit{and} production campaigns. Especially in the late 1950s, the state’s representation of sports often fell under the large symbolic and spiritual umbrella of the Ch'ŏllima Production Campaign. One article in \textit{Ch'eyukkwa Sūp'och'ū} titled, “Fulfilling and Joyous Worker’s Sports” clearly reveals the inter-connectedness of different state initiatives. The article reports: “On a fine morning, joggers can be seen on the premises of the Kaesŏng Women’s Fabrics Factory in perfect synchronization, and inside each of their hearts is the burning desire to complete the last bits of the Five-Year Plan by next year’s 8.15 [Liberation Day] anniversary.”\textsuperscript{119} The article then introduces its female protagonist, comrade Yi Kŭmnyŏ, as a “flag bearer of Ch'ŏllima,” and the leader of the group of joggers. Here, the journal’s representation of factory sports explicitly raises the spirit of the nation’s production campaigns, and, in this case, it is the symbols of production that give factory-sports its ultimate significance. The same journal also describes sports an area of

\textsuperscript{118} \textit{“Ch'eyukkwa hyusik,” Chosŏnnyŏsŏng}, no. 5 (1959): 37.
\textsuperscript{119} Paek Pyŏng Hŭm, 19.
“ideological” (sasang) refinement, and proclaims, “Let us continue our struggle to dissolve “old ideas” (nalgŭn sasang) that are leftover in sports.”

FIGURE 3 - 2. (Left) “Sound Fitness Assures High Production and Happiness!”
Ch'eyukkwa Sŏp'och'ŭ, no. 5 (1958).

The journal’s ideologically charged tone and its direct evocation of economic symbols deserve some consideration. Once again, Lüdtke’s concept of simultaneity can be useful; especially his suggestion that symbols are co-constructed and co-appropriated by both the state and its citizens.

Ch'eyukkwa Sŏp'och'ŭ was printed by one of the state’s official print houses (kungnip ch'ulp'ansa), and its main objective was, presumably, to educate, promote, and report on the nation’s sports. However, sport was just one of the state’s countless other initiatives in DPRK in

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120 Specifically, this article’s example of nalgŭn sasang is poor sportsmanship. Rayng Ui Sŭng, “Ch'eyugindŭl sogesŏ nalgŭn sasang chanjaerŭl ch'ŏngsansangi wihan t'ujaengŭl kanghwahaja,” Ch'eyukkwa Sŏp'och'ŭ, no. 7 (1959): 23 – 24. See also “Ch'eyugindurŭi sasanggyoyangŭl pudanhi sanggik'ija” (Let’s Continually Better Our Athlete’s Ideological Refinement), Inminch'eyuk, no. 10 (1949): 6 – 8. Here, it notes that athletes must rid themselves of ideological remnants from Korea’s colonial legacy, such as individualistic and professional sports, and undergo democratic ideological refinement (minjujuwijŏk sasang) to foster sports for the masses.

121 (The name of the official state press is Kungnip Ch'ulp'ansa.)
the late 1950s. Consequently, it often came into conflict, or was overshadowed by the state’s larger and seemingly more important campaigns (namely, reconstruction, industrial and agricultural production). Therefore, the journal’s consistent evocation of production symbols might have been, in part, an effort to include sports in the DPRK’s most momentous and extensive campaign at the time: the Ch’ŏllima Campaign. The result of this might have been to elevate sports to a higher level of importance, and subsequently strengthen the case of sports programs in factories. The fifth issue of Ch'eyukkwa Sŏp'ŏch'ŭ in 1958 contains an example of this form of symbolic appropriation (see figure 3 – 2). The cover page depicts a dramatic silhouette of a labourer that looms over an image of a runner, conceivably suggesting that the spirit of production is inherent in athletes. Underneath it, a message reads: “Sound Fitness Assures High Production and Happiness!” Once again, both this illustration and its caption encapsulate the idea that “good” athletes were invariably also “good” labourers. The correlation of health and high-productivity was especially common throughout the DPRK’s press. Comrade Chu Chae Kil, for instance, as the chair of the Pon'gung Chemical Plant’s sports committee, boasts in a 1959 issue of Ch'eyukkwa Sŏp'ŏch'ŭ about his factory’s recent installment of sports facilities and its ongoing efforts to further expand them. Throughout the article, Comrade Chu never misses an opportunity to stress that the main purpose of all this is to “improve the health of labourers.” Such examples, interpreted in the light of symbolic co-appropriation, can be seen as an effort to advance the interests of sports committees and athletes in factories. Perhaps this form of rhetoric aided people’s interest in extra exercise sessions or newer sports facilities in the factory. Or perhaps it aided the interests of talented factory-athletes to be able to concentrate on training in the midst of the country’s intense emphasis on economic development. Regardless of

the actual situation, it is useful to consider the representations of factory-sports and production as not just mere propaganda, but an encapsulation of specific (and sometimes conflicting) state and non-state agendas.

References to Ch’ŏllima were fairly common in other state initiatives, and images of the legendary horse were frequently seen alongside propaganda images of the military, farmers, laborers, and students.\(^{123}\) The WPK inevitably benefitted by bundling the nation’s diverse initiatives under one symbolic umbrella. Ch’ŏllima, as a symbol, was therefore an important precursor to the symbol of Kim Il Sung that – beginning the 1960s – gradually became nation’s most significant and omnipresent icon.


The issue of symbolic appropriation in sports journals brings us into this essay’s final consideration of the nature of the “state press.” Here, this essay returns to the *Chosŏn Kisa*

\(^{123}\) References to *Ch’ŏllima* (based on the author’s general observation of available sources) are far more explicit and frequent in sports journals than any other “specialty” subject magazine or journals.
(North Korean Journalism) article, titled, “More Stories, More Substance: Thoughts on Sports Journalism in Newspapers” that was examined in Chapter Two. However, whereas this article was previously used to consider the media’s presentation of sports spectacles, it is examined here to reconsider and problematize the concept (or existence) of an official, “state press.” The article’s tone is generally negative, as its author, Wŏn Chong-Yŏng, discloses his harsh comments on the allegedly dismal situation of sports journalism in the DPRK. Essentially, Wŏn argues that journalists should focus more of their content on sports commentary (e.g. play-by-play commentary, technique, strategies) rather than on the nature of the sports competition (e.g. attendance numbers, results of the tournament, atmosphere of sports stadium). Before the article launches into its criticism of the north’s press, he specifically points out the quality and quantity of sports articles in the Rodong Sinmun has “dramatically improved,” and as such, the central newspaper is left unscathed in Wŏn’s article. However, his appraisal of the Rodong Sinmun is considerably suspect. Having read every sports column in the Rodong Sinmun from 1957 to 1959, this essay can assert that it certainly did not produce the type of “good” sports journalism that comrade Wŏn endorses. In fact, the majority of the articles in the Rodong Sinmun are exactly the kind of “bad” sports journalism that Wŏn criticizes. The great majority of sports columns in the Rodong Sinmun adhere to this formulaic structure: first; it notes the title and date of sports competition, second; the number of participants and their backgrounds (e.g. students, farmers, labourers…etc.), third; the different types of sports in the competitions (e.g.

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124 Wŏn Chong-Yŏng, “Tŏ manhi tŏ silsok itke: sinnune sillin ch’eyuk kisadūrŭl ilgo,” Chosŏn Kisa, no. 12 (1959): 26 – 27. (The translation of this title is not precisely the literal one; it was slightly modified to better convey the original’s grammatical emphasis on “greater,” or “more”).
125 (This component of Wŏn’s article is examined in detail in Chapter Two).
126 Courtesy of the University of Toronto’s Cheng Yu Tung East Asian Library that holds an immaculate digital collection of Rodong Sinmun articles.
football, running, volleyball… etc.), fourth; a list of the competitions results.\textsuperscript{127} Virtually non-existent are play-by-play commentaries or columns that specifically discuss sports technique; exactly the things that Wŏn calls for in “good” sports journalism. He sates, “…If sports journalism is to be conducted in this manner, then reporters don’t need to go to the sports stadium. He can simply use a telephone to obtain information about the competitors… and easily obtain statistical information…. Sports reporters are unable to capture the distinct, technical aspects of sports.” Undoubtedly, the Rodong Sinmun’s special status as the official newspaper of the WPK left little or no liberty for Wŏn to criticize it. His direct and harsh criticism of other newspapers (especially rural (chibnag) newspapers), however, suggests two things: first; not every newspaper in the DPRK held the same type of “official state” status that the Rodong Sinmun held that made it exempt from criticism, and second; not all organs of the state’s media/press were in constant in synchronization or up-to-date on the central Party’s most pressing concerns.

Wŏn’s critique of sports journalism demonstrates the existence of a delay in some newspapers to understand and reflect the Party’s most recent and high-priority concerns into the content of their columns. To illustrate this delay, consider Wŏn’s critique that journalists were not including enough stories on winter sports – the Party’s most recent sports initiative in 1959. He notes,

This year, the mass popularization of skiing has become the most important priority of our Party’s winter sports [enterprise]. Our nation’s northern Hamgyŏng Province, in particular, has advantageous assets [i.e. mountains] to especially develop this area [of sports]. However, despite this fact, the Hambuk Sinmun\textsuperscript{128} only included two sports-related columns in the month of November, and not a single one of those contained the word “ski” in them.”

\textsuperscript{127} Of course, there are rare exceptions in the Rodong Sinmun, but hardly enough to justify Wŏn’s high commendation.
\textsuperscript{128} Hambuk Sinmun was the main newspaper of North Hamgyŏng Province.
To note another example, Wŏn reminds readers of the state’s most recent Central Committee Decision in December 1958 to “… further develop the nation’s sports and ch’eyuk enterprise in order to increase technique.” However, he complains that this is not reflected in the press, as one of his main critiques is the shortage of informed, professional sports commentary that can assist readers improve their “sports technique.” Considering that the state’s emphasis on “sports technique” was still a recently launched effort in 1959 (as detailed in Chapter Two), this too suggests the existence of a delay before the Party’s most pressing and recent issues were thoroughly reflected in the press. This “press-delay,” nonetheless, was not caused by journalists’ disinterest in promoting the state’s policies. On the contrary, some newspapers tended to focus too much on the state’s older policies, causing them to miss or ignore the Party’s more recent and pressing policies. One example of this is the press’ overemphasis on the ‘mass popularization of sports.’ Indeed, this was undoubtedly one of the state’s most important sports policies in the 1940s and early 1950s (as Chapter One notes). The Chosŏn Kisa article specifically notes that morning jogs and the Inmin Pogon Chejo (People’s Health Aerobics) were crucial components of the state’s sports-popularization policies. However, the problem was that stories about jogging and aerobics were too common and thus becoming redundant in the press. The article notes, “… On the subject of sports popularization, some newspapers are only filled with stories about this [jogging and aerobics]… Contrary to these stories, Inmin Chejo and jogging do not represent the entirely of [our nation’s] sports popularization [enterprise]. We [the press] can no longer remain stationary in one spot.”

This “press-delay” is significant because it prompts us to reconsider the meaning of “state press” or “state media.” Technically, all of the newspapers that the Chosŏn Kisa article critiques
were officially sanctioned and monitored by the state. However, “press-delay” demonstrates that some newspapers were interpreting the Party’s policies and attempting to satisfy its expectations by re-representing them rather than being a direct outlet of the Party. It is important to note, however, that this form “re-representation” was limited to the parameters of existing symbols and ideals established by the state, and therefore never veered far from the Party’s official discourse; a phenomenon that ironically continues to exist in the scholarship on the DPRK.

129 See the “press” (kisa) section of the Chosŏnjungangnyŏn'gam from 1956 – 1959 to see the state’s list of the nation’s media outlets.
CONCLUSION

Through the lens of sports culture, it is possible to see that the 1950s was an important transitional period in the DPRK; from generally grassroots, locally run cultural organizations and activities towards more direct and literal forms of state intervention. Signs of this transition were especially evident in both the content and form of the state’s media. Slowly but surely, from the late 1940s through to the 1950s, the media’s representation of sports spectacles, “model athletes,” and the model “sports lifestyle” began to revolve around the Party, its policies, and its leadership. Significantly, although the DPRK’s centralized sports administration system was technically monopolized by the state, it was by no means complete or perfect in its operations. On the sports field, athletes were not always disciplined; and in the factories, labourers were not always reaping the bodily or production benefits of sports. On top of this, sports journalists often failed to represent sports spectacles in the manner that the state desired, and in other cases, the DPRK’s various media outlets failed to adequately feature the state’s most pressing and recent sports policies.

However, despite this project’s general argument that the DPRK’s state was, in certain circumstances, non-unified and inconsistent in its implementation of sports policies, it ultimately highlights the state’s pervasive and persuasive influence over the DPRK’s sports culture – even as early as the 1950s. People in the DPRK, notably, had no other choice but to go through the state’s sports system to gain access to proper sports training, facilities, and organizations. Indeed, even the allegedly dismal state of sports journalism in the DPRK calls our attention to the state’s strong influence, as journalists were not criticized for writing on subjects contrary to the state’s desires, but rather, they were criticized for overtly focusing on the state’s old and non-pressing priorities. In factories, both supporters and opponents of sports programs upheld the state’s
emphasis on the priority of high-production to support their conflicting interests. In the case of sports journalism, although examples of the “non-dominant” narrative demonstrate that some aspects of the north’s sports system were far from being perfect, they ultimately represent its various challenges and shortcomings in light of the state’s expectations. Significantly, all of this demonstrates that deviances from the state’s expectations usually existed *inside* the parameters of the state’s official discourse, expectations, and symbols.

The existence of powerful and consistent state-sponsored symbols in the DPRK’s nascent and non-uniform sports system suggests that the state’s influence cannot be understood by just its institutional structures or coercion alone. Realizing this, recent studies on the DPRK have tried to understand the state’s influence, or power, through the aesthetization of politics.\(^{130}\) However, so far, this concept has been narrowly defined and is ultimately limited to representations of the state, its leaders, and its ideology. Broadening this concept, future studies on the DPRK should consider that aesthetics were not exclusively constructed by, or associated to the Party and its leaders – whilst simultaneously recognizing that they were the greatest benefactors and appropriators of its power.

\(^{130}\) Suk-Young Kim’s monograph *Illusive Utopia* (2010) and Heonik Kwon & Byung-Ho Chung’s *Beyond Charismatic Politics* (2012) are both notable examples that attempt to understand the aesthetics of power by characterizing the DPRK’s government as a “theater state.”


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