

Children of the Juche Revolution: Picturing North Korean Youth Culture at the Thirteenth World Festival of Youth and Students

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In this article, I analyze three dimensions of the Thirteenth World Festival of Youth and Students, which was held in Pyongyang in 1989. I focus on the discourse that unfolded in the lead-up to the event as North Korean leaders met with international representatives; encounters between North Koreans and international delegates on the ground during the festival; and North Korean artworks produced for and exhibited during the festival. Mobilizing Giorgio Agamben's theoretical frame of contemporaneity, I unfurl the competing ways in which the North Korean state and the festival's backing constituencies representing the global youth sought to establish their relevance in a shifting global order—one in which North Korea increasingly appeared an anachronistic holdover from the Cold War era. The tension that runs through each of the dimensions of the festival explored here provides useful insight into the Cold War ideological forces that subsisted during the frenzied political juncture of 1989 even as many sought to define this moment as marking the end of the Cold War and the arrival of a global community.

Keywords: Thirteenth World Festival of Youth and Students, youth culture, North Korean art, Cold War, contemporaneity

Introduction

On July 1, 1989, celebrants from over 170 countries filled Pyongyang's May Day Stadium for the opening of the Thirteenth World Festival of Youth and Students, a marquee event by which the North Korean state meant to rival the 1988 Seoul Olympics. There, attendees encountered an enormous background

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