

Ruins, Memory and Vibrant Matter: Imagining Future North Korean Rural Terrains

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Abstract

With recent work in mind from the fields of Critical and Human Geography and Philosophy on webs of political life and ruins as lively matters, in process and becoming the paper considers the futures for North Korean non-urban landscapes from a temporal (and spatial) frame beyond that of Pyongyang's present. Following a change of status quo on the Korean Peninsula in which North Korea as we know now it ceases to exist, how will both state bureaucracy and popular cultural power impact on terrains so heavily transformed by the ideology and political culture of North Korea? Will post-transformation forces consider architectures of ideological memory entirely ruined, attempt to write their own cultures and memories on these spaces, or unwrite previous ones, co-producing new landscapes of memory on the Korean Peninsula? In particular, this paper examines the physical and material futures for two important sites in North Korea. Firstly, the Samjiyon Grand Monument and the Birch Trees of Lake Samji, representative within North Korea's historical narrative of both military struggles in the area and the first acknowledgement of Kim Il Sung and his first wife, Kim Jong Suk's relationship. Secondly the paper considers Mt. Paektu and very specifically the Secret Guerrilla Camp below it, and Jong Il Peak, part of the mountain now graced by Kim Jong Il's signature written in huge Korean script. Both sites, along with North Korea's wider rural and wild spaces are in a sense ruined by their enmeshing with the political narratives of Pyongyang. However, in their ruination the paper sees the

unpicking and untwining of this state, through the processes of time and cultural-political re-configurations.

Keywords: North Korea, Ruins, Memory, Mt Paektu, Samjiyon

“Nostalgia for Socialism has become a commodity, but not for those who still live in its ruins, because they are at home.”²

While this paper in part deploys its authors’ imagination, the landscapes on which it focuses are not imagined. North Korean history, mythology and politics can often seem rooted in a process of ideological construction built up over many years deep within its institutional mind, but its physical terrains are certainly not fiction. North Korea’s material and historical presence affects global, regional and local landscapes, and deeply impacts the emotional, political and security landscapes of South Korea and East Asia. North Korea’s landscapes are not matters of the past and memory as much as they are matters of imagination. They are real, present and material, as much as the landscapes outside the window behind which the author of this paper writes. Much analysis focused on North Korea in recent years has centred on desires or aspirations for its landscapes to no longer be real, to be deconstructed, reconfigured, destroyed even. While these desires may particularly focus on North Korea’s military, fissile or nuclear landscapes, it cannot be denied that consigning the entirety of what are currently terrains under Pyongyang’s control and sovereignty to the realm of memory and the past, namely, the collapse of the state altogether, is also sought and dreamed of by many. It would in a sense make a great number of people across the globe very happy indeed if North Korea were no longer there, if it ceased to exist. A problem for all of these desires, and imagined outcomes however is the fact these dreams for North Korea to become a figment of memory, for the most part lack a consideration as to what that temporal shift would mean for its landscapes and inhabitants. While many desire the ruination of North Korea and its consignment to memory, what might a ruined North Korea or a ruin of North Korea look like. What will be remembered from North Korea and how will memory of the country operate in the context of its ruination is not clear.

This paper cannot possibly hope to have all of the answers to these questions, it cannot even hope to have most of the answers; in fact, it does not seek to. While this paper will not address all North Korean landscapes there are many examples of academic work which imaginatively considers North Korean urban spaces.³ Pyongyang with its dense agglomeration of monumental and dramatic

architectures has received the lion's share of interest so far as the future of North Korea is concerned. In contrast this paper moves beyond the city and the urban, beyond the vast majority of North Korea's population to places and spaces in its rural hinterland, the terrains in the span of Korean history which were once decidedly wild, but are now very much part of the nation's political narratives. In particular this paper considers places in Ryanggang Province such as Samjiyon, the Samjiyon Grand Monument and the various memorial landscapes surrounding Mt Paektu. While these places are not populated in a conventional sense and are peripheral in comparison to the urban population centres of North Korea, they are not peripheral to the nation's politics. Once wild, rural places have throughout the nation's history become key points in both North Korea's memory and in ideological narratives.

This paper therefore ventures some distance from the conventional conceptual frame in which North Korean is normally situated. The paper sits theoretically at a junction between politics, memory, geography and imagination which takes the reader through the past and present of North Korea and the intersections between its politics, ideology and topography. The paper is primarily concerned with considering North Korean topographies as potentially ruined, abandoned places and therefore uses the framework constructed by scholars such as Tim Edensor,⁴ Thomas Lahusen⁵ and Caitlin DeSilvey⁶ and more generally Geography's "ruin turn." Landscapes marked by autocracy and specifically the logics of Socialism and Communism have been ruined and abandoned many times in recent years. Even places once important to the functioning of government such as East Germany's Palace of the Republic in the middle of Berlin have been left to rack, ruin, abandonment and finally demolition (in this case, in order to reconstruct architectures from the Prussian Imperial past).⁷ The many examples of war memorials built to honour what the Soviet Union perceived as its liberation of eastern Europe from Nazi and fascist tyranny are further examples for this paper. While many were built into the core urban infrastructure of towns and cities, there are other examples on the edge of towns and in the countryside for the most part which have been left to ruination in our present.⁸ In countries such as Estonia, the policing of memory and the development of new and nationalistic legal frameworks focused on legitimate and appropriate remembrance have banished such places into graveyards on the edge of town, rendering them into places in which no commemoration is possible or legal.⁹ Other ruins include the various architectures of control and security from the socialist era such as air and army bases, missile silos, bunkers and border watch towers. This author himself remembers childhood encounters with the complicated and technological infrastructures of the German internal border in the Harz mountains. Revisiting the

area some 20 years later, he found these topographies to be scattered fragments of concrete, broken barbed wire and collapsed buildings deep in abandoned forest and scrubland. While much of Geography's ruin turn and "Ruinenlust" has focused on understanding and analysing the propensity of Capitalist politics to ruin and to make ruins of landscapes and communities, from post-industrial Detroit¹⁰ to the plastic stuffed wastelands of some South Asian urban environments,¹¹ the ruins of Socialism have also gained substantial interest. So, this paper takes DeSilvey and Edensor's reckoning with ruins¹² and extends it with a degree of perceived resilience and endurance into the realm of the un-Capitalist. Such theorizing of forgotten spaces and peripheral Socialist memorial spaces¹³ is extremely useful for this paper. This is also the case with the work of Hayden Lorimer and others on ruined contemporary sacred spaces.¹⁴ The ruins of North Korea are and will be material as well as ideological or intangible. Thus, this paper also uses the enormously important work of Jane Bennett¹⁵ and Sarah Whatmore¹⁶ on the generation, function and existence of what they have termed "vibrant" matter or political matter. Bennett has provided a conceptual frame in which materials either intangible or tangible are active participants, agents within the network of political actors. When this paper uses the word vibrant it means to deploy that sense of active, urgent, agential power. The author of the paper certainly bears in mind the critical writing from Lemke and others on Bennett's new approach to materials and matters, in particular the assertion that the dialectical politics of ownership, usage and access can be lost in the ethical claims of the energetic material landscapes she outlines. Such questions and critiques the author of this paper suggests may be more for a North Korea of the future than a North Korea of the present, whose ideology is essentially not concerned with dialectical relationships, and so for whom such questions are moot. Indeed the author reads the work of Bennett and in tandem with the work of Jason Moore and his theorisation of webs of ecological life and their enmeshing with human politics, ideologies and economics.¹⁷ Thus when this paper also uses the phrase 'web of life' it means to convey Moore's sense of networked enmeshing; that is to say that the fabric and terrain of a nation, society and culture are more than simply the product of its human parts, but are a complex assembly and mix of human, beyond-human, material and intangible. Despite its lack of conventional politics as identified by Lemke and others, Moore, Bennett and Whatmore's concepts function as well in a North Korean political framework marked by Juché, Songun or Byungjin as by any ideology of capitalism, and in North Korean rural and ruined terrains.

In contrast and perhaps in tension with the theoretical elements derived from non-constructivist, non-materialist approaches outlined in the previous section, this paper also deploys theoretical material from a constructivist tradition. This

is of course unusual, and perhaps contradictory; how can environmental or ecological elements of a political or ideological tradition be both intrinsic and constructed? North Korea is an unusual, if not unique case where that might be possible given its politics ability to hold multiple positions and adopt entirely different shapes and aspirations depending on circumstance. North Korea's politics depends on a greater level of performance and performativity for its function and energy, so that political practice is both real and imagined, constructed and unconstructed at the same time. Holding in mind the work of Max Weber on political charisma and Clifford Geertz on theatre states,¹⁸ Heonik Kwon and Byung-ho Chung's landmark work in the field *Beyond Charismatic Politics*,¹⁹ reads North Korean politics as a 'theatric politics.' In this theatre, North Korea's charismatic politics spills out beyond the realm of conventional political interaction, marking, constructing, reconstructing and deconstructing both physical topography and historical or cultural narratives. Thus, if all politics is theatre, is it necessary to redesign or reconfigure the stage and terrain in which that politics performs. Such reconstruction or reconfiguration is not new, unique or unusual to North Korea, Denis Cosgrove,²⁰ for instance, demonstrated how in fact the reconfiguration of terrain is a basic tool of statecraft and state building in contexts like a young United States. Settlers moving west across North America literally constructed new urbane landscapes as they travelled. Similarly, the work of Noel Castree²¹ posits the generation of new terrains through social construction. It might therefore be suggested that in North Korea charismatic politics, necessarily requires the construction of a charismatic landscape.²² Holding in tandem and tension these constructivist and de-constructivist perspectives the author of this paper also finds the work of Jamie Lorimer on non-human charisma²³ useful for the insights it offers towards the use of topographic features in these landscapes of political charisma.

This theoretical frame hopefully, supports the reader through the past and present of North Korea and the intersections with its politics, ideology and topography. However, this paper is concerned with a future North Korea, and in particular a future in which its current political frameworks and logics have transformed and disappeared. In that the paper is also a work of futurology (as suggested elsewhere in the special section this paper is a component of by Annie Pedret), disconnected from the realities of constructed, de-constructed or re-constructed landscapes, but not part of fictive or literary terrains.²⁴ Given the huge importance Pyongyang places on its constructed and in part imagined histories and mythologies and the extraordinary way the landscapes of important places within them are marked by these narratives, such a change would have dramatic impacts on such places. Unification for instance with South Korea and

the diminution or abandonment of North Korea's historical frameworks would render the vast majority of such commemorative or monumental places pointless and immaterial to new political realities. The actual material of these architectures would of course remain, unless completely demolished and eradicated. It is the presumption of this author that a wholesale annihilation of the charismatic places of North Korean politics would be expensive, time consuming and institutionally complicated in a time period when the integration of the two countries would be extraordinarily challenging. For the most part therefore the author suggests the likely outcome for North Korea's political terrains and landscapes of ideological memory would be a wholesale withdrawal of funding for their maintenance as well as the collapse of bureaucratic structures supporting them, the end of the yearly timetable of visits and pilgrimage to and around them and institutional disinterest and neglect. Perhaps within cities like Pyongyang, Wonsan and Chongjin it would be necessary for the larger of the physical places of memorial to be maintained structurally for public safety's sake; in the rural hinterland and wilder spaces of the north it would not be hard to envisage their whole scale abandonment.

Birch Trees and Lake Samji

“Leaning on a birch tree on which spring tints were emerging, he posed with the commanding officers as well as with other guerrillas. One of them suggested to him that he should have a photo taken with Kim Jong Suk. Hearing this, Kim Jong Suk grew shy, and hid behind the backs of the women guerrillas. They pushed her forward to his side. In order not to miss the moment, the ‘cameraman’ clicked the shutter. For Kim Jong Suk, it was as good as a wedding photo.”²⁵

It is debatable of course whether this brief moment in the lives of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Suk captured in euphemism the actual moment of their matrimony. The photo so often used which attests to record the moment is itself, in part at least, a work of fiction, reminiscent of touched up and manipulated early Victorian photographs, almost painterly in appearance.²⁶ There is certainly a birch tree behind them in the photo, perhaps two and it is North Korea's repeated contention that a stand of birch trees by Lake Samji have survived since this moment in the early 1930s. These trees by the lake are now used for rituals and ceremonies on the anniversary not just of the day on which the photo was taken, whatever it actually represented, but also the birth and death anniversaries of Kim Jong Suk and moments in Kim Il Sung's life. These trees are no longer objects in the background of this now ancient photo, but in line with the work of this author

on the use of topography in North Korean politics and Kwon and Chung's work on charismatic politics of that country, actors on the stage of that theatre.²⁷ The trees serve as reliable and capable witness to that moment and to the powerful energies of authority, legitimacy and authenticity that underpin and sustain the political mythologies of North Korea. This author has written on the processes and practices engaged by Pyongyang to scale and rescale political messages, authority, practice and power across time and space, from the grandest of North Korean governmental spaces to the most quiet and parochial of family places.²⁸ Lake Samji's birch trees are key to the rescaling of the energy, power and reality of its first family's relationship. In a conventional political framework the birch trees and their surroundings would be protected and conserved, attractive arboreal elements within a landscape of natural beauty. This is certainly not what has happened in the case of North Korea. Lake Samji, its waters and the birch trees have become part of an extensive terrain of political memory which includes the 15 metre tall statue of Kim Il Sung dressed as a young man in his army fatigues, extensive drill squares, statues commemorating the various battles claimed to have occurred in the area, hotels and other facilities for visiting groups of young pioneers, bureaucrats and others on political pilgrimage to the area.²⁹ North Korea is also currently building new roads and refurbishing local railways to make the lakeside and the birch trees more accessible.³⁰ Far from the remote wilderness in the far north of the Korean peninsula that Samjiyon surely was at the time of Kim Jong Suk and Kim Il Sung's struggles against the Japanese, the area is one of the key geographies of North Korea's political memory. It is deeply and almost intrinsically marked with the politics and ideologies of the nation, each year this marking becoming more dramatic.³¹

How might we imagine the future for Lake Samji and its trees and the Samjiyon Grand Monument and its wide open concrete spaces loomed over by the enormous bronze figure of a young Kim Il Sung. At this moment North Korea's institutions are focused on future infrastructural developments to integrate the area into the wider networks of the nation. Its spaces and constituent materials currently are vibrant and active in the projection of the current politics of Pyongyang, the gleaming bronze representing the perceived functionality of North Korea's governmental offering, the newly laid standard gauge tracks of the Samjiyon Line, replacing the problematic old narrow gauge tracks attest to the interest being paid to the region by central institutions once again.³² Railway lines and infrastructure in this part of North Korea have long been problematic and plans to connect Ryanggang with the far northeast along the northern border taking pressure off the coastal lines have been underway unsuccessfully for many decades. While there have since the Japanese colonial period, been extensive

industrial facilities amidst northern Korea's valleys and mountains, the connectivity of these places has always been problematic. It is not hard to imagine given the collapse or diminution of Pyongyang's central authority, problems arising with the future funding or support of these infrastructures. While the mines, factories and smelters of the north would surely survive changes in sovereignty on the peninsula, owing in part to the rarity of the mineral resources in this area, it cannot be clear whether Samjiyon would continue to be important to future governments. Perhaps the birch trees of Lake Samji would continue to have a certain curiosity factor given their place in the life narratives of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Suk. It must be surmised that whatever institutional control succeeded the current Kim dynasty it would not be as concerned to maintain the material fabric of some of the more ephemeral or peripheral elements of these narratives. The trees therefore would perhaps not be as well maintained, their straight trunks and well cared for branches and crowns might degrade a little, but it is doubtful whether they would not be subject to arboreal husbandry enough to reach the normal life span for a birch tree, which is around 140 years (Samji's have at a minimum reached half of this already).

What would befall the concrete, alloys and bronze of the Samjiyon Grand Monument is another case entirely. As has been seen across the landscapes of the former socialist nations of eastern Europe, following the transformation of ideological frameworks and the degradation of past institutional structures, the material life of the grand complexes of parade, drill and presentation is not long and certainly not subject to a great deal of resource. While elements of Samjiyon's memorial spaces can certainly make a claim on future memories and histories of a unified or different Korea, many more of course will not. It is not hard therefore to conceive of the drill and parade square falling into disuse and becoming derelict. It might be expected that the giant bronze statue of Kim Il Sung will disappear or be vandalised, though its accompanying statuary of supportive guerrilla fighters might be more resilient and less subject to whatever punishments and humiliations the larger statues will be subject to. Much of the areas memorial architecture will, in time, fade into disrepair, to be occasionally discovered or rediscovered by adventurous walkers, half buried in shrubs and overgrowth. It may be that the tourist infrastructures such as the hotels, guest houses and eating facilities built recently survive for other purposes, primarily those of the next place this paper is interested in, but their original purpose could well be lost to time, the necessary memories of the intricacies of moments in North Korea's complicated historical narratives forgotten. Ultimately it may be that while the material of these very much political places is vibrant and lively now in the wider politics of North Korea, without this memory, without this history it is much less active

and energetic. Its ruin will stand forgotten, testament to a ruined memory and a degraded and dispossessed history.

While Samjiyon and its monument may have a fairly negative future, this is not true for all the places and spaces of the northern areas of the nation. At first glance in the political and media productions of North Korea the spaces around Mt Paektu which are focused on the memory of the guerrilla struggle of Kim Il Sung's band of communist partisans in the early to mid-1930s might be considered extremely problematic. After all much of the political and ideological energy on which North Korean politics has driven for many years and contradicting each other, scholars such as Kwon and Chung and their notion of charismatic politics³³ and BR Myers focused on North Korean ideology as an extension of Japanese ethno militarism and quasi blood fascism³⁴ have claimed is the psychological and psycho-geographic root of its claim to authority and legitimacy, The mythologies of the Paektusan Generals are extremely deeply rooted in North Korean history and politics.³⁵ This paper has already in a sense considered this with the focus on the birch trees of Lake Samji, but for the rest of the paper we will need to move closer to the mountain and then onto and into the mountain itself.

Paektu Secret Camp and Jong Il Peak

For current North Korean politics and commemorative practice arguably the most important physical landscape for its memory is the Paektu Secret Guerrilla Camp. While Pyongyang's historical narratives freely and frequently admit the camp underneath the mountain was at one time but one of a number of similar camps used by the small groups of anti-Japanese communist fighters in the 1930s, these alternative sites have for the most part become diminished in importance. While the slogan trees, some of the bivouacs and cooking areas used by Kim Jong Suk and her smaller band of female fighters are repeatedly used in North Korean media publications and writings and are used in a similar way to the trees at Lake Samji for political tourism, they are not conceptualised as being on the same level of significance as the Secret Guerrilla Camp. This small collection of log buildings which North Korea insists are the original buildings of the camp and the original location forms a dual pole with Mangyongdae (Kim Il Sung's birthplace and the home of his father and family outside of Pyongyang) of 'authentic' architectures of revolutionary importance prior to the Liberation of Korea in 1945. The Guerrilla Camp is also of course not simply renowned as the hide out of Kim Il Sung's band of fighters, but also as the birthplace of Kim Jong Il and therefore the place in which the Kim dynasty which still rules the nation was crystallised. The camp itself is certainly a substantial building and the grounds around it have been

well trodden and extended to cope with the numbers of political and institutional tourists that must visit it through the course of each year. For South Korean politics the dynasty at the heart of North Korean governmentality is as problematic as the ideological direction taken by the country. However, the space above the camp is similarly problematic and riven with complication for the future.

The Secret Guerrilla Camp is at the base of Mt Paektu, one of the most important mountains in Korean spiritual and cultural traditions, a conduit for sacred and powerful energy flows in following the concept of *Paektutaegan* across the peninsula.³⁶ While its importance for Korean nationalism and national sensibility may be considered a modern convention, its place as a spiritually significant landscape in Korean cultural traditions is not. Whether new or old the mountain is now sacred ground for all Koreans, its peak, scree, lake and caldera an important place to visit for citizens of both nations. On the mountains' slopes above the Secret Guerrilla Camp however is a rock outcrop whose terrain will surely need to be reconfigured in the years following any change to the institutional structures of the Korean nations. North Korea on that outcrop above the camp has inscribed the signature of Kim Jong Il in huge letters and renamed the topographic feature "Jong Il Peak." While it is possible that some of the legacies and memories of Kim Il Sung as a figure of nationalist resistance against the Japanese in the 1930s may survive radical changes to the status quo of politics and sovereignty on the peninsula, it is unclear whether Kim Jong Il could be disconnected from the narratives of threat and danger to South Korea's population, his seeming intense disregard for ordinary North Koreans and the economic catastrophe that befell the nation under his reign. It is the assumption of this paper therefore that it would be impossible for future Korean administrations to justify maintaining or repairing the inscribed signature on the mountain. It is also likely that future political authorities and institutions on the Korean peninsula would undertake a wide scale renaming exercise following changes to the political and government status quo. Similar exercises in renaming occurred in many eastern European states following political transformations in the 1990s with towns such as Karl Marx Stadt and streets being renamed to their original names (in that particular case to Chemnitz),³⁷ and in the former Soviet Union following changes in political organisations after the death of Stalin and the dissolution of the union in the 1990 (Stalingrad's renaming as Volgograd for instance).³⁸ Local authorities and urban planners in other less politically tumultuous nations, such as the United Kingdom have also sought to rename streets and urban areas whose names mark difficult or contested histories (for example the renaming of streets which commemorated Imperial British victories in the Boer and Zulu Wars such as Mafeking). It is highly likely that Jong Il Peak would be renamed according to its previous historical nomenclature. It is also

highly likely that although a difficult task, political institutions in a reconfigured Korea would seek to remove the signature from the mountain side.

As the paper has suggested while it is likely that a great deal of the historical and political memory and narrative of North Korea would be subject to deletion, removal and reconfiguration in a future Korean nation. Other examples of such moments elsewhere in the world require the complete abandonment of previous narratives, such as in Estonia, the recovery of whose sovereignty has demanded the complete abandonment of models of history forged during the Soviet period, and Ukraine in which developments in national sensibility have required the generation of an entirely new historical narrative. However, some reconfigurations allow for uncomfortable historical dualisms to continue. Berlin for example, once capital of East Germany (GDR/DDR), now capital of a unified Germany still contains Rosa Luxemburg Platz, a square named after one of the most famous communist political agitators of the first half of the twentieth century and Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russia Federation still has a town named Pionersky, named after the Soviet Union's Young Pioneers youth organisation. While it is perhaps not credible that a future Korean government would be prepared to support a budget large enough to fund the current level of maintenance underneath Mt Paektu at the Secret Guerrilla Camp, it is possible that with a reconfiguration of historical narratives to avoid or downplay the element focusing on Kim Jong Il, the camp could still avoid ruination as a site connected to the less problematic narratives of anti-Japanese resistance. The camp facilities could be considered as less problematic themselves as it is not surrounded by statuary and architecture overtly focused on the ideological memory of communism or socialism. It is not clear of course whether the architectures and spaces commemorating other elements of the narrative would be or could be maintained in any new political era for Korea. It is likely that the slogan trees, bivouacs, cooking areas and other spaces which underpin the thick web of history among the mountains' slopes would be abandoned and left to ruin, unless they were close to access routes and walking trails leading to the summit.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to imagine future possibilities for specific currently highly political and ideological terrains in North Korea's more peripheral northern areas and those abutting Mt Paektu. The ideology embedded within these spaces and architectures by the theatric and charismatic politics of North Korea has under Pyongyang's sovereignty made the material of these places, vibrant and lively. In the historical narratives written, constructed and at times imagined by North Korea the rocks, trees and soil of the mountain and its surrounding area have

become important players and elements in the story, supportive of the struggles of Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Suk and other anti-Japanese guerrillas and important players in their memory. During the period of North Korea's sovereignty many other materials have been implanted and built into the landscapes of the area and in conjunction with the natural elements of its topography these together have produced a terrain of memory and political power. From the perspective of those seeking to counter Pyongyang's political power these terrains have already been ruined, ruined by the ideology of North Korea's autocratic political dynasty and system. These natural spaces have also surely been ruined by the construction of absurd monumental architectures designed to promote and develop elements of the personality cults surrounding Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, the bronze and concrete of statues and parade squares littering the landscape of the area. We might also consider the area, in common with many other places of politics and development in the era of Socialism and Capitalism on this earth to be permanently in a state of ruination due to human interaction. Geographers, Earth and Environmental Scientists call our current geological epoch the Anthropocene or Capitalocene as humans and their accumulations of Capital are responsible for a ruination of the planet's environments, ecosystems, atmospheres and landscapes at a scale that will be recorded by geology itself. The impact of human politics and ideology will thus be traceable in the planet's rocks for aeons to come. While North Korea will certainly have contributed to this global ruination, the impact of its politics on the spaces encountered by this paper is not as dramatic or on as large a scale. Lake Samji and the area to the south of Mt Paektu have indeed been impacted and transformed by North Korean politics, but their ruination is at a smaller scale.

In the future however, outside of the scale of geologic time and the Anthropocene/Capitalocene, this paper posits the potential for their ruination according to different parameters. The paper suggests that it is highly likely in the even of changes to the political status quo on the Korean Peninsula, that elements of the complicated network of architectures in this area, in reality a highly rural and peripheral space in Korea, will be subject to abandonment, neglect and ruination of a type. While Lake Samji's birch trees, the wood of the Secret Guerrilla Camp and the terrain of Mt Paektu itself will very much as material objects and participants in history, survive the collapse or replacement of North Korea's political ideology and sense of history, many other places in the ecosystem of memory surrounding them will not. For some of these the future holds the prospect of a passive neglect as the funding which supported their maintenance and the political imperatives which drove institutional, public and even private tourism to visit them disappears or is substantially reduced. The slogan trees, camp grounds and cooking areas on and around Mt Paektu which are important to memories of

the guerrilla struggle will for the most part disappear into increased forest cover and unmaintained ground cover, eventually to become ruined, deconstructed and atomised. The concrete of the Samjiyon Grand Monument as well will crack, fragment and diffuse over time as it is no longer repaired or used for ceremony and ritual. These places will fall into ruin both literally and in the memory, their vibrancy and liveliness becoming dimmer and dimmer as their place within an abandoned historical narrative is forgotten. Other materials in the area such as the giant bronze statue of Kim Il Sung, the many statues of communist fighters and the enormous signature of Kim Jong Il on the side of the mountain will befall a very active form of ruination. The paper considers that it is very likely these will be deliberately destroyed following a moment of political and institutional reconfiguration. It is likely that many statues of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il will suffer the same fate as Saddam Hussein's statue in Firdos Square, Baghdad on 9 April 2003, unceremoniously torn down as symbolic of a previous era.³⁹ Quite how the signature on Jong Il peak will be deconstructed is unclear, but the fate of Albania's slogan stones implanted throughout the nation on mountainsides under the role of Enver Hoxha might demonstrate that even large impacts on topography can be disappeared given time.⁴⁰ Perhaps the destruction and dramatic ruination of such elements of the landscape will bring them to the forefront of public consciousness for a time, revivifying them in national memory, however it is clear that even given these circumstances their memory will fade. It is conceivably that at some point in the years to come no one will be able to point out the spot on which a young Kim Il Sung's bronze boots once touched the concrete at Samjiyon.

What is most likely to survive without ruination and long into the memory are those physical places which might be amenable or translatable into the political and historical realities of whatever Korean institutions and powers follow a transformation of the status quo. The paper thus suggests that the most likely survivals in the area are likely to be the material of the Secret Guerrilla Camp, the birch trees of Lake Samji and the physical spaces on Mt Paektu which allow public access from the Korean side of the mountain. All of these places have been hugely important to the memory and vibrancy of North Korean politics and history, however all could, with some reconfiguration or repurposing become vibrant, lively materials in the memory, politics and history of a new Korean sovereignty. While it is likely that the area of the camp and the trees will be subject to some infrastructural diminution, they are unlikely to become ruined. Mt Paektu itself will for a long time to come be important to Korean national, cultural and spiritual sensibilities and so is extremely unlikely to become subject to ruination as we might understand it in the practical sense. As this paper has also touched on, the ecosystems of Mt Paektu and its surroundings are in this era

of the Anthropocene/Capitalocene, subject to a potential ruination on a much greater scale at the hands of climate change and environmental crisis. It may be ultimately this ruination that lives longer in the memory than the moments of ruin to which many North Korean political terrains will be subject to.

Notes

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