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Summary

This dissertation examines the aestheticized politics of North Korea by analyzing how history is presented in North Korean art. History is important in North Korea because it legitimates the North Korean state and its leaders. I use the concept the “narrative turn,” which focuses not on the content of history but on its presentation. I examine art because visual narratives are mentioned, but rarely developed in the study of history. Given that history is important for North Korea, it is interesting to look at how history legitimates the North Korean state and its leaders through the dramatization of history in art. I argue that the dramatization of history is about emotion, truthfulness, monumentality, and the personality cult.

The first chapter addresses why art is important for North Korea and how art is mobilized. It starts with several definitions of art, moves to revolutionary art, and arrives at the meaning and function of art in North Korea. Art in North Korea serves a political purpose and, in the following discussion, Socialist realism as a mechanism in North Korean art is examined. In the final section, this chapter analyzes how North Korean paintings relate to history through a discussion on history paintings. Similarities are found between North Korean paintings and European and American history paintings, reinforcing how North Korean paintings are part of a longer, romantic tradition.

The second chapter examines how art provokes emotions, but emotions are restricted in North Korea. It focuses on the Korean words *kamjŏng* and *chŏngsŏ* and the way they are used in North Korea—ideological emotion (*sasang kamjŏng*) and aesthetic sensitivity (*yesuljŏk chŏngsŏ*). *Kamjŏng* is the reaction of the viewer, which is linked to the revolution and Kim Il Sung. It is ideologically informed. *Chŏngsŏ* is what is in the painting—the aesthetic sensitivity. It is about

form and content and the way a painting is depicted. It is the depiction that will make the painting effective.

The third chapter analyzes the Korean words *sasil* and *chinsil* in North Korean writings on art. Art belongs to the realm of the experiential and history belongs to the realm of science. The distinction between art and history is truthfulness (*chinsil*) and truth (*sasil*). In the North Korean context, truth is about facts based on scientific analysis and truthfulness is for art. Truthfulness is something that is right and proper. It has a factual core, but it is embellished history. The debate about truth and truthfulness is about “realism” in Socialist realism. Realism is about truthfulness. This chapter examines the transformation from historical fact to truthfulness in art.

The fourth chapter examines how monuments use public space to write history, how monuments create a space for emotional engagement, and how monuments are aestheticized in paintings and posters. Through a monumental narrative centered on Kim Il Sung, the complexity of history is reduced to a single individual and narrative. The final chapter discusses the personality cult of Kim Il Sung. The dramatization of history is also about the glorification of heroes and heroines, which is directly linked to a personality cult. This chapter analyzes how Kim Il Sung occupies the center, the importance of a sense of rapport in a painting, and the making of a Kim Il Sung-centered utopia.