

SNUAC Asia Square Brown Bag Seminar Series, Fall 2024

Fluctuating Mosaic of Socio-spatial Inequalities in Contemporary Pyongyang

Pavel Em

North Korea is one of the world's remaining totalitarian states. Nevertheless, marketization, despite officially being banned, rapidly developed and metamorphosed local society following the severe economic crisis of the mid-1990s. Pyongyang is a city for the privileged that is simultaneously filled with disproportions and contradictions. The profound internal changes, however, rapidly changing the city since the 1990s make Pyongyang a fascinating urban case study.

This research examined the transformation of central Pyongyang after 2000 through the lens of socio-spatial inequalities using residential housing as a key criterion. Utilizing historical satellite images, the evolution of housing stock in central Pyongyang over the past two decades was accurately mapped and traced. The coexistence of the market and the legacy of the state's welfare system was found to have kept the slums, quasi-slums and a nomenklatura gated community geographically distinct and socially homogeneous. In contrast, in other parts of central Pyongyang, the active pursuit of middle-size and high-rise residential development, taking forms of housing renovations, redevelopments of industrial sites, and infill development, have rapidly expanded and verticalized the residential urban fabric while intensifying a spatial intermixture of different socio-economic groups. In short, marketization was powerful enough to transform the urban landscape and the patterns of socio-spatial inequality in Pyongyang despite the numerous institutional and administrative barriers that have maintained socio-spatial distance between those at the very top and the very bottom.

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Date & Time: November 5th, 2024. 12:00-13:00

Place: SNUAC Room 304 (3rd Floor)