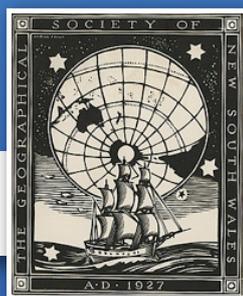




REPORT ON THE STUDY TOUR TO NORTH KOREA

September 2015



Geographical Society of New South Wales

Geographical Society of New South Wales Study Tour to the DPRK 2015



Report on the Trip



Introduction

A group of 12 people participated in the Geographical Society's first study tour to North Korea (or as it is officially known, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea) and neighbouring areas of China in September 2015. The tour was led by Dr Stephen Codrington, a former President of the Society who has



previously led study tours on behalf of the Society to such diverse locations as China, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Russia, Uzbekistan and Estonia.

When the Geographical Society of New South Wales first began to conduct study tours in the 1970s, it focussed on countries that were difficult to enter and even more difficult to understand. The

Society's early tours to China during the tumultuous Cultural Revolution are now legendary.

This ground-breaking study tour to North Korea and nearby border areas in China continued that tradition of helping curious travellers understand and appreciate places that are off the normal tourist trails.



Itinerary for the Group

Sun 30 Aug: Pre-tour meeting at the Koryo Tours office in Beijing, followed by an optional dinner at a duck restaurant. *Overnight - own arrangements at the Holiday Inn Express Dongzhimen.*

Mon 31 Aug: Free morning was free. Bus to Beijing Capital Airport's Terminal 3 to catch Air China flight CA1631 Dandong, China's border city that looks across the Yalu River to North Korea. Transfer to our hotel by minibus. *Overnight in Dandong at the Zhonglian Hotel.*

Tue 1 Sep: After breakfast at the hotel, visit the eastern end of the Great Wall which extends all the way to the North Korean border at Hushan (Tiger Mountain), the 'one metre jump' part of the border, the anti-refugee fence along the Chinese border. After lunch, take a boat trip on the Yalu River to see the North Korean city of Sinuiju at close range, and then walk on the Broken Bridge (still not repaired after being bombed by the Americans during the Korean War). *Overnight in Dandong at the Zhonglian Hotel, Dandong.*

Wed 2 Sep: Catch the train from Dandong to Pyongyang, departing at 10:00 and arriving at 17:30 (Note there was a half hour time difference). This train trip represented a north-south transect through rural and farming areas of North Korea. Upon arrival in Pyongyang, meet guides and check in to the hotel. *Overnight at the Koryo Hotel, Pyongyang.*

Thu 3 Sep: Morning introduction to Pyongyang (capital city of the DPRK), beginning with a visit to Fountain Park, followed by the Mansudae Grand Monument (huge statues of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il), where we showed respect by laying flowers and bowing. We then proceeded to the Chollima statue and the nearby propaganda posters, the Grand People's Study House (which had fabulous views over Kim Il Sung Square in addition to a fascinating adult education program), the Foreign Languages Bookstore, Kim Il Sung Square and the Pyongyang Stamp Shop. After lunch, we had an extended tour of the Mansudae Art Studio, the major centre of political art production (posters and sculptures) for the entire country, including opportunities to meet artists. We then returned to Kim Il Sung Square to tour the Korean Central Art Gallery before finishing the day's visits at the Tower of the Juche Idea, which offered extensive view across Pyongyang in all directions. After dinner, we had a half hour's evening walk from the new housing blocks on Mansudae Street along Sungri Street, through Kim Il Sung Square to the Pyongyang Grand Theatre. *Overnight at the Koryo Hotel, Pyongyang.*

Fri 4 Sep: In the morning, the group visited the newly reconstructed Korean War Museum (formally known as the 'Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum'), including the captured American spy ship USS Pueblo, before taking an extended ride on the Pyongyang Metro (subway), stopping at several stations to inspect the elaborate socialist-realist decor, finishing with a brief visit to the Arch of Triumph. After lunch, we visited the Jongsong Revolutionary Site, which is a preserved system of tunnels used as a wartime base by Kim Il Sung in the 1950s, followed by the surprisingly interesting Embroidery Institute. The final visit for the day was to Kang Bank Sok Secondary School, which included a performance by the students and free time speaking with students who were studying English. *Overnight at the Koryo Hotel, Pyongyang.*

Sat 5 Sep: The day began with a drive along the Reunification Highway to Kaesong, a city located just 7 kilometres north of the border with South Korea. Upon arrival, we visited two important historical sites in the rural area west of Kaesong, the tomb of King Kongmin (dating from the late 1300s) and the tomb of King Wanggon (which dates back to AD943). After lunch, we proceeded through rural farmlands to a section of the DMZ to inspect the Concrete Wall - which was far more interesting than the name suggests, being a concrete wall allegedly built by the Americans across the entire Korean peninsula between 1977 and 1979 (when they were demanding that the Soviets demolish the Berlin

North Korea is perhaps the least known and least understood country in the world. The itinerary for this study tour was more ambitious than most trips to North Korea, as it was of a longer duration and included a visit to Dandong, China's border city with North Korea on the Yalu River.

This was the tour leader's ninth trip into North Korea over a period of ten years. Major changes observed since previous trips included (a) the substantial increase in the quality and quality of motor vehicles, especially in Pyongyang; (b) greater freedom of movement and flexibility in travel arrangements, partly facilitated by the introduction of the Koryolink mobile phone network; (c) increased emphasis on construction of large, new housing blocks; (d) much greater emphasis on architectural quality and finesse in building design; (e) more willingness among local people to have unscripted conversations with foreigners; and (f) greater (though still not unfettered) freedom to take photographs.

On the other hand, some unique features of travel in the DPRK have not changed, such as (a) the requirement to be accompanied by guides at all times; (b) the sometimes virulent anti-US and anti-Japanese rhetoric; and (c) adulation of the leadership, both past and present.

One of the general criticisms made by some travellers to North Korea is that visitors can only see and hear what the government wants. This study tour attempted to overcome this concern by going to venues that required travelling on minor roadways, scheduling opportunities for free conversation (such as during the school visit), and by actively looking for ways to engage with local

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people. In order to try and obtain a more formal and balanced perspective on the situation in North Korea, an in-depth post-breakfast meeting was scheduled with Mr Tim Schaffter, the UNICEF representative in the DPRK, but unfortunately this meeting had to be cancelled because UNICEF was fully occupied attending to the needs of people affected by flooding in the far north-east of the country at the time of our visit.

The group managed to visit most places in the proposed itinerary, although local constraints necessitated changing the order of some visits. Three proposed venues had to be deleted: the Chollima Steelworks and the Korean War Museum in Dandong were closed for renovations, and the Pyongyang Maternity Hospital no longer accepts external visits because of their disruptive impact on hospital routines.

A significant factor in modifying the proposed itinerary was damage caused to a bridge between Sariwon and Sinchon a few days before our arrival during heavy rain. For a while, it looked as though we might have to abandon our visit to Sinchon and its Museum of US War Atrocities, but after negotiations between the tour leader and the guides, it was agreed that we would take a more circuitous route to Sinchon even though this meant additional driving, one late night and omitting a couple of scheduled visits (Kim Il Sung University, an orphanage in Nampo, and a sparkling water factory).

Among many highlights of the visit, several stand out. The ratings of the various visits on pages 6 to 78 highlight many of these, but it is worth expanding highlighting certain

Wall). After returning to Kaesong, the least war-damaged city in North Korea, we inspected Jannam Hill for an overview of the old city. *Overnight at Jannamsan Hotel, Kaesong.*

Sun 6 Sep: The day began with a visit to the Koryo Museum, a UNESCO World Heritage site in a centuries-old university that details the history of the Koryo Dynasty. We then took the short drive to today's frontline of the Cold War, the border with South Korea at Panmunjom. The group entered the DMZ and inspected the negotiating huts where the Korean War truce talks took place and the building where the armistice was signed, before entering the JSA (Joint Security Area) and going right up to the South Korean border. After returning through Kaesong, the group drove to Sariwon (a city on the Reunification Highway) for lunch before visiting the Sariwon Folklore Park and the Migok Co-operative Farm. Due to a bridge washout, the afternoon's program was adapted and we drove through Pyongyang with a stop at the Reunification Arch and on to Nampo for our overnight accommodation. *Overnight at Ryonggang Hot Spa Hotel, Nampo.*

Mon 7 Sep: After a one hour drive from Ryonggang, the group inspected the West Sea Barrage, which is a major engineering feat to reclaim inlets for fresh water from the sea. Following this, the group drove to Sinchon to inspect the Museum of US War Atrocities, recalling an alleged massacre of Korean women and children by US troops in Sinchon during the Korean War. Following this visit, the group drove to Mount Kuwol, stopping at the Woljong Buddhist Temple, before proceeding to Pyongyang for our overnight stay. *Overnight at the Koryo Hotel, Pyongyang.*

Tue 8 Sep: The morning began by visiting the Pohyon Buddhist Temple, followed by a major visit to the International Friendship Exhibition, which comprises huge underground palaces beneath two adjoining mountains filled with gifts from world leaders to Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il. After lunch, the group returned to Pyongyang and visited the new Revolutionary Martyrs Cemetery on the northern outskirts that houses the remains of hundreds of heroic soldiers who fought in the Korean War. *Overnight at the Koryo Hotel, Pyongyang.*

Wed 9 Sep: (National Day holiday) The day began with a formal visit to the Kumsusan Memorial Palace of the Sun, which is the mausoleum housing the bodies of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il. This was followed by an inspection of the Revolutionary Martyrs' Cemetery, which features individually shaped busts of each martyr from the Anti-Japanese Struggle (World War II) and impressive views across Pyongyang. After lunch, we attended a special holiday performance of the Pyongyang National Circus, followed by a visit to the Kwangbok Supermarket. We then attended mass dancing for National Day in front of Pyongyang Indoor Stadium. *Overnight at the Koryo Hotel, Pyongyang.*

Thu 10 Sep: Visits began at Mangyongdae with an inspection of Kim Il Sung's birthplace, noting the humble beginnings of the man who later became known as the Great Leader. This was followed by a visit to the Three Revolutions Exhibition, with inspections of the Heavy Industry and Light Industry pavillions. After lunch in the Revolving Restaurant at the top of the Yanggakdo Hotel, the group made a brief visit to the Ragwon (Paradise) Department Store before a tour and performance at the Schoolchildren's Palace, which is a centre of co-curricular excellence with study rooms and performance spaces. A special farewell dinner at a Korean Barbecue Restaurant concluded the day's program. *Overnight at the Koryo Hotel, Pyongyang.*

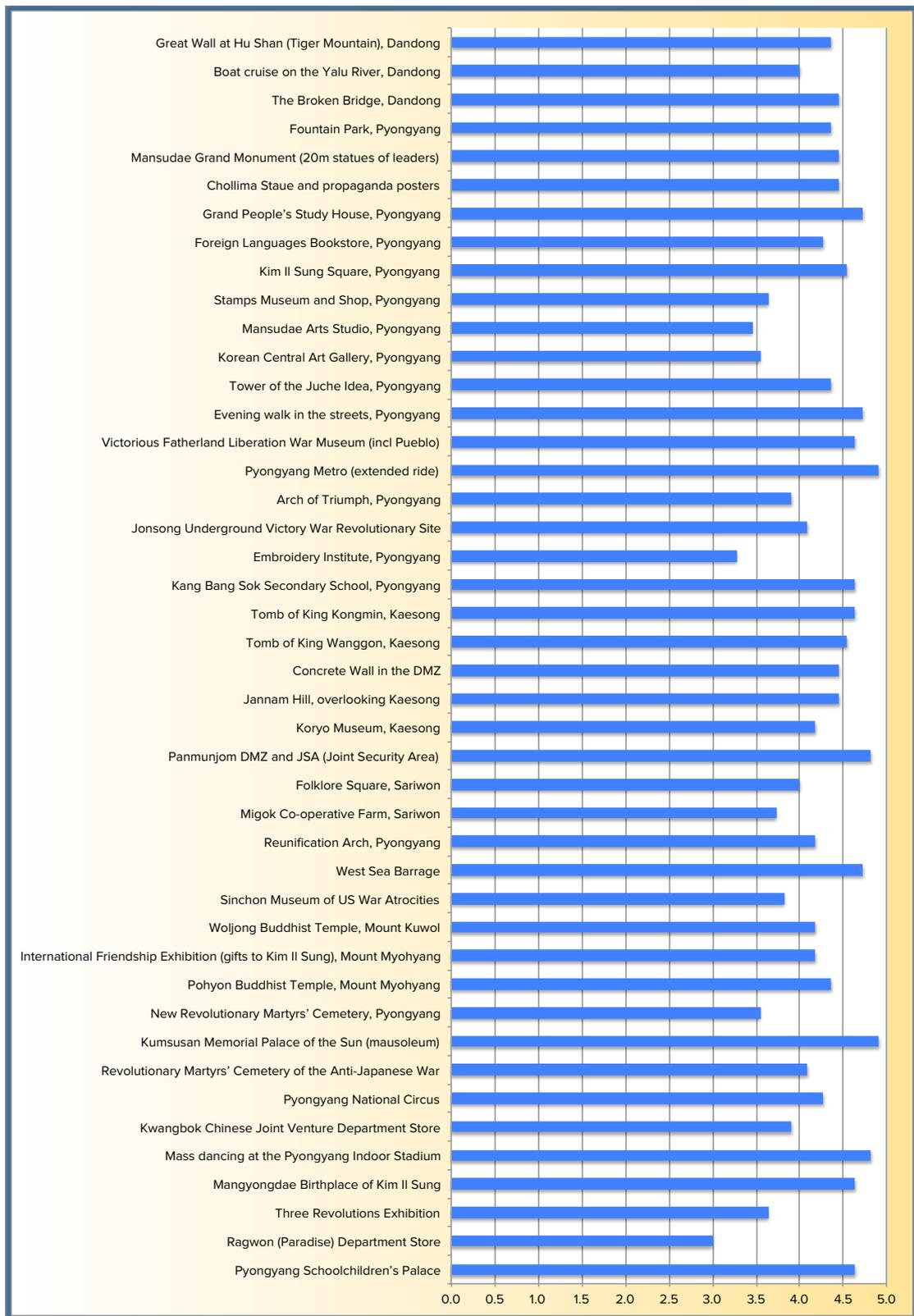
Fri 11 Sep: The group flew from Pyongyang to Beijing on Air Koryo flight JS151, departing at 8:30 am, arriving at 10:00 am.

A detailed, illustrated, daily trip diary can be seen online at http://www.stephencodrington.com/TravelDiaries/North_Korea_Travel_Diary_2015.html

Ratings of Individual Experiences

At the end of the trip, participants were asked to evaluate their experiences of the DPRK trip (in chronological order of visits) using the following five-point scale:

- 1 = very poor and/or largely a waste of time 2 = poor and/or not very useful
 3 = good, average, okay 4 = very good and/or quite useful 5 = excellent and/or extremely useful



Ratings of the Trip Organisation

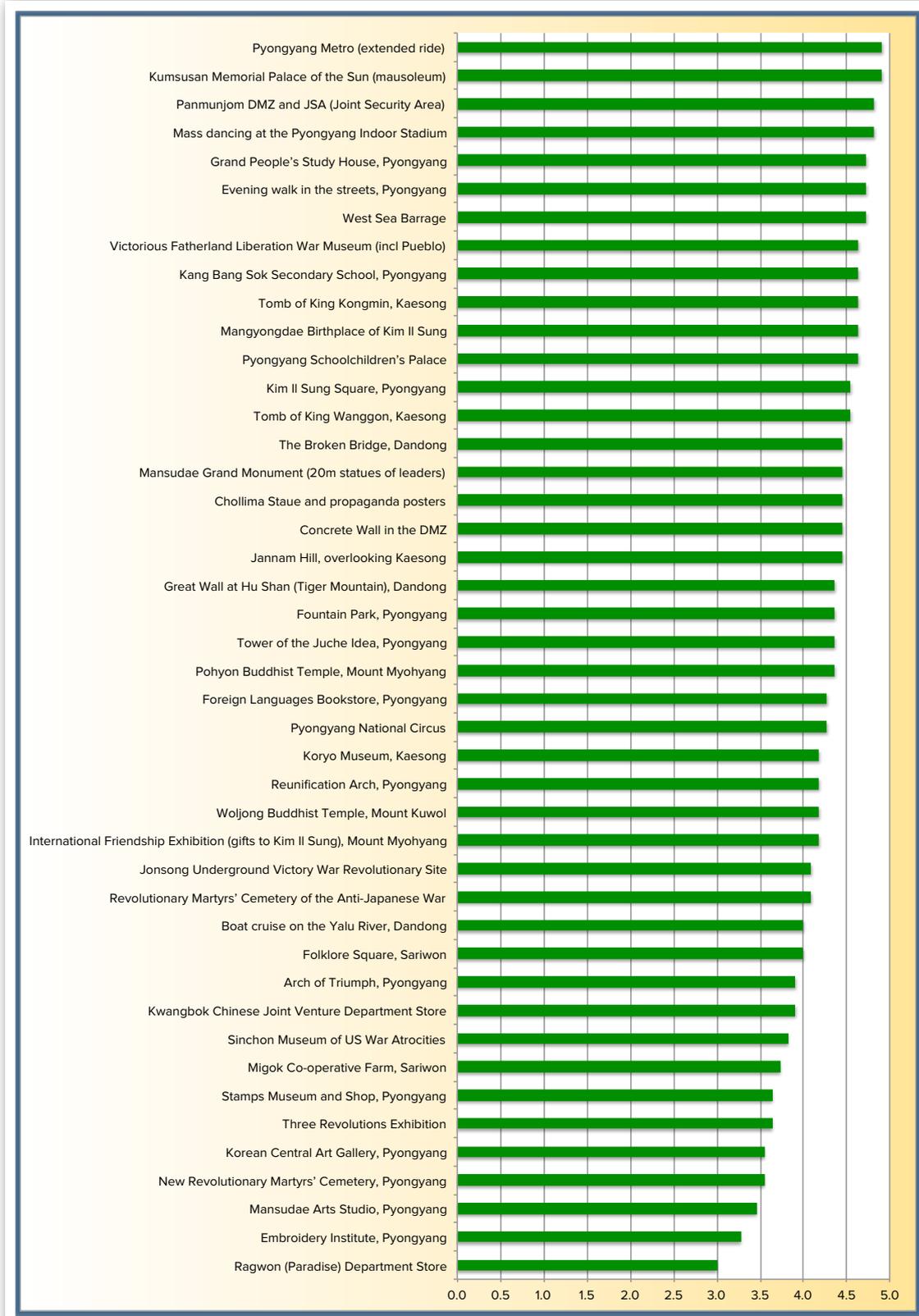
The same 5-point scale was used to evaluate the organisational aspects of the trip, including the travel arrangements, guide services, accommodation and meals. An overall rating of the trip was also obtained using the same 5-point scale. The results are shown below:



Rankings of Individual Experiences

Rankings of experiences of the DPRK trip (the visits shown on page 6) are shown below using the five-point scale:

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points.

The study tour included visits to 44 places (as listed chronologically on page 6 and in descending order of satisfaction on page 8).

Of the 44 visits, 14 received average scores between 4.5 and 5.0, while 33 of the visits scored between 4.0 and 5.0 (meaning that they were rated as “very good to excellent”). The remaining 11 visits were rated between 3.0 and 4.0 (good to very good). No visit received an average score of below 3.0. **The average score of all visits was 4.2.** This indicates a very high level of satisfaction with the study tour and the places visited.

The scores given for the travel arrangements were similarly positive, with all scores for the tour leader’s work and the guides’ services averaging between 4.8 and 5.0 (as shown on page 7).

Satisfactory scores were also given for the hotels and meals with one exception; the Jannamsan Hotel in Kaesong received an average score of only 2.8. There are only two hotels in Kaesong - the Jannamsan Hotel and the Minsok Folk Hotel. The Minsok Hotel is a higher rated hotel than the Jannamsan, but it is a traditional Korean style inn where guests sleep on a straw mat on the floor and meals are eaten sitting cross-legged on the floor. It was therefore decided that the Jannamsan Hotel, which has furniture such as beds and chairs, would be better suited to the demographics of the tour group despite its generally lower standard of accommodation.

Despite the physical difficulty of the steep climb, the visit to the Great

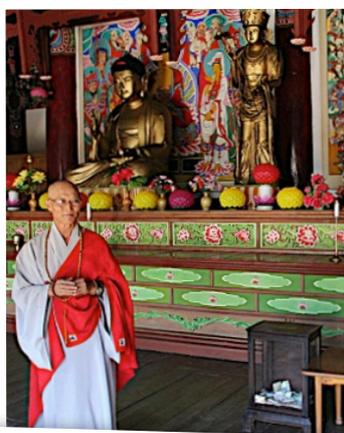
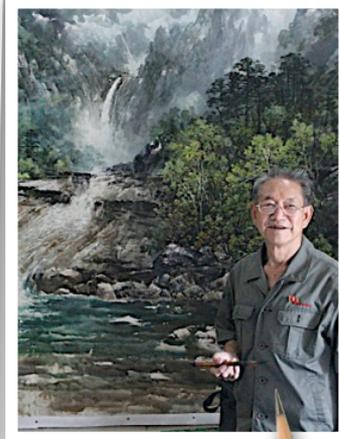
Wall at Hu Shan (Tiger Mountain) near Dandong provided spectacular views over the North Korean farmlands on the other side of the border. Similarly, travelling by train from Dandong to Pyongyang gave us a complete land transect from North Korea’s northern and southern borders.

Especially high ratings were given for our visits to the Pyongyang Metro, the Grand People’s Study House, the Kang Bang Sok Secondary School (both of which provided opportunities for free conversations with local people), and the Kumsusan Memorial Palace of the Sun, which is the mausoleum in which the bodies of both Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il are on display. The ratings given for some venues varied widely from person to person, largely as a result of personal responses to the versions of history being communicated there (examples being the recently rebuilt Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum in Pyongyang, and the Sinchon Museum of US War Atrocities).

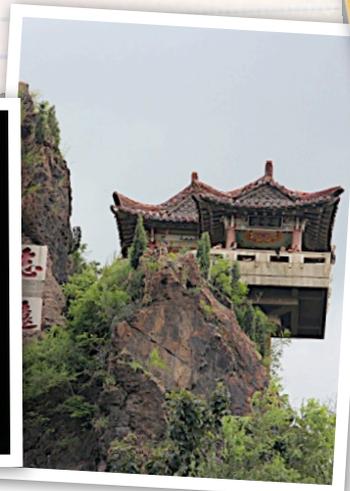
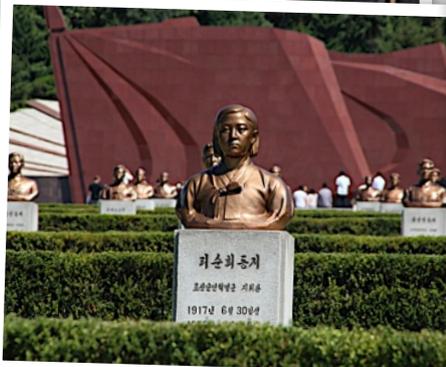
On Sunday 6th September, the group visited Panmunjom, the negotiating point in the centre of the DMZ (Demilitarised Zone) that divides North and South Korea. This must be one of the most extraordinary places in the world today, an active and visible reminder of the Cold War that divided the globe just a couple of decades ago. Although we visited several specific important places, such as the location of the armistice signing in 1953 and the negotiating huts that straddle the border, it was the simple experience of the surprisingly calm atmosphere of this front-line cold war location that made the experience significant.



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An illustrated daily diary of the study tour can be accessed at http://www.stephencodrington.com/TravelDiaries/North_Korea_Travel_Diary_2015.html.



The following day, the group took a long diversion (to go around the washed out bridge near Sariwon) to visit Sinchon, the site of an alleged but well documented massacre of 35,380 local people by US and allied troops during a 52 day period in late 1950. A new museum has been built to honour those who were tortured and killed, known as the Sinchon Museum of US War Atrocities. Very

few foreigners visit the museum (although all DPRK students do so) on the grounds that it is considered far too explicit for general foreign tastes.

For many (but not all) members of the group, the most moving part of the experience at Sinchon was listening to the quiet words (in Korean, but translated) of Mr Ju

Sang Won. Now 70 years old, Mr Ju was one of only three children who survived an incident in Wonam-ri, a small hamlet on the outskirts of Sinchon, in which just over a hundred children were herded into a brick storeroom by US troops, sprayed with petrol and set aflame. He was just five years old at the time of the incident, and to hear the words of the first-hand testimony of

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a survivor of the massacre left most of us all stunned, humbled and speechless.

Tour Evaluation

In addition to the statistical survey, the results of which are shown on pages 6 to 8, participants were given the opportunity to respond to several open-ended questions about the trip. The responses are shown below:

The highlight of the trip for me was ... because ...

"The highlight of the trip for me was the Grand People's Study House because we were able to talk to the North Korean English language students and didn't really get a chance to talk freely with many other DPR Koreans."

"The highlight of the trip for me was meeting mature students at the library because of the genuine contact we had with people. Also the Pueblo because of the interesting history. And getting an overall feel for the country and their interpretation of history. Hard to define the best thing. Almost everything was fabulous."

"The highlights of the trip for me were the Juche Tower, West Sea Barrage and hotel revolving restaurant: all geographical features allowing overviews of Pyongyang and economic development. Cultural features were good for the shock value."

"The highlights of the trip for me were the Great Wall, Grand People's Study House, Hall of Presents to Kim Il Sung and the Pyongyang Subway because they comprised: (Great Wall): exercise/ incredible views/ experience; (Study House): fascinating building and wonderful to meet students; (Gifts Hall): most bizarre collection of gifts unlike anything I've seen before. Going on the subway was superb, being in a train carriage with music blaring - people-watching was terrific."

"The highlight of the trip for me was visiting the countryside as well as the

cities because cities emphasise glitz, super building structures. China's points of interest we visited in the short time there were of great interest too."

"The highlight of the trip for me was simply being curious about North Korea and its people, because I believe there is so much told to us (here in Australia) that is not correct. Also the hearsay about the three Kim leaders. The Korean War and what the USA did in NK and SK was of great interest to me."

"We didn't have any particular highlights. It was more an accumulation of events, sights and information and impressions."

the little we do get, is negative as well. I wanted to experience and see as much as I could myself. Impressive were the public buildings, infrastructure like roads and public housing, pleasant and friendly people (as much as we were allowed to mix), the obvious mining wealth, the apparent self-sufficiency in manufacturing, and that they seem to have many trading partners (Australia misses out I think?). I was amazed by the Mausoleum; the collection of gifts to the Kims; the war museums. The train journey great - we could see so much countryside. The trip was extremely well organised and run. The trip group, all individuals, were all nice - helpful, friendly, and looked out for each other. I had a terrific and memorable experience



"The highlight of the trip for me was what I call 'the North Korea experience', because it far exceed my expectations in every way. My two favourite experiences were the 1 1/2 hours spent at the mass dancing on our second last day; I just found it great to be part of the locals' out enjoying themselves. And the second experience was the Sinchon Museum of US War Atrocities; very moving and how Mrs O was brought to tears."

"The highlight of the trip for me was EVERYTHING: so many things! I was excited and interested in this unusual destination with the new experiences. I have never just accepted media accounts/news about DPRK (USA bias),

at the school English class. The circus was extraordinary.

The main thing that was different to what I had expected was ...

"The main thing that was different to what I had expected was the diversity of Pyongyang, going out into the countryside, seeing locals in department stores (particularly the Paradise Department Store where 'bourgeois' locals were buying goods (and one guy was wearing an Adidas polo shirt). Going on the freeway that doubled as an airport runway. Seeing tombs in a quiet

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setting - hadn't imagined them at all. Meeting students."

"Pretty much as expected from your Traveller's Club talk a few years ago and from reading. Some loosening of restrictions (e.g. dress for mausoleum) since your 2010 visit. Lighting less restricted too."

"The main thing that was different to what I had expected was the amount of surveillance to the point of paranoia."

"The main thing that was different to what I had expected was that maybe the city was a bit more modern than expected, but after doing some reading and seeing numerous documentaries over the years the country was pretty much what we expected."

"The main thing that was different to what I had expected was how beautiful and green the country was and how modern looking the high rise buildings in Pyongyang were."

"The main thing that was different to what I had expected was that there seems to be an inward strength and acceptance of the people. They were gracious and kind to us. I expected not to be treated as well as we were."

"We had more opportunities to observe and photograph than we were expecting."

"The main thing that was different to what I had expected was that the North Koreans seemed to be happy and leading fruitful, busy lives - certainly different to what I had expected."

"The main thing that was different to what I had expected was that despite the initial somewhat intimidating Dandong train checks, how we were able to move about relatively easily within the country. Checkpoints were no problem. Border visits were informative and not a bit 'scary' (despite having 'hotel arrest!'). I think I expected to see more poverty, especially in rural areas. Maybe that was hidden from visitors or is in the north, in mountain villages, or elsewhere? Food was rather bland and repetitive (I thought it might be more varied and tasty

like Chinese). I thought I'd see more military machines e.g. tanks etc., but maybe they were hidden away? The many soldiers I did expect to see, but not doing all jobs e.g. construction (and doing very hard work and probably dangerous re health and safety on site!)."

The worst thing about the trip was ...

"The worst thing about the trip was the restrictions on movement and photography and that every place seemed very rushed. Although this did mean we could see more places, we didn't have enough time to see some places properly. Also, the emphasis on the war that ended in 1953; it is as if they haven't moved on since then."



"The worst thing about the trip was lack of time to rest because of overcrowded itinerary. We realise this is beyond your control but for older tourists just an hour's rest before dinner would be appreciated."

"The worst thing about the trip was the constant repetition of North Korea's claims to be victims or victors, contrary to our received history. There is much evidence, by the way, that children's memories are not trustworthy (to say the least), so their US atrocities stories have no weight."

"The worst thing about the trip was lack of exercise (I know we don't go to North Korea for exercise but would have been happy to do things that, possibly, required it). Eating dinner when lunch finished late and one was still full. Not being able to just 'wander' (again, not

something I was expecting to be able to do). Seeing bears at the circus."

"The worst thing about the trip was not being able to read signs or understand what was being said."

"Nothing was the worst, and nothing was bad or evil."

"The worst thing about the trip was how much time we spent at souvenir shops. Also beer and tea always being available at meals, but having to negotiate (mostly unsuccessfully) for something for non beer and tea drinkers."

"I didn't like the hotel in Kaesong, but it didn't affect my opinion of the trip. There were no 'worst things' on the trip... a few 'funny' decisions about our photography or where we could go or not go, but they were all part of the experience of the trip."

"The worst thing about the trip was some of the war atrocities exhibits, as these were graphic and confronting and upset me (like Mrs O I needed to go away to the Ladies for a while). Yet I feel more informed about the case North Korea has. Roads were very bumpy although straight and level in construction. Weather was a bit hot and humid but that is my problem."

Would you ever return to North Korea?

"Yes, I would love to go north, to Mt Paektu etc. Would love to see Pyongyang again and be able to absorb information second time around."

"I won't because time is running out, but recommending widely to others."

"No - not until the atmosphere becomes more pleasant. Too much dwelling on the past presented to the point of obnoxious paranoia (Australia was occupied by the Japanese in war times too). The country in general needs to move on maintaining what monuments there are with the dogma toned down, the people given full access to international information in order not to be managed by hierarchy."

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Maybe, if/when things have changed to there are less restrictions on tourists, and there is less emphasis on the Korean War."

"Probably not, but only because ten days was a really good amount of time to see quite a bit of the country and there are so many other places that we would like to see that we have not been to yet."

"Yes. I would like to return again but those close to me are very pro-USA and I would like to go to ski. But it would again create more irritation with those close to me."

"Not in the near future. Would return in ten years or so to observe any changes."

"Yes. I enjoyed it all so much that I would like to go back and experience it again. I foresee changes in North Korea in the years ahead and I would like to experience those changes first hand."

"Yes, I would love to explore DPRK more. Scenery, cultural aspects and way of life. I would like to see some of the native animals and birds. In a few years time it would be interesting to see the changes. One day they will reunite..... At present, everyday life in the DRPK countryside reminded me of China in the 1980's minus the Mao suits and the obvious rural poverty. Oxen to work and pull carts, no ponies did I see like in China."

If you returned, what would you like to do there next time?

"I would like the opportunity to talk freely with ordinary people, but obviously this is not possible in the present climate."

"See more of the mountains and the national parks, as well as other cities. More time in towns like Sariwon."

"See more economic activity at close range."

"Mount Paektu, and explore other country areas."

"See more of the northern areas as well as revisit parts of the southern areas."

"Same again in a few years."

"Just further afield in the country".

"Visit the north, the scenery generally, perhaps see mountain villages and hydro schemes. Want to visit the mountains and the crater lake area. Have an opportunity to visit a village, a village market, mix with locals rural and urban. Go to local family-restaurants in the evening."

For this trip, you had the freedom to choose your own airline and flight arrangements. Did this



innovation suit you, and is it a feature you would like to see on future study tours?

"Own arrangements okay with me."

"Yes, gave one a decent choice of flights with good range of prices."

"Yes it suited me. Yes I'd like to see it on future study tours."

It didn't worry me either way. But the option to fly with the others in the group would have been appreciated. I made the mistake of travelling from Beijing to Sydney via Shanghai as Shanghai is not a transfer airport. This meant I had to collect my suitcases, walk 500m to the next terminal and check in again - instead of being able to check my bag straight through to Sydney and get both boarding

passes in Beijing - even though both flights were Qantas code share or Qantas flights."

"Yes, we think it is a good idea to have this freedom to choose a preferred airline."

"I am totally happy with what we did and would do similar again."

"We would definitely like this freedom as would always go for longer than two weeks."

"Yes, it suited me. I would say I prefer to choose my own flight arrangements, although if I was not given a choice it certainly would not inhibit my going on a study tour."

"It did suit me as I had the confidence to travel alone to a foreign place and it enabled flexibility for travel dates/airlines and I personally obtained a splendid deal business class with China Southern. People often have a FF program for airlines as well."

Improvements I would suggest for future trips are

...

"Nothing really. It was all so good. Just as mentioned before, a little more time to relax and rest. This would add to appreciation of the sights we see."

"Either a longer trip or cutting out some activities so more time could be spent in the places visited. Fewer war museums."

"Breaks after lunch and before dinner where possible. I'm used to an after-lunch nap and revival thereafter. Several people expressed preference for a pre-dinner break, clean-up before dinner. More time between lunch and dinner would be preferable."

"Be able to be more flexible with eating times at restaurants (I do understand this might not be so easy to organise ahead as often tardiness for lunch wasn't expected". Really explain to people what they can't photograph and have very clear guidelines (again, harder to do once in situ). Sometimes it seemed eagerness to photograph everything could cause

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problems for the guides and was ignored. No complaints about the food given; we were lucky to have so much of it!"

"No suggestions. Stephen's planning was most suitable."

"I do not have any ideas that would assist future trips. Perhaps new places that would attract second timers."

"Nothing that comes to mind."

"No improvements spring to mind. Although I was very happy with the Koryo Hotel in Pyongyang, I wouldn't mind staying at the new 100+ storey hotel that has not yet opened if I were to go on a future trip. It was like an icon and somewhat baffling why it was unopened."

"I have only minor suggestions as I can't think of any really. Everything was great. Go when the weather is slightly cooler maybe (personal view!). Use the same two guides if available as they were excellent. Get the Koryo Hotel to include coffee for breakfast, even if a couple of dollars was added to the trip cost...it made a good, 'international-like' hotel look mean."

Any other comments

"No."

"No."

"Your thoroughness in preparation and report was exceptional; said as one who has been an organiser and attender to detail all my life."

"Because of my food allergies, I haven't completed the feedback on the restaurants because I would negatively skew the results. I hadn't realised that

everything would be cooked in soy-bean oil which I am allergic to (I had never heard of it before) and this really limited the meat, fish, chicken or duck (except for the last dinner) that I could eat. While it was probably normal for the DPRK Koreans, I found just eating a small plate of potato and either cucumber or cabbage (fried in sesame oil), some plain rice and 'thin soup' for lunch and dinner wasn't very satisfying. The odd occasions that I

leader and handled both my fellow travellers and the North Korean authorities so very well."

"It was extremely helpful to have a shared group email system to keep everyone in-the-loop regarding arrangements from a very early stage. My room-mate and I kept in phone contact as well which was good preparation."



was given protein cooked in sesame oil were great. I do understand why my meals were so basic and that they did their best for me, especially in the country, and I wasn't likely to starve."

"No."

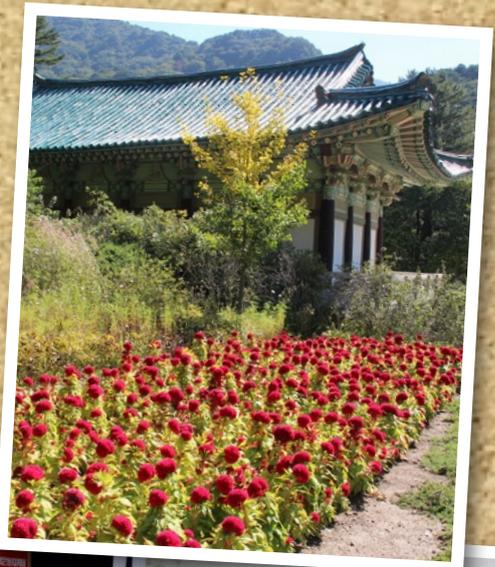
"In life it is important not to believe all we are told. Where possible attempt to seek the truth. Also not to imagine that the DPRK socialist system is not as good as our democratic. To have tolerance and understanding. Without the Americans' interference, Korea would be one united country. That is what most Koreans want but they do not have the power to forge the change."

"I do want to thank you for the whole North Korea tour. You were the 'best'

A note on the participants' feedback

The participants' constructive suggestions to improve future trips are well-taken.

It is often difficult to change 'the way things are done' in the DPRK; it is not known as being the world's most flexible or easy-going society. All visits and meals must be pre-booked, so when visits take longer than expected (as many of ours did because of the high level of interest shown, the desire to get lots of photos and the number of questions asked), arranging breaks becomes difficult. Restaurants are pre-booked to be as close as possible to the sites scheduled for visits, and therefore diverting via the hotel to rest or clean up is usually not possible or practical.



Concluding comments

An illustrated daily diary of the trip has been posted on the internet at http://www.stephencodrington.com/TravelDiaries/North_Korea_Travel_Diary_2015.html.

I would like to thank all those who assisted with the organisation of this trip. Thanks are due to Colin Sale and Arnold D'Souza from ACR International Travel & Tours for their invaluable assistance with organisation of travel and financial arrangements.

Special thanks are due to Simon Cockerell (Koryo Tours, Beijing) who acted as the principal liaison between the tour leader and the North Korean authorities in negotiating visas and the itinerary, and who kindly hosted a most informative pre-tour briefing for the group in Beijing.

The efforts of our local guides - David from CITS in Dandong, and Mr Kim Yong Un and Mrs O Hye Song from KITC in North Korea - are acknowledged with deep gratitude. We were indeed fortunate to receive the

support of such well-informed, helpful, competent and flexible guides during our travels.

Finally, I would like to thank the outstanding group of travellers who participated on the trip for their interest, co-operation, enthusiasm and diplomacy - they were sensational ambassadors both for Australia and the Geographical Society of New South Wales.

(Dr) Stephen Codrington
8th October 2015