



Tübingen Korean Studies Lecture Series

in cooperation with the King Sejong Institute Tübingen

Online via Zoom



July 14, 2021 (Wednesday), 18:00 c.t.

Zoom Meeting ID: 985 1558 0335 | Passcode: 099331

Dr. Thomas Stock (Heidelberg University)

North Korean Ideology in the Gorbachev Era: A Story of Failure

Abstract:

The 1980s saw considerable ideological transformations in North Korea and the Soviet Union. While North Korea revived Marxism-Leninism, the Soviet Union reformist forces increasingly questioned the fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism. Previous scholarship has barely explored this revival and the impact of Soviet ideological changes on North Korea. Drawing on new archival evidence and North Korean party publications, I seek to understand these interrelated and often contradictory phenomena. I find that North Korea's revival of Marxism-Leninism was not superficial but profound and strategically designed to better align a new foreign policy—a policy that actively reached out to the socialist world to attain economic and diplomatic superiority vis-à-vis South Korea—with state ideology. North Korea's strategy failed, however, because Soviet ideological changes under Gorbachev undermined the DPRK's foreign policy goals and new ideological commitments, consequently resulting in ideological disagreement and ultimately the end of North Korea's Marxist-Leninist renaissance.

Thomas Stock

Thomas Stock is a Humboldt Foundation Postdoctoral Fellow at Heidelberg University's Center for Transcultural Studies, specializing in North Korean intellectual history, global history, and transnational Marxism-Leninism. His current book project, a global history of North Korean ideology, explores the evolution of North Korean ideology in relation to global intellectual trends, trends which he argues structured spiritual developments in the DPRK.