

Mongolian Volunteers, North Korean Hero Horses and American Equine Idols of the Korean War

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Date: Wednesday, 25 June 2025

Time: 3 pm - 4 pm (NZDT)

Venue: Pat Hanan Room (Building 207 - Room 501)

Online available via Zoom: Registration required



Abstract

This paper explores the role of the horse during recent Korean history and the Korean War, finding connection with the historical cultural relationships between horse and human in Korean history, and the wider context of hero and war horses in human conflict. The Korean War was primarily a human conflict, but with previous writing on the place of pigeons and other animals in European conflict, as well as a developing body of work on animal geographies and cultural geographies of more than human relations in mind, this paper considers the conflicts' equine belligerents and participants. The paper considers the lives and journeys of horses gifted to North Korea by the Mongolian People's Republic, so numerous they were referred to as the Mongolian Volunteers. Archival material from Mongolia suggests Manzhouli became the transshipment point for these animals (as well as other war time materiel). on their long journeys from the steppe to the war's frontlines. Still longer were journeys travelled by horses captured from the North Korean side and co-opted into the United Nations forces and particularly into the US Marine Corps. Some, such as the mare who became known as Sergeant Reckless, would find their extensive service granted them passage across the Pacific and distant retirements in southern California. Other horses would become vital elements in a young North Korea's post war mythologies and mythographies, their memories projected even into the contemporary imagination of North Korea. While this paper situates itself in the time and place of the Korean War it finds connection with the historical cultural relationships between horse and human in Korean history, and the wider context of hero and war horses in human conflict.

All are warmly welcome to the seminar room. Online joining is also available, but registration is required. Please scan the QR code above. For any inquiries, please contact ch.song@auckland.ac.nz.