

CIÊNCIAS SOCIALMENTE APLICÁVEIS E HUMANIDADES:

SABERES, PRÁTICAS E HORIZONTES DE INVESTIGAÇÃO

JESÚS RIVAS GUTIÉRREZ
MARÍA DOLORES CARLOS SÁNCHEZ
(ORGANIZADORES)

VOL V



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PRÓLOGO

Las ciencias socialmente aplicables y las humanidades ocupan un lugar central en la comprensión de los desafíos contemporáneos. En un escenario marcado por transformaciones jurídicas, tecnológicas, educativas, culturales, laborales, ambientales y subjetivas, pensar la vida social exige articular múltiples perspectivas de análisis, capaces de iluminar tanto las estructuras institucionales como las experiencias concretas de los sujetos y las comunidades.

El volumen ***Ciências Socialmente Aplicáveis e Humanidades: Saberes, Práticas e Horizontes de Investigação V*** reúne un conjunto plural de trabajos que expresan la amplitud de este campo de investigación. Las contribuciones aquí reunidas dialogan con problemas vinculados a la justicia, los derechos humanos, el constitucionalismo, la educación, la formación docente, la ética académica, la inteligencia artificial, el patrimonio, la cultura visual, el lenguaje, la migración, el liderazgo, el bienestar organizacional, el cuidado, la subjetividad, el ambiente y el desempeño humano. Esta diversidad temática no constituye una dispersión, sino una muestra de la complejidad de los fenómenos sociales y humanos, que rara vez pueden ser comprendidos desde una única disciplina o perspectiva.

La organización de la obra fue pensada a partir de una lógica progresiva, estructurada en cinco ejes temáticos. El primer eje se orienta a los debates sobre justicia, derechos y constitucionalismo en sociedades plurales. En él se abordan cuestiones relacionadas con justicia distributiva, derechos fundamentales, inteligencia artificial aplicada al ámbito judicial y formas comunitarias de administración de justicia. Estos temas permiten reflexionar sobre las tensiones entre normatividad, equidad, acceso a derechos y reconocimiento de la diversidad jurídica y social.

El segundo eje se dedica a la educación, la ética académica y la innovación en la formación contemporánea. Los trabajos reunidos en esta sección evidencian que los procesos educativos no pueden desligarse de los debates éticos, tecnológicos, sociales e institucionales que atraviesan la formación de sujetos críticos. La educación aparece aquí como un espacio de transformación, pero también como un campo en constante renovación, donde convergen la inclusión, la enseñanza de las matemáticas, la formación y evaluación del profesorado, la integración de las tecnologías de la información y la inteligencia artificial en los procesos educativos, la escritura académica, las competencias socioemocionales, la innovación pedagógica, la corrupción en la educación superior y la responsabilidad institucional. En conjunto, estos estudios ponen de manifiesto la necesidad de fortalecer una educación capaz de responder críticamente a los desafíos contemporáneos.

El tercer eje reúne estudios vinculados a cultura, lenguaje, patrimonio y simbolismos sociales. Esta sección permite observar cómo las sociedades producen, preservan y comunican significados a través de signos, lenguajes, imágenes,

arquitecturas, objetos patrimoniales y dispositivos visuales. Los capítulos dedicados a la intervención y conservación del patrimonio arquitectónico dialogan con investigaciones sobre comunicación simbólica, identidad visual e imaginarios nacionales, mostrando que el patrimonio cultural y los sistemas de representación constituyen dimensiones fundamentales para comprender la memoria colectiva, la construcción de identidades y la relación entre pasado y presente. Desde esta perspectiva, la cultura se presenta no solo como memoria o representación, sino también como una forma de organización simbólica de la experiencia social, política e histórica.

El cuarto eje aborda temas relacionados con desarrollo, trabajo, liderazgo y transformaciones organizacionales. En este bloque, las investigaciones permiten pensar las dinámicas económicas y laborales contemporáneas a partir de fenómenos como la migración internacional, la innovación, la felicidad laboral, el liderazgo consciente, la neurocomunicación y los entornos híbridos y remotos. Estos temas evidencian la necesidad de comprender las organizaciones no solo como estructuras productivas, sino también como espacios de subjetividad, bienestar, comunicación y construcción de vínculos.

Finalmente, el quinto eje se aproxima a las subjetividades, el cuidado, el ambiente y el desempeño humano. Los trabajos aquí reunidos permiten reflexionar sobre la relación entre conducta, crisis ambiental, maternidad, neurodivergencia, bioética, feminismo, cuerpo, entrenamiento y rendimiento. Este cierre pone de relieve la dimensión humana de los procesos sociales, recordando que toda investigación aplicada a la sociedad debe considerar las formas concretas en que las personas viven, cuidan, sienten, se relacionan, habitan el mundo y construyen sentido.

En conjunto, este volumen evidencia que las ciencias socialmente aplicables y las humanidades son fundamentales para interpretar las transformaciones de nuestro tiempo. Sus aportes permiten problematizar desigualdades, comprender instituciones, revisar prácticas, analizar discursos, acompañar procesos formativos, preservar el patrimonio cultural, repensar el trabajo, cuestionar modelos de desarrollo y ampliar las posibilidades de vida colectiva.

Esperamos que ***Ciências Socialmente Aplicáveis e Humanidades: Saberes, Práticas e Horizontes de Investigação V*** contribuya al diálogo académico entre investigadores, docentes, profesionales y estudiantes interesados en comprender las múltiples dimensiones de la vida social. Que los trabajos aquí reunidos sirvan como punto de partida para nuevas preguntas, nuevas prácticas y nuevos horizontes de investigación comprometidos con la justicia, la educación, la cultura, el cuidado, la reflexión crítica y la transformación social.

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ABSTRACT: Postage stamps distill the ideological currents and social conditions of their time, functioning as visual artifacts that register historical transformation. This study analyzes North Korean stamp design as a dynamic visual system through which the state negotiates political authority, ideological communication, and the material conditions of print production. Since 1945, stamps have operated not simply as propaganda images but as compact mediating forms that encode foundational state motifs—revolutionary leaders, socialist labor, national flora and fauna—into a semiotic structure that ties everyday circulation to political legitimacy. The formal evolution of stamp design demonstrates how material infrastructures shape visual expression. Early letterpress and Soviet-style intaglio technologies constrained

resolution and chromatic range, whereas the subsequent adoption of standardized offset systems aligned production with the aesthetic imperatives of Juche visual culture. Export-oriented developments in the 1970s and 1980s enabled greater decorative complexity and chromatic experimentation, but the economic collapse of the 1990s abruptly halted this trajectory, resulting in marked technical deterioration. Since the 2000s, renewed investment in high-resolution offset and digitally assisted workflows has reestablished visual precision and compositional consistency. Typographic change further illustrates the co-production of ideology and materiality. The transition from colonial-era Ming-typefaces to state-standardized Gothic forms, brush-script variants, and digitally calibrated fonts reflect shifts in aesthetic norms and communicative strategies. A pivotal transformation occurred with the move from vertical to horizontal typesetting, enabling the systematic deployment of Hangeul-based slogans and reinforcing visual hierarchies. By situating stamp production within broader histories of visual ideology, print technology, and transnational philatelic circulation, this study shows how micro-scale media function as instruments of state power and material sites of ideological articulation.

KEYWORDS: North Korean visual culture; postage stamp design; visual symbolism; typography; state propaganda.

1. INTRODUCTION

North Korean postage stamps go beyond their basic role as indicators of postal payment; they serve as visual conduits for ideological dissemination and embodiments of national symbolism designed to legitimize political authority.¹

As instruments of political propaganda, these stamps project the leader's grandeur and authority, embedding state ideology into citizens' everyday consciousness through repeated exposure. Regularly issued to commemorate political events such as New Year's addresses, national holidays, and the leaders' birthdays, they not only consolidate domestic allegiance but also serve as vehicles of international propaganda, extending the regime's ideological influence beyond national borders.²

Authoritarian regimes—including the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, and North Korea—have systematically used various media, including postage stamps, as vehicles of propaganda. Carlos Støetzer (1953) observed that Soviet stamps played a pivotal role in legitimizing the transfer of power from Lenin to Stalin, while Nazi Germany institutionalized Hitler's cult of personality through philatelic imagery.³

These examples demonstrate that stamps serve as compact yet potent symbols of state authority. The maintenance of power in such regimes depends on the manipulation of admiration (Miranda) and belief (Credenda): emotional veneration of the leader and ideological justification for obedience. In the North Korean context, concepts such as the “Paektu bloodline” and “Rule by legacy” visually sanctify hereditary succession and reinforce regime legitimacy. Through symbolic manipulation—a common practice in totalitarian systems—North Korea incorporates leader portraits, Party–state–military iconography, and mythologized achievements into stamp designs, which are further amplified by state-controlled media.⁴ Due to their portability, accessibility, and visual immediacy, stamps effectively internalize ideology and consolidate loyalty, while also serving abroad as instruments of cultural propaganda.⁵

In summary, North Korean postage stamps serve as a crucial instrument of political symbolism rather than simply functioning as postal artifacts. Through the integration of

¹ Paekhwasa Ch'ulp'ansa, *Chosŏn Taebaek kwa Sajŏn* [Encyclopedia of Korea] (2001), vol. 28, Pyongyang: Paekhwasa Publishing House, 137.

² Sahoe Kwahak Ch'ulp'ansa, *Tae chung Chŏngchi' Yongŏ Sajŏn* [Dictionary of Mass Political Terms] (1959), Pyongyang: Social Science Publishing House; Chosŏn Rodongdang Ch'ulp'ansa, Widaehan Suryŏng Kim Il-sŏng Tongji ūi Nojak Yongŏ Sajŏn [Dictionary of the Works of the Great Leader Comrade Kim Il-sung] (1982), Pyongyang: Korean Workers' Party Publishing House; Paekhwasa Ch'ulp'ansa, *Chosŏn Taebaek kwa Sajŏn* [Encyclopedia of Korea] (2000), Pyongyang: Paekhwasa Publishing House; Dahyun Jeong (2023), *Agit-Prop Stamp Policy and Leader Symbol Manipulation in North Korea*, PhD diss, Korea University, 24–25.

³ Carlos Støetzer, *Postage Stamps as Propaganda* (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1953), 4.

⁴ Murray Edelman, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1964).

⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, rev. ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1976 [1951]).

imagery and typography, these stamps encapsulate national ideology in a concise visual format, offering valuable insights into how visual media shape power, identity, and belief within a totalitarian society.⁶

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND REVIEW OF PREVIOUS STUDIES

2.1. ACADEMIC POSITION OF NORTH KOREAN STAMP STUDIES

North Korean postage stamps function less as postal instruments than as visual apparatuses that condense and disseminate state ideology. Produced entirely within a centralized system, they serve as vital primary materials for analyzing the symbolic and ideological operations that underpin North Korean political culture.

Earlier studies of stamps were largely confined to collecting practices or the history of postal institutions. Since the 2000s, however, the field has expanded through the incorporation of visual culture theory, political communication, semiotics, and media archaeology. Within the North Korean context—where visual media directly materialize state ideology—stamps provide a distinctive analytical framework for examining the formation, circulation, and reproduction of national symbolic systems. This specificity demonstrates the significance of North Korean stamp design research for illuminating visual state representation, the material articulation of ideology, and the semiotic mechanisms through which political meaning is produced and sustained.

2.2. REVIEW OF PREVIOUS STUDIES

(1) Studies on the Visualization of Leaders

The examination of leaders' imagery and revolutionary narratives depicted on North Korean postage stamps constitutes a significant area of study within visual politics. Chŏng (2024) argues that North Korean stamps serve as visual instruments for manipulating and perpetuating the symbolic authority vested in the leader. Similarly, Kwon (2009) emphasizes that the glorification of historical figures and leaders through stamps helps construct political myths. While these studies highlight the role of stamps as vehicles for ideologically driven political representation, they offer limited analysis of specific visual elements such as color schemes, compositional structure, and Typography design.

(2) Research on the Representation of National Symbols and Monuments

The frequent reproduction of national symbols and monumental landmarks is closely linked to the consolidation of regime identity and the reinforcement of state narratives. An

⁶ "A Blessed and Worthwhile Life Reflected in Stamps" Rodong Sinmun, March 12, 2023; "Stamp Designers of Korea Who Breathe with the Times," Choson Sinbo, October 13, 2017.

(2019) observes that images of revolutionary historic sites and iconic monuments featured on North Korean postage stamps serve as instruments for strengthening the regime's ideological foundations. Similarly, Cho (2021) examines how the recurrent portrayal of the national flag, emblem, and commemorative architectural structures establishes visual coherence and reinforces national identity.⁷ While these studies elucidate the persistence and repetition of symbolic motifs, they offer limited analysis of the political contexts that influence the selection of such symbols or how these representations evolve across different historical periods.

(3) Research on Temporal Changes in Imagery

Several studies have demonstrated that changes in political leadership and discursive frameworks are reflected in the imagery of postage stamps. Lee (2018), drawing on a comparative analysis of early North Korean and South Korean postage stamps, explores how political symbolism and communicative strategies evolved across distinct historical periods. Similarly, Kim (1996) provides a systematic account of design modifications in socialist postage stamps, emphasizing the visual expression of political discourse within North Korean philately.⁸ This body of research is valuable for systematizing the relationship between political discourse and visual representation over time. However, it remains limited in its ability to explain the structural determinants of such visual changes, including institutional planning, production mechanisms, and policy-driven directives.

(4) Research on International Propaganda and Strategies for Shaping External Image

Another significant area of inquiry concerns the use of North Korean postage stamps in external contexts, such as the global philatelic market, international exhibitions, and diplomatic symbolic positioning initiatives. Jonsson (2005), in a comparative study of North and South Korean postage stamps, argues that North Korean issues serve as tools for shaping international perceptions and disseminating state narratives abroad. Grayson (2022) highlights how postage stamps convey nationalist messages and contribute to the regime's broader cultural diplomacy strategies.⁹ However, most of these studies rely

⁷ An, J.-y. (2019). *A study on North Korea's socialist construction line through stamps (master's thesis)*. University of North Korean Studies; Cho, K.-j. (2021). *Social change in North Korea seen through stamps (master's thesis)*. Dongguk University.

⁸ Lee, H.S. (2018). *Symbolic politics in Korea through stamps: From liberation to the Korean War period*. *Society and History*, 118, 35–70; Kim, S. (1996). *Socialist states' stamp design*. *Kyewon Nanchong*, 1(1), 45–60.

⁹ Jonsson, G. (2005). *The two Koreas' societies as reflected in stamps*. *East Asia*, 22(2), 3–28. Grayson, J. H. (2022). *Post-liberation Korea – The first postage stamps: A comparative semiotic study of nation-building in North Korea and South Korea*. In *Stamps, nationalism and political transition*, 20–25.

primarily on external observational data, yielding limited insight into the internal planning rationales or strategic deliberations underpinning North Korea's management of its external image.

(5) Summary and Research Rationale

Existing research has made significant progress in four main areas: leader iconography, recurring national symbols, political discourse as reflected in period-specific images, and the use of postage stamps as tools for external communication. However, gaps remain in several aspects, including formal visual analysis, long-term diachronic studies of national symbols, and integrated analyses of visual imagery and typography in stamp design. To address these limitations, this study proposes an integrated analytical framework that combines visual analysis, discourse analysis, and the examination of visual symbolism and typography.

3. PURPOSE

This study examines the historical evolution of visual symbolism and typographic practices in North Korean postage stamps, considering them a state-regulated medium integral to shaping national identity and structuring ideological discourse. Since 1945, stamps have served not merely as postal instruments but as curated visual texts that articulate political authority, mythologize revolutionary history, and naturalize anti-imperialist narratives within everyday visual culture.

The analysis focuses on four dimensions: (1) the formation and transformation of national symbols across distinct political periods; (2) the stamp's function as a propagandistic device that stabilizes and institutionalizes state ideology; and (3) the dual role of visual symbolism in legitimizing domestic power while projecting a controlled national image abroad. (4) Ryu's *The History of North Korean Typography Culture, 1945–2023*, provides the theoretical foundation for examining the intersection of typeface and political meaning.¹⁰

Ultimately, the study argues that North Korean stamps operate as a compact visual technology of governance – an apparatus in which symbolic form and typographic order converge to materialize state power.

¹⁰ Ryu, H.G. (2025). *The History of North Korean Typography Culture, 1945–2023*. Taehaksa.

4. THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF NORTH KOREAN STAMP DESIGN: SYMBOLIC, FORMAL, TYPOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

4.1. 1946–1950: FROM LIBERATION TO THE OUTBREAK OF THE KOREAN WAR

(1) Symbolic Characteristics

Between 1945 and the outbreak of the Korean War, North Korean postage stamps served as a crucial medium through which the new state asserted political authority and developed an early socialist visual vocabulary. Although functioning as postal instruments, these issues primarily served as ideological images that articulated narratives of liberation, modernization, and national consolidation. The 1946 series foregrounded emblematic national symbols – the Mugunghwa, Kumgangsan [Fig.1], and the pre-division Taegeukgi [Fig. 2], while the simplified woodcut portrait of Kim Il-sung signaled the emerging formation of a leadership cult.¹¹

In 1947, visual focus shifted to land reform, with depictions of farmers and rice cultivation aligned with the aesthetic program of socialist realism and its valorization of collective labor. After the founding of North Korea in 1948, stamps increasingly adopted formal state iconography – national emblems, urban landmarks, and archetypal socialist figures – to project unity, discipline, and revolutionary commitment. By 1949, imagery emphasizing women's education and literacy highlighted cultural modernization and gender equality as ideals of socialist citizenship.

On the eve of war, military and industrial motifs – symbolic representations of armored warfare, locomotives, and cogwheels – linked defense preparedness to technological modernization. Collectively, the 1946–1950 issues demonstrate how nationalism, propaganda, and socialist realism converged to construct a coherent visual ideology centered on authority, collectivism, and self-reliance.

(2) Formal Characteristics

Between liberation in 1945 and the outbreak of the Korean War, North Korean postage stamps functioned as a structured visual medium through which the emerging state articulated its political objectives and shaped early socialist representation. Under the Soviet military administration (1946–47), early issues featured national symbols such as the Mugunghwa, Kumgangsan, and the Taegeukgi, employing familiar motifs to signify liberation, national pride, and the legitimacy of the new regime.

¹¹ Lee, H.S. (2018). *Korean Society and Symbolic Politics of Postal Stamps: From Liberation to the End of Korean War*. *Society and History*, 118, 94–96.

After North Korea's founding in 1948, stamp design became more systematic, incorporating the national flag¹², emblem, state name, and archetypal figures of workers, peasants, and soldiers. [Fig.5.6.7.8.9] These elements created a codified visual language that conveyed state authority and reinforced socialist ideology through standardized iconography and hierarchical layouts.

In the immediate pre-war years, imagery shifted toward military and industrial themes. The Tanks, locomotives, and cogwheels served as symbols of defense readiness, technological progress, and economic self-reliance. Despite technical limitations such as monochrome printing and poor paper quality, designers emphasized clarity through streamlined forms and bold silhouettes. The later adoption of multicolor printing and more complex compositions added dynamism and enhanced the persuasive power of these visual messages.

(3) Typographic Characteristics

During the three years of Soviet military administration preceding the establishment of the North Korean government, stamp typography retained key colonial-era conventions, including Ming-style typefaces, vertical typesetting, and mixed Sino-Korean scripts. The introduction of Soviet *Goznak* intaglio and letterpress technologies.¹³ [Fig.10] However, this shift reconfigured the typographic landscape and established a new set of aesthetic and technical norms. Intaglio printing heightened the contrast of Ming-derived letterforms by sharpening vertical strokes and refining internal counters, thereby reinforcing the visual authority of state institutions. Letterpress printing, marked by mechanical irregularities, frequently compressed character interiors, and exposed the technological limitations of early domestic production. Typography in this period thus functioned as a transitional medium, mediating between inherited Typography practices and emerging Soviet-oriented aspirations.

After 1948, the adoption of horizontal typesetting and Gothic-style Hangeul typefaces improved legibility and conveyed a more formal and authoritative tone. [Fig.3.4.5.6.7.8.9] This shift strengthened the delivery of political slogans and socialist ideology, transforming stamps from decorative printed items into deliberate instruments of state communication. Taken together, North Korean stamps from 1945 to 1950 illustrate the formation of an early socialist visual culture in which symbolic imagery and structured typography were integrated to promote collectivist values, national achievement, and the political legitimacy of the new regime.¹⁴

¹² Kim, E.J., Ahn, M.K. (2013). *Three flags in the space of emancipation: Focused on the symbols of red flag, Taegeukgi, and Inkonggi*. *International Journal of Korean Diaspora Literature Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Issue 11, 29–56.

¹³ Goznak - 100th Anniversary of the Moscow Printing Factory (1919-2019), Source: <https://www.facebook.com/GoznakOfficialEng> (Accessed December 1, 2023.)

¹⁴ Ryu, H.G. (2025: 41-46)

Figure 1. Mugunghwa (Rose of Sharon); Kūmgangsān (Diamond Mountains, 12 March 1946), Source: Korean stamp database.

Figure 2. The 1st Anniversary of Liberation (15 August 1946), Source: University of Chicago Library. (n.d.).

Figure 3. The 2nd Anniversary of the Labor Law (5 June 1948), Source: Stampworld. (n.d.).

Figure 4. Establishment of the People's Republic (19 September 1948), Source: Stampworld. (n.d.).



Figure 5. The 3rd Anniversary of the Liberation (15 August 1948), Source: Korean stamp database

Figure 6. North Korean Flag (9 February 1949), Source: Korean stamp database

Figure 7. Opening of Kim Il-sung University in Pyongyang (9 August 1949), Source: Stampworld. (n.d.).

Figure 8. National Flag (4 April 1950), Source: Stampworld. (n.d.).

Figure 9. The 5th Anniversary of Liberation (20 June 1950), Source: University of Chicago Library. (n.d.)



Figure 10. Goznak - 100th Anniversary of the Moscow Printing Factory (1919-2019), Source: <https://www.facebook.com/GoznakOfficialEng> (Accessed December 1, 2023.)



4.2. THE KOREAN WAR PERIOD (1950–1953)

(1) Symbolic Characteristics

During the Korean War, North Korean postage stamps were categorized into five symbolic themes: military victory [Fig. 11], mass mobilization [Fig.15.16.17.20], anti-

American propaganda [Fig.18], international solidarity, and leader imagery. [Fig.14] This classification reflected the political priorities and propagandistic objectives of the wartime period, with stamps serving as a visual medium to advance these goals. Stamps issued after the outbreak of the war were primarily designed to justify the conflict, mobilize the populace, and promote North Korea on the international stage.

Military imagery emphasized tanks, aircraft, and soldiers as key elements of wartime propaganda. Mass mobilization portrayed women, youth, and laborers as central figures, employing socialist realist techniques to depict war heroes and equate labor on the home front with efforts on the battlefield. Anti-American imagery used symbolic exaggeration, depicting burning flags and fleeing enemy troops to personify adversaries visually. International solidarity was highlighted through cooperation with China and the Soviet Union, thereby promoting legitimacy within the socialist bloc. Leader imagery emerged in the later stages of the war, marking the beginning of a personality-centered visual culture. [Fig.19]

Korean War-era stamps served not only as postal tools but also as symbols of the war's legitimacy and national identity. They functioned as visual instruments to encourage popular participation in the conflict. Additionally, these stamps acted as tools of international propaganda, promoting alliances within the socialist world. The introduction of Kim Il-sung's portrait marked the early development of a leader-centered visual culture.¹⁵

(2) Formal Characteristics

During the Korean War, stamp designs centered on themes of liberation, state formation, and wartime mobilization. The designs prominently featured bold primary colors, frontal compositions, and symbolic motifs such as flags, maps, battle scenes, and the recapture of Seoul, all aimed at promoting national unity. These elements exemplify a clear application of socialist realist principles in stamp design. [Fig.11-20]

Wartime printing technologies were limited, prioritizing simplicity and symbolic legibility. Letterpress and lithographic techniques were primarily used, with scarce ink supplies restricting prints to predominantly two or three colors. Despite these constraints, the frequent use of vivid red and bold outlines enhanced the propagandistic visual impact. Emergency production relied heavily on basic letterpress printing, resulting in a significant decline in overall print quality due to wartime conditions. Designs were simplified, predominantly monochrome, and produced on inferior paper stock, which accounts for the poor preservation of many surviving specimens. These characteristics highlight how

¹⁵ Lee, H.S. (2018:102-104).

North Korean stamps during the Korean War functioned both as practical postal items and as potent symbols of visual propaganda, reflecting ideological priorities amid severe material constraints.

(3) Typographic Characteristics

The typography of North Korean postage stamps produced during the Korean War reflects the material austerity and ideological urgency of a society mobilized for total conflict. Limited printing infrastructure and shortages of paper and ink resulted in markedly simplified letterforms, reduced stroke counts, compressed counters, and flattened, sans-serif Gothic styles that facilitated rapid, high-volume production. [Fig.11-20] These reductive forms were not aesthetic innovations but functional adaptations to wartime constraints.

Typography and layout similarly emphasized immediacy and legibility. Bold Gothic type enlarged state names and slogans and centrally aligned single-axis compositions enabled swift visual recognition, transforming stamps into efficient vehicles of political messaging rather than routine postal instruments. [Fig.17:18]

Low-resolution offset and unstable letterpress processes produced blurred outlines, loss of micro-details, and inconsistent stroke densities – material traces of strained wartime production rather than intentional stylistic effects.

At the level of visual rhetoric, typography played an active role in wartime propaganda. Heavy, rigid strokes paired with military motifs and slogan-centric constructions reinforced narratives of resistance, unity, and revolutionary steadfastness. The occasional use of high-contrast Ming elements in commemorative issues added a sense of ceremonial gravity. [Fig.20] Collectively, these Typography strategies reveal how wartime stamps operated as compact ideological media, simultaneously asserting state legitimacy and mobilizing public sentiment.¹⁶

¹⁶ Ryu, H.G. (2025: 126-136)

Figure 11. Capture of Seoul (10 July 1950), Source: University of Chicago Library. (n.d.)

Figure 12. Kim Ki Ok (17 April 1951), Source: Stampworld. (n.d.).

Figure 13. Li Su Dok (10 January 1952), Source: Stampworld. (n.d.).

Figure 14. Chinese Korean Friendship (1 June 1952), Source: Stampworld. (n.d.).

Figure 15. The 7th Anniversary of Liberation (15 August 1952), Source: University of Chicago Library. (n.d.)



Figure 16. International Youth Day (20 October 1952), Source: Stampworld. (n.d.).

Figure 17. The 5th Anniversary of the National Army (20 January 1953), Source: University of Chicago Library. (n.d.)

Figure 18. Day of Anti-US Imperialist Struggle (1 June 1953), Source: Korean stamp database

Figure 19. Truce and Victory (28 July 1953), Source: Stampworld. (n.d.).

Figure 20. The 5th Anniversary of the People's Republic (25 August 1953), Source: Stampworld. (n.d.).



4.3. POSTWAR RECONSTRUCTION PERIOD (1953–1960)

(1) Symbolic Characteristics

During the postwar reconstruction period (1953–1960), North Korean postage stamps visually articulated the political and ideological imperatives of overcoming wartime devastation and legitimizing the socialist state-building project. [Fig.21.22] The dominant symbolic motifs of this era centered on the themes of “recovery” and “construction,” frequently depicting workers, farmers, and soldiers – the triadic pillars of the socialist populace – alongside factory chimneys, power transmission towers, reclaimed farmland, and irrigation facilities.[Fig.22-26] These images functioned as visual devices that reframed postwar hardship within narratives of collective unity and socialist modernization. The national emblem gradually emerged as a prominent design

element, symbolizing the consolidation of institutional authority and the strengthening of centralized governance. Chromatic choices tended toward restrained monochrome or two-color schemes, reflecting technological limitations while ensuring clarity and symbolic legibility. Compositional layouts relied on central-axis alignment and symmetrical structures, thereby reinforcing collectivist order and state-centered visual logic. Collectively, these symbolic configurations provided the ideological scaffolding for interpreting postwar reconstruction not merely as material recovery but as a process of reaffirming socialist national identity.¹⁷

(2) Formal Characteristics

North Korean postage stamps issued during the postwar reconstruction period (1953–1960) articulate a formal vocabulary shaped by the convergence of socialist state-building priorities and the technological limits of mid-century printing infrastructure. The visual program relied on pared-down iconography and strong tonal contrast, a consequence of letterpress and lithographic techniques that restricted fine gradation. [Fig.22-26] Bold contour lines, planar shading, and restrained monochrome or two-color schemes secured legibility while intensifying the visual rhetoric of reconstruction and socialist modernization. Central-axis alignment, symmetrical layouts, and disciplined distributions of visual weight further inscribed collectivist order into the graphic field. The predominance of monochrome and low-resolution offset printing produced softened outlines and inconsistent stroke densities, imparting a coarse typographic texture emblematic of the era's material austerity. Yet these constraints generated a distinctive graphic idiom marked by functional clarity and ideological directness. In conjunction with imagery depicting industrial sites, workers, and rebuilding efforts, typography operated as a visual mechanism that reinforced narratives of resilience, collective labor, and national renewal.

(3) Typographic Characteristics

During the postwar reconstruction period (1953–1960), the typography of North Korean postage stamps reflected both the material constraints of a war-ravaged printing infrastructure and the ideological imperatives of a state intent on visually articulating national recovery and socialist consolidation. Letterforms gravitated toward simplified, utilitarian Gothic styles characterized by minimal stroke contrast and compressed counters – features shaped by the scarcity of printing resources and the need for rapid, unambiguous legibility in mass-produced stamps. [Fig.21-26] Typesetting practices also

¹⁷ Shin, S.K (2023). *Pyongyang in the Post-War Reconstruction Period Reflected in the Visual Images: Focusing on the Postcard Set of "1530th Anniversary of Pyongyang City*. Association of Korean Modern & Contemporary Art History, vol., no.45, 143-178.

began to coalesce into a standardized regime: the state name was consistently rendered horizontally, while denominations occupied a central position, establishing a stable informational hierarchy within otherwise restrained layouts. Enlarged Gothic typefaces for state names and slogans were paired with auxiliary Ming-style text, producing a system that combined functional clarity with symbolic precision. [Fig.24] Through this typographic austerity, stamps surpassed their routine postal purpose to operate as visual instruments that normalized state authority and codified socialist ideological order. In this formative decade, typography thus became a condensed apparatus of governance, laying the structural foundations for the more formalized and codified state typeface standards that emerged in the 1960s.¹⁸

Figure 21. Liberation Monument (25 December 1953), Source: Korean stamp database.

Figure 22. Rebuilding (25 January 1954), Source: Stampworld. (n.d.).

Figure 23. The 6th Anniversary of the National Army (25 January 1954), Source: Stampworld. (n.d.).

Figure 24. The 6th Anniversary of the People's Republic (25 August 1954), Source: Stampworld. (n.d.).

Figure 25. Taedong Gate (1954), Source: Stampworld. (n.d.).



4.4. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE MONOLITHIC IDEOLOGICAL SYSTEM AND FORMALIZATION OF THE JUCHE IDEA (MID-1960S–EARLY 1970S)

(1) Symbolic Characteristics

From the mid-1960s onward, North Korean stamps increasingly served as visual media depicting Kim Il-sung's portrait, myths of the anti-Japanese struggle, revolutionary traditions, and the archetype of the “mature socialist woman.” These motifs functioned as a crucial channel for conveying leader-centered socialist ideology and its core values. [Fig.26-29]

In the early 1970s, regular issues prominently featured solo portraits of Kim Il-sung, images of his speeches, and commemorative stamps celebrating his birthday, visually reinforcing the leader's authority and the state's achievements. [Fig.30] These portrayals can be understood as part of a deliberate visual strategy aimed at cultivating a personality cult.

¹⁸ Ryu, H.G. (2025: 146-161)

Following the formal incorporation of the Juche idea into the constitution in 1972, stamps frequently depicted statues of Kim Il-sung, the party flag, the national flag, and red banners, signaling the codification of Juche as the official state ideology. In this context, stamps became a crucial instrument for disseminating ideology and promoting the veneration of Kim Il-sung. Additionally, stamps designed for external audiences – highlighting Non-Aligned Movement meetings and featuring anti-imperialist and anti-American slogans – served as diplomatic propaganda, emphasizing North Korea's international stance and political autonomy. [Fig.26-42]

(2) Formal Characteristics

The 1967 Principles for the Establishment of the Monolithic Ideological System institutionalized Kim Il-sung's authority and leader-centered governance. This ideological consolidation was vividly expressed through the design of stamps.

Color symbolism played a central role: red signified revolution and the Party; gold conveyed the leader's permanence; and blue and green referenced science, the military, and agriculture. Strong chromatic contrasts intensified the propagandistic impact. Compositional strategies emphasized centralization, with Kim Il-sung's portrait or statue positioned at the visual core, surrounded by frame-like ceremonial elements – flowers, flags, rays of light, and sunbursts – that reinforced his deification. [Fig.37-42]

Figurative depictions of Kim Il-sung combined realistic portraiture with heroic and quasi-divine stylistic elements, idealizing his image. Scenes of public speeches and mass acclaim conveyed collective loyalty, while monumental representations, most notably the Mansu Hill statue, asserted the leader's timeless authority. Textual components served as explicit ideological tools, featuring slogans such as “Long Live the Great Leader Comrade Kim Il-sung.” His name appeared prominently in bold Gothic type, and occasional English captions supported international propaganda efforts.

Together, the stamps from this period represent a rigorously codified visual language that seamlessly integrates aesthetic, ideological, and propagandistic objectives, systematically reinforcing Kim Il-sung's cult of personality and the Juche-centered state order.

(3) Typographic Characteristics

The 1967 Principles for the Establishment of the Monolithic Ideological System institutionalized Kim Il-sung's authority and leader-centered governance, and this consolidation was vividly manifested in the stamp design. Color symbolism operated as a key ideological device: red signified revolution and the Party, gold conveyed the leader's

permanence, and blue and green referenced science, the military, and agriculture. Strong chromatic contrasts heightened visual impact. Compositional strategies centered on Kim Il-sung's portrait or statue, framed by ceremonial motifs – flowers, flags, rays of light, and sunbursts – that reinforced his deification. [Fig.38]

Figurative portrayals blended realistic portraiture with heroic and quasi-divine elements, idealizing his persona. Scenes of speeches and mass applause projected collective loyalty, while monumental imagery, most notably the Mansu Hill statue, emphasized the leader's timeless authority. Textual elements served as direct ideological instruments, featuring slogans such as “Long Live the Great Leader Comrade Kim Il-sung,” with his name highlighted in bold Gothic type. Occasional English captions extended the propagandistic reach to foreign audiences.

Overall, the stamps of this period form a highly codified visual language that tightly integrates aesthetic devices with ideological imperatives, systematically reinforcing Kim Il-sung's cult of personality and the Juche-centered political order.

Figure 26. The Opening of Stalin Street (25 February 1960), Source: Stampworld. (n.d.).

Figure 27. The Twenty Articles of the Party Line (1 January 1962), Source: Stampworld. (n.d.).

Figure 28. The 4th Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea (17 September 1961), Source: Korean stamp database.

Figure 29. The Six Major Objectives: Construction of 200,000 Housing Units (29 June 1960), Source: Stampworld. (n.d.).



Figure 30. The 50th Anniversary of the Birth of Kim Il-sung (14 April 1962), Source: Korean stamp database.

Figure 31. Resistance against (24 April 1962) (From left: Kim Chaek, An Gil, Kim Jong-suk), Source: Stampworld. (n.d.).



Figure 32. Technology Progress (11 February 1963), Source: Stampworld. (n.d.).

Figure 33. Flowers (21 March 1963), Source: Stampworld. (n.d.).



Figure 34. The 10th Anniversary of Victory in the Korean War (27 Jul 1963), Source: Stampworld. (n.d.).

Figure 35. The 15th Anniversary of the People's Republic (15 August 1963), Source: Stampworld. (n.d.).

Figure 36. Happy Youth (23 April 1963), Source: Stampworld. (n.d.).



Figure 37. Kyungrak Biological System (30 June 1966), Source: Colnect, connecting collectors.

Figure 38. The 56th Anniversary of the Birth of Kim Il-sung, 1912-1994(15 April 1968), Source: Korean stamp database.

Figure 39. Production of Consumer Goods (5 November 1968), Source: Colnect, connecting collectors.



Figure 40. Agriculture (10 December 1968), Source: Colnect, connecting collectors.

Figure 41. Tasks of the Agricultural Revolution (25 February 1969), Source: Colnect, connecting collectors.

Figure 42. Public Health Service (1 April 1969), Source: Colnect, connecting collectors.



4.5. THE INTERNATIONAL MARKET ORIENTATION (1970S–1980S)

(1) Symbolic Characteristics

The 1970s and 1980s marked a pivotal period in North Korea's visual and cultural production, shaped by economic contraction and increasing geopolitical isolation. Within this environment, foreign-currency acquisition and the projection of a favorable international image became strategic state priorities, and postage stamps emerged as an important medium for engaging global audiences alongside tourism promotion and cultural export initiatives. [Fig.43-47] While Kim Il-sung's charismatic authority continued to dominate domestic discourse, stamps designed for international circulation exhibit a clear attenuation of explicit ideological messaging. [Fig.43.44] Instead, the state privileged non-political motifs – landscapes, vernacular architecture, flora and fauna, and traditional cultural practices – rendered with heightened representational clarity to construct an internationally legible aesthetic of heritage and authenticity.

Industrial and scientific imagery likewise served to convey a vision of technological modernity aligned with socialist developmental ideals. Depictions of power plants, factories, research institutes, and mechanical infrastructures articulated narratives of progress and national capability. Representations of international sporting events, Olympic participation, and multilateral gatherings expressed the regime's aspirations for global presence despite diplomatic marginalization. Traditional arts were deployed to enhance ornamental richness and cultural continuity. Although political symbols and Kim Il-sung's portrait persisted, they appeared with notable restraint, functioning as subtle markers of sovereignty rather than overt ideological directives.

(2) Formal Characteristics

Formally, the stamps of this period display intensified chromatic saturation and heightened representational clarity, particularly in natural and cultural subjects. High-

contrast palettes and vivid tonal schemes reflect a design logic focused on visual immediacy and international marketability, suggesting that aesthetic choices have become increasingly responsive to global collectors. Centralized or segmented layouts balanced landscapes, architectural monuments, human figures, and industrial facilities to create visually coherent compositions, while decorative frames and auxiliary motifs enhanced the finish and reinforced the stamps' status as collectible artifacts. [Fig.43-47]

Rendering practices prioritized meticulous detail, technical precision, and realism, reflecting both the professionalization of stamp design and the influence of international aesthetic norms.

Political imagery persisted, but in a strategically diminished form: Kim Il-sung's portrait often appeared at smaller scales or in peripheral positions, signaling a recalibrated approach to ideological visibility tailored to external audiences.

(3) Typographic Characteristics

During the 1970s and 1980s, North Korean stamp typography underwent significant diversification as the state increasingly oriented philatelic production toward the international market. While domestic issues continued to employ standardized, rounded Gothic and brush-influenced typefaces associated with Juche aesthetics, export-oriented stamps introduced a much broader typographic palette, incorporating serif, semi-serif, and decorative display forms tailored to global visual preferences. [Fig.43-47] This shift marked a notable departure from the reductive, utilitarian typography of the 1950s and 1960s. Stabilized multicolor offset printing enabled finer stroke modulation, enlarged counters, smoother curve transitions, and more consistent letterform rendering. These refinements enhanced visual awareness and transformed typography from merely an informational tool into a fundamental element of visual design.¹⁹

Typographic layouts also became increasingly flexible. Captions, commemorative titles, and foreign-language inscriptions—particularly in English and French—were often arranged in asymmetrical, diagonal, or loosely gridded compositions, reflecting contemporary international design trends. Integrated text-image arrangements further enhanced the graphic coherence of stamp designs. [Fig.46]

Collectively, the typographic developments of this period reveal a deliberate recalibration of North Korea's visual language, merging ideological clarity with market-oriented refinement to position stamps as exportable cultural commodities.

¹⁹ Ryu, H.G. (2025: 189-194)

Figure 43. Mount Paektu (10 March 1970), Source: Stampworld. (n.d.).

Figure 44. Ideological Revolution in the Country(25 June 1970), Source: Stampworld. (n.d.).



Figure 45. Executive Decisions of the Workers' Party Congress (5 October 1970), Source: Stampworld. (n.d.).



Figure 46. The 30th Anniversary of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (9 September 1978), Source: Stampworld. (n.d.).

Figure 47. North-South Reunification Football Match, Pyongyang (11 October 1990), Source: Stampworld. (n.d.).



4.6. THE 'ARDUOUS MARCH' ECONOMIC CRISIS OF THE 1990S AND ITS MODERNIZATION UNDER EXTERNAL-OPENING STRATEGIES IN THE 2000S

(1) Symbolic Characteristics

Formally, the stamps of this period exhibit intensified chromatic saturation and heightened representational clarity, most evident in natural and cultural subjects. High-contrast palettes and vivid tonal schemes reveal a design logic focused on visual immediacy and international marketability, indicating that aesthetic decisions increasingly respond to the preferences of global collectors. Centralized or segmented layouts

balanced landscapes, architectural landmarks, human figures, and industrial facilities to produce visually coherent fields, while decorative frames and auxiliary motifs enhanced the sense of finish and reinforced the stamps' status as collectible objects rather than solely communicative devices. Rendering techniques emphasized meticulous detail, technical precision, and realism, reflecting both the professionalization of stamp production and the influence of international aesthetic norms.²⁰

Political imagery persisted but in a deliberately reduced form: Kim Il-sung's portrait appeared on a smaller scale or in a peripheral position, signaling a recalibrated approach to ideological visibility aimed at enhancing external acceptability. [Fig.46.49.50]

(2) Formal Characteristics

During the “Arduous March” of the 1990s, the visual imagery of North Korean postage stamps contracted into a reduced symbolic vocabulary shaped by the state's need to project resilience amid profound economic hardship. Iconographic elements were simplified, with figures, landmarks, and industrial motifs rendered in broad forms and minimal detail. Compositionally, images often appeared spatially compressed, relying on frontal or central placement to reinforce directness and ideological immediacy. Background settings were pared down to essential contours, producing a stark visual field that emphasized symbolic motifs over narrative depth. Visual hierarchy weakened as scaling became inconsistent, and pictorial elements frequently lacked balanced proportions, reflecting fragmented production oversight.

In the 2000s, however, the visual program began to expand and recover. Compositions grew more structured and symmetrical, and imagery displayed enhanced depth through more deliberate foreground–background separation. The scope of subject matter broadened significantly, encompassing animals, architecture, global heritage, and various cultural motifs—signaling a shift toward visually engaging and internationally oriented content. Increased attention to spatial coherence, proportional balance, and naturalistic representation yielded a more polished and aesthetically cohesive visual regime. These changes represent a departure from the reductionist visual aesthetics imposed by the austerity period, giving rise to a modernized compositional logic informed by both state narratives and transnational cultural flows.

(3) Typographic Characteristics

From the 1990s to the early 2000s, North Korean stamp typography underwent a significant transformation, shaped by economic collapse and the gradual reopening of

²⁰ Literary Yearbook 1990, *Arts Council Korea (ARKO)*, 119–172. Retrieved from <http://www.arko.or.kr> (accessed May 10, 2022).

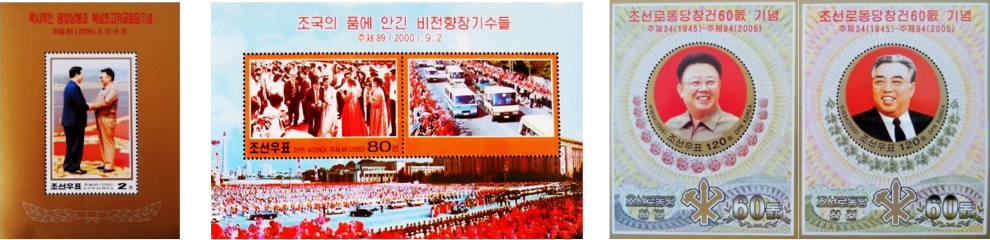
limited external markets. During the 1990s, acute shortages of paper, ink, and printing plates produced softened outlines, enlarged counters, and unstable stroke densities. Offset misregistration became commonplace, eroding typographic precision, while the inconsistent application of standardized state typefaces reflected the fragmentation of production hierarchies. Although photo-typesetting technologies were introduced, their uneven distribution merely widened the quality gap between domestic issues and export-oriented editions. [Fig.47.48.49]

By the early 2000s, however, typographic quality began to stabilize. The consolidation of four-color offset printing improved chromatic accuracy and tonal continuity, while limited digital color correction enhanced overall consistency. Hangeul sans-serif forms became the dominant typographic mode, supplemented by English and French inscriptions to secure international readability. The retreat from slogan-driven layouts toward information-centered clarity indicated the emergence of a more rationalized typographic regime.²¹ This transition signaled a broader shift from scarcity-driven, ideologically saturated production to a market-responsive visual system in which stamps functioned simultaneously as instruments of state representation and as exportable cultural commodities.

Figure 48. Korean Summit, Pyongyang (23 October 2000).

Figure 49. Repatriation of North Korean Prisoners of War from South Korea (20 December 2000).

Figure 50. The 60th Anniversary of the Korean Workers' Party (10 October 2000).



4.7. THE KIM JONG-UN ERA (2010S–PRESENT)

(1) Symbolic Characteristics

Since the 2010s, philatelic production in North Korea has undergone substantial rearticulation under Kim Jong-un's leadership. Although the foundational aesthetic grammar of Juche Realism – shaped by the monolithic ideological system and the legacy of Songun – remains visible, the thematic range has broadened to encompass nuclear and missile development, scientific and technological innovation, tourism promotion, cultural heritage,

²¹ Ryu, H.G. (2025: 99-103)

and participation in international events. This expansion signals a strategic recalibration in which stamps function not only as domestic propaganda but also as instruments of external communication, economic promotion, and cultural commodification. [Fig.50.51.52] A conspicuous feature of the Kim Jong-un era is the emergence of a multilayered symbolic regime that moderates overt ideological content in favor of heightened aesthetic refinement. Political symbols – portraits of Kim Jong-un, the national flag, and the red banner – persist but are deployed in more controlled, ornamental ways, serving as semiotic anchors rather than explicit didactic devices. In parallel, natural landscapes, historical sites, folk performances, and vernacular architecture are mobilized to construct a narrative of cultural continuity and national pride, positioning North Korea within global heritage discourse and aligning stamp imagery with tourism-oriented branding.

Simultaneously, modernizing motifs – hydroelectric power stations, factories, high-tech industries, mass sporting events, and infrastructure megaprojects – project a visual discourse of developmental dynamism. Diplomatic engagement is likewise foregrounded through imagery depicting the Non-Aligned Movement's activities, foreign delegations, and international conferences, thereby asserting global relevance despite geopolitical isolation. Collectively, the symbolic assemblage of this period embodies a dual mandate: preserving ideological continuity while enhancing international legibility and market appeal.²²

(2) Formal Characteristics

During the Kim Jong-un era, North Korean philatelic production has undergone notable refinement, shaped by the adoption of digital printing technologies and the modernization of production infrastructures. High-resolution offset and digital workflows now enable cleaner lines, sharper color reproduction, and more standardized compositional formats, marking a departure from earlier analog-based design practices. These technical advances support a contemporary aesthetic that enhances both visual coherence and international marketability.

Stamps today fulfill dual functions. Internationally, they serve as instruments of cultural diplomacy and foreign-currency acquisition, showcasing natural landscapes, cultural heritage, industrial achievements, and scientific progress. Domestically, they continue to articulate political authority and reinforce narratives of national development. Political symbols – including portraits of Kim Jong-un – persist but are deployed with greater restraint, integrated into visually polished layouts that prioritize realism, technical precision, and global legibility. [Fig.50.51.52]

²² Literary Yearbook 2020, *Arts Council Korea (ARKO)*, 101–202. Retrieved from <http://www.arko.or.kr> (accessed May 10, 2022).

This era is characterized by a hybrid aesthetic in which ideological messaging is reframed through modern graphic sensibilities rather than overt propagandistic modes. As a result, stamps function as cultural ambassadors that mediate between state ideology, global consumption patterns, and the regime's pursuit of international visibility. Philatelic design thus reflects a reconfiguration of visual politics under conditions of technological modernization and external scrutiny.

(3) Typographic Characteristics

In the Kim Jong-un era, philatelic production has become a central medium for both domestic propaganda and the state's external image-building campaigns, accompanied by notable advances in printing technology. High-resolution offset printing – often reaching 300–600 dpi – has emerged as the dominant reproduction method, while certain commemorative series adopt hybrid workflows that integrate digital printing and digitally assisted color correction. Selective use of special effects, including micro-patterning and metallic pigments, further signals a shift toward higher production value, particularly in stamps intended for international circulation. [Fig.50.51.52]

Typography practice has evolved in parallel with these technological upgrades. The regime has formalized a set of standardized state typefaces while simultaneously encouraging the development of new styles tailored to thematic series, ranging from political and military imagery to cultural and tourism-oriented issues. The transition toward digitally supported compositional environments has enabled sharper outlines, more stable stroke densities, and greater precision in letterform geometry, resulting in markedly cleaner and more export-ready Typography surfaces. Enhanced legibility and refined spatial calibration also allow text to integrate more seamlessly with increasingly elaborate pictorial motifs.²³

Collectively, the Typography developments of the 2010s reflect the regime's dual ambition: projecting the image of a “civilized and technologically capable state” while cultivating a competitive presence in the global philatelic market through elevated production quality.

Figure 51. The 7th Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea (25 July 2016), Source: University of Chicago Library. (n.d.)



²³ Ryu, H.G. (2025: 199-218)

Figure 52. Workers' Party of Korea Plenary Congress (2 February 2024), Source: University of Chicago Library. (n.d.)



Figure 53. Transforming the Rural Environment (10 February 2025), Source: University of Chicago Library. (n.d.)



5. CONCLUSION

Over the past 78 years, North Korean postage stamps have functioned as a compact visual medium through which the regime communicates its political authority, constructs national narratives, and promotes ideological goals. The symbolic elements of stamp design consistently emphasize foundational motifs – revolutionary leaders, monumental sites, socialist labor, and national flora and fauna – that collectively create a durable semiotic framework linking everyday circulation to state legitimacy. These motifs not only reinforce political mythology but also adapt to shifting diplomatic contexts, from Cold War polarization to contemporary image-building efforts.

Formally, North Korean stamps reflect an ongoing dialectic between technological capability and aesthetic intention. Early reliance on letterpress and Soviet-style intaglio printing produced stark, high-contrast compositions, while mid-century offset printing systems supported standardized color hierarchies aligned with emerging Juche aesthetics. Subsequent diversification – particularly during the export-oriented shift of the 1970s and 1980s – introduced decorative layouts, asymmetrical arrangements, and increasingly sophisticated chromatic effects. The material degradation of the 1990s resulted in blurred

outlines, weakened tonal structures, and fragmented visual hierarchies; however, these shortcomings were followed by significant refinement in the 2000s and the Kim Jong-un era, marked by the adoption of high-resolution offset printing, limited digital printing, and enhanced color calibration.

Typographically, the evolution from colonial-era Ming styles to state-standardized Gothic styles, brush-script styles, and digitally calibrated typefaces manifests the shifting interplay among political ideology, technological infrastructure, and communicative strategy. A particularly significant development was the transition from vertical to horizontal typesetting between the late 1940s and early 1950s. Initially rooted in colonial-era conventions and supported by the continued use of Ming-style typefaces and Sino-Korean mixed scripts, vertical composition gradually gave way as the newly established North Korea aligned itself with Soviet printing norms and adopted horizontal letterpress and offset systems. This transition not only facilitated clearer articulation of Hangeul-based slogans and standardized state terminology but also enabled more coherent spatial hierarchies and improved legibility within multicolor layouts. By the mid-1950s, horizontal typesetting had become firmly institutionalized, marking a decisive departure from pre-liberation graphic systems and establishing the typographic foundation of socialist visual communication.

The findings of this study demonstrate that North Korean stamp design is neither a minor decorative practice nor a static propagandistic tool; rather, it constitutes a dynamic visual system in which symbolism, formal structure, and Typography evolution converge. By situating stamps within broader histories of print technology, visual ideology, and transnational philately, this research offers a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding how small-format media contribute to the construction, reproduction, and international projection of state power.

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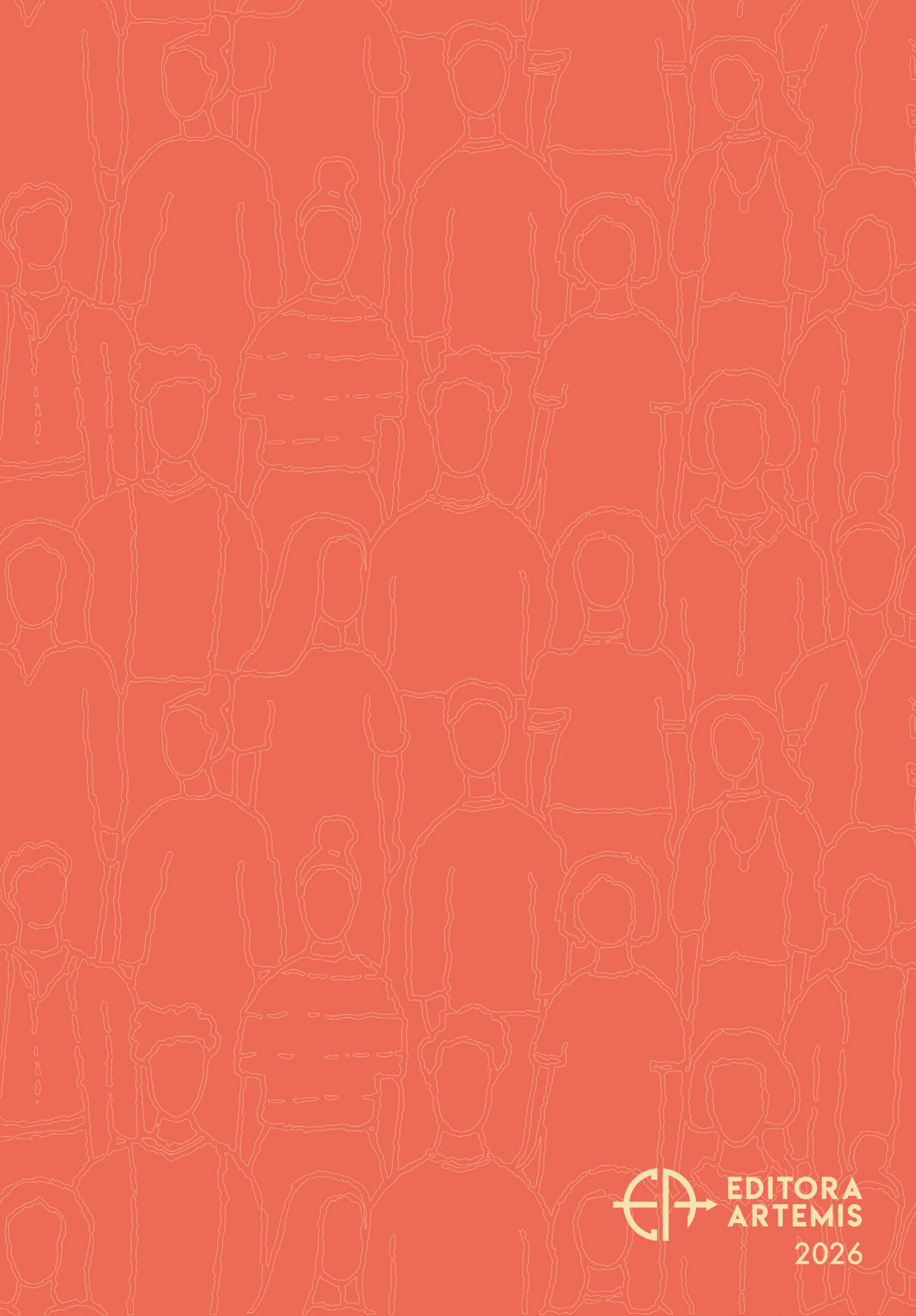
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