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The Foundation of the North Korean Workers' Party: Analyzing Russian Archival Materials*

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the background of the founding of the Workers' Party of North Korea (WPNK) through the merger of the North Korean Communist Party and the New Democratic Party, as well as the role of the former Soviet Union in this merger and the orientation and characteristics of the WPNK Programme, which has remained unexamined in research on North Korea. While the foundation of the WPNK reflected Stalin's desire to unify leftist parties in North and South Korea, other domestic factors also facilitated its establishment, such as the necessity for unity among leftist forces and power struggles among local organizations of the Communist Party and the New Democratic Party. One of the goals of the merger was to create a popular vanguard party, rather than merely a united leftist one. The Party Programme did not specify a socialist direction and downplayed the unique ideology of the Communist Party. This tendency was strengthened by the increasing need for internal unity as violent confrontation developed between leftist and rightist forces when the United States and the Soviet Union occupied the Korean Peninsula. Only after its establishment, did the WPNK begin to expand its exclusive rights among political organizations in North Korea.

Keywords: Workers' Party of North Korea, North Korean Communist Party, New Democratic Party, Soviet Union, Stalin, Kim Il Sung, Shtykov

Introduction

Today, North Korea exists under the general supervision of the Korean Workers' Party (KWP; *Chosŏn Rodongdang*). The nation's government, social organizations, and residents' daily lives are all under the complete control of the KWP. The KWP was founded in the year 1946 as the Workers' Party of North Korea (WPNK; *Pungnodang*), the basic structure of which has been maintained for more than 60 years. The answers gained from attempting to address the various problems related to the foundation of the WPNK that still remain unresolved will go beyond simply revealing historical facts. In particular, they will lead to a better understanding of the society of North Korea and in this way create an improved atmosphere for national reunification by offering in an objective and empirical manner a better grasp of the history, foundation, and initial activities of the KWP. Without considering the early history of North Korea after its liberation, no study of the KWP is likely to yield substantial findings.

Research on the origin of the KWP is of great importance when it comes

to general investigations of North Korea, and such studies have been actively conducted not only in Korea, but also in the United States, Japan, and Russia. Until 1990, most of the research focused on ideological perspectives (Pang Inhu 1967; Scalapino & Lee 1972; Van Ree 1989). These early works regarded the establishment of the North Korean system solely as a product of the influence of the Soviet Union. Korean communists were seen as simply following the instructions of Soviet policymakers. After the Cold War ended, however, attention started to be paid to the independent roles of political powers in North Korea, and less ideological, more substantive studies became mainstream (Yi Chongsök 1995; Kim Kwangun 2003; Sö Tongman 2005; Yi Chuch'öl 2008).

A new era for the study of the modern history of North Korea was established with the opening of Russian archives to the public in the 1990s. Russian archival materials are not only highly valuable for the study of politics, economics, society, and culture in Korea but also helpful in understanding the ruling structure and behavior of the North Korean state, as well as its policy-making mechanisms. Based on these materials, this paper asserts that the use of such dichotomous terms as “internal and external factors” or “endogenous and exogenous” variables to indicate the relationship between the former Soviet Union and the internal political mechanisms in the construction of the North Korean system is inappropriate. Since Koreans and Russians cooperated closely to build the North Korean system, the former Soviet Union was not merely a “director” or “commander,” nor were the local communists “mere puppets” or “policy executors.” On the other hand, the argument that local communists acted “independently” from the Soviet Union is also open to criticism. Rather, Koreans and Russians collaboratively pursued a common goal for the sake of mutual interests. The basic logic of this study is founded on this understanding of the problem.

Regarding the establishment of the WPNK, this study concentrates on three points: First, the background of the WPNK foundation; the question why the WPNK was founded so unexpectedly and quickly has not yet been adequately answered in North Korean as well as in South Korean sources. Second, concerning the process of the merger and formation of the ruling party, this study takes an approach and offers a perspective different from those that appear in existing discussions. Third, with regard to the process of the Party Programme's birth and its orientation and characteristics, it will examine the role of the former Soviet Union and develop a new approach to the interpretation of the party's orientation and characteristics.

Background of the Foundation of the WPNK

Having been founded in the Five Province Conference in Pyongyang on October 13, 1945, the North Korean Branch Bureau of the Korean Communist Party (hereafter, “the Bureau”) was initially under the supervision of the Korean Communist Party

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in Seoul, but gradually established its independence. Meanwhile, the administrative area of the Korean Peninsula was divided into a southern and a northern part by the United States and the Soviet Union. Although Kim Il Sung took the lead in the founding of the Bureau, he did not initially reveal his role as the leader of the "Communist Party" because he wanted to develop an image as a "national leader" rather than that of the head of a particular political party. However, in December 1945, when he became the executive secretary of the Third Extended Executive Committee of the Bureau, his position as the representative of the Communist Party became official. This was recognized as a new turning point in the Bureau's activities. After that, the ranks of the Bureau expanded sharply; as of January 1946, it had 6 provincial committees, 80 county committees, and 1,360 lower Party organizations.¹

Referred to as the "North Korean Communist Party" (NKCP; *Puk Chosŏn kongsandang*) since the spring of 1946, the Bureau, with the support of the former Soviet Union, developed into a major party in North Korean politics, expanding its influence in various areas including politics, economics, and society. Domestic communists, including Kim Yongbŏm, O Kisŏp, Chang Siu, and Pak Chŏngae formed the leadership of the NKCP, with the Manchurian partisans (Kim Il Sung and Kim Ch'aek), and the Soviet (Hŏ Kai) and Yen'an (Kim Ch'angman and Hŏ Chŏngsuk) groups joining them thereafter. The organization of the Communist Party was strengthened especially by Koreans from the Soviet group. From September to November 1945, 128 Koreans from the Soviet group were dispatched from Central Asia and the Soviet Union to North Korea. Having recognized the insufficiency of leading party officials, in early June 1946 Kim Il Sung requested the central committee of the Soviet Union Communist Party to transfer the thirteen Koreans that belonged to the Soviet group and had already entered the country, including Hŏ Kai, Yi Tonghwa, and Ki Sŏkpok, to the North Korean Communist Party.² These Koreans from the Soviet group, who had a wealth of experience in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, contributed greatly to strengthening the organizational basis of the NKCP. In addition, Soviet Koreans played an important role not only as a bridge between the authorities of the Soviet Army and the Communist Party, but also in establishing policies related to political, economic, and social problems.

There are some interesting aspects regarding the organization of the New Democratic Party: the political confusion over the Korean Peninsula caused by the Moscow Decision³ provided opportunities for the Yen'an group, which had developed its anti-Japanese campaign in cooperation with the Chinese Communist Party since the mid-1930s, to emerge as a new political power. On the part of the

¹ "From Romanenko to Shtykov. Communist Party (brief information)." TsAMO, Fond 172, Opis 614631, Delo 25. List 113.

² "From Shikin to Suslov." RGASPI, Fond 17, Opis on, 128, Delo 55, List 5.

³ At the Moscow Conference (December 27, 1945) of Foreign Ministers of the US, the USSR and the UK, agreement was reached on the question of Korea. It was decided to establish a Korean Provisional Democratic Government with a trusteeship over Korea for up to five years. However, the issue of trusteeship further split Korean society, with the left-wing supporting it and the right-wing rejecting it.

Communist Party and the Soviet Union, there was an urgent need for an ally that could replace Cho Mansik's group, the Chosŏn Democratic Party (CDP), which had rejected the Moscow Decision and had been expelled from the political arena. The members of the Yen-an group who entered the country in November 1945 were in the best position to do this. These communists and nationalist leftists significantly influenced the political situation in North Korea. Faced with a political power vacuum in North Korea due to the purge of the nationalist-rightists who were led by Cho Mansik, the Communist Party gained a powerful ally. The Yen-an faction, including Kim Tubong, developed a stance concerning trusteeship that was in line with that of the Communist Party, calling themselves the Independent Union of Korea. Among them, some individuals, including Mu Chŏng and Hŏ Chŏngsuk, joined the Communist Party.

The core members of the Yen-an circle did not act immediately after entering the country, passively observing the political situation. Kim Tubong explained "First, we were not aware of the internal situation of the country and could not speak out of turn, and secondly, we were very busy preparing to start immediate practical work."⁴ However, the Yen-an group failed to maintain consistency and unity in its direction and policies. For example, Kim Tubong, the leader of the Yen-an group, is classified as a nationalist leftist who held moderate views rather than communist ones. Later, he often clashed with the Communist Party.

On February 16, 1946, under the leadership of the Yen-an group, the New Democratic Party of North Korea (NDPNK, *Puk Chosŏn Sinmindang*) was formed with the goal of "assuring the foundation of the nation."⁵ Although the NDPNK was created as a leftist party, it did not consist of laborers and farmers, unlike the Communist Party; rather, it contained social classes that "rejected" the Communist Party, including office workers, intellectuals, and even some members of the propertied classes. The NDPNK leadership recruited widely and freely without firm standards and principles for membership.⁶

Organized for the establishment of the Democratic Provisional Government of Korea (DPGK) in May 1946, the US-USSR Joint Commission was dissolved with no tangible results due to the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union, making the political situation in the Korean Peninsula uncertain. Furthermore, the United States and the Soviet Union, which had temporarily cooperated with each other as allies during World War II, gradually began to come into conflict with one another. The death of President Franklin Roosevelt, who

⁴ "Translation of newspaper articles and various leaflets illegally issued in connection with the decision of the Moscow Meeting of three Ministers of Foreign Affairs about Korea" (*Pyongyang Minbo*, January 6, 1946), TsAMO, Fond USGASK, Opis 102038, Delo 2, List 33.

⁵ *Olt'a* [Truth], March 12, 1946.

⁶ Later Kim Yŏngju, Kim Il Sung's younger brother, stated that the above classes received party membership automatically, and as for those among them who did not accept socialist reform, it was "planned in the near future to exclude from the ranks of the WPK about ten thousand such persons in order to strengthen the quality of the Party ranks." From "Recording of the interview with the director of the Organizational Leadership Department of the C. C., the WPK, Comrade Kim Yŏngju (16 January 1959)." AVPRF, Fond 0102, Opis 15, n. 81, Delo 8, List 15.

was an internationalist, and the expansion of Soviet influence in Eastern Europe, deepened the estrangement between the USSR and the West. The Soviet Union then started to use the term, "American imperialism," which had not been utilized during World War II, to criticize the United States over its position in the Korean Peninsula as well. Thus the American and the Soviet Union's respective positions became further entrenched.

After the United States and the Soviet Union failed to come to an agreement, T. F. Shtykov, a Military Council member of the Military District of the Maritime Province and the executor of North Korea policies, came up with various strategies for strengthening the influence of the Soviet Union on North Korea. In his report to foreign minister V. M. Molotov on May 31, 1946, he requested a series of measures to be taken: the nationalization of Japanese industry within North Korea; the dispatch of 250 to 300 technicians from the Soviet Union for a period of two to three years for industrial recovery; the organization of fuel supplies for corporate operations in North Korea; as much as 100,000 tons of food aid as a counter-measure for famine caused by droughts; and elections for membership in the People's Committees in provinces and counties on August 15 in order to strengthen their authority.⁷ Shtykov did not mention the matter of leftist political parties at all. As of the end of May 1946, the issue of their merger had not been discussed as a measure to strengthen North Korea politically and economically. There was no statement on the merger by leftist leaders in either South or North Korea, including both Kim Il Sung and Park Hōnyōng, who cooperated closely with Shtykov.

As mentioned earlier, there were a series of measures to strengthen the position of the NKCP, but the issue of the merger of leftist parties around July 1946 was officially recognized in 1992 with the release of the third volume of *The Complete Collection of Kim Il Sung's Works*.⁸ According to this publication, June 26 was the day on which the first assembly of the NDPNK was held, with Kim Il Sung participating and giving a celebratory speech. He emphasized the importance of the United Front and the necessity of close cooperation between the New Democratic Party and the Communist Party, but there was no statement on the merger.⁹ It would have been neither appropriate nor possible to announce the merger on this occasion, an assembly marking the party's foundation, which he attended as a guest. On the same day, Kim Il Sung also attended the council of senior officials of the South and North Korean Communist Parties. In this event, he pointed out that the existence of a separate political party of workers would be a sign of disunion, and that "to prevent division among working people and unite them as one political

⁷ "Shtykov. Report of the joint Soviet-American Commission on the implementation of the decision of Moscow by three ministers of Korea (May 31, 1946)." AVPRF, Fond 06, Opis 39, Delo 638, List 63-64.

⁸ After the collapse of much of the socialist world in the early 1990s, North Korea published a series of volumes entitled *Kim Il Sung's Complete Works*. These works included speeches and conversations of a previously undocumented period, containing occasional criticism of the Soviet Union. However, newly listed documents need to be reviewed carefully because early ones frequently were modified for political purposes.

⁹ "Minju yōngnyang ūl hwaktae wa kanghwa hagi wihayō modūn him ūl tahaja" [Let us do our utmost to expand and strengthen democratic power], *Kim Il Sung chōnjip* [Kim Il Sung's Complete Works], vol. 3 (Pyongyang: Workers' Party of Korea Publishing House, 1992), 509-11.

work force, the Communist Party and the New Democratic Party should be united as one popular party for the working people.”¹⁰ This is the only statement by Kim Il Sung about the merger prior to the actual decision to unite the two parties. It is difficult, however, to prove whether or not he actually said that. Since there was no sign of the merger until July, such a sudden statement in *The Complete Collection of Kim Il Sung's Works* seems to be an attempt to rationalize it after the fact. Even if he really said this, such an unexpected suggestion would look out of place, as before this there had not been any signs of a merger.

What is certain then regarding this issue of the merger? One clue is found in the period when the delegates of the Communist Party, including Kim Il Sung and Pak Hŏnyŏng, visited Russia. Early in July, these two leaders of the South and North Korean Communist Parties arrived in Moscow to meet with Stalin. The date of the interview was around July 10.¹¹ Although the details of the talk are officially unknown, A. Shabshin, the vice-consul of the Soviet Union Consulate General in Seoul, was present at this talk as a translator and made a record of the occasion. His wife F. I. Shabshina also included some statements in her book on Korea (1992, 218-20). Various topics on the condition of the Korean Peninsula were discussed in the meeting: for instance, Stalin surprised the delegates from North Korea when he said that the Soviet Union's army would soon withdraw due to difficulties in keeping it there. One of the topics the Korean leaders did not expect to discuss with Stalin was the foundation of a new political party. Stalin asked if the Communist Party could rename itself the Social Democratic Party or Workers' Party and address urgent issues. According to Shabshin, the Communist Party leaders did not seem to be prepared for such matters. They simply answered: “That would be possible, but first of all, there should be discussion with the people (especially with the communists)” (Shabshina 1992, 219). In fact, there was no one then among the world's communist leaders who could dare challenge the authority of Stalin. Even Mao Zedong and Kim Il Sung humbled themselves before him as “followers.” Hence, it seems that after the talk with Stalin, the merger of leftist parties in the Korean Peninsula was considered an urgent issue.

Shtykov and chief executive officials of the Soviet Union, including L. P. Beria, A. A. Zhdanov, G. M. Malenkov, and A. I. Mikoyan, had already met with Stalin on June 15, ahead of Kim Il Sung's official visit to Moscow.¹² Shtykov visited Moscow right after the first joint meeting of the United States and the Soviet Union, probably in order to discuss future policies toward Korea. The Korean delegation

¹⁰ *Hyŏn sigi nara rŭl chajujŏk ūro palchŏn sik'inŭn te sŏ nasŏnŭn myŏtkaji munje e taehayŏ* [On some problems for the country's independent development at the present time], *Kim Il Sung chŏnjip*, vol. 3: 515.

¹¹ There was no date for the visit of the Korean delegation in the meeting record with Stalin because it was unofficial. There were official meetings between Stalin and Kim Il Sung, on March 5 and 14, 1949, April 10, 1950, and September 4, 1952. *Na priyem u Stalina. Tetradi (zhurnaly) zapisi lits, priyatykh I. V. Stalinyam (1924-1953)* [Visiting Stalin. Notebook (Journals) of Records of visitors to I. V. Stalin (1924-1953)]. Moscow, 2010, 630.

¹² *Na priyem u Stalina. Tetradi (zhurnaly) zapisi lits, priyatykh I. V. Stalinyam (1924-1953)*, 474. As this discussion is recorded as “22:00 20-25 minutes,” this time it was clear that Shtykov had only a brief meeting with Stalin.

was invited thereafter, and Shtykov met Stalin again along with high officials on July 11, sometime after he and the Korean delegation together met Stalin. It is reported that the officials were gathered from 9:05 to 10 at night while Shtykov was only present from 9:15 to 9:30pm,¹³ which suggests that during the brief meeting of Stalin with high officials, Shtykov could only have been instructed to carry out Soviet policies toward the Korean Peninsula and North Korea, including the foundation of the Workers' Party; there was no time for discussion.

A report from Shtykov to Stalin dated January 9, 1948, corroborates Shabshin's record on the foundation of the Workers' Party. According to this report, Shtykov stated: "As you ordered, the Communist Party and New Democratic Party in North Korea were merged into the WPNK in 1946. In South Korea as well, the Korean Communist Party, South Korean New Democratic Party, and People's Party were all combined into the Workers' Party of South Korea (WPSK; *Namnodang*)."¹⁴ This is strong evidence that Stalin was directly involved in the foundation of the WPNK.

If this is the case, why would Stalin advise the foundation of a new political party? In the bigger picture, this decision seems to be related to the situation of leftist parties in Germany. In April 1946, the German Communist Party and Social Democratic Party in areas occupied by the Soviet Union were combined and became the Socialist Unity Party of Germany. The merger of these two parties was persistently discussed from late 1945 to April 1946 despite strong concern that the Communist Party of Germany might be dominated by the Social Democratic Party.¹⁵ Of course, the Soviet Military Administration in Germany (SMAG) led by G. K. Zhukov, which exercised supreme power over the eastern part of the country, was actively involved in the process of the merger. Those in Germany who supported the merger had various reasons, but on the part of the Soviet Union, there was a need for a unified and powerful bloc of leftists rather than a divided left. It looked quite natural then that, having encouraged the merger of leftists in Germany, Stalin told the leadership of North Korea, who faced a similar situation, to do likewise. In other words, the merger of the German leftist parties must have encouraged Stalin to recommend a similar merger in Korea.

If that was the case, was there any internal reason for the merger of the NKCP and NDPNK? Would they have combined based only on orders from the leadership of the Soviet Union without domestic political motivations? In view of the situation in the Korean Peninsula at the time, there were evidently some factors that suggested the necessity of the merger from a communist perspective. First, the proposed programs and policies of the Communist Party and New Democratic Party were in agreement with each other; and second, the Communist Party failed to accommodate intellectuals and the New Democratic Party laborers and farmers,

¹³ Ibid. 476.

¹⁴ "From Shtykov to Stalin." TsAMO, Fond 172, Opis 614633, Delo 3, List 9.

¹⁵ Concerning the merger of the Communist Party of Germany with the Social Democratic Party, see Semiryaga 1995.

causing unnecessary conflicts in the subordinate agencies of both parties.¹⁶ Although this analysis is being made with the benefit of hindsight, some aspects of the situation at the time support it. Although it was a leftist party, the New Democratic Party was based on the middle classes and intelligentsia, unlike the Communist Party, which consisted mainly of laborers and farmers. Accordingly, there was the risk of disputes and competition for power between the primary bases of both parties unless the rank and file members were restrained by a unified leadership.

The political situation in Korea should also not be neglected. After the US-USSR Joint Commission was dissolved, the conflict between right and left intensified, and thus the need and demand for unity among leftists increased. From the Communist Party's perspective, left-wing hegemony was essential for achieving the strategic goal of establishing the Democratic Provisional Government of Korea and strengthening the United Front. Disunion among leftist parties was a hindrance since it would lead to a waste of energy.

Progress of the Merger and Organization of the Party Leadership

Right after Kim Il Sung and Pak Hŏnyŏng returned to Korea, the merger of the leftist parties became a major issue on both sides of the 38th parallel. The matter was actively discussed while preparation was in progress. Shtykov also intervened in the process; the Soviet Civil Administration under his leadership and the military command in each province both actively supported the merger. While Pak Hŏnyŏng, on his return to South Korea at the end of July, demanded the suspension of the campaign for the unity of the left and right led by Yŏ Unhyŏng and Kim Kyusik because he saw that the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) was intervening in the campaign, he considered a united front to be extremely urgent and immediately began to promote a merger of the three leftist parties.

The leadership of the Soviet Army presented a schedule for the merger with the title, "Measures in Preparation for the Merger of North Korea's New Democratic Party and Communist Party into the 'Workers' Party."¹⁷ According to the plan prepared in Russian, the merger was scheduled to begin July 15 and end by August 15, 1946. However, the merger was actually completed about fifteen days behind schedule. Except for this, everything was conducted successfully as planned.

As of May 1, 1946, the number of members of the NKCP was 43,000, and that of the New Democratic Party only reached 15,000.¹⁸ In contrast, the number of the members of the Chosŏn Democratic Party (CDP), which was a right-wing party that came under the influence of the Communist Party after the expulsion of the nationalist Cho Mansik, was more than 140,000. This indicates that both the Communist Party and the New Democratic Party adhered to specific criteria

¹⁶ *Tang kŏnsŏl (Kangŭi yogang)* [Construction of the Party (summary of the lecture)]. RG 242, SA 2008, Series WAR200602111. 114.

¹⁷ TsAMO, Fond 172, Opis 614631, Delo 25, List 137-38.

¹⁸ "Shtykov. Information on the presence of political parties and public organizations in North Korea and their numbers on May 1." TsAMO, Fond 172, Opis 614631, Delo 23, List 14.

Table 1. Increases in the Numbers of NKCP and NDPNK Members

	NKCP Members	NDPNK Members
January 12, 1946 ¹⁹	5,993	(Party not founded until February of 1946)
March 16, 1946 ²⁰	30,000	11,000
May 1, 1946	43,000	15,000
August 28, 1946 (Merger)	276,000	90,000

and principles when recruiting members, limiting their numbers. After the merger was decided upon, however, the number of party members drastically increased. The focus shifted from establishing a vanguard to the foundation of a broad-based popular political party.

As to the progress of the merger, on July 23, 1946, Kim Tubong, the chairman of the central standing committee of the NDPNK, sent a letter suggesting the two parties' amalgamation to Kim Il Sung, the executive secretary of the Communist Party. The two parties held a joint meeting of their Central Committees for three days beginning July 28 and passed a joint resolution and declaration on the amalgamation of the parties. During the next few weeks, party officials in the provinces and counties were notified, and under their direction, primary level organizations held assemblies and discussed the merger. The discussions focused on the necessity of the merger and the Rules and Programme of the Workers' Party. Rather than arguments over pros and cons, most of the discussions positively supported the merger. However, such discussions among local subordinate organizations were superficial. Most of the principal issues had been already decided by the leadership of the parties, especially the Communist Party, and then communicated to the subordinate organizations.

Nonetheless, the discussions among local parties regarding the merger should not be necessarily viewed as a mere formality; various views and opinions of both parties were raised in the discussions among the subordinate units. Right after the decision on the merger, worries and complaints were dominant. For example, one member of the Communist Party in Kangwŏn Province expressed his opinion: "Our party is the vanguard of the working class, the New People's Party, that of the petty bourgeois. The merger of these parties is unthinkable. I want to know about the Labor Party Programme and then I can give my final opinion."²¹ A member of the New Democratic Party in North P'yŏngan Province also complained: "The number of New Democratic Party members appointed to the committee of the Workers' Party is relatively small."²² He was concerned about a purge of Workers'

¹⁹ "Mekler. Characteristics of political parties and public organizations in North Korea." TsAMO, Fond 172, Opis, 14631, Delo 43, List 1.

²⁰ "List of political parties and public organizations of North Korea, listed by the Soviet military command." TsAMO, Fond 172, Opis 614631, Delo 18, List 2.

²¹ "Skutsky. Report on preparations for the unification of the Korean Communist Party and the New People's Party into the 'Labour Party' of the Province of Kangwŏn (August 3, 1946)." TsAMO, Fond USGASK, Opis 102038, Delo 1, List 61.

²² "From Fedorov to Romanenko. Report on the work of the military commandant of North P'yŏngyan Province for August." TsAMO, Fond USGASK, Opis 106546, Delo 4, List 167.

Table 2. WPNK Leadership

Name	Appointed position(s)	Previous party	Faction
Kim Tubong	Chairman, Member of Political Committee and Standing Committee	NDP	Yenan
Kim Il Sung	Vice-chairman, Member of Political Committee and Standing Committee	NKCP	Partisan
Chu Yōngha	Vice-chairman, Member of Political Committee and Standing Committee	NKCP	National
Hō Kai	Member of Political Committee and Standing Committee	NKCP	Soviet
Ch'oe Ch'angik	Member of Political Committee and Standing Committee	NDP	Yenan
Kim Ch'aek	Member of Standing Committee	NKCP	Partisan
T'ae Sōngsu	Member of Standing Committee	NKCP	Soviet
Kim Kyoyōng	Member of Standing Committee	NDP	Yenan
Pak Chōngae	Member of Standing Committee	NKCP	National
Pak Iru	Member of Standing Committee	NDP	Yenan
Kim Ch'angman	Member of Standing Committee	NKCP	Yenan
Pak Hyosam	Member of Standing Committee	NDP	Yenan
O Kisöp	Member of Standing Committee	NKCP	National

Party members. Such complaints continued to pour in from various areas.

It seems that the Communist Party expected the foundation of the WPNK to be completed by August 15.²³ The amount of time given, however, turned out to be insufficient. After the one-month preparation for the merger among the subordinate units, the meeting for the WPNK foundation was held from August 28 to August 30 in Pyongyang with 801 individuals present as representatives of 276,000 Communist Party members and 90,000 New Democratic Party members. This three-day meeting for the merger was an event intended to announce the foundation of the new party publicly. While there was no objection to the merger at the meeting, O Kisöp, the propaganda director of the North Korean Provisional People's Committee, expressed his view that merging as the Workers' Party would represent a departure of the communists from Marxism-Leninism. This was the only opinion that opposed the merger, although it was corrected by Kim Il Sung right away.²⁴

During the meeting, Kim Tubong was appointed as party chairman and Kim Il Sung and Chu Yōngha as vice chairmen. As is well known, Kim Il Sung was appointed to a lower rank out of consideration for the New Democratic Party. However, speakers in the assembly for the party's foundation competed to shout "Long live General Kim Il Sung!" the loudest, with Kim Tubong in particular leading the cheering.²⁵ The appointment of Chu Yōngha from South Hamgyōng

²³ "An action plan for the implementation of the urgent tasks in North Korea." TsAMO, Fond 172, Opis 614631, Delo 25, List 174.

²⁴ "Information about the First Congress of the Workers' Party of North Korea." TsAMO, Fond 32, Opis 11542, Delo 35, List 211.

²⁵ A similar practice was followed in November 1946 when the leader of the Korean Communist Party Pak Hōnyōng had conceded the chair of the WPSK to Hō Hōn, co-leader of the National Democratic Front of South Korea. In addition, there were similar occurrences when the left-wing political parties in Eastern Europe merged.

Province as a vice chairman was also unexpected. He studied at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV) in Moscow during the Japanese occupation and had been imprisoned by the Japanese for several years until he was finally released after national liberation.²⁶

The Political Committee (Politburo) of the Central Committee of the Party, which was its final policy-making agency, consisted of five individuals: Kim Il Sung (NKCP), Kim Tubong (NDP), Chu Yŏngha (NKCP), Ch'oe Ch'angik (NDP), and Hō Kai (NKCP). They firmly established their positions of supreme power by each concurrently filling a Standing Committee office.

As shown in the table above, the ratio of Communist Party to New Democratic Party members in the party leadership was 8:5. This clearly shows consideration for the New Democratic Party in comparison with the formation of subordinate agencies, in which the NDP was much less well represented. Generally, in communist countries it was customary that the members of minor parties would be by and large proportionally represented in the formation of the supreme leadership. When the range of the party leadership was expanded to the Central Committee, the difference in percentages was greater. The 43 members of the Central Committee were divided into 29 representatives from the Communist Party and 14 from the New Democratic Party, that is, slightly less than a 2:1 ratio.

When the individuals are classified by their geographic origin rather than former party, it becomes more evident where true power laid. Among the 43 individuals mentioned above, 4 were from the (Manchurian) Partisan group, 18 from the Yen'an group, 6 from the Soviet group, 12 from domestic circles, and 3 from unknown origins. Most strikingly, the position of the (Manchurian) Partisan group in the organization was insignificant. This is mainly because most of the members from the (Manchurian) Partisan group were younger and less prominent in terms of experience, career, and academic background.²⁷ Nevertheless, Kim Il Sung, a member of the Manchurian Partisan group, could become the supreme leader because of his popularity and well-known struggle against the Japanese during his career as part of the Manchurian Partisan units, as well as because of powerful support from the Soviet Union.

The leadership of the WPNK was not concentrated in certain groups. Rather, it was a combination of the (Manchurian) Partisan, Yen'an, Soviet, and domestic circles. However, as Kim Il Sung dominated the core of the emerging power structure next to the supreme administrative agency, his positions in the party organization were powerful enough to allow him to centralize control in the future.

Orientation and Characteristics of the WPNK as Seen in the Programme

In general, the orientation and characteristics of a certain party can be best grasped

²⁶ Although Chu Yŏngha joined the party in September 1945 and held a high rank, he was not well known enough as a political leader to be appointed a vice-chairman. "Documents characterizing Korean public and political personnel in 1947." TsAMO, Fond 172, Opis 614632, Delo 24, List 88.

²⁷ Investigations at the Taesŏngsan Revolutionary Martyrs' Cemetery, where the partisans were buried, revealed only eight members in their 40s or older at the time of liberation, including Ch'oe Yŏnggŏn (b. 1900) and Kim Ch'aek (b. 1903). See Kim Kwangun 2003, 765-97.

when its programme is analyzed. While there have been some general introductions to the WPNK Programme, there has been no thorough analysis of it.

A draft of the WPNK Programme was put forward during the expanded joint meeting of the NKCP and NDP. In his description of the party's programme, Ch'oe Ch'angik stated: "In the historical phase of the present democratic advancement, the general goal of the struggle for all progressive tasks and establishment of a completely independent democratic state will be made clear" (*Kuksa p'yŏnch'an wiwŏnhoe* 1982, 147). This indicates that the primary goal of the WPNK was to acquire the power necessary to establish a state by softening their ideological goals.

In the Congress, a thirteen-paragraph Party Programme, which contained the objectives and orientation of the WPNK, was adopted. Paragraph 1 was about the "building of an independent and sovereign democratic state of Korea," and Paragraph 2 mentioned the "transfer of state power for the whole of Korea to the people's committee and the people's government in order to build a Democratic People's Republic."²⁸ Speakers in the Congress all expressed their intention to establish the "Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)," arguing for the complete purge of remaining pro-Japanese collaborators. With the establishment of an independent country as the primary goal, they emphasized that people's committees formed in North Korea should be the basis of the national organization. Paragraph 3 was about land reform in North Korea (and eventually the whole nation), and Paragraphs 4 and 5 were dedicated to the economy, including the nationalization of industries owned by Japan. The rest of the paragraphs were about basic rights, including an eight-hour work day and social insurance (Paragraph 6), the right to vote and the right to be elected (Paragraph 7), freedom of speech, press, public assembly, and religious belief (Paragraph 8), gender equality (Paragraph 9), and the right to be educated (Paragraph 10).²⁹ Paragraph 2, which stated that sovereignty would be transferred to people's committees led by the left wing, was evidently based on the WPNK assumption that Korea would undergo a transition toward a socialist country. All the other paragraphs, however, were "generally democratic" and far from a drastic structural change.

The Soviet Union was deeply involved in the preparation of the WPNK Programme and thoroughly examined its details. The final draft of the WPNK Programme in Russian made by the authorities of the Soviet Union army in North Korea and the thirteen-paragraph Korean version were almost exactly the same.³⁰ A previous draft in Russian had consisted of fourteen paragraphs.³¹ After some minor revisions, this was approved as the final plan. The deleted items in the Programme were Paragraph 11, "the public health and free treatment of workers shall be taken

²⁸ *Rodongsinmun* [Labor newspaper], September 1, 1946.

²⁹ The last three paragraphs described the implementation of fair taxes, military conscription, and the promotion of friendship with other nations.

³⁰ "Programme of the North Korean Workers' Party." TsAMO, Fond 172, Opus 614631, Delo 25, List 125-26.

³¹ "Program of the North Korean Workers' Party." TsAMO, Fond 172, Opus 614631, Delo 25, List 152-53, 123-24. There exist two drafts, the modified portions of which are marked as deletions and interpolations.

care of at the government's expense," and the last section of Paragraph 3, "the land belongs to those who till it."³² Perhaps there was no guarantee of financial resources for free medical treatment and no need to emphasize private property in the Workers' Party Programme. In addition, the draft was changed for the final revision as follows (bold text indicates selections deleted in the final version; arrows point to the final version):

Paragraph 6: To introduce an eight-hour working day for factory and office workers, and social insurance **at the employer's expense, and to pay the same wage for the same amount of labor regardless of gender and age** → To introduce an eight-hour work day for factory and office workers, social insurance, and equal pay for women as for men.

Paragraph 13: To promote close friendship with **our great neighbor the Soviet Union**, fighting for world peace together with all democratic states and nations → To promote close friendships with neighboring countries fighting for world peace together with all peace-loving states and nations.³³

The revision to Paragraph 6 implies the rejection of capitalist terms such as "employer," and "wages." Some capitalist elements were contained in the general frame of "democracy" but they were kept beneath the surface. Paragraph 13 hints that the friendship with other states would not be limited to the Soviet Union and would certainly include the East European bloc.

Although it might be difficult to assert that the preparation of the Party Programme was under the complete control of the Soviet Union, it intervened as a strong partner rather than a mere supporter. This is well demonstrated by the fact that the draft revised by the Soviet specialists became the final plan for the Programme.

Similarly, the direct intervention of the Soviet Union in the preparation of the party Programme can also be observed in the merger, under the direction of Pak Hōnyōng, of the three left-wing parties in South Korea—the Korean Communist Party (KCP), the New Democratic Party of South Korea (NDPSK), and the People's Party. Released to the press in Seoul on September 4, 1946, the draft of the WPSK Programme in Korean (12 paragraphs) was almost exactly the same as the Russian draft.³⁴ The exceptions were that one of the thirteen paragraphs of the Russian draft was deleted and that there were some partial deletions or additions to four other paragraphs.³⁵

At the Inaugural Congress of the WPNK, Ch'oe Ch'angik presented the

³² Ibid.

³³ "Program of the North Korean Workers' Party." TsAMO, Fond 172, Opis 614631, Delo 25, List 123-26, 152-53.

³⁴ The Programme draft of the WPSK was published on September 6, 1946 in the *Chosōn Ilbo* [Chosun Daily Newspaper].

³⁵ Concerning the sources of The Programme draft of the WPSK in Russian texts, see: "The Programme of the WPSK." TsAMO, Fond 172, Opis 614631, Delo 25, List 254-55.

draft of the Programme, and in response, Han Ch'oeuk (representative of South Hamgyŏng Province), Yun Ch'angbok (North P'yŏngan Province), Ch'oe Kongjip (Kangwŏn Province), Im Ch'unch'u (South P'yŏngan Province), Yi Pongho (Hwanghae Province), among others, supported the motion to adopt it. The issues raised by some representatives included the minimum ages to be eligible for voting and candidacy, insertion of the term "traitors to the Korean nation" in Paragraph 3 and the omission of the term "feudal remnants" in Paragraph 10. A person whose name has not been transmitted even expressed the opinion that the entire draft of the WPNK Programme was inadequate (*Kuksa p'yŏnch'an wiwŏnhoe* 1982, 152-53). Despite various proposals, however, only the suggestion to insert the term "traitors to the Korean nation" in Paragraph 3 was adopted. Except for that, the original Programme draft passed unchanged.

Another subject for investigation are the Party Rules. In fact, the complete version of Party Rules that was passed during the Inaugural Congress of the Party is not extant. There is a draft of the Rules in Russian, however, consisting of five chapters and forty-one articles, each of which specifies general rules, obligations and rights of members, party organization and duties, party discipline, and membership fees. The Rules were revised during the second Party's Congress held at the end of March 1948 to 41 Articles divided into 4 Chapters ("Chapter 5 'Membership fees'" was incorporated into Chapter 4), but no major change was made to the content (*Kuksa p'yŏnch'an wiwŏnhoe* 1982, 467-71).

During the Congress, the Revision Committee proposed the examination of revisions to Articles 13, 14, and 17 as well as Article 4, "The Embodiment of Democratic Centralism" and Article 7, "Obligations of Party Members."³⁶ During discussion, Kim Yŏl, the secretary of South Hamgyŏng Province Committee of the NKCP complained that the drafts were not submitted to members for review, even though many changes to the contents had been made by the Revision Committee (*Kuksa p'yŏnch'an wiwŏnhoe* 1982, 157). This indicates that the preparation for the Inaugural Congress of the Party was insufficient. In fact, at the congress for the merger of local parties, there were no statements regarding Party Rules. As for the discussion of the Declaration and Programme, representatives continued to express ideas of agreement, with no dissent except the suggestion of Chang Ch'ŏl to add new items pertaining to admission to the WPNK after withdrawal from another party, and a proposal to rename the Department of Married Women (Punyŏ saŏppu) the Department of Women (Yŏsŏng saŏppu) (*Kuksa p'yŏnch'an wiwŏnhoe* 1982, 158). The draft of the Rules also passed unanimously.

As to the Programme and Rules of the WPNK, the draft prepared by the North Korean communists and the Soviet personnel was revised and then finalized according to the opinions of the representatives in the Congress. As mentioned above, however, the revision to the Programme draft was limited to the minor change of including the term "traitors to the Korean nation" in Paragraph 3 and the Party Rules.

³⁶ "Information about the First Congress of the Workers' Party of North Korea." TsAMO, Fond 32, Opis 11542, Delo 35, List 211-12.

Why did the WPNK not mention its prospects and objectives, such as the realization of socialism and communism, in the Programme, in contrast to the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, which was formed by a merger of the left-wing political parties in a similar manner during the same period?³⁷ The answer to this question is connected to the different levels of social development and the difference in the political situation in Germany and the Korean Peninsula. Communists in the Soviet Union and Korea set the stage for a “bourgeois democratic revolution” for Korea’s social development immediately after national liberation, criticizing some members of the left wing who pursued a socialist revolution as engaging in “leftist adventurism.” This was different from conditions in Germany, where the realization of socialism was freely discussed. In particular, the immediate goal of the WPNK was to assume leadership of the left in the formation of the Democratic Provisional Government of Korea. To this end, it was vital to strengthen the united front vis-à-vis competing powers. On July 22, 1946, right before the foundation of the WPNK, representatives of various political parties and social groups, including the Chosŏn Democratic Party (CDP) and Ch’ondoist Ch’ongu Party, gathered together and organized the Committee of the Democratic National United Front of North Korea around such commonly held goals as the purge of pro-Japanese collaborators and the construction of an independent state. If the WPNK had revealed its ideology while leading the United Front, there would have been a risk of non-communists breaking away in opposition. Above all, in consideration of the fact that the DPGK could be established only through negotiations with the United States and South Korea’s right-wing, revealing its ideological orientation would limit the expansion of leftist forces.

How, then, could the organizational status of the WPNK be explained? One major research finding in this area proves that the WPNK was more like a Marxist-Leninist party than a popular political party (Yi Chongsök 1995, 192-94). In other words, the Programme and Rules of the WPNK show it strategically following the political situation of the time, although the actual nature of the party was not changed from a Communist Party to a popular political party. On the other hand, North Korea later emphasized the status of the WPNK as a popular party, as stated in the Party Rules, that embraced laborers, farmers, and working intellectuals. Of course, the Party’s characteristics as a “General Staff for the workers” and a “militant vanguard for the workers” were also stressed.³⁸

The WPNK consisted of “workers” rather than comprehensively including representatives of people from various backgrounds, unlike the people’s committees. Nevertheless, the foundation of the WPNK can be viewed as an

³⁷ In its “Principles and Objectives,” the Socialist Unity Party of Germany enforced the consistent democratization of public life in Germany, and the eradication of fascist ideology, as well as the punishment of war criminals, the elimination of capitalist monopolies, and the nationalization of the basic means of production, but also declared the construction of a socialist society as its ultimate goal. See “Sotsialisticheskaya Yedinaya Partiya Germanii” [The Socialist Unity Party of Germany], *Bol’shaya Sovetskaya entsiklopediya* [Great Soviet Encyclopedia]. http://enc-dic.com/enc_sovet/Sotsialisticheskaja-dinaja-partija-germanii-83993.html. Accessed October 19, 2014.

³⁸ *Pulgŭn haepal arae ch’angjo wa kŏnsŏl ūi 40nyŏn* (1945. 8-1950. 6) [40 years of creation and construction under red sunshine (August 1945-June 1950)], vol. 1. 1981. 210.

attempt to transform it into a powerful popular party rather than as the sum of the Communist Party and New Democratic Party. An indication of rapid popularization is the drastic increase in the membership of both parties before the merger, and the rapid expansion of the WPNK following it. In March 1948, when the Second Congress of the party was held, the number of party members had increased to 750,000; this meant it had doubled in size in two years. However, this should not be viewed as the party giving up its avant-garde character. The communists maintained their position as a vanguard party while expanding their popularity, aiming to maintain the hegemony of left-wing forces nationwide in changing political circumstances. The WPNK tried to overcome the fact that it would have had a difficult time achieving its goal without turning into a “popular vanguard party.”

Meanwhile the WPNK, not content to remain on an equal footing with the KCP in Seoul, began to participate in the project of revolution in South Korea. This was made clear when the WPNK severely criticized individuals who disagreed with the merger of the three parties in South Korea (KCP, People’s Party, and NDPSK), expressing support for sanctions against them (*Kuksa p’yŏnch’an wiwŏnhoe* 1982, 166-70). On July 27, at the regular plenum of the Communist Party of North Korea, Kim Il Sung said that the South retained the form of exploitation that existed under Japanese rule and that their task was to bring North Korea’s way of life to South Korea.³⁹

Furthermore, the Inaugural Congress of the Party requested that the three leftist parties in South Korea “promptly proceed with the merger.”⁴⁰ While the KCP of Pak Hŏnyŏng was taking the lead in South Korea, over time the center of gravity moved to the communists in North Korea, who held an advantageous position in the organization. In fact, the leadership of the WPNK actively intervened even in the matter of the United Front in South Korea.

Conclusion

The formation of the WPNK was a significant turning point in the history of North Korea in that it established the leadership for national construction. It became the main axis of the North Korean government that was established in September 1948 and was transformed into the KWP through the merger (de facto absorption) with the WPSK in June 1949. During its formation process, the Soviet Union was not a mere supporter; its intervention was present in all aspects of the process from the suggestion of the party foundation to the drafting of the merger by Stalin, as well as the preparation of the Programme and Rules and direction of the upper and lower level assemblies.

Although the foundation of the WPNK was ordered by Stalin during his discussion with Kim Il Sung and Pak Hŏnyŏng, other domestic factors also facilitated its execution, such as the necessity of unity among leftists in response

³⁹ “From Meckler to Suslov (August 24, 1946).” RGASPI, Fond 17, Opis 128, Delo 205, List 126-27.

⁴⁰ “Resolution at the founding congress of the North Korean Workers’ Party.” TsAMO, Fond 32, Opis 11542, Delo 35, List 215-16.

to the conflicts between Washington and Moscow and between leftist and rightist forces following the failure of the US-USSR Joint Commission, and the struggles for power among local organizations of the Communist Party and the NDP.

Once the merger was decided upon, various procedural steps were promptly taken. After Kim Il Sung and Pak Hōnyōng returned from Moscow in July 1946, the merger was formally decided upon in an enlarged joint meeting of the Central Committees of the two parties on July 29. Following this, general meetings of party cells and assemblies of provincial, city, and county representatives were held, and finally the WPNK was founded at the end of August.

The amalgamation of the two parties was justified because the tasks and objectives of the NKCP and NDP were in agreement and both parties aimed to expand and strengthen the national united front with the goal of maintaining the hegemony of the left wing in the establishment of the DPGK. The merger of both parties appeared to take the form of equal integration, but in fact, the Communist Party, which was dominant, took the initiative. In this regard, there seemed to be no tangible complaints from the leadership of the NDP. A majority of them actively supported the merger and took satisfaction in profiting from the integration. Furthermore, since most of them were communists, they would have joined either the NDP or Communist Party anyway. However, there was the problem that many members of the subordinate units that joined the NDP consisted of intellectuals and members of propertied classes who had less sympathy for the Communist Party. It is no wonder then that they had complaints and raised concerns about the merger.

It is noteworthy that one of the goals of the merger was to establish a popular leftist political party; the Programme of the WPNK did not specify a socialist direction or emphasize the unique ideology of the Communist Party. This Programme not only sought to expand the power of the WPNK by embracing the workers, but also to maintain the initiative of leftist forces in general. Nonetheless, at the Inaugural Congress of the WPNK Syngman Rhee and Kim Ku were viewed as leaders of the pro-Japanese elements and traitors to the nation, so the political momentum had already to a marked degree moved away from the right. Therefore, the possibility of the establishment of the DPGK through negotiation between the left and right in the Korean Peninsula decreased.

Originally, the merger of three leftist political parties in South Korea into the WPSK was also expected to be implemented at the same time, but it was postponed until November due to opposition from some leftists and the pressure of USAMGIK on the Communist Party. This shows that it was impossible to unite all leftist forces in South Korea solely through the authority of Stalin. Immediately after its foundation, the WPSK was forced to conduct underground activities, as acting as a legitimate movement under USAMGIK was becoming difficult. In October of 1946 its leader Pak Hōnyōng was forced to leave the South for North Korea and from there had to supervise the legal and illegal activities of southern communists.

While the foundation of the WPNK was promoted in close connection with the leadership of the Soviet Union, it drew little public attention within that country. In July and August, *Pravda*, the newspaper of the Soviet Union's

Communist Party, included not even a single line about the foundation of the WPNK, except for one article about North Korea on August 31, which was about some cultural activists and delegates from North Korean social organizations staying in Moscow.⁴¹ This is because the USSR avoided making public the political status of North Korea until the election of provincial, city, and county people's committees on November 3, 1946, not because the Soviet Union ignored the significance of the foundation of the WPNK.

Once it was founded, the WPNK turned to expand and strengthen its leading role among the political powers in North Korea. This was in line with the increasing need for internal unity as rapid tension developed between the Korean left and right and the United States and the Soviet Union over the Korean Peninsula. However, the attempt to strengthen the position of the communists led to complaints from rightist parties, such as the Ch'ondoist Ch'öngu Party. The WPNK pursued such measures as "democratic reforms" in a flexible manner to coax the general population into the system while isolating or punishing "anti-Soviet Union or anti-communist powers" by various means, including physical force. From the foundation of the WPNK, no political forces dared to challenge its authority, and, as the leader of a united front, the party carried out its role as the ruling power backed by the Soviet Union.

GLOSSARY

Chang Ch'öl	張徹	Hwanghae Province	黃海道
Chang Siu	張時雨	Im Ch'unch'u	林春秋
Ch'oe Ch'angik	崔昌益	Kangwön Province	江原道
Ch'oe Kongjip	최공집	Ki Sökpok	奇石福
Cho Mansik	曹晩植	Kim Ch'aek	金策
Ch'ondoist Ch'öngu Party		Kim Ch'angman	金昌滿
	天道教 青友黨	Kim Il Sung	金日成
Chosön Democratic Party		Kim Ku	金九
	朝鮮民主黨	Kim Kyoyöng	金教英
Chosön Rodongdang	朝鮮勞動黨	Kim Kyusik	金奎植
Chu Yöngha	朱寧河	Kim Tubong	金料奉
Han Ch'oeuk	한최옥	Kim Yöl	金烈
Hö Kai	許哥而	Kim Yongböm	金鎔範
Hö Chöngsuk	許貞淑	Mu Chöng	武亭

⁴¹ *Pravda*, August 31, 1946.

Namnodang	南勞黨	<i>Punyŏ saŏppu</i>	婦女事業部
North P'yŏngan Province	平安北道	Pyongyang (P'yŏngyang)	平壤
O Kisŏp	吳琪燮	South Hamgyŏng Province	咸鏡南道
Pak Hŏnyŏng	朴憲永	South P'yŏngan Province	平安南道
Pak Hyosam	朴孝三	Syngman Rhee	李承晚
Pak Iru	朴一禹	T'ae Sŏngsu	太成洙
Pak Chŏngae	朴正愛	Yenan group	延安派
Puk Chosŏn Sinmindang	北朝鮮新民黨	Yi Tonghwa	李東華
Puk Chosŏn Kongsandang	北朝鮮共產黨	<i>Yŏsŏng saŏppu</i>	女性事業部
Pungnodang	北勞黨	Yŏ Unhyŏng	呂運亨
		Yun Ch'angbok	윤창복

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