

Troublesome Brotherhood: The Korean Volunteer Army and the CPC

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Abstract

In 1942, a small military force known as the Korean Volunteer Army was established in North China. It was composed of Korean revolutionaries and independence activists who had fled their homeland due to its colonization by Japan. For most of the Korean revolutionaries in China, the establishment of the Korean Volunteer Army was a critical juncture, and marked the point in time from which they worked in close cooperation with the Communist Party of China. The changing circumstances following the conclusion of the war against Japan, however, led the Korean Volunteer Army to diverge from the Communist Party of China, and this formed a challenge for the latter. This article tracks the short history of the Korean Volunteer Army, with a particular focus on the changing circumstances from the conclusion of the war against Japan until the impending civil war in Northeast China, and how these created and intensified tensions between the Korean and Chinese Communists. Likewise, it reveals the means and measures taken by the Communist Party of China in order to tackle this challenge, and to ensure the Korean Volunteer Army's adherence to the Party and its participation in the Civil War until its final stages.

Keywords:

China's Civil War, Communist Party of China, Korean Volunteer Army, Li Hong-gwang Detachment, Northeast China, War of Resistance against Japan

Troublesome Brotherhood: The Korean Volunteer Army and the CPC*

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Introduction

In early 1950, the newly established communist regimes in North Korea and China (in 1948 and 1949 respectively), negotiated repatriation of China's ethnic Koreans who had served in the People's Liberation Army (PLA).¹ Unlike earlier requests, such as in the spring of 1947,² when North Korea asked the Communist Party of China (CPC) to repatriate some, if not all, of the Korean troops serving in their army, this time was completely different due to the conclusion of China's Civil War (1945/1946-49). The new conditions in Northeast Asia, as discussed in studies of the Korean War, allowed China to repatriate its Korean troops as part of its procedure of downsizing the military, and at the same time, allowed North Ko-

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¹ Chen (1994): 88; Minnich (2005): 54.

² Baomiju, *Guoshiguan*, 002-020400-00034-114 (Apr. 22, 1947). According to Zhou Lijun, in 1947 North Korea asked the CPC to repatriate two Korean battalions from East Jilin, see: Zhou (2013): 33.

rea to step up its preparations for military confrontation on the peninsula.³ In total, according to some estimates the ethnic Koreans who served in the PLA numbered 60,000-70,000, while other estimates put the number even higher.⁴ While still controversial among scholars, mainly due to the lack of documentation, the prospect of North Korean direct intervention in the civil war might have enhanced the total amount of Korean soldiers that had participated.⁵ The core of these forces was repatriated to their homeland during 1949-50, while smaller components were sent earlier.⁶ Their repatriation to their liberated homeland after a long occupation by the Japanese Empire, marked the end of Korean participation in the Chinese communist revolution, which can be traced back to the time of the Northern Expedition (1926-28) and the Canton Uprising (1927).⁷

Whilst its total existence was relatively short, the history of the Kore-

³ See for example: Chen (1994): 87, and Halberstam (2017): 49. While there is still a debate whether North Korea had planned to launch the offensive that led to the outbreak of the Korean War or as Shen and Xia have argued, that North Korea was inclined to defend itself rather than attack the South—although I believe there are sufficient materials and studies that highlight it was a deliberate and planned action on North Korea’s side, it is still in line with the fact that following the Communist victory in China in 1949, North Korea desired the return of Korean troops in the PLA whereby it would enlarge its military and make it more prepared. See: Shen and Xia (2018): 21.

⁴ For sources that set the number of Korean troops in the PLA at around 60,000 by the end of China’s Civil War, see: Chen (1994): 110; Zhou (2013): 34. For similar estimates made by the GMD, see: Baomiju, *Guoshiguan*, 002-020400-00034-114 (Apr. 22, 1947), Du Yuming, *Guoshiguan*, 002-020400-00015-006 (Feb. 13, 1947). Some other sources and accounts have claimed greater numbers of Korean troops that participated in China’s Civil War, including the CPC’s Zhou Baozhong, who according to Lü Minghui had, in 1947, estimated the total number of Korean troops under the CPC’s command in Northeast China at as many as 250,000, see: Lü, (2013): 287. Other sources include intelligence reports made by the USA and the GMD, see: Cumings (1990): 363; Hou Sheng, *Guoshiguan*, 002-020400-00034-146 (Aug. 24, 1948); Zheng Jiemin, *Guoshiguan*, 008-010702-00044-004 (Oct. 9, 1947).

⁵ For more information regarding the issue of North Korea’s deployment of its forces to Northeast China during the civil war between the Guomindang and the Communist Party of China, see: Nisimov, “The Role of North Korea in China’s Civil War: The Soviet-led North Korean Assistance to the CPC in the Northeast Theater, 1946-1948,” *Journal of Chinese Military History* 9, no. 1 (March 2020).

⁶ Cumings (1990): 362; Hou Sheng, *Guoshiguan*, 002-020400-00034-146 (Aug. 24, 1948); Zhou, 2013, 33-34.

⁷ Lee and Scalapino (1972): 150-51, 170-71; Shi (1998): 52-54.

an Volunteer Army (KVA) extends over a vast geographical space and over East Asia's greatest wars of the mid-20th century. Its predecessor, the Korean Volunteer Corps (KVC; 朝鮮義勇隊 *Chaoxian yiyongdui*) came into being in Wuhan, Central China, October 1938, during the early stages of the War of Resistance against Japan;⁸ under its own embodiment from 1942 onwards, it took part in the Chinese Communist Revolution in North China, while continuing the struggle against Japan;⁹ and it was descended by other Korean units that were incorporated into the Chinese Communist armies in Northeast China (or Manchuria) during China's Civil War, parts of which continued as south as Hainan Island;¹⁰ and the predecessor of this army found itself later in its final struggle during the Korean War (1950-53) under the North Korean People's Army (NKPA).¹¹ Yet, in spite of accompanying such significant milestones in the history of East Asia and acting as one of the few international movements within China, the history of the KVA has evidently been understudied in the Western scholarship, and while it has received some attention in China and more so in South Korea, I argue that crucial aspects of the history of the KVA are barely understood or discussed, particularly those regarding its internal changes, but most importantly its relations with the CPC. This lacuna in the scholarship emanates first and foremost due to the deficiency of and limited access to documentation, and in particular valuable non-propagandic materials that can reveal what is hidden beneath the surface.

In distinction to former studies about the KVA, this article attempts to refute the former, rather optimistic convention that the KVA was a complying subordinate and that it was effectively controlled by its patron, the CPC. Rather, by exposing several incidents in the relations between the

⁸ Ma Yi 馬義, *Dangshiguan*, Regular record 515/45 (Dec. 1942); Yeom In-ho: 41; Yue Chaoxiang 岳朝相. "Women de zhanyou—Chaoxian yiyongdui," 我們的戰友—朝鮮義勇隊 [Our Comrades-in-Arms—The Korean Volunteer Corps.], *Chaoxian yiyongdui tongxun* 朝鮮義勇隊通訊 [The Korean Volunteer Corps' Newsletter], issue no. 10 (April 21, 1939): 4.

⁹ Kim (2017): chap. 1; Lee and Scalapino (1972): 178-79; Ma Yi 馬義, *Dangshiguan*, Regular record 515/45 (Dec. 1942); Shi (1998): 81-85; Yeom (2001): 142-48.

¹⁰ Cumings (1990): 362; Kim (2012): 229-31; Kim (2018): 25-26, 153-55;

¹¹ Chen (1994): 106-08; Kim (2017): chap. 5; Zhou (2013): 34.

CPC and the KVA following the conclusion of the War of Resistance against Japan and through the process of the Civil War in China, this article reveals the fragile and even volatile relations between the two, and the gradual deviation of the KVA from the CPC, and the aspiration of the former for greater autonomy from the latter. Therefore, this article draws the attention to several less known or entirely unknown incidents that had occurred during China's Civil War which reflect the complex relations between the CPC and its international unit. I argue that following the War of Resistance against Japan, a few factors contributed to the growing tension between the CPC and the KVA, which may be attributed to internal changes within the KVA such as its swelling number of members, its relocation to Northeast China, and other reasons such as disagreements about the way the war should be conducted, and conflicts of interests.

Such a new interpretation to the CPC-KVA relations was impossible had it been merely relying on materials and documents that were already in use for the last several years. Western scholarship on the KVA is scarce and in fact almost does not exist, while in recent years this unit has received greater attention by Chinese and South Korean scholars. Yet, the fact that primary sources regarding the KVA remain limited, has contributed considerably to the perception, both by Chinese and South Korean studies, that the KVA was a reliable subordinate unit to the CPC, that it had assisted to it in the times of the War of Resistance against Japan and China's Civil War, and that all these reflect the brotherhood and amicable relations between Chinese and Korean Communists.

Primary sources regarding the KVA remain limited in scope and time: as the South Korean scholar Yeom In-ho points out, the most comprehensive primary sources about the KVA are primarily propaganda materials published either by the KVA or the CPC, notably the "Korean Volunteer Corps' Newsletter" (朝鮮義勇隊通訊 *Chaoshian yiyongdui tongxun*), Chinese Communist newspapers, and other materials gathered and published by Japanese governmental apparatuses.¹² However, almost all of

¹² Yeom In-ho (2003): 38-40.

these sources are pertinent to the earlier period of the KVA, prior to the conclusion of the War of Resistance against Japan (1937-45). Therefore, the later part of the KVA and its participation in China's Civil War (1945/1946-49) lacks abundant sources, and due to that the main conception that rises from secondary literature about the KVA-CPC relationship at that time is of an amicable and cooperative one, highlighting their common struggle, but unaware of their conflicts and disagreements. Memoirs by leaders of the CPC Northeast Bureau and commanders of the Eighth Route Army, such as Peng Zhen, Wu Xiuquan, Xiao Jinguang, Zeng Kelin, and Lü Zhengcao—who had all operated at some point or another with the KVA in Northeast China—only rarely mention their existence, if at all.¹³ In his memoir, for example, Zeng Kelin refers to the KVA only twice: first, when his military district receive an order from Zhude to advance to the Northeast together with “Korean units”; and secondly, when he very ambiguously refers to the Tonghua Incident of March 1946, without mentioning other details than that “a Korean detachment” had suppressed a revolt attempt by Japanese remnants.¹⁴ While some of these memoirs acknowledge the KVA's participation in the Civil War in China alongside the CPC, it seems that on the whole they avoid raising the question of their relations.

As a result, a somewhat simplified representation is raised both in Chinese and in South Korean scholarship regarding the KVA-CPC relationship. In fact, the existent literature inclines to emphasize the cooperative relations between the KVA and the CPC in the Northeast Theater of 1945-48, their eradication of local bandits, their joint fighting against the GMD, and other activities with the local population.¹⁵ However, it

¹³ Lü Zhengcao (1997); Peng Zhen (1991); Wu Xiaoquan (2009); Xiao Jinguang (2012); Zeng Kelin (1997).

¹⁴ Zeng Kelin (1997): 79-80; 137.

¹⁵ See: Cui (1997): 48-62; Lü (2013): 282-92; Kim (2017): chap. 3; Kim (2012): 229-31; Yeom (2001): 314-24. These studies' discussions about the period of the civil war in Northeast China is limited to the cooperation between the KVA and CPC, the frequent reorganizations of the KVA units, their deployment in Northeast China, and the like. There are neither references nor implications to difficulties or strains in the relations between the KVA and the CPC, and the KVA mostly seems as a passive actor without independent thinking or aspirations.

fails—mainly due to the lack of available and external sources—to investigate and analyze the nature of the relations between the KVA and the CPC with different queries, such as: did both the KVA and the CPC have the same goals by the end of the war against Japan? How did the KVA's shift to Northeast China and its subsequent expansion impact its relations with the CPC? What kind of impact had the encounter with local Koreans in Northeast China on KVA-CPC relations? And, did they have contrasting views regarding how the war and revolution should be conducted?

Drawing on intelligence and military reports of their archenemy—the GMD—I was able to unfold some of the incidents between the CPC and the KVA, the GMD's attempts to shatter their alliance, and other differences between them that had burdened their relations. Therefore, by relying on external sources originated not within the CPC or the KVA, but by the military and intelligence apparatuses of the GMD, this article fills an important gap in the current literature.¹⁶ This article also tries to trace and explain some of the changes that occurred in the KVA following the conclusion of the war against Japan, and how these had influenced its relations with its benefactor.

With the conclusion of the war against Japan in August 1945, the intimate and reliable ties between the CPC and the KVA were beginning to unravel. Apparently, it was not clear to the KVA members whether they should stay in China with the CPC or return to their homeland in order to take part in political work. The KVA was sent together with the 8th Route Army to Northeast China and supposedly expected to return from there to Korea. However, by late 1945, only a small group of seventy to eighty of the most prominent cadres of the KVA was allowed to enter North Korea, while the rest of the KVA remained in Northeast China. Thus, the KVA was prevented from returning home, and was compelled to fight alongside the CPC in China's Civil War. As it turned out, at this crucial point for both

¹⁶ This article relies mainly on research and analysis of archival sources in the Chinese language. Although a few secondary sources in Korean are cited in this article, I acknowledge that due to certain limitations such as time and access, additional sources in Korean were not used in this research.

the Chinese and Korean Communist revolutions, the hitherto amicable and stable relationship between the CPC and the KVA was put into test.

The Korean Exiles and the Chinese Revolution

Of the various Korean organizations that had operated in China prior to 1949, the KVA, made up of Korean revolutionaries and communists, became the main military apparatus fighting in the War of Resistance Against Japan in about 1942.¹⁷ Throughout its existence, the KVA was officially affiliated with the CPC and the Chinese Red Army, although *de jure* it had a certain level of autonomy. Assessing the nature of the relations between the CPC and the KVA is not a simple task, as information regarding the KVA remains largely scarce or incomplete. Chinese sources dealing with the KVA and other Korean units within the Chinese Red Army—and later the People’s Liberation Army (PLA)—briefly summarize the development of these units, and while, on the one hand, they seem to emphasize their contributions to the War of Resistance Against Japan, to the victory of the Chinese Revolution and to the Civil War, on the other hand, they tend to avoid detailing their actions and relations with the CPC.

The aim of this section of the article is to succinctly describe the situation of the KVA prior to the conclusion of the War of Resistance against Japan and the commencement of the Civil War in China. The KVA came into being following a series of splits and unifications between a few Korean forces that had operated in South and North China.¹⁸ The first split occurred on July 4, 1938, when Ch’oe Ch’ang-ik (崔昌益, 1896-1957) and others, split from Kim Wŏn-bong (金元鳳, 1898-1958; aka Kim Yak-san 金若山), and formed their own organization, called the “Korean Youth War-time Service Corps” (朝鮮青年戰時服務團 *Chosŏn ch’ŏngnyŏn jŏnshi bongmu dan*).¹⁹ Due to interventions by the GMD and the CPC in an at-

¹⁷ Kim (2012): 229; Lee and Scalapino (1972): 175-78; Minnich (2005): 17-18; Shi (1998): 77-78.

¹⁸ Shi (1998); Han (2005); Yeom (2001); Cui (1997).

¹⁹ For names of Korean organizations, I have preferred to provide the Chinese/Hanja characters, followed by the Romanized name according to the McCune-Reischauer Romanization System.

tempt to reconcile this split, on October 10, 1938, the “Korean Volunteer Corps”²⁰ (朝鮮義勇隊 *Chosŏn ūiyong dae*) was established, and Kim Wŏn-bong was appointed its commander.²¹ Although it managed to remain a unified unit operating in the same region for a while, the old arguments regarding the location of operations continued to prevail, and from that time until 1941, it was under pressure from within and from without. Firstly, considerable parts of the unit were not satisfied with serving in South China, since many considered fighting against the Japanese Army more desirable as it was closer to their homeland. Secondly, the CPC worked on propaganda aimed at mobilizing the Koreans fighting in China proper in the goal of having them join their bases of operations in the north. The CPC let it be known that the prominent Korean commander Kim Mu-chŏng (金武亭, 1904-52) and his Korean unit had engaged in operations against the Japanese Army in North China. Moreover, it seems that in September 1940 Zhou Enlai, who was at that time in Chongqing, tried to influence the Korean Volunteer Corps from within in order to urge its members to move northward and reach the areas under CPC control.²²

Consequently, on several occasions, members of the Korean Volunteer Corps left South China in order to join fellow Koreans active alongside the CPC in North China. Thus, in 1939, Ch’oe Ch’ang-ik led a group of dissidents who joined the Korean revolutionaries in the north. Later, in June 1941, another group of about eighty members made its way to North China, thereby causing the Korean Volunteer Corps in South China to practically lose its main force; the dissidents were no longer affiliated with the Republican government in Chongqing, but with the CPC in Yan’an.²³

Following the growth in the number of Korean revolutionaries in the

²⁰ Note that the meaning of “*ūiyong*” (義勇) is “righteous and courageous,” however, as it is often translated as “volunteer” (for which “*Chiwŏn*” 志願 is the appropriate term) in the research literature, I use this name without change.

²¹ Kim and Wales (1941): 217-20; Lee and Scalapino (1972): 175-78; Pak (2007): 352; Shi (1998): 78-79.

²² Lee and Scalapino (1972): 177-78; Pak (2007): 354-55; Shi (1998): 78-80.

²³ Minnich (2005): 17-18; Lee and Scalapino (1972): 177-78; Lü (2013): 282; Pak (2007): 355; Shi (1998): 78-81.

areas under CPC control in North China, a reorganization of the Korean military organ under Kim Mu-chǒng's leadership took place. On July 7, 1941, the members of the former Korean Volunteer Corps, together with the members of Kim Mu-chǒng's political organization—the “North China Korean Youth Federation” (華北朝鮮青年聯合會 *Hwabuk Chosǒn ch'ǒngnyǒn yǒnhap'oe*)—merged their military force into a new unit called the “North China Detachment of the Korean Volunteer Corps” (朝鮮義勇隊華北支隊 *Chosǒn ūiyongdae Hwabuk chidae*). Pak Hyo-sam (朴孝三, years unknown) was appointed unit commander. In late 1942, the “Youth Federation” was renamed as the “Korean Independence Alliance” (KIA, 朝鮮獨立同盟 *Chosǒn dongnip tongmaeng*; aka “Korean Independence League”) and the former “Korean Volunteer Corps” became “The Korean Volunteer Army” (朝鮮義勇軍 *Chosǒn ūiyong kun*). Kim Mu-chǒng served as the commander of the KVA, and below him were his two deputy-commanders, Pak Hyo-sam and Pak Il-u (朴一禹, years unknown).²⁴

By the time of the establishment of the KVA, these Korean forces under Kim Mu-chǒng that were affiliated to the CPC were operating in the Taihang Mountain region in Shanxi province. There they were training their new rank and file who kept joining them in designated schools, and after constant reorganization their school was renamed to the “Korean Revolutionary Military and Political School” (朝鮮革命軍政學校 *Chosǒn hyǒngmyǒng kunjǒng hakkyo*) in late 1943.²⁵ The KVA, like its predecessor—the KVC, has mainly carried out propaganda tasks and infiltrations to the enemy's rear, attempting to arouse the Korean soldiers in the Japanese Army to act against their masters or to switch sides.²⁶ At any rate, although

²⁴ Lee and Scalapino (1972): 178-79; Lü (2013): 282; Pak (2007): 357-58; Shi (1998): 81-82.

²⁵ Lee and Scalapino (1972): 179; Shi (1998): 84.

²⁶ In its newsletter, the KVC had on several occasions published short stories from the frontline, where its detachments had operated or fought, see for example: Chaoxian yiyongdui 朝鮮義勇隊, “Ben dui xietong youjun sha kou,” 本隊協同友軍殺寇 [This unit killed an enemy in cooperation with the friendly forces], *Chaoxian yiyongdui tongxun* 朝鮮義勇隊通訊 [The Korean Volunteer Corps' Newsletter], issue no. 8 (April 1, 1939): 9; For a comprehensive explanation about the propaganda work conducted by the KVC, see: Li Da 李達, “Di'er qi Kangzhan Zhong Chaoxian yiyongdui yu dui di xuanchuan,” 第二期抗戰中朝鮮義勇隊與對敵宣傳 [The Korean Volunteer

it had participated in a few battles against the Japanese enemy, the KVA was limited in size and capabilities in order to serve as a fully-activated combat unit, and, as the CPC leadership soon realized, it was not worthwhile to send these Korean comrades to battle due to their potential in serving the Party in the future.²⁷

The KVA received its political and military instructions from the CPC, however, at the same time it was given a measure of autonomy, mainly an internal hierarchy of Korean revolutionaries at the top of which stood Kim Mu-chông. The Korean revolutionaries were permitted to maintain their own political and military organizations with Korean designations and to preserve their unique cultural and linguistic features. In late 1943, the CPC decided to pull the KVA back from the front line, as it understood that it would be better to protect its valuable leadership. By early 1944, the KVA made its way back to Yan'an.²⁸

To summarize, as long as the KVA was limited in terms of size and operations, and as long as it had a common enemy with the CPC – the Japanese Army, it is clear why it had maintained dependent, subordinate, and close relations to the CPC. In addition, its size and its close contact with the CPC guaranteed effective control and instruction of it by the CPC. But these factors were not to last for long: after Japan's surrender in August 1945, the KVA was dispatched to Northeast China, and thus it was operating farther from the central leadership of the CPC, and at the same time expanding its rank and file from the local Korean population that in most cases was unfamiliar with the CPC's lines and training. And as the war was

 Corps and the propaganda toward the enemy in the 2nd stage of the War of Resistance], *Chaoxian yiyongdui tongxun* 朝鮮義勇隊通訊 [The Korean Volunteer Corps' Newsletter], issue no. 12 (May, 11, 1939): 1; For further information regarding the KVA in North China, see: Kim (2017): chap. 1; Lee and Scalapino (1972): 176-79; Pak (2007): 352-54, 358-59; Shen (2003): 187; Shi (1998): 78-85.

²⁷ CPC member Peng Zhen (1902-97), for instance, in his essay "On the tasks in the cities in the occupied zones by the enemy" of May 1945, mentions briefly the contribution made by the "Korean Independence Alliance" and implies its greater importance for the CPC in the future after the conclusion of the war against Japan. See: Peng Zhen (1991): 98. See also: Lee and Scalapino (1972): 179; See also: Lee and Scalapino (1972): 179.

²⁸ Pak (2007): 358-59; Shi (1998): 78-85; Yeom (2001): 79-82.

over, it was not clear to many Koreans and Korean Communists whether they still had a common enemy with the CPC, or in other words, it was not clear whether they should remain in China or return to Korea.

Adhering to Internationalism or Prioritizing the Fatherland?

“*The red five-star flag of the People’s Republic of China is dyed with the red blood of the Korean martyrs*” was reportedly said by Mao Zedong to Kim Il-sŏng in one of their conversations,²⁹ and conveys the message that the Korean comrades had made a significant contribution to the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, and it can be inferred that this was true particularly with reference to the military struggle against Japan and later, the GMD. Chinese sources cite sayings of Chinese senior political and military leaders, such as Zhou Enlai and Zhou Baozhong,³⁰ who lauded the Korean comrades who had fought alongside them. Although relatively little is known about the scope of participation of the pro-CPC Korean forces in China, including the KVA, as more information is revealed regarding those forces, there is less doubt that they contributed significantly to the victory of the CPC in the Northeast Theater (1946-48).³¹ Aside from praising the Korean comrades, Chinese sources tend to simplify the com-

²⁹ Lü (2013): 1.

³⁰ For citations of Zhou Enlai and other prominent leaders of the CPC, see: Lü (2013): 1-3; For citations of Zhou Baozhong about the contribution of the Korean comrades in the resistance to Japan in Northeast China during the 1930s, see: Shi (1998): 70. In 1965 the Hunan People’s Publishing House published a short article dedicated to praising the Korean troops that fought alongside the Chinese Communists in Northeast China during the civil war. See: Hunan renmin chubanshe (1965): 366-69.

³¹ See for example: Lü (2013): 282-92. Military reports made by NRA officers, and particularly by Du Yuming, detail how the KVA and its affiliated units assisted the CPC in Northeast China. This includes massive mobilization of the Korean population in Northeast China to join the ranks of the KVA and other units or to support the war effort in other ways, as well as the KVA’s participation in crucial defensive and offensive campaigns. See: Du Yuming, *Guoshiguan*, 002-020400-00015-006 (Feb. 13, 1947); Du Yuming, Feb. 26, 1947, *Guoshiguan*, 002-090300-00162-255; Chen Cheng, *Guoshiguan*, 002-080200-00317-028 (Jun. 17, 1947).

plicated nature of the KVA and its relations with the CPC, and emphasize its faithfulness to the CPC, as if the relations were smooth and embodied ideal revolutionary comradeship.³² While some of these remarks are not far from the truth, these generalizations tend to cover up significant issues with regard to KVA-CPC relations.

One of the initial tensions to come up between the KVA and the CPC and which foreshadowed the approaching differences between the groups was due to the conclusion of the War of Resistance Against Japan in August 1945. In order to understand the differences between the period of war against Japan and the period of China's Civil War, which led to the tensions between the CPC and KVA, it is essential to highlight a few crucial points. First, in 1929, following instructions from the Comintern and its "one country, one party" policy, the Korean Communists operating in China had to dissolve their Korean Communist Party.³³ Consequently, they became members of the CPC, and followed their orders. For as long as they were operating in China, they had no organizational autonomy but were allowed to maintain their own designations. This, in fact, made them devoted to the Chinese Communist cause of fighting Japan on Chinese soil, and to contributing to the communist revolution there. As a result, their ultimate goal of liberating Korea from Japanese control and carrying out the revolution they envisioned in Korea had to take a back seat to supporting the CPC. This is a crucial point that has often been overlooked in earlier studies.

Second, while most of the Koreans affiliated with the CPC were, by 1941, very familiar with the Party's doctrines and policies, others who joined their ranks later, might not have been familiar with the CPC's prin-

³² Examples of such simplifications of the KVA's nature and inclination to portray it as a compliant body are extensive. Chinese sources often focus on the KVA's geographical distribution in Northeast China after 1945, with sporadic mention of its activities on the ground, and seemingly without referring to its relations with the CPC or the Northeast Bureau.

³³ The Comintern's "one country, one party" policy was urged since late 1927; however, it was carried out effectively in 1929. The Comintern was very dissatisfied with the rampant factionalism within the Korean Communist Movement and therefore, in December 1928 it ordered dissolution of the Korean Communist Party. See: Lee and Scalapino (1972): 149; Lee (1983): 113; Shi (1998): 54, 58.

ciples and guidelines.

Third, the experience of war was different for the Korean revolutionaries—both those who were CPC members in North China and particularly those who were operating underground in the Northeast—and the Chinese Communists. Practically all those Korean revolutionaries, at one stage or another, suffered from persecutions by the Japanese colonial authorities in their homeland, perilous struggles in Northeast China that were often followed by cruel military expeditions by the Japanese Army, not to mention the more than three-decade infamous and harsh colonization of Korea by Japan. All these definitely influenced the Korean revolutionaries, and anti-Japanese sentiments were quite prevalent at that time.³⁴ While for the Korean revolutionaries' ultimate goal was fighting Japan and liberating their homeland, it was, in fact, not the case for the CPC leadership, who understood that the War against Japan was only a preliminary stage before the real struggle for power in China with the GMD.³⁵ Lastly, as has already been pointed out in the previous section, throughout the period of the War of Resistance, the Korean Volunteer Army and its predecessor were limited both in size and in scope of combat operations.

Hence, when the War of Resistance Against Japan came to an end, these facts and differences surfaced and served to undermine earlier relations between the KVA and the CPC: The new circumstances were the result of the KVA's shift to Northeast China and the outbreak of the Civil War. The conclusion of the war against Japan had revived some of the questions that were temporarily put aside, such as the Korean Communists' role in the Chinese revolution: Now that the war was over, should they return to their homeland and carry out the revolution there, or should they

³⁴ On the Japanese colonization of Korea and the anti-Japanese sentiment in Korean society during the colonization period, see: Cumings (2005): 148-62, 174-84. For more information about anti-Japanese sentiment among Koreans in Northeast China prior to Japan's defeat, see: Lee (1983): 1-5, 111-13. The general inclination toward revenge and carrying out reprisals against Japanese civilians and military men following Japan's defeat in August 1945 by the local population in Northeast China is discussed in Mayumi Itoh's book "*Japanese War Orphans in Manchuria*." See: Itoh (2010): 15-24.

³⁵ Beevor (2012): 270, 466; Yang (2011): 324-26.

stay with their Chinese patrons in order to support their efforts in the imminent confrontation against the GMD? And, if their homeland was now liberated and a new Korean government was set up in Pyöngyang, should they maintain their membership in and allegiance to the CPC? These serious questions were quite probably very prominent in the minds of the Korean Communists.

Manchuria—Where All the Problems Started

Toward the end of WWII, the USSR joined the Allied forces against Japan, and launched a surprise attack during the night hours of August 9, 1945 on the outposts of the Japanese Kantō Army in Northeast China. Within a few weeks, the Soviet Army succeeded in occupying Northeast China and the northern half of the Korean peninsula.³⁶ Aspiring to take advantage of this opportunity, the CPC was set to march toward the Northeast. There, the CPC hoped, it could cement contact and cooperation with the Soviet Army and at the same time, guarantee its control of strategic points in the region while the GMD was far off in the South.³⁷ On August 11, 1945 Zhu De (朱德, 1886-1976)—commander-in-chief of the 8th Route Army, announced the “Seven Orders,” which outlined the general instructions and tasks for the Communist forces in North and East China in light of the anticipated struggle with the GMD. Zhu De’s 6th order instructed the deputy commanders of the KVA—Pak Hyo-sam and Pak Il-u—to lead their force and follow the marching units of the 8th Route Army to the Northeast. According to this order, the KVA was expected to fight alongside the 8th Route Army against the Japanese and “puppet” (former Manchukuo) armies, to mobilize the Korean population, and to take part in the liberation of Korea.³⁸ Estimates of the KVA’s size at that time vary, however, it seems reasonable that it included at least five hundred soldiers, and together with a

³⁶ Glantz (2003): 1-6, 24-33; Hasegawa, (2005): 189-91, 196-98.

³⁷ Zeng Kelin (1997): 78-80.

³⁸ Wang and He (2005): 285-90; Yan Xishan, *Guoshiguan*, 002-090300-00210-366 (Sep. 16, 1945).

few hundred Korean cadres from the KIA, about eight hundred to one thousand Korean comrades left for Northeast China by late September, 1945.³⁹

Following these orders, the KVA was intensively working on expanding its ranks. On the same day it received the 6th order, and on certain occasions in the following days, Kim Mu-chǒng called on the former Korean soldiers of the Japanese armies and other elements to join the KVA.⁴⁰ Along its way to the Northeast, the KVA continued little by little to expand its ranks, by joining up new Korean members, some of whom were also former underground guerilla warriors. By late October, 1945 the KVA arrived in Shenyang, where it incorporated local Korean units that had operated underground.⁴¹ According to ROC estimates, at this point the KVA had expanded its ranks to include as many as 1,800 members.⁴² On November 10, 1945, the members of the KVA convened in a Korean school in Shenyang for a military conference. In the conference Kim Mu-chǒng complied with the instructions given by the CPC Northeast Bureau, and declared a reorganization of the KVA into four detachments to be sent to

³⁹ The sources seem to differ in their estimates regarding the total number of Korean members in Yan'an at the end of the War of Resistance, both for the KVA and the KIA. Kim Dong-gil, Lü Minghui and Pak Ch'an-sǔng set the number at no greater than one thousand. On the other hand, Shen Zhihua provides an estimate of three thousand Korean members, which might include other Korean units in Northeast China around that time and not the core membership that set out from Yan'an, as other estimates of the KVA's size at the end of 1945 and following the incorporation of other units in the Northeast generally show. See: Kim (2012): 229; Lü (2013): 294; Pak (2007): 358; Shen (2003): 187-88.

⁴⁰ Shen, 2003): 187.

⁴¹ The foundation of the Korean force that was present in Shenyang prior to the conclusion of the war against Japan remains unclear. According to Yu Zhonglie, during 1945, when the war against Japan was not yet over, the CPC sent Han Ch'ǒng (韓青 years unknown) to Shenyang for underground tasks. Following the defeat of Japan, Han Ch'ǒng emerged with a small military organization of more than one hundred members strong, and it was later merged with the KVA when it arrived in Shenyang. However, according to Shen Zhihua's own account, Han Ch'ǒng was one of the leading Korean cadres who entered North Korea in October 1945, and after discussions with Kim Il-sǒng, returned to Shenyang in November together with a force of his own, which later merged with the rest of the KVA. See: Kim (2012): 229-30; Shen (2003): 188; Yu (2001): 71-72.

⁴² Guofu canjunchu, *Dangshiguan*, Special record 16/24.8 (Oct. 26, 1945).

north, east, and south Manchuria. At the same time, Kim Mu-chǒng also dispatched several Korean cadres to North Korea.⁴³

The conference concluded with the KVA's detachments ready to leave Shenyang and scatter in the Northeast. The 1st Detachment was assigned to Tonghua in south Jilin province; the 3rd to Harbin; the 5th was assigned to Yanji in east Jilin province; and lastly, the 7th Detachment was assigned to go to Jilin City.⁴⁴ It was estimated that around this time, circa November 1945, the KVA already included as many as 3,650 members, 2,000 of whom were in Shenyang at that time.⁴⁵ It thus shows how within two to three months the KVA had swollen conspicuously comparing to its time in Yan'an and North China. By about the end of 1945 all these detachments had arrived at their designated locations, and started mobilizing the Korean population to join their ranks, and carried out other tasks assigned to them, such as: propaganda campaigns for the CPC; organizing the Korean peasants and other social groups; fighting remnants of the Japanese and Manchukuo Armies and capturing their weapons; and, suppressing armed bandits and pro-GMD elements in Tonghua, Mudanjiang, Yanji, and other locations.⁴⁶

Meanwhile the KVA was gradually expanding by conscripting young Koreans from among the local communities and incorporating other local units, and by allowing former Korean troops from the Japanese and Manchukuo armies to join them. The decision to incorporate former Korean troops from enemy armies was sanctioned by the CPC. While this practice was in effect from the time the KVA was operating around Yan'an, it was now enhanced by the CPC's practical need to expand its military ranks in

⁴³ Cui (1997): 48; Shi (1998): 85; Zhou (2013): 32.

⁴⁴ The general description of the designations of the KVA's Detachments seems to match the Chinese source, however, it seems that there may be confusion between the designations of the 5th and the 7th Detachments, as Zhou's account differs from Lü and Shi. See: Lü (2013): 286; Shi (1998): 85; Zhou (2013): 32.

⁴⁵ Cui (1997): 48.

⁴⁶ Cui (1997): 49-50; Lü (2013): 288-92; Shi (1998): 85; Waijiaobu zhu Dongbei tepaiyuan gongshu, *Dangshiguan*, Special record 16/24.18 (Nov. 26, 1946); Yeom (2003): 146-58; Yu (2001): 71-73.

light of the upcoming struggle with the GMD.⁴⁷

Another important change took place in the core leadership of the organization. In December 1945, the KVA commander—Kim Mu-chǒng, together with some of the most prominent leaders of the KVA and the KIA, led a force from the KVA to North Korea. Their objective was to return to their homeland and to take part in the new regime’s political and military apparatuses, as had been declared both by the CPC and their own organization in the past, and as was aspired by many of the Korean revolutionaries. The CPC had definitely hoped that these senior members, who later constituted the “Yan’an faction” in North Korean politics, would construct positive and close relations between North Korea and the CPC. However, the Soviet Army in North Korea stopped this KVA marching force from entering into Korea at the border cities of Andong (today’s Dandong) and Shinūiju, and ordered the force to return to Northeast China.⁴⁸ Those allowed to enter North Korea were seventy to eighty of the most prominent leaders and cadres of the KVA and the KIA, including the commander, Kim Mu-chǒng himself, and others such as Kim Dubong (金科奉, years unclear; aka Kim Paek-yǒn 金白淵), Ch’oe Ch’ang-ik, Han Pin (韓斌, years unknown), and others.⁴⁹ This embodies the first two problems that arose during the interim period between the end of the War of Resistance Against Japan and China’s Civil War. One problem was the change in the unit’s composition, since a considerable part of its core senior leadership had returned to North Korea, while new, less-experienced, conscripts from the population or other units, lacking indoctrination and discipline, were added; the other problem was that many of the KVA members who wished to return to their homeland were prevented from doing so, and remained in Northeast China. As has been pointed out by a few sources, considerable

⁴⁷ Baomiju, *Guoshiguan*, 002-020400-00034-114 (Apr. 22, 1947); Cumings (1990): 358.

⁴⁸ According to Bruce Cumings, the Soviet authorities in North Korea wished to avoid violation of the agreement with the USA on their side by allowing the entrance of an armed Korean force into Korea, or were at least concerned about the possible publication of it to the American authorities in South Korea. See: Cumings (1981): 313.

⁴⁹ Chi and Wen (2000): 394; Minnich (2005): 25-28; Shen (2003): 187; Shi (1998): 314.

numbers of the Korean soldiers who fought in the Civil War even at later stages, expressed their desire to return to their homeland.⁵⁰

These first few changes had immediate implications for the KVA's functioning in Northeast China and its relations with the CPC, and especially as the Civil War broke out. A notable example is the case of the Tonghua Incident. Briefly, by early 1946, after Japan's defeat and the collapse of the Manchukuo puppet regime, many Japanese civilians and soldiers tried to escape the Soviet Army's attempts to capture them and use them for their own purposes. Hoping to get back to Japan via Korea, they had gathered in the city of Tonghua in south Jilin province, but were unable to continue fleeing due to the Soviet occupation of Korea. Several months prior, in October 1945, the CPC had succeeded in gaining control of the city with the help of the Soviet Army's presence there; the Soviets subsequently left in November.⁵¹ On December 20, 1945, the KVA's 1st Detachment arrived in Tonghua.⁵² The 1st Detachment was the main, or one of the main, CPC forces in Tonghua and south Jilin. By the time of the incident, it was reinforced by other Korean troops from other Detachments.⁵³ Meanwhile, the GMD had been trying to use some of its agents and pro-GMD elements in the city in order to make contact with former Japanese soldiers who were in hiding in order to revolt against the CPC and regain control of the city for the GMD.⁵⁴

On the night of February 3, 1946, the conspirators attempted to revolt against the CPC forces and to capture some of the main installations in the city such as, the military headquarters, administrative offices, the telegraph office, the city's airport, etc.⁵⁵ At the time of the incident, some of the CPC forces were out of the city, and the 1st Detachment which, by that point consisted of more than 5,000 troops, was responsible for defending the

⁵⁰ Kim (2012): 234; Zhou (2013): 33.

⁵¹ Kenji (1992): 241-42; Satō (1993): 17.

⁵² Lü (2013): 285.

⁵³ Cui (1997): 50.

⁵⁴ Cui (1997): 49; Kenji (1992): 246; Lü (2006): 163-64.

⁵⁵ Cui (1997): 50; Matsubara (2003): 190.

city.⁵⁶ The 1st Detachment and other CPC forces managed to suppress the revolt within a few hours, however, Japanese accounts of the incident emphasize the Korean units' cruelty toward and reprisals against the civilian and military population, which included mass murders of soldiers and civilians, and harassment of Japanese women, not only at the time of the incident but on the following days as well.⁵⁷ This went against the CPC's own position for three main reasons. First, a short time after the revolt was suppressed, the CPC issued an order to stop the counter measures against the conspirators,⁵⁸ therefore, if the Korean units did continue to make reprisals against the Japanese population, then it would have contradicted the CPC's orders. Second, the CPC's stance toward Japanese soldiers and civilians was clear from the conclusion of the war against Japan; that is, to incorporate skilled military men and at the same time, to make use of medical and technical personnel for its own sake.⁵⁹ Third, while suppressing

⁵⁶ Cui (1997): 51; Lü (2013): 285.

⁵⁷ Note that Chinese and Japanese sources are not in agreement with regard to the Communist forces' attitude toward the Japanese soldiers and civilians in Tonghua during and after the incident. Chinese sources, in general, describe the suppression of the revolt as successful, without mentioning other consequences following the revolt. In his book *Tonghua "er-san" shijian* (The "2-3" Tonghua Incident), Lü Minghui mentions that the Korean soldiers were particularly furious toward the Japanese rebels, because their nation suffered from harsh treatment and suppression by the Japanese Empire. In addition, several Japanese sources emphasize the Korean soldiers' role in attacking and harassing Japanese soldiers and civilians. See: Lü (2006): 1-5, 242-44; Matsubara, (2003): 195-98.

⁵⁸ Lü (2006): 244.

⁵⁹ On many occasions, the CPC invested great efforts in order to make the defeated Japanese soldiers turn their allegiance and assist the CPC. The CPC made use of Japanese Communists who were in Yan'an during the war against Japan, among them Nosaka Sanzō (野坂参三, 1892-93; aka Okano Susumu) was the most prominent, and for that matter, when the war with Japan was over as well. For more on that issue, see: Etter and Gillin (1983): 497-518, and Kenji (1992): 240-41. In his memoir, for instance, PLA general Wu Xiuquan mentions how the CPC made use of Japanese air personnel during the Civil War in order to develop its air force; see: Wu (2009): 147-48. Similarly, the GMD gathered information about some of the Japanese units that were left in China; a particular unit that had caught the GMD's attention was an aviation unit comprised of about 1,000 Japanese personnel in Tonghua, in March 1946. See: Junwuju, *Guoshiguan*, 002-090300-00158-174 (Mar. 4, 1946). Moreover, in their confessions, Japanese prisoners of war caught by the NRA related that they had served the Communist forces in several roles, such as medical personnel, stretcher bearers, logistics personnel, drivers, and other roles. See: Waijiaobu,

the revolt was essential for guaranteeing CPC control of Tonghua, unnecessary bloodshed and massacre of soldiers and civilians in the streets of Tonghua could have undermined the CPC's popularity among the people, and also among the Japanese themselves.⁶⁰ Hence, the KVA's conduct of the incident was not beneficial to the CPC cause, and the CPC had to figure out how to prevent such misconduct. The KVA's handling of the attempted revolt may have been a consequence of incorporating Korean troops from the outside, new conscripts who were not familiar with the CPC's agendas and guidelines, but it also reflected some of the Koreans' desire for revenge against the Japanese.

With the Civil War in Northeast China at full scale in spring 1946, the problems and tensions between the KVA and the CPC became more severe. Between March and May 1946, the Soviet Army was completing its final withdrawal from the region. This allowed Chiang Kai-shek and his commander of the NRA forces in the Northeast—Du Yuming (杜聿明, 1904-81)—to make further advances in the region and to put pressure on the Communist forces. By the end of May, the NRA succeeded in capturing the two central cities of Jilin province—Changchun and Jilin, and the smaller but strategic city of Siping.⁶¹ Consequently, the Communist forces in the Northeast—known at this time as the Northeast Democratic Allied Army (NDAA), which included the Korean Detachments as well, were split into two main forces: the bulk of the NDAA was located in Harbin and in North Manchuria, while a smaller force—consisting of the Third and Fourth Columns—was situated in South Manchuria and along the border with Korea.⁶²

At that point, however, George Marshall (1880-1959)—the US mediator for the Civil War between the GMD and the CPC, forced a cease-fire,

Guoshiguan, 020-022000-0030 (Mar. 1, 1946-Aug. 20, 1947).

⁶⁰ The CPC made great efforts during the Civil War—both in terms of propaganda and also of social policies—in order to establish a positive image and to win the common people's support, which was one of its key advantages over the GMD. See: Lary (2015): 50-55; Pepper (1999): 201-12.

⁶¹ Tanner (2013): 135-64; Wang and He (2005): 409-10.

⁶² Tanner (2015): 39-46.

which was eventually extended until October 1946.⁶³ After the cease-fire was lifted, the NRA sought to take advantage of the NDAA units' division, and to defeat those units that were situated in South Manchuria. According to Du Yuming's own reports, during this time the NRA forces in South Manchuria fought fiercely against the 1st Korean Detachment which, by this stage, was known as the "Li Hong-gwang Detachment" (LHD, 李紅光支隊) of the NDAA.⁶⁴ Reportedly, on several occasions, the NRA forces succeeded in inflicting heavy casualties on the Li Hong-gwang Detachment and other Korean units that were operating in the region, forcing them to abandon their positions and flee toward the borders. By late November, the LHD and other NDAA units evacuated Tonghua and fled to Ji'an on the border with Korea, in light of the impending NRA offensives.⁶⁵

Following these successes, the NRA units in South Manchuria launched an offensive campaign from January to March 1947 against the last main stronghold of the NDAA in South Manchuria—Linjiang. Although the NDAA was finally able to thwart the NRA's offensives through a combination of attacks from North Manchuria, throughout this campaign the NDAA units in the South suffered heavy casualties and difficulties, and it seems that the LHD and other Korean units became more and more embittered. Around this time, the GMD gathered intelligence information which indicated that the Korean forces within the NDAA were planning to leave for North Korea.

While CPC generals' and commanders' memoirs barely refer to the

⁶³ Ibid.: 39-40.

⁶⁴ The name "Li Hong-gwang" 李紅光 derives from a Korean guerrilla warrior in Northeast China, who was a commander in the Northeast People's Revolutionary Army (東北人民革命軍) and fought against the Japanese Army. Li Hong-gwang died in battle in 1935. I have chosen to differ from previous studies that transliterate the name as "Yi Hong-gwang" because the surname is pronounced as "Yi" in South Korea, unlike in North Korea and China where it is pronounced as "Li"; since both the person and the unit were operating in China, I refer to them as "Li." See: Jin, (1997): 2-3.

⁶⁵ Du Yuming, *Guoshiguan*, 002-090300-00146-109 (Oct. 31, 1946); Du Yuming, *Guoshiguan*, 002-090300-00147-028 (Nov. 27, 1946).

Korean forces affiliated to their armies, the GMD general Du Yuming had mentioned repeatedly skirmishes with various Korean communist units throughout his mission as commander of the NRA in Northeast China, as mentioned above. These and other reports reveal that the year 1947 was a very arduous and painful year for the KVA. In addition to their previous resentment and mixed feelings toward their Chinese comrades, and the fact that they were fighting another war not in their homeland while comprising a small part within the NDAA, the Korean units now suffered a series of defeats and heavy casualties by the hands of the NRA. According to Ye Xiufeng's (叶秀峰, 1900-90) report, feelings of hatred and probably of mistrust too marked the relationship between the Korean and Chinese Communists during this period, as the former felt they were purposely utilized by the latter to bear the burden of assuming more perilous tasks in fights in an unequal manner and to suffer from other forms of unequal mistreatment, such as inadequate weapons and clothes.⁶⁶

Another matter that implies the strains in the relations at that time, rises from an analytical document that had investigated the CPC relations with the Korean Communists issued by the ROC Ministry of National Defense. The document reveals several policies the CPC was willing to adopt in order alleviate the tensions with its Korean party members. According to one of its articles under the name "national equality," the CPC was not only considering to grant the Koreans in China a unique status—but more importantly to the case of the KVA and the Korean Communists—to promote young Korean Communists in the military and party apparatuses, and to appoint more of them to positions of deputies. The same specific article clarifies that the CPC will do its utmost to end disagreements between the Chinese and the Koreans, and remove misunderstandings. In other words, it is clear that the Chinese and Korean Communists still suffered from thorny relations to that point, and it was highly probable that following the reorganizations of the Korean units and official abolition of the KVA in 1946, the Korean Communists resented their downgrading by their Chi-

⁶⁶ Ye Xiufeng, *Guoshiguan*, 002-080200-00322-065 (Nov. 11, 1947).

nese comrades.⁶⁷

The harsh situation of the Korean units was not the only reason for resentment and apparent plans to leave for North Korea. It should be noted that at that time, the CPC and North Korea entered into a long negotiation concerning repatriation of the Korean forces; however, it is not clear which factor was more dominant—the North Korean regime’s will, or the Korean forces’ own desire to leave the theater of war.⁶⁸ Nonetheless, there is another important factor that should be taken into account, the differences between the GMD and the CPC in their stance toward the Korean question. When the War of Resistance Against Japan ended, the CPC sought to use the Korean forces for their own benefit, both by gaining their support in the Civil War, and by establishing close relations with the developing regime in North Korea. Unlike the CPC, the GMD sought to repatriate the Koreans to their homeland.⁶⁹ The GMD was concerned about the prospect of Korean support being directed to the CPC in the Civil War and therefore, it was working to undermine the Korean units’ morale, with the hope of agitating them against the CPC or making them leave China. For that purpose, Du Yuming operated several special organizations composed of Korean agents that were sent to the areas under CPC control in order to infiltrate the Korean units. There, they undermined their morale and agitated against

⁶⁷ Guofangbu, (May 1947); Han fei yu Han gong guanxi jiantao. Special record 16/24.17. 中國黨文化傳播委員會黨史館.

⁶⁸ Baomiju, *Guoshiguan*, 002-020400-00034-114 (Apr. 22, 1947).

⁶⁹ The GMD’s post-WWII policy toward the Koreans who lived in China, and particularly toward those who lived in Northeast China, was in some aspects unsympathetic. While the ROC government made efforts and encouraged many of the Koreans in China to return to their country, there were some instances when this policy was followed by confiscation of property from the Korean population, especially in the Northeast. Consequently, ethnic conflicts between Koreans and Chinese also appeared in the post-WWII period. This attitude toward the Korean population in China by the ROC government might have been aroused by at least two main reasons. First, it is reasonable that following the shift of the core Korean revolutionaries in China to the side of the CPC by 1941, the Koreans fell out of favor with Chiang Kai-shek. Moreover, Chiang Kai-shek’s attitude toward populations under Japanese occupation, and particularly those who lived in Northeast China, was distrustful. Cathcart (2012): 25-27; Jin Zongyue, *Dangshiguan* Special record 16/26.14 (Jan. 21, 1947); Kim, “The Chinese Civil War and the Ethno-genesis of the Korean Minority in Northeast China” (2014): 124-29; Pepper (1990): 175; Yeom (2003): 124-29.

the CPC. On one occasion, for instance, Du's agent succeeded in causing a small unit of the LHD, of about 350 men, to revolt against the CPC and to surrender to the GMD.⁷⁰

This period was a catastrophe for the CPC, due to the many setbacks and losses it had suffered not only in Northeast China, but also in the north, as the Communist capital—Yan'an, was captured by the NRA on March 19, 1947.⁷¹ It is noteworthy to disclose another incident that strained the relations between the CPC and its subordinate Korean units, which was reported to the GMD by one of Du Yuming's agents, who was appointed as Lee Ch'ön-u's (李天佑 years unknown) deputy.⁷² Lee Ch'ön-u, a Korean cadre, allegedly held several key roles in Harbin, including serving as Harbin's mayor, commander of Harbin's garrison unit, and commander of the Songjiang Military District (松江軍區). The episode can be referred to as the "Lee Brothers Incident."⁷³

This time the tension arose in North Manchuria—in Harbin, and not the South, when the commander of the NDAA—Lin Biao (林彪, 1907-71)—convened the senior cadres for an important meeting on March 28, 1947. At the meeting, the general situation of the Communists was surveyed, and in light of the serious setbacks and losses, it seems that the atmosphere of the meeting was despondent. Lin Biao contended that in spite of the predicament, the Communist forces must embrace an offensive stance. According to the report, Lee Ch'ön-u voiced his objection to Lin Biao's stance. Lee first complained that other cadres in the meeting could

⁷⁰ Du Yuming, *Guoshiguan*, 002-020400-00015-006 (Feb. 13, 1947); Du Yuming, *Guoshiguan*, 002-080200-00541-039 (Apr. 21, 1947); Du Yuming, *Guoshiguan*, 002-090300-00164-049 (Apr. 22, 1947).

⁷¹ Lew (2009): 62-77; Westad (2003): 148-55.

⁷² Not to be confused with a PLA senior commander at that time with the same name, Li Tianyou (李天佑, 1914-70).

⁷³ The GMD's intelligence reports claim that Lee Ch'ön-u held several prominent roles at the same time, however, this is difficult, if not almost impossible, to confirm. On the one hand, it seems suspicious or unlikely that one person simultaneously held several such prominent political and military roles. On the other hand, because of his part in the incident, there are no references to Lee Ch'ön-u in Chinese sources and therefore, there are no details about him at all.

not express their opinions regarding the current situation of the CPC; Lee continued and was resentful, saying that it was hopeless to count on Soviet aid, and that the pressure in the Northeast coming from the NRA was too great to thwart. Finally, he pointed out that following Yan'an's fall, the CPC might not have a chance to win and, in contrast to Lin Biao's own stance, said that the CPC must develop a new plan, or surrender. Subsequently, Lin Biao, who did not reply to any of Lee's points, charged him with serious accusations such as having the "mind of a reactionary" (*fandong zhi xin*), and added that each time Lee launched an attack on the enemy, he had failed. Therefore, Lin concluded and said that he must be punished in accordance with the law. Suddenly, Lee's twin brother who was also attending the meeting, and who apparently could not bear the humiliation his brother has just gone through, pulled out a gun and twice shot at Lin Biao's lower abdomen. Lin Biao's bodyguards executed him on the spot while Lee Ch'ön-u was taken away and was shot dead later on. Lin's bodyguards carried him to a hospital in the city's south, however, he could not receive adequate treatment there, and was rushed to the Jewish hospital of Harbin, where a foreign doctor (whose surname—"Golubev" 勾婁貝夫—suggests he was a Russian Jew) performed surgery.⁷⁴

Nonetheless, the incident was not over with the execution of the Lee brothers, nor with the medical treatment of Lin Biao. According to the reports, not only did the Communists in Harbin not report the incident, but in order to keep it quiet, they hid and buried the two brothers' bodies. It seems that the Chinese Communists were concerned about the Korean reaction to the incident, concerns that turned out to be correct once the Korean units in Harbin found out about the incident. According to one of the reports, after discovering the incident, the Korean units in Harbin considered reprisals against their Chinese comrades, but eventually sought the Soviet Army's mediation, which still had some sort of presence in the city.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Du Yuming, *Guoshiguan*, 002-080200-00541-039 (Apr. 21, 1947); Du Yuming, *Guoshiguan*, 002-090300-00164-049 (Apr. 22, 1947); Du Yuming, *Guoshiguan*, 002-090300-00166-250 (Jul. 2, 1947).

⁷⁵ Du Yuming, *Guoshiguan*, 002-090300-00166-250 (Jul. 2, 1947).

While other tensions and differences between the CPC and the Korean units might have arisen following this incident, the CPC was working not only on a strategy to reverse the situation in the theater of war, but also on securing unity within its military apparatus and Korean support for the war effort. Only by about the second half of 1947 and early 1948, did the CPC appear to be succeeding in achieving these aims.

Restoring the Status Quo Ante: Measures Taken by the CPC

The tensions and incidents in which the Korean units were involved definitely caught the attention of the CPC, and its political organ in the region – the Northeast Bureau. By 1947, the grave situation and development of the Civil War did not allow the CPC to brook disobedience, resentment, lack of discipline and in general, tensions that arose within its military and political organs. Not only could such tensions and incidents harm the CPC's cause in the military arena, but could also harm its relations with North Korea – an important partner that greatly supported the CPC in the Northeast.⁷⁶ Neither could the CPC neglect the potential aid the local Korean population in the Northeast, which in 1947 amounted to approximately two million, could provide.⁷⁷ For these crucial reasons, the CPC sought to guarantee unity in its military, eliminate signs of resentment, and have its forces concentrate on the objectives and guidelines, as directed by the Party.

However, the CPC had to operate cautiously, without triggering further tension with respect to inter-ethnic relations between themselves and

⁷⁶ Lü Minghui discussed mainly the logistical support of North Korea to the CPC during the Civil War in Northeast China in his book, *Chaoxian zhiyuan Zhongguo Dongbei Jiefang zhanzheng jishi* (Record of the Korean Assistance in the War of Liberation of China's Northeast). See: Lü, 2013. I have discussed North Korea's military role and contribution to the Chinese Communists in the Civil War in the Northeast Theater in my article "The Role of North Korea in China's Civil War: The Soviet-led North Korean Assistance to the CPC in the Northeast Theater, 1946-1948," *Journal of Chinese Military History* 9, no. 1 (March 2020).

⁷⁷ Zheng Jiemin, *Guoshiguan*, 008-010702-00044-004 (Oct. 9, 1947).

the Korean comrades, or other tension that may have led to counterproductive results. As far as the sources can tell, there were no signs of purges or other harsh measures against recalcitrant Korean comrades. Just a decade earlier, Northeast China saw one of the most tense events in Sino-Korean relations, known as the “Minsaengdan Incident” (民生團事件, *Minsaengdan sagŏn*). From October 1932 to February 1936, the CPC’s Manchurian Provincial Committee carried out mass purges against its own Korean comrades in East Manchuria, due to fears of Koreans infiltrating from the former pro-Japanese Minsaengdan Movement, which maintained relations with Japan and Manchukuo, and generally had national or autonomous aspirations in the Jiandao/Gando region (today called Yanbian/Yŏnbyŏn). However, when the purges were over, the CPC realized that its reaction had been extreme, resulting in hundreds of purged Korean comrades, and a considerable decline in the number of the Korean members.⁷⁸ This incident constituted a negative crossroads in the relations between the Chinese and Korean Communists, and the CPC, which learned lessons from it and did not repeat such measures.⁷⁹

Instead, the CPC adopted several other “soft” measures in order to achieve its goals with reference to the Korean units. There are several indications that from early 1946 to mid-1947 the CPC was working on gradually tightening its control over the Korean units. One of the early measures taken by the CPC, which apparently took place from time to time, though consistently, throughout the Civil War, was the reorganization of the Korean units. While reorganizations in the NDAA also took place due to in-

⁷⁸ Lee and Scalapino (1972): 167-69; Park (2005): 201-07.

⁷⁹ It should be noted, however, that as Kim Sang Won has pointed out in his article, North Korean sources claim that in 1947 the CPC launched a Rectification Movement which also led to the dismissal of Korean cadres from the Party’s organs in the Northeast. North Korean sources claim that it consequently caused more tension between the Chinese and Korean Communists and that following their dismissal, many Korean cadres wanted to return to Korea. However, such claims of rectification and dismissal of Korean cadres at this time lack evidence in Chinese and Western sources. See: Kim, “The Chinese Civil War and Sino-North Korean Relations, 1945-1950” (2014): 105. The book by the North Korean authors Kil and Li, translated to Chinese and Japanese under different names (Chinese: 金日成与中国东北解放战争; Japanese: 中国国共内戦と朝鮮人部隊の活躍), mentions it as well. See: Kil and Li (2015): 158-60.

creases (or decreases) in the number of the troops in the units and for other reasons, the case of the Korean units seemed to be different from the start. First, following the Tonghua Incident, on February 10, 1946, the CPC's Northeast Bureau decided to rename the KVA's 1st Detachment as the "Li Hong-gwang Detachment." However, another important but gradual change occurred: the Li Hong-gwang Detachment was not part of the KVA anymore, but was under the direct command of the NDAA.⁸⁰ This rather seems as a tactic of *divide et impera*, securing the CPC's grip over the bulk of the Korean units. While the KVA itself was under NDAA command, this step was important as part of the CPC's gradual control over the Korean units.⁸¹ Later, on March 25, 1946, the CPC made another important step when its Northeast Bureau issued a document called "On the Plan for Temporary Organization of the Korean Volunteer Army" (*guanyu Chaoxian yiyong jun zan bian fangan*) which, in fact, dismissed the KVA.⁸² From that point on, the Korean comrades were all under the direct command of the NDAA, and no unifying Korean organization such as the KVA existed for the different Korean units or acted as an intermediary between the NDAA and the Korean units. This demonstrates the CPC's determination to guarantee its control and to prevent the Korean units from deviating from the Party's instructions. Nonetheless, it should be noted that even after the abrogation of the KVA, or the reorganization of the LHD in April 1948 into the Northeast Field Army (NFA, *Dongbei yezhan jun*; the successor of the NDAA) or its reorganization into the PLA's 166th Division after the LiaoShen Campaign (September-November 1948), both the GMD and the CPC still referred to them by their former designations.⁸³

Moreover, according to a document issued by the Northeast Bureau,

⁸⁰ Cui (1997): 51.

⁸¹ The CPC wished to cut off this chain of command and bring all the Korean units under direct NDAA command. Therefore, the LHD was removed first from the KVA, and came under the direct command of the NDAA, thereby making the KVA a redundant body. This gradual measure allowed the CPC to eventually dissolve the KVA.

⁸² Shi (1998): 85.

⁸³ Dai Pu, *Guoshiguan*, 008-010702-00037-001 (Nov. 28-Dec. 2, 1957); Lü (2013): 285; Zhou (2013): 32.

it was claimed that about two thousand Korean members of the former KVA—specifically referring to less senior-ranking (company or lower) soldiers and cadres—would leave for Korea. However, it is not clear how many did leave, if any at all. As has been mentioned, just three months beforehand, in December 1945, the Soviet Army refused to allow repatriation of the core force led by Kim Mu-chông, permitting only several dozen to enter North Korea. While this was, in all probability, due to the Soviet interest in maintaining the political and military order in North Korea under their own control and a cautious stance not to provoke the American authorities in South Korea, it might have also played in the CPC's favor, which did not wish to see a complete repatriation of its Korean troops at this stage. Instead, what seems to have been the CPC's solution to the problem of resentment or intention to return to Korea, was specific and partial repatriations of some Korean troops,⁸⁴ which did not threaten the entirety of the Korean forces; at the same time, it could alleviate the feelings of resentment and the stress in the rest of the Korean forces. Another means for solving the problem was through making agreements with North Korea which regulated the terms of repatriation of the Korean troops. While return of the troops was in North Korea's interest, the two sides agreed to extend their presence in Northeast China for the sake of assisting the CPC. However, it should be pointed out, allowing Korean soldiers to remain in China and gain experience there was also in North Korea's interest as part of its intention to secure its regime and aspire for unification at a later stage. Thus, from 1947 onwards, the CPC signed several agreements with North Korea concerning the repatriation of the Korean troops, and it succeeded in guaranteeing that most of them would stay until the last phases of the Civil War in the Northeast.⁸⁵ And, as has been shown above, in 1947 the CPC also considered to promote young Koreans in its party and military apparatuses to positions of deputies, thus reestablishing trust be-

⁸⁴ Baomiju, *Guoshiguan*, 002-020400-00034-123 (Aug. 2, 1947); Shen (2003): 189-90.

⁸⁵ Baomiju, *Guoshiguan*, 002-020400-00034-114 (Apr. 22, 1947); Dai Pu, *Guoshiguan*, 008-010702-00037-001 (Nov. 28-Dec. 2, 1957); Lin Cang, *Guoshiguan* 002-080200-00322-064 (Nov. 14, 1947).

tween the two sides and assuaging former tensions.

A very important measure taken by the CPC was indoctrinating and training some of the Korean troops, particularly those with military backgrounds outside the CPC. This was the case for many of the Korean troops who were incorporated into the KVA in late 1945 and early 1946 from the former Japanese and Manchukuo armies, and possibly also the Korean guerillas who went underground during the Japanese occupation of the Northeast and were isolated from the CPC. While the CPC was in need of additional conscripts, preferably with military experience, it had to guarantee their loyalty to the Party, and to reeducate them regarding the Party's principles. Therefore, following their incorporation, the Korean soldiers with some military background were sent to CPC political and military institutions responsible for their indoctrination and training. Some of these troops were later shifted to defense units or to other assignments in the rear.⁸⁶

However, not only these Korean troops with dubious pasts went through this kind of process. In spring 1946, for instance, following its reorganization from the KVA 1st Detachment, the LHD launched a general education and training campaign for the Korean cadres in South Manchuria. During their studies, the Korean cadres familiarized themselves with the Party's political and social principles. Later, in September 1946, a military-political school was established in Fusong (撫松) in South Manchuria, modeled after Yan'an's University of Resistance to Japan.⁸⁷ As a result, all these measures enabled the CPC to ensure the Korean troops' loyalty to the Party, and improved their functioning on the battlefield by the second half of 1947. Thus, when Du Yuming reports on the dispatch of Korean agents to agitate among the Korean Communist troops in spring 1947, he mentions that the Korean cadres were indoctrinated by the CPC, and that his agents encountered difficulties in agitating them, implying that this task be-

⁸⁶ Baomiju, *Guoshiguan*, 002-020400-00034-114 (Apr. 22, 1947); Guofangbu (May 1947); Han fei yu Han gong guanxi jiantao. Special record 16/24.17. 中國民黨文化傳播委員會黨史館.

⁸⁷ Cui (1997): 60-64.

came harder than before.⁸⁸

Conclusion

The relations between the Korean and Chinese Communists were not always stable and harmonious, as was often depicted, but were rather turbulent in their later phase. During the War of Resistance Against Japan, the Korean revolutionaries affiliated with the CPC maintained close and special relations with their Chinese comrades. Due to their small numbers, and at the same time, the prospect of their political significance, the Korean revolutionaries conducted limited operational tasks. With the conclusion of the war against Japan, the CPC had soon found itself facing a serious challenge with respect to the impending civil war with the GMD. As a result, the KVA was ordered to follow the Eighth Route Army to the Northeast. While some of the members of the KVA hoped to return to their homeland, in effect, the KVA remained in the Northeast and made preparations for the upcoming struggle. However, as has been shown, the changing circumstances with respect to the KVA's geographical location, its internal composition, its aspirations and other differences with the CPC following the conclusion of the war against Japan, along with the subsequent commencement of the civil war, led to tension between the KVA and the CPC.

The KVA went through significant changes following its arrival in Northeast China, which were also due to the new challenges faced by the CPC. By spring 1946, and with the approval of the CPC, the various detachments which by this point comprised the KVA, were allowed to incorporate former Korean troops from the Japanese and Manchukuo armies and at the same time, were encouraged to conscript young Koreans from the local communities in the Northeast. The Korean detachments succeeded in expanding their manpower considerably and rapidly. However, by allowing Koreans with past service in other armies or guerrilla units, and others with no familiarity with the Party's social and political principles,

⁸⁸ Du Yuming, *Guoshiguan*, 002-020400-00015-006 (Feb. 13, 1947).

the detachments suffered from growing lack of discipline and distance from the Party. In addition to the resentments and deteriorating military and political discipline, the NRA's devastating offensives in South Manchuria from late 1946 to early 1947 orchestrated by infiltrations of Korean GMD agents into the NDAA's Korean units, led to a pivotal point in the already sensitive relations between the CPC and its Korean units. Whether as a result of the KVA's gradual alienation from the CPC or because of other reasons, another important factor that had intensified the strains in the relations was the Korean units' alleged mistreatment by their Chinese counterparts.

By early 1947, tensions and several incidents between the CPC and the KVA had occurred, and in light of the CPC's predicament on the battlefronts in North and Northeast China, and the concern that the CPC was losing its control over the KVA, the CPC had to take quick and efficient measures with regard to its Korean force. It also had to revise its treatment toward the KVA and assure it some sense of equality in order to maintain their cooperation. One of the CPC's first approaches to solving the problem was to reorganize the Korean units. This was quickly followed by the dismissal of the KVA as a confederating body, resulting in the NDAA's direct control over the Korean units. This measure, however, was only partly successful: while the CPC guaranteed that the KVA will be closer to NDAA command structure, it had led to resentments by the KVA members such as loss of autonomy and the lack of higher positions in the military and the Party. Second, the CPC had tried to regulate the repatriation of some members of the former KVA. This was successfully achieved as a result of agreements and cooperation with North Korea. Third, the CPC promoted the political indoctrination and training of the Korean units, particularly those that came with previous military experience, but generally for all those not familiar with the Party's doctrines. Some were sent to serve in defense units or under other designations in the rear. And last but not least, it had revised its former stance toward Korean members in its military and Party apparatuses and allowed their promotions. Therefore, unlike what was emphasized in previous studies, the KVA was not merely a subordinate – as if almost passive – unit within the Chinese Communist forces, but

rather, it time and time again resented its lower status and aspired to acquire a more equal status like the rest of the Chinese units. Altogether, these measures succeeded in preventing the KVA from deteriorating into a state of chaos, and at the same time, ensured the CPC's control over the Korean units until the conclusion of the Civil War and their final repatriation by 1950.

The story of the KVA is one of great challenge for the CPC, which required that it act cautiously with awareness of international and ethnical sensitivity and at the same time, so as to guarantee its success in the Civil War. Yet, it is also a story of two-fold achievements: the first is the CPC's victory in having won the Korean revolutionaries' support during the war against Japan, while the GMD seemed not only to have lost this match, but to have lost a potentially supportive group in the Northeast during the Civil War; the second achievement was the CPC's success in overcoming the problems and challenges that arose during the Civil War in the Northeast, without harming its relations with the Korean actors in the region: the KVA, the Korean population in Northeast China, and North Korea.

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