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*Nam-Pukhan kwallyŏn Hŏnggari oemubu kimil oegyo munsŏ
mongnokchip, 1945-1993* [Catalog of the Confidential
Diplomatic Documents concerning South Korea and North Korea
from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary,
1945–1993] by Kim Poguk (review)

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Nam-Pukhan kwallyŏn Hŏnggari oemubu kimil oegyo munsŏ mongnokchip, 1945–1993 [Catalog of the Confidential Diplomatic Documents concerning South Korea and North Korea from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary, 1945–1993] by Kim Poguk. Wŏnju: Ppang kwa Changmi, 2012. 477 pp. 100,000 KRW (hardcover)

This book provides a much-needed Ariadne's thread to a documentary labyrinth in which even native speakers might sometimes feel it difficult to find their way: the Korea-related diplomatic files stored in the Hungarian National Archives (Magyar Országos Levéltár, MOL). Its author, Dr. Kim Poguk—who currently teaches Hungarian language and literature at Hankook University of Foreign Studies (Seoul)—spent over ten years in Hungary, during which time he did extensive research in the MOL, partly on behalf of the Korean National Archives and partly to satisfy his own curiosity. Having become aware of the massive amount of novel information accessible in the MOL collections, he decided to facilitate the research of other Korean scholars by publishing the full list of declassified documents that Hungarian diplomats prepared concerning both Koreas, from the first tentative contacts between Budapest and P'yŏngyang to Hungary's abandonment of its troublesome old partner in favor of more fruitful cooperation with Seoul. His catalog contains the subject line of each document, both in the Hungarian original and in the Korean translation, while the introductory and explanatory parts of the book were written in English and Korean. The quantity of the files thus described may be gauged from the fact that nearly every page of the 477-page book enumerates five to ten documents; in the more eventful periods, the Hungarian diplomats in P'yŏngyang produced over a hundred confidential reports, memoranda, and telegrams per year.

To assess the significance of this catalog, one must first evaluate the scholarly value of the Hungarian archival sources into which it provides insight. Despite the increasingly extensive use of East European documents by such noted specialists of North Korean history such as Mitchell B. Lerner, Narushige Michishita, and Shin Jongdae, who could overcome linguistic obstacles by relying on the rich translated collection of the Washington-based North Korea International Documentation Project (NKIDP), the specific value of Hungarian diplomatic reports has not been fully established yet. In the introduction of his book, Kim Poguk makes a tactful reference to “some people . . . who presumably have some doubts about the value and effect of these confidential documents” (p. ii). Indeed, certain Koreanists did express the view that “Budapest is an odd place from which to view North Korea; to paraphrase the old joke, were I to look for North Korea I wouldn't start here.”¹ Such critical opinions were inspired not only by unfavorable comparisons with Russian and Chinese archival sources, whose special insight into top-level North Korean decision making the East European documents did not match, but also by the assumption that the other East

European people's democracies—particularly East Germany—had been more familiar with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) internal and external policies than the Hungarian Foreign Ministry.

On the merits of the Hungarian diplomatic documents, Kim Poguk lays the main emphasis on their free accessibility. In contrast with Germany, Poland, and the Czech Republic where such documents are released after thirty years, in Hungary a fifteen-year rule is applied to the files created before May 1, 1990. Consequently, most pre-1990 diplomatic files of the Hungarian Foreign Ministry were declassified by the mid-2000s. Actually, Kim Poguk also succeeded in gaining access to the otherwise unavailable list of the documents prepared in 1991–93. If the files to which he thus drew attention could be later released to the public, they will surely become a goldmine for researchers interested in Roh Tae-woo's (No T'aeu) "Nordpolitik" and the first North Korean nuclear crisis.

In terms of content, the Hungarian reports on the DPRK seem to be fairly comparable to their East German equivalents; the details provided by those scholars who used East German (GDR) sources—like Bernd Schaefer and Charles Armstrong—are mostly mirrored in the Hungarian files, not least because the Soviet bloc diplomats routinely pooled the information they managed to obtain. Due to their countries' representation in the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission (NNSC), the Polish and Czech embassies were more familiar with the events occurring along the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) than the other East European diplomats; but in other respects they were largely in the same league as the GDR and Hungary. In Eastern Europe, only independent-minded Romania could gain a clear advantage over the aforesaid four countries as far as access to confidential information was concerned, for the North Korean leaders were inclined to distrust those people's democracies that appeared too subservient to the USSR, and their honeymoon with Albania and Yugoslavia was limited to 1961–64 and the 1970s, respectively.

While Budapest lacked a special connection with P'yŏngyang, pre-1988 Hungarian–North Korean relations were rarely troubled by such specifically bilateral disputes as, say, the prolonged Bulgarian–DPRK conflict over a North Korean abduction attempt (1962–68), North Korea's complaints about the participation of South Korean athletes in a basketball championship in Prague (1967), and the GDR–DPRK friction over inter-German and inter-Korean rapprochement (1971–72). These relatively relaxed conditions facilitated Hungarian–DPRK interactions, and were advantageous to the accurate analysis of North Korean actions. At the same time, Hungary's post-1963 political system was one of the "softest" among the Warsaw Pact countries, which made Hungarian diplomats disinclined to approve those repressive North Korean practices which the hard-line regimes (like Romania) found less objectionable or even worth imitating. Finally, in 1988 Hungary was the first Soviet bloc state to recognize the Republic of Korea, and thus the Hungarian reports provide special insight into this phase of South Korean diplomacy.

In the light of these features of the Hungarian documents, Kim Poguk's catalog is definitely worthy of the intense efforts the author devoted to its preparation during his six-year-long research in the Hungarian National Archives. What makes his book truly unique in the field of North Korean studies is its near-comprehensive nature. Due to the obvious limits of NKIDP's translation capacity, the document collection of that project has been shaped by an inevitable process of selection. Consequently, certain subjects of particular political significance (like the Korean War, the security crises of 1966–69, and the inter-Korean talks of 1971–72) have been extensively documented by NKIDP, whereas other politically less spectacular fields (such as North Korean economic and cultural measures) are still mostly not covered by current research. In contrast, Kim Poguk's catalog—even though it does not include the so-called administrative documents (XIX-J-1-k)² whose original level of confidentiality was lower than that of the confidential documents (XIX-J-1-j)—enables researchers to search for information about any topic they might be interested in, ranging from North Korea's internal policies to its cultural diplomacy, from Japanese-DPRK relations to North Korean–Pakistani military cooperation, and from economic data on specific provinces, cities, and industrial plants to the living conditions of ordinary citizens. In certain respects, this trilingual book renders easier access than the MOL's own unilingual catalogs because, for the time being, only the list of post-1965 diplomatic documents is electronically accessible through the DigitArchiv section of the MOL homepage; the files created in 1945–64 are still registered in paper catalogs of varying degrees of detail.

The comprehensive nature of Kim Poguk's catalog manifests itself not only in its content but also in its structure. First of all, the book gives guidance both to the reference numbers of the original documents and the location of their microfilmed copies. Thanks to this combined system of registration, scholars can identify the files cited in earlier publications when the original documents were still accessible in the MOL's research room and find them in their currently available microfilmed form. Second, the catalog provides the following data about each individual document: its subject, the year of its creation, and the number of the box, folder, and file or microfilm roll. Consequently, researchers do not need to ask for entire boxes in the hope that the selected box might contain some useful materials, as is the case with many archives, but can accurately choose which files to read. If a document lacked a reference number (see, for instance, pp. 164, 166, 168), the author provided an alternative form of MOL registration so as to render identification and citation possible.

Kim Poguk also took advantage of his good command of Hungarian and his familiarity with the content of many documents to add supplementary information if the original title of a file happened to be too unclear or laconic. For instance, he accurately included the full version of such abbreviated Hungarian proper names as R. M. Kórház (Mátyás Rákosi Hospital, p. 68), NIKEX (Foreign Trade Company of Heavy Industry, p. 120), NOB (International Olympic Com-

mittee, p. 196), LNK (People's Republic of Poland, p. 248), and VSZK (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, p. 272) in the Korean translation of the documents' subject lines. In a few cases, he added brief explanatory notes, either in Korean or in English, if a name or term seemed not to be widely known (see, among others, "Bamako," p. 37; and "mass line," p. 125).

Similarly, the author made efforts to cope with a deficiency of the Hungarian and other East European diplomatic reports on Korea, that is, the inaccurate transliteration of Korean names. During the Cold War, Hungarian practices of romanization were based on the Russian transliteration of Korean names. The considerable differences between the latter system and the Western or Korean forms of romanization, compounded as they were by the Hungarian diplomats' initial unfamiliarity with the Korean language, often make it positively challenging to correctly transliterate the North Korean names mentioned in the documents, or to identify the persons involved. Worse still, the Hungarian diplomats accredited to Third World countries occasionally transliterated Korean names as they appeared in the local press, which resulted in further inconsistencies. For instance, a report by the Hungarian embassy in Iraq romanized Chŏng Chunt'aek's name as "Chung Jon Taik" (p. 213), whereas their colleagues in P'yŏngyang transliterated it as "Dzon Dzun Thek" (p. 231).

To his credit, Kim Poguk managed to correctly re-transliterate a number of Korean names that had been inaccurately or inconsistently romanized by the Hungarian diplomats and occasionally highlighted obvious misspellings by adding question marks (see, for example, Yi Tonggŏn, p. 53). Still, his limited familiarity with the *dramatis personae* of North Korean politics somewhat hindered him in this process. Of the North Korean names that appear in an inaccurate form in the Korean translation of subject lines, one may mention the following ones: Cho Kich'on (p. 269), Chŏng Chunt'aek (p. 213), Chŏng Iryong (p. 82), and Pak Chŏngae (pp. 65–66, 100, 129). Reflecting inconsistencies in Hungarian romanization, in a few cases the same name was re-transliterated in various forms, sometimes accurately and sometimes inaccurately (as is the case with Yu Ch'angsik, pp. 34 and 46; and Yi Sŭngbal, pp. 54–55).

The book also contains a few factual mistakes, mistranslations, and other inaccuracies. Some of these were made by the Hungarian archivists, rather than the author. For instance, the subject line of a document mentions North Korean military aid to the "Pakistani Liberation Movement" (p. 253), though the file in question actually refers to the Palestine Liberation Organization. In another case, the name of Pak Sŏngch'ŏl was misspelled in the MOL catalog as Pak Sŏpch'ŏl (p. 269), a mistake that escaped the attention of the author. A few bureaucratic and diplomatic terms, like *kollégium* (collegium: a group of leading officials in a ministry) and *Diplomáciai Testület* (Diplomatic Corps), were erroneously translated into Korean or English (pp. 8 and 12, respectively), while the city of Kusŏng was consistently confused with Kaesŏng in the Korean translation (pp. 10, 107, 110). Finally, certain North Korean terms and proper names mentioned

in the Hungarian files were lost in the re-translation process, as the Korean words replacing them are identical only in meaning but not in form (see, among others, *Chosŏn Nodongdang*, p. 45; *Hamgyŏng-namdo*, p. 285; *Hamgyŏng-pukto*, pp. 264, 276; *sadaejuii*, p. 125; and *suryŏng*, p. 256).

Nevertheless, these occasional deficiencies, caused as they were by the author's limited training in the field of historical studies, only slightly affect the scholarly value of Kim Poguk's catalog. Due to its nature, it is not particularly useful for classroom discussion, but for scholars interested in doing archival research on post-1945 Korean history it can serve as an invaluable research guide, provided that they manage to overcome the obstacles related to the copying and translation of the selected Hungarian documents.

NOTES

1. Charles Armstrong, "The View on Pyongyang," *St. Petersburg Times*, May 5, 2006.
2. These are MOL codes for administrative (XIX-J-1-k) and confidential (XIX-J-1-j) documents. No page numbers are applicable.

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The Northern Region of Korea: History, Identity, and Culture edited
by Sun Joo Kim. Seattle: Center for Korea Studies, University of
Washington, 2010. 397 pp. 3 illustrations. 4 maps. \$45.00 (paper)

The Northern Region of Korea: History, Identity, and Culture is the fruit of a long-term endeavor by its editor, Sun Joo Kim, an expert in regional history and the history of marginalized people. The result of two intensive workshops and an international conference, this volume takes an interdisciplinary approach to the historical evolution of Korea's northern provinces (Hamgyŏng, Hwanghae, and P'yŏngan) from the early Chosŏn Dynasty (1392–1910) to the liberation era that began in 1945—a subject that has, to date, been the focus of relatively little academic interest due to various limitations on conducting research in the area. The purpose of this volume is eloquently articulated in Kim's valuable introduction. Departing from the conventional methodology of a nation-centered framework as well as from that of micro-history, Kim calls for regional history as an alternative approach that challenges the grand discourse of the nation, which has not only muted the writing of Korean history as a single narrative but marginalized the northern region and its subjectivities in the historiography of Korea.