

Friendship between North Korea and Mongolia: Friendly Relations between Neighbors of Different Regimes

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1. Introduction

Mongolia is one of the friendly neighbors of North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea: DPRK) in East Asia. During the Cold War era, when the Mongolian People's Republic (MPR, hereafter unified as Mongolia) was under the one-party dictatorship of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP), North Korea also under the one-party dictatorship of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK), was one of the friendly countries of the Eastern Bloc for Mongolia. However, North Korea maintained a one-party dictatorship after the Cold War, while Mongolia transitioned to a multi-party system. Nevertheless, friendly relations between the two countries have been maintained. How was this possible?

Diplomatic relations between Mongolia and North Korea were established on October 15, 1948, about a month after the founding of North Korea. Mongolia was the second country after the Soviet Union to establish diplomatic relations with North Korea. Mongolia sent a lot of horses to North Korea for reconstruction after the armistice in the Korean War and took in many North Korean war orphans. The Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation was signed between the two countries in 1986, codifying that the two countries are important friends.

North Korea has maintained friendly relations with Mongolia, even though Mongolia transitioned to a multi-party system in 1990 after the end of the Cold War and dropped "People's Republic" from its name in 1992. The new Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation was signed between the two countries on August 8, 2002. It differs from the old Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed at the end of the Cold War.¹

Why do North Korea and Mongolia have a friendly relationship? The presence of the Eastern Bloc and the Soviet Union greatly influenced the relationship between North Korea and Mongolia during the Cold War. Balázs Szalontai, a North Korean diplomatic historian, argues that even

¹ *Rodong Sinmun*, August 10, 2002 (Korean).

during the Cold War, North Korea and Mongolia had conflicts between the two countries because their bilateral relations were affected by the Sino-Soviet split.² OH Mi-young, a South Korean researcher on Mongolia, also argues that one of the reasons for the effective relationship between North Korea and Mongolia is that Mongolia, which is also in the Eastern Bloc, sent aid to North Korea during the Korean War and took in North Korean war orphans.³ However, these do not seem directly related to the post-Cold War friendship. Neither the Soviet Union nor the Eastern Bloc existed after the Cold War.

Post-Cold War studies of friendly relations between the two countries have focused on Mongolia's objectives in pursuing a policy of engagement with North Korea. Charles Krusekopf, Director of the American Center for Mongolian Studies, argues that Mongolia's objectives are economic interests, including the use of the Rajin Port in North Korea.⁴ Migeddorj Batchimeg, a senior researcher at the Institute for Strategic Studies of Mongolia, argued that Mongolia's objectives are not only its security and development but also to promote peaceful prosperity and economic cooperation in the region.⁵ Tjalling H.F. Halbertsma, an adviser to Prime Minister of Mongolia N. Enkhbayar, argued that Mongolia aims to build a "spearhead a regional security mechanism."⁶ Many commentators argue that Mongolia continues to engage with North Korea, seeking to cooperate on economic and security matters.

However, data show that the economic relationship between North Korea and Mongolia today is tenuous. Trade between the two countries is almost nonexistent compared to the Cold War period, and although the new Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation states that the two countries should develop economic relations, little progress has been made. In addition, there is little confirmed security cooperation between North Korea and Mongolia. Defense delegations come and go, so there may be some defense cooperation, but it is probably minimal. The Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation also provides for disarmament cooperation but not defense cooperation. The economic and security objectives of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation alone cannot

² Balázs Szalontai, "Small-Power Diplomacy in Northeast Asia: Mongolian–North Korean Relations During the Cold War, 1948–1989," *North Korean Review*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (FALL 2016), pp. 45-63.

³ OH Mi-young, "North Korean War Orphans and Mongolia during the Korean War: Focusing on Data from the Mongolian Archives (한국전쟁 시기 북한 전쟁고아와 몽골: 몽골 문서보관소의 자료를 중심으로)," *North Korean Studies Review*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (January 2019) pp.269-297 (Korean).

⁴ Charles Krusekopf, "North Korea and Mongolia: A New Partnership for Two Old Friends?," *Asia Pacific Bulletin* (November 14, 2013), https://www.eastwestcenter.org/sites/default/files/private/apb240_0.pdf (Accessed on December 8, 2023).

⁵ Migeddorj Batchimeg, "Mongolia's DPRK Policy: Engaging North Korea," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (March/April 2006), pp.275-297.

⁶ Tjalling H.F. Halbertsma, "Mongolia and the DPRK at Sixty-Five: Ulaanbaatar's Changing Relations with Pyongyang," *North Korean Review*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (FALL 2014), pp.23-38.

explain why Mongolia has continued its post-Cold War policy of engagement with North Korea.

Moreover, since the establishment of diplomatic relations, the two countries have not maintained unchanged friendly relations. During the Sino-Soviet split and in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, relations between the two countries cooled at times when visits by dignitaries from North Korea and Mongolia were suspended due to their differing positions. However, unlike the Soviet Union and China, North Korea never publicly criticized Mongolia, even during the period of cooling relations. In this respect, North Korea's attitude toward the Soviet Union and China is different from its attitude toward Mongolia, even toward the same neighboring socialist country.

In this paper, I aim to clarify why North Korea and Mongolia were able to maintain friendly relations after the Cold War by examining how the two countries overcame the cooling period. This paper will add new material published since then to clarify how Mongolia and North Korea came out of the cooling period.

2. From the Conclusion of Diplomatic Relations to the Sino-Soviet split

Mongolia played a small role in the liberation of Korea from the Empire of Japan. Although Mongolian forces did not directly attack the Korean Peninsula, Mongolia declared war on the Empire of Japan on September 10, 1945, the day after the Soviet Union launched its invasion of Manchuria, and invaded Manchukuo and Inner Mongolia with an army of about 30,000 men against a population of about 750,000.⁷ The invasion of Manchuria by Soviet and Mongol troops was the precursor of the later deployment of the Soviet Red Army on the Korean peninsula.

In addition, Mongolia is North Korea's second diplomatic state after the Soviet Union. For Mongolia, North Korea is also the second state with which it has had diplomatic relations, except for a period when it had diplomatic relations with the Republic of China. Therefore, it is not surprising that the two countries have friendly relations.

The reality, however, is somewhat different. Mongolia and North Korea announced the establishment of diplomatic relations on October 8, 1948, and the two countries signed diplomatic relations on October 15.⁸ However, the establishment of diplomatic relations did not mean that high-level officials came and went between the two countries, but rather that diplomatic relations were established in Moscow. The relationship between the two countries was through the Soviet

⁷ Jamyang's Battor (Жамьянгийн Баттөр), *Mongolia-Korea relations of the 20th century Sub-book 1948-1961 (XX зууны Монгол Солонгосын харилцаа Дэд дэвтэр 1948-1961 он)*, (Ulaanbaatar: UB Admon 2004), p.55 (Mongolian).

⁸ *ibid.*

Union and was not considered mutually important. North Korea established diplomatic relations with Mongolia, which it considered a satellite state of the Soviet Union, and Mongolia established diplomatic relations with North Korea, which it considered a satellite state of the Soviet Union.

The dispatch of ambassadors was further delayed. It was not until 1951, amid the Korean War, that ambassadors were sent to each other. The first high-level Mongolian delegation to North Korea was in January 1953, during the Korean War, when C. Surenjav, Mongolia's first deputy prime minister, visited North Korea.⁹

During the Korean War, Mongolia helped North Korea. According to J. Lombo, Mongolia's ambassador to North Korea, Mongolia took in and raised 200 war orphans for seven years. It has continued to support North Korea. Mongolia sent 226,236 heads of livestock, 7,230 tons of meat and food, 129,000 cotton garments, 139 tons of medicine, and 6,204 tons of wheat to North Korea.¹⁰ Mongolian aid to North Korea during the Korean War is detailed in a study by OH Mi-young.¹¹ The DPRK Prime Minister KIM Il-sung visited Mongolia in July 1956, and Mongolian Prime Minister Y. Tsedenbal visited North Korea in October 1956. Friendly relations between the two countries continued into the 1960s.

In the 1960s, the relationship between the two countries changed. As Szalontai points out in his study of the conflict between North Korea and Mongolia through Hungarian diplomatic documents, relations between the two countries deteriorated as the Sino-Soviet split intensified in the 1960s. Szalontai points out that the differences in economic interests between the two countries limited economic relations between them.¹²

However, the impact of the deterioration of relations between the two countries on trade cannot be confirmed. Trade between North Korea and Mongolia during the Cold War period has only been published five-yearly since 1960 (Table 1). These trade figures show that even when relations between the two countries deteriorated due to the Sino-Soviet split, trade between the two countries gradually increased. This is an example of how conflicts between nations do not always affect trade. The difference is noticeable when we compare trade between Mongolia and China. During the Sino-Soviet split, Soviet pressure severely restricted trade between Mongolia

⁹ L. Khash-Erdene, ed., *70 Years of Relations between Mongolia and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea* (몽골 조선민주주의인민공화국 관계 70 년), (Ulaanbaatar: "Monkhiin usug" HHK-d, 2018), p.120 (Korean).

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.278.

¹¹ OH Mi-young, "North Korean War," pp.269-297.

¹² Szalontai, "Small-Power Diplomacy," p.51.

and China, and from 1960 to 1970, trade between Mongolia and China decreased. It was not until 1980 that trade between Mongolia and China exceeded that between North Korea and Mongolia.¹³

Year	1960	1965	1970	1975	1980
North Korea	0.2	1.8	2.8	6.1	5.9
China	5.7	5.4	2.5	5.3	7.4

During the Sino-Soviet split, Mongolia, which the Soviet Union heavily influenced, had cooled its relations not only with China but also with North Korea. Therefore, it was unsurprising that trade between North Korea and Mongolia was severely restricted. But it was not as bad as the economies of China and Mongolia. Trade between North Korea and Mongolia continued, probably because it was not as alarmed as it was in China.

North Korea and Mongolia did not criticize each other during the Sino-Soviet split. However, it is also true that there was a cooling-off period during which high-level delegations did not come and go. According to N. Baasanjav, who served as Mongolia's ambassador to the DPRK, this period began in the 1970s. According to Baasanjav, the restoration of bilateral relations began with the exchange of party delegations in 1975.¹⁵ However, this is probably Baasanjav's subjective view.

A list of high-level delegations from both countries in the book published by North Korea and Mongolia in 2018 shows that Mongolia did not send a high-level delegation to North Korea between 1961 and 1975, while North Korea sent high-level delegations five times during that period. In the 1960s, however, North Korea sent a high-level delegation to Mongolia only once, in 1966, suggesting that relations between the two countries were cool in the 1960s. This indicates that the North Koreans were trying to encourage Mongolia to restore relations.¹⁶ According to the subjective view of North Korea, the cooling of relations between the two countries probably occurred in the 1960s, but no North Korean documents clearly show this.

¹³ Japan External Trade Organization Overseas Economic Information Center (日本貿易振興会海外経済情報センター), *Economic Overview of the DPRK, North Vietnam, and Mongolia [Supplement: The Economy of the DPRK]*(北朝鮮・北ベトナム・モンゴルの経済概観[附: 北朝鮮の経済]), (Tokyo: Japan External Trade Organization Overseas Economic Information Center), August 1974, p.27 (Japanese).

¹⁴ B.Batdavaa, et. al. eds., *Mongolia in 100 Years* (Ulaanbaatar: National Statistics office of Mongolia, 2021), p.365 (Mongolian / English).

¹⁵ L. Khash-Erdene, ed., *70 Years of Relations*, p.251.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, pp.12-123.

As relations between North Korea and the Soviet Union were restored in the 1980s, relations between North Korea and Mongolia became more active. In May 1984, KIM Il-sung visited the Soviet Union for the first time in 23 years. This led to a new relationship between North Korea and Mongolia. This was reflected in the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between North Korea and Mongolia signed during the visit of Mongolian Supreme Leader J. Batmönkh to the North Korea on November 18-21, 1986.

The "Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between the DPRK and the MPR" signed on November 21, 1986, was signed by KIM Il-sung, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the WPK and President of the DPRK on the North Korean side, and by Batmönkh, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the MPRP and Chairman of the Standing Committee of the State Great Khural of Mongolia.¹⁷ The text of the treaty was announced the next day, making it the most important treaty signed by the supreme leaders of both sides.

The content of the treaty is highly socialist ideological. The preamble of the treaty states, "The Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the People's Republic of Mongolia, recognizing that the further strengthening of friendship and unity and the expansion and development of cooperation based on the principles of Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism, respect for autonomy, full equality, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, comradely cooperation and mutual benefit are in the fundamental interests of the peoples of the two countries and will contribute to strengthening the unity and solidarity of the socialist countries, wishing to strengthen the common action of the socialist countries and all progressive and peace-loving forces in the world, including the international communist movement, the non-aligned movement and the national liberation movement, and to make a positive contribution to the prevention and defeat of imperialist aggression and war policies and to the maintenance of peace and security in Asia and the world, have decided to conclude the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation and have agreed as follows."¹⁸ Both the Soviet Union and Mongolia had already begun to move toward de-socialization, and the North Korean side's wariness of such a move may have been reflected in the treaty.

Article 3 of the treaty stipulates the development of coordination and cooperation in various areas of social life, including economics, science, technology, culture, and education, with no explicit mention of defense cooperation. North Korea and Mongolia did not expect each other to cooperate in national defense. North Korea and Mongolia signed the treaty to develop friendly relations

¹⁷ *Rodong Sinmun*, November 22, 1986.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

between the socialist countries.

From June 28 to July 1, 1988, KIM Il-sung visited Mongolia for the first time in 32 years. At that time, KIM Il-sung told Batmönkh, “Among the socialist states in Northeast Asia, with the exception of our two countries, the rest are all large countries. The Soviet Union is a superpower; China is a big power, too. Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia are Southeast Asian countries. Therefore, we (North Korea and Mongolia) should keep a close relationship.”¹⁹

This story of KIM Il-sung is only documented on the Mongolian side and not reported on the North Korean side. However, KIM Il-sung's idea that North Korea and Mongolia must maintain friendly relations because they are small socialist states in Northeast Asia is a possible story given North Korea's foreign policy at the time, which was to establish friendly relations with several non-aligned countries in Asia and Africa in an attempt to eliminate as much of the influence of the great powers as possible. It was recognized that North Korea and Mongolia were small countries with little influence on each other and, therefore, needed to maintain friendly relations.

3. Relations between North Korea and Mongolia after the Cold War

After the end of the Cold War in 1989, on March 15, 1990, the Central Committee of the MPRP renewed its Politburo and decided to abandon its one-party dictatorship. North Korea, which maintained a one-party dictatorship, would have been alarmed by Mongolia. In addition, Mongolia established diplomatic relations with South Korea on March 26. However, despite North Korea's criticism of the Soviet Union when the Soviet Union normalized diplomatic relations with South Korea on September 30, North Korea did not criticize Mongolia. For North Korea, the Soviet Union and Mongolia were of different importance.

On January 11, 1992, the State Great Khural of Mongolia changed the country's name from the MPR to Mongolia.²⁰ Mongolia made it clear that it was breaking with socialism. North Korea, however, did not criticize Mongolia. For North Korea, Mongolia was just a friendly but uninvolved neighbor. When the Soviet Union established diplomatic relations with South Korea, North Korea was in danger of losing its nuclear umbrella. However, whether Mongolia established diplomatic relations with South Korea or renounced socialism, the impact on North

¹⁹ Migneddorj Batchimeg, “Mongolia's DPRK Policy: Engaging North Korea,” *Asian Survey*, Vol.46, No.2 (March/April 2006), pp.278. It is a quote from archive documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of Mongolia, as cited in Demberel, “Kim Ir Sen ba Mongol,” p.5.

²⁰ *Asahi Shimbun*, January 12, 1992 (Japanese).

Korea was minimal.

However, according to Udo B. Barkmann, in 1995, Mongolia abrogated the 'Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation' concluded in 1986 because it no longer corresponded to the existing legal framework in Mongolia with the adoption of the new Mongolian Basic Law (1992) and the new foreign policy and security concept (1994).²¹

Indeed, the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, based on Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism, was inconvenient for Mongolia, which had abandoned socialism. However, as the treaty is valid for 20 years, Mongolia's abrogation of it is a clear violation of the treaty. Mongolia did not seek to break off relations with North Korea; rather, it sought to conclude the new Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with North Korea.

According to Barkmann, Mongolia's proposal to negotiate the new treaty was not taken up because North Korea was incapable of acting at the time. KIM Il-sung died in 1994. His son, KIM Jong-il, took over the government only after a three-year mourning period. This long period of mourning paralyzed the North Korean state apparatus in many segments, including foreign relations and Mongolian-North Korean relations.²² After the death of KIM Il-sung in 1994, North Korea's diplomatic function was paralyzed, and it could not accept the Mongolian proposal.

In December 1996, the Mongolian government informed the North Korean government that it would expel the third secretary of the DPRK embassy in Mongolia by December 31 for using counterfeit US dollar notes, but this did not affect relations between North Korea and Mongolia.²³ On 25 August 1999, North Korea notified the Mongolian Ministry of Foreign Affairs that it was closing the DPRK Embassy in Mongolia.²⁴ During the 1990s, North Korea closed several embassies, including one in Mongolia, due to financial difficulties. However, some argue that the closure of the DPRK embassy in Mongolia was not solely due to economic problems. It is said to be due to that President N. Bagabandi expressed support for the South Korean 'Sunshine Policy' during a summit meeting on 31 May 1999, when South Korean President KIM Dae-jung visited Mongolia.²⁵ In this regard, no evidence suggests that relations between North Korea and Mongolia have deteriorated. In November 1999, the Mongolian Prime Minister, R. Amarjargal,

²¹ Udo B. Barkmann (Удо Б. Баркманн), "Relations between Mongolia and North Korea 1948-2003," *Baabar.mn*, <http://baabar.mn/article/relations-between-mongolia-and-north-korea-1948-2003> (Accessed on December 29, 2023).

²² *ibid.*

²³ *Mainichi Shimbun*, December 29, 1996 (Japanese).

²⁴ *Mainichi Shimbun*, September 18, 1999.

²⁵ *Asahi Shimbun*, November 2, 1999.

visited North Korea.

On August 8, 2002, North Korea signed a new Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Mongolia, which had been proposed by Mongolia. The DPRK Foreign Minister PAEK Nam-sun visited Mongolia to sign the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. The signatories were PAEK Nam-sun, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the DPRK, and L. Erdenechuluun, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia.²⁶

While the text of the old Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed between the Supreme Leaders was immediately reported, the text of the new Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed between the Ministers of Foreign Affairs was not reported. It was not until the book was published in Mongolia that the text of the treaty became known.

The new treaty's content is based on the purposes and principles of the UN Charter. The preamble of the treaty states, "Mongolia and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, wishing to strengthen the legal basis for expanding and developing the traditional friendly and cooperative relations, recognizing that the development of friendly and cooperative relations between the two countries is in the fundamental interests of the two peoples and will contribute to peace, security, progress and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region, to develop relations of goodwill and cooperation between the two countries, based on the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, have agreed as follows."²⁷ The socialist ideological part of the old treaty was removed, and the new treaty emphasized the UN Charter and defined the two countries as having a traditional relationship. Moreover, this treaty does not modify the old Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. It is defined as having been entered into for the first time in 2002.

North Korea has also reopened the closed the DPRK embassy in Mongolia. The two countries agreed to reopen the embassy during a visit to North Korea by Mongolian Foreign Minister N. Enkhbayar on November 19-20, 2003.²⁸ On November 20, an agreement was signed on Mongolia's aid to North Korea. This marked the beginning of a new development in relations between the two countries.²⁹ The North Korean embassy in Mongolia was reopened in August 2004. However, North Korea did not construct a new building; instead, it used the former Japanese embassy building.³⁰

²⁶ *Rodong Sinmun*, August 10, 2002.

²⁷ L. Khash-Erdene, ed., *70 Years of Relations*, pp.210-212.

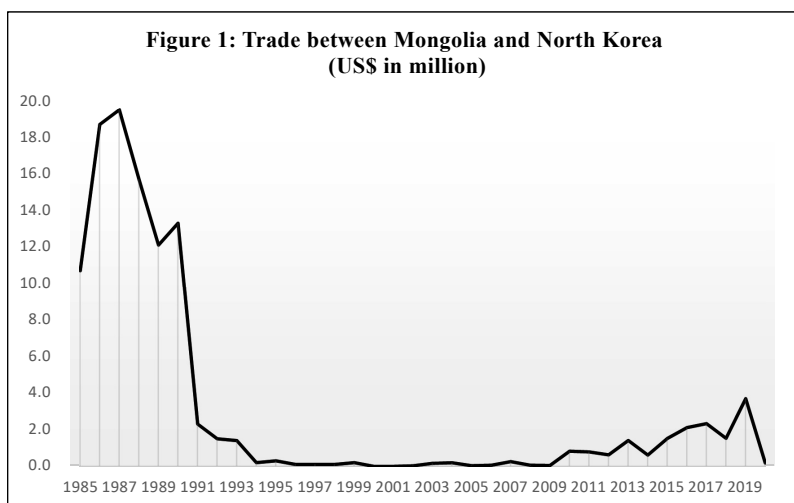
²⁸ *Asahi Shimbun*, November 22, 2003.

²⁹ *Rodong Sinmun*, November 22, 2003.

³⁰ *Sankei Shimbun*, September 5, 2007 (Japanese).

The signing of the new Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation did not lead to a steady development of friendly relations between North Korea and Mongolia. At least the positive effect on trade cannot be confirmed. We know the annual trade volume between North Korea and Mongolia since 1985. After 1991, the trade between the two countries was very different from that before 1990 and has almost disappeared. After March 31, 1991, when the Agreement on Trade and Payments between Mongolia and North Korea was signed, trade settlements shifted to hard currency.³¹ As a result, trade between Mongolia and North Korea has declined sharply since 1991. The trade volume in 1991 was only about 17% of that in 1990. The trade volume continued to decline, and by 2000, it had almost disappeared. This remained the case even after the signing of the New Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in 2002 (Figure 1).

The volume of trade began to increase somewhat in the second half of the 2010s. This is probably related to the fact that North Korea's economy began to develop. However, since the beginning of the 2020s, the border has been closed due to quarantine measures for the novel coronavirus strain, and it has returned to the level of the 2000s.



³¹ *Rodong Sinmun*, April 1, 1991.

1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
10.7	18.7	19.5	15.7	12.1	13.3	2.3	1.5	1.4	0.2	0.3	0.1
1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
0.1	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.2	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.1
2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
0.0	0.8	0.8	0.6	1.4	0.6	1.5	2.1	2.3	1.5	3.7	0.2

What would develop with the signing of the new Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation would be political exchanges. Until Mongolia established a multiparty system, the key relationship between North Korea and Mongolia was the exchange of their supreme leaders, the exchange of the WPK and the MPRP, the dominant party in both countries.

After Mongolia moved to a multiparty system, state relations became more important than party relations. The interaction of state representatives became more important than the party's supreme leader. In Mongolia, the president has been the state's representative since P. Ochirbat took office on September 4, 1990, after the constitutional amendment of May 10, 1990, introduced a presidential system and a multi-party system.

In North Korea, the Chairman of the Standing Committee of the Supreme People's Assembly has represented the state since the constitutional amendment of September 5, 1998 (the President of the State Affairs Commission has also represented the state since the constitutional amendment of April 11, 2019). Since then, the exchange between the leaders of North Korea and Mongolia has been between the Chairman of the Standing Committee of the Supreme People's Assembly of the DPRK and the President of Mongolia.

When Mongolian President N. Bagabandi visited North Korea from December 21-22, 2002; he was received by KIM Yong-nam, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the Supreme People's Assembly of the DPRK. KIM Yong-nam visited Mongolia from July 20 to July 23, 2007; he was received by President N. Enkhbayar.

When T. Elbegdorj, President of Mongolia, visited North Korea from October 28 to 31, 2013, he

³² National Statistics office of Mongolia, *Mongolian Statistical Yearbook 1997*, (Ulaanbaatar: National Statistics office of Mongolia, 1998), pp.210-211 (Mongolian / English); National Statistics office of Mongolia, *"Mongolia in a Market System" Statistical Yearbook 1989-2002*, (Ulaanbaatar: National Statistics office of Mongolia, 1998), p.221 (Mongolian / English); UN Comtrade, <https://comtradeplus.un.org>, (Accessed on December 8, 2023).

was received by KIM Yong-nam. However, since Elbegdorj's visit to North Korea was the first by a foreign leader since KIM Jong-un became the supreme leader of the WPK, there were expectations in South Korea that he might have a meeting with KIM Jong-un.³³

The South Korean expectations were disappointed. T. Elbegdorj returned home without meeting KIM Jong-un. On October 31, the last day of his visit, T. Elbegdorj gave a speech at the Kim Il Sung University, which the Mongolian presidential office published on its website on November 15. It included the sentence, "No tyranny lasts forever." This sentence led to speculations that T. Elbegdorj could not meet KIM Jong-un because of this sentence.³⁴

However, it is an exaggerated expectation. Since T. Elbegdorj visited North Korea at the invitation of KIM Yong-nam, he had no reason to meet with KIM Jong-un. The speech at Kim Il Sung University was given just before his return to North Korea, and it is an unreasonable explanation that he could not meet with KIM Jong-un because of the content of the speech. The Korean version of this speech is included in "70 Years of Mongolia-Korea Relations," which was jointly produced by North Korea and Mongolia, which shows that it is not considered a problem in North Korea.³⁵ On the occasion of T. Elbegdorj's visit to North Korea, North Korea treated its relations with Mongolia not as party diplomacy but as government-to-government diplomacy, as it has been doing since 2002.

To begin with, KIM Jong-un was legally in a position to represent the executive branch, but not the state. KIM Jong-un only became a state representative after he was promoted to the position of the President of the State Affairs Commission, which was newly empowered to represent the state through a constitutional amendment on April 11, 2019. The foreign heads of state that KIM Jong-un has met with since becoming Supreme Leader on April 11, 2019, are the President of China, the President of the United States, the President of Cuba, and the President of Vietnam. As for Singapore, he met with the prime minister as a executive branch representative, but not with the president as head of state. China, Cuba, and Vietnam are socialist countries with one-party dictatorships, where party diplomacy is more important than government-to-government diplomacy. There are no diplomatic relations with the United States.

The first foreign head of state KIM Jong-un met with was Russian President Vladimir Putin. This was KIM Jong-un's first meeting with President Putin. KIM Jong-un met with President Putin after he had the authority to represent the state. During the period when he was not a representative

³³ *Chosun Ilbo*, October 29, 2013 (Korean).

³⁴ *Chosun Ilbo*, November 16, 2013.

³⁵ L. Khash-Erdene, ed., *70 Years of Relations*, pp.196-201.

of the state, KIM Jong-un avoided meeting with the Russian and Mongolian presidents. In this sense, North Korea treats Mongolia, like Russia, as a traditional friendly country with neighborly diplomatic relations.

4. Conclusion

Today, North Korea and Mongolia are considered traditional friends. They were the second countries to establish diplomatic relations, and Mongolia supported North Korea during the Korean War. However, it is difficult to say that such traditions have maintained friendly relations between the two countries.

The relationship between North Korea and Mongolia was linked in the Eastern Bloc, with the Soviet Union at the center. During the Cold War, the relationship between North Korea and Mongolia was an ideological relationship in which party diplomacy took precedence as a socialist state with a one-party dictatorship. Thus, the Sino-Soviet split cooled relations between North Korea, which had deteriorated relations with the Soviet Union, and Mongolia, which had deep ties with the Soviet Union. However, since neither side publicly criticized the other and there was little caution, there was not much difficulty in repairing the relationship. After North Korea made peace with the Soviet Union, relations with Mongolia developed further. The fruit of this relationship was the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation.

Moreover, the cooling of relations between North Korea and Mongolia did not affect trade. This can be seen by comparing trade between China and Mongolia. Trade between North Korea and Mongolia was largely unaffected by politics.

However, after the Cold War, when Mongolia changed from a one-party dictatorship to a multi-party system and abandoned socialism, the Soviet Union and socialism became useless in the friendly relations between North Korea and Mongolia. Moreover, Mongolia, after abandoning socialism, tried to abrogate the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in 1995, which had a strong socialist ideology. However, North Korea, whose diplomacy had ceased to function after the death of Kim Il-sung, did not comply. In addition, North Korea closed its embassy in Mongolia in 1999. However, this post-Cold War cooling-off period between North Korea and Mongolia seems to have been caused by North Korea's financial difficulties and the decline of government functions due to the death of KIM Il-sung rather than a political confrontation.

In August 2002, North Korea and Mongolia signed the new Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, which excluded socialist ideology. This was a clear sign of the transition from party diplomacy to government-to-government diplomacy after the Cold War. Since then, the president has visited

North Korea as a representative of the Mongolian state, and the chairman of the Standing Committee of the Supreme People's Assembly has visited Mongolia as a representative of the North Korean state, the DPRK. Exchanges by state representatives were considered more important than those by party representatives. Nevertheless, state-to-state relations have not affected trade. The signing of the new Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation did not increase defense cooperation or trade.

The relationship between North Korea and Mongolia was an ideological one during the Cold War, when, as a one-party socialist state, party diplomacy took precedence. After the Cold War, however, the relationship became that of normal, friendly neighbor and government-to-government diplomacy. Nevertheless, they have never been at odds and have maintained friendly relations because they are both small countries. In the case of Russia and China, even though they are neighbors, they are often at odds with each other because of their significant influence. However, Mongolia and North Korea, which are small neighboring countries, have little influence over each other and do not criticize each other. That is why they have been able to maintain friendly relations.

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