

Keynote Speech (Masao Okonogi, Professor Emeritus, Keio University)

There have been various discussions regarding the reasons why the US intervened in the Korean War. Among Cold War historians, the general understanding is that it was “the lesson of Munich.” In other words, the US intervened to resolutely reject appeasement of the USSR in order to avert WWII. Other reasons include safeguarding the authority of the United Nations, which supported the establishment of the Republic of Korea (ROK), and securing US credibility, that is, not betraying the trust of the US held by allies and friendly nations.

However, there are also surprising viewpoints such as the argument by Louis Halle that, by winning WWII and occupying Japan, the US inherited the geopolitical causes of the conflict then held by Japan. Seen from such a perspective, it is highly significant that Stalin, who started the Korean War, was a born geopolitician., and I place this as the axis of my argument.

Compared with the First Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese War previously fought over the Korean Peninsula, the Korean War was a very complex conflict. Even looking just at the outstanding characteristics, the war was started as a test of the forced liberation of South Korea by the North Korean army. Looking at the events leading to the outbreak of hostilities, more than Stalin, it was Kim Il-sung who was eager to launch the war. This was supported by the nationalism of unifying the Korean fatherland, which had been divided. ROK President Syngman Rhee was in agreement on that point. These may be said to have been civil war factors. It is well known that

Professor Yonosuke Nagai has defined the Korean War as an “international civil war.”

Second, when the US/ROK counterattack crossed the 38th parallel, the Chinese army intervened and the Korean War expanded into a war between the US and China. Moreover, in February 1950, before the war began, China and the USSR had concluded the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance. The Cold War became militarized and expanded worldwide. In East Asia, not just the Korean Peninsula, but Taiwan and Vietnam were also placed within the US line of defense and became Cold War battlefields. Yet the division of Korea was not resolved, the US intervened in the Vietnam War, and the liberation of Taiwan by China has not been achieved to this day. In short, the international civil war on the Korean Peninsula has shaped the history of East Asia.

Looking back to its origins, the Korean War was planned by Stalin and Kim Il-sung as a local surprise attack. This fact is also the key to elucidating the decision to start the Korean War. In this webinar, we will approach the essence of the Korean War while discussing diverse aspects such as the inside facts of the decision by Kim Il-sung, Stalin, and Mao Zedong to launch the war, and the Soviet policy to support North Korea based on the East German model.

I believe that Stalin was half intentional and half opportunistic in risking war in Korea, encouraged by the withdrawal of the US Army from the ROK and the success of the Chinese Communist Revolution. I imagine that the background to this was the “geopolitical anxiety” held by Stalin and the USSR at that time.

**Report No. 1 (Atsuko Kawakita, Associate Professor, Graduate School of Arts
and Sciences, The University of Tokyo)**

Reconstruction Assistance to North Korea after the Korean War – Focusing on East
German Reconstruction Assistance to Hamhung

After the Korean War armistice was signed, the Eastern and Western camps both provided support for the reconstruction of North and South Korea, which had been severely affected by the war, as if they were competing. For East and West Germany, which were defeated in WWII and aiming to return to the international community within the Eastern and Western blocs at that time while bearing the burden of reparations payments, the situation on the Korean Peninsula was highly significant. This was especially the case for East Germany, and thus East Germany came to cooperate in the reconstruction of the important North Korean city of Hamhung (and Hungnam).

Because the Eastern Bloc countries including the USSR and East Germany exchanged information regarding their assistance to North Korea, it is possible to grasp an overall view of their assistance policy from East German diplomatic documents. This report empirically discussed the conditions of the assistance to North

Korea by Eastern Bloc countries, and in particular the assistance to North Korea by East Germany, referring to historical materials from the Political Archive of the Federal Foreign Office (Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts) and the German Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv).

The report was comprised of three parts. First, the report presented an outline of the reconstruction assistance to North Korea implemented by East Germany. The assistance to North Korea by East Germany had two routes: the mass organization level and the state level. At the mass organization level, during the Korean War, the Korea Aid Committee carried out fundraising activities among the people and sent relief supplies to North Korea. On the other hand, the assistance to North Korea by the government of East Germany took the two forms of bilateral agreements on the provision of goods, technologies, and equipment, and reconstruction aid for important cities.

Next, the report described aspects of the reconstruction of Hamhung (and Hungnam). In Hamhung (and Hungnam), the construction of high-rise apartment buildings, public facilities, infrastructure, and various types of factories were advanced during the assistance period of 1955-1962 with the cooperation of expert construction teams dispatched from East Germany under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Foreign Trade.

Finally, the report discussed a range of issues by positioning the reconstruction of North Korea after the Korean War in the global context from two perspectives.

The first point noted was the context of the construction of socialist cities. The assistance to North Korea by East Germany took the form of urban construction projects in Hamhung (and Hungnam), which is the second largest city in North Korea after Pyongyang. At the time, in Pyongyang and Hamhung, it was aimed to construct Soviet-type socialist cities with the cooperation of Soviet architects and Eastern European architects who had studied in the USSR. The report showed how the assistance to North Korea was carried out amid the concept and human network of socialist city construction.

The second point noted was the context of the conflict between East and West during the Cold War. The assistance systems developed by the East and West Blocs to North Korea and South Korea respectively suggest that the Korean Peninsula after the armistice agreement entered a new phase in which confrontation and competition between East and West surfaced in the form of economic aid.

Report No. 2 (Nam Ki Jeong, Professor, Institute for Japan Studies, Seoul

National University)

The Korean War as a Northeast Asian War and ROK-Japan Relations

The combination of “the Korean War and Japan” is a “reciprocally stipulated concept group” that restores and rectifies the historical image of Northeast Asia, which became common sense while remaining warped. Japan had a decisive significance for the origin, causes, development, and results of the Korean War. It is impossible to fully understand the Korean War without considering Japan. Similarly, it is impossible to fully understand post-war Japan without considering the Korean War. Without sufficiently assessing the role that Japan played in the Korean War, the armistice system cannot be brought to an end. Similarly, without properly understanding the significance of the Korean War in the development of post-war Japan, it is not possible to summarize post-war Japan.

Japan has a history whereby it cannot take the position of having no involvement with war on the Korean Peninsula. This was the background whereby Japan indirectly participated in the Korean War under the shadow of the US. Meanwhile, right from the start, the conflict had the aspect of a test of strength between the US and the USSR over Japan. At the beginning of 1950, the frontline of the Cold War was Japan, not

the Korean Peninsula. As soon as the Korean War broke out, Japan became a sortie base for counterattacks by the US military. Also, throughout the Korean War, Japan served as a supply and transport relay base, military goods repair and production base, training and recreation base, and otherwise as a rear base for US forces. Japanese nationals were mobilized in the process of this logistics support. Overall, some 8,000 Japanese workers participated in the war in this manner, which places Japan at number 6 among the 16 nations that were involved. This cooperation in the war was possible because Japan was under US occupation at that time and not recognized as a “state” under international law. So, Japan was neither a participant in the war nor a belligerent, but it played the role of rear support as its security was guaranteed by the US. This reality may be referred to as a “base state.” When the San Francisco Peace Treaty was concluded and Japan regained its diplomatic sovereignty, Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs re-opened embassies all over the world, mobilized staff, met with leaders in the concerned countries, analyzed the impact of the armistice on Japan’s political economy, and sought out possibilities for Japan to participate in international conferences regarding issues on the Korean Peninsula after the armistice.

At each stage of the Korean Peninsula peace process, Japan attempted to enter discussions on peace between North and South Korea, as well as negotiations between the US and the ROK. However, such diplomacy was developed “outside the

loop” of the Korean Peninsula peace process. The Korean War is often referred to as the “forgotten war,” and Japan is the “hidden presence” in the “forgotten war.” This is why the presence of Japan just does not come to the forefront in discussions about the conclusion of the Korean War. But the problem is that Japan is not simply a “hidden presence.” Japan played a decisive role in the war.

Japan’s participation in the war casts a very complex problem. The fact of that complexity is re-emerging in the process of concluding the Korean War.

**Report No. 3 (Shin Kawashima, Professor, Graduate School of Arts and
Sciences, the University of Tokyo)**

The Korean War as seen from China – Based on Chen Zhaobin, *Chūgoku Shimin no
Chōsen Sensō – Kaigai Hahei o Meguru Shomondai* [The decisive year, 1950: the
Chinese people's response to the war against the United States] (Iwanami Shoten,
2020)

Amid the progress of Chinese contemporary history research and new trends in Cold War research, new facts and historical images are being drawn regarding the Korean War as seen from China (PRC). As for the former, emphasis is being placed not only on the perspective of Mao Zedong and other leaders, but on the perspectives from individual regions and society. As for the latter, as a result of the release of archives in each country of East Asia, a Cold War history is being drawn emphasizing the viewpoints not only of the superpowers such as the US, USSR, and UK but also inside the East Asian region, and on the other hand there is an emerging research trend toward grasping the Cold War comprehensively, including society, economy, science, and culture. The purpose of this report is to introduce the image of the Korean War as seen from China based on such new developments. Specifically, I would like to introduce this based on the recently published book by Prof. Chen Zhaobin,

Chūgoku Shimin no Chōsen Sensō – Kaigai Hahei o Meguru Shomondai [The decisive year, 1950: Chinese people’s response to the war against the United States] by Chen Zhaobin (Iwanami Shoten, 2020).

To date, the representative works in Japanese regarding the Korean War as seen from China have been Zhu Jianrong, *Mō Takutō no Chōsen Sensō – Chūgoku ga Ōryokukō o Wataru Made Wataru Made* [Mao Zedong’s Korean War – until China crossed the Yalu River] (Iwanami Shoten, 1991) and Shen Zhihua (translated by Zhu Jianrong), *Saigo no ‘Tenchō’ – Mō Takutō / Kin Nissei Jidai no Chūgoku to Kita Chōsen* [the last Imperial court – China and North Korea in the era of Mao Zedong and Kim Il-sung] (Vols. 1-2) (Iwanami Shoten, 2016). Also, in addition to these, recently research has accumulated from the perspectives of constructing the economy and nation building, and regarding the mobilization of the masses. However, Chen asserts that “The research was limited to Mao Zedong and the other policymakers as usual, and as for the trends among regular citizens, these were hardly discussed at all.” And regarding research on the mobilization of the masses, he adds the criticism, “It cannot be said to have deeply investigated the speech and actions of Chinese people themselves and added overall considerations. While touching on the people, they are not treated as the subject.” Chen sets the question as “How did the Chinese people view the issues pertaining to soldiers dispatched overseas?”, considers “the period of about one and a half months including the week before and after November 1950 as the decisive

period” when Chinese citizens became aware of this war, and observed the Chinese peoples’ view on the Korean War during this period. For this, he uses materials published internally, regional newspapers, and the diaries left by intellectuals and military personnel, etc. Specifically, he develops his descriptions mixing in the understanding by each region, the understanding of intellectuals, businesspeople, laborers, officers and soldiers, and the personal perceptions of individuals. He discovered that Chinese people were hesitant toward participation in the Korean War, that is, regarding the overseas dispatch of troops, questioned Mao Zedong and other leaders, expected the US Army to attack China based on pro-American feelings, predicted the arrival of Chiang Kai-shek’s army, and had diverse perceptions by region, class, and individual. Then, he states that in December 1950 when the Chinese volunteer army recovered Pyongyang, the anxieties among the Chinese people started to be dispelled, and trust in the Mao Zedong administration gradually increased.

The Korean War was a war that plays a definitive role in the research on the Cold War in East Asia. Also, while this war became history, it is still a problem today. But at the very least we expect that a very rich history transcending political and diplomatic history and military history, like this research by Chen, will be written on the portion that became history, and hope that this will come to relate to how the problems are written about today.