Part IV
North Korea
North Korean state-making
Process and characteristics

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Introduction

Understanding North Korea’s present and future requires an awareness of the country’s state-making process. The end of World War II, the division of the Korean Peninsula, and the start of the Cold War created a sort of special “critical juncture” where the state and its institutions were able to exist on a continuous basis. The focus of historical institutionalism centers on the fact that an institution has a certain degree of “path dependence” and can continue to exist if that institution is decided by the choices of a special period under decisive conditions. The institutional formation and characteristics of the central elements of North Korea’s political system—the Party, military, and central government—that were formed in the compressed period between 1945 and the establishment of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea in 1948 have remained almost unchanged up to this day. As a result, a clear understanding of the Kim Jong Un regime requires grasping the origins and characteristics of North Korea’s state-making process.1

Studies on North Korea’s state-making process have viewed it with a wide range of perspectives. One perspective argues that the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) held considerable influence on North Korea’s state-making process. (Scalapino and Lee, 1972) According to this view, the establishment of the North Korean government was a series of political processes that occurred in line with a pre-planned program by the USSR, while the political, economic, social and cultural aspects of those areas under Soviet military influence were transformed by Korea’s communist party, in line with Stalin’s wishes. This analysis is based on the idea that the handling of important issues concerning North Korea from August 1945 to a certain period required the permission of Stalin and other high-ranking Soviet officials in Moscow. The Soviet military did in fact establish a central government institution and police offices in each region and worked hard to lead North Korea’s state construction by sometimes intervening in the minute details of the state-building process.

Yet another perspective is that North Korea’s leaders themselves led the formation of their power structure (Cummings, 1990). This perspective argues that North Korea’s communists were not closely linked with the Soviet-led international communist movement, but were rather more autonomous and nationalistic in nature. Proponents of this argument say that not only
did Kim Il Sung and other North Korean leaders have experience fighting against the Japanese, but the USSR also had to watch their own actions in North Korea in consideration of their relationship with the US. As such, in contrast with the Soviet satellites in Eastern Europe, the North Korean government had a certain degree of independence from the Soviets. Bruce Cumings, for example, argues that North Korea developed its own autonomous political system in the late 1940s under the influence of the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China, and that its political system had internal characteristics as a “revolutionary nationalist corporative.”

Cumings argues that North Korea’s state-making process was a “uniquely North Korean phenomenon” and argues this likely was based on influence from traditional Confucianism. However, Charles Armstrong recently went one step further and argued that the origins of North Korea could be found in North Korea’s geographical situation and recent historical legacy rather than simply due to a revolution from the outside. In essence, Armstrong argues that the tradition of Choson Dynasty-era Confucian ideology, which emphasizes ideological awareness rather than physical conditions, influenced North Korea’s political leadership and that the North Korean system was formed through a combination of top-down communist planning and bottom-up geographical conditions (Armstrong, 2003).

The question of how to measure Kim Il Sung and other anti-Japanese fighters’ influence during the state-making process, how to prescribe the military and party relationship during the state-making process, and even deciding on a period in time North Korea’s state-making process took place are all continuing academic disputes. The most significant reason these disputes are continuing is because North Korean documents are unavailable to scholars—despite the fact North Korea has been in existence for some 70 years. While scholars are able to view North Korean military documents captured during the Korean War, and Soviet-era documents released after the end of the Cold War, the documents in existence have not answered all the questions concerning the who, when, and how of North Korea’s state-making process.

As a result, any study on North Korea’s state-making process must balance its analysis on two broad areas of thought: the external factory theory (Soviet influence) and the internal factory theory (autonomous revolution). If too much focus is placed on the former perspective, there is no way to explain North Korea’s unique characteristics or autonomy. Likewise, if too much emphasis is placed on the latter, then the historical fact that the USSR had a decisive role in the state-making process may be overlooked. North Korean documents—when they are released—will likely reflect this complex understanding of the period. Understanding the mutual relationship between the “internal” and “external” factors inherent in the diplomatic policy decision process is required for a complete understanding of the era.

As such, this paper aims to examine the characteristics of North Korea’s state-making process with a focus on the establishment of the Korean Workers’ Party (KWP), the North Korean People’s Committee (NKPC), and the Korean People’s Army (KPA) from liberation in August 1945 to the proclamation of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea on 9 September 1948.

Establishment of the Korean Workers’ Party (KWP)

As the Korean Peninsula found itself liberated after World War II, there were a wide range of leftist forces with experience fighting the Japanese in the northern part of the peninsula. This environment ensured that the early power structure of the KWP was composed of a wide range of political forces. The KWP began as a simple political association but gradually became a party centered on the leadership of Kim Il Sung, until ultimately it became the cradle of a one-man leadership system. There were, of course, several power conflicts during this progression that were coupled with changes in the Party’s structure.
After liberation, communists in northern Korea moved to establish a political party that would have a monopoly over power in the northern part of the country. The real formation of the KWP started with the establishment of the North Korean Branch Bureau of the KWP. From 5–8 October 1945, before the holding of the Conference of Responsible Leaders and Enthusiasts of Five Northwest Provinces of the Korean Communist Party, a preliminary meeting between the two groups was held in secret in Pyongyang. During this meeting, the establishment of an implementation department and central party leadership institution was discussed and a decision to create the North Korean Branch Bureau of the KWP was made. Following this, Kim Il Sung and some 70 other well-known communists from northern Korea held a meeting on 13 October 1945, in Pyongyang and decided to create a North Korean Branch Bureau of the KWP independent of the pre-existing Central Party in Seoul. Then, in accordance with the 13 October meeting’s decision, the North Korean Branch Bureau of the KWP was established on 20 October. The First Secretary was Kim Yong-bôm, who represented the communist party in South Pyongan province, and the Second Secretary was O Ki-sŏp. Another 17 Executive Committee members were also elected.

This meeting allowed Kim Il Sung to analyze the political situation both at home and abroad, make the establishment of the Democratic People’s Republic a fundamental political duty, and raise the question of holding a National Party Representative Meeting to deal with the Party construction project. Kim then proclaimed a new Party organization platform and political platform and presented the “Four National Objectives.” These “Four National Objectives” included the thorough formation of a democratic national unification platform to establish a Democratic People’s Republic; the cleansing of remaining supporters of Japanese colonialism, international anti-communist forces, and all other anti-socialist forces; the establishment of a basis for the construction of an independent democratic nation through the organization of a people’s committee and democratic reforms; and the expansion of the Party (I.S. Kim, 1947: 26–27). Of course, due to the existence of a Central Party in Seoul and the dynamic relationship between communist forces, the North Korean Central Communist Organization Committee was never established. Even at that time, Kim Il Sung had not yet won complete hegemony over the North Korean communists.

Despite these restrictions, however, the Seoul Central Party’s General Secretary Pak Hŏn-yŏng had no choice but to accept the establishment of the North Korean Branch Bureau of the KWP ten days after it was established on 23 October 1945. This moved the leadership of the North Korean communist movement from Seoul to Pyongyang.

The North Korean Branch Bureau (NKBB) of the KWP held a series of Expanded Executive Committees (EEC) and increased its hegemony through the reestablishment of its political platform and refining its organizational system. During the 2nd EEC on 15 November 1945, Kim Il Sung argued that a discussion must take place on establishing a National Unification Platform Committee and Central Government Institution for the establishment of a Democratic People’s Republic. Given that Kim Il Sung was calling for the establishment of such institutions after a People’s Republic of Korea had already been proclaimed in Seoul, this meant that the North Korean Branch Bureau had become independent of the Central Party in Seoul. Following this, during the 3rd EEC from 17 to 18 December 1945, as the independent activities of the provincial and local parties continued, the question of reorganizing the Party organization and placing it under a central authority was discussed. This meeting adopted measures to make farmers Party members, issue a one-party-pass system, and improve procedures for entering the Party. Moreover, Kim Il Sung, who had become the NKBB Secretary, strongly moved forward with centralizing the authority of the Party, strengthening the central party’s control over local parties, and proposing new policy platforms.
During the 4th EEC on 15 February 1946, Kim Il Sung called for the destruction of factions, strengthening of organizational life, promotion of the North Korean People’s Committee, and expansion of campaigns to support the committee. These proposals soon led the North Korean Central Party to fall under Kim Il Sung’s control. Ultimately, as Kim Il Sung strengthened and solidified his singular position, the NKBB changed its name to the North Korean Communist Party in April 1946 in order to heighten its status.

As Kim Il Sung’s NKKB progressed in its activities, political changes on the Korean Peninsula accelerated the establishment of the KWP. After the suspension of the First Joint US-USSR Commission in Korea on 8 May 1946, the North Korean communists began mobilizing their forces to establish a national people’s government under the foundation of “revolutionary democratic base theory.” In short, this meant that the creation of the KWP would establish a strong, independent communist movement in North Korea, and would lead to the use of a wide range of neutral forces in both North and South Korea to expand communist influence on political events in South Korea. Importantly, Kim Il Sung aimed to increase his power both qualitatively and quantitatively through this process.

The 7th EEC, held from 22–23 June 1946, decided to move forward with merging political parties in order to “establish a strong democratic independent nation” in northern Korea. On 26 June the North-South Communist Party High Official Committee was held and called for the successful joining of the three parties and the establishment of a “united front” of political parties.

Of those parties within the Choson Independence Alliance, the North Korean Communist Party’s (NKCP) Friendship Party, which had changed its name to the Korean New Democratic Party (KNDP), was a target for alliance. The KNDP was led by Kim Tu-bong, Ch’oe Ch’ang-ik and others, and had been established to see the creation of a Korean Democratic Republic. The reason the KNDP was a target for a merger was to allow the KWP to expand its popular base of support to allow the smooth advance of the national unification movement.

On 23 July 1946, the KNDP sent a letter to the NKCP proposing the merger, and at the 8th EEC on 27 July 1946, the new political party was named the North Korean Workers’ Party (NKWP). At the Expanded Joint Party Central Committee on 29 July 1946, the “Two Party Merger Decision” and “Proclamation” were adopted. With this as a basis, a ceremony to establish the NKWP was held on 28 August 1946 and was attended by representatives from each province. In a speech during the ceremony, Kim Il Sung called for the Provisional People’s Committee to gradually become a People’s Committee in order to construct a democratic independent country, and called for the nationwide acceleration of the land reform, labor laws, nationalization of important industry, and democratic reform of the people’s education system. Moreover, the preliminary steps proposed by the Expanded Joint Party Central Committee formed the basis of the adoption of the five-article, 41-clause “Party Rules.” This committee also elected 43 Central Party members including Kim Tu-bong, Kim Il Sung, and Chu Yong-ha.

Following this, the 1st Central Committee of the NKWP was held on 31 August 1946, and was presided over by Kim Il Sung. This committee formed the Political Committee and elected Kim Tu-bong as chairman, Kim Il Sung and Chu Yong-ha as vice chairmen, and Hŏ Ka-i and Ch’oe Ch’ang-Ik as committee members. It also established the Standing Committee, which provided leadership and carried out Party-related projects. The NKWP was a political party for people because it stated in the first clause of its regulations that its duties were to “construct a democratic independent Korean nation” and, in the second clause of its Party Rules, that it was to “be the representative and supporter for the benefit of Korean laborers, construct a strong democratic independent Korean nation that can preserve the democratic freedom of the labor masses, and improve the political, economic and cultural standards of the labor masses.” While
the Party held to some degree of Marxist–Leninism doctrine, Kim Il Sung in October 1945 said that the duty of the Party was to construct a “democratic people’s republic” and construction of a communist nation was the ultimate goal. He further said that the Party should gradually move forward with the required and appropriate moves and doctrine.

The NKWP started to establish itself as the highest leadership institution in North Korea, as it was connected loosely with other labor and popular organizations. Figures who were in charge of the Party’s major positions like Kim Il Sung and Kim Tu-bong held multiple positions within the People’s Committee. Furthermore, as the military and political organizations undergirding the Party and nation fell under the leadership of Kim Il Sung, North Korea’s power structure became one centered on Kim Il Sung. The NKWP’s establishment led to the creation of a Standing Committee and Political Committee inside the Central Party Committee, and this gave its members a small degree of authority, which led naturally to the strengthening of Kim Il Sung’s status within the Party and leadership system. Kim Il Sung moved to strengthen his leadership system and place his own supporters inside the Party by moving forward with the one-party-pass initiative, and decisions related to cadre placement and movement.

Simultaneously, while Pak Hŏn-yŏng’s defection to the North in October 1946 led to some activities by the northern branch of the South Korean Workers’ Party (SKWP), Park and his party’s real influence had fallen drastically following the establishment of the NKWP and its expansion of power. As a result, the significance of the NKWP being established was that it

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting title</th>
<th>Meeting date</th>
<th>Main topics of discussion</th>
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<tr>
<td>Korean Communist Northern Regional Office Establishment Rally</td>
<td>1945.10.10-13</td>
<td>Proposed the Four National Objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Expanded Executive Committee (EEC) of the North Korean Branch Bureau (NKBB)</td>
<td>1945.10.16</td>
<td>Discussed land, industry, education and culture issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd EEC of the NKBB</td>
<td>1945.11.15–17</td>
<td>Discussed the establishment of the National Unification Association and Central Government Institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd EEC of the NKBB</td>
<td>1945.12.17–18</td>
<td>Discussed laborers, farmers becoming Party members, issuing a single-partypass, improvement of Party entry rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th EEC of the North Korean Communist Party (NKCP)</td>
<td>1946.2.15</td>
<td>Discussed cleansing of factions, strengthening of organizational life, promoting the North Korean People’s Committee, and starting promotional movements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th EEC of the NKCP</td>
<td>1946.3.4</td>
<td>Discussed implementation of land reform, creation of police force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th EEC of the NKCP</td>
<td>1946.4.10</td>
<td>Discussed end of land reform and future objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th EEC of the NKCP</td>
<td>1946.6.22–23</td>
<td>Implemented the Labor Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th EEC of the NKCP</td>
<td>1946.7.27</td>
<td>Merger between NKCP and KNDP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Korean Workers Party (NKWP) Establishment Ceremony</td>
<td>1946.8.28–30</td>
<td>Establishment of NKWP and election of Central Party members</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
was the only strong leftist party that held leadership over all communist movements in the country. While the NKWP’s Central Committee and other central institutions were somewhat of a political alliance, in reality they formed the basis for a single leadership system under Kim Il Sung.

Establishment of the North Korean People’s Committee (NKPC)

In order to examine the establishment of the North Korean People’s Committee that followed the launch of the NKPC in November 1946 (Ryu, 2004:41–92) there is a need to examine the activities of the Soviet Army based in northern Korea after liberation and the how the local people’s committees were established. (S.B. Kim, 2011:28–29) Following liberation, people’s committees sprouted up in each of North Korea’s provinces and they formed a variety of departments to deal with cleansing Japanese colonialism supporters and managing local affairs. For example, in North Hamgyong Province—even before the Soviet Army entered the area—the Communist Association and North Hamgyŏng Province National Building Preparation Committee (NBPC) was recognized by the Soviet Army and became the North Hamgyong Province People’s Committee on 30 August with Cho Man-sik as chairman. Soon the Soviet Army reformed this group into the South Pyongan Province People’s Political Committee and kept Cho as its chairman.

As this shows, in general the people’s committees were established under an alliance between nationalist and socialist forces, and this fell into the Soviet plan of created forces that were friendly to the Soviets. The Soviets were well aware that they could not handle the Korean question all by themselves and had plans to consider the interests of the US and other countries. In short, in the beginning of the Soviet presence, they supported the establishment of local people’s committees and tried to use them to manage the affairs of state, but also made efforts to stay in the background (Ryu, 2004:55).

However, the local people’s committees, as they became more centralized, ultimately moved toward becoming the NKPC. The Conference of Responsible Leaders and Enthusiasts of Five Northwest Provinces of the Korean Communist Party from 8–10 October 1945, was hosted by the Soviet Army Command and led to the regional people’s committees becoming more unified. In people’s committee meetings held in each province on 19 November 1945, the Soviet military government and North Korean leadership succeeded in establishing the ten administrative departments for the unified management of North Korea’s five provinces. This process led to the completion of a unified tax system and creation of a police force. That being said, the activities of the ten departments were independent of each other in each province, the activities did not last long, and other reasons, including the lack of Korean experience and lack of communication between the central and regional institutions, led the Soviet Army Command to view the whole project as a failure. However, the establishment of the ten administrative departments overcame the complexity managing the once disparate local people’s committees and their establishment ensured the efficiency and unification of managing local affairs. Given that the later North Korean Provisional People’s Committee and its central department inherited the system of the ten administrative departments, the experiment had some impact on the establishment of the future North Korean government.

As the people’s committees became more centralized, the international political situation gradually led to the establishment of an independent government within North Korea. Before the opening of the First US–USSR Joint Committee, the North Koreans and Soviets had two goals: 1) apply the format of the government established in North Korea into the provisional Korean government; 2) secure the North Korean system as a response to the establishment of
an independent government in South Korea. In February 1946, political parties including the NKBB of the KWP established a committee to construct a central institution in North Korea and appointed Kim Chae as chairman, and Kang Yang-uk and Chu Yong-ha as vice chairmen. On 7 February a preliminary meeting by the political parties was held to establish the NKPC, and on the 8th, an expanded meeting of provincial, city and gun people’s committee representatives was held to establish the North Korean Temporary People’s Committee (NKTPC) with Kim Il Sung as chairman, and Kim Tu-bong and Kang Yang-uk as vice chairmen.

The NKTPC was considered the highest administrative institution in North Korea and had judicial and legislative authority. According to the regulations concerning the establishment of the NKTPC, it “has the authority to legislate and announce temporary laws for the people, social groups and national institutions (Clause 3); correct incorrect decisions by each department and provincial people’s committees; and is the highest administrative sovereign unit in North Korea (Clause 4).” The NKTPC had to “conduct the laws and decisions announced by the Soviet Military Command” so North Korea’s authority was shared between the NKTPC and the Soviet Military. The 11 national objectives solidified arguments for the NKWP’s democratic base theory in preparation for the US-USSR Joint Commission. On 23 March 1946, the 20 platforms, which solidified the 11 objectives even more, included the cleansing of Japanese colonial elements, a guarantee of democratic freedom, the establishment of democratic elections, the securing of democratic rights of the people, the nationalization of industry, land reform, and democratic reform as the fundamental tasks for the provisional democratic government.

The various policies that were implemented immediately after the establishment of the NKTPC not only set the basic direction of North Korea’s state-making process but formed the basis for North Korean communists to organize and solidify North Korean society in a way that was favorable to themselves. The land reform project was completed thoroughly and swiftly under the basic principle of free forfeit and free distribution. Land reform was swiftly completed due to the mobilization of the people by local political parties and social groups, and the project reflected directly the enthusiasm of the farmers at the time, thus increasing the authority of the government.

Beginning with land reform, the government implemented taxes of agricultural goods, a labor law, a gender equality law, the nationalization of important industry, education reform, the systemization of local people’s committees, and the reorganization of administrative units. The measure to nationalize important industries was significant because it aimed to destroy the colonial-era ownership system and both restore and secure a planned economy. As the industrial sector came under the control of the communist party and people’s committees, communist party cadres were not only able to grow their power, but establish themselves as a both economic and social leaders.

As the NKTPC began its activities and the basis of state-building commenced, the halt of the US-USSR Joint Commission on 8 May 1946, allowed the North Korean communists to place more emphasis on establishing a national people’s government in accordance with the revolutionary democratic base theory. By November 1946, the North Korean communists believed that the results of the democratic reforms had been shown, and the systemic framework of the North Korean government had been formed. As such, they attempted to create legal government institutions. In August 1946, citizen passes were issued to facilitate the holding of an election. During the 2nd EEC of the Provisional People’s Committee on 5 September 1946, it was proposed that each people’s committee be confirmed through an election.

Through these preliminary preparations, the TPC held an election on 3 November 1946, where 3,459 provincial, municipal and local people’s committee members were elected. The
NKWP received the highest support of all the parties with 32% of the vote. In February 1947, provincial, municipal and other local PC meetings were held, and the land reform law, industry nationalization law, labor law, gender equality law and other laws that had formed the basis of democratic reform over the past year were officially approved. Finally, on 20 February, the NKPC was created and became recognized as North Korea’s highest governmental organ. The establishment of the NKPC was approved under the precondition of “until the establishment of a unified temporary government by the US-USSR Joint Commission.” Ch’oe Yong-gŏn, who chaired the Central Committee of the North Korean Democratic National Unification Front, proposed Kim Il Sung as the chairman of the NKPC and the body adopted this proposal. On 22 February, the NKPC became the country’s highest executive institution with Kim Il Sung as its chair, and along with the Pyongyang Special City People’s Committee (PC), six provincial PCs, 12 municipal PCs, and 90 local PCs were established.

Discussions on passing a constitution were held during the NKPC’s third meeting, 18–19 November 1947. During the meeting, 31 temporary constitution legislation members were delegated to discuss the issue, and the group’s first meeting was held on 20 November. On 29 April 1948, this special committee unanimously adopted a draft of a constitution. The draft upheld sovereignty for the people with the people’s committees as the basis, and focused on “people’s democracy” due the fact in the economic sphere it recognized state ownership, cooperative ownership and individual ownership.

The characteristics and significance of the NKPC are as follows. First, the NKPC was an extension of North Korea’s People’s Committees and the ten administrative departments and was significant for having gained legitimacy through an election. Second, the NKPC was created as the highest executive organ separate from the NKPM, where the NKPC held executive functions while the NKPM held sovereignty. Third, while the NKPC did succeed with the TPC’s democratic reforms, it moved to bring socialist change to the country. Fourth, the establishment of the NKPC meant that the influence the Soviet military had on North Korean politics had decreased.

Table 14.2 Establishment of the NKPC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major event</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conference of the Five Provincial People’s Committees</td>
<td>1945.10.8–10</td>
<td>Discussion on the new government organ system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation of the North Korean 10 Administrative Departments</td>
<td>1945.11.19</td>
<td>Implementation of a central administrative unit by sector to for economic linkage between each province</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishment of North Korean Provisional People’s Committee</td>
<td>1946.2.7–8</td>
<td>Role of North Korea’s highest administrative unit decided, nationalization of important industry, land reform and democratic reform conducted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election of North Korean People’s Committee members</td>
<td>1946.11.3</td>
<td>Election of provincial, municipal, and local People’s Committee members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishment of North Korean People’s Committee</td>
<td>1947.2.22</td>
<td>NKPC becomes country’s highest executive unit through regular election with Kim Il Sung as chairman</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Establishment of the Korean People’s Army (KPA)

The creation of the Korean People’s Army on 9 February 1948 occurred within the mutual relationship between the Party and military. In short, the creation of the Party and military were closely related to each other.

The major turning point in the establishment of the KPA was due to the Soviet military. On 12 October 1945, the Soviet military ordered the disarmament of all organizations in northern Korea and the creation of a new police force. At the 5th EEC of the KWP, the decision to officially create a regular military force was made. The NKTPC led the creation of a security force to protect the border, the 38th parallel and railways.

In June 1946 in Kaech’on, South P’yŏngan province, a security cadre training camp, which would serve as the central base for the future regular military, was established, and on 8 July the North Korean Central Security Cadre School was opened to train military cadres. The security force, which would become the basis for the army, navy and air force, was also created. In early October 1945, marine security divisions were established along the coasts, and in December 1946, these were expanded to form the coast guard. In October 1945, civilians led the formation of the Sinuiju Airbase in Sinuiju, and in August 1947, a regular plane division was formed, which later become the air force.

On 15 August 1946, the cadre training division, as the managing organ of all armed forces, was newly created. This institution was led by the regular military’s chiefs of staff, with Ch’oe Yong-gŏn as commander, Kim Il Sung as deputy commander, and Mu Chŏng as artillery commander. These former guerrilla fighters took the highest-ranking positions in the military, which strengthened Kim Il Sung’s and the guerrilla faction’s control over the regular armed forces. In September 1946, a Soviet military advisor group arrived in North Korea and was stationed at each training camp and military school to accelerate the creation of the armed forces. This process brought once disparate armed forces to unite under the single authority of the cadre training division, and this division was headed by former guerrilla fighters like Ch’oe Yong-gŏn, An Kil, and Kim Il Sung.

On 15 April 1947, Kim Il Sung sent a message to the Soviets requesting weapons and other material for the North Korean military, and the Soviets responded by sending weapons and equipment. This allowed the NK forces to expand to 6–7 divisions and two army groups. On 17 May 1947, Kim Il Sung instituted a new hierarchy system and the base was renamed to the “People’s Group Army” (PGA). Ch’oe Yong-gŏn was kept as head of the PGA, along with the other chiefs of staff. Following decisions made by the KWP Central Committee on 2 February 1948 and the NKPC on 4 February, the National Security Department was established as the North Korean military’s administrative headquarters and Kim Ch’aek was named its head. This allowed fluid management between the government and military.

On 9 February 1948, the KPA was officially established. Kim Il Sung emphasized that the KWP was “a Korean people’s army made by the Korean people,” and not for the Party. Ch’oe Yong-gŏn was named head of the KPA Central Command, Kim Il the deputy commander and cultural commander, and Mu Chŏng the artillery commander. The KPA First Division commander was Kim Ung, Second Division Commander Yi Lee Chong-song, and the head of the Third Hongsong Infantry Brigade was Kim Kwang-hyŏp.

After the KPA was officially established, the number of soldiers in each division increased due to cooperation with Party organizations. Moreover, the KPA’s fighting power decisively increased as the Chinese–Korean soldiers returned to North Korea following their participation in China’s civil war. This led to an increase from 27,000 soldiers in 1948 to 120,000 soldiers in 1950.
In summary, former guerrilla fighters centered around Kim Il Sung became the central force in solidifying social forces under the cooperation of the SAC. During the vacuum period (May 1946 to May 1947) until the 2nd US-USSR Joint Commission was held, they created and expanded their military power. As the possibility of establishing a unified North-South government faded, a regular army called the People’s Group Army was created on 17 May 1947, and this was made official on 9 February 1948. The establishment of the KWP was an inherently developmental process and, along with the Party and people’s committees, formed the material basis of North Korea’s state-building.

### Characteristics of North Korea’s state-building process

**The influence of the anti-Japanese guerrilla faction and Kim Il Sung’s autonomy**

The anti-Japanese guerrilla faction played an important role in the North Korean state-building process and allowed Kim Il Sung to have decisive influence within the Party and military (H.S. Paek, 1994:396–398). The guerrilla faction, which was more or less Kim Il Sung’s political capital, had been relatively weaker than other forces but had an outstanding ability to be cohesive. Kim Il Sung, through the anti-Japanese campaigns and “Arduous March” had a unique identity and confidence that was distinguished even among other Korean communists. During the campaigns against the Japanese, the experience of political training he received allowed him to demonstrate a high degree of political influence among the many forces that existed in North Korea following liberation (K.U. Kim, 2003:106–110).

The guerrilla faction began appearing in Pyongyang in early September 1945 and expanded its influence. The faction was able to carry influence for several reasons. First, Kim Il Sung was already well known to Koreans due to his armed campaigns against the Japanese in the 1930s. Second, even though he was under the control of the Soviet army, he displayed a high degree of independence (Seo, 1998:269). Third, he displayed a strong sense of uniformity compared with other political forces. Fourth, he made the armed struggle against the Japanese a central

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**Table 14.3 Establishment of the KWP**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major event</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soviet Commander Order</td>
<td>1945.10.12</td>
<td>All armed groups must disband and establishment of new police force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th EEC of the Central NKCP</td>
<td>1946.3.4</td>
<td>Decision to establish police force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishment of Defense Officers Training School (DOTD)</td>
<td>1946.6</td>
<td>Cultivation of officers for national defense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishment of Defense Officers Training Division</td>
<td>1946.8.15</td>
<td>Acts as highest unit of the regular military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOTD is expanded and renamed the People’s Group Army</td>
<td>1947.5.17</td>
<td>Ch’oe Yong-gŏn is maintained as head of PGA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPA (Korean People’s Army) established</td>
<td>1948.2.8</td>
<td>KPA Central Command establishment and Chae Yong-gŏn named as Supreme Commander</td>
</tr>
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</table>
platform while placing priority on personally dominating the military. Moreover, because there was no legitimate platform as important as having the experience of fighting against the Japanese, Kim was able to emphasize his experience and expand his influence domestically while retaining a certain degree of autonomy from the Soviets.

As we examined in the process of establishing North Korea’s regular army, the emphasis on the military strength of the guerrilla faction, its strong cohesiveness, and legitimacy all played a major role in its domination of the country’s military forces. Following the establishment of the North Korean government, the guerrilla faction became the generational cradle of the North Korean power elite and became the central symbol in strengthening the justification for Kim and his successors.

**Soviet influence**

While there was some degree of academic discussion on the influence of the Soviets during North Korea’s state-building process, generally it is understood the Soviets had considerable impact on the period. Soviet policies had a major impact on important phases of the state-building process and tremendous influence of the creation of regular military forces (Wada, Seo and Nam, 2003:72–73).

First is the impact Stalin’s orders had on overall Soviet policy. After the Soviets occupied northern Korea on 20 September 1945, Stalin ordered that the Soviets should “support all of northern Korea’s anti-Japanese democratic parties and organizational blocks in order to establishing a proletariat democratic power,” and that the Soviets should “not interrupt the formation of anti-Japanese democratic organizations and parties, and instead support them.” Then on 12 October 1945, the Soviet military permitted the establishment of anti-Japanese democratic organizations and activities. Given that the NKBB of the KWP was created the very next day on 13 October means there is a high possibility that the Soviet military cleared the way for it. (K.U. Kim, 2003:152) As a result, socialist forces were able to expand significant political influence due to Stalin’s orders for support of their activities.

The orders Stalin made in July 1946 also became the procedures for creating the Party and military. Stalin appeared to have decided to just turn North Korea into a socialist country after the failure of the First US-USSR Joint Commission at the end of June 1946. In the middle of July 1947, Stalin proposed during a meeting with Kim Il Sung and Pak Hŏn-yŏng the merger of the Communist and New Democratic Parties to create a new party. This led to the merger of the two parties and a drastic increase in members and increased influence (Wada, Seo, Nam, 2002:83–84).

Moreover, during the creation of the People’s Committee, the Soviets did not get involved in the specifics of its establishment or composition, but they did manage, to some degree, the establishment of the Department of Civil Administration (DCA) and its political issues. The head of the DCA, Andrey Romanenko, took over the administration work managed by the local people’s committee and placed advisors in each province (Ryu, 2004:58).

Additionally, the Soviets played a decisive role in the establishment and train of the KPA. Following the return of the Korean volunteer army, they received Soviet-style basic training as they were integrated into the regular army. There were at least three Soviet advisors for each regiment, and training plans followed Soviet military principles. This allowed soldiers who had experience fighting against the Nationalists in China to complete 2–4 months of training before being integrated into the North Korean army (K.U. Kim, 2003:577).
Relationship between the Party and military

While the Party and military were somewhat separate organizations, the experience of building the Party was used in creating the military and this led to the KWP being created in a short period (Jang, 2012:169). The creation of education programs was required for establishing the Party, military and government. One area in which the relationship between the Party and military was prominently displayed was in how the educational system used during the creation of the Party was the same as the political education system used in the military. Another point showing how the establishment of the Party and military was similar was that the Pyongyang School Political Class was turned into the North Korean Communist Central Officers Training School, while the military class became the Central Defense Officials Training School. Moreover, a cultural department was formed and a Soviet political committee member system was adopted in order to establish a culture and political department. As a result, the Party had some degree of influence over the military.

Beginning of “nation approval diplomacy” by the Soviet Union and China

The North Korean leadership’s goal was to create a socialist country, and as such the country’s diplomacy was focused on creating a favorable international environment. As such, North Korean policymakers placed as their diplomatic policies’ major goals: 1) creation of a favorable international environment for establishment of their government and implementation of socialism; 2) establishment of a united provisional government that would prevent national division; and 3) after the creation of the government, build the basis for activities on the international stage. (Park, 1985:60)

In accordance with these goals, North Korea created a host of organizations that conducted exchanges with the various international organizations and formed the basis to enter the international stage through Party-to-Party exchanges rather than nation-to-nation diplomacy. After the government was proclaimed on 9 September 1948, it began establishing diplomatic relations with socialist countries like the Mongolian People’s Republic, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Romania.

Of course, while diplomatic relations with Eastern European countries were established and cooperation began with third-world countries, the most important relationships North Korea had were with the USSR and China. North Korea understood the USSR to be a proactive supporter of the Korean National Liberation Movement and the only ally to protect and support the country and revolution. During the country’s state-building process, Soviet authorities’ and the military’s influence was absolute.

While North Korea received proactive guidance and support from the USSR during its state-building process, it also actively moved to establish relations with China. The North Korean government supported the Chinese Communist Party during the course of the Chinese Civil War, including sending a volunteer army of some 100,000 men led by Ch’oe Kwang and other former guerrilla fighters; large numbers of artillery and ammunition; permission for Chinese soldiers to move through the Korean Peninsula to enter China’s northeastern provinces; and permission for Chinese soldiers to use the North Korean region as a rear base. As a result, the solidarity between Kim Il Sung and the Chinese Communist Party grew, and the return of soldiers who fought in the Chinese Civil War to North Korea greatly assisted the construction of the country’s regular military forces. The relationship with China was strengthened even more through the Korean War and the relationship became a major pillar of North Korean diplomacy.
Conclusion

To understand present-day North Korea it is important to first understand how the country was established. As the above shows, Kim Il Sung and North Korea’s leadership built the basis for North Korea’s system by dominating the Party, government organs, and military. We must focus on this state-making period because the framework of Kim Il Sung’s system was built during this period and was maintained, strengthened, and continually institutionalized, even after the Korean War. While the Kim Il Sung one-man leadership model was not fully institutionalized until the 1960s and 1970s, we are able to examine the KWP’s domination during the state-making period and the fluid relationship between the Party and State systems. This framework requires close examination because it has continued even today with the third-generation succession to Kim Jong Un.

This paper’s main points can be summarized into the following. First, the KWP’s origins can be found in the establishment of the KCP NKNF. On 13 October 1945, around 70 of the most famous communists in northern Korea met to form an organization that would be separate from the Central Party in Seoul. During the 2nd EEC of the NKNF on 14 November 1945, a discussion was held concerning the organization of a central government organ. Through a series of expanded plenums, the Party’s control over the central system and local parties occurred, along with a merger with the Korean New Democratic Party. The KWP was formed between 28 and 30 August 1946.

Along with the establishment of the KWP, the NKPC was established. After liberation, each people’s committee in the provinces became part of a new government organ system following the Five Provincial People’s Committees and later as the ten administrative departments were established. As the NKTPC was established between 7 and 8 February 1946, it became North Korea’s most powerful administrative unit and began nationalizing important industries and implementing land reform and democratic reforms. Following this, a people’s committee election was held and on 22 February 1947, the North Korean People’s Committee was established with Kim Il Sung as its head.

Finally, the establishment of the KWP was established, similarly to the Party and government organs. The Soviets released an order to disband all armed organizations and created a new police force. This was followed by the establishment of the Defense Officers Training Facility and training cadres began. On 15 August 1946, the Central Defense Officers Facility was established, and military power increased.

It is a fact there have been a wide variety of discussions concerning North Korea’s state-making process. It is unquestionable that the Soviets, including their aid and guidance, played a decisive role in the early stages of state-building and in the KWP’s establishment. However, it is also true that internal factors like Kim Il Sung and the partisan faction’s leadership also played an important role. Moreover, factors such as the Confucian tradition and unique social-cultural environment also made North Korea’s state-making process different than those in Eastern Europe. The special succession structure between Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, and Kim Jong Un originated from these social and cultural factors. As a result, future research on North Korea’s state-making process will have to explain how these social-cultural factors combined to impact North Korea’s state-making process.
Notes


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