

*Transnational Flow of Technology and Ideas: North Korean Apprentices and Interns in Shanghai, 1953–1967**

Zhi Liang

Abstract

Foreign intern training is a typical case study for investigating personnel exchanges among socialist bloc countries during the Cold War. Receiving and training North Korean interns was the beginning of China's foreign intern training program. Additionally, China's training of foreign interns in the Cold War is an ideal case study for Chinese scholars who adopt transnational history approaches. In accordance with transnational history research approaches, studying the North Korean interns from the perspective of "bottom-up politics" contributes to the reconstruction of the history of Sino–North Korean relations. On the basis of primary documentation from Shanghai Municipal Archive as well as documents from the Chinese Foreign Ministry Archive and Hebei Provincial Archive, this article narrates the history of North Korea's selecting of interns and China's training of them in Shanghai from 1953 to 1967. The article reconstructs the daily interaction of the North Korean interns with their Chinese hosts. It highlights some of the common features in the evolution of the relations between the

Zhi Liang is a Professor of History in the Institute for Studies of China's Neighboring Countries and Regions, History Department, East China Normal University. Correspondence should be sent to zliang@history.ecnu.edu.cn.

* The research and writing of this article have been supported by the Special Entrusted Project of National Social Sciences Fund (Document Collection and Historical Studies on China's Neighbors' Policies Toward China, project # 15@ZH009).

Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Korean Workers' Party (KWP), and between the People's Republic of China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. From a longer and broader historical perspective, the article concludes that intern training programs usually became the victim of deteriorating bilateral relations. Thus, technical training served as an accurate barometer of the CCP-KWP relationship. It failed to be the driving force for promoting Sino-North Korean state-to-state relations.

When the People's Republic of China (PRC) was founded in 1949, it was poor and underdeveloped. China soon began to receive substantial material and technical assistance from the Soviet Union and East European communist countries. Meanwhile, in late July 1949, the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin explicitly requested the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to lead Asian revolution. In fact, China was also the center of economic reconstruction for other Asian socialist countries. Nevertheless, since the early 1950s, for the purpose of "enhancing the unity and prosperity of the socialist bloc ... developing friendly relations with Nationalist countries ... [and] fighting against invasion and expansion of the imperialist bloc headed by the United States," China proceeded on the road of providing economic and technical assistance to foreign countries, particularly the socialist countries in Asia.¹

Training apprentices and interns from the socialist-bloc countries was an important part of China's foreign aid. A *de facto* alliance existed between China and North Korea before 1961 due to ideological uniformity and geopolitics. It was for this reason that in 1950 China received the first batch of North Korean apprentices and interns, which inaugurated the project.² To a certain extent, China's experience and lessons in receiving foreign apprentices and interns were based on its training of North Korean interns. On the premise of these experiences and lessons, in the late 1950s, China's organizational mechanism and operation principles in receiving foreign apprentices and interns gradually improved. In the 1950s and 1960s, the majority of foreign apprentices and interns were from North Korea and Vietnam. Shanghai, the primary training base for foreign apprentices in China, received a large number of North Korean interns.³

Indeed, foreign interns in China during the Cold War are a group which have only recently attracted the attention of historians.⁴ In the last