

Between Isolation and Reconciliation: The “North Korean Puppet” as a Controversy in South Korean Politics, 1966*

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The present study examines how the concurrence of multipolarity and North Korean regime consolidation in the mid-1960s pressured South Korean political elites to reconsider the isolation of the “North Korean puppet” (*Pukhan koeroe*) inherent to unification policy at the time. The Sino-Soviet split, American policy alterations toward China and its impending UN entry in the context of the Vietnam War, and Soviet-American peaceful coexistence ensured the rise of a “Two Korea” view internationally. Meanwhile, North Korea gained the support of nonaligned countries and the Soviet Union, positioned itself to benefit from the boon of China’s rise, and established the monolithic ideological system. These circumstances not only invalidated Seoul’s claim to sole legitimacy (“One Korea”), but fundamentally challenged the inherent premise of isolating the “North Korean puppet” to the point of collapse. In 1966, the pressing need to factor these circumstances into unification policy deliberation produced a head-on partisan collision regarding the feasibility of isolationism, if not the nature of the North Korean communist threat itself. Whereas the ruling Democratic Republication Party’s (DRP) policy of “construction first, unification later” represented a variant of isolationism, the Masses Party’s (MP) criticism of the policy did not clarify the conditions for reconciliation. From the mid-1960s, the notion of North Korea as a passing phenomenon went into irreversible decline, compelling a reformulation of unification policy with respect to anti-communist orthodoxy.

Keywords: multipolarity, unification, Park Chung Hee, Kim Il Sung, isolation, North Korean collapse

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