

Introduction

The United Nations (UN) has been involved in the Korean question for over half a century since 1947. During its early period, it had played various roles in efforts of state-making, reconstruction, and unification of Korea, thereby helping lay down a firm foundation for subsequent national development. South Korea has achieved an unprecedented economic development out of the ruins of the Korean War. But more than anything else, the South Korean government and people have had a special affinity for the United Nations, which is rarely found with any other member states. They have held a strong belief in the world organization as the spokesman of world opinion and the administrator of the will of the international community. This was well reflected in their designation of the UN Day of October 24 as an official national holiday and by regarding UN diplomacy as the most important instrument of South Korea's foreign policy. South Korea has invariably identified itself with the UN.

The United Nations was instrumental in establishing the Republic of Korean government in August 1948 and provided the military shield against North Korea's attack on South Korea in June 1950. The Korean question had been placed on the agenda of the United Nations and debated as an annual event for thirty years until 1976 when the South and the North decided not to bring up the matter to avoid unnecessary confrontation in the world organization. Thereafter the United Nations had intermittently dealt with the problems of peace and stability on the Korean peninsula and with Korea's UN membership until 1991 when the two Koreas were finally admitted into the world body. In recent years the organization has also discussed North Korea's nuclear weapons development program, food shortage crises, and human rights abuses. Thus, the Korean question still remains as an unresolved issue of international concern in the post-Cold War era.

The Korean problem has been one of the most difficult and complex issues in the United Nations. It was the first major case that tested the capacity of the UN to enforce international peace during the Korean War, which brought about a transformation of the originally conceived collective security system. It had caused much controversies over the interpretation and application of the UN Charter, which led to some significant institutional and functional changes in the United Nations. For this reason, an analysis of these developments is necessary for understanding the implications of the Korean problem.

A study on the Korean question in the United Nations is important for two reasons. First, the Korean problem still remains as the major source of tensions in the East Asian region, which has become the center of world attention. Second, it has been managed and controlled within the framework of the United Nations. The Korean problem has shown the potential and limits of the UN's role in dealing with international crises,

which helps comprehend the dynamics of UN politics and diplomacy. The lessons of the Korean case also can be instructive for efforts to search a new direction of the United Nations in the twenty-first century.

The Korean question is essentially about South-North Korea's conflict in the United Nations. Therefore, a discussion of the Korean question needs to focus on the diplomatic rivalry of the two Koreas over political legitimacy and international representation in international organizations. The book examines the origins, nature, issues, development, and effects of the Korean problem in the context of UN politics and inter-Korean relations, covering the period of over fifty years from 1947. It discusses the meaning of the Korean problem in the context of the Cold War, and the pattern of the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union/China over the Korean problem. Special attention is given to the U.S. management of the Korean problem and the challenges of the communist powers in the United Nations, along with the influence of Third World states. As the Korean War marked a turning point in the development of the UN, the legal issues relating to the Korean War, and the UN action, the Korean Armistice Agreement, and the United Nations Command (UNC) are analyzed in detail.

An attempt is also made to examine the question of Korea's UN membership, which had escalated the confrontation between the South and the North for more than four decades because it involved the issues of political legitimacy, international representation, and unification. Furthermore, the book covers an analysis of UN resolutions on the Korean question, the role of the UN Secretary-General, and North Korea's nuclear and refugee problems. The two Koreas' participation in the UN activities is reviewed to assess their role in the new world order of peace, prosperity and humanity. Finally, two important points are noted in evaluating the implications of the Korean question. That is, the debate on the Korean question in the United Nations has exerted a restraining influence on the inter-Korean relations, although it had escalated tensions between South and North Korea; and it resulted in strengthening the UN system as the instrument of international peace. In this connection, the possibilities of the UN intervention in North Korea's problems are discussed.

A clarification is necessary about the use of the terms, the "Korean question", the "Korean problem" and the "Korean issue". The term "the Korean question" is used to refer to an agenda item in the United Nations, whereas the Korean problem means the general problems of peace and unification as the central issue of South and North Korea's conflict. The "Korean issue" denotes the contentious aspects of the Korean problem. But for the purpose of this book, I have used these terms interchangeably, although I have selectively used one term rather than the other, depending on the context of analysis and discussion in this book.