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China's Memory and Commemoration of the Korean War in the Memorial Hall of the "War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea"

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Abstract

After confronting each other as enemies during the Korean War, South Korea and China established diplomatic relations in 1992, forty years after fighting had ended. Around this time, the Chinese city of Dandong near the northern border of the Korean peninsula erected a memorial to observe the fortieth anniversary of the Korean War. In the twenty years since, China has become South Korea's primary economic partner and its largest market for exports. In effect, the memory of wartime hostility has coexisted with the reality of economic cooperation. This article examines how the Korean War, known in China as the "War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea," is commemorated by the war memorials in China, with a specific focus on the memorial in Dandong. It also discusses how North and South Korea have responded to the contrasting perspectives on the war embodied by these memorials, and it concludes with some reflections about how the memory of war can be restructured to convey a message of peace for the future.

Keywords: China, Korean War, Memorial Hall of the War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea, Dandong, global spectatorship, war memorialization

Introduction

The Korean War, known in China as the "War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea" (hereafter WRUAK), was a historic event that shaped the Cold War and geopolitical divisions in East Asia. The war consolidated the divisions across the two Koreas, China, and Taiwan, leading to a full-fledged Cold War in East Asia between the two hostile blocs. Owing to the seriousness of the remaining scars of the war, it

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was only twenty years after the armistice that the United States and China, the central pillars of the war, began to talk, initiating the first stage of the post–Cold War era. In 1992, forty years after the war, another pair of enemy nations, South Korea and China, normalized diplomatic relations in the second stage of the post–Cold War era. However, even now, after the sixtieth anniversary of the armistice, the last remaining hostile relations—between North Korea and the United States and between the two Koreas—remain unchanged.

The complex memory of the Korean War, consisting of two components—hostility and alliance—has been constructed mostly to defend and justify the stance of each state that participated in the war. In the subsequent development of the Cold War in East Asia, these war memories were used as an important ideological and cultural resource. War memorials are physical locations where war memory is expressed and reproduced in the most intense way. Once built, they become “hard” and “slow” mediums, devices by which to homogenize people’s war memories and adjust their sense of “hostility” or “friendship” with other states. As spaces of materialized memory regarding the Korean War, Korean War memorials are located not only in South and North Korea, but also in China. In 1958, when the Chinese People’s Volunteer Army (CPVA) returned to China, a war memorial was built in the border town of Andong (present-day Dandong) in the name of “resisting U.S. aggression and aiding Korea.”

However, the full-fledged cultural politics concerning Korean War memory started in July 1993, on the fortieth anniversary of the Korean War armistice, when the Memorial Hall of the War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea in Dandong reopened after a major renovation. That same year, in Pyongyang, North Korea, the Monument to the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War was built adjacent to the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum (see S. Kim in this volume). One year after that, in June 1994, the War Memorial of Korea in Seoul opened (see D. Kim in this volume), and in July 1995, the Korean War Veterans Memorial was built in Washington, DC. War memorials with different perspectives emerged one after another in all the core party states to the Korean War, as if the memory of the war had shifted

to a war of memory, and a new politics of memory had ensued. This structural frame of war memory and commemoration has persisted without significant change, coexisting with the evolving political realities in East Asia. Hence, understanding the politics of memory surrounding the Korean War as reproduced through war memorials not only provides a basis for understanding cultural politics in contemporary East Asia, but also is important to the project of establishing peace in the region.

This article examines how the memory of “resisting U.S. aggression and aiding Korea” (hereafter RUAK) in China, as one of the axes in the East Asian Cold War, was formed and reconstructed in the early 1990s, and what challenges this memory faces as a result of ongoing social and political changes in East Asia. Its focus is the Memorial Hall of the War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea (hereafter MRUAK) in Dandong. I am particularly interested in why China established a memorial reconstructing the RUAK memory right after the normalization of relations with South Korea, and what kind of responses the Chinese RUAK exhibitions have drawn from North Korea, as China’s onetime ally, and from South Korea, as China’s onetime antagonist but now cooperative partner. While recent years have seen many advances in studies on war memory in East Asia (e.g., Jager and Mitter 2007), studies on China’s war memory have been relatively slow due to the politically sensitive nature of the topic (Shen 2003). Studies on the war memorials in China have been carried out by South Korean scholars (Park 2009; Kim 2009), but they deal with patriotism in the Museum of the War of Chinese People’s Resistance against Japanese Aggression¹ and do not cover MRUAK.

China’s memory of RUAK is also reproduced in nonspatial representations, such as photography, documentary, film, and literature, as well as at sites such as cemeteries, monuments, memorials, and other war ruins. The important sites of memory regarding China’s RUAK and proof of bilateral friendship include the MRUAK in the border city of Dandong, the Cemetery of Martyrs of the War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea and its memorial in Shenyang (the provincial capital of Liaoning Province), and the Hall of the War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea (hereafter HWRUAK)

inside the Beijing Military Museum of the Chinese People's Revolution. Among those, the MRUAK in Dandong is the one that best represents China's perspective on the Korean War internationally and that lies at the center of all the spaces of remembrance of RUAK in China domestically.

China's Memory and Memorial to "Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea"

The Spatialization of RUAK Memory during the Cold War

The full-scale memory politics of RUAK in China started in February 1958, when the CPVA decided to withdraw troops from North Korea. On this occasion, China and North Korea agreed to build the Sino-Korean Friendship Tower in Pyongyang. Like the Soviet troop withdrawal from China,² the Chinese withdrawal from North Korea appears to have occasioned the building of a monument to represent the friendship between the two nations. The Sino-Korean Friendship Tower was built in 1959 at Moranbong.³

In addition to the Friendship Tower in Pyongyang, the MRUAK opened in Andong, China. The history on the MRUAK (Shi, Song, and Tang 2000) states that it originated in the Liaodong Province Museum of Annals of Local History built in August 1953. In 1954, when Liaodong Province was combined with Liaoxi Province to form Liaoning Province, the museum changed its name to the Andong City Exhibition Hall of History and Philology. In July 1957, the exhibition hall had twelve rooms, one of which was the Memorial Gallery to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea. In 1958, when the CPVA journeyed through Dandong to return to China, they left there most of the equipment they had carried, which later became part of the museum's collection. On September 29, 1958, the museum was renamed the Andong Memorial Hall of the War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea, and it officially reopened the next year. For the first time, the timeline of the war was arranged into phases, creating the Chinese prototype for Korean War historiography, and the movement to RUAK was also situated in the context of local history. In 1960, the Tower of RUAK was added to the site. In 1963, the Andong MRUAK modified its exhibition to conform with the display at the

Military Museum of the Chinese People's Revolution in Beijing. The new exhibition displayed the war in chronological order and extended the treatment of the movement to RUAK beyond local history to the nationwide movement. By attributing the start of the Korean War to the American invasion of Korea, it underscored the hostile relationship between the United States and China at the time. In 1965, when Andong became Dandong, the memorial was renamed accordingly.

However, after the Cultural Revolution erupted in 1966 and the chief commanders of the war, including Peng Dehuai, came under criticism, the exhibition on RUAK was hard to maintain and, in the end, the MRUAK closed. In 1969, the MRUAK, city libraries, and other institutions were turned into cultural centers for workers, peasants, and soldiers and used to raise class consciousness. In 1972, the Dandong City Commission decided to restore the MRUAK and took stock of the artifacts, but it could not reopen. In 1979, after China normalized relations with the United States and declared economic reforms, the city of Dandong again arranged the RUAK-related items; this still did not, however, lead to a public exhibition. The main reason for this failure was the difficulty in deciding on the contents concerning Peng Dehuai,⁴ as well as uncertainties regarding the location of MRUAK.

It was not until 1983, the thirtieth anniversary of the Korean War armistice, that the MRUAK began to be reconstructed. In August of that year, Hong Xuezhong, the former vice commander of the CPVA, and his delegation of the Chinese People's Friendship Association visited North Korea. Upon their return, they stopped in Dandong and discussed the reconstruction of the MRUAK. The Dandong city government proposed the reconstruction to the Liaoning provincial government, a discussion that concluded with an agreement that the memorial should be based on patriotism, internationalism, and revolutionary heroism, with a pedagogical orientation. In March 1984, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the State Council agreed to renovate the memorial based on these principles of patriotism and internationalism to further educate people on Sino-North Korean friendship. Dandong City and Liaoning Province planned accordingly to designate the former CPVA command post as the site of the new

memorial and to add a Sino–North Korean Friendship Tower on the same scale as the one in Pyongyang.

Discussion of designs for the memorial began in 1984, and the overall design plans for the memorial, monument tower, and panoramic mural were discussed in 1985. In 1990, there was a memorial design contest; six plans were submitted, and that of Deng Linhan, professor at the Harbin Institute of Architecture and Engineering, was selected by the military leaders and members of the Central Military Commission. They required the architecture to balance modern style with Chinese traditional culture. The project was important enough to require review by the head of state and the vice president of the Central Military Commission in the final stage. The contents of the exhibition were ultimately decided in light of the geographic significance of the memorial: the site—commanding a good view of the Yalu River and the border city of Sinŭiju in North Korea, as well as downtown Dandong—was where the general headquarters of the Thirteenth Army Corps was once located. On October 24, 1990, a delegation from the central government visited Dandong and participated in a groundbreaking event, where Hong Xuezhai delivered a congratulatory address.

After a two-year construction period, on July 25, 1993, the opening ceremony for the MRUAK was finally held. The city name of Dandong was removed from the memorial’s full name to emphasize its status as the only single-themed memorial on the Korean War in all of China. Although the memorial’s opening ceremony was originally scheduled for Korean War Armistice Day, in commemoration of the fortieth anniversary of “victory” in the war, the actual opening date was advanced by two days to allow the Chinese to attend the commemoration held in North Korea. Hu Jintao, the first secretary of the Central Secretariat of the CCP, participated in the opening ceremony in Dandong, after which he led the CCP delegation to take part in the North Korean “Victory Day” celebrations in Pyongyang on July 27.

The MRUAK is comprised of a monument tower, exhibition hall, and panoramic mural gallery. The memorial site is 180,000 square meters with a floor area of 13,790 square meters. The monument tower stands 53 meters high in symbolic commemoration

of the armistice's signing in 1953. The base was designed to be 10.25 meters in diameter to commemorate October 25 as the date of Chinese entry into the war, with 1,014 stones to represent the number of days in battle. The base consists of five levels to stand for the five important battles during the war, and the bottom of the tower bears the inscription "Great Spirit of RUAK" in both Chinese and Korean. The arches at the top of the tower symbolize the CPVA's triumphal return. The front of the tower features calligraphy expressing peace, victory, and friendship, while that on the back expresses appreciation for the CPVA's contribution. The two sides of the tower bear inscriptions commemorating RUAK and peace. When the memorial opened, there was a debate regarding the wording of the messages inscribed on this tower, specifically regarding the depiction of the U.S. Seventh Fleet's blockade of the Taiwan Strait, which occurred soon after the Korean War broke out in June 1950. The debate centered on whether the U.S. action should be described as an "invasion" or an "entry" into Chinese territorial waters. This was a major concern for Jiang Zemin, the top Chinese leader at the time, who approached the matter in terms of principle, warning that if not corrected immediately, the expression could lead to diplomatic problems. In the end, the Chinese leadership went with "invasion," maintaining the conventional Chinese narrative that the Korean War resulted from an American invasion.

To sum up, the memorialization project spatializing RUAK memory in China began as a form of local history between 1958 and 1966, shut down during the Cultural Revolution, and eventually expanded into a national memorial with the decision to renovate in 1984. There are several interesting points to be observed from this history. First, even though the MRUAK should have had significant meaning during the Cold War, it did not sufficiently function as a device of political propaganda due to the downfall of Peng Dehuai, the chief commander of the war, during the Cultural Revolution. Second, although the memorial opened in the post-Cold War era, the decisions about the actual construction and exhibition were made during a transitory period after China had established diplomatic ties with the United States but before normalization with South Korea. The memorial therefore replicates the same stance as

China held during the war, criticizing the American invasion as an imperialist act. This shows that the construction of the MRUAK was most significant within the context of state formation and nation building in China, rather than in the context of international politics.

Changes in the Exhibitions at the MRUAK

War memorials are situated in the field of cultural politics, relatively autonomous from realpolitik. War memorials perform a pedagogical function: the various and fragmented experiences of war participants are standardized, constructed, and materialized as a hegemonic war memory, presenting a specific frame to an audience that includes those who have no war experiences on which to base their understanding. At the memorial, multilayered and complicated readings take place, with audience members navigating the discrepancies between the “truth” of the war and the represented experiences of war memories.

To be more specific, the exhibition at the MRUAK is interesting in that it shows us not only China’s perspective on the Korean War but also its views on modern Chinese history. The exhibition spaces at the MRUAK include the space inside the monument tower and that of the exhibition hall. General visitors can easily miss the exhibition inside the monument tower, which is located outside the main route. However, it is in that small space that the unequal treaties China signed after the Opium Wars are listed: the Treaty of Nanking (1842), the Treaty of Aigun (1858), the Convention of Peking (1860), the Treaty of Maguan (1895), the Treaty of Xinchou (1901), the Treaty of Versailles (1919), and the Shanghai Armistice Agreement (1931). All seven treaties are unequal treaties that China regards as disgraceful. According to the exhibition, it was the Korean War Armistice Agreement, signed in 1953, that finally put an end to China’s history of unequal treaties; hence, the signing of this agreement is highlighted as a historic event that enabled China to overcome its disgraceful past.

The exhibition hall at the center of the memorial consists of the entrance gallery, which displays China’s perspective on RUAK, the WRUAK Gallery, the Movement to

RUAK Gallery, the Sino-Korean Friendship Gallery, the War Hero Gallery, and a gallery devoted to the air force. The theme of each gallery shows that RUAK was an ideology of mass mobilization to solve the domestic social problems in China after the Chinese civil war, even while mobilizing for war in Korea. It also shows that RUAK is a symbolic resource used to manage international relations by emphasizing China's "blood alliance" with North Korea. At the front of the memorial entrance stands a bronze statue of Mao Zedong and Peng Dehuai shaking hands; behind it, a relief sculpture portrays CPVA soldiers. The upper half of the sculpture is inscribed in Mao's own calligraphy with the characters for "Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea to Protect Our Homes and Defend the Country," and the Order of the Formation of the Chinese People's Volunteers and the Joint Declaration of Democratic Parties are hung on the wall. If the former inscription represents the WRUAK, the latter one signals the start of the RUAK movement.

The display in the WRUAK Gallery shows how China explains the development of the Korean War. According to *The Great Movement to RUAK*, published by the People's Congress of RUAK in 1954 (Huang 2014, 243), the outbreak of the war on June 25, 1950, was due to South Korea's full-scale attack north across the 38th parallel under American orders. Later in 1958, when the CPVA withdrew completely from North Korea, the Chinese government described the outbreak of the Korean War as the result of an American imperialist invasion into Korea and subsequent resistance by the North Korean military and civilians. Chinese entry in the war was explained as a reaction to the U.S. Army's closing in on the Yalu River as a threat to China's peace building. This narrative framing of the war essentially remained intact in the new 1993 memorial.

The exhibition starts with an explanation of China's decision to resist U.S. aggression and aid Korea. The explanation provides three reasons for China's inevitable entry in the war despite the various domestic and international problems it faced in the aftermath of declaring the new People's Republic of China in October 1949, including overcoming the ruins of war and recovering its national economy. The most important reasons for Chinese entry in the war include the UN and U.S. forces crossing the 38th

parallel into North Korea, marching toward the border of China, bombing the Dandong area, and seriously threatening Chinese security. The U.S. military's "invasion" of the Taiwan Strait, and its armed intervention in China's domestic unification war, constitute additional reasons for Chinese entry into the war. Finally, North Korea requested Chinese military assistance. The foregoing explanation indirectly lessens China's responsibility for its cooperation with North Korea regarding the outbreak of the war by highlighting the June 1950 CCP decision to focus on Chinese economic recovery. As evidence of China's decision to enter the war in response to North Korea's request for assistance, the memorial displays the relevant North Korean letter, signed by Kim Il Sung and Pak Hŏn-yŏng on October 1, 1950.

The exhibit also divides the war into three phases: maneuver warfare; positional warfare (armistice negotiations, attrition warfare, psychological warfare, and the capture of prisoners of war); and armistice negotiations and armistice agreement (as victory). Maneuver warfare (also referred to as mobile warfare) was conducted in five campaigns from October 1950 to June 1951. The exhibition provides specific descriptions of each campaign in terms of duration of operation, location, military unit involved, and results. This kind of war history is different from that of the United States or South Korea, and also different from that of North Korea, as will be shown in the remainder of this article. What is worth noting here is that the exhibition displays detailed evidence of American germ warfare and antiwar demands made by American prisoners of war. There is an especially large amount of material presented on germ warfare waged primarily in North Korea but, the exhibit claims, also in Manchuria. These displays on germ warfare have existed since the 1950s.

The Movement to RUAK Gallery shows mass mobilization during the war in the name of RUAK. China's perception of the United States shifted from "worship" during World War II and the formation of the Allied forces, into "fear" during the Chinese civil war era, and then into "resistance" during the Korean War. As this transition occurred in a very short period of time, Chinese authorities had great difficulty persuading the public. In order to enlist young people into the army and send them to

the battlefield, the campaign intensified public education and increased awareness. RUAK was used as an ideological resource for state formation and nation building. At the time, the Chinese government tried to overcome the aftereffects of the Chinese civil war, and to strengthen state power through the so-called Three-No-Movement: no corruption, no waste, and no bureaucratism (He 2013).

The Sino-Korean Friendship Gallery displays not only friendship between Chinese and North Korean soldiers, but also friendship between Chinese soldiers and North Korean residents, expressed through souvenir pendants, photos, and paintings. The archetype of Sino-Korean friendship is the image of a Chinese soldier and a North Korean elderly woman embracing as if mother and son. In this image, international, generational, and gender relations are combined to underscore the unilateral, rather than mutual, position of the Chinese vis-à-vis North Korea.

Lastly, the Gallery of the Heroes of the CPVA includes two top-class war heroes, appointed by North Korea and China, displayed alongside the list and busts of first-class war heroes and first-class models. The main protagonist here is Mao Anying, Mao Zedong's son, whose bust is displayed at the center of all the other heroes. Also noteworthy is the Hall for the Air Force of the CPVA. China experienced significant challenges entering the war due to its lack of air power, and it had to rely on the support of the Soviet air force. Because China's participation in the war promoted the development of its air force, the WRUAK became the starting point in Chinese air force history. The exhibition concludes with the following statement on the war's significance:

The WRUAK was a victory. The indiscreet intervention in Korea's domestic matters by the United States and its attempt to annex the entirety of Korea was crushed. The war thereby supported the Democratic People's Republic of Korea [North Korea] in upholding its independence. Moreover, the war protected the security of new China, and ensured new China's economic recovery and the smooth progress of its construction. It defended peace in Asia and the world, exposing the facade of American imperialism as "a paper tiger." The war enhanced the Chinese people's pride and encouraged the will and determination to advocate for world peace of the world peoples and to oppose invasion. The war showed off China's national and military prestige, enhancing the international status of new

China and achieving the modernization of the Chinese army. During the RUAK period, patriotism and internationalism were part of the education implemented in China with the participation of the youth. All the people joined the movement to increase production and practice frugality to contribute to the war effort, supporting not only the war but also the recovery and development of the national economy and social reforms.

The panoramic mural gallery displays the Ch'ŏngch'ŏn River battle scene and is equipped with audio devices. This kind of 360- or 180-degree panoramic painting is one of the important features characteristic of war exhibitions in socialist countries.

In 1998, a new tribute—"To the most lovable person"—was added at the entrance to the memorial. Who is this "most lovable person," and where did this expression originate? In October 1950, after the CPVA's entry into the war, many war writers, including Wei Wei, went to North Korea. Wei Wei visited North Korea in December 1950 at the order of the General Political Department of the Chinese People's Liberation Army. On April 11, 1951, he published a contributing article in the *People's Daily* titled "Who is the Most Lovable Person?" (Liu 2003, 48–52) Upon reading the article, Mao ordered it to be distributed to the entire army. In this way, "the most lovable person" became the ultimate title to describe the heroism of the CPVA.

The biggest change since the 1993 reopening of the MRUAK was its renovation in 2004. The Liaoning provincial government had adopted the policy of designating and promoting the MRUAK as an important cultural facility, so the exhibitions and surrounding grounds were renovated accordingly. The makeover was grounded in the basic principles and contents set out by the Military Commission in 1993, in addition to relying on the newly published *Chinese People's Volunteers in the Korean War History* (Junshi kexueyuan junshi lishi yanjiubu 1990) and review by experts from the Academy of Military Science. Opinions from those who participated in RUAK were also reflected. The most important update to the memorial's content was the acknowledgment of the Soviet air force's participation in the war and the related display of historical materials. Since the MRUAK also

performs the function of investigating and collecting statistics on Chinese casualties during the war, in July 2003, on the fiftieth anniversary of RUAK, the MRUAK published a directory of RUAK martyrs based on a new round of investigations conducted in 2000. As a result, in 2006, the death toll was raised from 171,669 to 183,108.

Expansion in the Commemoration of RUAK

The expanded reopening of the MRUAK in 1993 also affected the Cemetery of Martyrs of the War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea in Shenyang. The Memorial of Martyrs attached to the cemetery bears an inscription on its outer wall that reads, “War to RUAK Victory Memorial Picture Book.” A relief sculpture installed at the entrance portrays CPVA soldiers saluting, as well as phrases extolling the “spirit of patriotism, internationalism, [and] revolutionary heroism” written by Jiang Zemin in July 1993. The newly organized war narrative found at the MRUAK is repeated in summary form at the Memorial of Martyrs in Shenyang.

By 2000, Chinese memory represented at the MRUAK had spread to Beijing, the capital, where another MRUAK was established within the Military Museum of the Chinese People’s Revolution. The Military Museum was originally built in 1958, and on March 12, 1959, it was officially named the Military Museum of the Chinese People’s Revolution by approval of the Central Military Commission of the CCP. A detailed description of the museum’s Korean War exhibit hall was included in its publication *About the Military Museum of the Chinese People’s Revolution* (Zhongguo renmin geming junshi bowuguan 2008, 291–349). Preparation for the hall had started in 1995, and its construction was finished in October 1999, with limited viewing for officials only. In October 2000, on the fiftieth anniversary of Chinese entry in the war, the exhibition was officially opened to the general public. The exhibit in the Beijing Military Museum shares the basic exhibition concepts of the MRUAK in Dandong, but the exhibition in Beijing includes an iconic picture titled “CPVA Crosses the Yalu River,”⁵ with detailed explanations on the making

of the “Military Anthem of the CPVA.”

The establishment of the MRUAK inside the Military Museum in Beijing means that the memory of RUAK did not remain in the local city but moved to the capital city, and that the focus of the exhibit could shift from “aid Korea” to “resist U.S. aggression,” making it an important event in the context of U.S.-China relations. This could become a political burden to both the Chinese and American governments, particularly since the exhibit includes evidence of germ warfare, pointing to possible war crimes committed by the American military.

If the memorialization of RUAK spread from Dandong, a localized border city, to Beijing, the capital city, in 2000, what about Shanghai, another major city? After collecting materials for three years, the China Democratic National Construction Association—a business people’s organization with ties to the small-scale Democratic Party—opened the Shanghai MRUAK on October 25, 2013. This memorial aimed to commemorate mainly those volunteers who had originated from Shanghai: some 180,000 people who joined the CPVA and the 1,800 who died. The opening ceremony was attended by some 500 people (*United News*, October 31, 2013). As seen in the cases of Beijing and Shanghai, it is unlikely that the memorialization of RUAK will experience a downturn in China today; rather, the construction of memorials commemorating RUAK is likely to grow in the context of China’s economic growth and need for local identity.

Responses and Challenges to the MRUAK

Tension and Conflict with North Korea

The opening of the Dandong MRUAK in 1993 calls for an examination of its significance, not only in China’s domestic politics, but also in international relations, particularly in the context of redefining China’s new relationship with South Korea, as well as with North Korea, China’s traditional ally.

Official relations between North Korea and China began on October 6, 1949, when formal diplomatic relations were established. North Korea was, in fact, one of

the first states to establish diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China upon its founding. China provided active assistance to North Korea, not only by entering the war, but also by aiding in the postwar reconstruction for economic recovery. In November 1953, China and North Korea signed an agreement of economic and cultural cooperation. In 1959, the Sino-Korean Friendship Tower was built in Pyongyang. On July 11, 1961, the two states signed the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance. However, North Korea and China already had strained their relationship over military command during the war period, and by the early 1960s, when Juche ideology was established in North Korea, differences began to emerge over their perspectives on the Korean War.

The politics of memory in North Korea regarding the Korean War began with the construction of the Fatherland Liberation War Museum, which opened in August 1953, right after the armistice. An important turning point in the war over memory began in April 1974, when the expanded museum was relocated and renamed the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum (see S. Kim in this volume). From that point on, North Korea began to promote the war as a "victory" and reduced references to the participation and assistance of the CPVA, as reflected in the history of the war published in 1981 (Sahoe kwahagwŏn yŏksa yŏnguso 1981).

The establishment of diplomatic ties between South Korea and China in 1992 was a blow to North Korea. In reaction, North Korea removed from textbooks the parts on China's entry into the war, revising the narrative to state that North Korea's united strength made it possible to repel American imperialism during the Korean War (*Hankyoreh*, October 25, 2006). Under the present circumstances, it is rather difficult to know precisely how North Korea interpreted the opening of the MRUAK in 1993 because this period, following the dissolution of the Soviet bloc, was internationally delicate. However, what is certain is that China commemorated the armistice a few days earlier in July 1993 in order to appease North Korea by attending North Korean commemorations on July 27.

Although North Korea did not specifically mention the 1993 MRUAK, the

concept of “resisting U.S. aggression and aiding Korea” would not be pleasing from its perspective. While “resisting U.S. aggression” is a value shared by China and North Korea, “aiding Korea” is one-sided. From this time on, whenever relations soured between North Korea and China, North Korea expressed its discontent by stressing that North Korea supported the CCP before the founding of the PRC and highlighting its support during the early stages of the Chinese civil war, when the CCP was embattled by the Kuomintang. From North Korea’s position, the “aid” that China reciprocated was the obvious response to North Korea’s earlier assistance to China. North Korean assistance to China included not only the joint struggle against Japanese imperialism before 1945, but also the safe passage provided through North Korean territory to tens of thousands of embattled Chinese soldiers from 1946 to 1947, when the CCP was in a precarious situation in northern China (Manchuria). North Korean support of the CCP during the Chinese civil war was first publicized in the *Works of Kim Il Sung* beginning in 1992 (Yi 2000, 72).

As shown above, the 1993 expansion of the MRUAK caused tensions with North Korea due to the difference in perspective on the Korean War. But, more specifically, what are the fissures in the memory of the Korean War between China and North Korea? The North Korean perspective exhibited in the war museum in Pyongyang is quite different from that of the MRUAK, in that the former defines the outbreak of the war as North Korea’s counterattack against the South Korean invasion of North Korea, claiming that it was the Korean People’s Army that led the war and minimizing China’s entry and support in the war. Because of the one-sidedness in the concept of RUAK, latent challenges and criticisms always exist; when North Korea–China relations improve, the difference is latent and not exposed, but when relations worsen, difference turns into conflict.

The year 2009 was declared the “Year of North Korean–Chinese Friendship.” As if to affirm this, North Korea published a book titled *DPRK-China Friendship Develops Generation after Generation: Album Celebrating the 60th Anniversary of Establishment of DPRK-China Diplomatic Relations* (Foreign Languages Publishing

House 2009), which starts with photos of Kim Il Sung, Mao Zedong, Kim Jong Il, and Hu Jintao, and highlights “the invincible friendship forged in the anti-imperialist united front.” The book highlights the activities of Koreans during the Chinese liberation war, and also includes photos of Chinese support to North Korea under the banner of RUAK. The publication underscores not only North Korean–Chinese friendship but also, and perhaps more importantly, the mutuality of the two states’ support for each other.

North Korea–China friendship reached a climax in 2010. When the sinking of the South Korean warship *Ch’önan* on March 26 caused the Lee Myung-bak government to sever all economic cooperation with North Korea in the “May 24 Measure,” North Korean–Chinese economic cooperation was strengthened, and North Korea extensively promoted the top-class war hero Huang Jiguang as a symbol of the blood alliance between North Korea and China. On October 25, 2010, North Korea also held a mass rally of some thirty thousand people at the Pyongyang Indoor Stadium, commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the CPVA entry into the Korean War. North Korea–China relations deteriorated again, however, after Kim Jong Il’s death in December 2011 and the third nuclear test conducted in February 2013.

Responses from the Media and Citizens in South Korea

In July 1993, when the expanded MRUAK reopened, what was the response of South Korea, which had just established diplomatic ties with China the year before? The South Korean news agency Yonhap was the first to report that, during the opening ceremony of the memorial, Hu Jintao claimed that the WRUAK was “a rightful war against invasion” (*Yonhap News*, July 26, 1993). A detailed analysis followed, with background information regarding the participation of the high-level Chinese delegation in the North Korean event on the “fortieth anniversary commemoration of the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War” (*Yonhap News*, July 27, 1993).

The above news analysis suggested that, at the time of diplomatic talks to normalize relations between South Korea and China, discussions took place on how to settle the hostilities from the Korean War between the two states, with China informally agreeing to revise its textbooks.⁶ This was one indication that the newly established South Korea–China relation could bring fundamental changes to both the existing China–North Korea relation and the South Korea–Taiwan relation, as these plural bilateral relations are interlocked. The South Korean embassy in China objected to the MRUAK’s opening ceremony on July 25 and China’s participation in the fortieth anniversary of North Korea’s “Victorious Fatherland Liberation War” (*Dong-A Ilbo*, July 29, 1993; *Kyunghyang Sinmun*, July 29, 1993). The objection was, however, a formality.

If reactions to the MRUAK mainly came from the media and government figures in the early 1990s, after 2000 responses began to emerge from South Korean citizens who visited Dandong as tourists and happened to visit the memorial site. Critical South Korean reflections posted on the Internet point to the displayed letter from Kim Il Sung and Pak Hŏn-yŏng and the captured flag from the South Korean White Tiger Regiment. If the former elicits anti-Communist and nationalist responses, holding the North responsible for the war, the latter provokes national shame as the primary artifact associated with the honor of the South Korean military. In this regard, in July 2008, on the fifty-fifth anniversary of the Korean War armistice, one South Korean news outlet stated:

The flag of the White Tiger Regiment of the Republic of Korea Army Capital Division, captured by the CPVA, is still among the main exhibition articles [at the MRUAK]. On July 13, 1953, a unit leader of a reconnaissance party of the CPVA 203rd Division, 68th Corps, Yang Yu Cai, infiltrated the Capital Division’s White Tiger Regiment, the elite unit of the Republic of Korea Army, which had engaged in a fierce fight in the Battle of Kŭmsŏng, and “distinguished himself in war” by taking the flag of the White Tiger Regiment, the symbol of the unit bestowed directly by President Syngman Rhee. Though the flag is now faded yellow, the figure of the white tiger drawn in the center of the flag still radiates a vibrant energy. No one can guarantee the fate of the flag and when it might return to South Korea. (*Yonhap News*, July 27, 2008)

This kind of media coverage shows just how China's exhibit of "victory in battle" stimulates nationalism among South Koreans. It also suggests that the flag should be returned to South Korea as relations develop between China and South Korea, requiring that the hostile memory of the past be reconstructed according to present demands. This kind of reaction among South Koreans provokes deeper reflection on the spectatorship embodied by the MRUAK.

Border Tourism and Globalized Spectatorship

Since 2000, Dandong has expanded as quickly as other cities in China. As a hub for transborder commerce in northern China, Dandong draws an increasing number of businesspeople and tourists from other parts of China, South Korea, and North Korea. The Dandong government has attempted to grow the city's tourist industry by promoting border tourism. Through this endeavor, historical war sites have been restored, and the MRUAK stands at the center of a network of battlefield tourism, rather than simply being a site of war memory.

According to *Archives News* (September 7, 2000), between 1993 and early 2000 there were about 700,000 visitors to the Dandong MRUAK, including those from North Korea, South Korea, the United States, Japan, and Romania. While the Chinese government sees the site as an important base for patriotic education, local governments are increasingly seeing such sites in terms of border tourism and battlefield tourism, and this perspective was reflected in the renovations of the MRUAK in 2002. At that time, the principles of renovation emphasized the importance of paying attention to appearance and taste to captivate strong emotions, in addition to ideology, artistry, science, and education. In coordination with travel agencies, the MRUAK began to cater to tourists. Not only the inside exhibition space, but also the external grounds, were renovated to accommodate travel and leisure. While Chinese students and soldiers comprised the main visitors to the MRUAK until the 1990s, after 2000, the number of international tourists from South Korea, Japan, and the United States increased. This demographic change affected not only the exhibition but also the programming, so that there was now a

greater emphasis on experiential tourism, and that MRUAK had to increasingly deal with challenges against its perspectives on the Korean War.

The year 2006 was an important turning point for border tourism in Dandong. On the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of its port opening, Dandong City held the “Yalu River International Tourism Festival” and remodeled the area around the Yalu River Broken Bridge. Originally built in 1909 by the Japanese, the bridge was bombed and destroyed by the United States on November 8, 1950, when China’s entry into the war had been confirmed. The bridge site was designated an official historic site in 1988 and opened as a tourist site in 1993. For the international festival in 2006, souvenir stores at the bridge entrance were replaced by a large commemorative statue depicting Peng Dehuai leading the CPVA across the Yalu River (figure 1). A calendar-shaped sculpture was added to represent October 19 as the new revised date of Chinese entry into the war from the previous official date of October 25 (figure 2). The South Korean media described the site as follows:

The newly built monument was inscribed “For Peace” (爲了和平) instead of “Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea to Protect Our Homes and Defend the Country” (抗美援朝 保家衛國). A Dandong official explained, “The new monument embodies the hope to make Dandong a city symbolizing peace.” The new monument seems to reflect China’s changed perspective to seek a new relationship with North Korea, beyond the framework of blood alliance. (*Yonhap News*, October 15, 2006)

What is worth considering here is the meaning of the newly inscribed “peace.” It is unclear whether the expression “For Peace,” inscribed at the feet of Peng Dehuai and the CPVA soldiers, is past tense or future tense, and whose peace it is meant to refer to. What seems threatening about this “peace” is the men’s offensive stance at the entrance to the bridge, suggesting that China could reenter the Korean peninsula at any time.



Figure 1. Statue of Peng Dehuai leading the CPVA across the Yalu River in Dandong. *Source:* Photo by author.



Figure 2. Calendar-shaped sculpture near the Statue of Peng Dehuai. *Source:* Photo by author.

Dandong's attempt to boost border tourism and battlefield tourism is also reflected in the elevated status of the MRUAK. A survey by the CCP ranked the MRUAK in Dandong among the top ten revolutionary tourist destinations in 2006, earning the eighth highest score (*Yonhap News*, December 25, 2006). However, with increased border tourism in Dandong and the elevated status of the MRUAK, there are also greater challenges. Although tourist figures for the MRUAK are not precise, about one million visitors a year are said to have visited the site since its designation as a base of patriotic education and the elimination of an admission fee in 2008 (*Jilin Newspapers*, September 23, 2009). Though it is not clear whether the MRUAK maintains records of feedback from Chinese visitors, the younger generation in contemporary China clearly has different ideas from the older generation about the war's past, the culture of collectivism, and attitudes toward South and North Korea.⁷

If Chinese youth present a domestic challenge, the memorial's globalized spectatorship poses an even greater challenge. Though the memorial's exhibition in the past catered to the Chinese, the perspective of globalized tourists can no longer be ignored. Visitors from not only Korea but also the United States and Japan frequent the memorial, and they are increasingly casting doubt on the objectivity of the exhibitions. The Chinese government, for example, aware of potential American reactions to the notion of "resisting U.S. aggression," proposed that the MRUAK be renamed the Memorial of the CPVA during the 1993 reconstruction (Yu 2006); however, the proposal was rejected without a clear reason.⁸ China's more concrete response is reflected in the temporary closing of the WRUAK exhibit inside the Military Museum in Beijing just before the 2008 Beijing Olympics. In place of the exhibit, the museum opened an exhibition on Chinese painting and calligraphy and held an exhibition of Sun Tzu's *Art of War* with ancient Chinese military culture and artifacts. Though the WRUAK exhibit was "closed due to repair" (*Hankyoreh*, September 19, 2008), the Hall of War to Resist Japanese Aggression was still open. Therefore, South Korean media jumped to the conclusion that "around the Beijing Olympics, China closed the exhibit in order to avoid highlighting China's anti-Americanism to the foreigners visiting China" (*Segye Ilbo*,

September 20, 2008). However, at the same time, the memorial in Dandong was running an exhibition to commemorate the fifty-fifth anniversary of the “Victory of RUAK” (*Yonhap News*, July 27, 2008). This indicates that the same war memory can be used differently depending on the location. In December 2014, the MRUAK in Dandong was temporarily closed for renovation.

Conclusion: Is a War Memorial for Peace Possible?

War museums and memorials established in the key participant states of the Korean War that elicit official visits and temporary closings summon the past in contemporary politics. Recalling international hostility or alliances from past wars is part of a cultural politics to establish international restraint or cooperation, as well as domestic social integration in the present. Each state performs diverse forms of cultural politics, mobilizing the hard physical medium of war memorials and the soft, malleable means of events or exhibitions within those memorials.

The politics of memory on the Korean War was internationally invigorated with the fortieth anniversary of the Korean War armistice in 1993. Core party states to the Korean War sequentially built memorials or monuments representing their memory of the war. It is a historical irony that the cultural Cold War was revitalized through war memorialization in the post-Cold War period. Such projects strengthened national identity rather than dissolving hostility in favor of reconciliation. For some time, there have been increasing demands for East Asia to build a regional bloc as Europe managed to do after the Cold War. However, the strong legacy of Japanese colonialism and the Cold War system and the ongoing project of modern nation-state building have hindered the creation of a peaceful regional community due to contradictions and clashes in history, ideology, and economic development.

Based on the perspectives and experiences of the Chinese people in the Korean War, the MRUAK in China today faces many challenges, including the logic of border tourism and battlefield tourism, globalized spectatorship, and the perspectives of ethnic minorities. “Peace” is presented in an abstract and ambiguous fashion, without active

effort to alleviate past hostility and achieve reconciliation. There is strong demand for the Korean War armistice system to be replaced by a peace system in order to establish a peaceful regional community in East Asia. For that to happen, war memories of hostility and alliance would need to be critically reconstructed. In the case of war memorials, this means that they would need to overcome individual state-centric memories of war through a mutual exchange of perspectives, and an analytical framework would need to be developed that enables the coexistence of multiple views.

A fundamental critique of the MRUAK must include a consideration of the degree to which the exhibition fully reflects the facts of the Korean War. When the memorial reopened in 1993, scholarship on the Korean War saw a rapid development, with troves of documents becoming available following the opening of the Soviet archives (Goncharov, Lewis, and Xue 1993). While the MRUAK claims to have taken these new studies into account with repeated updates to the exhibition, these efforts have been insufficient. The fundamental view of the war and the explanation of its causes have not changed. Particularly egregious in regard to the background events that led to North Korea's initiation of all-out war and China's entry is the MRUAK's failure to mention the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance, signed in February 1950. This treaty voided the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance signed in August 1945 and marked an important part of the history of new China that formed the backdrop to the outbreak of the Korean War, according to groundbreaking scholarship in China today. In 2014, the South Korean government returned the remains of 437 members of the CPVA to China, who had been buried in South Korea and were reburied at the Cemetery of Martyrs in Shenyang. Such measures comprise a part of the humanitarian effort to ease the hostility emanating from memories of the Korean War in East Asia. It seems it will take more time before such efforts toward reconciliation succeed in changing the fundamental perspectives on the Korean War.

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Notes

1 China's patriotic education is said to have started with the reduced capacity of Socialist ideology for social integration after Chinese economic reforms in the mid-1990s (see Yun 2002).

2 The Soviet army, which conquered the eastern area of China in August 1945, finally withdrew its troops from Dalian, China, in 1955. To commemorate the 1955 withdrawal, the Chinese government built the Tower of Victory in Lüshun, Dalian, as well as the Tower of Friendship commemorating the friendship with the Soviet Union.

3 Liu Xiufeng (2003) recalls that, at first, the plan involved building friendship towers in several local cities, including Sinŭiju, Wŏnsan, and Kaesŏng, each with its own symbols. However, considering the small size of the Korean territory, it was decided that only one friendship tower would be built in Pyongyang. At last, the decision was made that the North Korean government would build it and the CPVA would be in charge of constructing the cemeteries for the CPVA in Hoeh'ang. The Sino-Korean Friendship Tower is 30 meters high, the same height as the Liberation Tower built in Pyongyang to commemorate the Soviet liberation of Korea from the Japanese in 1947.

4 CPVA commander Peng Dehuai was purged in August 1959, when he was criticized at the meeting of the CCP at Lushan. At that time, he was the target of the Red Guards. He died in 1974. After Peng Dehuai was exonerated in 1978 by Deng Xiaoping, the project to renovate MRUAK was ratified in 1984.

5 The photo "CPVA Crosses the Yalu River" was taken by Li Min, a newspaper cameraperson in the political department of the CPVA. The photo and the military anthem are iconic of the Great War to RUAK. The photo captures the CPVA crossing the Yalu River from Dandong in February 1951, during the Korean War.

6 Details of the negotiations to normalize relations between South Korea and China have yet to be released.

7 On the Chinese people's generational differences in their responses after watching the Arirang Mass Games, see Sima (2010).

8 Im Ch'aech'ŏng also notes that public opinion exists in China to remove "Resist U.S. Aggression" from the memorial name, considering China's relationship with the United States (*Dong-A Ilbo*, June 20, 1994). However, the issue of renaming the memorial was already proposed, and rejected, in 1984.

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