

# The East Berlin Incident and the Shifting Dynamics of Korean Unification in the 1960s

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## Abstract

This article examines the 1967 spy incident called the East Berlin (Tongbaengnim) Incident against the backdrop of North Korea becoming an increasingly contentious political issue in 1960s South Korea. The spy incidents of the 1960s occurred as South Korean public opinion became divided over North Korea's reality and prospects. During this period, as the international political order was becoming multipolar and the North Korean regime was consolidating, while theories predicting North Korea's collapse significantly weakened, existing unification policies and anti-communism ideology needed revision. As a result, the targets of spy accusations expanded beyond just political opponents of top leadership to include ordinary citizens, and their scope widened to encompass students and workers abroad rather than remaining limited to domestic cases. The 1967 East Berlin Incident occurred as the Park Chung-hee regime selectively accepted new changes emerging at three levels—international politics, inter-Korean relations, and North Korea's realities—while blocking and limiting discussions that crossed certain boundaries. This can be seen as the government's attempt to monopolize and control the pursuit of nationalist unification policies while accepting contemporary changes in anti-communist bloc policies, the Hallstein Doctrine, and unification approaches.

**Keywords:** anti-communism, East Berlin (Tongbaengnim) Incident, Park Chung-hee regime, spy ring fabrication, West Germany



# Domestic and International Changes in Korea's Unification Policy Environment

The spy incidents of the 1960s occurred as South Korean public opinion became divided over North Korea's reality and prospects. This article examines the 1967 Tongbaengnim Incident against the backdrop of North Korea becoming an increasingly contentious political issue in 1960s South Korea. In the mid-to-late 1950s, when the view that North Korea was merely "the puppet regime" facing imminent collapse prevailed, there was little room for national division over North Korea-related issues. Consequently, the impact of peaceful coexistence theory in 1950s South Korea was limited to the antagonistic relationship between Rhee Syngman and Cho Pong-am, without spreading into broader political debates about unification policy. The Cho Pong-am incident of the 1950s functioned as suppression of Rhee Syngman's greatest political opponent and was not directly connected to substantive debates about North Korea policy and unification policy. In the 1950s, spy cases were often products of the Rhee Syngman regime's political machinations to suppress political opposition (Kim et al. 2020, 77).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The major spy cases during the Rhee Syngman regime include the 1949 National Assembly Communist Spy Ring Incident, the 1952 International Communist Party Incident (Pusan Political Crisis), the 1953 torture death of Kim Seong-ju, vice chairman of the Northwest Youth Association (Cho Bong-' security guard), and the 1958 Progressive Party Incident.

However, as the international political order became multipolar while the North Korean regime consolidated and theories predicting North Korea's collapse significantly weakened, existing unification policies and anti-communism ideology needed revision. By the early 1960s, the international political order was already shifting toward "two Chinas" and "two Koreas." As North Korea's regime strengthened and its international recognition became more likely due to Communist China's increasing chances of UN membership, questions about North Korea's nature, how to deal with it, and what kind of relationship to establish with it became subjects of intense political debate. In other words, as the existing unification policy of UN-supervised general elections in North and South Korea lost its validity, nationalist unification plans began to emerge as alternatives. Entering the 1960s, South Korea faced a complex reality where it had to balance two competing imperatives: it could neither deny the international

reality of “two Koreas” taking shape, nor could it abandon its firm anti-North Korea stance domestically. Understanding this domestic and international Cold War context is essential for better comprehending the Tongbaengnim Incident.

## Background of Espionage Cases in the 1960s

### *The Expansion of Unification Discourse and the Mainstreaming of Espionage*

The unification discussions that had erupted during the Chang Myon government were greatly restricted after the May 16 military government came to power, declaring anti-communism as its national policy. However, during the Park Chung-hee era of the 1960s, debates about North Korea’s nature, prospects for survival, and inter-Korean relations became even more intense.

The unification issue had been discussed annually at the United Nations (UN) under U.S. leadership since the 1954 Geneva Conference. However, following the 1955 Bandung Conference, as the Non-Aligned Movement spread globally and newly independent Asian and African nations gained stronger voices in the UN, U.S. influence began to diminish. A particularly significant change occurred when disagreements grew in the UN General Assembly regarding South Korea’s sole invitation and UN-supervised general elections, leading to the passage of the draft resolution for the conditional invitation of North Korea, instead of South Korea’s sole invitation, at the 15th General Assembly (1960–1961) (J. Lee 2007, 213). Thus, the international order that had made it possible to maintain unification through UN-supervised elections underwent fundamental changes.

Moreover, entering the 1960s, North Korea began directly threatening military offensives and a Communist revolution in South Korea. As the North Korean regime strengthened its political and economic power, and its chances of international recognition as an independent system increased alongside China’s international rise, South Korean

domestic opinion about North Korea became divided, and South–South conflict over the “puppet regime” intensified. As conditions made the existing unification policy of UN-supervised elections increasingly untenable and demands for nationalist unification plans grew stronger among academics, intellectuals, and civil society, South Korea’s unification approach inevitably required adjustment. The country faced new circumstances where it had to achieve unification by securing superiority over North Korea while maintaining an anti-communist stance based on South Korea’s sole legitimacy, even as it could not diplomatically exclude the inevitable “Two Koreas” reality internationally. Unlike the 1950s, the 1960s saw an expansion in both the subjects and participants of unification discussions.

Consequently, the targets of spy accusations expanded beyond just political opponents of top leadership to include ordinary citizens, and their scope widened to encompass students and workers abroad. The spy cases of the 1960s—the People’s Revolutionary Party incident (1964), the Tongbaengnim spy ring fabrication (1967), the Unified Revolutionary Party incident, and the European spy ring fabrication (1969)—largely served as political machinations to suppress opposition and overcome various political crises. Understanding these cases requires a broader perspective. These 1960s spy incidents occurred as the Park Chung-hee regime selectively accepted new changes emerging at three levels—international politics, inter-Korean relations, and North Korean reality—while blocking and limiting discussions that crossed certain boundaries.

The diversification and popularization of spy cases was partly due to the decrease in North Korea-dispatched spies from the early 1960s. While the Park Chung-hee regime had caught actual North Korean spies until the early 1960s, after their numbers decreased, it created large-scale spy rings for political purposes. These especially included Europe-based cultural figures, students, government trainees, and public institution employees (Kim et al. 2020, 269). According to Pak Pyong-yop, a former North Korean high-ranking official in charge of South Korean operations, North Korea established propaganda bases in Prague and East Berlin from the late

1950s as it strengthened its political offensive at both domestic and international levels, further reinforcing these efforts after South Korea's April 19 Revolution in 1960. At this time, North Korea reportedly did not expect South Korean contacts in East Berlin to serve as spies or form underground parties; rather, as intellectuals, scholars, and professors, they were expected to support and propagate North Korea's peaceful unification plan, whether in Europe or upon returning to South Korea (Oh 2017, 133).

## Park Chung-hee's "Construction First, Unification Later" Policy

While the Park Chung-hee regime continuously promoted UN-supervised general elections as its official unification plan both domestically and internationally, the military government's actual unification theory could be summarized by the slogan "construction first, unification later," which prioritized economic growth as a means of anti-communism and aimed for unification after building national strength (J. Lee 2007, 217). This theory was a gradual, provisional approach arguing that unification could only be achieved once South Korea built sufficient national power to surpass the North Korean system. While the Park regime claimed to pursue this policy from a nationalist perspective, the opposition criticized it as contradicting nationalist principles.

Park Chung-hee, discussing the need to postpone unification talks, said, "while everyone wants unification, current discussions bring no practical benefits and only help the puppet regime, so we must quietly build our strength until we can take the initiative," and "unification won't happen just because some politicians make irresponsible statements, and making such statements as populist policy only benefits the puppet regime."<sup>2</sup> According to Park, unification discussions would "begin in earnest in the late 1970s, and even then, we cannot discuss it with Kim Il-sung's war criminal group that started the June 25 War (Korean War) and devastated our homeland, but only with a new national group if one

<sup>2</sup> "70 nyöndae huban-eya t'ongil munje pon'gyökhwa" [Unification issue to begin in earnest in late 1970s], *Chosun Ilbo*, June 9, 1966, p. 1.



<sup>3</sup> “70 nyōndae huban-eya t’ongil munje pon’gyōkhwa” [Unification issue to begin in earnest in late 1970s], *Chosun Ilbo*, June 9, 1966, p. 1.

emerges.”<sup>3</sup>

By the mid-1960s, the Park regime’s “construction first, unification later” policy faced complex circumstances. It needed to block North Korea’s “national independence” rhetoric from influencing political opposition in South Korea. It also had to appear to accept public opinion about modifying the existing unification plan based on UN-supervised elections in a nationalist way, as this became increasingly inevitable amid multipolarization of international politics. Meanwhile, it had to implement “independent diplomacy,” “practical diplomacy,” “diversified diplomacy,” and “neutral country diplomacy” that differentiated itself from both North Korea’s offensives and the Rhee Syngman government. Thus, the military forces had to take a position that appeared to diplomatically accept changes in unification conditions while labeling the unification theories of progressive forces from the period of the April 19 Revolution—such as inter-Korean negotiations and neutralization unification—as pro-communist ideology influenced by North Korea. They also faced the task of embodying “subjectivity” distinct from North Korea’s “national independence” (J. Lee 2007, 215).

However, in 1964, just one year after transitioning to civilian rule, the South Korean military government faced its greatest legitimacy crisis due to its aggressive push to normalize relations with Japan under the pretext of economic development. The nationwide protests against Korea–Japan diplomatic normalization, which began in the spring of 1964, lasted for 18 months and involved approximately three million students and 500,000 citizens. The demonstrations were so intense that the government could only suppress them through military deployment under martial law or a garrison decree (Kang 1999, 193). During this time, Kim Il-sung proposed three strengths for unification in August 1964, and at the 8th Plenary Meeting of the 4th Central Committee of the Korean Workers’ Party that same year, established a policy to build a vanguard party in South Korea, strengthening the position that South Korea’s revolution should maintain independence without direct guidance from the Korean Workers’ Party.

While the Park regime initially guaranteed freedom of

unification discussion in early 1964, it began controlling these discussions when opposition parties started attacking them and the discourse exceeded controllable bounds following the anti-Japan talks protests (J. Lee 2007, 219). Prosecutor General Shin Chik-su announced on November 19 that they would “strictly reject any form of pro-communist or neutralist ideology” and declared that only anti-communist unification was legally permitted, stating, “unification theories deviating from this limit under the pretext of freedom of speech violate the National Security Law and Anti-Communist Law” (J. Lee 2007, 21). The Park regime attempted to overcome the crisis caused by the Korea-Japan Agreement by expanding unification discussions. Amid anti-American and anti-government sentiment from opposition to the Korea-Japan Agreement, they also had political intentions to emphasize the regime’s nationalist character by raising interest in unification to appease public backlash.

A significant event in unification discussions at the time was the censorship and indictment incident (*p’ilhwa sagŏn*) involving Hwang Yong-ju, Park Chung-hee’s classmate from Taegu Normal School and former president of the Busan-based daily newspaper *Busan Ilbo*. Hwang was working as a director at Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) and was selected as one of the 50 people influencing Park in the October issue of the monthly magazine *Shin Dong-A*. He published an article titled “Minjokchŏk minjujuŭiron” [Theory of nationalist democracy] in the November issue of the monthly magazine *Sedae*, making radical proposals including recognizing two Koreas, simultaneous UN membership for both Koreas, withdrawal of all foreign forces including U.S. troops from the Korean peninsula, implementing simultaneous elections in both Koreas under UN police supervision, and considering a North-South federation system (Kang 1999, 200). While the article was written to defend Park’s “nationalist democracy,” it received strong criticism from the opposition for proposing to first undertake détente between North and South Korea and suggesting specific measures such as arms reduction, minimal UN police force presence for security, simultaneous UN membership for both Koreas, and inter-Korean dialogue through third countries.

## *The Ruling and Opposition Parties' Debates over Unification Policy and the East Berlin Spy Ring Incident*

In the mid-1960s, while the Park Chung-hee regime faced the need to emphasize its nationalist character amid fundamental changes in unification conditions, there were inherent limitations and dilemmas in successfully carrying out this task. While claiming “independent diplomacy,” the regime had to maintain the closest Cold War diplomatic coordination with the United States, as evidenced by the normalization of relations with Japan and deployment of troops to Vietnam. While advocating “active diplomacy,” it could not deny the emerging reality of two Koreas. While competing with North Korea over the representation and superiority of “independence” and “nation,” it had to establish effective new alternatives to the non-UN unification plan, whose inevitability was being recognized domestically. Korea’s diplomatic position at the time was such that while internationally agreeing to status quo policies, domestically it had to pursue changes in the status quo regarding unification.<sup>4</sup> If the government fully accepted the U.S. coexistence policy, Korea would end up treating the “puppet regime” as a de facto entity, risking the paradoxical result of leaving the unification issue unchanged.<sup>5</sup>

The government’s policy of postponing unification discussions (“construction first, unification later”) faced fierce criticism from the opposition. Notably, Kim Dae-jung, who was serving as chairman of the People’s Party’s policy committee and political affairs committee in 1966, lamented that “‘construction first, unification later’ is the height of defeatism” and that “it’s already sad that we cannot resolve the tragedy of national division, but now talking about the vital issue of unification is considered dangerous and subject to various legal punishments, just like speaking our family names, our language, and our history during the Japanese colonial period.”<sup>6</sup> Contrasting with the government and ruling party’s avoidance of unification discussions, he criticized that “in West Germany, the government and leaders have been engaged in constant research and effort regarding

<sup>4</sup> “Kongsan’gwŏn-ŭi kaebang chŏn’gi-e sŏn han’guk oegyŏ” [South Korean diplomacy at a turning point of opening to the Communist bloc], *Dong-A Ilbo*, April 26, 1966, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> “Kongsan’gwŏn-ŭi kaebang chŏn’gi-e sŏn han’guk oegyŏ” [South Korean diplomacy at a turning point of opening to the Communist bloc], *Dong-A Ilbo*, April 26, 1966, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Minutes of the 13th National Assembly Plenary Session, July 1, 1966, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Minutes of the 13th National Assembly Plenary Session, July 1, 1966, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Minutes of the 13th National Assembly Plenary Session, July 1, 1966, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> “Miguk-ŭi tonga chŏngch’aek-kwa han’guk” [U.S. East Asian policy and Korea], *Maeil Business Newspaper*, March 24, 1966, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> “Kongsan’gwŏn-ŭi kaebang chŏn’gi-e sŏn han’guk oegyo” [South Korean diplomacy at a turning point of opening to the Communist bloc], *Dong-A Ilbo*, April 26, 1966, p. 1.

the unification issue, unlike our country’s government and politicians who receive distrust from the people for being insincere, showing no enthusiasm, and appearing to have given up on unification.”<sup>7</sup> He further criticized the Democratic Republican Party for not implementing their original promises of “nationalist democracy” and “independent handling of diplomatic unification issues,” questioning why “after promising to strengthen anti-communist readiness across political, economic, social, educational, and cultural sectors and establish a national unification research institution as a state organization to prepare scientific research on unification and measures for various fields after unification,” they now “treat anyone who talks about unification as if they’re helping communists, just as Japanese authorities suspected those who spoke Korean and discussed Korean history during colonial rule, which is deceiving the people.”<sup>8</sup>

As shown above, not only were South and North Korea competing over what constituted a nationalist unification plan, but the ruling and opposition parties were also engaged in intense debate. Along with domestic political debates about unification and North Korea’s reality, it is notable that this period saw the beginning of changes in perceptions toward so-called “non-hostile communist countries” like the Soviet Union. Unlike the previous approach of treating all communist countries as equally hostile, distinctions between hostile and non-hostile communist countries began to emerge. Regarding the Soviet Union, there was a growing perception that its direct threat to East Asia had decreased somewhat over the previous decade. However, Communist China was still viewed as an ambitious and aggressive entity focused on expansion and infiltration of its surroundings.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, for communist countries except China and Vietnam, the government decided to send both government and private representatives to international academic and technical conferences hosted by international organizations that Korea joined, even if held in communist countries, and to allow entry of representatives from communist countries or non-diplomatic member countries when such conferences were held in Korea.<sup>10</sup>

As the Hallstein Doctrine was carefully readjusted in 1966,

<sup>11</sup> “Sujōng-doenūn t’abu” [Revising the taboo], *Dong-A Ilbo*, July 28, 1966, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> “Sujōng-doenūn t’abu” [Revising the taboo], *Dong-A Ilbo*, July 28, 1966, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> “Pan’gong ūishik-kwa chishigin” [Anti-Communist consciousness and intellectuals], *Chosun Ilbo*, July 9, 1967, p. 2.

Park Chung-hee handed down an order at the July 18 monthly trade expansion meeting to modify the policy that had prohibited trade with merchants or companies from the free world previously labeled as “pro-communist businesses.”<sup>11</sup> He specifically instructed relevant departments to modify the “pro-communist business transaction disapproval” policy, stating that if free world merchants would buy Korean goods, there was no need to restrict transactions with them even if they had traded with or traveled to communist countries, “except for Communist China, North Korea, or North Vietnam.”<sup>12</sup>

However, this change was only possible under the pretext of pursuing economic benefits. While trading was permitted with German “pro-communist businesses” that would buy Korean goods, political vigilance had to be maintained. Regarding Germany, warnings were common that “while they share our experience of national division, their situation differs from ours in that they didn’t experience a brutal fratricidal war, so overseas students and travelers must not let their guard down against communism after seeing situations where communist party activities are legalized, exchanges with the communist bloc can be freely made, and communist party members enjoy rights as legitimate citizens.”<sup>13</sup>

## The Tongbaengnim Incident of 1967

In 1967, Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) Director Kim Hyong-uk announced the “East Berlin North Korean Espionage Case” (Tongbaengnim Incident), claiming that it occurred in Germany, where the South Korean government was attempting to establish contacts with Eastern Bloc countries during the mid-to-late 1960s. The case alleged that 194 people, including prominent figures from academia, media, culture, and miners, visited the North Korean embassy in East Berlin, received money from North Korea, and engaged in espionage activities.

According to official announcements, 15 of those involved had been conducting espionage while traveling to and from

<sup>14</sup> “Kyosu haksæng dŭng 194 myŏng kwallyŏn” [194 professors and students involved], *Chosun Ilbo*, July 9, 1967, p. 1.

the North Korean embassy in East Berlin between September 1958 and May 1967. Seven others allegedly visited Pyongyang directly via the Soviet Union and China, received sealed training, and returned to conduct espionage activities.<sup>14</sup> The investigation was triggered by the confession of Lim Seok-jin, a Heidelberg University Ph.D. holder, who admitted to visiting North Korea twice through the North Korean embassy in East Berlin, introducing other students to the embassy, and even submitting a Workers’ Party membership application in 1963. This led to a widespread investigation of Korean students and residents in Europe. Of the 194 people involved, 31 were arrested overseas (including 16 in West Germany and 8 in France), while many of those arrested domestically had previously studied in West Germany or France.

According to the KCIA, “Through North Korea’s South Korean operations base in East Berlin, they contacted North Korea and traveled to Pyongyang, receiving orders to communize South Korea. Seven people including Lim Seok-jin and Cho Yong-su received sealed training in Pyongyang for 1–4 weeks between August 1961 and August 1965, traveling via the Soviet Union or China.”

Kim Hyong-uk claimed, “From 1958, North Korea established a European operations headquarters at their East Berlin embassy, luring Korean students, long-term residents, miners, and nurses. They brought them to Pyongyang via China or the Soviet Union, had them join the Communist Party, and provided operational funds. These individuals were then sent back legally to South Korea with missions to infiltrate political, academic, media, and cultural circles, expand underground party organizations, and conduct anti-government activities by criticizing and agitating against government policies.”<sup>15</sup> He also stated, “The recruited individuals used media outlets like newspapers, broadcasts, magazines, and panel discussions to create a socialist revolutionary atmosphere and recruited organizational members across various sectors of society, receiving over US\$100,000 in operational funds from North Korea.”<sup>16</sup>

The main charges against the East Berlin Incident suspects under the National Security Law and Anti-Communist Law were visiting the North Korean embassy in East Berlin (31

<sup>15</sup> “Kyosu haksæng dŭng 194 myŏng kwallyŏn” [194 professors and students involved], *Chosun Ilbo*, July 9, 1967, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> “Kyosu haksæng dŭng 194 myŏng kwallyŏn” [194 professors and students involved], *Chosun Ilbo*, July 9, 1967, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> “Yunisang bubu kongso shiin” [Yun I-sang couple admit to charges], *Chosun Ilbo*, November 16, 1967, p. 7.

people) and receiving money from North Korea (29 people). Some were also charged with visiting North Korea (11 people) and joining the Workers’ Party (10 people). Most suspects admitted to the charges. Composer Yun I-sang confessed that he visited Pyongyang in 1963 “out of pure artistic motives to find ethnic material for his compositions through seeing the Nangnang tomb murals in person and to hear news of his friend Choi Sang-han.”<sup>17</sup> More specifically, Yun admitted to meeting “North Korean operative” Yi Won-chan (European operations chief for the Workers’ Party liaison department), traveling to and from East Berlin, and visiting Pyongyang with his wife in April 1963, where he received about US\$1,800. He met his musician friend Choi Sang-han (conductor of the Sariwon Orchestra) and helped Choi’s son Choi Jeong-gil, who was in Busan, study in Germany and connect with Yi Won-chan in East Berlin.

Yun’s wife Lee Su-ja testified that she accompanied her husband to Pyongyang, and while her husband was in the United States, she alone met Yi Won-chan in East Berlin in July 1966 and received operational funds but left them in the car on her way back due to guilty conscience. Their initial connection to North Korea began in August 1958 at a modern music festival in West Germany, where they met East Berlin female students at a restaurant who said they knew Koreans in East Berlin. She asked these students to get news about her friend, musician Choi Sang-han, who was in the North. Later in December 1958, she received a letter from East Berlin asking her to “please come,” and she “gathered courage” to go to East Berlin partly to hear news about her friend.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> “P’yŏngyang kasŏ shilmang” [Disappointed after visiting Pyongyang], *Chosun Ilbo*, November 28, 1967, p. 7.

Subsequently, in April 1959, while at West Berlin Music University, she received a letter from Yi Won-chan in East Berlin saying, “Come here and let’s eat naengmyeon together,” and went to East Berlin with Kim Taek-hwan, a West Berlin Free University student. In March 1961, she went again to meet Yi Won-chan and received US\$200. When she went to Pyongyang with her spouse via Moscow in April 1963, they requested to stay at a hotel at the airport, but because their European-style clothes with narrow pants and other possessions were noticeably different from local people’s, they were taken to a safe house near the Kim Il Sung University

construction site. They toured the Kangseo Tomb Complex, Kim Il-sung's birthplace, Hamheung Fertilizer Factory, and Youth Center. Yi Won-chan, who accompanied them, urged them to join the Workers' Party, but they did not join.<sup>19</sup>

Choi Jeong-gil testified that on September 18, 1964, through Yun's arrangement, he went to East Berlin and met Yi Won-chan the next day. On August 7, 1966, he entered Pyongyang, met his father Choi Sang-han, received training in using number tables for sending and receiving messages, and returned with US\$500 in operational funds.<sup>20</sup>

Jeong Kyu-myeong also testified that following Yi Won-chan's orders in early August 1965, he visited Pyongyang with his wife Kang Hye-sun, and over six years from 1961, he had visited East Berlin 15 times, receiving a total of US\$10,200 in operational funds.<sup>21</sup> Artist Lee Eungno admitted to meeting with North Korean agents and receiving money in East Berlin, but stated his only purpose for going to East Berlin was to meet his child.<sup>22</sup>

Lim Seok-hun, a West Berlin engineering student, said that at his older brother Lim Seok-jin's urging, he traveled between East Berlin and Pyongyang, meeting North Korean agents and receiving their orders. However, after visiting Pyongyang and realizing that their propaganda was completely false, he did not engage in active operations and expressed shame at having been briefly used by them.<sup>23</sup> Poet Cheon Byeong-hee testified that while he did visit Pyongyang, he went because North Korea's excessive propaganda made him think "let's go see for ourselves."<sup>24</sup>

Of the 194 people involved in what the KCIA called "the largest spy ring case since liberation," trials for 33 individuals began in November 1967. These trials continued for one year and five months until March 1969, going through the Supreme Court's reversal and remand, and a second appeals trial. In the first trial and appeals, most of the charges against the defendants were acknowledged. However, many of the charges included content that the KCIA had expanded or fabricated through torture during investigation. Consequently, in July 1968, the Supreme Court found issues with the application of "espionage" and "infiltration" charges, overturned the original verdicts for most of those who

<sup>19</sup> "Pyongyang kasô shilmang" [Disappointed after visiting Pyongyang], *Chosun Ilbo*, November 28, 1967, p. 7.

<sup>20</sup> "Yunisang bubu kongso shiin" [Yun I-sang couple admit to charges], *Chosun Ilbo*, November 16, 1967, p. 7.

<sup>21</sup> "Yunisang bubu kongso shiin" [Yun I-sang couple admit to charges], *Chosun Ilbo*, November 16, 1967, p. 7.

<sup>22</sup> "Pyongyang kasô shilmang" [Disappointed after visiting Pyongyang], *Chosun Ilbo*, November 28, 1967, p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> "Pyongyang kasô shilmang" [Disappointed after visiting Pyongyang], *Chosun Ilbo*, November 28, 1967, p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> "Pyongyang kasô shilmang" [Disappointed after visiting Pyongyang], *Chosun Ilbo*, November 28, 1967, p. 7.



received heavy sentences, and sent the case back to the High Court.

After a second appeal trial, the final Supreme Court decision in April 1969 confirmed death sentences for two people and life imprisonment for one person, concluding the total of five trials. However, all defendants were released three years and six months after the incident occurred, and no death sentences were carried out. Ultimately, by the end of 1970, all those sentenced to prison terms in the East Berlin Incident were released through commutation or special pardons.

## Conclusion

The East Berlin Incident of 1967 revealed new aspects of the South–South conflict that was emerging at the time. When viewed in the context of changing domestic and international conditions for unification in the 1960s and the resulting unification discussions, it was becoming increasingly difficult for the then South Korean regime to unilaterally impose a single state-led nationalist unification plan, as conditions were becoming more complex. By 1967, not only the Democratic Socialist Party and the Unification Socialist Party, but even conservative opposition parties no longer advocated UN-supervised general elections as a unification plan.

However, as mentioned above, the government, the main opposition party, and progressive factions within the opposition were competing over alternative nationalist unification plans. Additionally, the situation required South Korea's diplomatic response as the United States was shifting to a policy of “containment without isolation” toward China. Eventually, after 1966, while continuing to prevent the “Two Koreas” policy, the South Korean government began accepting the need to adjust the Hallstein Doctrine. By the mid-to-late 1960s, the government began shifting from its position of prohibiting exchanges with communist countries, particularly academic and other non-political exchanges, except with China and Vietnam.

The East Berlin Incident of 1967 reflects the South Korean government's intent to monopolize and control nationalist unification policy while adapting to shifting dynamics in anti-communist policy, the Hallstein Principle, and unification plans, against the backdrop of renewed unification discussions since 1964.

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