

“People’s Diplomacy” and the Forging of Bilateral Relations: An Analysis of the Chile-North Korea Friendship Association, 1958-1973.¹

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Article history

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Abstract

In November 1970, Allende’s Chile recognized North Korea. This move is presented in North Korean foreign policy literature and in Chilean historical scholarship as a predictable outcome of the two nations’ ideological convergence. These interpretations, however, overlook the preceding work of a Chilean group that had devoted considerable effort since the early 1960s to creating conditions favorable for establishing relations with North Korea. This group, the Chile-Korea Culture Institute, was a friendship organization between Chile and North Korea. This research examines non-state actors’ impact on Chile-DPRK relations and, more broadly, on North Korea’s Third World engagement during the Cold War.

Keywords: Cold War; North Korea; Chile; Korea Friendship Association; People’s Diplomacy

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Alexander James, "'Useful Idiots'? The curious case of Britain's pro-North Korean Community", *NK News*, January 30, 2012, accessed December 3, 2022, <https://www.nknews.org/2012/01/useful-idiots-the-curious-case-of-britains-pro-north-korean-community/>

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More information on the current KFA can be found on its official website at <https://korea-dpr.com/about-us>. On Cao de Benós see Paul Adams, "Documentary claims to expose North Korea trying to dodge sanctions", BBC, October 11, 2020, accessed December 22, 2022, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-54464581> and Chaewon Chung, "FBI releases wanted posters for two men accused of aiding North Korea", *NK News*, May 31, 2022, accessed December 22, 2022, <https://www.nknews.org/2022/05/fbi-releases-wanted-posters-for-two-men-accused-of-aiding-north-korea>

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Chico Harlan, "N. Korea Finds a Purpose for Small Group of 'Friends'", *The Washington Post*, March 2, 2012, accessed October 26, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia-pacific/n-korea-finds-a-purpose-for-small-group-of-friends/2012/02/24/gIQAGHulmR_story.html

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See Joaquín Fernando H., *Mundo y Fin de Mundo: Chile en La Política Mundial, 1900-2004* (Santiago: Ediciones Universidad Católica de Chile, 2005).

Introduction

Contrary to its widely held image as the most isolated country globally, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK/North Korea) benefits from a considerable international support network composed of organized friendship associations. Notwithstanding these figures, these organizations have not been afforded adequate scholarly consideration. Specialists in North Korean studies tend to dismiss these groups as naïve sympathizers, doubting the effectiveness of their activities, which, instead of improving the DPRK's global image, seem to consolidate the Kim family's domestic power.²

The Korea Friendship Association (KFA), founded in November 2000 by the controversial Alejandro Cao de Benós, may exemplify this phenomenon, but this does not necessarily hold true for earlier iterations of such associations.³ Indeed, scholars studying North Korean Third World diplomacy during the Cold War may find these friendship associations valuable, as Hazel Smith notes that these groups "were a conduit of actual [socialist] thought, and they were part of a real political network."⁴

The state-level explanation for North Korea's connections with the Third World often centers on the alignment of its expansionist foreign policy with the radical agendas of its counterparts. These approaches, however, obscure the influence of non-state actors in generating a positive environment for the initiation of diplomatic ties between North Korea and a particular country. Conversely, this study examines the influence of non-state entities on the development of bilateral ties between Chile and North Korea, focusing particularly on the Chile-(North) Korea Cultural Institute (*Instituto Chileno Coreano de Cultura*), also known in Korean sources as the Chile-Korea Friendship Association (Ch'ille Chosŏn Ch'insŏnhyŏp'oe, hereafter Chile-KFA).

Chile provides a noteworthy, yet relatively unexplored, example of North Korea's interactions with Third World nations. Situated in South America, the Republic of Chile is geographically defined by its Pacific coastline, the Andes Mountain range, the Atacama Desert and the Patagonian region. Researchers have observed that Chile's relative isolation has fostered a unique national identity, distinguishing it from neighboring countries and, in certain respects, accounting for its exceptional circumstances. Initially settled by indigenous populations, it subsequently became a province under the Spanish colonial regime (1541-1823). The newly independent nation of Chile, in the aftermath of its independence wars, faced the controlling influence and exploitative practices of British and American capital over its natural resources. The 20th century marked the shift from the Chilean oligarchy's aversion to international affairs, born of isolationism, to the internationalism of a new social class. This force, informed by Marxist and unionist principles, contested the interests of the global ruling class and affirmed its solidarity with post-colonial societies.⁵

Chile remained neutral throughout the First World War and for most of the Second World War.⁶ Nevertheless, the outbreak of the Korean War compelled the Chilean administration under Gabriel González Videla (1946-1952), pressured by the United States, to align itself promptly with the Western powers in supporting South Korea.⁷ While the Department of State formally solicited Chilean military support⁸ and President Videla instructed the Chilean military to investigate the feasibility of contributing troops to the United Nations, the subsequent deployment

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Enrique Fernández Domingo, "LA PREMIÈRE GUERRE MONDIALE ET LE CHILI : DE LA PROPAGANDE ET LA MAÎTRISE DE L'INFORMATION À LA REDÉFINITION DE L'IDENTITÉ NATIONALE", *Guerres Mondiales et Conflits Contemporains*, no. 264 (2016): 91–110; Pedro Iacobelli, "La "Neutralidad" Chilena en la Segunda Guerra Mundial (1939-1943): Un Análisis Historiográfico con Énfasis en la Literatura sobre las Relaciones Chile-Japón", *Revista de Historia y Geografía*, no. 34 (2016): 95–108.

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Cristián Garay Vera and Javier Castro Arcos, "Chile y la Guerra de Corea. Un Episodio de la Política Exterior Chilena", *Revista de Relaciones Internacionales, Estrategia y Seguridad* 12, no. 1 (2017): 131–57.

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Memorandum of Conversation, by Mr. Milton Barall of the Office of South American Affairs, April 7, 1951, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1951: The United Nations; The Western Hemisphere*, vol. 2, ed. Ralph R. Goodwin et al. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1979), <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1951v02>

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Jorge Rojas Flores, *Años Turbulentos: Los Comunistas durante el Gobierno de Gabriel González Videla, 1946-1952* (Santiago: Ediciones Biblioteca Nacional de Chile, 2022), 537.

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According to Keie-Hyun Loh, North Korean people's diplomacy "may play a role of prior exchanges with nations with which North Korea has not established formal diplomatic relations, but more importantly it assumes a role of diplomacy for exporting revolution." See Keie-Hyun Loh, "ANALYSIS OF NORTH KOREA'S DIPLOMACY TOWARD THE NONALIGNED NATIONS", *Korea Observer*, 10 (1979): 54.

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B. C. Koh, *The Foreign Policy of North Korea* (New York: Praeger, 1969); Chae-gyu Pak, Byung Chul Koh, and Tae-Hwan Kwak, eds., *The Foreign Relations of North Korea: New Perspectives* (Seoul: Kyungnam University Press, 1987); Samuel S. Kim, *North Korean Foreign Relations in the Post-Cold War World* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2007).

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Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Odd Arne Westad, "The New International History of the Cold War: Three (Possible) Paradigms", *Diplomatic History* 24, no. 4 (2000): 551–65.

was ultimately prevented by strong opposition from Chilean civil society and leftist political parties, who condemned the purported American aggression in Korea.⁹

In the 1960s, despite official Chilean Government recognition of only the Republic of Korea, informal exchanges between Chilean and North Koreans flourished under the banner of "people's diplomacy" (inminoegyo). This study examines the impact of non-state actors on DPRK-Chile relations, providing a model for understanding North Korea's engagement with the Global South and advancing the field's understanding of North Korea's foreign relations.

In this article, "people's diplomacy" is defined through the concrete practices of the Chile-KFA rather than solely through North Korea's concept of "people's diplomacy"¹⁰, situating it within broader discussions of cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy, and soft power. In the Chilean case, North Korea's presence was articulated primarily through cultural forms—such as locally edited publications, permanent exhibitions of traditional art, and public events—rather than sustained interpersonal exchange. Although available sources suggest some level of DPRK involvement, including funding and symbolic endorsement, the extent of direct control remains unclear. Accordingly, the article foregrounds the agency of Chilean actors, arguing that the Chile-KFA operated as a locally driven intermediary that adapted North Korean narratives to domestic contexts, thereby challenging a strictly state-centered interpretation of "people's diplomacy."

It should be noted that the literature on North Korea's foreign relations is dominated by numerous academic works on Pyongyang's relations with the major powers—China, the Soviet Union/Russia, Japan and the United States— and inter-Korean relations.¹¹ In comparison, there is a relatively small body of literature dealing with North Korea's relations with the countries of the Global South. It was not until the late 2000s that historians inspired by the "New International History of the Cold War" viewed North Korea not as a mere Soviet satellite, but as a middle power capable of articulating relations with the Third World on its own terms.¹² This process, which began with Charles Armstrong's controversial book *Tyranny of the Weak*, led to the publication of several monographs, culminating in the publication of perhaps the most comprehensive account of North Korea and the Third World in Benjamin Young's *Guns, Guerrillas and the Great Leader*.¹³

When it comes to the Western Hemisphere, the focus has been primarily on North Korea and Cuba relations.¹⁴ Cuba's distinct position as a socialist state and Non-Aligned Movement member, however, makes it an unrepresentative example of regional dynamics. Likewise, scholarly attention has been devoted to the region's English-speaking nations; however, their insights into a predominantly Spanish-speaking region are limited.¹⁵ Research on North Korean involvement in Latin American revolutionary and guerrilla movements is also scarce, but offers valuable insights into North Korea-Latin America relations.¹⁶ However, these studies often overlook other key elements, such as commercial and cultural interactions.

The scholarly investigation of North Korea-Latin American relations has recently seen an expansion beyond the Anglophone literature.¹⁷ In Latin America, Argentine academics Luciano Bolinaga and Alejandra Conconi have recently published the first of a three-volume study detailing the relationship between North Korea and Latin America, commencing with an analysis of Argentina and Brazil. Two Argentine historians have also contributed to the field: Dante Anderson, with a monograph on DPRK-Argentina relations, the first of its kind to cover North Korean relations with a Latin American country, and Luciano Lanare, with an article that mobilized

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Charles Armstrong, *Tyranny of the Weak: North Korea and the World, 1950-1992* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013); Lyong Choi and Il-young Jeong, "North Korea and Zimbabwe, 1978-1982: From the Strategic Alliance to the Symbolic Comradeship between Kim Il Sung and Robert Mugabe", *Cold War History* 17, no. 4 (2017): 329-49, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2017.1328406>; Balázs Szalontai, "Courting the 'Traitor to the Arab Cause': Egyptian-North Korean Relations in the Sadat Era, 1970-1981", *S/N Korean Humanities* 5, no. 1 (2019): 103-36, <https://doi.org/10.17783/IHU.2019.5.1.103>; Benjamin Young, *Guns, Guerrillas, and the Great Leader: North Korea and the Third World* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2021).

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Moe Taylor, "A New Kind of Vanguard: Cuban-North Korean Discourse on Revolutionary Strategy for the Global South in the 1960s", *Journal of Latin American Studies* 53, no. 4 (2021): 667-90, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X21000754>; Moe Taylor, *North Korea, Tricontinentalism, and the Latin American Revolution, 1959-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

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Moe Taylor, "'One Hand Can't Clap': Guyana and North Korea, 1974-1985", *Journal of Cold War Studies* 17, no. 1 (January 1, 2015): 41-63, https://doi.org/10.1162/JCWS_a_00530; Benjamin Young, "Not There for the Nutmeg: North Korean Advisors in Grenada and Pyongyang's Internationalism, 1979-1983", *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 7, no. 2 (2018): 364-87, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ach.2018.0012>.

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Moe Taylor, "North Korea and the Latin American Revolution, 1959-1970" (Ph.D., University of British Columbia, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.14288/1.0388738>; Joseph S. Bermudez Jr., *Terrorism: The North Korean Connection* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 1990).

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See Camilo Aguirre-Torriani, "Un Análisis Historiográfico sobre las Relaciones entre Corea Del Norte y América Latina en el Marco de La Guerra Fría". *Miríada: Investigación En Ciencias Sociales* 17, 21 (2025): 289-311 <https://p3.usal.edu.ar/index.php/miríada/article/view/7476>.

archives and effectively used oral history to shed light on North Korean support for Argentine armed organizations Montoneros and PRT-ERP.

The subject of North Korea-Latin America relations has also begun to attract the attention of Korean scholars. Kim Domin has approached the region broadly, studying the DPRK's diplomacy towards neutral and non-aligned nations.¹⁸ Meanwhile, Jung Inchul is currently exploring new research directions. One such area of research is North Korean historiographical works on Latin America, a subject which has not previously been explored.¹⁹

Yet, despite the significant increase in studies on the subject, the impact of the KFAs on the development of North Korea's foreign relations remains largely unexplored. An exception is Peter Carlisle's master's thesis, which, through archival material and oral history, explores the role of the Korean Society Friendship Association, along with other Swedish NGOs, in fleshing out the early exchanges that preceded the establishment of bilateral relations between Sweden and North Korea.²⁰ Regrettably, this work remains unpublished.

While not centrally focused on the KFAs' role, Benjamin Young's *Guns, Guerrillas, and the Great Leader* observes that Pakistani KFAs infiltrated high-ranking government officials, leading to the establishment of formal bilateral relations in the early 1970s. Citing US-American and British intelligence sources, Young concludes that "Most members of North Korean friendship societies did not advance Pyongyang's positions because they believed in Kimilsungism. Rather, Pyongyang often paid locals in the Third World to become members of their friendship societies."²¹ Although this assertion may hold true for Pakistan, extending this case study to encompass the entire developing world reinforces the misconception of DPRK sympathizers as mere instruments of the North Korean regime. This study will critically examine the Chile-KFA case to contest this interpretation.

Methodologically, this study employs a multi-archival approach. It draws mainly on primary sources from the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea, minutes of sessions of the Chilean Senate and Congress, as well as North Korean and Chilean newspapers and journals and works published by the Chile-KFA. From a theoretical point of view, this work looks at the Cold War from a pericentric perspective. The pericentric approach to the Cold War was popularized by Tony Smith in his seminal article "New Bottles for Old Wine", in which he argued for the need to look at junior members of the two blocs as agents who "played a key role in expanding, intensifying, and prolonging the struggle between East and West."²²

While Smith made a notable impact on shifting the focus of Cold War historical studies, his approach does not stray from the traditional realist perspective, which emphasizes state actors and their national interests. Therefore, this study utilizes both pericentric and bottom-up methodologies to address this challenge, emphasizing the crucial role of non-state actors as agents of subaltern internationalism.²³ This argument posits that Chilean members of the KFA were not simply agents of North Korea, but rather principled internationalists dedicated to peace, political sovereignty, and economic independence across the Pacific.

1. The establishment of the Chile-KFA

The following section examines the establishment of the Chile-KFA in the broader context of North Korea's relations with the Third World. Although the

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Kim Do-min, "North Korea's Diplomacy toward the Non-Aligned Movement from 1970 to 1975", *Review of North Korean Studies* 26, no. 3 (2023): 8–49, <https://doi.org/10.17321/RNKS.2023.26.3.001>; Kim Do-min 김도민, "1948~1968년 남·북한의 중립국 외교 연구" (PhD diss., Seoul National University, 2020), <https://s-space.snu.ac.kr/handle/10371/167794>.

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See Jung Inchul, "Desarrollo y Límites de la Historia Latinoamericana en Corea Del Norte", *Asia/América Latina*, vol. 8, no. 15, (2023): 32–50.

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Peter Carlisle, "From Third World Offensive to 'Nordic Offensive': North Korean Diplomatic Relations with Sweden, 1968–1977" (master's thesis, SOAS University of London, 2016).

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Young, *Guns, Guerrillas, and the Great Leader*, 68.

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Tony Smith, "New Bottles for New Wine: A Pericentric Framework for the Study of the Cold War", *Diplomatic History* 24, no. 4 (2000): 568, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0145-2096.00237>.

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Rachel Leow, "Asian Lessons in the Cold War Classroom: Trade Union Networks and the Multidirectional Pedagogies of the Cold War in Asia", *Journal of Social History* 53, no. 2 (2019): 429–53, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jsh/shz102>.

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Avram Agov, "North Korea's Alliances and the Unfinished Korean War", *Journal of Korean Studies* 18, no. 2 (2013): 225–62, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jks.2013.0020>; Avram Agov, "The East Asian Frontier of the Socialist World: North Korea in the 1950s", *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 24, no. 2–3 (2017): 160–83, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18765610-02402001>.

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Choi Bum-sik, "The Third World Policies of South and North Korea: A Comparative Analysis" (Ph.D., Washington, D.C, The George Washington University, 1988), 227; Carolien Stolte, "'The People's Bandung': Local Anti-Imperialists on an Afro-Asian Stage", *Journal of World History* 30, no. 1/2 (2019): 125–56, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jwh.2019.0015>.

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Kye-dong Kim, *Pukhan Ŭi Oegyo Chôngch'aek Kwa Taeoe Kwan'gye: Hyôpsang Kwa Tojôn Ŭi Chôlyakchôk Sônt'aek* (Seoul: Myôngin Munhwasa, 2012), 396.

DPRK was closely aligned with the socialist camp in its early years, the Sino-Soviet split, the interference of both the People's Republic of China (hereafter China or PRC) and the Soviet Union in North Korea's internal affairs, and fears of growing dependence on the major powers of the socialist bloc pushed North Korea towards an independent path, which led it to refuse to join COMECON and to approach the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) countries.²⁴

Pyeongyang's interest in the Third World can be traced back to 1955, when a North Korean delegation attended the Conference of Asian Countries on the Relaxation of International Tension (CRIT) in Delhi.²⁵ A year later, North Korea founded the (North) Korean Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (Chosŏn Taeoe Munhwaryŏllak Hyŏp'oe), an organization responsible for formulating its Third World policy.²⁶ By 1957, North Korea had signed trade agreements with India, Indonesia, and Egypt, and DPRK delegates participated in the Afro-Asian Solidarity conferences that marked the expansion of North Korean diplomacy to the African continent.²⁷ Yet, despite this apparent expansion of its reach beyond the socialist camp, North Korea's relations with the Third World were strictly limited to Asian and African countries.²⁸

When the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) held its Fourth Congress in 1961, the thawing of the Cold War and the promotion of the idea of peaceful coexistence by the Soviet Union under Nikita Khrushchev (1953–1964) provided the DPRK with the ideal opportunity to develop a closer relationship with capitalist countries, including those in the Western Hemisphere.²⁹ It was in this context that Kim Il Sung added Latin America to the fight between imperialism and national liberation movements:

We are now living in a great era of national revolutions, when all the oppressed nations of the world are rising up valiantly to win their freedom and independence, casting aside the fetters of imperialism and colonialism. Today, the spirit of national liberation is running high in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.³⁰

This speech by Kim has been used to argue that the DPRK adopted a Third World identity to the detriment of its Marxist-Leninist roots.³¹ However, the same speech also allows for another reading. Kim describes North Korea as a "sovereign power that has inherited the glorious traditions of the communists and the patriotic people of Korea", stresses that North Korea is "led by a Marxist-Leninist Party", that "The Soviet people are pioneering the road to communism, the ideal of mankind" and that "the socialist camp represents the hopes and expectations of progressive people all around the world."³² Thus, it is difficult to interpret this intervention as a complete rupture with the socialist bloc or with the principle of peaceful coexistence in favor of an exclusive Third World alignment; rather, as Ryu Seung Hwan's study of DPRK–Tanzanian relations suggests, North Korea should be understood as occupying an intermediary position at the intersection of the Second and Third Worlds.³³

A more nuanced reading is also found in Choi Bum-sik's work, where he suggests that North Korea at the time was only partially supportive of the idea of peaceful coexistence because it rejected the exploitative nature of North-South relations.³⁴ However, this still raises the problem of determining the limits of North Korea's support for the idea of peaceful coexistence. In a capitalist but underdeveloped region, such as Latin America, North Korea sought to engage in bilateral trade while

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Choi, "The Third World Policies of South and North Korea", 229–31.

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Loh, "ANALYSIS OF NORTH KOREA'S DIPLOMACY TOWARD THE NONALIGNED NATIONS", 55.

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Daniel Wertz, JJ Oh, and Kim Insung, "DPRK Diplomatic Relations" (The National Committee on North Korea, 2016), 5, https://ncnk.org/sites/default/files/issue-briefs/DPRK_Diplo_Relations_August2016.pdf.

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Kim Il Sung, *On the Immediate Tasks of the Government of the DPRK in North Korean Modern History: A Sourcebook*, ed. by Dae-Sook Suh, Wan-bom Yi, and Seung Hyun Lee, 2 vols (Seongnam-si, Gyeonggi-do: The Academy of Korean Studies Press, 2018), 471.

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Loh, "ANALYSIS OF NORTH KOREA'S DIPLOMACY TOWARD THE NONALIGNED NATIONS", 54.

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Kim Il Sung, *On the Immediate Tasks of the Government of the DPRK*, 447–471.

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Seung Hwan Ryu, "Between Second and Third World: North Korean Use of 'Imagined Affinity' in the Socialist Globalization Project with Regard to Tanzania (1965–1970)", *Comparativ* 33, no. 3 (2023): 359–76, <https://doi.org/10.26014/j.comp.2023.03.05>.

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Choi, "The Third World Policies of South and North Korea", 236.

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Kim Il Sung, *On the Immediate Tasks of the Government of the DPRK*, 475.

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Ch'illi rodongja t'ongil chungang che3ch'a taehoe ch'amgahal urinara chingmaeng taep'yodan p'yöngyang ch'ulbal", *Rodong Sinmun* (Pyongyang), 21 July 1962, 4.

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Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, "Delegación norcoreana al III Congreso Nacional de la CUT y Asociación Cultural Chile-Chosen", 23 October 1962, Archivo General Histórico del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores (AGH), USA 15.

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"Ch'illi rodongja t'ongil chungang che3ch'a taehoe ch'amgahal urinara chingmaeng taep'yodan p'yöngyang ch'ulbal", *Rodong Sinmun* (Pyongyang), 21 July 1962, 4.

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Emilio Oelckers Hollstein, "Delegación norcoreana al III Congreso Nacional de la CUT y Asociación Cultural Chile-Chosen", 11 October 1962, AGH, USA 15.

supporting revolutionary organizations.

We actively support and express our firm solidarity with the revolutionary struggle of the working class and working people in capitalist countries who are fighting against exploitation and oppression by capital and their democratic rights and socialism.³⁵

These organizations included leftist parties and trade union federations. In Chile, the most influential union was the United Workers Trade Union Confederation (*Central Unitaria de Trabajadores*, CUT), founded in 1953. North Korean people's diplomacy targeted Chile as early as 1958, when journalist Fernando Murillo Viaña, then Public Affairs Secretary of the CUT, was contacted by North Korean representatives. Through channels opened by Murillo, the North Korean Government received an invitation to attend the 1962 CUT Third National Congress in Santiago. The event, though seemingly insignificant, nonetheless merited attention from the *Rodong Sinmun*, the official newspaper of the WPK Central Committee.³⁶

The presence of a North Korean delegation in Chile was closely followed not only by Pyongyang but also by Seoul. The South Korean Government, through its embassy in the United States, formally requested the Chilean Government to provide information about the North Korean delegation. Subsequently, the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs directed the Ministry of the Interior to ascertain the North Korean delegation's composition, activities within the country, and method of entry.³⁷ Because of these initiatives, Criminal Investigations Police Director General Emilio Oelckers Hollstein documented the arrival of "Tchoe Byeung Souk" and "Ho Pup Man" in Santiago on July 25, 1962, via air travel from Prague. "Ho Pup Man" is most likely a misspelling and appears to refer to Ho Pil Man, a member of the Standing Committee of the Central Committee of the General Federation of Trade Unions and Chair of the Central Committee of the Transport Workers' Union, as confirmed by a *Rodong Sinmun* article on the delegation's departure from Pyongyang.³⁸ This indicates that the delegation included at least one high-level official, as the remaining members of the delegation are not identified.

The sojourn of the North Korean delegation in Chile ended approximately one month later, on August 16, 1962.³⁹ According to the same report, the North Korean delegation attended the opening ceremony at the Caupolicán Stadium and on the second day of the Congress, Ho reported on his experiences in the social struggle and stressed the need to "promote an exchange of ideas on workers' struggles."⁴⁰

The visit offered a significant opportunity for the North Korean delegation to engage with Chilean political leaders, trade union officials, and cultural activists. The culmination of these exchanges led to the founding of the Chile-KFA on August 13, 1962.⁴¹ It should be noted here that the Chile-KFA adopted the Spanish name *Instituto Chileno-Coreano (Popular) de Cultura* (Chile-Korea (People's) Culture Institute). This name was in line with existing institutions such as the Chilean-North American Cultural Institute (1946), the Chile-China Cultural Institute (1952) and the Goethe Institute (1961), to name a few. An article published in *La Nación*, the official government newspaper, in 1964 highlighted an exhibition of traditional Korean musical instruments held following the inauguration of the Chile-KFA's premises (See Figure 1).⁴² The report further noted that "silk-embroidered artworks and several ceramic pieces are also on display," and described the venue as one that "features a reception area, an exhibition gallery, a reading room, a section specially designated to attend to public inquiries, and other facilities."⁴³ Custom clearance

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Oelckers Hollstein, "Delegación norcoreana al III Congreso Nacional de la CUT".

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"Sanch'yagoesŏ ch'illi-chosŏn munhwa hyŏp'oe ch'angsŏl", *Rodong Sinmun* (Pyongyang), 17 August 1962, 4.

42

"ESTOS INSTRUMENTOS COREANOS", *La Nación* (Santiago), 12 November 1964, p. 2. Available online at Archivo de la Palabra Impresa, <https://arpa.udp.cl/index.php/>.

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"ESTOS INSTRUMENTOS COREANOS", *La Nación* (Santiago), 12 November 1964, 2.

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"Ley Núm. 16.753 autoriza la internación bajo el régimen que señala de las mercaderías que indica, destinadas al Instituto Chileno Coreano de Cultura", *Diario Oficial de la República de Chile* (Santiago), 10 November 1966, 1. Available online DOE Diario Oficial Histórico. <https://home.doe.cl/> (subscription required).

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Oelckers Hollstein, "Delegación norcoreana al III Congreso Nacional de la CUT".

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Oelckers Hollstein, "Delegación norcoreana al III Congreso Nacional de la CUT".

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Felicity Williams, "Carlos Morales Abarzúa (1917-1988). Una semblanza", *Estudios Latinoamericanos* 5, no. 9 (1990): 40, <https://doi.org/10.22201/cela.24484946e.1990.9.47653>.

applications published in the Official Gazette also serve as proof that the above-mentioned North Korean cultural goods entered the country under the auspices of the Chile-KFA.⁴⁴

Figure 1. *Traditional Korean Music Instruments (kayagŭm and changgu) exhibited at the Chile-KFA premises.*



Source: *La Nación* (Santiago), November 12, 1964, p. 2. Available online at Archivo de la Palabra Impresa, Fondo Diario La Nación: <https://arpa.udp.cl/index.php/>

Oelckers Hollstein's report on the North Korean delegation also dealt with the formation of the Chile-KFA, an organization which he described as one of the "façade institutions" of international communism.⁴⁵ The report names the most important members of the Chile-KFA: Carlos Morales Abarzúa, deputy of the Radical Party (*Partido Radical de Chile*), as president; Julio Lavín Valenzuela, whose political affiliation was unknown, as vice-president; Fernando Murillo Viaña, whom he identifies as a communist journalist, as treasurer; and four directors: Enrique Grandi Basaure of the Radical Association of Semi-State Employees, Jorge Aravena Carrasco, a deputy of the National Democratic Party (*Partido Nacional Democrático*), Cesar Escobar Lopez, a teacher affiliated with the Radical Party, Roberto Lara Olate, an adviser to the CUT, and Tirso Boyardo Gonzalez Canales, President of the National Association of Public Employees (*Agrupación Nacional de Empleados Públicos, ANEP*).⁴⁶ Among the members of the Chile-KFA, Morales and Murillo are the members whose track record is best known given their status as public figures.

Morales was the son of a modest bureaucrat and was born in south-central Chile to a large and poor family. At an early age, he was awarded a scholarship to the Barros Arana National Boarding School, a public institution of excellence. Later, he studied law at the University of Chile, also a public institution. Felicity Williams, who shared time with Morales during his exile in Mexico following the Chilean coup in 1973, describes him as "a good example of what public education can produce."⁴⁷ He joined the Radical Party as a teenager, participating in the Radical's

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Fernando Murillo Viaña, "Oficio Ordinario DGA-Depto Personal No. 110-40/73", 12 June 1973, AGH, PRK1.

49

Esteban Silva Cuadra, *Chile-Argelia, Una Historia de Mutua Solidaridad que Resistió el Paso del Tiempo*. (Santiago: PRINTECH, 2021).

50

Osorio Pardo, "POLÍTICA INTERNACIONAL DE CHILE- OFICIO", *Diarios de Sesiones del Congreso Nacional (DSCN), Sesión Ordinaria N° 31, 27 December 1966, Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile (BCN)*. See also "Nuevo Bloque Socialista impone el antiimperialismo de combate", *Punto Final* (Santiago), 26 May 1970, 16-17. Online at <https://punto-final.org/>.

51

Naegak che il pususang Kim Il tongji ch'illi kija taep'yodanül chöpkýön", *Rodong Sinmun* (Pyongyang), 13 May 1964, 1.

52

"Ch'oe Yong Gön dongji ch'illesöñch'insön munhwahyöphoe sögijangül chöpkýön", *Rodong Sinmun* (Pyongyang), 13 September 1966, 1.

53

Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, eds., *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (London, New York: Lawrence & Wishart and International Publishers, 1992), 12-13.

54

DSCN, Sesión 83ª, 14 May 1963, BCN.

55

DSCN, Sesión 83ª, 14 May 1963, BCN.

56

"MISIÓN CULTURAL DE COREA VISITARÁ EL PAÍS EN BREVE", *La Nación* (Santiago), 18 March 1965, 3.

youth movement. Besides his militancy in the Radical Party, Morales defended trade unions and strikers, working closely with the National Association of Fiscal Employees (*Asociación Nacional de Empleados Fiscales, ANEF*), which made sense given his origins as the son of a bureaucrat. Later, he helped form the CUT.

His links with unionism provided him with a rare opportunity to develop ties with the socialist world and the recently decolonized peoples. As vice-president of ANEF, he visited Vienna and Beijing and toured several other countries. Besides being the president of the Chilean KFA, he was also a member of the Chile-China Cultural Institute, alongside personalities such as Salvador Allende and the poet Pablo Neruda. He additionally served as a bureau member of the Socialist International.

Fernando Murillo Viaña was born on May 27, 1913 in Antofagasta, a city in a northern province. He did not attend school and began to work at fifteen. He became a self-taught journalist and in 1967 was awarded the national prize for journalism in writing, the highest award to which a journalist can aspire in Chile.⁴⁸ In his capacity as a journalist, he expressed profound concern and offered his support to those resisting colonial rule. Through his articles on the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962), he fostered a greater understanding of the conflict within Chilean society.⁴⁹ After visiting Cambodia, Murillo Viaña established a Chile-Cambodia Culture Institute in Santiago, an initiative supported by professors, politicians, and journalists.⁵⁰

Murillo's proximity to the North Korean leadership is evidenced by his access to high-ranking officials, notably his 1964 meeting with First Vice Premier Kim Il while officially visiting as head of a journalists' delegation⁵¹, followed by a 1966 meeting with Choe Yong Gon, head of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly, as secretary of the Chile-KFA.⁵² Taken together, these encounters underscore the difficulty of separating Murillo's activities as a Chile-KFA representative from his broader engagement with the DPRK leadership.

Examination of their profiles reveals that, in contrast to the Santiago-based Chilean oligarchy's disregard for international affairs and non-European populations, Murillo and Morales demonstrated sensitivity towards the challenges faced by newly independent nations. This is most effectively understood through a Gramscian lens; these self-made provincial men functioned as organic intellectuals, addressing the concerns of their entire social class, even beyond national borders.⁵³ Continuing with the Chile-KFA, beyond its cultural activities, the association also advocated for the establishment of trade relations with the DPRK before the Chilean Congress. Morales, during his remarks on a proposed trade mission to Europe, emphasized the Radical Party's support for "establishing full commercial, diplomatic, and consular relations with every nation, extending beyond the West to include socialist nations."⁵⁴ And while he welcomed the visit of the Chilean trade mission to Poland, Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union, he regretted that it did not include countries such as China and (North) Korea.⁵⁵

Finally, the Chile-KFA also facilitated official contacts in the educational sphere. *La Nación* reported that Murillo visited the Ministry of Education to inform authorities of the forthcoming visit of a Korean cultural mission, which, according to the article, "will present to educational authorities the experiences they have had in developing programs that combine education with work."⁵⁶

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"Ch'illi-chosŏn ch'insŏn munhwa hyŏp'oe taep'yodan p'yŏngyange toch'ak", *Rodong Sinmun* (Pyongyang), 2 November 1962, 3.

58

"Ch'illi-chosŏn ch'insŏn munhwa hyŏp'oe taep'yodanŭi uri nara ch'eryu", *Rodong Sinmun* (Pyongyang), 13 November 1962, 4.

59

"Uri nara muyŏk taep'yodani ch'illi oesangŭl pangmun", *Rodong Sinmun* (Pyongyang), 24 May 1963, 3.

60

Joaquín Fernando Huerta, "Chile y la 'Cuestión Cubana', 1959-1964", *Historia* 17 (1982): 157.

2. Working towards the establishment of trade and bilateral relations

In the wake of the Chile-KFA's establishment, Morales and Murillo, accompanied by a KFA member whose identity remains a mystery, undertook a trip to North Korea. The delegation reached Pyongyang on November 1, 1962, where they were greeted by the vice-president of the Korean Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, Choi Seong Suk.⁵⁷ The KFA delegation spent 15 days in North Korea, visiting factories, farms, and educational institutions, witnessing "the fruits of Korean people's diligence and hard work blossoming with each passing day"⁵⁸

The visit of the Chile-KFA to North Korea was succeeded by a reciprocal visit to Santiago from a North Korean trade delegation. The delegation arrived on May 17, 1963, and convened with Chilean Foreign Minister Carlos Martínez Sotomayor. Martínez, like the president of the Chile-KFA, was a Radical Party member. It can be inferred that the interview was made possible by the political proximity of Martínez and Morales, an inference strengthened by the *Rodong Sinmun*'s account of Morales' presence at the meeting.⁵⁹ But regardless of his ties to Morales, Minister Martínez had a deep interest in Third World politics that may have motivated him to meet with the North Korean delegation. Chilean historian Joaquín Fernando has examined the writings of a young Martínez and concluded that, while the future minister took Chile's membership in the world of Western democracy for granted, he was also critical of the major powers, sympathized with the Non-Aligned Movement and even supported the People's Republic of China's entry to the United Nations.⁶⁰

Figure 2. *Fernando Murillo Viaña and Carlos Morales Abarzúa welcome a North Korean delegation, n.d.*



Source: Murillo Family Photo Archive.

61

"Uri nara muyök taep'yodani ch'illi taet'ongnyöngül pangmun", *Rodong Sinmun* (Pyongyang), 30 May 1963, 3.

62

Emilio Edwards Bello, "Visita del Embajador de Corea en Cuba", 3 September 1963, AGH, CUB 7

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Edwards Bello, "Visita del Embajador de Corea en Cuba".

64

Edwards Bello, "Visita del Embajador de Corea en Cuba". On DPRK-Uruguay relations see Camilo Aguirre-Torrini, "'Comercio a Palos': La Misión Comercial Norcoreana en Montevideo (1963-1966)", *Revista Encuentros Uruguayos* 16, no. 1 (2023): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.59842/16.1.5>.

65

"Ch'ille sonnimdürül yöllyörhi hwanyöngtanda! ch'ille konghwagung kuk'oe taep'yodan p'yöngyange toch'ak", *Rodong Sinmun* (Pyongyang), 14 October 1965, 1.

66

"Du nara inmindeul ganui chinseon gwangyeneun nallo ganghwa baljeon doel geosida", *Rodong Sinmun* (Pyongyang), 15 October 1965, 1.

67

"Ch'ille konghwagung kuk'oe taep'yodan kongöm min nongöm chöllamgwanül ch'amgwan", *Rodong Sinmun* (Pyongyang), 15 October 1965, 3.

The North Korean delegation's visit to Chile included a courteous call upon President Jorge Alessandri Rodríguez (1958–1964).⁶¹ Regrettably, we can only speculate regarding the precise nature of these amicable discussions, given the absence of meeting minutes. Our best source of information is a report submitted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by the Chilean ambassador to Cuba, Emilio Edwards Bello, after a meeting with his North Korean counterpart in Havana, Jon Don Chel.⁶² Edwards disclosed that, according to the North Korean ambassador, the DPRK trade delegation and the Chilean president had previously discussed the possibility of establishing trade relations.⁶³ Edwards was informed by the North Korean ambassador of a newly ratified trade agreement with Uruguay; the ambassador further requested that the Chilean government be notified of the DPRK's Montevideo trade mission's readiness to visit Chile to potentially facilitate bilateral trade negotiations.⁶⁴

North Korean diplomatic overtures to Chile consisted primarily of exchanges initiated through formal invitations. In 1965, the policy reached its apex with North Korea's formal invitation to a Chilean congressional delegation, an invitation facilitated by the channels established by Morales. The arrival of Margarita Paluz, José Manuel Isla, Carlos Morales Abarzúa, Ramón Silva Ulloa, Fernando Sotomayor, and Sergio Dávila Echaurren in Pyongyang occurred on October 13, 1965.⁶⁵ It is noteworthy that this event marked the first official congressional visit to an Asian nation by a South American republic.

At a welcoming ceremony for the delegation, Isla, the head of the delegation and a member of the ruling Christian Democratic Party (*Partido Demócrata Cristiano*, DC), declared Chile's interest in fostering trade and diplomatic ties with all nations irrespective of their political systems. On the following day, a meeting was held between the delegation and the Chairman of the Supreme People's Assembly, Choe Won-taek. Choe emphasized that, while geographically distant, the two countries are steadily growing closer.⁶⁶ In his address, Isla reassured his hosts that despite differing national social structures, amicable relations remained entirely feasible. He further noted that, although Chile secured political independence from Spain in the 19th century, its principal challenge remained the achievement of economic independence.⁶⁷

During their stay in the Asian country, the Chilean delegation visited the Fatherland Liberation War Museum, a vinylon (also known as vinalon, North Korea's synthetic fiber) plant (see Figure 3), the Industrial and Agricultural Exhibition, agricultural cooperatives, a tractor plant, and the Children's Palace, where Korean students performed the Chilean folk song *El puelche viene bajando* for the amusement of the congressional delegation.

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José Manuel Isla Hevia. "VISITA DE UNA DELEGACIÓN PARLAMENTARIA CHILENA A LA REPÚBLICA POPULAR DEMOCRÁTICA DE COREA". DSCN, Sesión N° 81, 27 April 1966, BCN.

Figure 3. *The Chilean Congressional Delegation visits a Vinylon Plant, October 1965.*



Source: Murillo Family Photo Archive.

So impressed was the delegation by North Korea's economic advancements that, upon returning to Chile, Isla set aside his ideological convictions and proposed the initiation of bilateral relations:

None of the members of the delegation that visited Korea is a communist. However, we are all aware that the socialist world is a laboratory of novelties and experiences worthy of observation and appreciation. We believe that we were fortunate to have got to know one of the small new socialist countries, and in particular, an Asian socialist country, because we could see that there are living lessons for every underdeveloped country on earth. ⁶⁸

Presented below are excerpts from Isla's address to the Chilean Congress. Among travelogues concerning North Korea from the 1960s, this one stands out for its objectivity. Isla, a Christian politician representing Chile's ruling centrist party, cannot be reasonably characterized as a "fellow traveler". Isla's address to the Chilean Congress concerning his DPRK trip also provides additional context for scrutinizing published information by enabling a comparison with North Korean media reports.

During his speech at the Chilean Congress, Isla acknowledged that North Korea was "not only a nation that has overcome underdevelopment", but a modern nation "on its way to unprecedented achievements". In his opinion, it was no exaggeration to say that the Koreans "have worked a genuine miracle". On the successful reconstruction of the North Korean economy, he noted that the "initial financial support from the socialist countries amounted to a little over 500 million rubles". This amount, converted into dollars, was "almost as much as Chile has received in

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Eduardo Murillo Ugarte, *Infierno en Norcorea*, ed. Camilo Aguirre-Torrini (Santiago: Asiática Ediciones, 2021).

70

San Francisco, Alejandro, et al. *Las Revoluciones en Marcha: El Gobierno de Eduardo Frei Montalva (1964-1970): Primera Parte* (Santiago: CEUSS, Centro de Extensión y Estudios de la Universidad de San Sebastián, 2018): 466.

71

San Francisco, Alejandro, et al. *Las Revoluciones en Marcha: El Gobierno de Eduardo Frei Montalva*, 467.

72

Joan Robinson, "Korean Miracle", *Monthly Review*, 2 January 1965, 541–49, https://doi.org/10.14452/MR-016-09-1965-01_2.

73

Kevin Gray and Jong-Woon Lee, *North Korea and the Geopolitics of Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 10–11, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108919579>.

74

Carlos Morales Abarzúa, "VISITA DE UNA DELEGACIÓN PARLAMENTARIA CHILENA A DIVERSOS PAÍSES SOCIALISTAS DE ASIA Y EUROPA". DSCN, Sesión Ordinaria N° 44, 18 January 1966, BCN.

75

Morales Abarzúa, "VISITA DE UNA DELEGACIÓN PARLAMENTARIA," 1966.

76

Morales Abarzúa, "VISITA DE UNA DELEGACIÓN PARLAMENTARIA," 1966.

77

José Manuel Isla Hevia and others, "ESTABLECIMIENTO DE RELACIONES COMERCIALES CON LA REPÚBLICA POPULAR DEMOCRÁTICA DE COREA.- PROYECTO DE ACUERDO". DSCN, Sesión Ordinaria N° 86, 11 May 1966, BCN.

contributions from the Alliance for Progress since 1961". Isla also praised the North Koreans' decision to lay the foundation for an independent economy by "building up heavy industry, developing light industry and at the same time carrying out land reform". The North Koreans, Isla told his colleagues, had decided to "sacrifice ten years, but they are already reaping the fruits of their efforts". He felt that the DPRK was a fitting example for Chile, and he was sure that Chile, like North Korea, "will achieve full economic independence! Economic independence!". Isla also devoted a few lines to the warm welcome he received from the North Koreans, noting that each member of the delegation was assisted by Korean interpreters "who spoke perfect Spanish" and was always accompanied by a Chilean, who also helped with translations. This Chilean was Eduardo Murillo Ugarte, the son of the treasurer of the Chile-KFA, who at the time was studying at Kim Il Sung University, illustrating another dimension of North Korean people's diplomacy.⁶⁹

Surprisingly, this episode has received little to no attention in Chilean historiography. The only scholarly work that has addressed Isla's account has analyzed it from a presentist perspective, claiming that Isla "applauded the social policies of the North Korean regime, one of the most repressive in human history, and presented it as a true example for Chile to follow."⁷⁰ Isla's speech, which the authors regard as "absurd language", is therefore understood as a mere consequence of the Christian democrats' need to "demonstrate their independent foreign policy in every possible way and to demonstrate that [Chile] was not subject to Washington's dictates."⁷¹

However, when Isla's impressions of North Korea are considered in context, they coincide with other accounts from foreigners who visited the DPRK. In the same year that the Chilean congressional delegation visited North Korea, British economist Joan Robinson described the DPRK's progress in *Monthly Review* as a "Korean miracle".⁷² Other contemporary scholars also agreed that North Korea had outperformed its Southern rival and provided an example for underdeveloped nations.⁷³

Like Isla, Morales also delivered a speech about his visit to North Korea in which he stated that North Korea's only goal was to establish a permanent trade mission in Santiago, "just as there are trade missions of the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, just as there was a Czechoslovak one, and so on."⁷⁴ Morales mentioned that the North Koreans were interested in importing "essential items for their economy, especially saltpeter and copper."⁷⁵ The mention of saltpeter is important because this natural fertilizer was Chile's principal export until World War I, when German chemists Fritz Haber and Carl Bosch developed an industrial process to produce synthetic fertilizers. Morales likely sought the backing of representatives from northern regions, still endeavoring to revive the saltpeter industry, by indicating Pyongyang's interest in acquiring it.⁷⁶

Both Isla and Morales' interventions elicited positive responses; on May 11, 1966, the Chamber of Deputies approved a motion from the congressional delegation to establish bilateral relations:

The Chamber of Deputies of Chile, having heard the report of the President of the congressional delegation that visited the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, agrees to request His Excellency the President of the Republic and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Chile to establish trade relations with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and to request authorization for the establishment in the country of an agency of the Foreign Trade Office of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.⁷⁷

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Máximo Pacheco, "Entrevista con el Embajador de Corea del Norte Señor Kim Ben Dik", 20 September 1965, AGH, RUS1.

79

Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, *Cable N° 60*, 28 September 1965, AGH, RUS2.

80

Carlos Morales Abarzúa.

"ESTABLECIMIENTO DE RELACIONES ECONÓMICAS CON LA REPÚBLICA DEMOCRÁTICA POPULAR DE COREA".

DSCN, Sesión Ordinaria N° 36, 23 August 1966, BCN.

81

"Ch'ille sahoe tanch'eesōjosōninmin'gwaūi ryōndaesōng wōlganūi sōlchōng", *Rodong Sinmun* (Pyongyang), 10 June 1966.

82

"Ch'ille sahoe tanch'eesōjosōninmin'gwaūi ryōndaesōng wōlganūi sōlchōng", *Rodong Sinmun* (Pyongyang), 10 June 1966.

83

"Ch'ille sahoe tanch'eesōjosōninmin'gwaūi ryōndaesōng wōlganūi sōlchōng", *Rodong Sinmun* (Pyongyang), 10 June 1966. On the issue of contrasting the realities of North and South Korea from a North Korean perspective see *Sharp Contrast between North and South Korea* (Pyongyang, Korea: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1959).

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OSPAAAL, *Tricontinental Bulletin* 4 (July 1966): 32. The British Library for Development Studies Legacy Collection.

Unfortunately for the members of the congressional delegation and the Chile-KFA, the request fell on deaf ears. In Chile, a country with a long tradition of presidentialism, foreign policy was to be determined by the president. Despite the high hopes of the pro-DPRK faction, establishing formal bilateral relations between Chile and North Korea was an unthinkable task for Eduardo Frei Montalva (1964-1970). The leader of the Christian Democratic Party was caught between his desire to pursue an independent foreign policy that would allow for relations with all countries, regardless of ideological differences, and the support he received from the United States through the Alliance for Progress. While normalization of relations with the Soviet Union was achieved, establishing relations with the DPRK remained unattainable.

Chilean Foreign Ministry sources reveal that, despite a lack of public renunciation of DPRK relations by the Christian Democratic Party government, an internal determination against establishing such ties was made in 1965. Following an approach by his North Korean counterpart expressing interest in exploring trade with Chile, the Chilean Ambassador to Moscow, Máximo Pacheco, requested further instructions from Santiago.⁷⁸ The response was concise: "Under no circumstances will the establishment of a (North) Korean commercial office in Santiago be authorized."⁷⁹

The Chile-KFA, and presumably the visiting members of the Christian Democratic Party, were unaware of this stance toward the DPRK, since Morales, on the occasion of the 4th anniversary of the founding of the Chile-KFA and in view of the lack of progress, repeated his demand that "His Excellency the President of the Republic should officiate the Minister of Foreign Affairs to establish at least trade relations with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea."⁸⁰

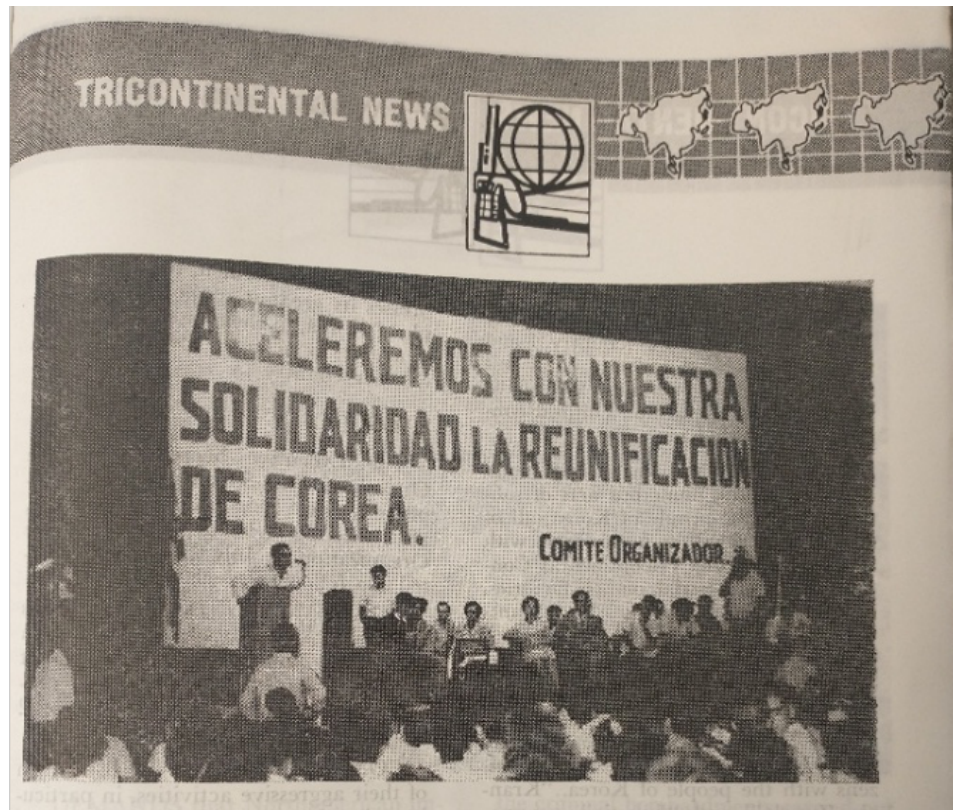
It should be noted, however, that solidarity with the DPRK was not limited to the occasional trips to Pyongyang by high-profile politicians. On June 10, 1966, the *Rodong Sinmun* published an article entitled: "Chilean Social Organization Launches Month of Solidarity with Korean People". According to information received by the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) through *Prensa Latina*, the newspaper informed that a month of solidarity with Korea would be held in Chile from June 25, "the day the US imperialist aggression began", to July 27.⁸¹ The representative of the commission, who is not named in the newspaper, mentioned that the Chilean people would demand the "expulsion of the Yankees from South Korean territory" and "the reunification of the fatherland under the conditions set by the DPRK", while making public their opposition to the Japan-South Korea treaty, the installation of nuclear weapons in South Korea, the sending of South Korean troops to Vietnam, and the handling of ethnic Koreans in Japan.⁸² Finally, the representative announced his plans to organize an exhibition to showcase North Korea's progress in the economy, culture, and science, which would be contrasted with "the living conditions of South Koreans under US occupation".⁸³

Issue 4 of the OSPAAAL Tricontinental Bulletin highlighted the activities of the Chilean Committee of Solidarity with the Korean People, specifically focusing on photo exhibitions conducted in different areas of Santiago, which offered "a panorama of the bellicose preparation of the Northamericans [sic] in South Korea; the struggle of the Korean People against the Japanese-South Korean pact, and the great advances obtained in all its activities by the Popular Democratic Republic of Korea."⁸⁴

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Carlos Jorquera Tolosa, "Allende habla de Corea, Vietnam y Cuba", *Punto Final*, n.º 84 (1969): 2.

Figure 4. *Let us accelerate the reunification of Korea with our solidarity. Organizing (Chilean) Committee (of Solidarity with the Korean People).*



Source: OSPAAL, *Tricontinental Bulletin* 4 (July 1966): 33. The British Library for Development Studies Legacy Collection

While exhibiting some overlap with the Chile-KFA, the Chilean Committee of Solidarity with the Korean People espoused a more distinctly revolutionary and tricontinentalist ideology. The following section will show that North Korea accorded both organizations equal recognition.

3. The Chile-KFA and the Chilean Revolution

In 1969, in his capacity as president of the Chilean Senate, Allende visited North Korea and, upon his return to Chile, spoke favorably of both the country's progress and the figure of its leader, Kim Il Sung. In an interview with *Punto Final*, he described Kim as "the undisputed leader of the forty million who make up both southern and northern Korea."⁸⁵ Taken together with his campaign promises as a presidential candidate to establish diplomatic relations with socialist countries—including North Korea—these remarks foreshadowed a subsequent strengthening of ties between Pyongyang and Santiago. While it is plausible that the Chile-KFA played a coordinating or facilitative role in this visit, the available sources do not allow for a definitive assessment of its involvement.

The presidential election of September 4, 1970 resulted in a narrow victory for the Socialist Salvador Allende Gossens (36.63 %) over Jorge Alessandri Rodríguez (35.29 %). The constitution stipulated that the Senate should decide the election. On October 24, 1970, before the watchful eyes of the world, the Chilean Senate

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Sebastián Hurtado Torres, "The Chilean Moment in the Global Cold War: International Reactions to Salvador Allende's Victory in the Presidential Election of 1970", *Journal of Cold War Studies* 21, no. 3 (2019): 26–55, https://doi.org/10.1162/jcws_a_00892.

87

Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional, *Allende a 50 Años de su Elección* (Santiago: Ediciones Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile, 2020), 52.

88

"Widaehan suryŏng kimilsŏng tongjikkessŏ ponashinŭn ch'insŏrŭl uri nara chŏngbuch'insŏndaep'yodani ch'illedaet'ongnyŏngege chŏndal", *Rodong Sinmun* (Pyongyang), 12 November 1970, 1.

89

Clodomiro Almeyda, *Reencuentro con mi Vida* (Santiago / Chile: Ediciones del Ornitorrinco, 1987), 233–34.

90

Puk'an Ch'ille Kwan'gye, 1971. In Republic of Korea (ROK) Ministry of Foreign Affairs Diplomatic Archives, DVD, D-0009(4249).

91

"Chosŏnminjujuŭi inmin'gonghwagung muyŏk taep'yobuga ch'illee kaesŏltoeyŏtta", *Rodong Sinmun* (Pyongyang), 24 November 1970, 1.

92

"Ch'ille chŏngbuga raenyŏne modŭn tonggwangdŭlgwa kaeinŭnhaengdŭrŭl kuckyuhwahagi kyŏlchŏng", *Rodong Sinmun* (Pyongyang), 5 December 1970, 5. According to the ROK Ministry of Unification's database of North Korean newspapers, during the 1,000 days of the Allende government, the *Rodong Sinmun* published 177 articles on Chile. <https://unibook.unikorea.go.kr/>.

confirmed Allende (1970-1973) as President of Chile, the first Marxist to be elected president in a liberal democracy.⁸⁶ During his victory speech in the National Stadium, Allende sent an unequivocal message to the delegations of the socialist countries attending: "I would also like to greet the delegations of the countries with which we do not yet have diplomatic relations. Chile will do them justice by recognizing their governments."⁸⁷ Included among the delegations was a delegation from the DPRK, headed by Deputy Foreign Minister Kuon Hui Gyon.⁸⁸

Upon assuming office, Allende pursued the foreign policy agenda articulated in his presidential platform, a course clearly reflected in the international orientation of the Popular Unity (Unidad Popular, UP) government. As articulated by Foreign Minister Clodomiro Almeyda, this approach emphasized solidarity with the developing world through Chile's formal accession to the Non-Aligned Movement and active participation in initiatives aimed at strengthening Third World autonomy, challenging structures of imperial dependence, and fostering ties with progressive forces, particularly socialist states. In line with these principles, the UP government expressed support for anti-imperialist struggles in Southeast Asia, established diplomatic relations with socialist and revolutionary governments in Vietnam, Cambodia, and North Korea, severed ties with regimes viewed as illegitimate, recognized the People's Republic of China as the lawful representative of the Chinese state, and supported its admission to the United Nations.⁸⁹

The pursuit of foreign policy independence from the United States by Alessandri and Frei, involving engagement with developing nations, did not result in relations with the DPRK because of overriding practical considerations. In contrast, the UP's foreign policy adhered to an ideological framework, actively promoting engagement with socialist states and supporting decolonization efforts.

However, the UP's approach cannot be characterized as lacking pragmatism. Although President Allende granted recognition to the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), full diplomatic ties were not immediately established. The best source that can help us understand the cautious approach to bilateral relations with the DPRK is an undated transcript of a meeting between the US Ambassador to Chile, Edward M. Korry, and his South Korean counterpart, Kang Chun-he. Korry assessed that, despite President Allende's likely intention to establish complete bilateral relations with the People's Republic of China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Chilean President opted for a more cautious strategy to dispel any impression of hasty communization.⁹⁰ Indeed, the Chilean Government faced an extremely precarious geopolitical situation, encircled by anti-communist military dictatorships, with Cuba as its primary ally, and under the watchful scrutiny of both the Soviet Union and China.

Chilean authorities, however, swiftly devised a solution. Although ambassadorial relations were not established, the DPRK was authorized to create a trade mission in Santiago, which assumed the role of a de facto embassy.⁹¹ North Korea acknowledged with appreciation the Chilean initiatives, however minor, which would have been unimaginable a few years prior. The *Rodong Sinmun* eagerly reported on Chilean developments, focusing mainly on progressive policies such as the nationalization of the copper industry and agrarian reform.⁹²

On January 5, 1971, Chile, as Ambassador Korry had foreseen, commenced full diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China. The *Rodong Sinmun* understood this as a sign of the "collapse of US aggression which had subjugated

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"Chunghwainmin'gonghwagukkwa ch'illega oegyogwan'gyerül sölchöng", *Rodong Sinmun* (Pyongyang), 7 January 1970, 4.

94

Pablo Ignacio Ampuero Ruiz, "Diplomacia en Transición. La República Popular China frente a la Dictadura Cívico-Militar en Chile", *Estudios Políticos (Medellín)*, no. 49 (2016): 41, <https://doi.org/10.17533/udea.espo.n49a02>; See also Camilo Aguirre-Torrini, "¿Ideología o Pragmatismo? Corea del Sur y el Gobierno de la Unidad Popular (1970-1973)", *Historia Crítica*, no. 90 (2023): 29–50, <https://doi.org/10.7440/histcrit90.2023.02>.

95

"Chon'gyöngghanün kimilsöngdongjiüi t'ansaeng yesundolse chüümhayö küikke türinün ch'ille kang chöngdang, sahoedanch'edürüi kongdongch'uk'ap'yöngji", *Rodong Sinmun* (Pyongyang), 17 April 1972, 3.

96

Antonia Fonck Larraín, *Miradas Desclasificadas: El Chile de Salvador Allende en los Documentos Estadounidenses (1969-1973)* (Ediciones Universidad Alberto Hurtado, 2020).

97

Kim Sang Zun, "Carta a su Excelencia Clodomiro Almeyda Medina, Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores de la República de Chile". AGH, PRK2.

98

"Chosöninmin'gwa ch'illeinminsaüi ch'insön'gwan'gyebalchönnüi saeroun tan'gye", *Rodong Sinmun* (Pyongyang), 2 June 1972, 3.

99

"Hyöngmyöngüi widaehan suryöng kimilsöngdongjiüi yöggwangch'allanhan hyöngmyönghwaltongnyöksaga suroktoen che1purül ch'illeesö esüppanyaöro ch'ulp'an", *Rodong Sinmun* (Pyongyang), 19 July 1972, 1

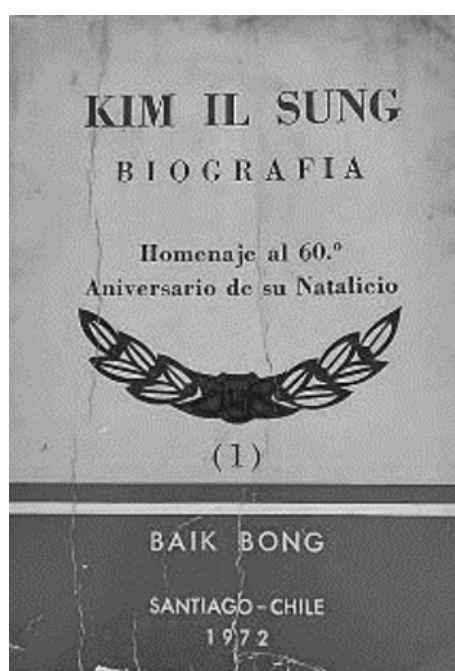
Latin American countries, including Chile, both politically and economically."⁹³ This decision, however, had a negligible effect on the development of comprehensive bilateral relations with North Korea, while relations with South Korea persevered.⁹⁴

Parallel to the bilateral channels opened by the UP Government, the Chile-KFA continued its mission to bring the two countries closer together. On the occasion of the 60th birthday of Kim Il Sung, it published a collection of greetings from the Chilean people's organizations to the "respected comrade Kim Il Sung", a publication that does not seem to have survived to the present day.⁹⁵

By mid-1972, it was already clear to the UP that the US Government, led by Richard Nixon (1969-1974) was committed to bringing down Allende.⁹⁶ As maintaining appearances in the interest of a modus vivendi became redundant, the Chilean Government proceeded to fortify diplomatic links with the DPRK. On June 1, 1972, Kim Sang Zun, chargé d'affaires of the North Korean trade mission in Santiago, officially notified the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the DPRK mission would henceforth function as an embassy.⁹⁷ North Korean media responded with an editorial in the *Rodong Sinmun*, titled "A New Stage in the Development of Friendship Between the Peoples of Chile and Korea."⁹⁸

Following the intensification of bilateral engagement, the Chile-KFA continued its work in fostering cultural exchange with the DPRK. The *Rodong Sinmun* informed its readers of the publication of the first volume of Kim Il Sung's biography by the Chile-Korea Culture Institute in Spanish (Figure 5).⁹⁹ Between 1972 and 1973, at least ten English-language books concerning North Korea were translated and published locally by the Chile-KFA (Table 1). Additionally, the Chile-Korea Friendship Association distributed Spanish-language publications from the Pyongyang Foreign Languages Publishing House.

Figure 5. *Kim Il Sung Biography Vol.1* by Baik Bong, translated and published by the Chile-KFA, 1972.



Source: Copy owned by the author

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Embajada de la República Democrática Popular de Corea en Chile, "Al Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de la República de Chile", 14 October 1972, AGH, PRK2.

101

Armando Uribe, *Memorias para Cecilia* (Santiago de Chile: Lumen Penguin Random House, 2016).

102

Fernando Murillo Viaña, "Instalación de la Embajada de Chile en la RPDC", 5 December 1972, AGH, PRK1.

Table 1. *List of publications by the Chile-KFA (Instituto Chileno Coreano de Cultura)*

Author	Title	Year
Kim Il Sung	Talk to Journalists of the US Newspaper New York Times	1972
Kim Il Sung	On the Present Political and Economic Policies of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and some International Problems.	1972
Baik Bong	Kim Il Sung Biography Vol. 1	1972
Kim Il Sung	The Tasks and Role of the Local Organs of Power at the Present Stage	1973
Kim Il Sung	On the Building of a New Korea and the National United Front	1973
Kim Il Sung	Talk to the Delegation of the Japan National Association of Socialist Mayors	1973
Kim Il Sung	New Year Address (1973)	1973
Kim Il Sung	On Eliminating Dogmatism and Formalism and Establishing Juche in Ideological Work	1973
Kim Il Sung	Let Us Further Strengthen the Socialist System of Our Country	1973
Baik Bong	Kim Il Sung Biography Vol. II	1973

Source: Data obtained from the National Library of Chile (*Biblioteca Nacional de Chile*, BCN) <http://www.bncatalogo.cl>

The Chile-KFA's work towards establishing bilateral relations was acknowledged upon notification by the DPRK embassy in Chile to the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Relations of the DPRK's bestowal of honors upon Morales, President of the Chile-KFA, Murillo, former Secretary General of the Chile-KFA, and Julio Benites, President of the Chilean Committee of Solidarity with the Korean People, "who have long worked for the development of friendly relations between the peoples of the two countries."¹⁰⁰

During the awards ceremony, Murillo's thoughts likely dwelled on his upcoming trip to North Korea. President Allende appointed him chargé d'affaires to the soon-to-be-established Chilean Embassy in the DPRK, reciprocating the DPRK's establishment of an embassy in Chile. Thus, the Chile-KFA's longstanding work culminated in the establishment of ambassadorial-level relations between the two nations.

The contrast between Allende's appointment of Murillo and his appointment of an ambassador to the People's Republic of China is noteworthy. Armando Uribe, who served as Chilean Ambassador to the PRC while concurrently accredited to the DPRK (until Murillo's appointment), explains in his memoirs that Allende's decision to appoint him stemmed from a desire to avoid appointing a Maoist to the PRC ambassadorship.¹⁰¹ The rationale behind Allende's appointment of a known Korean associate as ambassador to the DPRK remains unclear. It may be that Allende simply ran out of options, as appointments in the then so-called Far East were extremely unpopular among career diplomats.

In December 1972, Murillo, accompanied by his spouse, arrived in Pyongyang and, with the assistance of the DPRK, established the Chilean embassy there.¹⁰²

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Fernando Murillo Viaña, "Deterioro del Comercio con los Países socialistas – Relaciones Comerciales y Económicas con la URSS - Recomendaciones para el Manejo de las Relaciones Bilaterales con la RPDC", 5 June 1973, AGH, PRK1.

This station consolidated Chile's position as North Korea's ally, becoming the second Latin American nation, after Cuba, with a permanent presence in the country. Murillo's journalistic background and profound interest in Third World affairs led him to utilize his position to apprise the Chilean Foreign Ministry of developments in Korea, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Indonesia. Murillo authored multiple reports analyzing the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's foreign policy, with an emphasis on its relationships with China and Cuba. His contributions also provided valuable analysis of North Korea's relations with Latin American countries, notably those geographically proximate to Chile: Argentina and Peru.

Murillo's performance as a diplomat and de facto ambassador ultimately validated President Allende's confidence, as his long-standing personal ties with Korea did not prevent him from prioritizing Chilean national interests. His internal assessments of intergovernmental relations reveal a pragmatic and often critical view of his counterparts, noting bureaucratic inefficiencies and organizational shortcomings while cautioning against underestimating the capacity of socialist states to pursue independent development through sustained social investment. Drawing comparative lessons from the Chinese experience, Murillo emphasized the decisive role of political will in overcoming structural constraints. At the same time, he underscored the need for a strictly bilateral and interest-based approach in relations with Korea, arguing that cooperation would materialize only where concrete mutual benefits—particularly in the exchange of raw materials—were clearly identified. He therefore advocated for firm, written agreements, careful verification at higher levels of authority, and a negotiating posture that anticipated delays and revisions, reflecting both skepticism toward informal assurances and an insistence on institutional accountability.¹⁰³

As treasurer and secretary of the first KFA established in mainland Latin America, Murillo visited Pyongyang on several occasions and engaged with notable individuals such as Kim Il Sung and Ho Dam. Yet, despite his longstanding engagement with North Korea, he was entirely forthright in expressing his opinions regarding bilateral relations, prioritizing his country's interests. Although some of his remarks were harsh, they did not originate from racial prejudice but from a long history of cooperative endeavors with Koreans. This is noteworthy as it challenges the assertion that all North Korean sympathizers are simply agents of Pyongyang.

Unfortunately for Murillo, his days as Chile's representative in Pyongyang were soon to come to an end. On September 11, 1973, the Chilean military seized power, and Allende committed suicide rather than being forced to resign, ending the 'one thousand days of Chilean revolution'. In response to these events, Murillo called a press conference on September 15, 1973. During the press conference, he delivered a speech in which he condemned the "massacre perpetrated by the fascists" and the intervention of the CIA. His address, transcribed by a Cuban diplomat and forwarded to the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Relations, is reproduced hereinafter:

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Ricardo Pérez Haristoy, ed., *Chile en los Archivos del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Cuba (1960-1974)* (Santiago: Ediciones Biblioteca Nacional de Chile, 2019), 269.

“(…)You know that I recently returned from Chile. I was there three times with President Allende, the last time on 30 August. His great concern was to normalize relations with this part of the world. He wanted me to visit Vietnam and other countries to explain our difficulties, why we were not opening missions in those countries... He told me he would appoint me as an ambassador to the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea... All this is now behind us. I have summoned you here to officially declare that this embassy no longer serves as a diplomatic mission for the military junta. I have telegraphed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to inform them that I am disgusted to be serving an illegal and murderous government. From today, this is the embassy of the fighting people of Chile. I have received a mandate from the Popular Unity to represent them in this and other countries. I am no longer a diplomat. I represent the people of Chile in struggle.

Being thrown out of one’s homeland, 30,000 kilometers away, is a serious matter, but it does not matter when one must defend the honor of the revolution. I can no longer serve a government of criminals.

We Chileans are infinitely grateful for international solidarity. Almost all countries, capitalist and non-capitalist, and the progressive forces in the world support us. I must say that all the socialist countries, not missing a single one, have reached out to me. And I would like to thank especially the Korean Government and the Workers’ Party of Korea, who have extended their hand to me and welcomed me hospitably. I am surrounded by the affection and hospitality of my Korean brothers and sisters, and I am enormously proud of them.¹⁰⁴

Conclusion

The Chile-Korea Friendship Association (KFA) was instrumental in fostering bilateral relations between Chile and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. Its contribution to the dissemination of Korean culture in the South American nation was complemented by the organization of numerous exchange programs under the aegis of people’s diplomacy. Furthermore, members collaborated from their respective roles in fostering bilateral ties between the two countries.

Throughout its existence, spanning over a decade, the entity interacted with three distinct Chilean administrations: those of Alessandri, Frei, and Allende. Despite the willingness of all heads of state to disregard Cold War paradigms and engage with the Second World to uphold Chile’s autonomous international relations, diplomatic relations with the DPRK presented a political burden that both Alessandri and Frei were hesitant to assume. Only Salvador Allende, unwavering in his socialist convictions, was willing to bear this burden.

This may appear to contradict the central thesis of this study, as it emphasizes the necessity of ideological alignment between the two nations. Nevertheless, Allende’s approach to establishing bilateral relations with the DPRK was demonstrably pragmatic. The UP Government acknowledged the DPRK, delaying further engagement until any potential ramifications for US-Chilean relations ceased to exist. Allende’s selection of Murillo, a Chile-KFA representative, to serve in Pyongyang also differed from his approach to relations with the People’s Republic of China. Therefore, any comprehensive account of Chile-North Korea relations requires recognition of the KFA’s efforts during the 1960s, as well as the significant increase in Chile-KFA activities throughout the 1,000-day period of the Allende Government.

The limitations of this approach to North Korean foreign policy, which is based on the role of the KFAs, are evident, largely stemming from the unreliable nature of the data. Following the 1973 coup d’état led by General Augusto Pinochet that deposed President Allende, members of the Chile-KFA were forced into exile.

¹⁰⁵

Personal communication with Miriam
Morales Sanhueza, daughter of the late
Carlos Morales Abarzúa, 28 September 2020.

Consequently, a significant portion of their possessions were abandoned and are presumed irretrievably lost. Furthermore, the story's central figures are deceased, and their descendants lack knowledge of their connection to the DPRK.¹⁰⁵ In the absence of personal archives and firsthand accounts, this study reconstructs the history of the Chile-KFA using available resources. While offering only a partial reflection of lived experiences, the reconstructed account enhances our understanding of Chilean-North Korean relations, validating a non-state actor-centric framework for analyzing North Korea's interactions with the Third World.

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