



Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures  
Polish Academy of Sciences



ACTA ASIATICA  
VARSOVIENSIA  
No. 31

Warsaw 2018

*Editor-in-Chief*  
NICOLAS LEVI

*Editorial Assistant*  
IGOR DOBRZENIECKI

*English Text Consultant*  
JO HARPER

*Subject Editor*  
KAROLINA ZIELIŃSKA

*Board of Advisory Editors*  
ABDULRAHMAN AL-SALIMI  
MING-HUEI LEE  
THUAN NGUYEN QUANG  
KENNETH OLENIK  
JOLANTA SIERAKOWSKA-DYNDO  
BOGDAN SKŁADANEK  
HAIPENG ZHANG

*Acta Asiatica Varsoviensia no. 31 was granted a financial support of the  
Ministry of Science and Higher Education, grant no. 772/P-DUN/2017.*

© Copyright by Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures,  
Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw 2018  
PL ISSN 0860-6102  
eISSN 2449-8653  
ISBN 978-83-7452-091-1

ACTA ASIATICA VARSOVIENSIA is abstracted in  
*The Central European Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities,*  
*Index Copernicus, ProQuest Database*

# Contents

## ARTICLES

- ROBERT WINSTANLEY-CHESTERS, Fish, Subterfuge and Security in North Korean and Soviet Institutional Interactions in the 1970s ..... 7
- MARIA GRADJAN, Gender Acrobatics: The Questionable Liberalism of Popular Culture and the Emergence of Alternative Masculinity Patterns in Late-modern Japan ..... 26
- ARNAUD DOGLIA, Ōkunoshima and Japan's Chemical Arsenal: 1900-1945 ..... 47
- MARIA SOLDATOVA, Visualizing Poetry in Urban Space: The Gwanghwamun Poetry Placard ..... 64
- BYRAPPA RAMACHANDRA, Precursory Study on South Asian Security and Geopolitics ..... 82
- KRZYSZTOF IWANEK, Interests before Ideas. Does Hindu Nationalism influence India's Foreign Policy? ..... 97
- ÁDÁM RÓMA, Sino-Indian Standoff on the Doklam plateau 114
- MICHALEWICZ KATARZYNA, The image of China on the pages of the periodical *Naokoło Świata* ..... 132
- JAKUB ALI FAHRAN, "Century of humiliation" and its influence on modern Chinese politics with special emphasis on China-Japan relations ..... 149

## **BOOKS REVIEWS**

Kim Myung-ja. The Korean Diaspora in Postwar Japan - Geopolitics, Identity and Nation-Building, London: I.B Tauris, 2017, 304 pages. ISBN: 978-1784537678– rev. Nicolas Levi .....	164
Kim Byung-Yeon. Unveiling the North Korean economy, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, 329 pages. ISBN: 978-1-316-63516-2– rev. Nicolas Levi.....	167
Editorial principles .....	170



## Fish, Subterfuge and Security in North Korean and Soviet Institutional Interactions in the 1970s

### Abstract

By exploring the institutional and political fishing histories of North Korea, this paper traces developments in interactions with the Soviet Union in the 1970s. Drawing on newly found archival material from the Russian State Archive of the Economy and the Soviet Union's Ministry of Fisheries Archive, the paper considers the reality of such encounters. In particular it analyses research exchanges between North Korea and the Soviet Union, the security paradoxes created by these as well as interactions between North Korean and the Soviet Union in the Sea of Okhotsk. Fish, Fisheries Researchers and Fishing Technologies are certainly vibrant, active, lively matters in the landscapes of exchange between these two nations and their complex relationships of socialist fraternity.

**Keywords:** Development, fishing, North Korea, security, Soviet Union.

### Introduction

North Korea is one of the most political spaces on the globe. Its historical narratives are equally riven by political ideology and have been reconstructed anew throughout the last seven decades. North Korea's politics often generates intense geo-political response and feedback and political ecosystems and industries are generated around its containment, restriction and hypothecated eventual destruction. Since the collapse of the world communist bloc and the fracture of the Cold War status quo North Korea as a nation and its citizens have been forced to adopt many new strategies to underpin their own survival, including attempting greater levels of mobility through migration, developing practical elements of enterprise and exchange, many of which have an environmental connection or impact on local or regional ecosystems. New patterns of social and economic organisation at both formal and

---

\* University of Leeds. Faculty of East Asian Studies.

informal levels and at intersections with nature and environment have emerged with accompanying frameworks of practice and interaction.

North Korean histories are therefore interactions with these frameworks and complex relations between a politics of possession and dispossession. In contemporary political and media culture, Pyongyang's rule is marked as a repertoire of dispossession; dispossession of material goods, of intellectual mores, of freedom and liberty themselves. Absence or lack is certainly a key feature of North Korean history, through war, colonial occupation and the frozen conflicts of the Cold War and the Post-Cold War (only in North Korea has the Cold War continued past 1992 in such an acute and concrete fashion), its citizens lack peace and security. However, they also lack material possessions, stores of value and stores of calories. In a manner familiar to South Koreans for much of the twentieth century, North Koreans have been dispossessed by politics, history and nature. Even in the acts of development and production, North Korea and North Koreans experience dispossession. This is of course historically common to much of the globe dominated by capital and capitalism, surplus values extraction, the co-option and appropriation of property, nature and abstract goods. However, in North Korea this appropriation has been more dramatic in form and has historically been much more significant. Ostensibly the work of my research and this paper address histories and geographies of fishing, a developmental sector directly focused on the appropriation of common goods. While engaging with a waterscape once thought infinite, fishing and fishermen have been busy in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century manufacturing the collapse of a global ecosystem through appropriation and dispossession. This feeds back into North Korea, although the nation has not itself been excluded from this history, often seeking desperately to be a dispossessor and appropriator itself. This paper will deal with this in the context of the institutional relationships between the Soviet Union and North Korea. North Korea certainly sought to dispossess resources belonging to the Soviet Union, to the same extent that the Soviet Union attempted to co-opt North Korean institutional and research organisations into its wider framework of socialist solidarities and fraternity, as well as to prevent North Korea from taking more than or too much of the fishing commons in its sphere of influence and waters in the Pacific. In spite of these connectivities born of the world socialist or communist system, both sides were determined to maintain their own security.

This paper recounts some of the practices of subterfuge North Korea utilised in order to negate the security practices of the Soviet Union and to gain advantage in fishing and other matters. Fishing practices are not rooted in North Korea or the Soviet Union's contemporary ideological frameworks, but in the presuppositions, presumptions and predilections of modernism and colonialism. Fishing technologies and science, which now scours the seas for the last vestiges of maritime life, were born in the Japanese Empire and the Cold War military industrial complex of the United States, in the research centres designed to bring forth total power on behalf of modern capitalism. As committed to Socialism or Communism as the Soviet Union was, its fishing technologies and strategies were similarly sourced from these extractive imperatives and predicated on the fishing science of maximum sustainable yield and other statistical sleights of hand. Whether Japanese, American or Soviet, all fishing institutions of this period were focused on inexhaustible maritime resources and never-ending growth in catches. North Korea in this sense is a bit player in a highly destructive historical, economic, technological enterprise already underway.

North Korean fishing histories are thus not unique or exceptional, *sui generis* in space and place. While much media, academic and popular narrative asserts that North Korea is a place out of time, history and space, it is as connected to the themes of global development and politics as anywhere else, as riven by future crises and struggles as any other territory. Its fishing histories therefore have much in common with others in neighbouring nations, who have been subjected to similar attempts at and processes of dispossession. Small South Korean fishing communities have been dispossessed by the exploitative modes of capital and debt bondage represented by the *Kaekchu* middlemen, at the same time as the larger industrial complex of that nation's fisheries was busy engaging in the global dispossession and despoliation of the deep sea that was the trawling revolution. Chinese communities focused on fishing and sea products were dispossessed by European adventurism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and are now crowded out by both the appropriation of space and place by speculative urbanism and rampant vulture and venture capital and by the environmental disaster generated by both global and local developmental agendas.

### Literature and Theoretical Frameworks

Before moving on to interactions between North Korean and Soviet fishing institutions, an outline of the non-historical theoretical terrain through which these narratives are considered is necessary. North Korea's politics and culture is regarded as an extraordinary, aberrant conceptual landscape, one which in academic analysis is layered with a multitude of theoretical approaches. This author, despite being a geographer engages with theory derived from political anthropology, holding that North Korea's politics is a culture of charisma and theatre.

When this paper's author utilises the notion of charisma or charismatic politics he is doing so in the wake of much past research and analysis. This particular author holds to Heonik Kwon and Byung-ho Chung's influential channelling of Max Weber and Clifford Geertz in their assertion that North Korea has all the hallmarks of a theatre state,<sup>1</sup> in which performativity is vital to the function of politics. Pyongyang's theatric sensibilities are powered by a Weberian sense of political charisma deployed on a national scale, breaking temporal boundaries and embedding itself within the nation's historical memory and institutional practice. The author of the paper is by academic discipline a human geographer, so for him space, scale, boundaries and bounding are all vital elements within analysis. While performance and memory are important for North Korea's theatric or charismatic politic, the space and place for their performative practice and content is equally vital. Theatric politics will necessarily require a stage for the performance or re-performance of its charisma, and that stage is the physical bounded landscapes of the nation itself. This author therefore twins theories and concepts from anthropology (Benedict Anderson, Heonik Kwon and Byung-ho Chung), with work from geography on the construction of symbolic, political or social landscapes<sup>2</sup>.

Castree's conception of political landscapes in particular,<sup>3</sup> dovetails with Eric Swyngedouw's writing on scale as political practice

---

<sup>1</sup> Kwon Heonik, Chung Byung-ho, *North Korea: Beyond Charismatic Politics*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Denis Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*, Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1984 and Denis Cosgrove, *Landscape and Landschaft*, Lecture Given the "Spatial Turn in History" Symposium German Historical Institute, February 19, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Noel Castree, *Social Nature*, Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishing, 2001.

within landscape,<sup>4</sup> and the author's own on the application of such ideas within North Korean spaces.<sup>5</sup> In tandem with this political conception of scale and scaling, this paper is also particularly interested in the agency, action and politics of fishing terrain itself. To consider this agency the author utilises the enormously important work of Jane Bennett<sup>6</sup> and Sarah Whatmore<sup>7</sup> on the generation and existence of what they have termed 'vibrant' matter or political matter. However Bennett and Whatmore's work on the specifics of non-human or non-sentient vibrancy must be read in tandem with the equally vital work of Jason Moore.<sup>8</sup> Moore's interpretation of the 'web of life' holds that there can be no externalised Capitalism (or any other ism), acting upon Nature or natures, as both are intrinsically within and around politics and political forms. Nature and natures run through economic, political, cultural and social imperatives, entwining, enmeshing, influencing and reordering them, and are inseparable from the many functions of human life. Of course this must therefore be true of non-Capitalist polities and non-capitalist Nature or nature. North Korea's politics, institutions, cultures, social frameworks and topography must necessarily as much an assemblage of Nature, natures and human endeavours and practice as any other manifestation of sovereignty. Capitalism is in Nature as much as Nature is Capitalism in Moore's reading, could be reconfigured for the North Korean case to read that Juché or Songun is in Nature and vice versa.

Notions of vibrant materiality and lively non-human actors can also connect to previous conceptions of political charisma, themselves of course very active in North Korea. Jamie Lorimer for instance has used Bennett's conceptions to theorise a politics of non-human

---

<sup>4</sup> Eric Swyngedouw, 'Excluding the Other': the Production of Scale and Scaled Politics', in *Geographies of Economies*, Roger Lee, Jane Wills (eds.), London: Arnold, 1997, p.167-176 and Eric Swyngedouw, *Liquid Power*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> R. Winstanley-Chesters, 'Patriotism Begins with a Love of Courtyard: Rescaling Charismatic Landscapes in North Korea', *Tiempo Devorado (Consumed Time)* Vol. 2, No. 2, 2015, p.116-138.

<sup>6</sup> Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Sarah Whatmore, Bruce Braun, *Political Matter: Technoscience, Democracy and Public Life*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Jason Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital*, London: Verso, 2015.

charisma,<sup>9</sup> which he uses primarily within the field of environmental and species conservation, but which underpins this author's examination of the role of topography within North Korea's politics, history and culture. The reader should perhaps also consider the work of Thongchai Winichakul, especially addressing Thai state development on notions of the eco-body, in which topographic features, and a sense of local natural sensibilities become entwined and enveloped by the processes of nation building and state formation.<sup>10</sup>

Concepts of a North Korean 'eco-body' were particularly important following the end of the Japanese colonial period. The reader can certainly consider the fish, fishing ecosystems and perhaps even fishing infrastructures of North Korea in this light, as vibrant, lively participants with their own intrinsic charisma, active in the theatric politics and history of the nation. In tandem with the theories of space, place and vibrant matter through which North Korea's fishing histories will be encountered, it is vital to touch on the histories or sparsity of histories of fishing in the Asian context.

The paucity of history or historiography has been one of the most surprising findings of the author's exploration of fishing communities and fishing cultures. The majority of histories that exist focus on whaling practices and histories and fishing in the North Atlantic. While it might be expected that colonial or post-colonial histories would seek out and uncover the stories of fishing communities, this generally has not been the case. This may be because the object of these communities' enterprise and interest and often the communities themselves are remarkably transient and temporary. Fish and maritime resources often disappear or reappear with little rhyme or reason, the communities that seek them then being forced to move or reconfigure their life practices and home lives in order to catch up. In our age of industrial exploitation, climate change and environmental crisis this has become common and with rising sea temperatures can only become more so. Histories with a wide geographic or temporal span addressing the Pacific include Carmel Finley's important work on fishing history and technological development in the Pacific framed by the power of

---

<sup>9</sup> J. Lorimer, 'Nonhuman Charisma' Environment and Planning D', *Society and Space*, Vol. 24, No. 5, 2007, p. 911-932.

<sup>10</sup> Winichakul Thongchai, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*, Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1994.

American and Japanese interests following the end of the war in the Pacific in 1945.<sup>11</sup>

On the other side of the ocean is Ryan Tucker Jones' work on Russian efforts at sealing, fishing and whaling in the far north prior to the creation of Soviet Union.<sup>12</sup> Micah Muscolino's work on the development of fishing technologies and commodification of commons and resources in the Zhoushan archipelago, what he terms 'fishing wars' is also vital for work closer to East Asia.<sup>13</sup> Aside from theoretical material this paper also encounters North Korea through archival material from the various Fisheries Commissions in the Pacific held by Australian National University, CSIRO (Black Mountain), the Australian National Library and the University of Hull. Archival material has also been sourced from the Soviet Union's Ministry of Fisheries Archive held within the Russian Federation State Archive of the Economy. North Korean material has been sourced from collections at the University of Leeds, Australian National University and the National Library of Australia.

### **Political Fishing Histories of North Korea**

This paper will not go extensively or at length into the history of North Korean fishing. This author has already published a fairly comprehensive account of the strategies, processes and themes of North Korea's approach to the sector.<sup>14</sup> It will not surprise the reader to hear the suggestion that fishing for North Korea was deeply connected both to the various periods of its political and ideological development, and as a developmental sector essentially aimed at a resource of the commons and therefore for the most part free, vital to its developmental strategies. It must be said categorically any efforts focused on the construction of a coherent periodisation of North Korean fishing and

---

<sup>11</sup> Carmel Finley, *All the Fish in the Sea: Maximum Sustainable Yield and the Failure of Fisheries Management*, Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2011 and Carmel Finley, *All the Boats in the Ocean: How Government Subsidies Led to Global Over Fishing*, Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Ryan Tucker Jones, *Empire of Extinction: Russians and North Pacific's Strange Beasts of the Sea, 1741-1867*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Micah Muscolino, *Fishing Wars and Environmental Change in Late Imperial and Modern China*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University East Asia Centre, 2009.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Winstanley-Chesters, 'Politics and Pollack: maritime development paradigms under the Kims' in *Change and Continuity in North Korean Politics*, Roger Winstanley-Chesters, Adam Cathcart, Christopher K. Green (eds.), London: Routledge, 2016.

fishing practices can only be termed political fishing histories. In North Korea all aspects of life, development, social practice, invention and governmentality are imbued and enmeshed with politics and ideology, there is virtually no escape from this for North Koreans living in North Korea and in this historical process, for the fishing sector this is also the case.

Fishing was vital to Kim Il Sung's ambitions from very early on in North Korea's history, in part to both build a new economy and to deconstruct Japanese efforts to Japanise Korean fisheries during the colonial era. Fishing development was delayed by the chaos and destruction of the Korean War, but soon after the war institutional focus returned to the sector, in close relation to North Korea's close ally in its early years and technical supporter even in more complicated diplomatic times. Kim Il Sung even remarked on North Korean-Soviet interactions in 1957: "We invited Soviet scientists who were engaged on maritime research in the Far East. They came to our country under an agreement reached when our Government delegation visited Moscow last year."<sup>15</sup> While the Soviet Union may have influenced North Korea's initial efforts on the seas and some of its first efforts at planning extractive goals, Stalin's death in 1953 drove a geopolitical turn towards Maoism and the People's Republic of China.<sup>16</sup> The implications of this for the wider strategies in North Korea's development have been also noted by analysts from the period.<sup>17</sup> The Chollima movement, North Korea's developmental movement and response to Maoist urgency, would generate statements on fishing such as; "We must intensify ideological education among the fishery officials and eradicate mysticism, empiricism and all other outdated ideas so that they will improve the fishing method zealously with the attitude of masters,"<sup>18</sup> and "Fish culture is a not a difficult job. A little effort and everyone will be able

---

<sup>15</sup> Kim Il Sung, *On the Development of the Fishing Industry*, *Works*, Vol. 11, Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1957, p. 96.

<sup>16</sup> J. S. Prybyla, 'Soviet and Chinese. Economic Competition within the Communist World', *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 4, 1964, p. 464-473.

<sup>17</sup> Y. T. Kuark, 'North Korea's Agricultural Development during the Post-War Period' *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 1963, pp. 82-93.

<sup>18</sup> Kim Il Sung, 'On the Tasks of the Party Organizations in South Pyongan Province,' *Works*, Vol. 14, Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1960, p. 38.

to,” suggest that it was so in these acute, urgent times.<sup>19</sup> This was not a time for fishing ‘experts’.

North Korea more generally quickly attempted to avoid the collapse of the Great Leap Forward and the famine period following it in the PRC, reconnecting more fully with partners in the Soviet Union, while exploring further afield for new contacts among the non-aligned nations. In the fishing sector North Korea’s strategy focused on reconfiguring its goal setting and institutional structures in a more coherent manner, especially focusing on technical capacity.<sup>20</sup> The size, tonnage and capabilities of fishing boats and other fishing technology for North Korea has always been problematic. Pyongyang has always found it hard to manage the development of larger or more complicated boats, as well as the infrastructure required to produce such boats. For many years North Korea sought to obtain these from before, but in the late 1960s this to became problematic: “The 450-ton trawler we are now producing has many shortcomings. [For example,] it can be used for fishing only in the Black Sea or the Baltic Sea... [and] it cannot be used in the Pacific Ocean where the waves are moderate.”<sup>21</sup> By the early 1970s North Korea was engaged in reconfiguring its institutional framework and trying to carefully manage a few centres of maritime industrial excellence—for example, the Ryukdae Shipyard in the Komdok Island area. This shipyard was to serve as such a centre for the industry in the East Sea.<sup>22</sup> The primary site for this renewal of North Korea’s fishing fleet and accompanying infrastructure was located at Chongjin’s historically important port, where apart from Ryukdae’s efforts to build mid-range ships of some 600–1,000 tons, North Korea sought to construct much larger vessels of between 3,000 and 10,000 tons.<sup>23</sup> From the perspective of 2018 it is possible to say that in fact North Korea never managed to reach these heights of boat and infrastructure production. Even in contemporary times of the Great Fish

---

<sup>19</sup> Kim Il Sung, ‘On the Tasks of the Party Organizations in South Pyongan Province,’ *Works*, Vol. 14, Pyongyang, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1960, p. 39.

<sup>20</sup> Kim Il Sung, ‘For Bringing About Rapid Progress in the Fishing Industry,’ *Works*, Vol. 22, Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, p. 261.

<sup>21</sup> Kim Il Sung, ‘For Bringing About Rapid Progress in the Fishing Industry,’ *Works*, Vol. 22, Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, p. 55.

<sup>22</sup> Kim Il Sung, ‘For Bringing About Rapid Progress in the Fishing Industry,’ *Works*, Vol. 22, Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, p. 55.

<sup>23</sup> Kim Il Sung, ‘For Bringing About Rapid Progress in the Fishing Industry,’ *Works*, Vol. 22, Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, p. 57.

Hauls as announced in 2015's New Year's Address, fishing boats and processing technology are still a huge problem for North Korea.

### **North Korea Fishing Interactions in Soviet Institutional Archives and Memory**

The previous section has addressed the political histories of North Korean fishing up to the early 1970s as can be gleaned from the extensive documents and publications of Pyongyang itself. It has been to this point nigh on impossible to get a coherent sense of the reality of North Korea's historiography or the aspirations within it for development and success in the sector. FAO (Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations) fisheries statistics are notoriously complicated and troublesome from this period, methodologies being reconfigured every few years anyway.<sup>24</sup> When it comes to North Korea, the FAO received one set of statistics in 1957 which were so outlandish that from that point until now the organisation simply estimated and extrapolated the nation's statistics. Looking elsewhere to the statistics of the various commissions which manage the pelagic and anadromous fishing stocks of the Pacific, such as the North Pacific Fisheries Commission (NPFC), North Korean boats make no appearance, not even as illegal fishers (Taiwanese boats being the prime concern of the authorities of Japan, the United States and Canada). Thus while boats from the Soviet Union, the German Democratic Republic and the People's Republic of Poland are all accounted within the documents by the NPFC, Pyongyang's boats are nowhere to be found.<sup>25</sup> Fish for North Korea were important, lively matter, but perhaps Pyongyang was not successful at all in connecting with their vibrancy. This paper however recounts for the first time (that is known) in English, an encounter with the fisheries archives of the Soviet Union, which most certainly has a place for the North Korea of the 1970s within their historical narrative.

The author's interest in Soviet archives was first piqued a couple of years ago when Rodong Sinmun reported on the meeting of the Joint Fisheries Commission of the Russian Federation and North Korea. A reading of past North Korean media reports suggested this commission had met for many years, but its publications and minutes were never publicly available and certainly not made available by North

---

<sup>24</sup> FAO, *Fisheries Statistics Yearbook*, United Nations: Geneva, 1972.

<sup>25</sup> North Pacific Fisheries Commission, *Annual Report 1972*, NPFC: San Francisco, 1972.

Korea. North Korea and the Soviet Union in fact set up the predecessor to the currently constituted Commission in the late 1960s following some twenty years of attempts at engagement on Moscow's part. This author had in fact never seen any of the reports issued by these committees, however recent visits to the Russian State Archive of the Economy has allowed access to all of the committees' previous reports and the documents that surround them. These certainly give an external, Soviet perspective on North Korea's fishing history and especially its success or otherwise in Moscow's institutional eyes.

Interestingly, Soviet efforts towards conservation and the management of fisheries stocks were, counter to the imperatives of Socialist or Communist rationalism not designed simply to extract resources from the sea at this time (though of course they may have been in the past), so cannot be classified as seeking to dispossess the great treasury or commons of the ocean. The Soviet Union it seems had been very concerned to support North Korea's own efforts to develop its capabilities and capacities, perhaps to mitigate the cost of the various loans, credits and exchanges offered to Pyongyang by Moscow following the Korean War and to support relations between the two during the difficult politics following the death of Stalin and North Korea's dalliance with Beijing. Reports from the Ministry of Fisheries and VNIRO (Russian Research Institute of Fisheries and Oceanography) suggest that the Soviet Union had sought to connect with North Korean fisheries throughout most of the 1960s, especially to engage in researcher swaps and exchanges on each other's boats and ships.<sup>26</sup> But contrary to Kim Il Sung's assertions in previous decades, they had never happened. Vladivostok's branch of VNIRO and the Russian Academy of Sciences Fisheries Section especially were concerned to develop joint projects in the Sea of Okhotsk, knowing that North Korea sought snow and other crabs for their value and for local markets and that stocks had declined within its territorial waters.<sup>27</sup> There were it seems also a number of instances of illegal and dangerous fishing practices by North Korean boats in or near Soviet declared or territorial waters. After much negotiation and many false starts North Korea and the Soviet

---

<sup>26</sup> 'The Soviet Union delegation's account of work on session of Joint Soviet – North Korean Fisheries Commission' 1970, p. 3. Soviet Union Ministry of Fisheries Archive, Russian State Archive of the Economy, Fondy, 8202-20-2323.

<sup>27</sup> 'The Soviet Union delegation's account of work on session of Joint Soviet – North Korean Fisheries Commission' 1970, p. 2.

Union signed a protocol on the September 5, 1969 which established the joint Soviet-North Korea Fisheries Commission.<sup>28</sup> The first meeting of the commission was delayed by Pyongyang's preparations for a Workers Party of Korea Congress (the 5<sup>th</sup>, eventually held in November 1970), but was held between February 26 and March 10, 1970.<sup>29</sup>

Soviet reports on the commission's meetings give a fairly thorough if frustrated view of what sounds like a complicated and difficult series of exchanges. North Korea's representatives are described as intransigent, setting the agenda ended up taking an entire day and that the Korean's were extremely reluctant to discuss procedure.<sup>30</sup> The Soviet Union on the other hand had wanted to discuss the granular details of fish stocks and the North Koreans' perception of their own stocks and the framework of management and administrative principles governing joint exercises, whereas the North Koreans were determined to discuss potential joint collaboration and interactions as soon as possible.<sup>31</sup> The Soviet Union already had, it seemed, a careful and complicated network of restrictions and management around Kamchatka, the Sea of Okhotsk and Sakhalin and even joint agreements on stock capacity with Japan (with whom, even in spite of very difficult relations given the post-war status quo on Sakhalin and the Kuriles, the Soviet Union had a joint fisheries commission), which North Korea was keen to avoid being constrained by.<sup>32</sup> After much discussion the North Korean side agreed to abide by the wider restrictions on salmon fishing across the western Pacific which the Soviet Union subscribed to in collaboration with the Japanese (also quite possibly to avoid complicating relations with the United States and Canada on the subject of fishing for migratory species in the Pacific), as well as restrictions on crab fishing around Kamchatka, trawling the mid sea on the west coast of Kamchatka and herring fishing in the Gulf of Shelikov between mid-

---

<sup>28</sup> 'The Soviet Union delegation's account of work on session of Joint Soviet – North Korean Fisheries Commission' 1970, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> 'The Soviet Union delegation's account of work on session of Joint Soviet – North Korean Fisheries Commission' 1970, p. 4.

<sup>30</sup> 'The Soviet Union delegation's account of work on session of Joint Soviet – North Korean Fisheries Commission' 1970, p. 5.

<sup>31</sup> 'The Soviet Union delegation's account of work on session of Joint Soviet – North Korean Fisheries Commission' 1970, p. 6.

<sup>32</sup> 'The Soviet Union delegation's account of work on session of Joint Soviet – North Korean Fisheries Commission' 1970, p. 7.

April and mid-July (herring fry season).<sup>33</sup> In exchange the Soviet Union allowed Pyongyang to access the inshore waters of the Commander Islands, fish for flatfish around Kamchatka and Sakhalin and access the herring fisheries of the Soviet area of the Bering Sea.<sup>34</sup>

In exchange for these supplementary rights North Korea supplied the Soviet side with the details of its fleet and catch. According to the Korean side, its fishing fleet in 1969 had been some 35 boats, half medium sized trawlers and some purse seine boats<sup>35</sup>. North Korea also claimed to have four mother ships and four transport ships (having even bought two mother ships from the Netherlands) and had plans to two large trawlers with refrigeration capacity.<sup>36</sup> These boats had caught in 1969 according to the North Korean fishing experts, some 11,000 tons of flatfish and 25,000 tons of herring in the Sea of Okhotsk. In the Sea of Japan, North Korea claimed to have caught 1,000 tons of pink salmon, 400,000 tons of pollack, up to 60,000 tons of squid and 15,000 tons of crab (both hairy crab and snow crab).<sup>37</sup> The Soviet side thought these figures an understatement and that North Korea, in spite of its consent to restrictions, was seeking to exploit Pacific salmon resources as much as possible and to exploit the highly endangered fur seal populations on Tyuleniy Island off Sakhalin.<sup>38</sup>

Despite their own concerns and lack of trust in the North Koreans, the Soviet Union in the joint commissions sought to negotiate joint research collaborations between fishing experts from both countries in 1970. While this seemed very difficult to set up in 1970 owing to the demands of the forthcoming Workers Party Congress on North Korea's scientific bureaucracy, the commission managed to come to an arrangement.<sup>39</sup> Many complex challenges were overcome when it

---

<sup>33</sup> 'The Soviet Union delegation's account of work on session of Joint Soviet – North Korean Fisheries Commission' 1970, p. 8.

<sup>34</sup> 'The Soviet Union delegation's account of work on session of Joint Soviet – North Korean Fisheries Commission' 1970, p. 8.

<sup>35</sup> 'The Soviet Union delegation's account of work on session of Joint Soviet – North Korean Fisheries Commission' 1970, p. 7.

<sup>36</sup> 'The Soviet Union delegation's account of work on session of Joint Soviet – North Korean Fisheries Commission' 1970, p. 7.

<sup>37</sup> 'The Soviet Union delegation's account of work on session of Joint Soviet – North Korean Fisheries Commission' 1970, p. 7.

<sup>38</sup> 'The Soviet Union delegation's account of work on session of Joint Soviet – North Korean Fisheries Commission' 1970, p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> 'The Soviet Union delegation's account of work on session of Joint Soviet – North Korean Fisheries Commission' 1970, p. 4.

came to matters of responsibility and lines of control and even on the issue raised by the North Koreans, that Soviet ships in the Pacific were subject to mandatory boarding rights in certain areas by foreign powers and Pyongyang was absolutely keen to avoid any circumstance where hostile or unfriendly agencies might have access to North Korean workers and operatives on board Soviet ships far from its control. These joint exercises were to begin in late September 1970, the culmination of many years of effort on the part of the bureaucrats, diplomats and scientists from the various Soviet institutions.<sup>40</sup>

These efforts were to be severely challenged on September 28, 1970 when a highly urgent telegram found its way onto many desks across the Soviet Union. In the week that research cooperation efforts were supposed to begin on ships of both the USSR and North Korea, the telegram reported that a North Korean purse seine boat with its identifying marks illegally disguised had attempted to set its own nets across and above the nets of the Soviet Union's chief research ship, damaging the them and the Soviet boat's floats beyond repair.<sup>41</sup> Responses to the initial telegram revealed that this was not an isolated incident and that in fact North Korean boats had been repeatedly disguising their identification marks and using incorrect or impossible to decipher marks on their nets and floats in the Sea of Okhotsk.<sup>42</sup> Further telegrams from 'Far East Fish' the 'Fishing Cooperative of Kamchatka' reported near collisions and other dangerous interactions between North Korean boats and tugboats, an ocean-going barge, the Dagystanka and a fishing trawler, the Kammeniy. Unsurprisingly interactions between the research institutions of the Soviet Union and North Korea which had been very carefully organised and negotiated earlier in the year were for

---

<sup>40</sup> Urgent Telegram from USSR Ministry of Communications 'Urgent Moscow harbour to Ishkov Dal'ryba (FarEastFish) to Starzinskiy,' 28<sup>th</sup> September, 1970, Soviet Union Ministry of Fisheries Archive, Russian State Archive of the Economy, Fondy, 8202-20-2323.

<sup>41</sup> 'Letter to D. Gafin from Volkov A.A,' 28<sup>th</sup> September, 1970, Soviet Union Ministry of Fisheries Archive, Russian State Archive of the Economy, Fondy, 8202-20-2323.

<sup>42</sup> 'A list of violations committed by DPRK boats fishing in the Sea of Okhotsk regarding the Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea and the fisheries regulations,' October, 1970, Soviet Union Ministry of Fisheries Archive, Russian State Archive of the Economy, Fondy, 8202-20-2323.

the moment curtailed while authorities in Moscow reconsidered how to approach and engage a partner like Pyongyang.<sup>43</sup>

While activities at sea were restricted in 1970 the Soviet Union decided to allow North Korean researchers to engage on land with the Ministry of Fisheries institutions near Vladivostok in Nakhodka. North Korean researchers were in the Soviet Union between December 15, 1970 and January 16, 1971 for what was a fact finding mission for the Koreans and an exercise in epistemological training from the Soviets – according to the accounts it was an extremely difficult month.<sup>44</sup> The events of the previous year, which the Soviet institutions had essentially put down to some form of industrial sabotage, coupled with the complication of the discussions surrounding the joint research efforts had soured the mood between the two nations. The Soviet side considered the reasons for some of the more difficult moments in the discussions, such as North Korea's lack of willingness to allow any reciprocity in contract arrangement and complex negotiation over the legal framework and responsibilities for any of that nation's citizens on Soviet boats as exposing its institutions to moral hazard.<sup>45</sup> It appeared that there was a high security risk in engagements with North Korean institutions and that under the guise of an interest in fishing, Pyongyang could send intelligence operatives and engage primarily in industrial espionage on Soviet infrastructure and factories in the far east, but also to extract knowledge not available to it on fishing stocks and fishing areas in the Sea of Okhotsk and in the wider Pacific.

The exchange in 1970/1971 certainly did not begin in the most comfortable manner. In order to avoid issues of subterfuge, espionage and security threat the Soviet Union stipulated that none of the researchers or technicians sent by North Korea should have visited the area before or been involved in the institutions on the Soviet side in the past. Certainly none should have security or intelligence background and

---

<sup>43</sup> 'A list of violations committed by DPRK boats fishing in the Sea of Okhotsk regarding the Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea and the fisheries regulations,' October, 1970, Soviet Union Ministry of Fisheries Archive, Russian State Archive of the Economy, Fondy, 8202-20-2323.

<sup>44</sup> 'A report on the work with Korean delegation during a period of 15 December 1970 until 16 January 1971,' 29<sup>th</sup> January, 1971, Soviet Union Ministry of Fisheries Archive, Russian State Archive of the Economy, Fondy, 8202-22-468.

<sup>45</sup> 'The Soviet Union delegation's account of work on session of Joint Soviet – North Korean Fisheries Commission' 1970, p.4. Soviet Union Ministry of Fisheries Archive, Russian State Archive of the Economy, Fondy, 8202-20-2323.

essentially all should have fishing and fishing research experience. Of course, North Korea claimed that none of its researchers had ever been in the Soviet Union before and all were trained and experienced fishing experts, but Soviet intelligence soon reported that one had been to college in the USSR and two had worked in their consulate in Vladivostok – a fourth member of the Korean team it was decided actually had nothing to do with the fishing industry and knew nothing about fishing at all. The Ministry of Fisheries efforts to entertain the North Koreans continued to be combined with a concern for security and the obvious dangers of their potential efforts at subterfuge and espionage, concern which only grew when the Koreans appeared to be fairly consumed by the technological aspects of their visit to the extent that when they demanded the blueprints and layouts for the machinery in the various canning and preparation facilities they visited, the Soviet side actually restricted access. Eventually a reasonable negotiation of the problems was done by the Soviet side, with extensive reports in the documents of the North Korean's being refused visits to irrelevant infrastructure and careful management of their visits to technical or research institutions, so that they could not extract data or spend too long with technology that was delicate when it came to security matters. Of course the documents also report a number of moments of push back from the North Koreans and frequent returns to their hotel rooms after difficult moments with their hosts, to review material at length or to communicate with North Korea.<sup>46</sup> Finally in scenes familiar to watchers of North Korea in the present, the researchers aside from their focus on machinery and technology, were fascinated by shopping opportunities in the fishing towns they visited-the Soviet Union's Ministry of Fishing even sent the North Koreans back to their own country with an extensive supply of Soviet Crab, Caviar, Shrimp and Herring.<sup>47</sup>

The records of the Joint Soviet Union North Korean Fisheries Commission, which met on average every four years following the initial 1970 meeting, show more or less similar interactions between the two countries and their fishing industries for the next two decades. Undoubtedly on the surface Soviet efforts to develop North Korea's

---

<sup>46</sup> 'A report on the work with Korean delegation during a period of 15 December 1970 until 16 January 1971,' 29<sup>th</sup> January, 1971, Soviet Union Ministry of Fisheries Archive, Russian State Archive of the Economy, Fondy, 8202-22-468.

<sup>47</sup> S.Y.Hong, 'Marine Policy in the Republic of Korea,' *Marine Policy*, Vol. 19, No. 2, 1995, p. 97-113.

behaviour and technical capacity worked to mitigate the security and espionage risks it generated, but Pyongyang's desire to fish illegally and exploit what was not within its property or remit for the 1970s (though it could never seem to diminish Pyongyang's ambition to extract whatever it could from Japanese stocks), although it cannot be said that efforts from Moscow's researchers and academics supported much in the way of practical development when it came to North Korean fishing capacity. Nor can it be said that North Korea ever managed to extract by means of subterfuge or espionage any information or technology that would later drive success or development in its fishing industry or its fishing catches.

### **Conclusion**

North Korea, as the reader of this paper may know, was never able to reach the heights of extraction from the common seas managed by the Soviet Union during its existence. The Soviet Union and perhaps unlikely partners such as the Polish Democratic Republic and the German Democratic Republic would join the United States, Japan, South Korea and Canada in the 1970s and 1980s as a global fishing power, the ships of these nations found across the seas of the earth and at their farthest reaches. North Korea, in spite of efforts made in the 1970s as recounted by this paper and later in its history would never be a great success. However, this has never stopped it aspiring to such success, as seen in 2015's New Year's Address from Kim Jong Un, and in the following years, which features seas (and mountains) of gold as developmental imperative.<sup>48</sup> As much as Kim Il Sung wanted, desired and demanded it, North Korean fishing success on a global scale has never happened. The institutional redesign, scientific focus and technological jump required by North Korea's fishing strategy in the late 1960s and 1970s produced very little. North Korea fishing boats seldom top 1,000 tonnes (whereas South Korea's are in the tens of thousands). When North Korea finally successfully joined the West and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), (an organisation set up to manage the tuna and migratory fish in the waters around the Federated Republic of Micronesia, Vanuatu, Nauru and the other island archipelago nations of this area of the Pacific), in 2014 after many years of trying and diplomatic push and pull, its first membership of such an

---

<sup>48</sup> Kim Jong Un, 'New Year's Address, 2015', *Rodong Sinmun*, January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015.

organisation, it was required to submit useful and legitimate data on its fishing efforts in the area.<sup>49</sup> Extraordinarily this North Korea did, providing what to this day are the only reasonable and functional statistics on its fishing efforts and catch size in the wider Pacific area since its submission to the Soviet Joint Commission in the 1970s. These statistics reveal the miniscule scale of North Korea's contemporary fishing capabilities and efforts in the area, comprising only two small purse seine boats and one long line boat, collecting in total a sum of some 368 tonnes of tuna in 2014.<sup>50</sup>

While North Korea's fishing history it seems therefore has not by any means met any goal it set itself in the 1970s, it has certainly not been for want of trying. Evidence from the Soviet archives revealed here for the first time suggests Pyongyang made great efforts to connect to the Soviet Union's enormous infrastructure of fishing research and marine technical research and at the same time blatantly trying to cheat Moscow when it came to protected areas and stocks and to use subterfuge and espionage to extract scientific and technical knowledge. Reports from the very end of the Soviet Union in 1989 and 1990 suggest that North Korea has never given up trying, recording that Pyongyang had engaged in efforts during research exercises in the 1980s to breach Soviet information security in Nakhodka and Vladivostok.<sup>51</sup> North Korea had also developed an elaborate ruse by buying small trawlers from Japan and crewing them with Japanese fishermen who were instructed to insist that they were working on behalf of Japanese companies and to fish illegally in Soviet waters of Sakhalin and Kamchatka. When this was discovered the Soviet Union fined North Korea millions of US dollars for such an extreme breach of protocol and restricted any further collaborative efforts. Whatever its own lack of capability, North Korea placed a huge value on attractive and valuable maritime species such as Snow Crab and Pollack and was willing to engage in all manner of behaviour to get them with whatever resources

---

<sup>49</sup> Western and Central Fisheries Commission, *Report on admission of North Korea*, August, 2014, Phonpei, Marianas Islands.

<sup>50</sup> Western and Central Fisheries Commission, *Report on admission of North Korea, Letter from Ri Hyok, North Korean Minister of Fisheries*, August 5<sup>th</sup> 2014, Phonpei, Marianas Islands.

<sup>51</sup> "Report on the activities of the [Overseas] Office of the USSR Ministry of fisheries in the DPRK during 1990." 28<sup>th</sup> January 1991, p.3. Soviet Union Ministry of Fisheries Archive, Russian State Archive of the Economy, Fondy, 8202-23-1869.

it had to hand. Fish and fishing technologies it seems have always been hugely important to North Korea's institutional and developmental mind. The Soviet Union on the other hand was extremely patient and determined to bring Pyongyang into its institutional fold when it came to fishing, perhaps because of the challenges presented by illegal North Korean fishing in its waters, perhaps to reduce the concerns of other nation's focused on the Pacific, perhaps even because of the residual sense of socialist fraternity between the two nations. Even North Korea's absurd acts of sabotage to long negotiated and organised joint projects, a technique, behaviour and practice familiar to those attempting to engage Pyongyang in institutional development the world over throughout its history, and acts of espionage and subterfuge, did not completely stop Soviet interest. Moscow's institutions were instead required to develop new strategies and levels of surveillance and security when working with North Korean boats and institutions. While North Korea is repeatedly dispossessed by circumstance and geo-political positionality, it appears that Pyongyang was certainly not beneath or beyond dispossessing the common seas or an ally when it came to fishing stocks and resources in the 1970s. Ultimately Pyongyang's efforts in the deep sea have been so small as to scarcely register against the extractive and accumulative ambitions of the great nations of the ocean. In the evidential terms necessary for conventional historical narratives, North Korea is normally entirely opaque and corroboration of events is almost impossible. However, access to the Soviet archives has certainly challenged this frequently used truism for this author and has provided the evidence for this revealing paper.

