

SELECTED ISSUES IN THE DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA AND THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM (1955–1957): A VIEW FROM CHOI DUK SHIN'S VIETNAM-RELATED DIPLOMATIC DOCUMENTS

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Abstract. This article investigates new aspects of the diplomatic relations between the Republic of Korea and the Republic of Vietnam from 1955 to 1957, through the analysis of Choi Duk Shin's diplomatic reports. Through a comprehensive analysis of primary sources, including archival documents from both Korea and the U.S., the study reexamines these relations beyond the established focus on military cooperation. It investigates how anti-communism, Japan's economic and political influence, and the overseas Chinese community shaped bilateral dynamics. Content analysis of Choi Duk Shin's diplomatic reports provides valuable insights into South Korea's diplomatic strategies during the Cold War. Additionally, an interdisciplinary approach examines non-military factors, including Japan's influence and the overseas Chinese community, providing a deeper look into often-overlooked underlying influences. By highlighting these factors, the paper contributes new insights into how the Republic of Korea's foreign policy toward Vietnam evolved within a broader regional landscape, challenging previous studies with a nuanced understanding of non-military elements influencing the relationship.

Keywords: Republic of Korea, Republic of Vietnam, Choi Duk Shin, Cold War diplomacy, Japan, Overseas Chinese.

1. Introduction

The 1950s were defined by Cold War influences, including the Korean War (1950–1953), which entrenched the division of Korea, and U.S. involvement in Vietnam. These developments led to the formation of distinct political systems in both regions. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) established close ties, while the 1955 Geneva Accords facilitated the creation of a U.S.-supported government in South Vietnam under Ngo Dinh Diem, which aligned with anti-communist policies. The Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) gained recognition from various anti-communist states, including South Korea.

By the mid-1950s, Rhee Syngman's regime played a leading role in the Asia-Pacific anti-communist movement, notably through the founding of the Asian People's Anti-Communist League (APACL). This involvement brought South Korea into competition with Taiwan over the league's leadership, particularly regarding Japan's participation [1]. Concurrently, South Korea began to investigate overseas Chinese communities in Asia, viewing them as potential instruments of communist influence. Countries such as South Vietnam and Indonesia, with significant overseas Chinese populations, became focal points for mobilizing these communities in support

of anti-communist objectives, shaping South Korea's diplomatic relationships with countries like South Vietnam, the Philippines, and Thailand.

In this context, Choi Duk Shin (September 17, 1914 - November 16, 1989) emerged as a pivotal figure. Appointed as South Korea's ambassador to South Vietnam in early 1956 [2], Choi had already visited the country the year prior, engaging in diplomatic efforts and South Vietnam's internal affairs. Until 1957, he served as a crucial intermediary between the two countries, providing valuable insights into Southeast Asian dynamics that informed South Korea's regional foreign policy. Known as a staunch anti-communist before his later defection to North Korea, Choi was deemed well-suited to assess the Ngo Dinh Diem regime's anti-communist policies, especially its relations with Japan and Taiwan. His diplomatic reports reflected Rhee Syngman's concerns about Southeast Asia's political alliances and Japan's expanding regional influence.

Choi's career prior to his ambassadorship provided him with deep regional expertise. He had studied at Whampoa Military Academy, served in the Korean Liberation Army, and commanded a division in the Korean War. His postwar roles included addressing triangular relations between South Korea, the United States, and Japan, as well as securing American aid for South Korea. In 1955, representing the APACL, Choi surveyed Indochina, where he developed an understanding of the geopolitical and ideological challenges faced by Southeast Asian nations. This experience enabled him to navigate South Vietnam's political landscape effectively and propose strategic countermeasures to enhance South Korea's influence in the region.

Despite the importance of Choi Duk Shin's diplomatic efforts, much of the scholarship on South Korea's foreign relations in the 1950s has concentrated on U.S.-South Korea or South Korea-Japan dynamics, particularly regarding the tensions these alliances created [3]-[4]. Similarly, studies on South Korea-South Vietnam relations have focused on U.S. influence, emphasizing that bilateral ties were largely shaped by American foreign policy. These studies often underscore anti-communism and military cooperation against North Vietnam as the core elements of these diplomatic connections [5].

However, this paper shifts the focus to the diplomatic documents of Choi Duk Shin, which have been less explored in previous research. These documents, stored and preserved in The Korean Mission to the United Nations and Republic of Korea Embassies and Legations collection at the Syngman Rhee Institute, Yonsei University, are crucial to understanding the broader context of South Korea-South Vietnam relations, especially their military and non-military dimensions. By analyzing the content of Choi's diplomatic reports, this study seeks to offer new perspectives on South Korea's foreign policy and its evolving role in Southeast Asia during this period. Specifically, this paper analyzes factors other than military cooperation, including the role of Japan and the overseas Chinese community, and their impact on South Korea-South Vietnam relations from 1955 to 1957. South Korea's contentious relations with Japan in the 1950s often intersected with its foreign policy in Southeast Asia [6]. The overseas Chinese community, seen as critical to anti-communist efforts and fostering ties with Taiwan, also played a significant role in shaping bilateral relations with South Vietnam. Therefore, analyzing these issues will contribute to providing a detailed understanding of the broader dynamics that influenced South Korean-South Vietnam relations during the second half of the 1950s.

2. Content

2.1. The Formation of South Korea-South Vietnam Relations

After World War II, the shifting global landscape significantly impacted formerly colonized nations, many of which gained independence, while Korea and Vietnam faced ongoing struggles for sovereignty and reunification. In Korea, foreign intervention resulted in a lasting division. Soviet forces occupied the North, while the U.S. intervened at the 38th parallel to limit Soviet

influence. Although the Republic of Korea was established on September 6, 1945, the presence of U.S. and Soviet troops complicated reunification, leading to two separate states in 1948: Rhee Syngman's Republic of Korea in the South and Kim Il-sung's Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the North. The Korean War (1950–1953) solidified this division. In Vietnam, despite declaring the Democratic Republic of Vietnam post-war, French forces returned to disarm Japan, delaying independence. France established the State of Vietnam with former emperor Bao Dai in 1949, integrating it into the French Union. The 1954 Geneva Accords temporarily divided Vietnam into North and South, planning elections in 1956. However, with U.S. support, elections were not held, and in 1955, Ngo Dinh Diem ousted Bao Dai to become President of the Republic of Vietnam.

The establishment of diplomatic relations between Korea and Vietnam began in 1945. According to Korean independence activist Jo Kyung-han's memoir *Baekgang Hoeok* (1979), the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea, based in China after Japan's defeat, engaged with officials from the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. In November 1945, Kim Gu, head of the provisional government, attended a party hosted by Ho Chi Minh in Shanghai. Ambassador Im Hong-jae, who served in Vietnam, confirmed this interaction in his book *Vietnam Gyeonmunrok* (2010), noting that Kim Gu's son, General Kim Shin, acted as an interpreter during Ho Chi Minh's visit to the provisional government office in Chongqing [7]. However, Korea's immediate division hindered formal diplomatic relations. While North Korea established ties with North Vietnam in 1950, South Korea did so with the Republic of Vietnam in 1955. Choi Duk Shin became South Korea's first ambassador to South Vietnam by the end of 1955 [8]. On June 28, 1956, Duong Van Duc, plenipotentiary minister of South Vietnam to South Korea, presented his credentials to Rhee Syngman, who highlighted their shared "bitter experience of suffering under communism" and expressed hope for cooperative efforts against communism in Asia [9].

Ngo Dinh Diem's official visit to South Korea from September 18 to 22, 1957, resulted in a joint declaration emphasizing cooperation, particularly in combating communism [10]. Following Rhee Syngman's directive to enhance diplomatic relations, Choi Duk Shin consulted with the South Vietnamese government, leading to an agreement on March 1, 1958, to elevate relations to the ambassadorial level and establish embassies in Seoul and Saigon [11]. Later that year, Rhee Syngman visited South Vietnam from November 5 to 8 [12], and a customs agreement was signed shortly thereafter, marking the beginning of economic cooperation [13].

The 1950s represent a formative period in the South Korea-South Vietnam relationship, grounded in shared anti-communism and collaborative exploration. This relationship was significantly influenced by the United States, a key ally and supporter of both nations' state-building efforts. Through their connection to the U.S., South Korea and South Vietnam cooperated militarily and strategized against the spread of communism [14]. However, differing approaches to anti-communism and the role of overseas Chinese communities influenced their bilateral relationship [15]. Japan also served as a critical catalyst in the development of ties between South Korea and South Vietnam.

2.2. Issues in South Korea-South Vietnam Relations: An Analysis Based on Choi Duk Shin's Diplomatic Documents

2.2.1. Japan Issue

The Japan issue created tensions between South Korea and the United States, as South Korea feared that Japan's rising influence could isolate it and reduce U.S. support [16]. In response, South Korea sought to establish an anti-Japanese coalition within the Asian Anti-Communist Alliance to reshape U.S. views on Japan.

To gain backing from South Vietnam and other Southeast Asian countries, South Korea advanced two main arguments: (1) Japan's cooperation with communism and its expanding influence posed a security threat to Asia; and (2) Japan's colonial exploitation of Korea

complicated diplomatic relations. These points fueled debates about Japan's potential membership in the Asian Anti-Communist Alliance.

The Japan issue emerged as critical for South Korea in establishing diplomatic relations with South Vietnam. In a letter to Rhee Syngman, written a month before his official appointment as ambassador on November 26, 1955, Choi Duk Shin reflected on his March 1955 trip to Vietnam. He noted that South Vietnam embodied three essential elements of South Korea: anti-communism, anti-French sentiment, and, notably, anti-Japanese sentiment. Choi emphasized the importance of forging diplomatic ties with South Vietnam, particularly as the Rhee Syngman regime sought Asian allies to resist supporting Japan [17].

As the newly appointed ambassador, Choi endeavored to convey Rhee Syngman's concerns regarding the "danger of Japan" and encourage South Vietnam to limit economic exchanges with Japan. During discussions with the South Vietnamese Minister of Finance in July 1956, Choi reiterated the South Korean government's position, asserting that South Korea opposed making Japan a destination for investment by Asian nations. He argued that Japanese aid primarily served to bolster Japan's economic expansion rather than support development in recipient countries. Additionally, he highlighted Japan's trade cooperation with Russia as evidence of its pro-communist tendencies. Consequently, Choi advocated for increased economic cooperation among Asian countries instead of establishing relations with Japan [18].

Choi was concerned that Japan had conducted extensive commercial activities in South Vietnam since early 1953, supported by France. Given the vigorous economic activity of Japanese businesses in South Vietnam, persuading the Diem government to reject cooperation with Japan was challenging. Shortly thereafter, conflicts arose between the Republic of Vietnam and Japan regarding compensation for war losses, leading to the withdrawal of the Japanese embassy in South Vietnam and the cessation of Japanese investment companies' activities [19]. South Korea viewed this situation as an opportunity. In a report sent to Rhee Syngman on July 26, Choi suggested that the South Korean government effectively utilize this opportunity to strengthen trade cooperation with South Vietnam. He emphasized that South Korea could fill the economic void left by Japan and enhance export and import activities using the region's abundant resources [20]. Choi's proposal was quickly accepted by Rhee Syngman, resulting in concrete economic cooperation between the two countries [21]. Consequently, the Japan-related issue significantly influenced the establishment of economic cooperation between South Korea and South Vietnam.

In reports after 1956, Choi continuously reported his observations on the development of diplomatic relations between South Vietnam and Japan, indicating signs of a freezing relationship while suggesting directions for South Korea's response. In report No. 17, 18, and 20, Choi emphasized that if the compensation issue remained unresolved, progress in Vietnam-Japan relations would be impossible. He assured that South Korea would advise the South Vietnamese government on this issue, especially in maintaining a zero-tolerance stance toward Japan [22]-[24]. Choi's prediction that the compensation issue would continue to be a noticeable problem until 1957 proved correct. In September 1957, reports No. 55 and 56 highlighted the benefits South Korea gained from utilizing this period for economic cooperation development with South Vietnam, expressing satisfaction regarding the interrupted relations between South Vietnam and Japan. However, Choi's reports also emphasized the risk of Japan's economic expansion and urged Rhee Syngman to remain alert to Japan's plans for a tour of Asia [25]-[26].

In 1957, Ngo Dinh Diem visited South Korea. During a subsequent meeting, Diem praised Korean culture, claiming, "What the Japanese claim as their culture is no different from the 'influx' from Korea" [27]. In response, Choi pointed out the existing conflicts between South Korea and Japan concerning compensation and Korean residents in Japan. He stated that South Korea always wished to reconcile and establish friendly relations with Japan but noted that Japan did not reflect on its past acts of invasion against Korea, nor could it retreat from its exploitative

nature. Subsequently, Choi expressed that the South Vietnamese government should be cautious in establishing diplomatic relations with Japan on behalf of South Korea [28].

By late 1957, concerns in South Korea heightened as Japanese Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi toured Southeast Asia. In response, the South Korean government issued multiple warnings to South Vietnam regarding Japan's ambitions. In report No. 59, Choi Duk Shin conveyed Rhee Syngman's directive to inform South Vietnamese Minister of Finance Vu Van Mau about Japan's economic expansion strategies, asserting that Japan's claims of promoting Asian economic development masked its intent for dominance, reminiscent of the "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere" proposed by Japanese colonizers [28].

In report No. 62, Choi urged Rhee Syngman to continue exposing Japan's true intentions and advocated for increased diplomatic outreach to Southeast Asian nations to engage them in opposition to Japan, considering South Korea's resource limitations [29]. This proposal received prompt approval, leading to heightened activity among South Korean ambassadors in Southeast Asia.

Choi closely monitored Prime Minister Kishi's planned visit, reporting on negotiations for compensation agreements between South Vietnam and Japan. In his 64th report, Choi indicated that the South Vietnamese government remained indifferent to Japan's overtures due to unresolved wartime reparations, thus reinforcing the anti-Japanese alliance between South Korea and South Vietnam [30]. Rhee expressed satisfaction in telegram No. 101, stating, "I warned President Ngo Dinh Diem about dealing with Japan, and I am pleased to hear that he and his government have done everything they could to demonstrate that Japan is still untrustworthy and unwelcome, as confirmed in your (Choi's) report" [31].

Furthermore, South Korea appreciated that South Vietnam was the only Southeast Asian nation to resist Kishi's influence during his U.S. visit. Consequently, the Japan issue further strengthened diplomatic ties between South Korea and South Vietnam from 1955 to 1957. However, South Korea's ability to exploit the Japan-South Vietnam conflict was limited for two reasons.

First, the conflict was temporary, arising not from ideological differences but from reparations negotiations, which were eventually resolved amicably. Japan's final policy involved concessions to support South Vietnam's economic development while enhancing its influence in Southeast Asia under U.S. security [32]-[33]. Second, while South Korea aimed to draw South Vietnam into an anti-Japanese alliance, it proved ineffective. Conflicts with Japan yielded adverse outcomes for the South Vietnamese government, which did not perceive Japan's economic influence as detrimental but rather as beneficial for economic growth [34]. Moreover, the U.S. sought to maintain cohesion among its allies, recognizing that inter-state conflicts could undermine the anti-communist alliance. Given its youth and reliance on U.S. support, the South Vietnamese government required cooperation from Japan for stabilization and development [35].

Consequently, the Japan-South Vietnam conflicts were largely resolved by the late 1950s, leading to increased Japanese investment in the region. South Korea then pivoted towards strengthening diplomatic relations with South Vietnam in other areas, particularly military cooperation.

2.2.2. Overseas Chinese Issue

The issue of the overseas Chinese community has not been thoroughly examined as a factor in South Korea's efforts to establish an anti-communist alliance in Asia during the 1950s. While existing studies on the triangular relationship between South Korea, South Vietnam, and Taiwan suggest that these nations were considered anti-communist allies and potential front-line states against communism, they struggled to form a cohesive military alliance due to differing anti-communist views and objectives [36]. The Rhee Syngman regime, with its extreme anti-communist ideology, frequently expressed dissatisfaction with South Vietnam's reluctance to engage fully in the Asian anti-communist alliance, straining bilateral relations [14].

A significant aspect of this tension stemmed from South Korea's concerns over the Ngo Dinh Diem government's policies toward the overseas Chinese community in the late 1950s. Choi Duk

Shin, as the South Korean ambassador, provided regular and detailed reports on domestic issues in South Vietnam, often advising Rhee Syngman on responses to these developments. Between 1955 and 1957, Choi conveyed the South Korean government's apprehensions regarding Diem's coercive measures against the overseas Chinese.

In report No. 16, dated August 30, 1956, Choi noted his participation in the first-anniversary event of the anti-communist association of the overseas Chinese community in South Vietnam, organized by the Minister of Information of the Republic of China. The event underscored the community's anti-communist sentiments, and Choi argued that gaining the trust and support of the overseas Chinese could significantly bolster the anti-communist movement in South Vietnam and Southeast Asia. He highlighted the community's long-standing presence and economic influence, asserting that leveraging their resources in conjunction with anti-communist efforts could strengthen South Korea's objectives in the region [20].

Choi's reports indicated that conflicts between the Ngo Dinh Diem government and the overseas Chinese community arose from South Vietnam's policies. In Report No. 11 (July 1956), Choi criticized the government's restrictions on the rights of overseas Chinese, which adversely affected their economic status. However, he noted that the community still retained certain privileges compared to their counterparts in other Southeast Asian countries. To enhance anti-communist efforts, he recommended that the South Korean government urge South Vietnam to adopt a more conciliatory approach toward the overseas Chinese community. [19]

By Report No. 17, a month later, Choi observed minimal changes in the Diem administration's stance. The overseas Chinese in South Vietnam expressed a desire for friendly diplomatic relations and anticipated significant exchanges with Taiwan [22]. Nonetheless, the Diem government enacted Decree No. 47, requiring all Chinese born in Vietnam to acquire Vietnamese nationality, which prompted backlash and calls for protection from the ROC representative in Saigon [37].

During this period, South Vietnam also dispatched naval forces to the Spratly Islands, raising sovereignty disputes with Taiwan, China, and the Philippines [38]. In response, Rhee Syngman conveyed concerns to the South Vietnamese government that such actions could incite backlash from the overseas Chinese community, potentially jeopardizing relations with Taiwan and the broader anti-communist movement in Asia.

“As friends of Free Vietnam and Free China, and considering both are strong anti-communist nations, we hope that a reasonable and good solution can be arranged to further reduce the possibilities for communists to infiltrate and act subversively within the overseas Chinese community” [23].

Choi's reports to Rhee Syngman raised ongoing concerns about the Ngo Dinh Diem government's coercive policies toward the overseas Chinese community, which extended beyond nationality issues to education, culture, and economic matters. He noted significant support for these policies from Vietnamese natives, which fueled the government's continued oppressive measures. Consequently, the Republic of China representative in South Vietnam returned to Taiwan to seek directives from the central government regarding these issues [28]. This situation prevented the overseas Chinese community from protesting against the South Vietnamese government, prompting Choi to worry that such conflicts could harm the anti-communist movement in Southeast Asia.

Report No. 23 highlighted the Taiwanese government's strong opposition to the coercive policies, but the Diem administration dismissed this as foreign interference, insisting that the control measures were domestic matters. Choi expressed concerns that the South Vietnamese government would persist with these policies, jeopardizing the anti-communist alliance among South Korea, South Vietnam, and Taiwan [39].

These concerns persisted through 1957, with no resolution in sight regarding tensions over the overseas Chinese community. In Report No. 45, dated June 27, Choi relayed the South Vietnamese government's justification for its policies, cautioning that Taiwanese protests alongside the overseas Chinese would exacerbate the anti-communist movement. The South Vietnamese government perceived compliance with its policies and the naturalization of overseas Chinese as evidence of their commitment to anti-communism [40]. Additionally, Choi noted a significant decline in the overseas Chinese population in South Vietnam due to the government's measures, along with deteriorating relations between Taiwan and South Vietnam, especially after Taiwan sent helicopters to assist overseas Chinese seeking to migrate.

Rhee Syngman was primarily concerned about how the Ngo Dinh Diem government's policies toward the overseas Chinese community affected relations with anti-communist allies and the support of this community for the Asian anti-communist movement. Although South Korea could not directly intervene, it consistently voiced disapproval of the Saigon government's control measures regarding the overseas Chinese.

The Diem administration's stringent domestic policies elicited negative reactions not only from the overseas Chinese community in South Vietnam but also from the Republic of China government, raising significant concerns in South Korea. These policies hindered the formation of the anti-communist alliance, leading South Korea to question the South Vietnamese government's commitment to the anti-communist cause.

To understand the rationale behind Diem's coercive policies, it is important to note that the overseas Chinese had long held a stable economic position, which created conflicts of interest with the indigenous population. Upon taking power, Diem sought to gain popular support while reducing dependence on foreign powers in economic matters. He believed that building the Republic of Vietnam's economy required promoting engagement beyond agriculture, emphasizing the role of Vietnamese individuals as the primary economic drivers. Consequently, the Diem government was intolerant of dissent from the overseas Chinese community, reinforcing legal measures to ensure the swift implementation of its policies [41].

However, Ngo Dinh Diem did not realize that these coercive policies were strengthening the identity of the overseas Chinese community more than ever. By 1955, the overseas Chinese community in South Vietnam still supported the newly established government of the Republic of Vietnam to some extent. However, as coercive economic and nationality policies were imposed on the overseas Chinese community and support from the indigenous population for such policies increased, it became a decisive factor in the decision of many overseas Chinese to leave South Vietnam for Taiwan [42]. The distancing of the overseas Chinese community from the South Vietnamese regime was also a major concern for the South Korean authorities, as it negatively impacted the activities of the anti-communist movement in the Asian region.

South Korean concerns about the conflict between the overseas Chinese community and the South Vietnamese government reflected American dissatisfaction. The U.S. sought a stable South Vietnamese government to counter communism in Southeast Asia. However, alongside coercive policies towards the overseas Chinese, other issues with Saigon's policies fueled American discontent with Ngo Dinh Diem's rule, ultimately leading to the U.S. decision to replace him in the early 1960s.

The South Korean and South Vietnamese governments held fundamentally different views on the overseas Chinese community. South Korea considered support from this community essential for the anti-communist movement and a crucial link to diplomatic relations with the Republic of China. Supporting the overseas Chinese was seen as beneficial for enhancing cooperation with Taiwan and strengthening anti-communism, while Japan also aimed to engage this community in its economic initiatives, raising concerns for South Korea. In contrast, the South Vietnamese government prioritized national unification over anti-communism and did not

recognize the overseas Chinese community's significance. The Diem administration viewed this group as a potential source of social conflict, implementing strict policies to gain support from the indigenous population. These differing priorities led to contrasting assessments of the treatment of the overseas Chinese, with South Korea expressing dissatisfaction over South Vietnam's authoritarian measures. Ultimately, these divergent perspectives influenced the relationship between the two countries, particularly within their anti-communist alliance in Asia.

3. Conclusions

The initial diplomatic relations between South Korea and South Vietnam from 1955 to 1957 were influenced by both objective and subjective factors. The United States served as a pivotal bridge that facilitated closer ties between the two countries, with their diplomatic relations structured in alignment with U.S. strategies in East Asia. Beyond the American influence, however, the cultural similarities and shared political backgrounds of both the South Korean and South Vietnamese governments played a significant role in fostering bilateral cooperation. Through an analysis of the original diplomatic documents and texts of Choi Duk Shin, archived at the Syngman Rhee Institute, Yonsei University, this paper examined two key issues in South Korea-South Vietnam diplomatic relations.

One key factor to address is Japan. There has been considerable debate regarding Syngman Rhee's negative stance toward Japan. Some studies suggest that Rhee's deep-seated resentment toward Japan stemmed from its previous invasions and exploitation of the Korean Peninsula [43]. Other research highlights Rhee's concerns about U.S. favoritism toward Japan, fearing that the U.S.-Japan alliance would undermine American support for South Korea [44]. In his efforts to lead the anti-communist movement in Asia, Rhee was particularly apprehensive that Japan's involvement might overshadow South Korea's role. The Rhee administration further criticized Japan's expanding economic cooperation with Southeast Asian countries, likening it to Japan's prewar Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere, and accused Japan of supporting communism [45]. This hostility towards Japan led South Korea to closely monitor Japanese diplomatic activities in Southeast Asia, a concern that was confirmed through reports and telegram exchanges between Syngman Rhee and Choi Duk Shin regarding the Japanese ambassador to South Vietnam's activities between 1955 and 1957. During this period, diplomatic tensions between South Vietnam and Japan, especially surrounding the issue of war reparations, escalated. Under Rhee's direction, Choi Duk Shin strongly encouraged the South Vietnamese government to continue pressing Japan on the reparations issue. Concurrently, South Korea seized the opportunity to strengthen its economic ties with South Vietnam, effectively replacing Japan in areas such as ginseng exports. Therefore, Japan's involvement can be seen as a key factor in the development of South Korea-South Vietnam diplomatic relations.

In contrast, the issue of the overseas Chinese community raised significant concerns for the South Korean government regarding South Vietnam's anti-communist stance. The South Korean government's perspective on the Ngo Dinh Diem administration became clearer through the diplomatic exchanges between Choi Duk Shin and Syngman Rhee. The Rhee administration was particularly troubled by Ngo Dinh Diem's economic and nationality policies towards the overseas Chinese community in South Vietnam, which they could not endorse. These policies not only undermined the support of the overseas Chinese community for the South Vietnamese government but also had negative repercussions for South Vietnam's diplomatic relations with Taiwan. The South Korean government viewed these actions as a significant setback for the broader anti-communist movement in Asia. Both Choi and Rhee made considerable efforts to persuade the South Vietnamese government to adopt more conciliatory policies toward the Chinese community, but these attempts ultimately proved unsuccessful. In conclusion, a new perspective on the issues surrounding early South Korea-South Vietnam relations has been

thoroughly explored through Choi Duk Shin's diplomatic documents and reports. Additionally, Choi Duk Shin's observations and recommendations, recorded in these documents, played a pivotal role in shaping the early stages of diplomatic relations between South Korea and South Vietnam.

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