# THE INFLUENCE OF KOREAN LOBBYING ON U.S.-KOREAN RELATIONS, 1905–1945

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## NOTE ON ROMANIZATION AND KOREAN NAMES

Korean words in this text have been romanized according to the Revised Romanization of Korean System developed by the Republic of Korea's Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Sport. Despite the ease of use of the Revised Romanization system, the ideal way to represent the Korean language is with the Korean alphabet (hangeul). To this end, wherever appropriate, I have provided the hangeul following Korean words and phrases.

Korean names in this text have been kept in the traditional East Asian order: the surname coming before the given name. I have chosen to render the surnames in all capital letters to make them unambiguous (i.e. HEO Heon). The exception to this rule are Koreans who took western names (i.e. Henry Chung) and Koreans whose historic romanizations of their name are well-known or documented (i.e. Syngman Rhee, Kiusic Kimm). I have provided the hangeul in parenthesis after these names since it would be difficult to reconstruct the Korean name from the idiosyncratic romanization.

## ABSTRACT

This study examines how Syngman Rhee and the Korean independence movement used the rhetoric of American exceptionalism to lobby the U.S. government and the American public to support Korean independence between 1905–1945. Alleging that Theodore Roosevelt violated the 1882 Korean-American Treaty when he tacitly supported the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1905, Rhee and his surrogates argued that Germany was not the only nation guilty of regarding treaties as "mere scraps of paper" and exhorted Americans to right this historical wrong by supporting Korean independence. They argued that by doing so Americans could prove they were the exceptional people many believed themselves to be.

Rhee's message gained credibility not only because the concept of American exceptionalism resonated with American audiences, but also because at various junctures certain American political factions found taking up the cause of Korean independence useful. During the fight over the Versailles Treaty the so-called Irreconcilables used the Korean issue to criticize President Woodrow Wilson and also to deflect the charge that they were isolationists. During the denouement of World War II, anti-communist politicians and civic organizations argued that Korea must not be abandoned to communism and that the United States' treatment of Korea would be a test of American resolve in establishing a new rules-based order. The publicity and sympathy Korea received from these and many other episodes transformed Korea into an issue that could not be ignored in the postwar period. The irony and tragedy of Rhee's efforts, however, is they not only failed to regain Korea's independence, but directly contributed to the decision to divide Korea—an outcome he never foresaw nor supported.

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# INTRODUCTION

"So you see, time and time again, America has failed to do its duty which it owes to itself and to the world and consequently the gangster nations are threatening the very existence of this great republic," Syngman Rhee (이승만) told his audience gathered at the American University in Washington, D.C. on 8 October 1942. In the months and years after Pearl Harbor Americans wondered how their country had become embroiled in a war so suddenly and so unexpectedly. The "sneak attack" on Pearl Harbor galvanized American opinion in favor of involvement in the war, but it also raised questions about how their political and military leaders could have been so unprepared. Into this breach stepped conspiracy theorists and cynics, who wondered if President Franklin Roosevelt had not left the defenses at Pearl Harbor lax, hoping for just such an attack.

Syngman Rhee had his own explanation of what went wrong with American foreign policy—one that was calibrated to resonate with Americans accustomed to overlaying a moral geography on human history and geopolitical events. Although his explanation of Pearl Harbor was a long one, he had condensed it to a lecture he could give in about twenty-minutes and that he would repeat over and over again during World War II. It was an explanation that began with his own childhood, his delivery from blindness by western medicine, his political enlightenment in missionary schools, and his participation in Korea's embrace of Wilsonian self-determination in 1919. It was a personal story of how American ideals had inspired the Korean people, in Rhee's telling, to reinvigorate their own decaying politics by embracing Christianity and democracy. No doubt Americans were delighted to hear of the good deeds of their missionaries, but Rhee had much more to say. In the 19th century the American people were the "envy of the

world," but Rhee argued that over the previous fifty years their "very greatness, wealth, and power" had a "stupefying influence" on the American mind. Americans had lost sight of the fact that the "heritage of Liberty, for which their forebears paid so dearly" might not be theirs forever. They had become complacent, self-absorbed, and selfish. They forgot that "justice is the foundation of peace" among men and nations; that the "safety of the weak and the strong is inseparable"; and that the American principle of "democracy, liberty, and justice for all" should include places like Korea.[1]

Rhee's explanation of Pearl Harbor called into question more than just the United States' commitment to these principles. Rhee also questioned the United States willingness to honor its treaty obligations. The United States and Korea had signed a treaty in 1882 the first article of which read "If other powers deal unjustly or oppressively with either Government, the other will exert their good offices on being informed of the case to bring about an amicable arrangement, thus showing their friendly feelings."[2] Rhee himself had informed President Theodore Roosevelt of Korea's situation in 1905, but instead of extending American "good offices"—as required by the treaty—Roosevelt tacitly supported the Japanese annexation of Korea, providing the Japanese with a toe-hold on the Asian mainland. Germans were not the only ones guilty of regarding treaties as "mere scraps of paper" in Rhee's opinion.

Rhee placed Roosevelt's violation of the obscure 1882 Korean-American Treaty at the beginning of a series of disastrous American decisions, in which American leaders

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[1] "Speech given at the campus of the American University," 8 November 1942, "The Speeches of Syngman Rhee" folder, Syngman Rhee Institute (SRI), Seoul, South Korea.

[2] The text of the entire treaty can be found on the State Department's website <http://photos.state.gov/libraries/korea/49271/June_2012/1-1822%20Treaty.pdf>. [Accessed 4 December 2013]

sacrificed their own values, the freedom of other peoples, and finally their own security on the altar of expediency. But Korea was more than just an example of American shortsightedness. Korea was also a chance for the United States to redeem its foreign policy if the American people—once they understood the facts of the Korean situation—would pressure their leaders to do justice to Korea by helping to restore Korea's independence and honoring their treaty obligations. Rhee helped Americans locate Korea in their moral geography by arguing that Korea had been a place of betrayal and moral failing, but could also be a site of redemption.

Rhee was careful to distinguish between the actions of the American government and the sentiments of the American people. For him, the actions of the American missionaries, who built his school, who saved his life in prison, and who supported his education in the United States, were always the true embodiment of American sentiments and values, not American political leaders. During his forty-year exile in the United States as the de facto leader of the Korean independence movement, Rhee never tired of imploring the American people to make right the mistakes of their leaders and to restore the values that had made the United States "the envy of the world" to their rightful place in American foreign policy.

Rhee never used the term "jeremiad" in any of his speeches or writings, but he left ample evidence that he knew what it meant, and understood the historic role that rhetoric had played in American society. Rhee fully appreciated the idealism through which many Americans viewed the world and their place within it. The first Americans Rhee met—missionaries of the Student Volunteer Movement—had a profound effect on how he viewed the United States and the American people. For these Americans, the United

States being a wealthy nation or even a great power in realist terms was not the goal, or even desirable if it involved moral compromises. A religious and a social calling underpinned the way they conceived of themselves as individuals and collectively as a society. These Americans believed that their nation had a special mission to lead the effort to Christianize the world in a generation. This mission bestowed upon them both a sense of calling, but also anxiety. Were they doing enough to fulfill the mission? What were the consequences of failure? These missionaries were atypical in their concrete understanding of what America's special mission was and what it required of them personally, but the belief in a special mission and anxiety over it is a recurring theme in American history, especially in the context of the United States relations with other societies. This work tells the story of how Syngman Rhee and the Korean independence movement used the ideology of the American mission as an entrée into American foreign policy debates and as a means to shift American perceptions and policy towards Korea.

**American Exceptinoalism as *Potential***

The idea that Americans have a special mission to the world is an old one, even older than the United States itself. It was brought to North America by the puritans and best epitomized in a few lines of John Winthrop's sermon "A Model of Christian Charity," given aboard the *Arbella* in 1630: "For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us." It is worth noting that Winthrop's famous lines were just the closing rhetorical flourish in what was a lengthy sermon aimed at preparing his fellow colonizers for a period of immense hardship, interdependence, and confrontation as they tried to fashion a model politico-religious society on Massachusetts Bay. His primary objective was highlighting the extreme self-sacrifice necessary for communal and individual survival in their new environment and the very next lines warn

that if they should fail to become that "city upon a hill" it was not the people of the world who would be harmed by the lack of a beacon, but they themselves, as God's blessing would be withdrawn and they would become a "by-word" among the nations.

Despite the fact that Winthrop wrote his sermon for a particular group of people faced with a very particular historical challenge, his invocation to his fellow colonists to build a "city upon a hill" in North America has survived and thrived up to the present and has become a foundational text for understanding American exceptionalism. Of course the Puritans were not the only American colonists and the intellectual baggage they carried with them was only one part of the complex mixture of the philosophical, political, and theological ideas that would fuse together to create an American identity. And yet, through a process of historical selection—that is the willful and unconscious crafting of a historical narrative—Winthrop's invocation to his fellow colonists has outlived its original circumstances to become emblematic of American domestic and international ambitions: to become a model for other nations by championing values at home and abroad that Americans deem to be good, at that particular time.

Despite its longevity, American exceptionalism has been controversial. While the idea that God had held North America in reserve for European colonists to found a politically and theologically purified version of their own civilization was not controversial among themselves, the divine imprimatur on this endeavor made conflicts over which political and theological ideas should hold sway bitter and often violent. That such a manifest destiny dispossessed native peoples of their land, livelihood, and lives may have only occasionally troubled the early colonists, but many native American writers, especially those educated in mission schools and converted to Christianity were not

hesitant to point out that the means of building the city upon a hill were hardly a model of Christian charity.[3] For later generations of Americans treatment of Native Americans would be the ultimate refutation of their nation's founding myth.

Nineteenth century Americans were no less enamored than the Puritans with the possibilities that lay before them. They had an even broader vision of what they could accomplish, especially after the Civil War created a stronger central government and a more unified state. Whereas the Puritan endeavor was primarily religious in nature, Americans throughout the 19th century recognized the religious, political, and economic potential of their ever-expanding nation. The key concept was *potential*. "The United States are destined either to surmount the gorgeous history of feudalism, or else prove the most tremendous failure of time," wrote Walt Whitman in 1871. While Whitman was enthusiastic about American expansion and what it portended he feared there was a spiritual and cultural void at the heart of American society "as if we were somehow being endow'd with a vast and more and more thoroughly-appointed body, and then left with little or no soul."[4]

As the United States emerged as a global power in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the meaning of American exceptionalism, if not the idea itself, remained contested. Could the United States better serve the world through exemplary action at home or by actively promoting the American synthesis of political, religious, and

[3] See the work of Pequot Methodist Minister William Apess, especially his *Eulogy on King Philip* (Boston, 1837).

[4] Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas: And Other Papers* (Walter Scott, 1888), 3,13.

individual liberty abroad?[5] Those who favored exemplary action at home have often been maligned as "isolationists," but in fact isolationism has never enjoyed more than fleeting popular and/or regional support in American history. What is often described as the United States' retreat into isolationism after World War I, could more accurately be described as a return to American unilateralism. The senators that led the fight against the Versailles Treaty and American membership in the League of Nations argued that it would bind the United States to European empires and prevent it from exercising its peculiar destiny abroad.[6]

The 20th century saw debates over American exceptionalism shift fundamentally from arguing over its application to arguing over its existence. This shift in the debate was made possible by subtle changes in the meaning of American exceptionalism over time. For much of American history, American exceptionalism was not a description of American identity, but of American opportunity. Even a cursory reading of John Winthrop's "A Model of Christian Charity" reveals a pessimistic appraisal of human nature, including that of the Puritan colonists. They were only exceptional in the opportunities they were given and the consequences that might befall them if they failed to keep the covenant they were making with God. Similar, though less religious, ideas were present in the writings of the founding generation, who fashioned a system of government whose genius, in their own eyes, was its ability to balance human society's tendency towards anarchy on the one hand and tyranny on the other—the inhabitants of the thirteen original states not excepted. Josiah Strong, one of the greatest promoters of

[5] Two historians have examined this tension at length. See Walter McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World since 1776* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997); H. W. Brands, *What America Owes to the World: The Struggle for the Soul of Foreign Policy* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[6] For a lengthy discussion of this topic, see the "Korea and the Treaty 'Fight'" section of chapter four.

American expansion as a mission of world salvation in the late 19th and early 20th century predicated American expansion abroad on the "Christianization" of the nation at home. His most influential work, *Our Country: Its possible future and its present crisis*, was published by the American Home Missionary Society and its title page quoted Emerson's "American Civilization" claiming that "We live in a new and exceptional age. America is another word for Opportunity. Our whole history appears like a last effort of the Divine Providence in behalf of the human race."[7] Strong believed that only through internal redemption could American resources, in both the material and non-material sense, be used abroad.

**American Exceptionalism: A Genus, Not a Species**

The meaning of American exceptionalism expanded along with the United States, but unlike the United States, it fragmented as it grew. The theological conceptions of sin, salvation, and damnation that undergird the concept of American exceptionalism as *potential* began to shift. The rise of American Studies in the 1940s saw scholars interrogating the received myths of the American identity in new ways. Revisionist historians provided plenty of empirical data that the same economic, political, and social forces that have shaped other societies were at play in North America from its earliest days, and even in its most fundamental documents. Studies of the treatment of Native Americans, the lack of civil rights for African-Americans, and studies comparing the

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[7] Josiah Strong, *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis* (Baker & Taylor Co., for the American Home Missionary Society, 1885).

expansion of the United States to other historical empires, further challenged Americans' received wisdom about their history.[8]

These developments would have troubled, but not surprised John Winthrop and other early developers of the concept of American exceptionalism as potential. As Sacvan Bercovitch explains in his study of the American Jeremiad, explicit in this early ritual of American exceptionalism was mourning over what the offspring of the original colonists had become (rich and worldly), but also reaffirmation of what they could be.[9] Such Jeremiadic formulations were present in American political culture well into the 20th century, and still exist today. However, the primary response to 20th century shifts in American political discourse and the understanding of American history was not a jeremiad. Jimmy Carter, the last American president to attempt something like a national jeremiad in his infamous 1979 "malaise speech," was soundly rebuked for it by pundits. Since then American political leaders have been reluctant to rebuke Americans broadly (though certain segments of American society have at times made attractive targets) and to call for nation-wide repentance. As a result the understanding of American exceptionalism as *potential* has waned, and other competing understandings of American exceptionalism have become prominent. [10]

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[8] For a few representative titles of the trends described in this paragraph, see Charles A Beard, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1935); Angie Debo, *And Still the Waters Run* (Princeton University Press, 1940); William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy.* (Cleveland: World Pub. Co., 1959).

[9] Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1978).

[10] Many Americans and non-Americans still speak of American exceptionalism in terms of potential. See Tony Blair, "Address by the Right Honorable Tony Blair, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland," *Congressional Record* 149, no. 106 (July 17, 2003): H7060. Available from Proquest Congressional [Accessed 2 October 2015]; Geun-hye Park, "Joint Meeting to Hear an Address by Her Excellency Park Geun-Hye, President of the Republic of Korea," *Congressional Record* 159, no. 64 (May 8, 2013): H2487. Available from Proquest Congressional [Accessed 2 October 2015]; "Round Table with David Plouffe, John McCain, David Maraniss, Doris Kearns Goodwin, Mark Halperin, Harold Ford Jr.,

One of these understandings is American exceptionalism as *identity*—the idea that the circumstances that gave rise to the founding of the United States and its expansion across North America were so unique as to bestow upon Americans a unique quality and character. In its most benign form, few could argue that American history has not shaped the American character in at least some ways that are unique. Of course the same could be said of nearly all societies. In a more extreme form this idea can foster a belief in American *superiority* to other peoples. The identification of American exceptionalism with American superiority has made the idea politically controversial. Perhaps because of its religious roots and long tenure in American history, American exceptionalism is often treated as a traditional American value to those on the Right, while its association with American "superiority" (akin to white supremacism) and its eliding of more tragic narratives in American history (especially slavery) have made it repellent to those on the Left.

As a result, invocations of American exceptionalism—largely from those Americans on the Right—are now met with a barrage of empirical data belying the claim and arguing that in fact the United States is unique in very few areas that could also be described as exceptional. This has not been the end of American exceptionalism, but has rather transformed it into an article of political faith for some Americans and a national embarrassment for others. Denying American exceptionalism has been viewed as near treasonous for Americans on the Right—though this is changing—while proclaiming it is either a sign of a dull intellect or willful demagoguery to those on the Left. American leaders, such as Barack Obama, have tried to occupy the middle ground by both

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Kim Strassel," *Meet the Press* (Washington, D.C.: NBC, June 17, 2012); "Interview with Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby," *Religion and Ethics News Weekly* (PBS, March 22, 2013).

proclaiming American exceptionalism and redefining it at the same time. In a commencement speech at West Point in 2014 Obama told his audience, "I believe in American exceptionalism with every fiber of my being. But what makes us exceptional is not our ability to flout international norms and the rule of law; it is our willingness to affirm them through our actions."[11] Obama's conception of American exceptionalism in this speech would certainly offend few people, but in a world where pariah states like North Korea are almost singular in their flouting of international norms, it is questionable to assert that adhering to the rule of law makes the United States exceptional.

The politicization of American exceptionalism has made too many of the debates surrounding it normative: focusing on whether or not the United States is truly exceptional. On the one hand, scholarship showing the similarities between the United States and other societies and empires is useful on many levels. On the other, to suppose that such scholarship will disabuse Americans of their belief in American exceptionalism ignores that the idea has become an article of faith for many Americans. It is beyond the reach of empirical data. As Hilde Restad has pointed out American exceptionalism is an ideology and as such it does not matter if the United States is exceptional or not, so long as Americans believe that it is.[12] Efforts to discredit American exceptionalism too frequently dehistoricize it, and flatten it into a belief about American identity and uniqueness going back to the 17th century. The complexity is lost. American exceptionalism becomes only about *identity* and not *potential*. It becomes only a source of

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[11] Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President at the United States Military Academy Commencement Ceremony," U.S. Military Academy-West Point, May 28, 2014. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/05/28/remarks-president-united-states-military-academy-commencement-ceremony>. [Accessed 20 September 2015]

[12] Hilde Eliassen Restad, "Old Paradigms in History Die Hard in Political Science: US Foreign Policy and American Exceptionalism," *American Political Thought* 1, no. 1 (May 2012): 53–76, doi:10.1086/664586.

pride, rather than also a cause of humility and anxiety. It becomes a thoroughly domestic ideology, interested only in describing the uniqueness of the American character, rather than a debate over the United States' role in world affairs.

American exceptionalism construed as the uniqueness of the American character is something that non-Americans either find of little interest or somewhat threatening. This is especially true of peer-nations to the United States who see in American exceptionalism a justification of American unilateralism that may come at their own expense. Such was the case in Vladimir Putin's 2013 op-ed in the *New York Times,* warning Americans not only against unilateral action in Syria, but also against believing in their own exceptionalism.[13] Putin surely spoke for many foreign leaders disgusted with America's all-but-unilateral invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the bloody consequences that followed.

As Putin's criticism of American exceptionalism shows, the ideology can certainly be a stumbling block in American foreign relations. However, this has not always been the case. While American exceptionalism defined as a unique and seemingly immutable identity is nearly always offensive abroad, American exceptionalism defined as the opportunity to influence world affairs in a positive way has found foreign supporters from the 18th century to the present. American exceptionalism as potential supposes that the United States has a special mission, a peculiar destiny in world affairs. Exactly what this mission is and where and how it applies is constantly in flux. This is one of its primary attractions for non-Americans, who have recognized in this manifestation of American

[13] Vladimir V. Putin, "What Putin Has to Say to Americans About Syria," *The New York Times*, September 11, 2013.

exceptionalism—what I refer to as the American mission—an opportunity to enter debates over American foreign policy and perhaps nudge it in their desired direction.

Before explaining further what will proceed in the following chapters, I should make two things clear. First, while I draw distinctions between American exceptionalism as *potential, identity*, and *superiority*, none of these distinctions are mutually exclusive. American exceptionalism as *identity, potential*, and *superiority*, have long intermingled to various degrees in both American culture and in the mind of individual Americans. However, I feel justified in focusing on American exceptionalism as *potential*—the American mission—because this is the aspect of the ideology that Syngman Rhee and the Korean independence movement targeted. They focused on American exceptionalism as *potential* because it was useful for them to do so. That in the process they might also contribute to Americans understanding of themselves as a superior people probably troubled them little. Their goal, regaining Korean independence, was a concrete one, not an abstract one.

Second, I am not making a normative judgment about American exceptionalism, only examining how and why it would be invoked by Korean independence activists. As Seymour Martin Lipset pointed out two decades ago, American exceptionalism is a double edged sword in American culture, allowing both "pernicious and beneficial social phenomena to arise simultaneously from the same basic beliefs."[14] Lipset was writing primarily about American exceptionalism in a domestic context, but the same could be said of the American mission. That the American mission has received periodic foreign support does not sanctify it. In its most cynical form it has been used to justify attempts to

[14] Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 268.

impose on other societies American norms in which they had little interest and for which they had little desire. In its most forward-thinking form it has been used to justify policies that demonstrate an enlightened self-interest—which in fact demarcates the outer limits of altruism in any foreign policy—such as the return of the Panama Canal to Panamanian control or the Marshall Plan for Europe. The goal of this work is not to pass judgment on the American mission, but rather to describe how it operated within the context of U.S.-Korean relations in the first half of the twentieth century and contributed to the division of Korea, which I believe will yield larger insights into the role this ideology has played in American foreign relations broadly defined.

**Argument and Organization**

The understanding of American exceptionalism as an American mission to the world has largely—though not totally—been subsumed by other conceptions of American exceptionalism. The purpose of this work is to recover something of the history of the American mission and its importance to American foreign policy by examining how Syngman Rhee and the Korean independence movement invoked such a mission to influence American policy towards Korea from 1905–1945. By doing so, this work seeks to accomplish two goals.

First this work argues American exceptionalism is more a genus of ideas than a discrete ideological species.[15] By examining the American mission, I hope to convince

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[15] This introduction has described American exceptionalism in the broadest possible terms as *potential*, *identity*, and *superiority*. However, American exceptionalism has other meanings as well. In the context of national security, labor, and religious history, among others, American exceptionalism means different things. James W. Ceasar has described American exceptionalism as a "matrix of thoughts containing different possibilities." I concur and have tried to offer some organization to this matrix using the above terms. See James W. Ceaser, "The Origins of American Exceptionalism," in *American Exceptionalism: The Origins, History, and Future of the Nation's Greatest Strength*, ed. Charles W. Dunn (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013), 11–26.

readers to adopt a more complex view of American exceptionalism. By contextualizing Korean invocations of the American mission I hope to provide a framework for understanding similar foreign invocations of the American mission from the Marquis de La Fayette in the 18th century to Ahmed Chalabi in the 21st. The Korean embrace of the American mission during their country's colonization was far from an isolated incident. Foreign invocations of American exceptionalism only make sense if the ideology is more complex than the chest-thumping hypernationalism with which it is often associated. By arguing for the complexity of American exceptionalism, I hope also to at least partially explain why the belief remains so potent in American society. While American exceptionalism as *identity* can easily be attacked by historians, sociologists, and statisticians, American exceptionalism as *potential* is much harder to attack in the same ways. The United States is demonstrably not the "greatest country on earth" by a whole host of objective indicators (GDP per capita, the Human Development Index, life expectancy), but it is much harder to argue that the United States does not have incredible potential to influence world affairs in a positive (or negative) manner.

Second, this work hopes to make an important intervention into the historiography of U.S.-Korean relations by arguing against the interpretation that the Korean independence movement was a failure. Of course the movement was not successful at accomplishing its most ambitious goal: creating an independent and unified Korea from under Japanese colonial rule. However, scholars have too often conflated the failure to achieve this goal with having no influence at all on American policy. I will argue the Korean independence movement was instrumental in shaping American attitudes

towards Korea and was in fact crucial to the American decision to suggest the division of Korea to the Soviet Union in August 1945. I will argue against the interpretation that the division of Korea was an afterthought, a hasty decision taken without any consideration for the Koreans themselves. Rather, I will argue that the division of Korea was the result of Rhee and his associates successfully transforming his country into a place of symbolic importance in the American moral geography. They ensured that Korea could not be abandon without consequences for the Truman Administration and the already besieged State Department. The existence of idealistic Americans who believed in a special mission for their nation was essential to this outcome.

Scholars can hardly be blamed for overlooking the impact of the Korean independence movement on American policy towards Korea. The leaders of the movement themselves, especially Syngman Rhee, were unanimous in their judgment of the movement as a failure, especially after the division—an act they had no foreknowledge of, never supported, and vehemently opposed once they learned of it. If it had ever occurred to Rhee that his own forty-year lobbying career in the U.S. had contributed to the division of Korea—however involuntarily—he would have had no incentive to claim that influence given the cascading negative consequences for Korea. Besides, immediately after their division and liberation, Koreans, both in Korea and abroad, had much more urgent and pressing matters to attend to than examining the unintended consequences of their often contentious independence movement.

This work is organized into five chapters. Chapter one examines the importance of American missionaries to both U.S.-Korean relations and to the transmission of the American mission from one society to the other. This chapter describes Rhee's first

encounter with the American mission via American missionaries, how he came to realize the potential of invoking the American mission for his own personal and nationalistic aspirations, and how such invocations were essential to him establishing himself as a leader of exiled Koreans in the United States.

Chapter two examines the lobbying activities of Rhee and the Korean independence movement in the immediate aftermath of the March First Movement and in the context of Woodrow Wilsons embrace of self-determination as an American war aim. The Koreans used this new American interest in international affairs to expand their lobbying activities beyond those who had been involved in the American missionary effort in Korea. Through grassroots organizing, print media, and Chautauqua lectures, the Koreans established a small but influential constituency of American supporters who were willing to publically advocate for the Korean cause.

Chapter three examines how Rhee and the Korean independence movement utilized this constituency to place pressure on American policymakers during the fight over the ratification of the Versailles Treaty and during the Washington Naval Conference of 1921–22. The chapter pays special attention to the common cause the Korean activists and their American supporters made with the so-called "Irreconcilables" in the U.S. Senate. The Korean independence movement provided these senators with an "internationalist" justification for opposing the treaty and thus an answer to the charge that they were advocating isolationism. The Koreans in return received an airing of their views in the U.S. Senate and even a vote on a Korean reservation to the Versailles Treaty. While scholars have examined the importance of the issue of the Shantung peninsula to the case against the Versailles Treaty in the U.S. Senate, few have realized that it was the

brutal Japanese suppression of the March First Movement that injected such passion into the debate over the Shantung. While Korean activists' passionate invocations of the American mission during both the fight over the Versailles Treaty and the Washington Naval Conference did not result in any official policy changes toward Korea, it significantly shifted American perceptions of the Japanese colonization of Korea and brought much of the informed American public opinion on the situation into sympathy with the Koreans.

Chapter four examines the Korean independence movement in the interwar period—a period when the movement was nearly destroyed by factionalism and its leaders, in frustration, began to look beyond the United States for support. Although personalities—especially Rhee's—and Korean regional identities did much to fan the flames of factionalism, this chapter highlights how the efficiency of Japanese control of Korea exacerbated these problems. The diffusion of the Korean independence movement from Siberia to Shanghai and Hawaii to Washington, D.C., meant that communication and coordination would have been difficult under the best of circumstances. Rather than blaming factionalism for the failures of the Korean independence movement, I believe the emphasis should be placed on what the movement was able to accomplish in the face of almost insurmountable obstacles. This chapter also examines Korean efforts to look beyond the United States for potential allies in the 1930s. Such efforts are important to this study because of what they reveal about the Korean independence movement's relationship with the American mission. Koreans embraced the idea of an American mission not because they necessarily believed in it—though some may have—but as part of a broad and pragmatic strategy to regain Korea's independence.

Chapter five explores Korean lobbying during World War II. It shows how Rhee and others were able to build on the notoriety and sympathy they received in the 1920s, but also how they were able to adapt their message to take advantage of the anxieties and ambitions of that moment. In the new anti-Japanese environment after Pearl Harbor Rhee was able to portray Korea as the first victim of Japan's march of conquest and to link Theodore Roosevelt's betrayal of Korea in 1905 to the causes of World War II. Rhee's constant assertions that Korean manpower could substitute for American manpower in the Pacific War may have been far-fetched to the point of deceitful, but it was a claim that grabbed the attention of any American with a family member in uniform and which American politicians could not ignore. Rhee's constant lecturing, writing, and media appearances during the war turned him into a minor American celebrity and provided the Koreans with allies from Wenatchee, Washington to Washington, D.C. Such lobbying convinced many Americans that their nation's Korean policy for the last forty years had indeed been wrong: that in the case of Korea, the United States had not lived up to the idealism of the American mission. The complexity of alliance politics with China, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union, coupled with Korean factionalism, prevented the recognition of the Korean Provisional Government during the war. However, I argue that Rhee's lobbying and the sympathy it aroused for Korea was a key factor behind the American decision to suggest the temporary division of Korea.

Invoking the American mission provided the Koreans with an entrée into American foreign policy debates and garnered them a great deal of sympathy among the American people, however, it did not provide them with a means of actually determining American policy towards Korea. Their strategy of invoking the American mission earned

them a hearing in the United States, but they had no way to control what lessons Americans would draw from their invocations or what the policy implications might be. The division of Korea was a tragedy they did not intend and did not foresee. The consequences of this division still reverberate around northeast Asia. Invoking the American mission is not the same thing as defining it.

Finally, a note on the scope of this study is in order. This study examines Syngman Rhee's encounter with and uses of American exceptionalism from his boyhood until 1945, when the United States suggested the division of Korea to the Soviet Union. This was not the end of either Syngman Rhee's relationship with the United States nor of his uses of American exceptionalism. This study could have continued examining Rhee's use of American exceptionalism during his presidency, the Korean War, and the signing of the U.S.-Korean Mutual Defense Treaty. Indeed, it could have been expanded to cover Rhee's entire life. There are two reasons why I chose to end this study in 1945 with the division of Korea. First, while Rhee continued to invoke American exceptionalism until nearly the end of his life, his relationship with American exceptionalism changed fundamentally when American forces landed in Korea in September 1945. Once American forces landed in Korea, Korea became an American problem. Once occupied Korea could not easily be abandoned. Rhee had been arguing for years that Korean independence was an American responsibility. After 1945 this was a fact—at least for the southern half of the peninsula. After 1945 the choice facing Americans was not whether or not to do something about Korea, but what to do about Korea. In this new environment, invoking American exceptionalism was still valuable to Rhee, but it was far from the only, or even the most useful card he could play. Anti-communism would come

to supersede in Rhee's lobbying the role that the American mission had long played, even though the two were related.

Second, with the American occupation of Korea in 1945, the narrative of U.S.-Korean relations expanded rapidly and exponentially. Prior to 1945 the stakeholders taking an active interest in U.S.-Korean relations numbered in the thousands and represented a fairly small community of Korean and American activists. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s nearly two million Americans would serve in Korea, as soldiers, diplomats, and aid administrators. An untold number of Koreans also went to the United States as students, immigrants, and adopted children. Korea was no longer the province of Korean exiles, American missionaries, and their boosters. To tell the post-1945 story of Korean-U.S. relations with the same interpretive lens I use in this earlier period is not possible.

Finally, to expand the story through the years of Rhee's presidency would risk burying the important role American exceptionalism played in the division of Korea—what I believe to be the major contribution of this study. I hope in a future work to examine U.S.-Korean relations in all their complexity during Rhee's presidency. However, the literature on this later period is better developed compared to the pre-1945 era. I hope that this work will provide a crucial prologue to the division of Korea, the Korean War, and the transformation of U.S.-Korean relations that resulted.

# Chapter One: The American Mission Comes to Korea

## An Army of Nation Builders

American Christian missionaries were agents of creative destruction in the late nineteenth century. They were an army of social entrepreneurs, stirred to action by the ancient commission of Jesus and the belief that their own privileged place in the world as Americans entailed a responsibility to help others.[1] Encouraged by the revivals of Gilded Age America and the era's most famous evangelist, Dwight L. Moody, American and Canadian college students formed the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions to recruit, train, and dispatch university graduates as foreign missionaries. Highly educated, motivated, and idealistic, their numbers included many of the best and brightest of their generation. They expected a life of hardship and sacrifice. They left the comforts of home and the companionship of their families for years and decades at a time.[2] They were not wishing to be martyrs, but death from disease, accidents, or at the hands of those they were trying to convert was not a rare occurrence.

They were unashamed cultural imperialists with strong beliefs in the superiority of their culture and the religion that underlay it. Their goal was disruption. They went out into the world to change it. Subject to universal human frailties, missionaries could be selfish, condescending, narrow-minded, and hypocritical, but they also believed that the Christian religion sincerely applied was "an antidote to the social chaos that they believed

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[1] Mathew 28:16-20 is the passage of scripture associated with "The Great Commission", especially verse nineteen: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit[.]"

[2] An excellent survey of the American foreign missions movement is William Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (University of Chicago Press, 1987).

threatened all societies."[3] In pursuit of this change they were organized and strategic. Contemporaries used martial adjectives and military metaphors to describe them. John R. Mott, the leader of the student volunteers for a generation had "the mind of a general, but also had "that gentleness of spirit and that grace of manner which compel obedience without the necessity of orders."[4] His books such as *Strategic Points in the World's Conquest* and *The Present World Situation* speak to the geopolitical orientation of the movement. Student volunteers gathered by the thousands in mass conferences around the United States and, using maps the size of jumbotrons, devised strategies for completing the "evangelization of the world in a single generation." Their objective was not just to convert individuals, but also to redeem nations.

Beneath their explicit and implicit self-assurance was also a self-conscious recognition of their own cultural development. They believed that the superiority of their own institutions was not innate and that the changes they were trying to effect in other societies were the same theirs had undergone in the not-too-distant past. In explaining why he refused to use the words "heathen," "Oriental," or "Asiatic" former missionary William Griffis highlighted the historical continuity between the East and West: "To the eye of the scholar and the Christian, who knows the history and evolution from semi-brutality of our own savage ancestors, there is no Orient and no Occident, . . . The student of history, with the eyes of science and imagination, sees in the colonial America of a hundred, or the Europe of five hundred years ago, pretty much everything that is, or only lately was, visible in China, Korea, and Japan. Human nature and the race are

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[3] Michael Parker, *The Kingdom of Character: The Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions (1886-1926)* (Lanham, Md: University Press of America, 1998), 105.

[4] Quoted in Ibid., 35.

one."[5] This realization was their saving grace. It located Western development in a universal narrative of human progress that non-westerners could write themselves into, at least theoretically, on the basis of equality.

The legacy of western missionaries is not only, or even primarily, measured in the converts they made, but also in the lives they saved from death and disease. Unlike Christianity the benefits of Western medicine were easily proved to the skeptical, and medical knowledge became their passport into hostile societies. Its utility could trump the strangeness of their doctrine. So it was in Korea. The first American missionary to Korea was physician Horace Newton Allen. He traveled to Korea to serve as physician, without pay, to the newly established American legation in Seoul. Allen referred to these circumstances as the "ruse" that got him into Korea despite strict laws prohibiting Christianity.[6]

The timing of his arrival was auspicious. In December 1884, soon after he arrived, he was summoned to the royal palace to undertake the most important medical treatment of his life. The Queen's nephew MIN Young-ik had been severely wounded in an attempted coup. He was near death when Allen arrived. He had been slashed seven times, essentially scalping him and exposing his skull and spine. The bleeding had only been crudely stemmed by a German diplomat with no medical training. Allen worked all night in low light to save MIN and though he would need constant treatment for three months

[5] William Elliot Griffis, *A Modern Pioneer in Korea; the Life Story of Henry G. Appenzeller* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1912), 15.

[6] Fred Harvey Harrington, *God, Mammon, and the Japanese; Dr. Horace N. Allen and Korean-American Relations, 1884-1905* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1944), 11–12.

he made a full recovery.[7]

In this dramatic fashion the first American missionary to Korea ingratiated himself with the Korean court and unofficially "opened" Korea to Christian missionaries. Impressed with Allen's medical skills the court asked him to establish the first Western hospital in Korea, a dramatic shift away from the official xenophobia that characterized Korean society for the previous centuries and earned it the unflattering title of "The Hermit Kingdom." Only a few decades before, the Korean state had attempted to stamp out foreign religions and massacred thousands of native Catholics and several French priests.[8] Allen's hospital, elegantly named the "house of extended grace" (Kwang Hye Won, 광혜원), opened in 1885. For probably the first time there was a space in Korea where Koreans mixed with proselytizing foreigners under the sanction of the state.[9]

Word of the medical miracles taking place at Kwang Hye Won spread. Soon desperate souls with tortured bodies began trekking in from the interior by the thousands to seek treatment.[10] If Rhee's biographer, Robert T. Oliver, and several other Korean scholars are to be believed, Syngman Rhee's father LEE Gyeong-seon was among them.[11] LEE was a member of the *yangban* class of Korean nobility, but one whose property and resources were not reflective of his social standing. His family was poor and

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[7] Ibid., 24–25.

[8] Ching Choe, *The Rule of the Taewon'gun: 1864 - 1873* (Harvard University Press, 1972), 96.

[9] *Kwang Hye Won* eventually developed into Severance Hospital one of the leading medical institutions in East Asia today.

[10] Allen claims to have treated 10,000 patients in the opening year of the hospital. Horace Newton Allen, *Things Korean: A Collection of Sketches and Anecdotes, Missionary and Diplomatic* (Kyung-In Publishing Company, 1975), 189.

[11] Robert T. Oliver, *Syngman Rhee: The Man Behind the Myth* (New York: Dodd Mead, 1954), 11–12; Yŏng-ik Yu et al., *Korean Perceptions of the United States: A History of Their Origins and Formation*, trans. Michael Finch (Seoul: Jimoondang, 2006), 164.

made poorer by his attempts to live the lifestyle of a Korean aristocrat without the means to do so. He lavishly entertained his friends, wrote poetry, and studied his family's royal genealogy, all with a noble disdain for material concerns. Genealogy was of paramount importance to someone who possessed a noble birth and little else. LEE's preoccupation with his genealogy was augmented by worries about the tenuousness of his own ancestral line. For five generations his ancestors had managed to produce only one son, a circumstance LEE was not able to improve upon. A son had been born to LEE and his wife but this *yukdae dokja* (6 대독자 – sixth-generation only-son) had died while still a boy. Two daughters had followed. Then in her forties LEE's wife bore another son and the family's fortunes seemed to revive. Coddled from birth as befitting a *yukdae dokja,* Rhee was the center of his family's attention as well as their hopes and aspirations. LEE's dream for his son was that of all struggling *yangban* families: that his son could elevate the family's status by passing the civil service exam and joining the government bureaucracy. His parents sacrificed to provide him the classical education necessary to pass the exam. Seungnyong, as Rhee was called as a child, excelled at his studies and mastered several classical texts by the time he was six.[12]

Disaster struck when Seungnyong was still a small boy. He contracted an illness that left him blind and near death. A pain like a "red hot poker" shot through his eyeballs. His parents were beside themselves at the possibility of losing their second only-son. They tried every remedy and traditional doctor they could find to no avail. The thread of LEE's ancestral line appeared to be fraying the day he and his family set out for the

[12] Chong-sik Lee, *Syngman Rhee: The Prison Years of a Young Radical* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 2001), 151.

Kwang Hye Won. They traveled south to Seoul through the mountain passes carrying Seungnyong on their backs—his mother weeping as if he was already a corpse.[13]

His biographer claimed Rhee received treatment from Horace Allen.[14] He soon fully recovered, and the LEE household was full of joy. Out of gratitude his father sent several dozen eggs to the doctor only to have them returned with a message to keep them for their still-recovering son. Western medicine had saved the boy's sight and possibly his life. As he grew and traditional Korean society crumbled around him, Rhee remembered this experience and began to think about the West, western technology, and western religion in new ways and wonder if it was not capable of more than just his personal physical enlightenment. Syngman Rhee would later use his own experiences to trace the trajectory of the American mission in Korea. Rhee claimed to be a product of this mission and would become an important interpreter of it during his ninety years. He was the spiritual and physical fruit of American missionary endeavors. His body had been saved through missionary medicine and his soul through their evangelism. His story encapsulated the beneficent aspirations of the Student Volunteer Movement and was proof that their mission to bring spiritual and material uplift was yielding returns.

That was the narrative Rhee wanted Americans to hear. Most of it was true. As this chapter will show, American missionaries undoubtedly saved Rhee's life on several occasions and the education and religion they offered him changed his life. However, at the heart of his story of salvation from blindness is a discrepancy that his biographer was willing to paper over and scholars of Rhee appear to have missed. In a 1952 promotional

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[13] Ibid., "Autobiographical notes" 154.

[14] Oliver, *Syngman Rhee: The Man Behind the Myth*, 11–12.

piece for the John Milton Society for the blind, Rhee claimed that he was six years old when he contracted smallpox.[15] Rhee was born in 1875. Horace Allen did not arrive in Korea until 1884. His biographer was clever enough to recognize the discrepancy and claimed in his biography two years later that Rhee had contracted smallpox when he was nine, thus placing Allen in the country at the time of his sickness. It is possible that Rhee could have misremembered his age at the time of his illness, but more telling is the fact that Rhee never identified Allen in print—he may have done so orally—as the doctor who treated him, despite the fact that he visited the doctor in question after his sight was restored and that he and Allen were well acquainted later in life.[16] Rhee's own 1952 account makes clear that the doctor who treated him was "foreign" however. If Rhee was indeed six when he contracted the illness and the doctor who treated him was foreign, then that doctor almost certainly would have been Japanese. Japanese doctors were the only known practitioners of western medicine in Seoul prior to Allen's arrival. In fact Allen recorded the presence of a Japanese doctor during his treatment of MIN Young-ik.[17]

The question of who saved Syngman Rhee's sight is not merely a matter of historical trivia, if in fact it was not Horace Allen. Given the Japanese colonization of Korea that soon followed, Rhee might want to conceal the fact that his sight was restored

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[15] This promotional piece was partially reprinted in Lee, *Syngman Rhee*, 153–54. Rhee's fragmentary autobiography also appears to place the blindness before the arrival of missionaries to Korea. See "Autobiography of Dr. Syngman Rhee" SRI.

[16] Lee, *Syngman Rhee*, "Autobiographical notes", 153.

[17] Harrington, *God, Mammon, and the Japanese; Dr. Horace N. Allen and Korean-American Relations, 1884-1905*, 24. In addition to Oliver, Yu et al, also claim Allen treated Rhee in *Korean Perceptions of the United States*, 164. Professor Chong-sik Lee does not explicitly claim that Allen treated Rhee but he does write "However, the young man had a personal reason to be curious about the West. Had the missionaries not arrived in Korea with their medicine in time, he would have been blinded when he was barely six years old." He does not address the discrepancy between Rhee's age and the arrival of any western missionaries in Korea (see below). Lee, *Syngman Rhee*, 9. The assertion that Rhee was cured from blindness by Allen is now widespread.

by a Japanese doctor—lest Rhee be embarrassed by the Pythonesque question of "What have the Japanese ever done for us?!" That he would permit his biographer to alter his story to make it possible for Allen to be the agent of healing shows Rhee's willingness to mold—or have molded—his own personal story in ways that would better appeal to American audiences. For Rhee to be enlightened physically, spiritually, and politically by American missionaries made his story more compelling to Americans and would hopefully instill in them a sense of responsibility to finish the work begun by their missionaries.[18]

This chapter will examine Syngman Rhee's encounter with the American mission as a young man, describing how it inspired him, turned him into a radical reformer, sustained him through trying times, and put him on a path toward prominence. Rhee's experiences gave him the credibility to both praise Americans for what they had accomplished in Korea through their missionaries while also encouraging them to do more. As this chapter will argue, Rhee had to tread carefully during his early activities in the United States, lest he run afoul of many Americans' pro-Japanese sympathies and desire to eschew politics to focus on the spiritual and humanitarian aspects of their

[18] Circumstantial evidence exists that Rhee, or at least those close to him, became aware of the discrepancy and tried to get the reference to Allen removed from subsequent versions of *The Man Behind the Myth*. Francesca Rhee, Rhee's second wife, wrote Rhee's biographer, Robert T. Oliver, on 27 May 1954 telling him "The name 'Horace Allen' should not have been used here as connected with eye disease and should be omitted." In the revised edition of *The Man Behind the Myth* the explicit reference to Allen was removed, but the physician is referred to as a "Christian doctor." If Rhee in fact was not treated by Allen, which seems likely, this story must have originated either with Rhee or Oliver, or both. They collaborated closely on *The Man Behind the Myth*. For the letter between Mrs. Rhee and Oliver see Francesca Rhee to Robert T. Oliver, 27 May 1954, doc. no. 01300027, File 93, The Syngman Rhee Presidential Papers, Old and Rare Materials Collection, Yonsei University Library, Seoul, South Korea. For another letter in which Mrs. Rhee claims "Some few incidents related in the book [Oliver's biography of Rhee] were not strictly factual" see Francesca Rhee to Mrs. G. M. Hughes, 5 January 1955, *이승만 대통령 재임기 문서 [Presidential Papers of Syngman Rhee, Microfilm Edition]*, roll MF 우남 B01.

missionary work. That Rhee was able to walk this line contributed directly to his rise as the preeminent Korean leader-in-exile in the United States and laid the foundation for his future lobbying and diplomacy.

**A Change of Vocation**

Rhee's first brush with Western civilization—whether administered by an American or Japanese doctor—was physically transformative but did not give him or his family any reason to forsake the path he had been on: to become a Confucian scholar. For ten years after being saved from blindness he strained his eyes studying and memorizing classic Confucian texts in preparation for taking the *gwageo*—the civil service exam of the Joseon state. Rhee's political education and transformation began when the Japanese did to him what small pox could not: end his hopes of taking the *gwageo*.

In 1894 the political order of East Asia was reversed when the Japanese defeated the Chinese in the First Sino-Japanese War and supplanted Chinese influence in Korea. With Japanese troops occupying Seoul, Japanese diplomats pressured the Korean government into Japanese style reforms. Among them was the end of the *gwageo* and its replacement with an exam that privileged more practical forms of knowledge.[19] This reform ended what Rhee called in his autobiographical notes "the sacred hope of all the ambitious young Koreans" and the dream that he had spent his young life pursuing.[20] In fact it was a blessing in disguise. The administration of the *gwageo* was so heavily

[19] Jae-eun Kang, *The Land of Scholars: Two Thousand Years of Korean Confucianism* (Paramus, N.J: Homa & Sekey Books, 2006), 479.

[20] Lee, *Syngman Rhee*, "Autobiographical notes", 155.

influenced by family connections and graft that it is improbable Rhee could have ever passed it, regardless of his efforts.[21]

The utter defeat of China in the Sino-Japanese War was a shock to conservatives in Korea and China, who believed their adherence to Confucianism made them superior to the Japanese. Even after defeat many continued to cling to their faith in Confucian maxims as the basis for a good society and a strong state. Rhee did not. He was part of a cohort of young Koreans who grasped the meaning of China's defeat. The old Sino-centric East Asian system was being cut to shreds by both the Western powers and now the Japanese. The Koreans needed to learn from the Japanese and investigate Western ways if they were to avoid the fate of China.

It was this realization that led Rhee to Pai Chai (배재학당, pronounced Bay-jay), the first mission school in Korea.[22] The decision to study at Pai Chai caused Rhee some minor personal embarrassment. He had ridiculed his friends who had chosen to study there back in the days when Rhee had been self-assured about his future as a Confucian scholar.[23] His initial attraction to the West was technical, not cultural or religious. He went to Pai Chai to learn English, hoping to become a modern civil servant in a modern Korea rather than a bureaucrat in Joseon Korea. That Korea was being transformed by its contact with the West (and Japan) was apparent to him; that he would be was not. After a few months at Pai Chai he assured his mother, who was concerned he might

[21] Ibid., 7.

[22] Ibid., "Autobiographical notes" 155. For the name of this institution, I am using the romanization in use by its direct descendent Pai Chai University in Daejon, South Korea, rather than the Revised Romanization rendering of Bae Jae.

[23] Oliver, *Syngman Rhee: The Man Behind the Myth*, 14.

convert to Christianity, that Christian theology was so foolish no man of learning could believe it. [24]

### Pai Chai Mission School

The American missionaries that entered Korea in the late 1880s were all on the same mission but were not of the same mind. They all wished to see Korea Christianized, modernized, democratized, and, if possible, independent—mostly in that order. They differed greatly about the means, methods, and speed with which these goals could be achieved. Henry Appenzeller, the Methodist missionary who founded Pai Chai in 1886, was unusual among the missionaries for the emphasis he placed on Korean independence and the lengths he went to promote it. Just why Appenzeller involved himself in Korean politics is unclear. His writings reveal a theological conservative who believed that "soul winning" and evangelization were the primary duty of the missionary. But his actions reveal a commitment to the Social Gospel—the idea that uplifting people was essential to the message of Christ. For Appenzeller, as for many missionaries of the Student Volunteer era, evangelism and uplift went hand in hand.[25]

Appenzeller heard "the call" of missions while an undergraduate. He initially planned to go to Japan, but on learning of the greater need in Korea he volunteered to go there in December 1883.[26] Such strategic sensibilities were a hallmark of American missions during this era.[27] His family, pious though they were, struggled to accept his

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[24] Lee, *Syngman Rhee*, "Autobiographical notes" 156.

[25] Daniel M. Davies, "Building a City on a Hill in Korea: The Work of Henry G. Appenzeller," *Church History* 61, no. 4 (December 1, 1992): 425, doi:10.2307/3167795; Edward W. Poitras, "The Legacy of Henry G. Appenzeller," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 18, no. 4 (October 1994): 177–81.

[26] Griffis, *A Modern Pioneer in Korea; the Life Story of Henry G. Appenzeller*, 84, 87.

[27] The first generation of Korean missionaries were eager to cooperate across denominational divisions to be more efficient in their work. Appenzeller frequently worked with Presbyterian Missionaries, founded

decision; it was essentially losing a son. They feared that he would be buried in Korea. He would be. But his death was just the end of a long separation that had been imposed on him and his family by his calling. They were reunited only twice during the next eighteen years.[28]

Like many student volunteers, Appenzeller believed that the burden of Christian missions fell especially heavy on Americans: essentially blurring the lines between a religious and a national mission. He explained to his fellow missionaries in Korea that "The discovery of the New World throws upon that land tremendous responsibility. The question that falls back upon [us] is not so much "What will America be?" as "What will the world be?" And what is more, the burden of this responsibility falls upon the largest, wealthiest, and most populous country in America. We may shrink from it, but we cannot escape it."[29] Appenzeller conceived of this "responsibility" as not just changing people's spiritual lives, but their whole society. "Of that type of a nation-builder and rejuvenator of society, as an exponent of that Christianity which makes over both the man and the commonwealth, [Appenzeller] was a superb type," wrote his biographer.[30] He founded Pai Chai as a nation building institution. He considered every student at Pai Chai a future leader, and designed its curriculum accordingly.[31] "School for rearing useful men" is a

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Seoul Union Church—an ecumenical congregation still in existence—and was part of a landmark agreement between Methodist and Presbyterian missionaries to divide Korea into spheres of influence between the two churches so there would be no competition between them. Daniel M. Davies, *The Life and Thought of Henry Gerhard Appenzeller (1858-1902), Missionary to Korea* (Lewiston, N.Y.: E. Mellen Press, 1988), 209, 297.

[28] His biographer records only two furloughs during his work, see Griffis, *A Modern Pioneer in Korea; the Life Story of Henry G. Appenzeller*, chap. 24.

[29] Henry Gerhard Appenzeller and Henry D Appenzeller, *The Appenzellers: How They Preached and Guided Korea into Modernization: Sermons, Prayers, and Memoirs of Henry G. and Henry D. Appenzeller*, vol. I (Daejeon, Korea: Pai Chai University Press, 2010), 43.

[30] Griffis, *A Modern Pioneer in Korea; the Life Story of Henry G. Appenzeller*, 234.

[31] Ibid., 163.

rough translation of Pai Chai's Chinese characters, and the institution tried to live up to its name by educating students in subjects and instilling them with values that would be useful to Korean society. Independence was an important value at Pai Chai, one promoted by Appenzeller. Independence was a fundamental element of his theology, because only an independent actor can willingly accept Christ's gift of salvation. Appenzeller believed that independence was not just essential for individuals, but also for nations, especially Korea. Sandwiched between Confucian China, Shinto Japan, and Orthodox Russia, a dependent or subjugated Korea would never be a Christian Korea.[32]

Pai Chai offered its students independence as it promoted the independence of the nation. Students at Pai Chai could choose to become Christian or not. They could choose their course of study. Most importantly, they could choose to become economically independent from their parents. Pai Chai's "industrial department" taught trades and paid students for their work, which provided an opportunity for poor students to pay for their tuition. The jewel of the "industrial department" was the Triangle Press. Students working at the press turned out the *Korean Repository*, the English publication of record for Korea's foreign community and for those interested in Korea abroad. Edited by Appenzeller, the publication took a vigorously pro-independence stance on the issues of the day, irking Japanese, Russian, Chinese, and even some American diplomats.[33] At the Triangle Press, Pai Chai students gained their economic independence while awakening a spirit of independence among Korean elites and gaining a sympathetic ear for Korean independence among foreigners.

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[32] Davies, "Building a City on a Hill in Korea," 425.

[33] Ibid., 428.

Appenzeller's choice of faculty also demonstrated his support for Korean independence. Pai Chai's faculty consisted mainly of young, highly educated American missionaries of the Student Volunteer Movement variety. They hailed from schools like Dartmouth, Oberlin, and Drew Seminary.[34] But the star of his faculty was Korean: the remarkable Philip Jaisohn (서재필). Just thirty years old when he joined the faculty, he had already lived a very tumultuous life. Jaisohn was one of the youngest men ever to pass the *gwageo* and was chosen among the best and brightest of Joseon to study in Japan. It was an enlightening and troubling experience. Japanese modernization was impressive, but Japan's intentions towards Korea were obscure and worrisome. Would the country become a useful friend or a frightful enemy? Along with his mentor KIM Ok-gyun and many other young officials who had spent time in Japan, Jaisohn returned believing that Korea needed modernization immediately and by any means necessary. He was part of the cabal that hatched the Gapsin Coup (갑신정변) in December 1884, the same incident that flayed MIN Young-ik and provided Horace Allen an opportunity to "open" Korea to Christianity through his surgical prowess.[35] The Gapsin Coup flopped after a few days and its leaders were scattered.

Jaisohn paid dearly for his actions as a young radical. He managed to escape to Japan and then to the United States, but his parents, brother, wife, and son were executed in retribution for his actions.[36] In classic rags-to-riches fashion he restarted his life in the United States and worked his way up the ranks of American society. He worked

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[34] Young-ick Lew, *이승만의삶과꿈: 대통령이되기까지 [Syngman Rhee's Life and Dream: Until His Presidency]* (Seoul: Chungang Ilbosa, 1996), 26.

[35] *Gapsin* is the name of the year in which the coup occurred according to the Chinese sexagenary cycle.

[36] Se-ŭng Oh, *Dr. Philip Jaisohn's Reform Movement, 1896-1898: A Critical Appraisal of the Independence Club* (Lanham, Md: University Press of America, 1995), 12.

menial jobs in San Francisco for several years while learning English at the YMCA. With the help of some missionary-minded patrons, who hoped he would return to Korea to spread Christianity, he received a secondary and partial post-secondary education. He studied medicine at George Washington University and, in 1895, became the first Korean to earn an M.D. Along the way he acquired American citizenship and married into a well-to-do American family.[37]

Jaisohn never abandoned the cause of Korean development. When progressive, reform-minded forces took control of the Korean government after the Sino-Japanese War in 1895, Jaisohn returned to Korea a more tempered and wiser individual. Recognizing that the violence he and the other *Gapsin* plotters had employed had done nothing to further Korea's development, he returned to Korea as a teacher and aspiring journalist, not a radical. Jaisohn believed Koreans were ignorant of how badly they needed reform. They needed to be educated about the gains that could come from reform and warned about what might befall them if they did not. Jaisohn worked tirelessly to these ends. He founded Korea's first modern newspaper, *The Independent*—a muckraking periodical that eloquently advocated for reform by exposing the venality of the Korean court and the arbitrary nature of Korean justice. The paper's platform was "Korea for the Koreans, clean politics, and the cementing of foreign friendships."[38] *The Independent* won Jaisohn, who was already famous, increasing notoriety with foreigners and

[37] For the most detailed account of Jaisohn's first exile in the United States see Channing Liem, *Philip Jaisohn: The First Korean-American--a Forgotten Hero* (Kyujang Publishing Company, 1984), chaps. 5–6; Jaisohn married Muriel Armstrong. For their wedding announcement in Chicago see "Weddings," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 24, 1894.

[38] See Jaisohn's editorial statement in "The Seoul Independent" *The Korean Repository*, April 1896, p.171.

Koreans alike. Appreciating the uniqueness of his experiences and his similar goals, Appenzeller invited Jaisohn to become a lecturer at Pai Chai.[39]

At Pai Chai Jaisohn more than anyone else shaped Syngman Rhee's education.[40] A bond developed between the two men that lasted their entire lives despite the occasional rift. Jaisohn's life convinced Rhee that Korea needed to look West to secure its future. Jaisohn had accomplished everything that Rhee had dreamed of for his first twenty years, and then he risked it all to support the reform of a system from which he drew such benefits. His actions taught Rhee that the best traditional Korea had to offer paled in comparison with the freedoms and material benefits of the West. Jaisohn also had the advantage of quite literally speaking Rhee's language. Although Appenzeller had been in Korea for ten years and had achieved impressive mastery of the Korean language, Rhee wrote of his first encounter with Appenzeller—a chapel sermon—that the missionary's Korean was "mostly unintelligible."[41] Not so with Jaisohn. He could present the West, or at least his version of it, using all of the idioms, nuances, and metaphors of the Korean language. He could render the West intelligible to young Korean ears.

Appenzeller made sure Jaisohn had the opportunity to do so. The Americans at Pai Chai taught the skills-based courses—English, math, and chemistry—and left the humanities courses to Jaisohn,. His lectures began with the geophysical layout of the world and then proceeded with a "political and ecclesial history of Europe."[42] The exact

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[39] Daniel M. Davies, "The Impact of Christianity Upon Korea, 1884-1910: Six Key American and Korean Figures," *Journal of Church & State* 36, no. 4 (September 1994): 813.

[40] Lew, *이승만의삶과꿈: 대통령이되기까지*, 28; Lee, *Syngman Rhee*, 11–23.

[41] Lee, *Syngman Rhee*, "Autobiographical notes" 156.

[42] D. A. Bunker, "Pai Chai College," *The Korean Repository*, September 1896.

content of Jaisohn's lectures at Pai Chai are unknown, but his contemporary writings reveal what was on his mind. Jaisohn had an unpleasant message for Koreans. Despite Koreans' beliefs about themselves, they were "backwards" and "uncivilized" by the standards of the Western world. This no doubt came as a shock to a people who for many centuries believed that they were one of the most civilized peoples on earth. Conservatives could not accept this diagnosis, but editorial after editorial in *The Independent* carried irrefutable proof that citizens of Western nations enjoyed a more comfortable material existence and greater liberty. They lived in better housing, drank cleaner water, and enjoyed better medical care.[43] But Koreans were not stuck in this unenviable position, Jaisohn assured them. They could advance. "What Korea needs most," he wrote, were educated men "who understand not only how to rule, but how to teach others and guide them in the right path as a shepherd does his wandering flock." Only through the education of the people could the need for reform be recognized and the necessary political changes be accepted.[44]

The students at Pai Chai were a receptive audience. The very nature of what the school offered—a Western education in a still conservative Confucian country—meant that its students were self-selected for their curiosity about the West and openness to change. Jaisohn's lectures nurtured this curiosity and whetted their appetite for change by demonstrating that a better society was possible. Reflecting on his time at Pai Chai, Rhee wrote that the concept of "political liberty," by which he meant the rule of law, was the most important thing he learned there and that only those familiar with the political oppression common in Korean history could "imagine what a revolution should have

[43] Oh, *Dr. Philip Jaisohn's Reform Movement, 1896-1898*, 28–30.

[44] Philip Jaisohn, "What Korea Needs Most," *The Korean Repository*, March 1896.

been wrought in the heart of a young Korean who heard for the first time in his life that the people in Christian lands were protected by law against any tyranny of their rulers. I said to myself 'it would be a great blessing to my down-trodden fellow men, if we could only adopt such a political principle.'"[45] Just how to do this was the question.

By the late 1890s, Pai Chai students were willingly cutting off their topknots and debating openly how Korea might be reformed. Rhee was in the thick of it. With Jaisohn's help several students founded Korea's first debating society, the Mutual Friendship Society (협성회) and a newspaper, the *Mutual Friendship Society Circular* (협성회회보). Rhee was selected as the newspaper's editor and, following in the footsteps of Jaisohn's *The Independent,* molded the paper into a muckraking daily. As might be expected from a newspaper edited by young men in the process of conceiving of themselves as a new intellectual elite bent on reforming a creaking monarchy, the paper was radical in its denunciations. Appenzeller supported the reformers, but the radicalism of the paper threatened him since it was printed on Pai Chai's presses. When he attempted to assume editorial oversight of the paper, Rhee moved it out of the school and so laid claim to founding the first independent Korean daily.[46] Rhee was absorbing Jaisohn's ideas of independence as quickly as he was English, while Appenzeller was learning that a desire for Korean independence was easier to instill in his students than Christianity. Rhee converted to political liberalism, even radicalism, but not to Christianity at Pai Chai.

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[45] Lee, *Syngman Rhee*, "Autobiographical notes" 157; Lew *이승만의삶과꿈: 대통령이되기까지*, 28. Just how honestly Jaisohn portrayed the United States is questionable. However, he did not shrink from describing some of the injustices of American history. During a debate, Jaisohn gave an oration describing the "horrors" of slavery as it existed in the United States. See "The Independence Club," *The Korean Repository*, November 1897.

[46] Jaisohn's *Independent* was a semi-weekly, and not a daily. See, "Autobiography of Syngman Rhee," 6.

Rhee's facility in English and political activism came together when he was asked to deliver the student address at Pai Chai's commencement ceremony in 1897. Since Pai Chai was one of only two foreign schools in Korea its commencement was a significant event. Over 600 people, including government ministers, foreign missionaries, and diplomats attended. Rhee, referred to as the school's "embryonic valedictorian," gave an original address in English entitled "The Independence of Korea." *The Korean Repository* glowingly reviewed Rhee's speech: "National independence only will offer the field needed for the training these young men are receiving, and the spirit which seemed to animate the entire occasion was that the national independence must be made a real, permanent and lasting fact. Mr. Yi's [Rhee's] diction was good, his sentiments fearlessly expressed and his enunciation clear and distinct."[47] Rhee was making a name for himself.

Appenzeller had reason to be proud of his students. They were proof that he was fulfilling the mission that he left his home in Pennsylvania to undertake: not just to change the theology of individuals, but also to enhance the welfare of societies. Missionaries like Appenzeller saw themselves as the "moral equivalent" of imperialists, spreading not just their religion, but their values and technologies that would enrich the lives of others. Rhee had imbibed that vision at Pai Chai and was now working to make it a reality in Korea. Appenzeller may have fretted over Rhee's failure to convert to Christianity and his increasing radicalization, but there was no denying his students were undergoing a transformation and seeking to transform Korea as well.

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[47] "The Closing Exercises at Pai Chai," *The Korean Repository*, July 1897. This article was printed in the "Editorial" section of *The Korean Repository* and so no author was given. The likely author of the review was either Appenzeller or George H. Jones, another missionary working at Pai Chai.

**The Independence Club**

Rhee's "fearless" rhetoric and leadership in the Mutual Friendship Society began to open doors for him. The debating format pioneered by the society spread throughout Seoul and was taken up by other organizations, most notably the Independence Club, which was another of Jaisohn's creations.[48] Jaisohn formed the Independence Club as a political organization to support the efforts of his newspaper, *The Independent*, to bring "liberal and democratic reform" to Korea.[49] The Club not only appropriated the debating format of the Mutual Friendship Society, but also many of its members, including Rhee.

The Independence Club launched Rhee's political career. The skills he had honed in the Mutual Friendship Society were now on display for public audiences numbering in the thousands.[50] As a member of the club and a friend of Jaisohn's, Rhee became well-known in the American colony in Korea and was able to mingle with reformist-minded government officials and prominent diplomats.[51] Rhee's membership in the club coincided with the height of the club's influence in Korean society and with Emperor Gojong. The emperor's relationship with the club was complex and his support wavering. He was open to reform to the extent that it could be enacted without undermining his authority or upsetting the delicate balance of his court, which was divided not only between reformers and conservatives, but between rival clans, provincial factions, and partisans of the several foreign powers interested in Korea.

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[48] Lee, *Syngman Rhee*, 17; Oliver, *Syngman Rhee: The Man Behind the Myth*, 25–26.

[49] Oh, *Dr. Philip Jaisohn's Reform Movement, 1896-1898*, 47.

[50] According to the *Korean Repository* the membership of the club in 1896 was 2,000, with up to 6,000 attending meetings. See "The Cornerstone of Independence Arch," *The Korean Repository*, November 1896, 457–58.

[51] Oh, *Dr. Philip Jaisohn's Reform Movement, 1896-1898*, 50.

Gojong was pliable. Whoever brought the most pressure at any particular moment could sway him. Grasping this, the Independence Club pioneered the use of public mass-meetings, sometimes right outside of the palace, to pressure the emperor to reform. Here Rhee found his voice and proved most useful. His crisp rhetoric coupled with his youthful energy kept audiences engaged for hours, sometimes even days, of mass-meetings. He was foolhardy in a way that enhanced his prestige. When Gojong had leaders of the Independence Club arrested based on obviously planted evidence of a plot to overthrow him, Rhee led thousands of the club's sympathizers to Seoul's central police station where they staged a mass-meeting demanding that their leaders be released or that they all be arrested with them. The club's leadership had urged Rhee to hide at Appenzeller's house and even sent his father to beg his only son to return home. Rhee disregarded these appeals and noted triumphantly that, while others advised caution, the "Crowds were following me."[52] The audacious move forced the emperor to release the men and punish those responsible for the deception. When conservatives hired thugs to break up the ongoing meetings, Rhee jumped from an improvised stage and led the charge into the melee, kicking and punching like a mad man. He was frequently beaten and several times rumors spread that he had been killed, which only added to the joy, and perhaps his sense of destiny, when he reappeared, bruised but very much alive and more determined than ever.[53]

In fact, Rhee might have been killed had it not been for his connections with Pai Chai and the diplomatic community. On several occasions the conservative-hired thugs outnumbered the reformers to such an extent that flight was the only option. When this

[52] "Autobiography of Syngman Rhee", 7.

[53] "Autobiography of Syngman Rhee," 7-10.

happened Rhee and others fled to Pai Chai, the nearest legation, or the homes of missionaries, like Appenzeller's, which were protected by extraterritoriality treaties.[54] Under the protection of the American flag the reformers could regroup, dress their wounds, and wait for the mobs to disperse before gathering again. The use of missionary property to protect reformers placed the missionaries in an awkward position. They had advocated for Korean independence as a necessary condition for the spread of Christianity and the moral and material development of Korea, but they had not intended to foster a generation of young radicals, non-Christian radicals at that, who would run to them for protection when their high-risk political activities provoked a backlash. They did not support the radicalism of their students, but neither were they willing to refuse them shelter when doing so could result in their deaths. In this way they became unwilling enablers of Rhee's more radical actions.

If Rhee was central to the Independence Club's rise, he was also instrumental to its fall. The Club managed to wring some noteworthy concessions from Gojong, including the right to appoint members to a newly established privy council that would have a say in governmental decisions. In this heady atmosphere of victory Rhee drastically miscalculated. Over the objections of more moderate voices, he recommended the recall and appointment to the privy council of certain exiled Koreans who had participated in the anti-royalist Gapsin Coup. This decision not only shattered the Club's unity but also gave Gojong and the conservatives in his court the perfect excuse to outlaw the club permanently. The mass-meetings ceased, the leaders of the Independence Club

[54] Oliver, *Syngman Rhee: The Man Behind the Myth*, 42, 44; Lee, *Syngman Rhee*, 39; Davies, "The Impact of Christianity upon Korea, 1884-1910," 817.

were arrested again, and Rhee fled to Pai Chai. He hid under the protection of the American flag, a humiliating thing for someone so passionate for Korea's independence.[55]

Rhee's decision to recommend the recall of the Capsin plotters was symptomatic of the times. It was a radical decision; a more moderate leader would not have made it. But in late Joseon Korea, or any society teetering on the brink of civil war and foreign invasion, there are rarely moderate leaders to be found. When political battles are fought in the streets, when a leader's flailing fists earn him as much support as his rhetoric, when criticizing the powerful is treason, when the penalty for treason is death, both for the accused and their families, moderates stay indoors, flee the country, or find a quiet place to ride out the storm. They do not go into politics or seek leadership. Only those with a radical nature, a black and white vision of things, and a diminished sense of self-preservation venture into the fray. Philip Jaisohn was a moderate. He recognized the situation was hopeless and left Korea in 1898 and soon returned to the United States.[56] Rhee was a radical. He assumed leadership when the moderates left.

Rhee's radical animus came from within, but Pai Chai had awakened it. The knowledge and ideas he was exposed to at Pai Chai convinced him that Korean society needed fundamental change, not just new technology.[57] He came to embrace a mission of radical societal change, just like his missionary teachers. The difference was American missionaries believed that reform would follow the Gospel, whereas Rhee did not yet see a necessary connection between the two. Regardless of their priorities, American

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[55] Oh, *Dr. Philip Jaisohn's Reform Movement, 1896-1898*, 119–20; Oliver, *Syngman Rhee: The Man Behind the Myth*, 43–45.

[56] Oh, *Dr. Philip Jaisohn's Reform Movement, 1896-1898*, 170–78.

[57] "Autobiography of Syngman Rhee," 8.

missionaries promoted both the Gospel and reform at Pai Chai. They provided students with the knowledge, space (immune from Korean laws) and tools (a printing press) to become reformers, and by doing so unwittingly fostered radicalism. When this happened, American missionaries did not abandon their students. They continued to protect them, probably hoping that they could turn them back to a moderate path and convert them to Christian reformers. There is no doubt that Rhee interpreted this as approval. "Dr. Appenzeller was often standing at some corner watching the things [mass-protests] as if he was proud of the Pai Chai men taking the lead in the new movement," Rhee wrote.[58] Through such actions, missionaries provided Rhee with just enough protection and encouragement to spur him on. Pai Chai equipped and sustained Rhee, but it never controlled him. His mission, to change Korea drastically and quickly, was all his own.

**Prison**

The recklessness in Rhee that destroyed the Independence Club did not end with that incident. He was unhappy hiding at Pai Chai, but he was safe there. He probably could have waited in the school for an opportunity to flee to America or Japan, or, if he was willing to wait long enough, Appenzeller, Allen, and Horace Underwood, all missionary friends of Rhee and confidants of the emperor might have been able to intercede for him. But Rhee did not stay at Pai Chai long, and the first time he emerged he was arrested. He left the school to act as a translator for a medical missionary who was on his way to treat a patient. They both assumed that extraterritoriality laws protected Rhee because he was accompanying an American on official business.[59] It was a foolish assumption. Rhee's arrest sparked protest from the American community and demands

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[58] "Autobiography of Syngman Rhee," 7.

[59] Lee, *Syngman Rhee*, 39; Oliver, *Syngman Rhee: The Man Behind the Myth*, 45.

for his release. American officials visited Rhee every day in jail to ensure that he was not tortured.[60]

The combined efforts of the American missionary community, especially Dr. Horace Allen, now American minister to Korea, might have secured Rhee's release had the young man's recklessness not reached new heights. Rhee claimed that he resented the missionaries' protection and that he wanted to get out without foreign intervention. He believed "thousands of people were asking for a leader to call them together" and was determined to answer.[61] He engineered an escape only to be caught minutes later. During his few minutes of freedom, one of his accomplices shot a jailer, an action that made them all felons and eligible for the death penalty. Former Independence Club member YUN Chi-ho summed up the foolishness of this episode by writing "[Syngman Rhee] shows very little sense. He never thinks of consequences."[62]

Rhee probably thought about the consequences later that day. He was now no longer a political prisoner but a felon, beyond the protection of his missionary friends. He was taken back to prison were some of his "bitterest enemies" awaited him, including the guard wounded in the attempted escape and conservative officials who had been enraged by the Independence Club's actions. "They were furious, like enraged animals trying to give vent to their bitter feelings towards me." Rhee wrote.[63] For a week they did their worst. Perhaps knowing he was a calligrapher, they focused their torture on his fingers,

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[60] "Autobiography of Syngman Rhee," 10.

[61] "Autobiography of Syngman Rhee," 10-11.

[62] *Yun Chi-ho's Diary* [윤치호일기], 30 January 1899, vol. 5. 206; cited in Lee, *Syngman Rhee*, 46.

[63] "Autobiography of Syngman Rhee," 11.

repeatedly burning and twisting them with sharpened pieces of bamboo.[64] Later in his life, his mangled hands would become a sort of patriotic stigmata, testifying to the pain he had suffered in attempting to reform Korea.[65] He was kept in stocks with a twenty-pound, three-foot-long cangue around his neck for seven months while awaiting trial.[66] In constant pain from his torture and his shackles, he thought of death and what would follow after. He began to recall the hundreds of sermons he scoffed at in Pai Chai's chapel. His vulnerability and the closeness of death gave them a new significance. In classic conversion form Rhee cried from his prison cell "Oh God save my soul and my country."

It is tempting to discount Rhee's conversion story. It seems too tidy and too well tailored to the expectations of American missionary boosters. That it drips with patriotism also seems convenient. It may have been. Although he wrote about his conversion while still in prison, he did not record saying this specific prayer until 1913, after he had told this story hundreds of times to American audiences.[67] The words may have been invented later but the circumstances that produced them and the sentiments behind them were genuine. Like his restoration from blindness, Rhee's conversion was an experience that acquired meaning over time. By his own account, he seems to have undergone the prison equivalent of a "fox-hole" conversion to Christianity when he was certain he was going to die, but unlike many such conversions, his outlasted his immediate circumstances. His prayer of salvation, real or invented, explains why. His conversion was more than an

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[64] Oliver, *Syngman Rhee: The Man Behind the Myth*, 49–50.

[65] The story of Rhee's tortures was well known among Koreans active in the independence movement. It appears that accounts of his tortures were even passed down from parents to children. See Sunny Che, *Forever Alien: A Korean Memoir, 1930-1951* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2000), 202–03.

[66] A cangue is a type of pillory formerly used in East Asia to restrain and humiliate prisoners.

[67] Sherwood Eddy, *The New Era in Asia* (New York: Missionary Education Movement of the United States and Canada, 1913), 80; When Rhee wrote about his conversion for Korean audiences in 1903, he omitted any direct reference to the actual experience, see Lee, *Syngman Rhee*, Appendix 2 "Evangelism in Prison."

appeal for the salvation of his soul. It was also, or at least came to be, an appeal to save his country. In his prison conversion, Rhee integrated Christianity into his political agenda.

The politco-religious character of his conversion probably meant little to him at the time. His own survival was at stake. In 1899 as he awaited trial his chances looked poor. He could have been executed for his crimes, but a sympathetic judge reduced his sentence to life in prison.[68] As generous as this was, a life sentence in a Korean prison was often just a death sentence delayed. Hanseong Prison had no heat, no light, no sanitation, provided no bedding or clothing, and only coarse grains, often adulterated with sand, for food.[69] In these conditions death from exposure and disease were common. Those with friends or relatives able to provide them with food, clothing, and medicine had a much better chance of surviving. Rhee's missionary friends brought him all three and deserve no small portion of the credit for his survival, especially during a cholera outbreak in 1903 that killed forty prisoners.[70]

Believing that "man shall not live by bread alone" they also gave Rhee a New Testament and weekly English magazines, including Lyman Abbott's *The Outlook*. The New Testament was familiar to him but reading it with a convert's eyes from a convict's cell, he found comfort in it for the first time. Showing his egotism, he identified with the story of Jesus: falsely accused, tortured, and sentenced to death for trying to redeem his people.[71] *The Outlook* was equally influential. It was a progressive Christian magazine that

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[68] Lee, *Syngman Rhee*, "Autobiographical Notes" 164–65.

[69] Ibid., 47, Appendix 4 "Robert T. Oliver's Interview with Shin Hung–wu [Hugh Cynn]", 186.

[70] Ibid., "Autobiographical Notes" 166.

[71] Ibid., 48–49.

stressed reform and the Social Gospel as a way of building the Kingdom of God on earth. *The Outlook*'s progressive mood and optimistic view of what society properly organized could achieve strengthened his resolve to reform Korea. Under the influence of *The Outlook*, Rhee converted to a socially-minded, progressive version of Christianity that blurred the lines between spiritual and physical, individual and national salvation. For Rhee the power of Christianity did not stem from its being ultimately true, but from its power to transform: "This gave us [Rhee and his fellow prisoners] a strong conviction that even if this may not be the truth, Christianity is the only religion which can help change the hearts of our people of that time who were so selfish and individualistic that they care nothing for the welfare of their fellow men."[72]

Brimming with new ideas for Korea's modernization, Rhee needed an outlet. A change in administration of Hanseong Prison provided Rhee the opportunity he sought. When a new warden and his assistant, also a recent convert to Christianity, took charge of the prison, Rhee convinced them to establish a prison school under his direction. Rhee modeled his prison school on Pai Chai. Its mission was evangelical, but the education it offered was mostly practical, beginning with basic literacy but including classes in English, geography, Chinese classics, history, mathematics, and the Bible. A captive audience ensured solid attendance, and it was not difficult to find willing converts among so many desperate people. Rhee's missionary friends recognized the importance of this work and supported it. Although he had received help from American missionaries before, it had always been to save his life, not to support any of his personal ambitions. This changed with the prison school. The missionaries were supporting him, with books, medicine,

[72] Ibid., "Autobiographical notes", 167.

teachers, and money. Rhee could not have failed to notice that his conversion and his integration of Christianity into his reform ideas opened new avenues of support.

As Rhee's educational activities gained favor with his jailers, he was given more freedom. He began writing for the *Imperial News*, a paper published by a friend who was desperately shorthanded at the time. Rhee's editorials were comprised of information he himself was learning about the outside world, especially the United States, through *The Outlook*. He hoped to awaken the Korean public to the need of reform. His editorials were not radical in the sense that they stressed education as the solution to Korea's problems, but they were unsparing in their criticism of Korea's leaders. It is likely for this reason his editorial writing came to an end, perhaps under government pressure in April 1903.[73] Never one to be idle, Rhee channeled his energies into compiling a Korean-English dictionary, which would have been the first had he completed it.

The Russo-Japanese War ended Rhee's dictionary in the middle of the letter "F" in 1904. Recognizing that Korean independence would likely be a casualty of the war regardless of who won, Rhee hastily turned out a manifesto explaining why Korea's independence was lost and how it might be regained. *The Spirit of Independence* (독립정신) berated Korean leaders for allowing the country to fall into a state where its independence was threatened. The Korean people were not inherently inferior to anyone else, "It is only that our leaders keep the people uninformed and muzzled for fear that their own wrongdoing might be exposed or that their powers might be curtailed."[74] Rhee exhorted all Koreans, including women and children, that keeping Korean independence

[73] Ibid., 77.

[74] Syngman Rhee, *The Spirit of Independence: A Primer of Korean Modernization and Reform*, trans. Han-kyo Kim (University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 251.

alive was their responsibility, and that even if Korea's formal independence was lost, as long as it lived on in their hearts there was always hope for a later restoration.[75] He cited Polish exiles in the United States and their work for the restoration of Poland as an example.[76]

In the epilogue of *Spirit*, Rhee outlined an agenda that would guide his activism for the next forty years: diplomacy and education. Externally Korea must open to the outside world and learn to conduct diplomacy well:

> It must be understood that the maintenance of close diplomatic ties is the way to preserve a nation in today's world. Without diplomacy [a nation] stands alone, exposed to aggression by others. Therefore, even the strongest nation is in fear of diplomatic isolation. . . .
>
> If I, first of all, do not violate the spirit of international law and behave in a fair and just manner, maintaining close and warm relations with various foreign powers, others will be honor bound to treat me as a good friend; they will do the best within their power to help me whenever I am treated unjustly. Many nations will assist us without waiting for our request for assistance. This is the basic mechanism by which weak nations survive amidst strong powers.

Rhee's faith in diplomacy and international law was similar to other Koreans' at this time; however, unlike them, Rhee understood that Korea's treatment by foreign powers, regardless of international law, would also be determined by their ability to enact reforms. Korea would reap the benefits of this new era in international relations "only after we emulate and put into practice the sources of their good laws, politics, scholarship, and morals."[77] This could be done through education—Western education. "Instead of concentrating on old classics, everyone should focus on books of the new learning" wrote Rhee. "We must learn with single-minded dedication things that are new."[78] Traditional

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[75] Ibid., 53.

[76] Ibid., 56.

[77] Ibid., 266.

[78] Ibid., 260.

education must be abandoned, and quickly, as it was not capable of preparing Koreans to meet the challenges of the 20th century. Mining, agriculture, manufacturing, and foreign languages are some of the subjects Rhee emphasized. Only by mastering these disciplines could Koreans retake control of their destiny and take their place in the society of civilized states.

But technical education alone was not enough. Rhee pleaded with his fellow countrymen to adopt Christianity as the new religion on which they could build a new society. Confucianism was not suitable for the modern age. It only regulated human actions and not the thoughts from which they proceeded, and therefore was not transformative. The Christian emphasis on the afterlife, with its punishments or rewards and its all-knowing but merciful God, who despite human sin provided for humanity's salvation, provided greater incentive for moral action and the best hope for regeneration. Rhee wrote "As our nation struggles to rise up from its fall and new buds try to sprout from decayed morass, unless we base ourselves on this religion, we may not reap true benefits even from our contact with the [outside] world."[79]

When surveying the outside world Rhee looked primarily to the United States. He had already benefited much from American missionaries and he associated their actions with a broader American mission. He realized while still in prison "that the Koreans could not fight off the military power of the aggressor nations (Japan and Russia) without the moral and material support of the United States, whose main interest was in winning

[79] Ibid., 282. It is telling that Rhee includes the appeal to Christianity only at the very end of the book, rather than weaving it through his arguments. Possibly Rhee understood how radical it was to advocate that Koreans *en masse* change their religion and did not want this radical idea to detract from the other messages of the book.

the world for democracy and Christianity."[80] This was a very naïve and over-generalized understanding of Americans and the United States, but it was true to Rhee's experiences up to that time. His interactions with American missionaries had been transformative and winning the world for Christianity, and to a lesser extent democracy, is quite possibly how many of them might have explained their purpose for being in Korea.

Regeneration from within through modern education and Christianity and protection from without, through diplomacy and international law was Rhee's program. In this strategy he mixed old and new aspects of Korean thought—the educational impulse of reformers such as Jaisohn with the traditional Korean strategy of searching for security abroad, as the Joseon state had done with China for hundreds of years. This no doubt frustrated Rhee, who ideally would have preferred to defend Korean independence with Korean resources, but as he wrote himself alliances were "the basic mechanism by which weak nations survive amidst strong powers."[81] There was no question that Korea was weak.

**Exile**

Opportunities for Rhee to act upon the program outlined in *Spirit* arrived more quickly than he could have anticipated. He was released from prison on 7 August 1904. The exact circumstances of his release are unclear, but constant agitating for his release by his missionary friends, the appointment of some allies to the Korean court, and the Japanese assumption of Korea's Ministry of Police all likely played a role.[82] His

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[80] Lee, *Syngman Rhee*, "Autobiographical notes" 168.

[81] Rhee, *The Spirit of Independence*, 264.

[82] "New Calendar," *Korea Review*, 1904; Lee, *Syngman Rhee*, 99. The Japanese were not inimical to Korean reformers early in their occupation of Korea. Because the Japanese described their mission in Korea as one of civilization and development, many Japanese officials in Korea hoped that Korean reformers could

contemporaries noted that Rhee had transformed himself in prison. He entered a rash young man and emerged a wiser, tempered individual, still bent on reform, but better prepared for it. YUN Chi-ho who had been quite critical of Rhee commented after their first post-incarceration meeting that Rhee had become "a remarkable young man," brimming with new ideas.[83] YUN was not alone in his assessment of Rhee. After only a few months the former felon was made principal of the newly established Sangdong Youth Institute (상동청년학원), a new Methodist school.[84]

Rhee's time as principal was short-lived: less than three weeks. He left Korea for Hawaii aboard the S.S. *Ohio* on 5 November 1904. Many factors contributed to Rhee's departure from Korea. A desire for more education was one. He emerged from prison among the best-educated and informed Koreans of his day, conversant in international politics and proficient in English, thanks to his voracious reading and lexicographical work. However, Rhee's educational accomplishments, though significant, were not sufficient preparation for his goal of remaking Korea through Western-style education. He longed to go to the United States for further study. His missionary friends approved and assisted by writing no fewer than nineteen letters of introduction to prominent educators, pastors, and college presidents on the Eastern seaboard of the United States.[85] Rhee, along with his friends and family in Korea, also feared for his safety during the Japanese occupation. The missionaries were especially anxious for his departure. They saw in Rhee tremendous potential to be a Korean Christian leader once theologically

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become their allies. The heightened sense of nationalism that resulted from the occupation prevented any significant cooperation between the two groups.

[83] Lee, *Syngman Rhee*, 105.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Lew, *이승만의삶과꿈: 대통령이되기까지*, 46.

trained but worried that, given his nature and radical desire for Korean reform and independence, conflict between him and the Japanese was inevitable. It was best to get him to the United States to start his training as soon as possible.[86]

Their fears were well founded. Rhee had no intention of steering clear of politics, however his plans and theirs converged around a sojourn in the United States. The outcome of the Russo-Japanese War, which was largely fought in Korea, had left Japan the dominant power in East Asia and in *de facto* control of Korea, which its armies occupied. On surveying the international political situation after his release Rhee concluded, "The only hope was to call for outside help."[87] He was certainly not the only Korean to reach that conclusion. For nearly two decades the Korean court had believed that the 1882 Korean-American Treaty—its first with a Western power—could be used as a last resort to defend Korea's independence. The First Article of the treaty read: "If other powers deal unjustly or oppressively with either Government, the other will exert their good offices on being informed of the case to bring about an amicable arrangement, thus showing their friendly feelings."[88] Many Korean officials, including the emperor, interpreted this article as a defensive alliance with the United States and hoped to invoke it to prevent the Japanese annexation of their country.[89] Of course the Koreans' understanding of the term "good offices" was quite different from the Americans', but Homer Hulbert, who was a close confidant of the emperor at the time, wrote that many American residents in Korea may have inadvertently fostered Korean hopes for a last-

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[86] Lee, *Syngman Rhee*, 116.

[87] "Autobiography of Dr. Syngman Rhee," 15.

[88] The text of the entire treaty can be found on the State Department's website <http://photos.state.gov/libraries/korea/49271/June_2012/1-1822%20Treaty.pdf>. [Accessed 4 December 2013]

[89] Yu et al., *Korean Perceptions of the United States*, 97.

minute rescue by the United States by exaggerating their government's commitment to integrity and justice in international affairs.[90]

Invoking the 1882 treaty was no simple task. A year earlier the emperor had been pressured into turning over control of Korea's foreign affairs to the Japanese, so he had to use secret envoys to get his appeal to Washington. Rhee's command of English and connections with influential Americans through his missionary friends made him a suitable emissary for such a mission.[91] Rhee recognized that such a mission presented him with an 一石二鳥 (*ilseog-ijo*)—"one stone, two birds." In the U.S. he could prepare himself for future educational and reform work in Korea by receiving an American education while also trying to secure foreign support for Korea's independence.

From his first days in the United States, Rhee used the religious communities that had sent missionaries to Korea for support and assistance. In Hawaii Methodist missionary John Wadman made arrangements for Rhee's landing with customs officials. In San Francisco the San Anselmo Seminary provided him with lodging and, after reading his letters of reference, offered him free tuition plus board if he would take up his theological studies there. Rhee might have done so had the diplomatic mission not necessitated his presence in Washington. A "Mr. Vail"—presumably connected with the Seminary—purchased Rhee's cross-country train ticket for him at the sum of $53.75, no

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[90] Homer B Hulbert, *The Passing of Korea* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1906), 223.

[91] Rhee's hatred of Gojong was nearly the undoing of this plot. Rhee considered the emperor the reason for his imprisonment and the death of many of his friends and refused to even speak with his messengers. When the Minister of Home Affairs MIN Yoeng-hwan, who had been sympathetic to the Independence Club, approached Rhee and asked him to undertake a similar mission, albeit under the name of Korean progressives rather than the emperor, Rhee accepted.

small amount.[92] Rhee's status as an Asian convert to Christianity opened numerous doors for him. American Christians determined to spread the gospel in Asia recognized Rhee's potential and helped him accordingly.

Rhee's diplomatic mission had a promising start. Through his missionary contacts and his own determination, he arranged meetings with several senators, Secretary of State Hay, and finally with President Theodore Roosevelt in August 1905. Meeting Roosevelt was an exhilarating experience for Rhee. Roosevelt's offer to mediate a treaty to end the Russo-Japanese War offered an ideal opportunity for Koreans to invoke the 1882 treaty. Trying to look the part of diplomats, Rhee and a colleague rented tuxedos and traveled to Oyster Bay to Roosevelt's summer home to deliver their appeal for Korea. To their surprise, Roosevelt received them. The President listened to Rhee's appeal, expressed sympathy, but explained that he could not act on the appeal until it was delivered officially through the Korean Legation in Washington. For a few brief hours, Rhee believed that his country's salvation was at hand. It was not.

The Japanese had placed a pliant official, KIM Yun-jeong, in charge of Korea's Washington legation. KIM refused to forward the appeal to the U.S. government, leaving Rhee helpless and irate. KIM's refusal gave Roosevelt a perfect excuse for not lodging Korea's protest at the peace conference, and the resulting peace treaty between Japan and Russia cleared the way for the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910. Although his first foray into diplomacy ended in failure, the experience enhanced rather than harmed Rhee's reputation. Securing an audience with Roosevelt to discuss Korea was a remarkable accomplishment. His mission was also covered widely in the American press,

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[92] David P. Fields et al., eds., *The Diary of Syngman Rhee* (Seoul, South Korea: National Museum of Contemporary Korean History, 2015), 31. See also "Autobiography of Dr. Syngman Rhee," 16-17.

adding to his fame in Korea and publicizing his name for the first time in the United States.[93] Rhee also had a simple and plausible explanation for the failure of his mission. For years after Portsmouth, Rhee blamed KIM Yun-joeng's obstruction almost exclusively for the failure. He was hesitant to accept the fact that the pro-Japanese Roosevelt Administration had been complicit in Korea's annexation.[94] His faith in the American people and government were strong in those days, and not without reason.

The Americans Rhee came into contact with treated him exceptionally well. His letters of introduction from American missionaries gave him an entrée into the Presbyterian community in Washington, D.C. The same night he arrived in D.C. he found the home of Dr. Teunis S. Hamlin, pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church, who provided him with a meal, some money, and lodging for his first few days.[95] On Easter Sunday 1905 Rhee was baptized as a Presbyterian at Covenant. Through Hamlin, Rhee was introduced to Charles Needham, the president of George Washington University, who offered Rhee a full scholarship. Rhee's grades were not outstanding; his English skills were lower than those of an average American student. Despite this obstacle, Rhee impressed his teachers and those he met with his seriousness and dedication to return to Korea as an educator-reformer. Scholarships to Harvard and Princeton soon followed,

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[93] See the following papers for a sample of the coverage: "Many More Visitors for the President," *The Washington Times*, August 4, 1905; Special To The New York Times, "Koreans See The President.; He Cannot Receive Their Memorial Except in Regular Way.," *The New York Times*, August 5, 1905; "The Korean's Appeal," *Evening Star*, August 18, 1905.

[94] Tyler Dennett's revelation of the Taft-Katsura Memorandum in 1924, which proved that Roosevelt tacitly approved of Japanese encroachments in Korea before the Portsmouth Peace Conference, would disabuse Rhee of much of his faith in the American government. *Lew, 이승만의삶과꿈: 대통령이되기까지*, 44.

[95] Fields et al., *The Diary of Syngman Rhee*, 32n, 32–33. Because of a transcription error in Rhee's diary many sources have misidentified this individual as "Lewis T. Hamlin."

where he completed his M.A. and Ph.D., respectively.[96] At Princeton he was a frequent dinner guest at the home of its president, Woodrow Wilson.

Despite receiving scholarships, Rhee's life as a student was initially insecure. While scholarships covered his tuition and in some cases room, he had to fend for himself for his daily bread and often went hungry during his first year. Finding lodging when school was out of session was also challenging. His financial difficulties were soon alleviated by two wealthy benefactors.[97] The first, one Mrs. Boyd, was a "wealthy, elderly Methodist lady" who Rhee was introduced to by a missionary associate.[98] Impressed by Rhee, she offered him her cottage in Ocean City, N.J., where he could live during the summers and other vacations when the dormitories where closed. His acquaintance with one Lizzie G. Starks was more serendipitous. Prior to meeting Mrs. Boyd, Rhee arrived in Ocean Grove looking for lodging for the summer. He arrived late in the evening and when he asked a local where he could find a hotel he was directed to the home of Mrs. Starks—a "good Christian" who would certainly give him lodging. She did. This chance meeting led to a long-term friendship. Like Mrs. Boyd, Mrs. Starks was also a woman of means and sent Rhee fifty-dollar checks every few months for the next several years.[99] The aid of these women, not to mention the numerous missionaries and university

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[96] Oliver, *Syngman Rhee: The Man Behind the Myth*, 113; For an account of Syngman Rhee's time as a university student see Lew, *이승만의삶과꿈: 대통령이되기까지*, chaps. 5–6.

[97] Rhee sketches out his meeting with both women in "The Autobiography of Dr. Syngman Rhee," 18-19

[98] Oliver, *Syngman Rhee: The Man Behind the Myth*, 101.

[99] See the letters from Roston Pell to Syngman Rhee, in Young-ick Lew, ed., *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, vol. 2 (Institute for Modern Korean Studies, Yonsei University, 2009), 20, 31, 34, 40, 41. Starks would continue to support Rhee financially into the 1920s at least. See Rhee's account books reprinted as Appendix Two in Deok-hui Lee, *이승만의 하와이 30 년* [*Syngman Rhee's Thirty Years in Hawaii*], (북앤피플, 2015).

administrators who provided for Rhee's education and well-being during his first years in America, and reinforced his already favorable opinion of Americans.

**The Lecturer**

Rhee arrived in the United States with stories to tell and soon learned there was no shortage of people willing to listen. Within one month of arriving Rhee gave his first lectures at one "Mr. Smith's" church in Washington, D.C., on 8 January 1905. The next month he spoke at Gurley Memorial Church and received $12.79 "for helping my study." He continued to lecture about once a month until November when his speaking engagements increased rapidly. That month he spoke five times. In December 1905 he spoke fifteen times. Soon he was receiving invitations all over the Northeast. He recorded giving 184 lectures between 1905-1910, sometimes speaking three times a day.[100] His venues ranged from the Lakeland Colored Baptist Church to the First International Conference of the Young People's Missionary Society of the United States and Canada—a major missions conference that drew thousands of delegates from around the world. Rhee was just the sort of speaker that missions boosters desired. His tale of dramatic transformation from a Confucian scholar to a radical reformer to a prison convert was the sort of story that reassured American audiences that the great sums they were investing into foreign missions were yielding both spiritual and material returns.

Lecturing gave Rhee a much-needed source of income and a small measure of celebrity. His lectures could draw hundreds of people and were frequently covered by the

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[100] This count is taken from Rhee's diary entries between 1905–1910. See Fields et al., *The Diary of Syngman Rhee*, 33–62.

local press.[101] He held the audiences' attention with humor, slides of life in Korea, and his own personal story. Rhee's biographer wrote, "As a speaker he was less notable for his mastery of techniques than for possession of a body of vivid experiences and for a driving zeal which animated and indeed ennobled his talks."[102] He certainly had no shortage of "vivid experiences" to draw on: the restoration of his sight, his education at Pai Chai, his hoarse voice after leading all-night mass meetings for reform, his lacerated body and burned hands while being tortured in prison, his conversion, his release, his audience with Roosevelt, and his studies at Harvard and Princeton. Rhee had stories to tell and could draw a crowd. Soon, no lesser figures than Woodrow Wilson were recommending Rhee as a speaker, writing that Rhee "has been unusually successful in presenting those conditions [of East Asia and Korea] to general audiences."[103]

Restoring Korea's independence was always on Rhee's mind. "The future redeemer of Korean independence" is how Wilson frequently introduced Rhee at Princeton.[104] A neighbor at his Ocean Grove summer home described Rhee as a "dynamic, forceful personality who had one goal in life—the independence of his people"[105] However, maintaining his success as a lecturer required that he carefully balance the political and spiritual aspects of his agenda. American Christians were eager

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[101] "Every Inch a Man," *The Washington Herald*, December 9, 1906; "Ladies Hear Syngman Rhee," *Trenton Evening Times*, May 12, 1909; "Delegates Will Fill the Pulpits of Washington," *The Washington Times*, May 21, 1910; "Will Lecture at YMCA," *Washington Post*, June 10, 1907.

[102] Oliver, *Syngman Rhee: The Man Behind the Myth*, 98.

[103] Ibid., 110–11.

[104] Ibid., 111. According to a document in Rhee's personal papers, Wilson called him simply "the redeemer of Korea." See Syngman Rhee, "The 1919 Movement," n.d., "March First Movement" Folder, SRI, Seoul, South Korea.

[105] Ibid., 343.

to hear about the growth of Christianity abroad, but were significantly less interested in appeals to involve themselves in East Asian regional politics.[106]

Only one text of Rhee's lectures of this period survives, but it sheds considerable light on how he balanced the spiritual and political aspects of his message. In February 1908 the Secretary of the Young People's Missionary Movement of the United States and Canada, C.C. Michener, invited Rhee to speak at their first international conference—all expenses paid. Unfortunately, Rhee's responses to Michener have not survived, but subsequent letters from Michener indicate that the secretary was concerned that Rhee's speech might be too political for the conference. Michener told Rhee that while it would be natural to talk about the treatment of his people by the Japanese it would be better to "speak of the present opportunity for the church and the need of workers and money there immediately."[107]

Cleverly, Rhee prepared a speech that would both allay Michener's concerns and also make a subtle and effective argument for Korea's independence. His speech, entitled "Korea's Humiliation, Christianity's Call," began with Korea's age. Starting with Korea's five thousand years of national existence was a subtle and powerful argument for Korea's

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[106] His biographer and close personal friend, Robert T. Oliver, claims that Rhee "always took occasion" to persuade Americans that the United States had an interest in "preserving (or, later, in restoring) Korea's independence and in helping to maintain it as a bulwark against the expanding ambitions of Japan." According to Oliver, this was not always appreciated: "The normal reaction of his audiences was one of great interest and sympathy for the first portion of his talk [about Rhee's life story and Korean Christianity], and of uneasy rejection of the latter part [interesting Americans in Korea's struggle]."(*The Man Behind the Myth*, p.99) Korean independence was certainly Rhee's major preoccupation, but there is reason to doubt that Oliver accurately characterized Rhee's lectures as being overtly political and rejected by American audiences. Oliver's 1954 biography of Rhee was a collaborative effort between the two men. One of its chief aims was to validate Rhee's warnings against communism by highlighting how his warnings against Japanese militarism had fallen on deaf ears for forty years prior to 1941. Given this agenda, Oliver may have naturally over-emphasized the political nature of Rhee's early lectures, which he never actually heard.

[107] C. C. Michener to Syngman Rhee, 24 February 1908, Lew, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 2:23.

independence. It highlighted the futility of any attempt at amalgamation and challenged the argument that the Koreans were inherently incapable of running their own affairs. The "humiliation" referenced in the title was Korea's loss of independence, although rather than bemoaning this fact in a direct way Rhee presented it to his American audiences as an opportunity: "This is Korea's opportunity; this is God's opportunity; this is your opportunity, if you please, brothers and sisters." Rhee explained that Korea's former government was "rotten" and their hearts "had to be renewed." The loss of their independence had awakened them to the shortcomings of their politics, religion, and superstitions, and now their empty hearts were turning to Christ. Christianity would be Korea's salvation. More than "one hundred thousand" Koreans were praying "that their beautiful country may become a perfect Christian land, within the next twenty years." He thanked the American missionaries who had given the Koreans "the very thing they needed" and urged the members of his audience to consider becoming missionaries to Korea, or at least to pray for Korea, "for a nation in a condition like this needs to be prayed for."[108]

Rhee's refusal to mention Japan served a number of purposes. First, it kept him from alienating Japanese Christians and pro-Japanese Americans who sympathized with Japan's motives for annexing Korea. Not offending was especially important on this occasion since he was sharing the stage with a Japanese Christian. Second, leaving Japan out of the speech allowed him to spiritualize a conflict that did, and would have, political ramifications. He emphasized the spiritual and internal causes of Korea's humiliation—

[108] Syngman Rhee, "Korea's Humiliation, Christianity's Call," in *The Church and Missionary Education: Addresses Delivered at the First International Convention Under the Direction of the Young People's Missionary Movement of the United States and Canada, Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, March 10-12, 1908* (New York, Young People's Missionary Movement of the United States and Canada, 1908), 107–9.

false religions, superstition, and rotten government—and claimed that the Koreans themselves could and in fact were fixing these problems by adopting Christianity. What he did not say, and what his audience may not have completely grasped, was that turning Korea into the first Christian nation in Asia would mean conflict with the Japanese, who were wary of Christianity in Korea and its association with Korean nationalism. By cleverly framing Korea's struggle in spiritual terms, Rhee was able to appeal for American support in what would eventually be a political struggle. In this speech Rhee leveraged the energy of the Student Volunteer Movement—itself a spiritualized version of the American mission—to further Korea's political ends. Rhee acknowledged that this was a long-term strategy; he hoped that Korea could become a Christian nation in twenty years. This was in keeping with the strategy he had laid out for Korea's independence in *Spirit*. Nation-building was a long-term process and seeking foreign friends was not a shortcut to Korea's independence, but a potential resource to support the internal changes necessary to regain that independence.

Rhee's message that Korea presented a special opportunity for American Christianity was reinforced by events. In 1907 a massive Christian revival swept through Korea. Church membership grew exponentially and missionaries reported breathtaking statistics to their supporters. Missionary James Gale calculated that Christian converts had increased a thousand fold in the twenty-year period between 1888 and 1908. "No other field compares with this in the urgency and the promise of its condition. This is the strategic people and the present is the strategic time in this land," he wrote in *Korea in Transition*.[109] A guidebook to early twentieth-century missions' movements also

[109] James Scarth Gale, *Korea in Transition* (New York: Young People's Missionary Movement of the United States and Canada, 1909), 229.

emphasized the strategic importance of Korea: "the opportunity for multiplying missionary efforts is to be found in Korea as in no other field."[110] With proper support, Korean Christians could become so numerous that they would evangelize the rest of Asia. In 1909 the *Assembly Herald*, the organ of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., wrote, "It is not a question now before the Church—'*Do* missions pay in Korea?' but a statement '*How* missions pay.'"[111] "The only word to describe the work in Korea" wrote the *Assembly Herald*, "is 'Pentecostal.'" [112]

Rhee reaped the benefits of the Korean mission field boom. Korean Christians were multiplying by the thousands in Korea, but Koreans of any sort were scarce in the United States. Those with a western education, much less a Ph.D. were rarer still. This made Rhee almost uniquely positioned to become the premier representative of Korea in the United States. While Rhee used this platform to advocate for greater American interest in Korea and to build a personal network of friends, he remained determine to return to his homeland following the completion of his education. There was no shortage of offers from American missionaries eager to have him. Missionary Horace Underwood wrote Rhee in 1910 inviting him to join the faculty of what would become Yonsei University: "We feel that your name on the faculty list will not only give weight and name to our college, but will also recommend the kind of work that we may [be] planning to set

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[110] Ilsley Boone, *The Conquering Christ* (Boston: Bible Study Publishing Company, 1910), 136.

[111] "How Wonderfully God Has Wrought," *The Assembly Herald* 10 (1909): 512–13.

[112] "Korea," *The Assembly Herald* 10 (1909): 10.

before the people here."[113] Rhee had indeed made a name for himself, both in the U.S. and in Korea.

He returned to Korea in October of 1910 to work for the educational outreach programs of the Seoul YMCA. "I hoped that Japan would leave me alone, if I devoted myself to Christian educational work," Rhee wrote in his autobiographical notes.[114] That was not to be. The Japanese had become extra vigilant about Korean Christians after a Korean Catholic, AHN Jeong-geun, assassinated former Prime Minister and Resident-General of Korea ITO Hirobumi in 1909. In 1911 the Japanese authorities began the mass-arrest of Korean Christian leaders in what would be called the Christian Conspiracy Case on suspicion that they were planning to assassinate the next Resident-General. Many of these leaders were held without trial for over a year and some of them tortured before they were all eventually released or granted amnesty.[115] Somehow Rhee was able to avoid arrest. In his notes he comments cryptically on just how narrowly he escaped: "The beginning of the Christian conspiracy case. Philip Gillet[sic] took all my blame, he could not help it."[116] Rhee's biographer claimed that it was the intervention of no less a figure than John R. Mott, National Secretary of the Y.M.C.A. and the President of the World Student Christian Federation, who intervened on Rhee's behalf. Mott happened to be in Korea during the arrests and told the Japanese that Rhee was "so well known in America that his arrest would stir up considerable trouble."[117] The situation in Korea

[113] H. G. Underwood to Syngman Rhee, 16 February 1910, Lew, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 2:43–44.

[114] "Autobiography of Dr. Syngman Rhee," 21

[115] This incident was known as the "Christian Conspiracy Case" in English and the "105 인 사건" in Korean see, Arthur Judson Brown, *The Korean Conspiracy Case* (New York, 1912).

[116] "Autobiography of Syngman Rhee," 21

[117] Oliver, *Syngman Rhee: The Man Behind the Myth*, 118.

drew such attention in the United States that President Taft personally received a delegation of missionaries that had come to Washington to discuss the arrests.[118]

In this tense environment, his missionary friends again urged Rhee to leave the country. Methodist Episcopal Missionary Bishop for Korea and Japan Merriman Harris made arrangements for Rhee to attend a Methodist International Conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota as a Korean lay-delegate. Before leaving the Japanese warned Rhee to do nothing that would embarrass Japan and to return in six months. Rhee may not have known his own plans when he left Korea, but after just a few weeks in the U.S. it was clear he would not be returning. Displaying his characteristic zeal he made a speech on the floor of the Methodist Episcopal Conference calling for the "independence of the Korean Church," which alienated the conference's leaders, but met with the approbation of Methodist missionaries in Korea.[119] Rhee claimed that his speech was "misunderstood by the leaders of the conference," although does not say how. Regardless, after the conference it was not safe for Rhee to return nor entirely certain that the Methodist leadership would desire it.

Unsure where to go, Rhee undertook a six-month tour of the United States. The entries in his diary of this journey reveals his expansive network of friends and his reputation as a preacher and lecturer. Rhee moved from city to city lecturing in Y.M.C.A.'s or preaching in churches. Once when he had run out of cash near Lake George, New York, he seems to have just went to the nearest Presbyterian Church where he received accommodations and an invitation to preach the next morning, while he

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[118] Wi Jo Kang, *Christ and Caesar in Modern Korea: A History of Christianity and Politics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 48–49.

[119] Oliver, *Syngman Rhee: The Man Behind the Myth*, 120–21.

waited for funds to arrive.[120] During this tour he called several times at the New Jersey governor's mansion to visit Wilson and his daughters. Wilson's daughter Jesse was considering entering the mission field and Rhee encouraged her to consider Korea. Rhee was with the family in June when Wilson learned that he had received the democratic nomination for President.[121]

Rhee's life story and activities received a significant amount of exposure during this period. When he spent a few weeks in Washington, D.C. in 1912 studying "occidental standards" the press covered his activities closely. They reported on his speaking engagements and even printed his condemnation of the Washington Police Department's plan to use female officers.[122] In August of 1912 missionary and author Sherwood Eddy invited Rhee to spend a week with him and his family while Rhee lectured at nearby Camp Iroquois, N.Y. The meeting resulted in Rhee being featured it in Eddy's book *The New Era in Asia* the following year. Eddy's telling of Rhee's conversion experience emphasized his patriotism as well as his Christianity, recounting his conversion prayer as being "Oh God, save my country, save my soul."[123] Two years later Rhee's conversion story was expanded and given its own chapter in Margaret Burton's *Comrades in Service*; a work intended to inspire American students to devote their lives to religious and social service by highlighting the stories of religious reformers such as

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[120] Fields et al., *The Diary of Syngman Rhee*, 73.

[121] Ibid., 70–71. See also, "Autobiography of Syngman Rhee," 22-23.

[122] "Korean Coming Here to Study Civic Reforms," *The Washington Times*, October 20, 1912; "Washington Model of Civilization," *The Washington Herald*, October 20, 1912; "Work of YMCA in Foreign Fields," *The Washington Herald*, November 20, 1912; "The Twenty-Four Club Elects New Members," *The Washington Times*, November 21, 1912; "Korean Comments on Women Police," *The Washington Herald*, November 23, 1912; "Korea Y.M.C.A. Leader Speaks on Country's Advance," *The Washington Herald*, December 14, 1912; "Korean Addresses Club at Y.M.C.A.," *The Washington Herald*, December 16, 1912; "Large Holiday Program to Be Seen at Y.M.C.A.," *The Washington Times*, December 20, 1912.

[123] Eddy, *The New Era in Asia*, 80.

Rhee.[124] Both Eddy and Burton wrote laudably of Rhee's patriotism and dedication to reform prior to his conversion to Christianity. The political aspects of Rhee's life were not unappealing to American audiences, provided they were presented in a socio-religious context, and not merely a political one.

Rhee seems to have understood and even ostensibly embraced these limitations. From what can be gleaned from newspaper reviews of his lectures throughout this period, he was content to limit his topics to his own life story and to Christian development in Korea. The reviews frequently mention his "thrilling story" that "reads like romance" as well as the remarkable growth of Christianity in Korea thanks to American missionaries.[125] None mention either Japan or Korean independence. Events following World War I prove that Rhee was an ardent supporter of Korea's independence and was willing to advocate openly for it, even at the cost of alienating or embarrassing some of his American friends. However, during the first decades of the 20th century Rhee understood the limitations of what he could accomplish for Korea's independence among Americans.

The United States was deeply divided over its forays into Asia, especially the occupation of the Philippines. Already entangled there Americans did not have much interest in involving themselves in other Asian problems. Although Theodore Roosevelt received some criticism for his refusal to defend Korea's independence in 1905, his reasoning was hard to contest: "It was out of the question to suppose that any other nation with no interest of its own at stake would attempt to do for the Koreans what they

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[124] Margaret Burton, "An Ambassador in Chains," in *Comrades in Service* (New York: Missionary Education Movement of the United States and Canada, 1915).

[125] "Corean to Preach Here," *Trenton Evening Times*, March 5, 1910; "Washington Model of Civilization"; "The Presbyterian News," *The Washington Herald*, January 7, 1911.

were utterly unable to do for themselves."[126] Roosevelt's words must have been a bitter disappointment to Rhee, but he could scarcely disagree. Rhee himself had written in *The Spirit of Independence* that reforms in Korea should be undertaken gradually because "A tree branch that has grown crooked cannot be straightened overnight, and a child that has grown up in a seated posture cannot suddenly go on a long walk."[127] Rhee had tried revolutionary politics while leader of the Independence Club and had failed. From his vantage point in 1912 the only road to regaining Korea's independence lay through internal development, which would benefit greatly from foreign support. Given this reality Rhee was willing to invest his time strengthening the ties between Korea and American Christians rather than alienating them with demands for independence.

**Conclusion**

After his 1912 tour, Rhee settled in Hawaii, where a large Korean population offered him the best opportunities to work among Koreans for independence. There in 1913 he founded a school that he hoped would do for young Koreans what Pai Chai had done for him. While he dedicated himself to educating, he stayed engaged with Korea and in contact with American friends, hoping for a new set of circumstances that would be more favorable to Korea's struggle.

The circumstances that limited American interests in Korea to those activities that could be subsumed under the label of missionary endeavor would not last forever, or even much longer. The pull that the American mission exerts on American society is not constant; it has its peaks and troughs. It was a peak during the late 19th century that sent student volunteers off to places like Korea, where they were agents of creative destruction:

[126] Theodore Roosevelt, "The World War: Its Tragedies and Its Lessons," *The Outlook*, 1914, 174.

[127] Rhee, *The Spirit of Independence*, 119.

saving lives, changing societies, and creating new types of leaders. The people, technology, and ideas that the American mission propelled into Korea had changed Rhee's life radically. They were the waves that swept Rhee into the reform movement, in and out of prison, and into prominence in the United States. But in Hawaii in 1913 he may have wondered if these waves had marooned him on a small island in the Pacific where he would live out his days as just a school teacher with an interesting past. He could not have predicted that in the next few years Americans' sense of mission would experience a massive resurgence, that the missionary zeal of the Student Volunteer Movement would spread to the highest reaches of the American government and transform itself into a crusade for democracy. He scarcely could have hoped that his former teacher and friend Woodrow Wilson would be leading the charge.

# CHAPTER TWO: BUILDING AN AMERICAN CONSTITUENCY

## The Prophet of the Plains

The Reverend Thomas M. C. Birmingham may have spent his life as a minister of the gospel in half a dozen sleepy Nebraska towns, but his interests were anything but provincial. The portrait that graced the letterhead of his personal stationary showed a stern-looking man with intense eyes and a long patriarchal beard that surely bobbed in approval as he sermonized from his pulpit at the Methodist Episcopal Church in Milford, Nebraska: population 716.[1] Preaching and prohibition politics occupied most of his time, but his greatest success, modest though it was, was as a self-proclaimed prophet with a vision that extended far beyond the Great Plains.

"I am Heaven ordained with good news, glad tidings, a prophetical message from the Throne, duly authorized and commissioned to declare that the American people can exceed in prosperity…, advance more rapidly in civilization, and exert an influence for good world-wide over the whole habitable earth" he trumpeted in his 1913 sermon entitled "World Peace under American Leadership."[2] He claimed this sermon was inspired by a prophetic word he received that summer that put world events in a divinely ordained context. The European nations were raging, pouring money and resources into standing armies, and beating the drums of war. The vision revealed to Birmingham that this gathering storm was an opportunity for the United States to fulfill prophecy and its particular destiny: "To lead the nations to beat their swords into plowshares and spears

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[1] J. Walter Thompson Company, *Population and Its Distribution*, 4th ed (New York: J. Walter Thompson Company, 1926), 119.

[2] Thomas M. C. Birmingham, *"World Peace Under American Leadership" S. Doc. No. 139, 63d Congress, 1st Session*, 1913, 5.

into pruning hooks, and learn war no more."[3] There would be a European conflagration, after which a general disarmament would begin among the nations under American leadership.[4] "The American people are now called to the moral leadership of the human race that through us peace, prosperity, and civilization may spread over all the earth…. The way now to fulfill that highest mission and grandest destiny that ever came to any people in all the annals of time is to recognize that we are the chosen Nation under the New Testament to hasten the coming of the kingdom of God among men, spread peace, prosperity, and civilization over all the world."[5]

Birmingham was not the first American divine to receive prophetic visions of American grandeur, but he could lay claim to the unique honor of having his prophecy printed in the *Congressional Record*, thanks to the assistance of his friend, Nebraska Senator George W. Norris. This was no small measure of notoriety for a small town preacher, especially when Norris' assistance was exaggerated to represent congressional approval of his prophecy.[6] When World War I broke out a year after his prophecy had been printed Birmingham became a Midwestern sensation. In 1914 and 1915 he took his prophecy on the road by lecturing with the Redpath Chautauqua Association and so stepped onto the largest stage the Midwest had to offer. His promotional materials invited all to hear of the coming world peace and that "AMERICA IS THE CHOSEN NATION OF GOD UNDER THE NEW TESTAMENT TO LEAD IN THE CONSUMATION."

[3] Ibid., 6.

[4] Ibid., 10.

[5] Ibid., 17.

[6] After 1913 the letterhead of Birmingham's stationary identified him as the author of the only sermon "Congress ever ordered printed." See his letterhead in his letter to the Korean Commission, 13 December 1912 in Young-ick Lew, ed., *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, vol. 6 (Institute for Modern Korean Studies, Yonsei University, 2009), 366.

Birmingham's message was well received. The Mead, Nebraska, *Advocate* wrote that his Chautauqua lecture was "worthy of the cause of the 20th Century, of Congress that ordered it printed, and of the possibilities now before the American people in fulfilling the destiny of the United States." One Rev. Thomas Griffiths praised Birmingham's "novel and original idea about the United States being in the order of providence a chosen nation under the New Testament, like Israel was under the Old Testament. The Hebrews sang the song of peace and good will among men. The mission of America is to make that sentiment a reality in the social, industrial, and political life of the nations."[7]

Contrary to the praise of the Reverend Griffiths, the idea that the United States had a divinely ordained mission was neither new nor original. The Rev. Birmingham, with his prophetic sermons and global visions of millennial peace, was certainly not your average American, but his vision of the United States as a nation chosen by God for world leadership was only a hyper-religious rendition of an idea that has inhabited the American mind from the founding of the European colonies in North America until the present. The discovery, from the European perspective, of a continent so rich in resources and ripe for exploitation and the rebirth of democratic government there were circumstances too compelling for Americans not to believe they had a special destiny as a nation, a special mission to the world. The effects of this mission on American society are complex and uneven. For those who believe it, it can be a source of pride—not everyone is chosen. It can be a source of guilt—have Americans deported themselves in a manner worthy of their mission? It can also be a cause of anxiety. To be a chosen people is to be a

[7] Quotations taken from promotional materials of the Redpath Chautauqua Association regarding Birmingham's lectures entitled "Peace Meeting" and "Belgian Relief". They are part of "Traveling Culture - Circuit Chautauqua in the Twentieth Century" at the University of Iowa. Available online at <http://sdrcdata.lib.uiowa.edu/libsdrc/details.jsp?id=/birmingham/2> and <http://sdrcdata.lib.uiowa.edu/libsdrc/details.jsp?id=/birmingham/1>. [Accessed 11 March 13]

scrutinized people, and to claim moral authority begs for criticism.

The Korean independence movement in the United States under the leadership of Syngman Rhee understood the ambitions and anxieties of these "chosen" American people thanks to their first-hand experiences with American missionaries in Korea. They sought to leverage these to create an American constituency to support their struggle for Korea's independence. They accomplished this by cleverly writing Korea into narratives of the American mission. They highlighted the rapid spread of Christianity in Korea and the possibility of the first "Christian" nation in Asia to grab the attention of Americans who believed that spreading Christianity was central to the American mission.[8] They compared their struggle for freedom from Japanese oppression to the American struggle against British domination, and linked their desire for liberty to the American desire to promote liberty abroad. They also played on Americans' anxieties about their "chosen" status by reminding them of their role in the destruction of Korea's independence by failing to fulfill their treaty obligations: an act unbefitting a people aspiring to world leadership. They portrayed Korea as both the poster-child for the possibilities of the American mission and as a place where that mission was on trial. For believers in the American mission, such appeals were difficult to ignore.

### The March First Movement, Syngman Rhee, and the Strategy of the Korean Independence Movement

The first day of March in 1919 is one of the most important days in modern

[8] Following the Great Revival of 1907 (평양대부흥), Korea experienced a rapid expansion of Christianity. This revival is frequently considered the point at which Korean Protestantism became self-sustaining. See Kenneth Wells, *New God, New Nation: Protestants and Self-Reconstruction Nationalism in Korea 1896-1937* (University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 32–43; Young-Hoon Lee, "Korean Pentecost: The Great Revival of 1907," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 4, no. 1 (January 2001): 73; For an eye witness account originally published in 1910 see William Newton Blair, *The Korean Pentecost and the Sufferings Which Followed* (Carlisle, Penn: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977).

Korean history. The Republic of Korea, in the preamble to its constitution, traces its birth to this day. On this day thirty-three Korean leaders gathered in Seoul to draft a declaration of independence and to begin a nationwide, nonviolent protest against Japanese colonization. The document captured both the essence of emerging Korean nationalism and the optimistic internationalism that flourished in this historical moment when it was hoped that one of the greatest wars in history would give way to a time of lasting peace. "We shall not blame Japan;" they wrote "we must first blame ourselves before finding fault with others." By taking responsibility for Korea's loss of independence they also claimed responsibility for its future development independent of the Japanese. They proclaimed that not only justice, but also the future peace of East Asia, demanded an independent Korea. An occupied Korea would be an embittered Korea, striking at the Japanese at every opportunity, and a launch pad for Japanese attacks on China and the beginning of a war in northeast Asia. Now was the opportunity to avoid this tragedy. They placed their faith in the international community gathered in Paris and especially in Wilson. Their language resounded with Wilsonianism: "Behold! A new world is before our eyes. The days of force are gone, and the days of morality are here. The spirit of humanity, nurtured throughout the past century, has begun casting its rays of new civilization upon human history."[9]

To test if "the days of morality" had actually arrived, the thirty-three signers of the document encouraged Koreans to take to the streets waving homemade Korean flags, which could be easily fashioned out of Japanese flags, and shouting "mansei" (만새)

[9] All quotes taken from Han-Kyo Kim, "The Declaration of Independence, March 1, 1919: A New Translation," *Korean Studies* 13, no. 1 (1989): 1–4, doi:10.1353/ks.1989.0004.

meaning "may Korea live ten-thousand years."[10] They carried no weapons, but their actions were calculated to provoke and the Japanese obliged them. Thousands of Koreans were cut down on the first day alone and many thousands more in the following weeks. Tens of thousands were arrested, brutally tortured, sometimes to death, and then left in prison for months without being charged. The Japanese did their best to smother the news of the demonstrations and of their own brutal response, but there had been too many witnesses and the world was too well connected to suppress the murder of thousands of people who were demanding justice, especially at a time when the world's leading statesmen were gathered in Paris ostensibly hammering out an agreement that would create a more just and peaceful world.

The oppression of Korea had been in the spotlight before. In 1908 two members of the Korean National Association (KNA) murdered Durham W. Stevens, an American employed by the Japanese to advise the Korean Foreign Ministry, for publicly proclaiming that Koreans were happy with the Japanese administration of their country and then refusing to disavow his statement when confronted by some very unhappy Koreans in San Francisco. The coverage of the Stevens murder trial was surprisingly sympathetic to the Koreans. Their defense attorney cleverly shifted the focus of the trial away from Stevens' murder and onto the Japanese invasion of Korea by having the defendants plead not guilty by means of "patriotic insanity." The jury was at least partially convinced. They dropped the charges against one of the defendants and found

[10] While literally meaning "ten-thousand years" this phrase conveys the meaning that Korea as a nation should last forever.

the other guilty of only second-degree murder.[11] Korea also grabbed headlines during the so-called Christian Conspiracy Case of 1912, in which hundreds of Korean Christians and a few missionaries were arrested on the allegation that they were plotting to assassinate the Japanese Governor General of Korea. The resulting media attention put the Japanese in an unfavorable light, especially among American Christians.[12] These two events did much to focus attention on Korea and to garner American sympathy, but there was no greater Korean organization in place capable of turning these moments of sympathy into sustained support for Korean independence.[13]

The March First Movement changed this by giving the Korean independence movement an organizational structure. On 23 April 1919 representatives of Korea's thirteen provinces met secretly in Seoul to form the Korean Provisional Government (KPG), the first step in regaining their independence. To head this government, they chose forty-four year old Syngman Rhee. In some respects he was a surprising choice. He had not been in Korea for over seven years. He had little experience in administration outside of his small school in Hawaii. His brief leadership of the Independence Club in the 1890s had been controversial. But Rhee also possessed many positive qualities. He was highly-educated, articulate, and famous—both because of his writings from prison and his diplomatic activities in the United States. Rhee was undeniably a patriot, who

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[11] For a recent detailed account of the Stevens trial see Richard S Kim, *The Quest for Statehood: Korean Immigrant Nationalism and U.S. Sovereignty, 1905-1945* (Oxford University Press, 2011), chap. two.

[12] For more on the Christian Conspiracy Case see Brown, *The Korean Conspiracy Case*; Henry Chung, *The Case of Korea: A Collection of Evidence on the Japanese Domination of Korea, and on the Development of the Korean Independence Movement* (New York: Fleming H. Revell company, 1921), 177–78; Syngman Rhee, *Japan Inside Out: The Challenge of Today*, 2nd ed (New York: Revell, 1941), 75–77.

[13] There were in fact Korean organizations, the largest of which was the Korean National Association (KNA), which had a large following in California and branches in other western states and Hawaii. However, the bulk of KNA resources went towards addressing the needs of its members, who were mostly agricultural labors. It focused on internal development of the Korean migrant community rather than seeking external resources for Korea's independence.

had already suffered much for the sake of his country, and since he had been either in prison or in exile during the crucial moments of the Japanese annexation of Korea, he was free from the charge of collaboration. Rhee also had connections with powerful Americans, especially Woodrow Wilson. The Wilsonian rhetoric in the Korean Declaration of Independence is unmistakable and his support for self-determination was a main source of inspiration for the March First Movement.[14] Rhee had not only been a student of Wilson's at Princeton, but became a personal friend of the Wilson family, even receiving an invitation to the White House in 1913 for the wedding ceremony of Wilson's daughter. Word of this invitation quickly spread in Hawaii. Rhee became known as "the only man in Hawaii who received an invitation to the White House wedding." He finally became "so tired of it" that he asked people to stop. Because of his personal connection with Wilson and the President's reputed interest in Korea, Rhee wrote that "many people had the impression that the president would surely do anything he could to help Korea at this time." Rhee's personal connection with Wilson was critical to his election as president of the KPG.[15]

Rhee's selection was a fateful one, for it all but determined the character and strategy of the Korean independence movement. Rhee was not a military leader, an experienced administrator, or a skilled coalition builder. He was an educator, rhetorician, and a cosmopolitan. His selection ensured that the strategy of the Korean independence movement would focus on raising awareness, persuasion, and appeals, rather than

[14] Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford University Press, 2007), chap. 10. Syngman Rhee also credited Wilson's rhetoric for creating the climate in which the March First Movement took place. See Syngman Rhee, "The 1919 Movement," n.d. a manuscript held by SRI.

[15] "The 1919 Movement," n.d., SRI, Seoul, South Korea.

assassinations, uprisings, and other forms of violence. Rhee's 1904 manifesto, *The Spirit of Independence* (독립정신) was a call to self-improvement and national consolidation, not to arms. He did not believe the Koreans could defeat the Japanese by violence:

> "We cannot accomplish it [removal of Japanese influence] by building an army, by having power, by the governments conducting skillful diplomacy, or by devising clever stratagem. Only by promoting learning and moral education will the knowledge and fidelity of the people be made known to the world. Foreign nations will then become our dear friends…they would help us spontaneously…and we would become strong without an army. [16]

The Korean path to victory was to develop their sense of nationhood, and wait for the world to awaken to the injustice Korea had suffered and to the long-term imperial ambitions of the Japanese. Prior to World War II, Rhee did not ask Americans for arms, but for moral support. He asked them to recognize the injustice of Korea's annexation and the brutality of its treatment by the Japanese. He asked them to acknowledge that they had a legal responsibility to come to Korea's aid because of the 1882 treaty and that they had a moral responsibility to support Korean independence because of their own history, values, and ideals.

**Wilsonianism Despite Wilson**

If Rhee's selection as the first president of the KPG had been heavily influenced by his personal connection with Wilson, then the Korean representatives in Seoul would have been disappointed to discover that Rhee had already been trying to enlist the support of his former mentor unsuccessfully. Even before the March First Movement and his election as president, Rhee and many other Koreans had recognized the opportunity that the Wilsonian rhetoric of self-determination offered Korea. When the armistice was declared in November 1918, the KNA, the largest of the Korean organizations in the

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[16] Rhee, *The Spirit of Independence*, 242.

United States, elected Rhee and another American-educated Korean, Henry Chung (정한경), to represent them at the Paris Peace Conference.[17]

Chung and Rhee lost no time in putting the case for Korea before President Wilson. Their appeal to Wilson of 25 November 1918 was one of hundreds, if not thousands that Korean organizations would make over the next twenty-six years to American political figures, religious and civic organizations, and the American people in general. Their letter began with a summary of Japanese oppression in Korea, emphasizing the economic, cultural, and religious restrictions placed on Korean life. The Japanese were consigning the Koreans to "industrial serfdom" by policies that deprived them of land and extracted natural resources from the country. The Japanese were systematically killing an independent Korean identity through the destruction of Korean historical archives, the burning of books, and the imposition of the Japanese language in Korean schools. Christianity was being "insidiously discriminated against" while Emperor worship was required of all Korean school children. And all this was "only a few of the many flagrant injustices" to which the Koreans were subjected.[18]

Korea's situation was dire, but not without hope. "We, the common people of Korea, with a passion for self-government and political independence, come to you [Wilson] knowing that your Excellency is an arbiter of justice and a champion of equal rights for all peoples, strong or weak" and that the end of the war was a "significant time

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[17] Chung (later DeYoung) was fourteen years younger but had attained similar educational credentials. He was raised by an American family in Kearny, Nebraska, one of a cohort of Koreans studying there that local newspapers referred to as the "Kearny Koreans." He earned his B.A. at the University of Nebraska, his MA at Northwestern in Evanston, Illinois, and was working on his Ph.D. at American University in Washington, D.C., when he was selected by the KNA. Like Rhee he had earned a reputation as a lecturer and essayist on Korean issues who was particular adept at communicating with American audiences.

[18] Syngman Rhee to Woodrow Wilson, 25 November 1918, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, vol. 1 (Institute for Modern Korean Studies, Yonsei University, 2009), 56–57.

when the particular purposes of individual states are about to give way to the common will of mankind." This "common will" demanded justice for their nation. But their appeal was not based on pity alone. They reminded Wilson that the Korean-American Treaty of 1882 had never been abrogated or rescinded and so there was a "moral obligation on the part of the United States to aid the Koreans in their aspirations for self-determination." Beyond a "moral obligation" there were sound strategic reasons for the United States to support Korean independence. "We feel…that the United States cannot afford, for the safety of its own interests, to tolerate Japanese Prussianism in the Far East while its prototype is crushed in Europe, and that the world cannot be made safe for democracy as long as 20,000,000 liberty-loving Koreans are forced to live under an alien yoke." Quoting Wilson to Wilson, they reminded the president of his joint address to Congress of 11 February 1918 in which he asserted "all well-defined national aspirations shall be accorded the utmost satisfaction." They claimed that "well-defined national aspirations" characterized the Korean people as much as any other.[19]

Wilson did not respond. Rhee repeatedly wrote Wilson, his personal secretary Joseph P. Tumulty, and even his daughter Jesse (Wilson) Sayre trying to reach the president. He only received apologetic letters from Tumulty saying the president was too busy to take up the matter personally.[20] Supporting Korean independence would have risked much of Wilson's post-war vision. It would have alienated Japan, the strongest Asian power and an indispensable partner in the proposed League of Nations. This risk was not worth taking especially when, prior to the March First Movement, it was unclear

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[19] Ibid.

[20] See a series of short notes from President Wilson's secretary Joseph Tumulty to Syngman Rhee in *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 2:204–8.

that the Koreans were willing to take serious action for their own independence. Even more disheartening than Wilson's snub was the State Department's decision not to issue Rhee or Chung the necessary documents to travel to France to attend the peace conference.[21]

Rhee's hopes for Wilson's assistance were surely high, but his strategy for the Korean independence movement did not rest on Wilson alone. Even while trying his best to reach Wilson, Rhee and Chung met in Philadelphia in February 1919 to strategize about what could be done to support Korean independence in the United States. They were joined by Philip Jaisohn, Rhee's former teacher at Pai Chai in Seoul, who had entered the printing business in Philadelphia. These three men would form the nucleus of the Korean independence movement in the United States for many years. Over the next several weeks they prepared a strategy that focused on swaying American public opinion in favor of Korea's independence. They believed their appeal to Wilson was convincing, but many more Americans than just Wilson needed to hear it. If the American people knew the truth about the Korean situation they would support Korea's independence and pressure their government to do so. Although they still hoped to convince Wilson to raise the Korean situation at Versailles, they were prepared to bypass him and go directly to the American people with their message.

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[21] Rhee frequently claimed that the State Department cabled for instructions regarding whether to issue him and Chung visas and were told by Wilson that their presence in Paris would be unfortunate. This may well be true, but the State Department never had to deny Rhee a visa to prevent him from traveling to Paris as Rhee had no valid passport. The State Department initially instructed him to secure a passport from the "country to which you owe allegiance" in order to secure a visa. From the State Department's perspective this would have been Japan. Therefore, it is unclear whether Rhee was directly denied a visa to Paris on the advice of Wilson or whether he was indirectly denied by being asked to secure a Japanese passport. See Syngman Rhee to Mrs. George A. Fitch n.d. (late 1919), *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 1:233; Edwin S. Puller to Syngman Rhee, 5 March 1919, Lew, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 2:209.

Publicity was their major challenge. Even before this meeting, Chung and Jaisohn had been laying the foundation for a "high-class" English language magazine devoted to Korea and a publicity office.[22] This would be expensive; Chung estimated that establishing both on a permanent basis would require capital of $250,000. Koreans in the United States needed to be better organized to pool those kinds of resources.[23] The KNA's membership was large, but several other organizations also vied to represent Koreans living in the United States. Unifying these groups would not only raise more funds but also demonstrate that Koreans were capable of self-government.

The March First Movement could not have come at a better time for those hoping for unity. This tragic yet sublime event catapulted Korea onto the world stage and ushered in a new era of cooperation between Korean organizations. Seizing the moment, Rhee, Chung, and Jaisohn began organizing the institutions that would orchestrate the movement's diplomatic and propaganda efforts for the next several years. They founded the Korean Commission in a rented office in Washington, D.C as an unofficial Korean legation to the United States. Jaisohn's print shop in Philadelphia was rechristened the Korean Information Bureau and became the movement's propaganda arm.

Enlisting the aid of Korean student associations at Ohio State and Ohio Wesleyan universities, they published before the end of March the first issue of what would become the *Korea Review*, their monthly English-language propaganda organ.[24] The first issue was an impressive 31 pages, in two-columns of tightly packed type—a prodigious production

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[22] Henry Chung to Syngman Rhee, New York, 21 December 1918, Lew, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 2:200–02.

[23] Ibid., 2:202.

[24] Henry Kim, *The Writings of Henry Cu Kim: Autobiography with Commentaries on Syngman Rhee, Pak Yong-Man, and Chŏng Sun-Man*, trans. Dae-Sook Suh (University of Hawaii Press, 1987), 156.

on such short notice. The prose of the early issues was clunky at times. English was not the first language of several of the authors and the editors. But while they might have struggled with the correct use of definite articles they demonstrated in a piece entitled "America and the World Peace" that they knew the idiom of the American mission. "'My Country 'Tis of Thee, Sweet Land of Liberty,' is now the hymn of the Americans for America, but indeed it should be made that of all the human races" is the article's opening line. The article celebrates America's entry into World War I as the nation's debut on the world stage after a century of practical isolation, calling it a "real sacrifice for the freedom of man" and expecting that after ten or twenty years "we will be utterly astonished at the wonderful results that the world has wrought under the moral leadership of America. … No one can deny that America has been and still is the leader in true democracy. Therefore the great task for the common interests of all peoples depends on America and in a sense America only."[25] The Rev. Birmingham would have agreed.

Affirmation of the American mission was a constant theme in the *Review*. The United States was the "defender of Democracy," the leader of an "epoch-making movement" towards self-determination, and had a "sincere desire for the liberation of the world."[26] "The world should be Americanized," the *Review*, argued, thus paving the way for true democracy.[27] The editors made the connections between Korea and the American mission explicit when they wrote that most of the leaders of the Korean

[25] "American and the World Peace", *Korea Review*, March 1919 (Philadelphia, Pa: Bureau of Information for the Republic of Korea, 1919), 4.

[26] "The Pacific Age", *Korea Review*, April 1919 (Philadelphia, Pa: Bureau of Information for the Republic of Korea, 1919); "A Letter to the Christian Churches of America", *Korea Review*, May 1919 (Philadelphia, Pa: Bureau of Information for the Republic of Korea, 1919).

[27] "America and the League of Nations", *Korea Review*, May 1919.

independence movement were "the sons and daughters of the American institutions and the Christian institutions of Korea."[28]

The early voice of the *Review* was not without its sour notes. It contained much that would have resonated with Americans, but also ideas that would have been troubling. Referring to the League of Nations as a "world state" or as the "United States of the World", surely alarmed Americans worried that the league threatened their autonomy.[29] The slogan of one article, "**National self-determination or racial suicide**" may have accurately expressed the sentiments of many Koreans, but likely shocked more than impressed Americans.[30] Racial suicide would have been no less harmful to the spread of Christianity in Korea than the Japanese occupation. A few unfortunate metaphors also appeared. The Koreans claimed that as a member of the human "organism" they had a right to appeal to humanity as a whole for justice, but then carried the metaphor too far: "Has not a toe some right to ask the whole man to take care of its corns?"[31] The Koreans had a compelling message and a reasoned appeal, but it needed refining. Before they could convince thousands of Americans to support Korean independence, they would have to convince a devoted few to help with their messaging.

### The First Korean Congress

When it came to finding American supporters, Korean exiles knew where to start. The networks of churches and religious organizations that had sent American

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[28] R. S. Kim, "Why We Koreans Appreciate American Institutions", *Korea Review*, April 1919.

[29] "America and the World Peace", *Korea Review*, March 1919.

[30] "Mr. T. H. Yun's New Policy", *Korea Review*, March 1919. Incidentally "national self-determination or racial suicide" was not the policy T. H. Yun (YOON Chi-ho) was advocating, but was offered as a critique of his policy by an anonymous Korean.

[31] Ibid., 10.

missionaries to Korea could be traced backwards to find Americans already sympathetic towards Korea and more likely to support Korean independence, especially when it was presented as a necessary condition for the continued growth of Christianity. Rhee began revitalizing the many contacts he made while lecturing in American churches and civic organizations. Jaisohn drummed up similar support from the Christian community in the Philadelphia area, whose churches had sent many missionaries to Korea, including Pai Chai founder Henry Appenzeller. Leveraging this support, in mid-April they organized the "First Korean Congress" in a theater in downtown Philadelphia.

The Congress was called to unify Korean communities in the United States and Hawaii into a common front for Korean independence, but it was also the inauguration of Korean lobbying activities in the United States: publicizing the Korean Declaration of Independence and the creation of a provisional government. The dual purpose of the Congress was evident in the first few lines of Jaisohn's opening address when he told his audience, which included many Americans, that they were gathered there to undertake a "solemn and momentous *mission*…to bring about permanent peace in the Orient, that democracy and Christianity may be firmly established in the continent of Asia."[32] That he was speaking primarily to the Americans in the room is undeniable; Koreans had no need of framing their struggle in the broader trends of political or religious developments to find motivation, but such framing was essential for American audiences trying to locate not only Korea's geographical position, but also its moral significance to the United States. "There is no nation in the world whom the Koreans love more than the United States of America, excepting only their own country," Jaisohn explained. When other

[32] *First Korean Congress, Held in the Little Theatre* . . . (Philadelphia, PA, 1919), 3. Emphasis added.

countries tried to exploit Korea the United States sent missionaries who gave the Koreans "courage" and "new hope" and whose evangelical efforts "were followed by hospitals, schools, science, arts, music and the spirit of independence and democracy."[33] The Koreans were now looking to the Americans to finish the work they had started. Koreans presented their country as the "Belgium of Asia" whose violation by a Prussianized Japan was an affront to humanity, justice, and other American ideals. They believed that Americans would respond to their appeal once their situation was widely known.[34]

A series of American speakers at the Congress assured them this was the case. The Reverend Dr. Floyd Tompkins, rector of Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, one of the largest in Philadelphia, told the Congress that "Korea is the pride of these later missionary days" and that American Christians would do whatever they could to assist Korean independence. He urged the Koreans to put their case before the United States Congress and assured them they would receive some sort of recognition of their struggle.[35] Rev. Father James J. Dean, President of Villanova College, told the Congress that if they zealously brought their case to the attention of the American people they would awaken American public opinion, which was "slow to rouse, but mighty in action."[36] Mrs. E.L. Cook, a returned missionary from Seoul, went even further when she assured the Congress that "if you will arouse your soul you will have sympathy and you will have help and America will come to your rescue and you will be able to win your

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[33] Ibid., 4.

[34] For comparians of the Korean situation with Belgium see ibid., 11, 27, 41.; Syngman Rhee, "The Case for Korea," *The Public. A Journal of Democracy.* 22, no. 1102 (May 1919): 515–16; Chung, *The Case of Korea: A Collection of Evidence on the Japanese Domination of Korea, and on the Development of the Korean Independence Movement*, 284.

[35] *First Korean Congress*, 5–7.

[36] Ibid., 39–40.

cause."[37] Proving that sympathy for the Koreans reached beyond missionary or even Christian circles, Henry Berkowitz, rabbi of one of the largest synagogues in Philadelphia and founder of the Jewish Chautauqua Association, also gave a moving address expressing the sympathy in the Jewish heart for all oppressed peoples.[38]

The Koreans needed little encouragement to appeal to the American public for support. Rhee had been making such appeals for almost a decade, however the encouragement the Congress received from the American speakers surely buoyed the hope of the delegates that this strategy might be successful. At the suggestion of Jaisohn, Rhee was selected to author a short appeal to the American people on behalf of the Congress. "An Appeal to America" was clearly modeled on the earlier appeal that Rhee and Chung had written to President Wilson, only now with much more vivid evidence of Japanese brutality. The document expressed confidence that the American people would respond to the Koreans' appeal because of their love of justice and history of being a champion of the oppressed. "Your nation is the Hope of Mankind," it proclaimed, "so we come to you." The appeal also reminded Americans of their obligations to Korea under the 1882 treaty. It closed by once again quoting Wilson: "There is no subject that touches the peace of the world that is exempt from inquiry or discussion [in the proposed League of Nations]."[39]

Understanding that actions speak louder than words, the Koreans ended the three-day Congress with an act of political theater. Having secured permission from the Philadelphia Police Department they paraded the six blocks from their meeting place at

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[37] Ibid., 52.

[38] Ibid., 63–65.

[39] Ibid., 30.

17th and Delancy to Independence Hall, accompanied by a mounted escort and a brass band. Each delegate held an American flag in one hand and a Korean flag in the other. They gathered in the room where the Declaration of Independence had been signed and there Rhee read the Korean Declaration of Independence as proclaimed on March 1st only a few weeks before. After posing for some photos, they processed out of the room solemnly touching the Liberty Bell with their right hands on their way out. "The symbolism was unmistakable," wrote historian Erez Manela. "The Korean movement against colonial rule was akin to, and drew inspiration and legitimacy from, the history and ideals of the United States."[40]

The "First Korean Congress" was a success in more ways than one. Its timing was impeccable. The meeting coincided with the appearance of the first eyewitness accounts of the March First Movement in the American press and the revelation that the Japanese were holding several American missionaries. As a result the Associated Press covered the Congress, and articles summarizing the proceedings were published in hundreds of newspapers.[41] This favorable media coverage came at a time when American opinions of the Korean situation were shifting. The brutality of the Japanese response to the March First Movement had already discredited Japan's claims of benevolent administration in Korea, but many Americans still wondered if the Koreans could govern themselves effectively. Koreans were hoping that the March First Movement, the organization of the

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[40] Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*, 205.

[41] For a sample of the press reports see, "Korea Appeals to Uncle Sam Asking Support," *Logansport Daily Tribune*, April 15, 1919; "Mount Pleasant Man Involved in Korean Trouble," *Burlington Hawk Eye*, April 15, 1919; "Koreans Ask U.S. to Help Revolt," *Bridgeport Standard Telegram*, April 15, 1919; "Koreans Appeal to U.S. for Help," *Eau Claire Leader*, April 15, 1919; "Korea and Career," *Biloxi Daily Herald*, April 16, 1919; "Korean Congress at Philadelphia Adopts Organic Law for Republic," *Bakersfield Californian*, April 16, 1919; "Korean Revolt Report on Way: American Government to Hear Story of Rebellion; Orientals Proclaim Liberties in Philadelphia; Clash with Japanese Troops Injures One Woman.," *Los Angeles Times*, April 17, 1919.

KPG, and the First Korean Congress, would all be read as evidence that they could.[42]

**The League of Friends of Korea**

The First Korean Congress resulted in a network of American supporters of Korea. On hearing the assurances that the American people would support the Korean cause once they were informed of the situation, Jaisohn suggested that a "Korean independence league" or similar institution be formed "to bring the facts of the Korean cause before the American public."[43] The Rev. Tompkins in conjunction with the other American participants at the Congress began this work in Philadelphia under the name "League of Friends of Korea." Dr. Tompkins' Holy Trinity Episcopal Church had been one of the first to realize the potential of radio as a medium for disseminating information. Dr. Tomkins' standing in the Philadelphia Christian community was high, and he put his reputation to good use. The board of governors of the first League of Friends of Korea branch in Philadelphia boasted six influential ministers from the Methodist and Presbyterian churches as well as several prominent businessmen.[44] The league's objectives were to inform the American public of the "true conditions" in Korea, to extend sympathy to Korea in their struggle for freedom, to use its "moral" influence to prevent their cruel treatment, and to secure for them "religious liberty." "These facts should be known" the league's first press release read, "not only for the sake of Korea but for the good of the United States. We the friends of Korea believe that the principle of equal right to live and develop in freedom for weak and strong alike, should be upheld by

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[42] For the shifting attitudes on the Korean situation see, "Korea.," *New York Times*, April 24, 1919.

[43] *First Korean Congress*, 56.

[44] League of Friends of Korea Open letter to membership, Young-ick Lew, ed., *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, vol. 4 (Institute for Modern Korean Studies, Yonsei University, 2009), 250.

America, as we fought for that purpose . . . as Christians we feel it to be our moral duty to inject ourselves into the issue; for reasons of Christianity and humanity. The American public must make its voice manifest upon the great principles involved, for failing to do so will be shirking our duties."[45] The league's initial statement was a remarkable testimony to its members' overlapping identities as Christians and Americans and demonstrated that their sense of duty to support Korea resulted from these overlapping identities.

Under Tomkins' energetic leadership the league grew rapidly. From its base in Philadelphia it opened branches in Washington, D.C., New York, and Chicago. Prominent Christian ministers, such as racial progressives Fremont Tuttle, were represented on the boards of these new branches, but so were academics and newspapermen such as H. L. Murlin, President of Boston College, and John C. Shaffer, the owner and editor of six Midwestern newspapers, including the Chicago Evening Post and the Indianapolis Star.[46] The league publicized the Korean situation and formed new branches by holding "mass-meetings" in communities around the nation. These mass meetings were one- or two-day events that featured local entertainment and centered around a series of lectures on the Korean situation. The league used various kinds of Christian networks, especially local ministers' associations, to plan these meetings and to provide local speakers and entertainers to fill out the programs. These meetings frequently resulted in resolutions being sent to Congress demanding some action be taken showing sympathy for Korea. In many cases, at the conclusion of the meeting, officers

[45] "The League of Friends of Korea", *The Korea Review*, June 1919, 12-13.

[46] These names are taken from the letterheads of the League of Friends of Korea's Boston and Chicago branches. See *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, vol. 5 (Institute for Modern Korean Studies, Yonsei University, 2009), 480; *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, vol. 7 (Institute for Modern Korean Studies, Yonsei University, 2009), 460.

were selected to organize a new branch of the league.

Americans attending these mass meetings heard arguments for American support of Korean independence that were similar to those Rhee and Chung first made to President Wilson, but the impact of this reasoning was enhanced when the Koreans' assertion of an American responsibility to act was echoed by local American political and religious leaders. "Whenever we see the cause of liberty imperilled [sic] we are ready to cast our lot in common with those people . . . This is the true Spirit of America," the Rev. Dr. Robert M. Blackburn told those assembled at the first mass meeting of the League of Friends of Korea on 15 May 1919 in Reading, Pennsylvania. Blackburn continued, "It is because I prize highly the liberty which is my birthright that I stand here tonight ready to cast my lot in common with the people of Korea whose liberty has not only been threatened but has been filched away," George M. Jones of Trinity Lutheran Church of Reading told the same audience that "the Koreans have taken after the ways of the west and now they want their freedom like the people of the west." Jones went on to claim that the 1882 treaty obligated the United States to defend Korea and demanded that the United States live up to it. The mass meeting ended with the endorsement of a resolution to be sent to the Pennsylvania Congressional delegation calling for an expression of sympathy for Korea.[47]

Thanks to the league's efforts, sympathy for Korea spread rapidly. In May 1919 Methodist ministers of the Chicago area gathered to petition the State Department that something be done for Korea. They argued Korea was unique among the subject nations clamoring for representation at the Paris Peace Conference: "Unlike Armenia the power

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[47] "Activities of the League of the Friends of Korea", *Korea Review*, June 1919, 14-15.

that oppresses Korea is increasing and not waning from year to year. Unlike Ireland, Korea is dominated by a nation that is anti-Christian in sentiment and addicted to the most brutal practices… Unlike the smaller nations of Europe Korea apparently has no standing with the League of Nations." The ministers detailed how the remarkable growth of Christianity in Korea was being snuffed out by the Japanese and how the only hope for its continuation was "fellow-Christians in distant lands." They concluded, "Since the foregoing facts are known to the officers of our government, we urge them to make all haste in placing our government in the light of a defender of the rights, lives and liberty of the people of Korea."[48] These ministers took their message of sympathy for Korea back to their congregations and within the next month seven Chicago area churches and church organizations also sent telegrams and resolutions to the State Department.[49] At its annual meeting in St. Louis in May the Presbyterian General Assembly passed a resolution issuing a strong protest against Japan's "abhorrent and intolerable" administration of Korea, saying it was offensive to the spirit in which WWI had been fought.[50] As the league spread it continued to attract prominent religious figures such as Charles Wood, rector of the Church of the Covenant (soon to be National Presbyterian Church), one of the largest congregations in Washington. The eminent revivalist and leading fundamentalist R. A. Torrey also wrote the Korean Commission expressing his support for their work and wishing that every member of the U.S. Senate would consider the Korean situation.[51]

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[48] "Some outward Manifestations of American Sympathy", *Korea Review*, June 1919, 11.

[49] "What American Churches and Communities are Doing for Korea", *Korea Review*, July, 4.

[50] *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (New York: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1919), 261.

[51] A letter from Torrey was reprinted in the *Korea Review*, April 1920, 15.

As the coalition of Americans concerned about Korea grew, so did the demand for authoritative accounts of the Japanese suppression of the March First Movement. Desperate for news, even the *New York Times* began printing the private letters of missionaries in Korea. They could not have been more sympathetic; one missionary reported that the treatment of Koreans made his "blood boil" and aroused his sympathy for an "oppressed and defenseless people crying out for justice." These letters portrayed the Koreans as a vigorous and well-organized people, contrary to the negative stereotypes about them.[52] The coverage gave Korean leaders a new-found notoriety. Despite its editorial position that Koreans were an "excitable race" and its belief that most Americans did not favor independence for Korea, the *New York Times* printed rebuttals by Syngman Rhee and Henry Chung to pro-Japanese articles. The two explained that their mission was not to sabotage U.S.-Japanese relations or to entangle the United States in a war for Korea, but to ensure the future peace of the Far East by encouraging the United States to use its moral influence to end Japanese imperialism.[53]

The moral influence of American Christians angry over Korea was first felt within the Christian community itself. In July 1919, after a long delay and considerable pressure, the commission on Relations with the Orient (CRO) of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America released a report on the Japanese suppression of the March First Movement entitled "The Korean Situation: authentic accounts of recent events." The reason for the delay was the pro-Japanese sympathies of CRO secretary Sidney L. Gulick,

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[52] "Uncensored Account of Korea's Revolt: Official of Presbyterian Foreign Missions Board Tells of Conditions He Found," *The New York Times*, April 23, 1919.

[53] Syngman Rhee, "Korea Against Japan a Reply to Professor Ladd's Views on the Independence Movement," *New York Times*, May 18, 1919; Henry Chung, "Far Eastern Questions: Japan's Position Criticised in Regard to the Korean Independence Movement," *New York Times*, June 1, 1919, sec. Editorial.

a twenty-five-year veteran of the Japanese mission field and an ardent campaigner for better relations between the United States and Japan. Included in CRO's report was a set of cables between the Japanese government and CRO that showed the two entities cooperating in damage control after the March First Movement. The Japanese had urged CRO to withhold publication of letters and reports from missionaries in Korea because they would only "rashly" cause "additional excitement" which would make reforms in Korea more difficult. CRO accepted this logic for almost four months before cabling, "Agitation regarding Chosen (Korea) abuses increasingly serious, endangering good will. Cannot withhold facts. Urgently important you publish official statements that abuses have ceased and reasonable administrative reforms proceeding. Can you cable to this effect?" CRO defended this and other cables by arguing that it was only fair to take up reports of abuses with the Japanese before giving them to the press, but the wording of their cables indicated that if there had been no mobilization of American Christians they might not have published the report. CRO's introduction to "The Korean Situation" was calculated to cause as little offense to the Japanese as possible. It refused to comment on "political questions," such as whether Korea should be independent, and attempted to place most of the blame for the violence on Japanese "militarists" and "reactionaries" while calling for Americans to give the "strongest possible moral support" to Japanese liberals and progressives.[54] Gulick's Japanese sympathies so infuriated the Koreans that

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[54] For the cables cited above see the forward to Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, *The Korean Situation: Authentic Accounts of Recent Events* (New York, 1919); For more on Sydney Gulick's Japanese sympathies see Akifumi Nagata, "American Missionaries in Korea and US-Japan Relations 1910–1920," *The Japanese Journal of American Studies*, no. 16 (2005): 169–70. See also his letter to Ransford S. Miller, Chief of Far Eastern Affairs Division of the State Department, 4 June 1919, *Records of the Department of State relating to Internal Affairs of Korea (Chosen), 1910-29* (Microcopy 426), 895.00/633

Henry Chung even accused him of being a Japanese agent.[55]

Rhee and others seethed at what they saw as CRO's support for Japanese colonialism, but the massive publicity windfall that resulted from the report furthered their cause.[56] It contained only a tenth of the eyewitness accounts CRO had received, and those appearing in the report had been carefully authenticated. It could not have been more damning for Japanese colonialism in Korea. The report verified the worst accusations against the Japanese. The violence had continued for months, much of it at the hands of the Japanese police against defenseless individuals in their custody. Koreans suspected of involvement in the March First Movement were hung by their fingers, beaten, had their fingernails removed, and were burned with cigarettes, among other tortures. The sexual humiliation of Korean women figured prominently in many eyewitness accounts. Korean women were stripped naked and left so for several days while they were beaten, tortured, and interrogated.[57] The tortures did not end with the interrogations. Many Koreans found guilty of involvement in the demonstrations were sentenced to flogging. A typical sentence was ninety strokes over three days; an ordeal that turned their flesh "into a pulp." Being denied medical treatment during the duration of their beatings, many of the flogged developed fatal infections.[58]

The report also revealed that indiscriminate violence was used against Korean

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[55] Henry Chung to Syngman Rhee, 13 May 1920, Lew, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 2:352.

[56] Rhee remonstrated with Methodist-Episcopal Bishop and long-time friend Herbert Welch over the preface of "The Korean Situation" arguing that showing undo deference to the Japanese, and thereby alienating Koreans, might do more damage to American missionary work in Korea than offending the Japanese by supporting Korean independence. See Rhee to Welch 28 July 1919, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 1:168–69.

[57] Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, *The Korean Situation*, 18, 47–50, 50, 54.

[58] Ibid., 125.

Christians in the countryside in order to suppress the protests. On 16 April, nearly a month after the height of the protests, Japanese police gathered all of the male Christian residents of Jeam-ri (재암리) in the village church where they were summarily executed and the church burned. The fire spread to nearby houses destroying nearly the entire village. When the American consul arrived to investigate, he learned that other nearby "Christian" villages had also been burned. Other missionaries also reported villages and churches burned, which substantiated the Koreans' claim that the Japanese were singling out Korean Christians in retribution for their leaders' participation in the March First Movement.[59]

CRO's report revealed that Japanese brutality was not just an isolated overreaction to a nation-wide demonstration; the violence had been systematic and premeditated. Despite CRO's intentions to use the report to strengthen Japanese liberals' influence in Korea, it served to discredit the Japanese colonial endeavor. Rather than being the final word on atrocities in Korea, CRO's report opened the floodgates of media attention on the situation. *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *The Washington Post* reprinted portions of the report, and the Associated Press distributed it to local papers from La Crosse, Wisconsin, to Bakersfield, California.[60] In June and July the first photos of Japanese atrocities also began appearing in the United States. Severed limbs, gangrenous flesh, and shattered skulls silenced those who accused the Koreans of

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[59] All the above examples are taken from ibid., 68–72.

[60] "Christians Slaughtered by Japanese Soldiers," *Bakersfield Californian*, July 12, 1919; "Presbyterians Tell of Japanese Atrocities Against Koreans," *La Crosse Tribune and Leader-Press*, July 12, 1919; "Jap Atrocities Told in Report: Presbyterians Cite Cruelties Against Christians; Every Human Refinement in Brutality, Alleged," *Los Angeles Times*, July 13, 1919; "Says Japanese Killed 361 Koreans: Council of Churches Amplifies the Charges of Wholesale Atrocities by Police," *New York Times*, July 16, 1919; "Sword Rules Korea," *Washington Post*, July 16, 1919.

fabricating sensational stories and fueled sympathy for their cause.[61]

This increase of sympathy helped the Koreans through what would have otherwise been a depressing time. In May of 1919 it became clear that the hopes placed in Wilson and the League of Nations would come to nothing. Far from rolling back Japanese encroachments in Asia, the Japanese enhanced their position by gaining control of the Shantung peninsula in China. Furthermore, the wording of the Covenant of the League of Nations guaranteed the "territorial integrity" of its members and explicitly claimed to have no jurisdiction in "domestic" matters; two clauses that the Koreans interpreted as preempting any attempts to use the league as a forum for regaining their independence.[62] Frustrated, Rhee turned against Wilson and the league to focus on Congress and the American People. In his first official message as president of the KPG in June 1919, Rhee told the members of the Korean National Council that their efforts should be focused on the United States, because there the Koreans enjoyed "the good will of a great, generous, and liberty loving people, and ultimately, through their influence and pressure and final practical help, of a great government." Rhee assured them that prominent American citizens had formed "numerous societies and leagues" to support the Korean cause and that everyday clippings showing American sympathy came to his

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[61] Photographs from various press agencies were published in an undated pamphlet entitled "Japanese Atrocities: Reports Emphasized and made convincing by Japanese Propaganda," in 1919. The pamphlet had no author and no publisher but documents reprinted within the pamphlet indicate that Henry Chung and Syngman Rhee were involved. It was likely printed by either the Korean Commission or the Korean Information Bureau. Hathi Trust has preserved a digital copy of this pamphlet <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015013507382>. A similar pamphlet with the title of "The Korean Independence Movement" has been digitized by Columbia University. See *The Korean independence movement* [S.l. : s.n., 1919?]Electronic reproduction. New York, N.Y. : Columbia University Libraries, 2010. JPEG use copy available via the World Wide Web. NNC. *Columbia University Libraries Electronic Books.* 2006.

[62] "Korea, Japan, and the Covenant", *Korea Review* September 1920, 12. Articles 10 and 15 of the Covenant of the League of Nations contained the language that seemed to preempt Korea's appeals for independence.

office. If they stuck with this strategy "the future looks very bright for Korea."[63]

Rhee's assessment was obviously optimistic, but the March First Movement and the international response to it had given Koreans more reason to hope than at any time since Rhee's meeting with Theodore Roosevelt during the Portsmouth Peace Conference in 1904. Cooperation between Korean organizations in the United States provided Rhee with sufficient funds to hire a small staff for his Washington office and Jaisohn's in Philadelphia. With these resources Jaisohn turned the *Korea Review* into a much more sophisticated publication capable of advocating for American support without the awkward prose and metaphors of earlier editions.

Sympathetic media coverage allowed the League of Friends of Korea to expand and to plan more elaborate mass meetings. The San Francisco branch's "A Night in Korea" at the St. Frances Hotel in October of 1919 featured a full program of entertainment, including vocal and instrumental numbers, poetry readings, a motion picture, and an exhibition of the Korean arts performed by "pretty Korean university girls." Henry Chung gave the keynote lecture, "The Case of Korea," which warned that if not stopped the Japanese would become an "irresistible vampire among the nations thirty years hence." Notable attendees included the American minister to China, Paul Reinsch, who was soon to resign in protest over Wilson's acquiescence to Japanese demands for the Shantung Peninsula, and Mary Phelan, whose father, California Senator James D. Phelan, would later introduce resolutions in the Senate showing sympathy for Korea.[64] Similarly elaborate meetings were held on the East Coast. A Philadelphia

[63] Syngman Rhee to Korean National Council, 7 July 1919, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 1:161–65.

[64] "International Fete", *Korea Review*, December 1919, 12.

meeting was held in the Academy of Music, Philadelphia's opera house, and featured entertainment by the Boston Grand Opera Company's soprano Helen Stover, as well as a lecture by U.S. Senator Selden Spencer, who called Korea the only "Christian nation" in Asia and assured his audience that its acceptance of Christianity was unequalled in the history of the world. God was obviously at work in Korea, and Americans had a responsibility to support this work.[65] The New York branch filled Town Hall in New York City to capacity to hear U.S. Congressman William E. Mason draw parallels between Korea's cry for liberation and his own family's involvement in liberating slaves via the Underground Railroad. Mason claimed that promoting liberty abroad had been American policy since Thomas Jefferson's administration, and this policy necessitated aid to Korea. Attendees were treated to the music of noted New York violinist J. Parker Russell between speakers.[66]

In less than two years the League of Friends of Korea went from Reading, Pennsylvania, to Town Hall in New York City, from local pastors and church choirs to U.S. congressmen and professional musicians. It became an enormously valuable asset to the Korean cause. The league offered Americans concerned about Korea an opportunity to collectively respond to the Korean situation. It also gave the Koreans legitimacy. Rhee and Jaisohn no longer represented only their countrymen. When lobbying for Korea they could tell their audiences that there were already thousands of Americans "of the best sort" supporting them. Indeed patriotism was closely linked to Christianity in the league's propaganda. Advertisements frequently printed on the back cover of the *Korea Review*

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[65] "Senator Spencer's Address", *Korea Review*, June 1920, 9-12.

[66] "Review of Mass Meeting in New York", *Korea Review*, March 1921, 3-4; "Mason Raps Japan for Piracy in Korea," *New York Times*, March 3, 1921.

proclaimed "***Show Your American Spirit by Joining the League of the Friends of Korea***" and gave six reasons to join. The first was "membership in this League means that you are a red-blooded American who believes in a square deal between individuals as well as between nations, your sympathy is with the oppressed, and your aim is to uphold justice and liberty in all lands." Although Christians dominated the league its appeals drew as heavily on the American mission of promoting justice and liberty as it did on the Christian "great commission." In this particular advertisement it was not until the fourth reason for joining the league that the "Korean mission field" was mentioned.[67]

As potent as the league was, it also had its shortcomings. It favored breadth over depth. Eager to claim as many members as possible, membership in the league was free and rather informal; Tomkins claimed the league had 25,000 members by 1921, but there is no indication that the league kept a centralized membership roll so this could not have been more than a guess, and probably a rather optimistic one.[68] Advertisements for the league announced that for $3 a year one could become an "active member" entitled to a subscription to the *Korea Review*, but this sum only covered the cost of the subscription and would not have provided the league's central office—in fact Jaisohn's Korean Information Bureau—with adequate funds to develop the league's membership. In fact all decisions about membership, funds, and activities seemed to have been left up to the presidents of the local branches to decide. This decentralized structure allowed the league to expand quickly, but also meant that the leadership had difficulty coordinating its

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[67] For this advertisement see the back cover of the *Korea Review*, December 1920.

[68] Tomkins to Charles Evens Hughes, December 1921, Lew, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 5:515–18; The Japanese government disputed these numbers, claiming that the organization never had more than 3000 members. See Jeong-hyu Ko, *이 승만 과 한국 독립 운동 [Syngman Rhee and the Korean Independence Movement]* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 2004), 370–71.

activities. In some ways the league was more a mailing list of supporters than an organization.

Decentralization meant that the goals of the league where not always in accord with those of the Korean independence movement. Most of the local branch petitions stopped short of calling for the restoration of Korea's independence even while they argued that the United States had certain responsibilities toward Korea.[69] This may have been by design. Demanding an end to Japanese brutality in Korea was something nearly all Americans, even those with pro-Japanese sympathies, could agree on; demanding Korea's independence was more contentious.[70] Regardless, the league's petitions showed a gap between what the Koreans wanted and what many of their American supporters were willing to advocate.

**The Curious Case of George Benedict**

The strengths and shortcomings of the league can perhaps be best understood through the lens of the eccentric individual who claimed to be its founder, George A. Benedict. Benedict had no interest in or knowledge of Korea prior to entering Philip Jaisohn's stationary shop on a routine errand in March 1919. He arrived just as Rhee and Jaisohn were receiving reports of the March First Movement. Upon seeing the two Koreans moved to tears by pride for their countrymen and profound sadness for their fate, Benedict lost interest in the pencils he had come to buy and instead started asking

[69] For a selection of these petitions see the *Korea Review* April 1920, 12-13; May 1920, 14. Compare these to the more forceful earlier petitions of the League, which although they did not call directly for Korea's independence emphasized that the March First Movement had declared Korea to be independent and made their appeals in that context. See the *Korea Review* July 1919, 15; August 1919, 9.

[70] Many of the resolutions and petitions follow the same format and were likely ghostwritten for Philip Jaisohn by Fred A. Dolph, the legal adviser to the Korean Commission. See *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 6:258.

questions. By doing so he learned a story that "revolutionized" his life. Rhee and Jaisohn showed Benedict reports of the Japanese brutality complete with pictures of "[Korean] students with the flesh flayed off their bodies with the lash" all for the crime of yelling "hurrah for Korea." The Koreans laid out the whole tale of Japanese treachery and brutality as well as of the Koreans willingness to accept Christianity and desire for freedom and republican government. Benedict learned that the Japanese were "heathens" and the Koreans "mostly Christians" which made the struggle between them "more bitter. For the Koreans fought both as patriots and martyrs and were dying heroically both for country and Christ." The injustice of the situation and Americans' ignorance of it inspired Benedict. "Why not bring your cause before the American people, who will not stand for this a moment once they know it?" he asked them. The Koreans told Benedict that they had no money to spread their message or to counter the Japanese propaganda that always put "Korea in the wrong." From this point Benedict dedicated himself to bringing the Korean cause to the American people. In his autobiography he claims that holding the final session of the First Korean Congress in Independence Hall was his idea, as was the League of Friends of Korea, and that he recruited Tomkins to be its first president while he acted as secretary. Throughout 1919 Benedict toured the eastern states speaking at churches, universities, Sunday schools, and civic clubs raising awareness of Korea and founding new branches of the league. Benedict's advocacy of the Korean cause would not be remarkably different from other Americans who passionately supported Korea during the period except for one thing: Benedict was not a Christian, but a Jewish Rabbi. [71]

[71] The meeting between Benedict, Rhee, and Jaisohn is recorded in George Benedict, *Christ Finds a Rabbi: An Autobiography* (Philadelphia: Bethlehem Presbyterian Church, 1932), 127–33.

George Benedict immigrated to the United States from Britain in 1900 as a young Rabbi seeking greater religious freedom. Like the earliest American religious refugees Benedict emigrated in order to escape intra-religious persecution. Through a long and painful process, Benedict had come to believe that Jesus was the Messiah and that recognizing him as such would not only redeem Judaism, but also unite Jews and Christians in worship of the one true God. Benedict mostly kept these views to himself while in Britain, but reading about more liberal Rabbis in the U.S. inspired him to immigrate to the United States in search of a community that might accept him. Benedict quickly fell in love with the United States and became a devoted convert to the American mission. In his 1932 autobiography *Christ Finds a Rabbi*, Benedict called American Christianity "the hope of the world", wrote poems praising the global vision of Theodore Roosevelt, and argued that American moral leadership in the world was essential to the "solvency of civilization."[72] Benedict was imbued with his own sense of mission. He was born on *Purim*, the day that Jews commemorate their deliverance from a genocidal plot as recorded in the *Book of Esther*. Benedict saw his birth date as auspicious and hoped that he would be a second Mordecai for his people. His longing to be a redeemer of peoples may have motivated him to take up the Korean cause.[73]

Benedict claims that when he first met Rhee and Jaisohn he was by no means a Christian, but that through his exposure to Korean Christians and their American supporters he came to understand the power of Christianity; which he believed emanated from Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. The passion that drove Jesus to sacrifice himself to save mankind lived on in the hearts of Christians and compelled them to sacrifice for others.

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[72] Ibid., 3, 108ff, 111.

[73] Ibid., 91.

The Koreans inspired Benedict and he zealously promoted their cause. He was a dynamic speaker who knew how to craft his message. Two of his addresses on Korea, reprinted in the *Korea Review,* reveal how he made use of the American mission to prick the consciences of his audiences. In his rhetoric Benedict sounded much more like a WASPish Yankee than an immigrant Jewish Rabbi. In an address entitled "Korean Martyrs" Benedict compared Jaisohn and Rhee to Franklin and Washington: men not ashamed to "submit their cause to God, believing it righteous" and claimed Rhee was "one of the truest, most earnest Christians living in the wide world." He claimed the awakening of Korea was the result of the American mission at work there and that America's response to Korea would signal just how serious the United States was about fulfilling this mission. "I ask you to come to the rescue of a martyred people, martyred for those very principles which are, or should be, dear to our own hearts.[74] In another address he asked his audience repeatedly "Are we Americans?" and demanded that the question be answered "not by the test of the mouth, but by the test of deed." World War I had been a harsh test of Americanism, but even by that victory "Americanism is not made safe." While praising the sacrifices of the American people during the war he decried the American government for sacrificing the cause of justice at Versailles. The failure to confront the Japanese at Versailles was a betrayal of Americanism, which now had to be rectified.[75] Benedict, despite being an immigrant, or perhaps because of being an immigrant, had learned to speak the idiom of the American mission.

The Koreans did not seem too concerned that Benedict was a Rabbi. Over supper one evening, Rhee asked Benedict to consider becoming a missionary to Korea. When

[74] George Benedict, "Korean Martyrs", *Korea Review*, July 1919, 4.

[75] George Benedict, "Americanism and the Immigrant", *Korea Review*, October 1919, 10-11.

Benedict declined, saying he was not a Christian, but a Jewish Rabbi and that he was helping the Koreans for the sake of humanity and not for Christianity, Rhee responded, "What is humanity at its best but Christianity? Christ is working in you, has half won you, and will win you altogether."[76] Benedict called Rhee's statements prophetic, and a few months later, while speaking on behalf of Korea at the Third Christian Church in Philadelphia Benedict took communion for the first time and became a "Christian Jew" like "Paul on the road to Damascus."[77] Although Benedict considered taking communion a conversion of sorts, he maintained his Jewish identity and continued to serve as a Rabbi. He was soon under attack in the Philadelphia Jewish community for speaking in Christian churches in defense of Korea. Benedict defended himself by enlisting other Jewish leaders to join the Korean cause, including Henry Berkowitz who was a notable Reformed Jewish Rabbi. Berkowitz even agreed to participate as a speaker in the First Korean Congress. He also went further to protect Benedict when he admonished fellow Rabbis for criticizing Benedict's activities. "Just because he is a Jew and a rabbi is the reason why his heart should be engaged in this cause," he told a rabbinical opponent of Benedict's.[78]

Benedict's experience demonstrates the power of the Korean appeal to move even those who were not Christians. Benedict himself was an oddity in this regard because of his unorthodox beliefs about Jesus, but his ability to convince Berkowitz and others to support Korea is a powerful testament to the resonance that many Americans, regardless of their religious affiliation, could find in the Korean story. All Americans, excepting indigenous peoples, have immigrant connections, faint or fervent, to a distant homeland.

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[76] Benedict, *Christ Finds a Rabbi*, 142.

[77] Ibid., 152.

[78] Ibid., 136.

This was especially true in the early 20th century when immigration to the United States was at its peak. In the Korean story many former immigrants would be able to recognize the confluence of factors that had driven their forbearers abroad. For those who found a new life in the United States, like Benedict, the Korean story might have also rekindled their affection for the United States and its values as well as a desire to see them spread back to their homelands.

The Koreans benefitted greatly from Benedict's organizing, but the denouement of his involvement also carried a warning. By December 1919 Benedict was gone. Ostensibly he left to become a Rabbi of a Reformed Synagogue in Tampa, Florida, but criticism from other Philadelphia Rabbis for his "pro-Christian" activism also played a role.[79] By all accounts the severing of his relationship with the Koreans was amicable. Benedict had nothing but praise for them in his autobiography, especially for Rhee. Rhee sent him a warm letter of thanks for his service on receiving his resignation as secretary of the League of Friends of Korea, adding, "your good activities will long live in the memories of our people."[80] But Benedict's autobiography also gave another reason for his departure; he believed that he had worked himself out of a job. He wrote that the resolutions sent to Congress by the League of Friends of Korea caused such American ire that "the massacres and outrages ceased. Such is the respect Japan has for the United States."[81] By the fall of 1919 the worst of the Japanese abuses against the Koreans had

[79] Benedict himself never explicitly linked the criticism of his activism for the Koreans with his decision to leave Philadelphia for Florida, but he does include a poem in his memoir that was "wrung out" of his soul by the "slanderous criticism" he received from other Jewish rabbis for his interest in Korean Christians. See Ibid., 313.

[80] Syngman Rhee to George Benedict, 31 December 1919, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 1:228.

[81] Benedict, *Christ Finds a Rabbi*, 133, see also 155.

ended. The Governor-General of Korea had been replaced and Japanese policy shifted towards less violent means of control. The situation had improved, but Benedict's declaration of victory was myopic and self-serving. It should have been a warning to the Koreans of the volatility of appealing to the American mission. The Koreans were attempting to build a coalition to restore Korea's independence, but the issue that stuck out to most Americans was the Japanese violence. Koreans could not separate the two, but Americans could. Ending the violence was a cause that would unite nearly all Americans, but supporting Korean independence was not. So while surely many Americans could recognize the injustice done to Korea by its colonization and acknowledge the enabling role the United States played in Korea's annexation, the temptation to declare mission accomplished when the violence ceased was irresistible for many. Benedict was notable among American friends of Korea for his passionate entrance and early exit, but few Americans had the appetite to extend the American mission as far as the Koreans wanted to take it: championing Korea's independence. As a result, even as the number of their American supporters grew, the gap between what most Americans were willing to push for and what the Koreans hoped for was widening.

**Korea on the Chautauqua Circuit**

The League of Friends of Korea was not the only avenue for Koreans to reach Americans with their message. The league's mass meetings, with their mixture of entertainment and informative lectures, were modeled on the popular circuit Chautauqua format. Though almost forgotten today, in the days before radio, Chautauquas provided millions of Americans living outside of major cities with access to intellectual stimulation and entertainment. Circuit Chautauqua had its roots in the Lyceum Movement and the Chautauqua Institution, both of which provided educational programs for working adults

in the latter half of the 19th century. Lyceums and Chautauquas became important institutions in many small and medium sized towns in the Midwest and Eastern United States. But not all communities could afford to maintain such an institution. Seeing an opportunity Iowan Keith Vawter founded the Redpath Chautauqua Association in 1904. Vawter's innovation was that instead of each community maintaining its own Chautauqua or Lyceum, a central bureau could book speakers and entertainers who would then travel from town to town offering a three- to five-day program of lectures, plays, and musical performances out of a large tent. By keeping its programs on tour for months at a time rather than planning one-time events, the Chautauqua associations took advantage of economies of scale and were able to secure professional talent at a price small town America could afford. For a few days every summer the Chautauqua tent served as a university, theater, and arts center for countless small towns across the American heartland. Circuit Chautauqua quickly became a major American institution in the 1910s and 1920s. Williams Jennings Bryan, Robert La Follette, Eugene Debs, and Carl Sandburg all spoke on Chautauqua circuits. So did six presidents: Coolidge, Harding, Hoover, Theodore Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson.[82] "The Chautauqua is the most American thing in America." Roosevelt is to have said.[83]

Koreans realized the opportunity the Chautauqua offered them to spread their message. Initially, the League of Friends of Korea set up its own tours for Rhee, Jaisohn, Chung, and others in Rotary Clubs, YMCAs, and universities across the Northeast and

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[82] John E Tapia, *Circuit Chautauqua: From Rural Education to Popular Entertainment in Early Twentieth Century America* (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland & Co, 1997), 44.

[83] Ibid., 84.

Upper-Midwest in the summer of 1919.[84] These speaking engagements drew attention to the Korean cause, but keeping speakers on the road taxed the league's human and capital resources. In late 1919, Edward F. Reimer, a participant in the First Korean Congress and also the director of the Swarthmore Chautauqua Association, encouraged the league to use Chautauquas to reach a wider audience at minimal cost, since the association would do all the booking and even pay the lecturer. In the summer of 1919, Reimer went on the Chautauqua circuit himself and spoke to more than 90,000 people on the subject of Korea.[85]

With Reimer's assistance former missionaries Homer B. Hulbert and Stephen A. Beck went on the Chautauqua circuit multiple times between 1920 and 1922. Their experiences in Korea provided them with stories that were well suited to a Chautauqua lecture. Hulbert had been a confidant of Emperor Gojong and one of his secret envoys to the United States seeking American aid under the 1882 treaty. He had irrefutable evidence that the State Department under Roosevelt had ignored Korea's appeals for American "good offices" and so had violated its treaty obligations. Beck had been an eyewitness of the March First Movement and spared no details when lecturing on the subject: "Heads were cut open, and men and women were thrown in jail… school girls brutally flogged," all for the crime of shouting "mansei."[86] Telling a vivid story was essential for success on the Chautauqua circuit, and the reviews of Hulbert and Beck

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[84] "Dr. Rhee's Speaking Tour", *Korea Review*, November 1919, 9; "Dr. Rhee's Speaking Tour", *Korea Review*, December 1919, 5; "Pleads U. S. Moral Support for Korea," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, December 7, 1919; "Dr. Hulbert Gives Address on Far East," *New Castle News*, December 20, 1919; "Henry Chung Puts in Holiday Time in Korean Cause," *Kearney Daily Hub*, December 27, 1919.

[85] Philip Jaisohn to Syngman Rhee, 27 December 1919, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 2:313.

[86] Quotes taken from the *Boston Transcript*, 12 January 1920 and reprinted in "Korean Meeting at the Boston University", *Korea Review*, February 1920, p.15.

praised their abilities to do so. *The Boston Transcript* called Hulbert's lectures "more interesting than romance; a true story, and yet it has all the fascination of the best fiction." The *St. Louis Republican* said Hulbert "bids us pause in our complacency over the Far Eastern situation long enough to include in our view some facts not heretofore generally known."[87] Beck's lectures were judged so effective by reviews sent to George W. Stearns, vice-president of the League of Friends of Korea, that he wrote Rhee suggesting that Beck be kept on tour constantly.[88]

Beck and Hulbert were not just storytellers. Their exciting, exotic, and sometimes violent anecdotes of life in Korea—illuminated with lanternslides in Hulbert's case—were entertaining for sure, but they were also encapsulated in a larger more substantive message. Korea's embrace of Christianity made it the pride of American missionaries. Now Koreans were demanding Americans act according to the principles and values its missionaries preached. "The future course of Christian enlightenment in the Far East is at stake. Korea has virtually forced the hand of western civilization, and we must decide what we are going to do about it," Hulbert wrote in the Presbyterian national publication *The Interior* in October 1919. One million Korean Christians had convinced their non-Christian countrymen that the nonviolent approach of the March First Movement would be successful because Christians worldwide would respond to it. Now they were looking to their Christian countrymen saying "You told us the Christian world would listen. You induced us by visions of an outraged Christendom to fling ourselves unarmed upon the

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[87] Quotations taken from Hulbert's promotional materials in "Traveling Culture - Circuit Chautauqua in the Twentieth Century" collection at the University of Iowa. Available online at <http://digital.lib.uiowa.edu/cdm/ref/collection/tc/id/63629>. [Accessed 11 April 2013]

[88] George W. Stearns to Syngman Rhee, 6 June 1920, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 2:385.

bayonets for Japan, and all for what?" Hulbert explained that the Koreans were calling out to the Christian world saying: "It is now up to you to determine whether the love of liberty which Christianity, brought to us by you, has inculcated shall prove our own undoing." All the gains of Christianity in Asia could be reversed if Americans did nothing he warned. Americans must demand Korea's freedom "in God's name, in the name of common liberty, and in the name of the very basis of our own republic."[89]

Hulbert and Beck were not the only speakers on the Chautauqua circuits taking up the issue of Korea during this time. William T. Ellis, notable writer on religious topics and biographer of Billy Sunday, went on the Swarthmore Chautauqua circuit to lecture about Korea in 1920.[90] Dr. George E. Raiguel regularly lectured on Japan for several Chautauqua circuits, and while the content of his lectures are not known, two poems he submitted to the *Korea Review*[91] leave no question about his views on Japan's colonization of Korea:

**Korea and Shantung**
Two maidens,
Bound and gagged,
Beaten to insensibility,
Lie along the highway.
Ah God!
The people see them,
But, behold,
The rapers
Stealthily approach
Again!

**Korea**
He Possessed her,
Not as the bridegroom,
Tenderly pressing his kiss
Upon her lips
In consummation
Of their mutual love,
But as the bully,
The thief,
The assassin,
Binding and gagging and raping

Longtime medical missionary in Korea, Dr. Harry Whiting, resigned from the

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[89] Homer B Hulbert, "What Korea's Appeal Means," *The Interior*, October 16, 1919.

[90] "News Items", *Korea Review*, July 1920, 13.

[91] *Korea Review*, February 1920, 10.

Presbyterian Board after the March First Movement and returned to the United States to inform the American people of the "true" situation in Korea, which he said was being hidden by the mission boards for fear of Japanese retaliation. He toured his native Iowa and other Midwestern states for the International Lyceum and Chautauqua Association. Apparently a man of boundless energy, he wrote the *Korea Review* in October of 1920 to announce that he had just completed his 266th lecture on Korea. He frequently lectured twice a day on consecutive days in the same town, as he did in Janesville, Wisconsin where over two days he spoke at the Twilight Club, the Presbyterian Church, the Rotary Club, and addressed 700 students at the local High School. The *Janesville Gazette* gave him front-page coverage and told its readers "He showed the marvelous growth of Christianity [in Korea] since it had been introduced 35 years ago, and that it was toward the churches, teachers, and preachers of the gospel that the Japanese have vented their hatred." He warned that what the Japanese had done in Korea they would do in the rest of Asia, resulting in a "gigantic" war if not stopped.[92]

One of the most famous Chautauqua lecturers of the time was Korean PARK No-yong.[93] PARK began lecturing out of financial necessity while studying at Evansville College in Indiana. Because of his limited English, lecturing did not come easy. He practiced his first five-minute lecture every day for three months before his pronunciation

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[92] "Friends of Korea", *Korea Review*, November 1920, 10; "Mount Pleasant Man Involved in Korean Trouble"; "Korea 'Morning Star of the East' Dr. Whiting Says," *Burlington Hawk Eye*, February 14, 1920; "Missionary Charges Japanese Trying to Wreck Church in Korea by Deaths," *Waterloo Evening Courier*, September 13, 1920; "Dr. Whiting Talks," *Adams County Union-Republican*, December 1, 1920; "War Due Unless Japan Is Curbed," *Janesville Daily Gazette*, December 15, 1920.

[93] PARK's importance to the Korean independence movement has often been overlooked because at certain points of his life he identified as Chinese instead of Korean for reasons that are unclear, but likely related to his being raised in Manchuria after his parents fled the Japanese occupation of Korea. He generally refers to himself as Chinese in an early autobiography. see No-yong Park, *Chinaman's Chance: An Autobiography* (Boston: Meador Publishing Company, 1940).

was understandable. "America and Asia" was a long time in the making but after his first recitation of it for a student literary society it caught on "like wildfire" in the churches and social clubs of Evansville, Indiana. It is not difficult to understand why. "The new wind of freedom is blowing through the ancient corridors of the East and a new era of civilization is dawning" PARK proclaimed. "If the new era which is now dawning in the Orient is to be blessed with success and glory . . . America must assume the role of leadership, Uncle Sam must play the role of a modern Moses in leading the teeming millions of awakening peoples in the founding of a new culture and a new civilization." Only the United States, which had "always fought and bled for justice and righteousness, for the rights of mankind and the freedom of the world" was capable of this role.[94]

This short affirmation of the American mission launched PARK's career. He expanded this lecture and gave it repeatedly in churches and clubs around Indiana, building his confidence as a public speaker. In 1924 he was "discovered" by the Redpath Chautauqua Association of Chicago and hired at 85 dollars a week—premium wages at the time—to lecture on their circuit. Over the years PARK expanded his repertoire to include humorous comparisons of American and Asian societies, in which he lampooned both. He became predominantly known as a humorist and writer, albeit one with a Ph.D. from Harvard. PARK continued speaking and writing on substantive issues regarding Japan's expansion into East Asia, always with an eye towards securing greater American involvement in the region. As late as 1940 he was still invoking the ideas that had launched his career.[95]

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[94] Ibid., 38–39.

[95] Ibid., 182.

The Chautauqua associations gave the Koreans unprecedented exposure. These speakers entered the Chautauqua during its golden age. In 1924, 8,000 communities around the United States hosted a Chautauqua with an estimated attendance of 40 million.[96] Jaisohn estimated that Hulbert and Beck alone had presented the case of Korea to 200,000 people during their 1920 tours.[97] Considering that five other men were on the Chautauqua circuit lecturing on Korea during the same period, many of them for several years, it is conceivable that as many as a half a million, possibly more, Americans might have heard a Chautauqua lecture on Korea during the 1920s. This was a remarkable accomplishment considering the limited resources at the Koreans' disposal. It also says a great deal about the American public's interest in Korea, foreign relations, and the American mission. Chautauqua administrators were shrewd businessmen. They would not book a lecturer who did not sell tickets, and would not reengage one who proved unpopular. They calculated that Korea's story would move Americans, and if reviews of Hulbert's and Beck's lectures are any indication they were right.

**Korea in Print**

The Chautauqua lectures and the league's mass-meetings were an excellent way to broadcast Korea's plight to the American public, but the format was not well-suited to conveying in-depth information and sustained argumentation. Acknowledging the weakness of this medium, Rhee and Jaisohn used their resources to fund the production of monographs and other printed material to support their cause. Henry Chung proved

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[96] Tapia, *Circuit Chautauqua*, 32.

[97] This figure comes from a report written by Philip Jaisohn summarizing the propaganda activities of the Korean Information Bureau in the fall of 1920. The report is grouped together with the manuscripts of speeches given at the First Korean Congress under the title “"Philadelphia Conference 1919 Addresses and Resolutions" [Propaganda Report]” and can be found in the “First Korean Congress in Philadelphia Conference (1919)” folder, SRI.

to be their most effective author during this period. His three books between 1919 and 1921, which were published with the direct support of the Korean Commission, put the Korean case in writing, complete with full scholarly apparatus. Chung, who earned his Ph.D. from George Washington University in 1921, maintained a scholarly distance in his writing that impressed knowledgeable readers and earned him positive reviews. In *The Oriental Policy of the United States* Chung argued the Japanese long-term goal was the subjugation of the Asian mainland. That the book was published just prior to the March First Movement may have strengthened Chung's argument, giving the book an almost prophetic tone. His follow-up *The Case of Korea* published in 1921 was the most comprehensive account of the March First Movement written during the Japanese occupation period. Chung spared his readers none of the details, including a whole chapter on flogging, but also focused on the economic and religious suppression of the Korean people. His final chapters were dedicated to the hollowness of Japanese "reforms" in Korea, portraying them as a tactical shift in their long-term strategy of expansion.[98]

Chung's work received accolades from both the academic and political community. The prefaces to *The Oriental Policy of the United States* and *The Case of Korea* were written by Jeremiah Jenks of New York University and Senator Selden P. Spencer respectively. In his preface Spencer emphasized the American responsibility for Korea under the 1882 treaty: "This Treaty gave to Korea a 'big boy' friend upon whose strength and justice the twenty millions (present population) of Koreans instantly relied . . . Whatever may be the diplomatic situation of to-day, [sic] this fact cannot be morally

[98] Chung, *The Case of Korea: A Collection of Evidence on the Japanese Domination of Korea, and on the Development of the Korean Independence Movement*; Henry Chung, *The Oriental Policy of the United States*, (New York: Arno Press, 1970); Henry Chung, ed., *Korean Treaties* (New York: H.S. Nichols, 1919).

overlooked."[99] The Korean Commission heavily subsidized *The Case of Korea* by contracting with publishers to buy hundreds of copies, which they then distributed free of charge to churches, libraries, and individuals in over twenty-states. The commission's seeding of this publication paid dividends. It was reviewed by fourteen major newspapers including *The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times,* and *The Washington Post*, and through the Associated Press reviews appeared in hundreds of small town newspapers. Seventeen monthly publications also reviewed the book including the *Literary Digest, Review of Reviews,* and *The Outlook.*[100] This was a windfall of publicity that the Koreans could not have bought, and a testament to the growing sympathy for the Korean cause in the United States thanks to the March First Movement.

Chung's were not the only works the commission promoted and subsidized. By 1922 the *Korea Review* promoted seventeen titles on the back cover of each edition of its magazine.[101] These titles ranged from pamphlets of photos showing Japanese atrocities—mailed free of charge to anyone joining the League of Friends of Korea—to the novella *Hansu's Journey* by Philip Jaisohn, often credited as the first work of fiction published by a Korean-American. The majority of the publications were non-fiction works by western authors that argued that Western nations were responsible for Korea's political and spiritual awakening through their missionary endeavors. "You, the Christians of the United States and of Canada, are largely responsible for these people," wrote journalist and author Frederick A. McKenzie in his book *Korea's Fight for Freedom*. "The teachers you

[99] Chung, *The Case of Korea: A Collection of Evidence on the Japanese Domination of Korea, and on the Development of the Korean Independence Movement*, 8–9.

[100] Henry Chung to Syngman Rhee, 10 April 1922, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, vol. 3 (Institute for Modern Korean Studies, Yonsei University, 2009), 168–69.

[101] For the lists of titles that the *Korea Review* advertised see the inside cover of issues starting with October 1921.

sent and supported taught them the faith that led them to hunger for freedom. They taught them the dignity of their bodies and awakened their minds . . . Your teaching has brought them floggings, tortures unspeakable, death. I do not mourn for them, for they have found something to which the blows of the lashed twin bamboos and the sizzling of the hot iron as it sears their flesh are small indeed. But I would mourn for you, if you were willing to leave them unhelped, to shut your ears to their calls, to deny them your practical sympathy."[102] The Koreans understood the value of such advocacy. They not only provided McKenzie with information on Japanese atrocities, but also wired him $500 to cover much of the production costs of his book.[103]

A notable inclusion in the *Korea Review's* list of works was "The Germany of Asia" by the editor of *The Sacramento Bee* V.S. McClatchy. McClatchy had long been wary of Japanese immigration to California and used his paper as a platform for anti-Japanese views. McClatchy happened to be traveling in Korea in March of 1919 and witnessed the brutality of the Japanese first hand. Already anti-Japanese, this experience converted him instantly into an ardent supporter of Korean independence. He agreed to smuggle out a translation of the Korean Declaration of Independence when he left Korea and was responsible for its publication by the Associated Press. He also struck up a correspondence with Rhee offering his services to help the Korean cause. "The Germany of Asia" was an eye-witness testimony of Japanese brutality in Korea and linked it to the dangers of Japanese immigration to the United States. McClatchy argued a Japanese propaganda machine was hiding the facts about Japanese expansion in Asia and many

[102] Frederick Arthur Mackenzie, *Korea's Fight for Freedom* (Fleming H. Revell, 1919), 302–303.

[103] Syngman Rhee to Frederick A. McKenzie, 14 February 1920, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 1:250.

Americans, including Sydney Gulick, of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ, were collaborators. Besides providing the Koreans with copies of his pamphlet at cost he also introduced them to his Washington correspondent C.C. Hart. He wrote Kiusic Kimm (김규식) of the Korean Commission telling him "If at any time, you think that it would be well to advise me confidentially of matters which should not be published, you may convey such matters to Mr. Hart with entire confidence, in the event that you do not wish to write directly to me."[104] McClatchy frequently closed his letters to Rhee by writing "if I can be of service to you in any way, you may command me."[105]

Rhee's relationship with McClatchy—he and McClatchy remained close until the publisher's death in 1935—offers an insight into how Rhee and the Korean independence movement navigated race-relations in the United States.[106] Most of the Americans that these Koreans dealt with were a self-selected group whose ideas on race ranged from progressive to paternalistic. McClatchy was different. Immigration historian Mae Ngai called him "one of California's most virulent racists."[107] He would eventually become the president of the California Joint Committee on Immigration—a committee dedicated to maintaining support for immigrant exclusion in California. Yet his racism was complex, more focused on the fear of being displaced by immigrants than the innate

[104] V. S. McClatchy to KIM Kyu-sik, 11 December 1919, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 4:584.

[105] See McClatchy's letter to Rhee in *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 2:317; *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 3:11.

[106] Their correspondence lasted until at least 1935, three years prior to McClatchy's death. Rhee recorded a lunch meeting with McClatchy in his diary on 28 March 1934. See Syngman Rhee to V. S. McClatchy, 26 February 1935, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 1:513–14 and Fields et al., *The Diary of Syngman Rhee*, 265.

[107] Mae M Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton University Press, 2014), 47.

inferiority of other races. In such anxiety, the Korean independence movement sensed an opportunity to focus American opprobrium on Japan while at the same time deflecting it from themselves.

Their ability to do this was predicated on their conviction that the United States was not their home. Rhee was adamant that he was not an immigrant, but an exile. The school he founded in Hawaii was conducted equally in English and Korean with the avowed aim of creating the future leaders of a Korean state.[108] Adding credence to this argument was the paltry number of Korean immigrants in the United States. Prior to Korean War Koreans in the United States numbered fewer than 10,000, and were only concentrated into a sizable community in Hawaii. Likewise, the leaders of the Korean independence movement in the United States almost all arrived as students, not immigrants. Even though they were a small minority of the entire Korean population, they provided a veneer of cosmopolitanism and non-threatening urbanity.

The real basis of cooperation between McClatchy and Rhee, however, was their shared hatred of the Japanese. Rhee offered McClatchy further evidence of Japanese perfidy and McClatchy offered the Korean independence movement media coverage. The Koreans were certainly not above stoking racial resentment of the Japanese in order to further their cause. Rhee would describe the Japanese in racialized terms that many Americans would recognize in his 1941 book *Japan Inside Out* (discussed in chapter five). Of course stoking such racial resentment was a risky strategy. Few Americans, racists or otherwise, were as well traveled as McClatchy and aware of the great cultural distinctions

[108] Oliver, *Syngman Rhee: The Man Behind the Myth*, 122–25. Oliver further explained that "[Rhee] was against the principle of amalgamation" and that Koreans in the United States "should dedicate themselves to the resurrection of their fallen nation." Oliver further placed Rhee's views in opposition to the district superintendent of the Methodist Mission in Hawaii who was "determined to end all racial segregation."

between the civilizations of East Asia. Rhee understood as much. In a 1934 letter to newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst, Rhee both condemned a recent editorial by Hearst claiming that Japanese and Americans could find ways to live in peace while also vigorously protesting that any war between them would be between the "white and yellow races." Rhee explained that the Koreans felt no racial kinship with the Japanese and would side with anyone, "white, yellow, or black," in their fight against them. He wanted it clearly understood that the great threat to the peace of the Pacific was not the "'yellow peril', but the Yamato peril."[109]

Early 20th century American society was full of prejudice to be sure. Rhee and others almost certainly experienced many of the same indignities that other non-whites in the United States experienced during the same period, though his extant writings do not record any such incidents. In his diary, Rhee kept fastidious records of exactly what hotels he used in each town he visited. This may have just been a personal proclivity, but it may have also been an effort to keep a record of places where he was assured a room and good service. From his actions, it appears that Rhee recognized American racial attitudes presented obstacles, but also opportunities for his movement. Rhee surely preferred to work with racial progressives when possible, but he not averse to allying with even avowed racists when it was useful to do so.

McClatchy proved to be a powerful ally whose influence stretched beyond California. He sat on the board of directors of the Associated Press, which picked up many Korea related stories, nearly all of them sympathetic. Starting in August of 1921 portraits of Rhee appeared in newspapers, many of them AP papers, from coast to coast,

[109] Syngman Rhee to William Randolph Hearst, 12 January 1934, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 1:511–12.

introducing him as the president of the KPG who was seeking justice for Korea in the United States. Rhee preserved over forty of these portraits among the thousands of clippings sent to the Korean Commission by the Luce Clippings Bureau in his personal scrapbooks.[110] The Luce clippings allowed the Koreans to keep tabs on the newspaper coverage of their movement, which was extensive and overwhelmingly positive. In late 1920 an unsigned Korean Information Bureau report claimed that since March 1919 over 8,000 newspaper articles (including reprints) had appeared in American newspapers in all parts of the country and listed 351 of the most notable articles.[111] Such expansive media coverage was the result of a number of factors: the sensational violence the Japanese used to repress the March First Movement, the proliferation of American missionaries in Korea, the hope that Americans had for Korea to become the first "Christian" nation in Asia, and not least of all the tireless efforts of Koreans in the United States to publicize their cause. Thanks to these factors the Korean situation received national exposure and, as the Koreans had hoped, Americans who believed in the American mission needed little convincing of the merits of the Korean case. They recognized it placed some degree of responsibility on the United States.

### Conclusion: The Prophet of the Plains II

The wide exposure of the Koreans' message ensured that it found its way into the hands of those most willing to receive it, even if they lived in the hamlet of Milford, Nebraska. It is impossible to say for certain how Thomas M. C. Birmingham first encountered the Koreans' appeal. He may have heard a Chautauqua lecture, read about

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[110] Over thirty of these scrapbooks are preserved in the archives at SRI. For an example of one of these portraits of Rhee see page 3 of *The Washington Times*, August 26, 1921.

[111] "Editorials, News Items, and Special Articles" in the "Korean Commission" folder, SRI.

it in his local paper, known a missionary to Korea, or perhaps he met Henry Chung when the latter was touring through Nebraska speaking and seeking signers for his petition from the Citizens of the State of Nebraska to the U.S. Congress urging them to investigate the Korean situation.[112] That there were so many ways Birmingham might have come into contact with the Koreans message is a testament to their efforts. Given his beliefs about the heaven ordained destiny of the United States, the Koreans accusation that the United States had been complicit in Korea's loss of independence, and their appeal to the United States for their salvation and the salvation of Christianity in Asia was no trifling matter. Birmingham believed that America's claim to world leadership and its divine election were conditional and dependent upon its behavior. If these accusations were true, Germany was not the only country guilty of regarding treaties as mere scraps of paper. Troubled by their accusations he wrote the Korean Commission in December 1921 stating his acquaintance with the justice of the Korean cause and requesting further information regarding the treaties broken by Theodore Roosevelt.[113] Six days later Fred A. Dolph, legal counselor to the Korean Commission answered. He sent Birmingham materials outlining the Korean case and detailing the United States treaty violations. "There is a new world of hope and courage in your letter," Dolph wrote. "There lies back of it sincere sympathy and perhaps prayers for twenty million Christian people in bondage under a Shinto ruler. It seems strange to me the indifference we [Americans] have shown as a people, to the only predominately [sic] Christian people of the orient. Letters from such as you show that the people are becoming familiar with the conditions,

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[112] For references to Chung's work in Nebraska see Syngman Rhee to Henry Chung, 3 January 1920, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 1:244–45. For the petition of the citizens of Nebraska to the U.S. Congress see the *Korea Review*, May 1920, 14.

[113] Thomas M. C. Birmingham to the Korean Commission, 13 December 1919, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 6:366.

and knowing them, will resent and help."[114]

Birmingham was eager to help, in his own way. One might suppose that the failure to ratify the Versailles Treaty had been a blow to his prophetic vision. Quite the contrary, it kept his hopes alive. Birmingham believed Wilson had forsaken biblical principles at Versailles and that the resulting treaty was "*un-American and un-Christian*."[115] His vision had been of world peace under *American* leadership, not a coalition of powers bound together by a deeply flawed treaty. Birmingham believed the prophecy contained in his sermon "World Peace Under American Leadership" had foretold the gathering of the great military powers in Washington, D.C., for the Washington Naval Conference in late 1921. It was on this stage that he believed the United States could usher in a new era of peace through disarmament, if only its leaders would "seek the Lord."[116] Not convinced they would do so, Birmingham took the quixotic step of attempting to have himself appointed to the American delegation to the conference based on his credentials as a prophet. In a letter to the Populist Party Leader and former presidential candidate Thomas E. Watson, Birmingham explained that Woodrow Wilson had been deceived at Versailles into making unholy alliances detrimental to the United States. Although Birmingham did not go into specifics, there can be no doubt that the acquiescence to Japanese control of Korea and the Shantung was among them. Birmingham argued that to prevent another flawed treaty the voice of the Lord must be represented on the American delegation by a prophet of his qualifications. Only then could Americans be

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[114] Fred A. Dolph to Thomas M. C. Birmingham, 19 December 1919, Ibid., 6:380.

[115] Letter from Thomas M. C. Birmingham to Thomas E. Watson, 9 August 1921. The Thomas E. Watson Papers #755, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <http://www.lib.unc.edu/dc/watson/>. [Accessed 11 March 13]. Emphasis in original

[116] Ibid.

confident that "gospel principles" would be observed.[117]

Birmingham's beliefs and behaviors were by no means typical of Americans, even very religious ones. He is rather more like a caricature that reveals a subtle truth by exaggerating it. Birmingham was unusual in his clarity of what the American mission actually was, when it could be fulfilled, and what his personal involvement in that fulfillment could be, but not for believing that an American mission existed. For those who believe in it, the American mission exists as a vague assumption that the United States has a special destiny or responsibility to be an agent of good in the world. This vagueness is precisely what makes the American mission so useful and attractive to those, like the Koreans, who would leverage it to command the attention, sympathy, and if possible the support of the American people. The Koreans, with and through their American supporters, were able to channel the abstract desires entailed in the American mission into action. In essence they challenged Americans to be the exceptional people that they claimed to be. "I am just wondering if you Koreans are not somewhat an instrument of a Providence that we do not always fully understand" one George L. Boyle told a mass meeting in Washington, D.C. in August 1919. Perhaps the Koreans had come to the United States "at this critical hour, this psychological hour" when the United States was contemplating forsaking their "traditional policy" and "fundamental doctrines" by entangling themselves with "autocracy and king-craft" to remind Americans of their uniquely-American mission and to reaffirm it.[118]

By appealing to the American mission, the Koreans built an American

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[117] Ibid.

[118] "Session of Korean commission to Consider Proclamation and Demands for Korean Independence", 30 August 1919, "Korean Provisional Government" folder, SRI.

constituency. It was small, but formidable. Its primarily religious makeup gave it seemingly limitless potential to expand. The Koreans had proven that their case resonated with American Christians of all denominations and while perhaps only a fraction of them had become active supporters this demographic had vast resources of political power that could not be ignored. The next chapter will focus on how the Korean Commission in Washington turned this public sympathy for Korea into political pressure during the fight over the Versailles Treaty and during the Washington Naval Conference.

# CHAPTER THREE: MR. RHEE GOES TO WASHINGTON: KOREA IN THE DEBATE OVER THE VERSAILLES TREATY AND THE WASHINGTON NAVAL CONFERENCE

## The Lawyer

Fred A. Dolph had an inauspicious start in life. He was born to a poor Iowan family sometime in April 1870 and orphaned by the age of seven. Had he not been "a born genius," Dolph would likely have spent his days breathing coal dust in the mines he labored in as a boy. He worked his way out of the mines through night school and correspondence courses and into a small law firm as a stenographer. Both the legal and technical tasks required of a law clerk agreed with him. Something of a mechanical genius, he was awarded his first patent in 1891 for a "type-writing machine" capable of typing entries directly into oversized ledger books. Typing machines became a lifelong passion for Dolph. He continued to earn patents and build machines of such complexity that they were featured in newspaper articles and science magazines.[1] His genius at law was no less impressive. From rural Illinois, Dolph worked his way into the notable Chicago law firm of Hopkins, Peffer, and Hopkins, founded by U.S. Senator Albert J. Hopkins.

Dolph's professional success was plagued by personal failure. His career in Chicago came to a sudden end in 1912 when he lost his family. Rhee, wanting to protect his friend, claimed that they died of influenza. Others claimed that Dolph "neglected" them, causing his wife to run off with a lover. The latter is closer to the truth. Dolph and his first wife divorced. She married the manager of a local theatre, and Dolph married his secretary at the law firm soon thereafter. A custody battle for their children resulted in embarrassing details becoming headlines in the Chicago papers. Ironically, Dolph's love

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[1] "New Speed Typing Like Printing," *Popular Science*, January 1927.

of typewriters played a role in revealing his indiscretions, and newspapers lampooned his personal tragedy as "The Terrible Tale of a Timid Tailor and a Typist." To add injury to insult, Dolph soon thereafter seriously damaged his voice, making it impossible for him to practice law in court. Although he had won custody of his children, when he arrived in D.C. sometime later he was unaccompanied by either his children or his second wife.[2] He was a man looking for a fresh start.

Dolph had overcome adversity before. He quickly began to reestablish his professional reputation as a contract writer. His personal life was more difficult to repair. He lived the "life of a hermit" in a Washington hotel writing a textbook on anatomy and "observing some experiments on guinea pigs"(!) trying to find a way to restore his voice.[3] Perhaps out of a need for companionship or a desire to atone for his previous misdeeds, Dolph took up a rather unusual hobby: Korean independence.

"He told me the Korean question gave him new spirit. He asked to take up our cause as legal adviser with no compensation," remembered Rhee in the 1950s. "He knew we were not in a position to pay him any fees for his services."[4] Dolph's willingness to join the cause was a remarkable instance of good fortune for the Koreans and coincided with Rhee's opening of the Korean Commission in Washington, D.C., in June 1919. The

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[2] Details of Dolph's life have been reconstructed from the following sources, Kim, *The Writings of Henry Cu Kim*, 162–63; Oliver, *Syngman Rhee: The Man Behind the Myth*, 355; "The Terrible Tale of a Timid Tailor and a Typist," *The Day Book*, April 3, 1913; "Custody of Children Is Refused Mae G. Dolph," *Rock Island Argus*, April 12, 1913; "Taken from the Dolphs," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 9, 1913; "Mrs. Mae Dolph Made Target," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 4, 1913; "Turned Out Light Dolph Row Cause," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 3, 1913; "Known as Aurora's Dressiest Woman.," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 3, 1913; "Pajamas an Issue at Dolph Trial," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 2, 1913; "His Love Book a Boomerang," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 1, 1913.

[3] Fred A. Dolph to S. H. Bracey, 28 October 1921, Lew, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 6:254; Kim, *The Writings of Henry Cu Kim*, 163.

[4] Oliver, *Syngman Rhee: The Man Behind the Myth*, 355; In fact Dolph's own financial reports indicate that he was eventually paid for his services a fee of $100 a month. See *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 6:89, 143.

Korean Commission served as the unofficial Korean legation in Washington, overseeing all lobbying and diplomatic efforts to gain recognition for the KPG. Gaining sympathy or recognition from the United States government would be a difficult task. If the Koreans were to have any hope of doing so, the commission had to be efficiently run and professionally staffed. Despite his excellent education and long residence in the United States, Rhee had neither the time nor the skills to manage the day-to-day operations of the commission, nor did he have the connections in Washington to turn the commission into an effective lobbying organization. Dolph had both, and was soon indispensable.

Officially Dolph was the legal adviser to the commission, but his duties were more numerous. He kept the account books, wrote financial reports, carried on a good deal of the commission's English correspondence, lobbied congressmen, and acted as one of the movement's chief strategic advisers. His was a cautious voice that tempered the more aggressive approach that many Koreans preferred. He consistently counseled against making direct demands for recognition or attempting to turn the Korean Commission into an official embassy or legation, believing that once this demand was rejected by the State Department, as it surely would have been, the Koreans would have no further recourse. He preferred an indirect lobbying approach that stressed American obligations towards Korea under the 1882 Korean-American Treaty. He believed the Koreans had a "legal case without flaw" in requesting American assistance and only needed to make this case known to yield results.[5]

Dolph became Rhee's first ghostwriter. From this point in his career, Rhee

[5] Fred A. Dolph to P. O. Cho, 20 August 1921, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 6:132; Fred A. Dolph to Syngman Rhee, 19 July 1920, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 2:412.

frequently used a ghostwriter, not because he did not know what to say or because his command of English was poor, but because, for all his emphasis on diplomacy, Rhee could be very undiplomatic.[6] Men like Dolph checked Rhee's more aggressive tendencies and helped him tailor his ideas to an American audience. "They say I gave a very good speech Friday night, the credit due, at least partly to you," Rhee wrote to Dolph after a mass meeting in October 1919. "You will write some more for me, will you not?"[7] Having impressed Rhee with his rhetoric, Dolph was soon ghostwriting for other members of the commission. Dolph wrote English addresses for other Korean Commission members, a brief history of Korea under the name of the first chairman of the Korean Commission, Kiusic Kimm, and several letters to the membership of the League of Friends of Korea for Philip Jaisohn.[8] Because Dolph's correspondence is incomplete, the above should be considered only a selection of the ghostwriting he did for the commission.

Dolph also wrote under his own name. His legal background gave his writing a dispassionate tone that balanced the sensationalism and sentimentalism in much of the Koreans' propaganda. "I tried to put forward the absolute certainty of our position as an appeal to the 'thinker' without any clap trap or sentimentalism," he wrote describing his

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[6] In the 1950s Rhee would regularly introduce his American spokesman and ghostwriter Robert T. Oliver as the man "who helps me say what I want to say in a way that keeps people from getting mad at me." See Robert Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea, 1942-1960: A Personal Narrative* (Seoul: Panmun Book Co., 1978), 189.

[7] Rhee to Dolph, 12 October 1919, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 1:171.

[8] Dolph to Rhee, 19 July 1920 and 2 October 1920, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 2:412, 544; Jaisohn to Dolph, 29 October 1921, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 6:258; Dolph to Jaisohn, 14 March 1921, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 5:575.

strategy for presenting Korea's case.[9] Dolph's writings were impressive for their ingenuity. Determining that oblique attacks on Japan might be more effective, Dolph wrote two pamphlets for the Korean Commission that used Japanese official statistics to show that their annexation of Korea and incursions into Manchuria were not profitable and, furthermore, that these incursions were being financed by foreign capital.[10] Determining whether the Japanese empire was operating at a profit or a loss was surely beyond the accounting powers of one man, but Dolph's financial expertise and use of Japanese statistics were enough to unsettle some American investors, many of whom were likely already disturbed by Japanese brutality in Korea. Requests for Dolph's pamphlets came by the dozens to the commission from private individuals and university and public libraries.[11] Such effective propaganda did not escape the notice of Japanese diplomats, who, according to Rhee, paid Dolph a visit to inform him that he could do more to help the Korean cause by working with the Japanese instead of against them. Dolph refused.[12]

Dolph's lobbying and writing were a crucial complement to the publicity work being done by the League of Friends of Korea and the Korean Information Bureau. Mass meetings, petitions, reports, and newspaper articles could bring Korea to the attention of the American public and indirectly to the U.S. Congress, but it would require a concerted lobbying effort to see any congressional action on Korea. Dolph provided a crucial second point of contact for congressmen who became sympathetic to the Korean cause as

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[9] Fred A. Dolph to Philip Jaisohn, 16 November 1921, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 6:309.

[10] Fred A Dolph, *Balancing Debts and Credits in the Far East* (Philadelphia: P. Jaisohn & Co., 1920); Fred A Dolph, *Japanese Stewardship of Korea* (Washington, D.C., 1920).

[11] For some request for Dolph's work received by the Korean Commission see, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 5:545, 554, 636.

[12] Oliver, *Syngman Rhee: The Man Behind the Myth*, 356.

a result of the media coverage of Japanese brutality in Korea. Dolph's legal and financial writings gave such congressmen a reason to support the Korean cause that was not based on sympathy alone.

Where the last chapter focused on Koreans' construction of a grassroots movement, this chapter will examine their lobbying activities in Washington and how they leveraged their support to inject the Korean question into the Versailles Treaty fight and the Washington Naval Conference, 1921-22.

**Korea and the Treaty "Fight"**

Korea's role in the fight over the Versailles Treaty throws into sharp relief the issues that divided the United States Senate and a good portion of Americans over the treaty. The carnage of World War I convinced most American policymakers of the need for a concerted international effort to prevent another disastrous war, but they were deeply divided about how this should be done and what role the United States should play. The question at the heart of the treaty fight was not whether the United States would play a larger role in international affairs, but on what terms.

The Versailles Treaty split the Senate into three camps: the reservationists, supporters of Wilson, and the Irreconcilables. To the reservationists—who were a majority of senators—the Versailles Treaty placed unacceptable limits on American foreign policy. Article X of the Covenant of the League of Nations (itself Part I of the Versailles Treaty) "obligated" members to guarantee the territorial integrity of others from external aggression. To many senators this seemed dangerously close to the proverbial "entangling alliances" warned against by the Founders and also jeopardized Congress' constitutional power to declare war. To mitigate these dangers, Republican

senators led by Henry Cabot Lodge along with a few Democrats proposed to ratify the Versailles Treaty with a set of reservations aimed at guaranteeing American sovereignty. Democrats loyal to Wilson opposed ratification with any reservations, believing that Lodge's reservations would essentially nullify the treaty and undermine the league before it even began. The "Irreconcilables," led by Republican populists from the Midwest, but also including a few Democrats, opposed ratification under almost any circumstances. Joining the league would yoke the United States with the "Old World" problems Americans had mostly avoided prior to World War I. The Irreconcilables believed that the United States should engage with the world, but on its own terms. They were opposed to surrendering even a small portion of the United States' freedom to follow its own conscience abroad and its own peculiar destiny. Reinforcing the Irreconcilable's opposition to the treaty was also partisan politics; many of the Irreconcilables were some of Wilson's severest Republican critics in the Senate.[13]

In their mission to thwart the Versailles Treaty the Irreconcilables found the Korean issue useful. The Koreans remained fervent advocates of Wilsonianism, but by the summer of 1919, they had turned against Wilson and the League of Nations. "Had the covenant of the League of Nations been written with the one purpose of maintaining the territorial statu[s]-quo possessions of four of the greater nations, it could not have expressed that purpose more exactly," commented the *Korea Review*.[14] For the Koreans and the hundreds of millions of women and men in subject nations and colonies the

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[13] John Cooper has written the authoritative account of the "treaty fight." See John Cooper, *Breaking the Heart of the World: Woodrow Wilson and the Fight for the League of Nations* (Cambridge University Press, 2001); For the most detailed account of the Irreconcilables ideas and actions, see Ralph A. Stone, *The Irreconcilables: The Fight Against the League of Nations* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1970).

[14] "Korea, Japan, and the Covenant," *Korea Review*, September 1920, 12.

failure of Wilson to turn his vision of self-determination into reality was a bitter betrayal. Wilson did not see it that way. While Wilsonianism certainly had its idealistic elements—self-determination, open covenants openly arrived at—Wilson negotiated pragmatically in Paris. He was neither unprepared for nor bamboozled by his European counterparts, as his early defenders and detractors respectively claimed.[15] His idealism was subordinated to a clear agenda that placed creating a League of Nations at the top of the list and adjusting colonial claims at the bottom.[16] He succeeded in convincing the leaders of the four "great nations" to endorse the idea of a League of Nations, but at the cost of many of the more visionary aspects of his program. This was not the solution he would have preferred, but he hoped the League of Nations would eventually become a promoter of the more idealistic aspects of Wilsonianism.

Right or wrong, Wilson's pragmatism at Paris left him politically vulnerable. The idealism that infused Wilsonianism with its popular support still had currency, especially in the United States. The slogan that World War I had been the war to end all wars had been taken seriously, especially by American Protestants who had only reluctantly

[15] Marc Trachtenberg has described the shifting political motivations behind sixty years of Versailles historiography in Marc Trachtenberg, "Versailles after Sixty Years," *Journal of Contemporary History* 17, no. 3 (1982): 487–506; Recent reassessments of the Versailles Treaty have challenged much of the received wisdom about the peace conference, especially that the treaty was too harsh on Germany, that the Germans could not pay war reparations, that the French pursued a Carthaginian peace, and that the treaty, rather than the execution of it, was fatally flawed. See Manfred F. Boemeke, ed., *The Treaty of Versailles: A Reassessment After 75 Years* (Cambridge University Press, 1998); Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2002); David Andelman, *A Shattered Peace: Versailles 1919 and the Price We Pay Today* (Hoboken, N.J: J. Wiley, 2008); Among the "Versailles Revisionists" the work of Sally Marks stands out to the author as especially informative. See Sally Marks, "Mistakes and Myths: The Allies, Germany, and the Versailles Treaty, 1918–1921," *The Journal of Modern History* 85, no. 3 (September 2013): 632–59.

[16] Russell H. Fifield, *Woodrow Wilson and the Far East: The Diplomacy of the Shantung Question* (Hamden, Conn: Archon Books, 1965), 120.

supported the war before it was couched in those terms.[17] After his return from Paris, Wilsonianism was still popular, but now leaderless. The Irreconcilables recognized in this situation a chance to attack the Versailles Treaty and Wilson from the moral high ground while at the same time refuting the charge that they were backward-looking isolationists. They would use Wilsonianism against Wilson by highlighting the injustices Wilson had allowed to stand in the Versailles Treaty.

The role Korea played in the Versailles Treaty fight has frequently been missed because, early on, it was largely subsumed by the question of the Shantung Peninsula, which the Japanese occupied when they took possession of Germany's Chinese territories soon after entering World War I. To the shock of his supporters, Wilson agreed to Japanese control of the peninsula instead of its reverting to Chinese sovereignty. The "Shantung Question" became one of the most fiercely debated aspects of the Versailles Treaty. Wilson's actions resembled the carving up of China that American policy had resisted since John Hay's Open Door Notes. There was also the special relationship that had developed between the United States and China, partially the result of hopes that the "China Market" would absorb American surplus production and partially the result of American missionary endeavors in China, which had as their aim the conversion of the world's most populous nation to Christianity.[18] These factors accounted for Americans' interest in the Shantung Question, but it was Japanese brutality in Korea that gave the debate its passion and urgency.

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[17] Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012) see especially chapters 14 and 15.

[18] For the U.S.-China "Special Relationship" see Michael Hunt, *The Making of a Special Relationship: The United States and China to 1914* (Columbia University Press, 1983); Thomas McCormick, *China Market: America's Quest for Informal Empire, 1893-1901* (Chicago: I.R. Dee, 1990).

The Shantung Question shocked "the sensibilities of justice and right," leading Irreconcilable Senator George W. Norris (R-NE) told his fellow senators in July 1919. Not only would Japan be rewarded for her participation in the war at the expense of China—an allied nation—but 36 million Chinese would be turned over to the "one nation of all the earth [they] feared the most." Norris asserted the Japanese colonization of Korea would be the template for the Shantung. In Korea the Japanese were blotting out "every vestige of Korean literature and history," burning books, stamping out the Korean language, and murdering Koreans solely for "loving their country." During his speech Norris held aloft a photo given to him by S. A. Beck of the League of Friends of Korea of a "dead Korean citizen . . . his face smashed to jelly" and his body carrying twenty-eight wounds. "Of what was he guilty?" asked the Senator, "Of crying aloud 'hurrah for Korea.'" Norris quoted liberally from the CRO report on Japanese atrocities including stories of seared flesh, separated joints, and mutilated bodies. "You who have daughters and admire them, you who have wives and love them, you who have mothers and revere them, listen," implored Norris, as he read passages highlighting the sexual humiliation of Korean women. Physical destruction was not his sole concern, however. The Japanese were targeting Korean Christians hoping to discover a link between the March First Movement and American missionaries that would justify the latter's expulsion from Korea. They would do the same in China, he warned, and the damage to Christianity in East Asia would be immeasurable. "I wish all the Christian people of America would note that all sacrifices which they made in Korea now if this treaty goes through, all that they have made in China, or every missionary that has gone there to set up a church and preach the doctrine of Christianity, . . . are all in jeopardy." More unbelievable to Norris than the abuses Japan had perpetrated in Korea was the proposal

that the U.S. Senate "approve and ratify the same" in China in the Versailles Treaty. "We cannot build a temple of justice on a foundation of sand," Norris said. "Every guidepost of history" showed that Japan's policy of denationalizing Korea and China would fail, leading to future and more devastating wars.[19] In his discussion of the "Shantung Question," Norris spent more time talking about Korea than China. The two were inextricably linked. During the treaty fight Korea came to represent Japanese treachery, exploitation, and hostility to Christianity in East Asia.

Following Norris' lead, other Irreconcilable senators injected Korea into the "Shantung Question." Joseph M. McCormick (R-IL) had the entire CRO report read into the *Congressional Record*.[20] When Democrats tried to defend the Shantung decision by arguing that the Japanese had only taken over the German lease, which would expire after seventy-nine years, Lawrence Sherman (R-IL) pointed out that the Japanese had also occupied Korea under a temporary arrangement but showed no disposition to leave.[21] In early September, while President Wilson toured the country supporting the treaty, Senator Norris lampooned it with an allegorical speech entitled the "Troubled Community," whose main characters were named "Bill Kaiser," "John Chinaman," "Miss Columbia," "Miss Korea," "Mr. Jap," and "John Bull." The speech attacked Wilson—"Miss Columbia"—for taking part in the "secret diplomacy" at Versailles that transferred the Shantung to Japan despite Wilson's demand for "open covenants of peace, openly arrived at." The inclusion of "Miss Korea" in the story as the first victim of "Mr.

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[19] All quotations from the previous paragraph are taken from George W. Norris, "The Present Treaty," *Congressional Record* 58: 3 (July 15, 1919): 2593–95.

[20] Joseph M. McCormick, "Report on Situation in Korea," *Congressional Record* 58: 3 (July 17, 1919): 2697–2717.

[21] Lawrence Y. Sherman, "Japanese Control of the Shantung," *Congressional Record* 58: 3 (July 17, 1919): 2725.

Jap," and the reason why "John Chinaman" was so fearful showed just how intertwined Korea had become with the "Shantung Question."[22]

As the treaty fight developed the injustice done to Korea began to take on a significance of its own. William Borah (R-ID) attacked the covenant as contrary to American tradition, believing it would obligate the United States to defend empires against their colonies. "If Korea wants freedom, where can she get it?" Borah asked, "America could have never obtained her independence had their been a league of nations in existence at the time because France instead of assisting America would have been siding with Great Britain to suppress America."[23] The Democrats tried to retire Korea from the debate by asking Republicans which party controlled the White House and the State Department when Korea was betrayed in 1905. James E. Watson (R-IN) insisted that two wrongs do not make a right. Norris and Borah went even further, calling the United States' failure to respond to Korea's appeals in 1905 unjustifiable and indefensible.[24] It was easy for them to disavow their party's previous stance since they had not been in office then and details of the Korean situation were not generally known. Borah tacitly acknowledged the success of the Koreans' lobbying efforts when he claimed the treatment of Korea by Japan had been hidden for years, "but finally [the facts] have been gathered by Christian organizations and have been presented to the people of this country in such a way that they cannot be doubted or disputed" and that they "shocked the conscience of the civilized world."[25]

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[22] George W. Norris, "The Troubled Community," *Congressional Record* 58: 5 (September 6, 1919): 4960–63.

[23] William E. Borah, "League of Nations," *Congressional Record* 58: 3 (July 17, 1919): 2734–36.

[24] "The Peace Treaty and Japanese Interests in China," *Congressional Record* 58: 9 (August 5, 1919): 3640–41.

[25] William E. Borah, "Transfer of Shantung to Japan," *Congressional Record* 58: 5 (August 26, 1919): 4351–52.

Building on the publicity and public sympathy surrounding the Korean situation, Dolph prevailed upon Senator Selden P. Spencer (R-MO) to insert into the *Congressional Record* one of his legal briefs arguing that Japan's annexation of Korea had been illegal.[26] Prior to annexation, Japan had signed several treaties guaranteeing to respect Korea's independence. Dolph reasoned that since the final treaties of annexation had been extracted by force they were null and void, making the previous treaties between the two nations still in force. Dolph believed this had implications for a host of other nations, including the United States, because of the 1882 treaty. Dolph claimed that continuing to recognize the Japanese annexation of Korea—once the facts of its illegality were known—would make the United States "*particeps criminis* [accomplice] to the original wrong and injury."[27] None of this information was new. Many Koreans and several former missionaries had been making this case for years. But Dolph's legal standing, measured tone, and presentation of facts gave the argument more credibility than it had previously enjoyed.

Other senators also seized on Dolph's arguments. "We cannot sign this treaty without an utter disregard of our moral and treaty obligations to the Korean people," Joseph France (R-MD) told the Senate denouncing the Versailles Treaty. He quoted from State Department records that documented both America's treaty obligations to Korea and the betrayal of them. France told his colleagues that it was shameful enough that the United States had kept silent while Korea's independence was destroyed, but ratifying the

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[26] Dolph had first reached out to Spencer in June of 1919. See Fred A. Dolph to Seldon P. Spencer, 27 June 1919, Lew, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 4:245–48; Spencer was not an Irreconcilable, although his position on the treaty was always changing. "Flop[ping] like a herring on dry land" is how one of his colleagues described him. See Cooper, *Breaking the Heart of the World*, 147–48.

[27] Seldon P. Spencer, "The Korean Question," *Congressional Record* 58 (September 19, 1919): 5595–5608.

treaty would "rivet for all time the shackles upon the proud, noble, and liberty-loving people who appealed to us in vain in their hour of need." France went on to quote from the Korean appeal to the United States written by Syngman Rhee at the First Korean Congress held in Philadelphia: "We [Koreans] appeal to you [the American people] for support and sympathy because we know you love justice; you also fought for liberty and democracy, and you stand for Christianity and humanity." France told the Senate this appeal could not be discarded "as we consider this treaty which would forge forever the chains of bondage on her [Korea]."

More explicitly than any other congressman, France linked the Korean situation to the American mission: "Sirs, we have a peculiar national destiny, that of demonstrating to the world the transcendent and universal applicability of free republican government and of persuading all other peoples to the adoption of those institutions and ideals which will assure to them the blessings of an ordered liberty." He warned his colleagues that ratifying the treaty might seem like a victory, but the supplications of "Christian Korea, crying to be rescued from the ruthless clutch of her cruel pagan master and tormentor" and those of other subject peoples would go up to "Him" who is "unseen with mortal eyes." France prophesied a bleak future for the United States if it willfully shirked its divine obligations:

> This Republic, if she should desert her purpose and her standards by the ratification of this treaty, must be arraigned at the last before that eternal Power of justice to answer why to all these cries for vindication and for liberation she turned a deaf ear, and to her must come, if she shall participate in all these wrongs, the certain punishment and destruction which has been measured out through the past years to all those nations which could not hear the call of duty and refused to obey the mandates of the higher law.[28]

[28] All the foregoing quotes are taken from Joseph I. France, "Treaty of Peace with Germany," *Congressional Record* 58: 7 (October 9, 1919): 6597–6616.

France had elevated the treaty fight out of the realm of geopolitics and into a moral economy in which the United States' execution of its "peculiar destiny" was essential to its fortune as a nation. France sounds a great deal like Rev. Birmingham, in his politico-religious understanding of the United States' place in the world, but unlike Birmingham, France was no country preacher. He was one of only three senators boasting a foreign (German) education.[29]

As the end of the first session of the 66th U.S. Congress drew near, members of both parties introduced twenty petitions and resolutions from their constituents showing sympathy with Korea.[30] Some of these even urged that "the officers of our nation be used to the extreme in restoring liberty to Korea."[31] Perhaps sensing the issue was not going to disappear, at least one Democrat shifted tactics away from emphasizing Republican culpability for the Korean situation and instead tried to drive a wedge between Korea and the Shantung, hoping to secure ratification of the treaty. Charles S. Thomas (D-CO) acknowledged the Korean situation had "powerfully stimulated public sentiment in America, and have to some extent influenced the judgment of some senators regarding the treaty," and furthermore he believed "both morally and *legally* the United States should have given official expression, by way of friendly interference, of its disapproval of the destruction of Korea's political existence, basing its action upon the requirements of its treaty with Korea." But the United States had not done so; it had recognized Japan's

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[29] Cooper, *Breaking the Heart of the World*, 241.

[30] For the petitions and resolutions see *Journal of the House of Representatives of the United States, 66th Congress, 1st Session*, 1919, 88, 184, 203, 213, 230, 292, 323, 374, 410, 429, 519, 520, 527, 533.; *Journal of the Senate of the United States, 66th Congress, 1st Session*, 1919, 27, 119, 158, 214, 221, 105.

[31] Petition of the Methodist Episcopal Church of Elburn, Illinois to the Secretary of State, 13 May 1919, *Records of the Department of State relating to Internal Affairs of Korea (Chosen), 1910-29* (Microcopy 426), 895.00/618.

annexation of Korea, and in Thomas' opinion there was nothing more the Senate could do for Korea. However, the Senate could save the Shantung by ratifying the Versailles Treaty with the reservation that it did not recognize the Japanese acquisition of the Shantung and with the understanding that the Senate would work to reverse it. By separating the two, Thomas argued, the Shantung could still be saved.[32] Borah, speaking for the Republicans, agreed that the United States had failed Korea but refused to concede that it was a dead issue. "Having made the treaty which we had made, I think we are under obligations to exercise our friendly offices in preventing the amalgamation or incorporation of Korea with Japan." He excoriated the Democrats for their expediency: "No one is in doubt as to what is right and as to what we really should do if we were acting upon moral grounds."[33] In fact the Senate and the House each had an opportunity to shun expediency and to transform American sympathy for Korea into legislative action, albeit of the most inert type. Representative William E. Mason (R-IL) and Senators James D. Phelan (D-CA) and Selden P. Spencer (R-MO) all authored resolutions to their respective houses to show sympathy with the Korean people in their struggle for independence, but none made it out of committee.[34]

The Versailles Treaty itself faired little better when it finally came to a vote on 19 November 1919. The version of the treaty with reservations fell short of winning a simple majority, much less the two-thirds required for ratification. The Irreconcilables and the Democrats who refused any reservations voted together to kill the treaty by a vote of 39-

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[32] Thomas is frequently grouped with the "Irreconcilables" and did vote against the Versailles Treaty, but John Cooper identified his political views as "eccentric" and not aligned too closely with any faction.

[33] All of the above quotes for Senators Thomas and Borah are taken from "The Shantung Question," *Congressional Record* 58: 7 (October 15, 1919): 6941–44.

[34] For these resolutions see, *Journal of the Senate of the United States, 66th Congress, 1st Session*, 27, 221; *Journal of the House of Representatives of the United States, 66th Congress, 1st Session*, 781.

55. A quick parliamentary maneuver revealed that nearly a two-thirds majority of senators (63-32) were in favor of reconsidering the vote. The obvious desire for a compromise kept the debate over the league alive for another four months as "mild-reservationists" of both parties tried to peel members away from the Irreconcilable and Wilsonian camps. During these extra months of debate, the issue of Korea persisted. While pro-ratification senators tried to conjure a two-thirds majority, Irreconcilable Senator McCormick (R-IL) theatrically spun thread for lace on the Senate floor while mocking his colleagues for "spinning phrases hour after hour" trying to pass the treaty. "There are those of us who have considerable correspondence to answer. A great flood of protests has come into my office in the last few days against the horrors perpetrated in Korea," he told his fellow senators. McCormick managed in just a few words to highlight the time wasted trying to reconcile the treaty, the injustice inherent in the treaty, and the backlash they could expect from a portion of the American public if they succeeded in ratifying it.[35]

The issue of Korea stayed alive in the treaty fight until the very end. On 18 March, weary of months of debate, senators began to call for a second vote on the treaty. The Senate voted 18 times that day, as senators tried to submit last minute reservations to either secure a deal or scupper one. In this tense atmosphere Peter G. Gerry (D-RI) submitted a reservation calling for the self-determination of Ireland and its admittance to the League of Nations. The reservation wreaked havoc in the Senate, as various factions tried to kill the reservation without being on the record as voting against Irish

[35] Joseph M. McCormick, *Congressional Record* 59: 4 (March 4, 1920): 3861.

independence.[36] Charles S. Thomas added to the chaos by offering an amendment to Gerry's reservation that swapped "Ireland" for "Korea." The move angered his pro-treaty colleagues who asked why his reservation should not be expanded to include Algeria, Morocco, Tunis, the Dodecanese Islands, and the Philippines. "I believe that Korea occupies a position peculiarly appealing to the national sense of fairness and right," Thomas explained. He reminded his colleagues of the 1882 treaty and argued that Korea might have maintained her independence had not President Roosevelt disregarded his responsibilities. Thomas explained he did not approve of such specific reservations to the Versailles Treaty, but if the Irish were going to get a reservation the Koreans deserved one as well.[37]

A vote to table Thomas's amendment failed. Supporting Korean independence would get a vote in the U.S. Senate. In the ensuing debate over Thomas' amendment, senators who both voted for and against it wanted to make sure their votes were not misunderstood. Henry Cabot Lodge (R-MA) explained that, despite his deep sympathy for Korea, he voted to table the Korean amendment because he felt that it was tangential to the Irish reservation.[38] David I. Walsh (D-MA) told the Senate that he voted against tabling the amendment because he "wanted to go on the record favoring the application of the principle of self-determination to Korea."[39] Thomas J. Walsh's (D-MT) reasoning was just the opposite. He voted to table the amendment but assured his colleagues "If the proposition of the independence of Korea came up as an independent [measure] here, in

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[36] Cooper, *Breaking the Heart of the World*, 356.

[37] Charles S. Thomas, "Treaty of Peace with Germany," *Congressional Record* 59: 5 (March 18, 1920): 4499–4500.

[38] Henry Cabot Lodge, Ibid., 4503.

[39] David I. Walsh, Ibid., 4504.

undoubted good faith, I should be disposed to favor it."[40] Frank B. Brandegee (R-CT) explained his opposition to Thomas' amendment in the same terms and said he would support a separate measure on Korean independence.[41] Several senators attacked Gerry and Thomas both for political grandstanding. They pointed out that these reservations would do nothing to help the Irish or the Koreans. This gave Borah another opportunity to excoriate the expediency of his colleagues. He supported the reservations regardless of their practicality because he could not record his vote against the right of self-government—a principle he claimed the United States had long advocated. Finally Thomas' amendment supporting self-determination for Korea came to a vote. The amendment failed 34-46 with 16 senators not voting.[42]

The Korean Commission put a positive gloss on the vote. An open letter to the League of Friends, probably written by Dolph, reprinted much of the debate over Thomas' amendment, including the voting record. The writer pointed out that the twelve-vote margin of defeat was in fact smaller than it appeared. Gerry's Irish reservation eventually passed later in the day by a margin of 38-36, because so many senators were absent from the floor during that vote. He contended that if the Korean reservation would have come up under those same circumstances it would have carried. He also pointed out that many senators voted against the amendment because of broader considerations regarding the treaty and not out of a lack of sympathy for the Korean

[40] Thomas J. Walsh, Ibid., 4505.

[41] Frank B. Brandegee, Ibid., 4506.

[42] Ibid., 4512. Several of the non-voting senators declared in favor of the amendment but could not vote because they had made a previous agreement, a "live pair" in the parlance of the Senate, with an absent senator who would have taken the other side of the issue. By agreeing not to vote they nullify the effect of absences in the Senate.

cause.[43] Its passage would have been of little consequence regardless. The next day the Versailles Treaty with Republican reservations was finally defeated 49-35: seven votes short of the two-thirds majority needed. The United States would not join the League of Nations.

Korea's role in the defeat of the Versailles Treaty was certainly not decisive, but nor was it inconsequential. Korea was useful in throwing into sharp relief the varying interpretations of the United States' role in the world that was the real dividing line between those who could support the treaty and those who could not. For the Irreconcilables, Korea became a symbol of what the United States would be sacrificing if they ratified the treaty: its ability to follow its own conscience and pursue its own "peculiar" national destiny. What made the Irreconcilable senators' arguments against the Versailles Treaty and in favor of believing in the United States' peculiar destiny more than just nationalist twaddle was the jeremiadic rendition of their own historical involvement in the world, of which Korea was a prime example. The Irreconcilables did not maintain the United States was sinless in its foreign affairs, to the contrary the United States must be free to follow its conscience and to rectify wrongs, including those it had committed.

Support for Korea in the Senate was not based only on principles and ideology. The Irreconcilables' adoption of Korea's cause was unabashedly political. They believed that highlighting Korea's plight at the hands of the Japanese would help them defeat the Versailles Treaty, something most Americans and a majority of senators supported. That they chose Korea to play an important role in their arguments against the treaty speaks

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[43] "Open Letter to League of Friends of Korea", n.d. *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 4:253–257.

volumes of how convincing they believed the case to be. Despite the obvious politics involved in taking up the Korean cause, some senators on both sides maintained more than just a passing political interest in Korea: Spencer spoke at mass-meetings sponsored by the League of Friends of Korea, Thomas became a second legal counselor to the Korean Commission, and Norris became the Vice-President of the League of Friends of Korea.[44]

Even if it did not result in official action by the United States, the injection of Korea into the treaty fight served its purpose. The more than twelve months of debate gave the Korean Commission ample time to prepare its case and have it argued in the U.S. Senate. No longer could any senator claim ignorance about the history of U.S.-Korean relations or maintain that the Japanese colonization of Korea was beneficent. Japanese brutality in Korea had become part of the official record, as had the United States' violation of its 1882 treaty with Korea. These facts shifted the mood in the Senate and brought it into unofficial sympathy with the Korean people. Even when voting against the Korean reservation or arguing against any official declaration of sympathy most senators were careful to place their actions in a context of personal sympathy for Korea's plight. The Senate's treatment of Korea showed the power of the Koreans' appeal; a power largely derived from its invocation of the American mission. The Senate did not ultimately acquiesce to it, but neither could senators ignore it.

**Korea and the Washington Naval Conference**

The Koreans' success in inserting themselves into the treaty fight was remarkable

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[44] For Spencer's speeches with the League of Friends of Korea see "Mass Meeting of Citizens of Philadelphia," *Korea Review*, June 1920, 9-12; Thomas' activities as special counsel will be discussed below; For Norris as the Vice-President of the League of Friends of Korea see the League's letterhead in S.A. Beck to Syngman Rhee *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 2:353.

considering that it occurred while they were still getting organized. The Korean Commission and the League of Friends of Korea were not founded until June 1919, already months into the treaty fight. The Korean Commission's location in Washington, D.C., and the nature of its work allowed it to get up and running quickly, but the League of Friends of Korea took months to develop. The Chautauqua lectures that did so much to publicize the case of Korea did not begin in earnest until the summer of 1920. The end of the treaty fight found the Korean independence movement hitting its stride and with reason to be optimistic.

The election of Warren G. Harding energized Koreans. Harding was bent on establishing American leadership in world affairs without the restraints of the League of Nations, which as a senator he voted against. The *Korea Review* all but officially endorsed him during the 1920 presidential campaign, calling him a "Christian statesmen" who understood the "needs of the country and the world," and who would re-establish American leadership "among the nations of the earth by championing the cause of justice, ideals of democracy and principles of human liberty."[45] The *Korea Review* celebrated Harding's victory in November 1920 and told its readers that Harding intended either to revise the League of Nations or to form a new association of nations based on the "principles of justice through international co-operation." Unlike the original league, which tried to promote peace by balancing the interests of the great powers, this new organization would be a broad coalition of nations of "good will" determined to act unselfishly to maintain peace. The *Review* argued that while some would call this idea impractical, it deserved a trial. The editors of the *Review* personally endorsed this idea:

[45] "Students' Corner," *Korea Review*, July 1920, 16.

"We believe American leadership along this line will bring success and that a new sense of justice may be born among all peoples." "Good Americans" must support Harding and this new vision of American leadership abroad as they endeavored to live out the principles of Christianity more completely at home, setting an example that "the whole world may emulate."[46] Harding would place the United States back on the path to unilaterally fulfilling its peculiar destiny—a path Wilson's critics believed he had forsaken for diplomatic expediency.

Later that November, Jaisohn wrote a letter to President-elect Harding laying out the Koreans' appeal. It drew heavily on Dolph's research and briefs, citing the illegality of the Japanese annexation, the failure of the United States to fulfill its treaty obligations, the Japanese oppression of Koreans, and their financial mismanagement of Korea. He asked Harding to consider taking two practical steps to show American sympathy for Korea. First, the United States should interpose its "good offices" according to the 1882 Korean-American Treaty to protest the Japanese oppression of Korea and use "all of its powers of persuasion and argument to force Japan to remedy the wrongs that she had done to Korea." Second, the United States should recognize that a state of "belligerency" exists between the Republic of Korea and Japan. This would enable the KPG to have official communication with the United States and would be a powerful symbolic display of American sympathy. Jaisohn cited the American recognition of the belligerency of the Czech National Council, also a government in exile, as a precedent for such action. He reassured Americans weary of provoking the Japanese that "there is abundant authority that recognizing belligerency is not a cause for war" and would only be in keeping with

[46] "Harding Wins," *Korea Review*, November 1920, 11-12.

American obligations to Korea.[47] The Koreans were growing more sophisticated in their techniques. Jaisohn's letter suggested practical American actions that would show sympathy for Korea without explicitly demanding its independence.

Excitement grew among the Koreans when Jaisohn secured a meeting with the president-elect at Harding's private office in Marion, Ohio, on the last day of 1920. The League of Friends of Korea had cleverly planned a mass meeting in Harding's hometown for 2 January, giving Jaisohn a timely reason to call. Jaisohn summarized the interview in a letter to Rhee, who was in Shanghai at the time. Fearing the Japanese might intercept the letter, Jaisohn kept the details vague: "It is not safe for me to relate what he [President-elect Harding] told me, but I will state to you that he is anxious to know all the developments of the Far East and requested me to make special reports to him from time to time. He further extended the courtesy of the freedom of the White House, so I can call there at any time when I have anything to tell him. His views on the Oriental matters and Korea in particular are those of a first-class patriotic American statesman."[48] Senator Spencer was also encouraging the Koreans. He told Henry Chung, now secretary of the Korean Commission, in an interview in March 1921 that something might be done for Korea once Harding's organization to replace the League of Nations was in place.[49]

Talk of a new association of nations was misleading. The fight over the Versailles Treaty had sapped American enthusiasm for joining the League of Nations, much less creating a rival organization. International organizations with governmental-like

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[47] Philip Jaisohn, "An Open Letter," *Korea Review*, December 1920, 1-6.

[48] Philip Jaisohn to Syngman Rhee, 12 January 1921, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 3:4–6.

[49] Henry Chung to Syngman Rhee, 5 March 1921, Ibid., 3:12–13.

authority had never been preferred by Republicans, who rather favored the development of international law, arbitration, and disarmament as promoted since 1915 by the League to Enforce Peace, presided over by former Republican President William Howard Taft. Republicans believed that these methods provided a means to deal with threats to international peace that were more targeted and encroached less on American sovereignty.[50] Senator Lodge endorsed a return to these strategies in his keynote address at the Republican National Convention in 1920, when he spoke of an association of nations to develop international law and to meet on an *ad hoc* basis whenever peace was threatened. He made sure there was nothing in his address that hinted at proposing a new "political league."[51]

As the first step in forming this new association Harding invited members of the Supreme Allied Council from World War I, which included the world's leading Naval powers, to gather in Washington in 1921 to discuss limiting naval armaments and the future of the Pacific. There can be little doubt that this conference was to be an end in itself and not the beginning of a new association. The Harding Administration told the *New York Times* that the disarmament conference was the first step in the creation of a new association based on the Supreme Allied Council, but that this process would be "gradual" and that "The Supreme Council, as far as the United States is concerned, must work out

[50] For discussions of the Republican alternatives to Woodrow Wilson's political league and their conceptions of an idealized international community, see Stephen Wertheim, "The League That Wasn't: American Designs for a Legalist-Sanctionist League of Nations and the Intellectual Origins of International Organization, 1914–1920," *Diplomatic History* 35, no. 5 (November 1, 2011): 797–836, doi:10.1111/j.1467-7709.2011.00986.x; Emily S. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic Expansion, 1890-1945* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1987); John P. Campbell, "Taft, Roosevelt, and the Arbitration Treaties of 1911," *The Journal of American History* 53, no. 2 (1966): 279–98, doi:10.2307/1894200.

[51] Stone, *The Irreconcilables: The Fight Against the League of Nations*, 172–73.

its own salvation as a positive force for the preservation of world peace."[52] In other words, the United States was taking the lead by organizing the disarmament conference, but after that the initiative for a new association of nations would fall to the council, all of whose members besides the United States were already part of the League of Nations and unlikely to pursue the creation of a rival league. This maneuver allowed Harding to keep a campaign promise to propose an alternative to the League of Nations, while ensuring that American involvement in the world would evolve along Republican lines. This was a repudiation of Wilsonianism to be sure, but not a leap into isolationism.

The Korean Commission and their supporters were enthusiastic about the conference regardless of the political calculations behind it. They believed the Asian focus of this conference gave them a better chance of getting Korea on the agenda than at Versailles. As Dolph explained raising the Korean question at Versailles was all but precluded on the technical grounds that Korea had not been a belligerent in World War I, but as the Washington Conference was focused on the peace of Asia there was a greater likelihood that the Korean question could be discussed.[53] After the conference was announced Rhee tried to return from Shanghai, but difficulties arising from his stateless status and lack of a passport delayed him for months. As a result Jaisohn, Chung, and Dolph did most of the groundwork. Dolph played a central role in drafting the Koreans' appeals and lobbying various Washington personalities for support. Making the most of friends gained during the treaty fight, the Koreans enlisted the aid of Senator Spencer who had the Koreans' appeal to the conference read into the Congressional Record and

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[52] "Testing Peace Machinery," *The New York Times*, June 1, 1921.

[53] Fred A. Dolph to P. O. Cho, 20 August 1912, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 6:132.

printed as a Senate document.[54] The most aid came from Senator Charles Thomas of Colorado who the commission hired as a "special counsel" to represent them at the conference.

Whether they received an invitation or not the Korean Commission made every effort to be as professional as possible in their diplomatic and lobbying activities. Jaisohn authorized Dolph to purchase the appropriate "toggery" for the conference: silk top hats and Prince Albert coats. The commission also rented a house on 16th Street in Washington, D.C., where they could entertain and lobby potential supporters.[55] Thomas and Dolph made sure that the rented house was put to good use. Thomas had only recently retired from the Senate and still had excellent connections in Washington. In the weeks before the beginning of the conference the Koreans entertained notable journalists including H. G. Wells and Louis Seibold as well as former Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan.[56] Through Thomas the Koreans also received counsel from the recently retired Secretary of State Robert Lansing, who advised the Koreans on how to lobby without upsetting the State Department.[57]

These contacts were instrumental in the Korean Commission's propaganda offensive to pressure the American delegation to raise the Korean question at the conference. Pulitzer prize winning journalist Louis Seibold's reporting from the Far East

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[54] Spencer had the Korean's appeal to the conference printed by the Government Printing Office under the title "Korea's appeal to the Conference on Limitation of Armament," *S. Doc. No. 109*, 67th Cong. 2d Sess. (1922).

[55] Philip Jaisohn to Fred A. Dolph, 3 October 1921; George W. Whitwell to Fred A. Dolph, 28 October 1921, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 6:221, 257.

[56] Fred A. Dolph to Philip Jaisohn, 16 November 1921; Philip Jaisohn to Richard J. Beamish, 28 November 1921; Fred A. Dolph to Eleanor Franklin Egan, 29 November 1921, Ibid., 6:306, 329, 333.

[57] Fred A. Dolph to Henry Chung, 30 September, 1921, Ibid., 6:209.

in the fall of 1921 brought the Korean issue to prominence. Seibold told Americans in his syndicated stories on Japan that the Japanese attempts to assimilate the Koreans were useless, that Japan was using Korea as a staging area for further expansion into Asia, and that the United States was complicit in Japan's absorption of Korea.[58] Coming from a journalist as notable as Seibold, this information had a powerful effect. The *Los Angeles Times* published an editorial supporting Korea's right to a hearing at the conference and citing Seibold's "graphic" depiction of the Koreans' struggle as evidence of their desire for independence.[59] Dale R. Carrell, managing editor of the Iowa City *Press Citizen* was also moved by the media coverage and published an editorial in his newspaper urging that the Korean question be discussed before the end of the conference, and that the United States "finish the Far Eastern job, which has been so well begun."[60] A journalist at the *New York Sun* also tacitly supported Korean participation at the conference by writing in early November that "For many months past the attention of this country has been directed towards the deplorable situation of Korea" and "it is inconceivable that an attempt should be made to settle the Far Eastern questions without a definite understanding of the basis on which Japan exercises control over this country."[61]

While sympathizing with Korea, astute observers recognized that their hopes for representation at the conference were slim. H. G. Wells wrote favorably of his interview with Rhee and reported that he heard "ever and again an appeal for something to be

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[58] Louis Seibold, "Most Everything Korean Japnanned but Koreans," *Pittsburgh Post*, October 10, 1921; Louis Seibold, "Old Love of Country Strong," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, October 14, 1921; Louis Seibold, "Japanese Making Little Progress with Koreans," *Los Angeles Times*, October 14, 1921; Louis Seibold, "Jap Efforts to Conquer Korea End in Failure," *Los Angeles Times*, October 16, 1921.

[59] "Korea at the Conference," *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 1921.

[60] Dale R. Carrell, "Korea Makes Plea for Hearing in Far East Conference, Another Wrong to Be Righted Is Claim of the Koreans.," *Iowa City Press Citizen*, December 12, 1921.

[61] "Great Questions to Be Before Washington Arms Conference," *New York Sun*, November 10, 1921.

done for Corea [sic]" in Washington. But Wells argued that the best way to help Korea and other subject peoples was disarmament. Only disarmament had the potential of alleviating the fear of aggression that led Japan to take Korea in the first place, Wells wrote.[62] Cyril Player, who included a sympathetic portrait of Rhee in his book on the conference, *Arms—and the Men,* concluded "Everyone knows Korea has a case. The American people are by no means unsympathetic toward the Koreans; if there is apathy, it is the apathy of regret, tinged with weariness and impregnated by a miserable feeling of impotence to put matters right."[63] Another writer asked, "What answer can the American commissioners make to this Korean appeal? Their country has been allocated to Japan by international covenants, which our government respects. Yet it gripes [sic] one's heart to think that, by our inaction we must admit to them that we are unable to come to their aid . . . Civilization evidently has many stages yet to make before it fully emerges from barbarism."[64]

The Korean Commission's work was not just done in newspapers. The League of Friends of Korea continued to hold mass-meetings in cities around the United States and urged its branches to send resolutions to Washington. Rhee, Jaisohn, and Chung spoke at Kiwanis Clubs and social organizations in the Washington area at every opportunity. Homer B. Hulbert spent the summer of 1921 on the Chautauqua circuit challenging American audiences with his lecture "East meets West" in which he detailed the American betrayal of Korea and its own treaty obligations and asked his audiences if they were ready to "definitely haul down our colors and let democracy die in the Far East, or

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[62] H.G. Wells, "Stifled Voices at Washington Heard in Plea," *Syracuse Herald*, December 7, 1921.

[63] Cyril Arthur Player, "They Love Peace, But-," *Detroit News*, September 4, 1921.

[64] "Korea at the Conference."

whether the spirit of Lafayette shall make us say of Korea as he said . . . 'I will not see democracy die without an attempt to succor it.'"[65]

In a final push for publicity the Korean Commission delivered a petition to the American delegation signed by over 25,000 Koreans, from every provincial district, the former royal family, and representatives of 52 "social, industrial, and religious societies."[66] It stated that the only governing authority Koreans recognized was their provisional government in Shanghai and that they never assented to the Japanese annexation. They labeled the emperor who signed the annexation treaty as a "mental incompetent" and claimed that he was forced to sign under duress. They argued that making Korea an "independent buffer state" was the only way to guarantee the peace of Asia.[67] The great personal risk taken by the signers of the petition captured an unprecedented amount of media attention including the front page of the *New York Times*.[68] The Koreans had made their case, but would the conference listen?

From Rhee's correspondence and the accounts of other participants in the conference, it appears that the American delegation did raise the Korean question in discrete ways. Dolph claimed to have sources that kept him well apprised of what occurred within the American delegation and, if they are to be believed, the Koreans nearly scored a major victory when Senator Spencer was tapped to be the fourth member

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[65] Homer B. Hulbert, "Chautauqua and Korea," *Korea Review*, October 1921, 1-3.

[66] Liem, *Philip Jaisohn: The First Korean-American--a Forgotten Hero*, 237; A translation and facsimilie of this petition can be in *대한민국임시정부자료집 [Materials of the Korean Provisional Government]*, vol. 18 (National Institute of Korean History, 2007), 269–96.

[67] "Petition Presented to the Conference on Limitation of Armaments and the Far East by the People of Korea," *Korea Review*, January 1922, 3-4.

[68] "Koreans Publish Appeal to Conference; Ask Independence as Guarantee of Peace," *New York Times*, January 1, 1922.

of the delegation, only later to be dropped when British Prime Minister Lloyd George decided to attend the convention, necessitating Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes' taking Spencer's place.[69] Spencer's inclusion on the delegation would have placed a devoted friend of Korea in a position to exert some influence. Even without a strong ally on the delegation, Senator Thomas managed to persuade Senate minority leader and delegation member Oscar W. Underwood (D-AL) to agree to give the Koreans a hearing before the American delegation at least.[70] According to Dolph, Senator Underwood also succeeded in having the Koreans' written appeal to the conference referred to committee over the strenuous Japanese objection that Korea was not on the agenda. "That is first blood for us," reported Dolph, "though we may never see or hear of it, as this took place in executive session." He told Jaisohn this information was highly confidential and not for disclosure.[71]

Whether by Dolph's personal connections or through Senator Underwood's efforts the Koreans did get to present their case privately to Secretary Hughes during the conference. During the meeting Hughes explained that while he was sympathetic towards Korea he would not raise the issue of Korea publicly at the conference for fear of a Japanese walkout, which would be detrimental to the future of Asia, Korea included. He believed coming to an agreement on naval disarmament could check further Japanese encroachments in Asia and preserve the peace of the region. Allegedly Hughes promised the Koreans they would not be abandoned; he would raise the issue privately with the Japanese delegation in an attempt to moderate Japanese policy towards Korea.

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[69] Fred A. Dolph to Philip Jaisohn, 10 August 1921, Lew, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 6:99–101.

[70] Fred A. Dolph to Henry Chung, 30 September 1921, Ibid., 2009, 6:209.

[71] Fred A. Dolph to Philip Jaisohn, 22 December 1921, Ibid., 2009, 6:386.

According to several sources, Hughes did meet with the Japanese and criticized their policies in Korea as not becoming of a modern civilized nation. He warned them he was raising the Korean question with them privately now, but if their policies did not change he would be forced to take official action because of the pressure placed on him by religious organizations and public opinion. Allegedly the Japanese were disturbed by Hughes' statements and agreed to moderate their policies in Korea.[72] Jaisohn's biographer claimed that Jaisohn believed the pressure brought by Hughes was a key factor in the Japanese shift to more lenient policies in Korea—the so called "Cultural Policies" of the new Governor-General of Korea Saito Makoto.[73] Since Saito was appointed in late 1919 and his reforms began before the Washington Conference convened, Hughes' rebuke was not the origin of the "cultural policies" in Korea. However, the meeting may have reinforced for Japanese officials the need for reform.

Despite all their efforts, the Korean Commission could not consider the conference a success. Jaisohn highlighted the Japanese promise of reforms in a report to supporters, but had to acknowledge the disappointment that nothing official had been done. He wrote that Korea had been raised in "private meetings" and that all of the delegates to the conference had come to understand that the Korean independence movement was not just a few malcontents, but a broad-based movement. Thanks to grassroots support the justice of their cause was now widely recognized. Jaisohn contended that for these reasons their efforts at the Washington Conference were not

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[72] Accounts or references of the meeting between Secretary Hughes and the Korean Delegation can be found in Henry Chung, *Korea and the United States Through War and Peace, 1943-1960* (Seoul, Korea: Yonsei University Press, 2000), 83; Chong-Sik Lee, *The Politics of Korean Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 172; Oliver, *Syngman Rhee: The Man Behind the Myth*, 355–56; Liem, *Philip Jaisohn: The First Korean-American--a Forgotten Hero*, 238.

[73] Liem, *Philip Jaisohn: The First Korean-American--a Forgotten Hero*, 238.

wasted.[74] In other letters he told supporters the conference had established "precedents…, new methods of diplomacy and international settlement" that will "indirectly affect the Korean cause most favorably." He urged them to continue supporting the Korean Commission so that they could "keep the Korean cause before the eyes of the world" and build on their efforts of the previous three years.[75] In a letter addressed simply to "The Korean People" he encouraged them to persevere and to learn from other subject peoples who "confronting equally dismal prospects have resisted oppression for centuries, yet never in vain."[76] These letters imploring Koreans to steel their resolve indicate that the Korean leadership was aware of the eroding support for their movement. They could not have known, although they might have intuited, that the Korean independence movement had reached its high-water mark and was about to enter a long period of stagnation until December 1941.

**Conclusion: The Limits of the American Mission**

The Korean experience during the treaty fight and the Washington Conference demonstrated how right and wrong they had been in pursuing their American-centric strategy for regaining Korea's independence. They were correct that the case of Korea couched in the language of the American mission would resonate with many Americans. It attracted a small cadre of devoted Americans, such as Fred A. Dolph, Floyd Tomkins, and George Benedict who helped establish the movement. The publicity and lobbying work they did earned them the sympathy of many Americans. Thousands responded just

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[74] Ibid., 239.

[75] Philip Jaisohn to "Korean Residents in America, Hawaii and Mexico", 6 February 1922, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 6:453.

[76] Korean Mission to the Conference on Limitation of Armaments to "The People of Korea", 20 February 1922, Ibid., 6:480–85.

as the Koreans hoped. They wrote their congressmen, signed petitions, submitted editorials, and joined various organizations to promote Korea's independence. These Americans were drawn to Korea's defense for humanitarian and religious reasons, but both of these impulses were mediated through their sense of mission as Americans. They accepted the basic tenet that the United States had a special mission to promote liberty, justice, and Christianity and that this mission demanded support for Koreans. Through their efforts, the Korean question was discussed in churches, newspapers, and Chautauquas throughout the nation. The popular pressure brought by these groups and individuals brought Korea into the public discourse during the years between the Versailles Treaty and the Washington Conference. Sympathy for Korea abounded, but translating this sympathy for Korea into concrete action by the American government was a different and more difficult task.

American policymakers believed the United States had much to lose and little to gain by risking a conflict with the Japanese over Korea. Such a confrontation would have alienated the most powerful nation in Asia and may have precipitated a Japanese withdrawal from the League of Nations and the Washington Conference, resulting in the loss of even the meager restraints that these put on future Japanese expansion into Asia. Furthermore, it would have been imprudent to initiate a conflict with the Japanese when it was apparent that the United States lacked the will, and quite possibly the means, to force any change in Japanese policy in Korea. The Koreans were correct that the surest way to check Japanese expansion into Asia was to force them out of Korea, but this was unrealistic at the time. The inertia of previous policies worked against confronting the Japanese. The United States had recognized the Japanese annexation of Korea, and until

the March First Movement, it was unclear whether or not the Koreans valued their independence enough to fight for it. Resistance was sporadic. Theodore Roosevelt's justification for failing to come to Korea's aid on the basis that the United States should not be expected to do for another nation what it was unwilling to do for itself seemed reasonable, even if it did mean Americans technically violated their treaty obligations towards Korea. By the time Koreans made their sentiments unmistakably clear in March 1919, it was too little too late in the eyes of many. Although it aroused sympathy around the world, the March First Movement made clear that the Koreans had no hope of defeating the Japanese by force. To hardnosed Americans this made the Korean struggle for independence categorically different from the American Revolution, which the Koreans often invoked. The American revolutionaries sought allies in a war they were already fighting and had a chance of winning. The Koreans appeared to be looking for allies in a war they had not earnestly begun and had no chance of winning on their own.

All these factors worked against the United States government confronting the Japanese over Korea, or even raising the Korean question in a way that might lead to confrontation, especially when they believed other means existed for indirectly aiding the Korean people. Few American policymakers were indifferent to the fate of Korea, but they believed it wise not to let the best be the enemy of the good. This principle explains Secretary Hughes' actions at the Washington Conference no less than President Wilson's at Versailles. Hughes believed that more could be accomplished for Korea and East Asia—and with less risk to American interests—by privately protesting conditions in Korea with the Japanese. These indirect actions fell far short of the expectations of the Korean Commission and their American supporters, but considering the weight of factors

stacked against direct American involvement in Korea's conflict with the Japanese, the paucity of American interests in Korea, and the complete lack of a Korean voting block in the United States the Koreans received an adequate return on their lobbying. They fell well short of accomplishing their goals, but necessity had forced them to aim very high.

The Koreans had overestimated their ability to leverage the American mission. They were correct in thinking that the American mission could be invoked to build a constituency of American supporters, but they were wrong to suppose that they could focus the energy of this constituency on a particular policy goal: Korean independence. Americans' sense of mission is such an appealing target for foreign lobbyists because it is so imprecise and constantly changing. For one generation of Americans it might be to Christianize the world in a generation. For another it might be self-determination or universal human rights. It is not limited to any particular geographic space. In theory it can apply everywhere. In any situation where a wrong has clearly been committed, the American mission demands that the United States be on the side of justice. Many Americans may have never heard of places like Korea, Armenia, or the Shantung, but if the injustice is great enough it is not too difficult to find believers in the American mission who can be mobilized to support the cause. The vagueness and universality of the mission is what makes it attractive to foreign lobbyists, but it is also what makes it so unwieldy. The American mission is a vision, not a strategy. There are no tactics and no concrete goals besides keeping the United States on the "right side" of history.

In the Korean case this meant that many Americans were sympathetic to the Koreans' maltreatment under Japanese colonization, especially after the March First Movement. The violence was horrific and the roles of aggressor and victim so clear that it

was obvious whose side Americans should take. Japanese targeting of Christians further clarified the issue for many Americans, and Christian churches and organizations provided the backbone of the Koreans' American constituency. But it was the violence, not Korea's loss of independence, which demanded action. Many Americans became staunch supporters of Korean independence, but the majority of those who wrote their congressmen, attended mass-meetings, and subscribed to the *Korea Review* were more concerned about ameliorating conditions in Korea than with supporting Korean independence. For those who believed it, the American mission demanded that they do something for Korea, but it only demanded that they do so much. It demanded that they clearly condemn Japanese actions in Korea and take steps to ensure the continuation of Christianity on the peninsula, neither of which had Korean independence as a necessary condition. For many Americans the Japanese promise of reforms was a sufficient accomplishment to satisfy their consciences. After 1919 there were few supporters of Japanese colonialism, and surely most Americans would have supported Koreans regaining their independence if that had been an easily attainable goal. But it was not, and their sense of mission as Americans did not demand they go that far.

The Koreans discovered what others trying to leverage the American mission would discover: that while the American mission is accessible for any foreigner to claim, its practical applications are always defined by Americans. Americans are sensitive to the charge that they have not lived up to their own values, but only they will define what steps need to be taken to reestablish themselves, and only rarely will these steps involve risking American interests. Building a coalition around America's sense of mission is relatively easy given the right conditions, and so is spurring it to some sort of action.

Defining what those actions should be is nearly impossible. Americans agreed that the Koreans had been wronged and even that the United States had been complicit, but few agreed that these facts necessitated a confrontation with Japan or the restoration of Korea's independence. There were other ways of living up to the American mission.

# CHAPTER FOUR: INTO AND OUT OF THE WILDERNESS: THE KOREAN INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT DURING THE INTERWAR YEARS.

## Dry Rot

"Our only danger is dry rot," wrote Fred A. Dolph to Philip Jaisohn describing the state of the Korean independence movement in August 1922. "I am still convinced that mere active live presence if we can do nothing else will force results in time. Three years ago I doubt if 100 people in the U.S. knew the conditions in Korea and if your people would only stop to consider the difference in sentiment now." Dolph believed that the setback at the Washington Conference did not substantially change Korea's position. Sympathy for Korea was still high among American Christians, and Korea's friends in Congress were willing to do what they could, but Dolph was one of the few Americans in a position to see the "dry rot" that plagued the Korean independence movement: an intense factionalism.[1]

This chapter will examine the Korean independence movement during the interwar years, focusing on the disputes that tore the movement apart and also highlighting Rhee's efforts to keep the movement alive, efforts that included looking beyond the United States to secure allies and support for Korea's independence. Rhee's activities in Geneva and his obscure trip to Moscow in 1933—two episodes that reveal much about Rhee's political philosophy, his strategy for keeping the spirit of Korean independence alive, and, indirectly, his relationship with the American mission—also

[1] Fred A. Dolph to Philip Jaisohn, 15 August 1922, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 6:603–10.

figure prominently in this chapter.

Along with other Korean exiles, Rhee has been criticized for an overly narrow focus on the United States during Korea's struggle for independence. The bulk of Rhee's efforts were undeniably aimed at Americans, however, as this chapter will argue, Rhee was not averse to looking elsewhere—or anywhere—for additional sources of aid. Rhee's strategy was pragmatic to the core. As factionalism drove the Korean independence movement into a political wilderness during the interwar years, Rhee's persistence and pragmatism would do much to make the movement relevant again, just as American perceptions of the Japanese empire were changing in ways favorable to Koreans.

**Disunity and the Dissolution of the Korean Independence Movement**

Most of the squabbling among Koreans during the interwar years took place out of the American public eye and so did little direct damage to Koreans' publicity work, but divisions ate away at the movement from the inside, and soon after the Washington Conference the unity forged during the March First Movement fell apart. Although the Korean Provisional Government (KPG) and the Korean Commission continued to exist, they were starved of funds and unable to operate as actively as in the 1919–22 period. Koreans' failure to secure any official action from the United States government further divided them over strategy and contributed to greater disunity, but the seeds of this conflict had been sown years and even generations before. These divisions eventually deprived the Koreans of their ability to fundraise effectively, forcing them to close the Korean Information Bureau and discontinue the *Korea Review* and the League of Friends of Korea. These organizations did not die for lack of American sympathy, but rather for lack of Korean unity.

A complex mix of factors contributed to Korean factionalism. A strong North-South (Pyongyang-Seoul) regionalism had existed in Korea for hundreds of years because of the systematic exclusion of residents from the northern provinces from high government positions during the Joseon dynasty.[2] Korean migrants took these regional rivalries with them to the United States, where they viewed Koreans from different regions with suspicion. Strategy also divided Koreans. Rhee, Jaisohn, Chung, and AHN Chang-ho favored foreign diplomacy and the development of an educated Korean diaspora as the vanguard of Korea's independence. PARK Yong-man and other Koreans in China favored armed struggle and sabotage as a way to resist the Japanese.[3] Rhee would come to embrace these methods during World War II when the prospect of Lend-Lease aid from the United States made the development of Korean military forces feasible, but for much of his career he viewed armed struggle against the Japanese as quixotic at best and needlessly destructive of Korean life.

These divisions were further exacerbated by a clash of egos. In this regard, Rhee has often stood out for excessive criticism, much of it justified. He could be ungracious, quick to take offense, and stubborn. He was highly sensitive to criticism and suspected the loyalty of anyone who questioned him too vigorously. The hypersensitivity that sometimes plagued his interpersonal relationships can be seen in a letter to Philip Jaisohn during one of the many disputes between Rhee and other members of the Korean Commission. "From now on," Rhee wrote, "I want all my friends to be very careful with

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[2] Ki-baek Yi, *A New History of Korea* (Harvard University Press, 1984), 178; Wayne Patterson, *The Ilse: First-Generation Korean Immigrants in Hawaii, 1903-1973* (University of Hawaii Press, 2000), 48.

[3] Han-Kyo Kim, "The Korean Independence Movement in the United States: Syngman Rhee, An Ch'ang-Ho, and Pak Yong-Man," *International Journal of Korean Studies* VI, no. 1 (2002): 1–27; Young-ick Lew, *The Making of the First Korean President: Syngman Rhee's Quest for Independence, 1875-1948* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2013), 82–89.

what they say to me, if they want to work in harmony with me. Of course I shall not allow my feelings to interfere with the work, but I refuse to take any more of those humiliating remarks from anyone without expressing my feelings."[4] Few who worked closely with Rhee did so without falling out at some point. But Rhee's hypersensitivity was not entirely without reason. Many of the attacks made against him by rivals were vicious. Among the more outrageous were that he fathered several illegitimate children by American and Korean women, that he embezzled millions of dollars of donations intended for the Korean independence movement, and that he preferred mandatory status for Korea under the League of Nations over true independence.[5] Rhee's critics claimed that he made similarly far-fetched and unjustified denunciations of them in his Hawaii-based Korean language publication the *Pacific Magazine*.[6] This era of Korean diasporic politics was dirty, and Rhee was certainly guilty of fanning the flames of factionalism.

Of all the divisions the rivalry between Rhee and AHN Chang-ho did the most harm to the movement. The genesis of the conflict between them is difficult to locate and may have spun out of Korea's traditional regionalism—Rhee was from the area of Seoul and AHN from near Pyeongyang. Rhee may have unintentionally opened the hostilities in 1908 when he refused to act as interpreter at the trial of two members of AHN's Korean National Association (KNA) charged with the murder of American diplomat Durham Stevens. (Stevens had refused to retract statements he made claiming that the Japanese colonization was actually benefiting Korea.)[7] Rhee's refusal was probably not

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[4] *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 1:366–67.

[5] Kim, *The Writings of Henry Cu Kim*, 141, 199, 210; Kingsly K. Lyu, "Korean Nationalist Activities in the United States: Part Two 1919-1945," *Amerasia Journal* 4, no. 2 (1977): 54–55.

[6] Kim, *The Writings of Henry Cu Kim*, 144.

[7] Discussed in chapter two.

intended as a slight to the KNA. He believed the assassination was counter-productive and did not want to be associated with it. Tensions between Rhee and AHN continued to escalate when Rhee and his followers engineered a takeover of the Hawaii branch of the KNA.[8] In 1919, the KNA branches in Hawaii and California each tried to send representatives to the Paris Peace Conference.[9]

Philip Jaisohn did more than anyone else to try to mend the split between Rhee and AHN. At the First Korean Congress in Philadelphia in 1919, Jaisohn suggested the establishment of the Korean Commission as a way of uniting the two factions. The commission would have three commissioners, one from Hawaii, one from California, and a third "outsider" to act as mediator. Jaisohn's proposal of the Korean Commission failed soon after it started when the California faction dismissed their first representative, David Lee, and refused to send another, leaving the commission to Rhee.

The rivalry grew more intense when Rhee was elected president of the KPG. The result was especially bitter to AHN, who already viewed Rhee as a usurper. Rhee's actions as president further deepened the divide. In the name of more efficient fundraising, Rhee ordered the sale of interest-bearing KPG bonds through the Korean Commission in Washington rather than relying on local KNA committees to raise funds, as was the practice up to that point. He hoped this would streamline fundraising efforts and allow the movement to raise money among Koreans and Americans alike. The KNA strongly resisted what it saw as an attempt by Rhee to centralize fundraising efforts under his control. Rhee went ahead with the sale of bonds over KNA objections, resulting in

[8] Lew, *The Making of the First Korean President*, 69–70.

[9] Rhee was the representative of the Hawaiian KNA and Henry Chung of the Californian KNA. Neither was able to secure a visa to travel to France.

both organizations attempting to raise money among the same Koreans for the same purpose at the same time. The confusion caused by these competitive fundraising efforts created opportunities for mismanagement and graft which destroyed the confidence many Koreans had placed in the KNA, Rhee, and the KPG. Jaisohn tried to save the situation by striking a deal between the Korean Commission and the California KNA in which the KNA would send $3,000 a month to the commission in exchange for the exclusive right to collect funds on the American mainland. The KNA agreed, but the damage done had been so severe that they had difficulty collecting enough money for themselves, much less to send to the commission.[10]

Korean leaders understood their lack of unity was doing damage. On his way to Shanghai in 1920 to take up his post as president of the KPG, Rhee visited the headquarters of various Korean factions hoping to bring about unification. Jaisohn encouraged Rhee, but he also warned him that success would depend on some measure of self-sacrifice. "If you set a noble example," Jaisohn wrote, "the rest will follow." He encouraged Rhee to "remember the motto of the revolutionists of this country [the United States]: 'United we stand, divided we fall.'" The letter was written on 25 June 1920, thirty years to the day before the outbreak of the Korean War.[11] The tragedy of the factionalism that crippled the Korean independence movement was that all Korean leaders were aware of the damage it was causing—and would likely cause in the future—and yet were unable to put a stop to it.

[10] The above narrative of efforts to unify the Rhee and AHN factions among the Koreans is taken from a letter from Jaisohn to fellow Korean leader P. K. Yoon. Although no Korean leaders were completely free from factional associations, Jaisohn was more independent than most and enjoyed the confidence of both AHN and Rhee. See Jaisohn to P. K. Yoon, 11 December 1919, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 4:590–93.

[11] Philip Jaisohn to Syngman Rhee, 25 June 1920, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 2:378.

**Beyond Factionalism**

When examining the factors that divided the Korean independence movement it is possible to overemphasize personalities, historical prejudices, and differing strategies. They were not the only conditions that made unity difficult. The ruthless effectiveness of Japanese control of the Korean peninsula was the most formidable obstacle that independence leaders faced, and no moderating of personalities could change that. From its creation, the KPG and its leaders were separated from the people they represented by thousands of miles and a Japanese police cordon that made communication with the Korean peninsula difficult. The KPG was a head separated from its body. It could draw few resources from and exert little influence over what occurred on the Korean peninsula. Millions of Koreans supported the KPG in spirit, but doing so in practice was difficult and very dangerous. Koreans of wealth were closely watched by the Japanese and were not permitted control of their own financial affairs. Getting money out of Korea was difficult for foreigners and impossible for Koreans. This made the entire independence movement dependent on a few thousand Korean immigrants in the United States, most of whom were low-wage laborers. Even so they gave generously except during periods of political scandal. Even if they could have given more, their contributions could not have turned the KPG in Shanghai into anything more than what it was: a shadow government keeping the spirit of Korean independence alive while trying to find allies abroad and waiting for Japanese imperial ambitions in Asia to play out. Had it been better funded, the KPG might have been able to take advantage of the destruction of the Japanese empire in 1945, but it never could have challenged the Japanese for control of the Korean peninsula. The independence movement's reliance on Koreans living in America further intensified factional competition for resources. No faction believed that it could

accomplish its goals without the support of the entire Korean community in the United States and so continuously trespassed on each other's territory, furthering the divisions.

The Japanese isolation of the Korean peninsula also hampered the political development of the KPG by denying it the means to change leadership through a democratic process. Few could contest that Syngman Rhee had been elected by representatives of the March First Movement in 1919 and that this gave him a mandate to govern. But as the years went by and Rhee's actions caused more and more controversy, many Korean leaders wanted him replaced. In fact, Rhee was replaced as president of the KPG in 1926, but by an internal process that could not claim the same degree of legitimacy as the post-March First Movement elections. Rhee continued to identify himself as president of the Republic of Korea, and his supporters continued to view him as such well into the 1930s. Since the KPG was incapable of organizing an election in Korea, Rhee could claim a popular mandate until another was held. That did not occur until 1948. The inability to resolve leadership conflicts and other pressing issues by democratic means fanned the flames of Korean factionalism.

A host of technical problems also plagued the independence movement. Korean communities were spread from Vladivostok to Shanghai and from Hawaii to New York. Keeping lines of communication open across such distances would have been a challenge for any organization during that period, but especially for one short of funds. Telegrams were quick by the standards of the day, but were expensive and demanded the use of the English alphabet.[12] Cables either had to be sent in English or Korean written phonetically

[12] A telegraphic code did exist for Chinese characters, which well-educated Koreans could read, but for reasons that are unclear, the author has never seen a cable were the Koreans chose to use this code. A Korean telegraphic code was not standardized until the 1950s.

with the English alphabet—a process called romanization. Few Koreans in the movement outside of the United States spoke English, so most cables had to be sent in romanized Korean. Methods of romanizing Korean were not yet standardized, which meant that no two Koreans would romanize a cable the same way. Regional language differences, such as accents, further complicated cable messages, as did errors in transmission. Many cables sent between Koreans in China and the United States could only be deciphered after much effort. Even then the meaning was not always clear. Sometimes they could not be read at all.[13]

Letters were the alternative to cables, but these were painfully slow, especially between Shanghai and Washington, often taking weeks to arrive. Worse still, many letters would be sent on steamships traveling via Japan where they might be intercepted. Korean leaders trying to travel between the United States and Shanghai faced similar challenges; any stopover in Japan carried the risk of arrest. Procuring travel documents added another hurdle. Since Koreans were legally Japanese citizens in the United States they were expected to travel with Japanese passports, something many Koreans refused to do. A lack of travel documents made leaving the United States difficult and returning even more so. Rhee's visit to Shanghai in 1920–21 is a case in point. According to his diary, the trip took nearly eight months, with many complications resulting from Rhee's lack of travel documents and the necessity of avoiding Japan and Japanese steamship lines. Rhee actually completed the first leg of his journey as a stowaway. Had it not been for his personal relationships with customs officials in Hawaii and the sympathy he won from American officials in Shanghai and the Philippines, Rhee might not have been admitted

[13] For a sample of the problems of communicating by cable see *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 7:536, 539–40, 555, 600.

back into the United States at all.[14]

Considering the foregoing, the lack of unity in the Korean independence movement was not entirely of Koreans' own making. Isolated from their homeland and the main body of their countrymen, stateless, spread across two continents, starved for cash, without reliable communication and deprived of democratic methods to settle disputes, it seems miraculous that they accomplished as much as they did. Maintaining unity would have been challenging for even the deftest leaders. The situation called for patience, restraint, compromise, and trust, all of which were in short supply. Korean leaders' personal shortcomings were real and contributed to the movement's rapid contraction after 1922, but they need to be kept in perspective, for they were intensified by the movement's difficult circumstances as much as they were a cause of them.

**Geneva and the League of Nations**

The years between the Washington Conference and Pearl Harbor were difficult for the Koreans. The KPG continued to exist in Shanghai, but conflicts in the United States starved it of cash and robbed it of opportunities. Rhee spent much of this period in Hawaii, although he traveled regularly to the mainland visiting Korean communities, American friends, and consolidating support for himself as the only legitimate leader of the KPG. He set up his own organization called the *Dongjihoe* (Comrade Society), which competed with the KNA for members in Hawaii and on the mainland. Even with the passing of AHN Chang-ho relations between the two organizations did not improve. Broader trends also conspired to continue the disunity. Communism became a new force in international politics and attracted many Koreans who were frustrated that their

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[14] Fields et al., *The Diary of Syngman Rhee*, 117–21. Rhee's own incomplete account of this journey still survives. See "A-22", "Provisional Government" folder, SRI.

appeals to the West had produced so little. Communist sympathizers quickly became another faction in the Korean independence movement. Their embrace of revolutionary violence resonated with many Koreans who felt their leaders' emphasis on diplomacy had produced too little.

Rhee's disillusionment did not reach such proportions, but he also began exploring other means of support for Korean independence in the late 1920s and 1930s. In 1933, Rhee traveled to Geneva in an attempt to draw attention to the issue of Korean independence at the League of Nations. Many Koreans and their American supporters believed that the 1931 Japanese invasion of Manchuria had changed the way the leading powers viewed Japan and that such a shift in perception might provide an opening for Korean activists. Their hopes were not misplaced. When Rhee requested the State Department to issue him a passport to Geneva, unlike in 1919, he was not denied. He was issued a quasi-diplomatic passport signed by Secretary of State Henry Stimson. Rhee claimed that such a passport had never before been issued by the State Department to a non-citizen.

Traveling on an American passport, but proudly denying he was a U.S. citizen to inquisitive customs agents and curious fellow-travelers, Rhee arrived in Geneva on 5 January 1933.[15] As he had done when he immigrated to the United States thirty years before, Rhee carried letters of introduction from prominent Americans to local diplomats, journalists, and clergymen.[16] He immediately set to work finding a publicity agent and seeking allies among the various national delegations to the League of Nations. Although

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[15] Ibid., 164–69.

[16] Ibid., 171.

Rhee made contact with the American legation in Geneva, he spent little energy there since the United States was not a member of the league. Rather, Rhee devoted the bulk of his time toward the Chinese delegation and the "small states" of the league, which many observers told him would be natural allies of Korea.

Rhee focused on the Chinese delegation because China and Korea shared a common enemy. Japan's invasion of Manchuria and the creation of the Japanese-backed state of Manchukuo out of several Chinese provinces was then being debated in the League of Nations. The Chinese were trying to make the strongest possible argument that the invasion was unwarranted and that Manchuria was part of China. The Japanese partly justified their actions by arguing that they were bringing civilization to a wild part of northeast Asia and that the interests of Japanese citizens were endangered by the lawlessness of the region. The Japanese argued they could not wait for the issue to be taken to the League of Nations "in view of the delay invariably incidental to league procedure."[17] The Japanese delegation further presented the league with 586 documents from the region's inhabitants that they claimed showed local support for the new Japanese-backed regime. Since there was a sizable Korean population in Manchuria—in fact, the majority of those in Manchuria the Japanese claimed as citizens were displaced Koreans—the Korean opinion of the Japanese invasion was important to Japan's argument.[18] Whether or not Rhee was qualified to speak on behalf of Koreans living in Manchuria never troubled him. Nor did it trouble the Chinese delegation. As Rhee explained to Dr. Wieching Williams Yen, a member of the Chinese delegationM

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[17] This quote is taken from Rhee's "Statement of the Koreans in Manchuria," *League of Nations Official Journal, Special Supplement* 112 (1920-1946): 53.

[18] Barbara J. Brooks, *Japan's Imperial Diplomacy: Consuls, Treaty Ports, and War in China, 1895-1938* (University of Hawaii Press, 2000), 110.

presenting the "Korean question to the League will mean to beat the Japanese from another angle."[19] The Chinese delegation encouraged Rhee to prepare a statement that it could present to the league showing that Koreans in Manchuria did not support the Japanese.

Within a week of arriving in Geneva, Rhee had already engaged a Spanish anti-opium activist named Alfred [Alfredo] E. Blanco to act as his publicity agent. Like so many others who assisted Rhee and the Korean independence movement, Blanco refused any payment for his services. He had been an officer in the Opium Section of the League of Nations until his personal advocacy of a scheme to constrict the world's opium supply went beyond what his superiors believed was appropriate for a supposedly neutral office. Blanco was forced to resign in 1928 but stayed in Geneva running a one-man lobbying organization called the Anti-Opium Information League.[20] Given Blanco's passionate devotion to his cause and perseverance in the face of opposition, he and Rhee likely recognized themselves in each other.

Within a week Rhee and Blanco had a document ready for the Chinese delegation to submit to the league. But Chinese enthusiasm evaporated once they read the document. Rhee strayed far beyond the question of Manchuria, demanding recognition for the KPG and admission to full membership in the League of Nations. In response the Chinese reneged on their offer to present a communication from Rhee to the league. In a flurry of meetings with the Chinese delegation over the next three days, Rhee managed to undo the damage and agreed to submit a statement regarding Korean

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[19] Fields et al., *The Diary of Syngman Rhee*, 171.

[20] William B. McAllister, *Drug Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century* (Routledge, 2002), 87–88.

immigrants in Manchuria.

Rhee should have foreseen the problems with his initial draft. Only a week before, Rhee had met with Polish physician and adviser to the Chinese delegation Ludwik Rajchman, who tried to convince Rhee that it was not yet time to bring up the Korean question. Rhee was only able to convince Rajchman by assuring him that he would present the Korean question "side by side with the Manchurian problem" and that he did not expect the league "to get our Independence for us but to bring it up to make it a live issue." Perhaps both men left the meeting thinking they had reached an understanding where none in fact existed.[21]

Rhee rewrote his memorial and submitted it to the Chinese delegation only to have it rewritten again by the delegation's American counselor, a Mr. Collins. Not surprisingly, Collins' edits were unacceptable to Rhee, and he reworked it himself. Upon resubmission to the Chinese delegation, Rhee was informed the Chinese would write the memorial themselves and submit it to the league within the next ten days, causing Rhee to vent in his diary that "we cannot count on the Chinese any longer." He roundly criticized their delay and suggested the Chinese should do whatever they thought best for themselves and he would do what he thought best for Korea. Collins tried to heal the rift with Rhee and promised action within ten days. This meeting took place on 26 January—only three weeks after Rhee's arrival in Geneva.[22]

While Rhee waited he opined to Blanco that "the Chinese must have some reason of their own to hesitate in making the presentation of the Korean question" and that he

[21] Fields et al., *The Diary of Syngman Rhee*, 172–73.

[22] Ibid., 180–81.

and Blanco should do what they could for Korea on their own.[23] Rhee busied himself preparing his own statement and making friends among the delegations of the small nations of the league. His diary for January and February 1933 records meetings with the Irish, Finnish, Estonian, and Norwegian delegations. Rhee was also trying to secure meetings with the Czechoslovakian and Spanish delegations. Rhee appeared to be looking for a replacement for the Chinese: a sponsor to submit his own statement to the league.

Rhee received some encouragement from Sean Lester, a member of the Irish delegation and a future secretary general of the league. Lester met Rhee on numerous occasions and even offered to ask the secretary general to circulate Rhee's statement if Lester could secure permission from his government to do so. He also advised Rhee that, while the league secretary general would most likely ignore his communication, carefully prepared press releases sent the same day he petitioned the league might gain just as much publicity.[24] Ultimately, Rhee followed Lester's advice. He sent his own letter to Secretary General Eric Drummond on 8 February 1933 and also sent copies to every league member and every press correspondent in Geneva he could find.[25] The letter argued that Japanese ambitions extended beyond Manchuria and that no resolution of the current crisis was possible with Japan remaining in possession of the Korean peninsula. As Lester predicted, the secretary general took no action on Rhee's letter, but Rhee's appeal was covered in the local and international press, including the *New York*

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[23] Ibid., 83.

[24] Ibid., 188.

[25] A copy of this letter is printed in *海外 의 韓國 獨立 運動 史料* [Documents of the Korean Independence Movement Abroad] vol. 1 (Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs, 1991), 200–202.

*Times* and various American news syndicates.[26]

Such publicity was crucial to keeping Korea a "live issue," to use Rhee's language.[27] It was also key to winning and maintaining allies. The success of Rhee's individual efforts prompted the Chinese to circulate a statement of support for Rhee, which he dismissed as the Chinese "trying to throw a sop to me" since they had failed to "fulfill their promise."[28] But the Chinese did make good on their promise. On 16 February, the Chinese statement on Koreans in Manchuria was ready for Rhee's signature. Of course, Rhee was not satisfied with it, but a Korean friend in Geneva convinced him to accept it with minimal edits. The Chinese delegation submitted it to the secretary general on 20 February. The statement was subsequently circulated among league members.[29]

Rhee's relationship with the Chinese delegation highlighted difficulties in Sino-Korean relations that would last through World War II. While their interests aligned on a superficial level, their underlying goals differed, making cooperation difficult. The Chinese wanted Rhee to focus only on Koreans in Manchuria. Rhee wanted to use Manchuria to draw attention to Japan's misrule of Korea, which, he believed undermined the whole project of the Japanese empire. Personalities also clashed. Despite his perseverance, Rhee was by no means patient. The Chinese delegation moved too slowly and was too indirect for Rhee's taste.

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[26] "Appeal Is Made for Korea.," *New York Times*, February 9, 1933; "Japs Foresee Sino-Russian Alliance Soon," *Middletown Times Herald*, February 10, 1933.

[27] Fields et al., *The Diary of Syngman Rhee*, 173.

[28] Ibid., 190.

[29] "Statement of the Koreans in Manchuria," which was published in *League of Nations Official Journal, Special Supplement No. 112: Records of the Special Session of the Assembly* . . . (Geneva, 1933), 53–55. This document has been reprinted in Appendix K to Lew, *The Making of the First Korean President*.

Rhee's successes in Geneva were important to him personally. The financial situation of the Korean independence movement was no better in the early 1930s than it had been in the 1920s. Rhee needed results in Geneva to convince Korean communities in the United States and Hawaii that their funds were being well spent and to give more. Rhee's efforts paid off when he received a telegram from Honolulu on 6 March saying that his supporters in Hawaii would provide for his expenses in Geneva for one year. This no doubt pleased him greatly. Rhee was keeping busy in Geneva, shuttling back and forth between the delegations and also working on the manuscript of what would become *The Koreans in Manchuria*. But he was also having a very good time.[30] During the months in Europe, entries in Rhee's extant diary become more complete and more personal than other years.

A small Korean community in Geneva welcomed Rhee. Shortly after stories about him began appearing in the local press, one of Rhee's former students from the Seoul YMCA contacted him from Zurich. RHI (sometimes LEE) Han-ho had lived in Switzerland for ten years and distinguished himself as a judo expert and field hockey player. Rhee became quite close with RHI, his Swiss wife, and her sister and brother-in-law. The five of them spent the Easter holiday together and took several tours of the Alps. Rhee seems to have developed a strong attachment to RHI and his family. At the close of one of their tours together, Rhee wrote "the ladies were weeping and I felt so bad that I could not get over the sadness of the parting."[31]

Rhee also fell in love in Geneva. He did not record the story of how he met

[30] Syngman Rhee, *The Koreans in Manchuria* (Paris: Agence Korea, 1933).

[31] Fields et al., *The Diary of Syngman Rhee*, 197.

Francesca Donner in his diary. The first mention of her is in connection with the very unromantic topic of trying to secure a loan from a German bank, presumably to cover his living expenses. Donner was an Austrian translator working at the League of Nations, and he probably contacted her because of her fluency in German. Donner was twenty-five years younger than Rhee when they met; she was thirty-two and he was most likely fifty-seven. Both Rhee and Donner had been married before, but Donner, unlike Rhee, had been formally divorced. Rhee had been party to a traditional arranged marriage when he was a teenager, but the marriage essentially dissolved when Rhee left Korea for a second exile in the U.S. in 1912. Rhee and Donner's courtship was short. They met in Geneva during the spring of 1933. They spent a week together in Vienna in July and another few days together in Rome in August. Strangely, someone, perhaps Rhee himself, tried to excise their meeting in Rome from the transcribed version of Rhee's diary. Somewhat prudish, perhaps Rhee did not want it to be widely known that he and Donner met there unchaperoned. The next mention of Donner in his diary is in 1934, when Rhee sought the State Department's assistance in securing a visa for her to come to the U.S. to marry him.

The marriage caused some controversies among the already fractious Korean community. According to Rhee's critics, he had always preached against mixed marriages. His marriage to Donner only convinced them of his hypocrisy.[32] Still, Rhee's supporters in Hawaii probably caused him the most pain when, after his marriage to Donner in 1934, they cabled him twice asking him to visit Hawaii "alone"; they wanted him to leave his

[32] Kim, *The Writings of Henry Cu Kim*, 243.

wife of two weeks in New York.[33] Whatever controversies attended their marriage, the match seems to have been a happy one. Their marriage lasted until Rhee's death, and Francesca would play a key role in Rhee's political career, often acting as his personal adviser. That so many of Rhee's personal documents were kept in English was perhaps for of her.

**The Moscow Option and Rhee's Pragmatic Lens**

After the Chinese delegation submitted their document on the Koreans in Manchuria in February 1933, Rhee decided there was little more he could accomplish there. He had won a minor public relations victory and kept Korea "a live issue," but as Norwegian delegate to the League of Nations and Nobel Prize winner Christian Lange candidly explained to Rhee, it would be a "waste of time" to try to raise the issue of Korean independence or of Korean membership to the league at that time. Lange explained to Rhee that his actions had caused some "unofficial discussions" among the delegates about the status of Korea, but that they came to the conclusion that Korean membership in the league was impossible.[34] The "courteous and cordial" Mr. Lange convinced Rhee that further exertions in Geneva would be futile and after this meeting Rhee began focusing his efforts on a scheme he first recorded in his diary a week before: contacting Soviet officials in Moscow.

Rhee's trip to Moscow has received little scholarly attention. It does not fit with the narratives of Rhee as an arch-conservative and a virulent anti-communist that both his supporters and critics take as a starting point. Rhee's anti-communist credentials were hard-earned and, by the late 1940s, no doubt dearly held. However, Rhee's views on

[33] Fields et al., *The Diary of Syngman Rhee*, 258.

[34] Ibid., 199–200.

communism for much of his life were flexible. In an article titled "Communism: Right and Wrong" in his publication, the *Pacific Magazine*, in March 1923, Rhee spelled out his then-current thoughts on communism. It will come as a surprise to those familiar with the anti-communism of Rhee's later life that in this article he spends almost as much time describing what communism got right as what it got wrong.[35]

The most favorable aspect of communism to Rhee was its acknowledgment of the equal value of all human beings. Rhee's frame of reference for this judgment was the rigid caste system of late-Joseon Korea. Rhee lamented how in the Korea of his birth average Koreans—no matter how talented—had to consider "fools and idiots of noble blood [양반의 피를] as their superiors." He wondered how much human capital was wasted because of such prejudice. Had Rhee stopped there, this would not be a ringing endorsement of communism. Many ideologies, including capitalism, could make the same critique of rigid caste and class systems. But Rhee continued that while such rigid systems such as the Joseon caste system were disappearing, new forms of slavery were taking their place. Rhee complained that while slavery was nearly universally illegal "in the name of salary and wages people could still be made to live the life of a slave." It was this desire to make people equal, both philosophically and materially, that Rhee considered the positive aspects of communism.

Rhee's critiques of communism focused on the methods contemporary communists were using to bring this equality about. Rhee believed that the public ownership of all property was impractical and would lead to resources being given to

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[35] Syngman Rhee, "공산당의 당부당 (當不當) [Communism: Right and Wrong]," *태평양잡지* [*The Pacific Magazine*], March 1923. I am in debt to Professor LEW Seok-choon for bringing this article to my attention, for translating it into modern Korean orthography.

those who had neither the skills nor the desire to use them. He also believed that destroying the capitalist class and the intelligentsia would retard economic and social development. The solution to these class divisions was to remove the barriers to entry into these classes through education. Although the article is too short for Rhee to develop his ideas more fully, it is apparent that Rhee could see both the excesses of communism and unrestrained capitalism.

His final critiques focused on communism's attacks on two institutions that he had spent his life building up: religion and nationalism. Rhee acknowledged that organized religion had not always been a progressive force in world history but argued that Christianity, particularly Protestantism, was a means of developing "equality and freedom" and that churches were essential to developing human virtue. To Rhee communism's animus towards nationalism was incomprehensible. Rhee could not envision a society organized around anything other than ethnic nationalism. His Korean background is crucial here. Rhee wrote that as long as the Japanese were occupying Korea, Korean nationalism was indispensable. The time to discuss the merits of nationalism would come once the Japanese were expelled and not even the "silhouettes" of their warships could be seen from Busan Harbor. Before this point, Rhee claimed he would not countenance the destruction of nationalism, even if it could make him a millionaire.

In the final paragraph of this article Rhee elucidated his core ideological conviction, one that remained more or less consistent throughout his life: "To us Koreans, the most urgent, the most important, and the biggest issue is liberation activities. If Communism will help this work we should all become communist without delay, but [if] this work seems to be damaged by communism we can never agree to it." Rhee's

approach to communism could not be more clearly stated. He approached it not with an ideological lens, but with a pragmatic one. When asked directly by a supporter in 1928 what he thought of revolutionary violence, seeking the support of the Soviet Union, and nationalizing industries as a matter of economic policy, Rhee's response was similarly pragmatic, except on the question of violence. Rhee claimed that there was no room for the word "revolutionary" in the Korean independence movement and that he was opposed to violence "against justice and humanity." However, Rhee made clear that he would contact the Soviet Union if given the chance, but "it is difficult for me, given the fact that I am implementing the Korean independence movement from the United States, to promote communism." There is a certain ambiguity in Rhee's statement. Would he have preferred to promote communism had he not been in the United States? Almost certainly not. Communism's tendency to divide classes of people within a nation against each other was an "obstacle" to the Korean independence movement in Rhee's opinion. Rhee wanted to make clear to his correspondent that he neither categorically embraced nor condemned communism, but rather "it is more important for us to find our own survival strategy first."[36] Rhee was certain this survival strategy would not include revolutionary violence or fomenting class struggle, but he was equally certain that writing off potential allies, such as the Soviet Union, for ideological reasons was equally foolish.

The pragmatism that Rhee displayed in his stance toward communism has parallels to the way he approached Christianity, international law, and the American

[36] Lee Sang-Hoon, "Syngman Rhee's Vision and Reality: The Establishment of the Nation and Thereafter," *Review of Korean Studies* 14, no. 3 (2011): 33–60; The translation is from Lee Sang-hoon's article. For the original mixed script letters between Rhee and supporter Yu Chi-yeong see Yu Yeong-ik et al., eds., 이승만 동문 서한집 *[The Correspondence of Syngman Rhee in East Asian Languages]*, vol. 3 (Yonsei University Press, 2009), 129–45; Yu Yeong-ik et al., eds., 이승만 동문 서한집 *[The Correspondence of Syngman Rhee in East Asian Languages]*, vol. 1 (Yonsei University Press, 2009), 92–93.

mission. All were things he supported, at times passionately, but they also seemed to be linked fundamentally in his mind to the issue of Korean national self-determination. Rhee's conversion to Christianity as a young adult seemed to be genuine, but as was argued in chapter one it had national as well as personal implications. His conversion cry, as he recorded it (albeit years later), was "Oh God save my soul and my country." He remained a devoted Christian his entire life, but his call for Koreans to adopt Christianity *en mase* in *The Spirit of Independence* was as much about national rejuvenation as it was the destiny of individual souls.[37] Rhee believed in Christianity, but also hoped to use it pragmatically. Similarly, Rhee stalwartly supported the League of Nations and the development of international laws and norms until it became clear that the statesmen at Versailles would do nothing for Korea, at which point Rhee quickly changed sides and cooperated with the Irreconcilables in the U.S. Senate in their successful bid to block American entry into the league. Rhee would reverse course once again in 1933 when it appeared that the League of Nations might take a stand against the Japanese in Manchuria. He was willing to cooperate with the league and even argue for its legitimacy to the extent that it furthered his aims.

Rhee's relationship with the American mission was likely also pragmatic, although he may have believed some of what it. It is difficult to know his feelings for certain. The American mission Rhee invoked was always focused on the United States' potential and not Americans' national identity—that is, on what the American people could do for Korea rather than on who they believed themselves to be. Under these circumstances it would have been difficult for Rhee to believe that the American people had ever

[37] Rhee, *The Spirit of Independence*, 282–83.

definitively failed him. He would claim many times that the American government had failed him, but it would have been impolitic to say the same of the American people, even if he believed it. Still, it is probably not imprudent to assume that Rhee felt about the American mission throughout his life the way he felt about communism in 1923: if it had the potential to aid Korean nationalism, he would support it; if it would damage this cause, he would oppose it.[38]

Rhee's thoughts in "Communism: Right and Wrong" are also crucial to understanding Rhee politically. They reveal not only the pragmatic lens through which he viewed the world, but also ideas about political economy that resonate more with the ideals of the welfare state based on a mixed economy than with the laissez-faire capitalism that is often associated with those labeled as "right-wing." Although Rhee is generally placed on the far right of the political spectrum for his attacks on communism after 1948, his economic policies as president of the Republic of Korea—though frequently hampered by corruption and mismanagement—were those of a center-left social reformer. When he returned to Korea in 1945 he told the *New York Times* there were two types of communists in Korea: those who wanted to establish a communist government and those who believed "that some of the economic principles of communism will be beneficial to our people." He claimed that he believed in "some communist ideas" and that after a Korean government was established he would "work for the adoption of many of these theories."[39] This was not idle talk. Letters between Rhee and Francesca

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[38] Rhee's "pragmatic lens" as described above also had parallels in his relationships with American racists such as V. S. McClatchy (chapter one) and John E. Rankin (chapter five). Almost certainly Rhee preferred the company of non-racists, but as both men were in a position to assist Rhee in his efforts to restore Korea's independence he was not averse to cooperating with them.

[39] Richard J. H. Johnston, "Korean Red Group Assailed by Rhee," *New York Times*, November 22, 1945.

reveal a progressive social outlook. When Rhee wrote in November 1945 that his popularity after arriving in Seoul was so great that even the communists were supporting him, Francesca responded, "I shall be the first one to join the communist [sic] under your leadership. I think it is wonderful that they choose you as their leader. I begin to think that you and I have mapped out all the social reforms which would impress the communist more than anything else. I do believe in the social reforms which enable the working class a decent existence. You remember what dept. you have promised me—[.]"[40] Social reforms appear to have been a topic of some conversation in the Rhee household.

Even as the relationship between Rhee and Korean communists deteriorated, he continued to champion social reforms. In February 1946 Rhee broadcasted a twenty-seven-point "national program" as chairman of the Representative Democratic Council of South Korea. The program included proposals to nationalize all heavy industries, mines, forests, public utilities, etc.; "To inaugurate state supervision of all commercial and industrial enterprises to insure fair treatment to consumers, traders, and producers alike"; to redistribute "all confiscated agricultural lands to small farmers in accordance with their capacity and ability to work them"; to break up "large private estates" and redistribute the land to small farmers; to control interest rates; to reform the tax system to make it more progressive; to make gift and inheritance taxes more progressive; to implement unemployment and social security insurance; to promulgate minimum wage laws; and to establish "state control of medicine and to provide adequate public health facilities to the

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[40] Francesca Rhee to Syngman Rhee, November 12, 1945, Lew, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 3:435.

benefit of all workers."[41] Rhee's first Liberation Day speech as president in 1948 contained similar ideas about social welfare and included the same criticisms of Korea's historic social structure he had been making since he was a young man: "In olden days, every consideration was given to making easy the lives of the 'Yangban' [Korea's noble caste]." Rhee argued that must be replaced by a "new concept of the dignity of man, the dignity of labor, and the equality of all citizens to opportunity before the law." Under the new Korean constitution "The employer must not, and will not be permitted to exploit labor. Labor must not expect, and will not be permitted to destroy capital."[42] Rhee argued that the goal of his administration was to elevate the living standards of all Koreans, but to do so without pitting one class against another, as the communists did. Although progress was halting and Korean living standards would take decades to rise significantly, Rhee would remake Korea's social fabric through a major land reform program in the 1950s that provided a modicum of social security for millions of Korean farmers and laborers. This land reform was not a sufficient condition for Korea's future development, but it was a necessary one.

Rhee was probably never a socialist at any point in his life, but some of his close associates were. In 1933 he founded a magazine with Charles Edward Russell (discussed later), a well-known socialist and author. The socialist Unitarian minister John Haynes

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[41] A copy of this program was transmitted to the State Department by the chairman of the Korean Commission, Ben C. Limb, in June 1948. Limb explained to the department that, even though it was proclaimed in 1946, Rhee had espoused it ever since. See Limb to Niles W. Bond, June 10, 1948, 895.01/6-1048, *美國務省韓國關係文書 [Internal affairs of Korea, 1945-1949]*, vol. 9 (Seoul: Areum Press, 1995), 488–89.

[42] A copy of this speech was transmitted to the State Department in Joseph E. Jacobs to the Secretary of State, August 15, 1948, 895.01/8-1548, no. 669, *美國務省韓國關係文書 [Internal affairs of Korea, 1945-1949]*, 9:538–45.

Holmes presided at Rhee's wedding in 1934.[43] Sherwood Eddy, a close friend from the YMCA who included Rhee's biography in his book *The New Era in Asia,* publically joined the Socialist Party of America in 1931. Rhee hired Laurence Todd as the first publicity agent for the Korean Commission. Todd was an avowed socialist who had previously spent several years as the personal secretary of Meyer London, one of only two socialists ever elected to the U.S. Congress. Todd would later become a communist and spend decades as the Washington, D.C., correspondent for the Soviet TASS news agency.[44]

That Rhee would keep company with left-of-center Americans is hardly surprising given the historical context of race relations in the United States. All of these men were "racial progressives" by contemporary standards. Holmes and Russell were co-founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Todd briefly worked for the NAACP, and Eddy spent the later years of his life trying to construct an interracial, cooperative community in Mississippi called the Delta and Providence Cooperative Farms. While the topic of race in Rhee's papers is conspicuous by its near absence, Rhee could have hardly spent forty years in the United States and not have directly or indirectly experienced some prejudice. Still, Rhee was not primarily drawn to these men because they were socialists or racial progressives, though the socialist emphasis on equality and social change likely resonated with him and their views on race probably encouraged him. Rhee was drawn to these men because they each had something to offer him in his struggle for Korea's independence. Their socialism was no impediment to Rhee accepting their support.

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[43] Fields et al., *The Diary of Syngman Rhee*, 256.

[44] The sole surviving letter between Rhee and Todd reveals that Todd was an ardent supporter of the Bolshevik Revolution during the time he worked for the Korean Commission. See Todd to Rhee, December 30, 1919 in Lew, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 2:320–22.

Prior to the 1940s, even as Rhee harbored skepticism towards communists because of their methods, some aspects of socialist philosophy resonated with him. Rhee's 1933 trip to Moscow must be understood in this light and informed by his pragmatic approach to politics and international relations. The trip revealed Rhee's commitment to leaving no stone unturned in his search for support for Korean independence. That he undertook this trip at all indicates how his views on communism were more flexible and dynamic than the "far-right" label that is usually applied to him would indicate.

Rhee's mission to Moscow was not a secret one. He sounded out both the American consul and the Chinese delegation in Geneva before the trip. He explained his purpose to the Chinese as to meet with "Russian authorities" and also to go to Siberia "to have some understanding with our [Korean] leaders there." The Chinese encouraged him. The American consul described his plan as "interesting."[45] When he met the Russian minister to Vienna he emphasized the need of cooperation between Russia, America, and China to counter Japanese aggression. He may have had some misgivings when the minister warned him "to be very careful in order to avoid those whom I should not meet."[46] That would not be a problem for Rhee. He was only in Moscow for seven hours before an officer of the Foreign Ministry arrived at his hotel and promptly asked him to leave the country. At first Rhee was incredulous and asked to speak with the Foreign Ministry. The expelling officer explained to Rhee that he *was* dealing with the Foreign Ministry, that they knew who Rhee was and what his purpose was, that he had been granted a visa in error and would now have to leave.

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[45] Fields et al., *The Diary of Syngman Rhee*, 197–98.

[46] Ibid., 215.

It was far from the first time Rhee had run into bureaucratic hurdles while conducting diplomacy. However, Rhee seems to have accepted this expulsion with an uncharacteristic forbearance. He asked the officer if he had done anything to deserve expulsion. The officer replied it was nothing personal, but he would have to leave regardless. Rhee asked the officer to deliver a letter to the Foreign Ministry explaining his mission. This the officer agreed to, but insisted that Rhee leave the next day. Rightly or wrongly, Rhee deduced that the Japanese must have trailed him to Moscow and were placing pressure on the Russians to expel him. Rhee's first instinct was to make his expulsion public and "create sensation for news story but a better judgment prevailed" and he decided to keep it to himself so that "in course of time we may make use of it to our advantage."[47] Just what use Rhee expected to make of it is unclear.

Despite asking him to leave, the Soviets did not confine him to his hotel, and that night he had dinner with members of the Chinese legation in Moscow. They all expressed their regret over his situation but also advised him that nothing could be done. The next day the same officer returned the letter Rhee had written saying that the Foreign Ministry could not receive it. With perhaps unwarranted graciousness Rhee told the officer he was leaving the Soviet Union "with no unpleasant feelings of any kind" and that he was appreciative of the manner in which "they expressed themselves to me." He chose to construe the officer's visit as "an official expression of regret and apology" rather than a summary expulsion.[48] Later that night, Rhee was on a train bound for Poland.

The reasons for Rhee's quick expulsion from Moscow are impossible to know with

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[47] Ibid., 221.

[48] Ibid., 222.

any certainty. Perhaps the Japanese had exerted some pressure. Perhaps Rhee's visa was issued in error. The sedate manner in which Rhee accepted his expulsion revealed the different approaches he had to the Soviet Union and the United States. In a democracy like the United States, Rhee understood that bypassing the government and making a case directly to the people was always possible. In his relations with the U.S. government in the 1940s, as the next chapter will examine, Rhee was by no means afraid to make things public, to "create sensation," and to denounce American officials and policies. But Rhee understood the limits of these methods in the Soviet Union. He also understood the implications of Soviet proximity to Korea. As neighbors, the Soviet Union and an independent Korea would need to have cordial relations regardless of political ideology. Rhee's mission to Moscow failed to accomplish the goals that he had set for it, but it also reveals a great deal about Rhee's ideological commitments, the way he viewed the world, and his understanding of Korea's place within it.

**Rhee on the Road**

After his abortive trip to Moscow, Rhee was ready for some rest and relaxation. He spent the next few days in Zurich with RHI Han ho and his family taking trips into the Alps and steeling himself for what lay ahead. Just before leaving for Moscow he had received news the Korean Commission was on the verge of closing because of a lack of funds.[49] The news was startling enough that Rhee proposed to cancel his trip to Moscow, but his supporters in Honolulu encouraged him to make the trip but to return as soon as possible. Soon after returning Rhee learned of another disaster. His Dongji Investment Company had gone bankrupt. Rhee had set up this company with the support of

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[49] Ibid., 205.

Koreans in Hawaii. The idea was to create a model Korean community that would also turn a profit by providing the U.S. Navy with keel blocks made from ohia trees. The company won a Navy contract only to learn that producing keel blocks was beyond their technical skills. They failed to fulfill the contract and incurred fines from the U.S. Navy, accumulating more than $20,000 in debt in the process. Both Rhee and the Korean independence movement were on the verge of financial disaster. After a few days with RHI in Zurich, Rhee made a brief tour of Italy and Monaco before departing for New York on 10 August.

The next few months were a period of great physical exertion for Rhee. After spending a few days in relative comfort with supporters in New York, he undertook an epic 9,000-mile road trip across the U.S. visiting nearly every Korean community, major and minor, from New York to Los Angeles in an effort to save the Korean Commission and shore up support for his faction of the Korean independence movement. Several different traveling companions accompanied Rhee in the secondhand Willys coupe he purchased for the journey with funds raised from supporters in Chicago. Driving across the U.S. in the 1930s was no simple matter. Many of the roads were unpaved and in disrepair, distances between towns were great, and lodging facilities were extremely basic to non-existent in the Great Plains and Mountain West. Rhee's typical impatience did not make the trip any easier. He was pulled over for speeding by a police officer in Milwaukee. He crashed the Willys twice, stranding himself in rural Nebraska and Colorado. On a stormy night in Colorado he ended up plunging his car into a torrent that had washed out the road. Ironically, as Rhee himself acknowledged, the poor condition of the roads may have prevented him from doing worse damage to his car and himself. He wrote in his

diary the "so-called gravel road along that part of the country was so bad and rough that I was unable to speed and that saved me from a worse accident."[50]

Such mishaps forced Rhee to rely on the goodwill of local, rural Americans. If they ever disappointed him, Rhee never recorded it. A truck driver in Nebraska pulled Rhee's car out of the ditch, and five young men in a car in Colorado towed his disabled Willys thirty miles to the nearest town where the innkeeper introduced Rhee to the sheriff and other local notables. For reasons unknown, Rhee decided to tell his hosts he was a teacher on vacation instead of revealing his identity. He was more honest with the police officer in Milwaukee, perhaps hoping to claim diplomatic immunity from a traffic ticket. Whatever his motive, it seems to have worked. Once the officer discovered they were Korean "diplomats," "He turned around and with a changed tone, said, 'You are the first Korean I ever met.'" The officer did not give them a ticket, but instead recommended a route out of Milwaukee that avoided the most crowded streets. A jeweler in Buffalo, Wyoming rendered the greatest assistance. The unexpected repairs had drained Rhee's funds to the point he did not have enough money to continue. Rhee's traveling companion, a CHANG Kee Young, tried to sell or pawn his Kodak camera to the local jeweler. After hearing CHANG's story, the jeweler gave the Koreans two dollars ($35 in 2016 dollars). This money enabled their trip to continue and Rhee claimed that they paid the money back once they reached Los Angeles. "Each time we recall this experience," Rhee wrote, "we feel much grateful [sic] and appreciative and will remember it for a long time."[51] By the end of his trip Rhee was feeling generous himself. He picked up a hitchhiker in Cheyenne Wells, Colorado and rode with him nearly 500 miles to Kansas

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[50] Ibid., 246–47.

[51] Ibid., 241.

City, Missouri, adding in his diary that "I let him do the driving." Given Rhee's previous record, it was probably a wise decision.

Rhee did not record how much money he raised, but thanks to his efforts and the generosity of Fred A. Dolph's former legal partner, John W. Staggers, the Korean Commission survived. Staggers offered the Korean Commission an office for fifteen dollars a month in the Columbian Building in Washington, D.C. He owned the building. He also agreed to serve as the commission's legal counsel free of charge, provided the work did not take up too much of his time.[52]

Rhee split much of 1934 between Washington, D.C., and New York, where he and Charles Edward Russell, with Chinese support, created an organization called the Far Eastern Union and started a magazine titled *Orient*. The partnership with Russell was a further example of Rhee's pragmatic politics and interest in reform and socialism. Russell was a journalist, a Pulitzer Prize-winning author, and also a socialist who in the 1910s had published books such as *Why I am a Socialist*, *Socialism the Only Remedy,* and *The Passing Show of Capitalism*.[53] Rhee had known Russell since at least 1920. He became acquainted with him in Washington, D.C., at the height of the Korean Commission's activities during the fight over the Versailles Treaty. Russell was by no means a radical. He came to socialism by way of muckraking journalism—investigating the corrupt practices of many of the United States richest individuals and most valuable companies. Russell's interest in socialism also appears to have been more pragmatic than doctrinaire. His *Bolshevism and the United States* (1919) showed as much sympathy with the Russian

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[52] Ibid., 250.

[53] Charles Edward Russell, *Why I Am a Socialist* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, George H. Doran Co., 1910); Charles Edward Russell, *Socialism the Only Remedy* (New York: Socialist Party, 1912); Charles Edward Russell, *The Passing Show of Capitalism* (Girard, Kan.: The Appeal to Reason, 1912).

people as it did thinly veiled contempt for the Bolshevik project. Bolshevik ideas were vague and unworkable in Russell's opinion, especially the abolition of private property and the dictatorship of the proletariat. Russell was in favor of a "social revolution" but not one that would result in "chaos."[54] He was actually expelled from the Socialist Party of America for his support of the U.S. entry into World War I. Perhaps like Rhee, Russell did not see nationalism as antithetical to social reform.

Although Russell was credited as the editor on the first issue of *Orient*, it appears that Rhee and his life-long friend Homer B. Hulbert did most of the work in New York while Russell was bedridden in Washington.[55] The magazine was not a success, appearing to have had a run of just two issues. Rhee hints that the paper's short life was due to the failure of the Chinese community in New York to keep its promise of support and the small size of the Korean population there.[56]

Disappointment over the magazine's failure was tempered by the joy of Rhee's impending marriage to Francesca Donner. Rhee may have perplexed the staff of the Far Eastern Division of the State Department when he visited in June 1934 to discuss something other than Korean independence: a visa for Donner. He had been working on her visa for nearly six months. Impatient with the State Department's pace Rhee enlisted his friend, journalist Drew Pearson, to publicize the department's tardiness in handling the matter, and in handling visas in general, in his syndicated column "The Washington Merry-Go-Round."[57] Rhee's badgering and Pearson's article had the desired effect. The

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[54] Charles Edward Russell, *Bolshevism and the United States* (Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1919), 307.

[55] Fields et al., *The Diary of Syngman Rhee*, 285–86, 292.

[56] Ibid., 253.

[57] Drew Pearson, "The Weekly Washington Merry-Go-Round," *Salt Lake City Tribune*, September 23, 1934.

article was published on 23 September. On 26 September Rhee learned that Donner had her visa and would sail for the United States on 28 September.[58] Whether or not the article was effective it likely confirmed Rhee's belief that one way to influence American policy was to go to the press with stories of malfeasance or official incompetence.

**Small Victories**

The 1930s were a time of small victories for Rhee and the Korean independence movement. The failure of his Dongji Investment Company in Hawaii, his trip to Moscow, and the *Orient* magazine, were offset by shifts in the international political situation that appeared to show American policy and world opinion swinging in favor of Korea. Rhee was especially heartened by the reception he received from American customs officials in New York when he returned from Europe in 1933. On seeing his passport, the officials pulled him out of line and passed his baggage through without inspection. He was asked to sign their ledger book as the "chairman of the Korean Commission." Rhee gushed in his diary that this was "full diplomatic courtesy extended to me by the U.S. Government. This is a distinct mark of change of sentiment towards Japan."[59] This may have been an exaggeration, but the State Department's treatment of Rhee in 1933 was markedly different from 1919, when he could not get a visa at all. It was also during the 1930s that the State Department began treating the Korean Commission as a *de facto* legation and involving it in issues regarding Korean immigrants.[60] This could sometimes be a burden on the commission's meager resources, but it was also a source of pride and hope that even if the United States government did not recognize Korea as an independent state,

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[58] Fields et al., *The Diary of Syngman Rhee*, 253–55.

[59] Ibid., 234.

[60] Kim, *The Writings of Henry Cu Kim*, 163–64.

they recognized Koreans as a distinct people and considered their organizations capable of representing their interests.

After the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, American diplomats also had to acknowledge, although never publically, that Koreans' warnings about long-term Japanese ambitions were accurate. Assessing the Japanese incursions into Manchuria in 1932, the American consul at Mukden (Shenyang) told his superiors "Competent observers have noted the great similarity between the events of the past few weeks in Manchuria and those of a quarter century ago in Korea. History is probably repeating itself but with different trappings and possibly with more circumvention."[61] American Ambassador to Japan Joseph Grew pointed out that Japan's treaties with the puppet state of Manchukuo were virtually identical with those that gave them control of Korea.[62] Had Rhee been privy to this correspondence, he would have read it with a mixture of satisfaction and dismay: satisfaction because American policymakers were finally coming to acknowledge that he was right about the Japanese and dismay because it had taken so long.

The Koreans also won small victories in the U.S. Congress. In March of 1933 Hawaiian territorial representative Victor S.K. Houston and Senator Hiram Bingham (D-CT) managed to shepherd "An Act for the Relief of the Dongji Investment Co. (Limited)" through Congress.[63] The act released the company from nearly $8,000 in fines and damages that the U.S. Navy was seeking for breach of contract. The relief was not

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[61] M. S. Myers to Nelson T. Johnson, 18 March 1932, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1932*, vol. III: The Far East (Government Printing Office, 1948), 603.

[62] Grew to Secretary of State Stimson, 22 September 1932, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1932*, vol. IV: The Far East (Government Printing Office, 1948), 269–70.

[63] *An Act for the Relief of the Dongji Investment Company (Limited)*, Private Law 228, *U.S. Statutes at Large*, 47 (1933): 1734.

enough to save the company, nor Rhee, a serious embarrassment, but the legislation nearly halved the company's remaining debts. In 1939, two congressional allies, Senator Guy M. Gillette (D-IA) and Representative Kent E. Keller (D-IL), introduced identical bills that proposed to allow Korean students admitted into the United States after 1924 to remain until political conditions in Korea made it unlikely that "any such Koreans will be subjected to persecution because of religious, political, social, or economic views, upon his return to Chosen (Korea)."[64] Neither of these bills made it out of committee, but Senator Gillette told the *New York Times* in April 1940 that he and the Senate Immigration Committee had received assurances from the deputy commissioner of immigration that no steps would be taken to deport the Koreans students who were the subject of Gillette's bill.[65] In 1940 the federal government also allowed Koreans to register as Koreans instead of Japanese under the alien registration requirements of the Smith Act, a decision that reveals American officials' understanding of the distinction between Koreans and Japanese even if they did not officially acknowledge that Korea existed as a nation.[66] None of these bills or policy changes represented a major victory for the Korean independence movement, but, in Rhee's phrase, they kept Korean independence "a live issue."

Were these small victories attributable to Korean lobbying, or did they result from changing perceptions of the East Asian situation prompted by Japan's expansion during the 1930s? This is a critical question. Due to further Japanese incursions into Manchuria, the horrific massacre of Chinese civilians at Nanjing—publicized worldwide by the

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[64] These bills were S. 2870 76th Cong. (1939) and H.R. 7399 76th Cong. (1939).

[65] "235 Escape Deportation: Korean Students Can Remain for Present, Shaughnessy Agrees," *New York Times*, April 21, 1940.

[66] Patterson, *The Ilse*, 196.

infamous "Bloody Saturday" photograph—and the now-obscure Panay Incident, during which a U.S. Navy gunboat was sunk by the Japanese in the Yangtze River, Americans were quickly losing the will to accommodate Japan's further expansion. Anti-Japanese sentiment was on the rise. That Koreans benefited from Americans' shifting perceptions of Japan is undeniable, but these benefits were not obtained by default. Rhee and other Korean leaders struggled to make changing perceptions work in their favor. Increasing anti-Japanese sentiment in the United States would have done little to benefit Koreans—and might have harmed them—if American policymakers proved incapable of distinguishing between Koreans and Japanese or had no incentive to do so. Perhaps the most important thing Rhee and his followers did during this period was to continually remind Americans that Koreans and Japanese were different peoples, that they were enemies rather than allies, and that the United States was partially to blame for Korea's annexation into the Japanese empire.

This was much more of an accomplishment than Rhee and the Korean independence movement are normally given credit for. Had it not been for their efforts, few Americans might have been able to distinguish between Koreans and Japanese or been aware of their historical enmity. Americans consulting a map or atlas of East Asia created after 1910 would have learned Korea—or rather Chosen, to use the Japanese term—was part of Japan.[67] Those consulting an encyclopedia would learn the same thing. The fact that Koreans were applying to join the Japanese army by the hundreds of thousands would have further confused American perceptions of Korea had this

[67] The 1914 edition of the widely used *New Students Reference Work* used Rand-McNally's "New Map of Asia," which showed Korea as a part of Japan. This same map was used in many other atlases. See Beach, Chandler B., and Frank Morton McMurry, *New Students Reference Work for Teachers, Students and Families* (Chicago: F. E. Compton and Company), 1914.

information been widely known.[68] By the end of World War II, Koreans who had *actively* fought for the Japanese outnumbered those who had *actively* promoted Korea's independence by an order of magnitude. That Rhee managed to keep Americans focused on the small number of Koreans in the independence movement and to convince them that these Koreans represented the voiceless majority of Koreans living under Japanese rule was a noteworthy accomplishments. It not only led to better treatment for Koreans in the United States during World War II, compared to their Japanese counterparts, but also influenced the way the United States thought about Korea during the war, which will be examined in the next chapter. By keeping Korea a "live issue," Rhee managed to ensure that Korea and Japan remained distinct entities in the minds of Americans and so was able to use the growing anti-Japanese sentiment to further the cause of Korean nationalism.

### Japan Inside Out

Rhee was not content to reap the harvest of Americans' changing perceptions of Japan. He attempted to shape them to the extent he could. Sensing the time was right for a renewed warning about Japan, Rhee spent much of 1940 and 1941 writing one. *Japan Inside Out* is the only full-length monograph Rhee wrote in English and perhaps one of the few published pieces he wrote without a ghostwriter. His voice and opinions are unrestrained; the Japanese are "small folk, small in body and brain, circumscribed in their

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[68] Prior to the Japanese policy of conscripting Koreans in 1944, Koreans had to apply to join the Japanese Army. Between 1938 and 1944, more than 300,000 Koreans did so. Less than 20,000 were admitted. See Utsumi Aiko, "Japan's Korean Soldiers in the Pacific War," in *Asian Labor in the Wartime Japanese Empire* (National University of Singapore Press, 2006), 84. Their willingness to join the army likely resulted from the relatively high pay and promotion opportunities it offered, rather than genuine support for the Japanese imperial project. For a discussion of Korean motivations for joining the Japanese Army see 1. Carter J. Eckert, *Park Chung Hee and Modern Korea: The Roots of Militarism 1866-1945*, vol. 1 (Harvard University Press, 2016), 84–93.

small island world for centuries."[69] He describes American pacifists as "fifth columnists" for the Axis nations.[70] Aside from the more aggressive tone, Rhee's arguments had changed little since his first days in the United States: Americans had a responsibility towards Korea because of the 1882 Korean-American Treaty; an independent Korea was central to any lasting peace in Northeast Asia; the United States could avert a general conflagration in Asia by taking a firm line against Japan. What had changed was his evidence. It was mounting. Rhee compared his years of warning Americans about Japan's true intentions to someone who tried to warn incredulous neighbors of a forest fire, only to be dismissed until they "begin to feel the heat."[71] Rhee cites the *Panay* Incident, to which he devotes an entire chapter, the loss of business interests in Japanese-held territory in China and Korea, and the widely recognized vulnerability of the Philippines as examples of the Japanese strategy of pushing the Americans out of Asia.

*Japan Inside Out* was not just a warning, however. It was also an exhortation. More than American interests in the Far East were at stake, Rhee argued. A world war was beginning, pitting the Berlin-Rome-Moscow-Tokyo axis against the free nations of the world—totalitarianism against democracy—and American isolationists were soon to be disillusioned if they believed that the United States could remain disengaged without suffering the consequences. The United States was about to become "an island in a sea of totalitarianism."[72] Sooner or later an attack would come if the U.S. did not take action to

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[69] Rhee, *Japan Inside Out*, 1941, 18.

[70] Rhee spends chapter 14 developing this argument, ibid., 178.

[71] Ibid., 10.

[72] Ibid., 190.

rally the allies and begin its own preparations for war.[73]

Rhee argued that America's failure to confront totalitarianism not only put the nation at risk, but also denied the principles on which the United States was founded. Rhee argued that the "Spirit of '76"—a reference to revolutionary America—was not only about securing liberty for the American people, but also that this liberty "might be awakened among all oppressed peoples of the world."[74] In Rhee's telling this "Spirit of '76" had dominated American foreign policy through the Spanish-American War, when the United States took control of the Philippine Islands and Cuba in order to "liberate" them. The Open Door policy in China and the investment of the Boxer Indemnity in educational initiatives for Chinese students were proof that "the United States alone was capable of making large sacrifices for the uplift of mankind." But Rhee lamented that recent generations of Americans had become fixated on economic matters and shirked their international obligations.[75] Americans had shown some evidence of the "Spirit of '76" in 1919, but the experience at Versailles had left them disillusioned and isolated. Rhee argued this was no longer an option. "In order to save democracy, the American people must face the world situation and act quickly and co-operate with all the peoples of the world struggling to retain their liberty or to regain their lost freedom. The United States must take an active, leading part, in all the great world issues which involve the peace and safety . . . of the world.[76] Rhee argued that Americans had forgotten "Abraham Lincoln's famous statement that 'the government of the people, by the people,

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[73] Ibid., 197–98.

[74] Ibid., 190.

[75] Ibid., 192.

[76] Ibid., 13.

and for the people must not perish.'"[77] Rhee's call was not just for renewed American leadership in championing liberty, but for a reaffirmation of the American mission to the world. *Japan Inside Out* is unmistakably jeremiadic in its tone. The United States was not living up to its vocation to be a world leader in the cause of liberty and human freedom and its self-centeredness was leading it towards destruction. But there was still time to rediscover its true nature—the Spirit of '76—and to achieve its grand potential.

*Japan Inside Out* sold well. A second edition was printed before the end of 1941. Pearl S. Buck, China expert and Pulitzer and Nobel Prize winner for literature, reviewed the book so favorably that her review became the foreword to the second edition. "It is a terrifying book," Buck wrote in September 1941, "and I wish I could say it is not true, but I am afraid it is only too true." She praised Rhee for calling attention to the violation of the 1882 Korean-American Treaty. For Buck, that violation was "the spark which started the conflagration," and she claimed it "will make our generation in history a disgrace to humanity." This was a book "Americans ought to read because it was written for them, and now is the time they ought to read it."[78] Actually the hour was even later than Buck had imagined.

**Conclusion**

Rhee claimed in *Japan Inside Out* that "no clairvoyance or farsighted statesmanship was required" to identify the looming conflict between Japan and the United States.[79] However, when the Japanese struck at Pearl Harbor only a few months after its publication, the book took on prophetic overtones. Rhee would spend World War II

[77] Ibid., 189.

[78] Ibid., 4.

[79] Pearl Buck, "Asia Book-Shelf: A Review By Pearl S. Buck," *Asia*, September 1941, 521; Syngman Rhee, *Japan Inside Out: The Challenge of Today*, 1st ed (New York: Revell, 1941), 9.

telling American audiences how the Koreans had been right about Japan and how by extension this gave them credibility to speak on a range of issues from the service Koreans could do for the allied cause to the ultimate intentions of the Soviet Union in Northeast Asia.

Pearl Harbor and *Japan Inside Out* brought Korea and Syngman Rhee out of the wilderness and into American foreign policy debates. After Pearl Harbor and the American entry into the Pacific War, Korea was no longer just a "live" issue; it was now an issue that had to be dealt with sooner or later. That is not to say that Korean policy became a priority for American policymakers. Winning the war was always the priority and Korea, as well as many other issues, were subordinated to this end. But they agreed something had to be done for Korea during or after the war. American policymakers never considered permitting Korea to remain attached to the Japanese empire. At Cairo in 1943 Franklin Roosevelt, together with Winston Churchill and Chiang Kai-shek, pledged that Korea's independence would be restored, albeit "in due course."

The interwar period was a time of immense challenges for the Korean independence movement. Riven by factionalism that hampered their fundraising and outreach efforts in the 1920s and 1930s, the movement lost momentum and nearly disappeared. The "dry rot" that Fred Dolph warned of in 1922 nearly destroyed the modest structure Rhee, his surrogates, and their American supporters had built. However, by clever arguments, strategic investments, favorable publicity, and good timing, the movement managed to emerge from the wilderness in time to take advantage of shifting American perceptions of Japan. For those hoping that the movement would actually restore Korea's nationhood, these years were bitterly disappointing. But to those who, like

Rhee, understood the most realistic goal of the movement was maintaining the "spirit" of Korean independence until political and international conditions permitted Korea's rebirth as a nation, these years were full of trials to be sure, but also modest victories.

# CHAPTER FIVE: THE ABOUT-FACE: THE AMERICAN MISSION AND THE DIVISION OF KOREA

## The Korean Ghost

Robert T. Oliver fondly recalled his first meeting with Syngman Rhee in Washington, D.C., in 1942. They met at Scholl's Cafeteria just blocks from the White House. Presbyterian minister Rev. Edward Junkin arranged the meeting. Until recently Junkin and Oliver had co-chaired the Lewisburg (PA) Defense Committee, one of thousands of local organizations that sprang up after Pearl Harbor to support the American war effort through community organizing. Junkin had deep connections with Korea. He had been born there. His father and three of his brothers died there. Although he left Korea at age 12, he was active in the Korean independence movement in the United States and a supporter of Rhee. He hoped to further the Korean cause in the U.S. by introducing Rhee and Oliver.

"He had enormous forensic ability," Oliver recalled of their first meeting. For an hour or more, Rhee poured out Korea's story to Oliver: its ancient independence, its opening by the United States in 1882, Theodore Roosevelt's betrayal, the March First Movement and his selection as president of the Korean Provisional Government (KPG). Rhee told Oliver of "his conviction that the United States, as part of its dual program of winning the war and of seeking to establish lasting global peace, should do what it has resolutely failed and even refused to do," support Korea's independence. An independent Korea was essential to the long-term peace of East Asia. Rhee claimed that he had many American supporters, but that the State Department, steeped in condescension and fearful that supporting Korean independence might alienate the Soviet Union, denied his nation and its provisional government any support, despite the obvious service his

countrymen could render in defeating the Japanese.

"All this was news to me," Oliver recalled in 1993, "and I was sure that it was unknown to the American people." Oliver's response was the same as so many other Americans that came into contact with Rhee and other Korean activists:

> 'Why don't you write of this!' I exclaimed. 'If Americans knew the circumstances, they would rush to Korea's aid.' Rhee smiled at me indulgently and uttered a thought that literally changed my life and commenced our relationship: 'I'm not a writer.' he said, 'Why don't you do it?'

Rhee was being coy. He was a writer and had been one since his days at Pai Chai. Junkin had no doubt informed Rhee that Oliver was a rhetorician whose talents could do much to further Korea's independence. Oliver had written four college-level speech textbooks and a score of articles and was president of the Pennsylvania Speech Association. Oliver's skills had taken him from teaching at Bucknell University in Lewisburg to Washington, D.C., where he became assistant director of the Speakers Bureau of the Office of Civilian Defense and then served at the War Food Administration. In these positions Oliver ghostwrote speeches to be given around the nation in support of the war effort. Oliver was accustomed to using his skills to advocate for causes.[1]

Oliver found Rhee, his story, his cause, and his offer appealing. Like individuals highlighted in previous chapters, Oliver's attraction to Rhee was as much moral as it was personal. Indeed, even to many of his closest friends Rhee was more admirable than likable. Few descriptions of Rhee use adjectives like "warm," "personable," or even "friendly." "Rhee has been often denounced as 'stubborn,'" wrote Oliver. "To me his persistence in the face of such prolonged discouragement was proof that his principles

[1] Robert T. Oliver, "My Life as a Korean Ghost," *Korea Journal 33*, no. 4 (1993): 68–71. In this article Oliver states that the Speakers Bureau was located in the "Office of National Defense," but this is an error. The "Office of Civilian Defense" is the correct term.

were soundly based and steady." The two men actually had very little in common. Oliver grew up poor in rural Oregon and entered graduate studies in speech only after an admiring professor offered him an unexpected assistantship. To that point his love had been British literature. His outlook was parochial, and he was Rhee's junior by thirty-four years. The only things they had in common were their Ph.D.'s and their "crusading determination to do what we could to rectify wrongs."[2] When only a few weeks later former Secretary of State Sumner Welles called Korea's annexation by Japan "one of the great crimes of the twentieth century," Oliver needed no more convincing. Korea's situation needed to be righted, and he agreed to do what he could. "I felt no repugnance in advocating a foreign claim against what it seemed was a grievous injustice to which my own government was acquiescent and for which it seemed at least partially responsible."[3] For him, American idealism trumped the concerns of an overly-narrow nationalism.

The meeting with Rhee changed Oliver's life. He spent the 1940s serving as an informal adviser to Rhee and writing to support Korean independence.[4] His 1944 book *Korea: Forgotten Nation* told the story of U.S.-Korean relations in terms that Korean activists heartily approved. Oliver organized the book around the Four Freedoms proclaimed by President Franklin Roosevelt in 1941. Each of the Four Freedoms had been denied to the Korean people under Japanese occupation, Oliver contended. Rhee wrote the book's

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[2] Ibid., 71.

[3] Ibid., 70.

[4] Henry Chung and Robert T. Oliver, "Korea: Neglected Ally," *Asia and the Americas*, March 1943; Robert T. Oliver, "She's Japan's Oldest Enemy," *The Washington Post*, March 7, 1943; Robert T. Oliver, "Korea—the Country America Forgot," *World Affairs* 106, no. 2 (June 1, 1943): 87–94; Robert T. Oliver, "Koreans Know About Japan's 'Coprosperity,'" *Washington Post*, August 8, 1943; Robert T. Oliver, "Review," *World Affairs* 107, no. 2 (June 1, 1944): 123; "Korean Underground Says Allies Fail It," *New York Times*, August 14, 1944; Robert T. Oliver, *The Case for Korea: A Paradox of American Diplomacy* (Washington, D.C: Korean American Council, 1945); Robert T. Oliver, "Is Russia Helping or Hindering a Lasting Peace?," *World Affairs* 108, no. 1 (March 1, 1945): 24–27.

foreword.[5] After the war Oliver left his professorship at Pennsylvania State University to become Rhee's full-time adviser and speechwriter. He also served as ghostwriter for much of Rhee's cabinet. Oliver's 1954 biography of Rhee is still frequently used as a valuable source on Rhee's life.[6] For the rest of his life Oliver was a supporter of Rhee and, later, the Republic of Korea. He published his last piece on U.S.-Korean relations in 1997.[7]

Encounters with Americans like Oliver sustained Rhee during his long career as a representative from a country many did not consider to exist. Such encounters were proof that some Americans would respond to Rhee's appeals exactly the way he wished. In his first conversation with Rhee, Oliver grasped that the United States' treatment of Korea failed to reflect the ideals of the American mission, and realizing this he intended to work to change it.

This chapter will examine the final stage of the Korean independence movement in the United States. Korean activists took advantage of the attention that the war with Japan focused on northeast Asia to highlight the U.S. government's past betrayals of Korea and to argue that the American mission to the world, now embodied in concepts such as the Four Freedoms and the Atlantic Charter, obligated the United States to support the restoration of Korea's independence. This chapter argues that Korean appeals to the American mission successfully shifted perceptions of U.S. responsibilities toward Korea with dramatic consequences for the postwar period: neither American policymakers nor the American public would any longer hold to Theodore Roosevelt's

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[5] Robert T. Oliver, *Korea: Forgotten Nation* (American Council on Public Affairs, 1944).

[6] Oliver, *Syngman Rhee: The Man Behind the Myth*.

[7] Robert T. Oliver, "'The Way It Was--All the Way': A Documentary Accounting.," *Communication Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (1997): 5–130.

logic that no country could be expected to do for the Koreans what they were unable to do for themselves. However, this shift in perception did not result in the policy changes that Rhee and other activists were advocating. Instead, the heightened focus on Korea was pivotal in the American decision to suggest the temporary division of Korea into American and Soviet zones in August 1945. This was an outcome that Korean activists had not foreseen and never supported, but was nonetheless an indirect consequence of their activism.

### From Meek to Martial

Pearl Harbor changed Americans' perceptions of Koreans and Korea's recent history. Before Pearl Harbor, many Americans agreed with Theodore Roosevelt that Korea's colonization was the inevitable result of the decrepit nature of the Korean state: unable to defend itself, its annexation was a *fait accompli*. After Pearl Harbor, Korea became the "first victim" of the Japanese imperial juggernaut. Rhee himself had described Korea as such in *Japan Inside Out* and soon many journalist were describing Korea in just those terms.[8] If it were true, this characterization would be of little interest, but in fact Korea was not Japan's first victim; Taiwan was. The Japanese annexed Taiwan in the aftermath of the Sino-Japanese War in 1895. It was not until the end of the Russo-Japanese War ten years later that Japan became the *de facto* ruler of Korea. The Japanese formally annexed Korea five years later in 1910. Whether Korea was the first or second victim of Japanese expansion is trivial, but the fact that the idea became common reveals the extent to which Korean independence activists, especially Rhee, had gained

[8] Rhee, *Japan Inside Out*, 1941, 203; Yongjeung Kim, "Hitlerism Blamed on Samuraism," *Los Angeles Times*, October 27, 1941; "Japan's First Victim," *The New York Times*, March 1, 1942; George Kent, "Korea-Exhibit 'A' in Japan's New Order," *Reader's Digest*, June 1943; George Kent, "Korea--Exhibit 'A' in Japan's New Order," *Asia & the Americas*, April 1942; "Attack on Korea in 1894 War Part of Japs' Long Plan," *Hampshire Gazette*, November 6, 1942; Buck, "Asia Book-Shelf: A Review By Pearl S. Buck."

influence in the days after Pearl Harbor. After many decades on the margins, Rhee and his supporters now found themselves shaping the narrative of the history of U.S.-Korea relations.

American perceptions of Korea also changed in other important ways. Rather than being portrayed as lazy, passive, and backwards, Koreans became farsighted and long-suffering nationalists who had waited for decades for the world to awaken to the dangers of Japanese imperialism. They became pugnacious where they had previously been passive. Newspapers referred to Koreans as "Pioneer Jap Haters" and "The World's Deadliest Terrorists."[9] They also trumpeted the hope of 22,000,000 new Korean allies in the war against Japan.[10]

This hope was spurred on by Helen Foster Snow's *Song of Ariran* in 1941. *Song of Ariran* tells the story of KIM San, a Korean partisan fighting alongside Chinese communists against the Japanese in Manchuria. KIM's story vividly portrayed the toughness and determination of Korean guerrillas and did so in a way that would have grabbed the attention of believers in the American mission. KIM told Snow that he and his family were Christians and that Korea was the most Christian nation in Asia. But he did not necessarily see that as an advantage. KIM had all but abandoned Christianity by

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[9] "Koreans Pioneer Jap Haters Menace Tokio's Back Door," *Washington Daily News*, June 26, 1942; Joseph Wechsberg, "The World's Deadliest Terrorists," *Science Digest*, September 1943. This was a great exaggeration. A few Korean underground organizations had successfully executed assassination plots in the past, but nothing on a large scale. Two Korean assassins AHN Jung-geun and YUN Bong-gil successfully assassinated major Japanese officials in Manchuria and China respectively.

[10] Howard M. Norton, "Sabotage 'Army' Reported in Japan," *Baltimore Sun*, December 8, 1941; "Albany Korean to Help U.S. As 'Revenge' Against Japanese," *Knickerbocker-News*, December 9, 1941; Kilsoo Haan, "Korea to Be Factor in Pacific War," *New York Journal-American*, December 10, 1941; Donald F. Schram, "Her Personal History Clew [sic] to Jap Antipathy," *Free Press*, December 21, 1941; "Helping China Fight," *New Haven Register*, January 25, 1942; "The Freedom of India Does Concern America," *Brookville Democrat*, March 19, 1942; "Declares Korea Looking to U.S.," *Des Moines Iowa Register*, June 7, 1942; "Dropping Arms," *Washington Post*, July 1, 1942; Younghill Kang, "When the Japs Marched In," *The American Magazine*, August 1942; Seldon C. Meneffe, "Our Fifth Column Ally Against Japan," *Predictions*, Fall 1943.

the 1930s. He had been a student in a Christian school during the March First Movement and remembered his Korean teacher announcing the declaration of Korean independence to the class and assuring them "if our meetings are orderly and peaceful, we shall receive the help of President Wilson and the great powers at Versailles, and Korea will be a free nation."[11] The brutal Japanese response and the lack of international support for Korea's independence was a shock to KIM. "After this debacle my faith was broken. I thought there was certainly no God and that the teachings of Christ had little application for the world of struggle into which I had been born," KIM told Snow.[12] Thoroughly disillusioned KIM San became a partisan and a terrorist. The stories he related to Snow left no doubt of his grit or that of his fellow Korean partisans. They fought the Japanese alone until their forces were decimated and then joined the Chinese communists. He had been imprisoned several times and tortured on multiple occasions. He embraced violence and fully expected to die fighting the Japanese.

The story of KIM San demonstrated the martial abilities of Koreans at a time when the war with Japan made Americans interested in Korean allies. The story also pointed Americans to the crucial role their idealism had played in the development of Korean nationalism and how many Koreans still felt betrayed by the United States. The dust jacket claimed that *Song of Ariran* "is a story that fits the American tradition and the American wish to understand and support all peoples who have fought against their tyrants and oppressors. Perhaps not many know that Christianity was the mother of Korean independence, that Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points fired the Korean heart

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[11] Chi-rak Chang and Helen Foster Snow, *Song of Ariran: The Life Story of a Korean Rebel.* (New York: The John Day Company, 1941), 20.

[12] Ibid., 26.

and that the betrayal at Versailles broke it."[13]

*Song of Ariran* was a powerful cautionary tale. It warned that the United States could not passively maintain its position, real or imagined, as the champion of democracy in the region. KIM San, like so many Asians living under colonialism, had been inspired by Wilsonianism, but the American failure to live up to Wilson's promises—or at least their interpretation of his promises—left millions looking to communists as the true anti-imperialists. KIM San should have been a staunch ally of the United States, but American actions alienated him. *Song of Ariran* demonstrated to American audiences that there was untapped human potential in East Asia for fighting the Japanese—potential the United States could not ignore. The dust jacket concluded "[*Song of Ariran*] reveals the presence of 800,000 Korean rebels near Vladivostok, a fact that may soon be of importance to us all."[14]

The allure of Korean manpower was a powerful tool Rhee could deploy in his lobbying efforts. For millions of American families facing the prospect of losing sons and daughters in the war against Japan, the existence of any number of Korean allies willing to fight in the place of their children was an offer they would not reject. The potential benefits of using Koreans in the war and the potential blowback from American families if they did not use them added another layer of complexity to what, after Pearl Harbor, had already become a very complex issue for American officials in the State Department.

### The State Department and Korean Recognition

Once the Pacific War began, the State Department was free to reassess its relationship

[13] Ibid., dust jacket.

[14] Ibid.

with Korea—maintaining cordial relations with Japan was no longer the goal. Rhee wasted no time in exerting all the influence he could to ensure that this reassessment would result in tangible benefits to the Korean independence movement. The day after Pearl Harbor Rhee visited Representative Charles I. Faddis (D-PA) and convinced him to write Secretary of State Cordell Hull. Faddis detailed how recognition of the KPG would aid the American war effort against the Japanese.[15] Senator Guy M. Gillette made similar contact with the State Department.[16]

The question of recognizing the KPG fell to the State Department's Division of Far Eastern Affairs (FE) and Stanley K. Hornbeck, who was formerly head of FE but was now serving as special advisor to the Secretary of State. Hornbeck was familiar with Korea's struggle for independence. He had been in Paris with Wilson in 1919 and had recommended receiving Kiusic Kimm, the Korean sent by the KPG to represent Korea at the Versailles Conference. He raised the Korean question with the American delegation several times to no avail.[17] During the 1930s as the chief of FE, Hornbeck maintained contact with Rhee. He was likely responsible for Rhee being issued a diplomatic passport in 1933 and for helping Rhee secure a visa for Francesca Donner to come to the United States for their wedding in 1934.[18] As early as 1922 Rhee called Hornbeck "One of our true friends in Washington."[19] Throughout Hornbeck's career he had been a staunch opponent of Japanese expansion in Asia and a supporter of the idea

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[15] Faddis to Hull, 8 December 1941, 895.01/49, *대한민국임시정부자료집 [Materials of the Korean Provisional Government]*, vol. 20 (National Institute of Korean History, 2007), 319.

[16] Oliver, *Syngman Rhee: The Man Behind the Myth*, 176.

[17] Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*, 207–09.

[18] Fields et al., *The Diary of Syngman Rhee,* 253.

[19] Syngman Rhee to George A. Fitch, 8 July 1922, Lew, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 1:458.

that the United States had a moral obligation to China and Korea because of nineteenth-century treaties signed with those countries.[20]

Hornbeck was sympathetic to the Korean cause. Days after Pearl Harbor he was in contact with Maj. Wallace H. Moore of the Army Intelligence Services, asking him to explore what might be done to aid Koreans fighting the Japanese in China. Rhee and Moore met soon thereafter to open discussions. Rhee was encouraged by the prospect of military aid, but emphasized that official recognition for the KPG by the United States was equally important.[21] The State Department considered recognition, but a memo by FE on 20 December recommended "to defer such a definitive decision until the subject of the restoration of the independence of Korea can be thoroughly studied" and a definite policy adopted. The memo advised that the attitudes of China, Russia, and Great Britain should be taken into account before any decision was made and that "isolated action on our part might involve responsibilities which in the light of later events it might have been better for this Government not to have assumed." FE understood that American recognition of the KPG would likely influence the post-liberation politics of Korea and so wanted to consider its options carefully. The memo concluded that U.S. Ambassador to China Clarence Gauss should investigate the "organization and physical following" of the KPG prior to any further decisions.[22]

The instructions Gauss received were simple, but carrying them out was not. The

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[20] Hornbeck clearly felt this way in regards to the 1858 Treaty with China that contained a "good offices" clause that was a model for the1882 Korean-American Treaty. It is unlikely he felt different about the Korean situation. See Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*, 180.

[21] Rhee to Hornbeck, 17 December 1941, 895.01/60-4/26, *대한민국임시정부자료집 [Materials of the Korean Provisional Government]*, 2007, 20:145.

[22] 20 December 1941 Memo, Division of Far Eastern Affairs, 20 December 1941, 895.01/60-11/26 Ibid., 20:146.

Chinese government could give him little information because they were undertaking their own investigation of the KPG. However, the Foreign Office did tell Gauss that there were only about 200 Koreans in or around Chungking—nationalist China's wartime capital—and that the KPG excluded numerous leftist Korean guerilla groups fighting the Japanese in Manchuria. After his preliminary investigation, Gauss concluded that "the present attitude [of the Chinese government] is not enthusiastic."[23] Gauss' subsequent contact with KPG officials yielded little additional information. His interview with KPG Foreign Minister CHO So-ang[24] was "most vague and unsatisfactory." CHO was "unable or unwilling" to answer basic questions about the KPG's finances, composition, or relationship to other Korean independence organizations. More alarming, when asked about the Chinese government's relationship with the KPG, CHO "whisperingly suggested" that China was maneuvering to bring Korea back under Chinese suzerainty after the war.[25]

Had there been any enthusiasm for recognizing the KPG in Washington, Gauss' findings would have killed it. Although CHO was "vague" in his answers, he spoke volumes about the KPG's situation. CHO revealed that the KPG had no real connection with the Korean guerillas in Manchuria, whom the State Department regarded as the most effective fighters, and that the KPG was possibly being used as a tool to further Chinese interests in the postwar period. Recognizing the KPG at that time would have had few military benefits and might have caused significant political complications in the

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[23] Gauss to Hall, 3 January 1942, 895.01/56, *대한민국임시정부자료집 [Materials of the Korean Provisional Government]*, vol. 26 (National Institute of Korean History, 2008), 6.

[24] CHO's name is frequently spelled Tjosowang in Department of State records.

[25] Gauss to Hall, 12 February 1942, 895.01/81, *대한민국임시정부자료집 [Materials of the Korean Provisional Government]*, 2008, 26:21–22.

postwar period. Although Gauss' reporting gave at best an impressionistic portrait of the KPG's situation, it was enough for FE to draft its first policy recommendations on 20 February 1942.

Titled "Some Aspects of the Question of Korean Independence," the State Department's memo showed the subtle but significant ways American policy towards Korea was changing. In this twenty-page document FE claimed that pro-Japanese sentiment among Koreans living in Korea was only "skin-deep" and that given the choice between independence and full civil rights in the Japanese Empire, which Koreans did not then enjoy, Koreans would unanimously choose independence. However, the report made clear that Korean independence would entail "many practical difficulties and considerations." FE believed that the Koreans had little to no experience in administering their own country and providing for their own defense. Severing the Korean economy from the Japanese economy would involve "difficult and painful processes." FE concluded:

> It is obvious that, because of their political inexperience and defencelessness [sic], the Korean people at first would neither know how to run their country nor be able to defend it from *reconquest*, and that for a generation at least Korea would have to be protected, guided, and aided to modern statehood by the great powers. It would seem to be no more than essential justice, however, that the Korean people should be so protected, guided, and aided, and given the opportunity they never really had to be independent and develop along their very distinctive cultural lines. The Koreans are intelligent, quick and willing to learn, progressive, and patriotic and it is believed that, given disinterested protection, guidance, and aid, they will in a generation be able to stand on their own feet and contribute to world prosperity and advancement.

The paternalism of the FE report is unmistakable, but the document realistically identified Koreans' chief weakness: an inability to defend their country from "reconquest" without significant foreign assistance. For the duration of the Japanese occupation Koreans were prohibited from owning weapons and were only rarely accepted into the

Japanese army prior to 1944 for fear they might revolt. After liberation, the only Koreans with any military experience or training would be those under the influence of the Chinese and Soviet armies and the few who had served in the Japanese army. Turning any of these groups into the nucleus of a new Korean army would entail its own dangers. The term "reconquest" in FE's analysis is indicative of their fear that the first years of an independent Korea might closely resemble its last years as an independent nation, when Japan, China, and Russia fought two wars for control over the Korean peninsula.

To prevent history from repeating itself, FE argued that Chinese and Soviet approval of any KPG was "essential." Furthermore, no provisional government should be recognized until it was 1) as representative as possible, 2) had the support of known leaders *within* Korea, 3) had a substantial following, and 4) was capable of contributing militarily to the war effort. Once these criteria were met, recognition would be discussed with China, Britain, and the Soviet Union. If there was agreement between the Allies, a provisional government could be recognized and integrated into the war effort. Such a government would likely be transferred to the peninsula following the war, albeit under an "international commission"—an early mention of what would become the policy of "trusteeship" for Korea—that would administer Korea until the Allies deemed it no longer necessary. In FE's analysis neither the KPG nor any other Korean expatriate organization currently met those criteria. FE claimed that the State Department "need not dampen their [Koreans'] hopes of independence" but should avoid "any premature commitments in this respect" until the situation developed further.[26]

[26] All the above quotes are taken from, "Some Aspects of the Question of Korean Independence," 20 February 1942, 895.01/79, *대한민국임시정부자료집 [Materials of the Korean Provisional Government]*, 2007, 20:186–204. Emphasis added.

One might be tempted to interpret the State Department's decision not to recognize the KPG as evidence of continuity in American policy regarding Korea stretching back to 1905. Throughout the period, the United States government refused to support Korea's independence—and after 1919 to recognize the KPG—because the perceived risks of doing so outweighed the benefits. Though the State Department's decision not to recognize the KPG in 1942 does represent a surface-level continuity with prior U.S. policy, this apparent continuity should not mask the change that occurred during this period. FE's memorandum was the most official disavowal to date of Theodore Roosevelt's assertion that no nation should be expected to do for Korea what the Koreans were unable to do for themselves. The FE writer went so far as to invoke "essential justice" as an argument for supporting Korean independence. Koreans were described in the report as "distinct," "homogenous," "sturdy," "intelligent," "quick," "willing to learn," "progressive," and "patriotic." The memo also implicitly embraced the argument that the Korean independence movement had been proclaiming for decades: that an independent Korea was essential to the peace of Northeast Asia and so was in America's national interest.

The influence of nearly forty years of pro-Korean independence lobbying by expatriates and their American supporters suffuses the memo. Few if any American statesmen in 1910 would have described Koreans as "intelligent" or "patriotic." The memo also reveals that even at this early date in February 1942, FE was already feeling the pressure that Rhee and his supporters were applying. It stated, "By no means should the United States be *stampeded* into proclaiming the independence of Korea or into recognizing any shadow organization of Koreans as the Provisional Government of

Korea prematurely." The memo's recommendation to delay recognition of a Korean government was not the result of a lack of support for Korean independence. It was chiefly a decision aimed at preventing Korea from becoming a source of conflict between allies before the war was won. Prematurely supporting Korean independence would only "irritate our own friends" and give the Japanese "a good laugh."[27] Korea was clearly subordinated to Allied war aims, but the interest of Koreans was not wholly neglected. By refusing immediate recognition of the KPG and laying out conditions for future recognition, FE also hoped that it could push Korean factions to unify further, fostering a Korean provisional government that was more representative and would be more stable in the postwar period. Similarly, the idea of trusteeship was not designed to deny Korea independence, but to preserve it through the immediate postwar period when a new Korean state would be most vulnerable to Soviet and Chinese designs. FE's objectives considered Korea's long-term interest even as it sought to balance those with the short-term interests of fighting the war.[28]

The State Department's fears that the KPG was being used as a tool of Chiang Kai-shek to reestablish Chinese control over the peninsula were well founded. As conversations between KPG Foreign Minister CHO So-ang and Ambassador Gauss continued in Chungking a disturbing picture emerged. The Chinese had agreed to support the KPG financially in November 1941. But such support would come at a price. China would exercise complete control over KPG armed forces and seemed determined to keep them from becoming an effective military force. Disgusted, many motivated

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[27] Ibid., 20:202.

[28] James I. Matray, "An End to Indifference: America's Korean Policy During World War II," *Diplomatic History* 2, no. 2 (April 1978): 191, doi:10.1111/j.1467-7709.1978.tb00430.x.

fighters left the KPG to join forces with Chinese communists in Yenan, who were actually fighting the Japanese.[29] China provided the KPG with just enough support to ensure that it remained relevant—and, thus, a possible avenue for Chinese influence in the future—but not strong enough that it might become independent of Chungking or pose a threat to the Soviets, who might establish their own provisional government among Soviet Koreans living in Siberia. KIM Ku and other Koreans in the KPG made the State Department aware of this situation in hopes that it would encourage American policymakers to recognize the KPG and free it from Chinese control. They even suggested moving the KPG to Washington.[30] Revealing the true nature of the KPG's predicament had quite the opposite effect on the State Department, which grasped the futility of trying to free the KPG from Chinese restrictions while it was, of necessity, operating on Chinese soil. Removing the KPG to Washington would hardly improve the situation, sparking suspicions that the United States was attempting to dominate the Korean peninsula at the expense of its allies.

Revelations from Chungking confirmed the Department's fears that a rivalry for Korea had started among the Allies even before the war was over. Under the circumstances, American officials feared that any recognition of the KPG would be playing into Chinese hands, strengthening China's position in Korea during the postwar period and possibly sparking countermeasures from the Soviets. That the Soviet Union

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[29] Roy P. McNair, Military Attaché, American Embassy, Chungking China to the Chief of the Military Intelligence Service, 11 December 1942, 895.01/228. Notes within this same decimal number contain acknowledgements by the State Department that they are also aware of the restrictions places on the KPG by the Chinese regime at Chungking. See *대한민국임시정부자료집 [Materials of the Korean Provisional Government]*, 2008, 26:182–88; Xiaoyuan Liu, *A Partnership for Disorder: China, the United States, and Their Policies for the Postwar Disposition of the Japanese Empire, 1941-1945* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 88–90.

[30] Gauss to Secretary of State, 25 November 1942, 895.00/199, *대한민국임시정부자료집 [Materials of the Korean Provisional Government]*, 2008, 26:165–72.

had not yet entered the war against Japan meant that Korea's future was especially difficult to discern. In this context the Chinese informed Roosevelt in April 1942 that they were planning to recognize the KPG "without delay" and asked for the American position on this action. The State Department feared that the Chinese were trying to enlist them to "nip in the bud the development of any Soviet-supported Korean group," and to give China's restored influence in Korea an American blessing.[31] Despite these complications, an unsigned State Department memorandum of April 1942 acknowledged that "Factors weighing against the recognition of the 'Provisional Government' [KPG] would be discounted if by recognition our war effort were to be substantially aided." However, that was far from certain. That U.S. recognition of the KPG would cause "23 million Koreans to rise against the Japanese," which many newspapers and Korean boosters were reporting, was an "obvious exaggeration." If the KPG attempted to spark such an uprising, the writer of the memo feared, the only result would be a mass slaughter of patriotic Koreans whose services would be of greater value at a later time.[32] After some debate, the State Department advised Roosevelt that the United States should do "everything possible to further the organization and equipment of a Korean army" and to facilitate greater unity among Korean groups in the United States, but that American recognition should be postponed.[33] The State Department did not oppose Chinese recognition, however, responding that "we do not desire to stand in the way of the

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[31] "Memorandum for the President", 29 April, 1942, *美國務省韓國關係文書 [Internal affairs of Korea, 1940-1944]*, vol. 2 (Seoul: 原主 文化社 [Wonju Publishing Co.], 1993), 42–43.

[32] "Korean Nationalist Movement," unsigned memorandum, 11 April 1942, 895.00/98-1/2, Ibid., 2:15–22.

[33] Sumner Wells, "Memorandum," 13 April 1942, 895.01/96/3, *美國務省韓國關係文書 [Internal affairs of Korea, 1940-1944]*, vol. 1 (Seoul: 原主 文化社 [Wonju Publishing Co.], 1993), 513–520.

Chinese Government's taking any step which . . . seems to that Government the wisest."[34]

The Department's position was best summarized in a memo that Stanley Hornbeck wrote in response to the Chinese inquiry: "The question of what to do for and with and about Korea will be, when the peace settlement is made, a perplexing question; and it will be a question which should be decided in the light of conditions which then exist and of disposals which are being made of far larger questions."[35] No commitments were to be made that might hamper the war effort. Without American support the Chinese decided against recognizing the KPG. Korean frustration with Washington and Chungking grew. But the State Department's policy towards Korea was not as inimical to Korean interests as many Korean activists supposed. The State Department favored the restoration of Korean independence. The question was how to do it without harming Allied unity during the war and cooperation afterwards. American diplomats did not believe that recognition of the KPG, dominated as it was by Chungking, served these purposes.

**The OSS and Korea**

Other agencies gave the Koreans more encouragement. Just prior to the creation of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), Col. William Donovan requested that Rhee prepare some messages to be broadcast into the Far East as Allied propaganda.[36] Despite

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[34] Hull to Gauss, 1 May 1942, 895.01/99, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1942*, vol. I (Government Printing Office, 1960), 873–75.

[35] Hornbeck to Welles, 11 April 1942, 895.00/96 2/3, *美國務省韓國關係文書 [Internal affairs of Korea, 1940-1944]*, 1993, 1:521–22.

[36] The Korean American Council sent Stimson a "secret memorandum" prepared for President Roosevelt in March 1942, in which they revealed that the "Office of the Coordinator of Information" (CIO—precursor to the OSS) had accepted one such message by Rhee, only to be prevented from broadcasting it by the State Department. See Harris, Staggers, and Williams to Henry L. Stimson, 6 March 1943, Lew, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 7:120–24. The Syngman Rhee Institute (SRI) has eight drafts of messages prepared for the COI and its successor, the Office of War Information between

the State Department's objection, at least some of the messages were broadcast, no doubt enhancing Rhee's prestige among the Koreans who heard them, as will be discussed in the epilogue. In the spring of 1942, the OSS reached out to Rhee for fifty Korean applicants to receive special training for possible clandestine service in the Far Eastern theater. Such a program had several potential benefits to the American war effort. If the KPG eventually developed into an efficient government capable of contributing to the war effort or exerting influence in the postwar period the United States could claim to be a supporter. But even if the KPG failed to develop, this training program could be used as a psychological weapon against the Japanese. As an OSS memo pointed out, "If we . . . make the Japanese nervous for fear we *are* inspiring the Koreans to anti-Japanese acts, that alone might be valuable," potentially convincing the Japanese to devote more resources to policing Korea. The memo stated that the OSS hoped to create a Korean organization through which they would work—one that might be given "a symbol of power, but not the power itself; it should be under the final control of the United States." The memo suggested, "Dr. Syngman Rhee might be given some title commensurate with his age, education, and reputation, but actual executive authority would be left to younger, more responsible, and aggressive Koreans whose good character is assured."[37] In 1943, American policymakers were already overestimating their ability to control Syngman Rhee.

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1942 and 1943 in "The Speeches of Syngman Rhee" folder, SRI, Seoul. For a discussion of the impact of these broadcasts see the epilogue below.

[37] "Conference on the Korean Situation" memo, 8 June 1943, *OSS (Office of Strategic Service) 재미한인자료*, 11–14. OSS personnel referred to this project as "FE-6", but it is unclear whether "FE-6" referred only to this project or a broader set of OSS activities in the Far East. Later Korean projects were given names. This researcher is aware of two more, the "NAPKO" and "Eagle" projects, both of which trained a small number of Koreans for action against Japan, but the war ended before they could be deployed.

Of course, Rhee was happy to oblige. He judiciously used his selection by the OSS as evidence that he enjoyed American support. This proved useful in bolstering Rhee's position in Korean factional disputes. In private conversations with Americans, Rhee also used the cooperative arrangement with the OSS to criticize the State Department for not recognizing the KPG. Rhee argued that the OSS Korean program was proof that Koreans could be useful in the war, further undermining the State Department's delay of recognition.[38] Rhee's manipulation of the training program for factional purposes angered some inside the OSS, such as George S. McCune, who argued that the program should be terminated. The OSS demurred. There was no proof that Rhee had specifically named the OSS as the program's sponsor, although Rhee had revealed that he was cooperating with the War Department. Rhee's partial revelation may have suited the psychological component of the program well.[39]

**The Cairo Declaration**

By the spring of 1943 the fight for recognition of the KPG had stagnated as the Korean question became mired in alliance politics. The Chinese would not recognize the KPG unless the Americans did. The Americans would not until the KPG became an effective government—something the Chinese would not permit, as it clashed with their own plans. Both China and the United States feared Soviet intentions for the Korean peninsula in the postwar period, but openly conferring with the Soviets was not possible since the Soviet Union was technically at peace with Japan. Even if such a conference had

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[38] Oliver alleges that Rhee told him of the program at their first meeting in the fall of 1942, although Rhee mentioned that he was working with the War Department and not the OSS. If Rhee revealed this detail to a person he had just met, it is reasonable to assume it was a secret he was not guarding too closely. Oliver, "My Life as a Korean Ghost," 69.

[39] *OSS (Office of Strategic Service) 재미한인자료*, 527–51.

been possible, discussing the Korean question would have been extremely delicate as it quickly would have become evident each party was suspicious of the other's designs on Korea. Given the foregoing, the wisest course of action was to wait for whatever developments the war would bring.

The need for a clear policy statement on Korea, however, led to a single sentence being inserted into the Cairo Declaration of 1 December 1943, in which Great Britain, nationalist China, and the U.S. pledged that "in due course" Korea would become free and independent. Such a statement allowed the United States to go on record as supporting Korean independence—a response to the public pressure being brought to bear on the situation—while also taking a "wait and see" approach during the war. Although the Cairo Declaration never mentioned "trusteeship," savvy observers understood that some sort of protectorate was implied by the phrase "in due course." These same observers also noted the about-face in American policy towards Korea over the last forty years. The *New York Times* stated that not even "the wildest imagination" in 1905 would have "dreamed" that the United States would use force to undo Korea's annexation.[40] A reporter for the Overseas News Agency wrote that while the United States had tacitly accepted Japan's occupation of Korea, the Cairo Declaration indicated that "we are now officially ashamed of our former attitude."[41]

But the Cairo Declaration did not satisfy the Koreans. KPG President KIM Ku called the phrase "in due course" "absurd" and threatened that the Koreans would not

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[40] "V. Hope for Korea," *New York Times*, December 2, 1943.

[41] Carl Hartman, "Freedom, Coming for Korea," *Wisconsin State Journal*, December 6, 1943.

stop fighting until they were independent.[42] The Koreans could not wait. Rhee may or may not have been aware of Chinese attempts to control the KPG, but he was aware that the Soviet Union was in the best position to exercise control over Korea in the postwar period. He wrote the State Department warning that "the Korean Communist Army—trained and maintained by the Soviet Government . . . will undoubtedly move into Korea before the Korean Government can enter, erecting a grave situation for Korea and China, as well as for the United States."[43] Rhee believed that the Allied diplomatic impasse over Korea could be broken and a communist takeover of Korea prevented by the recognition of the KPG. American recognition could provide the KPG with instant legitimacy that would dissolve the Korean factions, even the communists in Siberia, into a unified movement. Rhee hoped the flow of lend-lease aid would turn the KPG's forces—the Korean Restoration Army—into a real fighting unit, forcing the Chinese to recognize the KPG as an ally and not a vassal. The State Department agreed with Rhee that the occupation of Korea by Soviet-dominated Korean forces was likely in the postwar period, but the department argued that the "recognition of the so-called Korean Provisional Government of professional revolutionaries constantly quarreling amongst themselves in China would not prevent the situation [Rhee] anticipates."[44]

If American foreign policy was entirely controlled by the State Department, the question of Korean recognition would have been closed in mid-1942. But the construction of a foreign policy is a complex negotiation between officials, citizens,

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[42] "Cairo Pledge on Korea Denounced by Exile Chief," *New York Times*, December 6, 1943.

[43] Syngman Rhee to Ambassador Clarence E. Gauss, 18 October 1943, 895.01/705, *대한민국임시정부자료집 [Materials of the Korean Provisional Government]*, 2008, 26:271.

[44] Ambassador Gauss to the Secretary of State, 6 December 1943, 895.01/705, Ibid., 26:270–71.

lobbyists, and pressure groups in which a myriad of interests and motivations are involved. Syngman Rhee understood this. While the State Department's decision was a significant hindrance to his work, it was not an insurmountable barrier. He would continue working just as he had for decades, telling Korea's story, winning new allies, and mustering them into a movement that would continue to pressure Washington to correct the mistakes of the past. As he had in 1919, Rhee set out to appeal directly to the American people for action on Korea.

**The Korean American Council**

Rhee was no doubt frustrated by the State Department's prevarications regarding recognition of the KPG, but he was not unprepared for them. In his four decades of struggle for Korean independence, Rhee had come to understand the importance of public opinion and publicity in American politics. Modest though they were, the successes of 1919–22 and the 1930s would not have been possible without the League of Friends of Korea, Fred A. Dolph, and the sympathetic media coverage that kept the Korean question before the American people.

Understanding this, Rhee remained in close contact with his American supporters from 1919. In 1934, after Dolph's death, his legal partner, John W. Staggers, took over Dolph's role, offering the Korean Commission free legal counsel and cheap rent in his Columbian Building on 5th Street in Washington, D.C.[45] Rhee also stayed in close contact with Jay Jerome Williams, a newspaperman he had befriended in 1919. Just days after Pearl Harbor, Staggers and Williams accompanied Rhee to meet with Senator Guy M. Gillette (D-IA) of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to ask for assistance in

[45] Fields et al., *The Diary of Syngman Rhee,* 250. Dolph had died in the late 1920s.

gaining recognition for the KPG. Gillette had already contacted the State Department on the Koreans' behalf and explained that the department was "sympathetic" to their cause but believed that no action should be taken until the U.S. and Japan exchanged diplomatic personnel. Gillette assured his three visitors that something could be done for Korea "at a later date" and that he would be "of any assistance possible" at that time.[46] The next day Williams and Staggers called at the State Department themselves and spoke with Laurence Salisbury of FE, who relayed to them the same information given to Gillette.[47]

Staggers and Williams were not satisfied. On 9 January 1942 they sent a letter to Secretary of State Cordell Hull and enclosed a copy of a memorandum that they intended to send to President Roosevelt. Titled "The Korean Situation," it declared that in the war against Japan Koreans offered a "tremendous opportunity" to aid the Allies. Koreans were the "first victims" of Japanese aggression and would make "powerful allies" if the State Department would recognize the KPG. "Beyond the practical advantages," the letter argued that there "exists an inescapable moral obligation to take this step" stemming from the 1882 Korean-American Treaty. They wrote "many Americans believe in the justice of the Korean cause" and that "their country, in the new era unfolding under the leadership of President Roosevelt, should morally uphold the sanctity of its treaty obligations." The memo mentioned that Rhee had already deposited his credentials at the State Department and implied that a formal declaration by the

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[46] Guy M. Gillette to Kee Young Chung, 18 December 1941, Lew, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 7:112.

[47] Memorandum of a Conversation between J. Jerome Williams, John W. Staggers, and Mr. Salisbury, 23 December 1941, 895.01/52-1/2, *대한민국임시정부자료집 [Materials of the Korean Provisional Government]*, 2007, 20:150–52.

department was the only remaining obstacle. Staggers and Williams also attacked the department's position that nothing should be done for Korea prior to the exchange of American and Japanese diplomats. The two men believed that Japan was already ignoring international conventions regarding American diplomats. Staggers and Williams explained that they had been involved in Korea's struggle for independence for twenty years with no compensation or thought of gain and that they were "anxious to do all in our power to aid the cause of Korean recognition." The memorandum was undeniably a warning to the State Department: it was a threat to utilize outside pressure if the department did not act on the Korean situation soon.

In addition to Staggers' and Williams' endorsement, the letter was signed by Frederick Brown Harris, who had pastored the politically important Foundry Methodist Church in Washington, D.C., since 1924. Harris was well connected in Washington, and later that fall he was elected as chaplain of the United States Senate, a position he would hold for a record twenty-four years. The addition of Harris' signature to Staggers and Williams' letter added credibility to their threats to escalate pressure on the State Department.

The trio also wrote Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson in early February, asking him to act independently on Korea on the grounds that assisting the Koreans was a military decision. They claimed Dr. Rhee was "ready to act on the slightest encouragement from the United States," and 23 million Koreans were eager to heed his call to revolt. This letter and others written by the trio contained characterizations of the March First Movement and Rhee's political power that angered his Korean rivals. The letter implied that Rhee had been the architect of the March First Movement and was the

undisputed leader of the Korean people. The first statement was simply untrue; the latter was an exaggeration.[48] The letter also made the bold assertion that America, "as a nation," never recognized the Japanese annexation of Korea and reminded Secretary Stimson that the 1882 Korean-American Treaty was still in force.[49] According to Harris, Stimson responded on 24 February in the manner expected of one "whose courageous and honorable views on the Far East have long been an inspiration to many Americans." Unfortunately, that letter has not been preserved.[50]

Sometime in February Williams, Staggers, and Harris began calling themselves the Korean-American Council and ramped up their efforts to pressure the State Department. In cooperation with the United Korean Committee in California and the Korean Commission, the three men organized the "Korean Liberty Conference" at the Lafayette Hotel in Washington over three days. The conference culminated on Sunday, 1 March 1942—twenty-three years to the day after the March First Movement. The conference was an impressive collection of journalists, missionaries, clergy, politicians, academics, and diplomats. The goal of the conference's fifteen speakers was to use the history of U.S.-Korean relations to convince the audience that the United States had a moral responsibility to recognize the KPG. Representative John M. Coffee (D-WA) told the conference, "We made the mistake of thinking that if Korea were sacrificed to Japan's plea for needed expansion, she would be satisfied." The mistake had been compounded, in Coffee's opinion, by policy after policy of Japanese appeasement, including the

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[48] The source of this misinformation was possibly Rhee himself. It is unclear whether any of the three men would have been familiar enough with the March First Movement to know that the movement was as much a surprise to Rhee as it was to other Korean exiles.

[49] Harris, Staggers, and Williams to Henry L. Stimson, 4 February 1942, Lew, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 7:117–18.

[50] Harris to Stimson, 3 March, 1942, Ibid., 7:120–24.

inability of Congress to pass a bill for dredging harbors on Guam for fear it might alarm the Japanese. "We have Pearl Harbor to remind us of our foolish policies of which we were guilty before the war and which we should never repeat."[51] Geraldine T. Fitch, a long-term missionary to China, was more direct:

> Now what I am going to say may hurt. But it must be said. We were Korea's "sister nation," we had insisted that she desert her isolation and detachment, we had opened the door, we had promised "in case of trouble" *we* would protect her. What did we do to fulfill our promises? We acquiesced to Japan's crime. I say it must be said, because this was the beginning of totalitarianism which today darkens the whole world. This was the beginning of disregard of international treaties. The United States of America helped usher in the era where treaties are no longer binding, war is no longer declared, and human life no longer sacred.

Americans had to confront their guilt for the Treaty of Portsmouth and "the sooner we make restitution to the Korean people by recognizing the Korean Provisional Government . . . the better!" she concluded.[52] Other speakers, such as Paul F. Douglass, the president of American University in Washington, D.C., went beyond the question of morality and argued that recognizing the KPG was a practical strategic decision.[53] Homer B. Hulbert, a veteran of the 1919 campaign for independence, told the conference moving stories of his time in Korea during its last days as an independent nation and of the role he played in that struggle. Korea's subjugation literally haunted him: "Sometimes in the night watches I wake and think about that land. I see before me Hagar. Driven out of the tents of Abraham . . . into the desert." He recounted the biblical story of how God took pity on Hagar in the desert and sent angelic messengers to save her and her sons. Hulbert concluded, "God needs no winged angels to work his will on earth, He uses men. This messenger, charged with the duty of leading Korea out of the

[51] United Korean Committee in America, *Korean Liberty Conference, Washington, D.C., February 27, 28, March 1, 1942* (Los Angeles: United Korean Committee in America, 1942), 14–18.

[52] Ibid., 56–57.

[53] Ibid., 28.

desert back into the family of free nations is *the United States of America*."[54]

The State Department came under particular attack by several of the conference speakers. Richard Eaton, a journalist, attacked the department's position that nothing should be done for Korea until American diplomatic personnel had been repatriated. He told the audience, "We have no just reason to practice appeasement towards the Japanese whose actions we know will be guided by their own interests and not by any lenience on our part."[55] James H. R. Cromwell, a wealthy author and former U.S. ambassador to Canada, told the conference that America needed "all the help we can get" in the Pacific. Few things could be more helpful than 23 million Koreans. "WHAT'S THE DELAY?" he apparently shouted at the audience. "We demand to know why the Korean Republic is not recognized now." In a follow-up speech Rhee told the audience, "I cannot answer that question, but you can. It is up to you to recognize our government. . . If every American gives his mandate [to recognize the KPG] then the [U.S.] Government will obey that mandate."[56]

Besides gathering an impressive array of personalities, the conference also garnered a fair amount of media attention. National newspapers carried stories about the conference, and a feature article by reporter Peter Edson was reprinted in hundreds of local newspapers across the U.S.[57] Portions of the conference were also broadcast live on

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[54] Ibid., 98.

[55] Ibid., 27.

[56] Ibid., 89–90.

[57] "Koreans Here Urge Recognition by U.S.: Plea to Join United Nations Is Also Revealed in Talks at Liberty Conference Threat to Tokyo Shown Millions in Homeland and Throughout Asia Called a Ready-Made Fifth Column," *New York Times*, March 1, 1942; "Roosevelt Spurs Movement," *New York Times*, March 1, 1942; "Koreans Celebrate Independence Call: Chungking Group Asks Lease-Lend Arms to Fight Japan," *New York Times*, March 2, 1942; Peter Edson, "The Situation in Washington," *Riverside Press*,

WINX-AM, which was managed by one of the speakers, Robert Eaton.[58]

As organizers had hoped, the conference focused attention on the State Department's policy towards the KPG and an independent Korea. At a press conference on the Monday following the conference's conclusion, Sumner Welles, acting secretary of state, was asked to indicate the department's attitude towards the Korean Liberty Conference and the Korean independence movement. Welles replied that the department viewed the conference and the meetings of similar liberation movements with "utmost sympathy." Korean recognition was under consideration, Welles noted, but he could not make any statement at that time.[59] The department had followed the conference closely. Hornbeck and Far Eastern Affairs member William Langdon both attended it. In Langdon's memorandum on the conference he noted that the "meeting was well attended by professional publicists and by the press representatives, and impressed one as a publicity stunt." He commented on several speeches' quality, especially Hulbert's, noting that Hulbert broke down three times "from the emotional strain" of recounting Korea's tragic history. Langdon wrote, "Of particular interest was [Hulbert's] final conclusion that the United States is God's messenger" charged with redeeming Korea. Langdon did not express any doubts about the motives or sincerity of conference participants, but he complained "they showed no knowledge of the problems of the present and were totally lacking in constructiveness . . . An objective stranger would have gathered the impression from the meeting that the independence of Korea is

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February 26, 1942; Peter Edson, "Jap-Hating Koreans Seek U.S. Recognition of Movement to Wrest Freedom from Nippon," *Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune*, February 23, 1942.

[58] *Korean Liberty Conference,* 13, 47, 84.

[59] "Consideration Given Korean Recognition," *Los Angeles Times*, March 3, 1942; "Korean Liberty Plea Wins U.S. Sympathy: Welles Defers Further Comment on Bid to United Nations," *New York Times*, March 3, 1942.

entirely an American problem."[60] That, of course, was the point.

The conference highlighted what would be a continual problem for the State Department. The department understood that inter-Allied diplomacy made the Korean situation complex. For the State Department to speak frankly about Korean independence without voicing its concerns regarding Chinese and/or Russian intentions for Korea in the postwar period was virtually impossible. In place of the real reasons for not recognizing Korea, the department justified its lack of action, first, by expressing concern about Japanese reprisals against American citizens in Japan and, then, by dwelling on the fact of Korean disunity, not the complex inter-Allied diplomacy that made this disunity so problematic. Rhee had straightforward responses to each of the State Department's objections to recognizing the KPG, and he and his supporters took full advantage of the situation by portraying the department's reluctance as inexplicable at best and malicious at worst.

**Rhee Speaks to the American People**

"I do not wish to say in any recriminatory way that we Koreans—the first victims of Japan's insane march of conquest—told you so, but we did," Rhee announced to an American audience in Washington in 1943.[61] It was a phrase Rhee probably used repeatedly as he took to the lecture circuit in the United States after Pearl Harbor. Rhee had warned of the dangers of Japanese expansion for nearly four decades. Now that it had come to pass, he was not going to let the moment go without comment. After Pearl

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[60] William Langdon Memo on the Korean Liberty Conference, 3 March 1943, 895.01/84, *美國務省韓國關係文書 [Internal affairs of Korea, 1940-1944]*, 1993, 1:440–45.

[61] This is taken from an untitled speech given 8 April 1943 in Washington, D.C., "The Speeches of Syngman Rhee" folder, SRI.

Harbor he fully embraced the spurned prophet motif and believed that he had license to admonish the American people for their past misdeeds. Rhee did so in jeremiads that revealed past American "sins" regarding Korea, but also told Americans how to redeem themselves.

As he had done since his college days, Rhee started his lectures with Korea's age, highlighting its 4,000 years of independent existence and thus belying the notion that Koreans were not capable of self-government. Playing on the sentimentality of his audiences, Rhee frequently feminized Korea, calling his nation "Miss Korea." He described the opening of Korea by Admiral Robert Shufeldt as a wooing: the Admiral knocking at the door of Miss Korea begging her to come out. "He [Shufeldt] told us that not only would the United States be our friend, but would come to our help—should we ask—if any other nation took oppressive measures against us."[62] The 1882 Korean-American Treaty was the result, and Rhee rarely omitted a reference to it in any of his wartime speeches. The treaty opened the way for American missionaries to transform Korea. Rhee cast his own personal story in these terms. Starting as early as his days at Pai Chai, he told his audiences that "a Christian nation for my people under a democratic government . . . was my highest ambition. From that time I have never ceased to dream about it and suffer and struggle for it."[63] Rhee used the March First Movement to show his American audiences how rapidly Koreans had been advancing towards democracy and Christianity. But this development had been stunted by Japanese repression with American complicity. Despite possessing Americans' "word of honor in a sacred treaty

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[62] "Korea in Crisis," 27 May 1942, "The Speeches of Syngman Rhee" folder, SRI.

[63] "Speech given at the campus of the American University," 8 November 1942, "The Speeches of Syngman Rhee" folder, SRI.

ratified by your Senate and signed by your President," Korea had been "'sold down the river' to the Japanese in 1905."[64] Rhee exaggerated Theodore Roosevelt's influence to maximize the outrage of his audiences. He told them, "One word from the President of the U.S. at that time would have saved Korea" and maintained peace in Asia, but Americans were "too deeply engrossed in Japan's propaganda stories to do anything for Korea. And Korea became Japan's arsenal and base of operations on the mainland of Asia."[65] Rhee believed that Wilson did little more to stand up for the Koreans or to confront the Japanese in 1919 when he chose expediency over morality at Versailles.

Despite these betrayals, Rhee did not blame the American people, at least not most of them. Most Americans were ignorant of the entire Korean situation and, "without exception, those Americans, who know the true story of the diplomatic relations between my country and their own, have spoken out courageously and have demanded that justice be done."[66] The problem was that too many Americans had fallen prey to Japanese propaganda: "your magnanimous Christian soul was too big either to suspect or to fear that cunning little man [the Japanese]."[67] Worse still was the desire of many Americans, satisfied with wealth and security, to pull back from the world. Rhee had strong words for an audience at American University: "During the latter part of the 19th century the American people, the envy of the entire world, became self-satisfied and lost sight of the fact that their blessed heritage of liberty for which their forebears paid so

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[64] "Address to the World Free Congress" 1943, "The Speeches of Syngman Rhee" folder, SRI.

[65] "Speech Delivered at Town Hall Club of New York," 24 February 1942, "The Speeches of Syngman Rhee" folder, SRI.

[66] "Speech Delivered at Town Hall Club of New York," 24 February 1942, "The Speeches of Syngman Rhee" folder, SRI.

[67] "Korea in Crisis," 27 May 1942, "The Speeches of Syngman Rhee" folder, SRI.

dearly may not be theirs forever, unless they are willing to pay for its protection."[68] Diplomats in the State Department had facilitated this loss of liberty by practicing appeasement towards Japan in hopes that a conflict could be avoided. Rhee noted that much to his astonishment this appeasement was still being practiced by refusing to recognize the KPG for fear that it might invite reprisals on U.S. nationals being held in Japan.[69]

Rhee's efforts were augmented by popular condemnations of the State Department for its perceived appeasement of the Axis powers prior to, and even after, Pearl Harbor. Robert Bendiner's 1942 book *The Riddle of the State Department* gave credence to public condemnation by arguing that the department's policy of appeasement could not be justified on strategic grounds. Bendiner claimed that the department's personnel came from a very narrow and elite caste of American society whose traditions and biased views stymied desperately needed visionary leadership.[70] Although Bendiner never mentioned Korea, his argument clearly applied to the Korean question. Using Bendiner's *Riddle* as a point of departure, Rhee and Cromwell took to the airwaves on WWDC in 1942 to ask their own "riddle": Why did the State Department not recognize the KPG and accept its offer of 20 million new allies in the war against Japan? Rhee and Cromwell found the roots of American appeasement of Japan in Roosevelt's failure to come to Korea's aid in 1905. U.S.-Japanese relations had fundamentally changed since then, but appeasement over Korea continued, they argued. The U.S. had everything to gain and

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[68] "Speech given at the campus of the American University," 8 November 1942, "The Speeches of Syngman Rhee" folder, SRI.

[69] "Speech to American Women's Overseas Writers," 16 May 1942, "The Speeches of Syngman Rhee" folder, SRI.

[70] Robert Bendiner, *The Riddle of the State Department.* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1942).

nothing to lose by recognizing Korea, and yet the State Department refused. Cromwell invited listeners to write the station with their own answers to this riddle.[71]

Rhee's lectures left his audience with no doubt that the United States had a special mission in world affairs. But the country was doing too little to fulfill it, either out of ignorance or selfishness. "So you see, time and time again, America has failed to do its duty which it owes to itself and to the world and consequently the gangster nations are threatening the very existence of this great republic," Rhee told an audience in November 1942.[72] He argued that the days of American isolation were over and that the U.S. could no longer claim that the invasion of Ethiopia or the violation of Manchuria were "none of our business." Rhee told his audience that he knew the "heart of this country" and that the United States was "the final tribunal for all wronged men and nations, that seek protection and redress."[73] The United States' "generous help to small nations such as Cuba, and the Philippines" assured Koreans that they could place their faith in the "ideals of the great American People" and gave Rhee confidence that his efforts over the past 35 years had not been in vain.[74] "You, great people of America, are the hope of the world," Rhee told the Rotary Club in Washington in 1944. "We know your high sense of justice and fairness. If we can only make this fact known to the American people, they will see to it that justice be done to Korea now."[75]

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[71] "Radio Broadcast of Radio Station WWDC, Washington, DC," 26 August 1942, "The Speeches of Syngman Rhee" folder, SRI.

[72] "Speech given at the campus of the American University," 8 November 1942, "The Speeches of Syngman Rhee" folder, SRI.

[73] "Address to the Free World Congress," 1943, "The Speeches of Syngman Rhee" folder, SRI.

[74] "Radio interview with Mr. Eaton," 9 December 1943, "The Speeches of Syngman Rhee" folder, SRI.

[75] "Speech—Rotary Club, Broadmoor Hotel, Washington, D.C.," 26 September 1944, "The Speeches of Syngman Rhee" folder, SRI.

Some Americans found Rhee's rhetoric convincing and began writing their congressmen as he suggested. At least seventeen congressmen contacted the State Department, either forwarding letters from constituents or asking the department for a statement regarding Korea that they could transmit back to their home districts. In a letter to Secretary Hull in May 1942, Senator Albert B. "Happy" Chandler (D-KY) wrote that recognition of the KPG would not only make good on FDR's pledge to restore sovereignty to subjugated peoples, but also "give courage to the Koreans and the oppressed peoples in many lands." Chandler wrote that all Americans were interested in any effort that might hinder the progress of Japanese aggression, and he believed that recognition of the KPG would be "distinctly helpful in this direction."[76]

Feeling the pressure, the State Department tried to convince Rhee to desist. Assistant Secretary of State Adolf Berle wrote Rhee in March 1943 explaining that neither the State Department nor any government agency was indifferent to Korea's fate and that they were doing what they could to help—he referenced exempting Koreans from enemy alien status—but told Rhee the United States was not the only power interested in Korea and that the Axis had to be defeated before the Korean issue could be settled.[77] This was a frank statement of the department's policy, but it hardly persuaded Rhee, who kept up pressure on the department through sympathetic congressmen. Senator Alexander Wiley (R-WI) telephoned the department saying that he was "besought by certain elements" to make a statement on Korean recognition and wanted

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[76] Senator Albert B. Chandler to Secretary of State Hull, 13 May 1942, 895.01/118, *美國務省韓國關係文書 [Internal affairs of Korea, 1940-1944]*, 1993, 2:172.

[77] Berle to Rhee, 1 March 1943, 895.01/214, *美國務省韓國關係文書 [Internal affairs of Korea, 1940-1944]*, vol. 3 (Seoul: 原主 文化社 [Wonju Publishing Co.], 1993), 166–68.

to know the department's position. A parenthetical note in a memorandum taken during Wiley's call suggested that Rhee's efforts lay behind it.[78] The State Department's troubles multiplied when the House of Representatives and then the House and the Senate together sponsored resolutions calling for the recognition of Korean independence.[79] The State Department urged Rep. Sol Bloom (D-NY) and Sen. Tom Connally (D-TX), as Foreign Relations chairmen to kill the resolutions in committee, which was done.[80] Still the resolutions demonstrated that Koreans were successfully mobilizing their supporters to pressure the government. Such pressure contributed to the need for a clear statement on Korean independence, eventually given in the Cairo Declaration of December 1943.

A letter from a Chet Hatfield of Wenatchee, Washington, forwarded to the State Department by his representative Walt Horan (R-WA), sheds light on how Korean independence activists were influencing congressmen through their constituents. Hatfield wrote to Horan in response to a lecture that he heard at the local Lions Club. The speaker was Dr. James D. Shinn, a representative from the Korean Commission who lectured widely during the war. Hatfield reported that Shinn told the club of the existence of 22 million Koreans "itching to get their hands on a gun and help us lick the Japs." Given that Hatfield had just read in *U.S. News* a few weeks ago that more infantrymen were needed for the war, Shinn's message seemed "almost too good to be true." Shinn

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[78] Memorandum of a Telephone Conversation between Senator Alexander Wiley of Wisconsin and Assistant Secretary of State. A. A. Berle Jr. regarding the Restoration of Korean Independence, 21 April 1943, 896.01/252, *대한민국임시정부자료집 [Materials of the Korean Provisional Government]*, 2007, 20:356.

[79] H.J. Res 109 and S. J. Res. 49 both of the 78th Congress.

[80] (Chairman of the House Foreign Relations Committee) Sol Bloom (R-NY) to Secretary Hull, 1 April 1943 and Secretary Hull's reply, 15 April 1943, 895.01/232; Sen. Tom Connally (D-TX) to Secretary Hull, 11 June 1943, and Secretary Hull's reply, 18 June 1943, 895.01/263, *美國務省韓國關係文書 [Internal affairs of Korea, 1940-1944]*, 1993, 3:323–26; 435–38.

told the local Lions that the Koreans had a provisional government, the KPG, ready to organize Koreans for the war effort, but despite its offer it had not been recognized or given lend-lease aid. "I think the big question in everyone's mind here in Wenatchee who heard Dr. Shinn was 'why' to both these statements." Hatfield was sure that Horan was already familiar with Dr. Shinn and his program and that the representative would do all he could to further Koreans' aims without any urging from constituents. He just wanted Horan to know that "Dr. Shinn got around quite a little during his stay in Wenatchee and made a very favorable impression on almost everyone he met."[81] For those unaware of the complex international problems involved, the question of recognizing the KPG seemed to have an obvious answer.

In Ashland, Ohio, a whole community responded to the appeals of Korean activists. Ashland had received a visit from a "flaming crusader of liberty" [James Shinn] sometime in the fall of 1943 and like the local Lions of Wenatchee, Ashlanders were moved. After Shinn's visit the townsfolk wondered why nothing was being done for Korea and then decided to do something themselves. The result was the Korean Recognition Conference held in late January 1944 in Ashland. Organized with the cooperation of the Korean Commission, the one-day conference featured several prominent friends of Korea, including William H. King, former president pro tempore of the Senate, and president of American University Paul F. Douglass. A town of only 12,000, the number of attendees could not have been large, but the Mutual Radio Network, the largest U.S. network in terms of stations, broadcast the conference, allowing

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[81] Chet Hatfield to Rep. Walt Horan, 4 April 1944, 895.01/329, *美國務省韓國關係文書 [Internal affairs of Korea, 1940-1944]*, vol. 4 (Seoul: 原主 文化社 [Wonju Publishing Co.], 1993), 170.

speakers to address their remarks to a national audience. Referencing the broken 1882 treaty and Roosevelt's betrayal of Korea, King told the assembled citizens, "We can cleanse a page of our country's diplomatic history now—now—now by recognizing the Korean Government. Let us right the wrong of 40 years ago." Douglass called the United States' treatment of Korea a "national dishonor." Rhee's address to the conference also contained his familiar arguments about Korea's right to be independent and American responsibilities to come to its aid. But in addition to attacking the State Department Rhee also praised the character of the American people and declared that his faith in them was not misplaced: "During the 49 years of my fight for Korea's freedom—even during the darkest days, when there was not a ray of sunshine—I never lost sight of a hope that some day the great people of America would come to know the truth about Korea and then they would see that justice was done to my people." The voluntary action of the people of Ashland was proof that Rhee's "cherished dream of nearly half a century" was at least partially coming true.[82]

**The "Korean" Cherry Trees**

Rhee also found creative ways of highlighting Korea's struggle. In 1943 Rhee led a campaign to rename the Japanese cherry trees that surround the Tidal Basin on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. Along with other Koreans, Rhee contended that the trees were actually Korean in origin and proposed that they be referred to as "Korean cherry trees." It was perhaps the easiest political victory he ever achieved. After Pearl Harbor the future of the trees was in doubt. Days after the attack vandals chopped down some of the trees and others were calling for their removal. Rhee's claim that the trees

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[82] All quotations taken from J. Harry McGregor, "The Korean Movement," *Congressional Record* 78: 2 (February 7, 1944): A600–602.

were Korean provided them with a much needed alibi, freeing the trees from their Japanese taint, and giving the trees' admirers a justification for keeping them on the National Mall. Although the name of the trees was never officially changed, newspapers, especially the Associated Press, took to calling them the "Korean cherry trees." For a while the name stuck.[83]

Turning the debate over the trees into an object lesson, Rhee in collaboration with American University President Paul Douglass decided to plant a grove of Korean cherry trees at American University in April 1943 in a solemn ceremony. In an address given at the ceremony, Rhee told the audience that the trees in many ways symbolized Koreans' attempts to warn Americans about the Japanese. He claimed that Koreans had known for years that the trees were not Japanese, but no Americans would listen to them until after Pearl Harbor, just as Americans had also failed to heed Korean warnings about Japan. Rhee also denounced an unnamed horticulture society, which learning the origin of the trees decided they should be called "oriental flowering cherry trees" instead of "Korean cherry trees." "My dear friends, this would be trivial were it not symptomatic of the manner in which Japanese propaganda influences continue in this great country," Rhee told the audience. He claimed the lingering influence of this propaganda caused Americans to doubt Koreans and to continue to disregard their warnings and advice.[84]

Rhee's crusade to rename the trees brought him an unlikely ally: one of Congress's arch-white supremacists, Representative John E. Rankin (D-MS). Despite

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[83] James Morgan, "Our Battles of Blenheim," *Boston, Mass., Globe*, July 11, 1943, Morning edition; Kirk Bates, "Those Korean Cherry Trees," *The Milwaukee Journal*, March 24, 1945; Charles A. Michie, "Cherry Trees to Join United Nations in Solemn Washington Ceremony Today," *P. M. New York City*, April 8, 1943; "Jap Cherry Trees Renamed 'Korean,'" *Los Angeles Times*, March 30, 1943.

[84] Syngman Rhee, "Address delivered by Dr. Syngman Rhee at the cherry tree planting on the American University grounds," 8 April 1943, "The Speeches of Syngman Rhee" folder, SRI.

Rhee's extensive travels and lectures in the United States over his forty-year exile, he had avoided the American South and counted few southerners among his supporters. Rankin is the notable exception. In March 1943, Rankin first proposed on the House floor that, with spring rapidly approaching, the trees become known as "Korean cherry trees." He told his colleagues that he had only recently become aware of the trees' true origins and renaming them seemed preferable to chopping them down "as a great many indignant Americans want to do." The next month Rankin took this crusade a step further by authoring a concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 19) stating that the trees surrounding the Tidal Basin "Shall be known as Korean cherry trees" and referring the bill to the Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds. The same day Rankin had read into the record a letter sent to him from a Californian. The letter recounted a recent conversation between the letter writer and a "well-traveled Korean" on Japan's ultimate intentions for the United States. The letter suggested that Koreans, if listened to, could provide more information on the Japanese than all the "crackpots" recruited by the Office of War Information. Two months later in June 1943, Rankin read into the *Congressional Record* the speech Rhee gave at the American University ceremony in which he memorably stated, "I do not wish to say in any recriminatory way that we Koreans—the first victims of Japan's insane march of conquest—told you so, but we did."[85] Rhee's relationship with Rankin is another proof that in his struggle for Korean independence he would take help where he could find it: even if it came from white-supremacists.

The Koreans scored another victory when the U.S. Postal Service added a

[85] John E. Rankin, "Public Bills and Resolutions," *Congressional Record* 78: 1 (April 17, 1943): 3536; John E. Rankin, "The Japanese Peril," *Congressional Record* 78: 1 (April 17, 1943): A1895–98; John E. Rankin, "Korean Cherry Trees," *Congressional Record* 78: 1 (June 29, 1943): A3286–87; John E. Rankin, "Korean--Not Japanese--Cherry Trees," *Congressional Record* 78: 1 (March 29, 1943): A1477.

Korean stamp to its series of stamps dedicated to nations overrun by the Axis powers. The series originally consisted of twelve stamps, all bearing the flags of European nations overrun by the Nazis, and was issued from June to December 1943. The Korean stamp was issued ten months later and would become the only country outside of Europe to be represented in the series. As opposed to the State Department, the Postal Service had no doubt who spoke for the Korean people. They consulted Rhee on the design of the stamp.[86]

**Making Friends in High Places**

The lecturing, conferences, tree-planting, and other grassroots activities that Rhee and his supporters did, though small in scale, propelled Korea into ever more important forums. In early 1942, Pearl S. Buck followed up her favorable review of Rhee's *Japan Inside Out* by planning an event entitled "Korea and the United Nations" under the auspices of the East and West Association. Buck actively recruited prominent Americans to speak at the event. In a telegram to New York Governor Herbert H. Lehman she explained "encouragement to Koreans at this critical time will be of great value to our own national morale as well as theirs." Lehman could not attend due to longstanding commitments, but Buck managed to line up National Book Award winning author, Vincent Sheean and prominent scholar Owen Lattimore to join her and Rhee on stage. Paul Robeson provided the musical entertainment.[87]

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[86] Fields et al., *The Diary of Syngman Rhee*, 288.

[87] See Buck, Pearl S., telegram, 1942 April 27, ldpd_leh_0108_0002, Herbert H. Lehman Papers, Special Correspondence Files, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library, <http://lehman.cul.columbia.edu/ldpd_leh_0108_0002> and Buck, Pearl S., telegram, 1942 April 28, ldpd_leh_0108_0003, Herbert H. Lehman Papers, Special Correspondence Files, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library, <http://lehman.cul.columbia.edu/ldpd_leh_0108_0003> [Accessed 18 October 2016]. An invitation to this event is preserved in Syngman Rhee's press clippings scrapbooks, SRI.

Rhee's star continued to rise. In December 1943, *Newsweek* ran a story entitled "Rhee's Revival" that featured a statesman-like photo of him at his desk at the Korean Commission. The story somewhat exaggerated Rhee's influence, stating that his *Spirit of Independence* was read by "all literate Koreans" and mistakenly claimed that Rhee was imprisoned by the Japanese instead of the Korean Monarchy as a young man—two errors that Rhee may not have been interested in correcting.[88]

Rhee's diary for 1944—the only year during World War II which is extant—reveals the extent to which he became a minor American celebrity. At Princeton he was entertained by Albert Einstein, who told him, somewhat cryptically, "He who lives a good life, lives hidden." In Washington, D.C. he met with author Upton Close (Josef Hall Washington) and journalist Walter Trohan. In New York he lunched with the "three head men of Time, Life, and Forum Magazines."[89] Also in New York, Rhee was a featured speaker at the second national conference of the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe. He shared the stage with prominent Mormon and U.S. Senator Elbert D. Thomas (D-UT) as well as Zionists Hillel Kook (then known as Peter Bergson) and Johan Smertenko.[90] Rhee was taking every opportunity possible to present Korea's case.

On 16 February 1944, Pearl Buck's East and West Association hosted a second Korean event at New York's Town Hall theater, featuring Buck as the main speaker. Buck argued that Americans had twice betrayed Korea—Roosevelt by violating America's treaty obligations in 1905, and Wilson by refusing to show sympathy with

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[88] "Rhee's Revival," *Newsweek*, December 13, 1943.

[89] Fields et al., *The Diary of Syngman Rhee*, 282, 285.

[90] "Utahn Wants Jews on United Councils," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, August 9, 1944.

Koreans' embrace of self-determination. She told the audience that Koreans were again looking to the United States for help to ensure not only their independence from Japan, "but from all other Alien governments" after the war. By touching on postwar policy for Korea, Buck was speaking not only in favor of Korean independence, but also against the State Department's policy as proclaimed in the Cairo Declaration, which stated that Korea would become independent "in due course." She told her audience that the time had come for Americans to champion the freedom of Korea: "There is not only the obligation of the past; there is the compulsion of the future. We need the freedom loving people of Korea as our allies, but more than that we must signify to subject peoples that we the people of America stand for the freedom of all peoples."[91]

Probably on this same visit to New York, Rhee began seeking a rather ingenious arrangement between New York City and the KPG that might further Korea's cause. In June 1944, Channing Liem of the Korean Commission wrote to Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia asking that the city's police and fire departments accept Korean candidates for training in preparation for setting up public services in post-liberation Korea. Liem asked that the city provide the candidates' training for free, while the Korean Commission would cover their living expenses. Liem also asked LaGuardia to recommend that two or more competent Korean lecturers be given positions in New York's municipal colleges to better acquaint New Yorkers with the Far Eastern situation. LaGuardia forwarded Liem's proposal to the State Department, asking if they had any objections. Hull responded that the State Department had no objections. Whether this training program got off the ground is uncertain, but over the next several months

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[91] Pearl S. Buck, "Our 25,000,000 Forgotten Allies of Korea, " Speech given at New York Town Hall, February 1944, "The Speeches of Syngman Rhee" folder, SRI.

LaGuardia displayed an interest in Korean affairs.[92]

In August 1944, when Rhee visited New York City for a gala hosted by the Korean-American Council at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, LaGuardia and Wendell Willkie sent letters of support for Korean independence, which were read aloud during the CBS broadcast of the event.[93] The next day LaGuardia received Rhee at his City Hall office, and they gave a joint interview to the *New York Times*. Rhee told the *Times* that no nation unwilling to fight deserved independence. Koreans had been fighting for decades unaided, according to Rhee, and now only asked for aid to make their efforts more effective. LaGuardia acknowledged the importance of Korea when he stated that "there can be no permanent solution in the Far East until Korea is free and independent."[94]

Probably the most prominent American to raise the issue of Korea was Eleanor Roosevelt. In May 1944, she chose to mark the 62nd anniversary of the signing of the 1882 Korean-American Treaty by writing about it in her widely syndicated "My Day" column. The treaty was the source of "much of the interest which we have had for Korea in this country," she noted. "The history of our actions that first year makes interesting reading, in view of what was to happen to Korea later."[95] Roosevelt did not directly

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[92] See Channing Liem to F. H. La Guardia, Princeton N.J., 15 June 1944, 895.01/343 and Secretary Hull to La Guardia, 17 July 1944, 895.01/6-2444, *美國務省韓國關係文書 [Internal affairs of Korea, 1940-1944]*, 1993, 4:254–55, 299–300. La Guardia would later become the director of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. In this position he worked closely with the American Military Government in Korea to secure aid for the American occupation zone. See M. Preston Goodfellow to John R. Hodge, 2 July 1946 in Byeong-jun Jeong, ed., *이승만관계서한자료집 [Correspondence and Materials Related to Syngman Rhee]*, vol. 1 (National Institute of Korean History, 1996), 114–15.

[93] Syngman Rhee, "Speech Given at Columbia Broadcasting Station, NY," 29 August 1944, "The Speeches of Syngman Rhee" folder, SRI.; "Korean Leaders Seek U. S. Arms To Fight Japan: Romulo, Dr. Kung Speak; Letter Read From Willkie at Council Dinner Here," *New York Herald Tribune*, August 30, 1944.

[94] "Korean Leader Asks for Arms, Munitions," *New York Times*, August 30, 1944.

[95] Eleanor Roosevelt, "My Day," *Long Breach Independent*, May 26, 1944.

mention American violations of the treaty, but she could hardly have been alluding to anything else. Roosevelt was certainly aware of the Korean situation. She mentioned Korea for the first time in her "My Day" column on 9 August 1937 after a meeting with Louise Yim, a Korean educator and nationalist who had participated in the March First Movement and was an ardent supporter of Syngman Rhee.[96] In 1942, while at Fisk University, the First Lady referenced Korea in response to a Fisk student who asked whether African-Americans should be loyal to the United States, which was dominated by a race of people that did not even consider her a citizen, or to the Japanese, with whose race she shared more kinship. Avoiding the domestic politics, Roosevelt responded that racial kinship meant little to the Japanese. "I am sure any Korean could tell you what being under the Japanese would be like," Roosevelt replied.[97]

On 1 March 1945, the First Lady again mentioned Korea in her "My Day" column, noting the 26th anniversary of the March First Movement and telling her readers that the provisional government, the KPG, created during this movement still existed. She praised the efforts of Americans interested in Korea and closed by saying, "Let us hope that the people of America will continue their sympathetic understanding and support of this long oppressed people."[98] In response to this column, the Rhees requested a meeting with the First Lady and were granted one. They expected only a social meeting and were delighted when the First Lady cut to the chase, asking them if the

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[96] Eleanor Roosevelt, "My Day," August 9, 1937, *The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project,* <http://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/myday/displaydoc.cfm?_y=1937&_f=md054715>. [Accessed 17 March 2015]

[97] Edward Freeman, "Aid Asked for 'Poor White Man in South Working for Nothing,'" *Nashville Tennessean*, April 21, 1942.

[98] Eleanor Roosevelt, "My Day," 1 March 1945, *The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project,* <http://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/myday/displaydoc.cfm?_y=1945&_f=md057038>.[Accessed 17 March 2015]

KPG was receiving Lend-Lease Aid. When Rhee recounted his difficulties procuring any assistance from the State Department, the First Lady promised that she would relay this to the president.[99] Whether Roosevelt kept her promise is unclear, but she was certainly impressed by Rhee. A few days later she discussed the meeting in her column, writing "a very beautiful spirit shines in [Rhee's] face" and expressing her desire that someday Korea could live in peace and security in a world where small and large states enjoyed equal protection.[100]

There is no stronger evidence that Rhee had become a minor celebrity than his invitation to attend the world premiere of Twentieth Century-Fox's film *Wilson* on 1 August 1944. Wilson was a major film; it was nominated for ten Oscars and won five. Rhee clearly enjoyed the attention and noted every detail of the occasion in his diary—from his room number at the Pennsylvania Hotel to his seat number at the Roxy Theater, where he was given "one of the best reserved guest seats." Rhee thought the film was "wonderful," which is surprising given his disappointment with Wilson and his opposition to the Versailles Treaty.[101] Rhee probably agreed with the *New York Times* review, which acknowledged the film's shortcomings on the finer points of Wilson's life but praised it for inspiring "millions of people throughout this land to renewed appreciation of its subject's ideals and especially of his trials, which may be ours."[102] Any film that focused Americans' attention on Wilsonianism and called for a "renewed appreciation" of these ideals was

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[99] Francesca Rhee to Robert T. Oliver, 9 March 1945, Jeong, 이승만관계서한자료집 *[Correspondence and Materials Related to Syngman Rhee]*, 4–5.

[100] Eleanor Roosevelt, "My Day," 12 March 1945, *The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project,* <http://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/myday/displaydoc.cfm?_y=1945&_f=md057047>. [Accessed 17 March 2015].

[101] Fields et al., *The Diary of Syngman Rhee*, 288.

[102] "'Wilson,' an Impressive Screen Biography," *New York Times*, August 2, 1944.

surely something that Rhee would enjoy.

Among those above who supported Rhee and Korean independence in big and small ways none had deep ties to Korea and only Pearl Buck was an expert on East Asian affairs. What would have drawn Wendell Willkie, Fiorello LaGuardia, Eleanor Roosevelt, and the management of Twentieth Century-Fox to Syngman Rhee and Korean independence? Some of Rhee's lesser known supporters have been accused of being spoilsmen—hoping to secure contracts and appointments if Rhee came into power in Korea. The same could not be said of Eleanor Roosevelt. The most plausible explanation is that Rhee's arguments convinced them that Korea was important to their nation's overall standing in the world. Supporting Korean independence was an opportunity to demonstrate an American commitment to the self-determination of a colonized people. It was also a chance for Americans to show they were serious about correcting their nations' past mistakes. Rhee helped these figures locate Korea in the American moral geography.

**The Final Push in Congress**

Rhee's raised public profile helped bring the Korean situation to the attention of the American public, but this did not lead to recognition. Although annoyed with Rhee's more direct denunciations of the department's policies, American diplomats maintained cordial relations with Rhee, but let the Cairo Declaration serve as their policy toward Korea: Korea would become independent "in due course" after the war. The details could be worked out later. Given the lack of better alternatives from its perspective, the department maintained hopes that a joint trusteeship for Korea might secure the nation's independence. Rhee was never able to convince American diplomats of his conviction that, rather than guaranteeing Korea's future, they were facilitating Soviet domination of

the peninsula. He had more success with Congress. The last few months of the war saw several congressmen speak out in favor of recognizing the KPG, invoking the American mission and demanding the United States to take some responsibility for Korea's fate.

When it became clear that the State Department was not going to permit the seating of a Korean delegation at the San Francisco Conference, which was convened in May and June 1945 to create the United Nations Charter, Rhee retaliated by calling a press conference in which he "revealed" that the Allies had made a secret agreement at Yalta to cede Korea to the Soviet Union, betraying Korea for a second time in forty years.[103] Rhee's statement grabbed national headlines, including the front page of the *Chicago Tribune*. The State Department denied Rhee's accusation, but failed to explain to several congressmen's satisfaction why a Korean delegation had not been seated, especially considering the seating of Argentina, Syria, and Lebanon, none of which was recognized as an Allied nation during the war. In a letter to the secretary of state, Senator Burton Wheeler (D-MT) demanded that Korea's right to be seated be decided by a vote of the conference. Even President Truman was reported to have asked for an investigation of the Yalta files to see if such a secret agreement had been struck.[104] Rhee basked in the media attention this "revelation" earned him. In a published letter to the editor of the *Chicago Tribune* thanking the paper for covering the "secret" Yalta Agreement, Rhee wrote that the paper's "brave disclosure" would prevent Korea from being secretly

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[103] Lew, *The Making of the First Korean President*, 229.

[104] Willard Edwards, "Senate Stirred by F.D.F.-Stalin Deal on Korea," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 17, 1945. There is no evidence to indicate such an agreement was made between Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin at Yalta.

sold out again.[105]

After Rhee made his allegations many Americans rallied to the Korean cause by writing President Truman, the State Department, and their congressmen. A Moselle Eubanks of the Wesley House in Nashville Tennessee wrote President Truman that it would be a "flagrant violation" of the Atlantic Charter and the "cause of justice and righteousness" if Korea was abandoned to Russia.[106] Alice Butts responded to President Truman's appeal for prayers on his behalf by giving him a lecture on Korean American relations going back to 1882. Koreans had absorbed the "American spirit" to a remarkable degree and wanted independence no less fervently than the American founders, she wrote. She was praying regularly, along with thousands of Koreans, that God would guide the president in this matter and that he would realize he was best placed to see that Korea was "treated right and given her sovereignty."[107] One Lottye B. McMeans told Truman that American Christians were "much concerned" to hear that "Christian Korea" had been traded to Russia. She was praying that Truman would receive divine guidance and that heeding this guidance "the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, will *again* shine forth as a GREAT CHRISTIAN nation." She also had it on good authority that Korea could furnish the Allies with three million men to fight Japan.

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[105] Willard Edwards, "Charges Reds Silence Korea's Freedom Plea," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 5, 1945; Willard Edwards, "Snub to Korea Laid to Secret Deal at Yalta," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 7, 1945; Syngman Rhee, "Voice of the People: Justice for Korea," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 11, 1945; "Grew Denies Allies Pledged Korea to Russia at Yalta: Grew Denies Big 3 Gave Russia Korea," *New York Times*, June 9, 1945.

[106] Moselle Eubanks to Harry S. Truman, 22 May 1945, 895.01/5-2245, *美國務省韓國關係文書 [Internal affairs of Korea, 1945-1949]*, vol. 8 (Seoul: Areum Press, 1995), 297–98.

[107] Alice M. Butts to Harry S. Truman, 28 May 1945, 895.01/5-2845 CS/D, Ibid., 8:315–16.

"This might be worth considering" she concluded.[108]

There was an implicit warning in the above letters; American Christians would not countenance Korea's abandonment. For other letter writers this warning was explicit. Washington lawyer and prominent Presbyterian leader William La Roe, Jr., warned in a letter to the *Washington Evening Star* the "resent among church people would, indeed, be deep" if rumors of a secret Yalta deal were true. He further argued anything short of safeguarding the "interests of this little nation" would offend "Christian people throughout the world."[109] Dr. William T. Ellis, the author of two nationally syndicated columns, "Religion Day by Day" and "Sunday School Lessons," was just as clear. He wrote Truman's Press Secretary Charles Ross asking him to forward a letter to the president on U.S.-Korean relations, particularly Theodore Roosevelt's violation of the 1882 Korean-American Treaty. "He [Truman] probably doesn't know the sensational Theodore Roosevelt story" Ellis wrote, "but he [Truman] does know what a row will be aroused among the Church people if we again go back on Korea."[110]

Other letters indicated that concern over Korea was no longer limited to American Protestants. Immediately following Rhee's accusation, a group calling itself Catholics for Korea cabled President Truman demanding any secret treaty be disavowed and that Korea be given its independence "free from the domination of any other nation" as soon as it was liberated. The letterhead of Catholics for Korea was packed with the names of prominent American Catholics including Archbishop Francis Spellmen,

[108] Lottye B. McMeans to Harry S. Truman, 4 June 1945, 895.01/6-445 CS/D, Ibid., 8:323–24. Emphasis in the original.

[109] A copy of this article was retained by the State Department, see 895.01/5-2445, Ibid., 8:305–6.

[110] William T. Eillis to Charles G. Ross, 25 May 1945, 895.01/5-2545 CS/LE, Ibid., 8:308–11.

American diplomat William Franklin Sands, and singer Bing Crosby. Further down the list of "sponsoring members" were several editors of the liberal Catholic magazine *Commonweal*, including well-known socialist John Cort.[111] By the summer of 1945 Korea was a cause that could bring many different groups together: conservatives like Spellman and Liberals like Cort.

Rhee's accusations and the response they provoked did not earn Korea a seat at the San Francisco Conference, but they did spark a passionate debate in Congress about the State Department's Korean policy. On 22 June, Representative Paul Shafer (R-MI) told colleagues on the House floor that it was beyond his comprehension why "Korea's democratically conceived government" and its "great apostle of democracy, Dr. Syngman Rhee, should be continuously rebuffed by our State Department." Shafer wanted the department to answer "forthrightly and honestly" if a secret deal had been made at Yalta regarding Korea. He asked why the door that had always remained open to liberty-loving foreigners such as Lafayette, John Boyle Reilly, and Luis Kossuth had been "slammed in the face" of Rhee. "Is that spirit dead in our State Department? Does it not realize the priceless liberty we enjoy constitutes an obligation to assist others?" Not hesitating to "wave the bloody shirt," Shafer asked if the 250,000 Americans who had died so far in defense of "American ideas of human freedom" would support the State Department's treatment of Korea. Shafer called for the "Americanization" of the department and demanded that it live up to the U.N. Charter just created in San Francisco. He concluded with a flourish of rhetorical questions: "Are we for the second time this century going to

[111] Catholics for Korea to Harry S. Truman (Telegram), 22 May 1945, 895.01/5-2245 CS/D, Ibid., 8:300. For a letter containing Catholics for Korea letterhead see William Franklin Sands to President Truman, 15 October 1945. The facsimile of this letter contains no visible decimal number, but it was filed in 895.01, and, if it exists, the decimal file would likely be 895.01/10-1545.

betray the Korean people? Are we going to forsake them and shatter their dream of democracy? Are we going to sell them down the river to communism?" Shafer believed that American soldiers, American churches, and average American "folks at home" would answer "no." The war had transformed America into a "Citadel of Freedom" and Shafer told his colleagues that when a stranger comes knocking seeking aid "God forbid that door ever remain unopened. Mr. Speaker, what about Korea?"[112]

Senator William Langer (R-ND) was no less passionate in his denunciations of the State Department. He blamed the State Department's appeasement of Japan for the current war and claimed, "we are [now] wiping out, with the blood of our heroes upon Pacific battlefields, the blunders of our diplomats." Even worse, Langer believed the State Department had not learned the right lessons from its Japanese policy: appeasement only leads to more conflict. He charged the department was now appeasing the Soviets instead of the Japanese. Langer contended that after Pearl Harbor the Koreans should have been supported as allies against the Japanese. Instead the State Department demanded that Syngman Rhee—again called "Korea's venerable apostle of democracy"—first unify the KPG with a minority of Korean communists. Further appeasement at Yalta resulted in a situation in Asia where the Soviet Union could unilaterally occupy Korea. According to Langer, the chances were "nine out of ten" that neither the United States nor any other Allied nation would send troops to fight for Korea. Rather, they would continue their appeasement policy.[113]

Senator Wayne L. Morse (R-OR) disagreed. He recounted at length the history

[112] Paul W. Shafer, "Korea," *Congressional Record* 79: 1 (June 22, 1945): 6580–81.

[113] William Langer, "The State Department," *Congressional Record* 79: 1 (July 12, 1945): 6580–81.

between Korea and the United States since 1882 and told the Senate that he was "raking up these dead coals" because "they have a definite bearing on the future." He praised Franklin Roosevelt for his determination in the Cairo Declaration that Korea would not be left in the hands of the Japanese, but what of the Russians and the Chinese? For the future of all nations seeking peace, Morse claimed that Korea needed to be made independent and free from the control of its aggressive neighbors and that the Cairo Declaration alone was not going to accomplish that end. He told his colleagues there was a "grave danger we shall miss our cue in this drama that is unfolding in the East" by marginalizing Korea from the Allied nations while the Soviets organized a Korean communist government. Morse stated that he did not necessarily see Korean communists as a threat to that country's future if they were willing to take their place in a pluralistic Korean democracy. But he reasoned that such an outcome was unlikely unless the United States took decisive action. Morse proposed that the United States immediately recognize the KPG and promise the Korean people that the United States would supervise free and fair elections as soon as conditions permitted it. Morse continued that the United States "should stand beside and behind that government with a real pledge to support its independence." If these actions were not taken, he assured his colleagues that Korea would "fall like a ripe plum" into the lap of the Soviet Union. He insisted that Korea was a test of the United Nations Charter. If the United States stood up boldly for Korean independence it would be acting in the long-term interests of all nations, including the Soviet Union, by securing the peace and stability of Northeast Asia.[114] In Morse's mind, Korea had become a test case for America's commitment to the international order in the

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[114] Wayne L. Morse, "Remarks," *Congressional Record* 79: 1 (July 28, 1945): 8159–62.

postwar world. Ensuring Korea's independence had become part of America's postwar mission. If Morse's words and sentiments sounds like they could have been written by Rhee himself, they may have been, or at least written by Robert Oliver. In a June 1945 letter to Oliver, Rhee thanked Oliver for writing a speech for Senator Morse, although he was uncertain whether the senator would use it. Even if the words were his own, Morse's ideas about Korea were heavily influenced by Rhee's lobbying.[115]

Morse's comments were made on 28 July, just over two weeks before Japan's surrender. Taken as a whole, the words of the senators and representatives examined above served as a warning to the State Department of the criticism and accusations it could expect to face if Korea was allowed to slip into a Soviet sphere of influence without a protest from American diplomats.

**Conclusion: Rhee's Lobbying and the Division of Korea**

When Japan surrendered on 15 August 1945 the KPG had still not been recognized. Nor would it be, despite many opportunities to do so as Americans occupied Korea in the fall of 1945 and despite many demands from Koreans that the allies return their exiled government to Korea. The failure of the KPG to earn recognition has often been portrayed as the failure of the Korean independence movement and personal failure of Syngman Rhee. It has also been interpreted as either American ambivalence or even antagonism towards an independent Korea. Indeed, even Rhee and nearly all other Korean activists considered their decades of lobbying to have failed when the end of the war brought about the division of Korea instead of the emergence of an independent Korea under the leadership of the KPG. Rhee and his followers never suggested or

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[115] Syngman Rhee to Robert T. Oliver, 27 June 1945, Jeong, *이승만관계서한자료집 [Correspondence and Materials Related to Syngman Rhee]*, 30.

approved division. They were appalled by it. Rhee's first action when he was on the ground in Korea in 1945 was to criticize the division, much to the consternation of the American Military Government (AMG).[116] However, it is only in the context of the Korean independence movement that the American suggestion that Korea be divided can be properly understood.

It has become axiomatic that the division of Korea was a hasty decision taken by men who had little knowledge of Korea and who were every hour being bombarded by issues of greater importance: that it was "wholly an American action" taken with no thought of the Koreans themselves or of the long-term consequences of that division.[117] Given the monumental consequences that resulted from that division, comparatively little effort has gone in to explaining the contradictory directives of the State and War departments that Colonels Dean Rusk and Charles Bonesteel were given thirty minutes and a small scale *National Geographic* map of East Asia to solve on 14 August 1945. The War Department wanted none of Korea, while the State Department wanted all of it.[118] Before the 38th Parallel was a compromise between the Soviet Union and the United States, it was first an internal compromise between American policymakers in the State Department who felt American action on Korea was crucial and American military leaders who believed it was not.

But why did Americans care about Korea at all? Military planners claimed that Korea had no strategic value to the United States and their lack of planning for either an

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[116] Richard J. H. Johnston, "Rhee Calls Korea to Resist Division," *New York Times*, October 21, 1945.

[117] Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes 1945-1947*, vol. I (Princeton University Press, 1981), 120.

[118] Jongsoo Lee, *The Partition of Korea After World War II: A Global History*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 37.

assault on or the occupation of Korea proved they believed it.[119] Assistant Chief of Northeast Asian Affairs during the Truman Administration, Niles W. Bond, claimed "The military never felt, and I don't think the political side of the Government did either, that we had any long term interest in Korea," but "The State Department always felt that we had a responsibility there." He continued, "The Koreans, of course, were very good at playing on this feeling, on this moral responsibility of ours.[120] Dean Rusk's own account of the division claims that he was tasked with dividing Korea for "symbolic purposes"—not strategic ones.[121] What could have made Korea symbolically important in 1945? If one believes that the Korean independence movement was a failure and that it had no effect on American policy, this is puzzling indeed. However, a proper understanding of the Korean independence movement, both its successes and its failures, brings the division of Korea into a new light.

When the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee hashed out American policy in the Pacific on 14 August 1945, Korea was not the most pressing issue they faced, but neither was it inconsequential. Rhee's activism had brought Korea to the attention of a wide array of stakeholders, and his allies in Congress had clearly communicated that abandoning Korea to the Soviets would have political consequences. The State Department was especially under pressure. Bendiner's *The Riddle of the State Department* had already given voice to the dissatisfaction many Americans were feeling with the

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[119] Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, I:120.

[120] Oral History Interview with Niles W. Bond, December 28, 1973, Harry S. Truman Library, <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/bond.htm>. [Accessed 12 November 2016]. Bond linked this moral responsibility with the American role in the creation of the republic of Korea in 1948, but he also hints that the origin of the State Department's moral responsibility lay deeper than that when he repeatedly references the American military's willingness to abandon Korea and the State Department's extreme reluctance to do so.

[121] Dean Rusk, *As I Saw It*, (W.W. Norton, 1990), 123.

judgments and decisions of their top diplomats. The coming years, culminating in Senator Joseph McCarthy's assertion that the State Department was full of communists, would show just how suspicious many Americans were about the department. Leaving Korea to be occupied by the Soviets after the Japanese surrender would have been another "riddle" they would have been called to account for. Rhee's allies in congress were already clearly sending a message they would make them pay for it.

A few angry congressmen might have been little to fear had it not been for the fact that the State Department and the Roosevelt Administration—and by extension the Truman administration—had come to the conclusion that Korea should be independent and that the United States' previous policies regarding Korea had been wrong. FE's own guiding memorandum of 20 February 1943 on Korea policy claimed that "essential justice" demanded the restoration of Korean independence.[122] There is anecdotal evidence that even the president shared this view. After his meeting in Cairo with Chiang Kai-shek and Winston Churchill a story began to circulate around the State Department that FDR had emphatically told Chiang: "You may have Manchuria. You may have the Pescadores and you may have Formosa, but you may not have Korea, which is to be detached from Japan and is to be given its independence after a period of international supervision."[123]

In many ways the "Korean Question" of 1945 was similar to the Korean question that faced President Roosevelt at the conclusion of the Russo-Japanese War. In 1905 Roosevelt acquiesced to the absorption of Korea by Japan for what he believed would be

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[122] Memo, "Some Aspects of the Question of Korean Independence," 20 February 1942, 895.01/79, *대한민국임시정부자료집 (Korean Provisional Government Documents)*, 20:186–204.

[123] Xiaoyuan Liu, *A Partnership for Disorder: China, the United States, and Their Policies for the Postwar Disposition of the Japanese Empire, 1941-1945* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 142.

a more stable order in northeast Asia. There was every strategic incentive to abandon Korea again in 1945. Korea was not necessary to the security of Japan nor the security of the United States. As in 1905 the Koreans were in no position to resist the *de facto* absorption of their country into a politically subservient relationship with one of their larger neighbors. Ceding control of the entire Korean Peninsula to the Soviets would have made strategic sense, and in the realm of superpower politics would have been more equitable: the United States occupying all of Japan and the Soviets all of Korea. And yet, there was no one willing to champion this strategy. The United States had to do something for Korea for "symbolic purposes" as Dean Rusk wrote.

Korea's symbolic importance in 1945 was largely due to Syngman Rhee and his almost forty-years of activism in the United States. Working steadily and starting from a place of little to no influence, he built coalitions of supporters leveraging many Americans' interest in the Christianization of East Asia, concerns for human rights, and their expectation that their government's actions abroad should be justified by more than narrow self-interest. In concert with these supporters and activists Rhee had convinced American policymakers they had a responsibility towards Korea. Although he was unaware of it, Rhee transformed Korea into the first battle ground of the Cold War long before June 1950. Rhee's assertions that the Soviets were attempting to set up a "Lublin Government" for Korea and that the State Department's dithering on the issue of Korea was facilitating Soviet designs further fueled the skepticism of Americans who questioned the State Department's handling of American foreign relations and alarmed Americans who were already worried that the U.S. had ceded too much to the Soviets in Eastern

Europe.[124] During the final days of World War II, Rhee skillfully translated Korea from an area of minor importance in that conflict to an area of increasing symbolic importance in the conflict between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, which many, including Rhee, believed was coming. He translated Korea from an issue that highlighted the State Department's appeasement of the Japanese to one that highlighted the State Department's appeasement of the Soviet Union.

Under such pressures in 1945 the State Department decided to at least attempt to do for Korea what the Koreans were temporarily unable to do for themselves—that is prevent their absorption into the Soviet Union in the hopes that indigenous and independent Korean institutions might develop under international trusteeship. The division of Korea was not a hasty decision made in less than thirty minutes by two military officers. It was a decision that had been years in the making. It was made in the context of domestic political support for Korea, the desire to right a historical wrong, State Department fears of being accused of further appeasement, and the hope that a more just postwar order would also be a more stable one.

Obviously Korea's geographical location did not change between 1905 and 1945, but how Americans' located it in their own moral geography did. The primary American motivation for suggesting the division of Korea was the pressure brought to bear on American policymakers by Americans who believed that U.S. treatment of Korea was a matter of morality. Once Americans where occupying the southern half of the Korean Peninsula its moral importance only grew. A CIA assessment of the U.S. position in Korea in March 1948 stated that Americans' abandonment of Korea would not only be a

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[124] Lew, *The Making of the First Korean President*, 262–63.

strategic setback for the U.S., but would also "injure US prestige throughout the world where it is recognized that the US has substantial moral commitments in Korea." If the U.S. abandoned Korea it would have "to face the charge of breaking another promise in the Far East."[125] Notably, this report was written almost a year before the "Who lost China?" debate began in the United States. Of course the American moral commitment to Korea was not ironclad, as many scholars have pointed out. The U.S. government was prepared to allow Rhee's regime in southern Korea to fall to communist subversion if it proved incapable of dealing with the communist threat, but the American moral commitment to Korea would not allow it to fall to external aggression. In this sense, the effects of Rhee's forty years of lobbying in the United States continued to be felt well into the 1950s.

If the Korean War is the "forgotten war" then the Korean independence movement in the US under the leadership of Syngman Rhee is doubly forgotten. Indeed neither the Koreans nor the Americans had any incentive to remember it, much less commemorate it. Despite his success at arousing American sympathy, Rhee was horrified by the division. He had devoted much of his life to Korea's independence only to see Korea emerge from the Japanese Empire divided and occupied by two foreign powers, neither of which had a definite timetable for withdrawal. From the American perspective, the division and occupation of Korea was a headache that turned into a nightmare, sparking a bloody war on the Korean peninsula and solidifying the mistrust, tension, and dangers that came to define the Cold War. However, understanding the division of Korea in this context highlights the ideological complexity, the historical memory, and the

[125] "The Current Situation in Korea (ORE 15-48)" (Central Intelligence Agency, March 18, 1948), <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/0000258335>. [Accessed 12 November 2016]

aspirations for the future in which this decision was made. It implicates more than diplomats and world leaders, more than capitalism and communism, and more than superpower competition in the origins of the Cold War. Syngman Rhee had realized as a young man imprisoned in Seoul that the religious fervor and ideology of the American people could potentially be leveraged to interest Americans in Korea's plight. His success at doing so had repercussions well beyond what he probably imagined and the implications of which, for good or ill, are still to play out.

## CONCLUSION: SOMEWHERE ELSE

American diplomatic historian Lloyd Gardner once suggested that the constant problem facing Koreans in their 20th century relations with the United States was "Korea was always about somewhere else." In an insightful review historian James Matray elaborated on this idea showing how presidents from Lyndon B. Johnson to George W. Bush made policy decisions affecting the Korean peninsula that were actually focused on U.S. relations with the Soviet Union, the Middle East, or American domestic politics.[1] One could easily see the tendency stretching back much further to Theodore Roosevelt's decision to give his blessing to the Japanese colonization of Korea at Portsmouth in 1905, to Wilson's decision to ignore the Korean question at Versailles in 1919, and Franklin Roosevelt's decision to add the words "in due course" to the Cairo Declaration in 1943. In all three cases American leaders made decisions that would have an enormous impact on Korea while focusing on their relations with Japan, China, or the Soviet Union. In these cases too, the issue of Korea was really about somewhere else. Even the American decision to intervene in the Korean War in 1950 was taken with one eye on Korea and one eye on Europe. When figures like George Kennan abruptly changed their position on the desirability of fighting for Korea after the North Korean invasion, he did so not because of a sudden conversion to the importance of Korea but because he feared acquiescence to communist aggression in Korea would send a troubling message to the United States' European allies and enemies alike.[2]

Gardner and Matray are certainly correct. Korea was about somewhere else for

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[1] James I. Matray, "Someplace Else: The Tragedy of Korean-American Relations," *Diplomatic History* 28, no. 1 (January 2004): 159–63, doi:10.1111/j.1467-7709.2004.00404.x.

[2] John Lewis Gaddis, *George F. Kennan: An American Life* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011), 397.

most American policymakers. This study builds on their analysis by showing that this phenomenon of Korea "being about somewhere else" was not just limited to physical geography and that in the realm of American moral geography, many Koreans themselves did not resist this tendency, but actually encouraged it. At a fundamental level figures like Syngman Rhee and his close associates tried their best to make Korea about somewhere else during their forty-years of lobbying in the United States. Their goal was to shift American perceptions of Korea from being a remote peninsula wedged between larger Asian powers to being a nation that presented both a challenge and an opportunity for Americans who believed in the existence of a wider American mission.

Rhee had imbibed the idea of an American mission at Pai Chai and never doubted the sincerity with which average Americans held this belief, even if he could be incredibly skeptical about the intentions of American diplomats. He understood the mutability of this mission and proved adept at changing his message to conform to its iterations during his long career as a representative of the Korean people in the United States. As a student in the United States, Rhee rightly subordinated his Korean nationalism to the American mission to "Christianize the world in a generation." Doing so provided Rhee with a crucial reservoir of personal support from American Christians that he used to secure himself a high-quality education and a reputation as a lecturer. Rhee's use of Christian networks was not merely for personal gain. His conversion to Christianity appears to be genuine, but he saw Christianity as more than just a personal religion. Rhee believed Christianity was a way of nurturing a new, more modern, Korean nationalism that would prepare Koreans to regain and maintain their independence. Couching his early appeals to Americans in terms of Christianizing Korea was almost

certainly more effective than direct appeals for Korean independence would have been. Although the issue of colonialism divided many Americans, few Americans during the age of Roosevelt would have argued self-determination was an intrinsic right of all peoples—much less a right that the United States could or should defend. Rather than trying to convince Americans of a premise many of them would dispute, he instead showed them how Korea fit into a strategy millions of Americans were already pursuing and into a system of beliefs that they already held.

While Rhee consistently emphasized a strategy that would relocate Korea in Americans' moral geography, he certainly was willing to make geopolitical arguments whenever he thought they might be effective. Such was the case during the Washington Naval Conference, when Rhee again realigned his movement to converge with the major mission of American foreign policy: establishing a durable peace between great powers through disarmament. While acknowledging the importance of disarmament, the unseated Korean delegation used the focus on the East Asian political situation during the conference to add a geopolitical argument to the moral arguments they continued to make in favor of Korea's independence. The Koreans' argued their nation was the "Belgium of Asia" and only its neutralization could ensure a peaceful and stable order in northeast Asia. The conference's focus on international law as a means of solving geopolitical problems also gave the Koreans an opportunity to highlight the 1882 Korean-American Treaty and the treaties signed between Korea and the other powers represented at the conference, including the Japanese.

Such a strategy of mixing Korea's geopolitical importance with its moral importance reached its zenith with the publication of *Japan Inside Out* in 1941. Here Rhee

argued that Korea was both a test of Americans' commitment to what he called the "spirit of '76"—referring to the American Revolution—while also arguing that Theodore Roosevelt's abandonment of Korea in 1905 had started a policy of appeasing the Japanese that would sooner or later lead to an attack on the United States. The attack on Pearl Harbor that followed just a few months later afforded Rhee plenty of opportunities to argue in favor of Korea's utility as an ally in the war against Japan, while he continued to insist it was Americans' moral failure to stand up for Korea's independence that enabled Japanese aggression in the first place.

Although it is outside the scope of this study, Syngman Rhee probably attained the height of his influence with the American public by translating Korea from an American moral failing in its relationship with Japan to one in its relationship with the Soviet Union. As chapter five argued, this was a process that Rhee had already begun even before the Japanese were defeated, when Rhee accused the late Franklin Roosevelt of making a secret deal surrendering Korea to the Soviets at Yalta. Rhee would continue to champion Korea's moral importance in the struggle against communism for the rest of his career. Although there was certainly a geopolitical component to Rhee's arguments portraying Korea as a major front in the war against communism, the extreme to which Rhee was willing to make Korea about someplace else can be seen in October of 1950, when in an interview with Lt. James Black, Rhee explained that Koreans did not resent the destruction of Seoul by American airpower because Seoul could be rebuilt, but "in slavery, nothing matters."[3] Rhee was willing to acquiesce to the destruction of the

[33] Lt. James Black, USAF, interviews President of South Korea Syngman Rhee, The Crucial Decade: Voices of the Postwar Era, 1945-1954: 330-78, National Archives, College Park, Maryland. A copy of this recording is also available at the University of Maryland under the title Surrender demand to Commander-

physical Korea in order to save it politically. In this belief Rhee was oddly consistent his whole life. In his 1905 magnum opus *The Spirit of Independence* Rhee wrote that even if the entire Korean population of twenty million was annihilated save for one person, as long as that one person had Korean independence firmly rooted in their mind and was willing to act as its guardian then there was "no cause for alarm."[4]

Rhee further de-centered Korea from its actual geography when he famously asked for the support of the American people and military to reunite Korea and win back the Chinese mainland in cooperation with Chaing Kai-shek during his address to a joint session of the U.S. Congress on 28 July 1954. Rhee described the Cold War as not merely between communists and capitalists, and not even as only between the United States and the Soviet Union, but as a struggle over the "fate of human civilization" and in defense of the "ideals and principles upheld by the fathers of American independence," which Rhee took to be universal in their application. Rhee urged the congressmen to realize that they had an opportunity to "make Asia safe for freedom" and in doing so "settle the world communist problems in Europe, Africa, and America." In his speech, the intrinsic value of Korea was subsumed into a larger conflict of ideas. Similarly, Rhee explained at the outset that his own identity as a Korean was incidental: "I am Korean, but by sentiment and education I am an American."[5]

Even at this late date—1954—Rhee was still reaping benefits from his nearly four decades of lobbying in the United States for Korea's independence. Prior to conducting

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in-Chief, North Korea People's Army [sound recording]/ Douglas MacArthur. Interview with Syngman Rhee. Actuality recording made by combat correspondent / Jack Seigal"

[4] Rhee, *The Spirit of Independence*, 53.

[5] Syngman Rhee, "Address of Syngman Rhee, President of the Republic of Korea," *Congressional Record* 83:2 (July 28, 1954): 12434–35.

business on the day of Rhee's address, the U.S. Senate opened its session with a prayer by Senate chaplain and long-time Rhee supporter Frederick Brown Harris. Harris had served as a key member of the Korean American Congress during the war and remained a booster of Korea his entire life. He would write a moving obituary of Rhee in 1965 and the correspondence between Mrs. Frederic Brown Harris and Francesca Rhee indicated that Harris spent the 1950s speaking "enthusiastically" about Korea and Rhee at every opportunity.[6] On the historic occasion of Rhee's address to a joint session of congress Harris took the opportunity to link the cause of Korea clearly to his own conception of the American mission. His prayer that day deserves to be read at length:

> Almighty God, eternal love, Thou source of all life and light: We would yield our flickering torch to Thee. Beyond all the madness of these angry days, with nations in commotion, we turn to Thee who sittest above the floods and in *whose balances the nations are weighed*.
>
> Lift us out of our doubt and cynicism by a great faith to live by and great causes to live for. Facing now unfinished tasks calling for courage and sacrifice, vision, and wisdom … *shape our policy and guide our destiny*.
>
> We thank Thee for the steadfast faith of Thy servant, Syngman Rhee, who today comes crowned with honor to plead the cause of Thy truth against the devil's falsehood, not only as that truth faces the principalities of darkness in his own land, but also in all the reaches and ranges of this global struggle. Give us a part in making the earth's crooked ways straight, when social and industrial relations will lose their hard antagonisms and become the hallowed cooperation of comrades in human service: In the name of the Servant of all. Amen.[7]

The belief in a moral economy and the judgment of nations by the Divine is a clear feature in Harris' prayer, as is the need for the United States to take up "tasks calling for courage and sacrifice, vision, and wisdom." Given what Rhee would ask for later in his address it is likely that Harris may even have composed his prayer with Rhee's mission in

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[6] For Harris' obituary of Rhee see "Spires of the Spirit," *Watertown Daily Times*, 7 August 1965. See also, Helen S. Harris to Francesca Rhee, 13 October 1956, *이승만 대통령 재임기 문서 [Presidential Papers of Syngman Rhee, Microfilm Edition]*, roll MF 우남 B01, frame 2088-2090.

[7] Frederick Brown Harris, "Prayer of Frederick Brown Harris," *Congressional Record* 83:2 (July 28, 1954): 12316. emphasis added.

mind. Just as clear in Harris' prayer is the same identification of Korea with the American mission to the world that Rhee would later expound upon in his speech. Harris' prayer describes the American mission in its vaguest—and to figures like Rhee—most useful form: a global struggle between truth and falsehood, a mission to make "crooked ways straight." There are also echoes of the fears of the earliest American divines; that the American mission is far from an exclusive arrangement with the Almighty. Harris' vision of the American mission draws firmly from an understanding that American exceptionalism is not a matter of identity, but of potential: "give us *a* part in making the earth's crooked ways straight." Harris words indicate that the United States playing no part in God's work on earth was also a possibility. Presumably the failure to act according to divine truth would result in the United States being denied a further part in God's work. This conception of the American mission as a constant test of the American commitment to truth and justice in international affairs was the foundation on which Rhee had built his career in the United States and would continue to exploit until the end of his life.

Whether it was the American mission to "Christianize the World in a generation," to make the "world safe for democracy," spread the "four freedoms," or contain the spread of communism, Rhee was a master at adapting his message to the needs of that particular moment and of finding Americans he could convince of the importance of his cause. Making Korea about somewhere else was the primary goal of Syngman Rhee and the movement he directed. The physical geography of Korea and the United States was a gulf that he would occasionally try to bridge—arguing that Korea was to East Asia what Belgium was to Europe, but even here he was arguing by analogy. Even the geography of

Korea had to be about somewhere else, somewhere more familiar and more intelligible to Americans. But Rhee never lost sight of the fact that Korea's location in the American moral geography was his primary and most realistic goal. While American missionaries to Korea played a crucial role in Rhee's activities many of his most influential supporters, from Fred Dolph to Robert Oliver, had no connections whatsoever with Korea until they encountered Rhee. To win their support it was imperative that Rhee argue by analogy. Fortunately for Rhee the character of the American mission provided ample opportunities for such work. The imprecise belief that American history is about something and the ill-defined American mission provided the entrée that he needed. Even better, once Rhee had successfully convinced these Americans that Korea was a test of American values and idealism, these supporters would become self-propagating, trying to convince other Americans of the validity of Rhee's analogy. American congressmen that spoke in favor of Korean independence from Joseph France in 1919 to Paul Shafer in 1945 framed their arguments around the moral damage that ignoring Korea was doing to the American character rather than the innate injustice done to the Korean people.

Rhee was aware that his appeals to the American mission were not unique and the Koreans were only the latest ethnicity to make such appeals. Their symbolic march to Independence Hall in 1919 was inspired by a similar march by Czech nationalists just a few weeks earlier.[8] In fact it seems to have been Finnish nationalist Aino Malmberg who first suggested that Koreans take advantage of the "Wilsonian Moment" the way so many

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[8] A propaganda report on the First Korean Congress contains documents that indicate the Koreans were aware of the Czech declaration and that it might have served as an inspiration for them. See "Philadelphia Conference 1919 Addresses and Resolutions [Propaganda Report]" in the "First Korean Congress in Philadelphia Conference (1919)," SRI.

other nationalities were doing.[9] Rhee clearly imagined himself in the pantheon of other foreigners who had come to the United States seeking their own nationalist ends by appealing to the inherent universalism in the American mission. In remarks given in December 1942 at a dinner to Korean recruits preparing to be inducted into an OSS project to train commandos for insertion into Korea, Rhee explained:

> In this great capital city of the United States of America, you will see many wonderful statues and monuments dedicated to the great men of the nation. In the Lafayette Park opposite the White house there stand two statues that are more inspiring to me than the rest of them. These two are -- the one for Lafayette, the famous French General and the other for Kosciusko, the Polish patriot. These were foreigners and aliens. Yet they fought for the United States of America and by fighting for this country they fought for their own. They are therefore not only heroes of their country but heroes of the world.[10]

Given the failure of Lafayette to win the American support he sought and the inability of Kosciusko to prevent the annexation of Poland by its neighbors, Rhee's association with them is ironic and one wonders if it demonstrated an understanding of the low-probability of the strategy he was pursuing or rather the degree to which personal fame and ambition were also motivations during his exile in the United States. For both Lafayette and Kosciusko their greatest success in the United States was acquiring personal fame. Neither was able to win long-term material support from the United States for their causes. Regardless, Rhee's remarks indicate an understanding that the most effective way to fight for Korea's independence was to champion the American cause. Embracing, and at times challenging, the American mission was the means by which he did this.

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[9] Rhee writes that it was Malmberg's visit to Hawaii in 1917 that convinced the Koreans there to send a representative to the League of Small and Subject Nationalities meeting in New York in October 1917. See Syngman Rhee, "The 1919 Movement," no date, "March First Movement" folder, SRI. For the Malmberg connection also see Rhee to Marion Smith, 17 July 1917, Lew, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 1:14.

[10] Syngman Rhee, "Speech at Avignon Restaurant," 21 May 1942, "The Speeches of Syngman Rhee" folder, SRI.

Making Korea about somewhere else was certainly not what Rhee would have preferred, but he was willing to use nearly any means necessary to secure support for Korea's independence. As Matray and Gardner have pointed out, Korea was always, or nearly always, about somewhere else. Koreans like Rhee understood that. They even came to accept it as a compromise that was necessary if Korea was going to become a "somewhere" instead of a "nowhere" in the American moral geography.

# EPILOGUE: RHEE'S RISE TO POWER

The connections Rhee built with Americans during his four-decades long campaign and the prestige these connections afforded him contributed directly to his rise to power in postwar Korea. Thanks largely to the debate that Bruce Cummings began about the origins of the Korean War in the 1980s, we know in some detail the actions taken by Koreans in the days immediately after Japan's capitulation but prior to the joint Russian-American occupation. Hoping to prevent anarchy and the massacre of Japanese citizens in Korea, Japan cooperated with Korean independence activist YEO Un-hyeong in establishing a transitional government, which YEO proclaimed as the Korean People's Republic (KPR, not to be confused with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, or DPRK, commonly known as North Korea). This short-lived republic was administered locally through the creation of hundreds of "People's Committees" (건국준비위원회) which had a left-leaning political orientation. On 8 September 1945, the same day that American forces landed at the port of Incheon, eighty-eight representatives of these committees elected officers for their new "republic" in hopes that American forces would turn power over to them. In a move that defies the conventional wisdom about post-liberation Korea, these Korean leftists elected Syngman Rhee as president. HEO Heon, Korean communist and leader in the KPR, explained their choice: "When I was twelve or thirteen years old, Dr. Rhee started his career with Yi Sang-jae. Because he has been fighting for our country all his life, we selected him as President of the KPR."[1] Korean conservatives, largely marginalized from the KPR, were hardly less enthusiastic about Rhee.

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[1] Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes 1945-1947*, vol. I (Princeton University Press, 1981), 190.

Contemporary observers and scholars have noted that respect for Rhee was only part of the explanation for his selection. H. Merrell Benninghoff, the first American political adviser to the State Department on the ground in Korea, wrote that he believed the KPR was going to use Rhee and other KPG members as a façade behind which they could operate.[2] Alan R. Millett concurs and suggests that Rhee was probably chosen in an attempt to make the KPR more acceptable to the arriving Americans.[3] They were likely unaware of Rhee's recent difficulties with the State Department. After Rhee alleged that there had been a secret deal selling out Korea at Yalta, he was essentially a *persona non grata* with the State Department. Rhee felt even more strongly about them. Francesca Rhee wrote earlier in 1945 that certain persons in the department should be "shot without trial" for what they had done to Korea over the previous decades.[4] Rhee hardly could have felt differently.

But there were plenty of reasons why KPR organizers might have believed that Rhee had American support. All of them had to do with his successes as a lobbyist over the past 40 years. Stretching all the way back to his time in prison, Rhee had an impressive record of finding and maintaining American supporters. As argued in chapters two and three, Rhee's meeting with Theodore Roosevelt and his relationship, real and imagined, with Woodrow Wilson was pivotal to his selection as president of the KPG after the March First Movement. Since Pearl Harbor his record was no less impressive. The lobbying effort that Rhee directed resulted in thousands of newspaper articles, many

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[2] Benninghoff to Secretary of State, Seoul, Korea, 29 September 1945, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1945*, vol. VI (Government Printing Office, 1969), 1064.

[3] Allan Reed Millett, *The War for Korea, 1945-1950: A House Burning* (University Press of Kansas, 2005), 46.

[4] Francesca Rhee to Syngman Rhee, 23 November 1945, Lew, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 3:455.

bearing his picture, scores of public appearances, radio addresses, conferences, congressional resolutions, and meetings with supportive and influential Americans from Pearl Buck to Eleanor Roosevelt. These successes kept his political career alive. Whether Rhee's Korean supporters knew the full range of his activities is debatable, but it would be unreasonable to assume that they had no knowledge at all. The Korean experience in 1919, when Wilsonian rhetoric sparked the March First Movement, indicated that the Japanese were unable to isolate Korea totally from world events. Furthermore, Korean conscripts in the Japanese army reported that they had heard Rhee's Allied propaganda broadcasts in 1942 and that many Koreans had been arrested for passing along the substance of the broadcasts by word of mouth.[5] These broadcasts urged Koreans to prepare for a revolt against Japan, but to wait until Rhee himself gave the signal. Had the Koreans heard nothing else about Rhee during the war, these broadcasts would have sent the message that one of their legendary leaders was still alive, still struggling, and working with the Americans to liberate Korea.

Rhee's failure to gain recognition for the KPG during World War II was quickly forgotten as more pressing issues threatened Korea after liberation. With Korean independence now threatened by both the United States and the Soviet Union, Rhee's connections with influential Americans made him an important figure in Korea. While the KPR had possibly embraced Rhee for strategic reasons, Benninghoff wrote, right-of-center Koreans were "almost unanimous" in their desire to see Rhee and the KPG

[5] Kim Ku to Young Han Choo, 23 February 1945 Lew, *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 2009, 7:247. Choo later forwarded this letter to Elmer Davis in the Office of War Information and to Secretary of State Byrnes. See *The Syngman Rhee Correspondence in English, 1904-1948*, 7:263-64.

returned to Korea at the earliest possible date.[6] The OSS's man on the ground, Capt. Clarence Weems, relayed a similar message on 28 September 1945: "Dr. Rhee actually has tremendous prestige within Korea as the original leader of the 'Korean Republic,' dating from 1919." Even Rhee's detractors could not afford to resist his repatriation, Weems noted. Weems' report advocated doing what Rhee had been demanding for 30 years—recognizing the KPG and getting it to Korea as soon as possible. Weems acknowledged the conflicts within the KPG, but felt that those were primarily the result of men trying to "make a good showing as revolutionary leaders while struggling to make a living." The conflicts would become less prominent once KPG leaders were given "something important to do."[7] After a month in Korea, William R. Langdon, who had been a chief architect of the State Department's policy of trusteeship, also changed his mind. The department's past caution at being associated with the KPG was now "unwarranted," Langdon thought, because the KPG had no rival in Korea and was regarded as a quasi-official government by a majority of Koreans. Langdon reported that trusteeship was universally reviled and feared that it could only be maintained by force. Under the circumstances he recommended that the department drop trusteeship and transfer power to the KPG as soon as possible.

Despite the recommendations of many advisers, the State Department would take almost two years to abandon trusteeship. In the meantime the department facilitated the return of Korean exiles and leaders of the KPG to Korea, albeit as private citizens. Given his prestige, presence in Washington, and connections with influential Americans—

[6] Benninghoff to Secretary of State, Seoul, Korea, 29 September 1945, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1945*, VI:1061.

[7] Clarence N. Weems, Jr. "Korea and the Provision Government," 28 September 1945, *OSS (Office of Strategic Service) 재미한인자료*, 274–86.

especially Millard Preston Goodfellow, the deputy director of the OSS—Rhee was the first of the major exile figures to arrive back in Korea on 16 October. Despite the State Department's insistence that Rhee was returning as a "private citizen," his arrival had the trappings of official American support. He was flown to Korea on a military plane after consulting with General Hodge, the military governor of Korea, and General MacArthur, who was in Japan. Hodge hoped that he could use Rhee as a figurehead. He was wrong. Rhee understood that the most important issue in post-colonial Korea was independence, which led him to attack trusteeship vehemently and to criticize both the United States and the Soviet Union for trying to implement it. Scholars less familiar with post-liberation Korea frequently claim in passing that Rhee was "installed" by the United States.[8] This is a mischaracterization. Rhee followed his own political instincts and never waffled on his demands for Korean independence. When Korean communists, under orders from Moscow, abruptly changed their position to favor trusteeship for Korea, the number of leaders who could claim an untainted nationalist record dwindled. As the dual occupation limped along, Rhee chose to prioritize independence for southern Korea over reunification, unlike his closest rivals KIM Ku and KIM Kyu-sic, who were lured to Pyongyang by the hopes of unification only to be humiliated when KIM Il-sung reneged almost instantly on agreements they had made.[9] With the field cleared of rivals, Rhee's party claimed the largest electoral gains in the 1948 legislative elections—albeit with only 26% of the vote—and Rhee cruised to victory in the following presidential election,

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[8] Roland Bleiker, *Divided Korea: Toward A Culture Of Reconciliation* (University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 8; Min Hyoung Song, *Strange Future: Pessimism and the 1992 Los Angeles Riots* (Duke University Press, 2005), 165; James Brady, *The Coldest War: A Memoir of Korea* (Macmillan, 2007), 11; Mara Hvistendahl, *Unnatural Selection: Choosing Boys Over Girls, and the Consequences of a World Full of Men* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), 129; Danielle L. Chubb, *Contentious Activism and Inter-Korean Relations* (Columbia University Press, 2014), 48–49.

[9] James Irving Matray, *The Reluctant Crusade: American Foreign Policy in Korea, 1941-1950* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), 147–56.

taking 180 of the 196 electoral votes in the Korean Parliament.

Rhee's lobbying in the United States was pivotal in his rise to the presidency of an independent South Korea, with all the consequences for good and ill entailed. His success as a lobbyist hinged on his repeated deployment of the idea that the United States had a special role to play in world affairs. Americans had not always lived up to that role, Rhee argued, but it was one that the country should not forsake. Rhee's appeal convinced thousands of Americans to advocate for Korea by joining organizations such as the League of Friends of Korea, attending mass-meetings, and writing their congressmen. These Americans' actions not only kept the issue of Korea's independence alive, but they also kept Syngman Rhee's political career alive. Rhee was successful enough with American audiences to be indispensable to the Korean independence movement. None of this made Rhee's rise to the presidency of the Republic of Korea inevitable, however. The obstacles that he faced on returning to Korea in 1945 were daunting. More than anything else, Rhee's political instincts were responsible for his rise. Only his willingness to alternately compromise with and betray political rivals, to alternately cooperate with and frustrate the American military government in Korea, to accept the support of wealthy Koreans tainted by associations with the Japanese, and to champion land reform and other socialist causes while at the same time ruthlessly attacking communists would see him rise to the pinnacle of Korean politics. Of course in the political chaos of post-liberation Korea, he also was blessed with a fair degree of luck, narrowly escaping several assassination attempts. His lobbying work in the United States was essential to Rhee's prominence in Korea in 1945, however, his own legitimacy and canny instincts are largely responsible for his rise to power.

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