

## **Early Korean Immigrants to America: Their Role in the Establishment of the Republic of Korea**

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### **KOREAN IMMIGRATION IN AMERICA**

**A**t the beginning of the 20th century, Korean laborers journeyed to the Hawaiian Islands in search of work on sugar cane farms. January 2003 marks the centennial anniversary of the first voyage, and it is fitting to recall the contribution those immigrants made to the Republic of Korea.

The Hawaiian planters welcomed Korean laborers, who were not only cooperative but were willing to be strike breakers against the Chinese and Japanese who wanted better work conditions and wages. Earlier, owners had depended mainly on Chinese and Japanese immigrants, but by 1902 the workers' demands had increased to the point that it was difficult to manage them. The alternative was to hire more Koreans.

In November 1902, Hawaii's sugar planters delegated David W. Deshler, an American living in Inchon at the time, to recruit more laborers. Meanwhile, in response to a recommendation made by the U.S. envoy in Korea, Horace N. Allen, the Korean government also established an emigration agency. Headed by Min Young-whan, the

agency, People's Comfort Agency (Suminwon), opened on November 16, 1902 to handle the issue of passports and emigration papers. And on December 22, 1902, Min Young-whan and others gathered at the Port of Inchon to bid farewell to the first ship bound for Hawaii.

Of the 121 contract workers, 24 were refused entry because they failed the physical examination. On January 13, 1903, a total of 97 people finally reached Honolulu, Hawaii, holding the first English-language passports issued by the Korean Empire.<sup>1)</sup> Between January 1903 and April 1905, 65 different ships carrying a total of 7,026 Korean passengers, including 755 women, arrived in Honolulu. Japan then, stopped emigration fearing that Korean dissidents would be able to gather more easily overseas.

The workers lived in group camps segregated by ethnicity; Portuguese, Puerto Rican, Chinese, Japanese and Korean. They would rise at 4:30 a.m. for a quick breakfast, meet at 5:15 and march to the fields to begin work by 6:00. After a thirty-minute lunch break, they would work until four. They were paid 15 dollars a month, half the average daily wage for workers in America. Although wages were later raised to 18 dollars a month, the workers imagined that much greater opportunities awaited them on the U.S. mainland. Between 1905 and 1907, 1,003 plantation workers fled to California to work in the rice fields, and by 1916, 1,136 Koreans had moved to the mainland.

Since 90 percent of the Korean immigrants were males, gender imbalance became a serious issue. Lonely bachelors resorted to the "picture-bride" match-making system, so named because photos of eligible Korean ladies were circulated and matches arranged. The Korean brides-to-be would then set sail to America to meet their husbands. From 1910 to 1924, an estimated 600 to 1,000 picture brides arrived in Hawaii with Japanese passports. Despite some

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1) Hyun Kyu-whan, *A History of Korean Migration, Vol. II* (in Korean), (Seoul: Samwha, 1976), pp. 796-802.

disappointment and personal horror stories, virtually all of the couples married and settled down. Gradually monthly incomes rose to 26 dollars, they saved every penny they could, and by 1922, dozens were running businesses of their own.

### **INFLUENCE OF THE COMMONWEALTH ASSOCIATION AND THE KOREAN NATIONAL ASSOCIATION**

#### *National Consciousness of Korean Immigrants in Hawaii*

At each plantation, Koreans organized a self-governing body, headed by an elected chief, to manage life in the camps. These organizations, along with Korean churches, played an important role in uniting Korean immigrants and maintaining order. The chiefs, mostly church leaders, set up schools that taught both Korean and English. On August 7, 1903 in Honolulu, Hawaii, Hong Seung-ha, Yun Byung-ku, Park Yun-sup, Lim Hyoung-ju and Ahn Jung-su, together with a group of Korean Methodists, founded Hawaii Shinmin-hoe (New People's Society), the first Korean political organization in the U.S. Hawaii Shinmin-hoe's mission was to instill a sense of national identity, and its platform called for uniting Koreans toward a common goal and educating them properly.

At the time, immigrants from about ten countries were living in Hawaii, all protected by consuls sent from their respective native governments. The Koreans were the only group without a consul. Thousands of Korean laborers had requested the government of the Korean Empire to dispatch a consul, but the country was already under heavy pressure by Japan. On May 5, 1905, Kan Saito, the Japanese consul in Honolulu, was delegated as honorary consul to the Korean Empire. The Korean community, including the Hawaii Shinmin-hoe, refused to recognize Saito, demanding a *bona-fide* Korean consul.

The appointment of Kan Saito only intensified anti-Japanese

sentiment. To add insult to injury, it coincided with the Five-Point Treaty of 1905 between Korea and Japan, which forfeited Korea's diplomatic rights. Beginning in March 1906, various patriotic organizations sprang up one after another, to resist Japanese imperialism.

*Relationship Between the Commonwealth Association and the Korean Chapter of Shinmin-hoe*

In September 1903, Ahn Chang-ho, who had moved to San Francisco in 1902, joined forces with others to organize the San Francisco Social Meeting, a pioneer organization of Koreans living in the United States.<sup>2)</sup> From 1904, it acted to help Koreans from Hawaii to find jobs. During that time, as Japanese incursions in Korea grew more brazen, the public demanded a political association to resist Japan. Against this backdrop, on April 5, 1905, Ahn Chang-ho transformed the San Francisco Social Meeting into a political association, renamed the Commonwealth Association (Gonglip Hyuphoe), and became its first president. Wherever there were Korean laborers, Commonwealth Association branches sprang up: in Riverside, Los Angeles, Oakland, Redlands, Rock Springs among others.

The Commonwealth Association's founding philosophy was based on love for fellow Koreans, mutual cooperation, and the anti-Japanese movement. The leaders of the association believed that uniting the various independence movements was most important in carrying out the war of independence. With this belief they sought to establish the first home branch of an alliance organization in Korea.

In early January 1907, leaders of the Commonwealth Association, Ahn Chang-ho, Lee Kang and Im Joon-Ki, founded the Shinmin-hoe (New People's Society) in Riverside, California and dispatched Ahn

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2) Ahn Chang-ho's compatriots in the organization were Lee Dae-wee, Park Seon-kyum, Park Young-soon, Kim Sung-mu, and Jang Kyung.

Chang-ho to Korea to establish a Korea branch. Ahn traveled to Pyongan Province, where progressive ideas were more widespread than in other regions due to the strong presence of Christianity. He spoke about the establishment of Shinmin-hoe in the United States, and called for the need to unite against the Japanese. Finally in April 1907, the leader, Ahn Chang-ho and businessmen, scholars and Christians from Pyongan Province and Hamgyong Province (Yang Ki-tak, Yi Tong-whi, Lee Seung-hun, Lee Gab, Ahn Tae-kuk); and prominent figures from the central region of Korea (Sin Chae-ho, Yi Dong-nyeung, Roh Baek-lin, Cho Song-whan) established the Korean branch of Shinmin-hoe as an underground organization, aimed at reviving national sovereignty and realizing the dream of Korean immigrants in America.<sup>3)</sup>

In addition to raising funds for the struggle for independence, Shinmin-hoe also sought to instill nationalism and democracy in Korean hearts through education and cultural activities. In keeping with this goal, Daesung School was established in Pyeongyang, Ohsan School in Jeongju, and Taekuk Printing Company in Pyeongyang and Daegu to educate and to publish materials. The *Korea Daily Newspaper*, run by Yang Ki-tak and Sin Chae-ho, regularly promoted the importance of education in the fight for independence from Japan. The founder of the *Korea Daily Newspaper*, Ernest Thomas Bethell, had granted editing rights to anti-Japanese Koreans, making the paper the voice of Shinmin-hoe, for all interests and purposes. Others organized Chungnyun Hakwoohoe (Young Men's Association) for young people, and opened a ceramics company in order to raise funds.

On the surface, Shinmin-hoe's activities were focused on education, publishing, public press, and campaigns to enlighten the masses, but its covert mission was to establish a base for the independence army. As combat by the anti-Japan Uibyong (righteous

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3) Cho Young-jin, *The History of Korean Independence War* (in Korean), (Seoul: Ilwon, 1999), pp. 71-74.

army) intensified after August 1907, Shinmin-hoe began investigating the possibility of creating a military academy and an army base overseas. Because Uibyong lacked modern military training and weapons that were crucial for battles against the Japanese, that seemed the best answer.

The Commonwealth Association sent Lee Kang and Lim Chi-jong to Korea to help in the independence movement. After setting up the Shinmin-hoe branch in Korea in January 1907, the Commonwealth Association voted to establish a united front in Hawaii and Vladivostok, Russia. Lee Kang, who was already in Korea and Kim Sung-mu, one of the founding members of the Commonwealth Association, were dispatched to act as leaders in the Far East. Lee Kang went to Vladivostok, and on September 29, 1908, established the Soochung (Partizansk) chapter, which embraced some thirty nationalists in the area. After founding the Soochung chapter, Lee Kang and Kim Sung-mu joined forces with the nationalists in Vladivostok's Korea Town and created the the Commonwealth Association Vladivostok chapter on January 7, 1909. (Later, a branch was also established in the city of Chita in southeast Russia.)

Meanwhile, in the spring of 1909, a secret national executive council of Shinmin-hoe was held in Korea at the home of Yang Ki-taek. The decision was reached to establish an anti-Japan army base overseas and to create a military academy.

#### *Emergence of the Korean National Association*

Once the Commonwealth Association based in the U.S. had organized the Shinmin-hoe in Korea, the representatives of 24 key compatriot groups in Hawaii gathered to establish their own united anti-Japanese organization. As a result, the United Association of Koreans, bringing together Korean associations in Hawaii, was established on September 2, 1907. With Lim Jong-su as chairman, the association's main platform called for support of the homeland's

nationalist movement.

During this time the United Association of Koreans in Hawaii, and the Commonwealth Association and the United Compatriots (Daedong Bokukhoe) on the mainland were the key associations in the U.S. On February 1, 1909, the Commonwealth Association and the United Association of Korea joined forces and named the alliance, Kookmin-hoe (National Association). On the day Kookmin-hoe was founded, Korean national flags hung in front of Korean homes, especially in Hawaii. Businesses were also closed and more than 1,000 people gathered for the celebration in Honolulu, including the deputy governor general of Hawaii. Chung Won-myong was appointed chairman of the Hawaii Kookmin-hoe and *Hapsong Shinbo* (*United Korean News*) was renamed *Shinhankook Bo* (*The Korean National Herald*). Chung Jae-kwan was appointed chairman of the mainland Kookmin-hoe and *Gonglip Shinbo* (*United Korean News*) was renamed *Shinhan Minbo* (*The New Korea*).

The Hawaii and mainland divisions agreed to establish branches of Kookmin-hoe for Koreans living in Siberia and Manchuria, and so, in addition to Lee Kang and Kim Sung-mu, two more leaders, Chung Jae-kwan and Lee Sang-sul were sent to those areas. Existing Commonwealth Association branches were renamed Kookmin-hoe branches and new chapters were established. By the end of 1910, Kookmin-hoe had 16 branches in Russia, with the Siberia Kookmin-hoe chapter in Soochung (Partizansk). Also, eight divisions were established in Manchuria, with its Manchuria Kookmin-hoe chapter based in Harbin. In addition to the chapters in Siberia and Manchuria, there were two other chapters, in Hawaii and on the U.S. mainland.

The initiative of Korean immigrants in the United States had sparked the creation of Korean nationalist associations across the globe. As Kookmin-hoe's popularity grew, the United Compatriots (Daedong Bokukhoe) decided to join in the alliance, and on May 10, the name Kookmin-hoe was changed to Daehanin Kookminhoe (the Korean National Association). At the same time, the four chapters

and branches were also renamed. Koreans in the United States had so much influence at the time that once a decision was made by them, immigrant Koreans living in other areas of the world simply followed without objection.

On November 8, 1912 the first General Assembly of the Korean National Association was officially held in San Francisco with representatives of the four chapters in attendance. For the first time since the fall of the Korean Empire, there was an association to embrace the Korean community abroad. Four guiding principles emerged from that assembly: The abolition of the monarchy and introduction of a republic; the establishment of an independent democratic nation; and recognition of the General Assembly of the Korean National Association as the highest autonomous body overseeing Koreans living overseas. The organization was to have separate legislative and administrative branches, with the legislative branch being a representative organization and the administrative branch being elected by that assembly.<sup>4)</sup>

At their peak, the four regional chapters boasted a total of 116 regional branches. The central general assembly was first located in San Francisco but moved to LA in January 1913. Ahn Chang-ho, Baek Il-kyu, and Yoon Byong-ku held the role of chairman in succession, and Park Yong-man, Baek Il-kyu, Hong Eun all served as vice chairman. In 1913, the Korean National Association was recognized as a self-governing society by the American State Department and the California state government. The influence of Koreans was such that the Hawaii regional chapter acted as an arm of law enforcement on matters between Koreans, making preliminary decisions on whether to prosecute a case.

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4) Hyun Kyu-whan, *op. cit.*, pp. 849-852.



### SHINMIN-HOE AND THE KOREAN COMMUNITY'S EFFORTS TO BUILD AN ARMY BASE

#### *The Independence Army in Manchuria*

Acting on the real goal, which was to construct an independence army base overseas, Shinmin-hoe held an emergency executive meeting in March 1910. Yi Dong-nyeung was sent to Primorskii, Russia, Yi Tong-whi to North Manchuria, and Lee Hoe-young and Lee Shi-young to West Manchuria to conduct field inspections. In September 1910, Yi Dong-nyeung, Lee Hoe-young, and Jang Yoo-sun traveled to Manchuria, surveyed the area around Sanyuanpu as a potential site for the army base. Subsequently, the national executive council of Shinmin-hoe was held in December 1910, to discuss detailed plans on building an independence army base and a military academy.

Shinmin-hoe recruited people willing to emigrate, and in early February 1911, a group of families led by Lee Hoe-young, Lee Shi-young, Yi Dong-nyeung, Lee Sang-ryong, Kim Chang-whan, and Ju Jin-su arrived in Sanyuanpu. With the help of the provincial government of China, land was purchased and families settled into their new homes.

Guaranteeing the survival of the immigrants was most urgent, so on April 1911, more than 300 people gathered at Sanyuanpu, Liuhexian, to found Gyeonghak-sa, a self-governing organization (president Lee Sang-ryong) to promote farming, educate the children, and establish a youth military training organization, Shinheung Military Academy. In 1911, because of the poor harvest and the arrest of Shinmin-hoe leaders in Korea, the promised funds did not arrive from Shinmin-hoe. Shinheung Military Academy thus had to graduate its 40 students and shut down at the end of the year.

However, Lee Hoe-young was undaunted. They purchased land about 35km south of Sanyuanpu and worked to establish a new

independence army base. Lee Hoe-young and Lee Sang-ryong organized a new self-governing body, Bumindan (People Helping Corps), that would succeed Gyeonghak-sa. Shinmin-hoe then moved to West Manchuria to establish an independence base to support the anti-Japanese movement. Then, in 1913, Shinheung School was founded to educate and train young men in military skills. (The school was renamed the Shinheung Military Academy in May 1920.) Graduates of the Japan Military Academy such as Ji Chong-chun and Oh Kwang-sun were appointed as instructors.

From 1914, graduates of Shinheung School, headed by Kim Dong-sam, established Baekso Farm. They cleared land in the jungles of Liuhexian for cultivation, and established a garrison farm system. Under the supervision of a training instructor, soldiers at Baekso Farm received intense military training that simulated real battles. When they were not training, they worked on the farm under the direction of a farming manager.

Shinheung School and the Shinheung Society, a secret society of Shinheung School graduates, trained numerous nationalists and independence fighters. Both organizations shine brightly in the history of the Korean independence movement.<sup>5)</sup>

### *The Independence Army in the United States*

Efforts to build an independence army against Japanese imperialism were also underway in the United States. From October 1910, both the Patriotic Compatriots' Group (Aekukdongpo-dan) on the U.S. mainland and the United Progress Group (Daedonggongjindan) in Hawaii promoted the military spirit among Koreans. Some 200 young men took part in military training classes three evenings a week in the United Progress Group. After the Hawaii Korean National Association began training, similar training was

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5) Seo Joong-suk, *Shinheung Military Academy and Defectors* (in Korean), (Seoul: Yoksabipyong-sa, 2001), pp. 105-229.

undertaken on the U.S. mainland and Manchuria concurrently. Creating an army base overseas was the main objective of Korean independence movement.

Prominently involved in military training in the U.S. was Park Yong-man. In June 1909, he founded the Korean Young Soldiers' School in Kearney, Nebraska. In April 1910, the school was moved to Hastings University in Hastings, Nebraska, where young Koreans took ROTC-style military training during summer breaks. By 1914, the school had produced around 100 Korean reserve officers. During the 1920s and 1930s, Hastings graduates joined independence army at posts in Manchuria and Russia. In June 1914, Park Yong-man moved to Hawaii to organize the Korea National Army Corps (Daechosun Kookmin Kundan) with approval from the Hawaii Army Headquarters. The corps, which adopted a militia-style training, was responsible for training 300 men. Unfortunately, it had to shut down in 1917 due to lack of funds.

#### **THE KOREAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY AND THE SHANGHAI PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT**

##### *The Role of the Korean National Association and Shinmin-hoe*

The March 1st Independence Movement galvanized independence leaders overseas. Word of the Independence Movement reached America on March 9 by way of the director of the Korean National Association, Hyun Soon (the translator on the first emigration ship to Hawaii). In Shanghai at the time, he wired a short message to Ahn Chang-ho to report on the demonstration led by Christians, students, and Chondoists, but details of the movement did not become known until March 11 through a United Press report from Seoul. On March 15, the KNA General Assembly passed the following resolution:

- (A) A representative would be sent to the Far East to found the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea.
- (B) Suh Jae-pil and Rhee Syngman would be sent to Philadelphia to establish the Diplomatic Information Bureau.

This was the first document in history to use the term *Daehan Minguk* (The Republic of Korea).

In the immediate wake of the March 1st Movement, several different provisional governments were established in Vladivostok, Shanghai and Seoul. Setting up governments at three different sites at nearly the same time was a move to provide widespread leadership, so urgently needed in the struggle for independence.

On April 13, 1919 the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea was established in Shanghai. Although it was a government in exile, it was significant in that for the first time in Korean history, a government was formed in accordance with the principles of democracy. Twenty-nine people were present for the first National Assembly meeting held on April 10-11. Among them Cho Song-whan, Lee Hoe-young, Lee Shi-young, Yi Dong-nyeung, Sin Chae-ho and Kim Dong-sam, as members of Shinmin-hoe, had participated in building a base for the army in West Manchuria. Hyun Soon was a leading member of the KNA in the U.S.

At the April 11 meeting to decide the name of the country, Shin Suk-woo proposed the name Daehan Minguk, which passed by majority approval.<sup>6)</sup> Rhee Syngman, Ahn Chang-ho, and Yi Dong-

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6) After the foundation of the Korean Empire (Daehan Jeguk), the term "Daehan" was widely used in reference to Korea. In the 1910s, there were Daehan Kwangbok-hoe (The Korean Association of Independence Fighters), Daehandoklip Euikunbu (The Korean Independence Righteous Army); in Manchuria there was Daehan Jonguikunsa (The Korean Righteous Army), Daehan Kookminhoe (The Korean People's Association), Daehan Doklipkun (The Korean Independence Army), and Daehan Kunmudodokbu (The Korean Military Administration); in the United States there was Daehanin Kookminhoe (The Korean National Association); and in

nyeung were nominated for the presidency and Rhee Syngman was elected.<sup>7)</sup> In the Shanghai provisional government, seven out of the nine cabinet members were associated with Shinmin-hoe.

On April 2, 1919, a people's assembly was held to elect 25 representatives from 13 provinces. Those 25 representatives elected members of the Provisional Government in Seoul. All cabinet members were nationalists and independence movement leaders overseas.<sup>8)</sup>

In 1918, the Russia Hanjokhoe (Korean Society) Central Assembly was organized. Later, on February 25, 1919, the Central Assembly was expanded and renamed Daehan Kookminuihoe (National Council of Korea). After the March 1st Independence Movement, the National Council claimed the title of Provisional Government in Russia.

Efforts were made to integrate all three provisional governments, and negotiations progressed without much difficulty since most of the cabinet member's responsibilities overlapped. On September 15, 1919, the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea was established. All titles of the cabinet posts and all cabinet member lists were carried over from the Seoul Provisional Government.

Among the cabinet members, only socialist Yi Tong-whi advocated that Korean independence should be achieved through a socialist revolution supported by Russia. None of the others believed

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Russia there was Daehan Kookminuihoe (The Korean National Parliament), all using the term "Daehan" meaning greater Korea.

7) The first cabinet members elected by the National Assembly were Ahn Chang-ho (home affairs), Kim Kyu-sik (foreign affairs), Choi Jae-hyong (finance), Moon Chang-bum (transportation), Yi Tong-whi (military affairs), Lee Shi-hyong (justice), and Yi Dong-nyeung (speaker of the National Assembly).

8) Under the leadership of the General-Consul Rhee Syng-man, the cabinet was composed of Premier Yi Tong-whi, Yi Dong-nyeung (home affairs), Park Yong-man (foreign affairs), Lee Shi-yong (finance), Shin Kyu-sik (justice), Kim Kyu-sik (education), Moon Chang-bum (transportation), Ahn Chang-ho (labor affairs), and Yu Dong-yeol (military affairs).

that a socialist revolution was the right choice for the new nation of Korea. In particular, Yi Dong-nyeung and Ahn Chang-ho were keen to prevent the Provisional Government of Korea from becoming leftist.

Meanwhile, independence armies battling against the Japanese in Manchuria recognized the provisional government as the top headquarter of the independence movement, and in this vein, they began referring to themselves as either the Northern military brigade or the Western military brigade instead of their former name “military government.”

### *Financial Sponsoring*

Upon hearing that he had been appointed Minister of Home Affairs in the Provisional Government, Ahn Chang-ho arrived in Shanghai on May 25, 1919, bringing funds raised by fellow Koreans in America. As Rhee Syngman was still in Washington, Ahn acted as his deputy. Using the money raised by Koreans in the U.S., he set up the government office in Habiro (within the French concession in Shanghai), and commenced official government duties. Indeed, a considerable provisional government funds were supplied by donations from Koreans in the U.S.

At the time, Koreans in the United States were financially better off than their compatriots in Manchuria or Russia, and “more ardent in their patriotism having been inspired by nationalist leaders active in the U.S.”<sup>9)</sup> Since they regarded donations a duty, money was readily collected. Based on the provisional government’s Enforcement Ordinance on Tax Collection and official document No. 57 of the Papers of the provisional government’s Ministry of Finance, per-capita taxes and patriotic donations were collected and sent to the provisional government.

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9) Description from Kim Gu’s autobiography, *Baekbum Ilji* (in Korean), (Seoul: Munhakyeseul-sa, 1982).

The 1919 statement of accounts of the KNA General Assembly shows the gross income as \$88,013; assistance to the provisional government and Rhee Syngman's Europe-America Commission, \$32,600; KNA's own diplomatic affairs and public relations, \$14,000; travel expenses for representatives of the Far East and Europe, \$8,500; the relief fund for Korea \$500; travel expenses, \$13,500; telecommunications \$2,600; and balance, \$4,000. In summary, most of the income was being used for the independence movement.

While donations made within Korea were sporadic, the flow of funds from Koreans in America was constant, and thus, the most reliable source of funds for the Provisional Government.

At one point, the Shanghai Provisional Government and the Europe-America Commission were at odds about funding. Originally the procedure, according to the provisional government's Enforcement Ordinance on Koreans Overseas, was for the General Assembly of the KNA to collect the taxes and patriotic donations in America on behalf of the provisional government, and then for the KNA to divide the funds as it wished, between the Shanghai provisional government and the commission in Washington.

However, the President of the Provisional Government Rhee Syngman, and chairman of the Europe-America Commission Kim Kyu-sik wanted instead to collect funds by directly issuing bonds. The KNA General Assembly opposed the plan as it would become difficult to collect more patriotic donations from Koreans once they had already made donations by buying bonds. Despite such opposition, the provisional government conceded in the end, and approved the proposal to issue bonds. KNA's responsibility for collecting funds ceased as of March 1, 1920, and all funds were sent to the commission. Once the Europe-America Commission started allocating funds, the provisional government's funds shrank while those of the commission rose.

During Rhee Syngman's stay in Shanghai from December 1920 to May 1921, his relationship with cabinet members worsened. Growing tensions and the changed funding scheme were a

contributing factor, and a motion to impeach Provisional President Rhee passed on March 23, 1925. The newly-elected second president of the provisional government, Park Eun-sik proclaimed an administrative decree abolishing the Europe-America Commission of Rhee Syngman. Clause 3 of the administrative decree stipulated that financial responsibilities of the commission were to be transferred to the North American KNA (in charge of the United States, Mexico and Cuba) and the Hawaii Korean Residents Society in charge of Hawaii.

By 1931, funding for the provisional government was only coming from Koreans in America. The situation worsened when the communication network (Yontong) between the provisional government and mainland Korea collapsed, and the Manchuria connection broke down as well. Once again, the taxes and patriotic funds donated by Koreans in America became the main source of funds for the Shanghai Provisional Government. The provisional government's struggle, including the attempt assassination of the Japanese emperor by Lee Bong-chang and the bombing in Shanghai by Yoon Bong-gil, were made possible by a 1,000-dollar donation from Koreans living in Hawaii.

Following Park Yong-man's assassination in Beijing in October 1928 by Lee Hae-young, a young communist under the influence of Kim Won-bong, and after Ahn Chang-ho was arrested in connection with Yoon Bong-gil's bombing, only Rhee Syngman was left to lead the Korean community in the U.S.

When World War II broke out in Europe in September 1939, and the war between China and Japan escalated in Asia, the independence movement among Koreans in America once again gained momentum. Since the early 1940s, the provisional government had been negotiating with the Chinese government to form the Korean Restoration Army, and throughout the process it asked Koreans living in America for support. A major fund raising effort was launched in the United States in February 1940, and with "40,000 won sent from our compatriots on the U.S. mainland and



Hawaii,”<sup>10)</sup> the Korean Restoration Army was founded on September 17, 1940.

Recognizing the need to integrate various overseas organizations, the North America Korean National Association first initiated an integration process on the mainland and in September 1940, proposed to form an alliance with the Hawaii KNA and Dongji-hoe (supporters of Rhee Syngman). Finally, on April 10, 1941, with representatives of each organization present, the Overseas Koreans Convention was held in Honolulu. At the end of the convention nine resolutions were adopted. The key resolutions on finance read as follows:

“Different funds under different names collected separately by each organization are all to be deposited in one independence fund. All funds used for the independence movement are to be referred to as the ‘independence fund.’ Each organization is to collect the funds and deliver them to the Korean Confederal Commission in the U.S. Two-thirds of the independence funds collected are to be delivered to the provisional government and the other one-third is to be used to support diplomatic affairs and military missions conducted in the United States. A diplomatic affairs committee is to be established in Washington, with Rhee Syngman as commissioner for diplomatic affairs in the United States. All Koreans living in the United States are to pay at least \$15 a year to the independence fund.”

It is again clear that even in adversity, Koreans in the United States were the major financial sponsors of the provisional government.

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10) Kim Gu, *op. cit.*

*Operations of the Europe-America Commission and the Korean Mission to the U.S.*

Once World War I ended in November 1918, the General Assembly of the KNA agreed to send Korean representatives to the Paris Peace Conference beginning in January 1919. Rhee Syngman, Jung Han-kyong, and Min Chan-ho were nominated as representatives, but their travel abroad was not permitted by the U.S. government, since it considered U.S.-Japan relations more important at the time.

On March 15, 1919, the KNA assisted Suh Jae-pil (Philip Jason) in setting up the Diplomatic Information Bureau in Philadelphia. Once the provisional government was founded, this organization was renamed the Korean Information Bureau, and Suh Jae-pil was appointed ambassador plenipotentiary by the Shanghai provisional government. Also in May 1919, Rhee Syngman as president of the Seoul provisional government, organized the Korea Commission in Washington, which merged in September 1919 with the Korean Information Bureau and the La Mission Coréenne Paris to form the Europe-America Commission.

On August 22, 1919, Rhee Syngman appointed Kim Kyu-sik, who had just returned to Washington from the Paris Peace Conference, as the Chairman of the Europe-America Commission. Lee Dae-wee and Lim Byung-jik assisted the chairman, along with Homer B. Hulbert (author of *The Passing of Korea*). Missionaries such as Frank Schofield, and journalists including J. J. Williams of the International News Service also provided considerable support. Main operations of the Europe-America Commission included publishing propaganda material, publicizing the tyranny of the Japanese government, and hosting lectures. Rhee Syngman, Suh Jae-pil, and Kim Kyu-sik individually contacted key U.S. officials in the Department of State and Congress to argue for Korean independence and to urge the U.S. to approve the provisional government.

Suh Jae-pil published the first issue of a journal called *Korea*

*Review* in June 1919, and organized the League of Friends of Korea, composed of Americans in support of Korea. In its heyday it had 10,000 members in 19 branches, and was the largest organization supporting the Europe-America Commission of the provisional government.

Backed by such support, in 1919 two proposals in support of Korean independence were submitted to the U.S. Senate, but they were set aside after discussion. Additionally, in the House of Representatives, William E. Mason of Illinois proposed that the House recognize the provisional government of Korea as the *de facto* government, but that proposal was not voted upon either.

In March 1920, when a proposal supporting the independence of Ireland was submitted to the Senate, senators favorable to Korea submitted a revised proposal to also recognize Korea as an independent nation and a member of the League of Nations. The proposal on Irish independence was passed, but the one on Korean independence was rejected by a vote of 32 to 46. Over 64 pages of the Congress minutes are devoted to the discussion of Korean independence, reflecting the intense struggle waged by the Europe-America Commission and the League of Friends of Korea.

In November 1921, the Washington Conference, composed of representatives from nine countries including the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Japan and China, was scheduled to discuss, over a three-month period, the reduction of naval armaments and other issues pertaining to the Pacific and Far East. The provisional government organized a Korean delegation headed by its president Rhee Syngman. Accompanying him were assistant representative Suh Jae-pil and Chun Se-hun, Lim Cho, Cho Byung-ok, Lee Won-ik, Huh Jung and two American advisors. The delegation tried all possible means to include Korean independence in the congressional agenda, and even sought the help of Secretary of State Charles Hughes, who was chairing the conference, but to no avail. Korea was never even mentioned in the plenary session. Only in the December 1, 1921 minutes of the U.S. Congress, is there a

mention of the Korean delegation's appeal.

All efforts had ended in failure. Finally, in 1925, the Europe-America Commission was shut down by the provisional government's second president, Park Eun-sik. The Hawaii Korean Residents' Society (formerly the Hawaii Korean National Association), on the other hand, continued to support Rhee Syngman's commission office until 1928 with the support of the Dongji-hoe.

A number a years later, the provisional government recognized the urgent need to resume diplomatic affairs with the United States. On April 2, 1934, it established a diplomatic office, appointing as chairman Rhee Syngman, who was in Hawaii at the time. In April 1941, when independence organizations in the United States united to form the Korean Confederal Commission, the Diplomatic Commission, headed by Rhee Syngman, was once again established in Washington, reviving the Europe-America Commission. In June 1941, the provisional government approved the Diplomatic Commission established by the Korean Confederal Commission as the Korean mission to the U.S., and appointed Rhee Syngman as the ambassador plenipotentiary in Washington.

When war broke out between the United States and Japan, Rhee Syngman concentrated on persuading the U.S. government to approve the provisional government of Korea, believing that it would strengthen Korea's status after the war. In letters dated February 5, and July 21, 1945, Rhee Syngman urged President Harry Truman to approve the provisional government of Korea, arguing that it was the only way to prevent a civil war on the Korean peninsula. That argument demonstrated Rhee's keen insight into history: He foresaw communist instigation of the Korean War.<sup>11)</sup> Those who steadfastly supported Rhee Syngman's work in the

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11) In a letter dated July 21, 1945, Rhee Syng-man writes "immediately approve the provisional government of Korea to prevent a potential war in Korea between communists and nationalists that can impair the friendly relationship between the

Korean Mission to the U.S. were members of the Hawaii Korean Residents' Society and Dongji-hoe.<sup>12)</sup>

*Participation in OSS Secret Missions*

While the U.S. Department of State was indifferent to Rhee Syngman's persistent requests to approve the provisional government and his proposal to organize a Korean guerilla corps, the Department of Defense believed that Rhee Syngman and his independence forces could be useful. In particular, intelligence agencies listened carefully to Rhee Syngman's proposal to form a guerilla corps to infiltrate Japan.

The Office of Strategic Services (OSS), which was headed by General William Donovan in 1942, believed that Koreans were needed to infiltrate the Korean peninsula. A cooperative relationship was formed between the OSS and the provisional government. One mission was to train soldiers in the Chongqing Restoration Army and another was to similarly train Korean-Americans. The first mission was dubbed "Operation Eagle" and the other "Operation Napco."

In an agreement reached in October 1944 between Lee Bum-suk, general of the second troop of the Restoration Army and the OSS, Operation Eagle was carried out. Koreans were assigned to either the intelligence squad or the communication squad and trained by OSS officers to perform a number of skills, including map reading, wireless communication, intelligence-gathering, intelligence

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Soviet Union and Korea, and give Koreans the opportunity to take on their share of the massive war against our common enemy Japan." U.S. Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States; *Diplomatic Papers*, 1945, Vol. VI, pp. 1023, 1031.

12) Chung Yong-dae, *The Diplomatic History of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea* (in Korean), (Songnam: The Academy of Korean Studies, 1992), pp. 123-153.

communications, special skills for guerilla activities, explosives, scaling cliffs, and marksmanship.

In the winter of 1944, another team was also dispatched to the U.S. Embassy in China to translate newspaper and magazine articles and enemy documents. Plans for Operation Napco began in 1944, and started full-fledged operations in early 1945. According to Colonel Eifler, who planned the operation, the goal was to train Korean-Americans as special agents who would enter Korea by submarine or parachute to collect intelligence information, install wireless networks, conduct demolitions operations and secure a stronghold for the landing of U.S. troops.

Korean-American participants included Chang Suk-yoon, Chang Ki-young, Lee Soon-young, Kim Kil-joon, Lee Moon-sang, Han Seung-yup, and Whang Duk-il. Other members were Yoo Il-han, Lee Kun-sung, Lee Tae-mo, Lee Cho, Park Ki-byuk, Byun Il-seo, Cha Jin-ju, Kim Kang, Choi Jin-ha, Reverend Kim Sung-duk, Dr. Chung Kye-won, Kang Woong-jo, and Ha Moon-duk. All were in their late thirties or early forties, and had led stable lives after graduating from prestigious universities in the United States or Japan. Among them were graduates of the Korean Young Soldiers' Academy of Hastings, and the Willows Flight Academy.

Isolated for months from the outside world on Santa Catalina Island off the San Francisco coast, they received commando, wireless, and explosives training. Before operations began, however, Japan surrendered on August 15, 1945, and the brave men of Operation Eagle and Operation Napco never saw action.

#### **FOUR DIVIDED MOVEMENTS TO ESTABLISH THE NEW COUNTRY**

##### *American-style Democratic Nation with Balance of Power*

After the liberation in 1945, nationalists had different visions for

the newly independent nation.

The KNA and other Korean-Americans were convinced that their new nation could not be a monarchy, but had to be a republic of liberal democracy. At the time, the only Koreans who had experienced democracy were immigrants living in the United States. After all, those in Korea were living under the tyranny of Japanese colonial rule, compatriots in Manchuria were living under the feudalistic control of Chinese war lords, and those in Russia were first under a despotic czarist regime and later, a communist dictatorship. Having left Korea in despair over the political situation of the Korean Empire, they held in awe the political system of the U.S., where they lived. They believed that a democratic nation was the ideal model for the new Korea, especially because checks and balances of the three governmental branches prevented abuse of power and guaranteed citizens' freedom.

The Korean-Americans vision is well reflected in an editorial "The Self-governing Organization of Koreans" in the October 5, 1910 issue of the *New Korea* (organ of the Korean National Association). The editorial shows that after fall of the Korean Empire in August 1910, the U.S. KNA regarded itself as the provisional government, presenting a vision for the new nation. It reads as follows: "Inside and outside Korea, the KNA is the only organization whose sole purpose is to protect and seek the interest of Koreans and restore the country's honor, and it is evident that it is the organization representing the Korean people." The editorial also urged that the general assembly establish a fully self-governing system with "the three executive branches; executive, legislative, and judicial." Park Yong-man, who became editor-in-chief of the *New Korea* in February 1911, described a more specific vision. He asserted that establishing the new country, "must indeed begin from Koreans in Hawaii and the United States, and Koreans in North America must organize their own form of government and become the founding fathers of the Korean constitution." The KNA was the model for that new nation, as it was an organization of freedom and equality and did not

discriminate against people based on religion or social class. It had a parliamentary system, with elected representatives and separate executive and legislative branches.

In April 1919, a declaration stating that Korea would establish an independent nation with the same philosophy and political system of the United States, was announced in Washington by the provisional government's minister of foreign affairs.<sup>13)</sup> This vision for a new nation is clearly stated in the provisional constitution drafted when the three provisional governments of Seoul, Shanghai and Russia merged into the provisional government of Korea in September 11, 1919.

Article 2 states, "Korea's sovereignty is with all Korean people." It denied a state ruled by the proletarian class only. Article 5 states, "Korea's legislative power is vested in the national assembly, the executive power in the administration, and judicial power in the court," defining the government not as a parliamentary cabinet system, but as a presidential system with three separate powers. Article 6 states, "Exercise of Korea's sovereignty is fully delegated to the president within the boundaries of the constitution," a provision intended to enable prompt decision-making in a state of emergency when sovereignty is threatened, and to ensure consistency in national administration. Ahn Chang-ho vehemently insisted on this provision and succeeded in getting it included. Article 12 states, "the president of the provisional government shall be elected by at least two-thirds of the vote of the members of the national assembly in a single-entry open vote."

Most provisions in the constitution of the provisional government were transferred directly to the Republic of Korea Constitution in July 1948. They include sovereignty of the people, separation of powers, election of the president by the national assembly, independent legislative, executive and judiciary branches,

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13) National Institute of Korean History, *The History of Korean Independence Vol. III* (in Korean), (Seoul: Jongum-sa, 1968), p. 831.



guarantees of the individual freedom and human rights, and protection of private property. Taking such developments into consideration, it is understandable why Rhee Syngman and his fellows in Kookmin-hoe pressed for the presidential system.

*Liberal Democracy Based on a Parliamentary-Cabinet System*

This vision was supported mainly by domestic nationalists who had been educated in Japan or Europe. They hoped to form a democratic government in which the administration was controlled by the parliament, the parliament was held accountable for their actions, and the people evaluated them in the next election.

The “Provisional Charter of Korea” of the Shanghai provisional government established in April 10, 1919, reflects this vision. Article 1 states, “Korea is a democratic republic.” Article 2 states, “Korea is to be ruled by the provisional government according to the resolutions of the provisional parliament.” Both articles clearly indicate that the parliament and administration would be combined. Therefore in the provisional charter, there was no president, only a premier. Moreover, in the third amendment of the Constitution enacted in March 1927, the government structure was changed, granting ruling power to a group, not a sole individual. Article 2 states, “Korea’s supreme power is vested to the provisional parliament.”

This system was maintained for 14 years until it was changed to a presidential system. The basic principle of free democracy was the same, but the concept, as it concentrates power in the parliament, was different from the vision of Korean-Americans. Considering that this was the political system adopted by most European countries at the time, it is understandable why nationalists in Korea preferred a system integrating the parliament and administration.

*A Single Party System Integrating Political Party and Administration*

This vision for the new country was common among right-wing activists in China. They believed that the party leading the independence revolution should rule the country through a single political party. Unlike the advocates of a free democracy, they saw little value in a representative body composed of politicians elected by residents in their corresponding districts.

Their model was China's first united front between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party, and they believed that a single nationalist party should lead the independence movement against Japan. They also believed a single nationalist party should pursue consolidation of the political party and its administration. A full-fledged movement to establish a single nationalist party proceeded in 1926. Branches were set up in Peking, Guangdong, Wuhan, and Nanking, and in November 1927 a united front, the Korean Independence Party (KIP), was formed. In the third amendment of the Provisional Constitution of 1927, a new provision stated that when a party wholly united independence activists, the highest power was to be vested to the party.

However, in 1928, the Chinese Communist Party left the first united front and the Comintern laid down its policy at the 6th general assembly. Consequently, Korean leftists started to abandon the single party movement (November 1929). A single party, without the leftists, had to be formed to lead the provisional government. This was the new Korean Independence Party established on January 25, 1930 in Shanghai by Ahn Chang-ho, Yi Dong-nyeung, Lee Shi-young, Cho Wan-ku, Cho So-ang, Kim Gu, and Ahn Kong-kun.

However, once the second united front between Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party was realized in 1937, Korean leftists who had left the single party movement showed renewed interest in the integration movement from August 1938. Talks began on uniting the seven parties: the right-wing organizations were the Korean Independence Party, National People's Party, and Chosun

Revolutionary Party; and on the left, were the Chosun National Revolutionary Party, Union of Chosun National Liberation, United Front of Chosun, and Union of Chosun Revolutionaries. Once power shifted toward the right-wing nationalists, however, the communists once again withdrew, saying they could not abandon communism for the nationalist movement. In 1940, the new Korean Independence Party was established through consolidation of the three nationalist parties.

In the fourth amendment to the Constitution, enacted October 9, 1940, the provision stating that “the highest power be vested to a single party” was deleted. The reason: Many felt that the movement to establish such a party had failed, and that it had only damaged the provisional government.<sup>14)</sup>

It is important to remember that Korean-Americans wielded considerable power from across the sea. When Korean-Americans learned of the united front in China, they wrote to Kim Gu, clearly stating that they opposed a single party embracing communists. They also threatened to discontinue financial assistance in such an event. However, once the communists left the coalition, the relationship between Korean-Americans and Kim Gu was again solid. At any rate, Kim Gu apologized to Korean-Americans and to his right-leaning colleagues for his ambiguity.<sup>15)</sup>

This vision remained after liberation. Officials in the Korean Independence Party pursued talks with the North (April 1948) even though efforts to communize North Korea were in full-swing by February 1946. The Soviet Union had made its intention to establish a satellite country in the North clear. This is in stark contrast to the Korean-Americans, who had a vision to establish a free democratic nation, and who were unwilling to join forces with a group that did not agree to liberal democracy.

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14) Chung Young-dae, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

15) Kim Gu, *op. cit.*, p. 239.

*Soviet-Style Dictatorship of the Proletariat*

This vision for a new nation was common among independence activists linked to China's Communist Party, activists in Russia, and leftists inside and outside Korea. They followed the strict instructions of the Comintern, led the single party movement, and then withdrew from alliances with right-wing groups. Regarding the trusteeship of the Moscow Agreement of the Allies, the Korean Communist Party first opposed it, only to change its position the next day because of the Soviet Union. Inside the provisional government Yi Tong-whi secretly plotted to model Korea after the Soviet Union, but Kim Gu blocked his efforts. After liberation, Yi's vision was ultimately realized in North Korea with the help of the Soviet Union Army.

**CONCLUSION**

The vision for the a new nation was split in four directions after liberation, and from the onset, a truly united nation was impossible. Recently some leftist scholars have argued that Rhee Syngman's goal to establish an independent nation first, and then realize unification (statement made in Jeongeup, South Korea, Jun. 3, 1946) made division inevitable, and that Korea could have been united if the Republic of Korea were not founded in 1948. Such an argument denies the fact that work to set up a communist government had already begun in February 1946.

Among the four visions for the new country, the one seeking to establish a Soviet Union-style state could not possibly be integrated with the other three. And since the Korean Independence Party, which advocated a single-party system integrating political party and administration, was composed of anti-communists, it could not possibly unite with those seeking a Soviet Union-style nation. The right-wing KIP could be the principle body and embrace the left-

wing, but it could not back left-wing causes. For those reasons, talks between the South and North, promoted by Kim Gu and Kim Kyusik, were bound to fail. As the leftists sought totalitarianism single-party rule, they certainly could not participate in the Constituent Assembly election.

The Republic of Korea and its constitutional government owe a debt of gratitude to those Koreans living abroad during the first decades of the 20th century. The current framework of the Republic of Korea was inherited from the provisional government, which in turn, was born out of the vision of Korean-Americans. They established branches of the Commonwealth Association and the Korean National Association in the United States, Hawaii, Siberia, and Manchuria (from 1908 to 1945), and Shinmin-hoe in Korea (from 1907 to 1912). Key members of Shinmin-hoe formed the cornerstone of the provisional government. And once it was established, the Korean-Americans supplied most of the capital required to set up the government office, establish the Restoration Army and operate the Europe-America Commission in the United States and the provisional government in China. Thanks to their concerted efforts and monetary assistance, Korean freedom fighters and statesmen were able to build our nation.

