“American” Ideas and South Korean Nation-Building: U.S. Influence on South Korean Education

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the American role in shaping South Korean nation-building during the early Cold War by considering how the United States attempted to form South Korea’s education and how Koreans responded to these efforts. It looks at education as an arena where “American” ideas such as democracy and liberalism were received, transformed, and utilized by Koreans. This study pays particular attention to the gap between American intentions and Korean expectations, as well as to the competition between American and Japanese systems, which explains the contradictory role America played in South Korean nation-building.

In order to better assess the role of the United States in shaping South Korean education, this article considers the complex dynamics between the Japanese legacies, American influence, and Korean actors. Americans had exerted a great effect on Korean education since the beginning of their relationship. American missionaries, U.S. military government, and educational mission teams had all contributed to the expansion of educational opportunities for Koreans. Through the educational institutions that they established or helped establish, Americans tried to spread “their” ideas. In this process, Americans had to struggle with two obstacles: Korean nationalism and the legacies of Japanese colonialism. Many Koreans used American missionary schools for their own purposes and resisted U.S. military government’s policies which ignored their desire for self-determination. American education missions had limited effect on Korean

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education due to the heterogeneous Japanese system that was still influencing South Korea even after liberation.

The ways in which Americans have influenced the democratization of South Korea have not been simple. Although "American" democratic ideas reached Koreans through various routes, Koreans understood the "American" idea within their own historical context and in a way that fit their existing socio-political relations. Oftentimes suspicious of "American" democracy, Koreans developed their own concept of democracy. The overall American influence on Korean democratization, as well as on Korean education, was important but limited. While Americans helped Koreans build educational infrastructure and tried to transfer democratic ideas through it, Koreans actors and Japanese colonial legacies limited its impact.

Key Words
U.S.-Korean Relations, Education, Democracy, Postcolonial Nationalism, American missionaries, U.S. Military Government in Korea, American Education Mission

Introduction

This paper illuminates the role and limitations of the United States in shaping South Korean nation-building during the early Cold War by examining how the United States attempted to form South Korea's education and how Koreans responded to these efforts. I am particularly interested in how "American" ideas such as democracy and liberalism were received, transformed, and utilized by Koreans.

Education has been an important area of interaction between the two nations since their first encounter. Early in their relationship, at the turn of the last century, American missionaries established many schools for Koreans and sent Korean students to the United States for further study. After World War II, the U.S. Military Government made efforts to reform Korean education. Since then, many American professional educators have

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visited Korea and advised Korean teachers on how to educate their students more effectively. American private and public funding provided about $33 million between 1953 and 1959 to help Koreans rehabilitate their system of education.[1] Still today, South Korean students go to the United States to continue their education and return to Korea to be professors and administrators.[2]

By numbers and statistics alone, we may judge these transnational educational efforts between Koreans and Americans a huge success. Such numbers and statistics, however, give a false impression that American objectives in shaping South Korean education were largely successful. In order to correct this false notion, this article looks at the gap between Americans' intention to spread "their own" ideas to South Korea and the ways in which Koreans accepted and institutionalized them. While this gap may not be surprising per se, exploring it affords us a more accurate and more nuanced picture of U.S.-South Korean relations.

The gap between Americans' intentions and Koreans' receptions especially, I believe, explains the contradictory role the United States played in South Korean nation-building and democratization. Although South Korea stands out as one of the success stories in U.S. nation-building efforts during this era, U.S. sponsorship came at a cost to South Koreans.

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1) Mungyobu, *Mungyo gaegwan* (1958), Hanguk gyoyukmunje yeonguso, *Mungyosa 1945-1973* (Jung-ang University, 1974), ed. Gwangman Choi, "Educational Aids" 1 Dec, 2006, Online. Korean National Archives, Internet. 2 Jun, 2010. Available http://contents.archives.go.kr/next/content/listSubjectDescription.do;jsessionid=4M1wLDYL3G9xm32Nv3wGSGYnz1r1Npzv7vtvCFvM8b0hblL1kwTj!732268681?id=003299

2) In the 2007-2008 academic year, the number of Korean students studying in the United States reached 69,124, or 11.1% of the total foreign students in the United States. Only India and China were ahead of South Korea, but South Korea ranked first in terms of the number of students per capita. Open Doors 2008, "Figure 2B: Top 20 Leading Places of Origin of International Students, 2006/07 & 2007/08," *Report on International Educational Exchange*, Internet. 1 Nov, 2009. Available http://opendoors.iienetwork.org/?p=131534

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Despite its claim to promote democracy, the United States backed authoritarian and anti-democratic regimes in South Korea, as it also did in South Vietnam and other newly decolonized nations. This contradiction can be explained, I argue, by considering the mismatch of intentions and expectations between the two nations.

Existing American and Korean studies of the U.S. influence on Korean education either criticize American influence as imperialistic, on the one hand, or emphasize positive aspects of its impact on the other. The critical studies tend to focus on the negative results of U.S influence, whereas the more laudatory ones tend to highlight American good will. Yet, neither seriously examines the question of *how* Americans shaped South Korean education. Neither did the United States simply try to transplant its system to other nations, nor did Koreans simply try to copy the institutions and ideas of other nations. The reality is much more complex. Actors in both nations have continuously struggled and negotiated with each other. Furthermore, neither nation has only one idea or strategy; both, instead, have various groups contending with each one another. This study, therefore, pays attention to the gap between the intentions of the two nations, but does not simply compare them. Instead, it traces how the different ideas and practices of the two actually clashed on the ground and how the conflicts were solved. In doing so, I will also be able to address the larger questions concerning Americans' efforts to spread their ideas and values to the world and the role of "American" ideas in the nation-building of South Korea.

U.S.-Korean relations are usually considered to have started in 1945, when the U.S. army came to Korea after World War II. However, before the two nations had full-fledged relations after the liberation, Koreans had begun to develop relations with American missionaries. These missionaries were the ones who played an early and important role in developing modern Korean education. Another important factor in shaping Korean education was Japanese colonialism, the influence of which long

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outlasted the liberation. In order to better assess the role of the United States in shaping South Korean education, therefore, we need to consider not only the tensions and negotiations between Americans and Koreans, but also those between the two foreign forces. Before entering the main period of my study, I will explore how American missionaries and Japanese imperialists affected the process of setting up the basic structure of "modern" Korean education and how Koreans responded to these two influences.

American Missionaries and Korean Education

American missionaries played a significant role in the early stages of Korean "modernization." They not only spread Christianity, but also contributed to the development of modern Korean education and medicine. The missionaries were, however, often criticized by Korean scholars as agents of American imperialism.[3] Yet, it is not a simple question of deciding whether they were imperialists or not. While the missionaries had a role in spreading American culture and ideas in one way or another whether they intended to or not, they were basically sincere evangelical missionaries, many of whom were sympathetic to the Koreans' difficulties and supported Korean nationalists. When we assess their influence on Korean education, therefore, these two faces of the missionary must be considered. It is also crucial to examine how the Korean people responded to the American efforts.

3) While Hey-seok Lee argues that the work of the missionaries in Korea was closely related to American imperialism in the article "Hanmal miguk seongyosadreun mueosl garucheonna? [What did the U.S. missionaries of the late Chosun dynasty teach?]," *Yeoksabipyung* (fall 1990), Dae-young Ryu maintains that the U.S. government tried hard to prevent these missionaries from meddling in Korean politics in his article "Hanmal migugui daehan jeongchaekkwa seongyo sa-eop [American foreign policy toward Korea at the end of Chosun dynasty]," *Hanguk gidokkyowa yeoksa* 9 (1998).

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Whether as agents of imperialism or sympathizers with Korean nationalism, American missionaries' ultimate goal was to spread the Christian Gospel to Koreans. Their contribution to the fields of education and medicine in Korea, and even their sympathy for Korean nationalism, were all subordinated to their ultimate goal. Meanwhile, the urgent matter for Koreans who followed the missionaries was to protect their nation from the invasion of foreign forces and modernize it, whether or not they truly accepted the Gospel that the missionaries preached. Education was a useful link that connected them. American missionaries used it to attract Koreans and preach them the Gospel, while Koreans wanted to learn English and access Western knowledge, with which they hoped to strengthen and save their nation.

After official diplomatic relations were established between the United States and Korea in 1882, American missionaries established modern schools where they taught foreign languages and the Christian Bible to Koreans. The missionaries paid special attention to higher education.[4] In 1885 *Baejae hakdang* [School] was established by the Rev. Henry G. Appenzeller, an American missionary. This was Korea's first accredited school for higher education that was commissioned to teach English to government-sponsored students. The American missionaries' efforts in education, in the long term, laid the groundwork for the development of higher education, which would later become profoundly important in the democratization movement. Although primary and secondary education remained, even after the liberation from Japan, a bureaucratic and centralized system regulated by the national government, higher education was, in contrast, more loosely controlled. The universities were not free from government control, but they enjoyed a modicum of independence compared with primary and secondary schools, which were under complete

4) Sungho Lee, "The Emergence of the Modern University in Korea," *Higher Education* 18. 1 (1989). From Dependency to Autonomy: The Development of Asian Universities. 89-90.

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government control. Maneuvering within this small space, the universities played a crucial role in the democratization of South Korea. However, the process was not simple.

Languages were a crucial part of the early curricula of the missionary schools, which taught not only English, but also Chinese and Korean. Some missionaries, however, were against this language-centered curriculum and attempted to change their focus from language education to religious study. For example, *Baejae hakdang*, the official English-language institution, at one point tried to transform itself into a religious seminary. It changed its language of instruction from English to Korean in order to make Christian religious studies more accessible to Koreans. This effort, however, failed because of the sharp decrease in student applications.[5] The students were more interested in gaining foreign language skills so that they would be able to interact with the wider world beyond Korea. This also shows that Korean students were active receiving foreign knowledge.

The emphasis on languages in these early modern mission schools not only increased communication between the United States and Korea, but also paved the way for knowledge exchange between the two nations. Having learned English from the Americans, more and more Korean students visited the United States for study.[6] The students who learned English

5) Anjung Kim, *A Report on Foreign Education Ideas and Korean Education: Gaehwagi Gumi Gyoyuk Cheje Yuipgwa Geundae Gyoyugui Taedong* [U.S. education system and emergence of modern education at the end of Chosun Dynasty] (Seoul: Education Research Center at Seoul National University, 1997) 34.

6) The importance of the English language in Korean society has continued to increase until the present. English is currently one of the most important subjects in the college entrance exams and in industry. More and more students take the Test of English as a Foreign Language, Graduate Record Exam, and Graduate Management Admission Test in order to apply to U.S. colleges. The current president of South Korea is even embracing immersion English in the normal curricula.

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and studied in the United States were to play a role as a channel through which knowledge flowed between the two nations. For example, many Korean students who had studied in the United States during the Japanese occupation era returned to the liberated Korea and participated in the nation-building process.

The missionary schools also expanded educational opportunities to the lower classes and to women, who had previously been excluded from the education system. The concept of equal opportunity was adopted by the Korean reformers and reflected in the *gabo gaehyeok* [reform] of 1894. It was, however, these missionary schools that actually put the concept into practice even before the reform. *Hyeminwon*, *Soongsil hakdang*, and *Jeongsin* y*eohak-gyo* [women's school] were all established in the 1880s to teach languages and the Christian religion.[7] Many of the early students of the schools were from the lower class, and the education they received provided them with opportunities to enhance their economic and social status.[8] In this sense, American education contributed to overthrowing the traditional caste system in *Chosun* that was based on *gwageo*, the highest-level state examination.

Among Korean nationalists who accepted the Christian Gospel of the American missionaries, many also accepted their concepts of modernity and civilization. Acknowledging the advancement of Western civilization and the alleged backwardness of their nation, they tried to catch up with the advanced Western nation by educating the "unenlightened" ordinary Korean people.[9] Although American missionaries helped in this Korean

7) Horace H. Underwood, *Modern Education in Korea.* (New York: International Press, 1926) 17-38; Jae-eun Park, "Gaehwagi gaesingyogye hakkyoui seollip-gwa gyo-yuk [Establishment and education of the Christian schools during the Enlightenment period]," (master's thesis, Hanyang University, 2006): 20-25

8) Jeong-Kyu Lee, *Historic Factors Influencing Korean Higher Education.*(Seoul: Jimmundang International, 2000) 97-98

9) Daeyoung Ryu, *Gaehwagi Joseon-gwa miguk seongyosa* [Late Chosun Dynasty

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effort, there were differences between the ultimate goals of the two. While this gap was not critical in this era, it would reappear and become significant later when the two nations attempted to forge a more serious relationship.

Japanese Colonial Rule and Korean Education (1910-1945)

The Japanese colonial government reduced the years of schooling for Korean students. Koreans could receive only four to six years of primary and five years of secondary education, whereas Japanese children in Korea were allowed and encouraged to attend school for five years in addition.[10] The colonial rulers therefore tried to inculcate more advanced thinking skills among their own people, while promoting only basic education to Koreans in order to mold them into loyal Japanese subjects. The Japanese colonizers emphasized Japanese language, history, culture, and philosophy and drastically reduced Korea-related subjects in the curriculum, thus attempting to eliminate Korean national identity by erasing their history and culture. They forced Koreans to use the Japanese language for any official business. Toward the end of their colonial rule in 1941, they even removed Korean language courses from the curriculum.

The Japanese government also wanted to train Korean students to be skilled laborers who could eventually meet the needs of the expanding Japanese empire. To this end, Japanese education administrators put more emphasis on a technical, rather than a general education for Koreans. A year after Korea formally became a colony of Japan, the Japanese

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and American missionaries]. (Hanguk gidokkyo yeoksa yeonguso, 2004), 351-387

10) Siyong Lee, "Ilje gangjeomgi Joseon chongdokbu ui gyoyuk jeongchaek e gwanhan gochal [Study on the Education Policy of the Japanese Colonial Government in Korea]," *Gyoyuk nondan* 18. 1 (2001): 4

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promulgated the Education Ordinance of 1911, by which many existing higher education institutions were downgraded to the post-secondary level. The Ordinance thus severely limited Korean opportunity to gain higher education. The focus on vocational education meant that girls were taught handicrafts and needlework, while boys learned the basics of agriculture and commerce.[11] Korean boys were also educated to become engineers who could support Japanese industry. After Japan entered a war with China in 1937, the Korean education system was also changed to meet the needs of the Japanese war plan. More and more classes focused on war-related training.[12]

The Japanese were also responsible for the centralization of Korean education. The system the Japanese put in place supervised and tried to control private educational institutions, while fostering the development of the national and public schools. The colonial government enacted laws to put all schools, including the American missionary schools, under central bureaucratic control.[13] Indeed, the colonial government's repression of higher education meant that the American missionary colleges and universities were especially targeted. The Japanese administrators came to regulate more tightly American missionary schools such as *Sungsil Union Christian College* and *Ewha College*. This suppression of the American missionary schools increased as the United States became an enemy of Japan. This centralized control of education remains one of the most important characteristics of Korean education even today.

Japanese influence on Korean education, however, had limitations: the colonial government could not completely remove the influence of the

11) Hye-young Lee, Jong-hyeok Yun, and Bang-ran Ryu, *Hanguk gundae haggyo gyoyuk baeknyunsa yeongu (II)* [History of 100 Years of Korea's Modern Education (II)] (Seoul: Hanguk gyoyuk gaebalwon, 1997) 63

12) Jaecheol Jeong, *Ilje ui Daehanguk Sikminji Gyoyuk Jeongchaeksa* [History of Japanese Education Policy Toward Korea] (Seoul: Iljisa, 1985)

13) Yeongcheol Park, "Hanguk gwanryojuui gyoyuk gochal [Study on Korean Bureaucratic Education]," (master's thesis, Chungnam University, 2004) 23-25

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American schools. Many American missionary schools of higher education did survive the colonial period, and later emerged as important sites for the pro-democracy movement. This rivalry between the two nations in their interference in Korean education continued after liberation. When the American military government tried to reform the Korean education system, it found itself contending with these three legacies of Japanese colonialism: Japanization of the curriculum, denial of access to higher education, and centralization of the education system. The tensions between the American and the Japanese education systems and Koreans' response to the systems shaped Korean education and nation-building.

Japanese rule also affected Korean nation-building in a more important way. During the thirty-five years of Japanese suppression and discrimination, Koreans desperately desired independence and came to put a high value on equality and self-government. This colonial experience influenced their attitudes toward the American occupiers and the direction of their nation-building process. Nation-building in post-liberation Korea, therefore, would be a complex process resulting from the competition among Japanese legacies, American influence, and Korean agents.

U.S. Military Government, Koreans and Japanese Colonial Legacy

After World War II, Korea was liberated from Japanese colonial rule, but the southern part of the nation was under the direct control of the United States for three years. During the three years of occupation, the influence of American rule permeated every significant aspect of the new South Korean state. While there are some positive aspects of the educational reforms, which are usually regarded as among the most successful policies of the U.S. military government, Korean scholars' assessment of the education policies of the U.S. Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK)

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has been largely negative. Positive views of this period usually emphasize that Korean education became democratized by eliminating the remnants of Japanese military and bureaucratic education and modernized by providing more equal opportunities for Koreans.[14] Critical views of the U.S. Military Government's education reforms assert, on the other hand, that the American reforms did not go far enough in expunging Japanese influence and used education as a means of ideological indoctrination.[15]

Whether positive or negative, all these views have some merit and therefore cannot easily be rejected. However, they do not give us a comprehensive picture of what happened because they focus upon revealing America's intention or evaluating the results without paying enough attention to the process by which American education policy was carried out on the ground. My analysis, rather, focuses on how Americans coped with the two related obstacles in implementing education policy: Korean post-colonial nationalism and the legacy of Japanese education policy.

The officially declared goal of the American occupation government in the newly liberated Korea was to *prepare* Koreans for complete independence and a democratic way of life. American officials both in the United States and the occupied southern part of Korea believed that Koreans needed U.S. guidance for the time being to *prepare* for full independence. In order to appease Koreans, however, they emphasized

14) United States Armed Forces in Korea, History of the United States Army Forces in Korea (HUSAFIK); Donald K. Adams, "Education in Korea, 1945-1955," diss., University of Connecticut, 1955; Hyung-gu Park, "Social Changes in the Educational and Religious Institutions of Korean Society Under Japanese and American Occupation," diss., University of Utah, 1964; Dong-gu Kim, "Educational Reorganization in South Korea Under the United States Army Military Government, 1945-1948," diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1984; Jeong-Kyu Lee, "Korean Higher Education under the United States Military Government: 1945-1948," *Radical Pedagogy* (2006)

15) Gilsang Lee, 2*0 segi hanguk gyoyuksa* [A History of Korean Education in the 20th Century] (Seoul: Jimmundang, 2007) 186-187

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the ideals that Koreans had long desired: independence and democracy. In the field of education, the military government claimed that it would liquidate the Japanese system and practices and provide broad and equal educational opportunities.[16] The democratic education system promoted by American Military Government was precisely what Korean people had yearned for under the oppressive and discriminatory Japanese colonial education system. All children between six and twelve had to be registered in public elementary school (Ordinance 6, Sep 17, 1945).[17] The Elementary School Subcommittee under the Korean Committee on Educational Planning passed several resolutions in January 1946 intended to establish compulsory education for elementary school-aged children. The Department of Education accepted the resolutions and decided to put $6.6 million for the next six years into reorganizing elementary schools to achieve the goal of educating 4 million southern Korean children. Under this policy, the number of elementary school students quickly increased during the three years of American military government, from only 1,372,883 (45%) in August 1945 to 2,224,113 (73%) in March 1948.[18]

In addition to this expansion of elementary school education, Korean students could now access higher education without institutional or legal obstacles.[19] At the time of liberation, there were only nineteen higher education institutions in southern Korea. There was only one four-year-university; the others were all two-year colleges. Each of these colleges specialized in particular fields such as law, medical science,

16) Records of General HQ, Far East Command, Supreme Commander Allied Powers, and United Nations Command, "Department of Education History: Administrative and Structural Notes," RG 554, box 36, National Archives II

17) Taesu Jeong, ed. *Migunjeong-gi hanguk gyoyuk saryojipseong* [Published Sources of Korean Education under the U.S. Military Government] (Seoul: Hongjiwon, 1993) 818

18) Gilsang Lee, 265-266

19) Jeong-kyu Lee, 4-5

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engineering, commerce, education, mining, and fisheries. Under the American occupation, most of these colleges were upgraded to universities, and several national and public universities, including Seoul National University, were established. The U.S. Military Government encouraged the creation of many private universities as well. By the end of the period of direct American rule, the number of higher education institutions had increased to thirty-five.

Koreans, at least in the beginning, generally welcomed the education policy of expansion and equal opportunity. A public opinion poll conducted in March 1946 revealed that the education policy of the military government was received positively by 85% of the respondents in Seoul, although there were more negative responses in rural areas.[20] In this poll, American efforts in education received more positive feedback than their political and economic reforms. However, this initial, highly favorable opinion about the education policy of the American occupation forces did not last very long. In an opinion poll taken in August that same year, positive responses about the education policy dropped to 26% whereas negative ones rose to 51%.[21] How can we explain this loss in popularity of the U.S. Military Government education policy? One of the reasons was the deteriorated educational condition at the time. The serious lack of facilities, teachers and textbooks could not be solved in such a short period.[22] Educational infrastructure could be improved only over the long term, and many Koreans were probably disappointed at the slow pace of reform.

The more significant reasons for the deteriorating public opinion of American policies on Korean education lay in the Koreans' anti-Japanese and anti-foreigner sentiment. This anti-foreigner nationalism was the first

20) Opinion Trends, Department of Public Information, March 31, 1946, G-2 Periodic Reports, RG554 General Correspondence USAFIK, Box 5, National Archives II

21) Ibid., August 2, 1946

22) Ibid., May 10, 1946

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obstacle that American occupying forces had to deal with. Nationalism in the newly liberated countries after World War II was expressed in various ways in different postcolonial contexts. In the liberated Korea, the most important issue was self-determination. Koreans, who had long desired autonomy under Japanese rule, began to put this desire into action right after liberation by forming various autonomous organizations. These were established to fill the vacuum of political authority and police forces, keep public order and prepare for nation-building throughout the nation.

The most prominent organization was *geonguk junbi wiwonhoe* [the Preparatory Committee for National Construction], formed by a moderate leftist national leader, Woon Hyong Lyuh. The organization later evolved into *Chosun inmin gonghwaguk* [People's Republic of Korea], spearheaded by the leftists. This organization included many autonomously created local councils called *jibang inmin wiwonhoe* [Local Council of People's Commissars], which played important role in the self-government of many local areas. The rightists formed a separate organization that later became *Hanguk Minjudang* [Korean Democratic Party], but leftist organizations performed a greater role in regional self-government.

American occupying forces, like many American officials in the United States and missionaries in Korea, believed that Koreans did not have the ability to self-govern. Koreans under the Japanese rule, believing in President Woodrow Wilson's principle of self-determination, had looked to the United States for help in their struggle for independence. This hope, however, was frustrated when the United States showed no interest in the independence of Korean nation. Koreans felt the same frustration under the American occupation government and came to distrust the United States. The U.S. Military Government disapproved of and made illegal the spontaneously organized committees that ruled the liberated Korea prior to its arrival.[23] For many Koreans, therefore, American forces were

23) Seokjun Kim, *Migunjeong sidaeui gukkawa haengjeong* [The State and

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not liberators, but more foreign occupiers.[24]

American occupation leaders were not unaware of this sentiment. For example, General John Hodge said that he heard anecdotally from a Korean source that the strength of anti-Japanese sentiment among Koreans was so strong that every Korean believed that every other Korean was pro-Japanese.[25] However, the Military Government depended on many pro-Japanese personnel in South Korean nation-building, which aroused great indignation among the Korean people. For efficiency, American occupation leaders preferred people with experience of working for the government. More importantly, the ex-Japanese officials, who transformed themselves to pro-American rightists after liberation, were the ones in whom the occupation leaders could place their ideological trust. Americans were vigilant against the leftists and distrusted the moderates. Many important high official positions, such as the Justice of the Supreme Court, chief of the National Police Agency, mayors of many cities including Seoul, and governorship of many provinces, were filled with people who had previously worked for the Japanese colonial government.[26]

The Military Government also depended on such people to carry out educational reform. Its Committee on Education was comprised of Korean members who had studied in the United States or Japan and were favorable toward foreign influence.[27] The close relationship between the U.S. Military

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Administration in the Era of U.S. Military Government] (Seoul: Ewha Womans' University Press, 1996) 126-136

24) Wonsik Kim, Interview by Gang, Myeongsuk in a project led by Professor Gisuk Kim in April and May of 1998 about the nationwide turmoil surrounding the establishment of Seoul National University, Seoul National University Archives

25) RG332 Records of General HQ, Far East Command, Supreme Command Allied Powers and UN Command, USAFIK XXIV Corps, G-2, Historical Section 1945-48, Box 27

26) Insoo Sohn, *Migunjeong-gwa gyoyuk jeongchaek* [U.S. Military Government in Korea and Education Policy] (Seoul: Minyeongsa, 1990) 139-173

27) Ibid., p. 169

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Government and the rightist pro-American group was an enormous source of distrust and complaint within the Korean populace. Korean people thus came to regard the pro-Japanese and the pro-American Korean officials as one and the same. This was one of the main causes of the decline of the Military Government's popularity overall.

We can observe the tension aroused by the peremptory way in which the U.S. occupying forces carried out their policies between Americans and Koreans in a series of events around the foundation of Seoul National University. On August 22, 1946, the Military Government issued Ordinance 102 establishing Seoul National University by consolidating Kyungsung University and nine other colleges. This so-called *gukdae-an* was designed to achieve two goals. First, they wanted to establish universities similar to those of the United States. According to the U.S. Armed Forces official history of the U.S. military in South Korea, the plan for the establishment of Seoul National University "followed closely the general trend in similar institutions in the United States."[28] The proclaimed goals of the new national university were to solve the current problems in higher education, to create a great national university capable of producing high-quality human resources, and to liquidate the legacy of the Japanese institutions of higher education.[29]

However, this attempt to create a great national university faced very severe resistance from many professors and students throughout the nation for almost a year. The resistance, which originated in the affected colleges, spread to other colleges and even to many secondary schools. The opponents of the proposal had several important demands.[30] The professors and

28) U.S. Armed Forces, *History of the United States Army Forces in Korea* (HUSAFIK), the National Assembly Library, Seoul, South Korea

29) Hyaeweol Choi, "'Gukdae-an padong [Turmoil surrounding the plan for foundation of Seoul National University]," *Nonjaeng-euro bon hanguksa 100 nyeonsa* [100 Years History of Korea Reviewed through Debates], Yeoksa bipyeong pyeonjip wiwonhoe (Seoul: Yeoksa bipyeongsa, 2000) 172

30) Daeyeong Heo, *Auh Chun Suk gwa migunjeonggi gyoyuk Jeongchaeck* [Auh

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the colleges in question were unwilling to accept the plan because it meant that their schools would disappear. Professors criticized that the new university would be controlled by the government and thus infringe upon their academic freedom. Many students who were involved in self-administration committees within those colleges worried that the government's control of higher education would be strengthened. Koreans were also provoked by the fact that all the university's board members would be appointed by the Department of Education, and that the first president of the Seoul National University was an American, not a Korean. The fierce Koreans' opposition caught the Americans by surprise because they did not anticipate such strong resistance.[31] This shows the huge gap between American ideals and Korean expectations during the U.S. occupation government.

Studies of this event in the literature focus on two issues. One is whether it was Korean educators supporting the occupation government or American governmental staff who first designed the plan. It has been widely accepted that the main agent in proposing the plan was Chun Suk Auh, Korean deputy head of Department of Education and a leading figure in the Korean Committee on Education and National Committee on Educational Plannin g.[32] Auh himself argued that it was he who initiated the proposal.[33] On the other hand, a revisionist scholar argues that the main actors were American administrators in the occupation government, and that Koreans were just supporting them.[34] Another point of debate has been whether the opposition was initiated and led by the leftists. Officials in the Military

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Chun Suk and Education Policy of the U.S. Military Government] (Seoul: Hanguk haksul jeongbo, Inc., 2009) 142-151

31) Insoo Sohn, 376

32) Giseok Kim, *Hanguk godeung gyoyuk yeongu* [Study on Korean Higher Education] (Seoul: Gyoyuk gwahaksa, 2008); Insoo Sohn; Daeyeong Heo

33) Chun Suk Auh, *Oeroun Seongju* [Lonely Castellan] (Seoul: Gyoyuk gwahaksa, 2001) 117-121

34) Gilsang Lee, 322

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Government and some later historians interpreted this unexpected large-scale resistance by Korean professors and students as having been instigated by communists; other scholars pay more attention to other issues and give less importance to the role of the leftists or communists.[35] While these two issues are important in understanding the tensions between the drafters of the proposal and the professors and students involved in the plan, they do not sufficiently explain why the opposition spread to the whole nation and continued for such a long time.

Rather than determining who initiated the plan or who led the opposition, this article focuses on the question of why Koreans widely supported those resisting the American plan. Giseok Kim's argument should be noted: that the essential issue in the turmoil was the question of autonomy. He documents the tension between Korean professors who had been running their own schools since the liberation and American military forces who tried to control the schools. Therefore, he argues that the professors and students who opposed the proposal did so because they believed it would allow the government to control their schools and thus violate their right to rule their own schools.[36] The gist of the conflict was thus the tension between control and autonomy.

I do not agree, however, with Kim when he traces the origin of these efforts for autonomy of the professors to the Kyungsung Imperial University of the colonial period, which was allowed broad autonomy. Rather, the professors' claim for autonomy should be understood in a larger historical context: the Koreans' desire for autonomy.[37] Koreans, who had already felt frustrated that Americans were violating their self-determination, also regarded the American decision to create Seoul National University as

35) Ibid., p. 326-328

36) Giseok Kim, 99-201

37) Wonsik Kim argued that the opposition to the plan to establish Seoul National University was opposition to the Military Government. (interview by Gang, Myeongsuk)

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counter to their desire for self-determination.

Most of the colleges that had reasserted independence after Japanese colonial rule by running their own self-administration committees could not accept the Seoul National University establishment proposal. Despite their relatively favorable attitudes toward the military government's education policy of more and equal opportunities, Koreans were very sensitive to issues related to self-determination. Since the opposition to the plan touched on the issue of autonomy, it could spread over inter-school boundaries. Of course, this conflict was in a sense a turf war among the professors of the related schools. However, many Koreans participated in or were sympathetic to the opposition to *gukdae-an* because they agreed with the opponents' claim that the proposal aimed at compromising the autonomy of Korean schools. The military government's crack-down on Korean resistance in the early stages aggravated the situation. Having endured thirty-five years of Japanese colonial rule, Koreans vehemently refused to tolerate American attempts to exercise control.

An example demonstrating how American ideas for reform clashed with Korean post-colonial nationalism is that one of the biggest issues in the nation-wide turmoil was the American citizenship of the first president of their new national university. American occupiers, whose policy was primarily concerned with ideology and efficiency, did not seriously consider Korean nationalism. Because of postcolonial sensibilities, Koreans did not cold-heartedly evaluate the pros and cons of the proposal. A participant in the protest recalled decades later that many were against the plan simply because they did not want the American system transplanted to Korea.[38)]

The situation took a favorable turn when the Military Government changed its coercive style and attempted to negotiate with its opponents.[39)]

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38) Byungik Go, Interview by Yu, Sungsang in a project led by Professor Gisuk Kim in April and May of 1998 about the nationwide turmoil surrounding the establishment of Seoul National University, Seoul National University Archives

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Seoul National University became normalized after a year of turmoil when the Military Government announced a revised proposal allowing considerable, though not complete, autonomy to the professors. The reform of higher education carried out by the U.S. military government and pro-American Korean educators, therefore, achieved only partial success. The president and the board of directors were to be Koreans and faculty council was restored.[40] While the government put the higher educational system under its control, it also left room for autonomy. This outcome bequeathed two contradictory legacies to Korean higher education. The government's control over higher education prevented autonomous development of universities and colleges. However, the small space for autonomy would later become a place for cultivating anti-dictatorship democratic movements.

Another obstacle to the Military Government's education policy and promotion of democracy in South Korea included the vestiges of Japanese imperialism. The strong influence of the Japanese system could not easily be removed in a short period of time. The Military Government's dependence on pro-Japanese personnel also contributed in some ways to maintaining the influence of the Japanese system, and thus made it harder for Americans to promote their democratic ideals. An example is the failure of the New Education Movement.

Under the circumstances in which American ideals and Korean nationalism collided, and in which the two different American and Japanese systems were interwoven, new movements for educational reform emerged. One was the Liberal Education Movement, which was inspired by socialism and criticized the negative aspects of capitalism. In this movement, political education and vocational education were regarded as important. Its adherents were strongly against the privatization of education and argued it should

39) Insoo Sohn, 370 - 382
40) Giseok Kim, 124-125

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be supported by the state. Although the U.S. Military Government established a state-supported public university, the political philosophy of this movement was at odds with the objectives of the U.S. occupying forces. The ideological difference and the movement's critical attitudes toward the Military Government's education policy meant the movement could not be effective during the period of American rule.[41)]

Another important school of thought was the New Education Movement. The educators belonging to this movement, unlike those of the Liberal Education Movement, were favorable to and supported the Military Government policy. They actively tried to accept American theories of democratic education and to apply them to Korean education. They embraced the progressive education theory pioneered by John Dewey that was popular in the United States at the time. Many of the educators leading the New Education Movement participated in the Military Government or advisory committees and were advisors on education policy.

Chun Suk Auh, one of the leading figures in the movement, pioneered the introduction of the educational theory of John Dewey by writing an introductory book about Dewey's philosophies and translating his works.[42)] He and other Koreans, including Ih-Wook Jang, Byung-Ok Cho, and Heung-Jeh Kim, had actually taken classes with John Dewey at Columbia University during the Japanese occupation era. In addition, several Koreans such as Helen Kim, Eunsuk Seo, Seok-Young Jang, Seong-Sun Yun, Jae-Myung Noh trained under one of Dewey's best pupils, William Heard Kilpatrick. After liberation, these individuals spread the theory of progressive education in Korea by giving lectures at colleges, participating

41) Gilsang Lee, 191-208

42) Chun Suk Auh's book *Building Democratic Education* deals with John Dewey's education theory. He also translated Dewey's books, *Democracy and Education* (1916) and *Experience and Education* (1938). Ingi Lee and Naewoon Seong also respectively translated *The School and Society* (Dewey, 1899) and *Group Education for a Democracy* (William Heard Kilpatrick, 1940) into Korean.

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in the government's education policy, and establishing leading universities, in which they served as presidents.[43]

Many who belonged to this New Education Movement also held demonstration classes introducing a new "democratic" way of education. In these demonstrations, students did not listen passively to what teachers told them, but rather actively participated in teacher-led discussions. Moreover, the Department of Education opened an exhibition "Building New Education" and displayed reports and material related to the New Education Movement.[44]

Despite these tireless efforts and state support, the New Education Movement was not very successful in reforming Korean education along the lines of a Deweyan philosophy during this period of direct U.S. rule. Why did it fail? Chun Suk Auh, one of the leading figures of the movement, attributed its failure either to the teachers' lack of passion or to their misunderstanding of the democratic idea.[45] Insoo Sohn, who agrees with Auh, also argues that Korean teachers on the ground, who were not then ready to accommodate the U.S. educational theory, had neither a clear understanding of, nor strong faith in, the "democratized" classroom or forms of pedagogy.[46] Another scholar, Gilsang Lee, criticizes the movement for ignoring the greater and more pressing societal problems, while focusing on the liberty of children to speak, challenge, and debate in the classroom.[47] His criticism targeted the leading educational administrators, including Auh, who led the New Education Movement. He points out that the leaders were dependent on foreign theories incongruent with Korean realties and implemented educational reform in top-down style. While these

43) Chun Suk Auh and Helen Kim were members of the Korean Education Committee during the U.S. Military Government.
44) Gilsang Lee, 212-218
45) Daeyeong Heo, 181-183
46) Insoo Sohn, 358-364
47) Gilsang Lee, 219

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evaluations of the movement show that the New Education Movement as based on foreign theory was doomed to failure, they do not suggest deeper causes of the failure. The shallowness of their analyses is due to the fact that they focused on actors without sufficiently delving into the systematic level.

A more important point to consider is the discrepancy between the two systems in America and South Korea. While the former was based on democracy and capitalism, the latter was still under the influence of the Japanese *authoritarian and bureaucratic* legacies. The Korean education system was uniform and standardized and did not allow for diversity, under the strong control of the government. The New Education Movement promoting individualism and relativism could not easily merge with the centralized system. The hierarchical university system creating fierce competition sustained the cramming method of teaching. The authoritarian attitude of the teachers in the classroom also did not allow each individual student to exercise his or her personality. Therefore, the more crucial point is not that the teachers simply did not understand the democratic method of teaching, but that they had difficulty in understanding American education theory and in applying it to their teaching due to their experience of the Japanese system during the Japanese occupation and its persistent influence. Education does not operate by itself, but rather in conjunction with the administrative system of the nation and societal culture. The New Education Movement could not succeed without a parallel philosophy, structure, and process for administering and supplying education in South Korea.

The failure of the New Education Movement also demonstrates the limitations of the U.S. Military Government's rule in South Korea. We can particularly see that its goal of liquidating the vestiges of Japanese colonialism was not successfully achieved. On the contrary, the military government's policy of preserving pro-Japanese personnel contributed to the persistence of the Japanese system in post-liberation South Korea

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and incurred the suspicion of Korean people concerning its democratic ideal. American attempts to reform education in Korea consistently ran up against a contradiction: trying to promote democracy on the one hand, but doing so in a way that seemed to Koreans patently undemocratic, on the other hand. As mentioned, many teachers, policemen, and administrators who had worked for the Japanese were rehired by the Americans, despite public protest. The ways in which the Military Government officials conducted their policies were not always "democratic." Those resistant to the National University Establishment Plan criticized the military government as undemocratic.[48] Thus the more the Military Government wanted to carry out reform in the name of democracy, the more Korean suspicion about American intentions grew and the gap between American democratic ideals and Korean nationalism widened. A Korean staff member in the Military Government, for example, said in an interview that professors closely allied with American advisors and Department of Education were accused by students of being dictatorial and Fascistic.[49]

This suspicion made Koreans develop different concepts of democracy. The concept of democracy embraced by the students who participated in the democratic movements against the dictatorships was not the same as that promoted by Americans. Under the Military Government, Koreans' concept of democracy was closely connected with autonomy. The gap between American intentions and Korean expectations produced the irony that many of the democratic student activists became anti-American. The tension between the American military government and Koreans surrounding the issue of education reform also shows an important and

48) Gilsang Lee and Manseok Oh, eds., *Hanguk gyoyuksaryo jipseong: migunjeonggi pyeon I* [Published sources of Korean Educational History: U.S. Military Government Era I] (Seoul: Hanguk jeongsin munhwa yeonguwon, 1997)

49) Taesu Jeong, ed. 1019

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persistent feature of South Korean society: division of political forces between pro-American conservatives and anti-American liberals.[50]

It is important to note that the suspicion of American democracy did not prevent Koreans from pursuing democracy. Whether the American government was sincere or not in its promotion of democracy, its emphasis on democracy affected the Korean people. Expanded education increased opportunities for coming into contact with the idea of democracy. The gap between the ideal and the real made Koreans keenly aware of the value of democracy. Students who learned democratic principles in school during the 1950s, therefore, were to lead the democratization movement in April 1960.

American Education Missions and Korean Teachers

When the Republic of Korea was established and the U.S. Armed Forces withdrew from Korea in 1948, U.S. influence on education continued through pro-American educators. Leaders of the New Education Movement were appointed to major positions in the new Korean government and became presidents of universities and private educational organizations. American educational experts continued to visit South Korea to advise the country on its educational policies.[51] More significant and full-scale influence of the United States on Korean education came after the Korean War broke out in 1950. With the Korean War gaining momentum, the U.S. policy toward Korea became more active. The United States not

50) For example, student activists who fought for democracy during the 1970s and 1980s in South Korea embraced socialist and/or communist ideas and strongly criticized U.S. imperialism and the global capitalist system led by the United States.

51) Teacher Training Center was established, after the U.S. troops withdrew, by some American scholars who visited Korea in order to transfer democratic methods of teaching to Koreans teachers. (Insoo Sohn, 315-358)

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only participated in the war, but also began sending more material and educational support. The paper used for textbooks during the Korean War was imported from the United States. In addition to financial support to rebuild the war-torn education system, a series of educational mission teams composed of American professional educators visited South Korea in order to help Koreans rebuild and strengthen their education system that had been devastated by the war.

The first mission started in 1952 when the war was still going on. The Unitarian Service Committee (U.S.C.), an incorporated agency operating on a non-sectarian basis, embarked on this mission in response to the State Department's request.[52] The request for the project, however, came originally from Dr. Nam-Jun (George) Paik, the director of the Ministry of Education in Korea via the U.S. embassy in Pusan.[53] The mission's primary goal was not simply to advise Korea on its education system, but to go into the field and work closely with Korean teachers, school principals and superintendents.[54] Working together with these Korean educators in several cities, American education experts trained around 600 Korean educators in workshop methods. The second and the third missionary groups operated between 1953 and 1955 and focused on training would-be teachers.

After the three terms of U.S.C. Education Missions ended, Peabody Educational Mission Teams visited South Korea between 1956 and 1962 to support Korean education. They focused on such programs as early childhood education, construction of school buildings, training librarians, and the establishment of educational colleges in addition to teacher training.

52) Andover-Harvard Theological Library houses the records of the activities of the Unitarian Service Committee. Call numbers bMS16011, bMS16040, bMS16103, bMS16118, bMS16135 contain the records related to their missions to South Korea.

53) RG bMS 16011, Box 22

54) RG bMS 16103, Box 15

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During the six years of the mission, thirty-nine members of the team carried out the various programs mentioned above, spending about $8.7 million in total. Hundreds of Korean education administrators and thousands of public-school teachers participated in these programs.[55]

One of the most remarkable characteristics of these educational missions to Korea was that the American educational staff was careful, this time, not simply to transplant the American system into South Korea. Helen Fogg, director of Child and Youth Projects, who also organized the educational mission team to Korea, emphasized that "our group can forget everything they know about the American 'system,' listen carefully to the Koreans and then bring their insights and experience to bear on the problem of helping the Koreans themselves to discover the ways of procedures and so forth which make sense in Korea."[56]

This respectful attitude toward Korean culture is often found in the reports on educational projects in South Korea. One of the reports on the Korean mission says that the American staff brought no preconceived ideas, blueprints or organizational charts with them to Korea. It further emphasized that a system of education in one country cannot simply be transplanted into another, as education is also dependent on customs, traditions, and ways of thinking. Therefore, the way educational missions trained Korean teachers was to ask them what their problems were, and then to encourage them to find their own answers. The leaders of the mission team also regarded the role of their Korean counterpart staff as important and appreciated the Korean staff's advice.[57] The American educators' awareness of cultural diversity reflects their progressive educational philosophy that highly regarded children's individual

55) Jini Lee, "1950 nyundae migukui daehan gyoyuk wonjo-e gwanhan yeongu [Study on the American Educational missions to South Korea in the 1950s]," (master's thesis, Ehwa Womans University, 1988)
56) RG bMS 16011, Box 22
57) RG bMS 16011, Box 4

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characteristics. The American educators taught their Korean pupils the essence of their education theory by demonstrating it themselves.

Korean participants in the workshops led by the U.S. educational mission appreciated the sincere efforts of the Americans to help Koreans rebuild the education system. One of the Korean teachers said that Americans always gave their Korean pupils something to think about. Another expressed his belief that the contributions of American educators would be a milestone in the development of Korean education.[58] These favorable attitudes of the Korean participants toward the American educators and their activities were what made the U.S. educational missions of the 1960s different from the education reforms of the U.S. Military Government. The following quote clearly shows the difference:

> We had once American educators who taught and introduced to us so-called democratic education at the time of the Military Government. But many of attendants then, as I heard, were disappointed by the ways of their teaching and introducing which were too far away from the real situations we lived in…..But you have been different from the beginning. You have come to us to help set up the modern and newer education system of ours on a long-term basis.[59]

Whereas the Military Government had been an occupation force, the United States now became a savior of Koreans from the assault of the Communists. Koreans were also active in receiving American support in restoring the war-torn Korean education system.

How can we assess the impact of the U.S. educational missions? Does the American awareness of Korean culture and do the positive Korean responses to the American educators demonstrate the success of the missions? There has been some research in both nations on the influence of the U.S. educational missions on Korean education and society. Some

58) Ibid.
59) Ibid.

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positive evaluations argue that American educators who visited Korea played an important role for Korean educators in developing curriculum, teaching methods, and educational philosophies.[60] There are also criticisms that the U.S. missions prevented Koreans from developing their own education system, and therefore made the Korean education system America-oriented.[61] The positive views focus on the good will of the missions, while the negative ones blame them for the negative aspects of Korean education in later periods. One study taking the latter perspective even explores the U.S. educational mission through the lens of Dependency Theory.[62] Both these views do not, however, persuasively explain or provide a detailed picture of the American influence on Korean education and U.S.-Korean relations.

It is not easy to trace how American education missions affected Korean education. However, it seems that their influence was limited since they primarily focused on teacher training, while not seriously influencing the education system as a whole. A few weeks of a workshop was not long enough for participants to fully understand and master what the American educators hoped to teach them. In a workshop, American educators were embarrassed by the request of Korean participants to deliver lectures instead of leading discussions.[63] In addition, American methods such as workshops, demonstrations, and field work could not easily be practiced in class for a number of reasons. The particular relationship between teachers and students and the lack of facilities were notable obstacles preventing American education practices from taking root in Korean classrooms. This American style that emphasized the importance of discussion was

60) Donald K. Adams.

61) In-hi Kim, "Miguk gyoyuk-i Hanguk-e kki-chin yeonghyang [Influence of the U.S. Education on Korea]," *Saegyoyuk* (1975); Jun-hi Park, *Hanguk gyoyuk: nuga chaegimjil geosinga* [Korean Education: Who Will be Responsible?] (Seoul: Gyoyuk gwahaksa, 1984)

62) Jini Lee.

63) RG bMS 16011, Box 4

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uncommon in South Korea until very recently, in this millennium.

It is important to consider the influence of the educational missions in a long term perspective. Although the democratic teaching style was difficult to practice in class-rooms, the concept of democracy that was often emphasized had a great impact on Korean participants. Democracy was easily accepted by Koreans because equality had long been one of their central tenets. Koreans who were discriminated against by the Japanese during the colonial period eagerly embraced the concept of democracy when told that it was similar to the concept of equality.[64]

The concept of democracy espoused by Korean students also focused on the political lessons they learned in class, such as equal suffrage, party systems and separation of the three branches of government. One of the participants in the April Revolution recalls that he and other students could not overlook the political reality in which the democratic ideas and values they had learned in textbooks were collapsing all around them.[65] This helps explain why Syngman Rhee's regime collapsed. The conception of democracy spread to Korean students in a variety of ways including teachers, textbooks, magazines, and political propaganda. Ironically, the authoritarian regime of Syngman Rhee itself used democracy as a crucial ideological weapon against communists and other political rivals. In education, therefore, democracy as well as anticommunism was emphasized, although the nature of the regime was far from democratic. As time went on, however, the gap between the real nature of the regime and the democratic ideal that it claimed to advocate widened. Rhee's regime, which emphasized

64) Myung-rim Park explains that Korean constitution emphasizes the value of equality in his article "Rhee Syngman jipgwon-gi hangukui gyoyukkwa minjujuui [Korean education and democracy under the regime of Syngman Rhee]," *Rhee Syngman daetongryeong jaepyeongga,*. ed. Young ik Ryu (Seoul: Yeonsei University Press, 2006)

65) 4.19 Hyungmyung Yeonguso [The Institute of the April Revolution], *4.19 Hyeongmyeong: san jeungindeul* [April Revolution: the testifiers] (Seoul, 2001) 32

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democracy, was dismantled by the students' democratic revolution in 1960.

Americans and South Korean Democracy

A remarkable fact of the April Revolution is that democracy was quite prevalent among the students. Furthermore, it was not only college students, but also middle and high school students who participated and risked their lives in the democratic revolt against the authoritarian regime. This strong faith of Korean students in democracy is all the more surprising when we consider that Koreans had a very difficult time in the 1950s living in a war-torn society. The 1950s are usually described as a period of political corruption, economic hardship, and cultural chaos. How could the Korean students embrace the value of democracy so strongly in this turbulent period? I argue that one of the answers can be found in the American influence on Korean education. The influence, however, should be carefully assessed.

As demonstrated in this article, Americans had exerted a great effect on Korean education since the beginning of their relationship. American missionaries, the military government, and the education missions had all contributed to the expansion of educational opportunities. They also tried to spread "their" ideas such as democracy and liberalism through the Korean education that they helped establish. However, there were limitations to American influences as well. Many Koreans used American missionary schools for their own purposes. The U.S. Military Government in Korea had to struggle with Korean nationalism and the legacies of Japanese imperialism. The "democratic" teaching methods that the education missions introduced to Korean educators did not work as expected in the classroom.

American democratic ideas, however, reached Koreans in the end through various routes. Americans in Korea, including missionaries, military

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personnel, and educators, directly delivered democracy to Korea. Koreans who had a chance to study in the United States with the support of American missions also strived to teach democratic ways to Koreans. The schools whose development can be at least partly attributed to Americans were also an important channel. The ways in which Americans influenced democratization of South Korea, however, have not been simple. Many Koreans became suspicious of the "American" version of democracy when they found that American activities were not always democratic despite their declared emphasis on democracy. The concept of democracy embraced by South Korean students was far from identical to the American version. South Koreans understood "American" ideas of democracy within their own historical context and in a way that fit their existing socio-political relations. The American influence on Korean democratization was, therefore, important but limited. While Americans helped Koreans build educational infrastructure and tried to transfer democratic ideas, Koreans used them in their own ways and for their own purposes. The ways in which Koreans understood and utilized democratic ideas further changed over time not only due to the changing relations between the United States and South Korea, but also according to South Korea's own evolving political, economic, social and cultural environment.

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