

## **TEACHING DEMOCRACY: THE DISCOURSE OF DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION REFORMS UNDER THE AMERICAN MILITARY OCCUPATION OF KOREA, 1945–1948**

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After Liberation in 1945, the concept of democracy was introduced to southern Korea through discursively contested representations formulated by the American occupation authorities and Koreans on the political left and right. One of the main fields of contestation was in education as the Americans and Koreans advanced their own interpretations of democratic education that addressed the relationship between the individual and the state. The American perspective on democratic education was grounded in the progressive ideals sweeping the United States. However, progressivism contained an inherent contradiction as it attempted the depoliticization of education while protecting colonial-era collaborators and enforcing anti-communism. The left-wing liberal Korean perspective challenged the social and economic contradictions inherited from the colonial period by critiquing bourgeois individualism in favor of a socially-oriented democratic education. The right-wing conservative Korean position was divided between the New Education movement and democratic nationalist education, but the latter emerged as the dominant education philosophy of the Republic of Korea. Democratic nationalist education under An Ho-sang pushed an ultra-nationalist agenda that submerged individualism in favor of the state but ultimately dismayed the American occupation officials who had previously overseen education reform. The discourse of democracy in the post-Liberation period initiated an evolutionary process of democratic development that has continued through modern Korean history up to the present day.

Keywords: South Korea, American occupation, education, democracy, discourse

Upon its surrender in August 1945, the Japanese empire collapsed and began disintegrating into its constituent elements. New nation-states arose from the

ashes of empire resulting in a reconfiguration of the East Asian political order.<sup>1</sup> On the Korean peninsula, the former Japanese colony of Korea was divided at the 38th parallel by the Allies to create two separate zones of occupation in the north and south administered by Soviet and American military forces, respectively. In the southern zone, the Americans announced that democracy would be the guiding political philosophy of the occupation period.

Despite the historical origins of democracy in post-Liberation Korea, contemporary studies of Korean democracy have overwhelmingly focused on the democracy movement of mid-1980s South Korea. In conjunction with studies of civil society, the history of Korean democracy has explored important areas such as social movements in democratization, protest cycles, and the constructed subjectivity of the *minjung*.<sup>2</sup> However, many of these studies operate from the assumption that democracy was quiescent, or non-existent, prior to the 1980s, primarily due to the stultifying effects of the 1948 National Security Law and policies that stifled domestic political dissent.<sup>3</sup>

However, democratic concepts and ideals were brought into Korea as a governing ideology in the wake of the Japanese surrender in 1945 and began a long evolutionary process that has spanned the last seventy-odd years. In order to understand the ebbs and flows of how democracy developed in Korea, it is necessary to see how the Koreans grappled with the concept of democracy starting from the post-Liberation period. In the political and social vacuum caused by the Japanese collapse, Koreans began to discursively construct an understanding of democracy that was informed by the American occupation, but also by the social and economic conditions in the peninsula following years of colonial rule.

Contrary to the contemporary histories of the occupation period, the establishment and evolution of democracy in Korea was not solely a process driven by the Americans and the occupation, but rather a process that involved both collaboration and conflict with and between the Koreans.<sup>4</sup> While the

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<sup>1</sup> Lori Watt, *When Empire Comes Home: Repatriation and Reintegration in Postwar Japan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), 19–20.

<sup>2</sup> Please refer to Jang-jip Choi, *Democracy After Democratization: The Korean Experience* (Stanford: Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center, Stanford University, 2012), 23–31; Gi-Wook Shin and Paul Y. Chang, *South Korean Social Movements: From Democracy to Civil Society* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007); and Charles Armstrong, *Korean Society: Civil Society, Democracy, and the State* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Paul Y. Chang, *Protest Dialectics: State Repression and South Korea's Democracy Movement* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 1–3.

<sup>4</sup> Earl Lockard, "History of Bureau of Education: From 11 September 1945 to 28 February

American occupiers were a critical factor, the Korean understanding of democracy was influenced by many other factors, including American progressivism, German fascism, and socialist ideology, that were championed by different Korean groups. These competing notions of democracy battled in a process of discursive contestation where each group sought to legitimize themselves and their ideas through rhetoric, protests, and power relationships.<sup>5</sup>

In this regard, Korean democracy in the post-Liberation era serves as an important case study in the larger debate over the survivability of imposed democratic regimes.<sup>6</sup> Despite meeting the fundamental definition of an “imposed democracy,” Korea has often been omitted from recent studies for a variety of reasons despite its geopolitical and historical importance.<sup>7</sup> However, the Korean case offers a valuable contribution to the field for both empirical and methodological reasons.

In the political science approach to studies of imposed democracies, a common tendency has been to distill many historical examples of imposed democracies down to find key correlations or principles that determine the eventual success or failure of the imposition.<sup>8</sup> While the reductive approach of indexing historical characteristics does differentiate between areas of perceived significance, the quantitative approach also homogenizes the different examples to create comparability within the scale.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, a detailed qualitative approach

1946,” Administrative and Structural Notes, Box 36, RG 332, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland (hereafter NARA), 2–4.

<sup>5</sup> Namhee Lee, “From *minjung* to *simin*: The discursive shift in Korean social movements,” in Shin and Chang, *South Korean Social Movements*, 50–51.

<sup>6</sup> Please see Andrew J. Enterline and J. Michael Greig, “Against All Odds? Historical Trends in Imposed Democracy and the Future of Iraq and Afghanistan,” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 4 (2008): 321–347; James Dobbins et al., *America’s Role in Nation-Building: From Germany to Iraq* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2003). This field has grown in scale and relevance since the American invasions of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003).

<sup>7</sup> Enterline and Greig, “Against All Odds,” 323; Dobbins et al., *America’s Role*, 2. Enterline and Greig state that “imposed democratic regimes are democratic governments installed by a foreign power in which the foreign power plays an important role in the establishment, promotion, and maintenance of the institutions of government.” Dobbins, et al. defines success (and failure) in imposed democracies as “the ability to promote an enduring transfer of democratic institutions.” Korea did not meet the criteria of the Enterline and Greig study because the occupation did not last at least five years.

<sup>8</sup> Dobbins et al., *America’s Role*, 3; Enterline and Greig, “Against All Odds,” 324; Sarah McLaughlin et al., “Timing the Changes in Political Structures: A New Polity Database,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 42 (1998): 233. For example, Enterline and Greig use the composite regime score (DEMAUT) from the *Polity III* database in McLaughlin to create their sub-sample of imposed democratic regimes.

<sup>9</sup> Enterline and Greig, “Against All Odds,” 337–338; Dobbins et al., *America’s Role*, 160–161. The

partially restores some of the unique social and cultural contours of a specific case like Korea, while simultaneously reincorporating the indigenous population as active participants in the democratic process. In the case of the American occupation of Korea, scholars have often concentrated on the policies of the American military government, usually at the expense of the Korean people themselves.<sup>10</sup> This study attempts to partially redress this imbalance by shifting its analytical focus to encompass both the Americans and the Koreans.

The study of Korean democracy in the post-Liberation period also addresses a historiographical issue that has diminished the occupation period as an independent field of scholarly inquiry. Bracketed by World War II and the Korean War, the American occupation of Korea has often been overshadowed by two master narratives. The first is the victory narrative of World War II, which emphasizes the triumph of the Americans, or the Allies, over the Axis powers and the simultaneous victory of democracy over German fascism and Japanese imperialism. In this narrative, Korea is successfully liberated by the Americans as the Japanese colonizers are sent back to Japan in humiliation and defeat.<sup>11</sup> The second is the origins narrative of the Korean War, where American occupation policies and Cold War tensions turned the occupation into the precursor for the outbreak of war in 1950.<sup>12</sup> In both narratives however, the primary subjects are the foreign occupation forces whereas the occupied Koreans become the objects of American policies and reforms.

In order to understand the evolution of Korean democracy, this study utilizes the concept of the discourse of democracy employed by John Gunnell to examine how democracy was discursively contested in post-Liberation southern

most common determinants of success include economic prosperity, overall level of development, and the commitment of the occupier to democratic transformation.

<sup>10</sup> Dobbins et al., *America's Role*, 4–6. Several current studies on imposed democracies generally place greater weight on occupation policies than the reaction of the indigenous population, which primarily needs to be pacified, repatriated, or reeducated, depending on the situation.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew J. Huebner, “Kilroy is Back: Images of American Soldiers in Korea, 1950–1953,” *American Studies* 45, no. 1 (2004): 103–129; United States Army 40th Infantry Division, “History of Evacuation and Repatriation Through the Port of Pusan, Korea: 28 Sept 45–15 Nov 45” (hereafter History of Evacuation and Repatriation), in Kyōngnamdae kūktong munje yōn’guso, ed., *Chibang Migunjōng charyojip* [Records of the American military government in the provinces] (hereafter CMC) (Seoul: Kyōngnamdae kūktong munje yōn’guso, 1989).

<sup>12</sup> Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War, vol. 1: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945–1947* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); Pak Myōng-rim, *Han’guk chōnjaeng ūi palbal kwa kinvōn II: Kinvōn kwa wōnin* [The Korean War: The outbreak and its origins, vol. 2, The origins and causes of the conflict] (Seoul: Nanam ch’ulp’an, 1996); Hyung-Kook Kim, *The Division of Korea and the Alliance Making Process: Internationalization of Internal Conflict and Internalization of International Struggle, 1945–1948* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1995).

Korea.<sup>13</sup> Specifically, this study uses education as its field of examination because education was an area that valorized the idea of democracy while simultaneously encompassing diverse political viewpoints. Consequently, this study identifies three distinct perspectives held by the American occupation authorities, left-wing socialist Koreans, and right-wing conservative Koreans. Even within these three broad categories, internal differences over issues like progressivism, individualism, and the role of the state highlight the unstable nature of the political and ideological context of post-Liberation southern Korea. Specifically, issues like the inherent contradiction between the progressive ideal of depoliticization, the American protection of colonial-era Korean collaborators, and the blanket condemnation of student protests as being communist-inspired illustrate the dynamics within the discursive contestation over democracy.

At the end of the occupation period, the eventual supremacy of an ultra-right-wing concept of democratic education, namely democratic nationalism, reflected the ascendance of a distinct form of Korean democracy led by the Syngman Rhee government that ultimately dismayed the American authorities.<sup>14</sup> Although current historiography has often glossed over the evolution of democratic discourse both during and after the occupation period, Gunnell shows the importance of “recovering the identity and contours of actual traditions” to resituate the original discourse that preceded the canonical fictions of the present.<sup>15</sup> To that end, this study begins by examining the conditions surrounding the historical development of democratic thought in post-Liberation Korea.

## DISCOURSE OF DEMOCRACY IN KOREAN EDUCATION

Education was a primary battlefield in the discourse of democracy because it was one of the key areas identified by both the Americans and the Koreans for establishing a democratic nation. According to education official Earl Lockard, “from the standpoint of the primary purpose of the interim American Military Government, which is to prepare Korea for ultimate complete independence and democracy, the work of the Department of Education is the most important the

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<sup>13</sup> John G. Gunnell, *Imagining the American Polity: Political Science and the Discourse of Democracy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004).

<sup>14</sup> Chōng Chin-a, “Yi Sūng-man chōnggwōn’gi kyōngje kaebal 3-kaenyōn kyehoek ūi naeyong kwa sōnggyōk” [The contents and nature of the three-year economic development plan of the Syngman Rhee government], *Han’gukhak yōn’gu* 31 (2009): 368–369.

<sup>15</sup> Gunnell, *Imagining*, 2.

government could be doing.”<sup>16</sup> The first priority was to eliminate all vestiges of the colonial education system, particularly the emphasis on Japanese language education and moral education [J. *shūshin*]. While the former is largely self-explanatory, the latter was part of the Japanese program of assimilation and imperialization [J. *kōminka*] whereby “the essential principle of education in Chosen shall be the making of loyal and good subjects [of the emperor].”<sup>17</sup> After the elimination of all vestiges of colonial education, nearly all Americans and Koreans agreed that the new educational program should focus on establishing “democratic education” [*minjujuūjōk kyoyuk*].<sup>18</sup> At this point, the viewpoints of the Americans and the Koreans diverged in several different directions as various interest groups began formulating and advancing their own interpretations of democracy and democratic education.

In his study of the historical discourse of democracy, John Gunnell argues that various paradigmatic transformations of the meaning of democracy valorized and propagated “democracy” as a grand tradition of political theory. However, Gunnell argues that the final conception of American democracy was itself a canonical “fiction” that was discursively and retrospectively contested between political scientists, historians, and commentators. As Gunnell states, the objective of commentators in political science at the time was to “provide an image of the polity and to justify that image,” which was not a process of simply understanding democracy, but creating a perception of democracy that would later come to define democracy.<sup>19</sup> Over time, a constantly shifting set of groups continuously contributed to an evolutionary process of defining democracy across different periods of American history, including how to address liberalism, totalitarianism, and conservatism before and after World War II.<sup>20</sup> Thus, democracy can be seen not as a solid ideology, but rather a continuous adaptation by many political scientists and commentators to discursively fit democracy to the changing realities of a particular political context.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Earl Lockard, “The Department of Education Summary Talk,” Administrative and Structural Notes, Box 36, RG 332, NARA, 1.

<sup>17</sup> Imperial Ordinance no. 229 (August 23, 1911) as quoted in Leighanne Yuh, “Contradictions in Korean Colonial Education,” *International Journal of Korean History* 15, no. 1 (2010): 128.

<sup>18</sup> Michael J. Seth, *Education Fever: Society, Politics, and the Pursuit of Schooling in South Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2002), 35–36.

<sup>19</sup> Gunnell, *Imagining*, 55. Gunnell builds upon Edward Morgan’s claims from an earlier period in Western history where the category of the “people” was created in the process of replacing the divine right of kings to rule with the concept of popular sovereignty. Edward Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (New York: Norton & Co., 1988), 36–37.

<sup>20</sup> Gunnell, *Imagining*, 131.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

In the case of Korea, the collapse of the Japanese empire in 1945 created a political and ideological vacuum within post-Liberation southern Korea where democracy was as widely anticipated as it was little understood by the Koreans awaiting the arrival of the American occupation forces. In the nearly month-long gap between the Japanese surrender on August 15 and the American arrival on September 8, Koreans sought some comprehension of democracy and how it might apply to their lives on the Korean peninsula. According to the recollection of two teachers, Mun Yong-han and Kwön Hyök-ch'ae, they went to the library of their teacher's college soon after they heard about the Japanese surrender and looked for books about democracy. "The books were generally written about five years earlier when there was greater freedom in Japan. Because those books were written back then, they also included an introduction of the United States and as I read it, I discovered what democracy was..."<sup>22</sup>

When the Americans finally arrived, they sought out Koreans who had both the educational and anti-communist credentials that would enable them to acceptably advise the American occupation forces. Two of the first Koreans introduced to the Americans were Yu Ök-kyöm and O Ch'ön-sök. Yu Ök-kyöm was the son of Yu Kil-chun, had a law degree from Tokyo University, and was the most influential Korean advisor for education until his death in 1947. After Yu's demise, O Ch'ön-sök became the key Korean figure in forming education policy during the remainder of the occupation. Educated at Teacher's College at Columbia University, O Ch'ön-sök was steeped in American progressive educational philosophy and championed its principles in Korean education reform.<sup>23</sup> Under the advice of O and Yu, the Americans invited Kim Söng-su, Kim Hwallan (Helen Kim), and Paek Nak-chun (George Paik) to join the Korean Committee on Education (Han'guk kyoyuk wiwönhoe, KCE). Established soon after the American arrival, the composition of the KCE fluctuated between seven and ten people but was primarily composed of highly-educated members of the colonial elite.<sup>24</sup> Its main purpose was to advise the director of education in the American

<sup>22</sup> "Söul taehakkyo Han'guk kyoyuk sago chuch'oe Mun Yong-han Kwön Hyök-ch'ae kang'yön nokch'wimun" [Transcript of the lectures by Mun Yong-han and Kwön Hyök-ch'ae held by the Korean educational history archive at Seoul National University] (January 24, 1995), as quoted in Kang Il-guk, "Haebang chikhu kyoyuk kaehyöngnon üi t'ükching kwa chön'gae kwajöng" [Characteristics and development of educational reform ideology in the immediate post-Liberation period], *Kyoyuk sabak yön'gu* 14 (2004): 116; Seth, *Education Fever*, 37.

<sup>23</sup> Cho Pyöng-hwa, "Ch'önwön O Ch'ön-sök üi kyoyuk sasang kwa chöngch'aek yön'gu" [A study of the educational philosophy and policy of Ch'önwön O Ch'ön-sök] (MA thesis, Myöngji University, 2008), 18–19.

<sup>24</sup> Yi Yöng-hak, "Haebanghu chöngbu üi kodüng kyoyuk chöngch'aek kwa Han'guk oegugö taehak üi söllip" [The higher education policy of the post-Liberation government and the

military government on the best way of reorganizing the Korean educational system. The KCE was ultimately dissolved in May 1946, partially due to the formation of the National Committee on Educational Planning (Chosŏn kyoyuk simŭihoe, NCEP).<sup>25</sup>

The NCEP was first established in November 1945 as an external advisory body. It was considerably larger than the KCE because it included seventy Koreans and ten Americans. It replaced the education planning bureau within the occupation government as it was charged with determining the future form and content of Korean education. For that purpose, the NCEP was divided into multiple sub-groups, one of which was the sub-committee on purposes and objectives. This sub-committee formulated a statement on the ultimate objective of Korean education, which stated “it will be the fundamental idea of Korean education to cultivate the ‘man of benevolence’ [*bongik in’gan*], as the aim of the establishment of the State, a citizen of a democratic nation whose character and spirit are perfect and patriotic.”<sup>26</sup> While the statement was generally agreeable in its incorporation of the Neo-Confucian ideal of benevolence, its meaning was vague and its applicability was unclear. Consequently, the American education authorities had to define and explain their conception of democratic education to the Koreans to gain their acceptance and understanding.

## THE AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE ON DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION

The American perspective on democratic education in Korea was summarized in a series of talks offered by Earl N. Lockard, director of the Bureau of Education from late 1945 to 1946. In his first talk, Lockard defined democracy simplistically,

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establishment of Hankuk University of Foreign Studies], *Yŏksa munhwa yŏn’gu* 20 (2004): 251–252.

<sup>25</sup> Hŏ Tae-yŏng, “Migun chŏnggi kyoyuk chŏngch’aek kwa O Ch’ŏn-sŏk ŭi yŏkhwŏl e kwanhan yŏn’gu” [A study of education policy and the role of O Ch’ŏn-sŏk during the American occupation period] (PhD diss., Kangwŏn University, 2005), 48–49; Seth, *Education Fever*, 37; Won Hyung Choe, “Curricular Reform in Korea during the American Military Government, 1945–1948,” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1986), 131. Kim Sŏng-su was one of the richest men in Korea and the founder of Posŏng College (later Korea University) and the *Tonga ilbo* newspaper. Paek Nak-chun (George Paik) was an American-educated professor at Yŏnhŭi College and later president of Yonsei University and the eighth Minister of Education of South Korea. Kim Hwallan (Helen Kim) was a graduate of Ewha School, helped organize the Korean YWCA in 1922, and was the first woman to receive a doctoral degree at Columbia University in 1931. She later established the English-language newspaper *The Korea Times* as a member of the Syngman Rhee government and became president of Ewha Womans University.

<sup>26</sup> Seth, *Education Fever*, 39; “Purpose and Objective of Korean Education, Feb. 13, 1946,” Box 36, RG 332, NARA.



emphasizing the necessity of basic literacy for Koreans to communicate their ideas to one another.

A people to develop and maintain a democratic form of government, must be educated. They must be able to read and write so they can communicate their thoughts to one another in order that there may be an exchange of ideas. They must be able to read newspapers so they can know what is going on in the world...The people must be able to read so that they can examine the qualifications of the candidates for public office.<sup>27</sup>

In his second and third summary talks, Lockard expanded his definition of democratic education to encompass decision-making and rationality. “Education, as the means for the cultivation of the reason, that faculty in man which distinguishes him from the animals, is important in that it enables man to fulfill himself as an individual.”<sup>28</sup> Throughout the ensuing discourse over democracy and education, the concept of individuality, or individualism, became a specific flash-point because it was repeatedly related to the role of the individual vis-à-vis a democratic society.

The emphasis on literacy, decision-making, and rationality in the first three summary talks highlights three points about the American reform program and its emphasis on teaching democracy. First, the educational level of the average Korean in 1945 was at a relatively low level, according to the standards set by the American occupation government. Although the Japanese colonial government had increased the number of schools in colonial Korea as well as the general accessibility of education for Korean students, the overwhelming focus on emperor-centric morals education and the use of the Japanese language meant many Koreans required reeducation in the Korean language.<sup>29</sup> The Americans estimated that approximately 80% of the Korean population could not read or write in Korean.<sup>30</sup>

Second, the American occupation government was addressing multiple audiences in their reforms and sought to navigate between various competing pressures, including official orders coming from Washington DC, the reality of life in southern Korea, and the attitudes and actions of the most senior officials

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<sup>27</sup> Lockard, “Summary Talk,” 1.

<sup>28</sup> Earl Lockard, “The Department of Education: Elementary and Secondary Schools,” and “The Department of Education: Bureau of Higher Schools,” Administrative and Structural Notes, Box 36, RG 332, NARA.

<sup>29</sup> Woo Dae Hyung and Howard Kahm, “Road to School: Primary School Participation in Korea, 1911–1960,” *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* (forthcoming 2017).

<sup>30</sup> Yuh, “Contradictions,” 128–130; Lockard, “History of Bureau of Education,” 32.

of the occupation. On the one hand, the occupation authorities had been instructed by the State Department to avoid involving themselves with any Korean political group or from interfering in the domestic political affairs of Korea.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, Lt. General John R. Hodge, the commander of American occupation forces in Korea, had disregarded portions of these instructions in reaching out to conservative Koreans who had enjoyed elite status in the former colonial society.<sup>32</sup>

These Koreans were incorporated into the occupation government, including educational planning, despite the fact that many of these Koreans were broadly despised by the majority of the Korean population for their perceived colonial collaboration with the Japanese.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, the Americans had to define democracy in a way that would allow them to continue to rely on the former collaborators while ignoring the general Korean calls to punish the traitors. In other words, the Americans could not be seen as promoting democracy while simultaneously ignoring the general will of the people, therefore they had to redefine democracy to suit their anti-communist and pro-American objectives. As seen in the summary talks, American plans for education reform were often couched in broad terms of harmless educational statements palatable to their multiple constituencies.

Lastly, the Americans relied on general statements of democracy because they were also unsure of how to define democracy in ways that would be both applicable to the reality of Korea, yet also meet the political objectives of the occupation. Even scholars in recent times have struggled to define democracy in ways that are acceptable across the various academic fields. For example, contemporary political scientists use a sliding scale across five variables to distinguish democracy from autocracy.<sup>34</sup> Other scholars have created typologies of democracy based on political culture that separate democratic regimes into two or three categories, such as Continental European, Anglo-American, or Scandinavian and Low Countries systems.<sup>35</sup> In his overview of the most common definitions of democracy, Charles Tilly groups definitions into the four categories of constitutional (legal arrangements), procedural (governmental procedures but specifically elections), substantive (conditions of life), and process-oriented

<sup>31</sup> Cumings, *Origins*, 129.

<sup>32</sup> James Matray, "Hodge Podge: American Occupation Policy in Korea, 1945–1948," *Korean Studies* 19 (1995): 21.

<sup>33</sup> "The Political Adviser in Korea (Benninghoff) to the Secretary of State," 26 September 1945, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS), 1945, Vol. 6, 1050.

<sup>34</sup> McLaughlin et al., "Timing the Changes," 234.

<sup>35</sup> Gabriel Almond, "Comparative Political Systems," *Journal of Politics* 18 (1956): 392–393; Arend Lijphart, "Typologies of Democratic Systems," *Comparative Political Studies* 1 (1968): 8.

(continuous processes) definitions.<sup>36</sup>

When applying Tilly's categorization to recent studies of imposed democratic regimes, it is clear that the most common definitions of democracy have been constitutional and procedural. In other words, the litmus test of democracy has usually been whether or not elections were held and new legal arrangements were made, typically under the supervision of a foreign power.<sup>37</sup> In the specific case of Korea, elections held under the authority of the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK) were practically the only standard against which South Korea was judged a democracy.<sup>38</sup> Likewise, many recent studies have relied on this Manichean characterization to classify particular countries as democracies, particularly in the case of imposed regimes. While static yes-no characterizations provide quantifiable characterizations for broad global comparability, this methodology also obscures the important point that "democratization is a dynamic process that always remains incomplete and perpetually runs the risk of reversal—of de-democratization."<sup>39</sup> In the American occupation of Korea, one important factor that advanced democratization in theory—while retarding it in implementation—was American progressivism.

### DOMINANCE OF AMERICAN PROGRESSIVISM

The broad generalities and general avoidance of controversial political topics espoused by the American occupiers in Korea also fit within the principles of American progressive education that was reaching its peak in the United States. In addition to the depoliticization of education, American progressivism called for the principles of mass education, an intense focus on teacher training, and general claims of democratizing education.<sup>40</sup> The wholesale transfer of American progressive educational principles into Korea is hardly surprising for several reasons. First, Korea was essentially an educational vacuum where the previous colonial system of education had been completely discredited and a new system was being openly called for by Koreans and Americans alike. Second, the United States had just emerged from a brutal global conflict where the perceived all-American ideals

<sup>36</sup> Charles Tilly, *Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 7–9.

<sup>37</sup> Dobbins et al., xvi.

<sup>38</sup> Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War, Vol. II: The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947–1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 70–78.

<sup>39</sup> Tilly, *Democracy*, xi.

<sup>40</sup> Lawrence A. Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1976–1957* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), 200–201; Diane Ravitch, *The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945–1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 44.

of democracy had triumphed over German fascism and Japanese imperialism. In this context, the victory narrative of World War II justified imposing the American template of education upon the formerly occupied Korean people. In fact, the 1947 Arndt education mission to southern Korea specifically argued that the American model was the only choice for the American reformers. According to their report, “the mission believes the basic concepts of American educational theory and practice are essential to the development of a sound democracy in Korea.”<sup>41</sup>

The choice of implementing the American system was also presented in civilizational terms. The colonial-era practices of the Japanese were tainted by Japanese imperialism and authoritarianism, but they were also premodern in scope and implementation. “The people and their teachers were taught and drilled in Japanese methods of authoritarian education... the majority of the Korean teachers today have... no conception of modern education as we know it.”<sup>42</sup> In describing higher education under the Japanese, an American official stated, “such a system may have served the Japanese overlords but in a country desirous of taking its place among the Nations of the world, it was outmoded and decadent. Nor could it contribute much to a country embarking on the road towards democratic self-government.”<sup>43</sup> In general terms, the Japanese-sponsored educational system in Korea was obsolete and undemocratic. The corollary of that conclusion was that the Koreans who had been produced by that system suffered the same flaws and biases.

The American perspective was clearly stated in occupation-era evaluations of the Korean higher education system. “The presidents, deans, and professors do not have the ability and training necessary properly to administer schools of higher learning. The buildings are dirty, professors are not on time, students often come and go as they please, school grounds are unpoliced, and the general appearance suggest [*sic*] neglect and apathy.”<sup>44</sup> This low opinion of the Korean educational system was repeatedly expressed by American officials both during and after the occupation.<sup>45</sup> The ideological dismissal of both the Japanese system

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<sup>41</sup> “Report of Educational and Informational Survey Mission to Korea, 20 June 1947” [Arndt Survey Mission to Korea], Memos, Box 36, RG 332, NARA, 1.

<sup>42</sup> “Education in Korea: The Situation and Some of the Problems, 28 August 1947,” Memos and Reports, Box 36, RG 332, NARA, 1.

<sup>43</sup> Edwin L. Miller, “Special Report on Student Strike, 10 February 1947,” Memos and Reports, Box 36, RG 332, NARA, 4.

<sup>44</sup> Lockard, “Summary Talk,” 24.

<sup>45</sup> Richard Werth, “Educational Developments under the South Korean Interim Government,” *School and Society* 69–1793 (1949): 309; Monika Kehoe, “Higher Education in Korea,” *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 8–2 (1949): 185.

and its Korean products thus paved the way for the introduction of an American educational system that was, by comparison, modern, democratic, and worthy of emulation.

Despite the perceived superiority of the American education system, adherents of progressive education in the United States realized that the fundamental ideology of progressivism encompassed an inherent tension between two opposing forces. On the one hand, education was intended to foster the freedom of the individual à la Jean-Jacques Rousseau. On the other hand, education also aimed at shaping the individual for the benefit of society.<sup>46</sup> In occupied Korea, this tension of educational progressivism manifested in two contradictory impulses, the desire to depoliticize education versus the burgeoning anti-communism of the American military government.

Officially, the occupation government stated that politics had no place in education. “From the very inauguration of USAMGIK [United States Army Military Government in Korea] it has been a fixed policy that the preservation of impartial education depends on the complete separation of politics from education.”<sup>47</sup> The avowed goal of depoliticization by the American reformers fit squarely with the social utility focus of progressive education. The reality however, was that politics had been an integral part of American education reforms since the first months of the occupation.

Soon after the Americans reopened the Korean school system in late September 1945, Korean students began protesting against American military government actions and policies.<sup>48</sup> “Since the beginning of the occupation a wave of student strikes has underlined the national unrest prevailing among the Korean people.”<sup>49</sup> In response to their perception of a rising tide of communist agitation, the American military government pursued an educational depoliticization policy that specifically pursued anti-communist goals. Consequently, the progressive American goal of depoliticization served to paper over the real issues that remained from the colonial period, including how to address former collaborators and the existing social and economic inequities carried over from the colonial system.

Instead, the educational directives were nearly always couched in terms of maintaining order and discipline. In one statement, the education department justified the enactment of disciplinary measures against perceived student

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<sup>46</sup> Ravitch, *Troubled Crusade*, 68.

<sup>47</sup> Yu Ŏk-kykŏm and Horace H. Underwood, “Press Release: 15 May 1947, Department of Education, Public Information,” Box 35, RG 332, NARA, 1.

<sup>48</sup> Lockard, “History of Bureau of Education,” 5.

<sup>49</sup> “Memorandum” [c. late 1945], Memos, Box 36, RG 332, NARA, 1.

agitators. “This [depoliticization] policy is in no way intended as an infringement of the personal liberties of the individual but *in times of such political confusion and strife as the present* it seems desirable to prevent school pupils being unduly prejudiced by partisan politics” [emphasis added].<sup>50</sup> As Bruce Cumings argues however, the American occupiers conflated Korean protests against the perpetuation of colonial-era injustices with communist agitation.

Specifically, Cumings cites the maintenance of the landlord-tenant system, the refusal to implement wide-ranging land reform, and the forcible extraction of agricultural produce as causing tremendous dissatisfaction among the Korean farmers who made up the vast majority of the southern Korean population.<sup>51</sup> More significantly for education, the American retention and protection of Koreans believed to have been pro-Japanese collaborators during the colonial period incensed many Koreans. In schools and universities, students protested against the appointment and promotion of teachers, professors, and administrators who had worked closely with the Japanese and supported Japanese imperialist aims in Korea.

For example, after the establishment of Seoul National University (SNU) in mid-1946, SNU students protested the appointment of Paek Nak-chun (George Paik) as dean of the College of Law and Pak Yong-ha as dean of the College of Business because they were seen as pro-Japanese collaborators.<sup>52</sup> For the students and many other Koreans, collaboration was not an issue of being pro-communist or anti-communist, but rather it was a colonial legacy that demanded punitive measures in the name of democracy and social justice. In the case of SNU, students formed organizations like the Committee for the Unity of Student Activities [Haksaeng haengdong t’ongil ch’oksönhoe, or Hakt’ong]. In protesting the appointment of pro-Japanese collaborators and the creation of SNU itself, Hakt’ong decried the annihilation of democracy in the Korean educational system through the “bureaucratization of academia” and continuous “military government interference” in education.<sup>53</sup>

For the Americans however, student protests against the staunchly anti-communist Koreans who were aiding the Americans in administering the

<sup>50</sup> Yu and Underwood, “Press Release: 15 May 1947.”

<sup>51</sup> Cumings, *Origins*, 129–130.

<sup>52</sup> Söul taehakkyo 60-nyönsa p’yönc’h’anwiwönhoe, ed., *Söul Taehakkyo 60-nyönsa* [The sixty-year history of Seoul National University] (Seoul: Söul taehakkyo, 2006), 834; Ch’oe Hye-wöl, “Migunjönggi kuktaean pandae undong üi sönggyök” [The character of the protest movement against the establishment of Seoul National University during the American occupation], *Yöksa pip’yöng* 3 (1988): 23.

<sup>53</sup> Ch’oe, “Kuktaean pandae undong,” 21; Alfred Crofts, “The Case of Korea: Our Falling Ramparts,” *The Nation* (1960): 545.

occupation were seen as signs of communist infiltration of the student movement. According to American military records, student groups like Hakt'ong were clearly leftist organizations with political agendas. According to the American analysis, Hakt'ong was reportedly controlled by students who had been trained by the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League (Komsomol) and took their orders from communist leader Pak Hŏn-yŏng.<sup>54</sup> Despite their use of democratic discourse, Korean student protestors were “pawns” who had been unwittingly duped by the Korean communist party.

Unfortunately, many students have become mere pawns in this program, demonstrating and striking in sympathy with the agitators but scarcely realizing that all three organizations are part of the so-called “People’s Front”, the homogenous nucleus about which the Communists hope to construct a Communist dominated Government.<sup>55</sup>

In this respect, the American military stance in Korea presaged the rise of the anti-communist hysteria that would later sweep the United States in the 1950s.<sup>56</sup> By emphasizing the communist tactics of subversion and deceit, the military government portrayed the entire student movement as dupes under communist thought-control. This interpretation transformed the complex historical and political context that spanned the colonial period and post-Liberation division into a simple binary of American democracy versus Korean communism. As a result, the Americans believed they had to “awaken” the Korean students to the communist menace and turn them towards the appropriate American value structure that would save the Korean education system. In the meantime, Korean student protests were automatically discounted as being communist-inspired, rather than indigenously sourced, which allowed American education officials to readily dismiss them without impeaching their own ideals of democratic freedom and education.

In the response to the rising tide of student protests that swept across university, high school, and even middle school campuses throughout the occupation period, the American military government turned first to moral suasion and then to harsher methods of surveillance and suppression. In the former, the American officials tried to persuade Koreans students that rather than boycotting classes and protesting, they “should be directed to form a committee

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<sup>54</sup> Miller, “Special Report on Student Strike,” 7–8.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Kevin Gotham, “A Study in American Agitation: J. Edgar Hoover’s Symbolic Construction of the Communist Menace,” *Mid-American Review of Sociology* 16, no. 2 (1992): 60.

on the lines of student government in America, the function of the committee members being to gather student information regarding their needs and desires.”<sup>57</sup> As stated above, the occupation reformers had difficulty adapting American-centric progressive notions of democratic education to the reality of life in post-Liberation Korea. Life for many students was harsh because economic activity in Korea had largely collapsed in the wake of the Japanese surrender and the division of the peninsula at the 38th parallel had further crippled the remnants of the colonial economy. Most schools had been taken over by the occupation forces and any educational activities that did take place were crippled by shortages in basic materials like paper, pencils, and textbooks throughout the early period of the occupation.<sup>58</sup> Prescribing committee meetings to gather information on student needs seemed both unrealistic and inadequate in addressing the actual needs of Korean students.

The Americans also used the discourse of democracy to persuade students to abandon their political protests and follow the curriculum established for them. “The right of students to peaceably assemble is a privilege enjoyed only under a democratic form of government. As all other rights granted in a democratic state, the privilege of assembly must not be abused.”<sup>59</sup> In this case, the Americans defined abuse of the right of assembly as students skipping classes to protest, which infringed on the rights of other students to pursue their studies. In other words, the Americans attempted to take control of the discourse of democracy to define the parameters of democratic action and to place the students outside of those bounds as undemocratic forces.

This discursive redefinition of democracy was further enunciated in a press release issued by Lockard in early 1946.

There has been, since the Japanese surrender, a misunderstanding of freedom and democracy. Some students believe that democracy means that they have the right to govern the school, that is, to choose the teachers and principals and to decide what is taught and how; and they have organized for that purpose...Of course neither freedom or democracy means such things.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Edwin L. Miller, “Special Report on Student Strike (continued), 25 February 1947,” Weekly Summaries, Box 36, RG 332, NARA, 1.

<sup>58</sup> Crofts, “Case of Korea,” 545; Glenn S. Kieffer, “Report on Education in South Korea,” Administrative and Structural Notes, Box 36, RG 332, NARA, 2–8; Lockard, “History of Bureau of Education,” 5.

<sup>59</sup> Yu Ōk-kyōm, “Press Releases, 18 November 1946,” Box 35, RG 332, NARA, 1.

<sup>60</sup> Earl Lockard, “Education: Press Releases: Item 2, 20 March 1946,” Box 35, RG 332, NARA, 1.



Despite the rhetorical flourishes employed by Lockard in his summary talks, he qualified his statements by situating the individual within society and under the government. Although Lockard was careful to assert that Koreans would participate in the formulation of the education system, he continued to assert the primacy of the government in general, and the American military government specifically. He stated that, “students and teachers as citizens are privileged to protest in an orderly manner [within] the limits set by proper authority. As citizens, both are free to express their views on politics and to join political parties, but not in schools.”<sup>61</sup> In other words, the Korean people had the inherent right to protest, but those rights were circumscribed by the government. At the same time, schools were supposed to be inherently depoliticized zones, as prescribed by the ideals of American progressive education, and therefore the right to protest or the right to engage in political action in schools was clearly prohibited.

Despite the many statements issued by the military government, moral suasion had little effect on the scale and scope of student protests so the military government turned to harsher methods of surveillance and policing. On May 1, 1947, several hundred students from various Seoul schools cut classes to attend May Day events at Namsan. Seoul metropolitan police officers were later sent to the schools to track down the truants for questioning. Once they were in police custody, the students alleged that they were beaten and insulted at the police station, which led to an official military government investigation. The Americans concluded that there was insufficient proof on the charge of abuse, but even if there had been any incidents, overall “the actions of the Metropolitan Police appear to be justified and in accordance with established policies.”<sup>62</sup>

During the SNU protests that began in late 1946 and continued into early 1947, the American military government used various appeals to halt the protests but finally resorted to mass expulsions of students. Following the early winter closure of several SNU colleges in December 1947, classes resumed in early March 1947. However, students who had been dropped or expelled for protesting were required to pass a faculty screening committee in their respective colleges and pay double tuition. At the end of this process, a total of 3,614 students were allowed to enroll but 4,801 students were permanently expelled.<sup>63</sup>

The Americans recognized that the students and the military government held divergent interpretations of democracy in education. The failure of American

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<sup>61</sup> Lockard, “Education: Press Releases,” 1.

<sup>62</sup> Ernest F. Lawes, “Report of Special Investigation, 12 June 1947,” Memos and Reports, Box 36, RG 332, NARA, 2.

<sup>63</sup> Harry B. Ansted, “Progress Report: Seoul National University, 1 Jan.–30 June, 1947,” Memos and Reports, Box 36, RG 332, NARA, 2.

appeals to halt the continuous student protests was a sharp rebuke to the idealistic American plans to create a democratic education system in Korea. In a candid admission of their failure, the Americans said, “with so many Koreans seeking the true meaning of democracy in Higher Education we have done almost nothing to make democracy a reality, by aiding with the organization of faculties, faculty meetings and student representative government along democratic principles.”<sup>64</sup> The most common excuses offered by the Americans was the dearth of available resources, including money, supplies, and facilities, in the face of exploding inflation and a greatly expanded student population.<sup>65</sup> However, a key element in the division between the Americans and the Koreans was a mutual misunderstanding of democracy.

On the Korean side, the Americans had pursued policies and programs that seemed to violate the fundamental values of many of the Korean people, including the American embrace of former Japanese collaborators that were seen as traitors to the Korean people. The Korean students expressed their opposition through protests and demonstrations, expecting that the Americans would recognize Korean concerns and change their policies. When the Americans refused to respond to the student protests and engaged in further repressive policies like mass expulsions, student protestors were driven further toward radicalization.<sup>66</sup>

For the Americans, Korean student concerns about undemocratic American policies were insignificant compared to the greater threat posed by communism in Korea. As the more enlightened and politically savvy authority figures in Korea, the Americans transplanted progressive education principles, which merged paternalistic ideas of social transformation with educational depoliticization. Both aims served the ultimate purposes of the occupation in replacing the hated educational system of Japanese colonialism, while allowing the Americans to use education in buttressing Korea as a bulwark against communist expansion in Asia. However, depoliticization failed to address the actual concerns of the Koreans while democratic education became another vehicle for anti-communist policies. Ultimately, the discourse of democracy employed by the Americans simply became the ideological justification for pursuing the ultimate political objectives of the occupation system rather than meaningful change of the system itself.

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<sup>64</sup> “Excerpt on Major Problems in Higher Education from Special Report to Dr. Underwood on Organization and Personnel, July 1947,” Box 35, RG 332, NARA, 1.

<sup>65</sup> Horace H. Underwood, “Where we stand in education today, 19 August 1947,” Memo and Reports, Box 35, RG 332, NARA, 4.

<sup>66</sup> Lee, “*Minjung to simin*,” 52–53; “Memorandum,” 5.

## LEFT-WING LIBERAL KOREAN PERSPECTIVE ON DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION

In contrast to the American position, the leftist perspective on democratic education was clearly enunciated by Yi Man-gyu and Sin Chin-gyun. Yi Man-gyu was a leftist intellectual who originally formulated education policy for the Committee for the Preparation of Korean Independence [Chosŏn kŏn'guk chunbi wiwŏnhoe, CPKI] and the Democratic National Front [Minjujuŭi minjok chŏnsŏn]. Yi later went to northern Korea in April 1948 and assumed various posts in the North Korean government. Sin Chin-gyun attended Sŏnin Commercial School in the early 1930s, wrote about education issues, and was a member of the South Korean Workers' Party in the early 1950s.<sup>67</sup> Unlike the American perspective on democratic education, these two educational theorists offered a dramatically different interpretation of democratic education. Specifically, Yi and Sin believed that the occupation educational system was a continuation of the colonial system because it perpetuated the contradictions of bourgeois capitalism.

Within the Marxist world-view, the bourgeoisie embraced individualism [*kaeinjuŭi*] as the guiding principle of education upon moving from feudalism to the capitalist stage. In the Korean case however, the Korean bourgeoisie had only partially broken free from their feudal identities, which created problems in pursuing the liberal objective of individual development. Korean capitalism was still irrevocably tied to the system created by Japanese imperialism, and was thus falling back upon a nationalist ideology that would inevitably evolve into extreme nationalism or fascism.<sup>68</sup> In this formulation, the establishment of democratic education required fundamental development of both the base, in the form of the Korean land system, as well as the superstructure of social values.

In one of the first leftist statements on democratic education, Yi Man-gyu cited the fundamental problem of a lack of “democratic consciousness” among Koreans in their pursuit of status of wealth.

There are many people who are wallowing in the past (even among revolutionary patriots), who are ignorant (even among the young), who are rich (even among gentlemen) and lack democratic consciousness. They use

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<sup>67</sup> *Tonga ilbo*, “Kŭmch'un kak hakkyo hapkyŏkcha palp'yo” [Announcement of successful school candidates for the spring], March 17, 1931; *Tonga ilbo*, “Yi In ssi changnam tŭng simnyungmyŏng ūl songch'ŏng” [Arrest of sixteen people including the eldest son of Yi In], March 8, 1950.

<sup>68</sup> Yi Man-gyu, “Kŏn'guk kyoyuk e kwanhayŏ” [In regards to education for building the nation], *Inmin kwahak* 1 (1946): 39.

their reputation, their power, and their money to protect their profit and position, both individually and as a class. In other words, significant time and effort is required for democratic ideology to be universalized as the philosophy of the people. Although they talk about democracy, it is incorrect to say that they understand democracy or wish to see it realized. Democracy can only be clearly understood through education and dissemination.<sup>69</sup>

In the absence of democratic consciousness and continued ties between capitalism, nationalism, and imperialism, Yi believed the inevitable result for Korea was a continuation of the semi-feudal colonial system. In education, this translated into the establishment of a system that supported an ultra-nationalist, or fascist, state that exalted the nation over the individual and enabled totalitarianism. The educational system of an ultra-nationalist state would then rationalize or conceal the contradictions of capitalism, while simultaneously obfuscating the advantages accruing the ruling bourgeois class.<sup>70</sup>

On a quotidian level, ultra-nationalist education would use individualism to establish a liberal philosophy of education that would appeal to the general Korean population as well as the American occupation authority. Certainly, individualism would jibe with the ideals of the progressive education espoused by the Americans that focused on child-centered learning and a decentralized classroom experience.<sup>71</sup> However, the leftists argued that individualism had both theoretical and social characteristics that rendered it unsuitable for “true” democratic education. On the theoretical level, Sin Chin-gyun argued that individualism was a feature of early-stage capitalism, whereas Korea was still mired in the stage between feudalism and late-stage capitalism. On a social level, individualism established a myopic focus on the individual at the expense of the greater good of society.<sup>72</sup>

Instead, Yi Man-gyu argued that a true democratic education should emphasize the relationship between the individual and society, while providing a “social education” [*saboejök kyoyuk*] that highlighted the effects of individual action within a larger social context. The product of a true democratic education system would be a “new intelligentsia” [*sae int’elli*] who would combine social consciousness with vigorous action to overcome social traditions.

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<sup>69</sup> Yi, “Kön’guk kyoyuk,” 34.

<sup>70</sup> Kang, “Kyoyuk kaehyöngnon,” 109–110.

<sup>71</sup> Ravitch, *Troubled Crusade*, 50–51.

<sup>72</sup> Sin Chin-gyun, “Chosön ūi kyoyuk hyöksin e kwanhayö” [In regards to Korean education reform], *Kwahak chönsön* 1 (1946): 886–889; Robert Scalapino, *The Japanese Communist Movement, 1920–1966* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 42–43.

A nation of national workers means that citizens should be defined as workers, and if you are a worker, then you are a citizen. In this case, a worker who is a citizen of a highly civilized nation is an individual who has completely developed in multiple dimensions. Like the intelligentsia in other countries, [our intelligentsia] must be individuals with knowledge and cultivation in academics, the arts, and other areas. [But] in contrast to the intelligentsia who cannot labor, our citizens should be called the “new intelligentsia.” They should be called the intelligentsia who work.<sup>73</sup>

From the leftist perspective, education was valuable for its own sake but it was also important for its influence on society. Marx himself said, “philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.”<sup>74</sup> Therefore, education in a Marxist context had a vital role as long as it was knowledge oriented towards action, rather than simply towards knowledge.<sup>75</sup>

The new intelligentsia approach heavily criticized the Americans for implementing a vocational education system that masqueraded as democratic education. The American system was simply a jobs training program, rather than a humanities-based educational system that focused on improving society. In this respect, the leftist intellectuals created a discourse of democracy that discounted the individual pursuit of profit while simultaneously elevating a social focus for education. In this formulation, democracy also meant turning away from ultra-nationalism and focusing on the inherent social contradictions that remained from the colonial era. While the concerns of Yi and Sin overlapped in major areas with the student protestors, Yi and Sin also took a larger view of Korean society that encompassed the rural farming population that made up the vast majority of the Korean population.

According to Sin, “the bourgeois class lives in a material lifestyle and does not give the laborers anything beyond what they need to live. [Similarly] the bourgeois class educates laborers only within the limits that are advantageous [to the bourgeoisie].”<sup>76</sup> In this statement, Sin made an explicit critique of the American-sponsored democratic education system that served only the bourgeois class, which was composed of the anti-communist Korean allies of the American military government and the former colonial elite. According to this viewpoint, the so-called pragmatic approach of American education reform was largely

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<sup>73</sup> Yi, “Kōnguk kyoyuk,” 45.

<sup>74</sup> Karl Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach,” *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1978), 144.

<sup>75</sup> Edmund J. King, “The Concept of Ideology in Communist Education,” in *Communist Education*, ed. Edmund J. King (New York: Routledge, 2012), 11.

<sup>76</sup> Sin, “Kyoyuk hyōksin,” 91.

similar to the Japanese colonial education system that directed Koreans toward vocational education because the Koreans were developmentally backward.<sup>77</sup>

For Sin and Yi, the ideal democratic education system turned away from the American-imposed system and focused on a state-controlled educational system that suppressed individualism for its own sake. In their estimation, only the state had the power to inculcate the “correct” values within future generations of Korean children that would promote actual democratic education to benefit all of Korean society rather than only the bourgeois Korean elites. Unlike American progressivism, the leftist discourse of democracy thus discounted individualism for individualism’s sake and focused on society, specifically the role that individuals could and should contribute to the greater social good.

The leftist education program was not well-understood by the average Korean person, nor even perhaps by those affiliated with the socialist movement. As Scalapino and Lee state, few Korean communists actually comprehended the differences between communism, democratic socialism, and liberal democracy.<sup>78</sup> However, the central principles of the leftist program of democratic education were understood by the Koreans who organized the early Korean governing groups like the Committee to Prepare for Korean Independence [Chosŏn kŏn’guk chunbi wiwŏnhoe, CPKI] and the Korean People’s Republic [Chosŏn inmin konghwaguk, KPR].<sup>79</sup> The class-based perspective of the new intelligentsia approach thus clashed directly with the educational philosophy espoused by the right-wing conservatives who attacked both the CPKI and KPR as communist groups masquerading as democratic groups. The conservative Koreans were heartened after the Americans outlawed the KPR and continued to seek their input on governing the southern zone. In education, the right-wing conservative Koreans took the American progressive ideals of democratic education and pushed them further towards their conception of democratic nationalism.

### **RIGHT-WING CONSERVATIVE KOREAN PERSPECTIVE ON DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION**

The right-wing perspective on democratic education was expounded by conservative Koreans who were either members of the Korean Democratic Party (KDP), like Paek Nam-un and An Ho-sang, or opposed communism in service to

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<sup>77</sup> Kang, “Kyoyuk kaehyŏngnon,” 112.

<sup>78</sup> Robert A. Scalapino and Chong-sik Lee, *Communism in Korea, Part 1: The Movement* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1972), 240.

<sup>79</sup> Cumings, *Origins*, 79.

nationalism, like Son Chin-t'ae.<sup>80</sup> As stated above, conservatives dominated the main advisory groups to the American occupation, like the Korean Committee on Education and the National Committee on Educational Planning.<sup>81</sup> While their initial statements on the objectives of Korean education were vague, they soon developed a conservative perspective on education that combined American progressive ideals with a strong dose of Korean nationalism.

In most discussions of occupation-era Korean educational philosophy, the most cited example has been the New Education Movement [Sae kyoyuk undong]. New Education encouraged the expression of individual choice and opinion by prioritizing the rights of the individual and making allowances for personal decision-making. Adherents to New Education believed that one-sided classroom instruction with didactic lecturing by the teacher was reminiscent of colonial-era authoritarianism and totalitarianism. Instead, teachers were instructed to respect student interests and emphasize individual experiences in the classroom. In other words, New Education focused on a child-centered [*adong chungsim chuui*] and a lifestyle-centered [*saenghwal chungsim chuui*] approach to teaching.<sup>82</sup>

One of the primary proponents of the New Education Movement was the aforementioned O Ch'ön-sök. In the early days of the occupation, O joined the occupation education bureaucracy, and he fit well with the Americans because he had been trained in Dewey-inspired progressive education in the United States.<sup>83</sup> In one of his earliest works on post-Liberation education, O Ch'ön-sök wrote that, “the purpose of democratic education naturally begins with free realization of the self.”<sup>84</sup>

The rise of child-centered education in Korea reflected the development of progressive educational ideals, which became the dominant pedagogy in the United States. During the Korean colonial period, several Koreans were directly influenced by their studies at Columbia University, including O Ch'ön-sök and Kim Hwallan, when they learned about the child-centered approach from one of

<sup>80</sup> Cumings, *Origins*, 95–96; Henry Em, *The Great Enterprise: Sovereignty and Historiography in Modern Korea* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2013), 145.

<sup>81</sup> Choe, “Curricular Reform,” 131.

<sup>82</sup> Seth, *Education Fever*, 36; Kang, “Kyoyuk kaehyöngnon,” 108.

<sup>83</sup> Kim Sön-yang, “Ch'önwön O Ch' ön-sök ü kyoyuk sasang” [The education philosophy of Ch'önwön O Ch'ön-sök] *Han'guk kyoyuk sabak* 18 (1996): 279–280; Song Chae-hüi, “Migun chönggi Ch'önwön O Ch' ön-sök ü kodüng kyoyuk kusang” [Ch'önwön O Ch' ön-sök's ideas on higher education during the American occupation period] (MA thesis, Seoul National University, 2000), 26–27.

<sup>84</sup> O Ch'ön-sök, *Minjujuü kyoyuk ü könsöl* [The construction of democratic education] (Seoul: Kukje munhwa konghoe, 1946), 19.

its most influential proponents, William Heard Kilpatrick.<sup>85</sup> In one important aspect of his methodology, Kilpatrick emphasized the deconstruction of authority from above to allow students to develop their own internal discipline. In this respect, Kilpatrick followed Rousseau's ideal of a natural education, whereby students would find freedom through self-exploration.<sup>86</sup>

However, Kilpatrick and his Korean students ultimately differed over the issue of student autonomy vis-à-vis the teacher and authority in general. On the surface, Kilpatrick and the Koreans seemed to agree that individuals were required to obey the state. However, Kilpatrick subscribed to Rousseau's position that the will of the state was ultimately derived from the general will of all the people.<sup>87</sup> In other words, the people obeyed the state, but the state was itself a product of the will of the people and thus the people were supreme over the state. O Ch'ŏn-sŏk seemed to draw a similar line between the individual and society in saying, "the individual and society are like the interior and exterior of the same object; without one the other cannot exist."<sup>88</sup> However, O Ch'ŏn-sŏk then placed the nation as separate and above the individual. "The education of members of society [*saboemin*] demands their education as citizens of the nation [*kukka ūi il kongmin*]. They have a duty to fulfill to the nation... [and] regarding their duty, they must be loyal."<sup>89</sup> In other words, a democratic education privileged the rights of the individual, but only so far as it did not interfere with the work of the nation. In the final analysis, the nation dictated its will to the people and individual autonomy was ultimately subsumed to national goals.

The other rightist perspective was "democratic nationalist education" [*minjujuŭi minjok kyoyungnon*], which promoted individual self-development but also prioritized the nation before the individual. Democratic nationalists believed that the needs of the state came before the needs of the individual. The dominant strain of democratic nationalist education was led by An Ho-sang, a Korean educator who had received his PhD from Jena University in Germany in 1929. After working as a researcher at Kyōtō Imperial University in 1931, he graduated from the graduate school of Keijō Imperial University in 1933. With the aid of

<sup>85</sup> Ravitch, *Troubled Crusade*, 50–51; Kim Sang-hun, "Haebang hu sahoe saenghwalgwa ūi toip kwa yŏksa kyoyuk ūi panghyang" [The introduction of social studies and trends in history education after Liberation], *Sŏgang immun nonch'ong* 41 (2014): 159.

<sup>86</sup> William Heard Kilpatrick, *Foundations of Method: Informal Talks on Teaching* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1925), 346, 367; Phillip Benson, *Teaching and Researching: Autonomy in Language Learning* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 30–31.

<sup>87</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. H. Tozer (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1998), 32.

<sup>88</sup> O, *Minjujuŭi kyoyuk*, 26.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*



Kim Sŏng-su, An was appointed to a professorship at Posŏng Professional School from 1933 to 1935. After Liberation, An Ho-sang taught at Seoul National University from 1945 to 1948 before he was appointed the first Minister of Education under Syngman Rhee from 1948 to 1950.<sup>90</sup>

An Ho-sang articulated a Korean-style mystic nationalism that combined suspicion of foreigners, promotion of the Korean nation, fear of communist infiltration, and loyalty to Syngman Rhee. To promote his viewpoint, An established the Korean Educational Research Society [Chosŏn kyoyuk yŏn'guhoe] to develop his agenda of democratic nationalist education which he termed Hanbaeksŏng chuŭi, which can be roughly translated as “One-people-ism.” His philosophy combined his conception of Korean-style democracy with suspicion of Soviet and American democracy. In An’s view, the Soviets were too focused on social class and violence, while the Americans were too selfish and materialistic. Furthermore, American educational principles were unsuitable for Korea because the racial diversity in the United States made it too different from Korea, while American education lacked spiritual and moral content.<sup>91</sup>

With the establishment of the Republic of Korea in 1948, An Ho-sang was appointed the first Minister of Education and he was able to implement his program of democratic nationalist education across South Korea. Students were taught that they shared the same blood [*tongil byŏlt’ong*] and that they should unite together for the nation in a way that transcended class. Youth organizations like the National Student Defense Corps were organized to train young South Koreans in democratic nationalist ideals. In various aspects, these organizations resembled the Hitler Youth as An Ho-sang was characterized as being the closest thing to a Korean fascist.<sup>92</sup>

An Ho-sang presented elements of his philosophy in a speech he delivered at the opening of the second session of the Teacher Training Center in Seoul on October 5, 1948. In his speech, he specifically defined democracy in terms of nationalism.

When the house goes wrong it wants a good wife; when the nation goes wrong it wants a good teacher. I had many good teachers in foreign nations as well as in Korea, who taught me many good things. But there lies a great

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<sup>90</sup> Ŭn Hŭi-nyŏng, “Haebang chŏnhu An Ho-sang ŭi kukka chisang chuŭi wa ‘minjujŏk minjok kyoyungnon’” [Ultrnationalism and “democratic nationalist education theory” of An Ho-sang before and after Liberation] (MA thesis, Chungang University, 2014), 25–27.

<sup>91</sup> Seth, *Education Fever*, 56; Yu Chong-yŏl, “An Ho-sang ŭi minjujŏk minjokkyoyungnon i sahoe kwa kyoyuk e mich’in yŏnghyang” [The influence of An Ho-sang’s democratic nationalist education theory on society and education], *Sahoe kwa kyoyuk yŏn’gu* 21, no. 2 (2014): 6.

<sup>92</sup> Seth, *Education Fever*, 56; Lee, *Making of Minjung*, 88–90.

difference between foreigners and Koreans because foreigners cannot teach you nationalism. The Silla dynasty did not last long, because it neglected nationalism in their education. Democracy is good and our education should be built on democracy. But this democracy should be built on solid nationalism.<sup>93</sup>

While O Ch'ŏn-sŏk and the New Education movement seemed to place equal weight on individual development with loyalty to the nation, An Ho-sang and democratic nationalism elevated the nation far above the individual. Within democratic nationalism, the individual could sacrifice themselves—or have themselves sacrificed—for the good of the nation.

The theoretical basis for An's philosophy can be traced to his studies at Jena University in Germany under neo-Kantian philosopher Bruno Bauch. Two years after An Ho-sang departed Jena, Bauch declared his support for the Nazi party and discussed his view of philosophy and politics at the 1933 Deutsche Philosophische Gesellschaft conference at Magdeburg. In arguing against Nietzsche's critique of values, Bauch countered the ascription of values to individuals and instead reserved that power for the nation. In Bauch's view, the individual was tied to the nation and was required to ascertain the will of the nation to determine right from wrong. In this interpretation, the national community needed a "great individual" to provide leadership. While Bauch turned to Adolf Hitler, An Ho-sang gave this role to Syngman Rhee as the ultimate representative of the Korean nation.<sup>94</sup>

Furthermore, An believed the role of creating an effective educational system and inculcating the proper values fell to the national government rather than to local institutions or governments, as the American occupation government had advocated.<sup>95</sup> Ironically, the emphasis on the role of the state and concentration of government in the central government apparatus brought the democratic nationalist education closer to the leftist new intelligentsia philosophy than to New Education. Both new intelligentsia and democratic nationalism deemphasized individual autonomy and focused on the role of individuals in directly contributing to the collective, rather than the collective being incidentally served by individual development.

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<sup>93</sup> "Activities of the American Advisory Staff Since the Advent of the New Korean Government" (1948), Administrative and Structural Notes, Box 35, RG 332, 2.

<sup>94</sup> Ŭn, "An Ho-sang," 9, 27; Hans Sluga, "Metadiscourse: German Philosophy and National Socialism," *Social Research* 56, no. 4 (1989): 810–811.

<sup>95</sup> Seth, *Education Fever*, 36. Although the Americans believed in the decentralization of education control to local communities, the practical problems of finding adequate funding for schools at the local level prevented any actual devolution of power.

At the end of the occupation, An Ho-sang took over the education bureaucracy in a short ceremony held in the office of the Director of Education on September 13, 1948. In short order, An began to dismantle the American-built infrastructure of education and install his own personnel and policies to bolster his program of democratic nationalist education.

Almost immediately the new minister [An Ho-sang] began calling various bureau, section and sub-section heads into his office and informing them of their dismissal... His new appointments seemed to be on the basis of his own personal friends or close associates... He [An] was going to carry out his promised continuance of military government policies by eliminating all personnel who was [*sic*] in any way familiar with these policies. In the positions of highly experienced and capable personnel, he placed inexperienced persons who in most cases had no idea what the position entailed.<sup>96</sup>

The Americans were dismayed at the sudden changes that An Ho-sang implemented upon taking control of the education bureaucracy. They were most concerned with his personnel choices, including the appointment of a new head of the Finance Section who was a former Buddhist monk living in An Ho-sang's house at the time. One of the final acts of the American military government was issuing three ordinances to establish school districts, elect school boards, and prepare for local control of education. Once in power, An Ho-sang refused to enforce these ordinances. "His one comment was to the effect that such a plan for decentralization of educational support and control diminished the power and authority of his office."<sup>97</sup>

## CONCLUSION

South Korea today is recognized as a thriving democracy. Notwithstanding the recent corruption scandal that brought down former president Pak Kūn-hye (Park Geun-hye), the largely peaceful "candlelight" protests were a marked departure from the history of violent clashes between police and protestors throughout the latter half of the twentieth-century. This shift in the nature of protests, coupled with the resolution of the presidential impeachment crisis by the Korean Constitutional Court, was heralded by observers and commentators around the

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<sup>96</sup> "Activities of the American Advisory Staff," 1.

<sup>97</sup> "Activities of the American Advisory Staff," 2.

world as a maturation point for Korean democracy.

In order to reach this point however, democracy in Korea underwent a long evolutionary process that began in the immediate post-Liberation period. Even as the American occupation forces were preparing to arrive on the peninsula, Koreans from all levels of society were seeking to understand and define democracy. As various perspectives on democracy were debated, three major interpretations coalesced around the American occupiers, left-wing liberal Koreans, and right-wing conservative Koreans. As these different groups advanced their own viewpoints, the discursive contestation enabled a paradigmatic transformation of Korean democracy over issues like the role of the individual vis-à-vis the state.

One major area of contestation was in education, which was considered a critical component in the process of turning the former colonial state into a democratic nation. The definition and implementation of “democratic education” became an important site of contestation for the discourse of democracy. While the American occupation championed progressive educational ideals, the inherent contradiction of depoliticizing education while protecting former collaborators and pushing an anti-communist agenda sparked widespread student protests. At the same time, left-wing Koreans sought the resolution of class-based economic and social contradictions that had been carried over from the colonial period by pushing for a democratic education that privileged the welfare of society over the individual. Although the left-wing position became increasingly untenable in the face of anti-communist repression by both American occupation authorities and right-wing Koreans, their perspective on democratic education continued to survive and develop, as did their warnings against the rise of ultra-nationalist fascism from the right-wing.

Ultimately, the ultra-right-wing interpretation of “democratic nationalist education” under An Ho-sang emerged as the official position of the new Republic of Korea, despite being challenged by the more individual-centric New Education movement that was based in American progressivism. As education in South Korea lurched further toward extreme nationalism after 1948, former American officials were dismayed by the transformation of democratic education into a system that moved away from their own occupation-era policies. However, these changes marked another step in the evolutionary process of democratic education and Korean democracy that continued through several important intermediate stages.

While a few scholars are currently examining the evolution of democracy and democratic education at various stages in recent Korean history, much work remains to be done, particularly around critical events like the April 1960 student

revolution and the “Korean-style democracy” of the Park Chung Hee (Pak Chōng-hŭi) era. Recent pioneering work on protest cycles in the 1970s has challenged that decade’s characterization as a “dark age” of democracy, but the impact of those protests on education and social change require further examination. More recently, the shifts in social attitudes following the 1987 democratization movement away from political concerns toward more personal issues has had significant ramifications across all areas of South Korean society, including education. In conclusion, much work remains in tracing the evolutionary development of the concept of Korean democracy and how it has been shaped by various forces throughout recent history. However, the fundamental nature of the discourse of democracy ensures that it will continue to change and evolve.

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