STRIVING FOR THE IMPOSSIBLE
The Decline of the Korean Independence Movement in the United States in the Aftermath of Pearl Harbor, 1941-1945

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ABSTRACT

Striving for the Impossible: The Decline of the Korean Independence Movement in the United States in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor, 1941-1945.

Since the Korean declaration of independence from Japanese colonial rule on March 1, 1919, Korean independence activists in the United States have lobbied for the diplomatic recognition of the Korean Provisional Government. Their efforts were continuously hampered throughout the years, as the American government sought to protect its own interests and internal strife crippled the network of Korean nationalist organizations, leaving many activists embittered by repeated failure. Yet the mood changed to that of optimism in 1941, immediately after the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the American declaration of war on Japan. The once seemingly Sisyphean task of securing Korean independence from Japanese colonial rule was now in the realm of possibility for the reinvigorated Korean nationalists.

Through the evaluation of primary evidence, I examine four themes that characterized the independence activities during the years 1941 to 1945, after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. First, I review the strategies and aims of the nationalists during this period in addition to identifying the key leaders in the movement. Nationalist rallied under the goal of unification through establishing the umbrella coalition known as the United Korean Committee. However, unification revealed itself to be a pipe dream as the disputes and complications that had beset the movement in the decades before afflicted this period as well. This segues into second theme I address: that the failure of unification during this period can be attributed to regional and irreconcilable ideological differences. Next, I analyze at the American government’s response to the movement, and conclude how the government limited the scope of the movement’s success through its vague response and self-interest. Finally, I study the environment in which the Korean community in America engaged in the independence activities, noting the anti-Japanese hostility that also affected Korean and the generational gap. I also see an unintended outcome of the independence activities, where the Korean community’s presence has been felt in American society.

In the end, I hope to have contributed to a holistic overview of this topic, by presenting the four themes through examining primary evidence. By no means does my thesis cover all the factors involved in this topic; however, I hope to have provided a thematic framework for discussion in future studies.
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INTRODUCTION

The Japanese annexation of Korea and the birth of the Korean independence movement – Looking to America – Pearl Harbor

Although there has been extensive research on the Korean independence movement within Korea, there has been less focus on the satellite movements in the expatriate Korean communities. While the study of all these activities is important in the assessment of the Korean independence movement, the legacy of the activities in the United States deserves attention, as it is a topic that is integral to understanding current Korean relations with the United States and the beginnings of the Korean American community. I concentrate on the activities occurring during World War II in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor from 1941 to 1945, as the independence activities during these final four years before Korean liberation coincided with the US-Soviet decision to divide the Korean peninsula, an arbitration that the Korean independence activists neither wanted nor expected. Some historians who focus on this topic, such as Hong-Kyu Park, have made the argument that the impact of the independence activities during these years was insignificant so that they could not prevent this decision to split the Korean peninsula in two. Whether this assertion is true or not, it is fascinating to see how the atmosphere of the independence movement in the United States during this specific period was shaped by the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor. Therefore, I provide a sense of the environment that the Korean activists and Korean American community were operating in, as well as evaluate their strategies in context of this setting.

The historiography of the Korean independence movement in the United States has revealed that many historians have neglected to synthesize a complete study of the activities in America during this period with a survey of the US government’s attitude
and subsequent wartime policies regarding the plight of the Korean people. For instance, in his discussion of Korean nationalism during the Japanese annexation, Chong-sik Lee devotes six pages to a shallow exploration of the Korean nationalist activities in America, only briefly mentioning the American attitude toward the movement. This suggests that he believes these activities and the American position regarding the movement were peripheral in their significance to the greater discourse on Korean nationalism. On the other hand, Timothy Savage examines the activities through a different lens, using the failure of the independence movement as a case study of US foreign policy during World War II. In this case, Savage indicates that the noncommittal US foreign policy was the dominant factor in setting the tone for the failure of the independence movement in the United States in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor. While the historiography of this topic is not limited to just Lee and Savage’s perspectives, they do not provide isolated or particularly biased views. I have also looked at some scholars, such as Kingsley Lyu, who have been directly involved or contemporary with the events of this period. While Lyu strives to present the history of the Korean independence movement to the best of his ability, his analysis of these events has been affected by his direct involvement in the movement, providing the danger of biased historical analysis. While being mindful of these varying perspectives, I use these secondary sources to supplement my analysis of my primary evidence.

I selected my primary evidence with the intent of introducing and analyzing sources that have been overlooked, in addition to ones already addressed within the current frame of historiography. I look at various correspondences and documents from

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the Korean American Digital Archive at the University of Southern California, a transcript of a conference, and documents issued by the United States government and the CIA, contextualizing them in the current strain of historiography. All of the primary sources I use are written in English.

The rest of the introduction will provide a brief historical background of the Japanese annexation and the start of Korean independence movement, while presenting the problem that the Korean independence movement posed to the United States. I conclude by describing the atmosphere that the bombing of Pearl Harbor created. This will set the stage for the discussion of four themes I found that characterized the independence movement during this period, explaining the conditions for the movement's failure.

*The Japanese annexation of Korea and the birth of the Korean Independence Movement*

The Japanese annexation of Korea was the culmination of a gradual, albeit tumultuous series of events. The Korean peninsula had been unified since the Koryo dynasty (918-1392 AD), and was known as the “Hermit Nation” due to its isolationist policy – until, that is, the Japanese government began to assert itself in Korea in 1876. Due to their military superiority and their need for a market for their goods, the Japanese government signed a treaty of “Trade and Frontier Regulations” with the Korean monarchy in that year. With the treaty opening the door into Korea, the Japanese government eventually expanded their sphere of influence in the Korean peninsula. They

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found the opportunity to take advantage of the weak and corrupt Korean government, when poor, common people revolted against the Korean government in the spring of 1894. The Korean government asked China for assistance with the situation, but Japan intervened immediately and forced the Korean king, Gojong, to renounce Chinese suzerainty. As a result, war broke out between China and Japan in July 1894, leading to China’s defeat and the signing of the Treaty of Peace in April 1895, leaving Japan the supreme power in East Asia. After this treaty was signed, Japan forced Gojong and the Korean government into catering to Japanese policies and interests. The last queen of Korea, Queen Min, was assassinated in that same year, as Japan considered her to be the most formidable obstacle in taking over Korea. She had been active in “meddling” with the Japanese plans by being friendly with the Chinese, and her death “stirred up an outbreak of Korean national awareness.”

Although the murder of the queen and the continuous Japanese encroachment in Korean affairs greatly unsettled the Korean nation, August 22, 1910 proved to be the most devastating day in Korean history. When Gojong – now a self-proclaimed emperor – signed a formal annexation agreement on that day, it officially signaled the end of Korea’s four thousand year history as an independent nation and stripped the Korean people of their autonomous government. Some Koreans could not bear this: one of the

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5 Ibid.
7 In an effort to assert the independent status of Korea from Japan and China, Kojong declared himself Emperor in February 1897. Obviously, it was a futile effort. Cumings 123.
8 Bruce Cumings notes that the “imagined beginning” of the Korean nation is in the third millennium B.C., referring to the legend of Tan’gun and his founding of Korea. Cumings 23.
three envoys sent by Gojong to the Hague Peace Convention in 1907 committed suicide when the three was denied an audience for their demand to null the Japanese's claim on their country. Not only did the Japanese deprive the Koreans of domestic and international political power, they also instituted a “cultural politics” that sought to reform the entire ethos of the Korean culture, making them Japanese citizens, but of an “inferior brand”. 

Despite this Japanese attempt to model the Koreans into second-class Japanese citizens, the Koreans’ sense of nationalism did not diminish. Instead it was inflamed by the release of Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points and its doctrine of self-determination on January 8, 1918. The Koreans finally exploded on March 1, 1919, when crowds gathered to pay respect at Gojong’s funeral. The ex-emperor had been seen as the symbol of centuries of Korean independence even after the annexation agreement was signed, and Koreans congregated to mourn the “death of independence.” On that day, before dawn, a handbill issued in the name of the “National Congress” was circulated, alleging that the Japanese or Japanese sympathizers had poisoned Gojong when he refused to sign a paper that claimed Korea was happy under the Japanese regime. Supposedly, this paper was to be used to block any Korean entreaties or chance of hearing at the Peace Conference. The possibility of this perfidious act excited the nation. The Korean Declaration of Independence was quickly drafted, the

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9 Cumings 145.
11 Lee 101.
13 Lee 111.
14 Cynn 18.
demonstrations of the March First Movement occurred, and the Korean Provisional Government (Kopogo) was set up in Shanghai (later moved to Chungking) as a direct result of the declaration and protest for independence. With the establishment of a “formal” government, the Korean independence movement shifted its focus from evicting the Japanese from Korea with international support to the diplomatic recognition of their provisional government. The Kopogo sought to exercise a ruling body’s right to declare war on Japan, in order to actively free the Koreans from Japanese influence. While the Korean independence activists appealed to the international community for recognition of the Kopogo, they especially sought the attention of the United States government. Many of the major Korean nationalists were based in the United States, locally lobbying for American support.

Looking to America

The United States and Korea have had an official relationship since 1882, when the United States became the first western nation to enter Korea and sign a treaty with them.\(^{15}\) This Korean-American treaty stated,

There shall be perpetual peace and friendship between the President of the United States and the King of Chosen and citizens and subjects of their respective governments. If other powers deal unjustly or oppressively with either government, the other will exert their good offices, on being informed of the case, to bring about an amicable arrangement, thus showing their friendly feelings.\(^ {16}\)

According to Henry Chung, this meant that America promised to “stand sponsor for the political independence and territorial integrity of Korea.” Unfortunately for the Koreans,

\(^{15}\) Kim, *Protestants and the Formation* 10.

the entire Korean government believed in this promise.\textsuperscript{17} With the belief that the grievances of the Korean nation would be heard, Gojong sent three emissaries to the Second International Conference on Peace at The Hague in 1907. However, the American government joined the rest of the world in declaring that Korea was no longer a nation.\textsuperscript{18}

Yet, Koreans did not stop seeking recognition and aid from the United States. They still believed in the words of Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points, and the circumstances surrounding Gojong’s death had ignited flames that would not be put out until 1945, when the wartime decisions of the Big Four powers made Koreans finally realize their powerlessness in diplomatic negotiations. In San Francisco, Korean-born members of one of the most prominent Korean organizations in the United States, the Korean National Association (KNA), were encouraged to attend the Peace Conference of Versailles after reading this statement. However, they could not receive a Korean or US passport to leave the United States as the US government decreed they must receive a Japanese passport as Japanese citizens.\textsuperscript{19} This still did not discourage them; rather, while they were in America in the years 1919 to 1941, these activists created an extensive network of organizations across the United States that communicated with other expatriate Korean communities, raised money to support the provisional government, and tried to court international and domestic support for their cause. Yet, the American government steadfastly refused to release an official stance on the Japanese annexation of Korea — until, that is, the attack on Pearl Harbor provoked the US government to declare

\textsuperscript{17} Chung 31.
\textsuperscript{18} Dudden 7.
\textsuperscript{19} Lee 103.
war on Japan. US president Franklin D. Roosevelt speedily signed the Declaration of
War against Japan the day after the attack, on December 8, 1941, subsequently raising the
hopes of Korean independence activists in the United States.

Pearl Harbor

On December 13, 1941, the Korean National Association sent a terse telegram to
several Korean nationalists in Mexico and Cuba with the following message: “We are
taking steps in Washington to protect our people. Korean Provisional Government
declared war on Japan yesterday.” It is obvious in this message that the Japanese
bombing of Pearl Harbor gave the Kopogo the confidence to declare war on the Japanese,
something it did not dare to do before due to a palpable lack of support by the
international community. The incident of Pearl Harbor convinced Koreans everywhere
that the United States would recognize their government at last, as they thought the
American government had finally realized the nefarious nature of the Japanese and would
join their cause against Japan. Korean nationalists now had a real chance to finally
convince the US government to recognize the Kopogo.

With the stage set for the discussion of the Korean independence movement in the
United States in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor, I will identify key themes that shaped the
activities and policies of the Korean community in the United States. First, I will explore
how three Korean leaders in America relied on military mobilization, education, and
international diplomacy to realize their dream of Korean independence from Japan.
Second, I will survey the history of infighting within the independence network, arguing
that despite this period of high optimism in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor, the nationalists
could not overcome the stigma of disunity due to the ever-present regional divides and ideological differences. Especially during the years 1941 to 1945, the infighting reinforced the image of the disunity within the independence movement and the inability for Korean self-government, as the American government’s response to the Korean independence movement indicated. An examination of the US government’s wartime declarations and policies in the section after that also reveal that while the US professed to be sympathetic to the cause, it was able to avoid commitment to recognizing the Korean Provisional Government, referring to the discord within the Korean nationalist network. The American government was successful in preserving its own interests at the expense of the Koreans’ political welfare. Yet, an unintended outcome of the independence movement can be seen in the activities of Koreans in America and the Korean American generation as discussed in the final section. Despite the American anti-Japanese campaigns that inevitably affected the community, Koreans actively participated in the US war effort, partly as a show of loyalty to their adopted country and partly to curry the favor of the US government in order to secure recognition of the Kopogo and official Korean independence. In the process, they inadvertently made a place for themselves in American society. In the end, I connect the infighting in the nationalist network to the environment created by American wartime policies, in order to contribute a more complete picture of the independence movement in America at this time. I also provide a sense of the hostile environment that the Korean community in America was affected by and how Koreans sought to overcome it, showing that while the independence movement failed to realize its primary purpose, it shaped the future of the Korean presence in America.
STRATEGIES AND AIMS OF THE NATIONALISTS AFTER PEARL HARBOR

A brief study of nationalist organizations before 1941 -- The Tongjihoe, Korean Commission, and KNA -- Syngman Rhee, Chang Ho Ahn, Kilsoo Haan -- The formation of the United Korean Committee

To evaluate more precisely how realistic the nationalist aims were during this time of high optimism, it is important to begin by looking at their various strategies to recover independence and gain US recognition of the provisional government. I begin by looking at the some of the objectives of different organizations that were or had been active in the independence movement, and move on to discussing three figures that have influenced the direction of the movement and dictated the strategies for the nationalist organizations during the World War II period. I conclude by examining how the independence movement leaders sought to reconcile these different ideologies in the Korean Liberty Conference of 1942. These leaders and organizations found common ground in desiring the independence of Korea, the betterment of the Korean quality of life in America, and international – specifically American – assistance. Yet, it would become apparent that despite their enthusiasm and lofty ideals, they would not be able to prevent factionalism in the nationalist network.

A brief study of nationalist organizations before 1941

Nationalist activities in America had been very localized and rudimentary from 1900 to 1919. During that period, the Korean organizations focused on the improving the quality of life for the scattered local communities that were continuously springing up in the United States as Koreans continued to immigrate for political and economic reasons. Kingsley Lyu asserts that the nationalist network began as pockets of local communities sworn to brotherhood, and that Korean families were the “backbone and mainspring” in
the organization of nationalist activities in America.\textsuperscript{20} While these organizations began as a space where Koreans in America engaged in “mutual protection from foreigners,” their purpose evolved after the formal Japanese annexation of Korea and later the March First Movement. As mentioned in the introduction, the March First movement directly resulted in the creation of the Kopogo, and the groups in America contributed to the international campaign for Korean independence as financial supporters.\textsuperscript{21} As the Kopogo stayed afloat through the fundraising efforts of these organizations, these groups developed into strong political and social institutions that campaigned to better the lives of Koreans in the United States.\textsuperscript{22} This was a consistent goal maintained by the organizations in the United States from 1919 to 1945.

Regardless of whatever agenda they had, it was the common goal of all nationalists to secure Korean independence from Japanese rule, and as quickly as possible. They were certainly united by a feeling of hatred for the Japanese.\textsuperscript{23} The attack on Pearl Harbor was a moment that Korean nationalists looked upon with a grim satisfaction, as they had been asserting — and predicting — for years the nefarious intent of the Japanese against Americans. Syngman Rhee’s polemic at the Korean Liberty Conference in 1942 sums up the Korean perception of the Japanese, where Koreans “understand the strange and savage way in which his mind works... how he seeks to

\textsuperscript{23} The United Korean Committee in America, \textit{Korean Liberty Conference in Washington D.C.} (Los Angeles: The United Korean Committee in America, 1942), 100.
degrade and debase his fellow man.”24 When You Chan Yang tried to persuade Americans to listen to Korean aspirations in the aftermath of the Korean War, he used Pearl Harbor as a warning against ignoring Koreans:

Before World War II I used to go around this country telling people, “Japan is going to attack the United States.” They said I was a crazy fool. I was not such a crazy fool when December 7, 1941, came around. I was trying to save thousands of your boys’ lives at Pearl Harbor. ... Think it over, please.25

Although the aftermath of Pearl Harbor eliminated the need for Korean nationalists to tout the Japanese menace, a new concern developed in the Korean community in America. Koreans were legally classified as Japanese citizens in the United States, and on December 7, 1941, they were turned into enemy aliens. Lili M. Kim examines how while the Attorney General Frances Biddle exempted the Korean communities in America from their status as enemy aliens, Koreans in Hawaii especially struggled to repeal their enemy alien status under Hawaiian martial law.26 One strategy for American-born Koreans and Korean immigrants was to assert their loyalty to United States by participating actively in American war activities.27

However, an aim that all the nationalists had hoped to realize quickly was to garner the formal recognition of the Kopogo by the United States government.\textsuperscript{28} The Kopogo was in its twenty-second year of operation by the time the United States entered World War II, and the Korean nationalists expected that their shared hostility toward the Japanese would persuade the United States to recognize the provisional government.\textsuperscript{29} While China recognized the Kopogo as a representative power of the Korean people in 1944, the Koreans were dissatisfied with Chinese recognition as it was a conditional one.\textsuperscript{30} As a result, American recognition was very attractive to the Korean independence activists.

By the end of the Second World War, there were countless organizations that had been active in the United States and dedicated to gaining Korean independence, which included churches and schools as well as political and economic groups. Among these were: the Korean National Association (\textit{Kungminhoe}); the United Korean Committee (\textit{Korean Yong-haphoe}); the Korean Commission (\textit{Kumi Wiwonbu}); the Like-Minded Society (\textit{Tongjihoe}); the Foreign Affairs Correspondence Bureau (\textit{Oegyo T'ongsinbu}); the Korean Legation in Paris; the Diplomatic Conference Bureau; the Korean Friends Council (\textit{Hanguk Ch'inuxhoe}); the Korean Women’s Relief Society of Hawaii (\textit{Taehanin


\textsuperscript{30} Chinese Nationalists undercut the power, independence and autonomy of the Kopogo by requiring them to accept Sun Yat-Sen’s Three People’s Principles, refusing to train Koreans in the Chinese Nationalist military (because of Japanese protest), and half-heartedly supporting the small Kopogo army (eventually taking away the Kopogo’s right to command the army in 1941). It was only in 1944 that Chiang Kai-Shek found it in China’s interest to give the provisional government a modest form of recognition. Cumings 159-160.
Puin Kujehoe); the Korean Women’s Patriotic League (Taehan Yoja Aeguktan); the Korean Independence League (Taehan Aeguktan); the Korean Methodist Church of Honolulu and its branch in New York; the United Society of Koreans on Kauai (Tanhaphoe); the League of Korean Independence (Tongnip-dae); the Tonji Investment Company (Tonji Siksanhoe); the Korean Residents’ Association (Hawaii Taehanin Kyomindan); the Independence Party of Hawai’i (Tongniptang); the Central Headquarters of Tonjiho (Tonjiho Pukmi Ch’onghoe); the Secrety Society (Pimil Tang); the Patriotic Party (Aeguk Tang); the Korean National Army Service of Kauai (Taehan Imsi Chongbu Kunsa Huwonhoe); the Corps to Promote Leadership (Hungsadan), the United Korean Society (Hanin Hapsang Hyophoe); the Mutual Assistance Society (Kongnip Hyophoe)\(^{31}\); the Great Unity Fatherland Protection Society (Taedong Poguk-hoe); and the Korean Independence Party (Han’guk Tongnip Tang). The names of these organizations attest to the geographic span and diversity of the people involved while pursuing a common goal.

*The Tongjihoe, Korean Commission, and KNA*

Many of these organizations were defunct within a short time of their inception for a variety of reasons, such as the lack of funds which closed down the Korean Legation in Paris,\(^{32}\) or the decision to merge groups, such as when the Mutual Assistance Society and the United Korean Society integrated to become the Korean National

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\(^{31}\) Kim, “The Korean Independence Movement” 3.

Association.\textsuperscript{33} When Pearl Harbor occurred, the most active and enduring organizations in the Korean nationalist network besides the Kopogo were: the Like-Minded Society (henceforth referred to as the Tongjihoe), which was formed in 1921;\textsuperscript{34} the Korean Commission, founded in 1923 in Washington, D.C.;\textsuperscript{35} and the Korean National Association (KNA), which was established on February 1, 1909.\textsuperscript{36} It is important to note that these nationalist organizations were meant to support the Kopogo after its inception in 1919, not to overtake its role as the primary government for the displaced Korean people. In their vigorous campaign to have the United States recognize the Kopogo, it is apparent that the Korean nationalists understood the importance of having a central government in their condition as a people without a recognized governing body. In the next section, it will be discussed how one method - among others - of undermining a nationalist’s reputation was to accuse him of not supporting the Kopogo.

In addition to their primary purpose, these three organizations sometimes had other concerns that they addressed in their activities. For example, the KNA asserted in their charter that its organization had

\begin{quote}
... all the rights, privileges, powers and immunities which are now or may hereafter be secured by law to corporations organized for educational and eleemosynary purposes, and especially with power to sue and be sued, plead and be impleaded in any and all courts, to make and use a common or corporate seal...; to hold, purchase, convey, rent, lease, receive gifts of and otherwise acquire and dispose of such a real, personal and mixed
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{33} John K. Hyun, \textit{A Condensed History of the Kungminhoe: The Korean National Association (1903-1905)} (Seoul: The Korean Cultural Research Center at Korea University, 1986), 4.
\textsuperscript{36} Hyun 4.
property not exceeding in value at any time the sum of Fifty Thousand Dollars ($50,000) as the purposes of the corporation shall require, and to mortgage the same to secure any debt of the corporation; to appoint such subordinate officers and agents as the affairs of the corporation may require; to make by-laws not inconsistent with any existing law for the management of its property, the election and removal of its officers and the regulation of its affairs and the transfer of its property.\(^{37}\)

The KNA clearly intended to abide by the laws that their adopted country had set for them. However, it is apparent in their charter that they also aimed to exercise their rights to operate as a fully functional political and economic body that was to work for the benefit of their community and purpose of independence. The Tongjihoe and the Korean Commission were both founded by Syngman Rhee, although they each served a slightly different function. Rhee created the Tongjihoe in hopes of having its members practice “obedience to the organization and economic self-sufficiency,” as well as “practice in rendering material support for Koreans so as to promote better living standards.”\(^{38}\) The Korean Commission, however, had a more diplomatic purpose, as its “principle mission was to win friends, especially among the members of the United States Congress.”\(^{39}\)

When looking at the missions of these organizations, it is clear that the goals of political autonomy, financial stability, and diplomacy were high in priority among the Koreans who joined as members.

*Syngman Rhee, Chang Ho Ahn, Kilsoo Haan*

Among the many members in the three organizations mentioned, an abundance of capable leaders came and went in the course of the Korean independence movement.

However, there were a few men who stood out as their particular ideologies inspired and

\(^{37}\) Hyun 5-6.

\(^{38}\) Hong 183.

\(^{39}\) Kim, "The Korean Independence Movement" 5.
provided direction for other nationalists to eagerly follow. While there were leaders like Philip Jaisohn who wholeheartedly devoted himself to the cause,\textsuperscript{40} consistent scholarly references to Syngman Rhee and “Dosan” Chang Ho Ahn’s activities in the United States reveal how much these two men are perceived to have influenced the direction and strategies of the movement. Kilsoo Haan, while not as recognized as the other two men, pursued an alternative method that is noteworthy for its militaristic approach and pursuing relations with China. Again, it must be stressed that the nationalist movement was not dictated specifically according to these men’s plans of action, but they were the more conspicuous figures within the nationalist network who inspired a certain approach to achieving independence.

The most visible of these leaders was undoubtedly Syngman Rhee, whose presence in the Korean, Korean American and the American communities was so strong that his activities marked him as a person of interest by the FBI – his file is currently available in the FBI Reading Room.\textsuperscript{41} Rhee championed a diplomatic approach to securing independence, and was or had been involved in all four major organizations by the time World War II began: he had been the president of the Kopogo;\textsuperscript{42} he founded the Tongjihoe;\textsuperscript{43} he had headed the KNA from 1915 to 1931;\textsuperscript{44} and he formed the Korean Commission.\textsuperscript{45} It makes sense that he was seen to be among the most prominent members of the Korean independence movement in the United States, since his strategy

\textsuperscript{40} Jaisohn even went bankrupt after two years of trying to support propaganda activities to gain support from the West. Lee 146.
\textsuperscript{42} Kim, “The Korean Independence Movement” 9.
\textsuperscript{43} Ch’oe, “Introduction” 6.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{45} Hong 180.
to achieve independence thrust him often into the public eye. Rhee was concerned with raising international awareness of the condition of the displaced Korean people, and he did so by courting the attention of American politicians through propaganda and diplomacy. As Kim San, an open Communist, said of the nationalists in America who followed Rhee’s method: “They actually expected to get Korean independence by being able to speak persuasive English.” He became acquainted with many politicians and government officials through his time at George Washington University, Harvard University, and Princeton University, even becoming friendly with Woodrow Wilson at Princeton. After Pearl Harbor, Rhee made use of his network of American officials to create the Korean-American Council, who participated in the Korean Liberty Conference. While Korean nationalists consistently petitioned the United States government, Rhee used his position as one of the foremost leaders of the movement to try to win support from men of influence in Washington.

Another nationalist leader during the World War II period was Kil Soo Haan, who advocated Sino-Korean relations and predicted that the success of the movement would rest on the support of the Chinese government. The Chinese, albeit reluctant and demanding, were nonetheless the strongest and visible ally that the Korean nationalists had, as Chiang Kai-shek also encouraged the United States government to recognize the

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47 Cumings 158.
Kopogo. In a similar manner to Rhee, Haan tried to court American support, but unlike other nationalists, he focused on garnering military assistance. His approach is comparable to the strategy of radical (and former friend of Syngman Rhee) Yong Man Pak, where Pak also advocated military preparedness and establishing an army as the most viable plan of action in winning independence. Haan believed that the conflict between Japan and China was the most viable piece of evidence that Chinese and Korean support would ultimately contribute to the success of the United States’ military plans. As a result, he consistently petitioned the United States government to enter into a cooperative plan with the Chinese. However, Richard Kim makes the argument that Haan changed the political landscape for the Korean nationalists as he eventually made his campaign an increasingly ethnicized one. Kim finds evidence for his claim by looking at how Haan responded to the US government’s Japanization of Korean immigrants with a crusade to help Americans distinguish between the Koreans and the Japanese. As a result, Haan can be seen to represent a militaristic and ethnicized approach to winning independence.

“Dosan” Chang Ho Han favored a more subtle approach. Although Ahn passed away in 1938 when his health failed during his incarceration by the Japanese thought police, his legacy as a leader who encouraged sustainable living for the Korean

53 Kim, “Managing” 16.
54 Pak had been assassinated in China in 1928 (Lee 177). Pak and Rhee actually had a falling out due to their different strategies, which will be discussed in the next section. Kim, “Managing” 48.
56 Kim, “Managing” 59. His efforts will be further discussed in the section four of this thesis.
community and his organization, the KNA, continued on.\textsuperscript{57} Ahn was respected in the nationalist circles, as his promotion of adhering to moral principles augmented his already respected reputation as a self-educated political exile. Lyu illustrates Ahn’s character through the following story:

When twenty-two-year-old An [sic] left Korea for America in 1899, his only ambition was to study in an American college. This changed, however, when he saw some Korean ginseng peddlers fighting each other over sales territories in Chinatown. An then became determined to educate these poor ignorant Koreans at the expense of his own educational ambition.\textsuperscript{58}

After this event, tales of Ahn personally cleaning the homes of Korean residents in San Francisco helped him to gain recognition in the Korean community in the United States for his humility and dedication.\textsuperscript{59} Ahn believed that the path to winning independence was through building “economic muscle.”\textsuperscript{60} While being involved with fundraising for diplomatic purposes, Ahn dedicated himself to personally soliciting funds from contributors and traveled extensively.\textsuperscript{61} However, perhaps Ahn’s greatest legacy in the independence movement was that of his constant work to secure unification within the Korean nationalist network.\textsuperscript{62} His call for unification was heard by his successors, who continued his efforts after his death to organize the nationalist organizations into a more consolidated body.

\textsuperscript{57} Kim, “The Korean Independence Movement” 16.  
\textsuperscript{58} Lyu, “Part I” 54.  
\textsuperscript{59} Kim, “The Korean Independence Movement” 11.  
\textsuperscript{60} Kim, “The Korean Independence Movement” 13.  
\textsuperscript{61} Kim, “The Korean Independence Movement” 13-14.  
\textsuperscript{62} Lee 176.
The formation of the United Korean Committee

Conferences were a common strategy for nationalists who wanted to invalidate the perception of disunity. These events were viewed as opportunities to reach consensus among the delegates who attended on behalf of their organizations. The Second World War did not deter these activists from their plans, and from February 27 to March 1, 1942, the nationalists attempted to reach a common strategy through the Korean Liberty Conference. Syngman Rhee envisioned this conference as a space where

The sole purpose of this convention is to reaffirm the principles embodied in our Declaration of Independence signed in Seoul on March 1, 1919, and the resolutions adopted at the All-Korean Conference held in Honolulu in April 1941. We will prove to the world how solidly united and how firmly determined we are to fight our common enemy, the Japanese.\(^63\)

They recognized that decades of disunity had undermined their success in reaching a common goal, and were determined to address and resolve that problem. In the previous year on April 20, 1941, delegates from nine organizations had gathered in Honolulu and established the United Korean Committee (UKC). Through this coalition, the delegates vowed to support the Kopogo and annually collect an ‘independence fund’ (fifteen dollars a person), two-thirds of which would be sent to the Kopogo and the rest used for diplomatic activities to secure recognition of the Kopogo. Through this conference, Rhee

\(^63\) Syngman Rhee, “Syngman Rhee to Fellow Koreans,” February 2, 1942, Unit ID page001-003, Record ID kada-m7931, Miscellaneous Box, Documents of the KNA Building Collection, Korean American Digital Archive, digitally reproduced by the University of Southern California Digital Archive, http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/assetserver/controller/view/search/kada-m7931 [accessed December 15, 2009], Unit ID page002.
took center stage in the nationalist network as he was selected to be the diplomatic agent.\(^6^4\)

The United Korean Committee (UKC) was thus heavily involved in the Korean Liberty Conference, which optimistic activists saw the conference and the committee as a renewal of efforts that would make political unity a reality.\(^6^5\) On February 28, 1942, the members of the UKC moved to adopt resolutions which proclaimed that they "will continue to fight for our freedom and liberty until it has been obtained";\(^6^6\) that they "reaffirm their whole-hearted support and maintenance of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea";\(^6^7\) that they "reaffirm and approve our Provisional Government's formal application submitted to the Department of State of the United States of America, requesting that our Government be permitted to become formally a party to the Declaration of the United Nations";\(^6^8\) that once recognition is achieved, they would "memorialize the President of the United States for the recognition of the Kopogo and to give us the status of an active member in the Declaration of the United Nations";\(^6^9\) and finally, that they "propose to petition the Congress of the United States for the recognition of the Kopogo."\(^7^0\) While these resolutions seemed achievable, they were immediately undermined by how, almost a year later, the delegates at the Liberty Conference were still fending off accusations that the nationalist network was not united,

\(^6^4\) Lee 228-229.
\(^6^6\) The United Korean Committee in America, *Korean Liberty Conference* 37.
\(^6^7\) Ibid.
\(^6^8\) The United Korean Committee in America, *Korean Liberty Conference* 38.
\(^6^9\) Ibid.
\(^7^0\) The United Korean Committee in America, *Korean Liberty Conference* 38.
a consistent allegation by the United States government over the years. While the primary purpose of the Liberty Conference was to reaffirm the Korean nationalists' and their allies' dedication to gain Korean independence through the five resolutions, it was also apparent that the delegates were still seeking a way to ensure the wider community that they were truly united:

Korean Delegates go out from here and tell the people what you have seen here. The Korean people are all united. If anyone says the Koreans are not united, say it is untrue. Every group and organization of Korean society is represented here. If you see any signs of disunity I want you to point it out and if not tell them.

The direction that the Korean independence movement was taking during this period of time was thus characterized by the activists' desire to prove the unity of the nationalist network to the world and definitively support the Kopogo. These activists believed they were operating in a time where the possibility of attaining their goal was very real.

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71 The United Korean Committee in America, *Korean Liberty Conference* 12.
A VICIOUS CYCLE

Political disputes before 1941—Regional differences – The fall of the UKC

In the following section, I will examine how the activities of the UKC characterized the course of the Korean independence movement during the war years, as they failed to successfully merge the nine organizations. The groups eventually began to drop out of the committee and with their withdrawal, the nationalists' opportunity to realize their dream of unification came to nothing. In the end, while the UKC had started out on a high note, the different strategies could not be reconciled, and set the table for an international and domestic squabble.

On February 11, 1942, Syngman Rhee released an open letter in English to the Korean community, as he proclaimed a new period of the Independence movement had been ushered in through the bombing of Pearl Harbor and America's declaration of war. In addition to asserting that the Lend-Lease program would enable the Korean Army in China to wage war on a larger scale against Japan, Rhee also declared that

The important part for all Koreans to take at this stage is to show complete unity in spirit and action. As you all know, the first prerequisite for recognition of a new state is STABILITY. Is our Government stable enough to justify the recognition? We say, Yes, because all the Koreans, everywhere beyond the reach of the Japanese military rule, have been solidly behind our Provisional Government in exile since its establishment in 1919 and again they reaffirmed their allegiance and loyal support at the All Korean Overseas Conference held in Honolulu in April 1941.\(^{73}\)

His declaration shows that he was aware of the disunity within the network of Korean nationalists, which the international community, particularly the United States, considered a sign of instability of the Kopogo. Therefore, the formation of the United Korean Committee (UKC) during this April conference had signaled a hopeful change to

\(^{73}\) The original orthography has been preserved in this quote. Rhee, "Syngman Rhee to Fellow Koreans," Unit ID page001.
the network of independence organizations that was beleaguered by a reputation of its infighting. The variety of strategies and ideologies discussed in the previous section exacerbated that reputation, but there was more than a grain of truth in that perception. Indeed, it turns out that the independence movement has been plagued with infighting since its official inception in 1919, and was still wrestling with the geographical span of the movement, setting the precedent for the UKC to fail.

*Political disputes before 1941*

One of the major reasons why the independence movement in the United States had obtained such a reputation for disunity was due to the frequent public squabbles between the nationalists, as they scrambled to make their respective organizations the premiere representative of the Kopogo to the American government. Kingsley Lyu provides an interesting case study in Syngman Rhee, as he details the various maneuvers that Rhee made in order to make his organizations, particularly the Tongjihoe and the Korean Commission, become the official agents of the Kopogo on US soil.

Rhee is probably the most controversial figure in the entire movement, as he was the most visible nationalist. Critics such as Kingsley Lyu were quick to label him as selfish, since he was taking away allegiance to the Kopogo in demanding the nationalists to pledge loyalty to him and his organizations. He certainly tried to position himself as the sole representative of the Kopogo in the United States through his organizations, the Tongjihoe and the Korean Commission. Lyu also notes that Rhee’s attempt to make

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74 Lyu’s evaluation of Rhee’s character should be taken with a grain of salt, as Lyu is writing from the viewpoint of someone who actually interacted with Rhee and obviously did not have the best experience. Lyu, “Part II” 58.

75 Lyu, “Part II,” 69-70.
the Tongjihoe the leading Korean organization in the late 1920s and early 1930s was blocked by many of the nationalist leaders, who were resentful of his strategy of absorbing all the major nationalist groups. Rhee tried to consolidate nationalist leaders in the various independence societies by giving them offices in the Tongjihoe. Leaders like Hyon-gu Kim (Henry Cu Kim), who was affiliated with the KNA, took umbrage at what they perceived the forceful taking of political functionality of their respective organizations.  

Discord resulted in instances such as the Minjunghwa (Democratization Revolt) occurred, where in 1929 Hyon-gu Kim led a campaign to restore the authority of the KNA (known as the Kyomindan when Syngman Rhee took over), resulting in Rhee forcing Kim to resign as the treasurer of the Kyomindan. However, internal disputes within the organizations also heavily contributed to the restless environment. The KNA branch in Honolulu in 1931 serves as a good example of this situation, as it was divided into several factions, one being headed by Rhee. In January and February 1931, physical violence erupted among the KNA members over disagreements about who was to blame for the problems in the Korean community. Accusations of misappropriation and dishonest policies eventually drove the members to seek redress in the US courts. The judge who presided over this case ruled in favor of Rhee’s opponents. Once again, Rhee

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76 Rhee, “Syngman Rhee open letters” Unit ID page001.
77 Lyu, “Part II,” 69-70.
78 Lyu, “Part II,” 68.
was singled out as the instigator of these events, and he left Hawai‘i in disgrace not long after the ruling.\textsuperscript{80}

The 1931 dispute dealt the most damaging blow to the independence movement in America. In the aftermath of this controversy, many nationalists became disillusioned and demoralized about the efficacy of their activities and the unity of their network. Not only that, but as it had been brought to the attention of the American legal system, it was an event that embarrassed the nationalists in the eyes of the international community.\textsuperscript{81} However, Richard S. Kim argues that this dispute was emblematic of the dilemma that was surrounding the nationalist movement. Kim asserts, “Multiple subjectivities create multiple realities,” and as a result, many of the organizations believed that their \textit{modus operandi} was the most effective.\textsuperscript{82} Part of this was also aggravated by the geographic expanse of the Korean diaspora, which had given rise to other problems in the independence movement.

\textit{Regional differences}

Bruce Cumings presents a startling statistic in his history of modern Korea: 11.6 percent of all Koreans were living outside of Korea by 1944, a number that he asserts is “unequalled by other Far Eastern populations and rarely matched in other parts of the world.”\textsuperscript{83} While many settled in the United States, nationalists were living and working for Korean independence in South America and Mexico, as well as China and even the

\textsuperscript{80} Kim, “Local Struggles” 173.
\textsuperscript{81} Lyu, “Part II” 72.
\textsuperscript{82} Kim, “Local Struggles” 172.
\textsuperscript{83} Cumings 175.
USSR. While the breadth of the Korean diaspora did not deter nationalists from communicating with each other, it certainly made unification more difficult. Not only did the geographic distance hamper the flow of communication within the network and spread resources too thin, but regionalism and localism also made for miscommunication and uncompromising agendas.

Indeed, Kingsley Lyu seems to think that the Korean nationalist organizations were destined to fail from the start. He notes in his study of the inception of the nationalist organizations that the local societies in Hawaii that were created for the first Korean immigrants to America weren’t only benefiting the social network of the Korean immigrants, but also dividing them. Rather than concentrating on their mutual goal of gaining independence from Japan, these societies were prone to localism, where “brothers” of the same society would doggedly defend each other against outsiders, even other Koreans who were not part of their organization. In fact, this foreshadows the regional differences that later heavily fragmented the nationalist network as the independence movement became an international effort that many Koreans in the diaspora were invested in.

There was some sense of a division of labor according to the region that the organizations were located. For example, the nationalists in China and the USSR worked to raise an army, and the organizations in America were charged to provide the capital

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84 Cumings 159.
85 Lyu, “Part I” 44.
86 Cumings 159.
to continue financing the movement,\textsuperscript{87} as well as secure international support, especially from the American government.\textsuperscript{88}

Although this sort of distribution of duties could work in theory, Richard Kim observes that

... the Republic of Korea lacked a true political center. Instead, several centers existed simultaneously. As a result, the locus of power in the diaspora was scattered throughout a matrix of sites, creating multiple and often conflicting attachments and loyalties. The KPG faced a formidable challenge of trying to centralize a national authority that could unite dozens of local communities spread all over the world and develop a focused policy toward a homeland.\textsuperscript{89}

The reality was that the geographic expanse was just too much for the Kopogo to handle, especially when they had little financial and political clout. While the nationalists in America professed to support the continuing existence of their de facto government, many of the Koreans who had immigrated to the United States had to work in adverse conditions to support themselves and their families. As a result the financial burden became too much to bear as the independence movement dragged on.\textsuperscript{90} The geographic scale of the nationalist network even within the United States, as well as the plethora of organizations that the members could choose to pledge themselves to, also heavily diluted the financial resources. For example, when the New York branch of the KNA was formed in 1924, it created a competitive environment for financial support from the Koreans in the East Coast, as there was also the Korean Commission in Washington DC to financially support.\textsuperscript{91}

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\textsuperscript{87} Kim, “The Korean Independence Movement” 22.  
\textsuperscript{88} Cumings 158.  
\textsuperscript{89} Kim, “Local Struggles” 159-160.  
\textsuperscript{90} Shin 33.  
\textsuperscript{91} Lyu, “Part II” 67.
\end{flushleft}
Additionally, this diaspora also led to differing perspectives according to the location the Koreans were situated in. For example, Chong-sik Lee notes, “The exiles were completely cut off from Korea for a considerable period. Only through student troops who arrived in 1945 were they able to hear directly how Korea had changed since the 1920's.” It was a fact that many overseas Koreans had to rely on hearsay to hear about the conditions that Koreans in Korea were subject to. As a result, Linda Shin concludes that many Koreans were “doubly exiled” when they found themselves alienated from returning to Korea after the division of Korea, especially when their years in America contributed to their feeling of cultural dislocation. Their interests had undeniably evolved with the demands of being in a new environment, as I will discuss in the fifth section, “Being Korean, Being American”.

Regionalism could also be blamed for different political agendas. Although Bruce Cumings acknowledges that “socialists and communists were always Korean nationalists,” he also observes that nationalists were also split between those who remained in Korea and those who went abroad. The nationalists in Korea were divided into radicals and “gradualists” (those who favored preparing the Koreans for independence through cultural and educational acculturation), while the Koreans in exile were split between people who pursued militant struggle and those who favored diplomacy as their strategy to secure Korean independence. Unsurprisingly, many of the Koreans in China and the USSR were communists, and found themselves prevented from returning to Korea or persecuted in South Korea when Rhee assumed power in

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92 Lee 231.
93 Shin 37.
94 Cumings 158.
95 Cumings 159.
South Korea\textsuperscript{96} and did not hide his anti-communist agenda.\textsuperscript{97} Also, Han-Kyo Kim makes a point that Rhee and Yongman Pak competed for political and financial support in the same geographic area, which eventually made their friendship dissolve into open animosity.\textsuperscript{98} It is evident that regionalism fostered an unhealthy competitive environment for the nationalist network, that undermined their efforts to unite.

As such, this was the political climate that was the setting for the formation of the United Korean Committee. Although the creation of the UKC had been fortuitous in its good timing, the spirit of goodwill could not prevail over the political machinations and the regionalism that pervaded the activities and agendas of the nationalist organizations throughout the history of the independence movement.

\textit{The fall of the UKC}

It seems that immediately upon its inception, the UKC was doomed to fail due to the history of infighting and the insurmountable regional differences. The breakdown of the UKC could be seen as a continuation of the power struggle brought about by political and regional factionalism in the Korean nationalist network, a local episode of the vicious cycle of infighting that followed the history and geographic breadth of the movement. However, this could be seen as a spectacular failure in comparison to previous instances of infighting, because the UKC had been a conscious effort of the nationalist organizations in American to officially structure themselves into a coalition. Although

\textsuperscript{96} Shin 37.
\textsuperscript{97} Kim, “The Korean Independence Movement” 21.
\textsuperscript{98} Yongman Pak, mentioned in the first section in relation to Kilsoo Haan, had advocated a direct military campaign, and clashed with Rhee over this strategy. Pak was assassinated in 1928, in conditions that are still unclear. Ibid.
Sun-Pyo Hong saw that the unification was achieved in the 1940s through the UKC\textsuperscript{99}, it was a short-lived success that degenerated into yet another instance of disunity.

The nationalists were well aware of the problems that political factionalism and regionalism could cause, and took precautions to ensure that their new umbrella committee would not participate in the nasty cycle of infighting. As a result, the UKC was divided into two bureaus, one in Honolulu and the other in Los Angeles. Again, this was due to concerns of the potential abuse of political power and the geographic expanse of the movement in America. Also, organizational representation in the UKC was determined in proportion to its membership. While Anne Soon Choi concedes that this seemed to be the fairest system to ensure democracy, she also asserts that some organizations, particularly the KNA and the Tongjihoe had the strongest voices in the coalition, by the virtue of their size. She also points out that while the organizations professed to support the operations of the UKC, they continued to carry out their own individual activities, sometimes in contradiction to the aims of the UKC.\textsuperscript{100} Overall, this complicated organizational structure made it difficult for the UKC to coalesce the activities of the organizations that were involved.

Additionally, the UKC was not the sole representative of the Kopogo in America, as it had hoped be. The Korean Commission, led by Rhee, worked almost independently of the UKC, leading the anti-Rhee members of the UKC executive board to send a flurry of communications to the Kopogo, demanding that Rhee be stripped of any authority to

\textsuperscript{99} Hong 192.
\textsuperscript{100} Choi, "Unity for What?" 222-223.
represent the Kopogo in the United States.\textsuperscript{101} For example, on December 28, 1943, the \textit{Korean National Herald-Pacific Weekly} (then a joint publication of the KNA and the Tongjihoe), published a lengthy statement by the United Korean Committee, which detailed the various transgressions and ineffective undertakings committed by Rhee during the course of his nationalist activities. The most effective incrimination made by the UKC, however, was that Rhee was causing "confusion as to the true purpose of the mission of the UKC to Chungking" by accusing the UKC of trying to "seize his position and cause disruption of the Korean Provisional Government."\textsuperscript{102} As the primary purpose of all the Korean nationalists was to support the Kopogo, one's reputation suffered heavily if one was perceived to undermine the activities of the Kopogo.

As tension between the UKC and Rhee escalated through public attacks on each other, Rhee and the Tongjihoe finally left the UKC in the fall of 1943.\textsuperscript{103} This dealt a mighty blow to the fragile façade that the UKC had of unity, and led the way for the other organizations to withdraw, such as the Korean National Revolutionary Party, and the Korean Student Federation of North America.\textsuperscript{104} It did not help the UKC's reputation when these organizations publicly denounced the UKC's policies and activities. The

\textsuperscript{101} Sidai Hahn, "Sidai Hahn, etc. to Kim Koo," no date, Unit ID page001, Record ID kada-m7759, United Korean Committee in America Box, Documents of the KNA Building Collection, Korean American Digital Archive, digitally reproduced by the University of Southern California Digital Archive, http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/search/controller/view/kada-m7759.html [accessed December 15, 2009], Unit ID page001.
\textsuperscript{102} Kungminbo, "Exhibit "A": Statement of Facts re: UKC-Rhee Dispute," 22 December 1943, Unit ID page005-008, Record ID kada-m7759, United Korean Committee in America Box, Documents of the KNA Building Collection, Korean American Digital Archive, digitally reproduced by the University of Southern California Digital Archive, http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/search/controller/view/kada-m7759.html [accessed December 15, 2009], Unit ID page008.
\textsuperscript{103} Choi, "Unity for What?" 235.
\textsuperscript{104} Choi, "Unity for What?" 237.
Kopogo had to intervene in 1944, after a series of correspondences between Sidai Hahn (the executive chairman of the Los Angeles UKC), and Kim Koo (the president of the Kopogo at this time), alerted the Kopogo that this situation had to be resolved in quickly or else the goal of unity would never be met.\(^{105}\) Hahn had been especially incensed by how Rhee set up another organization in Washington DC, under the name of the United Korean Committee. In his July 12, 1944 telegram to Koo Kim, Hahn claimed through actions like these, Rhee was “using Kopogo prestige to coerce people,”\(^{106}\) in an effort to establish himself as the de facto head of the Korean government.\(^{107}\)

It was obvious that the Kopogo needed to exert some damage control, as their authority as a government was being compromised by the Kopogo’s inability to coalesce the various nationalist organizations, and the UKC was obviously failing to do so as well. Therefore, on June 10, 1944, Y. Tjosowang, the Kopogo’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, filed a statement with the United States Department of Justice, outlining the Kopogo’s desire to make four facts known to the friendly nations. First, he stressed that there was political unification in the nationalist network, with the Kopogo as the center. Second, he emphasized the Kopogo’s intention to install democracy in Korea once independence from Japan had been secured. Third, he asserted the Kopogo’s authority as a government, claiming that it was working with the United Nations to “enter upon actual or closer military and diplomatic relationship.” Fourth, he again reiterated that the independence

\(^{105}\) Choi, “Unity for What?” 240.
\(^{106}\) Sidai Hahn, “Sidai Hahn to Kim Koo,” 12 July 1944, Unit ID page018, Record ID kada-m7759, United Korean Committee in America Box, Documents of the KNA Building Collection, Korean American Digital Archive, digitally reproduced by the University of Southern California Digital Archive, http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/search/controller/view/kada-m7759.html [accessed December 15, 2009], Unit ID page018.
\(^{107}\) Choi, “Unity for What?” 240.
movement is unified through the Kopogo. Tjosowang concluded with his hopes that this statement of facts about Korea and the Kopogo would encourage the four leading powers (Republic of China, Great Britain, United States, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) to "recognize the Korean Provisional Government and thereby exercise the principle of equity and co-operation among all democracies."\(^{108}\)

On August 12, 1944, the Kopogo again released a statement of their stance on this "Korean problem in America," this time directly addressing the perceived disunity of the nationalist organizations. Its solution was to reorganize the Korean Commission by calling forth another convention where the seceded organizations of the UKC as well as other prominent groups have a hand in restructuring the Korean Commission. It also called for the abolishment of the existing Korean Commission and the UKC, once this reorganization had taken place.\(^{109}\) In a sense, this declaration can be read as an effort on the Kopogo's part to reclaim their authority as the leading body for Korean governance.\(^{110}\) However, it can also be seen as the Kopogo's attempt to rebuild the structure for unity from the ground up, by dissolving the failed coalitions. However, this strategy was in vain, as not only was the conference a failure (Rhee and his followers

\(^{108}\) Y. Tjosowang, "Statement," Unit ID page001, Record ID kada-m7915, United Korean Committee in America; Korean Commission Box, Documents of the KNA Building Collection, Korean American Digital Archives, digitally reproduced by the University of Southern California Digital Archive, http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/assets/server/controller/view/kada-m7915.html [accessed December 15, 2009], Unit ID page001.

\(^{109}\) Korea (Korean Provisional Government, 1919-1945), "Korean Provisional Government to United Korean Committee in America," Unit ID page005-006, Record ID kada-m7762, United Korean Committee in America Box, Documents of the KNA Building Collection, Korean American Digital Archives, digitally reproduced by the University of Southern California Digital Archive, http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/search/controller/view/kada-m7762.html [accessed December 15, 2009], Unit ID page005.

\(^{110}\) Choi, "Unity for What?" 241.
withdrew from this conference as well),\textsuperscript{111} but the US government failed to change their official stance on their situation.

\textsuperscript{111} Choi, “Unity for What?” 241-242.
THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO THE INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT

The Atlantic Charter – The implications of Cairo Declaration – The Yalta Conference, Potsdam Declaration and the end of the war – Current Intelligence Study Number 30

Almost a year after the Kopogo's statement was released, the war officially ended on August 12, 1945, and the Korean nationalists still were not able to realize their goal of winning independence for their nation on their own terms. Instead, their country was returned to them, divided, a testimony to the real US attitude towards the Korean independence movement in America. I will next examine the American influence on the Korean nationalist activities in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor through US wartime policies. To begin, it must be asserted that Americans also realized the significance of Pearl Harbor in the Korean effort to secure independence:

Pearl Harbor brought the Koreans new hope of political support. But disillusionment soon followed. Our State Department continued to ignore Korea, and one of its officials actually voiced the belief that the country had lost its national identity. The department has steadfastly refused to recognize the Korean provisional government. It even failed to acknowledge a communication from Dr. Rhee asking whether the existence of the United States-Korean treaty of 1882 (which has never been denounced) might at least be noted, now that America has somewhat belatedly followed Korea in warring against the Japanese. ...Recognition of Korea as a nation, which would imply its independence after Japan's defeat, would make a tremendous political and psychological impression not only on the Koreans but on all of Asia.\(^{112}\)

Journalist Selden C. Menefee certainly seemed to favor official US support of the independence movement, and decried how the US government shied away from doing so.

Thankfully, in the midst of all the disunity that the nationalist network was experiencing,

\(^{112}\) Selden C. Menefee, “Our Korean Allies,” from The Nation, November 14, 1942, Unit ID page007-008, Record ID kada-m7930, Miscellaneous Box, Documents of the KNA Building Collection, Korean American Digital Archives, digitally reproduced by the University of Southern California Digital Archive, http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/search/controller/view/kada-m7930.html [accessed December 15, 2009], Unit ID page008.
there were signs of other sources of American support. However, the support from the United States government that the independence activists craved never came. Leland M. Goodrich asserts that before the bombing of Pearl Harbor occurred,

...the United States was prepared to recognize the special interests of Japan in Korea, [but] after the Japanese attack the policy and military operations of the United States in the Far East were directed primarily to defeating and punishing Japan, to limiting her future power, and to establishing peace and security in the Pacific on terms consistent with American security.\textsuperscript{113}

It might be said, then, that the US government’s policies regarding Korea were mostly shaped by their desire to punish the Japanese for their transgression on US soil, more so than a desire to help the displaced Korean nation. Here I use the Atlantic Charter, Cairo Declaration, the Yalta Conference, and the Potsdam Declaration, which will be complemented by correspondences and articles written by white Americans who were invested in answering the Korean question. I will then draw the section to a close with a look at a declassified CIA file on the Korean independence movement, which reveals the American government’s perception of disunity within the Korean independence movement. It can be concluded with this evidence that while the United States government supported the independence movement in principle, its vague statements allowed it to avoid committing itself to the diplomatic recognition of the Kopogo while protecting its own interests.

\textit{The Atlantic Charter}

Perhaps the first mention of formally addressing the Korean question can be found in the text of the Atlantic Charter, where US President Franklin Roosevelt and

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill made known their desires regarding the “future of the world.” This third point, which gave Korean nationalists hope for US intervention was, “…they respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them…” While this was a fine statement to make, it turned out that this was no guarantee that the United States would grant diplomatic recognition to the Kopogo, as James H.R. Cromwell and his group, the Korean-American Council, would find out.

The Korean-American Council, which was yet another organization started by Syngman Rhee, was comprised of American and Korean members. As the president of the Korean-American Council, James H.R. Cromwell was actively involved in trying to capture the attention of the US Department of State. In a May 5, 1942 letter to Cordell Hull (then Secretary of State), Cromwell also refers to the Atlantic Charter, saying, “The recognition of the de facto government of the Republic of Korea was, and still is, a golden opportunity to prove to all the peoples of the world that the Atlantic Charter is, in truth, a thing of deeds and not of words.” However, Cromwell continues to say, “Because, however, of our failure to grasp this golden opportunity, the Koreans, and I

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115 Cromwell was at one time a minister to Canada. Sidai Hahn writes a scathing description of him to Kim Koo, where he regards him to be a failure as a diplomat and a political non-entity in Washington. Sidai Hahn, “Letter from Sidai Hahn to Kim Koo,” June 16, 1944, Unit ID page009-011, Record ID kada-7759, United Korean Committee in America Box, Documents of the KNA Building Collection, Korean American Digital Archive, digitally reproduced by the University of Southern California Digital Archive, http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/search/controller/view/kada-m7759.html [accessed December 15, 2009], Unit ID page009.
assume, the countless millions of other Orientals who respect, admire and trust America, have about reached the deplorable conclusion that it would have been far better for us and our hopes for victory, not to have made any promises at all, inasmuch as we have refused either to carry them out or give the reason why." His admonition reflected the disappointment that the Korean independence activists had felt when the aftermath of Pearl Harbor didn’t produce the response they wanted from the US government.

Cromwell also published articles for American news circulations. In one newspaper article, he tries to evoke a sense of guilt from American readers, appealing to their Christian sensibilities. He even makes a charged statement, accusing Americans of being the true culprit for Korea’s situation, rather than the Japanese: “Korea, then, was never conquered by the Japanese. She was ‘let down’ by the Christian nations in the West in whom she had faith because a vast number of Koreans had been converted by some American missionaries, whose voices roared in protest even louder than those of the Koreans.” He goes on to provide a description of the lives of Syngman Rhee and Koo Kim (the president of the Kopogo at that time). He wistfully concludes: “But the question is bound to arise: what might have been accomplished and what might yet be accomplished if they had the recognition of the United States and other Allied powers

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and the material aid with which to give our enemy and their ancient arch-enemy a sterner battle and a good dose of all-out revolution!"\textsuperscript{118}

Despite the charges of apathy, the American government did display awareness of these accusations, and it quickly tried to rectify any negative perceptions that they found against them. In fact, Cordell Hull wrote a four-page response on May 20, 1942 to James Cromwell’s May 5\textsuperscript{th} letter, seeking to correct the “misleading” statements that he found in Cromwell’s letter. One such statement consisted of Cromwell’s allegation that the US government was all talk: “But no action is taken, nothing is done, no explanation is given and the “decision for freedom” has been postponed, first for weeks and now for months.”\textsuperscript{119} Hull specifically confronts this claim, riposting with

\begin{quote}
The simple fact is that officers of several departments of the Government have spent a great deal of time studying the problems presented by and connected with the petition of your group and similar petitions of other groups. [I] have repeated received and talked at length with members of your group and other such groups. [I] have endeavored to explain this Government’s responsibility regarding such matters and to give clear indication of the lines along which this responsibility is being and will be fulfilled.\textsuperscript{120}
\end{quote}

It is clear that Hull was trying to let the Korean nationalists and their allies know of the effort he and the government had put into addressing their situation, thus giving them no ground for blame. He then went on to explain that it was easier to an individual to side with a group of their own choosing, but it was difficult for the United States government to commit to preferential treatment of one group over others. What is most interesting about Hull’s letter is that while he reaffirmed US intentions of overthrowing the Axis powers and upholding the principles of the Atlantic Charter, he pointed out that there is

\textsuperscript{118} Cromwell, “Korea still awaiting” Unit ID page006.
\textsuperscript{119} Cromwell, “James H. R. Cromwell to Cordell Hull” Unit ID page002.
\textsuperscript{120} Hyun 67-68.
no provision in the Atlantic Charter that requires the United States to “accord to a particular group diplomatic recognition.” With this reply, Hull pointed out the shaky ground which Cromwell based his arguments upon, namely the vagueness of the Atlantic Charter provision. The Korean nationalists and American supporters could not argue with the Secretary of State, especially when their arguments were supported by nothing more than words on paper and goodwill.

*The implications of the Cairo Declaration*

Yet, the “misinterpretation” of the Atlantic Charter did little to undermine the hopes that the Korean nationalists felt when the Cairo Declaration was released on December 1, 1943. In addition to vocalizing the Three Great Allies’ intentions regarding future military operations against Japan, the declaration specifically mentioned Korea, saying:

> Japan will also be expelled from all other territories which she has taken by violence and greed. The aforesaid three great powers, mindful of the enslavement of the people of Korea, are determined that in due course Korea shall become free and independent.\(^1\)

Leland Goodrich warns that the Cairo Declaration should be viewed in terms of the US’ desire to punish Japan for their transgression at Pearl Harbor.\(^2\) Yet nationalist supporters were also excited about the possibility of finally achieving Korean independence. Arthur C. Bunce devoted two articles in two issues of *Far Eastern Survey* (April 19, 1944 and May 17, 1944) to examining the repercussions of this declaration. Both articles detail his practical concerns about the best courses of action regarding the

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\(^1\) Hyun 68.


\(^3\) Goodrich 10.
social, political, and economic changes that the peninsula would experience after obtaining freedom. It is interesting to see how Bunce asserted in both articles that Korea deserves to be free and sees potential for development, despite the ravages that Japanese imperialist policies had inflicted in every level of Korean society. He also stressed that the “need for unity between all factions grows greater as the day of freedom draws nearer.”

Tyler Dennett also published in the *Far Eastern Survey*, albeit some time later in the January 17, 1945 issue. In contrast to Bunce’s articles, his assessment of the declaration was tinged with a note of pessimism, as he asked, “How long is ‘in due course’ likely to be?” His opinion that Korea needed to undergo a “considerable period of international protection, direction, and support, comparable with the earlier stages of the American administration of the Philippines” is uncannily prescient, as that is what did happen (in a sense) in the aftermath of the war.

It seems that there were varying degrees of opinion regarding the ability of the Koreans to rebuild their nation. However, in his examination of the relations between Korea and America up to the Korean War, Robert T. Oliver called this declaration the “first constructive step towards the restoration of Korea’s 4,300-year old nationality.”

Bunce, Dennett and Oliver’s contemporaneous response to the Cairo Declaration provide

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127 Dennett 4.
a glimpse into American perceptions of the document’s implications for the realization of Korean independence.

Regardless of the American agenda, the Koreans were invigorated by this declaration. Kilsoo Haan, for example, was encouraged to ask the Big Four powers for Korean membership in the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), have the Koreans actively partake in wartime activities and become directly involved with wartime policy-making.\textsuperscript{129} However, he was brushed aside by UNRRA’s Francis B. Sayre, who thought this an impossible request on the grounds that there was no organization that was recognized as the formal representative of the Korean people.\textsuperscript{130} This exchange reveals the dilemma that the Korean nationalists found themselves in: they could not gain recognition for the Kopogo because their contributions weren’t recognized as a unified effort, but they also could not participate in other activities that would have helped them to gain diplomatic recognition because the Kopogo was not recognized by the United States. This situation would not improve as the war continued on.

\textit{The Yalta Conference, the Potsdam Declaration and the end of the war}

The Yalta Conference also had significant repercussions in the resulting division of Korea. While the document did not directly address the fate of Korea,\textsuperscript{131} Timothy Savage notes that it set the precedent for the US initiative in directing post-war policy, a point confirmed by Goodrich. Both Savage and Goodrich refer to a pre-conference briefing paper by the State Department, which emphasized that the Department did not

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{129} Savag, 217-218.
\item \textsuperscript{130} Savage 218.
\end{itemize}
have enough information to determine if independence should be granted the Koreans, in addition to looking to establish an "interim international administration or trusteeship".\textsuperscript{132}

At the conference, there was no formal written agreement on Korea, but there appears to have been an informal discussion between President Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin about the trusteeship on Korea.\textsuperscript{133} Not one of the Big Four powers consulted the Korean nationalists, either in the United States or elsewhere, for their take on the matter during the conference, but the outcome of their deliberations directly caused the Soviet and US involvement in the division of Korea.\textsuperscript{134} Man-gil Kang believes that this was a secret decision with dire, lasting consequences:

Nonetheless, because the Allies had secretly agreed at the Yalta Conference to implement a long-term trusteeship in Korea, the 38th parallel represented nothing more than a temporary demarcation line for accepting the surrender of Japanese troops until such time as the Allies arranged for an interim government for the whole of Korea. Because of the opposition of some of the residents of Korea and because of the growing confrontation between the US and the USSR, plans for the establishment of one single interim government under Allied trusteeship were never realized. Instead, the 38th parallel became a true line of national division with the establishment of separate northern and southern governments.\textsuperscript{135}

This was certainly not the ending that the Koreans expected for their pains, but as they were not part of the deliberations at Yalta, they could only suspect that a secret deal had been arranged there. As a result, they grew increasingly restive, even resentful.\textsuperscript{136}

\textsuperscript{132} Goodrich 10-11, Savage 218-219.
\textsuperscript{133} Goodrich 11, Savage 219.
\textsuperscript{134} Goodrich 12.
\textsuperscript{135} Man-gil Kang, \textit{A History of Contemporary Korea} (Kent: Global Oriental, 2005), 180.
\textsuperscript{136} Park 27.
As the end of the war drew nearer, the US government still had not officially endorsed Kopogo. However, the Department of State released a press release on June 8, 1945, which hinted at their recognition of a free Korea in the future:

Realizing that a free and independent Korea of the future will need the services of well-trained men in various fields, the Department has recently decided to make available to students from Korea, who are in this country, the same types of scholarship opportunities as are now open to Chinese enrolled in American Institutions.\(^{137}\)

Harry S. Truman (now the president of the United States) gathered with Joseph Stalin, Clement Atlee (replacing Winston Churchill as Prime Minister), and Chiang Kai-shek at the Potsdam Conference in July, and released the Potsdam Declaration on July 26.

Article 8 of the Potsdam Declaration became the subject of interest especially for the Korean nationalists and their American allies, as it promised that the terms of the Cairo Declaration would be fulfilled.\(^{138}\) This, of course, would include the fulfillment of the statement regarding the independence of Korea.

However, General Douglas MacArthur, who was the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers, issued a General Order no. 1 on September 2, 1945, which set the demarcation between Soviet and US spheres of influence in the Korean peninsula at the 38th parallel. This line had been quickly decided in the early hours of August 11, due to

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\(^{137}\) U.S. Department of State, “For the Press,” June 8, 1945, Unit ID page001, Record ID kada-m7939, Miscellaneous Box, Documents of the KNA Building Collection, Korean American Digital Archive, digitally reproduced by the University of Southern California Digital Archive, http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/search/controller/view/kada-m7939.html [accessed December 15, 2009], Unit ID page001.

\(^{138}\) “The terms of the Cairo Declaration shall be carried out and Japanese sovereignty shall be limited to the islands of Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu, Shikoku and such minor islands as we determine.” *Potsdam Declaration*, July 26, 1945, in *East Asian Studies Documents* at the UCLA Asia Institute, http://www.international.ucla.edu/eas/documents/potsdam.htm [accessed December 15, 2009].
American fears that the Soviets would move into the Korean peninsula after they marched through Manchuria. Korean historian Won Sul Lee sees this order not as an impulsive act on the US's part, but a premeditated maneuver that intended to prevent Korea's major resources and ports from falling into Soviet hands.\textsuperscript{139} Irrespective of the US's true intentions, this plan yet again shut out the Koreans from the negotiating table.

\textit{Current Intelligence Study Number 30}

By looking at the various wartime declarations, it can be inferred that the United States was doing its best to preserve the appearance of a fair and rational government, but in reality it was dealing with the Korean problem by keeping its own interests in the forefront. A classified CIA intelligence study on the Korean independence movement, entitled \textit{Current Intelligence Study Number 30}, that was released for public access in January 2002 affirms this observation. This document is dated July 20, 1945, placing it before the Potsdam Declaration in terms of chronology. It is apparent in this study that at least the CIA did not see the benefit in the recognition of the Kopogo, and the contents of this document can be seen to reinforce that of the Potsdam Declaration. In the proceedings of the Potsdam Conference, there is no explicit mention of Korea, but there is a reference to the Cairo Declaration, where all of its terms would be carried out\textsuperscript{140} — namely, that "in due course Korea shall become free and independent."\textsuperscript{141} The CIA evaluates the Korean independence movement, saying that

\textsuperscript{139} Park 30.
\textsuperscript{140} \textit{Potsdam Conference}, July 17-August 2, 1945, in \textit{The Avalon Project} at the Lillian Goldman Law Library, Yale Law School, \url{http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/decade17.asp} [accessed December 15, 2009].
\textsuperscript{141} \textit{Cairo Conference 1943}. 

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... the breach between the two chief groups, even though based largely upon personal differences, is wide. Furthermore recent indications are that political differences are coming to the fore, and that the newly announced Democratic Party in Chungking may become an active opponent of the Kopogo. The close relationship between the Kopogo and the Kuomintang and the strong anti-Soviet bias of Rhee and the Kopogo satellite groups would complicate Allied negotiation with Korean independence movement. Finally, the liberation of Korea might disclose the existence of an indigenous independence movement with closer ties to the Korean people than any of the groups which have been so long in exile.\textsuperscript{142}

While the first two reasons are rehashed arguments of disunity and protecting American interest, the third reason reveals that the CIA saw that the satellite independence activist groups as too distanced from the conditions of Korea to have a legitimate claim as the nation’s representatives, and preferred to recognize a group that had been active within Korea. This last stipulation can be seen as the US’s justification to draw out the recognition of Korea’s independence, following the “in due course” attitude that the Cairo Conference had established. The Potsdam Declaration not only echoed that attitude, but it also swept the Korean issue under the rug by not directly addressing it. Although at this time it cannot be discerned if President Truman was informed by this CIA document, it can be assumed that he was aware of this opinion that the Koreans should not have immediate independence, when he went to Potsdam.

BEING KOREAN, BEING AMERICAN

Enemy aliens -- American allies and citizens -- Participating in the American Dream

In his book, A Reluctant Crusade, James Irving Matray says, “American policy toward Korea from 1941 to 1950 presents an excellent case study for understanding how the United States reluctantly adopted a thoroughly internationalist approach in foreign affairs after World War II.”\(^1\) Timothy Savage corroborates this statement, asserting that “this type of thinking led American policymakers to consistently err in their decisions regarding Korea.”\(^2\) The American government’s internationalist foresight caused it to overlook the pressing desires of the Korean people, as it looked to reshape the world in the post-war period. I now look at the immediate reality that the Koreans in America faced, and how they overcame them despite the hostile environment shaped by American wartime policies.

In Ronyoung Kim’s novel Clay Walls, Faye is a second-generation Korean American who grows up in the United States during World War II. Faye’s experience in the immediate aftermath of the bombing of Pearl Harbor illustrates the environment that many Koreans in America and Korean Americans experienced during that period:

“Hey!” a man yelled from the car. We turned to see what he wanted. The brown-haired, blue-eyed man made sure his three companions were paying attention before he growled at us. “You stinkin’ Japs. Go back where you came from!”

Alice and I looked at each other. ‘We’re not Japanese,’ we told him.\(^3\)

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\(^2\) Savage 223.
Koreans and Korean Americans were frustrated by cases of mistaken identity and the injustices that were caused by them, and Lili M. Kim provides a succinct statement about how this period should be treated in Korean American studies, saying, “World War II was a race war.” Faye’s family and community were certainly determined to dissociate themselves from the Japanese:

[Faye’s Mother:] “We’re going to get together. United Koreans to help the United States. Men are going to volunteer for the national guard. People with money will buy bonds. And we’re going to wear badges saying we’re Koreans.”

[Faye:] “Badges?”

“You don’t have to worry. You’re an American citizen. But we might be mistaken for Japanese.”

Faye’s mother predicts the military and financial assistance that many Koreans in America and Korean Americans would provide to win the war against Japan, while echoing their confidence that they would be recognized as separate from the Japanese. Yet, Faye’s mother also voices the concern that many Koreans had, as they were legally registered as Japanese citizens in the United States, and they, as well as the Korean American community, were subjected to similar stringent wartime measures as the Japanese Americans, when Koreans were unwillingly classified as enemy aliens. However, the Koreans in America and the Korean American community were active in asserting their difference from the Japanese and winning the war. Despite their cultural and generational differences, both Korean immigrants and Korean Americans rallied together through actively participating in the war effort, as soldiers, interpreters, and providing financial assistance. As the war drew to a close, it became apparent that the Korean community’s participation in the independence activities – whether to convince

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147 Kim, “Faye” 106.
the Americans of their dedication to defeating the Japanese and freeing Korea, or to
display loyalty as Americans – caused it to become an indelible presence in American
society, then and in the future.

**Enemy Aliens**

There is no doubt that the Koreans in America were living in a peculiar
environment, where the US government felt that wartime necessitated the use of racist
policies to minimize domestic threats. Under the Enemy Alien Registration Act of 1940,
Koreans in America were required to register as enemy aliens due to their legal status as
Japanese citizens. For many, this was a humiliating experience, as they unwillingly
became categorized as the subjects of a nation they resented. Also, as depicted in Faye’s
encounter with the man in the car, their physical appearance often led them to be
mistaken for the Japanese, rubbing salt on an open wound.\(^{148}\)

On February 9, 1942, the Department of Justice lifted restrictions on some groups
of enemy aliens. While the Koreans were one of those groups, only the Koreans on the
continental United States, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands were able to enjoy this
freedom; Hawai‘i was under martial law due to Pearl Harbor, and the Military Governor
of Hawai‘i continued to treat the Korean community in Hawai‘i as enemy aliens.\(^{149}\)
While they were unofficially exempt from certain restrictions\(^{150}\), there were other
limitations placed that severely hampered their daily activities. For example, they had to

\(^{148}\) Lili M. Kim, “The Limits of Americanism and Democracy: Korean Americans,
Transnational Allegiance, and the Question of Loyalty on the Homefront during World

\(^{149}\) Kim, “The Limits of Americanism” 80.

\(^{150}\) Koreans were not arrested for possessing cameras or shortwave radios, and they were
allowed to work on the waterfront. This did not apply to the Japanese. Kim, “How
Koreans Repealed” 200.
follow curfew restrictions that forced them off the streets at an earlier time than non-
enemy aliens, and also had to carry around a special permit to move around during
blackout hours.\textsuperscript{151} This became a cause of protest for the Hawaiian Korean community
when a local community leader, Syung Woon Sohn, was arrested on March 28, 1943, for
violating the curfew.\textsuperscript{152} Even Syngman Rhee got involved, contacting Hawai‘i’s
congressional delegate, officers in the War department, the Secretary of War, and even
the President of the United States.\textsuperscript{153} The curfew was eventually lifted after the General
Orders No. 45 were issued on December 4, 1943. Also, their media was restricted: the
\textit{Korean Pacific Weekly}, a newspaper managed by the KNA, had to request a permit for
publication from the Military Governor of Hawai‘i, with its articles undergoing vigorous
military censorship before publication.\textsuperscript{154}

However, the situation on the mainland was not much better. When Carl Chung
Lim of California filed a complaint with the Department of Justice due to a brick being
thrown through his shop window, all he received was a letter of sympathy, explaining
that “inasmuch as people cannot tell the difference between a Korean and a Jap such
things are bound to happen.”\textsuperscript{155} With this response, American government let the Korean
community know that it was not going to provide resources for redressing racial
injustices committed against the Koreans.

An interesting question arose out of this situation in Hawai‘i: why were the
restrictions on Koreans maintained in Hawai‘i when it was dropped on the mainland?

\textsuperscript{151} Kim, “How Koreans Repealed” 200-201.
\textsuperscript{152} Michael E. MacMillan, “Koreans in Wartime Hawai‘i: An Introduction” \textit{Manoa} 14,
\textsuperscript{153} MacMillan, “Koreans in Wartime Hawai‘i” 103.
\textsuperscript{154} Lyu, “Part II” 87.
\textsuperscript{155} Kim, “How Koreans Repealed” 199.
One answer that Lili M. Kim proposes is that American distrust of the Japanese was too strong to overcome any assurances made by the Korean people of their hatred of the Japanese. She points to Hawai‘i’s military governor Robert Richardson Jr. as an example, and his suspicion that Kilsoo Haan had sold his loyalty to the Japanese.157 There was even suspicion that the Japanese would try to pass themselves off as Korean in order to spy for Japan.158 She also refers to the visibly fractured nature of the Korean independence movement, where Richardson uses that against the Koreans to assert that the Koreans could not work together due to their interest in “personal aggrandizement.”159 Additionally, Kim argues that Richardson believed that the number of Koreans affected was small as to be negligible, and that the restrictions were not severe. He also contended that paying attention to such a small number of people would put unnecessary strain on intelligence agencies, wasting time and resources during a time of war.160 As the military governor of Hawai‘i, Richardson was allowed to determine how to govern Hawai‘i during this period. It speaks volumes to the priority the American government placed on the Korean question when there was nothing done to rectify the environment that Richardson created.

Overall, the racist classification of Koreans as enemy aliens was, as Lili M. Kim asserts, due to the U.S. officials’ suspicions that the Koreans were loyal to Japan (despite the Koreans’ best efforts to convince them otherwise). It was also thought that the

156 Kim, “How Koreans Repealed” 205.
157 Kilsoo Haan had worked for the Japanese consulate in Honolulu from 1935 to 1937, and US officials suspected that he might have actually been involved in espionage, loyal to the Japanese. For more on Kilsoo Haan and his contribution to the movement, see section one. Kim, “How Koreans Repealed” 206.
158 Ibid.
159 Ibid.
160 Kim, “How Koreans Repealed” 207.
Koreans' participation in the war effort was motivated by their desire to achieve Korean independence, rather than a sincere show of allegiance to the United States, especially for the Korean Americans. In a written testimony submitted to the House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs on April 26, 1939, Kilsoo Haan tried to convince the US Department of State that the “status of Koreans in the United States as ethnic Americans guided their motivation to aid the United States.” His later campaigns to garner legal recognition of ethnic differences between Koreans and Japanese, especially in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor, were not entirely successful. Haan wrote to an Earl Harrison at the Department of Justice on January 14, 1942, trying to clear up the legal status of the Koreans. While Harrison affirmed that the Koreans were no longer considered enemy aliens, the military governance of Hawai‘i would prove that US mistrust of the Koreans were far from allayed.

Despite this assumption by the United States officials and the racist wartime policies, Koreans and Korean Americans diligently did their part to help the US war effort, whatever their motivations were. It wasn’t until the General Orders No. 59, issued May 6, 1944, that Koreans in Hawai‘i finally were distinguished as friendly aliens; this dovetailed with the decreasing threat that Japan posed as the end of the war approached.

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161 Kim, “The Limits of Americanism” 81.
162 Kim, “Managing the ‘Foreign’” 49.
163 Kim, “Managing the ‘Foreign’” 53-55.
164 Kim, “How Koreans Repealed” 213.
*American allies and citizens*

This war period is seen as a formative stage in Korean American history, as it was a period where how the Koreans and Korean Americans responded would shape their place in America. It was apparent that there was a generational and cultural gap between the Korean immigrants and their American-born children. The Korean Americans were most likely better educated in comparison to their parents, bi-lingual, and trying to negotiate their identity as both Korean and American.\(^{165}\) Korean American children also were troubled when their immigrant parents were considered to be enemy aliens of their country of birth.\(^{166}\) While there were Korean Americans like J. K. Dunn (who was instrumental in the activities of the UKC and the independence movement as a whole), generally many Korean Americans were not as invested in the independence movement as Dunn had been.\(^{167}\) The Sohn curfew incident illustrate the gap between the two group, when in its aftermath, many Korean American children refused to carry around papers and fill out forms proclaiming they were Korean, as they asserted they were Americans by birth. Their refusal to identify as Koreans was also caused in part by the decline of the nationalist organizations, where infighting among members that were of their parents’ generation diminished the appeal of the independence movement in the Korean Americans’ eyes.\(^{168}\) However, the Korean immigrants did not chastise their American-born children for not being Korean enough; rather, they urged the second generation to be

\(^{165}\) Choi, “Are They Koreaned Enough?” 73.  
\(^{167}\) J.K. Dunn is discussed in section one of the Korean independence movement.  
“good Americans.” With the advent of the American involvement in the war, many Korean Americans were also swept up in the fervor of beating the Japanese.

As a result, there were overlaps in the contributions that both communities made to the independence movement and the war effort. For example, both communities were allowed to enlist in the US armed forces, as indicated on two application blanks that are now part of the Korean American Digital Archive collection. A variety of positions were available, including espionage, sabotage, and translation. One applicant, William B. Chun, declared his interest in sabotage and his willingness to serve anywhere the US military needed him. He listed his experience as a graduate mining engineer, and also marks down his desire to be a soldier, revealing that he had participated in the ROTC for two years. Another applicant, Joseph Robert Choy, indicated his interest in being a soldier, mechanic, Caterpillar driver, or a truck driver. He was also prepared to serve anywhere, indicating that as a mechanic, he would be willing to go to Chungking immediately. This application form did not provide space for the two men to provide their age or their citizenship, much less about their background. This was clearly meant

169 Choi, “Are They Koreaned Enough?” 73.

170 The source of this form is of some question, however. It seems to have been created by the KNA, as listed in the KADA description. However, the format of this application indicates that this was not an official US military recruitment form. The forms filled out by Chun and Choy are used in this thesis to provide evidence that the Koreans and Korean Americans were actively participating in the war effort, and in what capacity.

171 Kuminghoe [collector], “Application Blank for Koreans or Korean-Americans Who Desire to Serve in the War Against Japan,” Unit ID page001-002, Record ID kadam7904, Immigrants and students Box, Documents of the KNA Building Collection, Korean American Digital Archives, digitally reproduced by the University of Southern California Digital Archive, http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/search/controller/view/kadam7904.html [accessed December 15, 2009], Unit ID page002.

172 Kuminghoe, “Application Blank” Unit ID page001.
to gather the most pertinent information regarding the applicant’s ability to contribute to the war.

Many able-bodied Koreans and Korean Americans from various parts of the United States enlisted in the US military armed forces in some capacity. The KNA had compiled a list at an unknown date of two hundred and two Koreans and Korean Americans who were known to have participated in the war. This list, while providing succinct descriptions of the enlistees’ backgrounds, shows the range of duties that these men and women performed. For example, James Rhee (a pre-med student at USC) served as an army medic\textsuperscript{173} and Mary Paik served as a 2\textsuperscript{nd} Lieutenant, as an army nurse.\textsuperscript{174} Quite a few of the men and women on the list had some sort of military rank, titles that do not fully explicate the effort that went into achieving their status in the military. Young Oak Kim became the most decorated soldier in the 442\textsuperscript{nd} Regimental Combat Team, continuing on in the military after World War II to eventually retire as a colonel.\textsuperscript{175} Many Korean immigrants were fluent in Japanese, and provided their services as translators and language instructors.\textsuperscript{176}

Both communities also provided fiscal support to the war effort. Faye’s mother mentioned that Koreans and Korean Americans were prepared to buy bonds, which is what they did. Korean newspapers heavily advertised buying bonds; the \textit{Korean}

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{173} Kuminghoe, “List of Koreans in US Armed Forces,” no date, Unit ID page001-022, Record ID kada-m7903, Immigrants and students Box, Documents of the KNA Building Collection, Korean American Digital Archive, digitally reproduced by the University of Southern California Digital Archive, http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/search/controller/view/kada-m7903.html [accessed December 15, 2009], Unit ID page022.
\item \textsuperscript{174} Kuminghoe, “List of Koreans” Unit ID page008.
\item \textsuperscript{175} The 442\textsuperscript{nd} was a regiment mainly comprised of Japanese American soldiers. MacMillan, “Koreans in Wartime Hawai‘i” 102.
\item \textsuperscript{176} Kim, “How Koreans Repealed” 211.
\end{itemize}}
National Herald-Pacific Weekly even advised their readers to set aside ten percent of their income for the purpose of purchasing bonds. Koreans also organized American Red Cross fundraisers and benefit shows that appealed to both Korean and American attendees.¹⁷⁷

Participation in the war effort was not limited to serving in the military or raising money. Philip Ahn, an American-born Korean and the first son of Chang-Ho Ahn¹⁷⁸, was also involved in the war effort, albeit a unique way. Ahn played many Japanese characters in anti-Japanese propaganda films (due to the internment of Japanese Americans), becoming recognized as “the man we love to hate” and the “leering yellow monster.”¹⁷⁹ In fact, movie studios and the media touted his background as the son of a Korean nationalist when promoting their movies.¹⁸⁰ Ahn was even able to defer his enlistment in the US Army until February 1945, as producers continuously booked him to appear in their movies. There was no question about Ahn feeling he was doing his part to help the war effort: “I felt that the more vicious I portrayed [the Japanese], the more I was accomplishing.”¹⁸¹

While Philip Ahn’s contribution was more visible than that of the majority of Korean Americans, all the efforts of the Korean community in America were vital in achieving American victory in war. The Korean community had made its mark in

¹⁷⁷ Kim, “How Koreans Repealed” 211.
¹⁷⁸ Chang-Ho Ahn’s contribution to the independence movement is discussed in the first section of this thesis. Philip Ahn also holds the distinction of being the first American-born Korean.
¹⁸⁰ Ibid.
¹⁸¹ Chang “Portrait of a Patriot’s Son” 50.
American society, and there was movement to recognize that contribution on the federal level.

Realizing the American Dream

On March 13, 1945, in the first session of the 79th Congress, Senator Claude Pepper (D-Florida) introduced a bill “to authorize the admission into the United States, under a quota for Koreans, persons of the Korean race, to make them racially eligible for naturalization, and for other purposes.”182 This also applied to people of Chinese descent, and to

Persons who possess, either singly or in combination, a preponderance of blood of the next preceding two classes or, either singly or in combination, as much as one-half blood of those classes and some additional blood of one of the first three classes and some additional blood of one of the first three classes named in this subsection.183

The third “class” included Filipinos. This senate bill was also meant to amend section 11 of the 1924 Immigration Act by raising the quota to seventy-five percent for the admission of Korean immigrants to the United States.

As the main purpose of this bill was to amend section 303 of the 1940 Nationality Act to include Koreans in the groups allowed to become naturalized citizens, this signals a step towards American recognition of the Korean community in America. While the bill never passed into law, it does reveal a federal awareness that the pool of potential Americans had expanded. However, the purpose of this bill clashes with what Hyung-

182 United States Senate [creator] and Kungminhoe [collector], “U.S. Senate Slip Bill (S.730) 79.1,” March 13, 1945, Unit ID page001-004, Record ID kada-m7942, Miscellaneous Box, Documents of the KNA Building Collection, Korean American Digital Archive, digitally reproduced by the University of Southern California Digital Archive, http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/search/controller/view/kada-m7942.html [accessed December 15, 2009], Unit ID page001.
183 United States Senate Unit ID page002.
chan Kim asserts in his study of the social demography of Korean Americans from 1901 to 1971. In his article, he wrote that the "several hundred Koreans [who] came to America for various reasons by way of China, Europe and Japan from 1905 to 1945 ... were not emigrants in a genuine sense," suggesting that these Koreans were only temporary exiles that were ready to move back to Korea if given the chance. Although Kim does not explain his reasoning for this statement, one is led to believe that his conclusion is misguided, as the activities of the Koreans and Korean Americans in the United States during the World War II period after Pearl Harbor prove that the Koreans in America were deeply invested in their lives in America.

The Koreans in America worked hard to make a living in the United States, in addition to fundraising for independence activities. Most Koreans who came to the United States as cheap laborers in the years from 1905 to 1945 were farmers or of a similar social origin, and most likely illiterate. Due to the 1924 Immigration Act, many of the Koreans who came in its aftermath were students who were sponsored by American missionaries and went to colleges mainly in the Midwest. Over the years, Koreans were able to save up money, start businesses, have families, and educate their children, gradually assimilating themselves in American society while still casting eyes to their beleaguered country, waiting for its independence. However, the division of Korea and Rhee's subsequent assumption of presidency of South Korea served to alienate many expatriates who disagreed with Rhee and knew that they would not be returning to the

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185 Kim, "Some Aspects" 23.
186 Cumings 452.
Korea they had left. Therefore, many Koreans opted to stay in the United States after the end of the war.\textsuperscript{187}

\textsuperscript{187} Shin 37.
CONCLUSION

What would have happened if the Korean independence movement in the United States was successful in unifying the various nationalist groups, garnering the US recognition of the Kopogo and freeing Korea from Japanese colonial rule, all before the General Order No. 1 was issued? Would there be a unified Korea today? I cannot say for sure if the peninsula would have been divided in a similar manner to how it is today, but I am certain that the US government would have been active in the rebuilding of the Korean society in Korea, especially in light of the CIA document I have found. I also believe that Korea would have fallen under (at least) one of Big Four’s sphere of influence, replacing the Japanese presence on the Korean peninsula.

Philip Ahn Cuddy, grandson of the Chang-Ho Ahn and the family historian, finds that the current study of the Korean independence movement in the United States after Pearl Harbor is still deficient in its ability to answer the repercussions of the movement’s failure. When asked, “How should historians be treating this subject, if you believe that the current historiographical strategies are not the best strategies (or incomplete)?” he responded:

People have manipulated or overlooked this part of history that makes the roles of America and Syngman Rhee in the Korean War's beginning more clear. Documents and information from this era that will help define causes of the Korean War and uncover the roots of Korea's trouble developing a functional democratic system of government. ¹⁸⁸

While I do not aim to explicitly link this period of Korean and Korean American history to the Korean War and Korean-American relations today, I hope to have made a meaningful contribution to a comprehensive study of the Korean independence

¹⁸⁸ Philip Ahn Cuddy, e-mail correspondence with author, March 24, 2010.
movement in the United States in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor, through introducing and synthesizing primary and secondary sources that previously might have been considered mutually exclusive of each other. I also aspire to have provided new venues of discussion through my choices of primary source material.

In addition, I have explored the aspirations and strategies, internal discord, and social impact of the Korean independence movement in America during World War II after Pearl Harbor, as well as the American government’s reluctance to recognize the Kopogo during this period. Clashing ideologies, geographic distance, and personal vendettas affected the US perception of the independence movement in the United States, while the vague American response to the movement frustrated the nationalists, whose efforts to display unity within the movement were in vain. Meanwhile, I have also shown how everyday Koreans in America and Korean Americans navigated this environment, as the independence movement inextricably affected the scope of the Korean community’s presence in American society. The topic is a complicated one, where many factors and perspectives are involved; it would probably take many years and pages to present a more complete picture of the subject.

Furthermore, the period of Japanese annexation and the subsequent independence activities in Korea and expatriate communities are still painful topics in Korean and Korean American history. This subject is arguably understudied (as Ahn asserts) and fraught with high emotions, producing a problematic historical study, especially as tension still exists between Japan and the two Koreas. Even in 2010, the year that marks the centennial anniversary of the Japanese annexation, yet another point of contention between the two nations has risen when the South Korean government accused the
Japanese government of withholding information on the lost remains of a Korean independence fighter, An Jung-geun.\textsuperscript{189} Also, the unsubstantiated claim that the Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama offered to pay reparation for the Korean victims of colonization was sensational enough to warrant a news article about it in the Korean media.\textsuperscript{190} Indeed, even scholars have exhibited some emotion regarding the topic, where Man-gil Kang does not hesitate to throw in colorful adjectives showing his distaste for Japanese colonial policies.\textsuperscript{191} The academic treatment of the independence movement in America in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor certainly did not escape this emotional spin, as apparent in the case of Kingsley Lyu, who had been one of the foremost nationalists in Hawai‘i since the inception of the independence movement and wrote two scholarly articles about the movement in the late 1970s. As one of the more vocal opponents of Syngman Rhee, he found many instances in his articles to bitterly point out what he perceived to be Rhee’s failings and hypocrisy, not-so-subtly suggesting that Rhee singlehandedly destroyed any attempt of unity due to his greed. As the topic starts to attain the glaze of time, it is interesting to see how what bias even this thesis might be perceived to have. Without a doubt, the emotions generated by this topic have had obvious repercussions for the academic treatment of the subject.

As for the movement’s place in Korean American history, it proved to be formative years in defining the Korean American presence in America. A generation of

\textsuperscript{191} Kang 12.
bi-lingual Koreans and Korean Americans was active during this period, whether as independence activists or American citizens, or both. It was clear that whether or not they were conscious of this, the Koreans in America and Korean Americans were helping to reshape the face of American society. Yet, this contribution to Korean American studies is still fragmentary, as I believe there are facets that this topic has not fully explored and primary sources still hiding somewhere.

I acknowledge that I have excised from my study certain points that might have further enhanced my discussion of the movement during this period. For example, I have not looked at the influence that churches and Christianity had on the independence movement, as many white American missionaries were directly involved in the movement. I also wish to see an ethnographic study of the Koreans who have been immigrating to the US, in order to see how their background might have affected their contribution to the independence movement in the United States. I also have not been able to use all of the primary evidence I have accrued, especially the American news articles during this period. Their perspective could have supplemented my analysis of the American response to the independence movement by shedding light on the media’s role in informing the average American’s about the movement. I hope that future scholarship would address these gaps and other points I have not identified.

While a highly stressful period for Koreans in America, the years 1941 to 1945 proved to be a time where they made an enduring mark in American history. Its more visible legacy can be seen in the Korean American communities that currently exist in the United States. Regardless of what might have happened had the Koreans’ goal of
unification been realized, it cannot be denied that without the efforts of the World War II
generation, the Korean community in the United States would not be what it is today.
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*Image on cover page:*

*United Korean Committee in America: Members of executive committee and delegates from Hawaii.* (Image). From the personal collection of Philip Ahn Cuddy. 5 April 1942.