
Making Korea Distinct: George M. McCune and His Korean Studies

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1. Introduction

Korea as a state disappeared with Japan's Annexation of the Korean peninsula in 1910. Simultaneously, Korea was virtually erased from the minds of most Westerners. Although Korea was sometimes cited as an appendage to the Japanese Empire, the West paid no serious consideration to Korea itself, with the exception of occasional missionary reports. However, with the commencement of the Pacific War in 1941, the region assumed a more meaningful role in world affairs. For American post-world planners, who were anticipating the collapse of the Japanese Empire, Korea now became a focal point of concern. Therefore, these designers conducted detailed research on Korea's postwar prospects.¹ The studies required

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1. On postwar preparation for Korea, see Bruce Cumings, "Introduction: The Course of Korean-American Relations, 1943-1953," in *Child of Conflict* edited by Bruce Cumings (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1983).

several qualified scholarly individuals. George M. McCune was the most appropriate person at a time when there were only a few bureaucrats who had no little personal and academic experience about Korea. This is one of the primary reasons why George M. McCune deserves more historical attention.

Beyond works on U.S. foreign policy, there were few academic studies about Korea at that time. Bruce Cumings asserts in his study of Korean-American relations twenty years ago that “in spite of such intense contact, familiarity has bred in the American mind not understanding and empathy, for the most part; the phenomenon of the Sinophile or Japanophile who bridges two cultures and creates understanding is almost unknown.”² This situation remains true today, but it even more so in the 1940s during World War II. Although the ignorance or misunderstanding of the general Korean situation was partly rectified through the study of “high policy” and the beginnings of Korean Studies in U.S. higher education institutions after 1945, we are still in need of a greater focus on “low policy” or in other words, mutual understanding. There is still a strong tendency among Korean academics to study Korean perception of the U.S. and U.S. policy toward Korea³ rather than to investigate how Americans perceive and understand Korea. Considering this, McCune was a rare scholar who understood Korean culture and history.

With this academic and historical context in mind, I shall attempt to examine one type of the American perception of Korea around 1940s through the works of George M. McCune. McCune deserves focus because he was the only Korean expert in the Japanese Affairs Division within the American Department of State

2. *Ibid.*, preface.

3. See for example Lew Young-ick, Byong-kie Song, Ho-min Yang and Hyssop Lim, *Hang'uki'nŭi Taem'ii'nsik: Yöksajökŭro Pon Hŏyngsŏngkwajŏng* [Korean Perception of the United States: A History of Its Formation] (Seoul: Minŭmsa, 1994). For popular perception of Korea, see several articles in Young-nok Koo and Dae-sook Shu eds., *Korea and the Unites States: A Century of Cooperation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1984).

during the Pacific War.⁴ Moreover, he is the first American to receive a Ph.D. specializing in Korean history *per se* in the U.S.⁵ The object of this paper is not to pursue the link between his ideas and U.S. foreign policy, the topic that I will deal with in another paper. Here, I want to discuss McCune's life and his basic views of Korean history and contemporary issues. I will also argue that his dream of a unified and democratic Korea may not have been realized but that, nevertheless, his sophisticated understanding of Korea contributed greatly to Korean studies in the U.S. Considering the fact that Area Studies in the U.S. was started by missionaries and that it was only during the Pacific War that this field of study came to have academic supporters, it is highly fitting and natural that McCune was a son of a famous missionary in Korea.⁶ Ultimately, McCune's works on Korea and their sinking into oblivion may show very well how the Cold War impacted our understanding of Korea's colonial and U.S. occupation period.

In order to understand McCune's ideas, I discuss his articles, dissertation and book, *Korea Today*.⁷ For information on the context of 1940s, I refer to a collected work on U.S. perception of Korea, a book that was published by the Academy of Korean Studies in Korea.

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4. Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, Vol. I, *Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes 1945-1947* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 466.
 5. By referring to McCune as the 'first' American specialist on Korea, I am pointing to the fact that he is the only scholar who used Korean traditional sources rather than other diplomatic works in writing about Korea. The title of his doctoral dissertation is "Korean Relations with China and Japan, 1800-1864."
 6. Kyung-il Kim, "Chŏnhu Mig'ukesŏ Chiyŏkyŏng'utŭi Sŏngnipgwa Paljŏn" [The Formation and Development of Area Studies in Postwar U.S.], *Kukje Jiyŏk yŏnggu* [Review of International Area Studies] (Seoul: Seoul National University, Fall, 1996).
 7. For the writings of George M. McCune, see Appendix in this paper.

2. The Pacific War and the Rise of Korean Studies

When World War II broke out, U.S. policy planners immediately set about to establish projects for the postwar situation such as the ‘War and Peace Project’ supported by the Council on Foreign Relations and the Advisory Committee on Post War Foreign Policy supported by the Department of State. Through these institutions, the planners of U.S. postwar policy conceived the idea of a Trusteeship Korea that was publicized in the Cairo Conference.⁸ This trusteeship plan would depend on the conditions of the recipient state, as demonstrated by subsequent events in Korea. Moreover, because America’s policy towards Korea was not fixed around 1945, the situation was transitory and fluid. More research will be needed to elucidate the relationship between how experts understood the Korean situation and the actual shape that American policy took, but it is sufficient to indicate the important role played by the ideas of country experts. These intellectuals’ ideas were derived from their understanding of Korea’s traditions and history. Although McCune’s arguments were overlooked during the Cold War era, his views were influential up to the time of the establishment of the Cold War configuration. To understand his work, we need to survey the academic situation at the time and its relationship to America’s contemporary policy.

During the Pacific War, there appeared a few significant scholarly works on Korea in the U.S. Fred Harvey Harrington at the University of Wisconsin and Andrew J. Gradanzev⁹ in particular

8. Chŏng Yong-uk, *Haebangjŏnhu Migukŭi Taehanjŏngchaek: Kwadojŏngbu Kus’anggwa Chungganpa Jŏngchaekŭl Chungsimŭiro* [The American Policy toward Korea around 1945: Centering on Interim Government Idea and the Policy toward the Middle Group] (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 2003), pp. 19-33. For the development of policy toward Korea during World War II, see the chart in p. 51.

wrote academically meaningful works. Let me briefly survey their main arguments and contents. Harrington's richly studied book describes Dr. Horace Allen who came to Korea first as a missionary in 1884 and later became a U.S. minister to Korea, and he had a critical stance toward Allen's business scheme to obtain more concessions. Allen had, Harrington argues, thought that American business interests would help to secure Korean independence. But he was willing to abandon Korea in exchange for promised commercial favors when Japan came to dominate Korea. Once Japan reneged on its promises, Harrington suggested, Allen then became opposed to the Japanese seizure of Korea.

Gradanzev criticized Harrington's interpretation of events. To Gradanzev, Harrington had erred in claiming that Korea should have acquiesced to Chinese dominance during 1882-1894 further, Gradanzev maintained that Harrington misrepresented Allen's business motives.¹⁰ Gradanzev acknowledges, however, that Harrington's work contributed to an enriched understanding of Korean-American relations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In fairness to Harrington, his work provides detailed information regarding traditional Korean politics and society from an external perspective in addition to offering readers a survey of American affairs in Korea. On the other hand, Harrington did not accord Koreans much of a role in shaping their own history. For example, he

9. Fred Harvey Harrington, *God, Mammon, and the Japanese: Dr. Horace N. Allen and Korean-American relations, 1884-1905* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1944), Andrew J. Gradanzev, *Modern Korea* (New York: International Secretariat, Institute of Pacific Relations, 1944). Harrington was professor at University of Wisconsin and later became president of the school. Gradanzev, a native of Russia, was a research scholar in China and the United States. He also worked for Institute of Pacific Relations and seemed to be a professor at Oregon State College around 1944. For his background, see book review by Harold J. Noble in *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol. 5, Issue 1 (November 1945), pp. 67-70. Another scholarly work is M. Frederick Nelson, *Korea and the Old Orders in Eastern Asia* (Baton Rouge, 1945). This book describes Korea as an appendage to mainland China in international terms.

10. Gradanzev's review of Harrington's book in *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol. 3, Issue 4 (August 1944), pp. 393-394.

interprets the issue of business concessions such as mining, transportation, and electric facilities etc, only from the perspective of Allen and of America's desire for profits rather than taking into consideration the motives of Koreans eager to draw in and utilize the U.S. presence in order to check other nations, especially Japan.¹¹

Gradanzev's *Modern Korea* also provided detailed information on colonial Korea, particularly with regard to economic conditions. Gradanzev was born in Russia and had extensive research experience in China and later in the U.S. For his book, he visited Korea and obtained many statistics and empirical data. The aim of *Modern Korea* was to analyze the impact of thirty-four years of Japanese rule. Gradanzev firmly believed that Koreans were fully capable of managing themselves and Korea could have succeeded as an independent nation. Japanese rule thus had a very negative impact on the Korean economy. One interesting point Gradanzev raised was that population pressures were negligible in Japan and Korea, but the real impediment to development was low agricultural productivity coupled with oppressive state policies. To solve its economic problems, Gradanzev reasoned, Korea needed far-reaching industrialization. This idea contradicted the Japanese justification that expansion into Korea and China was necessary to relieve overpopulation in Japan. Gradanzev's study provided rare and helpful glimpses into the workings of colonial Korean society.¹²

McCune's *Korea Today* is a comprehensive study of Korean history, its colonial period and notably the period of U.S. occupation, based on the aforementioned works as well as primary sources.¹³ Although this book was widely used by western or

11. Harrington is believed as the founding member or a progenitor of 'Wisconsin school,' which is the alias of Revisionist School in American Foreign Relations, a school arguing that the most important driving force of the American expansion toward other countries is economic desire and consequently seeing the U.S. foreign relations very critically.

12. Harold J. Noble countered Gradanzev's negative evaluations of Japanese rule in Korea. Noble's review of *Modern Korea* in *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol. 5, Issue 1 (November 1945), pp. 67-70.

western-educated scholars, it is not popular among the U.S. general readers and naturally Korean scholars. The two works by Harrington and Gradanzev were translated into Korean, but we do not have a Korean version of *Korea Today*. Harrington's work covered the late Chosŏn dynasty, while Gradanzev focused on the Korean colonial context. Delving into contemporary Korean issues, *Korea Today* adopted a critical stance toward the incipient South Korean government and the U.S. Military Government in Korea, not to mention the totalitarian North Korea. Perhaps because of its criticisms of Korean officials, this book is not well known among Korean scholars. McCune's book was not published in many editions in the U.S., so it does not seem that the ideas in *Korea Today* incurred much interest.¹⁴ I will discuss this book more thoroughly below.

Through these works and reviews, which mostly focused on the situations before the Pacific War and evaluated the strength of the Korean nation and the legacy of Japanese rule in diverse terms, readers were exposed to diverse and sometimes contradictory

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13. *Korea Today* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950) was published after McCune's sudden death in late 1948 with the collaboration of Arthur L. Grey, who was a graduate student and assistant for this book. But according to the Forward in the book by William L. Holland Secretary General of the International Secretariat Institute of Pacific Relations, this work was already completed about nine-tenth of the whole in late 1948 but was complemented by his wife Evelyn McCune and Arthur L. Grey in regard to economic developments in Korea. For the book review, see an article written by Fred Harvey Harrington, in *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol. 10, Issue 4 (August 1951), pp. 401-403. We can easily infer that those three scholars, Harrington, McCune and Gradanzev knew each other.
 14. Although *Korea Today* was "a sincere account by a principled liberal," to Bruce Cumings, just as the Korean War broke out, Forest Dulles, special counsel on foreign affairs under the President Truman and the Secretary of State under the Eisenhower administration, sent a letter to William Holland, secretary general of the Institute for Pacific Relations (IPR) (which had sponsored the book), saying that "I question whether its publication at this time will serve to promote real insights into the issues which today so deeply engage our nation." Dulles Papers, box 48, Dulles to Holland, August 17, 1950. Cited at Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, Vol. II, *The Roaring of the Cataract 1947-1950* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 639.

perspectives and conclusions.

3. George M. McCune, His Family and His Life

George McAfee McCune (June 16, 1908-Nov. 5, 1948), according to Martin Wilbur at Columbia University in 1950, was “one of the very few scholars in America who had made Korea his primary field of interest.” Therefore his death was a blow to the emerging discipline of Korean Studies, “because he was in the process of correcting the situation in regard to Korean studies-endeavoring almost single-handed to bring them to the level of the better-established Japanese and Chinese fields.”¹⁵ To understand McCune’s approach to Korean Studies, it is helpful to understand his background. He was born in 1908 in Pyŏng Yang, which was then called the “Orient’s Jerusalem” due to the strong Christian missionary presence, to George Shannon McCune (1872-1941) and Helen McAfee McCune.

His parents were educational missionaries sent by the Northern Presbyterian Church in the U.S. George S. McCune and his wife first came to Korea in 1905 and spent 4 years studying Korean and helping other missionaries, including William M. Baird¹⁶ to manage the United Christian (Soong-sil) college, until he assumed the position of Principal at Sinsŏng middle school¹⁷ at Sŏnchŏn,

15. Memorial article for McCune by C. Martin Wilbur in *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol. 9, Issue 2 (February 1950).

16. He is known to found the United Christian College in Pyŏng-Yang. His wife, Annie Adams Baird was a pioneer in educating zoology, botany, and general history. Also Dr. Arthur L. Becker, George S. McCune and Mrs. McCune were the first teachers in the Union Christian College. See L. George Paik, *The History of Protestant Missions in Korea, 1832-1910* (Pyeng Yang: Union Christian College, 1929), pp. 304-306. A daughter of Dr. Becker became the spouse of George M. McCune.

17. This school was called as the Hugh O’Neill Jr. Academy for Boys following

North Pyŏng-an Province in 1909. His wife also served at the Posŏng Women's School in the same city as Principal.¹⁸ Their basic task was to evangelize and educate Koreans. The McCunes were also very frequent contributors to the missionary's magazine, *The Korea Mission Field*.¹⁹ During his stay in Pyŏngyang, the elder George McCune witnessed the Great Awakening in 1907, the spiritual revival that further established Christian churches in Pyŏngyang.²⁰ Through their missionary works in Sŏnchŏn, the McCunes witnessed the great success of their ministry. Indeed, "the station was not organized until 1901, but within sixteen years it reported 187 outstations, 11,681 communicants, 5,416 catechumens, and 28,350 adherents."²¹

George S. McCune was believed by the Japanese authorities to be a strong supporter of the secret nationalist band, *Sinminhoe* or the Association of the New People, which was founded by Korean patriot, Ahn Chang-ho in 1907. The Japanese authorities disbanded this society with the charge that the organization had helped organize an abortive assassination attempt on Governor General Terauchi.²² It is no accident that McCune was believed to be

the donator's son.

18. For the basic information of him, see Kidokgyom'unsa, *The Christian Encyclopedia* (Seoul, Kidokgyom'unsa, 1984), Vol. 5, p. 1057, and several his articles in *The Korea Mission Field*.
19. Several Korean missionaries started this magazine in 1905. It continued until 1941 just before the Pacific War. About this magazine, see L. George Paik, *Supra*, p. 329.
20. His "The Holy Spirit in Pyeng Yang" in *The Korea Mission Field* (hereafter *KMF*), Vol. 3. January 1907 and "Ever Extending Blessings," in *KMF* April 1907.
21. Arthur J. Brown, *The Mastery of the Far East: the Story of Korea's Transformation and Japan's Rise to Supremacy in the Orient* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1919), p. 510. Dr. Brown (1856-1945) was a secretary of the Foreign Mission Board of the Northern Presbyterian Church from 1903 to 1929.
22. The abortive assassination accident started with the capturing of teachers and students at Sinsŏng middle school where George S. McCune was principal at the time. For a general overview of this case, see Yoon Kyŏng-ro, "105 in Sagŏnŭi Kidokgyojŏk Ihae" [Christian Historical Understanding of '105 Persons

anti-Japanese because he sometimes talked to his students about the Bible story of David and Goliath, “emphasizing the conventional lesson that the weak man whose cause is just and whose heart is pure can overcome the strongest,” an obvious metaphor for Korea and Japan each.²³ Consequently, the Japanese placed missionary groups, who were the only outsiders with influence within the Korean peninsula, under rigid state control. The incident taught the missionaries “the necessity for special care in their dealings with officials and people in matters which affect the government.”²⁴ Because he was under suspicion for being involved in anti-Japanese activities, McCune was actually expelled from Korea from 1921 until 1928.

When the Japanese authorities permitted his re-entry to Korea, he returned to the missionary field as the Principal of Soong-sil Middle and the President of Christian Union College in 1928.²⁵ One notable educational method used in the College was to allow underprivileged students the opportunity to work for their tuition. This practice resembled McCune’s own experiences during his Park College years in the U.S.²⁶ Mrs. McCune was a daughter of the College Founder. George S. McCune applied the college’s

Incident’] in his *Hang’uk Kundaesaiū Kidokgyojok* Ihae [Christian Historical Understanding of Korean Modern History] (Seoul: Yokminsa, 1992). As for George S. McCune’s activities, see Shannon McCune, “The Testing of a Missionary: George Shannon McCune and the Korean Conspiracy Case of 1910-1913,” *Soong Jun University Essays and Papers*, Vol. 7, Soong Jun University, Seoul, 1977. Cited at Shannon McCune, *Views of the Geography of Korea* (Seoul: The Korean Research Center, 1980), pp. 221-222.

23. Arthur J. Brown, *Supra*, p. 569.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 573.

25. At this College, George S. McCune published L. George Paik’s *The History of Protestant Missions in Korea, 1832-1910* (Pyeng Yang: Union Christian College, 1929). L. George Paik was Paik Lak-jun, who later became President of Yonsei University and Minister of Education. Interestingly, he happened to study at Sinsŏng middle school as a personal secretary of George S. McCune and at Park College with McCune’s help before he finished his higher education at Princeton and Yale. That is why he had a very close relationship with McCune’s family.

26. His “Honest Labor Makes the Man,” in *KMF*, Vol. 7. September 1911.

work-study system after he took charge of the middle school in Sŏnchŏn²⁷ and the program played a very critical role in producing many businessmen from the region. Under his leadership the school expanded its facilities. However, after protesting against the worship of Shintoism, Japanese traditional religion, forced on Koreans by the colonial administration, he lost his position. McCune had argued that paying homage to a Shinto shrine was against his conscience and the Christianity, so he could not order his students to obey this dictate. McCune's position differed from that of Horace H. Underwood, who argued that the Shintoism was merely a state ritual and, therefore, should not be objectionable to Christians.²⁸

We do not know how the young George M. McCune was influenced by his family background, but it is certain that he knew the situation of Korea well and possessed a fondness for the country. His brother, Shannon Boyd Bailey McCune (1913-1993) said that "naturally, as one who was born in Korea and who spent his boyhood there, I have certain prejudices; to me, Korea is a land of beauty and the Korean people are likable and have many fine qualities."²⁹ Likely George M. McCune's similar upbringing as his brother's and his affection for Korea inspired him to enter the field of Korean Studies.

As a young man, McCune attended Hurton College, Rutgers

27. Dr. Brown wrote that the school has "a model farm, garden and orchard, and shops of various kinds." His *Supra*, p. 554.

28. *Sasanghwibo* 思想彙報 [Thought Gazette], No. 16 (September, 1938), pp. 307-318. Cited at *Hang'uk Kidokkyo'ŭi Yŏksa* [A History of Korean Christianity] I, Institute of Christian History (Seoul: Kidokkyomunsa, 1989) p. 312. Also see *Hang'uk Kidokkyo'ŭi Yŏksa* [A History of Korean Christianity] II (Seoul: Kidokkyomunsa, 1990), pp. 289-290.

29. Shannon McCune, *Korea's Heritage: A Regional and Social Geography*. (Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1956), p. vii. Shannon McCune studied Geography, specializing in Korea. He published numerous articles about geography and East Asian Studies. As for the representative books regarding Korea, with the above one, *Korea: Land of Broken Calm* (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand Company, INC, 1966) and *Views of the Geography of Korea* (Seoul: The Korean Research Center, 1980).

University, and Occidental College finishing his B.A. in 1930. Then he returned to Korea to teach at the Union Christian College in Pyŏng Yang. But two years later, due to poor health, he moved to Hawai'i, and there he married Evelyn Margaret Becker,³⁰ herself the daughter of a prominent American missionary to Korea, Dr. Arthur L. Becker. With the support of his wife and father, McCune returned to Occidental College to begin graduate study, earning an M.A. degree in 1935. He continued his higher education at the University of California at Berkeley until May 1941, with two years fellowship for his research in Korea, and already attained faculty status at Occidental College in February 1939.

During his visit to Korea in 1937-1938, McCune invented a pronunciation and English orthography system for Korean with Edwin O. Reischauer, who would later become a prominent scholar and ambassador to Japan, as there was no standard work on how to write Korean in English. The system came to be known as the McCune-Reischauer Romanization system,³¹ and it proved useful and convenient to Westerners. This system was adopted by the *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, the United States Government Board on Geographic Names, and the Army Map Service for all maps on Korea.³²

During his stay at Seoul, McCune mainly used Chosen Christian College (today's Yonsei University) and the Keijo Imperial University (renamed as Seoul National University after 1946) to locate materials for his doctoral dissertation. In particular, he researched *Yijo Sillok* [the *Verifiable Chronology of the Chosŏn dynasty*], which became available in 1933. With the help of traditional Korean sources, McCune's doctoral dissertation, which

30. She is also a very talented scholar who wrote a brilliant art history of Korea, *The Arts of Korea* (Rutland, Vermont & Tokyo, Japan: Charles E. Tuttle Company: Publishers, 1962).

31. "The romanization of the Korean language based upon its phonetic structure." *Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 29 (1939).

32. Memorial article for McCune by C. Martin Wilbur, *Supra*, p. 188.

we will discuss shortly, was completed with the title “Korean relations with China and Japan 1800-1864” by the help of traditional Korean sources.³³

Another major achievement of his stay and research was the preparatory work he did for the publication of American consular report on Korea covering 1883 to 1905. He and the Honorable U. Alexis Johnson, who was then serving Vice-Consul in Seoul, planned to make copies of this extensive paper. The photos for the report were developed in the Chosen Christian College laboratory. The developer was Arthur L. Becker, McCune’s father-in-law. According to Evelyn McCune, George M. McCune smuggled the film into the College to evade the watchful eye of the Japanese police.³⁴ Although he only started this series, his purpose seems clear. That is to help other scholars and laymen to understand this neglected period with a focus on the American role in the Far East.³⁵ It is interesting to note his basic evaluation of the period of 1883-1886. In the introduction to the book, two interesting points were raised. The first one concerned the U.S. presence in Korea. The U.S. in those years exerted great influence, because in order to counter Chinese control over Korea, King Kojong (r. 1864-1907) solicited American advisors in the Korean Foreign Office and Military.³⁶ The other point was the very controversial argument

33. He explained his intellectual journey to completing his doctoral dissertation in the Preface and several footnotes. See his doctoral dissertation, Preface and Note on Romanization and Citation of Sources.

34. Regarding the background of this series, Korean-American Series, see Scott S. Burnett, *Korean-American Relations: Documents Pertaining to the Far Eastern Diplomacy of the United States*, Vol. 3: *The Period of Diminishing Influence, 1896-1905*, preface. The first volume of this series which was edited, with an Introduction, by McCune and John A. Harrison was published in 1951 with the subtitle, *The Initial Period, 1883-1886*. The second volume was pursued in 1963 after McCune died by Berkeley faculty members Dr. Woodbridge Bingham and Dr. Robert A. Scalapino and student Dr. Spencer J. Palmer. The subtitle is *The Period of Growing Influence 1887-1895*.

35. He said in the first series p. viii, “it is hoped by the editors that this compilation may prove of interest to the laymen and of use to the scholar and that it may serve as a springboard for other students interested in uncovering the little-known and badly told history of the United States in Eastern Asia.”

that “As the only party to the Korean struggle with disinterested authority the American effort could have been far less futile than it was” without the delay of sending advisors to Korea until 1888. To McCune, “The United States had fumbled an opportunity that would not again be offered.”³⁷

Let us now turn to McCune’s career again. In February 1942 onwards, shortly after the Pacific War broke out, McCune served in the Office of Strategic Services, the Board of Economic Warfare, and the State Department. He was generally recognized as the leading expert on Korean affairs. From May 1944 until he resigned from his position in October 1945 for health reasons, McCune had held a critical position as the Chief of the Korean Section in the Office of Far Eastern Affairs within the State Department. There he evaluated the Korean situation. As for the Korean independence movement, it seems that McCune supported the young moderates and the strong coalition of the independent movement.³⁸ Bruce Cumings argued that McCune was the key man in the State Department who evaluated the prevailing situation on the peninsula and who took notice of the guerilla movement in Manchuria and the presence of Kim Il-sing.³⁹

After World War II, McCune and his wife wrote many articles with one year’s recuperation in Los Angeles. He also joined the faculty of the University of California at Berkeley in July 1946 as a lecturer in the Department of History. Moreover, in 1947, he

36. McCune and John A. Harrison, *Supra*, p. 6 and No. 32, Foote to Freylinghuysen, October 19, 1883.

37. McCune and John A. Harrison, *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3, p. 19. A reviewer objected to this indictment while he supported traditional argument of Tyler Dennet and M. Frederick Nelson etc. John Oliver, Review of the book in *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol. 11, Issue 2 (February 1952), p. 253.

38. This paper is not intended for researching this topic further. But we can glimpse his activities in Chŏng Yong-uk, *Supra*, pp. 102-112.

39. Cumings (1981), *Supra*, p. 37. His wife also wrote a paper analyzing the relationship between Kim Il-Sung and his close circles for the State Department in 1963. Bruce Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), p. 410.

became a member of the advisory editorial board of *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, which in 1956 became *The Journal of Asian Studies*, the leading journal in the Asian Studies field. During this period, he worked on other projects such as developing a language program at the university, writing *Korea Today*, in addition to editing American consular reports dealing with Korea's internal situation and foreign relations during the period 1882-1905. His health eventually deteriorated again, however, and he died on November 5, 1948.

4. George M. McCune and His Korean Studies

What was McCune's vision for his research? What were the basic concerns in his career? What is his legacy? These are all basic questions that must be addressed. Regarding McCune's academic concern, his writings can be divided into two categories- Korean history and contemporary Korean issues. The first category concerns McCune's establishing Korean studies and introducing Korean history to the western world. The second category covers McCune's work on current issues such as Korea's post-liberation political situation and its future prospects. In both his historical and contemporary writings, McCune was ultimately concerned with the prevailing Korean situation and the nation's later development. The historical method was McCune's means of understanding Korea and its future.

Regarding the first category of works, what were McCune's contributions to building Korean Studies in the U.S. and what were his main ideas about Korean history? Confronted with the lack of useful books on Korea in the western hemisphere, he first tried to establish the foundation in this field, particularly by developing research tools. Firstly, as mentioned above, he formulated

the McCune-Reischauer Romanization system during his graduate years. Secondly, he introduced basic Korean historical sources, in particular the *Yi (Chosŏn) dynasty annals*, in his article.⁴⁰ The *Yi dynasty annals* are chronicles recording the history of each King of the Chosŏn dynasty, and are very useful for understanding Korea's traditional society before the Japanese annexation in 1910. This large collection was published around 1933 to be distributed to select institutions in Korea and Japan.⁴¹ The third basic research tool provided by McCune, mentioned earlier in the above survey of his life, was his compilation of document on Korean-American relations, which laid the foundation for understanding the period when Korea and the U.S. first established ties.⁴² As such, McCune was the first American to introduce key research tools to the academic world of the West.

It is clear that Korean history was an arena that attracted McCune as a scholar when one observes his position as a historian at Berkeley. As for his historical work, his dissertation is the sole remaining source of significance for ascertaining his academic interests and methods, because McCune was very busy working in government after his graduation and died before the completion of

40. George M. McCune, "The Yi Dynasty annals of Korea." *Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 29 (1939), pp. 58-82.

41. In the preface of his dissertation, he said that his academic advisor, "R. J. Kerner called my attention to this large body of source material when I first came to the University of California in 1935. He encouraged me in my studies to the end that I eventually had the opportunity of working in the collection myself." See his dissertation, "Korean Relations with China and Japan, 1800-1864," Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation in History, Graduate Division, University of California (1941), p. ii. I found his dissertation in the International Studies library at Yonsei University. The dissertation is among Dr. Kim Key-hiuk's collections. Professor Kerner published a book, *Northeast Asia: a Selected Bibliography* 2 Vols. (CA: Berkeley, 1940), so it is possible for him to know the importance of this collection.

42. George M. McCune with John A. Harrison, *Supra*. He copied Korean sources such as *Haehaeng Ch'ongjae*, the document of Korean envoys to Japan for his research. His dissertation, *Ibid.*, p. 141. The Institute of the Korean Studies at University of Hawaii at Manoa has McCune collection. I appreciate Prof. Edward Schultz for letting me know this.

his *A Short History of Korea*. The title of his dissertation was “Korean relations with China and Japan, 1800-1864.”⁴³ After he became interested in the *Yi Dynasty Annals* through the introduction of Professor Robert J. Kerner, McCune had intended to specialize in the international relations of Korea between the years 1870 and 1904. Yet he found that this project was not feasible as the *Yi Dynasty Annals* did not extend beyond 1864 and the period included many controversies surrounding the nature of the Japanese and Korean relationship. More importantly, McCune thought it necessary to first acquire knowledge of the years before 1864 before proceeding to the study of the later period.⁴⁴

To write his dissertation, McCune relied heavily on Korean sources such as the *Yi Dynasty Annals*, *T'ongmun'gwanji* (*Records of the Office of Interpreters*), *Tongmun Hwigo* (*Documents of Foreign Relations*), *Kukjo Pogam* (*National Precious History of Korea*), *Munhŏn Pigo* (*Official Encyclopedia*), *Ta-Ch'ing Hui-tien*, and *Chōsen shi* (*Korean History* 5 vols.) etc. The dissertation is composed of two parts. One part addresses Korea's relations with China and the other part covers Korea's relations with Japan.

Through detailed descriptions on diplomatic procedures and rituals,⁴⁵ he tried to show “the smooth functioning of traditional relations with China and Japan.”⁴⁶ The relations with Ch'ing China could be defined in terms of *Sadae* or “serve the great,” a form of relationship that was “a spiritual or cultural union rather than a political one.” The empire, according to McCune, never

43. A part of it is shown as “The Exchange of Envoys between Korea and Japan during the Tokugawa period” at *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol. 5, Issue 3 (May 1946) and “The Japanese Trading Post at Pusan” in the *Korean Review* in 1948.

44. His dissertation, *Supra*, pp. ii-iii.

45. He wrote in detailed fashion on the government organizations dealing with foreign relation, the types of envoys, the functions of envoys, travel itinerary, the number of envoy exchanges, and even the minute gift items between Korean and other courts and its prices etc.

46. George M. McCune's dissertation, *Supra*, p. 2.

interfered with Korean domestic politics and its relations with Japan and, therefore, “it was not until western nations brought pressure to bear upon Korea that the tributary state referred matters of international relations to the attention of the Imperial court.”⁴⁷ The apparent contradiction, according to McCune, could be explained by the thorough study of actual relations between the two countries. He estimated that trade between the two countries was not inconsiderable and “there existed a valuable exchange of commodities between the two states, beneficial to both sides.”⁴⁸ Korea was “much less isolated than she fondly supposed.”⁴⁹

He dealt with the relationship between Korea and Japan in the second part of his dissertation. This section similarly meticulously described the characteristics of envoys, the number of envoy dispatches, and gifts etc. The relations between two countries were traditionally termed the *Kyorin*, or “neighborly relations.” The relations, according to McCune, were very different because Japanese envoys were often scorned in Korean documents, “the methods of dealing were frequently changed,” and regular envoys came from Tsushima, not from the Japanese central government. A Japanese representative had his frontier in the southern tip of Korea, “so that the relations between Korea and Japan were actually closer and certainly more familiar than with China.”⁵⁰ In this respect, the purpose of McCune’s study was “to describe the practices and methods by which the two tenets were applied and to discuss the events of especial significance which occurred in carrying them out between the years 1800 and 1864.”⁵¹

In speaking of the general Korean relationship vis-à-vis China and Japan, McCune explained that “the Korean government used

47. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 123.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

50. *Ibid.*, pp. 136-138.

51. George M. McCune’s dissertation, *Supra*, pp. 231-232.

the tributary relationship as honored by the annual despatch [*sic*] of an envoy to Peking as a *sine qua non* for engaging in profitable trade. Thus, also, did the Japanese, particularly those of Tsushima, exchange proper ceremonial envoys with Korea in order to profit by trade with that country.”⁵² He raised awareness of the importance of trade as well as ceremony in Korean traditional foreign relations, and argued that “relations between Korea and China were largely a matter of ceremonial or political consideration, whereas those between Korea and Japan were predominantly commercial or economic character.”⁵³ His views on envoys exchanges between Japan and Korea during the Tokugawa period challenged the then popular notion that “Japan was completely secluded or that Korea was entirely a hermit.” Another implication of McCune’s research was to show the unique situation in East Asia arising from “the incompatibility between Eastern and Western concepts of international law at that time, an incompatibility which was particularly noticeable in the tributary relationship between Korea and China.”⁵⁴

His main contribution to his field was to use Korean sources to understand Northeast Asian economic and diplomatic relations. There have been many works studying European embassies to Peking, and so it was “refreshing to learn more about the Korean embassies and to see Peking, so to speak, through Korean eyes.”⁵⁵ Perhaps McCune’s greatest contribution, however, was to reveal that Korea was not traditionally an appendage of China and Japan. In this sense, he tried to rectify the general errors in western scholarship pertaining to Japan-Korea relations. He heavily criticized the argument that Korea sent envoys to Japan regularly from the ancient time to around 1832. According to McCune, no records

52. George M. McCune, *Supra* in *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, p. 309.

53. George M. McCune’s dissertation, *Supra*, p. 138.

54. George M. McCune, *Supra* in *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, p. 325.

55. Memorial article for McCune by C. Martin Wilbur, *Supra*, p. 189. McCune agreed to this point saying that “the value of this study lies chiefly in its use of Korean source material” in his dissertation, p. 230.

supported this conclusion. He indicated that Tyler Dennett, Stanley K. Hornbeck, Arthur J. Brown all agreed that Korea had sent envoys to Japan. Ultimately, McCune laid the blame for this mistaken notion upon William E. Griffis.⁵⁶ This error, as McCune and Prof. Yi Tae-jin also argued, gained wide popularity in academic circle due to William E. Griffis, who wrongly dated Japanese subjugation of Korea to ancient times.⁵⁷

In addition to his work on history, McCune's research on contemporary Korean political issues deserves recognition.⁵⁸ To understand the post-liberation situation, he continued to employ a historical approach.⁵⁹ Starting with pre-modern Korean history, he

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56. George M. McCune, his dissertation. *Supra*, pp. 252-253. Especially see footnote 22 in p. 253. Tyler Dennett was a scholar who found the Katsura-Taft memorandum. He is an author of *Americans in Eastern Asia* (New York: the Mcmillan Company, 1922). Stanley K. Hornbeck worked for the State Department as an Assistant Secretary of the Far Eastern Division during the World War II and authored *Contemporary Politics in the Far East* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1921). Arthur J. Brown wrote his book, *The Mastery of the Far East* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1919). He was a Secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. and two times visited Korea. Griffis was a famous Asia hand at this time, and wrote his widely known book, *Corea: the Hermit Nation* (London, 1882 and revised until ninth edition by AMS Press in New York in 1911). As for the critical review and its influence of this book, see Tae-jin Yi, "Was Korea a 'Hermit Nation'?" in *Korea Journal*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (Seoul: Korean National Commission for UNESCO, 1998, 12).
57. He wrote that "instances are indeed given in Japanese history where the conquerors not only remitted the tribute but even sent ship loads of rice and barley to the starving Koreans. When. However, for reasons not deemed sufficient, or out of sheer distance, their vassals refused to discharge their duties, they again felt the iron hand of Japan in war. During the reign of Yuriaki, the twenty-second Mikado (A.D. 457-477), the three states failed to pay tribute. A Japanese army landed in Korea, and conquering Hiaksai, compelled her to return to her duty." William Elliot Griffis. *Corea: the Hermit Nation* (New York: AMS Press, 1971) (ninth edition, revised and enlarged), p. 58. He also indicated Korean subservience to Japan in later history. See his book, p. 159, 372. Cited at McCune's dissertation. *Supra*, p. 252. Griffis' book astonishingly includes few footnotes.
58. After he finished his Ph.D. dissertation, he worked for the U.S. government and wrote many articles about the colonial period and post-liberation prospect. His understanding of the contemporary issues was well organized in his book, *Korea Today*. My analysis is based on this book.
59. The contents table is organized following chronology: Introduction, 1. The Historical Background, 2. Korea as a Japanese Colony. 3. Korea in 1945, 4. Korea

asserted that “the homogeneity of the Korean people is a significant factor in an evaluation of Korean political problems. Whatever disunity and diversity appear on the Korean political stage are not products of fundamental differences in race or culture within the Korean community, but are consequences of less substantial causes”⁶⁰ Factionalism has long been a factor of Korean politics and was very serious in late Choson society. In relation to factionalism, it is very interesting to see that McCune understood the prevailing north-south division as dating back to the Nam-in (Men of the South) and Puk-in (Men of the North) struggle during the Chosŏn dynasty.⁶¹ He might have known the difference among the elites from the *Sŏbuk* (Northwest) and *Kiho* (Seoul and neighboring regions). Consequently, to cope with this difficulty, McCune sought to reevaluate Korean social leadership. As McCune put it, leaders were not among the people “because of despotic rule, and the people, therefore, took no part in a government which was conducted by a bureaucratic that was reactionary and factional. Only in the small villages and within the social circle of the family could the people exercise democratic privileges.”⁶²

Ultimately, he thought that three factors were very critical during the transition from traditional to modern times: the strong historical and cultural ties which bound the Korean people together, Koreans’ extreme conservatism and factionalism, and Korea’s ancient ties to China. In McCune’s view, the three features of nationalism, conservatism, dependence “persisted throughout

in International Affairs since 1945, 5. The American Interim Regime. 6. American Economic Policies, 7. Agriculture in South Korea, 8. Industry and Labor in South Korea, 9. The Soviet Political Regime, 10. Economic policy in the soviet Zone, 11. Agriculture, Labor, and Industry in the Soviet Zone, 12. Divided Korea, 13. The Future of a Divided Korea and Appendices.

60. His *Korea Today*, p. 14. He did not pay close attention to pre-modern history *per se*.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

the Japanese era to re-emerge with the removal of Japanese power.”⁶³

Before moving on to a discussion of Korea’s colonial period that began with Japan expelling other rival powers from the Korean peninsula, McCune reminded readers of the fact that before the Annexation “for a time American capital played an important role. The first modern mines, the first electric lighting, the first modern office building, the first gas plant, the first street railroad, were all Americans. And the first railroad in the country, the line from Inchŏn to the capital, was commenced under concessions to Americans.”⁶⁴ Here, McCune again seems to criticize the U.S. for neglecting to help Korea when Japan exerted power over Korea.

Regarding McCune’s basic understanding of Korea’s colonial period, we can see this in his first article, “Korea: a study in Japanese imperialism,” published in 1940. This article was assessed as “a balanced, though clearly pro-Korean attempt to assess the effects of Japanese imperialism on the lives of the Korean people and their economy.”⁶⁵ This attitude is similar to Dr. Gradanzev’s sympathy with the Korean people in *Modern Korea*. Like Dr. Gradanzev, McCune also discussed the problem of colonial oppression, economic exploitation and Korean alienation. To him, leadership was very important issue. As for the colonial period, McCune predicted that owing to “the efficient but still despotic administration of the Japanese,” leadership would “be slow in developing from the common people.” The only democratic experiences that Korean people underwent had been in “small village governments and in Christian institutions.”⁶⁶ McCune believed the difference between traditional and colonial leadership training was notable. This democracy-oriented approach was very

63. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

65. Memorial article for McCune by C. Martin Wilbur, *Ibid.*, p. 190.

66. *His Korea Today*, p. 6.

typical among missionary circles and Christians.⁶⁷

Regarding Korea's colonial period, he examined in detail the functions and characteristics of the Japanese colonial administration, especially the Chosen Government-General. His evaluation evokes who George M. McCune was and where he came from: a son of American missionary who came to Northwest Korea. Generally, he criticized the colonial government not only because "the Korean population was not protected by the writ of habeas corpus or other safeguards against arbitrary action" by the police, but because Koreans had to experience "a thirty-five-year intermission in political responsibility and administrative experience at a time when the Korean people needed education, training and practice in modern techniques of democratic government if they were ever to become self-governing in a modern world."⁶⁸ Under colonial rule, Korean intellectuals divided themselves into moderates and radical communists. It was therefore evident to McCune that even though the Japanese did not eradicate Korean nationalism, "it did succeed in suppressing Korean leadership and in weakening the latent capacities of the Koreans for assuming responsibility in governing their country."⁶⁹ Despite Japanese repression in Korea, the Korean people had made progress in the fields of literacy and education, prerequisites in McCune's view for building a sound democracy. As for the economic dimension, his position resembled Grajdanzev's analysis that Korean was systematically exploited to the benefit of the Japanese empire. In summary, development under the colonial period "hardly constituted a Korean economy." To McCune, the serious problem for the post-liberation period was

67. I have a hypothesis that many people from Pyeng-an province abhorred the totalitarian regime such as North communist regime and South military dictatorship because of U.S.-influenced democracy perception promoted by Christianity. Pyeng-an Province was strongly influenced by Christianity. This is topic for future research.

68. George M. McCune, *Supra*, p. 26.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

the distortion of agriculture, especially the problematically high proportion of tenancy. Nevertheless, the future prospect for economic development based on the Japanese legacy and a united Korea appeared promising.⁷⁰

The post-colonial period was McCune's main concern. Because *Korea Today* contains rich sources and fresh interpretations for the post-1945 period, it is worth discussing McCune's basic tenets and his vision for Korea's future from the perspective of late 1940s.⁷¹ Regarding North and South Korea, he did not mechanically accept the idea that the North was an industrial region and the South is an agricultural one because some aspects of industry and agriculture were still well developed in each area. But the unshakable conclusion from his calculations is that "North and South Korea complemented one another and were each highly dependent upon the other for the satisfactory operation of their mutual economics." The diversified development across the peninsular made the unity of the country extremely important not only for Korean industry and agriculture, but also to "the ultimate attainment of a normal living standard for the Korean people."⁷² McCune found it easier to concentrate on the adverse economic effects as opposed to the political and social effects prompted by Japanese colonial rule. But one thing was quite clear to him; "the implantation of hostile ideologies in each half of the country would bring about conflict."⁷³

Regarding McCune's position on the South Korea, his assessment dates back to December 1945 when rightist party leaders formed the Anti-Trusteeship Committee. The conference

70. *Ibid.*, pp. 22-37, pp. 52-60.

71. The whole information and argument about the political and economic situation in and after 1945 is beyond this paper, so it would be natural to survey it in another paper.

72. We can see this point in his article, "Essential Unity of Korean Economy," *Korea Economic Digest*, January 1946, pp. 3-8. Cited at *Korea Today*, pp. 56-57.

73. *Korea Today*, p. 57.

for international trusteeship in Moscow in late 1945 reflected the wartime cooperation between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Even though the U.S. repudiated the rightists several times, it ultimately failed. McCune summed up the reasons for this failure as follows:

The Anti-Trusteeship Committee was an embarrassment to the American delegation, which was caught in a dilemma. If the rightists were repudiated because of their bad faith, the American delegation would have eliminated the largest group of anti-Communists in South Korea. On the other hand, if the Americans supported the Korean reactionaries, it was almost inevitable that the Joint Commission would collapse.⁷⁴

On this point and with other policies, the American Interim Regime fumbled with many paradoxes because in order to block communist influences, the U.S. supported “anti-democratic Korean reactionaries who had been associated with Japanese colonial oppression.”⁷⁵ Even though the U.S. later liquidated Japanese interests such as land once owned by Japanese colonialists, it still blocked land distribution and other reformist policies.⁷⁶ McCune found the American education policy laudable, however, because the occupation authorities maintained modern schools in Korea, which had been established earlier by American missionaries who “championed the principle of mass education, and gave many promising students the opportunity to study abroad.”⁷⁷ As for the South Korean government after 1948, McCune maintained that while the American occupation was generally “accountable for the course of political developments in the south, the regime which came to power was not notably amenable to American ideals.”⁷⁸ In

74. *Ibid.*, p. 66.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

76. It is astonishing that the prices in 1946 averaged ninety times those of 1937 for certain goods. *Ibid.*, pp. 104-107. Whether this is related to American military policy is arguable, but it is certain that people experienced hard times.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

the eyes of Korea experts such as Dr. Philip C. Jessup, the United States Ambassador-at-Large who visited Korea in early January 1950, South Korea's recalcitrance was particularly notable in the severe restraints imposed upon civil rights.⁷⁹

McCune argued that North Korea achieved more popular reforms such as agrarian reform, general suffrage, the law on the eight-hour working day and equal rights of women etc., while "the regime set up by the Russians gave the impression, whether erroneous or not, that Korean leaders possessed more than nominal authority in the government of North Korea."⁸⁰ But he pointed to the censorship of news as a sign that the apparent ease in governing North Korea was more apparent than real. McCune wrote: "It was quite obvious even from the Russian reports themselves that freedom of expression and freedom of political activity were denied to the Korean people. It could also be assumed that a certain degree of terrorism was practiced to keep the opposition in line."⁸¹

He thought that the northern part of the Korean peninsula followed the Soviet prototype in the early stages of occupation because the Soviet Union was well acquainted with the Korean situation since at the end of 19th century. Basically, to McCune, North Korea was a typical Soviet regime even though there were many achievements by "a body of highly-disciplined Korean Communists."⁸² Because of Japanese domination, McCune felt the Soviet system was well suited for the Korean situation. So the mass of the Korean people leaned toward the Russian regime "especially when it was accompanied by many of the revolutionary benefits of a socialist society." In contrast, in South Korea, the

78. *Ibid.*, pp. 268-269.

79. *Ibid.*, pp. 256-257.

80. *Ibid.*, p. 173.

81. *Ibid.*, p. 180.

82. *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6, 268, and *passim*.

democratic principles were not much appreciated because of the lack of social reform and the irregular application of democracy.⁸³ It does not seem that McCune did not support the perspective of only one side in evaluating Korean situations. He even criticized North Korea by stating that “in evaluating the North Korean regime this accomplishment must be discounted against the lack of true political freedom and democratic self-expression inherent in the essentially one-party bureaucratic system of government that has been established.”⁸⁴

His approach differed somewhat from that of both North and South Korean scholars who tended to justify each respective regime during the Cold War era. McCune sensed that future developments in Korea and in international relations would depend not only on the relations between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R., but also on the two Koreas. He expected the United Nations Commission on Korea to exert its good offices for the mediation of the two Koreas and additionally expected Soviet policy toward the U.N. commission to change greatly. He eagerly anticipated a democratic and unified Korea. His dream of Korean unification will not die because “both for reasons of patriotism and because their personal welfare critically depends upon it, Koreans will never cease to hope for their country’s unity, although the present prospect is of prolonged and deepening antagonism.”⁸⁵

83. *Ibid.*, p. 181.

84. *Ibid.*, p. 268.

85. *Ibid.*, pp. 271-272.

5. Conclusion

Korean-American relationship initiated the modern era in the 1871 skirmish around the Kanghwa Island. After the 1882 Korean-American Treaty was concluded, the Korean people saw the United States as a big brother believing that the “good offices” clause would curb the aggressive policy of Korea’s neighbors toward Korea and ultimately guarantee Korean independence. During the late 19th and the early 20th century, however, knowledge about Korea remained scarce in the academic world of the U.S., though the Korean region was familiar to many missionaries. Therefore, there was little popular understanding of Korea in the West from that period to the 1940s.⁸⁶ Although there were several universities and institutions dealing with area studies in the U.S. during the first half of 20th century, missionaries were the sole conspicuous presence in Korean studies. These missionaries and their descendants conducted research on their region during the Pacific War. George M. McCune shows how deep a connection these missionary works had with modern Korean history. McCune’s Korean studies shared the same passion with E.H. Norman’s work on Japan in terms of his thorough research, the acknowledgement of Korean agency in history,⁸⁷ active involvement with actual policies, and a concern

86. One exception is *Transactions of the Korean Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, which was founded by the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland in 1900. As for the background of this journal, see Young-ick Lew, “Origins of Modern Korean Studies: Contributions by Western Scholars to Modern Historiography in Korea” in *Han’guksae itsōsō Chibanggwa Chungang* [The Local and Center in Korean History] (Seoul: Sogang University, 2003).

87. He asserted that his primary purpose in writing *Korea Today* had been “to go beyond a mere description of the American and Soviet activities in Korea, and to present as clearly as possible the development of the Korean people during this period of transition,” p. x.

for the Korean people's welfare.⁸⁸ When the Cold War broke out in full force, however, missionaries had to limit their involvement only to South Korea. George M. McCune's case should receive much recognition after the cold war, because his analysis transcended the mind-set of a divided Korea. Keeping in mind the relative affluence of South Korea and its tremendous gains in terms of civil rights and democracy, McCune's work may still shed light on how North Korea had to accommodate its regime to the international community and point the way to what the future of Korean peninsula should be.

88. John Dower, "E.H. Norman, Japan, and the Uses of History," in E.H. Norman, *Origins of the Modern Japanese State*, ed. John Dower (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975), pp. 3-101.

Appendix 1.

George M. McCune: A Life

1908. 6. 16 Born in P'yŏngyang, Korea under missionary parents, George Shannon McCune and Helen McAfee McCune, who were educational missionaries of the Northern Presbyterian Church. His brother is Shannon McCune, a Professor at Colgate University, the University of Florida and the University of Massachusetts.
- 1930 A.B. Occidental College with study at Huron College and Rutgers University.
- 1930-1932 Instructor, Union Christian College, P'yŏngyang, Korea and Businessman.
- 1932-1934 Stayed in Hawaii because of his bad health and married Evelyn Margaret Becker, the daughter of American missionary to Korea.
- 1934-1935 M.A. Occidental College.
- 1935-1941 Graduate Student at University of California at Berkley.
- 1936-1937 Teaching Assistant in History at University of California.
- 1937-1938 William Harrison Mills Traveling Fellow in International Relations at the University of California, in Korea, China, and Japan.
1939. 2-1942. 2 Joined the Faculty member as an Instructor in History at Occidental College.
1942. 2-1944. 5 Researcher at the Far Eastern Section in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and the Board of Economic Warfare.
1944. 5-1945. 10 Chief of the Korean Section in the Office of Far Eastern Affairs in the State Department.

1945. 10-1946. 7 Recuperated in L.A. while writing a number of articles with his wife.
1946. 7-1948. 11 Joined the Faculty as a lecturer, Assistant Professor and later in early 1948 as Associate Professor in History Department at University of California at Berkley.
1947. 2 A member of the advisory editorial board of *the Far Eastern Quarterly*.
1948. 11. 5 Died of illness.

Appendix 2.

Writings of George M. McCune⁸⁹

- 1939 With E.O. Reischauer. "The romanization of the Korean language based upon its phonetic structure," in *Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 29 (1939), 1-57.
- 1939 "The Yi Dynasty annals of Korea," in *Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 29 (1939), 58-82.
- 1940 "Korea: A Study in Japanese Imperialism," in *World Affairs Interpreter*, Vol. 11 (April 1940), pp. 77-85.
- 1941 "Korean relations with China and Japan, 1800-1864," Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation in history, Graduate Division, University of California (1941) xiii, 292 pp.
- 1945 Review of *Modern Korea* by Andrew J. Gradanzev in *Pacific Affairs*, 18 (March 1945), 103-104.
- 1945 "Russian Policy in Korea: 1895-1898," in *Far Eastern Survey*, Vol. **IV**, No. 19 (September 1945), 272-274.
- 1945 Review of *Korea and the old orders in Eastern Asia* by M. Frederick Nelson in *American Historical Review*, 51 (October, 1945), 122-123.
- 1946 "The Essential Unity of the Korean Economy," in *Korean Economic Digest* (January 1946), pp. 3-8.
- 1946 "Occupation Politics in Korea," in *Far Eastern Survey*,

89. This is mostly based on Memorial article for McCune by C. Martin Wilbur, *Supra*, pp. 190-191. I added several lists to it.

- Vol. X, No. 3 (February 13, 1946), 33-37.
- 1946 "The Exchange of Envoys between Korea and Japan During the Tokugawa Period," in *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol. 5, Issue 3 (May 1946), 308-325.
- 1946 Six brief articles in *The Voice of Korea*, 3 (1946):
 [Unsigned] The Climate of Korea (March 12), 4 pp.
 The Island of Gelpart: historic amazon isle (May 6), 2 pp.
 Economic chaos in Korea (June 6), 2 pp.
 Investments in Korea: report of an interview (July 12), 2 pp.
 Cities and towns of Korea (August 14), 2 pp.
 Gold mining in Korea (November 30), 4 pp.
- 1946 "Korea emerges from her 40 years blackout by the Japanese," in *Export trade and shipper*, 54 (September 16, 1946), 5-8.
- 1947 "Korea: The First Year of Liberation," in *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 20 (March 1947), 3-17.
- 1947 "U.S. Policy Act II: Korea," in *New Republic* (May 5, 1947), 24-27.
- 1947 *Koreas Postwar Political Problems*, New York, Institute of Pacific Relations, Secretariat Paper No. 2, Tenth Conference of the Institute of Pacific Relations (September 1947), Stratford-upon-Avon, England (mimeographed), 56 pp.
- 1947 "The Occupation of Korea," in *Foreign Policy Reports* (October 15, 1947), 186-195.
- 1947 With Evelyn B. McCune, "Prospects for a Korean settlement," in *Foreign Policy Reports* (October 15, 1947), 196.
- 1947 "Postwar Government and Politics of Korea," in *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 9 (November 1947), 605-623.
- 1948 "Recent political developments in Korea," in *India Quarterly*, 4 (April-June 1948), 138-151.
- 1948 "The Japanese trading post at Pusan," in *Korean Review*, 1 (June 1948), 11-15.
- 1948 "The Korean Situation," in *Far Eastern Survey*, Vol. 17, No. 17 (September 8, 1948), 197-202.
- 1948 "Korea," in *The new international year book ... for the year*

1947 (1948), 262-264.

1950 With the collaboration of Arthur L. Grey, Jr. *Korea Today*.
Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950.

1951 With John A. Harrison eds. *Korean-American Relations:
Document Pertaining to the Far East Diplomacy of the
United States*, Vol. 1, *The Initial Period, 1883-1886*. Berkeley
and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1951.

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- Interim Government Idea and the Policy toward the Middle Group] (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 2003).
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ABSTRACT

Making Korea Distinct:

George M. McCune and His Korean Studies

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Scholars on Korean-American relations have primarily focused on political and economical dimensions rather than cultural aspects. In this sense, we need more works on cultural studies in this field. The primary purpose of this paper is to contribute to this neglected area. My assumption is that the Korean Studies in the U.S. shows a part of the cultural aspects of Korean-American relations. George M. McCune was one of the finest scholars on Korean Studies at that time. He became a first full time faculty member majoring in Korean Studies at the University of California at Berkeley after the Pacific War.

McCune's case shows well that missionary backgrounds were very productive in founding area studies in the U.S. around the Pacific War though he himself was not a missionary. He was born to a famous missionary family in P'yŏngyang, Korea, the city at the time called the "Jerusalem of the Orient." Father McCune was known as a champion of Korean Nationalist Movements such as the Korean Conspiracy of Governor-General assassination and March First Movement in 1919. His father's involvement in Korean education and politics seems to have influenced McCune's affection for the Korean people.

Considering McCune's family residence, P'yŏngyang, his idea is not without Northwest elites in Korea. The Northwest has a strong

locality in Korean history. The area was famous in terms of Christianity and commercialism during the colonial period. During the Chosŏn Dynasty, the region was marginalized, so the local elites were quite confident to deny the previous dynasty and Korean tradition. Many Christians tended to stress democracy and freedom, concepts which were heavily promoted by American missionaries. Though McCune had much affection for Korean history and Korea *per se*, we can easily find his criticism about the previous regime in terms of democracy. Therefore, his criticism pointed to the authoritarian regime, first the Colonial government and then South and North Korea. His book *Korea Today* was one of few scholarly works on Korea until 1960s. So we can surmise that his idea shows one of aspects of the U.S. perception of Korea.

Keywords:

George M. McCune, McCune Family, McCune-Reischauer, Korean Studies, Korea Today, P'yŏngyang, American missionaries.