AMERICAN INFLUENCE ON KOREAN EDUCATION

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In the historical development of Korean education, there have been many forces, both domestic and foreign, which helped to shape educational theory as well as practice. Before the opening of Korea to the West, Korean education was heavily influenced by the Chinese practice of teaching children how to read, write, and decipher Chinese classics. After the Yi Dynasty (1392-1910) adopted an open-door policy toward the West in 1882 by concluding a treaty with the United States, the first Western nation to establish diplomatic relations with the hermit kingdom, American Protestant missionaries rushed into Confucian Korea with modern methods of instruction and a determination to Christianize Koreans. Before Christian education, with its heavy emphasis on reading the Bible and singing Christian hymns, was given ample time to be tested in the Korean educational laboratory for its relevance to Korean culture and society, another major foreign influence penetrated Korea from Japan—a country determined to place the Korean people under its colonial rule. Consequently, when Korea became a colony of Japan, in 1910, Koreans were subject to Japanese colonial education—which was designed, basically, to “Japanize” Koreans. In 1945, at the end of World War II in the Pacific, Korea was put under the military rule of the United States until 1948. During this short, three-year period, Korean education was to be fundamentally restructured both to eliminate any colonial vestige from the Korean schools and to introduce American educational theory and practice based both on “scientific outlook” and “democratic ideals and values.” In 1948, with the blessings of the Americans, a government was established in Seoul with administrative control over the region south of the 38th Parallel; the northern region came under the influence of Soviet Russia. The government in Seoul, since its inception, has continued to work and cooperate with Washington in its effort to rebuild its educational system, particularly after the end of the Korean War in 1953. Even today Americans continue to exert influence over the Korean educational system either directly by giving educational assistance to colleges and universities or indirectly by means of training Korean students and scholars in American institutions of higher learning.

As briefly outlined above, it has been almost one hundred years since Korean education came under the American influence and many events have transpired during these years which defy any one person’s ability to describe them in detail. In discussing the influence of the United States on Korean education the last one hundred years will be grouped into three major periods: (1) the influence of American Protestant missionaries on Korean education, 1886-1945, (2) the American military government and Korean education, 1945-1948, (3) educational assistance and cooperation between Korea and United States since 1948.

The Influence of American Protestant Missionaries, 1886-1945

One of the most epoch-making events in the modern history of Korea was the fact that Korea adopted an open-door policy toward the West when advised by China, and established diplomatic relations with the United States by concluding a treaty of amity and commerce on May 22, 1882. This treaty, the first ever signed between the hermit kingdom and a Western nation, was ratified by the two respective governments in the following year. During the same year the first American ambassador, Lucius H. Foote, serving until then on a special consular mission at Aspinwall, Columbia, was appointed by President Arthur and came to Korea to represent the interests of the United States. To reciprocate Foote’s arrival in Seoul, King Kojong dispatched a special mission to the United States in August of the same year. The members of the special mission visited a number of American institutions to learn from American science, technology, education, commerce and industry; some of them returned to Korea in November. Hong Young-sik, vice-minister of the mission, reported to King Kojong upon his return and urged him to adopt the American educational system, when he emphasized that “definitely we
should adopt the American educational system in order to train people and use their skills in many different ways. . . . "3 Urged on by the report of the members of the mission, King Kojong began to plan for establishing an English-language school to be supported by the court. Included in the plan was the king's request for three American teachers to be assigned to the Royal English School "to undertake the management and teaching of the government school."4 The royal request was forwarded in the spring of 1885 to Washington by Foote and was carefully studied by commissioner of education, John Eaton, who selected three young Americans, George W. Gilmore, D.A. Bunker and H.B. Hulbert, all of whom were graduates of Union Theological Seminary. It was reported that these young men were chosen for their "sound views and excellent spirit,"5 suggesting that they were called because of their Christian character. They arrived in Korea on July 4, 1886 and immediately embarked upon the task of developing the school's academic program. The school opened its doors toward the end of September with an enrollment of 20 students from noble families in its junior class and probably an equal number of students with government appointment in the senior class. They were taught mathematics, natural science, history, geography and political science in English, and students with the junior rank were required to stay in the school's dormitory.6 Thus, the first modern school in Korea patterned after American education had a modest beginning.

One of the direct results of the treaty of 1882 between Korea and the United States was the influx of Western missionaries, particularly American missionaries of various denominations intent on bringing the Christian faith to the Korean people. In 1884, Horace N. Allen of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions of the United States of America was sent to Korea and his coming was followed by the arrival of another Presbyterian, Horace H. Underwood and that of a Methodist missionary, Henry D. Appenzeller in the following year. Others followed them later in large numbers.

From the beginning of mission work in 1885 to the end of the 19th century, foreign missions put more emphasis on general evangelism than on education. In particular, secondary and higher education for "non-believers" was not encouraged as Protestant churches regarded education of secondary importance. Primary education, however, was considered necessary and for the first fifteen years from 1885, educational activities were largely confined to primary schools. One of the first primary schools was established by Horace G. Underwood under the name of "Jesus Doctrine School" and operated as no more than an orphanage for boys. By 1908, there were thirty primary schools in Seoul with 780 pupils and in 1930 there were 422 primary schools which were operated by various missions. Almost one-half of these schools were one-room schools and 190 were non-standardized, suggesting that they were not recognized by the Japanese colonial government.

Modern secondary education in Korea had a rather humble start. In January 1886, Mrs. Mary Scranton, the mother of William B. Scranton, a Methodist missionary, who came to Korea in 1885, began to teach a girl in her house. Her student was a concubine sent to learn English by her patron in the hope that she might bring him prestige and fortune if she became the queen's interpreter.7 The school, though begun on a small scale, had lofty aims, one of which was to convert Korean girls into "missionaries of the Cross among their relatives and associates."8 During the same year Pechae haktang, a secondary school for boys, was founded by H.D. Appenzeller, whose views on the Christian aims of education were similar to those of Mrs. Scranton, the founder of Ehua haktang. Students were given lessons in Chinese characters, English, astronomy, geography, biology, mathematics, handicrafts, and the Bible. For the first time in Korean history Western sports were introduced to students of this school. It was reported that students attending the school were strongly admonished to keep and respect the laws of the land and to abstain from using alcoholic beverages and obscene language. The founding of these schools marked the beginning of secondary school education on the basis of the Western educational concept. Although emphasis was still placed on evangelism and primary school education, more secondary schools were built to educate Korean youth.

By the end of 1930 a total of thirty-one secondary schools—three for boys, six for girls, two industrial schools, and twenty non-standardized schools—were operated by various foreign missions in Korea. Between 1930 and 1937 seven more schools were added to this number.

Higher education in any modern sense of the word was developed in Korea by foreign missions. Through the combined efforts of all foreign missions, six major institutions of higher learning for Koreans were established during the first decade of this century. The first of these, Severance Medical College, was established by the Northern Presbyterian Mission in 1903. Three
years later a college that was to cherish "the aims and ideals similar to those of the small denominational colleges of the Middle West in America" was established in Pyongyang, now the capital of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, through combined efforts of four foreign missions. When Union Christian College opened its doors, non-Christian students were not admitted and this policy remained intact for a long time. The major subjects of the course of study consisted of the Old Testament, New Testament, philosophy of religion, church history and American history. In 1925 the college was recognized by the Japanese colonial government, but twelve years later it was ordered closed over the issue of "shrine-worship," against which many Korean Christians resisted. A third college, Choson Christian College which is now called Yonsei University, was founded in 1915 by Horace G. Underwood. Compared with the course of study implemented at Union Christian College where students were prepared for the Christian ministry, Choson Christian College made a broader basis of college work available for Korean youth by offering academic subjects in commercial, agricultural, industrial, professional, and cultural areas. Although it was chartered to "establish and maintain Christian principles," they were broadly interpreted to include such departments as literary, commercial, and agricultural subjects. The college also offered the Bible, mathematics, physics, and chemistry. A fourth college, Ehwa College which is now called Ehwa Women's University, was established in 1910, but it was able to graduate only twenty-nine students in the next fifteen years. The last two institutions of higher learning established by foreign missions were theological seminaries, one for the followers of the Presbyterian persuasion, and the other for those of the Methodist faith.

Soon after Japan put Korea under its colonial rule she began to undertake the task of restructuring the educational system in order to make it more suitable to Japan's national interest of assimilating Koreans into Japanese culture. The first educational reform put into effect to achieve this assimilationist goal was proclaimed in 1911, one year after Korea became Japan's colony, and three other reforms followed subsequently, the last one coming in 1943 during the Pacific War. One of the immediate results of the frequent reforms under the Japanese Colonial administration was a rigid and strict control imposed on private schools, including foreign mission schools. Japanese authorities did not favor the religious practice of reading and studying the Bible, and strongly discouraged parochial schools from offering religious studies. Toward the end of the Pacific War these schools were forced to comply with "shrine worship," which was quite often interpreted as worshipping of idolatry by many Korean Christians, and many of the educational leaders refused to comply with the Japanese demand. When schools were found in violation they were often ordered closed.

If foreign missions and their emissaries served as agents of bringing American educational influence to Korea directly, Korean students returning to their homeland after many years of study in America became agents of bringing Korean education under American influence indirectly. Historical records available so far indicate that Yu Kil-chun, a member of the special mission dispatched to America in 1883, was the first Korean student to enroll in an American educational institution. Yu was encouraged by his benefactor, Min Yong-ik, minister of the special mission, to study in America, and consequently enrolled in Governor Dummer Academy of South Byfield, Massachusetts, probably to prepare himself for a college education. But Yu was compelled to return home in 1885 when his benefactor was critically injured during a coup detat in December 1884 which was plotted by a group of progressive politicians against the ruling class. After his return he wrote a book, Soyu kyonmun or What I Saw and Heard During My Journey to the West, which introduced Koreans to the West. Later he served as a key member of the Kun'guk kimach'o, or Supreme Council for Military and State Administration, which was established to carry out government reform policies in 1894.¹¹

One of the leaders of the 1884 coup detat was a young man by the name of So Jae-g'il who had received a military training in Japan. He plotted against the conservative faction in power with Kim Ok-kyun, but the coup failed to keep him and his fellow plotters in power more than three days. Consequently he fled to Japan and subsequently came to America in 1885. He attended Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania, briefly and moved to George Washington University in Washington, D.C., where he worked as a medical librarian while attending school in the evenings. He graduated from the university in 1895, thus becoming the first Korean ever to receive a doctorate in medicine from an American university. In the following year, So, now a naturalized American citizen with an Anglicized name, Philip Jaisohn, returned to his native land with his American wife.
in order to serve as adviser to the privy council. While serving the Korean government in that capacity, he began to publish the first modern newspaper in Korea, *Independent*, with the assistance of Yu Kil-chun.

Another man forced to go into exile due to his suspected involvement in the 1884 coup d'état was Yun Ch'i-ho, who was then under American minister Foote's employ as his interpreter. Yun was very close to Kim Ok-kyun, the brain trust of the coup and was considered guilty by association. He left Korea in 1885 to go to Shanghai, China, where he attended the Anglo-Chinese Institute, a school sponsored by the American Methodist Episcopal Church, South. After his graduation, he was sent to Vanderbilt University by his Shanghai benefactors in 1888. He completed his studies at the university and went on to Emory College, Oxford, Georgia, where he continued to study until he came back to China in 1893. Yun was allowed to come back to Korea in 1895 by a group of his friends who were placed in high offices. He was given a number of government positions in rapid succession from 1895 until his retirement from politics in 1904. He then worked toward the establishment of the Anglo-Korean Institute where he introduced industrial education patterned after that of America.

The story of many Korean students who made good upon their return to the homeland after their study in America is repeated many times over since 1900. Included among them were such illustrative notables as Syngman Rhee, the first president of the Republic of Korea; John Chang, premier; Byong-ok Cho, one-time presidential candidate against Rhee; Ki-bong Lee, speaker of the National Assembly; Whal-nan Kim, president of Ehwa Women's University; Lak-geoon George Paik, president of Yonsei University; Li-wuk Chang, president of Seoul National University; Chon-sok Oh, minister of education, Republic of Korea. According to Oh, who also served as dean of graduate school, Ehwa Women's University, it was through a group of Korean students taught at Teachers College, Columbia University, under John Dewey between 1926 and 1931 that Dewey's educational philosophy was introduced to Korea. This was particularly true after Korea's liberation from Japanese colonialism in 1945.

**American Military Government and Korean Education**

The fate of Korea and her people had been sealed when the American government reached an agreement with the Soviet Union, during the Yalta Conference, to divide the Korean peninsula and disarm the Japanese army stationed in Korea. To the astonishment of the indigenous, however, American military personnel who came to Korea to disarm the Japanese army and to establish a military government were neither trained or prepared for what they would encounter during their administration. One of those unprepared administrators placed in the position of power and responsibility was Captain E.L. Lockard. His qualifications as an administrator to help create and develop a new educational system suitable to post-liberation Korea included his experience teaching at a local junior college in Chicago, Illinois. Due largely to his lack of knowledge of local conditions prevailing then in the midst of confusion in postwar Korea, he was compelled to rely on indigenous educators. One of them was Chon-sok Oh, a graduate of Teachers College, Columbia University, who had gone back to his native land to teach. Oh claims that he was the first Korean educator to be consulted by Captain Lockard on educational affairs. Upon the recommendation of Oh, Lockard helped to create the Korean Committee on Education which became a major decisionmaking organization on matters pertaining to education.

From September 11, 1945 when Captain Lockard assumed his administrative duties to August 15, 1948 when the Republic of Korea was ushered into its feeble but nascent existence, a number of major educational decisions were made that left indelible marks of the American influence upon Korean education. First, a decision was reached to establish a 6-3-3-4 educational system patterned after general American educational practice. Commenting on how the present Korean educational system came into being that includes six years of primary education, three years of lower secondary schooling to be articulated with three years of upper secondary education, and four years of tertiary education, Oh states that "one cannot deny the criticism that the present Korean educational system was patterned after the American educational system." Second, toward the end of the American military government, Governor-General William F. Dean issued "Military Government Order No. 217" which created, on paper, a system of local control and autonomy over education. This was not implemented, however, due to the establishment of the Republic of Korea. The present educational administrative system—which smacks of lay control of education by local boards established in provinces and in major cities—was certainly influenced by American practice.
This, though, is nothing but a facade of local autonomy behind which a highly centralized and rigidly controlled system of education is being practiced under the supervision of the minister of education appointed by the president. Third, from the beginning of the American military government there was a strong commitment to universal education based on the principle of equal opportunity, although it was not until the end of the Korean War that primary education was made universal, compulsory, and free. This notion of making education available to every citizen on the basis of equal opportunity was certainly American in origin, and has been responsible for the educational boom for the last 38 years. Some critics have characterized it as an "educational boondoggle," as they consider universal education in Korea as both a waste of financial resources and responsible for making people, who, with a smattering of learning, believe that manual labor is beneath their dignity.

Fourth, the American influence was also felt on Korean educational theory. As mentioned earlier, a small group of Korean students came under the influence of John Dewey, directly; others later learned his philosophy a la mode William Kilpatrick at Teachers College, Columbia University, where they were exposed to the idea of education based on democracy and experience. Upon their return to the homeland, they were not able to translate Dewey's theory into practice immediately as Korea was still under Japanese colonial rule. They were, however, given an opportunity to put what they learned into practice after Korea's liberation and, with the blessings of American military authorities, became missionaries for education according to the gospel of John Dewey. This gospel was spread rapidly over the Korean educational field like prairie fire and reached almost every aspect of Korean education before it encountered tempering affects of other educational gospels coming from America. In the meantime, Dewey's philosophy of education found its way into Korean educational law when the Korean Committee on Education finally decided to include a clause after it had held 120 different meetings between the winter of 1945 and the spring of 1946 where Dewey was often discussed. Dewey's educational philosophy became a standard bearer of a massive nationwide educational movement known as the "New Education Movement." One of the proponents of the movement, Chon-sok Oh, characterized it as "an imitation of the Deweyian education." 17

Educational Cooperation Between Korea and America Since 1948

The establishment of a government in South Korea did not change the course of education that had begun to put its roots down in indigenous soil with American help. It continued to grow until the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950. The three-year-long war played havoc with every aspect of Korean education. School buildings were destroyed, teachers were in short supply due to either the wartime draft or death, textbooks and school supplies were not readily available, financing for education was limited, and yet there were millions of children in need of education. Immediately after the end of the Korean War, in 1953, many public and private organizations in America rushed financial aid and materials to Korea, as well as human resources, in order to rehabilitate Korean schools. Among these were the AFAK (Armed Forces Assistance to Korea), the AID (Agency for International Development), the USOM (United States Operations Mission), the AKF (American Korean Foundation), the CARE (Cooperative for American Remittances to Everywhere, Inc.), the Fulbright Scholarship Commission and the Asia Foundation. Particularly noteworthy for educational assistance in the areas of teacher training, textbook publications, curriculum development and educational research were the Unitarian Service Committee and the George Peabody College Education Commission. The former sent three separate missions in 1952, 1953 and 1954 in order to extend its services, while the latter helped to reorganize Korea’s teacher education as well as education for school librarians between 1956 and 1961.18 In dollar terms, according to one calculation,19 public organizations in America spent approximately $100 million between 1952 and 1963 to assist in the rebuilding of the Korean educational system from primary to higher education. This, of course, does not include additional assistance extended to Korea by private foundations in America.

Direct educational assistance programs extended to Korea during this period were augmented by American institutions of higher learning which took in thousands of Korean students for their further training and education in different fields of study. During the two decades between 1953 and 1973 there were 11,770 Korean students enrolled in American institutions of higher learning. Many of these students returned to Korea either to teach at colleges and universities or to work for Korean industries and governments. In order to drive home the importance of the US-trained Koreans in their society in general and Korean education in particular, it should be pointed out that as of 1967 approximately 65 percent of the
faculty of engineering, Seoul National University, the Harvard of Korea, were American educated, while its College of Education has 32 faculty members trained in America, which constitute 45 percent of the total faculty. Although other institutions of higher learning may not have as many American-trained faculty members as Seoul National University has, it can be said without exaggeration that the American-trained academics now make up the core of the Korean elite.

Conclusion

In retrospect, there is a general consensus among scholars on both sides of the Pacific that Korean education has been greatly influenced by American involvement in Korea over the last century. Whether the American impact on Korean education has been positive or negative is open to debate. There are, however, some preliminary signs suggesting that Korean education as practiced today has failed to reflect some of the salient features of American education which, among others, include emphasis on respect for the individual and his dignity, the scientific and rational method for problem-solving, and the democratic way of life. Of course, there is little reason to believe that Koreans have desired to change their old way of life through their relations with America and adopt a whole new way of dealing with nature and life by learning from her. Nor do we have a right to expect that Koreans under American influence should accept American values and attitudes toward the scientific method and democracy. Notwithstanding this recognition, it is rather disconcerting to know that despite millions of dollars, immeasurable material assistance and human efforts that have been expended, Americans have failed to create a fundamental shift from an autocratic to a democratic attitude both in education and government in Korea. On the contrary, it seems that the United States has contributed to the formation of an elite class of Koreans educated in America who are either willingly or unwillingly working as tools of government oppression rather than as a voice of opposition to autocracy. The United States may well have contributed to this.

Footnotes

1 For detailed information on the historical development of diplomatic relations between the Yi Dynasty and the United States, see Yur-bok Lee, Diplomatic Relations Between the United States and Korea, 1866-1887, New York: Humanities Press, 1970.
5 ibid.
7 Paik, op. cit., p. 127.
8 Gilmore, George W. Korea From Its Capital, Philadelphia: The Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1882, p. 300.
10 ibid., p. 136.