History of US Policy Regarding the Occupation of Korea (1945-1948): Trends in Existing Research

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1. Introduction

In the period between the time of liberation from Japanese colonialism (August 15, 1945) and the Korean War, the Korean peninsula was swept up in a whirlwind of unprecedented changes. The entire East Asian region surrounding it also swayed with upheavals, groping for a new order. On the Korean peninsula, the search for a new order ended in armed confrontation, namely, the Korean War, which for both Korea and the world as a whole, served to strengthen the Cold War infrastructure and heighten the confrontation between the US and USSR.

The domestic and international significance of such developments on the Korean peninsula after World War II sparked many research efforts beginning from quite an early period. Particularly in American academia, the history of US policy regarding the post-liberation US occupation of Korea has been considered a valuable case study in explaining changes in US foreign policy after World War II. Research has been conducted not just in the US and Korea, but also in the USSR, Japan, and other surrounding countries. However, in terms of research tradition and level of documentation, US research is without doubt the most prevalent.

Research from the US can be divided into two fields. The first concerns US foreign affairs or foreign policy, and the US occupation of Korea is treated as one case study in the research on general US foreign policy or US policy towards East Asia. Secondly, Korean politics and society during the period of US occupation is

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studied within the field of area studies. The former field focuses on international relations, and the latter, on internal affairs. However, most of the studies in the latter field, rather than offering analytical explanations for the forces of development within Korean society, are comparative studies, employing descriptive methodologies based on anthropological approaches; otherwise, they are mere extensions of a survey on the history of US-Korean relations.¹

As is reflected in the overall state of research on the history of US occupation policy, most studies conducted in the US thus far have been written from the perspective of Washington as it views Seoul. These materials are often more concerned with developments in Moscow than in Seoul, and even if the focus is on Seoul, it is limited to the Headquarters of the U.S. Armed Forces in Korea. Some researchers emphasize the importance of Seoul or P'yŏngyang and even implicitly include Beijing, Moscow, and Tokyo in their studies, but when it comes to revealing the determining factors behind certain events, their focus invariably turns towards Washington.

The tendency of these researchers to understand the US occupation of Korea as a simple extension of overall US foreign policy towards Korea has resulted primarily from the fact that the US had absolute power in influencing social developments on the Korean peninsula at that time. That US research has dominated the debates on this question and that the US possesses the majority of the most important documentation materials also reflect this situation. If studies were to be written from the perspective of Seoul viewing Washington, what kind of picture would they draw?

For example, in October 1945, an official from the US State Department announced a proposal to extend international trusteeship of the Korean peninsula, but the opposition from the Korean people was so strong that the official could not avoid issuing a second statement of clarification. The existing research indicates that the trusteeship proposal was one which the US prepared for over several years beginning with the outbreak of the Pacific War. The US also earned the consensus of other powers through several wartime conferences of the Allies. Hence, regardless of what the real intent was, US officials considered the trusteeship plan to be the most rational way of dealing with the Korean situation after the war.

¹ Bruce Cumings' "Korean-American Relations: A Century of Contact and Thirty-Five Years of Intimacy" in Warren Cohen ed East Asian-American Relations (Columbia Univ Press, 1983) provides a good sketch of research trends regarding US-Korea relations. This work introduces materials and writings produced in the US on US-Korea relations. It also presents interesting descriptions of the images of Korea and racial prejudices reflected in American writings, as well as intellectual tradition in the field of Korean Studies.
However, it is also a fact that the plan met strong resistance from the Korean people from the beginning, failing to satisfy even the officials in the Headquarters of the US Armed Forces in Korea. If this is the case, then can the drafting of the trusteeship proposal be seen as an expression of American imperialism, as was asserted by a sector of the Korean people at that time, or was it, as some Americans argued, a result of the political inexperience of the Korean people? The question is simple, but the answer cannot help but be complicated. In either case, this situation shows that from the beginning, the Korean people viewed US occupation policy from a considerably different perspective from Washington's policy planners.

In addition, how are we to view the changes in the trusteeship plan, a proposal to form a provisional government in Korea through a US-USSR Joint Commission, which gradually turned into a plan to isolate the Soviet Union by establishing an independent government in South Korea? Can these changes in the trusteeship plan be seen simply as part of the shifts in US foreign policy towards the Soviet Union at that time? Of course, the US did seem to have made the effort, at least superficially, to resolve the Korea issue through international consensus involving the Soviet Union, and it is also probable that policymakers in Washington considered the Korea question to be one element in US policy towards the USSR. However, as is reflected in the fact that the US-USSR Joint Commission had to be dissolved because of the problem of selecting the political parties and social organizations within Korea that it was to consult with, it is clear that US occupation policy was in fact subject to change depending on developments within Korea.

As the above examples show, until US policy towards Korea can be implemented on the Korean peninsula, it must survive not only complex bureaucratic processes and conflicting interests among US officials, but also a process of interactions with Korean political forces. This thesis argues that in order to fully understand the US occupation policy in Korea, it is necessary to analyze the role of situational developments in Korea in changing US occupation policy. Moreover, as is evident from the above-mentioned debates regarding the trusteeship plan, different historical evaluations of the US occupation policy can also be proposed, evaluations

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2 This is related to the issue of how to historically evaluate the Cold War system. It would be of value to consider several perspectives in this regard: the idea that the Cold War ideology was in fact a concept used by the US to conceal its real interests in the Third World, Noam Chomsky's argument that the Cold War is another expression for the relationship between North and South, and Bruce Cummings' assertion that aside from the dimension of containing the USSR, the Cold War was on the other hand one link in the US plans to maintain its hegemony over the capitalist world. See Noam Chomsky, "Chapter 3 North-South/East-West," Year 501, and Bruce Cummings, "Trilateralism and the New World Order," World Policy Journal, 1992 (NY, 1992).
that can be as divergent as the perspectives of American policymakers and the Korean people.

Since it was the US military government that seized political power after liberation, the nature of the predominant influence of the US at that time on the development of Korean society as well as its strategies for preserving its influence, must be looked into with care. It is also necessary to historically evaluate the nature of US occupation policy based on this analysis. Methodologically, this effort would involve examining both high-policy and low-policy, as classified by Bruce Cumings.³

On the whole, research conducted thus far subsumes the unfolding of US occupation policy in South Korea or situational changes on the Korean peninsula under the changing trends in US policy towards Korea. The discussion is reduced to analyzing the functional factors involved in policy formation and decision-making, while the differences between the content and practice of policies are seen only to be the result of personality differences among the authorities involved. Hence, in order to situate US occupation policy within the development of modern Korean history, it is necessary to transcend these one-sided analyses and to conduct research which includes analyses of both high-level policies and the causes and background of changes in US occupation policy.

Even in Northeast Asia, the only region in the world where the Cold War state has yet to dissipate, change has become evident in recent years. Tensions created as a result of the North Korean nuclear arms issue have begun to dissipate, and attention has turned towards the direction of negotiated settlement. At a time when the reorganization of order in the Korean peninsula is being discussed from various dimensions, reexamining Korea's post-World War II history, when the current order on the peninsula was first formed, and considering this period with a new research perspective are exercises of great significance.

This article examines research trends by time period in regards to the history of US policy on the occupation of Korea after liberation. It also seeks to propose

³ Cumings defines high-policy to be Washington-centered decision-making in the US proper, while low-policy is defined to be the attitudes and policy designs that officials in the Headquarters of the US Armed Forces in Korea adopt as they actually carry out policies in Korea. Cumings emphasizes the importance of low-policy in research on US-Korea relations. See “From Internationalism to Containment to Rollback and Back Again: The Course of US Policy towards Korea, 1943-1950,” Child of Conflict: The Korean-American Relationship, 1943-1953 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983). What is important here is the relationship between high and low policy, and Cumings explains the inconsistencies and differences between the two through differences in political trends (which includes both individual beliefs and political foundations) and differences in individual interests.
directions and tasks for future research, which build on recently completed studies. Of course, quite extensive research has been produced in Korea, the US, and Japan. However, exchanges among scholars in these respective countries have not been very active, and such issues as overlapping research and mutual misunderstanding of perspectives have been pointed out as problems to be resolved. This article examines representative studies from various countries and surveys the perspectives, focal issues, and characteristics of each in the hope of creating the opportunity for mutual understanding among researchers in each country. This article is written from the perspective of a Korean researcher and is an attempt to situate US occupation policy within the development of Korea's modern history.

II. Research trends by time period

This section reviews trends in the research on US occupation policy divided into three periods: late 1940's to 1960's, 1970's to 1980's, and post-1990's. In particular, the author or publisher's basic inclinations and issues of concern, motivations or objectives for writing, the overall content of the study, and the author's ideological leaning or methodology are examined. The intent of this article is not to examine the results of each individual piece of research, but rather to understand the overall flow of research in each period by examining the structure of discussion in a few representative works. Changes in research from period to period are also examined.

1. Late 1940's - 1960's

If the published works in the US include writings or private documents from officials and institutions involved in the occupation at that time, then the history of research in this area is quite extensive. Particularly in the late 1940's and early 1950's, along with the defeat of the Nationalist Party in the Chinese Civil War, the creation of the People's Republic of China, and the outbreak of the Korean War, active debates surrounding US policy towards East Asia arose within the US. These topics became important issues for foreign policy, as well as domestic politics. At that time, US policy regarding the occupation of Korea or US foreign aid policy towards China became important evidence for arguments both in support of and in opposition to US policy towards East Asia. Many writings were produced by the US government, related divisions of the military, journalists, and opinion makers representing the interests of various political factions. The types of materials were also diverse and varied from pamphlets and officials documents by government institutions used for policy publicity to newspaper editorials and articles, as well as
publicity pamphlets from social organizations.

Among these materials, those which require special reference for purposes of this article are official documents from government institutions, writings by authorities involved in the occupation, and theses by early specialists on Korea. Materials from the US State Department, the Headquarters of the US Armed Forces in Korea, and the Department of the Army include activities reports and official documents regarding the Korean occupation. Most representative of these are "United States Policy Regarding Korea, Part II, 1941-1945, & Part III, December 1945-June 1950,"4 "History of the United States Armed Forces in Korea,"5 and C. Leonard Hoag, "American Military Government in Korea: War Policy and the First Year of Occupation, 1941-1946."6

We must pay particular attention to the ideological inclination in these writings, as well as their usefulness as research materials. In terms of their research value, these works are quite significant as they are the first that we must refer to for purposes of research on the history of the US occupation of Korea. Above all else, the editors represent the official positions of the State Department, the Headquarters of the US Armed Forces in Korea, the Defense Department, and other bodies connected with the occupation. They also serve as convenient guides in understanding and organizing the huge breadth of materials that these officials produced at that time. Though having individual particularities and differences in

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4 Research Project No 158, May 1950 & No 252, Dec 1951, by Division of Historical Policy Research, Office of Public Affairs, Department of State. Part II of this document describes the problem of approval of Korean Provisional Government and the process of US-Great Britain-China-USSR negotiations regarding the trusteeship plan. Part III covers the failure of US-USSR negotiations in the Joint Commission, the establishment of an independent government in South Korea through the UN, and subsequent military and economic aid to the new South Korean government. Individual events and the response of the US State Department are well organized chronologically.

5 This document is a huge three-volume work completed in 1947 and 1948, and can be said to be a standard representative of the opinions of the Headquarters of the Occupation Forces. It is a useful work that includes descriptions of both the occupation itself and the military government. Because many historians co-author the work, each chapter is qualitatively different depending on the author. The materials used for the writing of this work are preserved as separate records in the Washington National Records Center (WNRC). The most basic documents on US occupation policy and the activities of the US military government are collected as RG 332, Records of US Theaters of War, World War II, US Armed Forces in Korea XXIV Corps, G-2 Historical Section, Historical Files, 1945-1948.

6 Draft manuscript produced under the auspices of the Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1970. This document is a comprehensive work that reveals the US Army's official positions regarding the establishment of the US military government, its objectives and structure, as well as the trusteeship and the US-USSR Joint Commission. The document was drafted in a later period, but it gathers together the various opinions from the US Army regarding the Korean occupation and provides factual basis for these opinions.
content, these materials convey the structure, functions, and roles of government institutions connected with the occupation, as well as the flow of discussion and general atmosphere among administrators in these government bodies. However, if one is not careful in viewing these works, they also have the danger of conveying a distorted historical view.

First of all, it is important to point out that the materials are written in large part with a focus on objectives or results. The writers provide organized reports of their activities, negotiations with related divisions, and developments in certain events from their own perspectives. However, they fail to explain the political significance of each event, relationships among individual events, nor the structural background behind them. In short, the materials are written as a way to rationalize the activities of each government body after events have already occurred. They analyze the failure of the occupation policy as being caused by a lack of policy preparation or a lack of knowledge about the domestic situation in Korea, hence tacitly adding credibility to so-called “lack-of-preparation” or “well-intended ignorance” theories.

These theories emphasize several points. First, they indicate that the US had not made adequate preparations for the occupation and that the occupation forces, not having received adequate orders from above, were left to execute hasty and expedient policies. Secondly, as the increased bargaining and compromising among the powers weakened the possibilities of implementing the trusteeship plan, the confrontation between the US and the USSR became more pronounced after the end of the war, and Korea slowly became a hostage of the Cold War. Third, it is stressed that the early capabilities for sovereignty in Korea were weak, the reasons including factional strife among Korea's political forces, their lack of representativeness and popular support, and the lack of accumulated experience in government administration during the Japanese occupation.

The points emphasized in these writings, however, strongly reflect the confusion and self-rationalization of the authorities involved as they confronted the revolutionary situation in Korea directly following liberation. These materials are clearly intended to explain the origins of the Cold War and are hence, written as a history of the formation of the Cold War, strongly influenced by an anti-Soviet, anti-communist perspective. They all describe USSR occupation policy as expansionist and offensive in nature; US policy, as a defensive measure to defend against the Soviet offensive and protect the free world. In this way, these writings also play the role of instigating the Cold War mentality.

Also, the excessive emphasis in these materials on the Cold War confrontation as an explanatory variable lacks credibility. It is important to realize that the Cold War
itself originated from the exertions of the US and the USSR to protect their national interests to the extreme. But, just with this factor, it is difficult to adequately explain the nature and content of the National Liberation Movement issue, which develops in a new and distorted way after World War II. It is also undeniable that this confrontation of two blocs greatly influenced the formation of the structure of North and South Korean society after liberation. However, the early process by which these confronting systems were formed, as well as the process of overcoming this confrontation afterwards, cannot be explained simply through the variable of the confrontation itself. Moreover, it is important to realize that the systems confrontation was not a phenomenon within Korean society itself, but rather one imposed upon by power-politics between the US and the Soviet Union; there needs to be careful and concrete analysis on this point.

On the whole, the above-mentioned writings played the role of instigating Cold War rhetoric in support of the US occupation by representing the official positions of related government bodies. Unlike these works, other writings published in a similar period depart from this "traditionalistic" perspective to criticize the US occupation policy. Representative works include George C. McCune’s Korea Today,7 Richard Robinson’s unpublished work “Betrayal of the Nation,”8 a report on labor issues in Korea by Stewart Meacham,9 and Clyde Mitchell’s The Second Failure in Asia.10

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7 Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950. McCune was born in North Korea as the son of a missionary and worked as an advisor on Korean affairs in the US State Department from before World War II. He also had experience working as a specialist on the Far East in the OSS Division of Research and Analysis during World War II. McCune was the most well-informed specialist on Korea at that time.

8 This unpublished work is preserved at the Harvard-Yenching Institute at Harvard University. The author, Richard Robinson, worked in the G-2 Historical Section, Headquarters of the US Armed Forces in Korea and participated in the writing of the “History of the US Armed Forces in Korea.” He was quite critical of US occupation policy and the high-level elite in the Headquarters of the US Armed Forces in Korea. During his term, he wrote a journal article under a pen name criticizing US occupation policy, for which he was later secretly investigated.

9 Meacham came to Korea when he was selected as the labor advisor to the US Armed Forces in Korea. During his term, he attempted and failed to implement labor reforms. For chronicles of Meacham and his activities, see Chung, Yong Wook. March 1994, “Labor-related Materials of Post-liberation Korea in the US National Archives,” History and Reality No. 11, Organization of Korean Historians.

10 Clyde Mitchell was responsible for management of the New Korea Corporation, an agricultural company that had the largest size of all vested industries in South Korea at that time. Based on his experiences, Mitchell later wrote an academic thesis describing the policies and management of the company by the US military government. Aside from these work, other writings also have much research value. Grant Meade’s American Military Government in Korea (NY: King’s Crown Press, 1951) provides detailed descriptions of the activities of the US military government in the provinces. William W. O’Hearn’s “History of US Army Military Government in Korea Period of September 1945-June 30,
These works have research value as their contents supplement those of the official writings mentioned earlier. Moreover, as they describe the developments in US occupation policy with a differing perspective, they provide a more balanced approach to viewing the events of that time. However, these writings also share many of the basic assumptions and contents with the official writings. They begin from the same anti-Soviet, anti-communist premises, but criticize the means by which the Soviet Union is dealt with through US foreign policy. Hence, rather than rejecting the occupation policy itself, these works criticize the method of policy execution and the officials involved in it.

Though with some differences in degree, this category of writings generally asserts that the extreme rightist tendencies of high-level elites in the occupation forces, as well as US support of rightist factions in Korea, handicapped US policy towards Korea and eventually caused it to fail. These arguments flowed out of the general domestic discontent in the US at that time regarding US support for military dictatorships (Franco in the Far East, Chung Kaisek and Syngman Rhee) in liberated regions after World War II. In short, these writings can hence be said to have been liberal critiques of US foreign policy. With the emergence of McCarthyism beginning in the early 1950's, these critiques of US policy were later suppressed.

Hence, research and discussion during this period can be categorized as after-the-fact rationalizations based on Cold War rhetoric and liberal critiques of occupation policy. On the whole, the latter liberal critiques emerged intermittently, while the former traditionalistic opinions based on Cold War rhetoric dominated US academia in the 1950's and 1960's; this trend can also be seen to be related to the political situation in Korea and the US at the time. When the traditionalistic writings are examined in the present era, there are many cases where facts cannot be verified, and the overall value perspective and methodology deserve various forms of criticism. Yet, this perspective still continues to dominates popular opinion and certain sections of the media and academia.

Among the academic works from the US in the 1960's, one that must be examined first is Gregory Henderson's *Korea: The Politics of the Vortex.*

1946" (The Statistical Research Division, The Office of Administration, USAMGIK, 1946), also O'Heam's "History of US Army Military Government in Korea Period of September 1945-June 30, 1946" (The Statistical Research Division, The Office of Administration, USAMGIK, 1946), also provides good information on the activities of the military government, as well as its authorities and administrative apparatus. Other individual recollections recorded by administrators can also be referred to.

author was the most renowned Korea specialist after McCune, and the book was to have a great influence on Korean history research within the US. The book analyzes Korean politics from the time of liberation to the 1960's, but the author connects the particularities of Korean politics during this time with premodern political culture and labels this culture a "politics of the vortex." Henderson asserts that in earlier, premodern Korean society, state power was highly centralized, while mass society was extremely homogeneous and fluid. The reason that political democratization of Korea failed after the war is linked to the lack of a middle class capable of closing the gap between the central and provincial regions, as well as the higher and lower classes. The book also argues that the reason for the failure of US occupation policy to institute a pluralistic democratic system rather than Syngman Rhee’s one-man, dictatorial regime was that neither the US nor its military government understood the vortex-like political patterns in Korean society.

Henderson’s work is significant in that while the predominant Cold War rhetoric of the time focused on the external determinants of US occupation policy, his is the first western work to provide a theoretical explanation of the internal factors behind modern Korean politics. The book’s attempt to go beyond the distorted image of Korea as a “stagnant society groaning under Oriental despotism” and to analyze systematically the historical traditions rooted in Korea’s internal society, as well as its focus on the interactive relations between the US occupation and Korean society, represent a step forward in the level of understanding attained up to Henderson’s time.

However, the extent to which this book fairly understands and evaluates the logic behind Korea’s historical development is a matter for further consideration. Criticism of Henderson’s book can be divided into two categories: 1) the problem of how much factual basis exists for his conceptualization of the “historicity of Korean political culture” and 2) an assessment of the book’s causal analysis and historical evaluation of the political structure of Syngman Rhee’s regime, which is the main concern of the study.

In regards to the first criticism, it is questionable whether the concept of mass society used in Henderson’s analysis of Korean premodern society is adequate in understanding the farmers who lived at that time under a strict system of social-status stratification and non-economic compulsion. Subsequent research has in fact shown that despite the superficial appearance of centralized power, a tradition of regional self-government and decentralized power existed in the Chosŏn dynasty period, along with structures and mechanisms of regional political dominance. These tendencies, arguably, have existed throughout the later part of the Chosŏn
dynasty and even past the period of open-door. As is made evident in the period directly following Japanese occupation, it was necessary for Japan to fight against these decentralizing forces and to create a unified system of domination in order to colonize Korea.

Hence, as Henderson himself admits, the vortex pattern of politics, rather than being a tradition rooted in Korea's history, must be understood as the result of Japan's colonial policy of centralized domination, which was intended for more effective control and exploitation of colonial resources. The vortex pattern should hence be seen as a phenomenon that emerges in any colonial society that is invaded by an imperialist power, and the reason that it was seen in the Syngman Rhee dictatorship lay in the fact that US occupation policy after the war sought to preserve these remnants of the colonial period. This process was also made possible by the forceful suppression of the people's dynamism.\textsuperscript{12}

In addition, the absence of a middle class, which Henderson takes to be another reason for the political confusion of the post-liberation period, is questionable in that it blames deficiencies in Korean domestic society for the failure of US policy, initiated by a sector of the US military government. Subsequent research has pointed out that the failure of these policies were rooted in large part in America's dual attitudes towards the moderate forces and the moderate reform policy. Thus, in all these respects, Henderson's concept of vortex politics, rather than being a historical tradition reappearing in later years, must be seen as a remnant of the colonial era and the subsequent US occupation, a remnant which the author reimposes onto Korea's earlier history.

2. 1970's-1980's

In the 1970's, a revisionist perspective, which fundamentally criticizes the existing research on the history of US occupation policy in Korea, begins to emerge.\textsuperscript{13} This is made possible as secret documents relating to US foreign relations and military affairs during the occupation period are gradually made public. Moreover,

\textsuperscript{12} Many studies highly evaluate autonomous people's efforts at state formation through such groups as the People's Committee and argue that the US military government forcibly suppressed these efforts to construct a new system of control. Meade, who was an authority of the US military government at that time, criticizes US occupation policy in a roundabout way by arguing that the excessive centralization of power in the Headquarters of the US Armed Forces in Korea hindered the formation of an American-style system of regional self-government. Grant Mead, ibid

\textsuperscript{13} The revisionist camp includes a wide range of studies from liberal policy critiques mentioned earlier to criticism of the American imperialist system itself. It should be kept in mind that the traditionalist-revisionist division is a relative concept.
as social tensions in this period, created by the anti-Vietnam War movement and the movement for African-American human and civil rights, heighten media criticism of US policy towards Asia, revisionist writings are allowed to appear in US academia.

These revisionist works are characteristic in that in contrast with earlier traditionalistic writings, they draw the conclusion that the origins of and responsibility for the Cold War lie with the US strategy of worldwide military and political hegemony. The leading researchers arguing for this position were Joyce and Gabriel Kolko.14

Before the Kolkos, such scholars as I F. Stone and D. F. Fleming also set forth revisionist opinions regarding the division of Korea and the outbreak of the Korean War. Karunakar Gupta and Jon Halliday continued this line of thought in the early 1970's.15 All these writings, which were based mostly on already existing published materials, asserted that the US must take responsibility for Korea's national division and the outbreak of war. The Kolko's raised these writings to the level of academic theses by rooting them in newly declassified materials. By analyzing the methods behind America's worldwide military and political domination, as well as the worldwide movement of US capitalism, the Kolkos were able to explain, both theoretically and factually, the foundations of the Cold War structure and US foreign policy.

Revisionist works begin their discussions from such structural factors as the internal economic needs of the US. They also include a wide range of analyses on such topics as the nature of US interests in the East Asia region, the process by which these interests are institutionalized through US foreign policy, and the means and mechanisms by which US foreign policy was in turn executed. These theses are significant in aiding our understanding of the background behind the formulation of occupation policy, as well as the means and mechanisms behind its implementation.

These works also define World War II to be the turning point in the formation of a world order centered on the US and focus their analyses on the relationship between America's strategic world outlook and its foreign policy. US policy towards Asia and Korea are seen to be one part of this world strategy. However, the

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research is limited as it applies its analysis to all countries indiscriminately without regard to differences in US policy by country, particularities in policy content, nor interest relations existing among the countries themselves. Also, as the research does not consider the reaction of countries to US policy, it often offers only a one-sided account of the situation. In spite of the Kolkos' critical perspective and sharp analysis, their studies, at least in the case of Korea, hence lack a degree of factual foundation, exactness, and precision.

Beginning in the 1970's, research on US policy towards Korea was based on secret documents on US foreign relations and military affairs, as well as documents seized by the US during the Korean War, all of which were previously not available for public use. Representative works by US academics produced in the late 1970's and early 1980's include B. Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945-1947* and B. Cumings, ed., *Child of Conflict: The Korean-American Relationship, 1943-1953*.

The latter work is an edited compilation of writings by several authors, prepared for academic conferences, held in Seattle in 1978 and 1982, regarding US-Korea relations from 1943 to 1953. The perspectives of the authors included in the book are varied, but as their works are based on formerly secret documents, the book opens the way for a more in-depth understanding of US policy towards Korea during the occupation period. It includes important points of contention regarding the division of Korea and the Korean War, and allows for better understanding of the background behind the formulation of occupation policy in Washington.

The former is a voluminous work that describes both US occupation policy and Korean post-liberation society and politics under its overall framework. In this way, the author emphasizes the importance of considering Korea's domestic society and the response of the Korean people, in studying US-Korea relations. The book begins with an analysis of the role of Japanese colonial policy on effecting social change in Korea, describing the state of organization, activities, and political positions of Korean revolutionary forces during the Japanese occupation. This understanding of the experiences of people's movement forces under Japanese colonialism is important, for it is necessary in order to understand the activities of political forces after liberation, as well as their political positions regarding state-building. In order to understand social and economic changes after liberation, it is also necessary to understand the process of social change and colonial policy under Japanese occupation. The author's approach is appropriate in that it includes these two premises.

Moreover, the book categorizes US foreign policy into high-level and low-level
policy, and while analyzing the formulation of high-level policies by Washington’s top-level policymakers, also draws attention to the Headquarters of the US Armed Forces in Korea and its role in actually implementing Washington’s policies in Korea. The book also analyzes the forces within Korean domestic society which responded to US occupation policy and often caused changes in reversals in policies.

Bruce Cumings has greatly improved the level of research on the history of the US occupation of Korea through his documentation, understanding of facts, and methodology. Two aspects of his book deserve particular attention. First, it describes Korea’s nationalist resistance movement to have been in polar opposition to US occupation policy. It also provides factual documentation of the activities of post-liberation political forces, hence opening the way for historical evaluation. Secondly, the book provides a theoretical foundation for methodologies in US foreign policy research through concrete analyses of US policy towards Korea.

The former issue was also actively raised and debated in Korea when Cumings’ book was published. In the first half of the 1970’s, Ch’oe Sang-ryong raised two issues for consideration in regards to US occupation policy in Korea: first, the response of national movements to the external pressure of US occupation and second, the mutual, multiplicative effects of the Cold War within and outside Korea. The book attempts to analyze first, how domestic political forces responded to the externally imposed US military government and secondly, how the international Cold War between the East and West and the domestic Cold War between leftist and rightist forces in Korea influenced and changed each other.  

Raising these points of contention is quite justifiable if we are to make the effort to situate the US occupation within the overall development of Korea’s history. Stated more broadly, the arguments of both Cumings and Ch’oe basically point to the question of how we are to define the main contradiction within the distorted social structure of Korea in the occupation period. In this regard, these studies depart significantly from earlier works, which understand the central conflict to have been the leftist-rightist confrontation within Korea and which thus look for the causes of national division in the domestic sphere (These works are related to internal-cause theory account of the division of Korea). In contrast, the authors mentioned above understand the central conflict in that period to have been the confrontation between the US and the nationalist forces within Korea, internal 

confrontations within Korea are seen to have intensified through the influence of this more central conflict. Based on this perspective and even referring to Korean materials, Cumings' work is almost unrivaled among works written in English as a precise and broad-based analysis of South and North Korea.

Yet, in spite of its favorable approach and methodology, Cumings' work nevertheless has weak points that must be pointed out. First, aside from categorizing US policy towards Korea as high-level and low-level policy, the study lacks any further analysis on the content or implementation of US occupation policy. Without such analysis, the explanatory links between occupation policy and the domestic political and economic situation in Korea become tenuous. Explanations of changes and variations in occupation policy will potentially be reduced to mere personality differences among US officials, and the commonalities between high-level and low-level policy will become increasingly unclear.

Secondly, the study points out the antagonistic relationship between the US occupation and domestic political forces, but it lacks analysis of how the latter used domestic politics to influence the former and how this relationship affected the overall development of Korean history. Moreover, the book offers a simplistic view of the Korean people's response to US occupation, defining the response as a unified nationalist resistance without mention of the various political movements within it. Because of this tendency, the book leaves the impression that the issue of the Korean people's response is only a small, unimportant element within the entire logical framework of the work. The fact that Cumings eventually lays most stress on domestic class confrontation when discussing the background and nature of post-liberation revolutionary movements is also indicative of this tendency.

These limitations of Cumings' study are rooted in part in the author's sense of issues and in part in his research methodology. In relation to the latter, Cumings' methodological framework will be discussed here. Cumings' theoretical framework

17 Though concerned with a slightly different issue, a series of earlier studies strongly criticized the division of the sphere of influence among the powers in a similar effort to reveal the causes and responsible parties of the national division of Korea. These studies assert that the division was a result of conspiracy and illicit relations among the powers in the Yalta Secret Agreement and the Potsdam Agreement. Emphasizing the external determinants of national division, they reveal the motivations behind US policy, but fail to adequately illustrate the structural background of US policy towards Korea, nor the concrete process of policy implementation. See Yi Yong-hun, 1984, "The Declaration of the 38th Parallel," Modern Korean History before and after the National Division, Il-wol Publishing; Shin Yong-hua, 1988, "The Potsdam Secret Agreement and the Causes of the North-South Division of Korea," The National Question and Social Movement after the Liberation of Korea, Research Group on Korean Social History, Thesis No. 13, Munhak-gwa Jisongsan
for analyzing US domestic and foreign policy begins with two alternative conceptions of American political economy: internationalism/imperialism and nationalism/expansionalism. These two tendencies are said to appear naturally in the US state, and at the base of them exist conflicts among capitalists. According to Cumings, these two conflicting tendencies correspond to different ways of approaching the market, lead to conflicts between bureaucrats, and provide the starting points for divergent analyses and approaches to foreign policy. Also, the president and the executive are not seen as simply harmonizing their individual interests within the state but rather as existing as one body with a collective responsibility for preserving the entire state. Based on these theoretical distinctions, Cumings defines American foreign policy after World War II to have been determined by the three parameters of internationalism, containment, and rollback. Through his analysis of US foreign policy, Cumings explains the nature of and mutual relations among the three parameters.

Cumings' theoretical framework is significant in that it allows for a more systematic understanding of the background behind occupation policy, including the domestic background behind US foreign policy, the basis and method of foreign policy implementation, the character and personalities of policy officials, and the direction of foreign policy development. Building upon this framework, Cumings goes on to use world systems theory to link US hegemonic strategies in East Asia and US policy towards Korea with movements of the world capitalist system.

Hence, internationalism-containment-rollback, the general parameters of US foreign policy, are defined to be factors that determined US political and economic demands upon Korea, the concrete expression of these demands through policy formation, the means and methods of implementing this policy, and other general links between the US and Korea. If these three factors were determinants for US foreign policy, then the levels of world market system-states-societies are said to serve as an analytical framework for conceptualizing the US national economy and

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18 Cumings' theoretical framework considers a wide range of approaches, including theories on the state, bureaucracy, and world systems. An analysis of all these theories would be required in order to evaluate the appropriateness of his theoretical outlook, this article, however, will merely outline the logical flow of his argument. For a summary of Cumings' overall framework and the various theories that form its background, see Chon Sang-in's "Bruce Cumings' Understanding of Korean Society and History," Korea and International Politics, Vol 8, No 1, 1992

domestic politics, the dynamics in politics, economics, and society within Korea, and the connections between US world strategy and its policy towards Korea. In regards to the final dimension, the conceptualization within the latter framework of the structural position of the US within the world system and of the center-periphery-periphery hierarchy within the world structure serves to link US foreign policy, as well as the world order itself, with the development of the world capitalist system. To the three levels of world market system-states-societies, Cumings also adds the level of ‘region’ to further analyze the connections between the world system and the state. Cumings’ explanations of the nature of US Northeast Asian policy and the linkages between the political economies of Northeast Asian countries include the concepts of regional integration through power and the formation of industrial relations through plenty.20

The theoretical hypotheses set forth by Cumings require serious and sincere consideration as they represent a methodological step forward in research on Korean modern history. His theoretical treatment of US foreign policy and the world system, as well as his analysis of US policy towards Korea, allows for a better understanding of the movements of modern capitalism on an international level; the relationship between regional and international affairs and domestic politics, economics, and society, and the external determinants of internal events within countries.

In the case of Korea, however, Cumings’ theoretical framework situates Korea on the periphery of his study and marginalizes Korean history as a whole. Despite his early emphasis on the response of the Korean people to US occupation, Cumings increasingly stresses the explanatory force of world systems towards the end of the book. This methodology has the danger of subsuming Korea’s post-liberation

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20 See “The Origins and Development of the Northeast Asian Political Economy Industrial Sectors, Product Cycles, and Political Consequences,” International Organization, Vol. 38, No. 1 (1984); “Power and Plenty in Northeast Asia: The Sources of US Policy and Contemporary Conflict,” Eds Andrew Mack and Paul Keal, Security and Arms Control in the North Pacific (Winchester, MA: Allen & Unwin, 1988), “Trilateralism and the New World Order,” World Policy Journal, 1993 See H. Bix’s work for more on regional integration strategy. In the above writings, Cumings presents rich theoretical approaches and issues regarding topographical pictures of Northeast Asia of the past, present, and future. Recently, he has proposed a trilateral US-German-Japan system as the most favorable new world order for the post-Cold War period. Some time must pass for these opinions to undergo thorough evaluation, but their basic premises still seem to harbor too many unrealistic assumptions and logical gaps to be an appropriate method for resolving national issues in Korea. When the world order in the Northeast Asian region is discussed, it is interesting that progressive US scholars like Cumings are relatively unconcerned about the possibility of Japanese rearmament, but US scholars more critical of Japan tend to be those with more conservative leanings.
historical development under an analysis of the development of world capitalism in the region as a whole. His broad analytical viewpoint can potentially be reduced to a kind of either-or choice between the isolated development of North Korea and the dependent development of South Korea within the world system. By overlooking the internal energy and developments within the Korean people’s efforts to resolve the crisis of national division, Cumings’ analysis hence takes on a one-sided viewpoint, and any practical efforts at resolving the national question are seen as trivial under the structured world system.

Aside from Cumings’ book, other books written in the 1980’s offer in-depth analyses of various dimensions of US policy towards Korea. Shim Ji-yŏn’s study and Yi Dong-hyŏn’s thesis on the US-USSR Joint Commission and the trusteeship plan, Sandusky’s study on the pre-liberation formulation of occupation policy within the US State Department and the Department of the Army, and Stueck’s analysis of Wedemeyer Mission are all works that merit attention in this regard.21

III. Recent research trends in Korea

Research developments in the US, including the use of new materials and the emergence of more diverse, critical opinions regarding US policy towards Korea, in turn gave a sharp stimulus to Korean academia and sparked a new round of research on US occupation policy. Later, domestic unrest arising from the Kwangju People’s Uprising in 1980 and the subsequent rise of anti-Americanism also led to increased research on the US occupation and on modern Korean history as a whole. The long series of political events that occurred in 1980’s hence played a large role in focusing attention and public debate on the question of US influence on Korean politics, economics, and society after liberation, as well as inquiries regarding US policy towards Korea as a whole.

Among the research on the occupation period written in the 1980’s, of particular visibility are writings on the structure, nature, and control tactics of the US military government 22 Kim Sung-chol’s and Kim Kwang-shik’s research are

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representative of those that analyze the role and nature of the US military government. In his study, Kim Sŏng-ch'ŏl asserts that the military government sought to secure the interests of the US and the world capitalist system, thereby building a blockade against socialism. This political alliance then selected landowners and capitalists within Korea, the political expression of this choice being the political force for state formation centered around Syngman Rhee and the Korean Democratic Party. In this process, the US could not help but collide with the efforts of the Korean people to form a sovereign state, and as Kim goes on to point out, the US suppressed these opposing forces through the police, bureaucracies, state institutions like the army, and even youth organizations. The military government ends with the creation of a divided nation and the establishment of an authoritarian regime under Syngman Rhee. These arguments well illustrate the level of discussion and issue-raising of that period and basically assert that rather than being simply an exogenous variable, the US military government was actively involved in the movement for state formation within Korea but sought to institute another distorted state structure.

Efforts to theoretically explain the role and nature of the US military government are in turn taken up by later studies, which focus on the particular mechanisms and control structures of the military government. Here, analysis of the mechanisms of oppression, including the bureaucracy, police, and army, is offered, as well as studies of quasi-military forces like youth organizations. In addition, a recent study analyzes the character of the People's Committee, which existed in the regional provinces, and goes on to make conclusions regarding the nature and role of the US military government in the regional provinces.

In the late 1980's, as more discussions on the nature and role of the US military government emerged, research which concretely analyzed various dimensions of US occupation policy and policy towards Korea also began to appear. Among these, we should first examine those writings that analyze the socio-economic policies of the US military government and changes in Korean society and economy during that period. Kim Ki-won's work analyzes the economic policies of the military

23 Kim Sŏng-ch'ŏl, ibid, p. 345
government by examining the handling of vested industries and the response of the
government to the workers’ movement for autonomous factory management. The
author argues that US economic policies opposed a system of rapid progress and
rather than direct exploitation, supported a policy of securing US control over the
Korean economy.  

Yi Hye-sook begins from the premise that theoretical endeavors to understand the
nature of the military government are limited in that they lack concrete research on
the military government itself. The author eventually concludes that the formation
of the capitalist state, changes in the class structure (the downfall of landowners and
the emergence of the new capitalist class), and the reorganization of the economic
structure originated from the economic policies of the military government.
Asserting that the military government acted as a state power directing social
reorganization, the author again emphasizes the dominant role of the military
government in Korea.

Shin Byŏng-shik studies the process of land reform, which was executed by the
US military government and Syngman Rhee’s regime. The author emphasizes the
significance of land reform in overall process of social reorganization and state
formation in Korea. Unlike earlier studies, which are excessively concerned with
the economic significance of land reform and the political motivations behind its
implementation, Shin’s study analyzes the political confrontations and the role of
the US that appear in the process of land reform, and goes on to compare the policy
with those of other countries. This study is useful in that it allows for a clearer
understanding of the political nature of the land reform policy and presents an
effective comparative-historical approach. In these ways, both Shin Byŏng-shik’s
and Yi Hye-sook’s studies contribute to our understanding of facts and broadening
of research viewpoint.

Both authors use the world system-state-society analytical framework to include
both US occupation policy and internal changes in Korea society in their analysis.
This framework is similar to that of Cumings, but these scholars also assert in
addition that the US military government takes on the status of a state as it is
regarded as a state power or acts as the executive administrator of the US

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Question of Handling of Vested Industries and the Workers’ Autonomous Management Movement,
P’umisan

Government,” PhD Thesis, Seoul National University, Department of Sociology

Seoul National University, Department of Political Science
government. It seems clear that this analytical framework is used by the authors in an attempt to understand the effects of external variables on Korean internal society on a world systems dimension, as well as to understand how the state-like functions of the military government were turned over to the Korean government to form the "Korean state" after the US occupation.

Though more detailed theoretical examination may be necessary, what is the most unsatisfactory about this theoretical framework is the fact that it begins by defining the role and functions of the state, then uses this definition to analyze historical facts; the appropriateness of this functionalist, structuralist method is not verified. Of course, there must be analysis on the question of how the functions of the state or government change or are passed on from the Japanese colonial government to the US military government, then to Syngman Rhee's regime. However, what is perhaps more important is to offer analysis of the historical characteristic of the respective regimes themselves. The period directly following liberation was a time when rather than having an institutionalized state wholly devoted to controlling and reorganizing society, various social forces fought actively over the direction and method of forming the state itself. The main national tasks for this era were the recovery of sovereignty and the securing of independence. The US military government also participated as one actor in this political struggle.

Kim Sam-su's research analyzes the labor policies of the military government and the process of formation of the capitalist state, but uses a different analytical methodology from that of the above works. More than others, this book first of all offers more abundant facts and concrete analysis regarding the labor policies of the US military government and the Syngman Rhee regime. Kim argues that the state is the main actor in the formation of the national economy, but that until the state itself is formed, a long series of conflicts and reconciliations among the actors in the political and labor movements must occur; the state is hence understood within its connections with the social movements and political processes of the time. The analysis is flawed in some ways, such as the fact that the labor movement is categorized arbitrarily and that the labor movement, as well as the organizational factions within it, are seen as resulting simply from ideological differences. However, the effort to make linkages between the nature of the state and political process is of great significance.²⁹

Aside from these studies, other in-depth research on the relationship between the US military government and Korean political forces cannot be left out in this survey.

of research trends in the 1980's. Studies by Pak Tae-kyun, Chung Byǒng-jun, and Do Jin-soon, though each differing in time period covered, carefully analyze the relationship between the US military government and the nationalist and moderate forces. These writings allow us to understand concretely the political history of the occupation period. By analyzing the political maneuvers of the U.S. military government in regards to Korean political forces, as well as changes in their mutual relationship, these studies are able to explain the military government's policy of control, the political confrontations of the time, and the process of formation and dissolution of Korea's nationalistic forces in that period.30

IV. Towards new advancements in future research

Research on the history of the US occupation has progressed significantly after the occupation period in Korea, the US, as well as in other countries. The accumulation of such research has resulted in a rich historical picture of this period and developments in research methodology. Also, as if to reflect the changing position of the Korean peninsula within the world order and its rapid internal changes, the perspectives of the researchers are also varied, each with independent bases for explanation. When we now reexamine these writings, we see that some cannot be accepted as fact, or must be seen as having only partial truth. For others, cause and effect linkages are mistaken, or logical coordination is lacking. Viewed by topic, some fields have quite extensive in-depth research, while others are lacking both quantitatively and qualitatively in research materials.

Simply stated, there is still a need for modifications in perspective, development of methodology, expansion of research areas, and more detailed factual inquiries in this research field. The history of this period can no longer be evaluated simply as "the history of perspectives and positions," "authorized truth," or "unauthorized facts," but rather must rely on factual foundations and be evaluated through "historical causes and historical responsibilities." In addition, the limitations of the period and the reasons for these limitations must also be analyzed.

In order for research on occupation history to develop, the further discovery of

materials is also a task that must not be delayed. A significant amount of research materials made public in the US has played a key role in this regard, but the potential for discovery of even newer materials remains. In particular, as existing materials focus on politics and society, more efforts to find materials on economics or thoughts and culture, and to expand the field of research in this way, must take place. In order for more balanced research on occupation history to proceed, materials from the Soviet Union, also stationed on the Korean peninsula as another occupation force, must also be made public.

Of equal urgency is the obtaining of oral histories recorded by American and Korean bureaucrats who worked in the US military government, as well as documents written by politicians of that time. Central government materials can be found in US historical archives, but materials from regional bureaucrats must be found in the regional provinces of Korea or through field work.

Though applicable in different ways to writings depending on their focus of analysis and level of discussion, the issue of North-South Korean relations must also be examined as one perspective or focus of research. Studies on occupation history conducted thus far have often overlooked the problem of including the North-South relations as part of the research focus. The majority of research has regarded North Korea as an internal or external enemy, or simply has treated it as one exogeneous variable. These perspectives emerged in particular as US-USSR negotiations regarding the Korean peninsula began to fail, and became dominant after the Korean War and the solidification of the division.

However, the period directly following liberation was one in which the division had not yet become a reality; almost everyone, including Koreans, Americans, and Russians, all presumed North and South Korea to be one unit. The basic objective of US policy towards Korea was the “establishment of an independent, unified Korea,” and even though Syngman Rhee argued for the creation of a unilateral government in South Korea, his arguments were intended as the most practical means for him to secure political power (also regarded by the US in this way after the failure of the US-USSR Joint Commission). Whether it stopped at the level of rhetoric or was the actual intent of the US, this basic objective made clear the intent to unify the Korean peninsula centered on the South Korean government.

In order to understand U.S. and USSR policies towards Korea in this period, as well as internal socio-political changes within Korea, we must set forth a research perspective that takes North and South Korea to be one unit, and carry out analysis of the mutual impacts of situational developments on both the North and South. The dissolution of the US-USSR Joint Commission is usually dated September 1947,
but the actual date that the US Armed Forces in Korea and the US State Department gave up all expectations of the success of the Commission and decided internally to give up on it was about the middle of July 1947, directly after the US representatives came back from a visit to P’yŏngyang. The Soviet Union shows a continued attachment to the idea of resolution through the Joint Commission at this point. Also, it is interesting to note that the motivation behind the cutoff of US support to moderate forces and Kim Ku’s right-wing nationalist factions in Korea lay in the participation of these actors in the North-South Conference. These facts imply two points: first, that before the confrontation between the US and the USSR, the main determinant of US occupation policy was the political and situational developments on the Korean peninsula and second, that the occupation policy at that time was not limited to South Korea but covered the entire peninsula.

An additional concern of this article is the expansion of this field of research by space and time. In order to understand the US occupation policy after liberation, it is necessary to understand the preparatory process for US policy towards Korea before liberation, as well as the changes in this policy after the occupation. However, research on the period before liberation ends with analyses of the positions of the powers as they appear during the wartime conferences, or analyses of the background behind the proposal of the trusteeship plan. There is a need for studies on the preparations of US policy towards Korea, the content of the policy itself, and the contact between the US and Korean political forces.31 Regarding the period after the occupation, there is excessive focus on the origins of the radical social change subsequent to the Korean War and the unfolding of the war itself. There is need for analyses of how the nature of the occupation policy continued through the war and afterwards, and how this character changed afterwards.

In terms of historical space, comparative studies of US occupation policy as it existed in Korea and other regions are required. In Japan or Germany, for example, the US executed some democratic reforms, and the effects of these policies domestically will be different from those in Korea. It is necessary to explain the reasons for these differences as well. On the whole, such comparative historical approaches to analyzing US policy in Korea, China, and Japan will be quite useful in understanding the nature of US foreign policy at that time and the policy differences by target country.

Tensions in Korea have still not yet dissipated fully, but the end of the Cold War

31 For a recent work on this perspective, see Chung Yong-wook, “Formation of US Policy towards Korea during the Pacific War,” The Journal of Korean History, Vol 83 (Seoul, Korea 1993)
is now bringing about demands for a change in consciousness. The solution of the Korean Question can be divided into international and domestic methods. The series of historical events during the occupation period has the potential to offer the foundations for a sincere reconsideration of the future directions of the country from the present. As is evident from the history of division in Korea, the unilateral solution tactics centered on the national self-interest of the powers only serves to heighten tensions in the Northeast Asian region and maintain exhausting confrontations between the Korean peninsula and surrounding countries. Research in the present period must proceed from the perspective that problems in the Korean peninsula must be solved internally by the people themselves, the understanding and cooperation of the surrounding powers to be requested only in support of this basic principle.

(Translated by Kim, T'ae-hŭi, Havard Law School)