

The Ahn Changho Controversy: Rescuing a Patriot from Colonial and Postcolonial Myths

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The Journal of Northeast Asian History
Volume 9 Number 2 (Winter 2012), 181-227

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The “Ahn Changho Controversy” was sparked by new documentary evidence which challenged the earlier conventional views concerning the preeminent Korean nationalist leader, Ahn Changho (1878-1938). The Controversy arose from the historical mystery and enigma which long surrounded Ahn Changho, who was a leader of the transnational independence movement during the Japanese colonial rule, 1905-45. As one of the most spirited and enduring controversies in Korean Studies over the past decades since the 1990s, the Ahn Changho Controversy revealed theoretical divisions or ideological cleavages in the interpretations and re-interpretations of Korean colonial history: 1) gradualist pacifism vs. radical militarism; 2) a new view of “revolutionary-democracy” vs. the old view of “tripartite division” of Korean nationalist movement; 3) revisionism of “cultural nationalism” vs. neo-revisionism of revolutionary nationalism; 4) patriotism vs. collaborationism in the colonial period and the complicated legacy of the issue thereafter; and 5) the origins of Korean democracy, including the origin and drafter of the Korean republican constitution. In this regard, the Ahn Changho Controversy touched upon the highly complex and potentially explosive issues of patriotism vs. collaboration by probing into the previous revisionist binaries arising from the reductive matrix of the bipolar Cold War alignments. For example, the Ahn Changho Controversy accompanied serious interpretive critique of revisionist and polemical “cultural nationalism,” which describes Ahn Changho as a “passive collaborationist” leader through the prism of writing by patriot-turned-collaborator Yi Gwang-su. Through the long and arduous debates of the Ahn Changho Controversy, the compelling inner logos and ethos of Korean nationalism are underscored within the self-defining process of historical evolution. The Korean independence quest was a global and transnational, yet unique and indigenous, project. Much of the reality long hidden, it had been an epic historiographical puzzle which constituted the core of the colonial panorama in modern Korea.

Keywords: Ahn Changho, controversy, Korean nationalist movement

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Introduction

Among the celebrated moral leaders who embodied and symbolized the quest of national independence in the world during the twentieth century, Ahn Changho (1878-1938) remains a much beloved, commemorated, esteemed, and yet also fascinatingly controversial figure in Korea and beyond. A chief architect of the Korean independence movement, Ahn Changho for long had been an elusive luminary in modern Korean history. Enduring as a historical enigma, it seems that the leading intellectuals, writers, and scholars of Korea and the West could not exactly figure him out for nearly a century. He was often misjudged, misrepresented, or misidentified during the colonial period, 1910-45, and in the ensuing decades since the Liberation. In a sense, Ahn Changho's genius, that is, his adoption of a moderate reformist stance to camouflage and advance his ultimate revolutionary agenda of waging an independence war to reclaim his motherland, which eluded the Japanese police from the 1900s to 1930s in Korea, America, China, and Russia, among other nations, also eluded them.

Swirling colonial and postcolonial myths still continue to shroud

and complicate understanding of Ahn Changho's nationalist leadership, including his philosophy, strategy, movement, activities, identity, friends, rivals, and disciples. What is evident from the research into the newly released Ahn Changho Archives is that he was a man of exceptional faith, courage, sacrifice, and conviction. There is no doubt about his nationalist stewardship, credentials, loyalty, and devotion, for he was a man utterly consumed by and committed to the cause of Korean liberation all his life. Most of all, they compellingly reveal that Ahn Changho was a pioneering constitutional democrat with a passion for writing constitutions and a revolutionary militarist whose ultimate aim was to liberate Korea by winning a war of independence. During his lifetime, he created a series of self-governing associations and secret societies for he believed that a democratic self-government was the very means and the end of the anticolonial revolution. With multilayered and multidimensional strategic vision and planning, he neither eschewed violent tactics nor progressive socialist or anarchist ideologies to champion his life-long goal of independence. Ultimately, Ahn Changho uniquely and creatively reconciled democracy and revolution in his leadership, vision, and strategy of the Korean nationalist movement, and emerges as what I call "a revolutionary-democrat."

As a leader of principled moral dignity and labyrinthine strategic mind, Ahn Changho led a formidable international network of exile and underground activities for decades from the turn of the past century until his death in 1938, evading Japanese colonialists. His survival depended on his ability and agility to manage colonial repression as a diasporic exile. As a highly calculated and calibrated response to the Japanese colonial apparatus of repression, he carefully controlled and maneuvered the resistance guises of the Korean nationalist movement through the operational duality of *appearance vs. reality*. Ahn Changho, for example, did not fully reveal his revolutionary aims or intentions even to those who were close to him. It was his way of being utmost dedicated, responsible, and accountable to the patriotic call of freedom for his

people and country. The colonial myths and mythmaking that led to confusion, puzzlement, mystification, and controversy surrounding him, in this vein, cannot be separated from the ruthless quality of Japanese colonial rule, or the “East Asian holocaust.”

Wholly or partly, the postcolonial historiography of Korea and the West for the successive decades since 1945 too has often missed who or what Ahn Changho was as a nationalist leader. Inevitably, the earlier interpretations of Ahn Changho reflected and embodied the painful legacy and tumults of colonialism, the Korean War, division, and successive military dictatorships in modern Korean history, including its dilemmas, ambiguities, and contradictions. As a pivotal figure in modern Korean history, such entanglement of Ahn Changho’s legacy and the collective Korean historical fate may have been inescapable. Even during his own patriotic life, a distinction between self and nation often blurred for him. The problems and issues in the interpretations of Ahn Changho are more than identifying, defining, or comprehending the man and leader himself. Since he was at the epicenter of the anticolonial quest, delineating his activist identity, ideology, and leadership unlocks a path to understanding the entire nature, structure, and architecture of the Korean nationalist movement.

Who then was Ahn Changho? Comparable to Sun Yat-sen of China and Mahatma Gandhi of India, Ahn Changho was the founding father of the Republic of Korea who wrote the first Korean republican constitution, unified the Provisional Government in Shanghai after the March First movement in 1919, and led the independence struggle to liberate Korea from Japan. Like Sun Yat-sen, Ahn Changho was an exile republican revolutionary for many years in America and abroad; like Gandhi, Ahn Changho was an ethico-spiritual leader of his people. In comparison to Sun, Ahn Changho was more progressive as a constitutional democrat, writing a series of experimental self-governing constitutions for revolutionary organizations. With military objectives, Ahn Changho was also unlike Gandhi in that he did not only advocate

peaceful means of civil disobedience. Ahn did not shy away from military engagements or violent means to promote independence. He continued to make efforts to wage an independence war throughout his life.

Born in Pyongyang in 1878 and martyred to the nationalist cause in 1938 by dying in Japanese prison due to torture in Seoul, Ahn Changho is claimed by both Koreas today as their own national hero. Nicknamed “Mr. Unification” for his ceaseless life-long efforts to unify the independence quest during the time of the colonial diaspora, Ahn Changho is perhaps the most powerful symbol of unification. As a beloved historical figure in both Koreas, he indeed endeavored much of his life for unification of the anticolonial movement often divided by region, politics, personality, ideology, and strategy. One of the earliest Koreans to arrive in America in 1902, Ahn was the formative organizer of Korean-American community on the west coast. He is also claimed by Korean-Americans as their most important pioneer and diasporic leader. Almost a century after his arrival in America, a statue of Ahn Changho was unveiled in August 2001, next to the statue of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi, in the city square of Riverside, California, where he first resided and began his organizational activities for the formative Korean-American community.

At the helm of the transnational Korean independence movement from the 1900s to the 1930s, Ahn Changho was a republican revolutionary, constitution writer, and war strategist. With a comprehensive soul as a nationalist revolutionary, he was also an eloquent orator, innovative and expansive systemizer of independence ideology and methodology, grassroots organizer, educator, writer and publisher of leading journals, diarist, and composer of patriotic lyrics and songs (including the Korean national anthem), among others. A pioneering institution-builder and modernizer, Ahn Changho founded numerous schools, including the first Korean co-ed school, and business enterprises, including the first Korean-owned joint stock company. Yet, his most significant achievements were revolu-

tionary-democratic institutions such as the Gongnip hyeophoe (United Koreans in America, 1905), the Sinminhoe (New People's Society, 1907), the Daehanin gungminhoe (Korean National Association, 1910; Later, it seems that the name was often referred as the Daehan gungminhoe), the Heungsadan (Young Korean Academy, 1913), the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea (1919), the National Representatives Congress (1923), and the Korean Independence Party (1929). First to advocate a republican form of government, Ahn Changho introduced democratic principles of self-government, specifically a constitution prescribing a system of separation of powers, as the ideal and praxis of the Korean nationalist movement.

The aims of this essay are two-fold. First, it offers a brief introduction of over a decade of research on Ahn Changho through his archival papers, and shares new documentary and analytical evidence concerning his nationalist life, leadership, and strategy. It complicates and opens for question the earlier canonical beliefs, myths, or orthodoxies. A close scrutiny of Ahn's nationalist life, revolutionary organizations, and constitutional drafts elucidates his founding leadership of the Korean Provisional Government, as well as his deep and serious engagement in creation and maintenance of the Korean Independence Army, though yet untold and hidden. Further details on this subject will be provided in my forthcoming biography, *Ahn Changho and the Birth of Modern Korea: A Quest for Democracy, Globalization, and Unification*.

Second, this essay examines the nature and substance of debates of the Ahn Changho Controversy, with conceptual analysis and updated discoveries to shed new light on the Korean nationalist leadership and movement. By contextualizing the content of the Ahn Changho Controversy, this essay investigates how it emerged as a globalized controversy in the field of Korean Studies. A theoretical critique of the previous scholarship and writings since the Liberation will be offered, probing the problematic tropes that evolved over time from the immediate post-colonial nationalist to government-sanctioned to

radicalized revisionist discourse in modern Korean historiography, including gradualism pacifism vs. radical militarism, and patriotism vs. collaborationism, among others. While the essay's intent is not to deliberate a full range of myriad technical issues of the controversy on a very broad and contentious topic of Korean nationalism, it attempts to interrogate the *idée fixe*, or conventional received wisdom, unchallenged in the past half-century.

I. The Ahn Changho Archives: New Discoveries, New Perspectives

With the advent of civil democracy in Korea, the grand epic of the Korean independence struggle began to be more systematically mined from the 1990s with newly discovered sources of leading revolutionaries including, most of all, Ahn Changho. As an astounding treasure trove of archival sources on the Korean independence leader, the Ahn Changho Collection is comprised of several thousands of items of his private papers, including diaries, speeches, letters, documents, books, photographs, and artifacts. The Ahn Changho Collection was indeed the most significant and extensive collection among Korean nationalists. (The Ahn Changho Collection is also referred as the Dosan Collection, reflecting his pen name "Dosan," meaning "island-mountain.") The private papers of the Ahn Changho Collection provide rare and valuable insights into his role as the chief architect and strategist of nationalist movement. It also offers a rare glimpse of the actual *modus operandi* of the global network of exile and underground activities. For the first time, I was also able to view and use the newly opened documents of the Seo Jae-pil Collection and Ahn Junggeun Papers, which offered further fresh and enriching insights into the historical reality of Korean nationalism.

Some of Ahn Changho's most crucial sources, including documents, diaries, speeches, letters, and books, reveal the true revolutionary character of his nationalist leadership. From the Ahn

Changho Collection, the most arresting document is Ahn Changho's handwritten *Master Plan of Independence* before the outbreak of World War I in 1914. (The *Master Plan* is my nomenclature for this document without a title.) As a future-directed plan, Ahn Changho charted the course of the independence movement with comprehensive knowledge and systematic planning. A private and concrete articulation of a program of action for the independence movement, the outline manifests the totality of Ahn's revolutionary strategy. In his typically meticulous manner, the *Master Plan* is also a detailed diagrammatic chart which describes the necessary virtues, personnel, skills, means, and resources to achieve his ultimate aims, that is, independence and democracy.

Underlying the *Master Plan* in which Ahn Changho envisioned a well-integrated stage-by-stage development are his "philosophy of strength" to build "moral, intellectual and economic strength" of Koreans and revolutionary conviction that national liberation was only possible by military means. Consisting of five major stages and thirteen sub-stages progressively evolving toward his final goal, it is apparent that Ahn intended much of his own and compatriots' efforts to be mobilized for an all-out *independence war* to restore national sovereignty. The *Master Plan* is as much a mobilization roadmap for the independence war as a prophetic blueprint to create a new democratic republic. In fact, a striking feature of the *Master Plan* is how Ahn Changho creatively entwined his dual aims of democracy-building and war-mobilization within a single structure of the plan.

Written when Ahn Changho was about thirty-six years old, the *Master Plan* offers a synopsis of philosophical currents of his time and space. From his insistence on building moral character and strength as the fundamental requisites, formative influence of Confucian classics can be observed. Social Darwinism was a transvaluative philosophy from Confucian-Mencianism to Christian Enlightenment to Faustean-Promethean democracy for Ahn Changho. His conception of Social Darwinism was translated into dialectical self-strengthening and military

revolutionism. Ultimately, however, his futuristic orientation and democratic vision of equality and freedom were derived from his life-long Christian faith. His *Shanghai Diary* and speeches also attest to his active interest and involvement in developing Korean military capabilities. With such sources, Ahn's comprehensive strategy of the independence war, which included the primacy of the military action in his schematic vision of the liberational quest, affirm the revolutionary conviction of his nationalist leadership and personality.

1. The Pioneer of the Korean Constitution

The turbulent events in modern Korean history following the Liberation in 1945 and the Korean War of 1950-53 included decades of successive authoritarian rule as well as democratic demonstrations and uprisings from the 1950s to the 1990s in the postcolonial period. In such a political reality, a meaningful search or an engaging discourse about Korea's own authentic beginning of democracy or constitutional efforts were dangerous and thus ignored, neglected, and silenced. In fact, any discussion of the indigenous origins or historical roots of modern democracy was actively suppressed by increasingly hardening censorship of the media and press by the dictatorial regimes during those years. Championing economy and growth over human rights or historical honesty, much intellectual pursuit was subjugated or subsumed under developmentalist logic and rhetoric.

It is for this reason that among the cache of Ahn Changho's private papers, the most astonishing, if serendipitous, discovery is a series of his own constitutional drafts of the nationalist revolutionary organizations from 1905 to the 1930s. These drafts are the embryonic basis of the Constitution of the Provisional Government during the colonial era and the Republic of Korea after the Liberation. Ironically, the historical fact that Ahn Changho was the first Korean to draft the earliest Korean republican constitution had not been heretofore recognized. Essentially,

Ahn's series of constitutions in the Ahn Changho Collection are the earliest constitutional drafts as the "founding documents" of the Republic of Korea. Textual analysis of the constitutions reflects his unique personality and gifts as much as his intellectual and institutional vision and applicability which critically molded the moral-spiritual vision and liberation strategy of the collective quest toward creating an independent sovereign democracy.

These constitutional drafts of Ahn Changho's revolutionary organizations demonstrate the creative and original, if evolving and complex, character of his constitutional philosophy and institutional experiments. Ahn Changho unfailingly wrote constitutions for his associations, including the Gongnip hyeophoe in America, the Sinminhoe in Korea, the Daehan gungminhoe in Manchuria, Russia, and America, and the Heungsadan in America, and subsequently in China and Korea, the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea (1919), the National Representatives Congress (1923), and the Korean Independence Party (1929) in China, among others. Most of all, these revolutionary organizations capture the actual transnational scale and scope of the Korean nationalist movement which Ahn Changho came to lead. The undaunted vision and size of planning of the independence quest are almost astounding, if unexpected and unanticipated. With the transnational reality of the Korean nationalist venture and enterprise, it is apparent that Korean independence struggle had long been underestimated in terms of geographical reach, strategic acumen, resilient longevity, or even sheer survivability.

The documents of the Ahn Changho Collection allow further glimpse of his early life and budding patriotic activities in America from 1905 to 1913. In particular, Ahn Changho's constitutional drafts reveal pioneering democracy-building through institutional and organizational efforts. By 1913, Ahn had self-taught and mastered the skill and grasp of constitutional dynamics and mechanism in a sophisticated manner when he created his most symbolic and long-lasting revolutionary-democratic

organization, the Heungsadan, in San Francisco. The Heungsadan is essentially a revolutionary leadership-training association which still survives as the leading nationalist and activist organization in South Korea, with branches in other countries. It is apparent that such a tour de force constitution of the Heungsadan in the Collection prefigures Ahn Changho's authorship of the first Constitution of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea.

From an impoverished gentry family of Pyongyang, Ahn Changho's father passed away when he was eight years old. His father was a scholar-farmer and village seodang teacher. Ahn Changho studied Chinese classics until sixteen, when he decided to go to Seoul. He became a Christian at the Underwood School, later the Kyungsin School and the seed of Yonsei University, where he was taught English by Underwood himself and studied the "new learning." Ahn Changho became a teacher and taught at the Underwood School for a number of years. By meeting Seo Jae-pil, Ahn Changho was introduced to the patriotic activities of the Independence Club and the ideals and practice of self-governing democracy. When Ahn Changho arrived in California in 1902, he wished to pursue further study in theology and education. However, he chose the path of activist when he saw two Korean ginseng merchants fighting in the streets of San Francisco. After moving to Riverside, he pursued his education with the evening Bible and English classes at a Methodist church in Los Angeles. Soon he became a successful entrepreneur operating an employment agency, helping to place Korean workers on local orchards where he sometimes joined.

Following the creation of the Friendship Society in California, Ahn Changho founded the Gongnip hyeophoe, in 1905. Applying the American federalist constitution to the United Korean Association, Ahn Changho wrote a pioneering democratic constitution prescribing the system of separation of powers and checks and balances. Devising a two-tiered bicameral system of the headquarters and local branches in the constitution, a dual system of executive and legislative bodies of self-

government functioned as separate but equal powers. In the local branches, autonomy was stressed with an executive and legislative system of its own. A product of Ahn Changho's own inimitable interpretation and application of the sociopolitical demands and challenges of compatriots, the United Korean Association appears to have been the first Korean association with a republican constitution as the earliest crystallization of his conception of constitutional democracy and practice of the rule of law.

Returning to Korea in 1907, Ahn Changho formed the secret revolutionary organization the Sinminhoe, with a democratic constitution. A new revealing discovery for the highly republican constitution for the most elite and committed nationalist association at the time is its detailed and concrete plan for the war of independence. This is related to the fact that even before the Joseon government's signing of the protectorate treaty in 1905, Ahn began to call for war through the editorials of newspapers published by his revolutionary organizations in America. Ahn Changho's oratorical assertions for "an open war" (*gaejeon*) began to appear when he returned to Pyongyang in 1907 in Korea. Thus, Ahn Changho's call for a war of independence began much earlier than previously conceived, as much as his consistent commitment toward the cause of Korean liberation made possible by military means thereafter. The Sinminhoe reflects the transnational linkage of the republican revolutionary project of diasporic Koreans and Koreans, especially Korean-Americans. The Sinminhoe created by Ahn Changho in Korea was initially conceived and designed in America, as it was not mainly a homeland organization created by the revolutionaries in Korea. This demonstrates the active transnational impetus and migrational network of Korean nationalist leadership and movement led by Ahn Changho.

Prior to the annexation in 1910, Ahn Changho sought to open numerous branches of the Daehanin Gungminhoe as a constitutional self-governing organization in Russia, Manchuria, and China. During this

time, he continued his grassroots efforts to lead and strengthen the organization as a transnational enterprise in America. As the fruit of his peripatetic organizational groundwork, the Daehanin gunghoe was solidified when Ahn became the chairman of the central assembly of the organization (*jungang chonghoe*) in 1912, eventually with branches numbering over one hundred in Asia and the Americas.¹ Ahn Changho thus laid a political foundation for diasporic Koreans and began to formulate the idea of exile government. Already, the Daehanin Gunghoe possessed the body and network of transnational structure and began to function as the central organ of the “provisional government.” It is not surprising then that Ahn Changho would later become the most significant leader to form and unify the Provisional Government in Shanghai. In 1913, Ahn Changho established a revolutionary leadership-training society Heungsadan, and prepared the “Constitution Draft of the Heungsadan” (*Heungsadan yakbeop gichoan*) in mixed Chinese and Korean writing in California.

For example, the “Constitution Draft of the Heungsadan” is no less than forty-five notebook pages written in pencil from 1913, his passionate commitment can be observed toward the democratic process of self-government, such as the election, the separation of powers, and transfer of office by limited terms. In a number of revisions and drafts of the Heungsadan constitution among the private papers, Ahn Changho’s persistence too can be read in his democracy-building efforts toward constitutional achievement and fulfillment for his compatriots. With such a constitutional framework, Ahn Changho attempted to ensure the viability and longevity of the Heungsadan, which he hoped to be the role model of democracy for Koreans. Ahn Changho’s emphatic insistence on democracy for Koreans derived from his belief that the very act of self-governing constituted an essential part of subversive anticolonial revolution.

2. The Father of Korean Democracy: The Provisional Government in Shanghai

The conventional wisdom or canonical myth of modern Korean historiography concerning the March First Movement of 1919 and the Korean Provisional Government in Shanghai has been that the Korean independence movement abroad followed, rather than led, the domestic course of nationalist development or activism. Such a view also suggests that the exile independence struggle was an *a posteriori* outcome of the internal mass uprising within Korea. While it is true that the exile Korean nationalist leaders joyfully responded *en mass* to the sudden outburst of the nationwide uprising of the March First Movement by heading to Shanghai, it would be highly inaccurate to assert that the mainstream Korean nationalist movement was primarily led and planned from within the peninsula.

It is well known that the Japanese rule was quite harsh and oppressive from the beginning, especially from the early 1910s as Japan imposed its political will on Koreans as colonial subjects. The “105 Incident” in 1911 led to the sacrifice and the torture of many of the Sinminhoe members, who were the most ardent nationalist leaders. As the core group of Korean nationalism, the Sinminhoe members had to escape or choose exile. The economic hardships also led to an unprecedented number of diaspora of the Korean people to China, Russia, and America, among other nations. Not much Korean nationalist activity could survive within Korea during the 1910s. The historical documents and records affirm that the foundation and formative framework of the Korean independence movement was very much created and established during this decade by Ahn Changho and close colleagues in diasporic exile. This affirms that the nationalist leadership and enterprise abroad was the *a priori* force and momentum which led, not followed, the collective independence quest in the subsequent decades, after Ahn Changho laid the bedrock of the Korean Provisional

Government in Shanghai in 1919.

Before the nationwide uprising of March First, Ahn Changho had already devised a plan to create a Provisional Government. He had signed the declaration of independence with other Korean revolutionaries in Manchuria which was the most radical in agenda and tone, among a number of versions prior to the uprising. Widely acknowledged as the most skilled conciliator and gifted institution-builder as well as fundraiser, Ahn Changho was invited by the Korean revolutionaries in Shanghai after the March First movement. Following the meeting, Ahn was sent as a representative of the Daehanin gungminhoe in America. From a young firebrand independence fighter, he had also become a seasoned revolutionary who thought with his head as much as his heart in his early forties.

Arriving in Shanghai in 1919, Ahn Changho purchased a house as the seat of government and his residence with funds provided by the Daehanin gungminhoe and Heungsadan in America. (Newly released documents of the Heungsadan indicate the members' purchase of the bonds issued by the Provisional Government. They reveal that the Heungsadan assumed perhaps the greatest financial burden of the Korean Provisional Government from its inception.) Since three provisional governments arose in Vladivostok, Seoul, and Shanghai, Ahn Changho consolidated the Provisional Government in Shanghai in August, carefully balancing the Seoul and Vladivostok cabinet appointments. As an acting premier, Ahn Changho considered the Seoul government as the legitimate heir of the March First movement. And he followed the representation of the Seoul government as closely as possible, against those who insisted that the roster of the Seoul government merely represented an underground resistance group. Toward a grand solidarity, Ahn appointed Syngman Rhee as the president for he could potentially be the most critical agent in altering the direction of American policy toward colonial Korea, as Rhee, the first Korean recipient of a doctoral degree in the United States, had been a doctoral protégée of Woodrow

Wilson at Princeton University. Also, he appointed Yi Dong-hwi, the most influential revolutionary leader in the Far East, as the premier of the Korean Provisional Government.

Though an unfair slight, Ahn Changho accepted the insignificant title for himself as the Chief of the Bureau of Labor (*Nodong chongpan*) assigned by the Seoul government. He accepted such a post for himself, conscious of the larger task of unification of the Korean Provisional Government. As Ahn entirely subsumed his personal ambition or reputation for a goal larger than himself, such an act of charitable humility and earnest stewardship stunned the nationalist community, both at home and abroad.

Table 1. The Unified Provisional Government in Shanghai

	Vladivostok	Seoul	Shanghai(Unified)
Head (<i>Suban</i>)	Son Byeong-hui Bak Yeong-hyo	Syngman Rhee	Syngman Rhee
Premier	Syngman Rhee	Yi Dong-hwi	Yi Dong-hwi
Minister of Interior	Ahn Changho	Yi Dong-nyong	Yi Dong-nyong
Minister of Diplomacy		Bak Yong-man	Bak Yong-man
Minister of Finance	Yun Hyeon-jin	Yi Si-yeong	Choe Jae-hyeong
Minister of Military	Yi Dong-hwi	No Baek-rin	No Baek-rin
Minister of Education		Kim Gyu-sik	Kim Gyu-sik
Minister of Justice		Sin Gyu-sik	Sin Gyu-sik
Minister of Transportation		Mun Chang-beom	Mun Chang-beom
Minister of Labor	Nam Hyeong-u	Ahn Changho	Ahn Changho

Upon unifying the Korean Provisional Government, Ahn Changho drafted the first Constitution of the Republic of Korea which espoused the presidential system with the three branches of government. Mindful of his historic task to lay the cornerstone of the future independent democracy, he prepared a comprehensive constitution of eight Chapters and fifty-eight Articles as the Provisional Constitution of the Republic of

Korea. After considerable debate, the constitution was passed by the Provisional Assembly on September 11, 1919. In the prefatory chapter, it read:

- I. The Republic of Korea is composed of the people of Korea.
- II. The sovereignty of Korea rests entirely on the people of Korea.
- III. The land of Korea is the peninsula of the old Joseon dynasty.
- IV. The people of Korea are all equal.
- V. Korea's legislative right belongs to the Assembly (*Uijeongwon*), executive right belongs to the Executive (*Gungmuwon*), and the judicial right belongs to the Judiciary (*Beopwon*).
- VI. Within the limits of the Constitution, the governing of Korea is delegated to the Provisional President.
- VII. Korea will courteously respect the monarch of the *ancien regime*.

In simple yet elegant language, the constitution proclaimed the sovereign right and equality of Koreans and stipulated the presidential system based on the separation of powers. Emphasizing the Provisional Government as the legitimate exile government, the declaration of the Provisional Constitution buttressed the overseas movement as the highest body of organized resistance to the Japanese rule, with its legitimacy ultimately derived from anticolonial democratic revolution of the March First by the Korean people.

3. The Korean Independence Army: The Role and Leadership of Ahn Changho

As demonstrated by the enduring controversy surrounding him, Ahn Changho, for long, was not considered nor recognized as a military leader with military intentions to recover his nation in the conventional or orthodox view. However, *The Master Plan of Independence* and other documents from the Ahn Changho Collection overwhelmingly disprove

such an assumption. Even if this was due in part to Ahn's own strategic leadership and deliberate decision to not reveal his revolutionary identity, there was also plenty of intellectual oversight and misjudgment concerning this issue in early scholarship and writing. There are, in fact, myriad available and existing sources of Korean nationalism since the Liberation, aside from the Ahn Changho Collection, which affirm that Ahn Changho always was and had been a leader with a militarist objective, as his primary concern throughout his life to reclaim his country from Japan. Here, some of the documents which clearly illustrate his military or revolutionary plans, short term and long term, for Korean independence will be selectively cited and explained. The defining matter of Ahn Changho's leadership and strategy as pacifism vs. militarism is at the heart of the Ahn Changho Controversy, which is also substantively and ideologically connected to the debate about patriotism vs. collaborationism, with critical implications and interpretive resonances in the debates of nationalist history and modern Korean historiography.

Along with the *Master Plan*, Ahn Changho's earlier efforts toward military mobilization can be read from the Gongnip hyeophoe in America which anticipated a war of independence. For example, Ahn Changho's "Tasks for All Armed Koreans to Implement" (undated), which survives among the Ahn Changho Collection of papers from America, enriches the understanding of his grass-roots military mobilization in diaspora. It is an extensive set of instructions for Korean military training. In the document consisting of three chapters and twenty-eight articles, Ahn champions his revolutionary call for all Koreans to be militarily trained for the war of independence. He stressed that the smallest military unit will consist of from ten to twenty-five people and a unit leader among them will be selected by vote and unanimous acceptance, using a democratic method as often as possible, which is consistent with his principle and practice. Ahn also emphasized change and transfer of responsibility for the leader and reiterated lack of

grew as an important leadership quality. He displays an easy familiarity with the subject of the military by reading books in his personal library, such as *A Summary of Military Tactics*, *History of Seize and Destroy Warfare*, *Applied Minor Tactics*, *Manual of Field Artillery*, and *What a Soldier Must Know* (*Gunin suji*).

From an examination of his private papers and other Korean nationalist documents, it becomes evident that Ahn Changho not only advocated military mobilization but also primarily led a systematic effort for an independence war as the acting premier of the Provisional Government from 1919. In his *Shanghai Diary* in 1920-21, Ahn Changho conscientiously recorded the nature of his daily activities, including each visit, meeting, personage, and substance of discussion. Acutely aware of the historical significance of the account, he carefully delineated the circumstances and characters surrounding the birth of the first republican Korean Government in Shanghai. Upon conceiving the constitutional foundation of the Provisional Government, the *Diary* affirms that Ahn Changho committed himself to the task of step-by-step mobilization for the War of Independence and devoted much of his time and energies toward unification, enlargement, and empowerment of the Korean Independence Army. Soon after arriving in Shanghai, Ahn Changho declared the Military Rules of the Provisional Government (*Daehan minguk imsi gunje*), an extensive body of military guidelines and regulations to unify and supervise the military groups under a central authority. One of his first tasks in Shanghai was to begin to unite the scattered Korean military groups in the Far East by consolidating disparate military organizations in Russia, Manchuria, and China under the jurisdictional umbrella of the Provisional Government.

Through Ahn Changho's efforts, many of the disparate military groups either declared their support or submitted to the authority of the Provisional Government. With growing numbers of military groups in Manchuria expressing allegiance, further unification became possible in the Far East. The leading military figures in Russia and Manchuria,

including Yi Dong-hwi, Hong Beom-do, and Kim Jwa-jin, conjoined to form the Korean Independence Army, and were personally quite close to Ahn who offered financial, moral, and material support. Kim Jwa-jin and Hong Beom-do played the leading roles in the famous War of Independence at Qingshanli (K. Cheongsanri) in Jiandao.

Encouraging the nationalist community, including the cabinet members of the Provisional Government, to submit their policy proposals and objectives, Ahn Changho formulated a comprehensive independence movement strategy as the acting premier. His strategic outline is articulated in an address on January 3, 1920, of “*Great Six Strategies for Independence*.” Perhaps the most important speech at the inception of the Korean Provisional Government, Ahn Changho offered his strategic priority of the major tasks for Koreans to reclaim independence: “Now, there are six great tasks that our people must achieve. They are, 1) military, 2) diplomacy, 3) education, 4) law, 5) finance, and 6) unification.” Concerning the primary military task, Ahn asserted the importance of unification, training, and national conscription by stating, “An independence war is not an imagination, for the war to be a reality. ... We all have to be soldiers. ... Let’s all receive military drills. ... Even women have to learn.”

These war agendas reflected the military priority of the Provisional Government to create a well-united and trained Korean Independence Army. It is also evident from the composition of the cabinet which included leading military figures, such as Yi Dong-hwi, Choe Jae-hyeong, No Baek-rin, and Sin Gyu-sik. Among them, Yi Dong-hwi and Choe Jae-hyeong were commanders whose military organizations were influential in both Russia and Manchuria. Possessing military training and leadership, No Baek-rin was from America and Sin Gyu-sik was from China. With almost equal weight of representation, the cabinet was divided into the operational regions of America and the Far East. From America were Ahn Changho, Syngman Rhee, Kim Gyu-sik, and No Baek-rin; from the Far East were Yi Dong-hwi, Choe Jae-hyeong, Sin

Gyu-sik, and Mun Chang-beom.

While Syngman Rhee was exclusively devoted to diplomacy, Ahn Changho, Yi Dong-hwi, Kim Gyu-sik, No Baek-rin, and Sin Gyu-sik were involved in both military and diplomacy. In addition to Syngman Rhee and Seo Jae-pil, who became diplomatic plenipotentiaries of the Provisional Government, Kim Gyu-sik and No Baek-rin initially directed their diplomatic endeavors to the West, especially America. A socialist nationalist, Yi Dong-hwi's diplomatic negotiations were strictly conducted with Russian communists. Sin Gyu-sik mostly concentrated his diplomacy with Chinese revolutionaries. Realistic and pragmatic, Ahn Changho preferred the balance of power approach to America and the West as well as China and Russia. He also stressed war over diplomacy by distinguishing "foreign dependence relying on diplomacy" vs. "self-reliance of fighting the independence war" to reclaim the country.

In the *Shanghai Diary*, it can be read that Ahn Changho was most preoccupied with the military unification of the Provisional Government from the earliest entry on January 15, 1920, to the last on March 1, 1921. He pursued the following activities to coordinate the effort to wage the Independence War: formulation of military policy and rules; organization of the conference of military leaders; formation of alliances between the Provisional Government and the existing military groups; recruitment and training of soldiers in Manchuria and Russia; establishment of military schools; referral of Korean students to foreign military schools; importation and accumulation of food, weapons, and other logistical support; and dispatch of military envoys and/or correspondents. Ahn Changho was also the most responsible figure behind the planning and staging of the Qingshanli War. The details of Ahn Changho's involvement in the Qingshanli War are further described in my forthcoming book.

II. The Ahn Changho Controversy and Modern Korean Historiography

Ahn Changho has been a critical subject of literary and scholarly attention among the colonial and post-colonial Korean intellectuals in Korea and West. Caught at the nexus of modern Korean history and historiography, Ahn Changho was misinterpreted or misjudged as a “gradualist-pacifist” by Yi Gwang-su, Ju Yo-han, Chong-sik Lee, and Arthur Gardner from the 1940s to the 1970s (Yi, 1947; Ju, 1963; Lee, 1965, Gardner, 1979); “cultural nationalist” by Michael E. Robinson as a revisionist analysis in the 1980s (Robinson, 1988); and “self-reconstruction nationalist” by Kenneth Wells in the 1990s (Wells, 1990), among others. Evolving from a heroic nationalist icon to an object of hostile criticism, there are, in fact, few other nationalists who have experienced as much recent academic controversy as the subject of Ahn Changho. He was consistently lionized as the very paradigm of a Korean leader and personality ideal by writers and scholars like Yi Gwang-su (1947), Ju Yo-han (1963, 1987), Chong-sik Lee (1965), and An Byeong-uk (1991). During the violence scarred era of the 1980s and the early 1990s, Ahn Changho nonetheless came under serious revisionist attack and scrutiny by Gang Dong-jin (1980), Michael E. Robinson (1988), Seo Jung-seok (1989), Bak Chan-seung (1992), and others. If seminal works on Korean nationalism or nationalist leadership were “vague” at best (Lee, 1965, for example) with overextended paradigmatic shadows and factual lacunae concerning the subject, the problem with the historical works which emerged in the 1980s post-Gwangju era was that they were byproducts of political fury against dictatorial violence, often overloaded with ideological excesses and political polemics (Robinson, 1988; Shin and Robinson, eds., 1999). The politically angry and even intellectually violent revisionism of the 1980s led to the potent mix of charges against the nationalist credentials of Ahn Changho, describing him as a possible and lukewarm collaborationist during the colonial era.

In fact, Ahn Changho was for long misconstrued as a “gradualist-pacifist” educator by many writers, scholars, historians, and even his disciples (Yi Gwang-su, 1947; Ju Yo-han, 1963; Chong-sik Lee, 1965; Arthur Gardner, 1979; Seo Jung-seok, 1989; Bak Chan-seung, 1992; Hyung-chan Kim, 1996; Byung-yool Ban, 1996; Kim and Reinschmidt, eds., 1998). The interpretations variously considered Ahn Changho’s nationalist resistance leadership and activist identity as “gradualist,” “pacifist,” “cultural nationalist,” and “unrevolutionary.” Yet, the “passive collaborationist” charge was the most polemical and ideologically loaded concerning Ahn’s supposedly limited and tepid approach to Korean independence from Japanese colonial rule (Lee, 1965; Robinson, 1988). Here, Ahn Changho was often seriously misconceived as a “cultural nationalist” whose main focus was only on the self-reconstruction of the Korean national character in the revisionist attempts with an ideological impetus in the 1980s and 1990s (Robinson, 1988; Shin and Robinson, eds., 1999).

The “Ahn Changho Controversy,” as referred to in the fields of Korean Studies and Asian Studies in the West, was ignited by my introduction of new discoveries and analyses of the Ahn Changho Collection of historical documents to international scholars through an email forum, or listserv, as a globally shared academic bulletin in 1995. Since my novel findings contested the conventional wisdom undisturbed for the past half century after Liberation in 1945 in the Korea and the West, such inevitably led to a sense of shock and bewilderment in the global academic community linked through the internet. Almost instantaneously, a series of fierce and lengthy debates arose among Korean Studies scholars all over the world. Subsequently, I received a downpour of academic responses, which became a long stream of opinions, including challenges and counter-challenges, and points and counterpoints, which lasted for several years. Thus, from the mid-1990s, growing interest in the subject of modern Korean history and nationalism led to the emergence of the “Ahn Changho Controversy” among the

several hundred international scholars in various disciplines of Korean Studies. The then-new technology of the internet transformed the quality and quantity, as much as the speed and scope, of academic discourse in Korean Studies as the *bona fide* transnational medium as never before. The sheer volume of the opinions generated by the Ahn Changho Controversy in the e-forum was over a hundred pages and could become a book by itself. The content of the Ahn Changho controversy has been removed from the website. The “Moderated Korean Studies Internet Discussion List” is still in existence at koreaweb.ws/ks.

The documentary findings from the newly available Ahn Changho Collection of papers squarely defied much of the received wisdom of the past fifty years. And my historiographical analysis of Ahn Changho’s leadership of the Korean nationalist movement not only challenged and interrogated the twists and turns of myriad interpretations in the postcolonial era. It also debunked the previous conceptions and paradigms which often underestimated or misrepresented Korean nationalism. New insights, perspectives, queries, and nuances to the understanding of the unique phenomenon of Korean nationalism were much needed. Becoming one of the most heated and enduring debates in the field of Korean Studies, and still ongoing, the “Ahn Changho Controversy” is perhaps the longest and most intense series of debates in Korean Studies in Korea and the West. In this regard, it follows the “Korean War Controversy” introduced in *The Origins of the Korean War* by Bruce Cumings (Cumings, 1981), which has now become a dismissed theory of the “Korean civil war” during the Cold War era by new documentary sources from Russian and Chinese archives. Cumings’ revisionist history of the Korean War had profound repercussions in terms of ideological conflicts and policy divisions in Korea and the West since the book was published in the early 1980s.

The spirited debates on Korea’s quest for freedom and Ahn Changho’s role in this epic struggle escalated from the cyber sphere to international academic conferences to the public and community events,

which I took an active part in over many years. The controversy over Ahn Changho, or the grand narrative of Korean nationalism, generated much enthusiastic discourse in academe, policy, community, and the media, including invitations and participants from Europe, Asia, the Americas, Russia, and the former communist bloc. By now, I have been invited and delivered nearly one hundred lectures, speeches, and presentations on the subject around the world in the past decades. Since 1996 at academic conferences, I have addressed the historiographical problems of properly contextualizing and historicizing the false critiques of Sin Chae-ho and Kim Il Sung of Ahn Changho, among others. Perhaps the first event which introduced and observed the significance of the subject of the Ahn Changho Controversy was “The Origins of Korean Democracy” conference at the prestigious Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C., often referred as the think tank of the U.S. Congress, which attempts to link the world of scholarship and the world of policy. My conference paper was published as “Ahn Changho and the Origins of Korean Democracy.” Several years later, the Ahn Changho Controversy was further described in my chapter “Cradle of the Covenant: Ahn Changho and the Christian Roots of Korean Constitution,” in *Christianity in Korea*, from a Christian perspective.

Over the years, a flurry of Korean-American community activities also began to appear surrounding Ahn Changho as the subject of increasing focus, attention, controversy, and scholarship, in addition to the creation of his statue in Riverside, California, in 2001. The Ahn Changho Controversy, in this sense, also made possible a growing number of memorial projects on him, as the community rediscovered the meaning of his pioneering leadership and identity. Among many commemorative landmarks in South Korea and America, a beautiful memorial park, Dosan Park, long honored Ahn in the Gangnam district of Seoul. Although Ahn himself never lived there, the family home on 36th Place in Los Angeles has been restored by the University of Southern California. In recent years, the City of Los Angeles has also

declared the nearby intersection of Jefferson Boulevard and Van Buren Place to be “Dosan Ahn Chang Ho Square” in his honor. A main freeway interchange in downtown Los Angeles where the 10 Freeway and 110 Freeway meet is named after Dosan Ahn Chang Ho. One of the patterns of taekwondo became Dosan in his honor, and so forth. A commonly used three-hundred won Korean stamp has long honored him, as well as a serious debate and deliberation of setting his image on Korean currency which still lingers.

In academe, the Ahn Changho Controversy allowed a canon-shattering departure from the past conceptions and interpretations of Ahn Changho and Korean nationalism. More importantly, the new evidence and analysis also probes the fundamental shortcomings and misconceptions of the previous theoretical paradigm or structural schema of interpretations of the Korean nationalist movement at large. They underscore the perils and pitfalls of interpretation of Ahn Changho and the Korean nationalist movement, including the nature of his philosophy, vision, and strategy. The paradigm-altering implications of the new research also solicit radical reappraisal of the politico-ideological dialectics and dynamics of modern Korean history and historiography. With complex political, ideological, and historiographical implications, the Ahn Changho Controversy endures as an ongoing academic storm in Korean Studies and beyond in modern Korea and the West. It revealed that Korean nationalism and the independence struggle are enduring topics of academic and popular interest not only in America but also in the world curious about and concerned with modern Korea, a country full of turbulence yet also of triumphs.

What was at stake in the “Ahn Changho Controversy”? A potentially explosive clash of ideas concerning Ahn Changho that remains is patriotism vs. collaborationism. The Ahn Changho Controversy thus pivots on the highly complex, combustible, and at times vexing issues of patriotism vs. collaboration, as it probes the previous revisionist binaries arising from the reductive matrix of the bipolar Cold War alignments and

lasting division of the Korean peninsula. For instance, the arch-patriot Ahn Changho has been, surprisingly enough, questioned on his nationalist and patriotic credentials over time. Especially during the 1980s, he has been alternately described as a “gradualist pacifist,” “cultural nationalist,” or a “passive collaborationist” leader through the prism of writing by patriot-turned-collaborator Yi Gwang-su, among others. How was it possible that Ahn came to be discerned as a “passive collaborationist” or compromiser, who supposedly only advocated non-confrontational means of education and cultural development within the Japanese colonial framework? (Robinson, 1988; Wells, 1990) How did these historiographical myths and orthodoxies develop over time concerning the Korean nationalist leader, philosophy, and movement?

My own research confronts the issues of patriotism vs. collaborationism of the Korean nationalist movement in colonial-postcolonial Korean history and historiography by questioning the theoretical and interpretive assumptions of such polemicized historiography motivated by ideological and political impetus, especially during the violent and angry era of the post-Gwangju 1980s and thereafter. Signifying the essential role of Ahn Changho’s leadership in the anticolonial struggle and the inquiry of nationalism in modern Korean history, the Ahn Changho Controversy interrogates the ideologized polemics of the Gwangju-scarred decade in the 1980s. Born of such a milieu, however, the post-Gwangju historiography concerning Ahn Changho was driven by the political and ideological agendas of the time. In the following decades, the controversy continued to raise uncomfortably thorny, if complex and difficult, issues in colonial-nationalist history. The enduring debates on Ahn Changho parallel the political and intellectual change from polemicized revisionism to empirical neo-revisionism within modern Korean historical discourse. Indeed, the disinterred historical truths arising from the Ahn Changho Controversy problematizes the earlier historiography based on inadequate and biased sources or motivated by politico-ideological contingencies. The Ahn Changho

Controversy, therefore, critically invites theoretical deliberations on the leadership, vision, and program of the most responsible figure of the Korean independence movement. And the controversy opened and sustained substantive debates on the underlying paradigmatic pattern and politico-ideological dynamics of the Korean nationalist movement as a whole.

This invites inquiries to address what actually constituted Ahn Changho's nationalist revolutionary ideology, strategy, and project, as colonial and postcolonial myths and orthodoxies proliferated. The Ahn Changho Controversy entails debates concerning the character, morality, decision-making, and judgment at the pinnacle of the Korean independence leadership but also the historical authenticity of the Korean nationalist struggle as a whole. At the heart of the controversy, then, is the insistent questioning of the empirical and theoretical basis of the historiography of the Korean nationalist leadership and movement. The controversy necessarily includes and inquires about the newest revelations and insights which proved that the earlier views were derived from misreadings, misappropriations, or underestimations of the independence movement in modern Korean history. Through the unearthed historical documents and sources, the past scholarship becomes debunkable, since my documentary discoveries inevitably contest the previous interpretations of him as a "gradualist pacifist," a "cultural nationalist," or a "passive collaborationist." These definitions or terms evolved from the seminal "tripartite division" scholarship of Ahn Changho and Korean nationalism, which was later translated into a depiction of him as possibly a latent compromiser with the Japanese colonial regime, whose leadership and strategic vision only concentrated on educational and cultural activities (Lee, 1965; Robinson, 1988), and not military or political endeavors.

The Ahn Changho Controversy, therefore, came to question and confront the myths and orthodoxies of colonial and postcolonial Korea and abroad. In my view, accumulated colonial myths and postcolonial

mistakes concerning Korean nationalism and nationalist movement entailed a lacuna of information, historical distortions and misjudgments, over-reliance on colonial Japanese police sources, obscurantist scholarship, neglect of existing materials, overly politicized or ideological agendas, excessive moralizing, culturalizing and depoliticizing, and Orientalism, among others. As a brief overview, the Ahn Changho Controversy included critical problematics of the postcolonial historiography of Korean nationalism, which may be summarized as follows: 1) patriotism vs. collaborationism; 2) gradualist pacifism vs. radical militarism; 3) “cultural nationalism” vs. “revolutionary nationalism”; 4) a new view of “revolutionary-democracy” vs. the old view of “tripartite division” of the Korean nationalist movement; and 5) the origins of Korean democracy, including the earliest beginning and author of the Korean republican constitution. The Ahn Changho Controversy emerged in Korean Studies prior to some of the more popular and sensationalistic coverage and publications on the “East Asian holocaust,” for example, the Nanjing massacre and comfort women. In this manner, it predates and prefigures other subsequent historical debates with strong political and policy repercussions in East Asia, such as war crimes and responsibilities of World War II, war reparations, textbook distortions, Dokdo, and the East Sea, among others. (Pak, 2005)

1. Critique of the Controversy

A. *Gradual Pacifism vs. Radical Militarism*

The writer of “New Literature,” Yi Gwang-su, and the poet of “New Poetry,” Ju Yo-han, who became Heungsadan members in Shanghai, offered the most exhaustive biographies as eye witness accounts. Yi Gwang-su’s earliest biography, *Dosan Ahn Changho*, was the top best-seller in 1947, published two years after the Liberation. The book was widely read by Koreans who acutely felt the absence of the extraordinary

leader in Korea in the post-Liberation chaos. Ju Yo-han's expanded biography with historical documents, *Ahn Dosan jeonso* (Complete Works of Dosan Ahn Changho), first published in 1963, was a seminal study and pioneering academic effort on Ahn Changho's life. Yet, as disciple-biographers, Yi Gwang-su and Ju Yo-han's works need to be carefully considered as well-intentioned but compromised sources. Written after their colonial collaboration under duress, the works inevitably contained their self-justification and even self-mortification to properly narrate the nationalist life of Ahn Changho, who was an uncompromising patriot and martyr to the cause until the end.

Yi Gwang-su and Ju Yo-han's writing of Ahn Changho's life seemed to have been a sober and sincere act of atonement for their troubled conscience. If the undercurrent of their works were characterized by "gradualist" and "pacifist" quietude or ethico-spiritual and moral self-reflection, this was not surprising. Their biographies were also marred by inconsistencies and paradoxes stemming from their collaboration which further clouded and complicated an understanding of the moral complexities and authentic truths of Ahn Changho and the Korean liberation movement. For this reason, Yi Gwang-su and Ju Yo-han's biographies eventually led to the subsequently ideologically-loaded and politically-coded interpretations of Ahn Changho as a "gradualist-pacifist" and set the tone for future interpretations of Ahn's life, thought, and activities. A discussion on the collaboration of Yi Gwang-su and Ju Yo-han and the circumstances of the Donguhoe trial in 1937 is included in *Heungsadan undong chilsipnyeonsa* (The Seventy Year History of the Heungsadan Movement).

Among other protégés, Jang I-uk, a Heungsadan member who worked with Ahn Changho, also wrote a biographical sketch of Ahn Changho in *Na ui sarang Han bando ya* (My Love, Korean Peninsula), co-edited with Ju Yo-han in 1987. After the Liberation, Jang I-uk became the Republic of Korea's ambassador to the United Nations and subsequently the president of Seoul National University. For Korean

youth in search of direction and purpose in life during the post-war and military dictatorship era, An Byeong-uk, a prolific and popular essayist of philosophy, wrote *Dosan sasang* (Dosan Ahn Changho Thought, 1991), as his own synthesis of Ahn Changho's patriotic "*Him ui cheolhak*" (philosophy of strength) for the moral progress and advancement of the nation as the foundational philosophy of modern Korean nationalism. An Byeong-uk became an ardent admirer of Ahn Changho, though he never met him. Both authors attempted to systemize Ahn Changho's independence philosophy and strategy. Yet, their interpretations often tended to only focus on his exemplary character, moral-spiritual mentorship, and visionary message for Koreans of future generation.

Much of the interpretive problems on Ahn Changho and Korean nationalism originate from *The Politics of Korean Nationalism* (1965) by Chong-sik Lee, whose study was the first English monograph to provide a rough outline of the Korean nationalist leaders and movement. Delineating the causes of the political division among nationalists of the Provisional Government, the study characterized Ahn Changho as a "gradualist"; Syngman Rhee and Seo Jae-pil as "propagandists"; and Yi Dong-hwi and Bak Yong-man as "militarists." Offering the classic "tripartite division" as a conceptual framework to discern the Korean nationalist leadership and politics, Lee's early work has heavily influenced academic writing on Korean nationalism for the past several decades.

The conception of "tripartite division" gave a convenient and facile explanation for generations of scholars to explain away the personality conflicts, political and professional rivalries, strategic and ideological differences, organizational divisions, and other incongruencies and contradictions found in Korean nationalism. In the "tripartite division" presuppositions of a continuously fractured nationalist movement without unity, it was axiomatically posited that Ahn Changho focused on education and economic-cultural empowerment as "gradualist" (and

later, “gradualist pacifist” and/or “cultural nationalist”) and espoused gradual reforms and improvements in the colonial and diasporic Korean communities. The danger with this view was that it implicitly, if rather pejoratively, assumed that these strategic differences between the leaders led to the inevitable division, eventual decline, and subsequent failure of the Korean independence movement. It was also sometimes extended as an analytical tool or framework to understand the independence movement and pioneering activism among the overseas communities, including the leaders of early Korean-America, such as Ahn Changho, Syngman Rhee, and Bak Yong-man. Yet, such an analysis did not effectively discern the fact that the leaders, Ahn Changho, Syngman Rhee, and Bak Yong-man, as well as Seo Jae-pil and Yi Dong-hwi, were, at one time or another, militarist, diplomatist, or self-strengthening educator in their revolutionary careers.

Not only did the “tripartite division” schema offer a quite simple and reduced depiction of the Korean nationalist struggle, it relied on a misguided hypothesis that neglected to address how and why the independence quest could be sustained and motivated as a “movement” with its organizational cohesion and momentum for as long as it did from the late nineteenth century to Liberation, even with its weaknesses and undulations. The problem with much of the past writings was that they concentrated too much on the negative aspects of Korean nationalism, such as a lack of unity and continuity of Korean nationalism which, in turn, denied the holistic yet dynamic historical authenticity to the movement. In reality, was not the Korean independence quest actually better inspired and survived by a far-sighted and progressive leadership and multinational organizational structure with a concerted unification drive to achieve freedom and democracy? Such divisive paradigms did not fully take into account the unification efforts and leadership of the nationalist movement as a formidable transnational network and enterprise, which laid the foundation of democracy for the future nation-building and globalization of Korea. Previously much underestimated by

the West and misunderstood even by Koreans themselves, the Korean independence quest was indeed an elaborately linked international movement of quite sophisticated, sometimes clandestine, revolutionary operations with an ambitious geographical and organizational outreach. Thus, in this study done over forty years ago, the tripartite categories were indeed “vague” with over-reliance on Japanese colonial sources, as Lee later admitted. Yet, some scholars still fervently continued to adopt and recycle this outdated and debunked view of Korean nationalism in a repetitive and formulaic manner, neglecting to search for a new paradigm of understanding for decades.

B. Patriotism vs. Collaboration: “Cultural Nationalism” and “Self-Reconstruction Nationalism”

The “gradualist” interpretation of Ahn Changho as a nationalist leader’s strategy, ideology, and methodology in Chong-sik Lee’s work was later more ideologically translated and appropriated as “cultural nationalism” in the 1980s. Against an overly nationalist historiography, Gang Dong-jin, who discovered the “Saitō documents,” attempted to address the complex problem of moderate nationalist-turned-collaborators such as Yi Gwang-su and Ju Yo-han in light of new sources (1980). In this vein, Michael E. Robinson asserted that Yi Gwang-su and Ahn Changho were essentially unrevolutionary “cultural nationalists” by examining Yi Gwang-su’s *Minjok gaejoron* (Treatise of the Reformation of National Character) in *Cultural Nationalism in Colonial Korea, 1920-1925*. Adopting the radical leftist critique of the 1920s which arose from the intense political and propaganda struggle between the mainstream Korean nationalists and communists, Robinson contended that Yi Gwang-su and Ahn Changho were “elitist gradualists” whose measures toward recovering independence were actually “a tacit acceptance of the colonial rule,” or “passive collaborationism.” His analysis thus misconstrued Ahn Changho as a “gradualist-pacifist” who originated the

conservative “rightist” nationalist philosophy with an emphasis on cultural accommodationism, rather than political and military revolutionary activities. Within such logic, Ahn Changho’s *supposedly* gradualist or cultural nationalist strategy of non-confrontation and educational-cultural reform was explicitly condemned and ridiculed as cautiously tepid, if not outright anachronistic and hypocritical. Provocatively challenging the nationalist credentials of Ahn Changho, this work led to a conclusion that his gradualist ideologico-methodology was “conservative-rightist” with its linear teleology as self-rule (*jachi*) under the Japanese (Robinson, 1988).

Charging that such “cultural nationalists” sought non-political gradualist reform before independence and only wished to work *within* the Japanese colonial framework, Robinson examines the journals and social movements already censored and curtailed under repressive Japanese rule within Korea (Robinson, 1988). Failing to evaluate the activities of the Korean Provisional Government in Shanghai, he does not connect the nationalist movement within the peninsula and abroad. In turn, the work hardly considers the reality of the domestic-exile linkage among revolutionary nationalists and communists, including the war of independence. After all, the locus of action and momentum of the Korean independence movement lay outside Korea in the 1920s, especially following the March First Movement in 1919 and soon thereafter. Such analysis failed to investigate the extensive exile activities of Ahn Changho and other nationalists during this time, such as an almost frantic array of activities of the Provisional Government, which was surely where the action was.

Only an indirect or referential treatment of Ahn Changho was possible through an ideologically-charged evaluation of *Minjok gaejoron*, a single work of the famously prolific Yi Gwang-su. Yi Gwang-su actually portrayed Ahn Changho as a role model for the Korean youth to emulate in several of his major works, such as *Mujeong* (Heartless), *Heuk* (Soil), and *Seondoja* (Teacher), in addition to the already

mentioned posthumous biography of Ahn Changho. It appears that the polemicized and ideologized notions of gradualism or cultural nationalism as Korean mainstream non-communist nationalism were strongly influenced by the fact of Yi Gwang-su's subsequent collaboration with the Japanese. Here, perhaps too much emphasis was placed upon the relationship or mentorship between Yi Gwang-su and Ahn Changho, who possessed a highly distinctive quality of moral character and path of life as well as inner strength and nationalist commitment, in addition to a considerable following and circle of friends, colleagues, disciples, and rivals. Throughout his life as a nationalist leader, Ahn Changho was naturally quite close to a significant number of prominent nationalists, including An Jung-geun, Kim Gu, Yi Dong-hwi, Yeo Un-hyeong, Seo Jae-pil, Bak Un-sik, and Jo So-ang, who did not become collaborators or compromisers during the colonial period.

A more serious methodological and empirical problem of earlier historiography on the Korean independence struggle is an over-dependence on the Japanese Government-General (J. *Chōsen Sōtokufu*; K. *Joseon Chongdokbu*) records and sources, without a careful examination of the then available material on Ahn Changho and other revolutionaries such as diaries, speeches, biographies, recollections, and journals. A historiographical interpretation solely based on Japanese sources cannot adequately grapple with the colonial reality of harsh repression vs. gritty resistance. For example, with routine exposure to grave danger and threat which included strict censorship and curtailment of activities, the nationalists were often forced to disguise their true intentions or identities. Such deception or pretense against the notoriously severe Japanese was no less than a matter of life and death for them.

It can be observed that Ahn Changho, who successively operated multitudes of underground and exile activities, including an espionage communication network (*yeontongje*) of the Provisional Government, did not intend to carelessly reveal his genuine revolutionary philosophy or

method. After all, it is quite improbable to imagine Ahn revealing his innermost revolutionary thought or strategy to the Japanese authorities. As he sought to preserve his anticolonial revolutionary career for a long time, it would have been irresponsible, if not outright foolhardy, for Ahn to make provocative statements of a revolutionary character, as indicated in his much censored “Plea to Compatriots” as an exile leader.

Japanese sources on Ahn Changho or other nationalists, including the so-called “collaborators,” must be utilized with extreme caution and care, since the subtle guiles of the Korean nationalists and the delicate and indelicate pressures by the Japanese colonialists must be fully accounted for an accurate description of the colonial/nationalist reality. Indeed, the colonial subtext and intertext must be intuitively probed and decoded. The blank spaces and silent voices too must be read and heard to appreciate the nationalist movement as an epic tapestry of complexly interwoven layers and linkages of figures and activities. Otherwise, an over-invested confidence in the colonialist sources can only result in a superficial depiction of a nationalist’s *colonial disguise*, as in the case of Ahn Changho, who has been often misrepresented as a “gradualist-pacifist,” “cultural nationalist,” “preparationist,” and “ability-cultivationist,” among other views. For example, in a Japanese police interrogation report (K. *Yesim simmungi*), Ahn Changho only appears to be forthcoming about the nature and extent of his nationalist activities, while he completely denies any revolutionary or military intent in them. The hazards of interpretation can be perceived when we realize that this report has been widely used by scholars without careful discretion, particularly for its biographical details concerning Ahn Changho. It may also be an ironic perpetuation of the unfortunate colonial legacy, especially as the Japanese administration’s records are, still, somehow considered more “legitimate” to judge a Korean nationalist revolutionary. Without sensitive and intuitive discernment, therefore, it is not possible to properly analyze colonial sources on the activities of Korean nationalists.

Moreover, a philosophical limitation of Neo-Marxist historiography concerning the Korean nationalist movement or the nationalist leader Ahn Changho is that it is inherently unable to delineate the core essence of Ahn's spirituality or metaphysics, perhaps reminiscent of the character Dong-hyeok in Sim Hun's *Sangnoksu* (Evergreen) who quixotically trusts that the transcendental matters of the spirit can actually be reduced to an imminent scientific and materialistic ideology. A historian of political ideas, Eric Voegelin, remarked that "the soul of Marx was demonically closed to transcendental reality" since "in the critical Post-Hegelian situation he cannot extricate himself from the difficulties by returning to the freedom of the spirit." Yet, the Marxist discourse characterized by "spiritual impotence" and "dictatorial prohibition of metaphysical questions" (Voegelin, 1975) too was a part of a utopian vision to fulfill the promise of perfection of man and society. Utopian vision and ideals profoundly engaged Ahn Changho and his life endeavors and experiments toward sovereign freedom of his people.

If the problem of the pre-1980s scholarship on Ahn Changho was its narrow focus on him only as a nationalist philosopher and educator, the post-Gwangju revisionist historiography of the 1980s with its overtly polemicized, politicized, and ideologized motivations also hardly succeeds in grasping the full dimensions of Ahn Changho or Korean nationalism. To better comprehend a multifaceted and multilayered revolutionary-democrat such as Ahn, the substantive nature and universe of his metaphysics, ideology, strategy, and activities need to be systematically illuminated. In this regard, Ahn Changho's internal choices and responses against his external challenges, constraints, and circumstances have to be carefully reconstructed. Furthermore, the paradigmatic structure of Ahn's authentic inner existence that molded the contour of his unique adaptability, originality, creativity, and imagination should be investigated. Only then does it seem possible to accurately conceive of Ahn Changho as the quintessential Korean nationalist leader who courageously confronted, scientifically attempted, boldly applied,

always hoped, frequently disappointed, often agonized, eagerly transformed, and experientially matured (Pak, 1995).

The ambiguous historical legacy of other prominent nationalist/collaborators, such as Yun Chi-ho or Kim Seong-su, has compounded the accumulated difficulties of grappling with the true Ahn Changho and other Christian- and capitalist-nationalists in later works as well. In *New God, New Nation: Protestants and Self-Reconstruction Nationalism in Korea, 1896-1937*, published in 1990, Kenneth M. Wells explores the ethico-spiritual, or “self-reconstructionist,” character of Protestant Christian nationalism. Redefining “cultural nationalism” as “self-reconstruction nationalism,” however, he did not distinguish the nationalist philosophy and activities of Yun Chi-ho and Yi Gwang-su from those of Ahn Changho. Believing that Ahn was a leading culturalist, Wells too judged Ahn Changho as a “gradualist,” or non-political pacifist. He suggested that Ahn chose to pursue the goals of “nation [i.e., culture] over state [i.e., politics].” While Wells focused on the underlying tension of Christian universalism vs. nationalistic particularism to explain Yun’s collaboration, this could not apply to Ahn Changho, whose nationalist program and worldview sharply diverged from the culturalists. Ahn not only actively sought political and military means to achieve independence but also never collaborated with the Japanese.

2. In Search of a New Paradigm

The Ahn Changho Controversy opened conceptual and empirical debates about the long-sustained paradigms and conceptual frameworks of Korean nationalism in Korean Studies, such as the conventional knowledge of “tripartite division,” binary Cold War paradigms, ideologically burdened and polemicized interpretations, or simply careless scholarship. Formerly, Ahn Changho and the mainstream Korean nationalist movement were interpreted as “gradualist pacifist,” “cultural nationalist,” “self-reconstructionist,” or “rightist ability-cultivationist.”

Yet, Ahn's philosophy and strategy were not limited to the educational and cultural means, for he aspired to reclaim national freedom by revolutionary military means or a war of independence to achieve his ultimate aim of democracy. The documentary sources affirm that Ahn Changho was actually a multi-layered militarist strategist and life-long revolutionary who advocated, planned, and waged the war of independence against colonial Japan from the 1900s to the 1930s. In this regard, Ahn was also more of a "political nationalist," rather than a "cultural nationalist" or self-reform nationalist, whose life-long passion and energy were directed to champion the ideals and practices of constitutional democracy for Koreans.

The actual scope and intensity of the Korean independence struggle had been seriously underestimated and misread by earlier scholars in the Koreas and the West due to the residual colonial legacy and the Cold War division that ineluctably shaped the subsequent historiographical treatment. Departing from the *post hoc* divisional and binary logic which pervaded historiography on modern Korea during the Cold War era, which often took its points of departure the peninsular division after the Korean War, such as the works of Cumings, among others, my research seeks to highlight the unique paradigm of the Korean nationalist leadership and movement in its own terms and conditions of colonial diaspora. Ultimately, a series of interpretive debates on the Ahn Changho Controversy were fruitful, for they advanced the idea that Korean colonial-nationalist history encompassed far greater complexities and mysteries. Perhaps to assert otherwise would be to insist on the shibboleth of Orientalist hubris or imperialist nostalgia.

If the structural edifice of the earlier historiographical assumptions and theoretical underpinnings of the past decades of scholarship is challenged, a reassessment of the political and ideological alignments and composition of the Korean nationalist movement, which preceded the Korean War and division, is invited. As the quintessential epic and narrative of modern Korea, the philosophies, politics, and strategies of

the independence struggle inherently embodied the consequential seeds of historical development and evolution, including the origins of peninsular division and war, in the twentieth century and beyond. The Korean independence movement was also later translated into the democracy movement in the post-colonial nation against the decades of dictatorial repression of military authoritarianism. The history and interpretation of the Korean liberation struggle persist as a fervently contested ground of moral-political legitimacy of the divided peninsula and the enlarged identity of the transnational community of diasporic Korea.

A Revolutionary-Democrat

As the first Korean to advocate a republican form of government and the first to draft a Korean republican constitution, Ahn Changho introduced and experimented with the democratic principles of self-government as the vehicle of the independence struggle. He authored constitutions for the revolutionary organizations which he founded and led, prescribing a system of separation of powers, including the constitution of the Provisional Government. Leading the nationalist quest as democratic revolution for colonial and diasporic Koreans, Ahn was both a theorist and a practitioner of democracy who conceived constitutional praxis of self-government as the means and the end of the Korean independence movement. Ahn Changho inaugurated the practice of modern constitutional democracy and the rule of law to achieve national freedom, beginning a “republican revolution” for Koreans.

Defining Ahn Changho as a “revolutionary-democrat,” my research demonstrates the distinctive manner in which Ahn entwined constitutional democracy-building and engagement of the independence war in his nationalist ideology and methodology, especially within the colonial/nationalist duality of *appearance vs. reality*. It illuminates the nature of his role in constructing the ideal and process of nascent Korean

democracy and the war of independence to achieve national freedom, by articulating a new interpretive framework to re-imagine the pattern and dynamics of the Korean liberation struggle. By closely examining the Korean nationalist leadership of Ahn Changho, it is possible to reconfigure and retranslate the underlying political and ideological impetus and calculus of the nationalist movement from the *gaehwa* enlightenment reform of the late eighteenth century to the independence war of Qingshanli in 1920 to Ahn Changho's continued military unification drive in China and Russia in the subsequent decades of the 1920s and 1930s.

The transformation of the cultural and military movements in Korea can also be reevaluated in terms of division and merger over several decades from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. Here, a more organic and fluid, yet ever changing unity, rather than an artificial division between the cultural and military movements, can be conceived in the historical stream of the Korean nationalist movement. What I mean by cultural and military, or *mun* and *mu*, movements are the patriotic enlightenment and righteous army movements (*gyemong undong* and *uibyeong undong*) as the two major strands of Korean nationalist struggle.

During the course of the Korean independence quest, Ahn Changho attempted to reconcile democracy and revolution, nationalism and communism, as well as the left and the right, and created his own unique *sui generis* Korean paradigm as a synthesis of democratic ideology and revolutionary strategy. As a matter of strategic dialectics and historical requisites, Ahn creatively and imaginatively entwined his goals and vision of Korean democracy and revolution, or the *mun* and *mu* spheres of the civil body politic and military affairs. Such dialectical and dialogical intertwinement of "revolution" and "democracy," as the means and the end, lies at the heart of the paradigm shift in the interpretation of the nationalist movement as "revolutionary-democracy." As a model of an independence movement, a rare merger of revolution and democracy

and the transnational diaspora, as well as visionary leadership that firmly fixed its gaze on the independent and democratic future, distinguish the Korean experience toward modernity and independence in the twentieth century.

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