

## CURRENT INTELLIGENCE STUDY NUMBER 30

OFFICE OF STRATEGIC SERVICES  
RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS BRANCH

R & A 3302S  
20 JULY 1945

### THE KOREAN INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT

The Sino-Anglo-American policy declaration at the Cairo Conference in 1943 promising that "in due course Korea shall become free and independent" supplied a tremendous political capital for the numerous Korean independence groups in exile. Despite this asset and a common desire for independence, these groups, some of which have been in existence since 1919, are not fundamentally united. The chief source of this disunity lies in personal disagreements among the leaders, rather than in major differences in political principles. As yet none of the independence groups has been recognized by the Allied Governments as the official representative of the Korean people. The long separation of these exile groups from popular opinion within Korea and their lack of real cooperation with one another suggest the possibility that new, more representative groups may be formed following Korean liberation.

Until the end of the 19th century Korea was ruled under the loose suzerainty of the Chinese. In this virtually autonomous position Korea had sufficient freedom to develop a national culture and a national language. In 1895, following the Japanese victory over China, the traditional suzerainty was dissolved. In 1905 Japan was granted a free hand in Korea by the Treaty of Portsmouth, and in 1910 the Japanese annexed the peninsula, which they considered a strategic "dagger pointed at the heart of Japan." Under Japanese domination approximately 80 percent of the Korean population of 23,000,000 has been engaged in food production, especially rice, the bulk of which has been exported to Japan. The Japanese have also availed themselves of such Korean raw materials as timber, iron ore, coal, gold, and cotton.

Both Koreans at home and those in exile have given evidence of a strong desire for immediate and complete independence. Although the Japanese have been partially successful in winning over the Korean royalty and aristocracy through titles, gifts, and preferences, national consciousness has grown steadily among all classes under Japanese rule. The higher level of education, the more efficient administration, and the industrial development which the Japanese have brought to Korea have only served to stimulate the desire for independence. The Japanese have been increasingly forced to govern through strict police controls and armed force. Despite this rigid supervision Korean underground nationalist groups have been established. Other groups have chosen to leave Korea and to work for Korean independence in exile.

The foremost Korean independence group in exile is the Korean Provisional Government (*Kopogo*) with its headquarters in Chungking. The *Kopogo*, which receives the nominal allegiance of nearly all other

Copy No. \_\_\_\_\_

APPROVED FOR RELEASE  
DATE: JAN 2002

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

exile groups, was founded in Shanghai in 1919 following the failure of an uprising in Korea at that time. The *Kopogo* has drawn up a Provisional Constitution of the Republic of Korea and has established a Provisional Legislative Assembly. It maintains control over the Korean Independence Army which operates as a part of the Chinese National Army. It directs underground work in Occupied China and Korea. Funds to operate the *Kopogo* come from a "tax" levied upon members in China and the United States and from monthly grants received from the Kuomintang. Besides the monthly grants the *Kopogo* receives substantial funds from the Kuomintang for underground work.

The political viewpoint of the *Kopogo* is largely conservative because of the dominance of the Independence Party, chief of the smaller groups which compose the *Kopogo*, and of that Party's leader, Ku Kim, who is chairman of the *Kopogo*. The other important group within the *Kopogo*, the Revolutionary Party, represents a somewhat more liberal point of view, but because the latitude between the political views of the two parties is not great, relatively little friction exists. Despite the inclusion of several members of the Anarchist and Communist Parties, the *Kopogo* probably is more representative of the wealthier classes than it is of the average Korean.

Outside China the chief Korean independence groups are in the United States and Hawaii. In the United States the official representative of the *Kopogo* is the Korean Commission. The chairman of the Commission is Dr. Syngman Rhee, a co-founder of the *Kopogo* who has spent his lifetime working for Korean independence. Rhee's followers, few in number but influential in the United States, have formed the Comrades Party (*Tongji-hoe*). In Hawaii members of this party are both numerous and wealthy. The political views of both the Korean Commission and the Comrades Party, like those of the *Kopogo*, are conservative. Most of the disagreement among the Korean exile groups has centered about Rhee's leadership and influence.

Nearly all other Korean groups and factions in exile are joined together in the United Korean Committee (UKC). The chief orientation of these numerous groups is their strong opposition to Rhee and therefore to the policy and practice of the Korean Commission. Despite Rhee's eminence in the Korean independence movement, the UKC in 1944 requested his removal from the chairmanship of the Commission, charging that he was playing personal politics and seeking personal aggrandizement. The *Kopogo* denied the request. Notwithstanding, the UKC has continued until the present to profess its allegiance to the *Kopogo*. In February 1945, however, the organization of the New Democratic Party in Chungking was announced, ostensibly to oppose the leadership of the *Kopogo*, although no official break has since been made. The UKC expressed its interest in the manifesto of the new group. The political principles of the new Party have not yet been declared, but its leadership and the wording of the manifesto suggest that the Party's program will be more liberal than that of Rhee and the *Kopogo*.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

The present inability of the two chief Korean groups in the United States to work together was fully demonstrated at the San Francisco Conference. Following a joint meeting for the purpose of selecting unofficial representatives to send to the Conference, the two groups, unable to come to any agreement, decided to send separate delegations. The UKC charged that Rhee attempted to appoint only delegates of his choice without regard for the rights of the UKC. At the Conference itself, the UKC took strong exception to Rhee's allegation that the USSR had been granted an exclusive sphere of influence in Korea by a secret agreement at Yalta. The chairman of the UKC declared that Rhee's statement was "unfortunate and indiscreet" and not in "the best interest of the Korean people." Rhee declared that those in the opposite political camp, "Korean opportunists of America," were "new passengers on the Russian bandwagon." Despite the obvious splits within the Korean ranks, Rhee asserted that the Korean independence groups in the United States have achieved unity except for "a few Communist agitators." He further implied that the UKC was linked with a Korean independence group at Yenan, which he asserted has been indoctrinated "with communist principles" by the USSR. Only in the dissemination of information about Korea did the two groups work jointly at the San Francisco Conference.

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

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~