

“Unitary Social Democracy” and Lyuh Woon-hyung’s Relationship with the American Military Government in Korea, 1945-1947

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Abstract

This article will argue that “Unitary Social Democracy” had its roots in egalitarianism as emphasized by *Tonghak* and Christian Humanism and aimed to promote social democracy through a mixture of democratic electoral politics and a Socialistic welfare system; it was due to such a radical amalgamation of Left-wing and Right-wing ideas which earned Lyuh the American military government’s ire and led Lyuh to an ultimate failure in finding a satisfactory agreement with American officials who refused and could not understand Lyuh’s objectives. However, despite American reluctance to understand his philosophy, Lyuh never gave up on his quest to realize an equitable system of land and property distribution guided by democracy and socialism, and he never relinquished his firm belief that the only solution to eradicating the Manicheism of the Cold War was through seeking the American military government’s cooperation. This article will also argue that Lyuh showed a highly consistent and dedicated commitment to realizing his ideals such that he never changed or forfeited his philosophy even after north Korea was established in September 1945, keeping his creed intact until his announcement of the Seven Principles for Left-Right Unification in October 1946 and untimely assassination in July 1947.

Keywords: Unitary Social Democracy; Lyuh Woon-hyung; *Tonghak*; Korean Provisional Government; American Military Government in Korea; Korean Unification; Left-Right Unification

Introduction

August 15, 1945. Hirohito slowly but clearly uttered the words which acknowledged Japan’s defeat and surrender to the United States. However, what seemed to be a definitive yet humiliating end to Japan’s 15-year attempt to expand and defend its empire was for Lyuh Woon-hyung (1886-1947) merely a beginning. August 15, 1945 was a day which not only affirmed Korea’s long-awaited independence but also a day which announced the beginning of Korea’s reconstruction, a quest to unify the

Korean people and to establish a unitary national government for Korea. Yet, the road to independence seemed still yet so distant and unclear, for barely after a month following Korea's liberation, the American military government would establish itself on Korean soil to act as a temporary but an unquestioned authority to administer Korea. The United States and the Soviet Union had yet to come to terms about exact conditions under which Korea would be guaranteed complete independence, and it was under such nebulous and complicated circumstances that Lyuh had to begin a long and an arduous struggle to establish a Korean government for, by, and of the Korean people.

Lyuh Woon-hyung's solution to this struggle was to eliminate the roots of ideological conflict that was dividing the Korean peninsula into a heated warzone between the Left and the Right by promoting "Unitary Social Democracy," a unique political philosophy which aimed to unite the Right and the Left through a mixture of nationalism, economic socialism, and democracy.

This article will argue that "Unitary Social Democracy" had its roots in egalitarianism as emphasized by *Tonghak* and Christian Humanism and aimed to promote social democracy through a mixture of democratic electoral politics and a Socialistic welfare system; it was due to such a radical amalgamation of Left-wing and Right-wing ideas which earned Lyuh the American military government's ire and led Lyuh to an ultimate failure in finding a satisfactory agreement with American officials who refused and could not understand Lyuh's objectives. However, despite American reluctance to understand his philosophy, Lyuh never gave up on his quest to realize an equitable system of land and property distribution guided by democracy and socialism, and he never relinquished his firm belief that the only solution to eradicating the Manicheism of the Cold War was through seeking the American military government's cooperation. This article will also argue that Lyuh showed a highly consistent and dedicated commitment to realizing his ideals such that he never changed or forfeited his philosophy even after north Korea was established in September 1945, keeping his creed intact until his announcement of the Seven Principles for Left-Right Unification in October 1946 and untimely assassination in July 1947.

A Review of the Scholarly Literature on Lyuh Woon-hyung

Recent scholarship in Korean and English on Lyuh Woon-hyung has largely focused on his life, his diplomacy against Japan, his experiences in

China and the Soviet Union during the 1920s, among other topics, but his relationship with the American military government in Korea has received sparse attention. While Kim Kyung-il studied similarities between Lyuh Woon-hyung's political philosophy and Marxism, Kang Toksang explored his relationship with the Korean Provisional Government (KPG) in Shanghai and analyzed the causes of his conflict with the KPG over Syngman Rhee's return to Korea. Additionally, So Chung-sok examined Lyuh's place in modern Korean history. Pyon Unchin wrote about Lyuh's life, and Chongsik Lee, Cha Hye-yong and Pae Kyonghan considered Lyuh's diplomacy and demands against Japan during the final years of Japan's colonial rule in Korea as well as Lyuh's activities in the Soviet Union and China.

However, as much as these works were seminal in their treatment of Lyuh's diplomatic activities, they failed to link Lyuh's political philosophy directly with his stance towards the American military government in Korea. This lacuna exists precisely because they did not examine which modern political ideology Lyuh's ideas concerning land reform, democracy, and the unification of the Left and Right approximated and why Lyuh's thought was thereby radical.¹

Bruce Cumings, formerly of the University of Chicago, attempted to meticulously analyze Lyuh's thought by describing it as an amalgamation of Christianity, Wilsonianism and self-determination, and Korean nationalism in works such as *Korea's Place Under the Sun* and *The Korean War: A History*. "While he made impressive use of Korean sources, they were mostly limited to those available at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland, and therefore did not fully capture the complexity of Lyuh's thought. Moreover, although Cumings showed in *The Origins of the Korean War* that Lyuh and the American military government in Korea were uncomfortable with each other, he did not precisely explain why inherent features within Lyuh's thought made reconciliation impossible with the Americans.² Therefore, the primary objective of this article is to shed light on Lyuh's political thought and to analyze the causes behind the disharmony between Lyuh's ideas and those of the American military government. Through such an endeavor, this article aims to show why Lyuh eagerly and earnestly wanted to realize a mature Korean nationalism which could transcend the Manicheanism of the Cold War.

Lyuh Woon-hyung and Unitary Social Democracy

Lyuh Woon-hyung wished to terminate the sharp division between the Korean Left and Right to enable both parties to solely concentrate on achieving a genuine political unification of the country. Having studied the Chinese Classics deeply, yet possessing a liberal mind—evident in his decision to free his slaves and study English at Nanjing University in his youth—he emerged as a highly eclectic thinker. Lyuh believed that a combination of the *Tonghak* (Eastern Learning in Korean)’s creed, “Heaven resides in every human being” and Christianity’s emphasis on egalitarianism would enable him to found a unique political doctrine. Lyuh never officially labeled his ideology during his lifetime, but the essence of his thought was that the state’s fundamental obligation was to equally distribute land to citizens and to ensure that the state efficiently carried out this duty, it was imperative for citizens to democratically elect statesmen. In other words, Lyuh favored adopting socialism as a state’s fundamental economic policy while politically favoring a democratic electoral system. The ultimate objective of such liberal and balanced political thinking was to prepare a political system that could satisfy both the Left and the Right, such that all of their energies could be devoted to realizing a Korea for and by Koreans.³

With such ideological unification secured, Lyuh desired to build a state which endorsed diversity through democracy and simultaneously emphasized social welfare. Lyuh did not understand democracy simply as an ideology but as a structural backbone for good governance and it was through the presence of such a backbone that he wished to implement a blend of socialism and social democracy. Hence, we can refer to Lyuh’s philosophy as “Unitary Social Democracy.”⁴ Considering that Lyuh prioritized the unification of Koreans, we can understand Korea’s political reunification as the Korean peninsula’s geopolitical goal, and because Lyuh sought to relieve tensions between the Left and the Right through unification, we can say that unification served as a central cornerstone of “Unitary Social Democracy.”

However, Lyuh certainly did not romanticize unification solely as a goal to be pursued among Koreans. Even though he envisioned the reconstruction of Korea by Koreans as an ideologically neutral ideal, Lyuh believed that independence and unification were essential for Korea to pursue realistic diplomacy between the Soviet Union in the North and the United States in the South—without becoming a sacrificial pawn.⁵ Insofar as he was serious about pursuing that goal, he was clearly a progressive

and kept a clear distance from men such as Syngman Rhee and Kim Koo or Kim Kyu-sik who had supported or sympathized with Rhee. Lyuh also distanced himself from nationalistic Communists such as Kim Il-sung, but he did not give up hope that he could work with politicians such as Kim Il-sung in pursuit of unification as a common goal.

Therefore, he announced a communique urging for the resumption of the trusteeship negotiations between the Americans and the Soviets to bolster his cause for unification, negotiated with both the American military government and north Korean officials on numerous occasions, and made tireless efforts to bring back the Americans and Soviets to the negotiation table until his assassination in 1947.⁶ Lyuh especially emphasized that nationalist forces must absolutely unite for the sake of Korea's political unification and urged that Korea must prepare capital to build industries by confiscating land from the rich for certain sums of money and reinvesting the capital toward constructing industrial infrastructure. Lyuh also stressed that no one must be ostracized or isolated for holding different values and worked hard to convince Kim Il-sung and other north Korean officials of the necessity to understand "Unitary Social Democracy."⁷

Unfortunately, Lyuh's experiment with "Unitary Social Democracy" ended in failure because no one was willing to understand or could fathom the radical depth and nature of his ideology. Yet, it was not Lyuh's solution of realizing national reunification through the promotion of a balanced ideology which failed, but the inability of the Manichean political climate of Korea in the 1940s, with its emphasis on Conservatism and anti-Communism, which prohibited "Unitary Social Democracy" from gaining wide appeal and acceptance. To be more precise, it was because "Unitary Social Democracy" was neither purely Right-wing nor purely Left-wing that it could not comfortably adapt to the political climate of the Cold War. What Lyuh actually sought was a definitive balance between democracy as a political ideology and socialism as an economic one, with each maintaining its respective sphere of influence—allowing both to coexist in pursuit of Korea's complete decolonization.⁸ It was precisely such a unique feature of "Unitary Social Democracy" which enabled it to stand apart from both the Right and the Left and preserve its original essence.

Of course, there was a possibility for Lyuh to cooperate with Kim Koo and Kim Kyu-sik, since the latter all favored unification. Yet, in contrast with the two Kims and Syngman Rhee who interpreted anti-Communism as a union between political and economic strands of thought, Lyuh

believed that some degree of compromise between the economic and political realms was inevitable and necessary if unification was to be seriously achieved. Lyuh's firm belief in the necessity of such a compromise delineated his ideology's radical nature. It was undoubtedly important that a leader had to be elected democratically to reflect popular will, but given that Korea's economy was in a poor condition following liberation and that laborers' rights had to be guaranteed through an "economic democracy" which would guarantee laborers' "economic liberation," Lyuh believed that if property and land redistribution could achieve these ideals under the leadership of the state, then the government reserved the right and even the obligation to determine how the redistribution had to be made.⁹ Lyuh's thought directly challenged the Cold War assumption that politics and the economy cannot be separated. Unlike the antagonism between Communism and anti-Communism, which ran deep in Korean society during the late 1940s, Lyuh sought to replace such Manicheanism with a balanced, stable, and eclectic ideology—one that made 'Unitary Social Democracy' embody a form of high idealism. Rather than criticize Democracy or Communism for their faults and disadvantages, Lyuh concentrated on relieving Korean society of the Manicheanism which poisoned the Korean mind.

The question of how precisely and fully we can understand the core of "Unitary Social Democracy" is difficult to answer, as Lyuh left no concrete writings discussing his ideas either in private or in public. Lyuh did not label his philosophy. Yet, if we examine "*Chucha Yukaekmun*," or "Zhuxi's Joke for a Visitor," (1943) we can find some critical clues about the aims of "Unitary Social Democracy." Lyuh wrote a rather jocular and nonsensical poem intended to criticize Japanese colonialism, but a closer and a more literal reading of the poem suggests something higher than a satire about the politics of an immediate moment. Lyuh's interpretation of his poem reveals much about his ideas regarding humanism, a harmonious society, and his ideal of a unified Korea:

人我人, 我不喜

Even if people should call me a human being, I am not happy.

人我不人, 我不怒

And even if people should not call me a human being, it is not a cause for me to express fury.

我人, 人我不人, 我人

If I am truly a human being, I am still so even if someone else should tell me I am not.

我不人, 人我人, 我不人

But when I myself am not a human being and another person still refers to me as one, I am still not a human being.

欲知我 人不人,

To truly know whether I am a real human being,

我人, 我不人 人之人不人

I must determine whether those who judge me as a human being or not

人我不人欲怒知之

Are themselves human beings¹⁰

The most noticeable feature of the poem is the interchangeable translation of 人 into either “people” or “human beings,” and it demonstrates how deeply Lyuh was influenced by Christianity and *Tonghak*’s emphasis on “Heaven residing within people’s minds,” or egalitarianism.¹¹ The flexibility inherent in 人’s translation represents how egalitarianism forms the core of Lyuh’s humanism. People can be considered or not be considered as human beings, but more importantly, if a society matures to nurture mutual respect as a social ethic, then Lyuh is hopeful that such humanism could be the basis to realize a harmoniously unified community. Lyuh is espousing the belief that what matters is not what kind of ideology a person has, but it is the capability of a society to embrace diversity, differences, and disagreement which serves as true hallmark of a well-functioning nation. Lyuh made this belief clear in a statement he released to the Daehan Maeil Sinpo (Daehan Daily News) in October 1946:

“Who is a Red in the business of constructing Democracy in Korea these days? Why is there a need to exclude Communists? Is it not enough to have a common idea of Democracy that we can all adhere to? If the duty to be in the service of laborers, farmers, and the popular masses must brand one as a Communist, I will

wholeheartedly be a Communist. I shall devote all of my life to the cause of the workers and the popular masses...divided we shall fall, united we will rise. The Democratic Party of Korea, the Citizens' Party, and the Committee for National Reconstruction must congregate the strength of every citizen in this country, and this will be the work of our national citizens."¹²

As such, "Unitary Social Democracy" had *Tonghak's* egalitarianism as its core and economically concentrated on an equal and a fair distribution of land and property while politically yearning for a democratic order. Lyuh wanted to promote a union between Right and Left-wing forces and establish a government which could be collectively responsible for encouraging a balance between private and public ownership of land. It was through the coexistence of the Left and Right, of privatization and public ownership of property that Lyuh wanted to found a truly centrist political platform, the political goal of "Unitary Social Democracy."¹³ Indeed, a year before he publicized his announcement in the Daehan Daily News, Lyuh had proclaimed the "Central Principles of the Committee for National Reconstruction":

1. All individuals and organizations must concentrate all of their abilities to spiritually and morally overcome the ills of Japanese colonialism.
2. We must cooperate with the anti-Axis Powers and actively participate in the anti-Japanese front. We will exterminate any force which seeks to obstruct or prevent the realization of Korea's independence.
3. All resources formerly owned by the Japanese Government-General must be invested for the advancement of the welfare of the Korean people.¹⁴

The first principle clearly reflects Lyuh's belief that political factionalism must be eliminated for Korea to truly overcome Japanese imperialism. For Koreans to completely cure themselves of the wounds and scars left by Japanese imperialism, Lyuh believed that it was urgent for both the Left and the Right to understand that a political union between them would best guarantee a constant generation of political outcomes reflecting Korea's national interests. "Unitary Social Democracy" endorsed full cooperation between the Left and Right to overcome

Japanese colonialism and held that any kind of ideological conflict must be shunned and avoided. The second principle is notable for using “anti-Axis” instead of “Allies.” True national liberation for Lyuh could only come once dictatorship and oppression as practiced by Axis powers are definitively ended, and the only genuine end to such practices can only come by permanently ending imperialism.

Finally, the third principle reflects Lyuh’s belief that the Japanese Government-General’s monopoly over the Korean economy constituted a clear abuse of authority, and that proper public use of such authority should serve to promote social welfare among the Korean people. The lack of any mention about specific methods to bring about this recovery in the third principle is not necessarily a weakness, for Lyuh believed that only through a genuine cooperation between the Left and the Right could economic recovery as an important public good be implemented and actualized. Of course, the omission of methods concerning economic recovery would unfortunately be an excuse for the Communists associated with the South Korean Workers’ Party to arbitrarily infiltrate into the National Reconstruction Council, but what is evident is that ideological unity for Lyuh was not simply a personal ideal but a necessary condition to bring about true socio-economic liberation and societal harmony in Korea.¹⁵

The Conflict Between Lyuh Woon-hyung and the American Military Government in Korea

When the American military government was first established in August 1945, it was confronted with a challenging decision. On one hand, it had to hire bureaucrats from the more numerous right-wing groups, but doing so risked intense criticism and protests from the Korean public for mostly hiring former pro-Japanese collaborators. Although it was technocratically plausible for the American military government to favor expertise over nationalist sentiments, exposing the American military government to excessive criticism harbored the danger of sacrificing the legitimacy for the Americans to administer a country about which they knew little. However, hiring mostly Left-wing and Communist activists was in the Americans’ view, more dangerous because they feared that doing so would give a green light to either the Soviet Union or China or even north Korea to plan a full-scale invasion to Communize the entire peninsula. In short, American legitimacy hung in a limbo between Korean nationalism and Cold War security against Communism, and there was no

easy way out of the dilemma because the Americans had not only entered a foreign country as foreigners, but also had very little familiarity with Korea to confidently choose one option over another.

However, the situation was equally, if not more, complicated for Lyuh Woon-hyung. Although he was certain that he had to pursue Unitary Social Democracy to realize true neutrality and stability for the Korean political scene, a major problem was that it was very difficult to convince American officials of the need to understand “Unitary Social Democracy.” Moreover, when Lyuh tried to implement the Principles of the National Reconstruction Council more vigorously by founding the People’s Republic in September 1946, American officials grew increasingly alarmed that Lyuh was trying to brew up a Communist insurgency, for it was unfortunately true that the majority of the Leftists within the People’s Republic were Communists due to the South Korean Workers’ Party’s infiltration a few months earlier. Even under these circumstances, Lyuh did not waver in his belief that the Americans had to be his greatest supporters and he tirelessly arranged meetings with diverse American military government officials to convince them to be on his side.¹⁶ Unfortunately, despite his best efforts, American officials could not overcome their deep suspicions and incessantly badgered Lyuh by asking whether he had been bribed by the Japanese when he was negotiating for Korea’s liberation or the Communists before he established the People’s Republic.

Most importantly, American officials had trouble understanding Lyuh’s vision because they could not comprehend why Lyuh was so obsessed with finding a centrist platform amidst a highly Manichean political climate. In the Americans’ view, Lyuh seemed to be a daydreamer because the only way they thought Korea could get out of the quagmire was to directly confront Communism by bonding tightly with the United States.¹⁷ The Americans’ perspective was a matter of course because the United States’ basic policy was to treat Korea as a part of an East Asian and Pacific anti-Communist network in which Japan would form the core and Korea would at best be an auxiliary supporter of Japan. The Truman Administration, confronted with the Soviet Union’s relentless absorption of Eastern Europe, firmly believed that Korea had to be incorporated into the Pacific anti-Communist network or suffer the same fate as most Eastern European nations. Truman himself believed that Korea did not possess the strength or right to declare itself truly independent, and only through American tutelage could Korea truly learn what democracy really

was.¹⁸ Fundamentally, because Japan was already acting as the core of the anti-Communist bastion in East Asia, Truman naturally believed that Korea was not so important in terms of American grand strategy.¹⁹

Independent from President Truman's perception of Korea, the American military government understood its primary mission as stabilizing the peninsula as an anti-Communist nation. Faced with this clear and urgent task, Lyuh's abstruse and opaque vision appeared not only incomprehensible to Truman, but also irrelevant. This helps explain why Lieutenant General John R. Hodge, head of the U.S. military government in Korea, deeply abhorred Lyuh and regarded him as a major obstacle to establishing an anti-Communist security regime.²⁰ When the American military government heard of Lyuh's plan to announce the People's Republic in November 1945, officials grew increasingly alarmed and declared Lyuh to be a "primary target of interest."²¹ They tried to persuade Lyuh to omit the Hangul "궐" and prevent him from consolidating an independent political force, but both sides could not come to any sort of agreement, and relations between Lyuh and the American military government quickly soured.²²

Lyuh's Skepticism about the American Military Government's Anti-Communism

From Lyuh's perspective, the Americans were deeply frustrating. Lyuh understood that the Americans had entered Korea after emerging victorious in the Second World War and sought to stabilize Korea against potential Chinese or Soviet aggression, but the Americans' inability to understand "Unitary Social Democracy" as the ultimate tool to unite the Korean people, promote land reform, and restore complete independence and autonomy for Korea was disappointing for Lyuh. Lyuh also resented being falsely branded by the Americans as a pro-Japanese collaborator—based on the mistaken belief that he had accepted bribes during his negotiations with the Japanese. What troubled him even more, however, was the Americans' blatant disregard for a balanced political system in which the Left and Right could cooperate. Instead, they appointed former pro-Japanese collaborators to key positions. In Lyuh's eyes, the Americans were not in Korea to promote unification but to exacerbate the situation by encouraging further division.²³ It was incredibly difficult for Lyuh to expect the Americans to relieve Korea of the intensely Manichean climate given that the Americans themselves were caught in the maelstrom of ideological antagonism themselves.²⁴

Lyuh's Efforts to Turn the American Military Government into a Supporter of "Unitary Social Democracy"

Yet, Lyuh did not lose the hope that the Americans would be able to understand why he established the People's Republic. While the Americans might take considerable time to understand why an ideological balance between Left and Right was essential to demonstrate Korea's true commitment to neutrality, Lyuh firmly believed they would eventually understand his intentions. To elaborate on his ideas and win their support, Lyuh tirelessly engaged in negotiations with American officials from September 1945—when he began serving as Vice-Chairman of the Korean People's Party—until his resignation in February 1946. He emphasized that the People's Republic sought genuine neutrality through a broad coalition equally representing the Left and the Right, with the ultimate goal of achieving socio-economic unification of the Korean people.²⁵

Yet, as soon as the Americans heard that Lyuh was going to found the People's Republic, they criticized him for being a Communist and identified the inclusion of Ho Hon, a former Korean Communist Party member as the ultimate evidence for their accusation.²⁶ In the eyes of the Americans, it seemed as though Lyuh was trying to form a large Left-wing coalition. They viewed the significant infiltration of former Korean Communist Party members into the People's Republic as definitive proof and subsequently declared the organization defunct. Unfortunately for Lyuh, Pak Hon-yong of the South Korean Workers' Party, the successor to the Korean Communist Party of the 1920s and the largest Communist party in southern Korea during the mid-to-late 1940s, ordered the full absorption of the People's Republic by the SKWP. Despite these setbacks, Lyuh still believed that he had sufficiently demonstrated how a centrist coalition would function, so he continued to demonstrate his resilience by founding the Korean People's Party in November 1945 and never gave up on his ambition to create his ideal coalition.²⁷

In addition, because Lyuh believed that the Americans' suspicions were unjust and obstructing his plans, Lyuh met with John Hodge and argued that his political efforts were not aimed at forming an alliance with Communists but were aimed at convincing America to deliver the Cairo Declaration's promise of realizing Korea's independence "in due course" and to promote Korea's peaceful coexistence with the rest of the world. Unfortunately, despite Lyuh's best efforts, negotiations ultimately ended in failure by July 1946, with the Americans still criticizing Lyuh as a daydreamer, and although Lyuh tried to convince Right-wing leaders such

as Kim Koo to support his cause, Kim sided with Syngman Rhee in declaring the sole legitimacy of the South Korean government, and hence, Lyuh's project to found a pan-ideological union had finally come to a dead end.²⁸

On July 25, 1946, the American military government finally made a modest effort to realize a pan-ideological union of its own design by declaring Kim Koo to be the Right-wing members' head and Lyuh Woon-hyung to be that of the Left-wing members of the Korean political spectrum, but the Americans still suspected Lyuh to be insincere because he lacked "moral courage" and because they believed that Lyuh was still deeply associated with the Communists.²⁹ Lyuh Woon-hyung attempted to broker an agreement between the Left and Right on key social policies. However, the Left was demanding free land redistribution, the nationalization of industries, and immediate punishment of former pro-Japanese collaborators. Meanwhile, the Right was insisting on political, educational, and economic freedoms to be defined by a People's Congress and called for punishing collaborators only after deliberation by a provisional Korean government. As a result, the pan-ideological coalition collapsed.

Once it became clear that there was nothing left between the Right and the Left but positional differences, on October 7, 1946, a tired and frustrated Lyuh Woon-hyung organized the various demands from both parties into the Seven Principles for a Left-Right Alliance.³⁰ He urged for the founding of a broad coalition-based provisional government, the nationalization of industries, the penalization of former pro-Japanese collaborators, and the preservation of political freedom and freedom of the press.³¹ Yet, Lyuh failed to found a proper party to implement his principles into policies. He tried to found the Social Labor Party in the Autumn of 1946, but Right-wing members of the party, sensing that Lyuh wanted to primarily unite Left-wing politicians, abruptly left the SLP and the party was subsequently disbanded. After announcing a temporary retirement from politics on December 4, 1946, Lyuh returned to politics for one last time and founded the Laboring People's Party in May 1947, but again, he failed to prevent the infiltration of Communists, and this party also met the same fate as his previous attempt.³²

In essence, Lyuh's efforts to found a broad and general coalition ended in failure, and his assassination in July 1947 by a Right-wing extremist would make that failure permanent, but Lyuh never relinquished his hope that the American military government would understand Unitary Social

Democracy as a sincere method to promote a Left-Right alliance.³³ As evident in some of the demands from the Seven Principles, Lyuh wanted a democratic government with a strongly socialistic welfare program—one that guaranteed equal land distribution, nationalization of industries, and labor law reform—features resembling Social Democracy. He earnestly believed that “Unitary Social Democracy” was the only viable solution for Korea to escape the Cold War and never abandoned that belief. He always yearned for a united Korea which could transcend ideological differences, and while the American military government never exactly understood him, Lyuh himself always strived to be politically neutral and wished for the construction of Social Democracy in Korea. He wanted an amalgamation of Democracy and Socialism, with a Confucian humanism acting as the essential glue to bond them together, and never gave up believing that a Korea for and by the Koreans alone could be possible. Lyuh’s Seven Principles for a Left-Right Alliance reflected his conviction that, even if the American military government continued to wrongly view him as a Communist, he would remain a “Unitary Social Democrat.” His determination to do so was itself a testament to the essence of his diplomacy toward the American military government in Korea.³⁴

Conclusion

It is difficult to exactly interpret Lyuh Woon-hyung’s political philosophy because he left almost no direct evidence about its details. He left no articles or books discussing his ideas as a uniform system. Yet, the dearth of written evidence should not lead one to conclude—as some historians have—that Lyuh’s philosophy is “impossible to discern” or “like a cloud.” Sources such as “Zhuxi’s Joke for a Visitor” or “The Principles of the National Reconstruction Council” reveal that Lyuh sought to implement a Social Democracy led by a democratic government.³⁵ Lyuh steadfastly believed that a democratic government and freedom of the press can coexist with land redistribution and the nationalization of industries if Korea had the will to realize a Left-Right alliance. Lyuh believed that democratic governance could provide a certain basis for the implementation of socialistic policies and that such a combination had to be possible for the sake of advancing Koreans’ public welfare. Although the United States primarily considered Korea to be another anti-Communist base against potential Chinese or Soviet aggression, Lyuh kept his faith in the American military government’s ability to understand and support his cause.

Unfortunately, the American military government, confronted with the urgent task of preparing Korea for a possible confrontation with China or the Soviet Union, found Lyuh's philosophy to be too abstruse and progressive. The question of how to integrate various ideologies within the seemingly simplistic and extreme framework of anti-Communism versus Communism seemed too idealistic and withdrawn from reality. Indeed, Lyuh's failure to prevent the Communists' infiltration into the People's Party unfortunately served as evidence to confirm the American military government's impression.

Yet Lyuh never wavered in his belief that democratic politics could coexist with a socialist economy, guided by a humanism shaped by Christianity and *Tonghak* philosophy. Through his announcement of the Seven Principles for the Left-Right Alliance, he demonstrated his determination to struggle to the end for a harmonious union among the Korean people and to prepare a clear path for Korea to exit the Cold War. Lyuh's favored policies such as land redistribution, the nationalization of industries, the punishment of pro-Japanese collaborators were all meant to bring unity and prosperity for the Korean people, and he never lost sight of that objective until his assassination in 1947.

Lyuh did not believe that a pursuit of political neutrality signified a fear of political conflict or a nebulous ideal functioning only to steer clear from political extremism. He dreamed of a unified Korea based on a blend of socialism and democracy rooted in humanistic principles. He likely did not label his philosophy as this article has, as he believed that it was a higher political ideal than a mere political philosophy. His announcement of the Seven Principles for the Left-Right Alliance was the final expression of "Unitary Social Democracy" as a public policy and the sole diplomatic principle with which he tried to convince every political party, the American military government, and by extension, the American government, that "Unitary Social Democracy" was the only instrument which can eternally unify the Korean Peninsula. Lyuh Woon-hyung may have become a historical memory due to his untimely assassination. However, because his ideal has yet to be realized, Korea continues to live in Lyuh's era—even in the 21st century.

Notes:

¹ Kim, Kyeong-il. “Lyuh Woon-hyungeui Sasang Noseonkwa Marksjeueui,” (Lyuh Woon-hyung’s Ideology and Marxism) *Yeoksa Bipyeong (History and Criticism)*, Vol. 146 (February, 2024), 394-433; Seo Joong-seok and Kim Deok-ryon, *Seo Joong-seokeui Hyundaesa Yiyaki 1 (So Chung-sok’s Modern History of Korea), Vol. 1* (Oweoleui Bom (Spring of May Press, 2015); Kang Deoksang and Kim Kwangyeol, *Lyuh Woon-hyungkwa Shanghai Imshi Jeongbu (Lyuh Woon-hyung and the Shanghai Provisional Government of Korea)* (Sunin, 2017); Kang Toksang and Kim Kwangyeol, *Lyuh Woon-hyung Pyeongjeon 1 (A Biography of Lyuh Woon-hyung, Vol. 1)* (Yoksa Pip’yongsa (History and Criticism, 2007), Seo Joongseok, *Hankuk Hyundaesa 60 Nyeon (Sixty Years of Modern Korean History)* (Seoul, Korea: Yeoksa Bipyeongsa (History and Criticism, 2007), Byun Eun-jin, *Lyuh Woon-hyung* (Yoksa Kongkan (Historical Space), 2018), Chongsik Lee, “Iljeemalkieui Lyuh Woon-hyungkwa Ilpon,” (Lyuh Woon-hyung and Japan During the Final Years of Japanese Rule in Korea) *Kyekan Sasang (Intellectual Quarterly)*, Vol. 50 (September, 2001), 121-160; Cha Hye-yeong, Moskba Keukdong Pi apbak Minjok Hoeuei Chamkakireul Tonghae Bon Hyeokmyeongueui Kiok: Kim Tanya, Lyuh Woon-hyungeui Kirokeul Chungsimueuro,” (Recollections about Participating in the Congress for Oppressed Peoples of the Far East, with Particular Emphasis on the Records of Kim Tanya and Lyuh Woon-hyung,” *Hankuk Geuntae Moonhak Yeonku* (Studies on Early Modern Korean Literature), Vol. 18, No. 2 (October, 2017), 67-104; Bae Kyeong-han, “Lyuh Woon-hyungkwa Kungmin Hyokmyong,” *Joongjuk Geunhyundaesa Yeonku* (Studies on Early Modern China), Vol. 64 (December, 2014).

² Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War, Vol. 1: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981); Bruce Cumings, *Korea’s Place Under the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2005).

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⁵ Lyuh Woon-hyungkwa Lertsch Kunjeong Jangkwankwaueui Yodam (An Important Meeting Between Lyuh Woon-hyung and Minister Lertsch of the American Military Government), *Dongnip Shinbo (Independent Daily)*, May 26, 1945.

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⁸ Choi Sang-yong, “Lyuh Woon-hyungeui Sasangkwa Haengdong,” (Lyuh Woon-hyung’s Thoughts and Actions) in Lee Soo-sung, Baek Nak-chung, et. al. eds., *Discussing Lyuh Woon-hyung* (Seoul: Beautiful Books, 2007), 66.

⁹ Choi, “Lyuh Woon-hyung’s Thoughts and Actions,” 66; 여운형, “Inmindangeui Shinnyeom,” (The Creed of the People’s Party); Lyuh Woon-hyung, *The Legitimacy of Korea’s Independence*, 359.

¹⁰ Lyuh Woon-hyung, “Juja Yoogaekmoon” (Zhuxi’s Joke for a Visitor) (1943)” Lee Ki-hyung, *Lyuh Woon-hyung Pyeongjeon (A Biography of Lyuh Woon-hyung)* (Shilcheon Moonhak (Practical Literature), 2004), 317.

¹¹ Jo Young-keon, “Lyuh Woon-hyungkwa 6.15 Shidae” (Lyuh Woon-hyung and the Spirit of June 15) in Lee Soo-sung and Baek Nakchung et. al. eds., [*Lyuh Woon-hyungeul Malhanda (Discussing Lyuh Woon-hyung)*], 93. The *Tonghaks* were founded as a peasant-based militant group founded by Ch’oe Chae-wu in opposition to Christianity for being a Western and an imperialistic religion. It intensely opposed both the Korean government for its rampant corruption and the Japanese for attempting to usurp Korea’s national sovereignty in the guise of “borrowing” Korea as a base to launch an invasion against China. However, the movement later splintered into three different groups. Some of remanent members of the *Tonghak* ironically found themselves supporting the Japanese colonial project in Korea by founding pro-Japanese societies such as the Society for the Progress of Japan (Ilchinhoe in Korean). On the Ilchinhoe’s history, see Yumi Moon, *Populist Collaborators: The Ilchinhoe and the Japanese Colonization of Korea, 1896-1910* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2013).

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Korean version of Swedish Social Democracy as it aspired to realize the coexistence of democracy and economic equality and freedom, the coexistence of private and nationalized industries, the unification of the Korean public through the promotion of social welfare and social democracy, and the “neutrality” of a welfare state. On the characteristics of Swedish Social Democracy, see Richard Tomasson, “The Extraordinary Success of the Swedish Social Democrats,” *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (August, 1969), 784 and 787; Timothy Tilton, “A Swedish Road to Socialism: Ernst Wigforss and the Ideological Foundations of Swedish Social Democracy,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 73, No. 2 (June, 1979), 506-514 쪽; Francis Sejersted and Richard Daly trans. *The Age of Social Democracy: Norway and Sweden in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2011) and Mary Hilson “The Nordic Welfare Model,” in Annika Lindskog and Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen eds., *Introduction to Nordic Cultures* (London, England: University College London Press, 2020).

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¹⁴ Kyu-hyun Jo, *The Rise of the South Korean Left, the Death of Unitary Socialism, and the Origins of the Korean War, 1945-1947*, 224.

¹⁵ “The Political Adviser to Korea (Langdon) to the Secretary of State,” April 30, 1946. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, The Far East, Vol. 8* (Washington, D. C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1971). “The Economic Adviser in Korea (Bunce) to the Secretary of State,” August 26, 1946. *FRUS, 1946, The Far East, Vol. 8*.

¹⁶ Jo, *The Rise of the South Korean Left, the Death of Unitary Socialism, and the Origins of the Korean War, 1945-1947*, 225-226.

¹⁷ Kim Sam-woong, *A Biography of Mong-yang Lyuh Woon-hyung*, 15; Lee Kyu-tae, “Lyuh Woon-hyungeui Yeonhapkuk Inshikkwa Tongil Jeongbu Koosang” (Lyuh Woon-hyung’s Perception of the Allies and His Blueprint for a Unitary National Government) *Mongyang Lyuh Woon-hyung Seonsaeng Je 66 Jooki Choomoshik mit Je 6hoe Haksool Symposium (The 6th Academic Symposium in Commemoration of the 66th Memorial Service for Mong-yang Lyuh Woon-hyung)* (Yangpyeong, Korea: Mongyang Lyuh Woonhyung Foundation, 2013), 121; “The Political Adviser in Korea (Benninghoff) to the Secretary of State,” January 22, 1946, *FRUS, 1946, The Far East, Vol. 8*; “The Political Adviser in Korea (Langdon) to the Secretary of State,” July 3, 1946, *FRUS, 1946, The Far East, Vol. 8*.

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Kukje Kwankye,” The Division of Korea, Unification, and International Relations) Mongyang Lyuh Woon-hyung Seonsaeng Seokeo Je 68 Jooki Chumoshik Mit Je 68 Hoe Mongyang Haksul Symposium (The 68th Memorial Service for Lyuh Woon-hyung and Academic Symposium), 28-29.

²⁰ Robinson, *Betrayal of a Nation*, 13.

²¹ Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, Vol. 1, 299; Robinson, *Betrayal of a Nation*, 62-63.

²² Robinson, *Betrayal of a Nation*, 66-67.

²³ “The Political Adviser in Korea (Langdon) to the Secretary of State,” August 2, 1946, *Foreign Relations of the United States, Vol. 8: The Far East*; Jo, *The Rise of the South Korean Left, the Death of Unitary Socialism, and the Origins of the Korean War, 1947-1950*, 374 쪽; E. Meade, *American Military Government in Korea* (New York: King’s Crown Press, 1951) and Bonnie Oh ed., *Korea Under the American Military Government, 1945-1948* (New York: Praeger, 2002).

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²⁵ Jo, *The Rise of the South Korean Left, the Death of Unitary Socialism, and the Origins of the Korean War, 1947-1950*, 375.

²⁶ Robinson, *Betrayal of a Nation*, 45.

²⁷ Jung Byeong-joon, *1945 Nyeon Haebang Jikhusa: Hyundae Hankukeui Wonhyeong (A History of Korea’s 1945: The Prototype for Modern Korea (Dolbaegae (Stone Pillow, 2023), Chapter 1.*

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²⁹ “The Political Adviser in Korea (Langdon) to the Secretary of State,” August 2, 1946, *FRUS, 1946, The Far East, Vol. 8.*

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³¹ Lee, *A Biography of Lyuh Woon-hyung*, 458.

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³⁵ Young-soo Kang, Lyuh Woon-hyuungron: Ohneuleui Shijeom eso Bon Lyuh Woon-hyungeui Sasangkwa Eopjeok,” (A Theory About Lyuh Woon-hyung: A Contemporary Perspective on Lyuh’s Ideas and Accomplishments) *Jeongkyeong Yeonku*, (*Studies in Politics and Economics*) (1965); Chu Unsong, “Hyundae Inmul Pyeongron: Lyuh Woon-hyung Ron,” *Cheongnyon Kongron* (*Public Debates Among the Youth*) (May, 1936).