

The Historical Background and Content of Oh Kiyōng's Middle-of-the-Road Nationalism in Korea, 1919-1948*

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Introduction

Oh Kiyōng was a political critic who was famous in South Korea during the US military government period (1945-1948). Oh wrote for the political criticism sections for magazines such as *Sinch'ōnji* [A New World], *Minsōng* [People's Voices], and *Saehan minbo* [New Korean People's Journal] from their early editions. These magazines were typical general magazines that recorded the highest sales in Korea during those days. Although Oh was not an editor or reporter for these magazines, he wrote for the main sections of them at the personal requests from the editorial staff. In addition, Oh wrote for the "P'almyōnbong" corner which was the front-page brief comment session of the *Chosōn Ilbo*. Starting from 1924, the "P'almyōnbong" corner continues until now and the heads of political, social, and international departments write pieces on a daily basis. During US military rule, however, Oh was in charge of this important corner as an external personnel. According to the memoirs of Oh,

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he wrote for the corner everyday as a result of personal requests of the editorial team of the *Chosŏn Ilbo*.¹ These examples show that the journalists of the time had deep trust in Oh Kiyŏng's political criticism.

While Oh was famous as a writer and political critic amongst Korean intellectuals, he worked at the government-vested firm Kyŏngsŏng Electronic Company in an administrative position (general affairs manager, business director) throughout the US military government period. In other words, Oh was not a full-time professional writer, scholar, or journalist during this time and did not even graduate from high school. Nevertheless, the analytical skills, insight, and cosmopolitan outlook in his writings are amazing even from the perspective of present-day researchers. The historian Sŏ Chungŏk said, "I learned about Oh Kiyŏng while writing my doctoral dissertation about the left-right coalition movement and I often referred to his writings." He also evaluated that it was very hard for an independent intellectual to exist during the time of harsh left-right conflict. However, Oh was certainly "an independent intellectual."²

The purpose of this study is to examine how Oh Kiyŏng could situate himself as an independent intellectual with astonishing insight and a cosmopolitan outlook regardless of his relatively low level of education and profession as a company manager. Especially, this study seeks to take a close look at how Oh could form a middle-of-the-road nationalism emphasizing a coalition of the left and right and unification in South Korean regions with severe left-right conflicts during the US military rule, and determine what the key contents of his middle-of-the-roadism were.

There is some existing research on Oh Kiyŏng. Chang Kyusik analyzed Oh Kiyŏng from the perspective of the Christian national movement in the northwest regions during the Japanese colonial rule.³ On the other

1 Oh Kiyŏng, *Sammyŏnbul* (Seoul: Sŏngkakasa, 1948); *Tongjŏn Oh Kiyŏng Chŏnjip 4: Sammyŏnbul* (Seoul: Mosinŏnsaramdŭl, 2019), 19.

2 Sŏ Chungŏk, "Ch'uch'ŏn-ŭi mal," *Chintcha mugunghwa* (Seoul: Sŏnggyungwan taehakkyo ch'ulp'anbu, 2002), 3.

3 Chang Kyusik, "Iljeha Kwansŏjibang Kidokkyominjokundong-kwa Oh Kiyŏng,"

hand, Han Kihyŏng examined Oh Kiyŏng's *After Chain Was Broken* as autobiographical literature during the US military government period and analyzed his political criticisms and essays from the perspective of his social criticism activities.⁴ The research of Chang Kyusik and Han Kihyŏng holds significance for discovering Oh Kiyŏng who has been neglected in academia and for introducing his activities.

This study seeks to take a step further by examining the historical process in the formation of Oh's middle-of-the-road nationalism and by analyzing the contents of his political ideas. The publication of consecutive political commentaries based on his middle-of-the-roadism could have been a huge political decision risking his life during the time of US military government rule with severe left-right conflict. The death of the representative middle-of-the-roader Yŏ Unhyŏng is a case in point. After liberation, Yŏ was constantly exposed to physical violence from extreme leftists and rightists. In May 1947, his house was severely damaged by grenades. The murder of Yŏ by an extreme rightist in July 1947 was a death sentence for middle-of-the-roadism in Korea.⁵ Like Yŏ, Oh was also criticized as an "opportunist" from both left and right groups and was terrorized.⁶ Nevertheless, Oh never gave up his belief of middle-of-the road nationalism like Yŏ.

How could Oh Kiyŏng form such a political character as an independent intellectual and a middle-of-the road nationalist? Where did such courage to keep his faith in spite of violent world changes come from?

Han 'guk kidokkyo yŏksayŏn 'guso sosik 38 (1999), 3-11.

- 4 Han Kihyŏng, "Haebang jikhu sugimunhak-ŭi han yangsang: Oh Kiyŏng Sasŭl-i p'ullindwi," *Sanghŏhakbo* 9 (September 2002), 253-279; "Oh Kiyŏng-ŭi haebang jikhu sahoebip'an hwaldong," *Ch'angjak-kwa pip'yŏng* 30, no.4 (December 2002): 371-385.
- 5 Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 191-192.
- 6 Oh Kiyŏng, "T'up'il-ŭi silp'ae (1947)," *Tongjŏn Oh Kiyŏng Chŏnjip 2: Minjok-ŭi piwon* (Seoul: Mosinŭnsaramdŭl, 2019), 22; Oh Kiyŏng, "Inyok (1948)," *Tongjŏn Oh Kiyŏng Chŏnjip 4: Sammyŏnbul*, 185-189.

What are the main aspects of Oh's middle-of-the road nationalism? To find detailed answers to the above questions, this study analyzes the regional and family background of Oh, and his major writings from the Japanese colonial period to the US military government period.

The Formation Process of Middle-Of-The Road Nationalism by Oh Kiyōng, 1919-1945

1. Regional and Domestic Formation of Middle-Of-The Road Nationalism

Oh Kiyōng was born in Paech' ōn-gun, Hwanghae-do, Korea in 1909. During his childhood, Oh was directly influenced by the 'New Education Movement (Sin'gyoyuk undong)' carried out by Christian nationalist movement groups, which were the strongest in the region. The development of the new education movement in Hwanghae-do is well explained in *Paekbŏm Ilji* by Kim Ku. As an influential figure in the new education movement in the Hwanghae-do at the end of the Chosŏn Dynasty, Kim Ku served almost five years in prison (1911~1915) due to the 'Anak Incident.'⁷ Kim explained the historical characteristic of Hwanghae-do's new education movement as follows: "The trend of the new education movement was developed by Christians in P'yŏngan-do and Hwanghae-do. Most people wanted to develop a new culture devoted to Christianity. The people who had only adhered to nationalistic opinions managed to learn about the outside world from western missionaries."⁸ The memoirs of Kim Ku show a close correlation between the Christian new education

7 Anak Incident (1910): An Myōng'gūn and others were arrested by Min Pyōngch'an's covert information while seeking funds for the establishment of a military school in Sinch'ŏn, Hwanghae-do, in December 1910. The Japanese fabricated this incident as a recruitment of military funds for the assassination of Governor Terauchi Masato, and arrested more than 160 people including Kim Ku.

8 Kim Ku, *Paekpŏm Ilji* (Seoul: Chipmundang, 1995), 138.

movement and Oh's hometown, Hwanghae-do.

Oh studied at a Christian private school, Ch'angdong School and the missionary school, Paeje High School where he formed his own identity under the direct influence of Christian nationalism carried out in the form of the new education movement. Especially during Oh's childhood, Paech'ön-gun governor Ch'ŏn Ponghy'ŏn and Ch'oe Kwangok (who served as principals for numerous schools in Paech'ön) were active in developing the new education movement. According to records of Oh Kiy'ŏng, governor Ch'ŏn mourned over the loss of diplomatic sovereignty after the Ŭlsa Treaty of 1905 and started establishing schools in each town. Ch'ŏn directly invited Ch'oe Kwangok to Paech'ön as to lead the new education movement in the region. Ch'ŏn also appointed Ch'oe to serve as the principal of numerous schools.⁹

Ch'oe Kwangok was an exemplary intellectual who was born in P'y'ŏngannam-do. After completing his studies in Japan, he returned to Korea and served as a pioneer for the new education movement in Paech'ön. In 1907, Ch'oe organized the Sinminhoe (New People's Association) with An Ch'angho and Yang Kit'ak. He was also one of the crucial enlightenment activists who led the education movement around Sungsil School in P'y'ŏngyang and Ky'ŏngsin School in Seoul during the Korean Empire Period. However, Ch'oe became weak and fell ill during his education and patriotic speech tours and ultimately died in Paech'ön.¹⁰ All the Paech'ön residents mourned over the death of Ch'oe and "cried loudly". Oh wrote that his neighbors told Oh about the patriotic activities of Ch'ŏn and Ch'oe over ten times.¹¹ These show that Oh grew up in a strong patriotic atmosphere in Paech'ön, Hwanghae-do in the early 20th century.

9 Oh Kiy'ŏng, *Sas'ul-i p'ullindwi* (Seoul: S'ŏng'gaksa, 1948); *Tongj'ŏn Oh Kiy'ŏng Ch'ŏnjip 1: Sas'ul-i p'ullindwi* (Seoul: Mosin'ũnsaramd'ũl, 2019), 49-52.

10 Tongnip yugongja konghunrok p'y'ŏnch'anwiwonhoe, "Ch'oe Kwang'ok," *Tongnip yugongja konghunrok* 13 (Seoul: Kukkabohunch'ŏ, 1996), 620-621.

11 Oh Kiy'ŏng, *Tongj'ŏn Oh Kiy'ŏng Ch'ŏnjip 1: Sas'ul-i pullindwi*, 52.

Besides the regional impacts, domestic growth had more influence on Oh's distancing from Christian nationalism and embrace of socialist ideology and formation of middle-of-the-road nationalism. It is related to the tragic situation of the imprisonment of Oh's father (Oh Sehyōng), older brother (Oh Kiman), younger brother (Oh Kiok), and brother-in-law (Kang Kibo) during Japanese colonial rule, and the death of his older brother and brother-in-law due to physical abuse and disease while in prison. Oh expressed the suffering of his family as "27 years of tiring hardship and pain."¹² The "27 years" refers to the period from 1919 when the family members became active in the nationalist movement to independence from Japanese rule in 1945. In addition, Oh's family members endured much suffering as they had extremely different political views. While Oh Kiyōng and his father Oh Sehyōng were rightist nationalists who were active in their regions, Oh Kiman, Oh Kiok, and Kang Kibo devoted themselves to the socialist nationalist movement.

Oh Sehyōng was a merchant who owned a general store in downtown Paech'ōn. He was a figure who showed the typical type of rightist bourgeois nationalism in the northwest regions of the Korean peninsula. When the March First Independence Movement swept the whole nation in 1919, the townspeople secretly gathered at Oh Sehyōng's store to read the Declaration of Independence, draw the T'aegŭkki (national flag), and discuss plans for the independence movement on a market day. These show how much Paech'ōn residents trusted Oh.¹³ However, Oh Sehyōng was suspected as the leader of the March First Independence Movement in Paech'ōn and he was sent to Haeju Jail together with teachers who led the new education movement in the region. As shown in the title of chapter two of Oh Kiyōng's memoirs, "Fall of Father", the general store owned by Oh Sehyōng rapidly collapsed after March First Independence Movement. As a result, Oh Sehyōng "ruined himself by carrying a turf from

12 Oh Kiyōng, *Tongjŏn Oh Kiyōng Chŏnjip 1: Sasŭl-i pullindwi*, 39.

13 Oh Kiyōng, *Tongjŏn Oh Kiyōng Chŏnjip 1: Sasŭl-i pullindwi*, 52-53.

Paech'ŏn's mountain valley on his shoulders."¹⁴

Among the family members, Oh Kiyŏng's brother Oh Kiman had the biggest influence on Oh's life. Especially, Oh Kiman's devotion to the socialist nationalist movement had a significant influence on Oh Kiyŏng's embrace of socialism and his formation of middle-of-the-road nationalism. After the March First Independence Movement, Oh Kiman declared to his family members that he would be devoting himself to the independence movement.¹⁵ In the 1920s, Oh Kiman visited China several times and interacted with independence activists. In April 16, 1928, he was arrested while distributing the manifesto at the Sin'ganhoe Paech'ŏn Branch Foundation Ceremony. In the early 1930s, Oh Kiman was involved in the Red Labor Union and Chosŏn Communist Party reconstruction activity whereupon he was arrested. After serving time in prison until June 1936, he died in August 23, 1937 from a disease contracted while in prison.¹⁶

Oh Kiyŏng and his wife Kim Myŏngbok, a dentist, secretly helped the domestic revolutionary movement of Oh Kiman in the early 1930s. Kim Myŏngbok managed to arrange the funds for revolutionary activities of Oh Kiman and supported him several times. Oh Kiyŏng and Kim Myŏngbok regarded Oh Kiman's activities as part of the national liberation movement rather than as a working-class revolutionary movement and took pride in supporting Oh Kiman. When Kim Hyŏngsŏn, who participated in movements with Oh Kiman, visited Oh Kiyŏng's house, Oh Kiyŏng asked Kim about the realistic chances of national independence. Then, Kim answered that "although our individual power is weak, will be like the river and the sea, like the small springs that join with other streams to form larger streams, rivers, and oceans."¹⁷ They firmly be-

14 Oh Kiyŏng, *Tongjŏn Oh Kiyŏng Chŏnjip 1: Sasŭl-i pullindwi*, 87.

15 Oh Kiyŏng, *Tongjŏn Oh Kiyŏng Chŏnjip 1: Sasŭl-i pullindwi*, 84.

16 Oh Kiyŏng, *Tongjŏn Oh Kiyŏng Chŏnjip 1: Sasŭl-i pullindwi*, 106-107; Tongnip yugongja konghunrok p'yŏnch'anwiwonhoe, "Oh Kiman," *Tongnip yugongja konghunrok* 15 (Seoul: Kukkabohunch'ŏ, 2003). 271-272.

17 Oh Kiyŏng, *Tongjŏn Oh Kiyŏng Chŏnjip 1: Sasŭl-i pullindwi*, 39.

lieved that they could bring about national liberation with their own power despite the powerful Japanese empire and they were willing to sacrifice themselves for their beliefs. Oh Kiyōng experientially learned from his brother and other activists around him that the ideals of Korean socialism and rightist nationalism are not hostile.

Oh Kiyōng had another immediate family member devoted to the socialist nationalist movement. Oh's younger brother Oh Kiok was a young elite who graduated from the Department of Law at Kyōngsōng Imperial University in 1943. However, he was sent to the prison for eight months after violating the Maintenance of Public Order Act in 1944. After liberation in 1945, he served as chairman for a leftist group, the Chosōn Democratic Youth Alliance, but died during the Korean War. Oh Kiyōng's brother-in-law Kang Kibo was also a socialist independence activist. In 1927, Kang was the chairman of the P'yōngannam-do Branch of the Koryō Communist Youth Association. He was arrested in 1930 for the Chosōn Communist Party Incident and served time in the prison until 1933. Kang died on August 21, 1935 due to tuberculosis which he contracted while in prison.¹⁸

Oh Kiyōng's expression on "27 years of tiring hardship and pain" about his family history during the Japanese colonial period was not a mere exaggeration. Oh Kiyōng's mother had to supply clothes and food to her husband, three sons, and son-in-law in prison and she even had to hold funerals for her oldest son and son-in-law. After such suffering, Oh Kiyōng experientially learned that political conflicts between the leftist and rightist were not so grave and significant. Oh said, "My father is a rightist and my younger brother is a leftist. However, I respect my father just because he is my father and I love my brother just because he is my

18 Oh Kiyōng, *Tongjōn Oh Kiyōng Chōnjip 6: Ryugyōng 8nyōn* (Seoul: Mosinūnsaramdūl, 2019), 350-363; Tongnip yugongja konghunrok p'yōnch'anwiwonhoe, "Kang Kibo," *Tongnip yugongja konghunrok* 17 (Seoul: Kukkabohunch'ō, 2009), 5.

brother.”¹⁹ When he was writing this sentence, he gave examples of different political characters of his father and brother and emphasized that being leftist or rightist did not matter at all to him. Based on his personal experiences, he knew that Korean socialist revolutionists were people with passionate love for the nation. He also gradually formed a belief that middle-of-the-road nationalism aiming at left-right solidarity and unification was the best practical goal for Koreans at the time.

2. Journalist Oh Kiyŏng’s Vocational Ethics and Tonguhoe [Like-minded Friends Association] Activity

Oh Kiyŏng’s middle-of-the-road nationalism was shaped by Christian nationalism and the new education movement around the Paech’ŏn region during his childhood, and influenced by his leftist and rightist family members’ independence activities. Meanwhile, his experience as a newspaper reporter in his twenties also had a significant influence on the formation of his middle-of-the-road nationalism.

At the age of twenty in March 1928, Oh started his career by working at the *Tonga Ilbo* as a reporter dispatched to P’yŏngyang. He worked for the *Tonga Ilbo* for about ten years and spent eight years in P’yŏngyang. At that time, P’yŏngyang was the second largest commercial and industrial city in Chosŏn and the political and economic center in the northern part of the peninsula. Sending such a young and inexperienced man to P’yŏngyang as a reporter was quite an exceptional act. In fact, P’yŏngyang’s representative nationalist figure Kim Tongwŏn complained to the *Tonga Ilbo* CEO Song Chinu about sending such a young reporter.²⁰ However, Sŏl Ŭisik, who was in charge as editor in chief at the *Tong-a Ilbo*, described Oh as follows: “Although Oh lacks an academic background, his writing ability was outstanding.” While the *Tonga Ilbo*

19 Oh Kiyŏng, “T’up’il-ŭi silp’ae (1947),” *Tongjŏn Oh Kiyŏng Chŏnjip 2: Minjok-ŭi piwon*, 21.

20 Oh Kiyŏng, “Yu’gyŏng p’alnyŏn,” *Tong’a ilbo*, June 1, 1935.

generally hired college graduates as reporters, Oh's outstanding writing abilities superseded his lack of education.²¹

In some of the writings he released during and after Japanese colonial rule, he directly offered his view of the press. Articles like "Sinmun Sogo [Brief review on newspapers]," "Yisöng-üi mollak [Collapse of rationality]," "Öllon-kwa chöngch'i [The press and politics,]" and "Minyo-wa minüi [Popular riots and popular will]" are representative examples. "Sinmun Sogo" is a long critique about his view of the press written based on the contents from the two books *Sinmun-üi hwa* [Conversations in Newspapers] and *Sahoe-wa Sinmun* [Society and Newspaper]. In this article, Oh describes in detail the history, role, and value of the existence of newspapers. In the conclusion of the article, he emphasizes that the newspaper's most important role is to "report the truth to provide accurate decisional data to the world and to form sound and fair public opinions."²²

In the midst of tense left-right conflict after liberation, Oh prioritized unbiased reports based on "strict neutrality". According to Oh, the press has the duty "to be like a clear mirror reflecting the true image, to examine all problems properly, and to clarify the truth to enlighten the views of the public and advocate for the voices of the people without distortion." In addition, Oh claimed that the press should not be used as propaganda for one party or faction. In response to one newspaper editor's speech on how each newspaper should have its own political views to defend, Oh sharply criticized that the speech was a "sword dance of a mad man." Also, Oh repeatedly emphasized "the original feature and pride of a strictly neutral press" and "the right path of neutrality."²³

In regard to the main controversial issues of the time, Oh thoroughly

21 Söl Üisik, "Yangso sogae," *Saehanminbo* 2, no. 5 (March 1948); *Tongjön Oh Kiyöng Chönjip 4: Sammyönbul*, 332

22 Oh Kiyöng, "Sinmun sogo (10): Kyöllon (Sinmun-kwa Öllon chayü)," *Tong'a ilbo*, January 23, 1930.

23 Oh Kiyöng, "Öllon-kwa Chöngch'i," *Sinch'önji* 2, no. 1 (January 1947); *Tongjön Oh Kiyöng Chönjip 2: Minjok-üi piwon*, 56-60.

investigated not only the voices of capitalists and authorities but also the appeals of weak farmers and laborers who were usually excluded from the press. Seven articles in a series on the Yongch'ŏn farm tenancy dispute in 1929, a series of ten articles on the life of miners in 1929, a series of seven articles on the P'yŏngyang rubber factory workers' general strike in 1930, and a series of three articles on the Hwanghae Irrigation Association in 1930 are examples of this.²⁴ Instead of unilaterally representing the voices of landowners or capitalists who had a close relationship with the Japanese Government General of Korea, he tried to objectively identify the truth of the case based on thorough field surveys and interviews. Furthermore, such articles were mostly released in series as he tried to inform the objective truth in detail.

For instance, in regard to the tenancy dispute with 1,800 tenants in Puri Farm located in Yongch'ŏn, P'yŏnganbuk-do, he started the article series by saying that he seeks to “deliver what I saw and what I think as it is” to the world.²⁵ In fact, his seven article series explained the background, development process, and main opinions from the landowner and farmers. He also ultimately suggested that, “This tenant land cannot be managed by the landowner alone. Thus, the rights of tenants should be no less than the landowner.” In addition, he emphasized that “he intended to encourage general introspection by talking about his personal opinions on the dispute as he heard and saw things.”²⁶ As seen in this example, Oh tried to show the detailed background and contents of controversial matters to help the readers make their own decisions instead of making unilateral or

24 Oh Kiyŏng, “Segan-ŭi chumok-ŭl kkŭnŭn Yongch'ŏn chaeng'ŭi chinsang (1-7),” *Tong'a ilbo*, May 1–7, 1929; “Kohaesullye: kwangbu saenghwal chosa (1-10),” *Tong'a ilbo*, May 25 – June 7, 1929; “P'yŏng'yang komujaeng'ŭi chinsang (1-7),” *Tong'a ilbo*, September 4–11, 1930; “Hwanghae surijohap-ŭn tang'yŏnhi haesan-hara (1-3),” *Tong'a ilbo*, October 23-26, 1930.

25 Oh Kiyŏng, “Segan-ŭi chumok-ŭl kkŭnŭn Yongch'ŏn chaeng'ŭi chinsang (1): munjae-nŭn ōttŏke chŏn'gaedoena,” *Tong'a ilbo*, May 1, 1929.

26 Oh Kiyŏng, “Segan-ŭi chumok-ŭl kkŭnŭn Yongch'ŏn chaeng'ŭi chinsang (wan),” *Tong'a ilbo*, May 7, 1929.

fragmentary claims. While Oh clearly offered his personal opinions in his articles, he tried his best to depict the detailed truth while emphasizing the neutrality of the press.

Oh's analysis and criticism as a journalist during the Japanese colonial period might have resulted in the ability and courage to make neutral analyses on domestic and overseas situations even in times of extreme left-right conflict right after liberation. However, the ideas of the P'yöngyang area nationalist leader An Ch'angho and the social group 'Tonguhoe' under An's leadership had also a huge influence on Oh's formation of social values in his twenties. Oh stayed in P'yöngyang as a *Tonga Ilbo* reporter and visited the P'yöngyang Christian Youth Association where Cho Mansik served as manager. Then, Oh started to become involved in the nationalism of An. Oh joined Tonguhoe in P'yöngyang in October 1929 and continued as a member for more than ten years.

Tonguhoe was one of the social groups promoting rightist nationalism. It was organized during the cultural movement in the 1920s and continued until the late 1930s. Tonguhoe claimed to stand for a training group under the purpose of ethnicity reconstruction and individual self-discipline as a domestic branch of Hüngsadan [Yong Korean Academy]. Hüngsadan was an organization formed in San Francisco by An Ch'angho in 1913 and it claimed that the people of Chosön should focus on individual self-discipline to develop into people suitable for a modern civil society. Such emphasis on self-discipline developed into a reformist theory of "Sön-minjok hu-tongnip [National Reformation First and Independence Later]" through "Minjok kaejoron [Theory of National Reformation]" by Yi Kwangsu who was one of the main leaders of the Tonguhoe.²⁷ However, Tonguhoe also had a group that broke away from the level of self-discipline and promoted social structural issues and reformation.

The figures who emphasized social reform and revolution in Hüngsadan and Tonguhoe were often classified as 'Tosan Leftists.' The repre-

27 Pak Ch'ansüng, "Iljeha sillyökyangsunnon," Doctoral Dissertation of the Dept. of Korean History, Seoul National University, 1990, 153.

sentative figures of Tosan Leftists were Kwak Rimdae of Hŭngsadan in the US, Chu Yosŏp of the Hŭngsadan Wŏndong Committee, Chu Yohan of Tonguhoe, and Cho Pyŏngok of Tonguhoe. Kwak Rimdae argued that, “Carrying out revolution after training is merely a lukewarm attitude. Instead, we need to be a direct revolutionary group.” Chu Yohan and Cho Pyŏngok also claimed, “We need to get away from training and we should carry out a direct revolutionary movement through political training and struggle.”²⁸ Oh also directly expressed his voice similar to those of ‘Tosan Leftists.’

Through *Tonggwang*, the official organ of the Tonguhoe published in 1931, Oh Kiyŏng made the following claim: “When destroying feudalism, capitalism promised humankind to bring more happiness. However, such a promise is given to only some of the privileged class. The public is excluded from this promise and is exposed to increased impoverishment. The flood of people without jobs, increasingly poor farmers in rural areas, and sharply increasing numbers of lumpen proletarians never fell behind because of their personal causes.”²⁹ While Yi Kwangsu and others identified the cause of public ignorance and poverty from an individual level, Oh approached the issue from a social structural aspect of absurdity in the capitalist system. In fact, he directly adopted fundamental socialist claims to analyze and criticize society. This shows that Oh had a social awareness identical to ‘Tosan Leftists’ who tried to convert Tonguhoe into a revolutionary group.

It is also necessary to focus on the fact that the so-called ‘Tosan Leftists’ (including Oh Kiyŏng) was not a group that completely deviated from the ideas of Tosan An Ch’angho. In fact, they inherited An’s idea of emphasis on solidarity with socialist groups. Starting from the 1920s, An believed that the general trend of the future would move toward socialism

28 Kim Sang’ae, “1920~30nyŏndae tong’uhoe, hŭng’ŏpkurakpu yŏn’gu,” *Han’guksaron* 28 (December 1992): 218.

29 Oh Kiyŏng, “Komin,” *Tonggwang* 27 (Nov. 10, 1931); *Tongjŏn Oh Kiyŏng Chŏn-jip 6: Ryugyŏng ŏnyŏn* (Seoul: Mosinŭnsaramdŭl, 2019), 160-161.

and repeatedly argued that the unification movement amongst the nationalist movement groups would be the independence movement itself. While An emphasized national unification, he earned the nickname of “An Ch’angho-ŭi t’ongil tongnip [unified independence by An Ch’angho]”.³⁰ In fact, An highlighted solidarity with socialist groups through the promotion of Minjok Yuildang [One National Party] Movement and the declaration of Taegongjuŭi [A spirit to handle the matters in a fair and upright attitude without self-interest] that follows public opinion based on the principle of cooperative unification. In this sense, Tosan Leftist claims of adopting socialism and converting into a revolutionary group surely inherited an important part of An’s ideas. Therefore, Oh’s socialism-based analysis and criticism on the reality of Chosŏn also reflected An’s unification thoughts and the radical changes within Tonguhoe.

Oh’s gradual evolution into a middle-of-the-road nationalist seeking for a left-right alliance was shaped by many influences—Christian nationalism and the new education movement in Hwanghae-do, various political characters of family members, vocational ethics as a journalist seeking objectivity and neutrality, and An and Tosan Leftists of Tonguhoe seeking to accommodate a socialist critical mind. Understanding such an ideological growth process contributes to an overall historical understanding of the characteristics of Oh Kiyŏng’s middle-of-the-road nationalism during the US military government period.

30 An Ch’angho, “Chŏngbu-esŏ satwŏe hamyŏnsŏ,”; Tosan kinyŏmsaŏphoe ed., *Andosan chŏnjip chung: ŏllon charyo p’yŏn* (Seoul: Pŏmyangsa, 1990), 163.

Development of Middle-of-the-Road Nationalism during the US Military Government Rule and Its Main Contents, 1946-1948

1. Proposals on Pro/Anti-Trusteeship Movement and Left-Right Coalition Movement, 1946-1947.5

After the Tonguhoe Incident in 1938, Oh Kiyōng was fired from the newspaper. At that time, The Japanese police asked Oh, “What will you do in the future?” Then, Oh answered, “I will become a newspaper reporter again after the independence of Chosŏn.” Because Oh regarded newspaper reporting as his natural calling. Surprisingly, however, Oh joined the most representative government-vested firm, Kyōngsōng Electronic Company, in an administrative position after liberation. Many criticized Oh’s choice of “getting away from the world of media.” However, Oh wrote “T’up’ilgi [Record on Quitting Writing]” to express his feelings and entered the field of industry without hesitation. In his own words, it was a choice of hardship for “reconstruction of the devastated production fields.”³¹

In fact, Oh’s choice was hardly a comfortable one. Oh said that working at Kyōngsōng Electronic Company was “a life of service where I devoted all my energy and it was incomparable to the whole of my twenty years of activity.” During his service at Kyōngsōng Electronic Company, he couldn’t have a comfortable life due to an excessive workload, extreme conflict and stress from in-company relationships, and political persecution and terror from left-right conflicts. Especially, as Oh supported a middle-of-the-road nationalism politically, he had to endure the insults of nicknames such as “Akchil kanbu [wicked executive]” or “Ppalgaengi obujang [Commie Manager Oh].”³²

31 Oh Kiyōng, “T’up’il-ŭi silp’ae (1947),” *Tongjŏn Oh Kiyōng Chŏnjip 2: Minjok-ŭi pivon*, 20.

32 Oh Kiyōng, “Na-ŭi kyōngjŏn saenghwal (June 30, 1948),” *Tongjŏn Oh Kiyōng Chŏnjip 4: Sammyŏnbul*, 180, 181, 187.

Although Oh suffered from an excessive workload and stress, he ultimately started writing again. He said he had to start writing again because he “witnessed the chaotic political world and people struggling with each other and he couldn’t sleep at night.”³³ Oh restarted his literary activities by writing a memorial article for an independence activist Oh Tongjin in December 1945. Then, he started writing as a political and social critic by publishing the article titled, “Sint’ak-kwa Chosön hyönsil [Trusteeship and the Reality of Chosön]” in a monthly magazine *Minsöng* in February 1946.³⁴

Oh generally published his critical works in magazines such as *Sinch’önji*, *Minsöng*, and *Saehan minbo* and daily newspapers such as the *Kyöngnyang Sinmun* and *Seoul Sinmun*. Those magazines and newspapers shared a clear common feature—they were classified as ‘Neutral Media’ during the US military government period. While political middle-of-the-roaders decreased in number and became isolated due to the US military government’s policies and bipolar left-right conflicts, the intellectuals and public’s support for the middle-of-the-road nationalism was substantial. In fact, *Seoul Sinmun*, *Chayu Sinmun*, and *Kyöngnyang Sinmun* reflected the voices of middle-of-the-road intellectuals in financial management and personnel composition and they secured more readers than leftist or rightist media.³⁵ Also, *Sinch’önji*, where Oh’s main critical works were published from 1946 to 1947, recorded a circulation of 30,000 which was the highest during that time.³⁶

Oh started his political criticism in earnest by publishing writings related to trusteeship for *Minsöng* in February 1946. It was the time when political conflict became more intense around the pro/anti-trusteeship

33 Oh Kiyöng, “T’up’il-ü silp’ae (1947),” *Tongjön Oh Kiyöng Chönjip 2: Minjok-üi piwon*, 20.

34 Oh Kiyöng, “Sint’ak-kwa Chosön hyönsil,” *Minsöng* 2, no. 2 (January 1946); *Tongjön Oh Kiyöng Chönjip 2: Minjok-üi piwon*, 203-208.

35 Chang Sejin, *Sumgyöjin mirae* (Seoul: P’urün’yöksa, 2018), 23.

36 Ch’oe Tök’kyo, *Han’guk chapchi paengnyön* 3 (Seoul: Hyönamsa, 2004). 460.

movement among Korean leftist and rightist groups. Oh had believed that liberation from Japanese rule would naturally lead to unified independence of the nation. However, the left-right conflict focusing on trusteeship issue made national tasks very difficult.

The pro/anti-trusteeship movement refers to the political conflict between the Korean leftist and rightist groups around the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers' decision on Korea announced at the end of December 1945. Regarding the independence of Korea, the Moscow conference made decisions on the establishment of a provisional government composed of Koreans, the operation of a Joint US-Soviet Commission, and the implementation of trusteeship for up to five years. Among those decisions, Koreans especially focused on 'trusteeship.' While rightist groups opposed trusteeship, leftist socialists declared overall support for the decisions of the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers. Of course, overall support included the support of trusteeship. Then, the political situation became chaotic as numerous pro-Japanese/anti-national groups joined the rightist anti-trusteeship movement group. Furthermore, the criticism and hostility between the left and right groups intensified.

Oh Kiyŏng had huge concerns over the extreme conflict between the leftist and rightist groups around the trusteeship issue. Ultimately, such concerns propelled Oh to start writing again. As he was aware of the reality that "the unprecedented golden chance of rebuilding the nation was changing into a crisis of self-destruction again,"³⁷ he had to start writing. Oh also said that he wanted to warn of the "collapse of rationality"³⁸ that relied on the ideologies from the United States and the Soviet Union and failed to look back at the reality of the Korean people.

Oh's analysis and suggestions on the pro/anti-trusteeship dispute did not take sides. Instead, Oh exposed the problems of both claims and sug-

37 Oh Kiyŏng, "T'up'il-ŭi silp'ae (1947)," *Tongjŏn Oh Kiyŏng Chŏnjip 2: Minjok-ŭi piwon*, 21.

38 Oh Kiyŏng, "Yisŏng-ŭi mollak," *Sinch'ŏnji* 2, no. 4 (May 1947); *Tongjŏn Oh Kiyŏng Chŏnjip 2: Minjok-ŭi piwon*, 27.

gested detailed practical solutions. First, Oh focused on the patriotic character of anti-trusteeship claims and encouraged leftist groups to have “a national perspective.” He said, “Aversion of trusteehip is apparently a patriotic emotion,” and that “it is natural to cry out in objection throughout the nation.” Regarding the reason for the leftist groups’ rapid turn towards the Moscow conference’s decision including trusteehip, Oh analyzed that it was because of the “support toward the policies of the Soviet Union.” He explained, “without the Soviet Union, leftist groups would stand at the head and carry out the fiercest and most drastic anti-trusteeship struggle regardless of sacrifice.”³⁹ Such an assertive claim might have originated from his family background and his historical understanding of the Korean leftist groups’ patriotic characteristics. Oh also emphasized the importance of the “sense of nation” to the leftist groups and argued that “becoming Chosŏn as a part of the Soviet Union” should be strongly rejected.⁴⁰

For the rightist groups, Oh requested “calmness.” He said that it was necessary to look straight into the reality with a cool head as resentment was not the solution. He also explained, “Although it is understandable to have a nationalistic emotion of aversion of trusteehip, we should not focus merely on the trusteehip issue to establish our own independent government as soon as possible.” Then, Oh also emphasized that the United States’ mention about “the only way for Chosŏn’s independence is the support of the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers.”⁴¹ Oh also analyzed that “it is hard to become an independent nation by our own will” as the independence of Chosŏn was the result of the Allied Powers’ victory in the Second World War.⁴² In the situation where the United

39 Oh Kiyŏng, “Yisŏng-ŭi mollak,” *Tongjŏn Oh Kiyŏng Chŏnjip 2: Minjok-ŭi piwon*, 36.

40 Oh Kiyŏng, “Yisŏng-ŭi mollak,” *Tongjŏn Oh Kiyŏng Chŏnjip 2: Minjok-ŭi piwon*, 34.

41 Oh Kiyŏng, “Yisŏng-ŭi mollak,” *Tongjŏn Oh Kiyŏng Chŏnjip 2: Minjok-ŭi piwon*, 37.

42 Oh Kiyŏng, “Chwau hapchak-ŭi kanŭngsŏng,” *Minsŏng* 2, no. 8 (July 1946);

States and Soviet Union divided and occupied the Korean Peninsula militarily, Oh believed that emotional behavior focusing on the trusteeship issue may risk the future of Chosŏn.⁴³ In fact, Oh's comments and practical solutions toward the leftist and rightist political groups were very outstanding even from the perspective of today's scholars.

Oh's middle-of-the-road nationalism can be found in his consistent insistence on the importance of a left-right coalition. Oh argued that "a coalition is an absolute requirement" for national independence. He emphasized that "we need to find the principles of independence by all means and establish the means for collaboration."⁴⁴ Oh also pointed out to the rightist group that the existence of the leftist group should be admitted as a key political group of Chosŏn. This opinion is a sharp criticism of the policies of the US military government and the rightist groups that obviously illegalized and suppressed the leftist political groups. Oh then said to the leftist groups that "we should acknowledge that this is not the period of constructing a Soviet Chosŏn." It shows how Oh criticized the social policies of leftist groups that were gradually becoming extreme after mid-1946. Oh also emphasized that "we must return to our ego where left and right groups are faithful to the ideologies of Chosŏn once again."⁴⁵

When the left-right coalition was promoted in late 1946 under the lead of the US military government, Oh heartily welcomed it. Right after the rupture of the Joint US-Soviet Commission in May 1946, the US military government suppressed the leftist groups in the southern part of the peninsula and pulled the middle-of-the-road leftist group centering on Yŏ Unhyŏng to promote a left-right coalition and to encourage the political

Tongjŏn Oh Kiyŏng Chŏnjip 2: Minjok-ŭi piwon, 118.

43 Oh Kiyŏng, "Miguk-ŭi taejosŏn yŏron," *Sinch'ŏnji* 2, no. 2 (February 1947); *Tongjŏn Oh Kiyŏng Chŏnjip 2: Minjok-ŭi piwon*, 225.

44 Oh Kiyŏng, "Chwau hapchak-ŭi kanŭngsŏng," *Tongjŏn Oh Kiyŏng Chŏnjip 2: Minjok-ŭi piwon*, 116.

45 Oh Kiyŏng, "Chwau hapchak-ŭi kanŭngsŏng," *Tongjŏn Oh Kiyŏng Chŏnjip 2: Minjok-ŭi piwon*, 121.

situation led by the rightist groups.⁴⁶ On May 25, 1946, Kim Kyusik from the rightist group and Yō Unhyōng from the leftist group met under the arrangement of the US military government's advisor, Lieutenant L. Bersch and it resulted in a left-right coalition. Oh praised the meeting as "a gleam of hope in a gloomy situation." Oh evaluated that "under the meeting between Kim and Yō, we finally forget the weariness of disputes that lasted over a year and domestic unification finally finds the right path."⁴⁷

On July 25, 1946, the Left-Right Coalition Committee launched officially. However, during the first regular meeting on July 26, the leftist and rightist groups had severe conflicts over the principles of coalition. While the leftist group suggested five coalition principles, the rightist group offered eight coalition principles. Both groups repeated biased opinions which led to doubt over the sincerity over cooperation for unification. Oh blamed both the leftist and rightist groups and said, "They are just getting drunk after pouring drinks from their own bottle like the past."⁴⁸ Oh also suggested that he cannot support the opinions of both groups without amendment. In regard to the five coalition principles of the leftist group, he strongly criticized the principle on the immediate transfer of the southern region's political power to the People's Committee. For the eight coalition principles of the rightist group, he strongly blamed the group's claim on solving the problems of the pro-Japanese groups and national traitors after the establishment of the provisional government. According to Oh, the leftist group's claim was still "radical" and the rightist group's claim was "stubborn." While both groups used the expression "coalition principle," the principles were no better than "non-coalition principles."⁴⁹

46 Chōng Yong'uk, *Haebang jōnhu miguk-ūi taehanjōngch'aek* (Seoul: SNU Press, 2003), 235-356.

47 Oh Kiyōng, "Ch'amkwōe-ūi sinyōksa," *Minsōng* 2, no. 9 (August 1946); *Tongjōn Oh Kiyōng Chōnjip 2: Minjok-ūi piwon*, 87-88.

48 Oh Kiyōng, "5-wonch'ik-kwa 8-wonch'ik," *Sinch'ōnji* 2, no. 2 (February 1947); *Tongjōn Oh Kiyōng Chōnjip 2: Minjok-ūi piwon*, 189.

49 Oh Kiyōng, "5-wonch'ik-kwa 8-wonch'ik," *Tongjōn Oh Kiyōng Chōnjip 2:*

Oh perceived the left-right coalition as a significant task that “determines the destiny of the nation for over a thousand years.” Failing to accomplish the left-right coalition could lead to loss of the opportunity to rise as an independent nation.⁵⁰ For such reason, Oh sincerely appealed to both groups. He emphasized that “we cannot abandon independence. We need to find the principles of unification and establish methods of coalition at all costs.” To Oh, coalition was the most significant and practical way to achieve national independence. Oh declared that the Joint US-Soviet Commission cannot be resumed without a left-right coalition and the outcome cannot be accomplished without unification even if it is resumed.⁵¹ According to Oh, both leftist and rightist groups had to refrain from radical claims and be “faithful to ideologies of Chosŏn.”⁵² He firmly believed that a left-right coalition based on middle-of-the-road nationalism would be the most practical solution for national independence.

2. Consciousness of Crisis over the Actualization of Division and Emphasis on Peace, 1947.5.-1948

At the beginning of 1947, the international situation became rapidly hostile. Containment policy became official when the United States announced the Truman Doctrine in March 1947 to emphasize the deterrence of communist groups, and the Marshall Plan in June as a European economic aid program. Also, the Soviet Union held the Cominform foundation ceremony at the end of September, 1947 and officially announced the “Two Camps Theory” which established the United States as the biggest

Minjok-ŭi piwon, 201.

50 Oh Kiyŏng, “Chwau hapchak-ŭi kanŭngsŏng,” *Tongjŏn Oh Kiyŏng Chŏnjip 2: Minjok-ŭi piwon*, 115; Oh Kiyŏng, “5-wonch’ik-kwa 8-wonch’ik,” *Tongjŏn Oh Kiyŏng Chŏnjip 2: Minjok-ŭi piwon*, 187-188.

51 Oh Kiyŏng, “Chwau hapchak-ŭi kanŭngsŏng,” *Tongjŏn Oh Kiyŏng Chŏnjip 2: Minjok-ŭi piwon*, 116.

52 Oh Kiyŏng, “Chwau hapchak-ŭi kanŭngsŏng,” *Tongjŏn Oh Kiyŏng Chŏnjip 2: Minjok-ŭi piwon*, 117.

enemy. The Two Camps Theory was announced by chairman Andrei Zhdanov from the Community Party of the Soviet Union and it claimed that “after World War II, the world became divided into the ‘Imperialist Camp’ led by the United States and the ‘Democratic Camp’ led by the Soviet Union.”⁵³ The United States and Soviet Union, which had temporarily formed the anti-fascism united front during the Second World War, started regulating each other as the most dangerous enemy in the world.

Such changes in the international political situation had a direct influence on the political situation and the division of the Korean peninsula. In Korea, the left-right conflict already developed sharply even from 1946 and the international conflicts between the United States and Soviet Union in 1947 led to a much bigger and explicit division and conflict. While the second Joint US-Soviet Commission was held in May 1947 to solve the Korean issues, the commission closed down within two months without any outcome. The United States and Soviet Union ended the meeting after unilaterally insisting on their own principles that could not be agreed upon. In July 1947, there was also an unfortunate incident that the middle-of-the-road group’s representative leader Yō Unhyōng was assassinated by a young man from the radical right group. The death of Yō seemed to represent the demise of the left-right unification.

Oh was discouraged and afraid of such conflicts in domestic and overseas politics. He described the process of actualizing the division of the Korean Peninsula as a “disaster of self-destruction.”⁵⁴ He viewed Korean society at the time with great sorrow and fear. Nevertheless, Oh never gave up his middle-of-the-roadism.

Around 1947 and 1948, Oh continued to express his opinions through the media supporting middle-of-the-roadism. *Saehan minbo*, *Sinch’ōnji*, *Minsōng*, and *Seoul Sinmun* were the representative media that published

53 United States House of Representative, *Report on the Communist “Peace” Offensive* (WashingtonDC: US Government Printing Office, 1951), 4.

54 Oh Kiyōng, “Chasō (1948),” *Tongjōn Oh Kiyōng Chōnjip 3: Chayu choguk-ŭl wihayō* (Seoul: Mosinūnsaramdŭl, 2019), 12.

Oh's major critiques. Especially, Oh published his five political critiques in the *Saehan minbo* during this time and the special personal connection between Oh and Söl Ŭisik had a significant influence on such publications. Söl was the chief editor of the *Tonga Ilbo* in 1936 when the *Tonga Ilbo* suffered from the incident of the Erasure of the Japanese National Flag. Söl had a close relationship with Oh for a long time. Söl said that Oh's sharp news articles are like "a hawk hunting on pheasants" and praised Oh's political critiques as "a star after liberation."⁵⁵ Söl published the first edition of the *Saehan minbo* in 1947 as a middle-of-the-road newspaper and it was natural for Söl to request Oh to write for the most important corner, "Saehan Sip'yöng [Saehan comments on current topics]," from the first to third edition. From June to July 1947, Oh published critiques such as "Kongwi-wa kongjon [The Joint US-Soviet Commission and Coexistence]," "Terror-üi künmyöl [Eradication of Terror]," and "Tapsin-ül kömt'oham [Review on Reply]" under the name of "Saehan Sip'yöng."⁵⁶ Figures such as Söl and Oh couldn't give up on national independence and autonomy based on middle-of-the-road nationalism even in the polarizing circumstances internationally and domestically.

As Oh observed the national crisis between 1947 and 1948, he introduced social democracy that somewhat revises and combines capitalism and communism systematically. According to his expression, the introduction of so-called "Sae Chayujuüi [New liberalism]" or "Chungjöng-üi kil [The upright middle way]" was urgently needed for national independence. The idea of "new liberalism" and "the upright middle way" based on his own understanding acted as his basic principle found in almost all of his writings during the time.⁵⁷

55 Söl Ŭisik, "Yangsö sogae," *Saehanminbo* 2, no. 5 (March 1948); *Tongjön Oh Kiyöng Chönjip 4: Sammyönbul*, 332.

56 Oh Kiyöng, "Kongwi-wa kongjon," *Saehanminbo* 1 no. 1 (June 1, 1947); "Terö-üi künmyöl," *Saehanminbo* 1 no. 2 (June 30, 1947); "Tapsin-ül kömt'oham," *Saehanminbo* 1 no. 3 (July 15, 1947).

57 Oh Kiyöng's "new liberalism" can be possibly understood as an acceptance of the ideas of a group of British thinkers like John Arkinson Hobson or Thomas Hill

Oh suggested the concept of “new liberalism” as a thought urgently needed in Chosŏn and he attempted a historical interpretation of new liberalism. According to Oh’s historical interpretation, while liberalism in the early modern period achieved developments in economic capitalism and political democracy, it also led to the formation of monopolistic capital and oppression of the proletariat that was a partner of the liberation. As a result, the labor and farmer groups came to be awakened by communism, and their struggles for ‘freedom’ brought the destruction of Imperial Russia and imperialistic fascism. This shows that Oh reinterpreted modern world history from the advent of modern capitalism to World War II based on the concept of ‘liberalism’ or ‘freedom.’⁵⁸

With such historical reinterpretations of liberalism, Oh also claimed that capitalism bought up freedom with the “power of money” while communism deprived freedom with “political authority.” In other words, Oh criticized that capitalism as “economic dictatorship” and communism as “political dictatorship.” He also claimed, “Both capitalism and communism include democratic and undemocratic sides at the same time.”⁵⁹ In view of such criticism, Oh emphasized the following: “The two ideas need to be revised to establish a new country without exploitation or dictatorship. It will also allow us to build a new country that eradicates poverty caused by misdistribution of wealth and secures peace and freedom.” He also said that “people who are intoxicated with the formula” would laugh at his ideas. However, “unified independence is only possible in

Green in the late 19th century and early 20th century. They argued “New liberalism” in favor of state intervention in social, economic, and cultural life. What they proposed is now called social liberalism. Chŏngch’ihak taesajŏn p’yŏnch’anwiwonhoe, “Chayujuūi,” *21segi chŏngch’ihak taesajŏn* (Seoul: Academy research, 2002)

58 Oh Kiyŏng, “Sae chayujuūi yinyŏm,” *Sinch’ŏnji* 3 no. 3 (March 1948); *Tongjŏn Oh Kiyŏng Chŏnjip 3: Chayu choguk-ŭl wihayŏ*, 20-23.

59 Oh Kiyŏng, “Sae chayujuūi yinyŏm,” *Tongjŏn Oh Kiyŏng Chŏnjip 3: Chayu choguk-ŭl wihayŏ*, 30.

harmony of the two thoughts and systems.”⁶⁰

Oh’s opinions can be regarded as the introduction of thoughts and systems close to social democracy which was accommodated by some European countries of the time. Social democracy usually places more emphasis on seeking “economic equality” following political equality through popular election or assembly. Such social democracy was made by combining democracy with socialism. According to social democracy, since inequality and an unstable economic order caused by the market cannot be controlled only with assembly, the government makes a partial intervention to accomplish practical fairness.⁶¹ Such ideals of social democracy coincided with Oh’s calls for anti-exploitation and anti-dictatorship systems.

Oh believed that unified independence and peace in Korea were only possible through harmony and combination. Oh also emphasized that the so-called “upright middle way” would be the best way for the survival and prosperity of the nation. Such critical ideas were consistently found in Oh’s major political critiques such as “Minjok wiki-ŭi paekyŏng [The background of the national crisis]”, “Tongnip pŏnyŏng-ŭi kich’o [The foundation of independence and prosperity]”, “Chaegae kongwi chŏnmang [Prospect on the resumption of the Joint US-Soviet Commission],” and “UN-kwa Chosŏn tongnip [UN and Chosŏn Independence]” written after mid-1947.⁶²

Another major characteristic of Oh’s writing after mid-1947 was the emphasis on ‘peace’ more than in previous times. While Oh had not ignored peace before, he consistently emphasized ‘peace’ as one of the

60 Oh Kiyŏng, “Sae chayujuŭi yinyŏm,” *Tongjŏn Oh Kiyŏng Chŏnjip 3: Chayu choguk-ŭl wihayŏ*, 35.

61 Chŏngch’ihak taesajŏn p’yŏnch’anwiwonhoe, “Sahoeminjujuŭi,” *21segi chŏngch’ihak taesajŏn* (Seoul: Academy research, 2002). 1187-1188.

62 Oh Kiyŏng, “Tongnip p’ŏnyŏng-ŭi kich’o,” *Seoul Sinmun*, March 10, 1948; “Chaegae kongwi chŏnmang,” *Minsŏng* 3, no. 4 (May 1947); “UN-kwa chosŏn tongnip,” *Sinch’ŏnji* 3 no. 2 (February 1948).

most important reasons for unified independence after mid-1947. Such emphasis on peace is related to the acceleration of the global cold war system after mid-1947 when the possibility of World War III increased. If the political situation of a Korean peninsula occupied by the United States and Soviet Union led to the establishment of two hostile countries, the Korean peninsula could be the victim of a war between the hostile countries.

Therefore, Oh mainly focused on interpreting and emphasizing the significance of Korea's situation from the perspective of 'World Peace' during the 2nd Joint US-Soviet Commission held in May 1947. In "Kongwi-e yōham [For the 2nd Joint US-Soviet Commission]," Oh emphasized that the outcome of the 2nd Joint US-Soviet Commission will have "significance in world history." According to him, the "2nd Joint US-Soviet Commission needs to be successful for cooperation between the United States and Soviet Union. Such cooperation will evade the war and such evasion will allow the world to establish a peaceful world."⁶³ In his "Kongwi-wa kongjon [The Joint US-Soviet Commission and Coexistence]," he more directly clarified his peaceful awareness of the matter. He emphasized that "Chosŏn needs to be independent as a unified nation faster than any other country to prevent war and establish a peaceful world. Above all, the division of the Korean peninsula under the confrontation of the two countries should be solved." Oh also pointed out that the "Joint US-Soviet Commission will be the significant turning point for peace in the new world and for a new history."⁶⁴

In "UN-kwa Chosŏn tongnip [UN and Chosŏn Independence]," Oh stressed that the independence of Chosŏn was a "basic issue for world

63 Oh Kiyōng, "Kongwi-e yōham," *Minsōng* 3, no. 5-6 (July 1946); *Tongjŏn Oh Kiyōng Chŏnjip 3: Chayu choguk-ŭl wihayŏ*, 96.

64 Oh Kiyōng, "Kongwi-wa kongjon"; *Tongjŏn Oh Kiyōng Chŏnjip 3: Chayu choguk-ŭl wihayŏ*, 102-103.

peace.”⁶⁵ In “Tansŏn-ŭi siljil [The Essence of unilateral election],” he also claimed that the establishment of a separate South Korean government may bring “the risk of skirmishes before the US-Soviet Union War.” He also argued that such a separate government would bring the “self-destruction of our own nation with people pointing guns at each other.”⁶⁶ Also, in another writing, “Nambuk hyŏpsang-ŭi ŭiŭi [The Significance of South-North Negotiations],” he threw the following question as if the Korean Peninsula was about to go to war. “Why do we have to go into a war? Do we really need to have a fratricidal war?”⁶⁷

To Oh Kiyŏng, the establishment of two separate North and South Korean governments meant war. The excitement of national liberation was rapidly changing into a crisis of self-destruction within three years. Oh became impatient and desperate as an intellectual who could see the tragedy of the world through the Cold War. In the preface of his book *Chayu Choguk-ŭl wihayŏ* [For my free nation] published in 1947, he said that his book was “written with tears of blood”⁶⁸ and this was never an exaggeration. As he predicted, the military conflicts between South and North Korea happened at the 38th parallel beginning in 1949. Then, in June 1950, the Korean War, which had an important meaning in Cold War history, took place. The Korean War led to millions of victims in South and North Korea and it spread and solidified Cold War conflicts all around the world. Oh’s claim about how a peaceful solution to Korean issues would be the foundation of world peace was never an exaggeration.

65 Oh Kiyŏng, “UN-kwa chosŏn tongnip”; *Tongjŏn Oh Kiyŏng Chŏnjip 3: Chayu choguk-ŭl wihayŏ*, 153.

66 Oh Kiyŏng, “Tansŏn-ŭi siljil (April 5, 1948),” *Tongjŏn Oh Kiyŏng Chŏnjip 3: Chayu choguk-ŭl wihayŏ*, 162.

67 Oh Kiyŏng, “Nambuk hyŏpsang-ŭi ŭiŭi (April 30, 1948),” *Tongjŏn Oh Kiyŏng Chŏnjip 3: Chayu choguk-ŭl wihayŏ*, 169.

68 Oh Kiyŏng, “Chasŏ (1948),” *Tongjŏn Oh Kiyŏng Chŏnjip 3: Chayu choguk-ŭl wihayŏ*, 13.

Conclusion

This article analyzed the formation of Oh Kiyōng's middle-of-the-road nationalism from a historical aspect. Oh was a famous political critic in South Korea during the US military government period. He consistently upheld his middle-of-the-road nationalism emphasizing left-right coalition and unification in spite of the harsh political situation of bipolar conflicts in the early cold war in Korea. During the US military government rule, he toiled in an administrative position at Kyōngsōng Electronic Company. However, he never gave up his writing by working during the day and studying at night. Especially, it was not easy to publish critiques consistently recommending middle-of-the-road nationalism during the time of the US military government rule where the leftist and rightist groups had intense political conflicts. As he described, his activities were dangerous choices that "always put himself in a position to be attacked from both the leftist and rightist groups." So, "it was impossible without courage."⁶⁹

Oh Kiyōng's middle-of-the-road nationalism stood firm because it was gradually formed on a strong foundation based on various experiences since his childhood. First, Oh was directly influenced by Christian nationalism which was dominant in his hometown Paech'ōn, Hwanghae-do. Oh also formed his own national identity by learning from the new education movement in the region of Paech'ōn led by Chōn Ponghyōn and Ch'oe Kwangok. In addition, his family members' devotion to the independence movement had a critical influence on Oh's formation of middle-of-the-road nationalism. Oh and his father Oh Sehyōng, older brother Oh Kiman, younger brother Oh Kiok, and brother-in-law Kang Kibo were sent to prison for their nationalist liberation movement during the Japanese colonial period. Also, Oh Kiman and Kang Kibo died at an early age due to diseases contracted while in prison. Especially, Oh Kiyōng could be expe-

69 Oh Kiyōng, "T'up'il-ūi silp'ae (1947)," *Tongjōn Oh Kiyōng Chōnjip 2: Minjok-ūi piwon*, 22.

entially confident in the socialists' love for the nation from the case of Oh Kiman and Kang Kibo's devotion and death.

Oh Kiyōng's experience as a reporter at the *Tonga Ilbo* and his Tonguhoe activities also had a direct influence on his formation of middle-of-the-road nationalism. In his critiques written during Japanese colonial rule and right after liberation, he repeatedly asserted that the Korean media needed to have "pride of a strictly neutral press" and the "right path of neutrality." In fact, Oh published several in-depth investigative reports during the Japanese colonial period and released series of reports showing the realities of laborers and farmers. At the same time, his interaction with influential figures in P'yōngyang and his participation in the social group Tonguhoe immersed him in the national movement theory of An Ch'angho. Especially, Oh was influenced by so-called 'Tosan Leftists' who emphasized social reform and revolution in Hūngsadan and Tonguhoe. With such influences, he strived for the realization of An Ch'angho's idea that the unification movement is the independence movement in the nationalist movement front.

Oh's middle-of-the-road nationalism was formed naturally under the influence of regional, domestic, and occupational circumstances during the Japanese colonial period. Such thoughts led him to continue his political criticism emphasizing the left-right coalition and unification in spite of the intense left-right political conflicts right after liberation. He continued mainly through *Sinch'ōnji*, *Minsōng*, *Saehan minbo*, *Kyōghyang Sinmun*, and *Seoul Sinmun*, etc. which were classified as middle-of-the-road media outlets. From early 1946 to May 1947, Oh mainly covered the key controversies in left-right conflicts such as the trusteeship issue and the left-right coalition led by the US military government. From mid-1947 when the division of Korea was becoming a reality, he mainly published political critiques related to the necessity of a social democratic system and the riskiness of a war between South and North Korea.

Oh Kiyōng's middle-of-the-road nationalism can be evaluated as practical and peaceful ideas to realistically overcome the crisis of the nation. Oh firmly believed that a left-right coalition would be the most important

solution for national independence like An Ch'angho. However, two hostile countries were formed on the Korean Peninsula in August and September of 1948. Then, after two years, the Korean War broke out and caused death of millions of people just like Oh had predicted. Furthermore, the people of Korea still cannot enjoy peace due to the unstable military armistice system after the Korean War. This shows that Oh Kiyōng's middle-of-the-road nationalism and ideas on peace still hold significant meaning even in the present.

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〈Abstract〉

The Historical Background and Content of Oh Kiyōng's Middle-of-the-Road Nationalism in Korea, 1919-1948

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Oh Kiyōng was a political critic who consistently published political and social criticisms from the perspective of middle-of-the-road nationalism in South Korea during the US military government period (1945-1948). Due to his middle-of-the-road political criticism emphasizing a left-right coalition, Oh was continuously criticized as an opportunist both from the political left and right. However, his middle-of-the-road nationalism was a firm belief based on various experiences from childhood and which he never abandoned. In his hometown Paech'ŏn, Hwanghae-do, Oh grew up under the strong influence of Christian nationalism, the new education movement [sin'gyoyuk undong], and Christian school learning. In addition, Oh was strongly influenced by the tragic death of his older brother and brother-in-law who had devoted themselves to the nationalist liberation movement. Influenced by this agony, Oh developed from personal experience a conviction for Korean socialists' love for the nation [minjok]. Oh could also form a strong middle-of-the-road nationalism through professional influences as a journalist which emphasized 'strict neutrality', and through the impact of the reformist group the Tonguhoe [Like-minded Friends Association] which promoted 'solidarity with socialists.' As a result, Oh could continue his rational middle-of-the-road proposals on the pro/anti-trusteeship movement and the left-right coalition movement even in the situation where sharp left-right conflicts continued during the US military government period. When the national division of North and South Korea started to become a reality after the middle of 1947, he advocated for the necessity of a social democratic system ["New Liberalism"] and the im-

portance of peace.

Key words: Oh Kiyōng, middle-of-the-road nationalism, left-right coalition, An Ch'angho, pro/anti-trusteeship, unification of Korea, social democracy, new liberalism, the Korean War, antiwar peace

〈국문초록〉

1919~48년 오기영의 중도적 민족주의의 역사적 배경과 내용

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오기영은 미군정기 좌우 갈등이 극심했던 남한 지역에서 중도적 민족주의 관점의 정치·사회평론을 지속적으로 발표했던 대표적 문필가이다. 오기영은 좌우연합과 통일을 강조하는 중도적 정치평론 활동으로 인해 좌우 양측으로부터 지속적으로 기회주의자로 비판받았고, 물리적 테러를 당하기도 했다. 그러나 그의 중도적 민족주의는 유년시절부터의 다양한 경험에 의해 형성된 강직한 신념이었기 때문에 쉽게 흔들리지 않았다. 오기영은 고향인 황해도 배천의 기독교 민족주의와 신교육운동, 기독교계 학교 수학 등의 영향 하에 성장할 수 있었다. 게다가 오기영은 그 자신을 포함해, 그의 아버지, 형, 동생, 매부 등이 민족해방운동을 이유로 일제 감옥에 여러 차례 투옥되었고, 형 오기만과 매부 강기보가 감옥에서 얻은 질병으로 인해 요절하는 불행한 가족사의 영향을 받게 되었다. 그는 사회주의자였던 형제들의 고뇌를 통해 그들의 민족애에 대해 경험적으로 확신할 수 있었다. 여기에 엄정중립을 강조했던 언론인으로서의 직업정신, 사회주의 세력과의 연대를 주장했던 동우회 내의 개혁적 목소리의 영향 등을 통해 오기영은 강고한 중도적 민족주의를 형성할 수 있었다. 때문에 오기영은 미군정기 좌우 갈등이 첨예하게 전개되는 상황 속에서도 찬반탁운동이나 좌우합작운동 등에 대한 중도적 관점의 조언을 지속할 수 있었고, 1947년 중반 이후 남북분단이 가시화되는 상황 속에서는 사회민주주의적 제도[“새 자유주의”]의 도입의 필요성과 평화의 중요성 등을 흔들림 없이 주장할 수 있었다.

주제어: 오기영, 중도적 민족주의, 좌우합작, 안창호, 찬반탁운동, 남북통일, 사회민주주의, 새 자유주의, 한국전쟁, 반전 평화