

The “Bunce Plan” and the Aborted Land Reform of 1946

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The first land reform in South Korea after liberation from Japanese colonial rule took place in 1948, three years after US forces established a military government in the south. While the 1948 land reform is often evaluated as a success, less attention is given as to why it took so long to be carried out, especially when demand was high among people in a postcolonial agricultural society still suffering from long-term exploitation. The focus of this research is to take a closer look at the earlier years of US occupation on the Korean Peninsula, and examine the events leading up to the first plan for land reform in 1946, the so-called “Bunce plan.” Addressing the question as to why it failed, based on an analysis of the early postcolonial situation in the South, this research argues that the inconsistency of policy decisions and structural weakness of the occupation regime led to an overall delay of many social and economic reforms, including the redistribution of farmland.

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List of Abbreviations

KDP: Korean Democratic Party

KPR: Korean People’s Republic

NKC: New Korea Company

ODC: Oriental Development Company

USAMGIK: United States Army Military Government in Korea

YMCA: Young Men’s Christian Association

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