

Yi Hun-gu's Agricultural Reform Theory and Nationalist Economic Thought

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Introduction

In colonial Korea, the problem of peasants and rural society (*nongmin-nongch'on munje*) emerged as the principal social issue. As argued by many Korean intellectuals, national revival and liberation from Japanese rule were not possible without first relieving the impoverished state of peasants and rural society. In the 1920s and 1930s numerous social organizations and intellectuals actively promoted the relief of peasants and rural society and initiated peasant movements and rural society movements. These agrarian improvement plans and theories can be classified as socialist and nationalist in orientation, with the latter subdivided into social democratic and capitalist approaches to agrarian reform.¹ The awareness of the agrarian problem and its theoretical solution was closely related to the issue of national liberation and the direction chosen for state-building, with the result that after liberation from colonial rule in 1945,

1. Kim Yong-söp, "Ilche kangjömggi üi nongjöp munje wa tagae pangan," *Chöngbop'an Hanguk künh'yöndae nongjöpsa yön'gu* (Seoul: Chisik Sanjöpsa, 2000); Pang Kie-chung, "Nongji kaehyök üi sasang chönt'ong kwa nongjöng inyöm," *Nongji kaehyök yön'gu* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 2001).

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land reform (*toji kaehyŏk*) was pursued in North Korea while agricultural reform (*nongji kaehyŏk*) was pursued in South Korea. In this sense, understanding the different trajectories in thinking about agrarian reform during the colonial period has important implications for understanding Korea's post-colonial history, shedding light on the internal forces that led to the formation of a divided Korea.

With such a problematic in mind, this article examines national-capitalist thought in the colonial period through a study of the agrarian reform theories of Yi Hun-gu (1896-1961). After studying at Tokyo Imperial University and the University of Wisconsin in the 1920s, Yi Hun-gu returned to Korea to teach in the Agriculture Department of Sungsil Junior College. In time, he became the pre-eminent authority on capitalist agricultural economics in colonial Korea. He was also active as a leader in the Presbyterian Church rural movement, which formed the mainstream of the Christian rural movements, along with the YMCA, in colonial Korea. In the post-liberation period, Yi Hun-gu became the director of the Farm Affairs Bureau in the U.S. Occupation Government. In that capacity, until the establishment of the South Korean state in 1948, he oversaw the formation and implementation of farm policies in South Korea. After 1948, as a member of the Constitutional Assembly, Yi Hun-gu was instrumental in enacting the Agricultural Reform Law. That is to say, during the period of Japanese rule, as an agricultural economist and rural movement theorist, Yi Hun-gu was the key intellectual for the national-capitalist position. After liberation, he became a Farm Administration official and played an important role in the process of state-building in South Korea.²

The study of Yi Hun-gu's thought and activities is therefore integral in understanding the character and substance of national-capitalist economic thought, one of the main axes of modern South Korean ideology. It is furthermore essential to understanding U.S. Occupation agricultural policies and South Korean agricultural policies in the 1950s. This article focuses on Yi's agrarian reform theory and national-capitalist economic thought in the period of Japanese rule, particularly focusing on the academic influences which shaped his "small farm" (*sonongjuŭi*) theory of agricultural economics and his social reformist (*sahoe kaeryangjuŭi*) theory of national economic independence.³

2. During Syngman Rhee's regime in the 1950s, Yi was active in the academic arena and from 1959 participated in the reform faction and the struggle against dictatorship. He had a number of important posts, such as the joint representative of the *Pandokchae minju suho yŏnmaeng*, general affairs commissioner of the *Sahoe taejungdang*, political officer of the Tongil sahoedang, and joint chairman of the *Minjok chaju t'ongil chungang hyŏpŭihoe*. After the May 16 coup, he was arrested and died of a heart attack on 13 June 1961 while confined in Taejon Penitentiary.

Academic Background and Practical Consciousness

Yi was born in April 1896 in Kisan in South Ch'ungch'öng Province. He was born into the Hansan Yi clan, which since late Koryö had been a prominent yangban clan, as the descendants of Yi Saek, a pillar of Chosön Confucianism. His family resided in Hansan and Kisan and was therefore native to the clan seat in Hansan. There was a branch of the Yi clan that sought to preserve the power of the clan through Confucian training and veneration of Yi Saek.⁴ As the Chosön dynasty came to a close and the period of Japanese rule began, the greatest influences on Yi Hun-gu were his father and grandfather, who ran a *söddang*. They opposed Japan's seizure of power in Korea and were bastions of the anti-foreign *ch'öksa* thought of the period. They were typical Confucian zealots who sought to preserve their clan position within the feudal world order.⁵

Until his adolescence, Yi was trained in the *söddang* run by his clan, and consistent with their opposition to the "new learning" (*sinhangmun*), he was trained in Confucian and Mencian proprieties and prepared to carry on the affairs of the clan. This understandably had a great influence on his social consciousness and pattern of behavior. In particular, at this time Yi acquired a fundamental knowledge of Confucianism and read extensively from a wide range of Classical Chinese texts, forming an important basis of his later scholarship. However, as trends in the period under Japanese rule overwhelmed traditional intellectuals, the enervated Confucian learning of his youth no longer satisfied him. As a national consciousness awakened in him, he came to blame the traditional *söddang* education system, which had emphasized Chinese culture, for the loss of national consciousness and spirit. He then determined to study in a modern school.⁶

In spite of his family's opposition, he enrolled in the Suwon Agriculture and Forestry School in 1917 and studied agricultural economics.⁷ This was a

3. For scholarship on Yi Hun-gu's agricultural theory, see Kim Yong-söp, op. cit., 436-454, and Pang Kie-chung, "Ilche ha Yi Hun-gu üi nongöpnön kwa kyöngje charip sasang" *Yöksa munje yön'gu* 1 (1996): 315-345.

4. Yi Hak-kyu [Yi Hun-gu's father], *Hoünjip*, vol. 1 (A *munjip* edited by Yi Hun-gu in 1952); Seuchungun, *Naegojang munhwa yujök ch'ongnam* 3 (1993): 184-191. The Hansan Yi and Yi Hun-gu's family were affiliated with the *söin/noron*.

5. Yi Hak-kyu, op. cit., 355-359, 361-363, 372.

6. Yi Hun-gu, "Uri nongch'on kwa kü kyoyuk (9), (11)" *Chosön Ilbo*, July 25, 27 1927.

7. Suwön Agriculture and Forestry School, see Pang Kie-chung, *Hanguk künhyöndae sasangsa yön'gu* (Seoul: Yöksa Pip'yöng sa, 1992), 37-41.

government school and operated in accordance with colonial agricultural policy, which at the time had the goal of making Korea into a breadbasket for Japan while exploiting it as a market for Japanese goods. To achieve this, Japan promoted agricultural improvement projects for increased production. Japan sought to preserve the landlord system and ease rural class conflict by promoting the organization and enlightenment of rural society (*nongch'on kyohwa*) as a means to control the peasant class (*nongmin ch'ŭng*).⁸

The Suwon Agriculture and Forestry School faithfully executed colonial agricultural policy by training the technical leaders who would stimulate agricultural productivity. It fostered rural social leaders who would advocate the enlightenment of rural society and in so doing would pacify discontented tenant farmers. Accordingly, the school taught a landlord-centered agronomy (landlordism; *chijujuŭi*) that rationalized the rule of Japanese capital over Korean rural society. It advocated easing rural class conflict and an approach to increasing productivity that sought to preserve the status quo of landlord hegemony.

Yi came to understand the modern capitalist worldview in this environment. He devoted himself to his studies and graduated at the top of his class.⁹ In the process, he became well versed in natural science, received training in agricultural technology, and mastered the elements of capitalist and agrarian economic theory. In particular, through his direct study of farming villages in Korea, he was able to witness firsthand the impoverishment of rural society and developed a deep sympathy and concern for the plight of peasants. In this way, Yi came to understand the need to study rural society in Korea and its problems.¹⁰ In the process, he became skeptical of the landlord-centered agricultural view and agricultural policy advocated by his teachers, and after his experience in the March 1st movement of 1919, gradually came to realize that Korea's agricultural problems were closely related to Japanese colonial rule. This understanding was academically consolidated during his time as a student at Tokyo Imperial University.

8. Yi Ha-na, "Ilche kangjŏmgi 'mobŏm purak' chŏngch'aek kwa Chosŏn nongch'on ŭi chaep'yŏn" *Hak rim* 19 (1998): 123-180; Chŏng Yŏn-t'ae, "1910 nyŏndae ilche ŭi nongŏp chŏngch'aek kwa singminji chijuje" *Hanguk saron* 20 (1988): 413-502; Chŏng T'ae-hŏn, "1910 nyŏndae singmin nongjŏng kwa kŭmyung sut'al kigu ŭi hwangnip kwajŏng" 3-1 *Minjok haebang undong yŏn'gu* (Seoul: Ch'ŏngnyŏn sa, 1989).

9. *Suwŏn nongnim chŏnmun hakkyo kyuhoe hoebo* 13 (1920), 86.

10. Yi Hun-gu, *Chosŏn nongŏpnon* (Seoul: Hansŏng tosŏ chusik hoesa, 1935), 5-6.

Yi Hun-gu entered the Tokyo Imperial University Agriculture Department in April 1921 and graduated in March 1924. In Japan, it was a time of great turbulence in political thinking. Capitalist development and the problem of peasants and proletarians were major issues until the First World War. After the war, changes in world political thought led to the Taisho period, with its call for democracy and social reconstruction (the Taisho democracy movement). With the panic of 1920, the rural crisis worsened and the peasant/proletarian movement and proletarian party movement gained force as socialist thought took hold. Yi experienced this social and intellectual transformation and established his academic groundwork at the Tokyo Imperial University Agriculture Department, where the academic atmosphere itself was shaped by these changes in society.

The Tokyo Imperial University Agriculture Department had been an outlet for Agriculture and Forestry bureaucrats and rural social leaders since the time of the Meiji Restoration and was the government school responsible for providing official agricultural policy. Scholarship there sought to realize the demands of Japanese capitalism, which had at first developed on the basis of the landlord system and pursued a landlord-centered agricultural policy that would stabilize the system and deal with the rural crises that accompanied the development of capitalism. The Suwon Agriculture and Forestry School had its roots in these same academic and policy concerns. The person who established this approach and dominated the area of agricultural policy at Tokyo Imperial University was the pro-landlord physiocrat (*nongbonjuŭija*) Yokoi Tokiyoshi.¹¹

But as Japan's agricultural problem worsened and as agricultural policy reform as embodied in the 1920 Tenancy Law became a major issue, the academic environment at Tokyo Imperial University began to change. This happened when Nasu Hiroshi thoroughly criticized Yokoi's theory and advocated instead a small farm theory of agricultural administration

11. Yokoi Tokiyoshi (1860-1927) was in charge of agricultural economic theory from 1893-1922 and established the academic environment for agricultural policy and agricultural economics at Tokyo Imperial University. He was influenced by the Historical school's economics and argued for a "rich nation, strong army" protectionist policy that sought the founding of the state upon both agriculture and industry. The heart of his theory of agricultural policy was that for Japanese capitalism to develop it was necessary to stabilize the union of the landlord system and petty and small farmers. He sought to protect small farms to ease class conflict in the countryside in order to protect landlords as a means to increase productivity. Yokoi Tokiyoshi, "Jinushiron," in Yokoi zenshū kankōkai, *Yokoi hakushi zenshū*, vol. 7 (Tokyo: Tai Nihon nōkai, 1925), 375-392; Sumiya Kazuhiko, "Keiseiki Nihon burujoaji no shisōzō," *Kindai Nihon keizai sisōshi* 1 (Tokyo: Ryuhikaku, 1969), 186-194.

(*sonongjuŭi nongjŏngnon*).¹² Nasu Hiroshi was an aspiring young professor in the Agriculture Department and the leading theorist of agricultural administration reform. He regarded the small farm as the main agent of agricultural management and increased productivity, and sought to modernize the structure of the Emperor System based upon the independence (*charip*) of this group. Moreover, because he located the source of the rural crisis in inequalities in both property relations and the distribution of wealth (*punbae*), Nasu argued that the autonomy of the small farm would require strengthening the regulation of landlords and passing a tenancy law whose central aim was to establish a system of reasonable tenancy fees.¹³ The goal of Nasu's agricultural policy theory was to block the penetration of socialism into the countryside and to preserve a system of independent small farms wedded to capitalism. This was to be achieved by gradually dissolving the landlord system and equalizing the distribution of wealth (*punbae ŭi kongjŏnghwa*), seeking the solution to rural overpopulation, and promoting small farm solidarity and cooperative association movements.¹⁴

Nasu's agricultural policy theory began to take hold at the Tokyo Imperial University Agriculture Department as a new academic trend associated with the Tenancy Law, and Yi Hun-gu developed his own understanding of Korea's agricultural problem based on Nasu's framework.¹⁵ With this understanding of Nasu's small farm agricultural policy theory, Yi viewed the essence of Korea's agricultural problems as a matter of property relations and tenancy issues. He thought this could be resolved through a coordinated and rational approach to land distribution (*punbae kwangye*). However, he did not accept Nasu's perspective as it was, which admitted Japanese colonial control of Chosŏn and mainly sought to resolve Japan's agricultural problems. He received Nasu's

12. Nasu Hiroshi (1888-1984) was a student of Yokoi Tokiyoshi and graduated from Tokyo Imperial University in 1911. He became a professor in the Agriculture Department there in 1917 and from 1922 was in charge of the agricultural policy economics lecture #3. On his scholarship and views concerning the 1920 Tenancy Law, see: Tokyo Imperial University, *Tokyō teikoku daigaku gakujutsu taikan* (1942), 796-802; Takemura Tohiro, "Jinushisei no dōyō to nōrin kanryo" *Kindai Nihon keizai shisōshi* 1 (Tokyo: Ryuhikaku, 1969); Teruoka Shusan, *Ilbon nongŏp kyŏngjesa*, Chŏn Un-sŏng trans. (Ch'unch'ŏn: Kangwŏn University Press, 1991), 169-176.

13. Nasu Hiroshi, "Kiro ni tateru nōmin shinri to nōchi seisaku," "Kosaku rippō no honshitsu," "Kōsei naru kosaku ryō," *Nōsei ronkō* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1928); Nasu Hiroshi, *Nōgyō seisaku* (Tokyo: Nihon hyōronsha, 1931), chapter 3.

14. Nasu Hiroshi, *Nōsei ronkō* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1928), 38-39, 141, 266.

15. Nasu Hiroshi regarded Yi highly, and their relationship as teacher and student later led to an international collaborative research project.

agricultural economy from the viewpoint of the Chosŏn national perspective and did his best to understand the colonial characteristics of the Chosŏn agricultural problem. This is clearly illustrated when he identified the accumulation of land by Japanese monopoly capital as the most important cause of unequal property relations and the worsening of the tenancy problem in Korea.¹⁶

This clearly shows what kind of position Yi adopted within the intellectual trends of Taisho democracy. At this time, various kinds of Western political and social theory were introduced to Japan, and Marxism was rapidly disseminated. As the socialist movement developed, it came into conflict with various ideologies that sought to defend Japanese capitalism. Nasu Hiroshi's agricultural policy theory reflected one trend of social reform that opposed Marxist revolutionary theory and sought the cooperation of labor and capital. Nasu advocated a gradualist and centrist form of social reconstruction that recognized private property and the value of capital and opposed the Marxist argument for the uncompensated confiscation of land. This became a very attractive alternative for those young intellectuals opposed to Marxism.

Particularly after the collapse of the March First Movement, many Korean students in Japan who were disposed to nationalism and seeking new ideas were attracted to this sort of reformist social Reconstructionism, as well as other bourgeois tenets (such as social evolutionary theory and culturalism) popular at the time.¹⁷ Yi was similarly influenced by these trends and associated mainly with those nationalist students in Japan who were active in the Tonggyŏng Chosŏn yuhaksaeng haguho (Tokyo Korean Student Fellowship) and the Tokyo Korean YMCA. In this we see his concern for the future and his recognition of the realities confronting the nation, and it was in this way that he became a Christian.

Yi completed his studies at Tokyo Imperial University in March 1924 and taught for two years at the Christian Yŏngmyŏng School in Kongju. At this time, he was concerned about the intensifying peasant movement associated with Japan's exploitative agricultural policy, the accumulation of land by Japanese monopoly capital, and high tenancy fees. His research focused on the

16. This can be seen in the following articles Yi published in the *Chosŏn Ilbo* shortly after graduating: "Nongch'on kyŏngje ŭi ugi," January 1, 1925; "Nongch'on kŭmyung kwa sojaknong ŭi piaie," December 1-5, 1925; "Uri nongch'on kwa kŭ kyoyuk," July 17-29, 1926.

17. See *Hak chi kwang* 20-22 (1919-1921) for the writings of Korean foreign students; Pak Ch'an-seung, *Hanguk kŭndae chŏngch'i sasangsa yŏn'gu* (Seoul: Yŏksa pip'yŏng sa, 1992), 176-185.

problems of rural education, the rural economy and especially the tenancy problem. In July 1926, through the invitation of the U.S. Methodist Young Men's Association Education Bureau, Yi was able to study at the Kansas State Agricultural University, and this was to be a turning point in his life. After only one year he completed his thesis, "The Tenure of Farmland in Korea" and received his M.S. In the fall of 1927 he entered the doctoral program of the Agricultural Economics Department at the University of Wisconsin. The University of Wisconsin had a unique position in the field of economics in the U.S., and Yi's training there was to have a particular significance for his later scholarly activities.

In the U.S., with the rise of monopoly capital in the late 19th century, social contradictions worsened and labor and agricultural problems became serious social issues. In the process, working class and farm movements arose, along with populist and radical socialist movements. To counter this, the progressivist (*chinbojuŭi*) movement arose from another quarter and sought to reform the laissez-faire capitalist order, which was the basis of monopoly capitalism. The goal of this movement was to stem the spread of socialism while preserving the social order and alleviating the grievances of the working class and farmers. This was to be achieved through the institutional regulation of monopoly capitalists and landlords, and by promoting social welfare projects.

The University of Wisconsin provided the theoretical basis for this sort of progressive reform movement and was exemplary of those schools advocating social reform. They were closely involved in drafting actual policy. The pioneer who established the character of the University of Wisconsin Economics program was R. T. Ely.¹⁸ Ely was a Christian socialist influenced by the Historical school's economics. He rejected classicism and Marxism and stressed the need to humanize economics, which he felt should be informed by inductive and historical methods. Ely argued for dealing with the abuses of monopoly capital and the labor/farmer problem through state-led institutional reforms and by establishing cooperative associations. Through Ely and his students, such as J. R. Commons, this approach made great progress and the University of Wisconsin became the center of a core, institutionalized approach, which in turn had the effect of making the state government into a forerunner of progressive

18. R.T. Ely (1854-1943) graduated from Columbia University in 1876 and went on to study the Historical school's economic thought from K. Knies at Heidelberg University. He began teaching at the University of Wisconsin in 1892 and had many students. He founded and led the American Economics Association, modeled after the German Social Policy Association, and had an important role in creating a new era for economics in the US. See Joseph Dorfman, *The Economic Mind in American Civilization*, vol. 3 (New York: The Viking Press, 1949), 161-164; vol. 4, 211-214.

reform.¹⁹

This academic environment of social reform also prospered in the field of agricultural economics in the hands of Ely-influenced scholars such as H.C. Taylor and Yi's own academic advisor, B.H. Hibbard. These figures understood agricultural economics as a social science that was distinct from agronomy and stressed the need to analyze the agricultural economy.²⁰ Agricultural economics at the University of Wisconsin emphasized land economics and led U.S. research on the history of land policy, the land system, and agricultural history. As such, it was influenced by the historicist and institutional schools and promoted historical analysis as well as inductive, empiricist, and statistical methodologies.²¹ As a part of this process, Ely founded the Institute for Research in Land Economics at the UW in 1920.

Because the Wisconsin School theory of small farmer agricultural policy regarded the self-cultivator as the subject of agricultural production and the agent of democracy, it sought to develop capitalism on the secure growth of the self-cultivator. This theory stressed three arguments: 1) a theory of land ownership that saw the causes of the agrarian problem in terms of tenancy issues, the crisis of self-cultivators, and inequalities in property holding; 2) a theory of land utilization that understood the tenancy problem not as one of relations of production but as one of land utilization and distribution; and 3) a theory of social policy that emphasized land as a form of public interest, and while recognizing the rights and limits of private property, saw the principal solution to the agricultural problem in the state regulation of land ownership and land utilization. This school actively promoted its so-called "social reformist" agricultural policies, which sought institutional reforms and laws such as the regulation of landlords, the Tenancy Law, the organization of tenants, the strengthening of the Homestead Law, regulation of land use, and the formation of land committees, all of which were intended to foster and protect the self-cultivator. These proposals were adopted as official agricultural policy in a variety of forms until the time of the Great Depression.²²

19. Joseph Dorfman, op. cit., vol. 3, 276-294; vol. 4, 377-394; Kim Kwang-su, *Yöksa hak'pa* (Seoul: Sungjün Univ. Press, 1986), Ch. 7. Chedohak'pa.

20. B. H. Hibbard, *Agricultural Economics* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1948), 2-5.

21. Henry C. and Anne Dewees Taylor, *The Story of Agricultural Economics in the United States* (Ames Iowa: Iowa State College Press, 1952), 79-83, 277-315, 403-411, 769-771, 848-850, 869-870.

22. Joseph Dorfman, op. cit., vol. 4-5, 212-214 ; Henry C. and Anne Dewees Taylor, op. cit., 591-600, 824-826, 850-870.

Yi built on his study of agricultural administration at Tokyo Imperial University through his training at Wisconsin in agricultural economics and emerged with a more sophisticated understanding of capitalist economics. His experience in the U.S. was an important stage in the process of his training in small farm-centered social reformist agricultural economics. An important element was his exposure to the academic environment and research methods of the Wisconsin School while studying under Hibbard at the Institute for Research in Land Economics. Part of this training was his dissertation, *A History of Land System and Policies in Korea* where he particularly emphasized land utilization theory and institutional-historical methods. The objective of the study was to analyze, from the perspective of land utilization, Korea's land system and policy, which were deeply related to the economic lifestyle of each era.²³ After studying the history of the Korean land system, Yi recognized Korean traditional Confucian ideas about agricultural reform and land reform. This came to be an important intellectual basis for his agricultural economic thought. It was a new understanding of *Sirhak* thought that argued social reform and agricultural reform led by the state (king) on behalf of the small farmer. Yi was especially influenced by the thought of Chŏng Yak-yong.²⁴

In this process, Yi gained a deeper understanding of such modern economic theories necessarily related to his training in capitalist agricultural economics, such as Ricardo's ground rent theory, Malthusian demographics, and the doctrine of limits (*han'gyejuŭi*) of the neo-classical economic school. Yi also studied the methods of on-site survey and concrete analysis needed for treating land and agricultural problems from the perspective of land utilization theory. In this process, he earned recognition as a skilled member of the Wisconsin School. After graduation he was offered a job as official translator for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Economy Bureau, through the auspices of his upperclassman, L.C. Gray, who was a supervisor of land policy there. At this time Yi was able to continue his research in the U.S. for another

23. Lee Hoon Koo (Yi Hun-gu), *A History of Land System and Policies in Korea* (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 1929), Preface, 1-3.

24. Ibid., 54-55; Yi Hun-gu, "Nongjŭnghak sang ŭro bon Dasan sŏnsaeng", *Chŏsun Ilbo*, July 16-17, 1935. He used a huge amount of materials published by the government during the Koryŏ and Chosŏn periods and various writings by bureaucrats and intellectuals in his doctoral dissertation. It is most unlikely that he saw those materials in the US for the first time, rather, he was acquainted with those materials from his youth. This means that he came to newly understand Korean traditional agricultural reform and land reform, which he had studied during his youth, through his later academic training and research abroad on the history of the Korean land system.

year, until the summer of 1930.²⁵

Yi's time of study in the U.S. deepened his sense of nationalist praxis and his understanding of ethics and the Social Christian Gospel, which were at the heart of his small farm academic views. This deepening of his practical and social consciousness was not only due to the influence of the progressive environment of the Wisconsin School, with its Christian Socialist tradition, but was also closely related to the Korean nationalist movement in the U.S. and the intellectual atmosphere of Korean students (*yuhaksaeng*) there at that time. Although he was not in the U.S. long, his interaction with Korean students expanded his social experience, and they agonized together over the reality and future of their nation.

Korean students in the U.S. in the 1920s were generally Christians who had gotten through the legal processes required for studying abroad either through the offices of the YMCA or the invitation of American missionary churches in Korea.²⁶ The North American Korean Students Assembly (*Pukmi Chosŏn yuhaksaeng ch'onghoe*) was formed in 1919 and shaped the intellectual climate shared by Korean students and strengthened their organizational unity. The leaders of the Assembly were largely Christian nationalists in Korea or young intellectuals closely associated with Korean-American nationalist organizations. Such individuals generally had relations with Christian nationalist groups in Korea like the Pyongyang Presbyterian Church leaders who were closely related to An Ch'ang-ho, or the Seoul Methodist Church-led YMCA and the Enterprise Promotion Club (*hŭngŏp kurakpu*) associated with Syngman Rhee. Upon returning to Korea, these individuals were active in the fields of religion, education, the media and business.²⁷ In other words, the North American Korean Students Assembly was a major outlet for the recruitment of Christian nationalists, and its leaders were naturally very concerned with affairs in Korea and abroad, as well as the activities of the Korean nationalist movement in general.

25. Yi Hun-gu, *Chosŏn nongŏpnon* (Seoul: Hansŏng tosŏ chusik hoesa, 1935), 7; "Namgyŏng kŭmnŭng taehak kyosu sidae," *Samch'ŏlli* (June 1940): 121.

26. Prior to the colonial period there were no more than 30 Korean students in the U.S., but after the March First Independence Movement in 1919, that number rose to over 500: "Yumi haksang tonggye p'yo," in "Miju yuhaksaeng gŭp yuhaksaeng hoe yaksa," *Urak'i* (April 1930): 153-154.

27. Kim Wŏn-yong, *Chaemi hanin 50nyŏnsa*, 1959; Pang Sŏn-ju, *Chaemi hanin ŭi tongnip undong* (Ch'unch'ŏn: Hallim Taehakkyo ch'ulp'anbu, 1989); Ko Chŏng-hyu, "Taehanminguk imsijŏngbu kumi uiwŏnbu (1919-1925) yŏn'gu," (PhD diss., Korea University, 1991).

In approximately 1925, Korean nationalists were seeking a new strategy and these Christian nationalist leaders redoubled their promotional activities; for example they published the magazine *Urak'i*. Since there existed sectarian differences and conflicts born of differing political relationships within the foreign student community, leaders in the Assembly strove to organize and promote solidarity among Korean students in the U.S. emphasizing their shared status as Christians and foreign students in the U.S. Yi Hun-gu actively supported this endeavor and was elected the seventh president of the Assembly in September, 1929. The reality for foreign students was that it was not easy to obtain a degree. Yi, however, earned his Ph.D. in the unprecedented span of three years and also became an official of the U.S. government, which gained him respect and popularity among Korean students in the U.S.

The Assembly staff was immersed in American notions of liberal democracy rooted in Christian social ethics. As students abroad, they were strongly affected by the overwhelming level of materialism in the U.S. While individual members may have had differences in personal preferences concerning the American doctrines of progressivism or conservatism, the Assembly advocated as its ideological position such things as Christian personalism (*ingyŏkchu'i*), liberalism, the social evolutionary belief in the survival of the fittest, the eradication of extreme individualism and recognition of national consciousness, and a strong opposition to socialism.²⁸ Thus, they considered the tasks confronting the nationalist movement to be the promotion of nationalist unity and the various self-strengthening projects of developing education, industry, science and rural society. The staff of the Assembly sought to awaken Korean students in the U.S. to these goals.

Yi Hun-gu shared in this pro-American / Christian / nationalist intellectual atmosphere of the Korean student community, and it was in this environment that his actual affinities concerning the future of his nation were formed, with nationalist consciousness as the basis. Yi considered Tangun, the progenitor of the Korean race, an actual historical figure and the source of national spirit and soul (*Chosŏn chŏngsin*, *Chosŏn hon*). Yi was a nationalist with a strong sense of pride in the primordial nature of Korean history.²⁹ He adhered to an anti-Japanese nationalism fundamentally opposed to colonization and stressed that the Korean people's fight for justice and freedom must not be abandoned.³⁰ In

28. "Miguk yuhaksaeng ūi Miguk munmyŏng e taehan kamsang (intöbyu)", *Urak'i* 3 (1928): 1-11; "Urak'i Ch'ujang", *Urak'i* 3 (1928): 52; "Urak'i Ch'ujang", *Urak'i* 4 (1930): 104.

29. Yi Hun-gu, *Chosŏn nongŏpnon*, 1-2.

this process, his capitalist views, which included social evolutionary theory, were considerably clarified. His anti-Marxist position was reinforced through his experience of American materialism and gained further support as he came to sympathize with the Wisconsin School doctrine that it was possible to build a healthy capitalist rural economy through gradual institutional reform.³¹

Yi's Christian beliefs were founded upon this sort of national-capitalist thought and social theory. His was not the traditional, conservative gospel that preached individual or religious salvation but was instead the Social Gospel Christianity that stressed social equality and collective salvation. Yi's Christian views were shaped in a period when the contradictions of American capitalism were intensifying and when the fundamentalist theology, with its doctrine of salvation in life after death, was waning. In contrast, at this time a liberal Social Gospel and a Christian socialist theology were developing that stressed social salvation movements and the reconstruction of capitalist society.³² Yi believed that the basic doctrine of the spirit of Christ was found in the pursuit of the economic independence of the common man.³³ Based on this sort of practice, he believed that peasant relief and a rural movement was the proper way to national revival, and Yi determined that his own role in it would be in the area of academic activities.

In March 1931 Yi became an instructor and head of the Agriculture Department of the Pyongyang Sungsil Junior College operated by the Korean Presbyterian Church, and in so doing began in earnest his academic activities in Korea. This was the time of the Great Depression and in order to overcome the crisis of capitalism, Japan contrived the Manchurian Incident, pursued the formation of the Japanese-Manchurian block, and reconfigured its colonial policy for Korea. Yi's academic activities began in this context in two directions.

He first completed an international research project that had been commissioned before he had assumed his post at Sungsil Junior College. He had been commissioned in 1929 by the U.S.-led Institute of Pacific Relations to study the land utilization and the rural economy in Korea, and he had also been

30. Yi Hun-gu, *A History of Land System and Policies in Korea* (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 1929), 1-4.

31. Yi Hun-gu, "Chosŏn nongch'on ŭi p'ip'ye wŏnin kwa ki taech'aek(3)," *Nongmin saenghwal* 7, no. 7 (1935): 473-474.

32. Lefferts A. Loetscher, *The Broadening Church: A Study of Theological Issues in the Presbyterian Church since 1869* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1954), 75-80; Pang Kie-chung, *Paeminsu ŭi nongch'on undong kwa kidokkyo sasang* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1999), 147-148.

33. Yi Hun-gu, "Chosŏn yesukyo wa nongch'on" *Chonggyo sibo* 3 (1933): 14.

commissioned by the American Geographical Society to study the condition of settlers in the Manchurian frontier area.³⁴ Yi completed the bulk of this research after arriving at Sungsil Junior College, and it was published in both English and Korean.³⁵ This gave him recognition as a professional in the field of Chosŏn agriculture in the U.S., and made him the most prominent and famous nationalist agricultural economist in the Chosŏn academy.

The other avenue of academic activity was theoretical and concerned the Presbyterian rural movement, which was intimately related to the Sungsil Junior College's Agriculture Department. The Socialist peasant movement made great gains as the agricultural problem worsened in the 1920s. To counter this, nationalist forces began their own rural or peasant movement in the second half of the 1920s. In the Christian sector, the main impetus came when Columbia University Professor E.S. Brunner presented his study, *Rural Korea*, at the Jerusalem International Missionary Conference in April 1928, and called for further rural activities from Korean Christianity. From this time, Christians began to actively initiate rural movements. The Presbyterian Church also established its Rural Society Bureau of the Secretariat in 1928, and from this time began its own rural movement.³⁶ Because Sungsil Junior College was run by the Presbyterian Church Secretariat, its Agriculture Department naturally played the role of coordinating the Presbyterian rural movement from its inception. Yi was responsible for publishing the Rural Society Bureau's official journal, *Nongmin saenghwal* (Peasant Life) and was active as a theorist providing the rationale of the Christian rural movement and national-capitalist solutions for the Korean agricultural problem.³⁷

34. These studies were closely related to U.S. policy for East Asia. The study commissioned by the Institute of Pacific Relations was done jointly with Yi's former teacher, Nasu Hiroshi, who was a key member of the staff of that body.

35. After the study commissioned by the American Geographical Society, "The Pioneer Belt in Manchuria with special Emphasis on Korean Settlement," was published in late 1931. It was published in Korean as *Manju wa Chosŏnin* (Pyongyang: Sungsil chŏnmun hakgyo, June 1932). The Institute of Pacific Relations study, "Land Utilization and Rural Economy in Korea" was published in February 1932 and then in Korean as *Chosŏn nongŏpnon* (Seoul: Hansŏng tosŏ, June 1935).

36. On the Presbyterian rural movement see: Min Kyŏng-pae, *Hanguk kidokkyo sahoe undongsa* (Seoul: Taehan kidokkyo ch'ulp'ansa, 1987); Han Kyu-mu, *Ilcheha Hanguk kidokkyo nongch'on undong* (Seoul: Hanguk kidokkyo yŏksa yŏn'guso, 1997); Pang Kie-chung, *Paeminsu ūi nongch'on undong kwa kidokkyo sasang* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1999); and Chang Kyu-sik, *Ilcheha Hanguk kidokkyo minchokjuŭi yŏngu* (Seoul: Hyaeon, 2001).

37. Pang Kie-chung, "Ilcheha Yi Hun-gu ūi nongŏpnon kwa kyŏngje charip sasang," 136-139; *Paeminsu ūi nongch'on undong kwa kidokkyo sasang*, 169-174.

Yi's academic activities at Sungsil Junior College came to an end in the latter half of the 1930s with the rise of the Japanese military Fascist system and the intensification of thought control. In June of 1937, in relation to the Shinto Shrine Worship Order, it was decided to close Sungsil Junior College. Yi resigned his post there and took a position as managing director of the Taedong Nongch'onsa (Taedong Rural Company), a rural enterprise institution founded by the progressive nationalist Yi Chong-man. This organization began a form of ideal village movement based on the principle of corporatism (*chohapjuûi*) that sought to establish farm collectives for the purpose of creating self-cultivating farmers and tenant farmer autonomy.³⁸ However, Yi could not endorse the radical collectivized farm movement's goals of group land ownership and the communal collectivization of producers and laborers, and in January 1938 he moved to the Chosŏn Ilbo, where he became editor and vice president until the paper was closed in 1940.

Consciousness of the Agricultural Problem and Agricultural Reform Thought

Throughout his period of training in agricultural economics in the 1920s and his academic activities in the 1930s, Yi consistently maintained that the real problem of rural society was the lack of autonomy in the rural economy and peasant life in general. This was based on a realistic awareness of the fundamental collapse of the rural economy and the view that the impoverishment of the countryside was a severe crisis and one that prohibited any hope for national revival. Accordingly, the prospects for national revival rested upon the discovery and resolution of the cause of the rural crisis. For Yi, this meant establishing the autonomy of the rural economy and peasant life.

This understanding of rural crisis and of the realities of Korean rural society formed the basis of Yi's small farm economic thought and his understanding of the particular nature of the Korean countryside. As was discussed above, Yi located the key to the healthy development of the rural economy in the autonomy of small farms, centered especially upon self-cultivating farms. Yi viewed the small farm as the main agent of agricultural productivity increases and the basis of a strong, locally-conscious rural leading class or rural bourgeoisie. For Yi, protecting the self-cultivating farm was the most important

38. Pang Kie-chung, "Ilche malgi taedong saöpch'e üi kyöngje charip undong kwa inyöm," *Hanguksa yön'gu* 95 (1996): 157-168.

precondition for realizing a sound capitalist economy in the countryside, for achieving the highest level of productivity, and for putting the land to use in the best way possible.³⁹ In contrast, he felt that rather than being treated as the active agent of increased productivity, tenants had become a passive object of relief efforts, and landlords (particularly absentee landlords) had become social parasites who caused tenant farmers to engage in “plunder farming.”⁴⁰

This small farm economic view was supported by a small farm theory. Yi recognized that inevitably rural society would atrophy and a rural crisis would occur in the process of capitalist development, and considered this a world historical phenomenon. In particular, he saw the general causes of the worsening of the rural crisis to be the surplus production of the 1920s, the Great Depression, and the intensification of negotiated price margins (*hyöpsang kagyökch'a*). However, he did not view the crisis, as did Marxists, as one of the inevitable decline of the small farm economy due to the polarization of the peasant class. This was because Yi's thinking was based on a small farm theory that argued that agriculture was unlike industry because self-cultivators had an innate strong resistance to and independence from external forces; therefore the rural economy had a much stronger elasticity than did the urban one.⁴¹

However, the problem was that the foundation for the autonomy of the small farm economy itself had come to ruin. The decline of the self-cultivator, accompanied by the disintegration of land property relations and the development of the landlord system led to the bankruptcy of peasant life as the problems of tenancy and chronic household debt intensified. Yi pointed out that during the Great Depression, the amount of land under tenant cultivation reached 56.2 percent, and while the farming population was 80 percent of the total, more than 78 percent were tenants or self-cultivating tenants, a shockingly high rate of tenancy compared to the U.S. (44%), China (36.8%) and Japan (66.7%). Tenants usually paid the unprecedented high tenancy fees of 50-60 percent and sometimes as high as 80-90 percent of the harvest. In relation to landlords, they were no better off than feudal serfs and lived constantly on the

39. Yi Hun-gu, “Nongch'on chungsan kyegŭp ŭi mollak kwa kŏ taech'aek” *Tongbang pyŏngnon* 1, no. 3 (July 1932): 29; Yi Hun-gu, “Sojungnong ch'ölchŏ chŏk poho” *Nongmin saenghwal* 8, no. 3 (March-April 1936): 168.

40. Yi Hun-gu, “Sojak munje ŭi kyŏngjehakchŏk ilgoch'al (7)”, *Chosŏn Ilbo*, 1 September 1927; Yi Hun-gu, “Nongch'on chungsan kyegŭp ŭi mollak kwa kŏ taech'aek,” 29.

41. Yi Hun-gu, “Nongch'on chungsan kyegŭp ŭi mollak kwa kŏ taech'aek,” 31; Yi Hun-gu, “Chosŏn nongch'on ŭi p'ip'ye wŏnin kwa ki taech'aek (1),” *Nongmin saenghwal* 7, no. 5 (1935): 295-297.

verge of starvation. This, Yi argued, was the basic nature of the rural crisis.⁴² Korea's family farm economy was such that prior to the Depression, 75 percent of farm families were in chronic debt totaling 800,000,000 yen, and were subject to usury and the mortgage of their land. The rural economy was headed for total bankruptcy.⁴³

What were the causes and structural conditions that provoked the tenancy problem and the decline of self-cultivators? Yi lists five factors.

The first was the landlord-centered land policy of the Japanese Government General. Yi, who had been trained in capitalist agricultural economics, recognized the landlord system as a modern capitalist economic system. This is because the existing landlord system was a socioeconomic system formed according to the development of capitalism and the establishment of a modern land ownership system in which the landlord and tenant engaged in the modern legal relations of letting and hiring through freely entered into contracts that determined their rights and obligations concerning land use.⁴⁴ Yi regarded the established Japanese land survey as a modern land use system, and the landlord system under Japanese rule was at least in principle also a modern one.⁴⁵ The problem was that the rights of tenants had been completely omitted from the rights and duties inherent to the modern capitalist letting and hiring system guaranteed by law. The landlord system thus reflected only the interests of landlords, and tenants suffered unprecedented tenancy fees ranging from 50-60 percent of yield, even going as high as 80-90 percent. They usually were able to contract the land for no more than a year at a time, had to pay the taxes on the land, and provided uncompensated labor for the landlord.⁴⁶

The second problem stemmed from Japan's colonial landlord-centered policy. Japanese capitalists and large landowners operating large farms continued to accumulate land. Japan forcibly pushed through the land survey and established a modern land system as well as the system of colonial rule. As

42. Yi Hun-gu, *Chosŏn nongŏpnon*, 1935, 281-312; Yi Hun-gu, "Sojak munje ŭi kyŏngjehak chŏk il koch'al (6)," *Chosŏn Ilbo*, August 31, 1927.

43. Yi Hun-gu, *ibid.*, 1935, 401-406; Yi Hun-gu, "Nongch'on ŭi am, nongga puch'ae rŭl ŏdok'e hamyŏn chŏngni hal su issŭlkka? (1)," *Nongmin saenghwal* 6, no. 3 (March 1934): 135-137.

44. Yi Hun-gu, *ibid.*, 1935, 262-263; Yi Hun-gu, "Sojak munje ŭi kyŏngjehak chŏk il koch'al (1), (8)," *Chosŏn Ilbo*, August 19, September 11 1927.

45. Yi Hun-gu, *ibid.*, 1935, 265-267; Yi Hun-gu, *A History of Land System and Policies in Korea*, 55-56.

46. Yi Hun-gu, *Chosŏn nongŏpnon*, 299-312, 323; Yi Hun-gu, "Sojak munje ŭi kyŏngjehak chŏk il koch'al (6)," *Chosŏn Ilbo*, August 31, 1927.

such, large capitalists such as Touyoutakushoku, Fuji Kōgyō, and Kumamoto increasingly accumulated land, and the rural middle class and small and medium landlords experienced accelerated decline. Yi argued that a fundamental reason why the tenancy problem had expanded in a single leap to become a social problem was the exploitation of tenants and the operation of large farms by Japanese capitalists—especially in the North Cholla province and throughout the rice belt in the south.⁴⁷

The third problem was Japan's exploitative agricultural policy and the control of rural society by finance capital in the 1920s, best seen in the Rice Products Proliferation Plan (*sanmi chūngsik kyehoek*). Yi judged this plan to be a form of imperialist state policy designed to relieve Japan's food problem. He argued that the Rice Products Proliferation Plan, which demanded increased production and agricultural improvements, was unrelated to the actual improvement of the Korean rural economy but was merely a way to benefit Japanese large landowners, and just as there can be starvation in times of plenty, created distress and hardship for Korean peasants.⁴⁸ In particular Yi pointed to the semi-coerced implementation of irrigation association enterprises (*suri chohap saōp*) that reduced Korean landlords and peasants alike to debtors and accelerated the accumulation of land by Japanese capitalism. Yi also argued that against the backdrop of this exploitative agricultural policy, colonial financial institutions such as bank and finance associations strengthened the control of capital over Korean agriculture and turned peasants into chronic debtors.

Fourth, the internal characteristic of Korean agriculture and rural society was peasant ignorance and the decline of agricultural production. Yi argued that the causes of Korean rural society meeting with crisis and the ruin of peasant life were not just the external conditions of Japan's exploitative agricultural policy and the rule of capital. The inferiority of Korean agricultural technology and management methods and the low levels of production were also important factors.⁴⁹ The reason for this, he felt, was the 80 percent illiteracy rate among peasants. Peasant ignorance was a basic cause of rural impoverishment and peasant decline.⁵⁰ Accordingly, because a capitalist commodity economy was penetrating a rural economy that had a low level of production, it was inevitable

47. Yi Hun-gu, *ibid.*, 1935, 267-275; Lee, Hoon K., *Land Utilization and Rural Economy in Korea* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932), 281-289.

48. Yi Hun-gu, *ibid.*, 1935, 113-116; Yi Hun-gu, "Pungnyōn kikūn ūi migok munje" *Nongmin saenghwal* 5, no. 11 (November 1933).

49. Yi Hun-gu, *ibid.*, 1935, 109-121, 177-181.

50. Yi Hun-gu, *ibid.*, 1935, 105-108; Yi Hun-gu, "Uri nongch'on kwa kū kyoyuk (1)," *Chosŏn Ilbo*, 17 July 1926.

that farm households went into worsening debt. Rural impoverishment worsened as rural society was thus subject to capitalist control—the so-called extortion of the countryside by the city—in all its aspects of production, circulation, and consumption, among other things.⁵¹

The fifth problem was one of rural overpopulation. Yi thought the correspondence of land utilization and the population problem to be of great importance. Given the underdevelopment of industry and an inadequate labor market and the fact that peasants accounted for 80 percent of the total population, the average annual population increase of 220,000 would exacerbate shortages in foodstuffs and arable land and necessarily become a factor in the decline of the rural economy.⁵² Accordingly, tenant farms inevitably experienced an all-out land rent war, and the only weapon capable of winning that war was a willingness to suffer high tenancy charges.⁵³ In other words, Yi's interpretation was that rural overpopulation was an important structural factor in creating high tenancy charges and a sense of landlord omnipotence.

The above are Yi Hun-gu's main arguments concerning the national crisis of Korean rural society and agriculture. We have seen how he viewed the agricultural problem of this period. His solutions and proposed direction for reform were based on this sort of analysis. The solutions he proposed for the agricultural problem ranged over a variety of forms, but if we accept his own categorization, then there are three main approaches: measures for dealing with the land problem, measures for the tenancy problem, and relief for rural society and peasants.

His plan for the land problem was the heart of his agricultural reform.⁵⁴ Without the reform of the landlord system and resolution of inequities in land property relations, the actual establishment of a rural economy centered on the self-cultivator would be impossible. Yi was steeped in the small farm theory of universal land ownership that held that for the rural economy to develop and have autonomy in a capitalist system, it was necessary for peasants to own land.

51. Yi Hun-gu, "Chosŏn nongch'on kujech'aek e taehayŏ (1)," *Chonggyo sibo*, September 1933) p. 13; Yi Hun-gu, "Chosŏn nongch'on ŭi p'ip'ye wŏnin kwa ki taech'aek (1) (2)," in *Nongmin saenghwal* 7, no. 5 (May 1935): 294-297 and 7, no. 6 (June 1935): 374-375.

52. Yi Hun-gu, *ibid.*, 1935, 91-99, 201-208; Yi Hun-gu, "Chosŏn ingu sajŏk palchŏn ŭi yŏn'gu (4)," *Tonga Ilbo*, July 23, 1932.

53. Yi Hun-gu, *ibid.*, 1935, 85-87, 304-306; Yi Hun-gu, "Sojak munje ŭi kyŏngjehak chŏk il koch'al (5)," *Chosŏn Ilbo*, August 30, 1927.

54. Yi Hun-gu, *ibid.*, 1935, 274.

Thus, while recognizing the landlord system as a modern economic one, Yi nevertheless was confident that it would have to be actively dissolved; the problem was how. Because he subscribed to the capitalist theory of private property, he fundamentally refused to recognize the revolutionary land reform theory that advocated the confiscation of land without compensation to its owners. Furthermore, he thought that the argument for carrying out land reform in one fell swoop was impractical and unrealistic given the fact that Korea was a colony.⁵⁵ Rather than the total deconstruction of the landlord system, Yi argued for gradual reform measures. He proposed gradual measures to establish cooperative association land companies (*hyöpdong chohapsik t'oji hoesa*) and enterprises for the creation of self-cultivating farms (*chajaknong ch'angjöng saöp*).

Self-cultivating farm creation enterprises were a traditional land policy of capitalist states. While recognizing the private property rights of landowners, the government under these plans would sell state-owned land or parts of privately owned land to tenants, who customarily could pay off the land price in yearly installments over a fixed period. The Government-General promoted this from 1932 as a measure for dealing with the tenancy disputes of that period. While Yi generally felt that this was the most desirable means of resolving the worst land problems, he was skeptical about the effectiveness of the Government-General's implementation of it, as it was done only for appearances.⁵⁶

Cooperative land companies were conceived as an alternative measure because Yi was disappointed with the Government-General's land policy; they were intended as a solution to the land problem that Koreans themselves could implement. The gist of the plan was to take advantage of the merits of capitalism and make full use of large capital and rural petty capital and form land companies that would promote cooperative land management enterprises, with the profits being returned to the rural petty and small capitalist investors.⁵⁷ These companies would buy land cheaply from landlords and divide it into small parcels, and then sell it to diligent, landless peasants who would repay their mortgage over a 20-30 year period, thereby creating self-cultivating farms. The company could also directly reclaim uncultivated land as another means of creating self-cultivating farms.

55. Yi Hun-gu, "Nongch'on chungsan kyegüp üi mollak kwa kü taech'aek," 31; Yi Hun-gu, "Chosön nongch'on üi p'ip'ye wönnin kwa ki taech'aek (3)," *Nongmin saenghwal* 7, no. 7 (July-August joint issue, 1935): 474.

56. Yi Hun-gu, *ibid.*, 1935, 334.

57. Yi Hun-gu, "Chosön nongch'on üi p'ip'ye wönnin kwa ki taech'aek (3) (4) (6)," *Nongmin saenghwal* 7, nos. 7, 10, 11 (July-August, October, November 1935).

Yi's measures for dealing with the tenancy problem focused on the tenancy customs of the landlord system. As discussed above, Yi considered landlord omnipotence and rural overpopulation the most important causes of the worsening tenancy problems. Accordingly, he felt that the most effective policy was to legislate changes in the tenancy system and confront the problem of rural overpopulation.

Yi realized the landlord system was based upon modern contractual relations premised upon the right to private property, and felt its institutional improvement would resolve the inequities and irrationalities to a certain extent. Enacting a tenancy law would restrict the harsh exploitation and accumulation of land by large landlords and stabilize the lives of the peasant class. The central element of a tenancy law would be the rational determination of rents and contract periods. Yi felt that rents should be established as they were in the West and set at a rate that fairly reflected the production contribution of both landlord and tenant. Yi estimated a fair rate would be 30-40 percent of yield.⁵⁸ As far as the tenancy contract period, which was one cause of the practice of plunder farming, Yi argued that tenants should be guaranteed terms of at least five years in order to allow for secure farm management practices.⁵⁹

Yi proposed the emigration of peasants into the cities and the transfer of farming to land in Manchuria and China as a solution to the problem of rural overpopulation. Of course, the emigration of peasants into the cities was predicated upon the development of urban industries' ability to assimilate rural labor power. Yi saw that under the domination of Japanese monopoly capital, Korean capital and technology remained inferior and so had poor prospects. Despite this, he felt that given Korea's geographic situation, it had potentially unlimited markets in China, Manchuria and Japan. Thus there existed at least the possibility for development, and so the emigration of the rural population into the cities had to be actively considered.⁶⁰ Yi argued by extension for the export of agriculture. Although such things as Manchuria's political situation and racial prejudice in China were obstacles, Yi considered that to the extent it was a life and death problem for Korea, investing in those areas had a high value as a solution to Korea's agricultural problems and would advance the Korean economy considerably.

58. Yi Hun-gu, "Sojak munje ŭi kyŏngjehak chŏk il koch'al (3), (4), (8), (9)," *Chosŏn Ilbo*, 28, 29 August, 11, 12 September 1927; Yi Hun-gu, "Sunapki wa sojangnyo munje," *Nongmin saenghwal* 8, no. 9 (November 1936): 637-639.

59. Yi Hun-gu, *ibid.*, 1935, 307-308.

60. Yi Hun-gu, *ibid.*, 1935, 60-65; Yi Hun-gu, "Oerae chabŏl ŭi t'uyŏng kwa kyŏngje kigu naeyong kŏmt'o," *Tonga Ilbo*, June 3, 1936.

Yi's measures for the relief of peasants and rural society involved a variety of remedies geared to improving farm household accounts (*sujŭ*), which would resolve farm household debt and elevate peasant lifestyles. Yi felt that a major cause of the impoverishment of rural society in Korea was the chronic debt and worsening ratio of income to expenses for farm households, which followed low productivity and the squeezing of the countryside by urban industrial capital. Yi thought it would be impossible to elevate peasant lifestyles and remedy the rural crisis without solving the problem of farm household debt. Yi proposed three major relief measures.

One measure was a variety of farming improvements intended to increase productivity and augment farm household earnings. These included the application of scientific techniques and the development of agricultural technology, the conversion of a rice-centered monoculture into the raising of diverse crops, and the resurrection of rural handicrafts and farm household by-employments. Yi also pointed to the self-reliance of self-cultivators and the importance of cutting expenses to improve household accounts.⁶² Another measure was establishing cooperative associations to provide the peasant organizational basis crucial to agricultural and farm management reform. Yi argued that the best way for rural society and peasants in a capitalist system to obtain economic independence and to minimize the exploitation of capitalist middlemen was to form peasant self-preservation cooperative associations and to operate farms and distribution projects collectively.⁶³ The final relief measure was the promotion of peasant education and rural enlightenment. Yi believed that the internal cause of low agricultural productivity was peasant ignorance, and therefore the key to the rural problem was peasant education and rural enlightenment. An implicit criticism of colonial education policy, Yi's position strongly argued for implementing additional agricultural education along the lines of a Denmark-style public high school, which would crack the hold of feudal ideas in the countryside and train a rural middle class (*chunggyŏn ch'ŭng*) to take the lead in solving the rural problem and increasing productive

61. Yi Hun-gu, "sŏron," *Manju wa Chosŏnin*; "Manju nongŏp e kwanhan iyagi myŏt kkaji," *Nongmin saenghwal* 8, no. 2 (February 1936): 103-105; Yi Hun-gu, "Nongch'on kwa imin munje," *Nongmin saenghwal* 9, no. 3 (March 1937).

62. Yi Hun-gu, "Chosŏn nongch'on kujech'ae e taehayŏ (3)," *Chonggyo sibo* (December 1933) 17-18; Yi Hun-gu, Chosŏn nongch'on ŭl ŏttŏk'e hamyŏn chinhŭng halga?" *Nongmin saenghwal* 6, no. 4 (April 1933); Yi Hun-gu, "Yŏngnong pangsik ŭi kaeryang ŭl chech'angham," *Nongmin saenghwal* 9, no. 5 (May 1937).

63. Yi Hun-gu, "ŭibong ŭi ch'ŏrhak," *Nongmin saenghwal* 5, no. 8 (August 1933); Yi Hun-gu, "Nongmin kaengsaeng ŭi kihoe rŭl p'och'ak haja," *Nongmin saenghwal* 7:11 (November 1935); Yi Hun-gu, "Nongch'on kyŏnggi wa nongmin ŭi kaksŏng," *Nongmin saenghwal* 9, no. 4 (April 1937).

power.⁶⁴

Yi consistently held that the basic remedy for the rural crisis was the creation of an autonomous small farm economy centered upon the self-cultivating farm. Yi made clear his small farm agricultural theory was intended for a capitalist system.⁶⁵ However, he did not advocate a form of capitalism that endorsed the landlord system and the rule of monopoly capital, but instead upheld a small farm-based anti-monopoly capitalism. Yi sought to remedy the landlord-centered agricultural system in Korea where the landlord enjoyed every privilege and the self-cultivator was brought to ruin. Yi also sought to remedy the industry-centered monopoly capitalist system that sacrificed the countryside. The subject of capitalist development was for Yi not the landlord or monopoly capital, but the rural middle strata of autonomous small farms. Yi's small farm agricultural reform theory was grounded upon a revised capitalism that was anti-monopolist and took the perspective of the petty bourgeois class.

The gist of Yi's small farm agricultural reform plan was to establish a small farm-based capitalist, rural economy by awakening peasants to class cooperation as well as rectifying the monopoly capital and landlord systems. This was to be achieved through a state-led social policy and a planned economy farm administration (*sahoe chŏngch'aek chŏk tongje kyŏngje nongjŏng*). This reformist idea of gradual social improvement achieved within the capitalist system was a natural outgrowth of Yi's academic training. Yi's understanding of agricultural economics was based on capitalist land ownership and land use theories, and involved a theory of social policy for farm administration in which the landlord problem was not an issue of productive relations, but the result of an irrational monopoly that heavily favored the landlord. Yi accordingly felt that the agricultural problem could be solved through state regulation and mediation based upon the principles of economic rationalism, class cooperation, and the importance of collaborative associations (*hyŏpdong chohapjuŭi*).

However, Yi resolutely opposed socialist revolutionary theory and its call for the fundamental upheaval of social and economic structure. Yi criticized as delusional the socialist argument for land redistribution grounded on Marxist agricultural theory, which he felt could never be accomplished, and even if it

64. Yi Hun-gu, "Uri nongch'on kwa kŭ kyoyuk (2)," *Chosŏn Ilbo* (18 July 1926); Yi Hun-gu, "Nongch'on ch'ŏngnyŏn ege ponaenŭn na ŭi hŭimang," *Nongmin saenghwal* 8, no. 4 (April 1936); Yi Hun-gu, "Nongch'on kyoyuk munje e taehayŏ," *Nongmin saenghwal* 8, no. 7 (September 1936).

65. Yi Hun-gu, "Chosŏn nongch'on ŭi p'ip'ye wŏnin kwa ki taech'aek (3)," *Nongmin saenghwal* 7, no. 7 (July-August 1935): 473-474.

were, couldn't guarantee the relief of rural society.⁶⁶ As illustrated in his views of land utilization and demographic theory, Yi's agricultural economic ideas were fundamentally distinct from Marxist ones. In the 1930s, the Marxist and national-capitalist camps came into acute conflict over the future of the nationalist movement and their understanding of the agricultural problem. Yi stood clearly on the anti-socialist and anti-Marxist side of issues at that time.⁶⁷

Related to this sort of intellectual position, Yi's agricultural improvement plans were entirely reformist in nature. Though Yi subscribed to a small farm agricultural economic thought and actively sought the dissolution of the landlord system and the autonomy of the rural economy, he opposed radical dissolution of the landlord system through land reform as not only unrealistic but leading to pain and sacrifice. Instead, Yi advocated all kinds of gradualist remedies, beginning with his self-cultivating farm creation plan.⁶⁸ Yi's self-cultivator farm creation plan, which was to be implemented within the landlord system, could not be expected to be effective, and this can be clearly seen in Government-General policy. And his alternate plan to establish land companies could never be realized without the fundamental participation and cooperation of capitalists and landlords.

This sort of reformist disposition is even more visible in the fact that his agricultural remedies were founded upon the notion of class cooperation. Yi argued that the socialist-affiliated Red Peasant Union movement and tenancy disputes would only exacerbate tenant class-consciousness and inter-class conflict, and therefore were harmful to creating a sound rural economy. Instead, Yi advocated rational solutions and cooperation between landlords and tenants.⁶⁹ Of course, Yi saw peasant solidarity and cooperative organizations as the principle means to peasant relief and rural development. Yet these were not peasant movement organizations opposed to landlords and colonial policy.

66. Ibid.

67. On intellectual currents in the 1930s, see Pang Kie-chung, *Hanguk kūnhyōndae sasangsa yōn'gu*, 85-100.

68. This argument can be found in his approach to the theory of land reform of *Sirhak*. For example, Yi only mentioned and highly praised Jūngjūnnon based on his advocacy of private land ownership and the theory of small farm administration without mentioning radical Yōjūnnon, who argued for non-compensated confiscation and a collective farming system when he evaluated the agricultural reform thought of Chōng Yak-yong. Yi Hun-gu, "Nongjūnghak sang ūro bon Dasan sōnsaeng," *Chosōn Ilbo*, July 16-17, 1935.

69. Yi Hun-gu, *ibid.*, 1935, 299, 323-325, 331; Yi Hun-gu, "Sojungnong ūi Ch'ōlchō chōk poho," *Nongmin saenghwal* 8, no. 3 (March-April 1936); Yi Hun-gu, "Sunapki wa sojangnyo munje," 639-640.

They were, on the contrary, movements for enlightenment and economic autonomy that sought to increase production and which were passive in their stance towards monopoly capital. The operating principle of the cooperative associations Yi proposed was the cooperation of labor and capital. Yi's agricultural reform plan was not a peasant movement theory but was rather a theory of economic autonomy and a plan for rural relief, and its actual implementation by the Christian rural movement was in the form of a rural movement rather than a peasant movement. This is because Yi, with his petty bourgeois view of the peasant and his cooperativist practice (*chohapjuŭi chŏk silch'ŏngwan*), viewed the peasant not as the subject of the movement but as the ignorant object of enlightenment.

With the principle of class cooperation, the small farm agricultural economic policy of the state was the most important one among Yi's agricultural remedies. It was his academic opinion that the only possible way to resolve landlords' omnipotence was the state policy of small farm agricultural economy if the subjective power of peasants could not be expected. The remedies for agricultural reform he proposed could not be carried out without Japanese and the Government-General's administrative power. Herein lies the dilemma and limits of his agricultural reform theory. The dilemma inevitably arose from the gap between his nationalistic sense of value opposing Japanese colonial control and his agricultural remedy to seek impetus through the systemic control of the state to resolve agricultural problems. And it was deepened by the realistic factor of the agricultural control policy of the Government-General in 1930s.

As is well known, the Government-General had known the serious problem of Chosŏn agriculture and recognized that it was the basic background of spreading the socialist peasant movement. Thus they acknowledged it would be difficult for Japan to stabilize her ruling system in Korea unless the structural contradiction of Korean agriculture was relieved and peasants' complaints pacified so that rural society was stabilized.⁷⁰ This was the background for the Government-General promoted Rural Society Improvement Movement (*Nongchon Jinhŭngundong*) in accordance with the agricultural control policy under the slogan of 'self revival' (*Jaryŏkgaengsaeng*) and 'capitalist-labor cooperation' (*Nojahyŏpcho*) ideology from 1932. This policy also made Korean people the subject of the Japanese emperor (*Hwangminhwa*), moving from a so-called '*naesunyunghwa*' to '*naesunilche*'. Accordingly, most Korean peasants

70. Chōsen Sōtokuhu Keimukyoku, *Chōsen no chianjyōkyō*, 1930, Nōminundōkō; Ugaki Kazushige, *Ugaki Kazushige Nikki*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Misuzushobō, 1972): 932, 949-950.

and the entire agricultural nationalistic movement were dismantled or merged into the Rural Society Improvement Movement by the government from the late 1930s onward. In the process, some intellectuals and rural society activists who hoped for the economic autonomy of small farmers cooperated or actively corresponded with the policy of the Government-General, and collaborated with Japan.⁷¹

Yi Hun-gu argued that the ideology of the agricultural control policy of the Government-General was very similar to the ideas of small farm agricultural economic thought and cooperative agricultural reform. However, the agricultural control policy of the Government-General could not be “self-revival measures” for Korean peasants in relation to the structural nature of Japanese capitalism and of the colonial policy in Korea. The basic nature of that policy was to control peasants and their thoughts in order to prevent nationalistic resistance, preserving the landlord ruling systems and relieving the class conflicts of rural society partially deepened by the control of landlords. It was also a preparatory maneuver to make Korea a supply base to prepare for the invasion into China to break through the systemic crisis of Japanese capitalism.⁷²

In the end, national economic independence of Korean peasants was impossible under colonial control. At this time, the agricultural problem could not be resolved through social reformist remedies or Japanese agricultural policies to control her colony. To recover the rural economy and peasants’ life, what was needed was to establish a fundamental remedy to tenant problems and resettle the overall production relations. Therefore, for the genuine economic independence of rural society and peasants, it would be possible only when national liberation was accomplished and the democratic agricultural reform was implemented by the new Korean state.

Yi was also well aware that the agricultural control policy of the Government-General could not be a practical resolution for Korean peasants under colonial control. He was basically skeptical of the policy of the Government-General and did not cooperate with the Rural Society Improvement Movement. However, he had a measure of hope for the promulgation of the Chonsŏn Farm Land Law in 1934 and the Hirota Military

71. Pang, Kie-chung, “Ilche Malki Daedong saŏpche ūi Kyungje jarip undong gwa inyŏm”; Pang, Kie chung, “1930nyŏndae Mulsan jangryŏ undong gwa minjok-jabonjuui Kyungje sasang,” *Dongbanghakji* 115 (2002): 88-94.

72. Kim Yong-sŏp, *ibid.*, 419-436; Pang Kie-chung, *Hanguk Kŭnhyŏndae sasangsa yŏn’gu*, 208-216; Chŏng T’ae-hŏn, “1930nyŏndae sikminzi nongŏp jeongchaek ūi seongkyŏk jeonhwan e kwanhan yŏngu,” *Ilchamal Chosŏn saheo wa minjok haepang undong* (Seoul: Ilsongjeong, 1991); Chŏng Yŏn-t’ae, “Ilche ūi hanguk nongji jeongchaek,” (PhD diss., Seoul National University, 1994), Chapter 3.

Cabinet's championing in 1936 of a planned economy and a small farm party platform.⁷³ It was natural for him to waver due to the nature of his ideas of agricultural reform and remedies; that was the dilemma of his social reformist economic thought and the limits. Although he was wavering between his economic ideas and the policy of the government, he never collaborated with the Government-General and chose retirement, a passive resistance way of life, just before the Pacific War when the wartime Fascist system intensified. This was due to his nationalistic sense of value associated with his social reformist economic thought.

Conclusion

Yi's small farm theory of agricultural reform sought to rectify monopoly capitalism and the landlord system associated with it by awakening peasants to class cooperation and through a planned economy farm administration. It sought national economic autonomy and the resolution of the rural crisis by establishing a small farm-based capitalist rural economy. This agricultural reform theory was a form of social reform that sought to gradually reconstruct the colonial capitalist system dominated by landlords and Japanese monopoly capital. Yi's national-capitalist values and social consciousness were shaped by his Confucian upbringing and Christian social experience and were confirmed through his training in social reform, agricultural economics in Japan and the U.S.

The agricultural economic reform theory Yi was exposed to at Tokyo Imperial University and the University of Wisconsin was one that clung to the capitalist notion of property and sought to establish a small farm economy through state regulation of land ownership and by limiting the influence monopoly capital had on the countryside. The guiding principles for that regulation and autonomy were economic rationalism, class cooperation, and the establishment of cooperative associations. However, given the colonial situation whereby the Korean state had lost its sovereignty, it was difficult for this sort of agricultural reform theory to obtain results by working within the system. Insofar as Yi's agricultural reform theory could not internalize the nationalist aspiration for national liberation and for the seizure of state power, it would be

73. Yi Hun-gu, "Chonsŏn nongjiryŏng ŭi sihaeng kwa jiju wa sojagin ŭi gaksŏng," *Nongmin saenghwal* 6, no. 10 (October 1934): 603; "Chinagan illyŏn ŭl hoe-go hago Nongmin saenghwal ŭi singukmyŏn ŭl jŏngae haja," *Nongmin saenghwal* 6, no. 12 (December 1934): 703-704; "Sojungnong ŭi ch' ŏljŏ chŏk poho," 170.

hard for him to realize his dream of a nationally autonomous small farm economy. In the end, Yi's logic, which espoused small farms and an ideology of class cooperation, could not be assimilated or subordinated to Japan's colonial planned economic agricultural policy.

Yi Hun-gu's agricultural reform theory was not merely an individual project but was adopted as the rationale of the Christian rural movement, and so was at the heart of nationalist-capitalist debates. For this reason it is very relevant to our understanding of the politics of the nationalist movement in the 1930s. The agricultural reform plan proposed by Yi was in many ways substantially the same as the rural relief proposals made by nationalist intellectuals and organizations, but Yi put greater emphasis on the problems of land ownership and the distribution of wealth (*punbae munje*), and actively sought to substantiate his small farm economic ideology. In particular, his recognition of the essence of the rural crisis as a problem both of land ownership and the distribution of wealth (*punbae*) shows us that he had, for a national-capitalist intellectual, a relatively thorough approach to Korea's agricultural problems in this period. Yi not only sharply criticized the socialist argument for a revolutionary peasant movement and land reform, but he also became a spokesman for the national-capitalist camp which raised the debate concerning the agricultural problem to its highest level. As such, Yi stood as the representative agricultural theorist for the national-capitalist camp.

After liberation, Yi's state-building activities and political path grew from this sort of agricultural reform thinking and was its practical substantiation. Because Yi had already been recognized by the American academy and government as a capable agricultural economist, he was appointed chief of the Agricultural Affairs Bureau by the Occupation Government and oversaw South Korean agricultural policy and put it in practice. During the state-building period, he became a member of the legislative assembly and played an important role in establishing an agricultural reform plan for South Korea as a member of the Agriculture and Forestry Committee. With respect to the overall situation at that time—that is to say, one in which the united democratic nation-state building movement was broken-down and the divided-nation state system was established—we can say he sold out to the project of capitalist state building with the American Occupation Government and the right wing against the socialist state building movement of the left wing after liberation.

However, Yi actively sought the autonomy of the national economy and wanted to build an anti-monopoly capitalist state on the basis of the dissolution of the landlord class and a secure small farm economy. He therefore was not able to go along with the political position of the Korean Democratic Party (*Hanmindang*), which represented the interests of the landlord class, or with

Syngman Rhee's pursuit of dependent capitalist development. Although the liberation from colonialism intensified ideological conflicts in terms of determining the way to establish a new nation-state and political interests, Yi devoted himself to his economic thought even more than in the colonial period and his ideological nature became more reformist. This is the reason why Yi supported the legislative assembly's (June, 1947 – April, 1948) land reform bill planned by the centrist faction (*Chungganpa*) with the cooperation of the American Occupation Government, after the South Korean government was established, and why he actively led the Agricultural and Forestry Bureau's agricultural land reform bill, which represented the interests of peasants against the Korean Democratic Party, who represented the interests of the landlord class.⁷⁴ Also, he actively participated in the anti despotism-democratization and reformist party movements and played a leading role with the progressive political group beginning in 1959 when Syngman Rhee and his government propelled dependent economic and agricultural policies that represented the interests of the capitalists while sacrificing the interests of the rural society and peasants. In the end, his small farm, anti-monopoly economic thought joined with progressive nationalism, resisting the conservative anti-communist nationalism, that had become the mainstream political ideology of the South after the national division. Here, we can find the modern meaning of Yi Hun-gu's economic thought of the Japanese colonial period in the context of Korean modern political and intellectual history.

74. Refer to Pang Kie-chung, "Nongji kaehyök ŭi sasang chönt'ong kwa nongjŏng inyŏm" *Nongji kaehyök yŏn'gu* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 2001), 112-127. Yi did his best to represent the peasants' interests on the land reform bill against the Korean Democratic Party establishing the Korean Laborer-Peasant Party (*Daehan Nonongdang*) and submitting an independent land reform bill.