The Royal English Academy: Korea’s First Instance of American-Style Education and the Making of Modern Korean Officials, 1886-1894

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ABSTRACT

Amidst the turbulent circumstances following the forced “opening” of Korea in 1876, the Korean government launched a variety of reform programs, including the establishment of the Royal English Academy (Yugyŏng Kongwŏn) in 1886, the first modern government school, which lasted only eight years. This paper argues that the most significant factor for its closure was the incompatibility of American educational ideology and pedagogical objectives with the Korean socio-political context. The prospective students who would have been most receptive to a US-style education were the progressive reformers (the Enlightenment Party) since they advocated Western practical learning and technology. Unfortunately their staging of the 1884 Kapsin coup and its subsequent suppression resulted in their systematic elimination and destroyed any possibility of the Royal English Academy finding an enthusiastic student body among the aristocratic yangban who survived the fallout. Unable to attract students, it eventually lapsed under mismanagement, shutting down in 1894.

Keywords: Royal College, Yugyŏng Kongwŏn, Open Port period, education, government school, educational reform, Enlightenment Party, sirhak, chungin, Kojong, Homer Hulbert, George Gilmore, Dalzell A. Bunker

Introduction

Following the forced opening of Korea to trade in 1876, the government faced a fiscal crisis, an unstable political environment, foreign intervention, and considerable social unrest. Amidst these turbulent circumstances, and in an effort to stabilize the country and maintain sovereignty, the Korean government launched a variety of reform programs. One important component of reform was the establishment of official schools based on Western, specifically American, models. The first modern government school, the Royal English Academy¹ (Yugyŏng Kongwŏn) was established in 1886, but shut its doors a mere eight years later. Existing scholarship on the 1882 to 1895 period emphasizes foreign (particularly Chinese) intervention, the entrenchment of conservative officials, and King Kojong’s (r. 1864-1907) ineptitude to explain the failure of the government’s initial efforts at educational reform.² Framed in terms of Kojong’s modernization strategy, this argument holds that the Royal English Academy ended closing down since leadership in the Korean government was not “progressive enough” and was
dominated by the pro-Chinese conservative Yŏhung Min clan, who stood as an insurmountable obstacle to Kojong’s reform efforts.\textsuperscript{3} However, even though this initial attempt involved hiring American teachers and importing American-style education, previous studies do not consider the historical context of 19\textsuperscript{th}-century American education, its democratic nature, and its emphasis on practical and technical skill training.

In contrast to previous research, this article argues that while the aforementioned causes contributed to the school’s demise, the most significant factor was the incompatibility of American educational ideology and pedagogical objectives with the Korean socio-political context. Kojong might have hoped that the Royal English Academy and the establishment of an American presence would counteract rising Chinese influence and help cultivate officials supportive of the reform program, but the most fundamental problem at the outset was that the American curriculum was not appealing to Royal Academy students from aristocratic backgrounds. The prospective students who would have been most receptive to a US-style education were the progressive reformers (the Enlightenment Party). Their espousal of Western practical learning and technology made them the perfect target group, but their staging of the 1884 Kapsin political coup d’état and its subsequent failure resulted in their systematic elimination and destroyed any possibility of the Royal English Academy finding an enthusiastic student body among the aristocratic yangban who survived the fallout of the coup. As the school struggled to attract students, it eventually lapsed under mismanagement and shut down in 1894.

This article will examine the historical background of developing Korean interest in American education following the signing of the Treaty of Amity and Commerce between the United States and Korea in 1882, and the importation of American education with the establishment of the Royal English Academy in 1886. In order to appreciate the kind of education the American instructors introduced to their students through the Academy, it is imperative to understand the principles and objectives of late 19\textsuperscript{th}-century American education. An examination of US-style practical education and the Royal Academy’s student body will reveal why

\textsuperscript{1} I am deeply indebted to Professor Kyuhyun Kim at UC Davis and Professor John Duncan at UCLA for their feedback, and to the tireless assistance of Bowoon Keum. Also, I wish to thank the anonymous reviewers of the \textit{Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies} for their helpful comments.

\textsuperscript{2} Although there are different English translations for the Yugyŏng Kongwŏn such as “Royal English School,” “Royal College of English,” and “Royal English Academy,” I have chosen to use “Royal English Academy” since it was closer to an academy that taught special subjects and skills, and was not an ordinary school (hakkyo) or an institution of higher learning offering general studies (taehakkyo). It should also be noted that the term yugyŏng (育英) can be traced back to Mencius (372 BC-289 BC) and meant something along the lines of “fostering talent” or “training talented men.”

\textsuperscript{3} Representative works include: Han’gŭlsa (Kuksa P’yŏnch’an Wiwŏnhoe, 1994) 45: 21; Kim Kyŏngyong 2008; Lew 2008; Ch’oe Poyŏng 2012; and Han Yongjin 2012.

\textsuperscript{4} Lew (2008, 47-48) describes the conservative Min officials as unsupportive of modernization, and Ch’oe Poyŏng (2012, 307-09) explains that Min Ungsik and Min Chongmuk reduced the number of hours of classroom instruction, falsified reports, and withheld salaries from the teachers.
classically-trained Confucian yangban students remained aloof, and why the school suffered from severe attrition rates.

**Korean Interest in American Education**

In 1876, a flotilla of ships from newly modernized Japan arrived in the waters of Kanghwa Island to revise its foreign relations with the Chosŏn government (1392-1910) and to establish trade. Chosŏn, which saw no need to reform its traditional relationships and had no interest in opening its ports to trade, had rebuffed previous requests from the Japanese. However, the Japanese employed classic gunboat diplomacy and the Korean government reluctantly acquiesced to the signing of the Kanghwa Treaty, marking the “opening” of Korea. Shortly thereafter, limited steps were taken to reorganize the government and to respond to the rapidly changing environment. Turning to both the Chinese and Japanese who had already made improvements and begun “self-strengthening,” in the early 1880's Korean leaders began to send fact-finding missions (“sight-seeing” trips) to Japan and China to learn about their programs of reform.

In addition, despite staunch opposition from conservative elements in the government, Korean leaders started to entertain the idea of signing treaties with Western nations, particularly with the United States, since it did not display territorial ambitions. At the urging of the Chinese statesman Li Hongzhang, Korea was encouraged to “play one barbarian off the other” (the United States and Russia), which would also serve to neutralize Japan. Offering his good offices to facilitate the negotiation of the treaty, Li Hongzhang invited Commodore Robert W. Shufeldt from the United States to visit him in Tientsin, which he did in August and September of 1880. On May 22, 1882, the “Treaty of Amity and Commerce between the United States and Corea” was signed by Shufeldt, Sin Hŏn, and Kim Hongjip (Swartout 1980, 32). This was the first modern treaty signed between Korea and a Western nation.

The 1882 treaty signed between Korea and the United States was ratified by the United States Senate on January 9, 1883 and proclaimed in force on June 4, 1883 (Mansfield 1934, 32). On May 13, 1883 the first American minister to Korea, Lucius Foote, arrived in Korea, much to the delight of the Korean king who is said to have “danced for joy” (Lew 1982, 12). At Foote’s suggestion to send a goodwill diplomatic embassy to the United States, Kojong promptly dispatched an eight-man mission in August of 1883 with the influential Min Yŏngik (Queen Min’s nephew) at the helm. During their three-month visit, they visited the Bureau of Education in Washington, D.C. where John Eaton, the United States Commissioner of Education, provided them with materials on the American educational system.\(^4\)

\(^4\) Li Hongzhang was an influential official in the Chinese government and “in charge of the Korean problem since 1879 as the Viceroy of the Metropolitan Province and High Commissioner of the Northern Ocean” (Lew 1982, 7).

\(^5\) In a letter from Commissioner John Eaton to Minister Min Yŏngik on October 8, 1883, the Bureau gave the mission a history of the office, the 1882 annual report, and other pamphlets concerning American education (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1883-1888, 1890-1891, 1-90).
Upon his return from the goodwill mission to the United States in 1883, Min reported to the king that American civilization was highly developed and recommended the establishment of a new-style educational institute (Sŏngjŏngwŏn ilgi 1884: 21/05/09). However, since the Americans were slow producing an adviser, in July of 1884 King Kojong made a request to Minister Foote for three American teachers to establish an English-language school (Ch’oi 2012, 293). This request was forwarded to the State Department in September, but “the State Department’s hesitant—even lackadaisical—approach to the subject resulted in the expiration of an entire year before the request was seriously considered” (Swartout 1980, 36). The Kapsin political coup d’état a few months later in December interrupted the necessary preparations for the hiring and dispatch of three American teachers, but Kojong was persistent and continued to make the same request (Oemubu chŏngmuguk 1960, 163-65).

The Progressive Reformers
After 1876, there was much debate within the Korean government over the acceptance or rejection of Western knowledge and technology, the need for reform of Chosŏn’s political, economic, and social institutions, and the extent to which reform should be implemented. Amidst these circumstances, a group of reform advocates emerged whose political platform was based on ideals of enlightenment, progress, and reconstruction. This small group of progressive reformers was influenced by Pak Kyusu (1807-1877), the former governor of P’yŏngan Province and Third State Councilor (U-uijŏng), and the grandson of the notable Reformed Confucianism (sirhak, “Practical Learning”) scholar Pak Chiwŏn (1737-1805). The sirhak group, and particularly Pak Chiwŏn’s Northern Learning branch (pukhak-p’a), was critical of the emphasis on moral philosophy, embraced scientific knowledge, and advocated pragmatic and realistic reforms to improve the conditions of the people for the rehabilitation of the country.

When Pak Kyusu traveled to China as royal envoy to the Qing court in 1861 and 1872, he learned about the West and China’s self-strengthening movement. Both China and Japan had appropriated Western technology to invigorate the military and bolster the economy (to varying degrees of success). Upon his return to Korea, Pak brought with him books expounding on these ideas, and passed along this information to young officials of like mind such as Kim Okkyun (1851-1894), Pak Yŏnggyo (1849-1884), Pak Yŏngyo (1858-1939), and Sŏ Kwangbŏm (1859-1897). This group of yangban from varying backgrounds and members of the chungin class, a hereditary group of technocrats who were professionally trained but of lower social status, were inspired by ideas of national independence, social equality, and military security. For example, Kim Okkyun was closely

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6 Late Chosŏn society was hierarchically structured as follows: yangban (civil and military officials), commoners (farmers, artisans, merchants), and lowborn (slaves and outcasts). Kyung Moon Hwang in Beyond Birth discusses the secondary status groups (chungin (technocrats), hyangni (local clerks), sóŏl (children of concubines), northerners, and muban (central military officials)) whose status fell between the yangban and commoners (2004).
associated with O Kyŏngsŏk (1831-1879), a chungin interpreter for Qing missions who traveled to China six times between 1866 and 1874. O had also learned about the West through his travels, and every time he traveled to Beijing would visit the book market in Liulichang (琉璃廠) to buy Western maps, scientific equipment, and books on Western learning and culture, passing these along to Pak Kyusu. O introduced the book *Haiguo tuzhi* (An Illustrated Book on Maritime Countries (海國圖志)) written by the influential Chinese reformer Wei Yuan (1794-1856) to Pak and his friend Yu Taech’i (1831-?), a chungin physician.7

After the deaths of Pak and O in 1877 and 1879, Yu became the most senior member of the progressive group (Kim Okkyun referred to him as “sŏnsaeng” or “teacher”). O’s son O Sech’ang (1864-1953) came under his tutelage, and Yun Ch’iho referred to him as a “great man” (yŏngung) and “elder” (orūn). Yu was also well acquainted with lower status yangban such as Yu Hyŏngno, a military official and a Five Guards General (Owijang), and Pak Chegyŏng (Yi Kwang-rin 1977, 71; Yi Sanghyŏp 2004, 168 and 175). It was between 1877 and 1884 that this group consolidated, frequently gathering to discuss the state of affairs and Korea’s possibilities for reform. Concerned by increasing Chinese military and political intervention, the progressives stood for complete Korean independence. However, their proposed program was unacceptably radical for many of the elite at the time. This group emphasized self-strengthening through economic wealth and military strength (*puguk kangbyŏng*, “rich country, strong army”), and supported a political overhaul that would eliminate waste and corruption and establish a modern government. “Kim (Okkyun) was emphatic that Korea open her doors to the West, import new knowledge, religion, and technology, strengthen her economy and military, and establish her full and complete independence” (Nahm 1984, 44).

Moreover, the reformers issued a scathing criticism of the social status system and called for social equality through the abolition of class distinctions. They pointed to the widespread corruption and avarice among yangban officials, and recommended their punishment and/or removal from office. This is consistent with sirhak scholarship, which also criticized factional strife and rigid class distinctions. Themselves victims of the monopolization of power by a few yangban lineages, sirhak scholars existed on the margins and included displaced social groups such as the sŏol (sons of concubines). Although some of the 19th-century reformers (Pak Yonghyo, Sŏ Kwangbŏm, and Sŏ Chaep’il) hailed from distinguished yangban families, many of their associates from secondary status backgrounds suffered from discrimination and exclusion from power much like their sirhak predecessors.

It has been noted that several of the progressive party members traveled to Japan where they witnessed that country’s accomplishments in terms of

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7 Nahm 1984, 40; Yi Kwang-rin 2007, 31-32. Although most scholarship on Yu Taech’i describes him as a chungin, some scholars contest this assertion and claim that there is a possibility he was a yangban. See Yi Kwang-rin 1977, 76-77; Yi Sanghyŏp 2004, 169 and 181. However, since he was a member of the Hanyang Yu clan, a chungin lineage, this author believes he was a chungin and not a yangban.
modernization and self-strengthening. In Japan, Kim Okkyun met with the enlightenment thinker Fukuzawa Yukichi and wrote a memorial to the king, which was submitted by Pak Yonghyo on December 24, 1882. In Chido yangnon (A Brief Discourse on Governance) Kim explains:

> Today Your Majesty’s high ministers as well as humble people are engaged in discussion in order to help the country and improve the people’s conditions...The most urgent task of today is to employ talented and able persons in the government, economize government spending, curb extravagance, and to open doors and establish friendly relations with neighboring countries... The time has passed for discussion on this or that opinion. It is the time to seek practical results. (Nahm 1984, 45)

However, the progressive reformers were not satisfied with the slow pace of reform and were distressed by the hostility from conservative officials, and so under the leadership of Kim Okkyun, they staged a violent overthrow of the government on December 4, 1884. Killing six high ministers, injuring many others, and holding the king hostage, the new government lasted a mere three days before it was brutally suppressed by Chinese troops. The violence led to an attack on the Japanese legation, burning it to the ground and taking Japanese lives in the process. The progressive reformers were either captured and killed, or forced to flee the country. Anti-Japanese sentiment soared, and support for Western-style reforms fell. “Soon after the coup, memorial after memorial flooded the court, all expressing shock and anger at the abominations perpetrated by the enlightenment leaders. Their crimes were compared with the most heinous acts of recorded history” (Ch’oe 1982, 109). Consequently, even those who were associated with the progressives but did not directly participate in the coup were exiled (Yun Ch’iho), arrested (Yu Kilchun), or executed (the fathers of Kim Okkyun and Pak Yonghyo). The father, elder brother, and wife of one progressive and participant in the coup, Hong Yong sik (1855-1884), all committed suicide.

What is quite astonishing is that even despite the bloodshed and destruction, followed by the vehement backlash to the coup (not to mention the complete eradication of the progressive reform party and its associates), a mere seventeen months later three Americans boarded a steamship in San Francisco to set up Korea’s first official school offering a Western-style education.

One would suspect that the association of the coup with Western enlightenment thinking would have discredited Western learning in general, or at least put attempts at Western-style reform on hold. On the contrary, once the dust had settled, plans for the establishment of the Royal English Academy resumed.

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8 Yun Ch’iho, Yu Kilchun, Pak Yonghyo, Kim Okkyun, Pak Chehyongsu, An Chongsu, So Chaep’il, and Chong Nan’gyo all traveled to Japan in the early 1880s.

9 Hong was a member of the progressive party and a participant of the coup.

10 Hulbert recalls departing for Korea on May 21, 1886 via Japan (Hulbert 2000, 14).
The Recruitment of American Teachers

The treaty between the United States and Korea was signed in 1882, and the following year Kojong sent a goodwill embassy to the United States. Korea continued to establish friendly relations with Western countries through the signing of treaties with Germany in 1883, and Russia and Italy in 1884. And since his requests for an American advisor went unfulfilled, in July of 1884 Kojong asked US Minister Foote to recommend three American teachers to come to Korea to teach and help establish an English school.

Upon receipt of King Kojong’s request for three American instructors, the State Department forwarded it to John Eaton, the commissioner of education in the Department of the Interior. Eaton was born in 1829 and graduated from Dartmouth in 1854, a time when American colleges were undergoing a major transformation from traditional or classical education to modern education emphasizing practical and technical skills. He was highly interested in international education, particularly in Japan and China, and consistently included a chapter on educational developments abroad in his annual reports to Congress. “Like many American leaders since the birth of the Republic, Eaton believed that the United States had a mission to spread its democratic system worldwide…Foreign leaders, Eaton claimed, wanted to copy American society, and they recognized correctly that ‘the sources of American greatness are to be found in our education’” (Sniegoski 1995, 11). Korean leaders too came to the same conclusion, as demonstrated by Min Yongik’s report to Kojong of the impressiveness of American strength and wealth after his return from the goodwill mission to the United States the year before. Eaton felt that the establishment of an official school in Korea with American teachers was an important opportunity to “export” the American public school system and educational ideology, thereby spreading civilization and extending American influence. He did not waste any time and recruited three teachers for the fledgling Korean school: Homer Hulbert, George Gilmore, and later Dalzell Bunker.

Homer Bezaleel Hulbert (1863-1949) was the first teacher Eaton contacted (Eaton and Hulbert’s father had attended Dartmouth together). Hulbert was born in New Haven, Vermont on January 26, 1863 and enrolled in Dartmouth in 1880, graduating in 1884. After a summer of intensive study of Hebrew, he attended Union Theological Seminary in New York for two years. Education ran in his genes. His father Calvin Hulbert was a Dartmouth graduate and served as President of Middlebury College. His maternal great-great-grandfather was Eleazar Wheelock, the founder of Dartmouth College. “His great-grandfather, in turn, was Ralph Wheelock who, in 1644, established in Dedham, Massachusetts the

Figure 1. John Eaton, ca. 1870.
first so-called ‘public school’ in this country” (Hulbert 2000, 13). Homer Hulbert was only twenty-one years old when Eaton recruited him.

George William Gilmore was born in London, England on May 12, 1857. He graduated from the College of New Jersey (later, Princeton University) in 1883, and was a student at Union Theological Seminary from 1883 to 1886, overlapping with Hulbert, and was ordained by the presbytery of Brooklyn, New York on April 28, 1886. Gilmore was also recruited by Eaton to teach in Korea, but following the political turmoil of the 1884 Kapsin coup, Gilmore resigned. Two years later when the request was renewed, Gilmore reconsidered. According to Hulbert, “Gilmore had married and it was a question whether it would be well to take his wife to a country still seething with political unrest, but she was willing to take a chance whether she would have to live in a house, a hut or an igloo. His other plans had fallen through and he was glad to come back to the fold” (Hulbert 2000, 14).

After the third teacher Eaton recruited (a gentleman known only as “Valentine”) resigned, Hulbert asked Dalzell Adelbert Bunker to join them. Bunker was the oldest of the three men, born in Colebrook, Ohio on August 10, 1853. He graduated from Oberlin College in 1883, and also attended Union Theological Seminary with Hulbert and Gilmore.

19th-Century American Education
Due to the delay caused by the Kapsin Coup, in 1885 Eaton instructed Hulbert to visit Boston to “look up thoroughly the mass system of public schools.” Eaton also asked Hulbert to visit him in Washington to “look over the education department here thoroughly and study up the methods of the good here in general.” By this time, Eaton was close to finishing his tenure at the Bureau of Education (he served as the Commissioner of Education from 1870 to 1886). During his sixteen years at the Bureau, Eaton himself zealously promoted public education (Sniegoski 1995, 17-21). However, the American public school in 1885 was itself a relatively new

11 “Hulbert’s Letters,” December 1885, Hulbert to his father. From the History of Korean Independence Movement Information System. Korean Independence Movement History Online, accessed March 9, 2015, http://search.i815.or.kr/OrgData/TranslateText.jsp?ID=3-008785-010. Also, in his memoir, Hulbert explains that in December 1884 “as we were busy with our preparations, came the startling news of a sanguinary emeute in Seoul and that all plans for our school were in abeyance if not entirely quashed” (2000, 13).

invention. Educational reform in the United States following the Civil War changed the overall character of the curriculum, the student body, and the purpose of education itself.¹³

In the first half of the 19th century, most American children did not attend school, and most of the schools were neither publicly controlled nor free. In fact, state officials discouraged the attendance of very young children because of the belief “that school was physically, intellectually, and psychologically harmful to children younger than five or six years of age” (Winzer 1993, 142). The public school system that Hulbert was instructed to research by Eaton was the common school system, a system that developed during the 1830s and 1840s and that was first established in the New England states, with Massachusetts and Connecticut providing the best examples. With the election of President Andrew Jackson in 1828, the 1830s witnessed a dramatic shift to popular democracy that championed the ability of the common folk to conduct state affairs as competently as the elites who traditionally dominated the government. The common school movement was based on the democratic ideas that education should be open to all social and economic classes, and that the citizens of a democratic and self-governing society need the skills to intelligently elect government officials.¹⁴ When Eaton assumed the role of Commissioner of Education in 1870, he “saw the United States as divided by class, ethnicity, religion, and politics…. ‘As the only agency by means of which these divers peoples can be molded into a homogeneous population, having the unity of ideals, purposes, aspirations, and patriotic sentiment which make up national life, the schools are emphatically a national institution,’” (Sniegoski 1995, 18) and therefore held that the public schools played a pivotal role in creating national unity. In a speech to the National Teachers’ Association in 1870, Eaton boasted that learning was now available “to every child, however low,” and quoted George Washington as saying, “Among the motives to such an institution is the assimilation of principles, opinions and manners of our countrymen by the common education of a portion of our youth from every quarter: the more homogeneous our citizens can be made in these particulars, the greater will be our prospect for permanent union” (Eaton 1870, 4-5). This could only be accomplished if education was broad, comprehensive, and universal.

In addition to the promotion and dissemination of universal education, the public schools were to equip their students with the necessary skills to be productive workers. In an address to the literary societies of Roanoke College in 1879, John Eaton explained, “Our American civilization is a great stimulus to the assumption of responsibilities. Its fundamental principles force all of us to be workers. Our law recognizes no rights of primogeniture…. Every man is constituted

¹³ For a more detailed discussion on educational reform and the establishment of the public school system in nineteenth-century America, see Ornstein and Levine 1989, 169-79; Spring 1994, 56-71; Monroe 1940.

¹⁴ See Ornstein and Levine 1989, 169-70. At the outbreak of the Civil War, 85 to 90 percent of Massachusetts children aged seven to thirteen were enrolled in school. By 1890, 77 percent of children aged five to seventeen were enrolled nationwide. See Snyder 1993.
a worker, and beginning at the beginning, he must of necessity be a learner, and in this sense a scholarly worker, whether his instrument be the spade, the plow, the carpenter’s plane, the sword, or the pen….but as a first condition of producing scholarly workers, education must be universal. No single individual must escape its influence or its benefits” (Eaton 1879, 3, 9, and 15). This meant that the function of the schools was not only to integrate children from all different social, economic, and ethnic backgrounds into the broader community, but also to teach citizenship and the basic skills (such as literacy and arithmetic) for use in everyday life and at the workplace that could facilitate job placement, economic security, and upward mobility. Individual progress was intrinsically linked to progress of the civilization, with education providing the essential key. “The enlightenment of the people and national prosperity are not accidentally coincident, but necessarily so, sustaining to each other the relation of cause and effect” (Eaton 1870, 11). Eaton reiterated, “The progress of the whole people in all attainments in character and in life will be determined by the height to which their average advancement can be carried” (Eaton 1879, 15).

Another purpose of the common school was to provide an education that would produce and increase wealth for everyone in American society. Horace Mann, the father of the common school, wrote, “nothing but Universal Education can counter-work this tendency to the domination of capital and servility of labor.” He believed that the common schools “would eliminate the problems of the unequal distribution of property by increasing the general wealth of society and, consequently, improving the economic conditions of the poor.” In his own words, “Education, then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men” (Spring 1994, 71). For American educators, the common school was a mechanism for the realization of democracy and an instrument for the experiment in social reform.

As for American higher education, the mid-19th century witnessed a shift to the sciences, and practical and technical skill training (Lucas 2006, 135-36). Whereas in the early 1800’s Latin, Greek, and philosophy were the core courses of higher learning in Northeast colleges, beginning in the 1830s, and particularly between 1850 and 1875, natural sciences and other professional studies were introduced. The transition in the United States from an agrarian to industrial economy necessitated changes in the universities. “The times require practical men, civil engineers, to take charge of public roads, railroads, mines, scientific agriculture, etc.” Yale established a professorship of “agricultural chemistry and animal and vegetable physiology” in 1846, and the Massachusetts General Court in 1850 ordered Harvard to provide training for “better farmers, mechanics, or merchants” (Rudolph 1990, 237).

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15 Horace Mann was appointed as the first secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education in 1837.

16 All three American instructors sent to Korea in 1886 were products of this system—George W. Gilmore graduated from Princeton, Homer B. Hulbert from Dartmouth, and Dalzell A. Bunker from Oberlin.
Thus, given the charge to implement an American-style education at the Royal Academy, the instructors attempted to offer a universal and utilitarian education through modern subjects introducing Western culture (such as English, geography, and history). However, practical training was a hard sell to the classically trained yangban, especially since technical skills in Korea fell under the purview of the inferior technocrat class, the chungin. The chungin were a distinct group of technical specialists with lower hereditary status because yangban believed utilitarian training—including the acquisition of foreign languages for their roles as interpreters and translators—was an inferior form of learning (Palais 1996, 207). This is not surprising if we are to examine a classical Confucian education at the time. Confucian education (particularly in preparation for the civil service examinations) became the exclusive right of the yangban elite during the Chosŏn dynasty, and helped maintain and perpetuate their power and status.

This education entailed the study of the Confucian classics in preparation for the civil service examination and required fluency in classical Chinese, not to mention years of study and vast amounts of resources, and meant the dominance of belles-lettres and the devaluation of technical training (Yi Yŏnsuk 2009, 63-77). Similar to eighteenth and early 19th-century American classical education that emphasized the classics, Latin, Greek, and moral philosophy, a classical Korean education did not focus on scientific studies or professional training (Ch'oe Yŏng-ho 1987, 61).

The reality of the incongruity of giving a chungin-style training to yangban students became even clearer after the Kapsin coup, which functionally eliminated an entire group of incumbent or potential government officials who were supportive of progressive reform and who advocated practical learning. Among the five leaders of the coup—Kim Okkyun, Pak Yŏnghyo, Sŏ Kwangbôm, Hong Yŏngsik, and Sŏ Chaep'il—all except Kim came from established aristocratic families but were vigorous proponents of Western-style practical education. These men and their colleagues would have been ideal for the kind of training the Americans brought to the Royal Academy. Unfortunately, their participation in the failed coup resulted in their execution or exile, leaving an intellectual void and a remaining prospective student body much more wary of Western learning.

In addition to the disregard for a practical and technical education, the

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17 Both the Americans and Koreans were sensitive to the status distinctions amongst the students and understood that the yangban were hesitant to even sit in the same classroom as students of lower status and rank. Regarding the second day of class, Hulbert wrote, “He (Foulk) said the one danger now is that the men in the school that are of high rank will be unwilling to stay in a school with the lower rank men. That is why the President of the House office comes so much. For if he is willing to sit there with the lower scholars then the higher rank scholars cannot complain.” “Hulbert’s Letters,” September 24th, 1886, Hulbert to his mother. The History of Korean Independence Movement Information System. Korean Independence Movement History Online, accessed March 9, 2015. http://search.i815.or.kr/Search/TotalSearch.jsp?st=T&tid=&kyv_allword=%ED%97%90%EB%8B%84%ED%8A%B8+1886&x=24&y=7.

18 For more on the yangban monopolization of classical Confucian education and disregard for technical education, see Yi Sŏngmu 1994.

19 Kim Okkyun was born in Kongju in Southern Ch'ungch'ŏng province into a poor yangban family. His uncle, Kim Pyŏnggi, adopted him and they moved to Seoul where he pursued his education and passed the civil service examination in 1872 (Nahm 1984, 42).
Yangban had little reason to warm to the “equality of knowledge” and universality of education as an ideal. They prided themselves on their privileged access to Confucian scholarship and institutionalized this in the form of the civil service examinations. Their monopoly on education and exclusive right to sit for the civil service examinations were precisely what separated them from the other (lower) classes. In fact, they had put into place extensive measures to make further distinctions within their own class by discriminating against yangban sons of concubines (sŏl) and forbidding them from sitting for the exams (Yi Songmu 1994, 188-201; Ch’oe Yong-ho 1987, 123). An education that integrated students from all social backgrounds would be the death knoll for the yangban and completely counterintuitive to their efforts to distinguish themselves as a separate social class.

Furthermore, a democratic education emphasizing the responsibilities and participation of all citizens in the institutions of government (based on American democratic principles) was incompatible with the political structure of the Chosŏn dynasty. The newly formed American government required popular participation—without it, the government could not operate properly. In contrast, the yangban renounced republican principles of government. Even radical progressive reformers like Kim Okkyun did not advocate popular elections of officials, only the recruitment of talented officials regardless of their social origin (Nahm 1984, 45). The Korean king and his officials were qualified to govern the people because they had been given the Mandate of Heaven based on their faithfulness to Confucian principles, not because they had been given the mandate of the people based on democratic principles.

The Royal English Academy (Yugyŏng Kongwŏn 育英公院)

Despite numerous setbacks, the Yugyŏng Kongwŏn or the “Royal English Academy” opened in 1886 and was the first official educational organ offering a new Western-style education. The school in essence reflected the government’s immediate need for people who could translate and interact with foreigners. But a school devoted to a new Western education was progressive, if not radical. It is unclear exactly what Kojong envisioned when he made the request for American instructors to establish the Royal Academy, but he did indicate that the school was to teach English and introduce students to Western culture (Yu Pangnan 1992, 125). Homer Hulbert describes its purpose as follows:

The abysmal ignorance of the Korean officials about everything foreign suggested to Mr. Foulk (the Naval Attaché) the need of instruction, and it was through his influence that the Government determined to establish a school where young members of the nobility, upon whom the burden of government would sooner or later rest, might be taught the English language, the science of geography and other basic elements of Western culture. (Hulbert 2000, 11-12)

The Americans clearly felt the Koreans were in desperate need of modern

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20 For a detailed discussion of the civil service examinations and social structure during the Chosŏn dynasty, see Yong-ho Ch’oe 1987.
education, being ignorant of “everything foreign.” Hulbert also explains in his memoirs that when the Americans arrived in Korea, their students had no textbooks. “I determined that what the Koreans needed most of all was a geography of the world but including many things that an ordinary geography does not give, details about government, revenue, industries, education, religion, armies and navies, colonies, and other important matters, so that the reader could get a sort of birds-eye view of the world and degree of wealth, culture and power attained by each nation” (Hulbert 2000, 64). Even a cursory look at geography textbooks printed in the United States in the 19th century reveals that “ordinary” geographies did in fact provide the information Hulbert describes above. They were akin to encyclopedias, only in condensed form, and provided not only maps that illustrated the physical locations of countries, but also presented vast statistical information on each country.\(^{21}\) Essentially, these texts took an inventory of and measured the degree of civilization of each geographical area based on each country’s “wealth, culture, and power.”

Before classes began, Hulbert’s plan for the inaugural preparatory course included reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic, geography, and history;\(^{22}\) but since not a single student in the 1886 entering class spoke a word of English, the teachers had to begin with the alphabet (Gilmore 1892, 229). Three months later, Hulbert reports that they started teaching mathematics, geography, and grammar.\(^{23}\)

\(^{21}\) These geographies also included information on such topics as population figures, ethnicity, languages, natural resources, political structure, school system, armies and navies, religion, urbanization, industrialization. See Cornell 1857, Colton 1880; Warren 1886.


\(^{23}\) “Hulbert’s Letters,” December 9, 1886, Hulbert to his father. The History of Korean Independence Movement Information System.” Korean Independence Movement History Online, accessed March 9, 2015, http://search.i815.or.kr/ImageViewer/ImageViewer.jsp?tid=oo&id=3-008785-045&pid=. Much later, the Royal College curriculum expanded to include reading, writing, foreign languages, math, the natural and physical sciences, geography, history, political science, international law, and economics. For example, more than two years after its establishment, Hulbert explains, “I am beginning to teach my pupils political economy although of course in a very humble way.” This is identical to the educational content of American common schools that began with reading, writing, and arithmetic, and would subsequently add geography and basic science.

\(^{24}\) Available at http://m.blog.daum.net/jidam55/16143389#.
By order of royal decree, students who would be able to learn quickly were to be chosen from among the families of officials. The school was divided into two classes, the left and the right. The “left classes” (chwawŏn) were composed of students who were incumbent low-ranking government officials, and in the right classes (uwŏn) were intelligent boys aged fifteen to twenty (of mostly yangban extraction with some chungin exceptions). The entering class was recruited by order of the King sent to government officials of the Foreign Office (T'ongni Amun), asking them to recommend relatives (sons, sons-in-law, brothers, etc.) and select students for the school (T'ongni Kyosŏp T'ongsang Samu Amun ilgi 1886:23/7/12). If the families did not comply, they were subject to punishment by royal decree (Sŏngjongwŏn ilgi 1886:23/08/10).

In the first graduating class, there were thirteen students in the left class and twenty-two students in the right class. Students took tests at the end of the month and at the end of the year, and were required to pass a final test after three years. If the student passed, he graduated and was given a government position. However, students in the left classes already held official positions, thus reducing their motivation to attend class.\(^{25}\) This explains why “but few of the ‘rank men’ or scholars with official position attended. They had a smattering of English, could talk a little, and were too indolent to work since they could get along without it” (Gilmore 1892, 232). If students were already of rank, had acquired some English skills, and had to fulfill their official duties, what was the incentive to attend class through to graduation? As acting government officials, they needed to attend to matters of the state in addition to attending class and keeping up with their studies. The heavy workload caused the students enough stress that eventually they were not required to attend to official matters daily, and only needed to attend official state sessions once every two or three days (Kim 2010, 40).

In the beginning years, the American instructors complained that the students showed no enthusiasm for Western learning and were often “corrupt” (Chŏng Chaegŏl 1994, 12). The key question is why did they show no enthusiasm for Western learning? This was not simply a disparity in moral or ethical values (for example, the Korean students being lazy or corrupt), or even a negative association of Western learning with the bloody Kapsin coup, but a matter of differing values of curricular content— what Americans believed was worth

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\(^{24}\) Available at http://m.blog.daum.net/jidam55/16143389#

\(^{25}\) In 1887, there were six students in the left class and fourteen in the right class, and in 1889 there were fifty-seven students in the right and none in the left. Chŏng 1994, 10-11.

\(^{26}\) Available at http://mpva.tistory.com/1120.
studying was quite different from what Koreans believed was worth studying. The purpose of an elementary education in the United States was to cultivate basic skills for practical use in daily life, thereby offering accessibility to a broad and diverse student population; but these notions were anathema to yangban officials. Of course in 1886 the Royal Academy offered its students a unique educational opportunity unavailable to the general public, but the actual content of the education was hardly erudite or scholarly to yangban. Moreover, passing the civil service examination was a rite of passage for officials—even members of the progressive reform group such as Kim Okkyun, Pak Yonghyo, and Sŏ Chaep'il passed the civil examination—and this examination was based on a Confucian curriculum, not Western learning. Perhaps it was because Kim, Pak, and Sŏ had already passed the civil service examinations that they could be more open to other types of learning, but pragmatically speaking, a yangban student with any hope of entering the official ranks during the Royal Academy’s years of operation would have prioritized preparing for the exams over learning English and geography. For yangban students, a Confucian education was practical.

In his memoirs, Gilmore recounts that the “best scholars were the youngest boys and those who could hope for advancement through their English studies,” and not the “rank men or scholars with official position” (Gilmore 1892, 229-32). These young and most promising students came from chungin or secondary status backgrounds. Ironically, to Americans the chungin appeared better educated because of their professional instruction. Their training as “interpreters, medical officials, legal specialists, astrologers and astronomers, accountants, painters, and copyists” resembled the so-called learned professions of law and medicine (Hwang 2004, 33).

The American author James Hyde Clark observed with surprise that the education system of the chungin resembled the modern Western university since they devoted themselves to the study of science (such as astronomy) and medicine, law, cartography, horology, portraiture, and the archival sciences (Kim Kyôngyong 2010, 52). Nevertheless, their educational programs and examinations (chapkhwa) were entirely separate from the yangban (Lee 2014, 35). Due to the fact that modern Western education was more analogous to the practical and technical education of the chungin, the subjects of study the American instructors imported to Korea in 1886 to the classically trained Korean yangban appeared demeaning, if not disgraceful. In fact, beginning in 1881 Confucian scholars submitted several memorials to the throne that denounced Western learning. One memorial warned that learning foreign languages and Western technology would bring shame and ridicule “in all directions” (Kojong sillok 1882:19/03/29). Thus, it would have taken some time to convince classically-trained yangban students that this new style of education was in fact scholarly, not to mention superior. After centuries

27 John Eaton mentions the “learned professions” in his speech, “Scholarly Workers” (1870, 15).
28 Other memorials describe Western technology as an instrument to plunder Korea’s ancestral lands (Kojong sillok 1881:18/07/06). They also described Western technology as something that was simply used to enchant and “bedazzle,” and to frighten the king (Kojong sillok 1882:19/03/29).
of eschewing technical training, it is unsurprising the yangban would regard American teaching methods with a healthy amount of distrust.\footnote{See Ch’oe Poyông 2012, 306. Gilmore claimed their “work was hampered by the distrust of foreigners which is universal in the East.” See Gilmore 1892, 231.}

On the other hand, chungin students at first welcomed the new style of education and made up the youngest segment of the student body. Enrollment records of the Royal Academy indicate chungin students included Yi Hyönsang, a Chinese language exam passers and a descendant of one of the most successful Chosôn chungin lineages, and sons of the famous chungin Ko Yonghû and Ko Yongch’ööl (Kyung Moon Hwang 2004, 69). According to Gilmore, “the younger scholars had been doing fine work” (Gilmore 1892, 232). This savvy group of men must have regarded a Royal Academy education as an opportunity to enter into the highest levels of government service, from which the chungin had heretofore been excluded. “The students were looking forward to government preferment in a few years and, being under the King’s eye, they were well aware that to neglect their work would militate against their chance to get a good fat government job. Of course the novelty of it made them keen at first, but that could not be depended upon to form a permanent incentive” (Hulbert 2000, 63). In fact, according to official records, many graduates of the Royal Academy went on to obtain positions close to the throne. Placements included positions at the Office of Royal Lectures, the Kyujanggak (Royal Library), the Office of Special Counselors, the Royal Secretariat, the Tutorial Office for the Crown Prince, the Foreign Office, and the Sônggyun’gwan (Royal Confucian College). However, past research indicates that all these placements of prestige went to the yangban students, and none went to chungin students (Kim Kyôngyong 2010, 53-54). The continued marginalization of the chungin and their denial of employment to the highest government positions despite their commendable academic performance almost guaranteed their eventual discouragement and decline in enrollment. Coupled with the difficulties of attracting and retaining yangban students, it is no wonder the Royal Academy suffered from severe attrition rates.

The most notable alumni of the Royal Academy include Min Yongdon (1863-1918), the minister to France, Yi Hanûng (1874-1905), the minister to England, and Yi Wanyong (1858-1926). Yi Wanyong was one of the first students to enroll in the “left class” at the Royal Academy and served as the secretary to the first Korean minister to the United States, Pak Chôngyang (1841-1905) (Yi Kwang-rin 1964, 41). However, he is most famous, or infamous, for being one of the “five traitors” to sign the treaty of 1905 which made Korea a protectorate of Japan and stripped the country of its diplomatic powers, and later as prime minister for signing the 1910 Annexation treaty which made Korea a formal colony of Japan. It is a painful irony that one of the first recipients of Western learning that was intended to protect and strengthen the country ended up signing away Korean independence.

In spite of the earnest efforts of the Americans, the school did not last long. By 1889, the instructors resorted to appealing to the throne directly to send more
students. “Yesterday Bunker and I sent to the King through the legation making certain statements about the school and asking that the members of scholars might be increased by an addition of forty more.” King Kojong complied with this request in March of 1889, thereby doubling the number of students (Kim Kyŏngyong 2010, 40-41). Despite royal intervention, however, student enrollment still lagged, and by December of 1891, only about 12 students remained. The teachers did not last either. In 1889, Gilmore resigned after being denied a raise in salary. Hulbert followed in 1891 ostensibly in protest of the Korean government’s decision to allow Germany to take over the Royal Academy property for their legation, but from Hulbert’s memoir it is clear that after five years of operation the Royal Academy had not developed into a major source for Western learning.

In the year 1891 we renewed our contracts for another five years, hoping against hope that the political situation would clear up and that the Government would be able to turn its attention to more progressive matters than these political jealousies. But affairs got worse rather than better, and it became apparent that there was no intention of allowing us to broaden out our work and begin to do something for general education. Unless this could be accomplished I could see no career as an educator in Korea. (Hulbert 2000, 129)

In 1894, Bunker, the last teacher to remain, also resigned. During its time, which lasted only eight years, the school graduated 112 students.

Conclusion
The Royal English Academy offered an American practical and technical training that was not particularly appealing to the yangban students Kojong recruited. Regrettably, those progressive yangban who would have been most receptive to this type of learning had either recently fled the country or been eliminated as a result of the failure of the 1884 Kapsin coup. As a result, the American teachers faced a constant challenge to attract students. Attrition rates among those students who had already passed the civil service examination and held an official position (the students in the “left” classes) were especially severe and plagued the school until its demise. The Royal Academy might have offered technical training, but for an employed junior official, it was not particularly career-enhancing. If anything, the negative association of Western progressive learning with the recently failed progressive movement would have been an impediment to career advancement. For yangban students in the “right” classes, studying for and passing the civil service examination would have taken priority over learning English and other Western subjects. Kojong might have attempted to raise the level of prestige by naming the school the Royal Academy but to many yangban, the school was just a reincarnation of the Tongmunhak which was a school for training interpreters and more suitable to the chungin. 30

30 The Tongmunhak was established to train interpreters in 1883 under the direction of the foreign German advisor Paul George von Möllendorff (1847-1901); this school closed once the Royal Academy opened. This author does not consider the Tongmunhak to be the first modern government school since it was a school for translators and did not offer a substantively new or modern curriculum like the Royal English Academy.
Unfortunately for the Royal Academy's more responsive chungin students, Kojong maintained the conventional practice of promoting yangban to the highest government offices to the exclusion of the chungin. This resulted in rewarding the yangban with something they already had (an official position), and removing the incentive for the chungin. Consequently, the Royal Academy was unable to retain either set of students for a sustained period of time. Had the Royal Academy survived through the Kabo Reforms (1894-1896) which abolished the civil service examination system and called for the recruitment of officials based on merit rather than social status, Kojong could have awarded chungin students prestigious government posts. Ultimately, the Royal Academy made its biggest impact in the fields of education and foreign service. Several graduates of the school received posts in the Office of Royal Lectures, the Tutorial Office for the Crown Prince, and the Royal Confucian College. However, it is difficult to determine how much Western learning infiltrated these quintessential Confucian institutions, especially since the ideals of “Western education” as envisioned by the American instructors did not match the Korean reality.

GLOSSARY

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Yugyŏng Kongwŏn 育英公院 Yu Taechi 劉大致
Yu Hyŏngno 柳赫魯 Yun Chi'ho 尹致昊

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