

## A Note on *The Korean Communist Movement* by Dae-sook Suh

— With Special Reference to Source Materials Used —

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There are many difficulties in studying the Communist underground movement. Above all, first-hand information and original material are often almost unavailable. Korea is no exception to this. Dae-sook Suh himself states in his book that "the old Korean Communist movement, partly as a result of constant police surveillance, was repeatedly shattered by the arrest and jailing of its leaders. As a result, new leaders time and again emerged to perpetuate the movement, only to be arrested and replaced by still others. Likewise, study groups and party organizations succeeded each other with great rapidity . . . . Another difficulty is the nature of the available sources. There is very little extant Korean material emanating from the party itself or its leaders, certainly not enough to cover substantial portions of this history." (p. xii) This is also true of studies in the history of the Japanese Communist movement.

However, circumstances seem to be much more favourable in the case of Japan than in Korea. The reproduced copies of *Sekki*,<sup>1</sup> the official organ of the pre-war Japan Communist Party, are available today, and some issues which were not available before the reprinting have since been collected.<sup>2</sup>

In the Korean Communist movement, however, even the existence of such material is unknown. Therefore, studies necessarily have had to rely on secondary or second-hand material, as is the case with the book under review. However, the author has succeeded in making a wise use of available material, except for points which will be mentioned later and he makes sharp analyses of the movement and relevant events.

Many of the published studies in the history of the Korean Communist movement depend greatly on police material (as does Dae-sook Suh to a considerable extent). Typical of these studies is *Chōsen minzoku dokuritsu undō hishi* (Secret History of the Korean People's Independence Movement) by Senji Tsuboe, which does not deal with the Communist movement alone as Suh also states. Tsuboe was a naturalized Japanese secret policeman of Korean

<sup>1</sup> Although the author reads the Chinese characters for *The Red Flag* "Akahata," the pre-war reading was "Sekki."

<sup>2</sup> The reviewer himself has made public in two volumes the various documents on the party policies issued in the course of the movement. The testimonies of the party leaders have also been edited by him and are to be published in five volumes in the near future.

ancestry who was specifically assigned the job of arresting the Korean Communists. His *Secret History* was written on the basis of the material collected from his own experience (the greater part of it drawn from the police), and is not worthy of scientific study. Most of the books hitherto published are more or less similar to Tsuboe's. Thus, in comparison with Tsuboe, the merits of the book by Dae-sook Suh will immediately become obvious.

In the *Secret History*, hardly any mention is made of the sources of information and material used for describing the movement and relevant events. Dae-sook Suh, on the other hand, is strict in his usage of material. In addition, Dae-sook Suh attaches to his book a rich bibliography, which is not found in Tsuboe's. Dae-sook Suh also introduces a considerable amount of literature written in Russian. There have been few books which have dealt with the Korean Communist movement, and most of these have been governmental publications, which, in most cases, use little Russian-language material. Any study of the Korean Communist movement, however, cannot dispense with this material. In this sense, the present book by Suh will play an important role in future studies in this field. The author seems to have made good use of the Comintern material which is essential for tracing the history of the Korean Communist Party. This is but one aspect, among others, of Suh's work which takes it to the highest level ever attained in this field.

Nevertheless, Suh's work leaves room for comment; especially that he should have undertaken a more critical examination of the material he used. For example, it does not seem proper for the author to use English versions of the Comintern protocols, for the Comintern used the two languages, Russian and German, in its official protocols; their English versions give, in most cases, merely abridged translations, not the whole text. Take, for instance, the minutes of the 6th convention of the Comintern which was closely related to the Communist movement in Korea. The German and English versions differ from each other in length; the latter gives a much shorter account of the debates at the convention. Thus the German version should have been used. However, at the time of the 7th convention of the Comintern, when the Nazis were already in power in Germany, the English version of the *Inprecor* is more detailed than the German version. Thus the lack of the author's attempt at a comparative examination of the different versions of respective Comintern documents seems to constitute a flaw in his book. Similarly, there are two versions, German and English, available of the meeting of the revolutionary organizations of the Eastern countries which was held in 1922. In this case, the German version ("Die Fern Oster") contains only the main report plus the decisions taken at the meeting, while the English version carries the major debates along with the main report and the decisions.

Next, Suh's book will be reviewed, with special reference to the examination of the material used in it.

(1) As is well known, the Korean Communist movement arose among the Korean immigrants in Russia, notably Siberia, who were influenced by

the Russian Revolution. Here the author bases his descriptions on articles written in Russian, which may be regarded as a characteristic feature of this book. There is also some information on the Communist movement of the Koreans in Siberia available from the Japanese Army which for a time occupied that part of Russia. This is also used by the author. However, since the Japanese information was extremely inaccurate, it could not have been used without much care. In this respect the author does not seem to have made a critical examination of the material. It was not until 1930 that the information of the Japanese Army and police became correct enough to rely upon.

(2) The author describes in some detail how the Korean Communist movement developed factional struggles within itself, due to the fact that the movement had originated from two overseas centres, Shanghai and Siberia. A famous armed clash known as the Alexeyevsk Incident took place in Siberia in 1921, though not between the above two factions but between the Communist Irkutsk faction and the old Korean nationalists. About this Alexeyevsk Incident, the author, quoting from a book<sup>3</sup> published in Seoul, Korea, after World War II states: "Perhaps the most interesting explanation is that this incident was a result of an agreement between Karakhan and the Japanese legation attaché Fusazawa<sup>4</sup> to disarm the undesirable Koreans." (p. 31, Note 21) However, if the author had glanced over the diplomatic history of Japan, he would have immediately seen that this was not a correct interpretation. Although the Russo-Japanese negotiations on the *rapprochement* between the two countries had begun with the Talien conference in August, 1921, with Hajime Matsushima and Yourine (or Petrov) representing Japan and Russia (in this case the Far East Republic) respectively, they were broken off eight months later. The talks were resumed in September, 1922 at Changchun, Manchuria, between Tsuneo Matsudaira and Joffe, and again in Tokyo in the following year between Toshihiko Kawakami and Joffe. All these negotiations, however, came to naught. The fourth Russo-Japanese talks, that is, the Yoshizawa-Karakhan talks, began from September, 1923, and finally reached agreement in 1925. Therefore, the Alexeyevsk Incident on June 21st, 1921 could not have been a result of an agreement between Karakhan and Yoshizawa as observed by the author.

The author also makes use of Ch'ae Kün-sik, *Mujang tongnip undong pi-sa* (Secret History of the Armed Independence Movement). This book treats the Alexeyevsk Incident in the same way as Kim's book. Studies of this sort tend to have factual inaccuracies and exaggerations, so that a careful examination of them is required. As another example, the author uses *Shisō geppō* (later changed to *Shisō ihō*), the monthly publication of the High Court of the Korean Government-General. This publication also needs critical examination before it is used. To be sure, the author remarks, "although these

<sup>3</sup> Kim Sūng-hak, ed., *Hanguk tongnip undong-sa* (History of the Korean Independence Movement), Seoul, 1956.

<sup>4</sup> This name should be corrected to Yoshizawa.

records are valuable, the information for the reports were, at times, no doubt received from people hostile to the Korean Communist activities and particularly to certain individuals in it, from informants whose sources frequently are unidentified, and also from victims of torture whose confessions may be of dubious validity. Moreover, most of these records are biased and denigrate the Korean revolutionaries and their movements. Consequently they have certain limitations and must be used with great care." (p. xiii) But Suh does not seem to have used them "with great care."

(3) The rise of the Communist movement in the Korean Peninsula dates back to the March First Uprising, which took place in 1920. The uprising itself was not started by Communists. In the year or so following the 1st March, 1920, however, the forces of the national independence movement striving for the restoration of the Yi dynasty lost their influence as a driving force. On the other hand, two new forces began to influence the movement. One aimed at building a republican Korea on the basis of the Provisional government at Shanghai, and the other attempted a national liberation of Korea through the infiltration into the peninsula of the Korean Communists from Siberia. Since 1921 the latter claimed leadership in the independence movement. It was only after 1922 that the Korean Communists residing in Japan began to have their influence upon the movement in their motherland.

(4) This book has depended for many of its sources on government material in depicting the history of the Communist movement in the Korean Peninsula. The result has been that some parts of the book represent the history of arrests and reorganizations of the Communists, rather than the history of the movement. The author uses in Part II such appellations as "First Party," "Second Party," etc. But these appellations should be said to be only expedient in describing the repetition of arrests and reorganizations of the Party and its members. Certainly these may have constituted a part of the movement, but the movement itself must have been primarily a mass-based movement led by the Communists, since the labour and peasant union movements in Korea in those years were affected neither by the right-wing forces nor by the centralist unions under socialist influence, the opposite of what occurred in Japan. For example, the author could have gone into more detail about the labour and peasant movements and the "Shnkan-hoe" as a united national front, because these formed the background to the Communist movement in Korea. The same comments may apply to Chapter 5 of Part III (The Labor and Peasant Movements), where the author should have given a fuller account of the relation between these movements and Communist activities. As a reference for this there is *Sangyō rōdō jihō* (Bulletin of the Industrial and Labour Research Institute) which often carried comparatively good articles and accounts of the economic situation and the movements in Korea in those years.

While the present book touches on the Comintern's "December Theses," it leaves untouched the "Theses on the Revolutionary Movement in Colonial and Semi-colonial States," i. e., a resolution at the Sixth convention of the

Comintern, which contains some accounts, though brief, of the revolutionary movement in Korea. There are also such Comintern theses concerning Korea called the "Theses on National Colonial Problems" (from the Second convention) and the "Theses on Oriental Problems" (from the Third Convention). The author does not seem to have attempted a comparison of these theses with the December Theses. This would appear to constitute a flaw in this book.

To describe how the December Theses came into being, the author uses a secondary source, "Chōsen kyōsantō to Sano Manabu" (The Korean Communist Party and Manabu Sano) in *Shisō geppō* and observes that "there is some inconsistency in Sano's testimony, for he testified that they discussed the problems until December 25-26, 1928, but the Theses had already been approved by the ECCI [Executive Committee of the Communist International] on December 10, 1928." (p. 10, Note 44) As the author points out, Sano states in his testimony that while Yi Tong-hui, a representative of one faction of the Korean Communist Party, arrived first, the representatives of his opposition came very late, arriving only in *November*, and thus discussions were postponed to *December* 25-26. At the same time, however, Sano says in the same testimony that the discussion began immediately after the arrival of the late-comers in *November*, this indicating that Sano's memory was incorrect. This would have become obvious if the author had used Sano's testimony itself rather than the second-hand material given in the *Shisō geppō*, and there would have been no "inconsistency."

The author is correct when he states: "Unless there is another original document which specifically states the expulsion of the Korean Communist Party from the Comintern, the expulsion was neither ordered nor hinted at in the December Theses." (p. 109, Note 45) The reviewer is impressed by the correctness with which the author has understood the Theses. He has made a fine summary of the contents of the Theses. Incidentally, a commonly-held view, the opposite of that held by Suh, was that the expulsion of the Korean Communist Party from the Comintern was a direct outcome from the December Theses seems to be a result of supposition based on inadequate material. The fact is that in July, 1928, there was a directive of the Comintern addressed to the Korean Communist Party demanding that the Party should get rid of all factional strife. This is the very document that the author mentioned as "another original document." The above view has been popularized, the present reviewer supposes, by those who did not know of the existence of the directive.

(5) The author's description of the Korean Communists in Japan is generally appropriate, though he could have gone into more detail. There were close ties between the Korean Communist movement in Japan and that in Korea. The documents appearing in the *Intānashonarū* (International), to which the author makes frequent reference, had to be published in Japan because they could not be legally published in Korea. The dissolution of the Japanese Bureau of the Korean Communist Party and the amalgamation

of its members into the Japan Communist Party might have been dealt with in more detail. In this connexion, there might have been a comparative examination of why the Korean Communist Party had remained an independent party at a time when Korea was a colony of Japan while its counterpart in Taiwan, also Japan's colony at that time, was a branch of the Japan Communist Party. The dissolution of the Japanese Bureau of the Korean Communist Party represented an application of the Comintern principle of "one party for one country." A closer study might have revealed a number of interesting facts about the organizational problems of the Communist parties under these circumstances.

The author's descriptions of the Korean Communists' movement in Japan since 1937 are exaggerated because most of them are dependent on police sources. Suh states that "after the Sino-Japanese Incident of July 7, 1937, Communist activities were confined to the students in various Japanese universities. The more active ones were in Meiji University, where the students invited Takazu Masamichi and Yi Ch'ong-won to lecture on the theory of communism and its application to Korea." (p. 207) It must be noted, however, that Masamichi Takazu could not have lectured on "the theory of communism" because he was no longer a Communist at that time. Such a misconception, together with others, was perhaps due to the author's relative ignorance of the general social situation and the Communist movement in Japan in those days. In pre-war Japan, it was not uncommon for a 'haiku' (poem) group at Kyoto Imperial University, for example, to be arrested under the Peace Preservation Law. On the other hand, the Supreme Court had passed judgment on a case concerning Koreans to the effect that "to advocate the independence of Korea from Japan means to snatch away a part of the state under Imperial rule, thus constituting the grave crime of attempting a change in Japan's national polity as defined in the Peace Preservation Law." Therefore, if Koreans talked about Korean independence, they ran the risk of being arrested under the Peace Preservation Law and, after brutal tortures, of eventually being framed as Communists. Under these circumstances, it should be clear that the police material is not reliable.

(6) The Communist movement in Korea increasingly lost its vigour under the Japanese suppression, as well as through the factional struggles within itself. The leadership of the movement moved abroad, notably to Manchuria, where the influence of the Chinese Communist Party on the Korean Party grew stronger. The author's descriptions of these developments are comparatively detailed. He touches, however, rather briefly on the movements of both the Chinese and the Japanese Communist Parties. This is probably because the author is not well acquainted with the movements of the "foreign parties" (i. e., Communist parties other than the Korean). Comments on the Communist movement in Japan seem especially brief to the reviewer, who himself was engaged in the movement, and the same can be said about the Communist movement in Manchuria. If the author had studied such movements in Manchuria more closely, he might have been able to illuminate

more clearly the background of the rise of Kim Il-sŏng in Part V.

For example, although the author touches on the "January Directive" (1933) of the Comintern in Chapter 8, Part IV, his descriptions are a little too brief and rough to match its importance in relation to the December Theses (1928). This January Directive, together with the "February Directive" (1934) of the contents of which no explanation is given, is a document of crucial importance. It seems to the reviewer that the author has probably never seen the originals of these two directives. Besides these two documents, there are also such important documents from that period as the well-known article on "The Anti-Imperialist United Front in Manchuria" carried in the Comintern organ and a letter addressed to the Korean Communist Party by Wan Min and others who were then stationed at the Comintern. This letter was similar to one written by Sanzō Nosaka alias Susumu Okano to the Japan Communist Party. They were in fact the Comintern directives.

The 5.30 Incident of Chientao, of which an account is given in the present book, was an event, as the author points out, caused by the "Li Li-san Course" of the Chinese Communist Party. (p. 232) But there might have been a more detailed explanation of the course and the eventual change in it.

(7) Part V, the last part, is devoted to the clarification of the rise of Kim Il-sŏng as the central figure of the Korean Communist movement. The author points up the failure of the old Communists as a factor making for Kim's rise. This failure resulted from the adventurist course taken by the various factions of the Korean Communist Party including the Marxist-Leninist faction, and Kim Il-sŏng revised this course. This revision, however, took the form of a decision by the Fourth Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party which was held in Shanghai. The reviewer agrees with the author who ascribed the rise of Kim largely to the failure of the old Communists. Take, for example, those Communists who were released from jail upon the independence of Korea from Japan. Most of them had apostatized their former faith while in jail. Therefore, they dared not challenge or criticize Kim Il-sŏng, a man who had fought with armed forces against Japanese imperialism, and with whom they chose to ingratiate themselves. There is also a psychological factor which cannot be overlooked in considering the seizure of power by Kim Il-sŏng. According to *Chōsen shinwa* (New Stories of Korea) written by Kenichirō Sawada, and quoted by the author, as many as two-thirds of pupils and students at primary and middle schools in southern Korea mentioned Kim Il-sŏng as their most respected figure, when asked this question during World War II with the assurance that their replies would be kept secret.

Another factor making for Kim's seizure of power was the social reforms which were carried out in North Korea after the liberation. This made it possible for Kim to seize the support of the workers in the area in which the greater portion of the Korean industry is located, and, through the thoroughgoing agrarian reform, to win the confidence of the tenant-farmers in the farm villages. It seems to the reviewer that the analysis of these socio-

economic factors should have claimed a greater space in comparison with the pages devoted to the descriptions of Kim's past. For example, the author might have dealt in more detail with political problems, in addition to military aspects, in Part V, Chapter 9 ("Kim Il-sōng and the Chinese Guerrilla Forces"); his explanation of the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army also seems to be a little too brief. For, if there had been a more detailed treatment of the non-Communist anti-Japanese armies which had been in existence in Manchuria for many years, it might have helped clarify the background of Kim's seizure of power. The lack of adequate analyses of the socio-economic background can be observed not only in Part V but throughout the book. This is a pity, as the book can be rated among the best of the books of this sort.

The attached list of material used in each chapter of the book should prove very useful to those who wish to study in this field. The reviewer believes that the present book will well serve as the starting-point from which to further studies in this field.