

Article

Korean Studies in Transition: Focusing on the Missionary Children at the University of California, Berkeley

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Introduction

Formalized Korean studies was virtually non-existent up to the mid-1960s in the United States (Nahm 1971, 9), but, as is widely known, Korean studies by Americans existed even before departments and research institutes were established in American universities. Some Protestant missionaries who arrived in Korea in the late 19th century began studying Korean language, culture, and history around 1890. On June 16, 1900, they founded the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, which was the first academic body for Korean studies that continues to this day (Lee 2021b, 164).

Americans did not study Korea only on the Korean Peninsula. In the 1920s, a few missionaries received doctorates from American universities by writing their PhD dissertations on Korea: Horace H. Underwood (1890–1951, NP) at New York University in 1926, James E. Fisher (1886–1989, SM) at Columbia University in 1928, and Charles A. Clark (1878–1961, NP) at the University of Chicago in 1929.¹ However, they chose missionary work in Korea as their thesis topic, not Korean language, culture, or history, and after graduation, they returned to work—Yonhee College for Underwood and Fisher, and Pyongyang Theological Seminary for Clark—in Korea. They did not contribute much to introducing or establishing Korean studies in the United States.

Since the early 1930s, some people have received degrees from American universities by studying Korea itself. They were missionary children born and raised in Korea and made Korea their theme of academic research based on their love for the country. After earning their degrees, they worked at universities or for the government. They laid the foundation for Korean studies at a time when formalized Korean studies was non-existent or weak, and they also took on various tasks related to Korea. This paper examines, among others, Harold J. Noble (1903–1953), George M. McCune (1908–1948), and McCune's wife, Evelyn B. McCune (1907–2012), who worked in the early period.

Although Noble, McCune, and Mrs. McCune each of three left a significant mark on Korean studies in the United States before its formalization, they are not sufficiently known.² In Korea, the main reason is lack of interest in Korean studies by Westerners. In the United States, their relative obscurity is likely related to their short lives; Noble and McCune died long before Korean studies was formalized, and it appears that Mrs. McCune was not very active in the arena of formalized Korean studies although she lived a long life of 104 years.

The author believes that there was a transitional period in which the stage of Korean studies by Americans shifted from the Korean Peninsula to the United States. This paper argues that Noble, McCune, and Mrs. McCune played important roles during that period. The reason McCune's younger brother, Shannon B. McCune (1913–1993),³ was excluded is because only the three had something in common: they were all interested in Korean history and received their final degrees in history from the University of California, Berkeley. Therefore, the paper examines their birth and growth, their studies in the United States, and their careers as Koreanologists by using the method of prosopography, and through this, seeks to explore the characteristics and meaning of Korean studies in the United States before formalization or in the transitional period.

Birth, Growth, and Education

All three were born as missionary children in Pyeongyang in the early 1900s. Noble was born on January 19, 1903, the fifth of seven children of Rev. W.

2 The most famous of the three, both in Korea and the United States, is McCune. He created the so-called McCune-Reischauer romanization system for the Korean language and was known for a long time as America's first Koreanologist as Noble was forgotten. In Korea, relatively recent studies on them include An Jong-chol (2004), Kim Seo-Yeon (2016), Lee Yeong-Mi (2022), and Jang Mi-Sung (2022), etc.

3 He graduated from the College of Wooster, Ohio, in 1935 and Syracuse University, New York, in 1937, and in 1939, received a doctorate in geography from Clark University, Massachusetts, with a PhD dissertation titled "Climatic Regions of Tyosen (Korea)." His brilliant career includes professor at Colgate University, 1947–1955, provost at the University of Massachusetts, 1955–1961, and professor at the University of Florida, 1969–1979. He was a well-known Korea expert and published several books on Korea, including *Korea's Heritage* (1953).

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1 NP is an abbreviation for Northern Presbyterian Church, and SM for Southern Methodist Church. Most American missionaries who worked in Korea were sent by the NP, NM (Northern Methodist Church), SP (Southern Presbyterian Church), and SM.

Arthur (1866–1945) and Mattie W. Noble (1872–1956), NM missionaries from Pennsylvania. McCune was born on June 16, 1908. He was the second of four children of George S. (1873–1941) and Helen M. McCune (1872–1952), NP educational missionaries who graduated from Park College, Missouri. Evelyn M. Becker, later Mrs. McCune, was born on August 17, 1907, the first of three children of Arthur L. (1879–1978) and Louis S. Becker (1880–1961), NM educational missionaries who graduated from Albion College, Michigan.

Noble spent most of his childhood in Pyeongyang, except for about a year when he visited the United States with his family from 1904 to 1905. He visited the United States for the second time in early 1912, when he was in the fourth grade at Pyeng Yang Foreign School, on his parents' leave. From early 1914, he lived in Seoul, his parents' new workplace, and attended the Seoul Foreign School.

Most American Protestant missionaries were well educated. Naturally, they were also interested in their children's education, which led to the foundation of the Pyeng Yang Foreign School in 1900 and the Seoul Foreign School in 1912. Therefore, missionary children attended Pyeng Yang Foreign School or Seoul Foreign School or were educated at home by their mothers, and when they reached their mid-teens, they were sent to the United States to enter college preparatory schools. Noble went to the United States in the summer of 1919 at the age of 16 after graduating from Seoul Foreign School. He lived and attended school with his older brother, Alden E. Noble (1899–1960), who went to the United States before him. They went to the same two universities one year apart. He received a bachelor's degree from Ohio Wesleyan University in 1924 and a master's degree in history from Ohio State University in 1925. Alden received his bachelor's degree in 1923 and his master's degree in zoology in 1924.⁴

Noble submitted "The Recognition Given Native Custom in the System of Judicature Established in India, 1750–1785" as his master's thesis. His interest in Indian history appears to have been due to his friendship with the Garden sisters, whom he met at Ohio Wesleyan University. As the daughters of a Canadian minister, they were born in Telangana, India, and, just like the Noble brothers, came to the United States with his mother in 1918 to pursue

higher education. The Noble brothers made friends with them, who had similar backgrounds, and over the years they became closer. Noble married Frances E. Garden (1903–?) in 1929, and his older brother married Pearl F. Garden (1899–1942) in 1924 (Lee 2022, 646).

McCune lived in Pyeongyang for only one year. He spent his childhood in Seoncheon, as his parents were sent there in 1909, and was educated by his mother at home as there were no schools in Seoncheon. Therefore, he had no opportunity to make friends with Noble and Becker, who had spent their childhood in Pyeongyang. Unlike McCune, Noble and Becker both lived in Pyeongyang as children of NM missionaries, and from 1916 they lived in Seoul and attended school together. Becker, four years younger than Noble, was closer to his younger twin brothers than him, but the two were family friends.

McCune had heart problems at a very young age. In early 1921, his parents resigned from their positions and returned to the United States for his treatment, and his father was appointed president of Huron College, South Dakota. He attended three universities in different parts of the United States. He entered Huron College after graduating from Huron Academy in 1926, and a year later he moved to Rutgers University, New Jersey, and after a semester he moved again to Occidental College, Los Angeles. He spent five semesters there and received his bachelor's degree with a major in history in 1930 (Kim 2016, 16). It is not known why he changed schools three times, but presumably, his transfer from Huron College to Rutgers University was related to his father's resignation from the former.⁵

Becker spent her childhood in Pyeongyang, lived in Seoul from 1914, and graduated from the Seoul Foreign School in 1926. After graduation, she returned to the United States with her family as her parents resigned from their missionary positions because their salary could not afford their children's college tuition. She attended his parents' alma mater, Albion College, where her father took a job as a physics professor for one year, and when her father got a better job at the Georgia Institute of Technology, she transferred to Agnes Scott (Women's) College, Georgia. A year later, in 1928, when his parents decided to return to Korea by accepting the job offer from Yonhee College, and also when

4 For more information about Noble's childhood and family, see Cho 2020, a published PhD dissertation about his mother's missionary life.

5 McCune's father resigned from Huron College in September 1927 and returned to Korea in May of the following year. He was the principal of Soongsil Middle school and Soongsil College until January 1936 (Kwak 2017, 27).

it was time for his younger brother, Maxwell E. Becker (1909–2002) to enter college, she once again transferred to the University of California to attend the same college with him. The reason she chose it among many schools was to join Noble's younger twin brothers, as stated in the quote below.

Evelyn and Max decided they wanted to go to the University of California in Berkeley to join their friends from Seoul, the Noble twins, Glenn and Elmer...In July, Dad Becker and his three arrived safely in Berkeley... they rented an apartment at 2227 Parker Street, just a block from Dr. and Mrs. Noble...her brother Max insisted that she move in with his group at the Alden Noble's house...and the Noble twins and her brother are in the same house. (Thompson and Blackwood 2006, 35–43)

In 1927, Noble's older brother Alden entered the doctoral program in zoology at the University of California. He had worked as a biology instructor at Yonhee College from the end of 1925 and left Korea after realizing there was no possibility of establishing the department of biology (Noble 2010, 351). Soon after, Noble's parents, with Noble and his younger twin brothers, visited Berkeley, where Alden's family lived, and they decided to enroll the twins at the University of California. It was very good news for Becker and her brother. Becker, her brother, and the twins attended school together and joined the Epworth League, a Methodist youth organization, together.

In June 1930, Becker graduated from the University of California with a major in English literature and a minor in art. However, by the time she graduated, her main interest was history, especially Oriental history. As a senior, she was a "full-fledged Reader," similar to a teaching assistant, for a senior Oriental History class. She worked paid hours, correcting exam papers, taking a roll call, advising students about outside reading, and she began to pursue her dream of studying history further in the future: "I cannot see why I did not take history before as it means so much" (Thompson and Blackwood 2006, 50–51).

Noble, McCune, and Becker were all born and raised in Korea. Including occasional visits to the United States with their parents, McCune lived in Pyeongyang and Seoncheon for a total of 12 and a half years, Noble lived in Pyeongyang and Seoul for a total of 16 and a half years, and Becker lived in Pyeongyang and Seoul for a total of 19 years. Thanks to their parents who were very interested in their children's education, they received higher education in

the United States. Interestingly, they all liked history. Noble earned his MA and McCune earned his BA in history. Backer was not a history major, but she graduated with a love for history over English literature.

They were born and spent a good half of their lives in Korea. Therefore, they had no physical or psychological distance from Korea, and as Americans born in Korea, they had a strong attachment to Korea and an identity different from that of ordinary Americans.⁶ It seems that it influenced them to study Korean history rather than the history of the United States or other countries and especially to study it from a different view from that of ordinary Westerners.

Studying Korean History at the University of California

The three came back to Korea, the land they called home, after completing some of their studies. Noble returned to Seoul. He attended his father's 60th birthday party in September 1926 and worked as an English instructor at Ewha Womans College between 1927 and 1928. McCune returned to Pyeongyang, where he was born, in the fall of 1930. He got a job as an English instructor at Soongsil Middle School and Soongsil College, where his father was the principal. He purchased and operated a grocery import and export company as a side job. Becker returned to Seoul in the fall of 1930. As a full-time teacher at Seoul Foreign School, she began teaching algebra, history, and geography. Although they all worked at school, they did not come back to Korea to work as educational missionaries. They hoped to spend time with their families and earn some money in Korea and then wanted to attend graduate school as soon as circumstances allowed.

⁶ Noble mentioned the following in his PhD dissertation about his love for Korea and his complex identity as follows:

Korea is my native land...I am, however, an American by parentage and inclination...I say these things because my prejudices do lie in just those two directions, toward Korea and toward the United States...The American living in Korea, especially the American who is born and who grows up there as I did during those tragic days when the Koreans were losing their identity as a sovereign people, almost necessarily develops a great affection for them. The result is a prejudice which only careful study of history can eradicate. It was only after years of historical study that I could view the record of modern Korea as a whole and not as a series of provocative incidents such as I personally had witnessed. (Noble 1931, i–ii)

Noble had another reason for returning to Korea. Around 1925, when he was attending Ohio State University, he read Tyler Dennett's (1883–1949) famous book, *Americans in Eastern Asia* (1922), and through this book, he was determined to carefully study the relations between Korea and the United States (Noble 1931, iii). Therefore, he used his time in Korea to conduct field work for future studies. He participated in the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, where Henry D. Appenzeller (1889–1953), his brother-in-law, was the president, and acquired the private papers of George C. Foulk (1856–1893), who served as chargé d'affaires in Seoul from 1885 to 1887. He studied the archives of the American Legation, without any restriction with the special permission of the US Consul General in Seoul, and also published his first paper titled "The Korean Mission to the United States in 1883" in the 1929 issue of *Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*.

In 1929, Noble began his doctoral studies at the Department of History, University of California under a teaching fellowship. The University of California was the most natural choice for him in that all three of his brothers were attending it, although it had a special interest in East Asia, establishing the first endowed chair, the Agassiz Professorship of Oriental Language and Literature, in the United States in 1872 (Chang and Park 2022, 266). He had Dwight C. Baker (1892–1971), who studied the relations between Germany and East Asia around the 20th century, as his advisor. He received advice from Baker as well as Yoshi S. Kuno (1865–1941), who taught Japanese in the Department of Oriental Studies, and Payson J. Treat (1879–1972), Japanologist and history professor at Stanford University, when he wrote his dissertation on the relations between Korea and the United States in the late 19th century.⁷ He received his doctorate in August 1931 at the age of 28. Since he had already completed fieldwork in Korea, and since he examined only English materials due to the nature of his topic, he was able to complete the nearly 600-page

dissertation in just two years.

Noble's topic was the history of Korea's relations with the United States during the years that China and Japan competed over Korea. In particular, he was interested in American policy toward Korea and ultimately sought to solve the question, "Why did the United States allow Japan to dominate Korea?" His answer was that Korea's independence was not essential to American interests. He challenged the blind worship of American policy by his fellow citizens, criticizing that the United States for prioritizing markets and trade and considering Christian missions, the spread of Western civilization, and the independence of weak countries as secondary. The reason he was able to make this argument was, as he mentioned, because he was born and raised in Korea.

Becker was a senior when Noble began his doctoral studies. As previously mentioned, she finally got interested in Oriental history during her senior. It seems that she was probably influenced by Noble. In the summer of 1932, about two years after returning to Korea, she left for the United States to pursue her master's degree in history at the University of California. However, her studies were interrupted before completing one semester when she traveled to Hawai'i to see McCune in March of the following year.

Becker and McCune became friends while they were in Korea from 1930 to 1932 and began exchanging affectionate letters after she left Korea. Meanwhile, McCune suffered from heart disease after he returned to Korea. In order to recover his health, he stayed in Hawai'i, where his sister lived, from the end of 1932, but he did not get better. Becker went to Hawai'i to see him after hearing that he might die and even dramatically married the man who had been diagnosed with only three months to live.

Becker, now Mrs. McCune, prioritized her husband's studies and raised their two daughters, as did many women of the time. However, she began working a little whenever she got the chance, after her husband got a job at Occidental College. She was a lecturer on Asian art at Occidental College in 1940, and from 1941 to 1942 she taught art to middle and high school students at a secondary school named Polytechnic. In 1945, while living in Washington, DC because of her husband's government work, she served as research analyst of the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas and as technical assistant to the Army Map Service. As her husband moved from Occidental College to the University of California in 1946, she worked as an editor of Official Publications, the

⁷ The contents of Noble's dissertation (1931) are as follows: Preface (pp. i–vii), Ch. 1. Introduction (pp. 1–14), Ch. 2. Korea's Early Foreign Relations (pp. 15–37), Ch. 3. The American Naval Expedition to Korea (pp. 38–53), Ch. 4. The First Treaties (pp. 54–94), Ch. 5. The Establishment of the American Legation (pp. 95–172), Ch. 6. Ensign Foulk Chargé d'Affaires (pp. 173–216), Ch. 7. Increasing Chinese Dominance (pp. 217–266), Ch. 8. The Forced Recall of Lieutenant Foulk (pp. 267–313), Ch. 9. Missionary, Commercial and Consular Affairs (pp. 314–389), Ch. 10. The Establishment of the Korean Legation (pp. 390–444), Ch. 11. Japanese Activity in Korea (pp. 445–508), Ch. 12. The Outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War (pp. 509–548), and Ch. 13. Conclusions (pp. 549–568).

University of California, from the following year (Thompson and Blackwood 2006, 120).

McCune's health recovered considerably after marriage. According to a letter written by his mother-in-law, he had already secured a fellowship at Stanford University when he was in Hawai'i or before, but he entered the master's program at Occidental College, his alma mater, in 1934. It appears that he chose Los Angeles, where the weather was milder, for his health,⁸ although the exact reason is unknown. He made Japanese militarism his topic as a person who detested it, and the following year he earned his master's degree with his thesis, "Manchuria as an Agent in Japan's Rise to Dominance in Asia (1931–1935)" (Kim 2016, 17–21).

In September 1935, McCune began doctoral studies in history at the University of California, nearly six hours north of Los Angeles. The reason he moved to it was because Noble received a doctorate in Korean history from it four years ago. It seems pretty clear that during this time McCune knew Noble well, if not personally. Moreover, since his wife knew Noble and his family well, he would also have heard many stories about Noble through her.

McCune's advisor, Robert J. Kerner (1887–1956), was an expert in Eastern European history who was interested in East Asia. He suggested that McCune study the *Annals of the Joseon Dynasty* (*Joseon wangjo sillok*): "Professor Kerner called my attention to this large body of source material when I first came to the University of California in 1935. He encouraged me in my studies to the end that I eventually had the opportunity of working in the collection myself" (McCune 1941, ii). In 1937, McCune came to Korea with his wife and daughter under the Mills Travelling Fellowship from the University of California and decided to examine the Korea-China and the Korea-Japan relations until 1864. He originally wanted to major in Korea's opening of ports and foreign relations between 1870 and 1904, but he learned that *Joseon wangjo sillok* after 1864 were compiled by the Japanese, making them unreliable. He also realized that with Japan ruling over Korea, it was practically impossible to freely work using the source materials he chose (McCune 1941, ii–iii).

In addition to defining his topic, McCune achieved two important

accomplishments. One is that he created a Romanization system for Korean called the McCune-Reischauer Romanization. The name sounds like McCune and Edwin O. Reischauer (1910–1990) made it together, but in fact, McCune was in charge of creating it in Korea. He completed it with the help of Korean scholars at Yonhee College, including Choi Hyun-Bae, Jeong In-Seop, and Kim Seon-Gi, and Reischauer, who was a graduate student in Japanese history at Harvard University, and promoted it to young scholars studying in China and Japan. The result was a great success.

The other thing McCune did was to copy diplomatic documents from 1883 to 1905 which were kept at the US Consulate General, which Noble had reviewed ten years earlier. With the help of US Vice Consul, U. Alexis Johnson (1908–1997), an alumnus of Occidental College, and his father-in-law, Becker, a professor at Yonhee College, he secretly took pictures of the materials at the Consulate General and printed them in Becker's laboratory. *Korean–American Relations: Documents pertaining to the Far Eastern Diplomacy of the United States* (1951), published after his death, was the fruit of this work (Kim 2016, 22–23).

McCune published his papers in the 1939 issue of *Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, just like Noble did almost a decade ago. One was "The Romanization of the Korean Language Based upon Its Phonetic Structure," which introduced the McCune-Reischauer Romanization, and the other was "The Yi Dynasty Annals of Korea," which was an overview of *Joseon wangjo sillok*. *Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* was the fruit of Korean studies initiated by Americans and other Westerners in Korea and was the most suitable journal to publish papers specializing in Korea.

McCune returned to the United States in the end of 1938 and the following year was appointed lecturer at Occidental College. He taught and studied in Los Angeles, completing his doctoral dissertation titled "Korean Relations with China and Japan, 1800–1864" in April 1941, almost ten years after Noble.⁹ The committee members were Kerner, his adviser, Woodbridge Bingham (1901–1986), and N. Wing Mah (1893–1975), of whom Bingham

⁸ Considering that McCune had recuperated in Hawai'i because of the mild weather and that his health never fully recovered, it is possible to speculate that he chose Occidental College for his health. Occidental College is located more than 570 kilometers south of Stanford University.

⁹ The contents of McCune's dissertation (1941) are as follows: Preface (pp. i–iv), Ch. 1. Introduction (pp. 1–17), Ch. 2. The Exchange of Envoys with China (pp. 18–68), Ch. 3. Isolation and China (pp. 69–95), Ch. 4. Trade with China (pp. 96–123), Ch. 5. Korean Foreign Relations and China (pp. 124–135), Ch. 6. The Exchange of Envoys with Japan (pp. 136–171), Ch. 7. Diplomatic Relations (pp. 172–202), Ch. 8. The Japanese Depot at Fusan and Trade (pp. 203–229), and Ch. 9. Conclusions (pp. 230–261).

and Mah each received a doctorate in Chinese history and Chinese political science from the University of California. Kuno, the Japanese professor who was on Noble's committee ten years ago, retired in 1935.

While Noble had explored the nature of Korean-American relations between 1882 and 1895, McCune explored the nature of Korean-Chinese and Korean-Japanese relations between 1800 and 1864. Regarding Korea's foreign relations, most Westerners at the time understood that Korea was a weak country in East Asia, being ruled by China and paying tribute to Japan (An 2004, 173–74).¹⁰ As a counterargument, McCune argued that Korea's policy toward China, *sadae*, was a method of diplomacy premised on its independence and autonomy, and that tribute was implemented as a kind of trade, not as a one-sided obligation. He also argued that Korea adopted a *gyorin* policy toward Japan based on equal relations, but in reality, it regarded Japan as an inferior country. He also revealed that Korea did not pay tribute to Japan and only dispatched a delegation at its request.

After McCune's death in November 1948, Mrs. McCune wanted to resume her studies which she stopped 15 years ago. In 1949, she began a master's program at the Department of History, University of California under the Rockefeller fellowship, and she earned her MA the following year with "History of Lo-lang with Special Attention to the Ways in Which Chinese Institutions Were Adopted by Surrounding Korean Tribes."¹¹ She had Bingham, who read his husbands' dissertation nine years ago, as her advisor, and received advice from Delmer M. Brown (1909–2011), professor of Japanese history, and Otto J. Maenchen-Helfen (1894–1969), professor of Chinese history. Both Brown and Maenchen-Helfen specialized in ancient history.

Unlike Noble and McCune, who studied Korea's foreign relations in the 19th century, Mrs. McCune delved into ancient history to understand the extent of Chinese influence on Korea. She acknowledged that Korea had been

influenced by China since it established Nakrang on the Korean Peninsula and explained that Koreans especially adopted Chinese titles and surnames, Chinese writing, architecture, clothing and furniture, pottery, and ruling system (McCune 1950, 134–37). Nevertheless, she emphasized that non-Chinese characteristics were abundant in Korean culture and art and thus opposed the view that China's influence on Korea was absolute and full-scale.

This study of Lo-lang and the surrounding areas has led me to believe, however, that although Han civilization as represented in Lo-land was undeniably strong, it was neither the only influence from China, nor the only civilizing influence from abroad, nor even, possibly, the dominating influence....but an appraisal of both historical and archeological evidence leads one to the conclusion that while Chinese influence was continuous during the whole period of Lo-lang it was cultural rather than political, and more a matter of commerce than either. (McCune 1950, 130–33)

Noble's receipt of his doctorate from the Department of History at the University of California led to Mrs. McCune's admission to the master's program in 1932 and McCune's admission to the doctoral program in 1936. Noble and McCune earned their PhDs in 1931 and 1941, respectively, specializing in 19th-century Korean foreign relations, while Mrs. McCune earned her MA in 1950 studying ancient Korean culture and art. The three missionary children born and raised in Korea thus became the first Korean history specialists in the United States. The Department of History at the University of California had little to do with Korean studies when Noble enrolled in 1929, but by the time Mrs. McCune graduated, it had become one of the centers of Korean studies.

Noble, McCune, and Mrs. McCune's research on Korean history reflects their affection for Korea. Korea was the land where they were born and their parents devoted their lives. Noble criticized the United States for not stopping Japan's occupation of Korea, and McCune proved that Korea was not a weak and submissive country through its excellent source material. Mrs. McCune argued that Koreans had selectively adopted Chinese culture and that Korean culture had many non-Chinese characteristics. Lastly, they inherited the research produced in Korea by American missionaries since the late 19th century. They published their papers in *Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* and consulted many people's works related to Korea, including

10 McCune laid the blame for this misunderstanding upon William E. Griffis (1843–1928), the author of *Corea, the Hermit Nation* (1882).

11 The contents of Mrs. McCune's dissertation (1950) are as follows: Ch. 1. Background (pp. 2–8), Ch. 2. Origins of the Koreans (pp. 9–23), Ch. 3. Invasion of Choson by the Chinese (pp. 24–47), Ch. 4. Lo-lang and Neighboring States; History from Literary Sources (pp. 48–77), Ch. 5. The Korean Tribes and the Three Kingdoms 100 B. C.–300 A. D. (pp. 78–100), Ch. 6. Lo-lang: Its History from Archeological Sources (pp. 101–128), and Ch. 7. Concluding Remarks (pp. 129–139). Lo-lang is the Chinese pronunciation of Nakrang 樂浪.

missionary-scholars such as Homer B. Hulbert (1863–1949), G. Heber Jones (1867–1919), and James S. Gale (1863–1937). Korean studies by Americans and other Westerners, which began in Korea in the late 19th century, was thus introduced to American scholars in the United States.

Careers as Koreanologists

Noble obtained a professorship as soon as he received his doctorate. He was appointed as an assistant professor of history at the University of Oregon in September 1931 at the age of 28 and was promoted to associate professor in 1934. He taught a three-semester course called “History of China and Japan,” and actually taught the history of China, Japan, and Korea as a Korea expert.

Noble’s top priority was Korea, but it was impossible to study only Korea when Korean studies was not established. Therefore, he was awarded a Rockefeller Fellowship in Chinese and Japanese studies and taught at Third College in Kyoto, Japan, from 1939 to 1940 (Tucker 2010, 637). It appears that he learned Japanese during that period. In addition, he worked closely with other scholars to found an academic body for East Asian studies in the United States. When the Far Eastern Association (today’s Association for Asian Studies) was founded and *The Far Eastern Quarterly* (today’s *The Journal of Asian Studies*) was published in 1941, he was one of 16 members of the advisory editorial board (Lee 2022, 654–57). He worked for 11 years as a scholar who specialized in Korean history and studied East Asia.

Noble’s career was interrupted by World War II. He was mobilized into the Marine Corps in June 1942, with Paul S. Dull (1911–1981), his fellow professor at the University of Oregon, because they could speak Japanese. They started a Japanese language program for the 2nd Marine Division at Camp Elliot, San Diego, and established the three-month Enlisted Marine Japanese Language School that continued even after the 2nd Marine Division left for the South Pacific (McNaughton 2007, 160). Afterwards, he served in New Zealand, New Caledonia, and the Solomon Islands as a combat intelligence officer, company commander, and a Japanese language officer until 1944.

McCune, on the other hand, began his career as a Korea expert during World War II, not in academia but in the government. He provided information on Koreans in the United States at the request of the Far East

Committee, Office of the Coordinator of Information (COI) at the end of 1941, and in February of the following year, he took a leave of absence from Occidental College and was hired as a social science analyst. He worked at the COI (renamed the Office of Strategic Services) for about a year and a half and then worked at the Office of Economic Warfare and the Foreign Economic Administration for a few months each (Kim 2016, 61–62). In May 1944, he was appointed officer of the Korea Desk in the State Department. He proposed a plan to use Koreans in the war against Japan and argued that trusteeship should be implemented due to the Koreans’ lack of experience, not their lack of ability. He worked as Korea expert for the US government for a little over three and a half years until he resigned from the State Department due to health issues in October 1945.

McCune left Occidental College to become an instructor in the Department of History at the University of California, in July 1946. The University of California allowed Choi Bong-Yoon (1914–2005), as known as Bong Youn Choy, to teach its first Korean language class in 1943 (Chang and Park 2022, 275), and as World War II ended, recruited McCune, who had majored in Korean history. McCune opened two lectures, “Far Eastern Diplomatic History” and “Korean History” and taught them for three semesters. He also opened an intensive Korean language course that he directed and was taught by a Korean instructor. Following Noble, he became a member of the advisory editorial board of *The Far Eastern Quarterly* in 1947, and in February of the following year, he was appointed assistant professor in the Department of History. He taught the “Korea Seminar” class. However, while he was working so passionately, his health deteriorated rapidly, and he eventually passed away from complications of heart disease on November 5, 1948, at the age of 40.

Because McCune worked in the Department of History at the University of California for a very short time, he was unable to train many students or supervise their PhD dissertations. However, it is clear that he influenced several people who graduated from the university. Arthur L. Grey, Jr. (1922–2012), a graduate economics student, worked as his assistant when he wrote *Korea Today* and completed and published it with Mrs. McCune after he died (McCune 1950, 10–14). John A. Harrison (born 1915), who earned his PhD in modern Japanese history in 1949, published *Korean American Relations: Documents Pertaining to the Far Eastern Diplomacy of the United States* in 1951, after McCune’s death, which was a compilation of American diplomatic documents

collected by McCune when he was in Korea (Kim 2016, 22–23).

In 1952, Carl F. Bartz, Jr. (1921–1997) received his doctorate, following Noble and McCune, with “The Korean Seclusion Policy, 1860–1876.” He received a master’s degree from Harvard University and entered the doctoral program in history in 1948, most probably to learn from McCune.¹² Finally, in 1953, Michael C. Rogers (1923–2005) earned his doctorate and was appointed professor of Oriental Languages. Although he was not a Koreanologist, he took a Choi’s Korean language class as an undergraduate and McCune’s Korean history class as a doctoral student, and by the late 1980s, he was an adviser of nine people who wrote a doctoral dissertation in Korean studies. Among them are Gari K. Ledyard (1932–2021), who trained many Koreanologists at Columbia University, and Son Bo-Gi (1922–2010), known as Pow Key Sohn, history professor at Yonsei University (Chang and Park 2022, 280–84).

While McCune worked hard to establish Korean studies at the University of California, Noble began to show greater interest in the reorganized world order and the role of the United States in the East Asia. He became a full professor at the University of Oregon in 1945 but left for East Asia the following year. After working as a foreign correspondent for the *Saturday Evening Post*, he became chief of the publications branch of the Civilian Intelligence Section of the Far East Command in Tokyo, Japan, from 1947 to 1948, and chief of the Political Liaison Office Headquarters in Seoul, Korea, in 1948. He even served as first secretary at the US Embassy to the Republic of Korea, from August 1949 to January 1951.¹³

12 In February 1950, while staying in Japan and preparing for field research in Korea, Bartz took a job at the U S State Department, although it was not what he had planned. He came to Korea in April 1950 as an English teacher at the US Embassy in Korea, and he worked as a public affairs officer there from November 1950. After submitting his PhD dissertation in September 1952, he continued his career as a diplomatic official instead of teaching or studying. He served as publication officer at the US Embassy in Tokyo, from 1952 to 1957, director of public affairs at the US Civil Administration of Ryukyu Islands in Naha, from 1957 to 1960, and cultural affairs officer at the US Embassy in Yangon, Myanmar, from 1960 to 1963. He began his second tour of Korea in June 1967 as the cultural affairs officer at the US Embassy in Korea, and in 1969, he was the president of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.

13 The reason Noble worked in Korea was mentioned in his book, *Embassy at War*, as follows: “The United States and the Soviet Union had divided the country at the 38th parallel,...Even the Japanese had never done anything like this to Korea...Now, we believed, the United States was morally obligated to give this government sufficient moral and other support during its first few years so that it could develop enough muscle to protect itself. American Embassy Seoul was the formal expression of that obligation and that support” (Noble 1975, 8).

Noble did not come back to academia even after returning to the United States in June 1951. He joined the Committee for a Free Asia (renamed The Asia Foundation in 1954), founded by the US government and supported by the Central Intelligence Agency. He wrote *Embassy at War*, a book on the events of the early days of the Korean War. This book was completed in July 1952 but was rejected by publishers because of poor sales prospects. It was not published until 1975 by the University of Washington Press. In September 1953, he visited post-war Korea to prepare his next book on Korea and died of a heart attack on a flight to Honolulu on December 22 of that year. He was returning to the United States to spend the Christmas holidays with his family.

Mrs. McCune began working as a Korea expert, instead of pursuing a doctoral degree. After earning her master’s degree, she moved to Washington, DC, where she became chief of the Korean Unit, Orientalia, Library of Congress, and for several years thereafter she engaged in several jobs in Korea. In 1952, she traced the location of artifacts and books lost during World War II and the Korean War, and in the following year she was appointed liaison officer for the United Nation’s Korean Reconstruction Agency. From 1954 to 1955, she was a lecturer in the University of California’s Overseas Program, where she taught Asian art and East Asian history in Korea and Japan.

Mrs. McCune returned to California after living in Korea for several years. In 1956, she got a teaching job at a public community college called Diablo Valley College and resumed her studies, although she did not go so far as to receive a doctorate. She pursued an additional graduate work at the University of California, from 1956 to 1957, on her second Rockefeller fellowship and took two summer sessions at the University of Chicago in 1958 and 1959, on a Ford fellowship and a Carnegie fellowship. It is not strange that she never received her doctorate, considering that she was in her 50s in the late 1950s. She did not have a PhD, but she was one of the few Koreanologists at the time, and practically speaking, receiving a doctoral degree would not have changed much her life. It was too late for her to obtain a professorship in history at a better university.

As a Koreanologist, Mrs. McCune was the most active from the late 1950s to the early 1960s. She wrote several reviews for *The Far Eastern Quarterly* during the period between 1957 and 1961, and in 1961 she published articles such as “Korea” in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “Korean Cities” in the *Grolier’s Encyclopedia*, and “Korea” in *The American Historical Association’s Guide to*

Historical Literature. She published *The Arts of Korea*, the completion of her studies, in 1962, and in 1962 and 1963 she conducted research on North Korea at the request of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State. From the early 1960s until her retirement in 1978, she had little activity other than teaching at Diablo Valley College and writing her father's biography, *Michigan and Korea, 1899–1914* (1977). It was at that time the formalization of Korean studies began in the United States, and it was done by others rather than her.

In the early 1980s, Mrs. McCune visited Korea in her 70s. In 1982, she received an honorary doctorate from Yonsei University, where her father worked, and the following year she published *The Inner Art: Korean Screens* in Korea. It appears that she had lived the life of an ordinary retiree from the 1990s, and she died on July 3, 2012, about a month before her 105th birthday.

Certainly, Noble, McCune, and Mrs. McCune were active as Koreanologists when the academic field of Korean studies did not exist. Noble was a history professor at the University of Oregon for 11 years from September 1931, and he participated as the only Korea specialist in the Far Eastern academia in the United States, which centered on Chinese and Japanese studies at that time. When he began working as a government official in Japan and Korea after World War II, McCune, who had moved to University of California in July 1946, replaced him. He had a significant impact on several people by teaching Korean history, albeit only for two years, and several years earlier, laid the foundation for the development of Korean studies by creating a Romanization system for Korean. Mrs. McCune never received a doctorate nor was appointed a history professor because she resumed her studies in her 40s. Nevertheless, she worked as a Koreanologist in the United States and Korea from the 1950 to the early 1960s, and unlike Noble and McCune, she made ancient history and art history her own expertise.

Conclusion

This paper reviews the birth, growth, research, and activities of three people who worked as Koreanologists at different times from the early 1930s to the early 1960s and explores the characteristics and significances of Korean studies in the United States before formalization or during the transitional period. First of all,

they were all missionary children who were born and spent their childhood in Korea. Their attachment about Korea and Koreans were different from those of ordinary Americans and were also different from those of their parents. It was natural for them to choose Korea as their expertise.

Secondly, the University of California became the hub of Korean studies in the United States by the three. Although Noble chose the University of California not because its objective conditions were great but because all of his brothers attended it, his receipt of a PhD in 1931 led to Becker's (Mrs. McCune's) admission to the master's program in 1932 and McCune's one to the doctoral program in 1935. Through this time, the University of California became the first university in the United States to produce Korean history specialists and to open Korean language and history courses.

Thirdly, the three Koreanologists in transition respected and accepted the Korean studies that Americans had done in Korea. They published their papers in *Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, and as their bibliography shows, they consulted many works on Korea written by Americans in Korea.

Finally, they laid the foundation for Korean studies in the United States before its formalization, teaching Korean history, created the Romanization of Korean language, and proposed new perspectives on Korean history. Unfortunately, because they died young (Noble and McCune) or started studying late (Mrs. McCune), they could not directly participate in the formalization of Korean studies in the United States.

They brought Korean studies, which had been conducted in Korea by scholarly missionaries, i.e., non-specialists, to the American academia. Because they were Americans, they could do things that Koreans had difficulty doing in the United States at the time: they made cases for an American public university to grant master's and doctoral degrees in Korean history; they created the Romanization system as the basis for Korean studies in the United States; also, they made Korea known to the US government and institutions by working with them. In conclusion, they prepared for the emergence of Korean studies in the United States starting in the late 1960s.

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Abstract

This paper examines the lives and works of three early Koreanologists, Harold J. Noble (1903–1953), George M. McCune (1908–1948), and his wife, Evelyn B. McCune (née Becker) (1907–2012), to explore the characteristics and significances of Korean studies in the United States before formalization or during the transitional period. They were all missionary children born and raised in Korea. They began studying Korean history based on their strong affection for Korea, and all received their final degrees in Korean history from the Department of History at the University of California, Berkeley. While working as Koreanologists at different times from the early 1930s to the early 1960s, they inherited the Korean studies that Americans had done in Korea, studied Korean history from a different perspective from that of ordinary Westerners, and laid the foundation for Korean studies in the United States before it was formalized.

Keywords: Korean studies in the United States, Harold J. Noble, George M. McCune, Evelyn B. McCune, University of California

