

# Korean Immigrants' Socioeconomic Adjustment in California (1905–1920): *Participation in Rice Farming and Subsequent Advancement during the World War I Rice Boom*

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## Abstract

*This study examines the socioeconomic advancement of Korean immigrants in California from 1905 to 1920. Based on county archives, special collections, oral histories, U.S. government documents, contemporary studies, and newspapers, this study analyzes how the Korean immigrants in California were influenced by the World War I rice boom and made efforts to develop their status in California at the start of the twentieth century. Successful rice cultivation started in California around 1912 and this new agricultural development provided opportunities for Koreans to make the transition from migratory farm laborers to rice farmers. This study presents the unique adjustment pattern of exceptional Korean immigrants who made significant efforts to adjust to Californian society and improve their socioeconomic status; however, in this process, they continued to strongly express their Korean identity and contributed to Korean independence rather than develop an outward loyalty to the United States. Korean immigrants' successful adjustment to California resulted from their combined efforts to maintain their Korean identity, overcome racial discrimination that denied them citizenship rights, and promote the upward mobility of ethnic Koreans.*

**Keywords:** Korean immigrants, racial discrimination, California rice farming, tenancy, World War I rice boom, Alien Land Act of 1913, Korean identity, socioeconomic status, adjustment

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## **Introduction**

Since the early twentieth century, Korean immigrants to the United States have resided predominantly in California, where they have represented the socioeconomic center of the early Korean community in the continental United States. Korean immigrants who had first migrated to Hawaii before settling in California formed a new Korean community there. Until 1952, Korean immigrants in the United States were classified as “aliens ineligible for citizenship.”

Early Korean immigrants in California were victims of discrimination and experienced employment inequality, residential segregation, physical violence, and exclusion from mainstream American society. When they settled in California in 1905, they faced racial discrimination and experienced downward mobility. Deprived of urban employment opportunities, many of them became migratory farm laborers in California. In addition, they were treated as second-class citizens, and suffered further racial discrimination as a consequence of Korea's annexation by Japan in 1910. Many cases of social injustice and anti-Japanese laws that also affected Koreans existed until the end of World War II. Only the enactment of the McCarran-Walter Act in 1952 allowed Korean immigrants to acquire American citizenship.

Starting in 1910, there was a great change in the agricultural industry of California. In 1912, rice cultivation started and was soon developed into a viable industry. The World War I rice boom afforded Koreans as well as Asians in general socioeconomic mobility, and Koreans who recognized the potential for upward mobility persevered to acquire better socioeconomic opportunities. Farming, in particular, became the most important factor in the local Korean economy of California during the 1910s.

The period from 1905 to 1920 is historically significant because it was the only time when Koreans in the United States achieved financial success and socioeconomic mobility through agricultural activities. The adjustment pattern of Koreans and the characteristics of the Korean community during this period were uniquely distinguished from other Korean experiences. Nevertheless, the process by which these Korean immigrants adjusted

to, and the impact they made upon, American life has not been well documented.<sup>1</sup>

Most research on Koreans in the United States before 1945 has concentrated on Korean independence activities and Korean nationalist identity.<sup>2</sup> However, there has been limited research on early Korean immigrants' adjustments to life in the United States from the perspective of rice farming. Korean farming activities are only mentioned briefly in the historical context of Asian immigrants to the United States, with limited studies and academic investigations that lack primary sources and historical objectivity. The research on the economy of Korean immigrants has mainly dealt with the economic activities and self-owned small businesses of Korean immigrants after 1965.

In view of the need to expand the scope of important Korean experiences in the United States, this study analyzes the adjustment of Korean immigrants in California from 1905 to 1920 with a focus on rice farming. This study first examines the formation of the Korean community in California from 1905 from a socioeconomic perspective. Second, it investigates several factors that attracted Korean immigrants to engage in rice farming. Third, it analyzes the development of Korean immigrants to California during the 1910s by examining their efforts to achieve socioeconomic mobility and the economic methods that Koreans used to adjust to life in the United States. In particular, this study explores the socioeconomic development during the World War I rice boom by comparing annual cultivated acreage, profits, harvests, and price value in detail. Finally, this study presents a new historical model for the adjustment pattern of early Korean immigrants from the context of Korean immigration history.

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1. Koreans as well as Asian farmers transitioned from rice farming to other ventures after 1920 due to the end of the World War I rice boom and the strict application of the Alien Land Laws of 1920 and 1923. The majority of Korean farmers in California moved to urban areas and started self-owned small businesses.
  2. For more on this matter, refer to Moon (1976), Patterson (1988, 2000), and Son (1989).

## Formation of the Early Korean Community in California

In 1903, the Korean population in California was less than a hundred. From 1903 to 1905, 6,747 Koreans emigrated from Korea to Hawaii. Then, between 1905 and 1907, some Koreans who had worked on Hawaiian plantations moved on to California seeking a better life. According to the U.S. Census, some 1,015 Koreans resettled in the continental United States between 1905 and 1910, as indicated in Table 1. In March 1907, migration from Hawaii to the mainland was halted when President Theodore Roosevelt issued Executive Order 589, prohibiting Korean and Japanese laborers from Hawaii, Mexico, or Canada from remigrating to the continental United States.

**Table 1.** Korean Migration from Hawaii to the U.S. Mainland (1905–1910)

Year	Men	Women	Children	Total
1905	373	16	10	399
1906	428	17	13	458
1907	130	12	6	148
1908	1	0	0	1
1909	2	0	0	2
1910	7	0	0	7
Total	941	45	29	1,015

Source: U.S. Immigration Commission (1911, 710-711).

Starting in the 1870s, farmers in California began to gradually make the change from cereal cultivation to the cultivation of specialty crops such as fruits, nuts, and vegetables. This transition increased incomes and led agriculture to become the basis of the Californian economy. However, these crops required large amounts of labor to cultivate, harvest, pack, and ship the produce. Landowners had difficulty securing enough white workers at the low wages they wanted to pay; consequently, they started to employ non-white unskilled workers who did not have equal rights with

American citizens. The expanding agricultural industries of California began to recruit laborers by offering wages above the average daily wage of 70 cents found on Hawaiian sugar plantations.

Many Koreans in Hawaii, dissatisfied with life on the plantations, moved to California with expectations of higher wages and opportunities for a better life. Meung-son Paik recalled, "We worked in the sugar plantation making 90 cents a day. Opportunities in the Hawaiian Islands were very limited. We heard of unlimited opportunities on the mainland; so dad arranged a loan for steam ship fare and landed in San Francisco in 1906 right after the earthquake" (Sunoo 1982, 270).

However, Korean immigrants faced racial discrimination and experienced downward mobility after they began to settle in California in 1905. Koreans, like other Asian immigrants, were at the bottom of the racial hierarchy of American society and bore the brunt of the Naturalization Act of 1790. White supremacy was very intense in California, where most Asian immigrants to the United States resided. California's State Constitutional Convention of 1849 had decided non-white people were "aliens ineligible for citizenship"<sup>3</sup> because European Americans in California perceived themselves as superior to non-European people of color (Barth 1964, 37).

Korean immigrants were deprived of urban employment opportunities; subsequently, many of them became migratory farm laborers in California. At that time, Koreans were often mistakenly identified as Japanese or Chinese and were called such things as "Chink," "Chinaman," and "Jap." According to Sang Ok Han, "When I first came here [California] there was extreme prejudice against the Orientals. In Sacramento I remember Asians being stoned, and hit with the fist, and being looked down on. All Orientals were looked down on as 'Japs'. . . . We used not to be able to go to the restaurant or to any hotel, or barber shop."<sup>4</sup> Early Korean immigrants who were very few in numbers in California did not have a protective community

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3. See the California State Constitution of 1849, accessed June 10, 2014, <http://www.sos.ca.gov/archives/collections/1849/full-text.htm>. Also refer to Almaguer (1994, 7-11).

4. Interview with Sang Ok Han, Korean-American Oral History Project Collection, 1970-1979, Box 1, 8A, no. 39.

such as Chinatown. They could not rent decent housing in residential areas because of extreme racial prejudices. Only the most shabby and old housing units were available at outrageous fees (Sunoo 2002, 27).

Around the period when the Koreans resettled in California, the Asiatic Exclusion League was established with the aim of stopping the inflow of Japanese and other Asians. However, landowners still expected to hire them as the lowest-paid farm laborers (M. Lee 1990, xliv). For example, Sasun Hwang wanted to work at a factory or post office in the city but he had no opportunity to be employed in that area due to racial prejudice (Takaki 1987, 273). According to a Korean woman who arrived in California in 1905, Koreans were not even permitted to do housework. At that time, Californians called Koreans “dirty” and “smelly” and only outdoor jobs such as gardening or picking fruits were offered to them (Sunoo 2002, 144).

Korean immigrants who had expected better opportunities had to face severe racial prejudice and experienced downward mobility. Facing such social and economic discrimination, Koreans had to rely mainly on their own abilities and efforts to survive (Choy 1979, 108). The Korean community first consisted of laborers (Sunoo 1982, 5). Korean immigrants, including well-educated people, found seasonal farm work to be one of the few available occupations for survival. Almost all Korean immigrants labored on Californian farms and orchards, sleeping in shacks and moving from one place to another to work (M. Lee 1990, xliv-xlv). For example, Lee Wook Chang from Hawaii earned 25 cents per hour on an orange farm in Upland,<sup>5</sup> while Kyung Sin Sunoo received 15-20 cents per hour working in a vineyard.<sup>6</sup> For a number of years, every orange season, Riverside became the largest Korean settlement in California. There were also smaller Korean communities in the towns of Claremont, Redlands, and Upland. Ea-surk Cha from Hawaii recollected his experiences as a migratory farm

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5. Interview with Chang Lee Wook, Korean-American Oral History Project Collection, 1970-1979, Box 1, 4A, 4B, 5A, no. 90, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles, CA.

6. Interview with “Honey” Kyung Sin Sunoo, Korean-American Oral History Project Collection, 1970-1979, Box 1, 2A, no. 27, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles, CA.

laborer as follows:

It was paradise to me, I thought, as compared to the cane field work in Hawaii. Picking prunes, peaches, and pears was easier, and cleaner work, and the pay was more than double the Hawaiian pay, being one dollar and fifteen cents a day. The fruit season was soon over, however, in the middle of August. Then came the grape season and all roads led to Fresno, the capital of the San Joaquin Valley grape empire. At Malaga we picked raisins at two cents a tray for two weeks, and at Fresno we picked wine grapes at three cents a box. . . . Working from dawn to dusk, I made from three to four dollars a day and saved enough money . . . . As soon as the grape season was over, the Shinn family and I left for Riverside where the orange season would come next in about ten weeks, a little before the Christmas season (Charr [1961] 1996, 150-151).

In 1910, the Korean laborers in Hawaii earned between US\$18 and US\$25 per month, while Korean laborers in California earned between US\$35 and US\$45 monthly (Moon 1976, 307).

### **New Opportunity: The Rise of California Rice Farming**

Rice was first successfully cultivated as a commercial product in California during the 1910s. Americans had tried to grow rice in California since the 1880s. Agricultural experts first planted long-grain varieties because they thought that Chinese immigrants concentrated in California would desire this food staple. However, long-grain rice did not ripen properly due to the cold and foggy nights of the Central Valley. After they failed to grow long-grain rice, growers tried to cultivate the hardier, short-grain varieties introduced in the first decade of the twentieth century.

In 1911, short-grain rice crops were successfully field-tested in several agricultural experiments. William W. Mackie of the U.S. Bureau of Soils, Charles E. Chambliss of the Office of Cereal Investigations of the Bureau of Plant Industry, and a Japanese immigrant named Ikuka experimented in scientific agronomy until they successfully cultivated short-grain rice

(M. Lee 1990, 173). Around 1912, rice was cultivated in California and the rice industry became fully established; subsequently, rice became an important profitable crop in California. In 1916, William A. D'Egilber, who was a pioneer in rice farming, made a scientific study of rice cultivation in the Sacramento Valley. This location soon developed into a lucrative commercial farmland for rice (*Pacific Rice Courier*, March 1919).

Several factors worked to convince Korean farm laborers to start rice farming. First, white landowners were keen to utilize Asian labor to plant large-scale farms even though the industrialized farming system in the Sacramento Valley differed from the styles of cultivation found in Asia. As historian Valerie Matsumoto has observed, white landowners eagerly accepted Asian farmers as the California rice industry grew dramatically from 1916 to 1920 (Matsumoto 1993, 22-24). Second, tenancy was advantageous for landowners because they could maximize their profits by leasing their land to Asian tenants: owners received higher cash rentals and increased crop yields while the tenants were responsible for securing laborers. Furthermore, as white farm laborers and managers during this period were migrating to cities to find jobs in industrial areas, Asian farmers were able to replace them and find opportunities to shift from being farm laborers to tenant farmers (Yim 1984, 526).

The restrictions of the Alien Land Act of 1913 took effect on August 13, 1913 and prevented Asians from purchasing land or from leasing land for more than three years. Although specifically aimed at the Japanese, this act had a profound impact on Asians in general.<sup>7</sup> The three-year lease limitation of the Alien Land Act of 1913 forced Asian farmers to plant continuous annual crops like rice. Under these conditions, tenant farming became the most efficient method of farming rice as well the most efficient means for Asian immigrants to achieve economic profits (Azuma 1994, 20-22). Rice growers preferred to lease land for one or two years and then move to land where rice had not been grown previously to avoid problems with weeds and soil nutrient depletion.

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7. Refer to oral interviews with Yun-do Yoon and Ke-yul Park (Sunoo 2002, 69, 281).

## Participation in Rice Farming and the Pursuit of Upward Mobility

During the 1910s, nearly 80 percent of Koreans in California resided in rural centers and small towns (Yim 1984, 525). This is why in those days Koreans were not clustered into Korean-concentrated residential areas like a Koreatown (Sunoo 2002, 68). In 1910, a majority of the Korean immigrants in the United States were also unmarried men, with the ratio of men to women at about nine to one (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census 1932, 98). As a result, rice farming became a turning point in the lives of many Korean immigrants, who with their improved socioeconomic means were able to establish families with Korean “picture brides”<sup>8</sup> who had begun to immigrate to California from 1910.

Korean immigrants made efforts to raise agricultural capital to start rice farming since capital was an essential factor in the transformation from farm laborer to rice farmer. First, Koreans saved their earnings to begin rice farming. On average, during this period Korean agricultural workers earned US\$3 per day and piecework laborers US\$6 per day. In the cities, the average wage of a cook was from US\$70 to US\$150 per month; a kitchen helper, from US\$50 to US\$90; a houseboy, from US\$40 to US\$75 (W. Kim 1959, 224). The average monthly living expense for an individual in a rural area was about US\$25, while the living expense for a married couple was about US\$38 (Choy 1979, 124). Therefore, it was not difficult for some Koreans to save money (Lee and Houchins 1974, 562).

Koreans who had difficulty securing bank loans were able to raise agricultural capital through a rotating cooperative credit system called *gye* 契. In this system, a group of friends or members of an organization pooled their money towards one recipient. They rotated the recipient on a regular basis until everyone had a turn. For example, ten associates collected a fund of US\$200 and then maintained it on a monthly basis through the ten member associates. Each month, whoever needed the money bid a certain rate of interest, and the highest bidder took the US\$200 (Patterson 2000,

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8. The term “picture bride” refers to the practice of early twentieth-century immigrant workers in the United States, selecting brides from their native countries via a matchmaker who paired couples using only photographs and family recommendations.

76, 217). This evolving system depended on trust and the fulfillment of the participants' obligation to continue their contributions after they had been the beneficiary. Although individual proprietorship based on saving one's own capital was common, *gye* was an advantageous system in terms of helping Koreans to start rice farming.

Koreans with assets to use as security gradually accessed bank loans to diversify their agricultural ventures. Initially, Koreans cooperated with each other to raise funds for rice farming and then individually expanded their land holdings through individual loans. Korean farmers continued to increase their loans after 1918. On September 18, 1918, D. Y. Song received a US\$1,500 mortgage on 49 acres from the First National Bank of Colusa at an interest rate of eight percent. On July 14, 1919, Y. S. Park, J. Soo Lee, and C. H. Kim took out a US\$9,030 mortgage on 280 acres.<sup>9</sup>

Though the exact number of Korean farmers in California during the 1910s is unknown, we do have records of some Koreans registered as farmers in county documents.<sup>10</sup> There also exist some records on the upward transition of Korean immigrants. According to the article "Mr. Yang's Agricultural Management," which appeared in *New Korea*, Ju-eun Yang, who had been a migratory laborer since 1905, moved to the Sacramento Valley to participate in rice farming and by 1920 managed 200 acres as a tenant farmer (*New Korea*, August 26, 1920). It was obvious that tenancy provided great opportunities for larger economic earnings, and Koreans participated in rice farming by cash rentals or profit sharing according to their abilities to raise the required capital. They usually organized partnerships with fellow Koreans to collect the required capital to lease land because few Koreans possessed the individual capital adequate

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9. "Personal Property Mortgages," Book 3, 193, 376, Colusa County Recorder's Office, Colusa, CA.

10. See the cases of Leo K. Chang, C. H. Mang, C. L. Kim, D. K. Kim, W. H. Kim, and M. S. Soo in "Personal Property Mortgages," Book 23, 148, 214, 268, Book 38, 21, "Crop Mortgages," Book 34: 58, 139, 190, 202, Glenn County Recorder's Office, Willows, Glenn, CA. See also the cases of J. Soo Lee, J. K. Lim, C. H. Lim, Y. S. Park, D. Y. Song, Y. H. Yoon, and A. Lee in "Personal Property Mortgages," Book 3, 193, 244, 334, 376, 427, Book 7, 126, 210, Colusa County Recorder's Office, Colusa, CA.

to launch an enterprise. Koreans generally comanaged with one to four other participants to control 80 to 100 acres of land (Moon 1976, 203). After Koreans leased farmland, they planted, cultivated, harvested crops, and then shared in the profits.

From the early 1910s to 1920, Korean farmers leased land for rice production primarily in Colusa and Glenn counties in the Sacramento Valley. Korean tenant farmers preferred profit sharing that divided profits based on the annual harvest results rather than cash rentals. Tenant farmers were responsible for cultivation, harvest, and transportation in exchange for a percentage of the profits. They would send the annual harvest to owners who would sell it on the market. The exact percentage that tenant farmers received is unknown; however, it was most likely a “ten percent profit deal” during this period. The landowner provided water and equipment to the farmers in exchange for 90 percent of the profits. It is noteworthy that Korean immigrants successfully participated in rice farming, and many landowners in California would eagerly hire Koreans at higher wages because they were considered “talented farmers” (*New Korea*, April 27, 1920). Hung-man Lee provides a good example of a Korean working as a tenant rice farmer in Willows, California around 1917. Lee was not originally a farmer by trade but learned rice-cultivating methods from others. He was hired by a Mr. A. P. Cross to work a 4,500-acre farm about five miles outside Willows. A. P. Cross’s son, P. B. Cross, managed matters related to the hiring of tenants. The general contract stipulated that the landowner would provide everything to raise the crop and Lee would be granted 10 percent of the harvest profits. Lee’s experience, as later related by his wife Mary, provides us valuable information about rice farming at that time and place:

By 1919 airplanes were used for things besides war. Rice planting was made much easier by sowing the seed from the air. . . . The work on the farm increased as the rice plants got taller, so we had to hire more men. At harvest time there were a hundred men working in the fields. Because 4,500 acres is a huge farm, H. M. [*sic*] built three camps at equal distances from one another.

He hired a cook for each camp and a young man to go to town so often to get supplies, groceries, and meat. We had made an agreement with the stores that we would pay them after the harvest in December. The name of Mr. P. B. [sic] Cross was their guarantee (M. Lee 1990, 68-69).

According to an oral interview with Leo Song,<sup>11</sup> Korean rice farming was based on the sharecropper model, wherein Koreans worked as tenant rice farmers to receive 10 percent of the harvest profits. During the rice boom, Song went to Chae Pil's farm in Maxwell and received a percentage of profits for rice farming. Landowner Chae suggested an eight percent deal to Song to lease him his farm. In his turn, Chae would provide water and remove weeds. Song agreed with this arrangement. As a result, Song worked for Chae's farm and earned US\$3,000.

### **Koreans' Rapid Advancement during the Word War I Rice Boom**

Even though they were fewer in number than the Japanese and Chinese in California, Korean farmers significantly developed their rice ventures there (Stark 1990, 76).<sup>12</sup> During this period, the percentage of Koreans engaged in farming increased proportionally to the scope of rice farming in California as Koreans made vigorous efforts to integrate themselves into a fast-developing capitalist economy.

In 1915, Chong-lim Kim harvested about 6,200 *seok* (144 kg) and Myong-sun Hwang 1,500 *seok* (216,000 kg) in Colusa County (*New Korea*, December 9, 1915). In 1916, Chong-lim Kim also managed 240 acres in

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11. Interview with Leo Song, Korean-American Oral History Project Collection, 1970-1979, Box 1, 30A, 30B, 31A, 31B, no. 35, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles, CA. Song stated that the average rice production per acre was about 40 sacks. In that case, the net profit for farmers would have been about US\$150 since the price of one sack of rice at the time was US\$7 while the expenses per acre came to US\$130.

12. In 1920, Japanese managed 361,000 acres of rice cultivation in California.

Delevan; Sun-ki Lee managed a 640-acre rice paddy with two white partners; Jung-hi Maeng, Kwang-hi Shin, Seung-hak Kim, and Choon-bong Ma comanaged 140 acres; and Ji-sung Lim, Jin-sup Lee, and Guk-bo Kang comanaged 80 acres. In total, Koreans controlled 1,500 acres in the Sacramento Valley in 1916. Koreans were able to turn a profit from rice farming and consequently expand their rice cultivation. The article, "Record on Koreans' Rice Farming in 1916," appearing in *New Korea*, stated that the cost of cultivating rice per acre was about US\$50 and an average harvest came to more than 40-50 *seok* (5,760-7,200 kg) of rice per acre. The value of one *seok* of rice was about US\$1.75 (*New Korea*, September 28, 1916).

There is also some evidence of Koreans who earned net profits from rice cultivation. In 1916, Ji-sung Lim earned US\$400 and Jung-hi Maeng earned US\$1,000 in profits (*New Korea*, December 7, 1916). With the successful harvest of 1916, Korean farmers became more confident of future returns from rice cultivation (*New Korea*, November 23, 1916). It is important to understand that Korean farmers trusted their own abilities and efforts and continually struggled to improve their socioeconomic status. Koreans who transitioned from laborers to rice farmers gradually made their fortunes from rice farming. In 1917, Chong-lim Kim became known as the "Rice King," with annual earnings of US\$300,000; that same year, Jung-hi Maeng earned US\$10,000 and Kwang-hi Shin earned US\$5,000-6,000 (*New Korea*, November 8, 1917).

In 1918, Korean rice farmers in the Sacramento Valley had a bumper harvest. They managed a total of 4,000 acres in Willows and Maxwell.<sup>13</sup> After deducting the 4,000 acres managed in cooperation with white partners, the total Korean cultivated area came to some 3,500 acres. In 1917, 53 bushels of rice per acre were harvested; however, about 60 bushels per acre were harvested in 1918.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the total harvest from 3,500 acres could amount to 210,000 bushels. The total price value of 210,000 bushels

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13. Chong-lim Kim managed 1,800 acres; Young-sun Park, 700 acres; Kwang-hi Shin, 500 acres; Shin-Gu Baik, 500 acres; Jin-sup Lee, 250 acres; In-soo Kim, 200 acres; and Duk-yong Song, 50 acres (*New Korea*, October 10, 1918).

14. One bushel is equal to 35.2 liters.

was about US\$907,000 because the expenses per acre were US\$100 while the price value per bushel was US\$4.32. The net profit for Korean farmers was about US\$700,000-800,000 (*New Korea*, October 10, 1918).

In 1920, Korean rice farming in California was at its peak. One *New Korea* article, "Korean Rice Farmers Achieve the Great Bumper Harvest," from October 1920 is a significant source for our understanding of Korean rice farming activities in the Sacramento Valley during this period. It is remarkable that in 1920 Korean farmers leased 17,750 acres designated for rice production in the Sacramento Valley, a four-fold increase from 1918. Between 1918 and 1920, Korean rice farming had developed rapidly (*New Korea*, October 26, 1920).

Table 2 shows that in 1920, 32 Koreans and one Korean company participated in rice farming in the Sacramento Valley as independent farmers and harvested a combined 279,650 *seok* (40.3 million kg) of rice from 7,990 acres, while tenant farmers harvested 34,160 *seok* (4.9 million kg) of rice from 9,760 acres.<sup>15</sup> The estimated total revenue from the rice harvest on these Korean-managed lands was about US\$1,569,050. Furthermore,

**Table 2.** Koreans' Rice Farming in the Sacramento Valley in 1920

Farmers	Participants	Cultivated area (acres)	Harvest estimate ( <i>seok</i> )	Price value estimate (US\$)
Independent	32 persons 1 company	7,990	279,650	1,398,250
Tenant	43 persons	9,760	34,160	170,800
Total	75 persons 1 company	17,750	313,810	1,569,050

Source: *New Korea*, August 26, 1920.

15. Independent farmers cultivated a total of 7,990 acres (single cultivation 2,310 acres; company cultivation 2,200 acres; comanaged cultivation 3,480 acres). Tenant farmers received 10 percent of harvest profits.

independent farmers managed about 120-280 acres per person, while tenant farmers managed from 100 to 400 acres per person.

In addition to Koreans' financial success, there was another change as Koreans expanded their ethnic boundaries to develop their ventures beyond the Korean community during the World War I rice boom.<sup>16</sup> On September 23, 1918, Y. S. Park with partner I. G. Zumwalt borrowed \$20,000 from the Capital National Bank of Sacramento at eight percent interest.<sup>17</sup> Korean farmers used to sublease their lands to Punjab farmers to maximize their profits. In March 1919, Chong-lim Kim, F. M. Porter, J. R. Scheimer, and F. B. Gilliam subleased 385 acres to Thakar and Bosnt Singh, and 600 acres to a certain Nathoo and Aman. The contractual terms stated that tenant farmers should remit one-third of their harvest. This same group also subleased 1,000 acres to Bowa Singh, Ver Singh, Kharak Singh, and Ram Singh.<sup>18</sup>

The most important change during this period was that Korean immigrants showed their distinct identity as Koreans even as they made full efforts to adjust their socioeconomic status in California, and in spite of the additional burden of having their country annexed by Japan in 1910. It was not a contractual requirement to clarify one's ethnic identity; however, some contractual documents show that Korean farmers identified themselves as Korean on such contracts. During the period 1917-1919, D. Y. Song, J. K. Kim, S. K. Paik, Roy Kim, and M. S. Whang all stated their ethnicity as Korean on contractual documents.<sup>19</sup>

Korean immigrants who struggled to maintain their Korean identity demonstrated their loyalty to Korea and actively donated funds to the Korean independence movement. In 1919, the Korean National Association (KNA) commenced a full-scale campaign to raise funds for the independence

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16. "Personal Property Mortgages," Book 1-8, 11, Z; "Leases," Book 3, Colusa County Recorder's Office, Colusa, CA.

17. "Personal Property Mortgages," Book 3, 202, Colusa County Recorder's Office, Colusa, CA.

18. "Personal Property Mortgages," Book 33, 1, 141-142; "Leases," Book 2, 459-463, Glenn County Recorder's Office, Willows, CA.

19. "Personal Property Mortgages," Book 3, 70, 76, 193, 427, Colusa County Recorder's Office, Colusa, CA.

movement. Notably, in 1919, 185 Korean rice farmers from the Sacramento Valley donated a total of US\$42,955, nearly half of the total donations of US\$88,013.50. The average per capita donation to the KNA's independence fund drive by Korean farmers in 1919 was US\$350, with some individuals contributing more than US\$1,000. One farmer donated US\$3,400 and another US\$3,000, while seven other farmers each donated US\$1,000 (*New Korea*, September 23, 1919). Due to their patriotic donations towards nationalist activities, the Korean Provisional Government (in absentia) was able to initiate several political campaigns, such as the Korean Commission to Washington, D.C., and the establishment of the Korean Information Bureau in Philadelphia (Moon 1976, 217).

## **Conclusion**

This article has explored the response of some Korean immigrants in the United States, more specifically California, to new socioeconomic opportunities between 1905 and 1920. The involvement of Koreans in rice farming in California was an attempt to advance their social and economic status in American society in the face of historical and social forces.

Prior to 1910, Korean immigrants discovered specific career (i.e., farming) limitations in California. In their struggle to counter the ethnic discrimination they faced, and in search of greater economic rewards, Korean immigrants in California turned to rice farming. In this, Koreans were able to obtain a degree of economic mobility that had previously been denied them as migratory farm laborers.

Rice farming started in California around 1912 and there were several factors that motivated Korean farm laborers to become involved in this infant agricultural industry in California. The three-year lease limitation set forth by the Alien Land Act of 1913 forced Korean farmers to plant continuous one-year crops, like rice. During the World War I rice boom, landowners eager to maximize their profits believed that Asians would be expert rice farmers and agreeably accepted Asian farmers as managers of their fields. Furthermore, as white farm laborers and managers moved to the cities to find jobs in new

industrial areas, Asian farmers were able to replace them and thereby found opportunities to transition from farm laborers to tenant farmers. Tenancy was important for Koreans for entering the agricultural sector as rice farmers because the majority of Koreans had inadequate capital to launch individual ventures.

From the early 1910s to the 1920s, Korean farmers leased rice lands primarily in Colusa and Glenn counties in the Sacramento Valley to cultivate rice. Their efforts to improve their socioeconomic status through rice farming resulted in several changes that set them apart from earlier Korean immigrants. To transition from migratory farm laborers to rice farmers, Korean immigrants used several strategies, including ethnic cooperation, crop-share leasing, profit sharing, and securing loans. During the World War I rice boom, Korean immigrants were ambitious in developing their rice-farming ventures, making vigorous efforts to integrate into a fast-developing capitalist economy. Subsequently, every year during the World War I rice boom, Korean farmers increased their total area of cultivation, harvests, and profits.

Korean immigrants also significantly expanded their ethnic boundaries beyond the Korean community to enlarge their ventures. Most importantly, they expressed their Korean identity in official documents and demonstrated loyalty to the Korean independence movement. Korean rice-farming activities in California during the 1910s were very successful, and the most important factors in that success and the socioeconomic development of Korean immigrants were individual ability and efforts.

This study examined the adjustment pattern of an exceptional group of Korean immigrants who made significant efforts to adjust to Californian society and improve their socioeconomic status. In this, they strongly expressed their Korean identity and contributed to Korean independence rather than develop an outward loyalty to the United States. Korean immigrants' successful adjustment to life in California was a result of their combined effort to maintain their Korean identity, overcome the racial discrimination that had denied them citizenship rights, and promote the upward mobility of ethnic Koreans.

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