Profit-Based Diplomacy: Success, Failures, and Consequences of Korean Immigrants to Hawaii

Seoul Foreign School

Jenna Kim

Abstract

Over the years, there has been much discussion and argument about immigration. As a result of immigration, countries have gained a good synergy among diverse populations, and the amalgamation of ideas from diverse views has advanced technology, living conditions, and even other forms of international relations. However, both the welcome of a fresh wave of immigrants and their departure to another country are extremely complex. Due to its multifacetedness, migration necessitates a deeper interaction between the involved states, as well as consistent, strong diplomacy. There must also be a lot of variables that are tempting to both parties, yet despite this, both failures and achievements can result from the partnership.

This paper focuses on the origins of South Korean immigration to the United States, particularly to the state of Hawaii. This immigration procedure is characterized by its profit-based diplomacy. South Koreans initially migrated to the United States in response to push factors such as the fear of Japanese colonialism, but mostly in response to the captivating promises of an American minister, Horace Newton Allen. The paper emphasizes the personal advantages Allen would obtain from the migration, as well as his significant influence on Koreans. In addition, it describes the subsequent decisions immigrants had to make in Hawaii, including the pervasive concept of temporary migration. The paper finishes with a discussion of the extent to which Koreans impacted Hawaiian culture, as well as the viewpoints of Koreans adjusting to a new life full of hardships and far-reaching repercussions in an unfamiliar environment.

The Reciprocity Treaty of 1875 between the Kingdom of Hawaii and the United States sanctioned the free-trade agreement guaranteeing a duty-free market for Hawaiian sugar in exchange for exceptional economic benefits for the United States.[1] With the emergence of diplomatic interactions between the U.S. and Hawaii[2], the subsequent demand for sugar plantation laborers became emblematic of the relationship between labor, profit, and immigration that is inherent to international alliances.[3] As a

result of the Reciprocity Treaty's tariff-free entry of Hawaiian sugar into the U.S., the demand for sugar skyrocketed,[4] leading to an inflow of Chinese and Japanese immigrant laborers on Hawaiian sugar plantations.[5] With the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, which restricted Chinese immigration to the United States, Korean labor became a realistic alternative for Hawaiian sugar plantations.[6] Horace Newton Allen was the diplomat and physician who utilized this to his advantage.[7] His bipartite alliance with King Gojong and the Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association (HSPA) persuaded the king to grant Allen permission to recruit Korean immigrants to Hawaii in 1902, highlighting the economic motivations underlying his engagement.[8] Whereas Horace Allen's immigration-based diplomacy led to the exchange of Korean labor for sugar plantation harvests, the link between labor and mobility among subsequent generations of Korean-Hawaiians is exemplified by the consequences, failures, and success factors of profit-oriented immigration.

Horace Newton Allen

In 1882, when the Joseon-U.S. Treaty opened Korea to the United States, Horace Allen became involved diplomatically in Korean affairs.[9] Allen arrived in Joseon in 1884 as a member of the U.S. delegation's medical team but won the royal family's trust after assisting a prominent figure injured during a coup.[10] Years later, in 1897, he was appointed U.S. minister to Korea and created a trilateral alliance with King Gojong and the Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association (HSPA).[11] Without his proactive cooperation with the HSPA's emigration scheme, the migration of Koreans may not have been possible. This connection enabled him to push Korean immigration to Hawaii. As a result of his considerable social and political influence at the Korean court, Allen was able to obtain royal favor on the subject of Korean immigration.[12] Allen reassured the monarch that the Chinese would not be allowed to enter the areas where his subjects would be transported, explaining the nature of the regulations governing the Chinese Exclusion Act and contract laborers.[13] Allen commented on the viability of such an arrangement, adding, "There will be no great difficulty with Koreans; they seem to like the idea of being able to send their emigrants where the Chinese are not allowed to go." Allen subsequently hired a labor recruiter, solicited U.S. government aid, and assisted the HSPA in circumventing its contract labor restrictions to accommodate the Koreans.[14] Allen's diplomacy was also motivated by the profit he made through his relationship with the HSPA, opportunism that frequently obscured the reality of the hard labor he disguised as part of the American Dream.

Factors in Korean Immigration (1882-1905)

Korea was not only intrigued by Allen's promises

to improve life for Koreans but also understood the benefits of immigration due to natural disasters, such as the famine and droughts that plagued Korea.[15] Moreover, as the international battle among Western powers for economic gain in Joseon intensified, the option of emigrating to the Kingdom of Hawaii became increasingly attractive. In the previous century, Korea had experienced a number of political events, such as the Imo Military Uprising (1882), the Gapsin Coup d'État (1884), and the Sino- Japanese War (1894).[16] Though Korea had previously isolated itself from the rest of the world, with the exception of China[17], the encroaching menace of Western and Asian powers remained central to the discontent of Korean civilians, who considered the power dynamics between China, Japan, and Russia as a collective threat.[18] When evaluating immigration factors, it may be evaluated using a 'push-pull' dynamic, where political turmoil and natural calamities within Korea functioned as 'push' forces, while the 'pull' remained the attraction of economic gain through labor in the Kingdom of Hawaii. By incorporating such 'push-pull' dynamics into his diplomacy, Allen was able to establish profitable Korean-Hawaiian relations.[19]

With substantial assistance from Allen, the Hawaiian government played a vital role in influencing Korea's decision to enable migration to the Hawaiian sugar plantations.[20] In 1884, when the Hawaiian government attempted to regulate its dependence on Chinese labor, Hawaii issued regulations declaring that ships carrying Chinese immigrants could not carry more than twenty-five immigrants.[21] In 1903, Theo F. Lansing, the Hawaiian Commissioner of Immigration, issued a notice encouraging Korean immigration, which proved more profitable than Chinese immigration, stating, "All able-bodied laborers in good health and of good character will have no difficulty in obtaining regular and constant employment" and that in Hawaii, "the public school system is extensive and well established throughout the entire group and schooling in the English language is free."[22] Horace Allen incorporated similar sentiments into his own diplomatic strategies in Korea, noting, "The Koreans are a patient, hard-working, docile race" and "they are usually very keen on getting a foreign education."[23] Allen's diplomatic initiatives from 1903 to 1905 were conscious of the political vulnerability of Korea, Hawaii's interest in preserving Korean labor, and Korean immigrants' independent aspirations to achieve economic mobility. In the first two years of immigration, around 7,000 Koreans settled in Hawaii.

The 1882 Joseon-U.S. Treaty

During this time, the Joseon Treaty of 1882, also known as a treaty of "Peace, Amity, Commerce, and Navigation," emerged. It is crucial to remember, however, that despite its language promising partnership, Korea was forced to accept the Joseon Treaty with the United States, as it protected Korea from the threat of Japanese dominance—making it yet another "unequal treaty" with the West.[24] As a result of the Joseon

dynasty's forced partnership with the United States, Korean immigration to Hawaii once again displayed a mixture of 'push-pull' factors.[25] Allen promised Koreans a guarantee of work, housing, and government protection under Article 6 of the treaty, which enticed the Koreans.[26] Whereas the United States had already begun to facilitate immigration efforts just before the end of the Civil War, Horace Allen's work stressed the mutually beneficial relationship between migrants and workers, with an emphasis on profit-sharing goals.[27] The treaty underlined the labor sanctions made possible by Korean-American cooperation and the economic diversification that would result from cross-cultural business enterprises. And while Koreans were 'pushed' by the rigidity of existing Korean hierarchies within the Joseon dynasty, the Kingdom of Hawaii represented the promise of social mobility through government-sanctioned plantation labor and the economic gains that would inevitably follow; in the Joseon dynasty, an individual's employment was inherited, and jobs were strictly ranked and classified, limiting any kind of mobility.[28] Horace Allen's work in Korea would have been impossible without Joseon-U.S. Treaty, which allowed him to enter the country in the first place; nonetheless, his diplomatic efforts were feasible due to their historical context. Allen's diplomatic efforts succeeded in part due to his ability to facilitate supply-and-demand dynamics, which were timed precisely to satisfy the post-Civil War U.S. sugar demand (see Appendix A). [29] Resting on a diplomatically protected relationship between the U.S. and Korea, Allen's efforts to secure Korean immigrants for Hawaiian plantations excelled within the historical framework of the time that necessitated immigrant labor.

Social and Economic Mobility as Success Factors for Korean Immigrants

External success elements resulting from Allen's diplomacy include the social and economic mobility of Korean immigrants in Hawaii. [30] As promised by Allen, some Koreans worked in Hawaii before moving on to steady-paying jobs such as grooms, clerks, gardeners, and seamstresses.[31] Margaret Nam, a Korean-Hawaiian, recalls, "My mother went to Korea just about every year—that tells you how well my father was doing at the laundry shop".[32] Given the economic growth factors of Korean immigrants in Hawaii, it is important to analyze the individual factors that allowed immigration as equally significant as diplomatic achievements.

Reverend George H. Jones remarked in a report published in an edition of 'The Korea Review' that Koreans were learning essential values and concepts such as equality, liberty, and unity, and were even renouncing their prior life philosophies and religions. [33] Koreans grew significantly more concerned with cleanliness and abandoned traditional Korean cuisine, dress, and lifestyle in favor of more Westernized elements (see Appendix B).[34] In addition, whereas Koreans in their

home country were primarily adherents of Japanese Buddhism and Confucianism, the Christian church became an essential unifier.[35] The Hawaiian Methodist Episcopal Church complimented the Koreans' determination to educate their children in Christian academics and activities. They considered the Koreans as "God-sent" for the spread of Methodist churches in Hawaii.[36] Dr. J. Summer Stone, a representative of the Methodist Board from the United States, asserted that Christianity facilitated the Koreans' transition into the industrial sector.

Additionally, Koreans achieved greater economic success in Hawaii than in any other U.S. territory.[37] In subsequent decades, racial discrimination limited economic prospects in other states, but not in Hawaii.[38] A substantial proportion of immigrants in this area shared a strong common bond: nationalism.[39] Their combined efforts were devoted to fundraising for the independence movement.[40] These "free representatives of a captive people" established a strong Korean society that fostered national consciousness and identity.[41]This resolute society created a limited but secure "homeland" for Koreans and concentrated all of their energies on entrepreneurial agriculture in Hawaii, which flourished on a scale unreachable by firms in other regions. As a result, when Koreans began to settle in various U.S. states, they created vineyards, orchards, and vegetable farms in homage to the Hawaiian agricultural model. As a result, these enterprises expanded their operations to encompass up to 2,085 acres, with some reaching yearly revenues of $400,000 or more.[42] Thus, immigrants' nationalism not only created a safe community but also helped Korean immigrants see the significance of labor mobility during future economic expansion.[43]

As Korean immigrants began abandoning sugar fields, families began departing Hawaii; many immigrants left Hawaiian sugar plantations for work on railroads, in fisheries, or in mines.[44] As stated previously by Horace Allen in a letter to the governor of Hawaii in 1902, the flow of Korean immigrants to the United States was characterized by an unceasing pursuit of an improved standard of living.[45] As Allen's perception and understanding of Korean situations impacted his diplomatic efforts, the benefit he reaped reflected itself in both the successes and difficulties encountered by Korean immigrants.

Profit-Oriented Diplomacy: Controversies

Allen's proposal to satisfy the HSPA's expanding labor demand is fraught with controversies resulting from his profit-driven diplomacy. Due to the rising demand for sugar in the United States in 1902, the viability of the HSPA depended on Allen's ability to meet a quota.[46] Kim reports that Allen "confessed that the United States had gone to Korea for profit" because, as "cheap laborers" accepting "low

wages," Korean immigrants were ideal for Hawaiian sugar plantations.[47] In addition, the HSPA deposited illegal loans to Korean sugar plantation employees in order to ease their immigration.[48] Allen exhibited less interest in the fitness of Korean immigrants for sugar plantation work in Hawaii due to his objective of addressing labor shortages. And despite his ability to further U.S.-Korean relations, the promises made by Allen made their way into Korean newspapers, portraying the United States as a hopeful answer to the frequently illusory benefits of immigration.

The realities of laboring on Hawaiian sugar fields contrasted starkly with Horace Allen's idealistic depictions. Bernice Kim, a Korean-Hawaiian, “observed that... some boys and even men, with fair hands blistered, faces and arms torn and scratched by the cane leaf stickers, would sit between the rows of cane and weep like children” (see Appendix C).[49] The necessity for physical laborers essential to supporting the HSPA's demand led to the misalignment of a large number of Korean immigrants who undertook strenuous jobs unsuited to their backgrounds.[50] Such a mismatch illustrates the inadequacies of Horace Allen's diplomacy and his desire to primarily persuade potential Korean immigrants rather than address their needs. And while many immigrants were concerned with permanent immigration to Hawaii and the United States, others expected to earn money quickly on Hawaiian sugar farms and then return to Korea, as Allen had promised (such temporary migration remains a common theme in migration narratives today).

In addition to the dissatisfaction of the Koreans' struggles with assimilation, many native Hawaiian plantation managers saw the Koreans as predominantly incompetent and unreliable employees. Only four of the thirty-four sugar plantation employees viewed the Koreans as qualified personnel. In their HSPA summaries, many authors stated that Koreans ranked third behind the Japanese and Chinese.[51] Allen's disillusioned advice to the HSPA that Koreans are exceptional farm laborers led to unanticipated barriers for plantation proprietors, which appears to be another noteworthy failure of profit-based diplomacy.

While it may be true that some Korean families were able to diversify into many sectors and even achieve some semblance of the American Dream, the majority of Korean immigrants arrived in Hawaii as bachelors, "sojourners." Their objective was to return to their native country after accumulating sufficient funds. With the annexation of Hawaii by Japan in 1910, however, this group was forced to remain in Hawaii, unable to return to their Korean homeland,[52] revealing the inequalities present in the exchange of labor and prosperity between Koreans and America, in which Korean immigrants were forced to assimilate. And with such forced assimilation comes the fallacies of Horace Allen's diplomacy and its sugary intentions concealing a profit-based objective, underlining the two-way nature of diplomacy.

Conclusion

During the 'Posthumous Presentation of Order of Merit to Decorated Independence Activists in Hawaii' in 2021, Korean President Moon stated, "I always feel compassion for the Korean community in Hawaii. The contemporary movement of Koreans began in 1903, at a time when our nation was unable to protect its citizens. In spite of arduous labor and harsh lives, the first generation of immigrants who established in the United States contributed to the nation's independence."[53]

His statement embraces all facets of the history of Korean immigration to Hawaii. Hawaii presented itself to Koreans as a fantasy of wealth and prosperity owing to the imminent threat of Japan, and Horace Allen sought this possibility of immigration as an investment. Thus, with his message of the American Dream and independence, we can now see the results of Allen's profit-based diplomacy and its objectives to influence migration by economic 'pushing' and 'pulling.' Allen's methods of intertwining private gain with international diplomacy and migration continue to be reflected in certain instances where private businesses become involved with contemporary international diplomacy and migration, as they have an indisputable impact on the image and perception of a country.

Whereas the end of the American Civil War and the Reciprocity Treaty of 1875 marked a juncture mandating the immigration flow from Korea to Hawaiian sugar plantations, Allen's diplomacy represents opportunism and is also peculiar in its attempt to tackle a problem. And while the experiences of Korean immigrants in Hawaiian sugar fields frequently led to economic and social mobility, [54] they also exposed the complexities and entropic effects of assimilation processes, resulting in both failures and triumphs for Koreans and Hawaiians.

The Korea-United States relationship that made Korean mobility in Hawaii possible rested, as does the majority of international diplomacy, on agreements mutually beneficial to both nations; however, the unfolding Korean narrative of adaptation, assimilation, and labor is frequently obfuscated by legends of profit margins.

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