

June 19, 2022
Korean American Citizenship Day
Philip Jaisohn Memorial House
Remarks by Dr. Hope Elizabeth May (호프 엘리자베스 메이/호프 메이)

*These remarks are constructed from Dr. May's memory. Dr. May did not read from written remarks but spoke from her heart, as is her practice. When she was asked if she had a copy of her speech (she did not), she prepared this text from her memory. These notes were prepared on June 21, 2022.

Good afternoon.

Happy father's day, happy Juneteenth, and happy Korean-American Citizenship Day.

Congratulations to the Philip Jaisohn Memorial Foundation and its leader George Choe; congratulations to all of the elected officials who are here today. Congratulations to all of you for coming to together to stand in this morally powerful memory. Today is Juneteenth, and the late, great John Lewis, a Congressman who walked alongside Martin Luther King Jr., refers to something he calls "The Spirit of History". He says it called to him at various points of life, and he could feel it. And I believe today we are standing together in the Spirit of History.

I have about 15 minutes, and my job is to transmit to you how Philip Jaisohn worked on behalf of Korean, democracy, of American democracy, and of World democracy. Yes, I dare to use the phrase "World democracy" in current times. It is a project we have been working on for a long time. And Philip Jaisohn one was someone who worked on it.

I am going to be throwing out some dates, and in case they do not stick with you, let me give you a different context.

In my own life, I say "I need to get organized." I have periods of focus, and then something happens, and I become disorganized. The leaders of something called the "Peace through Law Movement" had the same sentiment. They said, "the world is disorganized and we need to get organized". In fact "organize the world" was one of their slogans. And we have been trying to organize the world for a long time for brotherhood, fellowship, and peace. The founder of Pennsylvania, William Penn, was a participant in this effort and so was Philip Jaisohn. Judy [Yoo] mentioned Philip Jaisohn's work on fostering unity and humanity. This is part of the project of organizing the world for brotherhood, fellowship and peace. We say that after slavery there was "reconstruction" and we refer to the "reconstruction amendments" to the Constitution, but I prefer "reorganization" and the "reorganization amendments." Philip Jaisohn organized the world on behalf of democracy and unity.

What did Philip Jaisohn do? As Consul General Kwon explained before, he was involved in a failed coup early in his life. After that, Jaisohn came to America and became an American citizen. He was around 20 years old when he came here. But eventually he was called back to his place of origin, Korea. I would say it was the Spirit of History calling him. It was around 1895, so he was around 30 years old. Why then? It was an opportunity to re-organize Korea. Why? China had just lost to Japan in the first Sino-Japanese war, and this was an opportunity because Korea had been a tributary state to China, a vassal state. But the Treaty of Shimonoseki that ended war between China and Japan said "Korea is now Independent" and "Korea shall no longer pay tribute to Japan". So what did Philip Jaisohn do? He went back to Korea at this time and did 3 things to help organize Korea for independence. Because, as Korean philosopher Ham Sok Hon said, "one

does not become independent just because one declares it. Rather, declaration begins the process of independence." [독립하고서 선언이 아니라, 선언으로 시작이다]. U.S. President Woodrow Wilson said it too in his *Constitutional Government in The United States*: democracy and independence requires a certain character and the development of certain capacities. And this is what Philip Jaisohn did - he educated the people, he cultivated capacities essential for democratic citizenship. What did he do in Korea to develop these capacities? Three things: 1) He created the first newspaper entirely in Korean, with no Chinese - "The Independent"; 2) he created an institution for civic education - "The Independence Club"; and 3) he created a tangible visible symbol so that Koreans could reimagine their place in the new world order - Independence Gate: Dognimmun. *Dongnip*. Independence. Independence. Independence.

Let me talk about the newspaper. Imagine if our news was delivered in Latin? *Pacta Sunt Servanda. Obsta Principiis*. We could not understand it. Only the most learned people, scholars, can understand it. That was the situation in Korea before Philip Jaisohn created *The Independent*. The news was in Chinese, which only scholars could understand. So, Philip Jaisohn had to awaken the people and provide them with information. He did that with his newspaper which was in the accessible Korean language with no Chinese. His newspaper was very successful. People were becoming informed.

Let me talk to you about The Independence Club. What was it? A debating society. An adult educational institution which taught civic engagement. All were welcome. In a democracy, people debate and discuss issues. This was new in Korea. So, with his Independence Club, Philip Jaisohn taught members the rules of Parliamentary Procedure, Roberts Rules of Order, etc., debate, etc. A resolution was set, an argument for the affirmative, then the argument against it. Some actual topics that were debated were: Resolved: *that women should be educated*; Resolved *that patriotism is necessary for peace*.

Now, Philip Jaisohn's work in Korea was so successful that he was asked to leave by the ruling class. An awakened people is a threat to those in power. I teach Ancient Greek Philosophy, and we have seen it before. Socrates was awakening the youth. The powerful did not care for it so they put Socrates on trial and condemned him to death. Well, Philip Jaisohn was not condemned to death. He was just asked to leave, and he did in 1898.

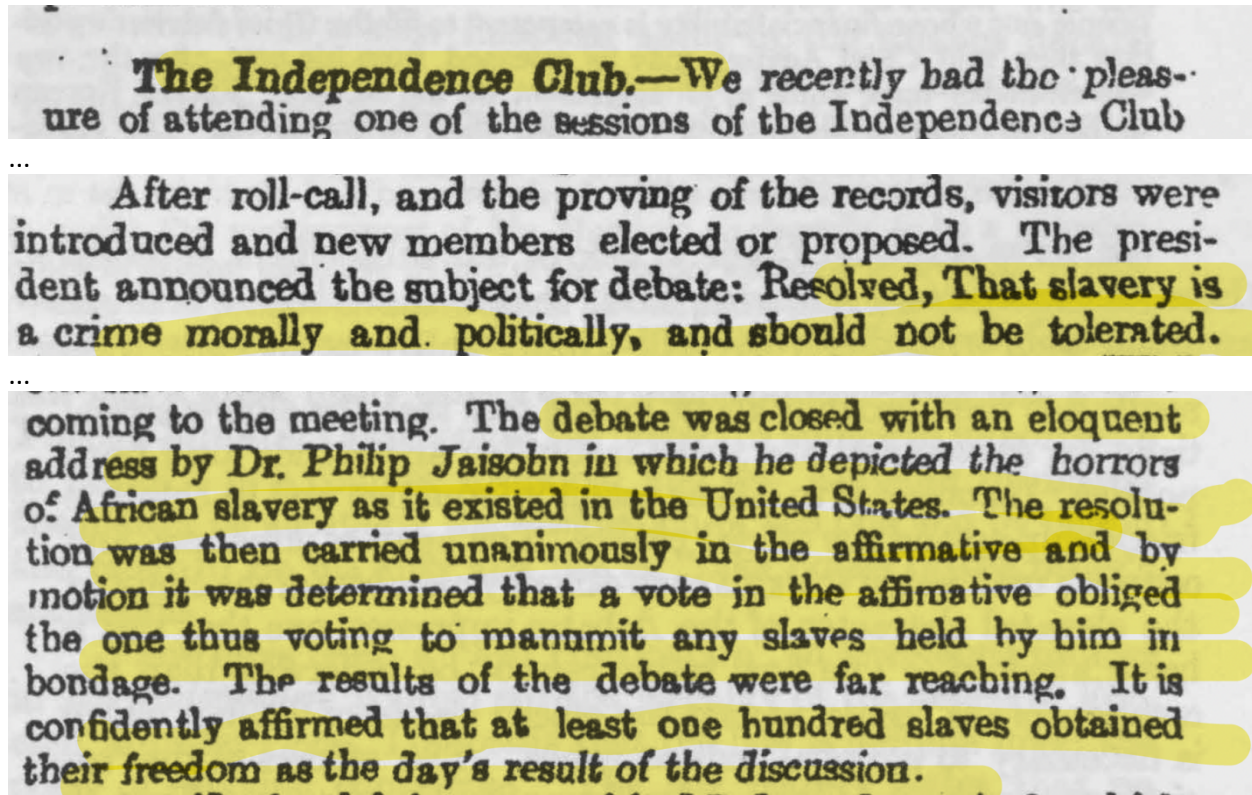
So Philip Jaisohn returned to the United States in 1898 and lived his life. Then what happens? What is the big thing that happens around that time? World War 1. It begins in Europe in August 1914. The United States does not enter until 1917. When he addressed the U.S. Congress requesting a declaration of war, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson laid out a vision. The first world war was a "war for democracy", a "war to end all wars", "wars to help the small and subject nationalities", and so on. A vision was laid out. The world was to be reorganized. The armistice was declared on November 11, 1918. We now celebrate it as "Veteran's Day" but its origin is armistice day, ending World War 1.

Now, Philip Jaisohn was a believer in this vision - and so were his colleagues. The world was to be reorganized, and Philip Jaisohn and his 2 colleagues worked on this reorganization. All three are mentioned in the Pennsylvania resolution: Philip Jaisohn, Syngman Rhee and Jung Han Kyong (Henry Chung). It is so great that they are all mentioned - not only because they were all believers in the vision, but also because they are from different generations. Philip Jaisohn is the oldest; Syngman Rhee is 11 years younger; and Henry Chung is 26 years younger than Jaisohn. So you really have 3 generations working alongside each other around 1918/1919: 50s, 40s, and 30s, which is very important in Korean politics these days.

So what did Philip Jaisohn do for American democracy? For world democracy? He realized that one does not simply declare "world democracy". It must be built. The declaration begins a process. The people must

be educated. So like he did in Korea, he created a magazine, "Korea Review". The first issue was in June 1919. It is a thing of beauty and you can read it online. He did it for 3 years. But it was not in Korean, it was in English. It was for Americans. It was for American democracy, and for world democracy. The American people needed to be educated to participate in world democracy, which includes of course Korean independence. Korean democracy, American democracy. World democracy. Philip Jaisohn worked for them all.

In closing, as it is both Juneteenth and Korean-American Citizenship day, I would like to share a fitting story with you of an actual debate from the Independence Club. This happened in 1897, 125 years ago. The story appears in "The Korean Repository" - a gazette published by the Methodist Press in Korea:¹



I must tell you that when I read this for the first time, I cried. And I am surprised I am not crying now. You see, it was The Independence Club, one of Philip Jaisohn's creations, and his mentioning the "horrors of African slavery" caused everyone in the room to agree that slavery is morally and politically wrong. And also because of the debate and discussion in this club, 100 Korean slaves were set free. And on this Juneteenth and Korean-American citizenship day, I think this is a fitting way to end.

Kamsahamnida.

¹ The entire 1897 article "The Independence Club" can be accessed here:
<http://www.forwardintomemory.com/IndependenceClub.pdf>