

KOREAN PERCEPTIONS OF JAPAN DURING THE MODERN REFORM PERIOD (1876–1910)

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Introduction

The Kanhwa Treaty of 1876, and the cultural exchanges between Japan and Korea that followed—exchanges that had been brought to a halt in the aftermath of the Meiji Restoration of 1868—paved the way for Japan’s invasion of its neighbour. While some sections of Chosŏn officialdom strove to reform and modernise the system, their efforts to transform the country into a modern nation-state eventually failed, and Chosŏn became a protectorate of Japan in 1905, before becoming a full-fledged colony of Japan following the Annexation Treaty of 1910. As a result, Koreans suddenly found themselves being subjects of the Japanese emperor. This paper takes the period from 1876 to 1910, during which the Chosŏn dynasty unsuccessfully attempted to reform itself in order to ward off invasion from foreign powers, as the opening period in that process.

The opening up of the country in 1876 marks both the point at which the traditional flow of culture was reversed, with Japan suddenly becoming the diffuser and Korea the recipient, and the official starting point of the Japanese imperialists’ invasion of Korea. Japan invited the *Susinsa*—special diplomatic envoy—in 1876 and 1880, as well as the Korean Courtiers’ Observation Mission (also known as *Sinsa yuramdan*—Gentlemen’s Observation Mission) of 1881, in order to introduce Koreans to its Westernised culture and modern military facilities. Japan hoped to entice Chosŏn into reforming its system along the lines of the one which it had adopted, by taking such steps as donating modern weapons and luring Korean students to study in Japan. In addition, whenever it had the opportunity, Japan would warn the Chosŏn government about the need to prepare against a Russian invasion. Japan intervened in Korea’s internal affairs in 1880 in order to insure that the latter would establish diplomatic relations with the United States (US). Moreover, Japan actively promoted

Japanese-style modernisation movements such as the Kapsin coup of 1884 and the Kabo reforms (1894–6). On the other hand, Japan violently put down anti-Japanese groups, such as the Tonghak peasant rebels in 1894 as well as several revolts launched by the so-called righteous armies. In addition, Japan provoked the Sino-Japanese War (1894–5) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05) in order to establish its control over Korea. Put simply, from 1876 onwards Japan portrayed itself as the protector and champion of Chosŏn's opening and independence. In reality, however, Japan's interest in Korea was, rather, imperialistic.¹

When it came to the perception of Japan, significant differences emerged between the reformist group, who had visited Japan and experienced Japanese culture and civilisation, and the traditional intellectuals' group, who continued to abide by Confucian ideals. To date, very few studies have focused on this dichotomous perception of Japan which existed during the modern reform (*kaehwa*) period, usually placed between Korea's opening to Japan in 1876 and its full colonisation by Japan in 1910. As such, this paper will focus on the negative and positive perceptions of Japan which emerged during this period in order to analyse how the stereotypes of Japan were introduced into and formed in Korea. Such sources as newspaper articles, reports, travel writings, diaries and petitions made during the opening period, have been drawn upon to introduce the various perceptions of Japan that emerged at that time.

Negative perceptions of Japan

Japanese as 'Barbarians as savage as the Westerners' (Waeyang ilch'eron): a new extension of the traditional Sinocentric worldview

One of the fixed notions of Japan present during this period was that of the Japanese as barbarians of the same ilk as those found in the Western world; a perception that was based on a Sinocentric understanding of the world. This Sinocentric viewpoint was one in which the world was divided into those countries within the Chinese sphere, in which Confucian ethics were abided by, and those barbarian countries in which Confucianism was not present. As such, Japan was regarded as having lowered itself to the level of the barbarians by removing itself from the Chinese cultural sphere and 'cavorting' with Western countries. Until the middle of the 19th century, the great majority of Koreans adhered to the Sinocentric view of the world in which a country's degree of 'civilisation' or 'barbarity' was based on Chinese notions of culture, and as such looked down upon Japan as a country of barbarians. Throughout the Chosŏn dynasty, Japan was negatively perceived as a country of marauders, a "crowd of *wae*" (the latter a derogative name for the Japanese).²

Korean defenders of *wijŏng ch'ŏksa*—'[Movement] to defend orthodoxy and reject

heterodoxy’—, who continued to adhere to a Confucian-oriented worldview, regarded the newly modernised Japan as having left the Chinese cultural sphere, and as such lumped it together with the Western barbarian nations with which no intercourse was deemed to be possible. However, this negative perception of Japan began to weaken gradually among certain sections of the Chosŏn government in the aftermath of the Kanghwa Treaty of 1876 and the subsequent advent of the West-centred international order. Nevertheless, the influence of this China-centred viewpoint, which refused to recognise Western culture, including that of the now westernised Japan, remained pervasive. In fact, this perception of Japan and of Japanese culture as being barbaric remained strong among the general public; in particular among those Confucian leaders who led the righteous army revolts of 1896, 1905 and 1907, and the Tonghak peasant rebels who advocated an anti-Western and anti-Japanese platform in 1894.

Japan mobilised its military forces and thoroughly crushed any group engaged in anti-foreign and anti-Japanese activities. During the Imo Soldiers’ Riot of 1882, Japan dispatched a military vessel to the Korean coast in support of China’s efforts to suppress the anti-foreign conservative followers of the Taewŏn’gun. Moreover, Japan used military force to suppress the Tonghak peasant soldiers in 1894 and the anti-Japanese campaigns launched by the righteous armies between 1896 and 1907, in the process killing thousands of peasant soldiers and righteous army members. These actions, in which Japan exposed its imperialistic designs, led the Wijŏng ch’ŏksa factions, the conservative and anti-foreign Taewŏn’gun, and those involved in the Tonghak movement to develop a strong impression of Japan as an invader.

Let us now take a closer look at the Wijŏng ch’ŏksa factions’ perception of Japan. In a petition which he submitted to the government, Kim P’yŏngmuk criticised Japan’s invasion of Korea within the framework of the waeyang ilch’eron—the notion that Japan and the Western world are composed of the same kind of barbarians³: “Japan has become a puppet of the Western world. This is not the Japan of old.” Moreover, in a petition filed right after King Kojong’s flight to the Russian Legation in February 1896, Ch’oe Ikhyŏn claimed that:

Since the opening of the country in 1876, attempts have been to reform all of the legal institutions by which we have abided since the days of our ancestors. All of this has been undertaken under the leadership of the barbarians, which has led us to denigrate China and its people as a country of barbarians, and turned all humans into barbarians ... This is the most serious disruption we have experienced since the foundation of the dynasty.⁴

In a petition submitted in January 1899, Ch’oe expressed his disdain for Japan, which he considered to be a barbaric country, and had the following to say about the Japanese-style reforms of 1894:

If your excuse is that you were trying to reform the country by simply transforming little China into a little Japan, and you believe that we have reformed our system and destroyed little China, then you have deceived yourself into ignoring the ignoble act which you have committed by following these barbarians. This is nothing more than deceptive behaviour.⁵

The Tonghak peasant rebels, whose perceptions were shaped by the Sinocentric worldview, also regarded Japan as an aggressive, predatory power. Their perception of Japan is well exhibited in a petition which Tonghak members from Chōlla province submitted to the Chōlla provincial government in 1893, as well as in the *Munjang*, or appeal to the public, which called for an anti-Western and anti-Japanese struggle, submitted following the large Tonghak congregation that gathered in Poŭn.⁶

As a result of the Japanese and Western barbarians' further encroachment into our country, the national turmoil which we find ourselves in has reached fever pitch. Look at our capital. It has already become the haunt of these barbarians. How can we even mention the Hideyoshi invasions of 1592 and the disgrace caused by the second Manchu invasion in the same breath as the current situation? How could such disgraceful events occur? Presently, our country has become a base for these barbarians, who are hell-bent on destroying 500 years of history. The whole nation will be turned into a useless wasteland. Where have all the faithful subjects gone? Although our Japanese enemies fully intend to cause a calamity of epic proportions in our country and a dark dangerous spectre has descended upon us, our people continue to make nothing of it and to cling to the belief that everything will be fine ...

The raising of righteous armies is designed to defeat the Japanese and Western imperialist powers. How could this be regarded as a serious crime? ... In addition, although the threats to our king emanating from these barbarians have become extremely dangerous, no member of the government has taken it upon himself to avenge this dishonour. Where has their loyalty gone? ... Although we are from the lower classes, we know that the Japanese and Western barbarians pose a serious threat to our nation. As such, all of us who have been enlightened by the Tonghak teachings would prefer to die trying to defeat these barbarian enemies than live a humiliating life. Our resolve should be encouraged by the state, not seen as something to worry about.

These hostile views spread beyond Confucian scholars and Tonghak peasant rebels to include the general public as well. This fact is well exposed in a public notice which was hung in front of the Japanese Legation in March 1893.⁷

Listen carefully you Japanese merchants. When the sky and earth were first formed, borders were created and humans set about establishing countries. From that time onwards the *samgang* [the three human relationships] and the *oryun* [the five moral principles] have been in place. At the centre of the world are those humans who understand humanity, while the rest of the world is composed of barbarians who know nothing about humanity. Chinese civilisation spread to barbarian countries, and people were enlightened the world over ... Don't you know that you also received the gift of

civilisation even though your country was located on the periphery of the world? The natural order of things is for civilised countries to rule over their own country in order to protect their land and their people, while respecting their ruler. Why are you now invading other countries and killing and attacking other people? What good will such barbaric behaviour do you in the end?

A similarly hostile depiction of Japan is clearly exposed in a secret letter which the Taewŏn'gun sent to Confucian scholars and Tonghak peasant soldiers in which he exhorted them to raise a righteous army in the name of King Kojong in order to repel the Japanese invaders.⁸

You have continued to exist as a people because of the benevolence of our ancestors. Those presently in government are closely allied with our enemy. I, who have nobody to trust, can only lament the situation in silence. The Japanese marauders have invaded the palace. Under the current circumstances, the destiny of Chosŏn is no longer clear; how can I handle the imminent calamity if you do not come to my aid? I instruct you to begin an uprising at once.

This assessment of Japan was accepted by everyone, from the conservative Confucian scholars to the ordinary people and the Tonghak peasant soldiers, with the exception of the enlightenment group. This fact is further demonstrated in the will written by Hwang Hyŏn, who committed suicide to protest against the imminent demise of the Chosŏn dynasty.⁹

I do not have any particular reason to die. However, 500 years of history will fade away once the destruction of our country is complete. Who will be able to understand the sadness that we feel at the loss of our country if no one loses their life over this? I have decided to kill myself so that the Heaven-given human ethics and the principles which I have read so much about are preserved. Please do not be sad.

However, this perception of Japan as a nation of barbarians disappeared with the collapse of the Chosŏn dynasty. With an increase in the 1880s in the number of moderate reformist scholars who advocated the *Tongdo-Sŏgi* school of thought, which argued that while the Confucian order should be preserved, the advanced military and scientific technologies developed by Japan and the West should be accepted, the view of Japan as a nation of barbarians was gradually weakened, even among Confucian intellectuals. Over time, some Tonghak supporters joined pro-Japanese groups such as the Ilchinhoe, while others saw their previous perception of Japan and the West as barbarians altered as a result of their acceptance of new schools of thought such as the Ch'ŏndogyo. For example, Son Pyŏnghŭi, who was the third leader of the Ch'ŏndogyo, travelled to Japan in 1901 ostensibly to experience 'new culture'. While there, he struck up a friendship with some members of the exiled reformist groups

such as Pak Yŏnghyo. Thereafter he began to recommend that his followers study in Japan and that they do away with their Sinocentric view of Japan.¹⁰

Western-based perception of Japan as an underdeveloped modern nation

Another fixed perception of Japan which emerged during this period was of it as a second-tier country, whose experience Korea should not, at least, follow in its entirety. As such, Japan was considered to be a peripheral state removed from the centre of Western civilisation. This idea originated from individuals such as Sŏ Chaep'il (Philip Jaisohn) and Rhee Syngman (Yi Sŭngman) who had received their education in the West. Sŏ and Rhee regarded Confucianism and the monarchic system as being unable to guarantee the prosperity of a state under the international order which prevailed at the end of the 19th century, an order which, they argued, was ruled by the Social Darwinist 'struggle for survival'. As such, Korea should establish a new state founded on the acceptance of Christianity and an American-style democratic system. To these people, Japan was an example of a state from whose mistakes Korea could learn. As such, Japan was not a model which should be fully emulated, but an underdeveloped modern country.

The pro-American reformist group, which promoted the modernisation of Korea in the early 1900s, regarded Christianity as the best possible spiritual foundation, and accepted American-style democracy as the preferred alternative to a ruling structure dominated by the monarchy and *yangban* gentry. As is well demonstrated in the retrospective essay written by Sŏ Chaep'il (1863–1951) after his conversion to Christianity, these individuals regarded the religion and the political system of the US as the model which Korea should emulate.¹¹

I went to a Presbyterian church located on Mason Street every Sunday ... This was after I had sworn to give my heart to Jesus Christ, our Lord who preached the gospel of love and hope to man. Religion has provided me with great strength throughout my whole life ... When I heard from Pak Yŏnghyo about the state of our country, I realised that this was my opportunity to do something for my homeland. As such, the time for our country to achieve the ideals of freedom and independence, which is something that I have been thinking about for a long time, has finally come.

This pro-American group's perception of Japan as a nation that should not be emulated, and as a country whose mistakes should be learned from, is also reflected in the works of Rhee Syngman. In his *Tongnip chŏngsin* [Spirit of independence], Rhee argued that the reason why the Western nations had been able to become militarily powerful was because their people were free.¹² Moreover, in an essay in the *Sinhak Wŏlbo* (Theological Monthly), which he wrote from prison in 1903, Rhee held out hope that Korea's revitalisation would come from Christianity:

Reform is an integral part of Christianity. Anywhere Christianity spreads, changes are brought about ... Once these changes occur the country begins to develop ... Koreans should realise the existence of such a relationship and have the strength to spread Christian teachings throughout the land. By doing so, a new national strength will emerge. While this strength cannot be used immediately, it will serve as the basis on which the future of our nation is built.

Furthermore, in an essay which he apparently wrote at the beginning of the 1900s, Rhee pushed for the country to be re-established on the basis of Christianity. In this essay, Rhee pointed out that Japan was an underdeveloped country for the following reasons:¹³

In those countries where Christian churches are allowed to take root, people have the power; as such there are no evil practices such as rebellions, uprisings, impositions, deception, or fraud. The US is a perfect example of such a country. In the case of countries that prefer constitutional law to enlightenment, the king and his subjects appear to be involved in politics. Although these countries have established great laws and regulations, all kinds of discrepancies occur during elections as a result of the acts of corruption and demands made by those with the financial ability to corrupt others. The perfect example of such a country is Japan. There are other countries which do not even attempt to enlighten their people. Although they expand their power abroad, these nations are hard pressed to keep their countries from falling apart because of domestic upheavals. Russia is a good example of such a country. Does this not prove that we should enlighten our people on the basis of the law?

Although this group regarded an American-style democracy as the ideal model for Korea, they were of the opinion that under the circumstances which prevailed at that time, such a model could not yet be introduced in Korea. As such, they argued that a constitutional monarchy should first be established. Sŏ Chaep'il, in his capacity as one of the leaders of the Independence Club's efforts to establish a legislative assembly in 1896, became one of the main proponents of the establishment of a constitutional monarchy.¹⁴ In his book *Spirit of Independence*, published in 1904, Rhee Syngman also promoted the establishment of a constitutional monarchy. "Democracy is the best system in the world. However, it would be very dangerous to introduce such a system in Korea right away."¹⁵ However, what is also clear is that this pro-Western group regarded American-style democracy as the ideal model for Korea, and Japan and Russia as countries from whose mistakes lessons should be learned. For this pro-Western group, Japan, whose emperor system was enshrined in its constitution, was regarded as an example of underdeveloped modernity.

Positive perceptions of Japan

Japan as the defender of Chosŏn's independence and opening

In Article 1 of the Kanhwa Treaty of 1876, Japan clearly recognised the independence of Chosŏn. Japan invited diplomatic envoys and observation missions such as the Susinsa and the Courtiers' Observation Mission as a means of introducing its modernised culture and to promote the opening of Korea. As a result, Japan came to be seen as the foreign power which supported the independence and modernisation of Korea. Japan refrained from taking any action during the period of direct Qing intervention in Korean affairs. This period spanned the years from the 1882 Soldiers' Riot, which the Qing government used as an excuse to reassert its suzerainty over Korea and strengthen its secondary imperialism, until 1894, when the Qing were finally forced to retreat from the Korean peninsula as a result of their defeat in the Sino-Japanese War. In reality, however, Japan simply pretended to support the independence and opening of Korea. Japan proceeded to force Chosŏn to sign the unequal Kanhwa Treaty in which it secured special rights—including trade concessions, leasehold and extraterritorial rights, a conventional tariff of 8 per cent, as well as the right to station the Japanese military in Korea—that served as necessary prerequisites for any invasion of Chosŏn. As a result, Japan was able to enjoy special rights equivalent to those which Korea, as a vassal state, had granted to China until 1894. Japan, which successfully managed to remove China from the Korean peninsula by defeating it in the Sino-Japanese War, intended to turn Chosŏn into its protectorate. However, its efforts were frustrated by the intervention of Russia.

The pro-Japanese reformist group, which led the Kapsin coup (December 1884) as well as the leaders of the Kabo reforms (July 1894–February 1896) regarded Japan as the true supporter of Chosŏn's independence and opening. However, Japan failed to provide full support to its Korean admirers at the time of the Kapsin coup. Furthermore, in the aftermath of the Japanese victory in the Sino-Japanese War, Japan's intention towards Chosŏn became further evident, as shown by its actions during the period of the Kabo reforms. After the Tripartite Intervention of Russia, France and Germany in April 1895 (forcing Japan to give up the Liaodong peninsula), Japan and the pro-Japanese reformist faction, which had been removed from power by Russia and Queen Min, refused to go quietly, even taking such drastic steps as assassinating Queen Min in order to hang on to power. However, King Kojong's flight to the Russian Legation (11 February 1896–20 February 1897) changed the situation on the ground completely. Kim Hongjip and Ŏ Yunjung, who were members of the pro-Japanese reformist faction, were killed. Yu Kiljun was forced into exile in Japan. The Japanese advisors to the king were replaced by Russian advisors and Russian schools and the Russo-Korean Bank were established. A pro-Russian cabinet centred around such pro-Russian figures as Yi Pŏmjŏn and Yi Wanyong was inaugurated.

However, the Russian advisors were forced to leave and the Russo-Korean Bank was closed down as a result of the movement launched by the Independence Club to oppose foreign aggression and exploitation on the peninsula and to restore the sovereignty of Korea. King Kojong then made his way back to Kyōngun palace and on 16 August 1897 proceeded to proclaim the establishment of the Taehan empire, thus doing away with Korea's status as a vassal of China once and for all. Although Japan was engaged in a fierce battle with Russia for the control of Korea from 1895 to 1904, it nevertheless managed during this period to secure an economic foothold for itself on the peninsula by expanding its number of mining concessions, establishing new ports, and setting up new financial organisations. Japan's long-cherished goal of establishing a monopoly over Korea was finally completed with its victory in the Russo-Japanese War of 1905. However, right up until the point that Japan officially made Korea its protectorate, the majority of the members of the pro-Japanese faction continued to regard Japan as a friendly power protecting Korea from Russian attempts to usurp its independence.

What was it that made those who led the movement to modernise Korea, who were also those who played a central role in such important events as the Kapsin coup, Kabo reforms, and the activities of the Independence Club, regard Japan as a power which would defend the independence and opening of Korea? In essence, these men became absorbed by the concepts of Pan-Asianism and of the superiority of the yellow race. The strategy which modern Japan used to extend its control over the mainland was premised on the notion of Pan-Asianism and the imminent threat emanating from the Western powers. In fact, the need to secure the Asian mainland, which translated into Japan's overseas expansion, as well as Pan-Asianism, which was a movement to resist the encroachment of Western powers by forming an alliance with other Asian empires such as China, started to spread within Japan at the same time.¹⁶ This notion of Pan-Asianism began to gain a foothold in Korea in the 1880s. The 'Rise Asia Association' (Kōakai), established on 10 March 1880, which consisted of Japanese, Chinese residents in Japan, and Korean envoys to Japan, called for the creation of an Asian tripartite alliance designed to deter Western powers, especially Russia, from encroaching in Asia. Japan concentrated on using this Pan-Asianism to spread a sense of Russophobia among Koreans.¹⁷

Based on this concept of Pan-Asianism, the pro-Japanese faction's perception of Japan as a friendly foreign power that would protect the independence of Korea from Western encroachment, and which would support the modernisation of Korea, remained a fixed one from 1885 to 1910. The persistence of this notion is well demonstrated in the official apology submitted to the Japanese emperor by Pak Yōnghyo, who had been dispatched as a special envoy to Japan in August 1882 in order to restore relations which had been severed as a result of the Soldiers' Riot. "Please let us cooperate with each other in a manner that is similar to how the teeth

and gums depend on each other. Let our two countries enjoy mutual benefits and happiness.”¹⁸ This perception is also evident in an article published in the *Tongnip Sinmun* on 8 February 1899 and in another published in the *Hwangsŏng Sinmun* on 9 January 1910:

Sincerely, all Asian countries should follow our Japanese brothers’ courage and strategy when it comes to re-establishing our independence. Presently, Japan is the centre of the future of all Asian nations, the mirror which we should hold our political systems and constitutions up to, and our protector. Japanese leaders, who have been so upright and persistently remained committed to their goals no matter what, should lead all Asian nations’ relations with the Western powers. Japan should establish a Pan-Asian plan to protect the Asian region and to keep the peace in Asia. These obligations have been sent to Japan from above.¹⁹

Japan has strived to support the independence of Korea and China, to cooperate with them in their modernisation drives and to increase their economic development, so as to achieve eternal peace and wellbeing in Asia. Japan does not have any ambition to cause problems.²⁰

This notion of Pan-Asianism, indulged in by the pro-Japanese Koreans during the opening period, which led them to misperceive Japan as the foreign power that would protect Korea’s independence from Western encroachment, was eventually integrated with the notion of the superiority of the yellow race in the early 1900s. The most representative proponent of these beliefs is Yun Ch’iho (1864–1945). Yun had experienced firsthand in Japan and the US the racism which pervaded Western society. He became an advocate of the ‘weaker’ oriental nations of Korea, Japan, and China joining hands and creating a defensive form of racism designed to counter the encroachments of the racist West.²¹ Moreover, he was one of the main actors in the Independence Movement, a group which developed into an anti-Russian movement once Russia’s attempts to encroach on the peninsula increased after 1895. Yun resented the fact that Koreans residing in Vladivostok were being treated as slaves by the Russian people. His anti-Russian sentiment was made evident in comments such as the following: “The meanest Japanese would be a gentleman and scholar compared to a vodka-drunk, orthodox Russian.”²² Meanwhile, as we can see from his words quoted below, Yun promoted a sense of allied, community consciousness with the people of China and Japan that was based on the notion of the superiority of the yellow race. “Between a Japanese and a Korean there is community of sentiment and of interest, based on the identity of race, of religion, and of written characters. Japan, China and Korea must have one common aim, one common policy, one common ideal—to keep the Far East the permanent home of the yellow race, and to make that home as beautiful and happy as nature has meant it to be.”²³ Influenced by

these notions of the superiority of the yellow race and Pan-Asianism, Yun praised the victory of Japan in the Russo-Japanese War of 1905.

What a glorious campaign this has been to Japan! As a Korean, I have no special reasons for rejoicing over the uninterrupted successes of Japan. Every victory is a nail in the coffin of the Korean independence ... Yet as a member of the Yellow race, Korea—or rather I—feel proud of the glorious successes of Japan. She has vindicated the honour of our race.²⁴

I am glad Japan has beaten Russia. The islanders have gloriously vindicated the honours of the Yellow race. The white man has so long been the master of the situation that he has kept the Oriental races in over [*sic*] for centuries. For Japan to break this spell single handed, is grand in its very conception ... I love and honour Japan as a member of the Yellow race; but hate her as a Korean from whom she is taking away everything independence itself.²⁵

Yun Ch'ihō had already stated in his diary record written in the end of 1893 that “[i]f I had means to choose my home at my pleasure, Japan would be the country. I don't want to live China with its abominable smells or in America where racial prejudice and discrimination hold their horrid sway, or in Corea as long as its infernal government lasts. O blessed Japan! The Paradise of the East! The Garden of the World!” As we can judge from this record, his favorable impression of Japan was based on an outlook already blatantly racist in the 1890s.²⁶ However, this racism originated from the concept of Social Darwinism.²⁷

This belief that the Russo-Japanese War was in fact a competition between the races is also visible in an essay written by a Korean student in Japan: “The Russo-Japanese War was the result of the international competition which began in the 19th century. Posterity will record this war as one between the yellow and white races. The biggest international problem today is this competition between the races.”²⁸ This positive perception of Japan as the defender of the independence of Chosŏn was not limited to a few intellectuals. The argument is supported by a passage from the novel by Yu Wŏnp'yo (1852–?) entitled *Mongkyŏn Chegallyang* which was written immediately after the Russo-Japanese War.²⁹

Presently the Western powers are occupying Asia. The yellow and white races are involved in a struggle for supremacy. Therefore, if we—Korea, Japan, and China—do not cooperate with each other, this would be the equivalent of an internecine war. However, let us look at the mindset and strategies of these three countries' governments right now. The time has come to seek out bigger advantages, not to be jealous of others or think only about trivial interests ... If Japan really starts a war and constructs a Pan-Asian structure in the Eastern hemisphere, a great society in which many Asian countries, such as China, Chosŏn, Vietnam, Burma, and Thailand, cooperate with each other will be established. The unified yellow race, with Japan at the centre, will separate the world

into the Eastern and Western powers. As such, despite the fact that the white race is now inundating our shores with weapons and soldiers, we, the members of the yellow race do not have to be scared.

The pro-Japanese group did not understand the true nature of Japanese expansionism. As a result, they overlooked Japan's chauvinism and imperialistic designs which were contained in these notions of Pan-Asianism and the superiority of the yellow race. In particular, the racism embedded in this concept of Pan-Asianism, as can be seen from Yun Ch'ihō's pro-Japanese activities, was connected to Korea's willingness to reach a compromise with the Japanese, and the sense of national inferiority which was used to justify Japan's invasion of Korea.³⁰

Japan as the ideal model

Japan, which was considered to be on the periphery of Asia under the traditional Sinocentric East Asian order, rapidly responded to the Western impact that accompanied the advent of the international era, and created a Japanese-style nation-state which allowed it to be reborn as the centre of Asia. From that point on, it was the Japanese who developed a negative image of Korea. The perception of Japan possessed by Korean progressives who were striving to respond to the new world order rapidly changed. The progressives, who after the Kanhwa Treaty of 1876 had witnessed firsthand Japan's modernisation in their roles either as diplomatic envoys and members of observation missions or as students, were forced to reassess their perception of Japan as a barbarian country. As we can see from the title of the travel piece written by Pak Yŏngghyo—*Sahwakiryak* [Brief record of my embassy to Japan]—who went to Japan as a Susinsa in 1882, Japan was no longer the country of culturally inferior 'wae'—Japanese marauders, but of 'hwa'—high-class culture, which could be learned from. As such, modernised Japan was regarded as the ideal model for the progressive leaders of the Kapsin coup, the Kabo reforms and the Independence Club to learn from.

After the Meiji Restoration of 1868, Japan introduced the methods and tools of modernisation that had been developed in the West since the French Revolution. As a result, a uniquely Japanese modern state was created which combined Western-style modernisation with the emperor system of ancient Japan. The modernity of Japan possessed inherent differences from the one that developed in the West, differences which stemmed from the former's imperfect acceptance and misunderstanding of Western modernity. For example, the devices which this Japanese-style nation-state, characterised by a non-democratic government and a lack of a civilian society, used to integrate the nation were fundamentally limited in their ability to create a modern civil society. Looking back on Japanese history, the origins of Japanese militarism can be traced back to this non-democratic government which was in place

at the beginning of the Meiji Restoration. Nevertheless, this Japanese ruling system, partially based on the Western concept, was a transitional one which was supposed to give way to a constitutional monarchy. As the ruling system was based on the separation of the legislative, executive and judicial branches, Japan's appeared to be a modern political system. As such, it was seen as the ideal model and alternative for Korea, a country in which a civilian class also did not exist.³¹ Moreover, for Korean progressives the Japanese nation-state model was the only option available.

Ö Yunjung, who experienced the modernised culture of Japan as a member of the Courtiers' Observation Mission of 1881, highly praised Japan's modernisation and political system. "The Japanese people were able to establish a modern state because they resolutely carried out policy measures without taking personal profit or loss into account. Meanwhile, the Chinese are wasting their time abiding by outdated traditions. When all of this is taken into account, it becomes clear that anybody who acts without taking personal interest into account will succeed."³² According to Sö Chaep'il's own recollections, Kim Okkyun, the leader of the Kapsin coup, wanted to adopt the Japanese modernisation model for Chosön: "Kim realized that Western civilisation had not been formed in an instant, but had gradually come about as a result of the centuries-long competition between powers. However, Japan had achieved modernisation in one generation. As such, Kim felt that Japan should be used as the model to modernise Chosön."³³ In a petition which he wrote following his exile to Japan after the failure of the Kapsin coup, Pak Yönghyo also argued that Japan's modernisation model should be adopted.³⁴

There is a neighbouring country [Japan] whose people are of the same race as the people of Chosön, a people who have received the same benefits from the rains and dew, and on who the same light emanating from the sun and moon shine. Moreover there is not much difference between the size of these two countries, or in their production capabilities. However, there is a big difference in the way these matters are managed. Japan has accepted modernisation as a means of catching up with the outside world in the realms of culture and technology. Meanwhile, our country has still not awakened from its drunken stupor, and has failed to understand the changed nature of the international situation. As a result, we are now being humiliated in front of the entire world. Yet, our country acts as if it were oblivious to this humiliation. Although I am ignorant and know little about the current international situation, I cannot help but be seriously concerned about our country. In addition, if Chosön lets other countries view it as a stupid, drunken country, how can we not be humiliated?

Kim Okkyun, Pak Yönghyo, and Ö Yunjung were members of the progressive faction that attempted to establish a modern nation-state in Korea that was based on the model adopted by Meiji Japan. These leaders of the Kapsin coup and Kabo reforms hoped to implement the following: the establishment of a system of constitutional monarchy centred around a cabinet and the introduction of limited representative

mechanisms; creation of a police system and the modernisation of legal institutions; the establishment of a standing army to achieve national integration; an increase in government revenues through rectifying the financial system adopted by the royal family; improvement of the taxation system; creation of new taxation sources; the promotion of a government-led private commercial and industrial sector in order to achieve economic integration; and the securing of the necessary finances from Japan. Furthermore, they planned to educate the public by abolishing the traditional social status system, and to introduce a modernised school system in order to facilitate social integration. They also planned to secure the independence of Chosŏn and end its vassalage to China. As such, they strove to establish a nation-state which would be based on the Japanese model.³⁵

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to look at the perceptions of Japan in the modern reform period in all their complicated combination of sympathies and hatreds, from a long-term historical viewpoint, through the available written record. In way of conclusion, the following points may be emphasised:

First, cultural exchanges between Korea and Japan have taken place since the days of the ancient kingdoms. Since the cultural centre of East Asia before the 19th century, when the Western world began its global takeover, was China, the flow of culture went from the Korean peninsula to Japan. Koreans, as the diffuser of high-class culture, were accustomed to regard Japan and Japanese culture as barbaric. In addition, Korean scepticism towards Japan remained strong because of the lingering sense of hostility caused by the Japanese invasions at the end of the Koryŏ dynasty and the Hideyoshi invasions of 1592.

Despite the fact that this cultural relationship between the two countries was reversed, and Western powers entered Korea, conservative groups such as the Wijŏng ch'ŏksa faction and Tonghak peasant soldiers continued to hold on to their traditional perception of Japan, which was based on the Sinocentric worldview, as a nation of barbarians. Meanwhile, the members of the Enlightenment faction, who realised that a new world order was taking shape, had a positive understanding of Japan, a nation which they regarded as offering the ideal modernisation model for Korea and which they saw as the defender of the independence of Korea.

This conflicting love-hate perception of Japan nurtured during the period of modern reforms, in which Japan is regarded as both an imperialist power and an ideal nation for Korea to learn from, still permeates contemporary Korean society. Koreans hate the Japanese for their refusal to atone for their misdeeds of the past, but imitate their economic development model.

Second, throughout the whole modern reform period Japan played in Korea the

role of an ‘imperialist aggressor’ under the mask of ‘supporter for Korea’s progress and independence’. While this point was painfully clear for the conservative Confucian intellectuals and peasants, they were clinging to an outdated traditional worldview and did not wish to know about the changes in the wider world governed now by Social Darwinist principles of ‘might is right’. On the other side, the reformers, while cognisant of the new tendencies in the world, were falling into the trap of Pan-Asianist ideology based on Social Darwinism and racism and were thus unable to recognise Japan’s aggressive designs. This inability realistically to identify Japan’s intentions was one of the factors contributing to Korea’s colonisation.

Third, while Yun Ch’iho and some other Japanophile reformers, fascinated by Pan-Asianism, were considering Japan’s modern experience a viable model for Korea’s own development, for Yi Sŭngman, Sŏ Chaep’il and other pro-American reformers of the 1900s, who idealised Christianity and American democracy, Japan was no longer an ideal model—it was a “backward modern country” to be perceived critically, and often as a model of how one *should not* modernise. This divergence in views on Japan was, from a macro-historical perspective, continued after 1945, as Rhee Syngman or Chang Myŏn strove to follow the American model, while Park Chung-hee and his acolytes followed the Japanese one.

Finally, why have Koreans had such a love-hate perception of Japan since the opening period? One of the reasons for this may very well be that Koreans’ perception of Japan was based on the dominant ruling ideology during the opening period. Koreans who were influenced by Chinese culture regarded Japan, a nation, which while having accepted Chinese culture, maintained its own cultural uniqueness, as barbaric and its culture likewise. For contemporary Koreans who have accepted Christianity—and form the only nation to have accepted Christianity on a national scale in East Asia—and who are presently striving to rectify the past by building a Western-style civil society, Japan, a country that has maintained an emperor system despite the influence of Western culture and which has glorified its imperial past, cannot be seen in a positive light. As such, Japan has simply been regarded as something that Korea can criticise or as a nation from whose mistakes Korea can learn. Meanwhile, Korea established Yusin-style militarisation, which was based on the model adopted after the Meiji Restoration, and has copied the economic development plans laid out by the Government-General of Chosŏn. The country, moreover, is still dependent on Japan for its industrial technologies and capital.

Editor’s note: Professor Huh’s text was translated from the Korean by Michael Bujold and Yu Yŏnggi of Somang Translation. Their translation includes all quoted passages, with the exception of the citations from Yun Ch’iho’s English diary, and have been edited where necessary.

Notes

1. Lew Young-ick (Yu Yǒngik) 1983:136–42.
2. Ko Pyǒngik 1992:53–56,71.
3. Kim P'yǒngmuk introduced four points to support his argument that Japan had designs on Korea. "First, the Japanese marauders, in their capacity as the puppets of the Western powers, have been trying, in conjunction with their Western overlords, to gain a foothold in China for a few years now. Second, that Japan and the Western countries are of the same barbarian stock can be ascertained by the fact that Japan uses Western-style ships and weapons. Third, the action of dispatching 4000 soldiers under the guise of 'protecting' another nation is one without historical precedence. Such barbaric behaviour is usually associated with Westerners. Fourth, according to Chinese documents, the 'Western forces' who invaded Kanghai Island in 1866 were in reality Japanese marauders sent to threaten Chosŏn." Kim P'yǒngmuk, *Chungamjip*, vol.5:2–3, in *Han'guk munjip ch'onggan*, 2003; O Yǒngsŏp 1999, quoted on p.106.
4. Ch'oe Ikhyŏn, *Myŏnamjip*, vol.4:11, in *Kugyŏk Myŏnamjip*, 1977:148.
5. Ch'oe Ikhyŏn, *Myŏnamjip*, vol.4: 44–45, in *ibid.*:192.
6. Nihon Gaimushō 1936, vol.5 (Korea):457; Kuksa p'yŏnch'an wiwŏnhoe 1959. *Tongnak nan kirok*, vol.1:117
7. Nihon Gaimusho 1936, vol.5 (Korea):423
8. Yi Sangbaek 1962:13
9. Ch'oe Sūnghyo 1985:36.
10. Ŭiam Son Pyŏnhŭi sŏnsaeng kinyŏm saŏphoe 1967:6–7.
11. Kim Tot'ae 1972:153, 167–168.
12. Rhee Syngman, 1993:31
13. Rhee Syngman, *Okchung chapki* [Prison writings], cited in Lew Young-ick 2000:37.
14. Lew Young-ick, 'Pak Yŏnghyo wa Kabo Kyŏngjang': pp. 101–102; Sin Yongha 2003: 149–151.
15. Rhee Syngman 1993:110–112.
16. Pak Chungŏk, 1985. 'Ilbon chisigin ũi taehan'gwan: 1872–1894':64–75; Pak Chungŏk 1996:107–110; Hatada Takashi 1983:17–21; Kang Ch'angil 2002:27–40, 298–317.
17. Yamada Shoji 1969:43–45; Yi Kwangnin 1989:140–141.
18. Pak Yŏnghyo 1977:343.
19. *Tongnip sinmun nonsŏlji*, 1970:881–892
20. 'Siguk e taehaya maengsŏngham i kaham' [Evaluation of the present situation], *Hwangsŏng Sinmun*, 9 January 1910.
21. Yu Yŏngnyŏl 1985:265–267.
22. Kuksa P'yŏnch'an wiwŏnhoe, 1971. *Yun Ch'ihŏ Ilgi*, vol. 5:327 (7 May 1902).
23. *Yun Ch'ihŏ Ilgi*, vol. 5:327 (7 May 1902).

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