

# Rethinking Hegemony and Neutralization in Korea: Multinational Diplomatic Engagements in the Run-Up to the Russo-Japanese War (1903–1904)<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This article demonstrates that the Russo-Japanese rivalry, far from being just another example of imperialist competition during the Age of Imperialism, can also serve as a useful case study of a diplomatic contest over a periphery between hegemonic powers. During this diplomatic tug-of-war, the Korean peninsula became the focal point of a contest between Japan and Russia. The present study illuminates the interactive processes of major diplomatic engagements between multiple actors through careful use of multi-lingual archives, as well as locates the significant implications of these exchanges for contemporary geopolitical landscapes in the Far East. Ultimately, this research provides an analytical framework for a more in-depth understanding of diplomatic interactions and the impacts of hegemonic struggles in modern Korean history.

**Keywords:** Hegemony, neutralization, Russo-Japanese rivalry, Korean peninsula, imperialism

## Introduction

The historical contexts and geopolitical factors that loomed over the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) were multi-layered. As a recent addition to the Eurocentric-international system, Korea theoretically enjoyed equal status as an independent state. However, Korea found itself at the centre of a hegemonic rivalry, one in which major powers contested for regional domination at the expense of Korea's territorial integrity and diplomatic sovereignty. Unable to muster the strength to protect its sovereignty, Korea would seek neutralization as a second-best option.

Recent studies from some Japanese scholars suggest there was nothing inevitable about the Russo-Japanese War. Chiba Isao has closely examined the framework of Russo-Japanese proposals presented during diplomatic negotiations from July 1903 to February 1904, as well as the subject matter of meetings convened by Japan's *genrō* (an informal group of Japanese political elders). Chiba asserts that the *genrō*, Prime Minister Katsura Tarō, and Foreign Minister Komura Jutarō remained hopeful for an agreement with Russia until late 1903.<sup>2</sup> Itō Yukio stresses the conciliatory influence of Itō Hirobumi on Japan's Russian policy. Itō Hirobumi, a *genrō* and president of the Seiyūkai Party, the largest party in Japan's House of Representatives, favoured a dovish approach towards Russia well into the second half of 1903.<sup>3</sup>

Different interpretations of the Russo-Japanese War emerge when we examine Russian scholarship. Igor Vladimirovich Lukoianov has analyzed the Bezobrazov clique in St. Petersburg, which earned the patronage of Czar Nicholas II in 1903 and became a major force in Russia's geostrategy in the Far East. Lukoianov finds that this faction pushed for the redeployment of Russian troops from northern to southern Manchuria and the development of the Yalu River basin that bordered the Japanese sphere of influence (i.e., Korea). Under these circumstances, it would have been difficult for Russia and Japan to arrive at a negotiated settlement.<sup>4</sup>

Bella Pak, however, faults Japan's determination to secure political and economic hegemony on the Korean peninsula for triggering the war.<sup>5</sup> Like Lukoianov, she accepts that, during the two special conferences on 8 April and 20 May 1903, Russia decided to exploit its timber concession on the Yalu River to boost Russian influence in Korea.<sup>6</sup> However, Pak also argues, first, that Russia was much more inclined to avoid war than Japan; second, that as the Russian telegram of 3 February 1904 attests, Russia eventually agreed to include Manchuria as part of Russo-Japanese negotiations, and, third, that Russia never wavered from upholding Korea's territorial integrity and independence.<sup>7</sup>

Given such conflicting scholarly interpretations from the main belligerents of the Russo-Japanese War, a closer reading of both published and unpublished

documents and a careful reappraisal of the complex interplay of Russo-Japanese negotiations surrounding Korea and Manchuria (which bordered the former), seems necessary for presenting a more comprehensive picture of the multi-faceted diplomatic manoeuvres undertaken during 1903 to 1904, when Japan and Russia edged closer to war. Relatedly, Korea's diplomatic activities (centring on neutralization) are selectively reviewed to appreciate how a weak state attempted to reshape the geostrategies of Japan and Russia, given that the latter's victory in a possible Russo-Japanese conflict could have allowed Korea to realize a neutral, buffer status.

The structure of this article is as follows. The first section briefly surveys the academic discourse regarding the theoretical concepts used in this study. The next section appraises the instruments of diplomacy that Japan and Russia employed to attain their strategic objectives before the Russo-Japanese War and Korea's endeavors to make its diplomatic voice heard. The third section reviews some of the major aspects of the different actors' diplomatic stratagems and assesses their implications before this study finishes with its conclusions. In retracing some of the significant aspects of diplomatic engagements in the run-up to the Russo-Japanese War, this study delves into the diplomatic side—especially the Russian angles—of the historical and geopolitical dynamics that overshadowed the hegemonic struggle. More importantly, in using a multi-archival approach to examine a much under-appreciated international development, this work aims to transcend the traditional East–West dichotomy, mindful of its implications for modern Korean history, imperial history, and international relations.

## Hegemony and Neutralization

No scholarly consensus on the precise definition of hegemony and its application to the international system exists. According to one definition, hegemony is a structure where “a single powerful state controls or dominates the lesser states in the system.”<sup>8</sup> Michael Mastanduno suggests that hegemony confers, “a preponderance of material power ... the ability to control international outcomes ... and some degree of consent and acceptance from other states.”<sup>9</sup> Approaching hegemony from a Chinese perspective, Yan Xuetong draws on the pre-Qin Chinese thinker Xunzi to critique the supposed notion of equality between nation-states.<sup>10</sup> Yan contends that although the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648 gave rise to principles affirming an equality of state sovereignty that evolved into international norms, a state's status in international society does not necessarily reflect those norms.<sup>11</sup>

Unlike with hegemony, a relatively strong academic consensus exists concerning neutralization. Neutralization is an international status conferred by

stakeholder countries granting neutrality to countries, territories, and waterways through agreement. Neutralised countries maintain militaries only for self-defence and are not a party to treaties that might violate their neutrality.<sup>12</sup> Such countries are expected to maintain political independence, thus contributing to regional stability. First conceived in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, neutrality was not enshrined in international law through judicial rulings and international conventions until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

A candidate country must be located in an area suitable for neutralization and fulfil subjective, objective, and international requirements.<sup>13</sup> The subjective requirement is the most important for neutralization, requiring the support of the country's leaders and citizens for neutralization. A neutralized state must also demonstrate its political, economic, and diplomatic abilities and its willingness to execute domestic and international rights and duties. The objective requirement relates to a country's geographical position, one containing strategic assets that could intensify neighboring countries' interests. Neutralization is available for a newly created country, a divided but independent country, a country subject to intervention or potentially subject to intervention from a neighboring major power, or a country that could serve as a conduit connecting one major power to another.<sup>14</sup>

Though meeting the subjective requirement might be sufficient to facilitate the customary neutralization of a country, permanent neutralization requires an international guarantee through an agreement between a candidate country and its neighboring countries acting as guarantors. A permanently neutralized country must also maintain a sufficiently strong military for self-defence<sup>15</sup> and is furthermore required to adhere to international expectations. If a neutral country violates its duties, such as by giving assistance or providing any advantages to warring countries, its neutrality would then be void.<sup>16</sup>

## Japan and Russia spar for a diplomatic edge in the Far East

Having examined the two theoretical concepts relevant to the present study, we can now turn our attention to reinterpreting the Russo-Japanese interactions in the run-up to the Russo-Japanese War, focusing on the high-level diplomacy involving Japanese and Russian officials. This war, sometimes referred to as World War Zero,<sup>17</sup> involved two rivals with significant stakes in Manchuria and Korea. The conflict began with Japan's initial strike on Russia on 6 February 1904, though it did not officially declare war until six days later. Lasting over a year, the war was brought to a close by the Treaty of Portsmouth on 5 September 1905. Although Japan and Russia eventually went to war, they first made several concerted efforts

to settle their disputes diplomatically (which later involved Korea), that would have prevented war from occurring and preserved the balance of power between continental and maritime powers. The Russian emperor's comment:—"I do not want a war between Russia and Japan and will not allow it. Take all measures so that war will not occur"<sup>18</sup>—suggests it would have been possible for both Japan and Russia to iron out their differences by respecting their respective spheres of interests in Korea and Manchuria.

As early as 31 January 1903, the Russian Foreign Ministry anticipated possible negotiations with Japan concerning Korea<sup>19</sup> and Manchuria.<sup>20</sup> A conference organised by the ministry concluded that a future agreement with Japan should stipulate that neither it nor Russia should occupy any strategic point in Korea. Furthermore, any agreement would have to constrain Japanese rights in Korea and should specify that Japan lead any negotiations.<sup>21</sup> In reality, however, Russia could only do so much to push its agenda regarding Korea. In late 1902, Russian minister to Korea Pavloff had advised Army Minister Alexei Nicholayevich Kuropatkin to allow Japan (at least temporarily) to dominate over the Korean peninsula, noting that Korea remained "politically and militarily incapable of any decisive action."<sup>22</sup> Pavloff's scathing comment suggested there was serious doubt about Korea's ability to protect its sovereignty against Japan among Russian policymakers directly involved in Russo-Korean relations, which meant the Korean court had its work cut out into winning over Russian sceptics of Korean neutralization.

A week after the January 1903 conference, Foreign Minister Vladimir Nikolayevich Graf Lamsdorff, under Nicholas II's orders, convened a council. Attending were Finance Minister Sergei Yulevich Witte, Kuropatkin, acting Navy Minister Fyodor Karlovich Avelan, Russian Minister to Japan Roman Romanovich Rosen, and high-ranking Foreign Ministry officials. At the council, Witte<sup>23</sup> called for a closer relationship with Japan, contending that only by reaching a *modus vivendi* with it could stability in the Far East be secured.<sup>24</sup> Kuropatkin sympathized with Witte's cautious analysis, warning against cutting off diplomatic relations with Japan.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, while advocating a more prudent approach towards Japan, Kuropatkin did not in any way fear Tokyo. Claiming that St. Petersburg could mobilise 400,000 men in just thirteen days, the Russian general did not believe Japan posed a military threat to Russia. Kuropatkin's complacency (which he would come to regret as described later), might have reflected the Russian military establishment's unfounded confidence in Russia's military strength *vis-à-vis* Japan's.

While concurring that an agreement was needed, Avelan sought to present a more hard-line stance, arguing that there should be no special compromises from

Russia.<sup>26</sup> Echoing Witte, Rosen, a long-time Japan observer, also called for more amicable ties with Japan but simultaneously argued that Russia required a clear Korean strategy, astutely grasping that Korea should be considered a key element of its strategy to stabilize the Far East. Witte later added that he was against extending Russia's military presence onto the Korean peninsula: his rationale was that Russia, which already had Vladivostok and was occupying Dalian, did not need a port in Korea.<sup>27</sup>

Subsequently, on 7 February, a new conference was convened to reassess Russia's Manchuria policy and, relatedly, its Korean affairs. The conferees' views on Russia's Korean policy were split, with hardliners like Admiral Tyrtov opposing any concessions to Japan, since they could restrict Russia from employing the Korean port of Masanp'o as a temporary naval station.<sup>28</sup> More dovish voices like the Russian minister to Japan Rosen called for caution in dealing with Japan since it did not covet Korean territory. In the end, the conference could not come to a consensus on the Korean issue, and the attendees agreed to table the issue until future discussion,<sup>29</sup> which showed the importance of Korea as an element of regional geopolitical dynamics.

Russia struggled to reach internal consensus on its Korean policy, and it would soon become more interventionist, attesting to Russian policymakers' growing recognition of the Korean peninsula's important geopolitical value. Reflecting Korea's importance in the Russian decision-making process, the 8 April special cabinet meeting was chaired by Nicholas II, who solicited government ministries' views on the role of northern Korea as a shield for Russia. The main participants of the previous conference, Lamsdorff, Witte, and Kuropatkin (relative moderates in Far Eastern affairs), were now joined by Interior Minister Vyacheslav Konstantinovich von Plehve, a hardliner. Plehev's participation signified a growing interest in Korea among the wider Russian political establishment. In the absence of a clear consensus over Russia's geostrategy in the Far East, policy was pulled by the two very different forces (dovish vs. hard line approaches).

The conference's agenda was to discuss the feasibility of establishing a timber company along the Yalu River in response to the expansion of Japanese influence from Korea to southwestern Manchuria.<sup>30</sup> The conference approved the establishment of a corporation to develop said timber resources (which suggested the hard-liners prevailed), while allowing American, Belgian, and French investment in the company.<sup>31</sup> Permitting foreign participation in Russia's strategic asset may have been a way to assuage major powers' suspicions regarding Russia's hegemonic drive in the Far East. However, Japan could still interpret Russia's unwillingness to permit Japanese investment in the company as St. Petersburg's desire to deny Tokyo a share of critical Korean resources. Considering Vladivostok

merchant Briner's success in securing the timber concession along the Tumen and Yalu rivers, which Witte paid close attention to,<sup>32</sup> irrespective of his scepticism towards the value of the concession,<sup>33</sup> it is safe to conclude that St. Petersburg accorded special attention to this strategically important concession.

As will be demonstrated later, Russia's subsequent actions in Manchuria and Korea would indeed fuel Tokyo's distrust over its rival's geostrategic ambitions there. The suspension of the scheduled second-round withdrawal of Russian troops from Manchuria on 8 April,<sup>34</sup> Russia's announcement of seven conditions for their withdrawal (18 April), the Russian occupation of Yongamp'o (21 April), and its construction of a strategic post under the pretext of logging (4 May) severely threatened the status quo in Korea and inevitably increased tensions between Japan and Russia.

The Japanese government believed these moves closely reflected Russia's expansionist "New Course" policy targeting Korea and Manchuria, which was adopted after two rounds of the aforementioned special conferences.<sup>35</sup> This new policy was composed of three parts: maintaining Russia's dominance in Manchuria through increasing the number of Russian troops there, preventing foreign influence or capital from making any inroads in Manchuria, and exploiting timber concessions on the Yalu River to expand Russian influence over Korea.<sup>36</sup> Before Russia could implement this new policy, sizeable roadblocks lay ahead. It hoped to remove at least one of them through bilateral negotiations with Japan to de-escalate tensions. Russia was determined to tread carefully with Japan, and both the Russian government and private commercial interests were eager to explore ways to avoid a war with Japan.<sup>37</sup> St. Petersburg's willingness to engage in diplomacy with Tokyo suggested Russian officials were reluctant to confront Japan too aggressively, at least at this stage.

Coincidentally, the Japanese government also seemed ready to adopt a more cautious stance. On 23 June 1903, the members of the *genrō* joined four cabinet ministers to hold an imperial conference, at which they unanimously agreed to enter negotiations with Russia. Tokyo then informed London about its intention to enter talks with St. Petersburg,<sup>38</sup> which demonstrated Japan's desire to keep its ally abreast of any major diplomatic exchanges between Japan and Russia that could potentially upend the status of Far Eastern geopolitics.

To this end, on 22 July, Komura telegraphed Japanese Minister to Russia Kurino Shin'ichiro to have him test Russia's willingness to enter direct negotiations with Japan. Komura's decision was a by-product of the Murinan Conference on 21 April, the Japanese Imperial Conference, and cooperation with Britain and the U.S.<sup>39</sup> By soliciting necessary advice from Britain, the global hegemon, and the U.S., a rising Pacific power, Japan was trying to enlist friendly Western

powers' diplomatic prowess to advance its interests to push back against Russia's hegemonic ambitions.

On 12 August, Kurino duly carried out Komura's instructions, holding talks with Russian Foreign Minister Lamsdorff and submitting the first Japanese proposal. Among other things, it called for the preservation of the territorial sovereignty and independence of China and Korea and Russian acceptance of Japanese pre-eminence on the Korean peninsula in exchange for Japan's recognition of Russia's special interest in the Manchurian railways.<sup>40</sup>

From the Russian perspective, Japan's reluctance to accord Russia "preponderance" over its Manchurian railway concession could only be viewed as Tokyo's deliberate intention to undermine St. Petersburg's hegemony in Manchuria. That the proposal also contained a clause dictating Russia's non-interference in the extension of the Japanese-controlled Kyōngbu Railway (Seoul to Pusan) into Manchuria meant Japan was trying to undermine Russia's hegemonic influence in southern Manchuria by restricting its rights to railroads there.<sup>41</sup>

Japan's decision seemed to reflect its wish to group Manchurian and Korean issues together when dealing with Russo-Japanese spheres of influence, which inevitably Russia could not stomach since Manchuria was an indispensable element in St. Petersburg's Far Eastern geostrategy. For its part, by presenting demands that benefited its hegemonic interests, Japan intended to shift the balance of power in Korea and Manchuria to its favour as it sought to expand its presence in continental Asia. Getting Russia to agree to the future extension of a Japanese-controlled Korean railroad into Manchuria would herald a much-coveted strategic opportunity for Tokyo, one denied Japan after the Triple Intervention in 1895.

The Russian businessman Aleksandr Mikhailovich Bezobrazov was entrusted with the task of drawing up a reply to the aforementioned Japanese proposal by Nicholas II, his draft receiving the Russian monarch's preliminary approval on 29 August. However, it was left to Russian Foreign Ministry official G.A. de Rigny De Plancon to come up with the following official counterproposal to the Japanese proposal, which he shared with Viceroy of the Russian Far East Yevgeni Ivanovich Alexeyev on 7 September:

- 1) Mutual recognition of the independence and territorial integrity of Korea and equal rights of commerce for all nationals in that country
- 2) Russian acknowledgement of Japan's special rights and commercial interests in Korea
- 3) Russian non-interference in Japan's right to dispatch troops to Korea to protect Japanese interests and to suppress uprisings
- 4) Russian recognition of Japan's right to extend advice and assistance to Korea for its reforms and improvement of government administration



- 5) Japanese acceptance that it does not have any stake in Manchuria and its coast.<sup>42</sup>

Alexeyev assented to De Plancon's counteroffers but thought that the first article should also include Japan's recognition that Russia possessed all special rights in Manchuria,<sup>43</sup> thus giving St. Petersburg the edge in their strategic contest over Manchuria. De Plancon was equally adamant about the Manchurian issue, asserting that Russia could not tolerate any intervention from Japan. He did, however, believe that Russia had much room for compromise on agreements affecting Korea.<sup>44</sup> Comments from Russian officials with direct influence in shaping its Far Eastern policy suggest that Manchuria (not Korea) remained a central pillar of Russian hegemonic interests, while also indicating that at least some in Russia's top echelon were willing to respect Japanese dominance in Korea, with the latter serving as a buffer protecting Russia-dominated Manchuria.

Russia's reply to Kurino's proposal arrived from Rosen on 3 October.<sup>45</sup> Lamsdorff informed Kurino on 9 September that the Russian foreign minister had already instructed Rosen and Alexeyev to draw up a counterproposal as quickly as possible and to begin talks at their earliest convenience. Wishing to consolidate Russia's sphere of influence in Manchuria and northern Korea, Rosen offered to respect the area south of the thirty-ninth parallel as Japan's sphere of influence. In return, north of the parallel would not fall under Japanese influence and Russian troops would not be required to withdraw.

The Russian diplomat's counterproposal was, in effect, a direct countermeasure against the Japanese strategy spearheaded by Komura (an advocate of the exchange of Korea and Manchuria into distinct spheres of influence) that involved the creation of a neutral zone or a Russo-Japanese joint-protectorate on the Korean peninsula.<sup>46</sup> Given the proximity of northern Korea to Manchuria, Russia's call for the establishment of a neutral zone<sup>47</sup> on the Korean peninsula may have stemmed from the country's desire to use at least a part of Korea as a buffer for constraining Japan's hegemonic designs in Manchuria, Russia's sphere of influence. From Korea's standpoint, this meant that the Korean government could hope to leverage Russia's plan for a neutral zone, although the neutralization of the Korean peninsula was clearly not part of the Russian agenda.

While all this was taking place, a wary Korea remained in the dark about the Russo-Japanese diplomatic exchanges that could potentially undermine its already fragile independence—a justifiable concern given Seoul's peripheral status in the regional world order. As a remedy, the Korean court geared itself to keep abreast of contemporary geopolitical developments in readiness for having to formulate a possible policy response against this new strategic reality. Accordingly, on 1 June, Kojong held an audience with U.S. Minister to Korea Horace Newton Allen, an

old Korea hand who enjoyed close personal ties with the Korean monarch, to sound him out on the possible outbreak of war. From his meeting with Allen, Kojong judged that Russo-Japanese armed conflict was likely unless Russian troops withdrew from Manchuria and that the dispute over the Yalu River concession could also end in bloodshed.<sup>48</sup>

As if to validate Kojong's suppositions, on 4 July, Korean Minister to Japan Ko Yŏunghŭi dispatched an urgent telegram to Seoul concerning a rumour of an impending war between Japan and Russia. Kojong anxiously tried to corroborate the risk of hostilities through existing diplomatic channels and, from August to October 1903, contemplated diplomatic options to prevent Korea from becoming involved in such a war.<sup>49</sup> One option was declaring wartime neutrality; Kojong's efforts to make that happen deserve further scrutiny, for successful neutrality could have shielded his country from the worst effects of the Russo-Japanese hegemonic intrigues and increased his country's bargaining power in the diplomatic arena.

Kojong's efforts included him and his close aides launching a series of diplomatic initiatives aimed at major powers, seeking assistance from abroad to turn the Korean peninsula into a neutral zone in the event of war.<sup>50</sup> Their vision for neutrality resembled that of Russia, which toyed with the same concept, albeit in a geographically limited area (i.e., a neutral zone) to protect its strategic interests in Manchuria. According to a report from British Minister to Korea Sir John Newell Jordan, the British financial advisor to Kojong and Chief Commissioner of Korean Customs Sir John McLeavy Brown was instructed to compose official notes<sup>51</sup> addressed to Japan and Russia under the name of Korean Foreign Minister Yi Tojae. These notes restated Korea's desire to remain neutral during wartime and requested that neither powers use the Korean peninsula for military operations.<sup>52</sup> Upon their completion, they were forwarded to Russia and Japan by Hyŏn Sanggŏn and Ko Ŭisŏng,<sup>53</sup> who respectively departed for St. Petersburg on 21 August and for Tokyo four days later.<sup>54</sup>

Kojong had to rely on emissaries to handle diplomatic messages related to neutralization because Japanese surveillance severely undermined the operation of Korea's telegraph network,<sup>55</sup> inevitably undercutting the Korean government's ability to implement major power diplomacy confidently and speedily. For its part, Japan was determined to make the best use of its control of Korean telegraph lines, seeking to exploit these critical modes of communication to its advantage. For example, while Russian Foreign Minister Lamsdorff was engaging in tough negotiations with his Japanese counterpart Komura concerning Korea and Manchuria, Russia's representatives in Japan and Korea could not utilize telegraphy to securely exchange diplomatic messages with Lamsdorff. In Japan, the Russian diplomat

Gagarin noted at one point that it had become almost customary for Japan to purposely destroy Russia's secret telegraphs.<sup>56</sup>

Cynics may question the authenticity of a Russian diplomat's statement and dismiss Gagarin's assertion as a simple anti-Japan gambit. However, the Korean government's subsequent wartime neutrality declaration process and a report from the French representative in Korea would provide strong indications that Japan was monitoring telegraphic correspondence related to Korea, knowing all too well the importance of secured diplomatic communication channels in times of urgency.

While both missions had important diplomatic implications for Korea, Hyön Sanggön's tasks carried more weight because they involved ascertaining the stance of relatively friendly powers (France and Russia) on Korean neutralization, in addition to exploring mediation by international organisations.<sup>57</sup> Hyön's missions thus marked a new beginning for Korea, a fresh approach to its foreign policy via direct communication with possible benefactors of Korean neutralization—Russia and France—and international institutions. The potential role of the latter in shaping Korea's neutrality diplomacy needs to be taken into account as the Korean monarch may have calculated that Korea would have a better chance of securing Korean independence through an international forum, one perceived to be even-handed,<sup>58</sup> and by extension, free from the influence of a single hegemonic power.

Living up to his sovereign's expectations, Hyön, upon his arrival in France, threw himself into a diplomatic offensive, attempting to secure a meeting with French Foreign Minister Théophile Delcassé. When this failed, he left Kojong's secret message regarding neutrality in the hands of Min Yöngch'an, the Korean minister in France,<sup>59</sup> thus indirectly laying the groundwork for French cooperation with Korea's later wartime neutrality declaration. In the Netherlands, Hyön sought to attend the International Peace Conference and visit the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague, but the conference did not convene, and the court was in recess. He then travelled to St. Petersburg, where he conferred with Korean Minister to Russia Yi Pömchin on neutrality and met with former Russian Chargé d'affaires to Korea Waeber, an old-Korea hand, with close ties to Kojong and pro-Russia faction members in Korea. On his way back to Korea, Hyön visited Dalian and spoke with the Russian governor of the Far East.<sup>60</sup> In the end, for all his efforts, Hyön failed to win any qualitative support for Korean neutrality; Russia and France did not seem ready to respond to his overtures, and support from the International Peace Conference was unavailable.<sup>61</sup>

Despite this setback, Kojong's quest for international support for Korean neutrality continued. In October, he passed on his letter expounding on Korea's

wartime neutrality plan to the Korean Minister to Russia Yi Pömchin. Later that month, the Korean minister met with Russian Vice Foreign Minister Obolensky and presented Kojong's letter to him. Korea also reached out to France, where Korean minister Min Yöngch'an, notwithstanding his earlier disappointment with the French government, called on Paris to persuade Russia to back Korean neutrality.<sup>62</sup> To Yi's chagrin, Obolensky agreed only to consider the merits of Korean neutrality without offering any explicit assurances. More distressingly, Obolensky's superior Lamsdorff was sceptical of the plan, citing Japan's inconsistent adherence to the Rosen-Nishi Protocol.<sup>63</sup> He expressed his doubts about Japan's record of complying with international accords and the chances of that changing. Though by no means certain, had Lamsdorff regarded Japan as a trustworthy partner, Korean neutralization could have at least received a more sympathetic hearing from the Russian government.

Undaunted, Yi met with Kurino on the same evening to discuss neutralization of the Korean peninsula. During the meeting, the Korean diplomat sounded out his Japanese counterpart's thoughts on Korean neutralization, but Kurino held his tongue and merely replied that Korea should cooperate with Japan and China.<sup>64</sup> He did not explain why Korea's cooperation with its East Asian neighbours was necessary, but his rationale may have been based on the then fashionable "Theory of East Asia Peace,"<sup>65</sup> insinuating that Kurino may have subscribed to a pan-Asian philosophy in which Korea and Japan could cooperate together.

Lukewarm responses from senior-level Russian officials may have convinced Yi that even if Korea declared neutrality in the event of a Russo-Japanese war, neither country would support it (prematurely since it turned out that Russia supported it), and that Japan was likely to disrupt Korea's neutralization efforts, which were already facing severe headwinds. Yi instead turned his attention towards an alliance with Russia,<sup>66</sup> revealing not just his pro-Russia colours but also indicating the residual strength of Russian influence within Korean diplomatic circles. To facilitate this process, he sent a report to Yi Tojae, reminding him that Korea, lacking military muscle, had failed to prevent the invasion of foreign troops during the Sino-Japanese War and had been unable to resist foreign demands. This document underscored his point that Korea would be unable to abide by neutrality and his concern that even if it declared neutrality, neighbouring countries could question Korea's commitment to international law if it failed to observe the rules of neutrality.<sup>67</sup> Yi Pömchin might have had a point about Korea's inability to secure its neutral status during geopolitical crises, one attested to by damning contemporary assessments of Korean military strength from both inside and outside Korea.<sup>68</sup>

Irrespective of his pro-Russia bias, a front-line Korean diplomat's serious reservations about the feasibility of neutrality for securing Korea's territorial integrity

and sovereignty forewarned of the severe difficulties the Korean state could face after declaring neutrality. Meanwhile, after receiving Rosen's counterproposal, the Japanese government convened a cabinet meeting on 24 October to discuss possible alternatives. Rosen opined that Japan was now torn between accepting Russia's substantial compromise over Korea and maintaining a hard-line stance towards the Manchurian question.<sup>69</sup> His astute observation suggested that, at least for now, there was a lack of consensus among the Japanese political establishment on the appropriate direction of Japan's policies towards Korea and Manchuria, leaving more wiggle room for policymakers in Tokyo to manoeuvre on the international stage.

As it turned out, even after Rosen, who unlike his more hard-line Russian colleagues had advocated reaching an accommodation with Japan over Korea, tried several times to explain to Komura that Russia could not stomach the thought of intervention from a third power owing to his country's centuries-long relations with China, Japan would not budge. Eight days after the cabinet meeting, Komura presented to Rosen a revised Japanese proposal comprised of eleven articles. Alongside the independence and territorial integrity of China and Korea, this counterproposal highlighted Japanese recognition of Russian interests in Manchuria, restrictions on where in Manchuria Russian troops could be deployed, and Japan's consular jurisdiction and the establishment of a Japanese settlement in Manchuria.<sup>70</sup> Upon closer inspection, we can reasonably conclude that this revised proposal favoured Japan, as it sought to constrain Russia's military presence in Manchuria and to strengthen Japan's diplomatic and geo-economic influence there.

Rosen observed that Japan's uncompromising stance was rooted in its ability to deploy troops in Manchuria faster than Russia could and in a deep-seated belief that Russia would do whatever it took to maintain its superior status there. For his part, the Russian emperor was unperturbed by this perceived intransigence and continued to support continued negotiations with Japan while pushing forward with Russia's main demands.<sup>71</sup> Nicholas II's firm stance towards his country's hegemonic interests in the region intimated that it would be increasingly unlikely for his government to reach a workable compromise with Japan over Russia's core interests in the region. This indeed proved to be the case, for as an aspiring regional hegemon, it would have been unthinkable for Japan to give any ground in Manchuria (let alone compromise over Korean independence) to its rival Russia. In this context, Korea's path towards neutralization, already tortuous, would inevitably face further difficulties, stymied by the disparate national interests of Japan and Russia.

Against this backdrop, the secretary general of the special committee of the Far East, Alexey Mikhailovich Abaza, joined the fray, sharing his views on the second proposal from Japan with Rosen. Extending an olive branch to Japan, Abaza sought

to acknowledge that country's dominance over Korea, its right to dispatch troops there, and even conceded that Korean railroads and the Chinese Eastern railroad could be connected. On the other hand, he concurred with Rosen that Japanese involvement in Manchuria should be blocked and was equally resolute in leaving the area north of the thirty-ninth parallel a neutral zone.<sup>72</sup>

Abaza was tactically astute enough<sup>73</sup> to anticipate Japan's possible objections to Russian demands, irrespective of his willingness to entertain pragmatic diplomatic options. He enquired into Japanese activities in Beijing and Seoul (which counted on sympathy and support from American and British representatives) and paid close attention to Japan's efforts to maintain combat readiness. Abaza also feared Japan would discuss not just the Korean issue but also bring up Manchuria in future negotiations and weighed postponing Russia's submission of a revised counterproposal to Japan.<sup>74</sup>

By this stage, an inability to receive a rapid response to the questions put forward during previous Russo-Japanese diplomatic exchanges was vexing the Japanese government, which felt it maintained a much more efficient and speedy decision-making process on Far Eastern diplomacy. Komura complained to Kurino that even though Tokyo had given "prompt answers to all propositions of the Russian Government ... the negotiations have not yet reached a stage where the final issue can certainly be predicted."<sup>75</sup> Kurino thus met with Lamsdorff on 9 December to press the Russian foreign minister about a Russian counterproposal to the Japanese propositions.<sup>76</sup>

Two days after Kurino's inquiry, Russia presented its second counterproposal, consisting of eight articles, to Japan via Rosen. As in the first counterproposal, the Russian government accepted Japan's special interests in Korea and its right to advise on its internal affairs and send military forces there. But Russia remained resolute in designating the area north of the thirty-ninth parallel a neutral zone and refused to extend the scope of the agreement to Manchuria.<sup>77</sup> Neither Japan nor Russia seemed disposed to yielding an inch regarding their respective spheres of interest in Korea and Manchuria.<sup>78</sup> This deadlock left Korea in a less and less advantageous position, with Japan especially determined to make up ground as a latecomer to imperialism.<sup>79</sup> This constrained Seoul's ability to pursue more hard-headed diplomacy (i.e., neutrality) that could not only defuse Russo-Japanese tensions over the Korean peninsula but that could also change the geopolitical status of the region.

The third proposal from Japan reached Russia on 21 December. While interviewing Rosen, Komura referred to profound discrepancies in the territorial compass between Japan's original proposals and Russia's counterproposals.<sup>80</sup> Komura subsequently ordered Kurino to deliver a *note verbale* to Lamsdorff and

obtain an early response from Russia. Japan further requested the excision of article six of Russia's second counterproposal, which dealt with the creation of a neutral zone north of the thirty-ninth parallel.<sup>81</sup> With Tokyo refusing to consider even a limited form of Korean neutrality, Seoul's drive for neutralization was in danger of stalling out.

Upon reviewing this note, Abaza saw through Japan's steadfast refusal to walk back from its core demands and now feared that obtaining a workable compromise with Japan was increasingly futile. He thus advised the Russian emperor to make use of the available time to comprehensively review Russia's Korean policy in connection with Manchuria and other issues in the Far East.<sup>82</sup> The secretary general's concern had some basis, as Komura warned Rosen of the Japanese public's extreme anger towards Russia for its rejection of including Manchuria as part of an agreement; during this period, Japanese newspapers were stoking war fever, urging their government to send an ultimatum to Russia for a declaration of war and to occupy Korea.<sup>83</sup> The reality in Japan was much more nuanced, however, as Naoko Shimazu points out that not all Japanese society segments bought into their government's war narrative.<sup>84</sup> Thus, we can surmise that Komura may have exaggerated the degree of anti-Russia sentiment within Japan to push Tokyo closer to a war with St. Petersburg.

At this juncture, Rosen developed new plans to cope with Russia's diplomatic conundrum, suggesting that some Russian officials perhaps still preferred a diplomatic settlement to a costly military conflict. He proposed a conventional agreement that confirmed Korea was not part of Russia's sphere of influence and that Manchuria was not part of Japan's. In a rider, Rosen pushed for the inclusion of a provisory clause that banned the construction of any facility on the Korean coast that might threaten freedom of navigation along the Korea Strait.<sup>85</sup> He reasoned that such an approach would not predetermine Korea's independence problem and would stop Japanese interference in Manchuria,<sup>86</sup> thereby frustrating Japan's hegemonic drive in Northeast Asia.

Nicholas II's subsequent instructions to Rosen showed that the minister's strategic acumen might have had some impact in recalibrating Russia's policy stance in the Far East. The Russian emperor insisted that three amendments had to be included in the third counterproposal. The first amendment banned any military activity on the Korean coast that could threaten freedom of navigation and forbade the use of any part of Korean territory for strategic purposes. The second amendment reaffirmed the preservation of a neutral zone,<sup>87</sup> and the third promised Russia would not interfere with Japan exercising its rights and privileges in Manchuria, though the creation of a settlement zone was still ruled out. Rosen delivered Russia's third counterproposal to Komura on 6 January 1904.<sup>88</sup>

The Russian sovereign's firm stance meant the prospect for a peaceful resolution of Russo-Japanese disputes became increasingly grimmer. As a precautionary measure, the Western powers (the U.S., Britain, France, Italy, and Germany) now prepared for the worst, sending reinforcements to guard their legations.<sup>89</sup> This new strategic reality shook Korea's political world and caused public sentiment to plummet, fuelling skyrocketing inflation in Seoul.<sup>90</sup> The last thing the Korean state wanted was a fragile domestic economy, complicating its task in grappling with the immensely challenging diplomatic landscape.

Meanwhile, on 11 January, Japanese political leaders met at the Tokyo residence of Prime Minister Katsura Tarō to discuss the latest Russian counterproposal, which pushed for a neutral zone north of the 39th parallel in Korea while refusing to acknowledge China's territorial integrity in Manchuria. St. Petersburg's reaction manifested its determination not to sanction Japanese predominance over Korea and, from Tokyo's standpoint, to defuse any attempts at frustrating Russia's hegemonic designs in Manchuria. Though Komura wanted Japan to end negotiations with Russia and declare war, the navy asked for more time for war preparations.<sup>91</sup> Hence, together with its war preparation, Japan decided to make one last diplomatic push, submitting a final proposal restating its main stance to Russia.<sup>92</sup>

Two days after the Tokyo meeting, Komura presented Japan's final proposal to Rosen, declaring that Japan could neither accept any compromise in Manchuria nor Russia's proposal of the establishment of a limited neutral zone north of the 39th parallel in Korea. A seasoned observer of East Asian affairs, British Minister to Japan Sir Claude Maxwell MacDonald intuited that unless Russia quickly made concessions, a Russo-Japanese war was now all but certain.<sup>93</sup> Komura also showed a copy of his communication to U.S. Minister to Japan Lloyd Carpenter Griscom, saying that unless Russia's reply arrived within a reasonable time, Japan would "decide what measures it may have to take to protect its rights and interests".<sup>94</sup>

Griscom did not mince words when he reported on Komura's ultimatum to Secretary of State John Hay: "It is no exaggeration to say that if there was no war it will be a severe disappointment to the Japanese individual of every walk of life."<sup>95</sup> Unlike Britain, which enjoyed a formal alliance with Japan, the U.S. remained officially neutral amidst the Russo-Japanese stand-off.<sup>96</sup> However, Komura's action signified that Tokyo regarded Washington as a de-facto ally. Maintaining friendly ties with the U.S., after all, would bolster Japan's negotiating position vis-à-vis Russia and tilt the regional balance of power in Tokyo's favour (indeed, U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt would broker the peace between Japan and Russia at Portsmouth in 1905).

As Japan stepped closer to war, the Korean establishment scrambled to enact an urgent measure to preserve at least some semblance of Korean sovereignty.



Hyŏn Sanggŏn returned from his European mission on 11 January, carrying a letter from French Foreign Minister Théophile Delcassé that advised Korea to align itself closely with Russia and France. Interpreting the French official's advice as pertinent to his efforts to salvage Korea's sovereignty and to protect its border and his subjects from becoming casualties of a war fought by and for others, Kojong backedpedaled from exploring a potential alliance with Japan.<sup>97</sup> Aside from the letter from France, Kojong had one more reason to align Korea more closely with the Franco-Russian axis; around this time, Nicholas II's reassuring letter reached Seoul, further convincing Kojong he could count on Russia to support Korean independence.

Energised by these encouraging signs, Kojong and Korea's newly emboldened pro-neutralization faction, led by the high-ranking courtier Yi Yongik, proceeded with a wartime neutrality declaration. On 14 January, Hyŏn took a preliminary step for wartime neutrality by revealing to Russian Minister to Korea Pavloff Kojong's intentions to proclaim Korea's strict neutrality in the event of a Russo-Japanese war.<sup>98</sup> He then requested Pavloff's assistance with sending a statement of wartime neutrality via telegram from Shanghai to avoid the Japanese-controlled telegraph office in Korea, perhaps cognizant of possible manipulation and even worse, the delay of the telegram's transmission abroad by the Japanese authorities.<sup>99</sup> Now that the Russo-Japanese War was on the horizon, Korean policymakers needed to obtain international recognition of Korean neutrality from their foreign counterparts, however slim the possibility.

Pavloff told Hyŏn to wait until he had received instructions from his government and advised that Shanghai could not be used to transmit the telegram since no passenger ship would leave for Shanghai for four days. On 17 January, Russian Foreign Ministry official De Plancon telegraphed Pavloff, concurring with his scepticism of the Shanghai option and asking that Kojong's telegram be transmitted to the French consulate in Shanghai from the French legation in Seoul. The next day, Pavloff telegraphed the Russian foreign minister, reporting that Korea's neutrality declaration would be announced from the French consulate in Chefoo, China, by French Consul (referred to as a vice-consul in French sources) A. Guérin, who doubled as acting Korean consul.

As if to prove the point made by the French foreign minister (that Korea should depend on his country and Russia), French nationals acting as facilitators of Korea's wartime neutrality were of substantial benefit to Seoul, even in the absence of explicit instructions from the French government to support its Korean counterpart. Working in concert with neutralization advocates Yi Yongik, Kang Sŏkho, Yi Hakkyun, Hyŏn Sanggŏn, and Yi Yinyŏng, the French language teacher Martel became intimately involved in Korea's neutrality policy, including crafting

appropriate negotiation strategies.<sup>100</sup> Most importantly, French Chargé d'affaires Vicomte de Fontenay would compose Korea's neutrality declaration and even suggest a reliable means for transmitting this message abroad.

Fontenay first broached a major power-guaranteed Korean neutralization to Pavloff, arguing that this would help defuse the ongoing tension between Japan and Russia and preserve peace in the Far East. During Fontenay's second meeting with him on 14 January, Pavloff told him that with the Russian government's blessing, he too was backing Kojong's wartime neutrality project. Encouraged by this positive development, Fontenay drafted a declaration of Korean neutrality addressed to eleven countries that maintained diplomatic ties with Korea and to seven Korean diplomatic representatives. Next, Kojong received the text of the neutrality declaration statement, which Fontenay asked him to approve. But at this moment, the Russian government objected to transmitting any telegrams from the Russian-controlled Port Arthur, fearing that it could diminish the declaration's value due to its lacking spontaneity. Fontenay then stepped into the breach, remembering that French Consul Guérin in Chefoo was also serving as the consul of Korea and recommending that Guérin transmit the Korean government's messages abroad from there.<sup>101</sup>

Eventually, working in concert with Martel and Adhémar Delcoigne,<sup>102</sup> Kojong's palace aides Hyön Sanggön, Kang Sökho, Yi Hakkyun, and Yi Yinyöng composed an official wartime neutrality statement. Fontenay translated this into French, and Yi Könch'un, an interpreter at the Foreign Ministry, was reportedly sent to Chefoo to deliver the text and have the French vice-consul declare it on behalf of the Korean government.<sup>103</sup> Finally, under the name of Foreign Minister Yi Chiyong, the wartime neutrality of Korea was announced at Chefoo on 21 January,<sup>104</sup> a declaration the Russian cabinet believed (wrongly as it turned out) could prevent Korea from becoming Japan's protectorate.<sup>105</sup>

Meanwhile, back in St. Petersburg, having reviewed the fourth proposal from Tokyo, Russian officials now realised their country's talks with Japan had reached a dead end. Abaza, for one, did not see any value in prolonging negotiations. In addition to calling for the comprehensive review of the Korean issue, Abaza advised the emperor to transfer a battalion to southern Manchuria on the Korean border.<sup>106</sup> As a high-ranking official on Far Eastern affairs, Abaza's words would have carried considerable weight in Russia's Northeast Asian policies, and his latest advice suggested that the hardliners within Russian officialdom were baying for blood (i.e., war with Japan).

However, the Russian sovereign, reluctant to forcefully break the diplomatic deadlock with Japan, maintained that Russia should still pursue a peace agreement by continuing talks with the Japanese cabinet, and on 3 February, he instructed

Alexeyev to submit a fourth counterproposal to Tokyo.<sup>107</sup> While the original counterproposal contained eight articles, the Russian monarch now consented to the removal of article six, which dealt with a neutral zone in Korea.<sup>108</sup> Despite this new overture, the Japanese government refused to receive the counterproposal and severed diplomatic relations with Russia on 7 February,<sup>109</sup> bringing to an end Russo-Japanese efforts to avoid a military showdown, and by extension, essentially extinguishing any realistic chance for even a limited form of Korean neutrality.<sup>110</sup>

## Disparate Diplomatic Stratagems: Some Observations

To recapitulate: in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century Korea fell victim to a hegemonic rivalry between Russia and Japan. Overwhelmed by their hard power and dominant international status, Korea could only hope to safeguard its territorial integrity and independence through deft diplomacy—but this proved to be beyond Korea's grasp. More hard-headed observers may argue that Korea's diplomatic activities did little to change the multi-level dynamics of regional geopolitics and failed to contain a hegemonic rivalry over a key conflict zone, given the considerable gap of state capacities between Korea and the two hegemonic powers (Japan and Russia). Considering these assessments, we can observe the following findings.

First, Korea was effectively side-lined from a series of key Russo-Japanese diplomatic exchanges, in which issues affecting Korea's geopolitical position were brought to the fore. Having joined the Western-led international system, Korea was not theoretically obliged to maintain a subservient relationship with any hegemon; however, Korea had to remain alert to the geostrategic intents of Japan and Russia, both of which exerted a strong influence over the peninsula. Their strategic presence on the Korean peninsula forced Seoul to continuously adjust its diplomatic strategy through the dispatch of special envoys, multilateral diplomacy and eventually, the declaration of wartime neutrality.

Second, despite playing a minor role on the regional diplomatic stage, Korean policymakers still tried to play Korea's weak hand to their advantage by searching for a card that would deliver a way to peacefully preserve the country's sovereignty. Their wartime neutrality diplomacy marked the high point of such efforts, receiving a sympathetic hearing from several powers. In its documents (dated 20 February 1904) dispatched to Russian representatives abroad, the Russian Foreign Ministry noted that Korea's wartime neutrality declaration won sympathy from Russia and other major powers.<sup>111</sup> Given Russia's strong desire to contain Japan's strategic influence in Northeast Asia, some cynics may question the

accuracy of this report. Nevertheless, it would be equally wrong to entirely dismiss the effects of the declaration on the international stage and not recognise Korea's unyielding desire to survive the Russo-Japanese imperialist intrigues.<sup>112</sup> At the same time, given Korea's well-publicised ties with Russia, as Kim Sŭngyŏng rightly notes, it was not easy for Japan to stomach the idea of neutralization since a neutralized Korea could end up toeing the pro-Russia line,<sup>113</sup> thereby undermining Japan's hegemonic position on the Korean peninsula.

Third, Russia waged a protracted struggle with Japan to consolidate its sphere of influence in the region, but was perhaps blindsided by a widespread tendency to underestimate Japan's military capabilities, as evidenced by the statement: "Russian society and officer corps [who were] obsessed with illusions of an easy, quick colonial expedition to ... punish 'yellow dwarfs,' 'ugly pigmies' or simply 'macaque'."<sup>114</sup> Such prejudices notwithstanding, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, unable to exercise exclusive hegemony over the Far East, Russia moved to obtain Japanese understanding for creating a neutral zone within Korea. But because St. Petersburg remained preoccupied with preserving its position along the Pacific coast and retaining an interest in Far Eastern development, it could not afford Korea falling under Tokyo's sphere of influence. Its decisions also reflected Russia's prudent approach to the changing geopolitical landscape on the Korean peninsula, which went as far as advocating neutrality to stabilize the region's geopolitical situation. Only Korea housed an ice-free port that Russia might require in the future,<sup>115</sup> which explains Witte's interest in Korea.<sup>116</sup> If Japan took Korea and Manchuria, Russia might end up losing all its territories on the Pacific.<sup>117</sup>

Fourth, there were significant differences in how the three countries' leaders and administrations arrived at policy decisions. In Korea, the country's major power diplomacy and, crucially, neutrality diplomacy, were spearheaded by Kojong, who relied on trusted aides and diplomats to execute a series of important diplomatic tasks. This tendency ensured that Korea's diplomacy effectively bypassed a conventional channel, the Foreign Ministry (even though the wartime neutrality declaration was declared under the foreign minister's name). Russia's Far Eastern diplomacy was a by-product of tripartite coordination among the Russian Foreign Ministry, Far Eastern Governor-General, and the Far Eastern Committee. Though Nicholas II acted as a final arbiter in all matters related to Korea and Manchuria, this institutional complexity culminated in disharmony and sowed confusion in Russian decision-making. Compare Seoul and St. Petersburg's institutional deficiencies with Tokyo's comparatively smooth decision-making process. During pivotal moments in Russo-Japanese negotiations, Japanese officials quickly convened cabinet meetings to decide upon negotiating tactics and

to fine-tune Japan's Korea and Manchuria strategies. Furthermore, all diplomatic instructions passed through the foreign minister, unifying the chain of command and ensuring the smooth execution of foreign policy measures.

To the above-mentioned inability of Japan and Russia to reach a *modus vivendi*, we should add their choosing instead to reject opportunities to find common ground. Since both powers were competing for regional hegemony, despite the flurry of diplomatic exchanges between Tokyo and St. Petersburg, neither would completely accommodate the opposing party's hegemonic ambitions.<sup>118</sup> To be fair, at one time, both Tokyo and St. Petersburg tried to reach possible compromise scenarios regarding Korea and Manchuria. Russia's proposal for a neutral zone in northern Korea and Japan's call for China and Korea's territorial integrity were cases in point. Had cooler heads prevailed in both capitals, Japan and Russia could have settled their differences peacefully by agreeing to limit their hegemonic presence in Korea and Manchuria. Consider Witte's failed 1901 proposal, which judged that avoiding a war with Japan was Russia's top goal. In this plan, he contemplated abandoning the political and military occupation of Manchuria and minimizing his country's strategic priority to railroads on Manchuria,<sup>119</sup> which could have given diplomacy between Japan and Russia new momentum. In the end, neither Japan nor Russia was ready to offer substantial concessions that could undermine either party's long-term hegemonic position in Northeast Asia.

## Conclusion: Impacts, Echoes and Legacies

Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War sent shock waves through the international community. By defeating a major European power, Japan sealed its stature as a new imperial power. Soon to be embroiled in revolutionary turmoil, Russia's hegemonic strength would be markedly reduced in the Far East, and it would henceforward direct its strategic attentions towards Europe. Relying on the goodwill of Britain and the U.S., Japan reinforced its economic, political, and military dominance over the Korean peninsula. In November 1905, Korea became a protectorate of Japan and, despite protests from Kojong and Russia, other major powers backed this decision, which culminated in the official loss of Korean independence in 1910. Having colonized Korea, Japan now turned its attention to Manchuria, using its newly acquired possession as a stepping stone to expand its hegemony in Northeast Asia.

Though failed, Korea's neutralization would have laid the basis for a more stable, multipolar order, in which both Japan and Russia could have solidified their commercial and political interests in their respective spheres of influence without undermining Korea's formal independence. Considerable time has passed

since the Korean peninsula became the focal point of hegemonic conflicts between major players in the region. However, the danger of the Korean peninsula becoming ground zero for a proxy war between hegemonic powers remains real. The geopolitics of contemporary East Asia resemble those of early modern and modern East Asia; just like nineteenth century Korea, South Korea is a faithful participant in a regional world order underwritten by a strong hegemon (the U.S.) which is locked in a rivalry with an ambitious challenger to its hegemony (China).

Then again, the division of the Korean peninsula into two separate states, North and South Korea, and the growing hegemonic rivalry between China and the U.S. may catapult the spheres of influence issue onto centre stage. If today's Korea peninsula is to avoid meeting a fate similar to Kojong's Korea, policymakers should seriously revisit these fascinating episodes in the history of East Asia and envision a unified and *neutral* Korean peninsula acting as a strategic buffer between China and the U.S.

## Notes

1. The Seed Program for Korean Studies through the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and Korean Studies Promotion Service of the Academy of Korean Studies (AKS-2019-INC-2230005) supported this research.
2. Katō Yōko. "What Caused the Russo-Japanese War—Korea or Manchuria?" *Social Science Japan Journal*, 10 (2007), p. 96.
3. Katō Yōko. "What Caused the Russo-Japanese War—Korea or Manchuria?," p. 69.
4. Katō Yōko. "What Caused the Russo-Japanese War—Korea or Manchuria?," p. 100.
5. Bella Pak. "Russia's Policy Towards Korea during the Russo-Japanese War," *International Journal of Korean History*, 7 (2005), p. 30.
6. Bella Pak. "Russia's Policy Towards Korea during the Russo-Japanese War," pp. 36–37.
7. Bella Pak. "Russia's Policy Towards Korea during the Russo-Japanese War," p. 49.
8. Robert Gilpin. *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 29.
9. Michael Mastanduno. "Incomplete Hegemony" in *Asian Security Order: Instrumental and Normative Features*, edited by Muthiah Alagappa (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 145.
10. Daniel Bell. "Realizing Tianxia: Traditional Values and China's Foreign Policy" in *Asian Security Order: Instrumental and Normative Features*, edited by Muthiah Alagappa (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 134.
11. Yan Xuetong. *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, translated by Edmund Ryden (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2013), pp. 104–105.
12. Cyril Black, Richard Falk, and Oran Young. *Neutralization and World Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1968), p. 11.
13. Graham Evans and Jeffery Newnham. *Dictionary of International Relations* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), p. 366.
14. Kang Chongil and Yi Chaebong. *Hanbando ūi yōngse chungniphwa tongil ūn kanūnghan-ka* (Seoul: Tūllyōk, 2001), p. 237.
15. Roderick Ogley. *The Treaty and Practice of Neutrality in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 10.

16. Kang and Yi, *Hanbando üi yöngse chungniphwa tongil ün kanünghan-ka*, p. 235.
17. The war was a “modern twentieth century conflict that offers much evidence revealing the direction in which the policies of the Great Powers ... were taking the rest of the world.” John Steinberg, “Was the Russo-Japanese War World War Zero?” *The Russo-Japanese War in Global Perspective: World War Zero, Volume II*, edited by David Wolff, Steve Marks, Bruce Menning, David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, and Shinji Yokote (Leiden: Brill, 2007), p. 7.
18. Andrew Malozemoff, *Russian Far Eastern Policy 1881–1904: With Special Emphasis on the Causes of the Russo-Japanese War* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1958), p. 243.
19. It is important to stress that in contrast to Japan, Russia was less interested in acquiring Korean territory. Still, St. Petersburg entertained a “new method of conquering backward countries” and sought to use the East-Asiatic Company as a means to exploit “the natural riches of Korea and East Asia”. Boris Romanov, *Russia in Manchuria (1892–1906)* (New York, NY: Octagon Books, 1974), p. 259. Romanov’s observation could also be found in an official Russian document, which acknowledged Russia’s interest in Korea’s timber concession. Kim Sönan, ed., *Rösia munsö pönyökchip V: yönbang kungnip munsö pogwanso (IAPΦ)* (Seoul: Sönin, 2011), p. 165.
20. John Albert White, *The Diplomacy of the Russo-Japanese War* (Princeton, NJ: 1964), p. 57.
21. Yi Wönyong, ed., *Rösia munsö pönyökchip IX: yönbang kungnip munsö pogwanso (IAPΦ)* (Seoul: Sönin, 2013), p. 57.
22. Though unmentioned, it is possible to deduce that Russian policymakers were conscious of the negative international reception surrounding Russia’s perceived threatening presence on Manchuria and northern Korea. White, *The Diplomacy of the Russo-Japanese War*, p. 51.
23. Unlike his more hard-line colleagues, Witte was ready to compromise with Japan over Korea, advising the Russian emperor to allow Tokyo to “temporarily” seize Korea provided that Japan recognised Manchuria was “unconditionally and forever lost” to her (i.e., Japan). Romanov, *Russia in Manchuria (1892–1906)*, p. 294.
24. Yi Wönyong, ed., *Rösia munsö pönyökchip IX*, p. 60. He thought that this temporary agreement would bring a much needed stability for the economic development of Russia. Witte also had the recently acquired Chinese Eastern Railway in mind, for which security was crucial for enhancing Russian prestige in the Far East. Pak Chaeman, ed., *Rösia munsö pönyökchip VI: yönbang kungnip munsö pogwanso (IAPΦ)* (Seoul: Sönin, 2013), p. 61. By preferring Russia’s economic development and its directly-controlled Chinese railroads over direct competition with Japan, Witte signalled that he opted for a more prudent course, one plotted to avoid unnecessary confrontation with Tokyo.
25. Kim Yonggu, *Segye oegyosa* (Seoul: Taehakkyo Ch’ulp’an munhwawön, 2006), p. 367.
26. Yi Wönyong, ed., *Rösia munsö pönyökchip IX*, p. 62.
27. Yi Wönyong, ed., *Rösia munsö pönyökchip IX*, p. 63. From Russia’s perspective, together with the port of Dalian, Korea could serve as an excellent base for Japan to attack China and Russia. Kim Sönan, ed., *Rösia munsö pönyökchip V*, pp. 172–173. Thus, it would have been inconceivable for Russia to bend over and meet Japan’s demands without reassurances.
28. Malozemoff, *Russian Far Eastern Policy 1881–1904*, p. 203.
29. White, *The Diplomacy of the Russo-Japanese War*, p. 53.
30. Pak Chaeman, ed., *Rösia munsö pönyökchip VI: yönbang kungnip munsö pogwanso (IAPΦ)* (Seoul: Sönin, 2011), p. 131.
31. Pak Chaeman, ed., *Rösia munsö pönyökchip VI: yönbang kungnip munsö pogwanso (IAPΦ)*, p. 153.
32. Romanov, *Russia in Manchuria (1892–1906)*, p. 268.
33. Pak Chaeman, ed., *Rösia munsö pönyökchip VI*, p. 135.
34. True enough, both the Blue Paper of Britain and White Paper of Japan would later point to this Russian action as one of causes of the Russo-Japanese War. Kim Sönan, ed., *Rösia munsö pönyökchip V*, p. 165.

35. Hyön Kwangho. *Taehan Cheguk kwa Rösia kürigo Ilbon* (Seoul: Sönin, 2007), p. 203.
36. Pak Bella. "Russia's Policy Towards Korea during the Russo-Japanese War," p. 37.
37. Pak Chaeman, ed., *Rösia munsö pönyökchip VI*, p. 174. Later, on 31 June at a Dalian conference, the participants unanimously agreed that occupying all of or the northern part of Korea would not benefit Russia. Pak Chaeman, ed., *Rösia munsö pönyökchip VI*, p. 177. This insinuated that, for the time being, Russia was determined not to make any aggressive moves in Korea.
38. Malozemoff, *Russian Far Eastern Policy 1881–1904*, p. 237.
39. Kim Wönsu. "The Russo-Japanese War and the Crisis Diplomacy of the Great Han Empire—Connected with the Yongamp'o Incident." *Söyang yöksa wa munhwa yön'gu*, 2016, pp. 224–225. The Murinan Conference saw two prominent *genrö*, Itö Hirobumi and Yamagata Aritomo, were joined by prime minister Katsura Tarö and foreign minister Komura Jutarö to confer Japan's negotiation strategy with Russia. The idea of a 'Manchuria–Korea' exchange was one of the major results of this conference.
40. Kim Wönsu. "The Russo-Japanese War and the Crisis Diplomacy of the Great Han Empire—Connected with the Yongamp'o Incident," p. 225.
41. Paek Chungi, *Eurasia cheguk üi t'ansaeng: Eurasia oegyo üi kiwön* (Seoul: Hongmunkwan, 2014), p. 687.
42. Pak Chaeman ed., *Rösia munsö pönyökchip VIII*, p. 129.
43. Pak Chaeman ed., *Rösia munsö pönyökchip VIII*, p. 130.
44. Pak Chaeman ed., *Rösia munsö pönyökchip VIII*, p. 131.
45. Pak Chaeman, ed., *Rösia munsö pönyökchip VIII*, p. 215.
46. Kim Wonsu. "The Russo-Japanese War," pp. 225–226.
47. In fact, Kuropatkin had already, 1901, contemplated creating a neutral zone on the Yalu River's Korean side as a buffer between Japan and Russia's spheres of interest. White, *The Diplomacy of the Russo-Japanese War*, p. 56.
48. Kim Wönmo ed., *Allen üi ilgi* (Seoul: Tan'guk University Press, 1991), pp. 203–204.
49. Kim Wönsu "The Russo-Japanese War," p. 228.
50. Kim Süngyöng. "Russo-Japanese Rivalry over Korean Buffer at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century and Its Implications", *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 16.4 (2005), pp. 632–641.
51. Eöm Ch'anho. "Chugwön suho rül wihan Kojong üi tüksa woegyo," *Kangwön sahak* 15. 2000, p. 209.
52. The National Archives. *Affairs of Corea and Manchuria Further Correspondence* Part II, FO 405/139, no. 6, Jordan to Lansdowne, 26 August 1903.
53. Known as Hyön Yöngun in other accounts.
54. Pak Chonghyo, ed., *Rösia kungnip munsö pogwanso sojang Han'guk kwallyön munsö yoyakchip* (Seoul: Han'guk kukche kyoryu chaedan, 2002), p. 406, p. 409.
55. Pak Chonghyo, ed., *Rösia kungnip munsö pogwanso sojang Han'guk kwallyön munsö yoyakchip*, p. 363.
56. Pak Chonghyo, ed., *Rösia kungnip munsö pogwanso sojang Han'guk kwallyön munsö yoyakchip*, p. 311.
57. Kuksa p'yönc'h'an wiwönhoe, ed., *Chu-Han Ilbon kongsagwan kirok*, 21, p. 247.
58. In so doing, Kojong was placing his hopes on an international organization (albeit without clear enforcing mechanisms) rather than a friendly power like China, which Yu Kilchun sought to rely on to fulfil Korean neutralization. Kang Manki, *Pundan sidae üi yöksa insik* (Seoul: Ch'angjak kwa pip'yöngsa, 1978), pp. 110–111.
59. Min was said to have appealed to the French government to induce Russia to help realize Korean neutrality. Hyön Kwangho, *Taehan Cheguk üi taeye chöngch'aek* (Seoul: Sinsöwön, 2002), p. 119.
60. *Hwangsöng sinmun*, 20 August, 1903; 12 September, 1903.



61. Hyön Kwangho, “Taehan Cheguk üi taeoe chöngch’aek,” p. 120. Hyön Sanggön pursued Korean neutralization under the guarantee of major powers and through international institutions (e.g. the Red Cross, the International Peace Conference, and the International Court of Justice). *Tokyo asahi shimbun*, 24 January 1904.
62. Hyön Kwangho, “Taehan Cheguk üi taeoe chöngch’aek,” p. 119.
63. Kim Wönsu, “The Russo-Japanese War”, p. 236. Concluded on 25 April 1898, the Rosen-Nishi Protocol was meant to guarantee Korea’s independence and non-interference in the country’s internal affairs by Japan and Russia. However, Russian recognition of Japan’s economic primacy in Korea allowed Japan to consolidate its presence in Korea, unintentionally undercutting its independence. Söng Hwangyong, *Kündae Tongyang oegyosa* (Seoul: Myöngjisa, 2005), p. 274.
64. Kuksa p’yönch’an wiwönhoe, ed., *Chu-Han Ilbon kongsagwan kirok* 20, pp. 358–360.
65. This theory was first propagated in August 1898, by Japanese statesman Itö Hirobumi, who urged China to ally with Japan to counter Western imperialism. Some Koreans also advocated cooperation among Korea, China and Japan under Japan’s tutelage, provided that Korean sovereignty was not put in danger. Hyön Kwangho. *Taehan Cheguk kwa Rösia kürigo Ilbon* (Seoul: Sönnin, 2007), p. 95. These contemporary trends suggest that while not constituting a clear majority, there was a sizeable minority among the East Asian establishment who supported cooperation with Japan.
66. Kim Wönsu, “The Russo-Japanese War,” p. 237.
67. Kyujanggak sojang munso, ed., *Chu A raegöan*, 28 November 1903, No. 18062.
68. A Russian report harshly criticized Korea’s military strength, stating that it lacked real fighting power. Kim Sönan, ed., “Rösia munso pönyökchip V,” p. 16. French military attaché Colonel Clement de Grandprey was no less critical in describing the woeful status of the Korean military, calling it too weak to defend itself from potential military aggression. Diplomatic Archive Centre, *Correspondance Politique et Commerciale/Nouvelle Série 1897–1910 Corée: Armée-Marine (1901–1917)*, 20 December 1902, p. 24. The Korean army marshal Paek Sönggi lamented that instead of producing weaponry domestically, Korea was importing it. Sö Inhwan, *Taehan Cheguk üi kunsä chedo* (Seoul: Hyeon, 2000), p. 162. This laid bare Korea’s grossly inadequate combat readiness, as a steady access to military ordinance is vital for military operations, and by extension, the Korean state’s ability to safeguard its independence and ultimately, Korean neutralization.
69. Pak Chaeman, ed., *Rösia munso pönyökchip VI*, p. 262.
70. Pak Chaeman, ed., *Rösia munso pönyökchip VI*, p. 263.
71. Pak Chaeman, ed., *Rösia munso pönyökchip VI*, p. 264.
72. Pak Chaeman, ed., *Rösia munso pönyökchip VI*, p. 265.
73. According to Andrew Malozemoff, Abaza thought Russia could afford to compromise with Japan over Korea since the Japanese takeover of the Korean peninsula would arouse resentment of other powers and fail to secure its position there. The Japanese were “petty traders, not large merchants.” Malozemoff, *Russian Far Eastern Policy 1881–1904*, p. 245. Abaza’s seemingly dismissive attitude of Japanese ambitions on Korea implied the Russian official might have underestimated the international support that Japan could count on, including from its ally, Britain, who remained wary of Russia’s hegemonic intents in Asia.
74. Pak Chaeman, ed., *Rösia munso pönyökchip VI*, p. 266.
75. Gaimushö, ed., *Correspondence Regarding the Negotiations between Japan and Russia (1903–1904)*, Presented to the Imperial Diet, March 1904, Baron Komura to Kurino, 1 December 1903, No. 30, Forgotten Books, 2008, p. 38 [hereafter *Correspondence*].
76. *Ibid.*, Mr Kurino to Baron Komura, 9 December 1903, No. 33, p. 40.
77. Pak Chaeman, ed., *Rösia munso pönyökchip VI*, p. 267. Abaza commented that although he thought this revised counterproposal represented the maximum gain for Russia, it was

- highly unlikely that Japan would accede to it. Abaza mentioned the Japanese government's decision to prepare for possible military action in Korea as proof. Ibid.
78. Korean scholar Shin Pokryōng contends that Japan and Russia had different interpretations concerning a neutral zone on the Korean peninsula. Shin reasons that St. Petersburg was interested in establishing a "line" along the borders of China and Korea and Korea and Russia. Conversely, Japan envisaged a neutral zone between China and Korea, signifying Tokyo's desire to associate neutrality with "territory". Shin, Pokryōng. "Rō-II chōnjaeng ūi han tanmyōn: kŭgōsŭn ōttōk'e Taehan Cheguk ūi mangguk kwa yōn'gwan toeōnna", *Hanguk chōngch'isa nonch'ong* 42. 1 (2020), p. 101.
  79. Jordan Sand. "Subaltern Imperialists: The New Historiography of the Japanese Empire", *Past and Present* 25.1 (November 2014), p. 275.
  80. Gaimushō, ed., *Correspondence*, Baron Komura to Mr Kurino, 21 December 1903, No. 35, p. 42.
  81. Gaimushō, ed., *Correspondence*, p. 44.
  82. Pak Chaeman, ed., *Rōsia munsō pōnyōkchip* VI, p. 268. Abaza's intervention showed a close link between Korea and Manchuria in Russia's hegemonic designs in the Far East.
  83. Pak Chaeman, ed., *Rōsia munsō pōnyōkchip* VI, p. 269.
  84. See Shimazu Naoko, *Japanese Society at War: Death, Memory and the Russo-Japanese War* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009).
  85. Pak Chaeman, ed., *Rōsia munsō pōnyōkchip* VI, p. 269.
  86. Pak Chaeman, ed., *Rōsia munsō pōnyōkchip* VI, p. 270.
  87. Pak Chaeman, ed., *Rōsia munsō pōnyōkchip* VI, p. 271.
  88. Pak Chaeman, ed., *Rōsia munsō pōnyōkchip* VI, p. 272.
  89. Sō Yōnghŭi, *Taehan Cheguk chōngch'isa yōn'gu* (Seoul: Taehakkyo ch'ulp'anbu, 2003), p. 179.
  90. Sō Yōnghŭi, *Taehan Cheguk chōngch'isa yōn'gu*, p. 180.
  91. Raymond Esthus, *Theodore Roosevelt and Japan* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1967), p. 20.
  92. Tatsuji Takeuchi, *War and Diplomacy in the Japanese Empire* (Doran: Doubleday, 1935), p. 142.
  93. *Correspondance Politique et Commerciale/Nouvelle Série 1897–1917 Japon*, 14 January, 1904, Tel. No. 37, p. 84.
  94. The National Archives and Records Administration, *Dispatches from the United States Ministers to Japan, 1855–1906*, M133, Griscom to Hay, Telegram, 13 January 1904.
  95. The National Archives and Records Administration, *Dispatches from the United States Ministers to Japan, 1855–1906*, Griscom to Hay, 21 January 1904.
  96. But it was equally true that there was a call for an Anglo-American-Japanese entente. Malozemoff, *Russian Far Eastern Policy 1881–1904*, p. 229. This suggested that the United States was keen to align its Asia policy with Britain and Japan to preserve a favourable balance of power to aid Washington's geostrategy in China, short of a formal alliance among the three countries.
  97. Hyōn Kwangho, "Taehan Cheguk kwa Rōsia kŭrigo Ilbon," p. 282.
  98. Pak Chonghyo, ed., *Rōsia kungnip munsō pogwanso sojang Han'guk kwallyōn munsō yoyakchip*, p. 429.
  99. American scholar John Albert White underscores this point in his study, acknowledging Korea's difficulty in transmitting diplomatic message directly to the Western powers. White, *The Diplomacy of Russo-Japanese War*, p. 124.
  100. *Hwangsōng sinmun*, 30 September 1902.
  101. Diplomatic Archive Centre, *Correspondance Politique et Commerciale/Nouvelle Série 1897–1910 Corée: Politique extérieure Étrangers en Corée III, 1902–1904*, Fontenay to Delcassé, 2 February 1904, No. 210, pp. 16–18.

102. Adhémar Delcoigne was a Belgian advisor appointed by Kojong in July 1903 to reinforce his neutralization policy. William Franklin Sands, Sands to Hulbert, *Sands Papers*, 12 January 1904; Box 3, Folder 2, Doc. 3. Delcoigne's appointment showed that the Korean monarch remained determined to change his country's unfavourable international situation by reattracting major powers' attention to Korea's plight under Japan's domination. That Delcoigne was from Belgium, an internationally-recognized neutral state, may have induced Kojong to put his faith in the Belgian, since, unlike other foreign advisors, Delcoigne could offer practical advice on Korea's neutralization diplomacy.
103. Gaimushō, ed., *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 37(1), <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>, No. 348, p. 319.
104. Gaimushō, ed., *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 37(1), No. 332, pp. 310–11.
105. Diplomatic Archive Centre, *Correspondance Politique et Commerciale/Nouvelle Série 1897–1917 Japon*, No. 200, Fontenay to Delcassé, 23 January 1904, p. 135.
106. Pak Chaeman, ed., *Rōsia munsō pōnyōkchip VI*, p. 273.
107. Pak Chaeman, ed., *Rōsia munsō pōnyōkchip VI*, p. 277.
108. Pak Chaeman, ed., *Rōsia munsō pōnyōkchip VI*, p. 279.
109. Pak Chaeman, ed., *Rōsia munsō pōnyōkchip VI*, p. 280.
110. According to one analysis, along with Britain, Japan and Germany, the U.S. sought to implement the American strategist Alfred T. Mahan's containment strategy against Russia to prevent its access to the sea. Choi Dōkkyu, "Taehan cheguk ūi chōnshi chungnip kwa Rō-II chōnjaeng—Miguk ūi taeRō pongswae chōllyak ūl chungsim ūro," *Slav hakpo* 34.2 (2019), p. 262. This could explain the U.S. decision to ignore Korea's wartime neutrality, unlike China's, which received Washington's backing. Choi Dōkkyu, "Taehan cheguk ūi chōnshi chungnip kwa Rō-II chōnjaeng—Miguk ūi taeRō pongswae chōllyak ūl chungsim ūro," p. 261.
111. Pak Chaeman, ed., *Rōsia munsō pōnyōkchip VIII*, pp. 139–40.
112. Seen from this light, we could understand why Kojong and his aides ended up adopting Korean opinionmaker Yu Kilchun's theory concerning a Western-inspired neutrality of Korea (Kang Mankil, "Pundan sidae ūi yōksa insik," pp. 111–16), under the guarantee of major powers. Kang Mankil. "Pundan sidae ūi yōksa insik," p. 108.
113. Kim Sūngyōng. "Russo-Japanese Rivalry over Korean Buffer at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century and its Implications," p. 640.
114. Streich, Philip and Levy, Jack. "Information, Commitment, and the Russo-Japanese War, 1904–1905." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 12.4 (2016), p. 505. Such fateful misjudgement could be attributed to cultural complacency, which even weakened the state's institutional capacity, as recognised by Kuropatkin. In his post-war memoir, the Russian minister lamented that while Japan boasted hundreds of agents monitoring Russian military and naval forces in the Far East, a single officer was tasked with keeping track of the Japanese forces in the region. Streich, Philip and Levy, Jack. "Information, Commitment, and the Russo-Japanese War, 1904–1905."
115. If the Russian navy were to occupy a port on Korea's southern coast, Russia expected taking a central position on the oceans of the Asiatic region. Kim Sōnan, ed., *Rōsia munsō pōnyōkchip V*, p. 102. Evidently, despite exercising limited hegemonic influence over the Korean peninsula, St. Petersburg knew all too well that Korea served as a bridgehead for Russia's access to maritime Asia.
116. Romanov, *Russia in Manchuria (1892–1906)*, p. 268.
117. Kim Sōnan, ed., *Rōsia munsō pōnyōkchip V*, p. 181. Nevertheless, a prudent Korean strategy ruled the day in Russia, with Witte counselling that a war with Japan would harm Russia's relations with other powers and weaken its position in the West and the Near East. Kim Sōnan, ed., *Rōsia munsō pōnyōkchip V*, p. 227. This reveals the nexus of Korea and Russia's grand strategy in the Far East.

118. Kim Sōnan, ed., *Rōsia munsō pōnyōkchip* V, p. 224. This was especially true for Tokyo, as Korea constituted a geopolitical priority for Japan, offering a solution to overpopulation and a new market for manufactured goods.
119. Paek, “Eurasia cheguk ūi tansaeng,” p. 683.

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