

# CHAPTER 1: THE BEGINNINGS OF MODERN JAPANESE-KOREAN RELATIONS

## 1. KOREAN XENOPHOBIA AND COMPLACENCY

### **Modern Sino-Japanese relations begin on equal footing**

Anyone who believes that relations between Japan and China at the beginning of the modern era were confrontational is terribly mistaken. This revelation may surprise some readers, but Sino-Japanese relations in the modern era started off on an equal footing. Doubters would do well to peruse the Sino-Japanese Friendship and Trade Treaty of 1871, the first treaty, and an equal treaty at that, concluded between the two nations.

During the Edo era (1603-1868), the relationship between Japan and China was handled by private individuals. In August 1870, by which time Japan had decided, once and for all, to proceed with the Meiji Renovation, the first step toward modernization, the Japanese proposed establishing diplomatic relations with China, but were rebuffed. However, diplomats Li Hongzhang and Zeng Guofan pressed the Qing court to accept Japan's proposal, explaining how China would benefit by inaugurating commerce with Japan, which was on its way to becoming a modern nation. The court finally acquiesced and negotiations between the two nations commenced in May of 1871; the Sino-Japanese Friendship and Trade Treaty, comprising 18 articles, was signed in July 1871. The provisions of the treaty, which extols the friendship between Japan and China, are expressed in highly refined language. For instance, here is Article 1:

Relations of amity shall henceforth be maintained in redoubled force between China and Japan, in measure as boundless as the heaven and the earth. In all that regards the territorial possessions of either country the two Governments shall treat each the other with proper courtesy, without the slightest infringement or encroachment on either side, to the end that there may be for evermore peace between them undisturbed.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike treaties concluded in later years, written in hackneyed legalese, the cultivated turns of phrase in this treaty harbor the promise of cordial relations for all eternity.

An important aspect of the 1871 treaty was the acknowledgement of mutual extraterritoriality and consular jurisdiction, which made it an equal treaty. With consular jurisdiction, if a Japanese commits a crime in China, the Japanese consul reserves the right to judge him in accordance with Japanese law; similarly, if a Chinese commits a crime in Japan, the Chinese consul has the right to judge him in accordance with Chinese law. Treaties that afford consular jurisdiction to one party, but not the other, are unequal treaties. Commercial treaties concluded during the Ansei era (1854-60) between Japan and the Western powers (the US, the UK, the Netherlands, Russia, and France) were called unequal

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<sup>1</sup> <https://worldjpn.grips.ac.jp/documents/texts/pw/18710913.T1E.html> (retrieved 07/2022).

treaties because (in addition to their failure to grant tariff autonomy to Japan), they did not grant the right of consular jurisdiction to Japan.

The various treaties signed between China and the Western powers subsequent to the Opium Wars were also unequal treaties that put China at a disadvantage. For that reason, Japan would have preferred to enjoy the same rights as the Western powers did via their treaties with China. But Japan's wishes came to naught, since its national strength was markedly inferior to that of the Western powers, as was its diplomatic prowess.

In any case, the Sino-Japanese Friendship and Trade Treaty served as the starting point for formal Sino-Japanese diplomatic relations, which had ceased to exist after the Muromachi era (1336-1573). The 1871 treaty is of great significance because it placed the two nations on an equal footing. If the 1<sup>st</sup> Sino-Japanese War had not broken out 23 years later, that treaty would likely still be in force today. and perhaps the two nations would have been able to sustain a peaceful relationship. However, all treaties between two warring nations automatically become null and void as soon as hostilities commence. And that became the fate of the Sino-Japanese Friendship and Trade Treaty of 1871.

It was replaced by the Sino-Japanese Treaty of Commerce and Navigation, which was concluded in 1896. This was an unequal treaty, differing from the previous treaty in several ways, e.g., granting extraterritoriality only to Japan, and not granting China tariff autonomy. Differences of opinion and disagreements on these matters surfaced during attempts to revise the treaty. The failure to resolve them became an enormous problem that culminated in the Manchurian Incident in 1931. Perhaps the seeds of that incident were already being sowed during the 1<sup>st</sup> Sino-Japanese War.

The difference between the 1871 and 1896 treaties reflected the shift from a relationship between equals to an unequal relationship. The direct cause of that shift, unequivocally, the 1<sup>st</sup> Sino-Japanese War. Then, why did that war break out? Does Japan bear the responsibility for its inception? Or was it China? Or Korea?

### **Korea rejects Japan's diplomatic overtures**

It was the Korean problem that led to the 1<sup>st</sup> Sino-Japanese War. However, no discussion of that conflict can take place unless we are familiar with the relationship between Japan and Korea at the time.

Relations between Japan and Joseon Korea had broken off as a result of two campaigns against Korea<sup>2</sup> ordered by Imperial Regent Toyotomi Hideyoshi. In 1607, after his death, Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu succeeded in reestablishing diplomatic relations with Korea. Subsequently, Korea dispatched emissaries to Japan on a regular basis (Korean delegations visited Japan 12 times) until 1811. Thereafter, Korean envoys delivered tribute to Tsushima, a Japanese island located between Japan and Korea. The Shogunate often thought about

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<sup>2</sup> Bunroku (1592) and Keichō (1598) campaigns.

reestablishing diplomatic relations, but distracted by other problems both at home and abroad, let the matter languish.

After the Meiji Renovation began, the plan was for interchange between Japan and China to take place with Korea as the intermediary, as it had previously. In January 1868 the new government sent notifications to some nations announcing the restoration of imperial rule. But the notification to Korea was sent through Sō Yoshiaki, *daimyō* (lord) of Tsushima domain, who had been serving as the intermediary between Japan and Korea. He was also asked to deliver a message from the Japanese government stating its desire to reestablish diplomatic relations. However, the Koreans refused to accept the message. The reason given for their refusal was that the message from Sō contained several Chinese characters that did not appear in previous missives of that sort. They were the characters representing *Imperial House of Japan*, *imperial decree*, and *imperial court*. Additionally, the seal the Japanese had affixed to the message was a new one, replacing the one that had been supplied by Korea.

For nearly 500 years, ever since Taejo, the first king of the Joseon dynasty, decided to submit to Ming China at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Korea had pledged allegiance to China. In fact, the name Korea (then Joseon, Chosun, or Choson) was chosen by China. Since Korea was a tributary state of China, in the minds of the Koreans, the Chinese characters to which they took offense could be used only when referring to China.

The reason given by the Koreans for rejecting Japan's overtures was the departure from traditional formalities and language. But when a system of government changes, it is reasonable to make adjustments that affect politics and diplomacy, be they cosmetic or otherwise. After all, strict adherence to old traditions makes renewal impossible. The other nations of the world recognized Japan's new government. Even China, known for clinging stubbornly to tradition, entered into diplomatic relations with Japan three years later, in 1874, as already stated. But Japan's closest neighbors, the Koreans, were incapable of comprehending Japan's renovation, no matter how many times it was explained to them. This misunderstanding marked the beginning of the unfortunate history of relations between the two nations.

### **Koreans apprehensive about becoming Japan's servants**

Then, in March of 1869, in an attempt to clear up any misunderstandings, the Japanese government submitted a rebuttal to the Koreans. It said that, as the Koreans were well aware, Japan's emperor had presided over the national administration of Japan for more than 2,000 years. The Chinese character for *emperor* was used now because changes had occurred, and the emperor had personally taken charge of the government. From now on the imperial government would handle diplomatic matters, which had previously been entrusted to the Tsushima domain. A new seal had been created as a symbol of Japan's sincere desire for cordial relations with Korea.

The Koreans continued to spurn Japanese overtures, insisting that the Japanese were using the Chinese characters for *emperor* and *imperial decree* because of their fixation on

making Korea Japan's servant. Here is an excerpt from one of their deceptive high-ranking Korean officials who obviously had underlying motives.

We must never tell [the Japanese] that we would prefer not to enter into diplomatic relations with them. We should base the justification for our stance on time-honored custom. Using ambiguous, equivocal language, we must declare that although we are not opposed to being on amicable terms with our neighbors, we are wedded to the traditional ways. We shall state and restate our response in the vaguest manner possible, and await a rejoinder from the other party. Should the Japanese become impatient and break off the negotiations, then they shall have to bear the responsibility for the consequences. At that juncture, our only choice shall be to devote our national strength to waging war.<sup>3</sup>

Today one of the popular opinions among Korean historians is that the Japanese used the word *emperor* because they wanted to enslave Korea. If that had been the case, then why would the Japanese have used the following language in the Treaty of Ganghwa, concluded eight years later (and said to have been forced upon the Koreans)? There was no need for the Japanese to use such language if it did not say what they meant.

ARTICLE I.

Chosen [Korea] being an independent state enjoys the same sovereign rights as does Japan.

In order to prove the sincerity of the friendship existing between the nations, their intercourse shall henceforward be carried on in terms of equality and courtesy, each avoiding the giving of offence by arrogance or manifestations of suspicion.<sup>4</sup>

A more serious problem lay in the fact that over several hundred years, Korea had become the servant of Ming and Qing China.

**Korean stance: inflexible and obtuse**

This was hardly the first occasion on which the Koreans had rejected attempts to establish friendly relations. Two years earlier, in 1866, an incident had taken place involving the *SS General Sherman*, an American merchant vessel. When the ship arrived at a location near Pyongyang on the Taedong River, its captain requested provisions and fuel, and permission to engage in commerce. The Koreans refused, destroyed the *General Sherman* by ramming a burning fireship into it, and killed its entire crew. In the same year the Koreans repelled a French fleet that had arrived at Ganghwa Island to protest the murder of nine French

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<sup>3</sup> Tabohashi Kiyoshi, *Kindai Nissen kankei no kenkyū* (A study of modern relations between Japan and Korea) (Seoul: Office of the Governor-General of Korea, 1940).

<sup>4</sup> <https://worldjpn.grips.ac.jp/documents/texts/pw/18760226.T1E.html> (Treaty of Ganghwa is also known as Treaty of Peace and Friendship Between the Empire of Japan and the Kingdom of Korea) (retrieved 07/2022).

missionaries. At that time, King Gojong's father, who was known as the Daewongun, was acting as regent for the young monarch, and thus was in control of state affairs. His policies were vigorously and staunchly exclusionist and isolationist. The tragic history that was to unfold between Japan and Korea, the former open and progressive and the latter closed and inflexible, was already incubating.

In September 1869 the Japanese government transferred jurisdiction over diplomatic matters relating to Korea from the So family to the Foreign Ministry. It made perfect sense for Japan, which had taken the first step toward becoming a modern nation, to dispense with diplomacy conducted by private individuals and unsupported by treaties. In December of that year the government dispatched two Foreign Ministry staff members, Sata Hakubō and Moriyama Shigeru, to Busan. Their mission was to request a response to the diplomatic message announcing the renovation, but the Koreans refused to cooperate. In March of 1870, having observed conditions in Korea, Sata returned to Japan and presented a memorial to Foreign Minister Sawa Nobuyoshi. In it Sata wrote: "They are arrogant and egotistical. No matter how hard we try to make them understand, they will not listen." Sata suggested that the deadlock with the Koreans could not be overcome unless Japan sent 30 battalions of soldiers to Korea to convince them. His conclusion, which he reached after personally observing the Koreans and the situation in their country, was a radical one: send a military expedition to Korea.<sup>5</sup>

Sata's 30-battalion suggestion was derided, then died a quiet death. But his stance certainly deserves our attention because it was not a reactionary one. Sata advocated punitive action after having carefully observed and experienced first-hand the unvarnished relationship between the two nations from the viewpoint of a diplomat.

The Japanese government did not adopt a militaristic policy toward Korea. In October 1870 it dispatched envoys to Korea, who carried with them a letter from the foreign minister requesting diplomatic relations. This was the first such message that did not involve the mediation of the So domain. It did not contain the Chinese characters for *emperor*, *imperial edict*, or *imperial court*, but the Koreans rejected it nonetheless. They insisted that all negotiations be done as before through the So domain. After waiting in Busan for more than a year, the delegation returned to Japan empty-handed. During that time, the Daewongun erected anti-appeasement stelae in all eight of Korea's provinces, exacerbating xenophobia and anti-Japanese sentiment among the Koreans.

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<sup>5</sup> Tabohashi, *op. cit.*

## 2. THE OPENING OF KOREA

### Saigō seeks justification for punitive expedition against Korea

In 1872 the Japanese government terminated the arrangement whereby all interchange with Korea was handled by Sō *daimyō*, and took charge of all negotiations with Korea. The Koreans reacted to this change by engaging in cruel, ruthless behavior. For instance, they blocked deliveries of firewood, coal, and provisions to the Japanese Pavilion in Choryang, Busan, where Japanese diplomats lived and worked when they visited Korea. In 1873 exclusionist sentiment grew even more malevolent; in addition to preventing supplies from reaching the Japanese Pavilion, the Koreans demonstrated their hatred of Japan openly by posting anti-Japanese notices in front of the pavilion's gate. When news of those actions reached Tokyo, the desire to launch a punitive expedition against Korea immediately intensified.

Chancellor of the Realm Sanjō Sanetomi prepared a draft proposal in which he was critical of the Koreans: "Not only did they fail to respond when we acted in good faith, but they exacerbated the situation by adopting an arrogant, insulting attitude." He recommended dispatching sufficient Army and Navy personnel to protect Japanese nationals residing in Korea, and sending envoys to Korea, instructing them to negotiate with the Koreans and convince them that the Japanese position was the correct one.

The draft proposal contained two articles, one concerning the dispatching of troops, and the other sending a special envoy. However, Councillor Saigō Takamori rejected the first one, and approved of the second. Saigō's reasoning was: "If we send troops immediately, the Koreans will fear they are being subjugated by Japan. This would be a bad beginning because it would be inconsistent with our esteem for Korea. We must first dispatch a responsible envoy plenipotentiary who will explain Japan's intentions to the Koreans providing ample justification, and convince the Korean officials to see the error of their ways."<sup>6</sup>

Saigō volunteered himself as envoy plenipotentiary, and said that he would not be accompanied by military personnel, not even one soldier. Armed only with the knowledge that he was right and a sense of justice, he would arrive in Hanseong (present-day Seoul) and negotiate. If his efforts were unsuccessful (if the Koreans remained attached to their arrogant stance and killed him), then and only then should Japan send troops to Korea.

*Seikanron* (literally "advocacy of a punitive expedition against Korea") is often misunderstood. Saigō subscribed to Bushido, the samurai code of chivalry, but he had no interest in conquests of any sort. According to Uchimura Kanzō's *Representative Men of Japan*, "Saigō had very strong ethical objections to starting a war for the sole purpose of conquest. He never enjoyed crushing the weak. Saigō said that George Washington was his hero; he detested Napoleon and others of his ilk. These facts alone prove that Saigō was not a slave of base ambition."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Uchimura Kanzō, *Representative Men of Japan*, trans. Inamori Kazuo (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

This passage offers a superb description of Saigō's disposition. Because he did not want to wage an unjustifiable war, he emphasized the necessity for a justifiable pretext for dispatching troops; to that end he was even willing to sacrifice his own life. One of the teachings that form Saigō's legacy states: "Diplomatic interchange cannot be accomplished unless we tread the path of righteousness and are willing to sacrifice our lives in the course of representing our country."<sup>8</sup>

By advocating what he did, Saigō was practicing what he preached.

### **Japan: modern-age pioneer of East Asia**

The meaning of the term *seikanron*, which has an assertive ring to it, becomes clear only when we understand it within the context of the grand foreign policy that the Japanese of the late shogunate and early Meiji eras envisioned. For instance, Satō Nobuhiro, Yoshida Shōin, and other intellectuals active at the close of the Tokugawa shogunate are remembered for having championed the quest for hegemony over the Asian continent. They were opposed to passive resistance in the face of the rapid inroads made by Western powers, but in favor of accomplishing an Asian revival through the establishment of a robust overseas Japanese presence that would check white imperialism.

By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Japan's neighbors were in a deplorable state. Senescent, sickly China lacked the energy needed to resist Western colonialism. The Koreans knew that their nation was a tributary of China; however, they knew nothing about the world situation. Wallowing in ignorance, they were completely unaware of the looming menace from the Western powers. Japanese intellectuals of the late shogunate were without any doubt whatsoever, the modern-age pioneers of East Asia. They and they alone, in that region, were not only aware of the threat from the West, and but also issued warnings about that threat. Except for Japan, all of Asia was in decline – asleep, as it were. It was the inevitable course of history that its foreign-policy philosophy placed Japan in a position of leadership. When a void, powerless area is surrounded by aggressive, intimidating forces, it is devoured, subsumed. East Asia's only hope for withstanding and repelling enemy attacks was forging a strong union with a strong leader.

Here I would like to mention that in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, toward the end of the shogunate, a Korean Confucianist scholar named Yi Hang-no advanced a school of thought known as *wijeon cheoksa* (defend justice and expel evil). By this he meant upholding Confucianism and expelling Christianity. In 1866, when American and French battleships arrived in Korea, Yi presented his extremist, exclusionist argument to the king: "By battling the pirates we can protect Korean Confucianism, but if we allow ourselves to become acquainted with foreign bandits, humankind will descend into the realm of brutes."<sup>9</sup> This rigid ideology was handed down to Yi's followers, and cast a long shadow on the evolution of modern Korea. According to one Korean scholar, this

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<sup>8</sup> Saigō Takamori, *Nanshū ō ikun* (Teachings of the late Nanshū) (Tokyo: Kadokawa, 2017); Nanshū was Saigō's pen name.

<sup>9</sup> Kang Jae-eun / Kang Chae-on, *Chōsen no jōi to kaika: kindai Chōsen ni totte no Nihon* (Korea's exclusion of foreigners and the flourishing of Korean civilization: Japan from the standpoint of modern Korea) (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1977).

philosophy was in no way exclusionist. Rather, it advocated politics, diplomacy, and society. Pan-Asianism, based on the bonds of loyalty among Korea, China, and Japan in the face of Western aggression encroachment on Asia. Unfortunately, Japan's treachery gave rise to rifts among the three nations.

However, the Japanese had realized that one means of resisting the Western powers was to *temporarily* acknowledge Japan's impotence in the face of Western power, bow to it by opening its doors, and embrace modern civilization. They had also realized that joining hands with Korea and China in the spirit of Pan-Asianism was an impracticable proposition. After all, Korea was still under the thumb of the self-righteous *wijeong cheoksa* mentality, and China was still clinging to imperious Sinocentrism. The unbridgeable gap in awareness of the world situation among the three nations was enough to convince Japanese intellectuals of the late shogunate and early Meiji era that any revival of East Asia must be led by Japan.

It is mistaken to call Saigō's advocacy of a punitive expedition against Korea an aggressive ideology; that it is a mistake will become self-evident. Unlike a scholar's abstract musings, Saigō's ideas about policy were rooted in an acute awareness of the world situation.

In 1871 Saigō had sent Army Maj.-Gen. Kirino Toshiaki to Hokkaido on an inspection tour. He also drafted a plan that would help Japan prepare for a southward Russian advance; it involved securing territory in Karafuto (present-day South Sakhalin) and the Primorskaya Oblast. In 1872 Saigō dispatched Army Lt. Col. Kitamura Shigeyori and Major Beppu Shinsuke to Korea on an inspection tour. He also sent Ikenoue Shirō of Kagoshima and Takeichi Seikan of Tosa as representatives of the Foreign Ministry to Manchuria, on whose soil no Japanese had previously trod, instructing them to familiarize themselves with military geography (for strategic purposes), politics, the financial situation and even manners and customs. In early 1873 he instructed Army Maj. Kabayama Sukenori and Naval Secretary Kodama Toshikuni to visit South China and Taiwan to observe the situation there. Saigō's foreign-policy perspective extended not only to the North and the Asian continent, but also farther afield, to the South.

Korea was not the only territory Saigō was watching. Therefore, we can only understand his argument in favor of a punitive expedition against Korea as part of an ambitious East Asian policy.

### **Ganghwa Island Incident**

Saigō Takamori's proposal to launch a punitive expedition against Korea was defeated by Iwakura Tomomi and his confederates, whose response was, "Dispatching an emissary to Korea would be premature, as our domestic affairs are not yet in order and there are frequent disputes with Russia over Karafuto (Sakhalin)."<sup>10</sup> As the events that ensued (the departure of Saigō and his sympathizers from the imperial court in protest) are well known, I will not discuss them here. However, an unforeseen incident led to the resolution of the Korean problem, for the time being at any rate.

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<sup>10</sup> Kawamichi Rintarō, *Saigō "seikanron" no shinsō: rekishika no kyokō wo tadasu* (The truth about Saigō's advocacy of a punitive expedition against Korea: correcting historians' fiction with fact) (Tokyo: Bensei Shuppan, 2014).



The Japanese battleship *Un'yō*, on a mission to explore sea routes on the west coast of Korea, approached Ganghwa Island on September 20, 1875. Its captain had planned to request drinking water, but was greeted by sudden, intense shelling from a fort on the island.

Since the Korean government had been given a Japanese flag, *Un'yō* Captain Inoue Yoshika hoisted his flag on the mast, but the Koreans continued to fire at the Japanese. The *Un'yō* counterattacked and sent a landing party ashore, which captured the fort and confiscated the guns. The battleship then returned to Nagasaki.

News of the incident was met with an outcry when it reached the Japanese government. Officials proposed sending an emissary to confront the Koreans. With everyone in agreement, a decision was made to dispatch Kuroda Kiyotaka, head of the Hokkaido Development Commission, having invested him with full powers. In February 1876 a Japanese delegation went to the Ganghwa government office, where they discussed Korea's rejection of Japanese diplomatic messages and the assault on the *Un'yō* with Korean officials (also with full powers). The Koreans offered a variety of excuses, but in the end, agreed to establish diplomatic relations with Japan and, on February 27, the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1876 was concluded. This was Korea's first treaty with a foreign nation. Incidentally, when Saigō heard of the Japanese Navy's use of force on Ganghwa Island, he was disappointed, saying "What a shameful manner in which to treat friends!"<sup>11</sup>

Korean history books describe the Ganghwa Island Incident as having been deliberately engineered by Japan with aggressive intentions.<sup>12</sup> But historical fact is never so simple. Here I would like to provide a brief explanation of the events that culminated in that incident.

In 1874, the year after those who favored a punitive expedition against Korea were outnumbered by their opponents, rumors were circulating round Busan: (1) the Daewongun's influence was waning, and (2) King Gojong now controlled the reins of power and was making reforms. It so happens that at just about that time the Japanese government had been planning to send Foreign Ministry Councillor Sō Yoshiaki, who had a long-standing relationship with the Koreans, to Korea to attempt to make some headway with establishing diplomatic relations. First, in June they dispatched Foreign Ministry staff member Moriyama Shigeru to Busan to assess the political situation.

Moriyama negotiated with Korean advisers at the Japanese Pavilion in Choryang. For the first time, the Koreans officially recognized and received a Japanese Foreign Ministry staff member. In September, the Koreans told Moriyama they would approve the Japanese proposal stating that Japan wanted to make peace. The Japanese were to send a new diplomatic message, which the Koreans would accept. During the negotiations Moriyama delivered Japanese flags and the naval ensign to the Koreans and asked that an official announcement be made to coastal areas to the effect that Japanese vessels should be protected.

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<sup>11</sup> Kawamichi, *op. cit.*

<sup>12</sup> One of many similar accounts appears in (Yi Ki-baek) Lee Ki-baik, *New History of Korea*, trans. Edward W. Wagner (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).

Thus, it seemed as though diplomatic relations between the two nations would, at long last, become a reality. In October Moriyama returned to Japan and submitted his report. In February of 1875 he returned to Korea, this time as an attaché, bearing letters from the foreign minister and the councillor. He requested a reply, but the Koreans reneged on their previous promises and, even more astonishingly, voiced objections to the fact that the Japanese delegation had traveled on a steamship and that its members had entered the banquet hall through the main gate in formal Western-style dress; the Koreans refused to negotiate. They had previously demonstrated their fixation on tradition, but this was taking things to the extreme. This about-face in the Korean stance occurred because the Daewongun and his cronies had regained their position of power, returned to the royal palace, and were bolstering the exclusionist policies of the Korean court.

Moriyama berated the Koreans for their betrayal and breach of promise, but to no avail. There was almost no hope of resolving the problem through an exchange of letters. Even at the Korean court, the King and Queen Min seemed anxious to avoid a confrontation with Japan, and though they seemed somewhat willing to compromise over dress regulations and the format of official letters, the overweening stance remained uncompromisingly exclusionist.

In June the Koreans announced that interchange with Japan would be handled in the old way, and that not only dress code, but also any approach that broke with tradition would not be countenanced. Consequently, Moriyama was unable to submit the letter from the Foreign Minister, and the agreement reached the previous September could not go into force. On September 20, Moriyama received orders to return home; he departed on the following day, but the Ganghwa Incident erupted on the very day he received those orders.

### **Biased textbooks distort history**

I have already described the facts about the Ganghwa Island Incident and the resulting Japan-Korea Treaty of 1876. Article I of the treaty proclaims that Korea is an independent state. Articles IV and V state that, in addition to Busan, two additional ports will be opened up for commercial purposes. Article X grants Japan consular jurisdiction in Korean ports that have been designated for commercial intercourse. Consular jurisdiction (also known as extraterritoriality) means that if a Japanese resident commits a crime against a Korean, the Japanese consul will pass judgment on the case.<sup>13</sup>

At first glance this might seem like an unequal treaty. However, during the Tokugawa era, any Japanese who committed a crime in Korea was handed over to the administrator of the Japanese Pavilion. The administrator would mete out a punishment according to the criminal's social class, or have the criminal transported to Tsushima, where the *daimyō* would decide the criminal's fate in accordance with laws and regulations prevailing in Tsushima. In fact, even before the restoration, Japan had enjoyed extraterritoriality in Korea for many years. The stipulations in the 1876 treaty were simply a matter of codifying customs that had endured for many years. For that reason, the Koreans deemed consular jurisdiction to be fair, and accepted it without argument.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://worldjpn.grips.ac.jp/documents/texts/pw/18760226.T1E.html> (retrieved 8/2022).

The Japan-Korea Treaty of 1876 permitted Japan to establish a legation in Seoul and restored, at least temporarily, diplomatic relations between the two nations, which had ceased since the end of the Tokugawa Shogunate.

Readers may wonder why I have devoted so much space to the Ganghwa Island Incident and the 1876 treaty. They will understand once they have read the following account of the incident from a history textbook.

In 1868 the Japanese government, seeking to reestablish diplomatic relations with Korea, took the upper hand. However, the Koreans wanted the relationship between the two nations to remain as it had been in the past, and clung to its isolationist policies. Within the Japanese government, some elements advocated a punitive expedition against Korea. Subsequently, when the Ganghwa Island Incident occurred in September 1875, Japan adopted an unyielding stance, and in February of 1876 forced the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1876 on the Koreans. The treaty stated that Korea was an independent state that enjoyed the same rights as Japan. But in compelling Korea to open its doors and to agree to consular jurisdiction, Japan was imposing an unequal treaty on Korea, the same type of agreement that Japan itself had signed with the Western powers.<sup>14</sup>

This account appears in *Sanseidō Japanese History*. Accounts of the incident in other textbooks are virtually the same. Some of them add that the incident was the first phase of Japanese advancement into the Asian continent. I think readers will view this account seems overly simplistic and arbitrary.

It would have us believe that the 1876 treaty was an unfair agreement that the Japanese, spurred by their determination to make inroads into Asia, forced the Koreans to sign under the threat of military action. To maintain that the treaty had its footing in aggressive aims is to parrot the content of Korean history textbooks.

It is indeed disappointing that the Ganghwa Island Incident could not be resolved without a military confrontation. But it is important to remember that prior to the incident, for nine long years beginning with the first year of the Meiji era, the Japanese explained the renovation that had occurred in Japan time and again, and proposed establishing diplomatic relations time and again, only to reach an impasse because of Korean isolationism and conservatism. Biased accounts in a history textbook — accounts that omit pertinent events — do not represent history in its true form. As I have demonstrated, the course of events was far too complicated to place responsibility on Japan and Japan alone.

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<sup>14</sup> Inagaki Yasuhiko *et al.*, *Sanseidō Nihon shi santeiban* (Sanseidō Japanese history, third edition) (Tokyo: Sanseidō, 1985); first edition appeared in 1981.

### 3. KOREA: CAUGHT BETWEEN PROGRESS AND SUBSERVIENCE

#### The Imo Incident

Now I shall describe how the Japanese-Korean relationship unfolded subsequent to the Ganghwa Island Incident. After diplomatic relations had been established, the influence of the Daewongun and his old-guard followers was waning, while that of Queen Min and her fellow progressives was on the rise. Eager for Korea to modernize as Japan was doing, the queen sent a sizable delegation to Japan in 1881. The Koreans, determined to accomplish military reforms, asked Sub-Lt. Horimoto Reizō, a Japanese Army engineer, to help them build a modern army between the end of that year and spring of the following year.

The old guard, particularly soldiers dismissed during the military reforms, resented this progressive trend. In July 1882 the delivery of those soldiers' salaries (in the form of rice) was delayed, and an uprising ensued. Seizing upon this opportunity, the Daewongun encouraged the mutineers. Joined by rioting civilians, they murdered a great many Japanese and stormed the Japanese legation. They then broke into the palace and killed some of the queen's chief retainers, as well as Sub-Lt. Horimoto, though the queen somehow managed to escape with her life. China sent approximately 5,000 troops to Korea to quell the uprising. The Chinese kidnapped the Daewongun and took him to Baoding, where he was detained. The uprising came to be known as the Imo Incident.

As a means of settling the incident, the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1882 was concluded on August 30. The Koreans agreed to punish the wrongdoers severely, to pay Japan indemnity amounting to ¥500,000, to accept the stationing of Japanese soldiers in Seoul to guard the Japanese legation there, and to send an envoy to Japan to apologize.<sup>15</sup> The ringleaders of the uprising were punished, the queen returned to the palace, and the anti-appeasement stelae installed by the Daewongun were removed. In October a Korean delegation headed by special envoy Pak Yong-hyo traveled to Japan, where an apology was offered, thus settling the incident. The Koreans had agreed to pay the ¥500,000 in reparations over a period of five years, but later asked for permission to pay it over 10 years; the Japanese agreed. It is noteworthy to mention that in 1889, after the Koreans had submitted two payments of ¥50,000 each in 1887 and 1888, the Japanese government forgave the remainder (¥400,000), so that the Koreans could use it to make domestic reforms. They also gave the Koreans a steam launch and two mountain guns.

#### Toadying to China

The Imo Incident provided an excellent opportunity for the Chinese to gain control of Korea. In its aftermath 3,000 Chinese troops remained in Korea, where they oversaw Queen Min's rebuilding of the Korean government. In the meantime, the queen abandoned her plans to emulate Japanese reforms, instead espousing sycophancy to China (*sadaejuui* in Korean), choosing policies that were China-dependent. She remodeled the Korean government bureaucracy after the Chinese system. At China's prompting, the two nations signed the China-Korea Treaty of 1882, which reinforced the suzerainty relationship, with China as the suzerain and Korea, the tributary state. It

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<sup>15</sup> <https://worldjpn.grips.ac.jp/documents/texts/pw/18820830.T1J.html> (in Japanese) (retrieved 08/22).

gave Chinese, as citizens of the suzerain, the right to reside, conduct business, and travel freely in Korea. Appointed as diplomatic advisers were Ma Xiangbo, a Chinese, and Paul Möllendorf, a German recommended by the Chinese. Korea's modern military units were placed in the jurisdiction of the commander in chief of the Chinese troops stationed in Korea.

China had now gained control of Korean military and military affairs. But the Chinese were still not satisfied. To prevent the Japanese from acquiring any advantage in Korea, they directed Korea to enter into commercial relationships with the nations of Europe and the US. Pitting one barbarian state against another was a time-honored Chinese diplomatic artifice. Between 1882 and 1884 Korea signed commercial treaties with the US, the UK, Germany, Italy, Russia, and France.

With the conclusion of the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1876, Korea had opened its doors to the world. Normally, events like this would have provided the impetus for modernization, but a combination of China's resistance to modernization and Korea's own conservatism delayed the modernization process for quite some time.

### **Japan supports Korean Enlightenment Party**

Any discussion of Korean independence activists necessarily includes Kim Ok-gyun and Pak Yong-hyo. As already stated, Pak was part of the Korean delegation that traveled to Japan after the Imo Incident to apologize. Kim Ok-gyun, who later formed strong ties with Japan, was another member of the party. Unlike the Conservative Party, which relied heavily on China, Pak and Kim were members of the Enlightenment Party, which had chosen Japan's modernization as its model. Its objectives were the achievement of modernization and independence for Korea.

Pak and Kim approached prominent Japanese reformer Fukuzawa Yukichi, and asked him for guidance. Fukuzawa lectured them on the significance of independence and suggested that they establish a school specializing in Western learning as a way to nurture the human intellect; he also advised them to publish a newspaper. This is precisely what Fukuzawa had done in Japan, but would have been extremely difficult to accomplish in Korea. However, Inoue Kakugorō, one of Fukuzawa's disciples, had been invited to advise the Korean government. He established the Office of Culture and Information, which edited and published the Hanseong Weekly Bulletin. Its inaugural issue appeared in November 1883. It was Korea's first newspaper.

Upon Fukuzawa's recommendation, Kim Ok-gyun arranged for more than 40 Koreans to study in Japan in early 1883. Half of them enrolled in the Toyama Army Academy and the other half in vocational schools. Later Japanese teachers helped them acquire knowledge needed to support military and industrial modernization in Korea. During this period, the Korean Enlightenment Party depended on Japan for support, and Japan spared no effort in guiding and educating them.

### **Korean reform attempts fail: Gapsin Coup**

But because of Queen Min's enmity of the Enlightenment Party, its members never received appointments to important government posts. Therefore, their plans for modernizing Korea made less progress than they had hoped. Such was the situation in December 1884, when China was defeated in the Sino-French War. The Enlightenment Party took advantage of this opportunity by attempting to rid Korea of the Conservative Party. On December 4, with support from Japan, Kim

Ok-gyun and Pak Yong-hyo staged a coup d'état at a banquet celebrating the establishment of a national post office. Enlightenment Party members killed several leading members of the rival Conservative Party and established a new government on December 5. On December 6 they announced a 14-point political-reform program. Some of the important points were: (1) abolition of tribute and empty formalities, (2) abolition of aristocratic descent groups, (3) abolition of eunuchs, (4) establishment of a police force to prevent thefts, and (5) establishment of a royal bodyguard.

However, under the advice of Chinese military advisor Yuan Shikai, the Conservative Party asked China to send troops to Korea. The elite Chinese troops invaded the palace, and the coup was reversed. During the turmoil the Japanese legation was burned down, and a great many Japanese residents, including women, were massacred. This chain of events is referred to as the Gapsin Coup. In defeat, Kim Ok-gyun, Pak Yong-hyo, and other key members of the Enlightenment Party sought refuge in Japan.

The coup was a conflict between Japan and China; it was ultimately settled with the Convention of Tsientsin (Tianjin), concluded in April of the following year (1885). The treaty was signed and sealed by Ito Hirobumi, representing Japan, and Li Hongzhang, representing China. The real beneficiaries of this conflict were the Western powers, especially Russia. Ito signed the treaty because he knew that Japan and China needed to work in close cooperation if further advances of those powers were to be forestalled.

According to the convention,

- (1) Both Japan and China would withdraw their troops from Korea within four months.
- (2) Korea would be responsible for training its troops and maintaining public order. A third-party nation would train the Korean troops; neither Japan nor China would participate in such training.
- (3) If Japan or China were to send troops due to unrest in Korea, the nation sending troops was obligated to notify the other in writing before the fact, and withdraw those troops as soon as the unrest was quelled.<sup>16</sup>

Both Japan and China removed their troops from Korea in accordance with the convention (however, reports have it that the terms of the treaty notwithstanding, the Chinese secretly kept more than 200 soldiers in Seoul). Still, Korea had certainly not achieved independence. Yuan Shikai was ensconced in Seoul, having been appointed Chinese Plenipotentiary. Besides putting pressure on Korea and interfering in its affairs, by establishing a Chinatown in Seoul he protected Chinese merchants but oppressed Japanese and Korean tradesmen.

### **Russian encroachment commences**

After the abortive Enlightenment Party coup, the Chinese were partially successful in blocking Japanese inroads into Korea. However, they were now faced with a new threat that had materialized in Korea, namely Russia. In its determination to restrain Japan, China had created this

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<sup>16</sup> <https://worldjpn.grips.ac.jp/documents/texts/pw/18850418.T1E.html> (retrieved 08/2022).

particular threat by turning Korea into a lamb ready to be devoured by the Western wolves. Now the Chinese tactic of pitting one barbarian state against another was beginning to backfire. China has adopted foolish plans that wreaked havoc on the Far Eastern political situation too many times to enumerate, and this was certainly one of them.

After Russia signed the Russia-Korea Treaty of 1884, a commercial pact, Karl Ivanovich Weber became Russian ambassador to Korea. Weber soon used ingenious methods to ingratiate himself with the Korean court, and succeeded in expanding Russian influence there. At the same time, after the Convention of Tsientsin was concluded, the Chinese intensified their interference in Korean domestic affairs, as already stated, which caused the Conservative Party to turn against them, and turn toward Russia, contrary to Chinese designs.

To suppress the pro-Russia ambience in the Korean court, the Chinese allowed the Daewongun, whom they had been holding in custody, to return to Korea in 1885. They also seized control of Korean customs affairs. Moreover, when diplomatic advisers like Möllendorf began to lean toward Russia, the Chinese dismissed them one after another. Although China had compelled Korea to sign treaties with the Western powers, it made every effort to protect its suzerain status, for example, by obstructing Korean attempts to dispatch envoys to those nations in 1887, a striking inconsistency.

The UK, as well as China, sensed the new threat from Russia. At that time, the British were enmeshed in border wars with the Russians in Afghanistan. They also needed to halt the progress of Russian encroachment in the Far East (the Russians were advancing southward, threatening China and Korea). In April 1885, without warning, a British fleet occupied Geomun Island, a critical passage for Russia's Pacific Fleet, located on the southern tip of Korea. Startled by the UK's bold move, the Russians issued a protest through China and Korea, and announced that if the British continued to occupy Geomun Island, they would occupy part of the Korean peninsula. After negotiations that dragged on for two years, China convinced the Russians to promise not to occupy any part of Korea whatsoever. By way of guarantee, the British fleet withdrew from Geomun Island in 1887. The British occupation of that island shows clearly how great a threat Russian encroachment posed to the Far East. Moreover, Korea's inability to deal effectively with intrusion from and disputes with third-party nations indicated the complexity and tragic nature of the Korean problem.

Korea's tendency to lean on Russia continued to grow. In 1888 the Russia-Korea Commercial Convention was signed. As a result, in 1889, Kyonghung in northeastern Korea opened up to trade in 1889, and a Russian concession was established there. Additionally, Korea allowed Russians free passage along the Tumen River. This was the same tactic used 30 years earlier, when Russia concluded the Treaty of Aigun with China. This gave the Russians the right to navigate the inland waters of the Amur and Ussuri rivers, and paved the way for incursions into Manchuria.

Fifteen years prior to that, Saigō, nursing his wounds after failing to win support for a punitive expedition against Korea, made the following remarks to Suge Sanehide, a chief retainer of Shōnai domain (today Yamagata prefecture). Suge had traveled to Kagoshima to pay him a visit: "Eventually Russia will attack Japan, coming by way of Manchuria and Korea. This will be the

second Mongol invasion, and Japan's survival will be at stake." But the scenario that could realize Saigō's greatest fear was already materializing in Korea.

#### 4. STATE WITH LITTLE DESIRE FOR INDEPENDENCE

##### **Kim Ok-gyun: sustained or manipulated?**

As I have already mentioned, Kim Ok-gyun, one of the leaders of Korea's Enlightenment Party, failed in his attempt to stage a coup d'état (the Gapsin Coup), and fled to Japan with Pak Yong-hyo and other comrades. I would like to recount a bit more of Kim's story.

Again and again, the Korean government demanded that Japan arrest and extradite Enlightenment Party members. However, the Japanese government considered them political refugees and refused to send them back to Korea. At first Kim was transported to Chichijima in the Ogasawara archipelago, but found life on an isolated island monotonous and asked to be accommodated elsewhere. The government moved him to Hokkaido.

While Kim was living on Chichijima, Kurushima Tsuneki<sup>17</sup> of Gen'yōsha (the Black Ocean Society, a Pan-Asianist organization) and other Japanese intellectuals made the long trip to Ogasawara to console Kim and keep him company. When Kim arrived in Hokkaido, he received the good offices of relatives of Hokkaido Agency Director Nagayama Takeshirō and others. Kim was ostensibly living in Hokkaido, but he spent a good part of his time in Tokyo.

The Japanese government gave the political asylum-seekers from Korea a monthly stipend of ¥15 while they lived on Chichijima, and ¥50 after they moved to Hokkaido. Since a civil servant's starting salary was ¥30 at that time, this was a very generous amount. In any case, it was a rare government that paid a monthly salary to political refugees.

In 1890 Kim was permitted to reside in Tokyo, where he enjoyed staunch support from, and the company of, distinguished government officials and private citizens like Inoue Kaoru, Gotō Shōjirō, Inukai Tsuyoshi, and Tōyama Mitsuru.

However, at about the same time, assassins sent by the Korean government began to stalk the refugees. In March 1894, over the objections of Tōyama and other partisans, Kim was lured to Shanghai. On March 27, the day after his arrival there, he was shot to death by Hong Jong-u, one of his traveling companions.

Kim's body was loaded onto a Chinese warship and taken to Korea. The Korean government proceeded to dismember the corpse, severing the head, arms, and legs from the trunk (dismemberment was one form of capital punishment used in Korea at the time). The head and extremities were put on display for several days, and then paraded around all eight provinces. The

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<sup>17</sup> Kurushima later opposed Foreign Minister Ōkuma Shigenobu's decision to extend the terms of unequal treaties with Western nations; he tossed a bomb into Ōkuma's carriage and then took his own life. Ōkuma survived.



torso was thrown into the Han River. Kim's father was executed, his younger brother died in prison, and his grief-stricken mother committed suicide.

Given that Kim's remains were taken to Korea aboard the *Weijing*, a Chinese vessel, and that Li Hongzhang sent a telegram to the Korean king congratulating him on Kim's assassination, it is safe to assume that Li was involved in the plot to kill Kim. Fukuzawa Yukichi expressed the feelings of the Japanese people about Kim's murder: "I cannot forgive the actions of the Chinese," adding his fears that "from now on the Japanese will be even more suspicious of Korea and China." As Fukuzawa feared, once the news about the Korean government's abuse of Kim's corpse and China's praise of the assassination and its perpetrator became known, the Japanese public was indignant. Kim Ok-gyun's funeral was held on May 20 at Asakusa Hongan Temple. It was a magnificent, solemn ceremony attended by Kim's friends and acquaintances.

Kim's grave is located at Shinjo Temple in Hongō, Tokyo. Kim's friend, photographer Kai Gunji, retrieved some of Kim's hair from the gibbet and brought it back to Japan; it was buried in Kim's grave. The splendid gravestone is more than 2m high, and on its face is incised "Grave of Kim Ok-gyun of Korea" in large block characters.

Next to it is a smaller gravestone belonging to Kai Gunji. Kim's gravestone is larger than the graves of Japanese within the temple precincts. Gravestones as imposing as his are unusual in Japan.

Once, during a debate with a Korean historian about the history shared by Japan and Korea, I suggested that Kim's grave "tells the story of the hopes of Japanese patriots and some Koreans for Pan-Asianism." The Korean historian's rebuttal? "No, it tells us that Kim Ok-gyun was someone who could be manipulated."<sup>18</sup>

Japanese of good will enthusiastically befriended and supported Kim Ok-gyun precisely because they had grand goals: first, an independent Korea, and if at all possible, an Asian revival in which Japan, Korea, and China would join together and lead an effort to counter the Western colonizers' stranglehold. The Japanese supported Kim because they viewed him as a comrade in their quest for Pan-Asianism. Those who claim that the Japanese manipulated him prove only that they are ignorant of a concept that was an important historical theme at the time.

Korea was a hotbed of domestic discord then, thanks in no small part to the conservatives, who seemed to have lost interest in the pursuit of independence. The Japanese, in their recognition that bringing about reforms in Korea was the necessary first step toward an Asian revival, were certainly not mistaken.

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<sup>18</sup> Nakamura Akira, "激突！日韓大討論" (Confrontation! Great debate between Japan and Korea) *Bungei shunju*, December 1986.

The Japanese say that they sustained Kim Ok-gyun, while the Koreans say that we manipulated him. These disparate locutions perfectly reflect the difference between Japanese and Korean historical awareness.

### **Abandoning Asia: bidding farewell to bad company**

It was March 1885, not long after the Gapsin Coup, when Fukuzawa Yukichi's "Argument in Favor of Abandoning Asia" appeared in *Jiji shinpō* (Current events). An excerpt follows:

When our thoughts turn to Japan's foreign policy, we must realize that Japan does not have the time to wait for China and Korea to acquire modern civilization to the extent where Japan can join with them in encouraging the growth of Asia. Instead, Japan should separate itself from its declining neighbors and cast its fate with the enlightened nations of the West. There is no need to afford special consideration to China and Korea simply because they are our neighbors. We should treat them as the Western nations do. If we prolong amicable relations with bad company, we shall ultimately be compelled to share their dishonor. I hereby sever my ties with our disreputable Asian friends.<sup>19</sup>

This is Fukuzawa's resolute announcement stating that he is parting ways with China and Korea. The Gapsin Coup had prompted him to write uncompromising editorials destined for *Jiji shinpō* advocating war against China. They were often blocked by censors, who in fact sometimes threatened to rescind *Jiji shinpō*'s publication rights. However, when the incident was settled with the Convention of Tsientsin, and Japan seemed to have washed its hands of Korea for the most part, Fukuzawa was unhappy. Not long thereafter, when the British occupied Geomun Island, Fukuzawa published an editorial bearing the title "Congratulations to the Korean People on the Ruin of Their Country." As a result, he was ordered to shut down *Jiji shinpō*, a bitter experience for him.

This was the same Fukuzawa who, after the Imo Incident, was so generous with guidance and support for the modernization of Korea through members of the Enlightenment Party. And it was the same Fukuzawa who said, "I am completely sympathetic with the Korean people." Then why did he do an about-face and launch invective against Korea?

It must have been the rigorous standards of independence and self-respect Fukuzawa applied to individuals and nations that prompted him to desert China and Korea. He certainly believed it was necessary to protect Japan's independence by halting the rapid advances of Europe and the US on Asia, and by exhorting Japan's neighbors to modernize and gain independence. In Fukuzawa's eyes, it was not enough for only Japan to be independent. He explained his thoughts using a fire-prevention analogy.

Let us turn our thoughts to preventing fires. Suppose I dwell in a stone house, but my neighbor's house is a ramshackle wooden building. Is my mind at ease? No, surely not, because if I wish to ensure that a fire will not spread to my house, I must

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<sup>19</sup> Fukuzawa Yukichi, "Datsu-A ron" (Argument in favor of abandoning Asia), *Jiji shinpō* (Current affairs), March 1885.

support my neighbor by speaking to him and convincing him to build a stone house exactly like mine. Or if the circumstances are right, I might build one for him. I would do so not out of affection for my neighbor, nor out of dislike, but because of my fear that fire might spread to my house.<sup>20</sup>

A clear-cut statement, if there ever was one. But given the situation, there was no choice; survival was at stake. This was Meiji Japan's desperate journey toward the ability to defend itself, toward greater strength, toward independence. It is this sense of urgency that gave rise to slogans like "enrich the nation, strengthen the military," "civilization and enlightenment," and "promote industry."

Fukuzawa wrote, "Those who lack the will to gain independence do not truly love their country."<sup>21</sup> He must have believed that a people without a strong desire for independence would never rouse their compatriots to take part in a struggle for it.

I am aware of critics who maintain that Fukuzawa was contemptuous of Asia, and link his remark with the ideology of aggression and imperialism. Yes, it is true that when we read his harsh criticism of China and Korea in "Abandoning Asia," it is easy to point out the absence of the spirit of universal brotherhood or love for his neighbors. But Fukuzawa was not a Utopian pacifist. He was a realist and an ardent advocate of independence. In the face of the aforementioned criticism, he provided an answer:

You may hear pronouncements like the following: "Our responsibility as members of the human race goes beyond winning independence for our country and only our country. We must set our sights on other noble, eternal objectives." Those who speak these words are, of course, right. However, given the state of the world today, it is too soon to discuss lofty aspirations in connection with interchange among nations.<sup>21</sup>

Fukuzawa had no use for irresponsible, empty arguments. He disliked vague debates that veered away from the situation at hand. For that reason, the moment he realized that, given the situation in China and Korea for the previous 20 years, it would be impossible to rescue them, he decided that the only hope for the survival of his beloved country, Japan, was to bid farewell to "bad company" and go it alone.

I have already described the bad company. There was arrogant China, convinced that it was the center of the world, and determined to keep Korea in its clutches. Then there was conservative Korea, ever vacillating between submission and rebellion, where squabbling between the Daewongun and Queen Min never ceased; the Koreans submitted to China at times, seemed partial to Japan at others, and welcomed Russia at still others. If Japan continued to associate with neighboring states that did not hunger for civilization and refused to understand the importance of

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<sup>20</sup> Fukuzawa Yukichi, *Jiji shōgen* (Commentary on current affairs). September 1881.

<sup>21</sup> Fukuzawa Yukichi, *Outline of a theory of civilization*, trans. David A. Dilworth and G. Cameron Hurst (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

independence, it would soon join them in ruin. Unsurprisingly, Fukuzawa shunned such a fate. We must keep all these factors in mind when we read “Abandoning Asia.”

Those who attempt to use “Abandoning Asia” to justify claims that subsequent Japanese continental policy was aggressive and imperialistic are laboring under a fantasy that disregards the historical situation described in that editorial. Japanese continental policy subsequent to the 1<sup>st</sup> Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese War was driven by the reality and logic of international political dynamics, which had changed since 1885. To hold Fukuzawa responsible is to espouse a false doctrine that loses sight of the unpredictability of historical development.