

A New Look at the Annexation of Korea (Summary)

The Committee Against Government Apologies to Korea

In contrast to the insistence of masochistic Japanese as well as strident nationalist Koreans, abundant historical evidence points out that Korea greatly benefited during the period of annexation (1910-1945) and even before annexation. While current day Koreans who cast Japan as evil could be faulted for lacking in historical perspective, current day Japanese should indeed be chided for disregarding the context of the Japanese annexation, their cowardly response to Korean accusations and their “misplaced, hypocritical, and futile” compassion. The main point of the booklet is to present facts of the Japanese annexation of Korea, which was undertaken entirely in accordance with international law and highly dissimilar to Western colonialism as practiced in Asia.

The book is divided into seven chapters, though there are three main points that the author emphasizes as indicated by the subtitle: The annexation of Korea was absolutely necessary; The annexation of Korea was not colonialist policy; The annexation of Korea requires no apology.

The book outlines the regional circumstances prior to annexation and details the events leading up to annexation. One needs to remember that Korea up to the end of the 19th century was a tributary state of China and a frequent target of Russian designs and at the same time China was invaded by numerous Western concessions. Although China was a much larger country, the West admitted Japan as an “equal sovereign Power” after their victory in the First Sino-Japanese War. While Japan was strong enough to prevent foreign encroachment upon her territory, the Japanese also recognized that Korea and China must modernize as well: “we three nations must pool our resources to stave off invasions by Western forces.” With respect to Korea’s level of development, Westerners, as well as Japanese, repeatedly observed how “uncivilized” and “backwards” Korea was in the late 19th and early 20th century. Westerners reported their amazement of Korea’s modernization following annexation. “Civilization,” a French reporter noted, “is defined as progress achieved by peaceful means. From this standpoint, Japan’s annexation of Korea will become a new facet of Far Eastern prosperity and progress.” In fact, even before annexation, Japanese reforms to Korea’s finances and social inequality, brought about by centuries of abuse by “corrupt Court of attendants, soothsayers, fortune tellers, and foreign parasites,” were met with praise by the West as well as ordinary Koreans.

In the drive to modernize, extensive investments were made in Korea’s transportation and communication infrastructure, hospitals and educational institutions, at considerable expense by both Japanese taxpayers and Japanese private investors. Also, use of the Hangul alphabet, shunned by the Korean literary elite as “inferior” to Chinese, was encouraged by the Japanese and the Korean language itself underwent modernization. Far from being suppressed, the Japanese encouraged the use of Hangul and school books in Hangul were issued by the office of the Governor-General of Korea. Furthermore, Japanese employees of the Governor-General were encouraged to learn Korean. However, the preservation of the Korean language and culture, the drive to free Korea from Chinese rule and Western intrusion and the drive to modernize Korea at Japan’s expense have been entirely lost to modern Korean nationalists as well as hypocritical Japanese.