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Korean Students in Imperial Japan: What Happened After 1919?

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ABSTRACT

During Japanese colonial rule, a growing number of Koreans went to Japan for education. The authorities always saw them as potentially subversive. Today, too, they are largely remembered for their resistance to Japan, especially the heroic call for independence in 1919 that came to be celebrated as the “February Eighth Declaration.” In subsequent years, however, overt resistance receded and would be ultimately reduced to fragments. Even the police, their chronic alarmism over Koreans’ latent seditiousness notwithstanding, were noting downturns in activism. While pursuit of learning remained resilient, students’ acquiescence to the colonial status quo appears to have become increasingly routine. Underlying that trend may have been the cogency of the longstanding gradualist cause for working within the system; its proponents, who remain stigmatized as “pro-Japanese collaborators,” may well have been most in tune with what most Korean subjects of the empire could realistically have hoped for under the inexorable reality of assimilative colonialism.

Keywords: colonial Korea, 1919, students in Japan, resistance, gradualism, collaboration

Korea’s “Second” Independence Movement

As familiar as it is, the sight of students pouring out their demands in unison imparts a sense of energy, urgency, and righteousness—a scene which, in narratives of South Korean politics, remains palpably relevant. From the hallowed 1960 April uprising through the anti-authoritarian protests in later years, students formed a dogged and effective part of dissidence. Taking a stand on Japan, of course, has been no exception. Student rallies in 1964 against the “ignominious” normalization talks were so vehement that they had to be put down with martial law. In recent years, too, students have been a vocal presence at the scenes of “comfort women” protests and the like, demanding unequivocal settlement of thorny issues carried over from the normalization treaty and, inextricably, from Japan’s colonial rule.

In the lore of the colonial-era independence movement itself, students again loom large as a distinctly activist segment of the Korean population. The first and foremost event in collective resistance was executed in 1919 by those studying in Japan. On February 8, three weeks before the beginning of the celebrated mass rallies of the March First Movement, hundreds of students gathered at the Korean YMCA in Tokyo and demanded national self-determination. Their declaration of

independence brimmed with the fresh confidence of young activists prepared to “fight Japan to the bloody end” and “build a new state on the bedrock of democracy sustained by justice and liberty.”¹

We know that Yi Kwangsu 李光洙 (1895–1950), the main author of this much-touted “February Eighth Declaration,” never lived up to his words. Already in the early 1920s, instead of fighting a bloody war, he would urge Koreans to look inward. Korea’s decline, in his view, was directly attributable to the maladministration that foreign critics had diagnosed but, as he delved further, was fundamentally due to the “degenerate national character” of both the ruler and the ruled. He then enjoined Koreans to reconstruct themselves into a vigorous nation of “integrity and deeds” in a complete departure from their proclivity for “trickery” and “empty talk.” Reconstruction, spiritual and material, was to take place in the realm of daily life, through expanding circles of apolitical membership (Yi 1922). As Michael Robinson (1988, 64) put it, “Yi presented the case for gradualists, both at home and abroad, who believed continued national development had to precede political independence.”

Much has been and is being written about Yi’s intentions and rationale. Suffice it here to say that he did not come to his gradualist solution all of a sudden. What was sudden, according to Kenneth Wells’s seldom-cited essay (1989, 9–15), was the heroics of 1919 which were “prompted by extrinsic international factors at the close of the Great War.” Before that “self-contained incident,” he observed, Yi and his fellow students had been pursuing gradualist aims, just as they would resume upon their return home. Curiously, little has been written about those remaining and newly arriving in Japan. Very little, in fact, has been written about how student activism unfolded after 1919, save for sporadic incidents of agitation which are then upstaged by harrowing stories of wartime mobilization.

The gap in the overall narrative created by highlighting 1919 and fast-forwarding to the final years of Japanese rule in effect obfuscates the scale of activism during the intervening years, during which students would face the pressures of police scrutiny and their own discord, not to mention the demands of schooling. After 1919, with independence denied, Koreans embraced education like never before, demanding far more than was available on the peninsula. By the early 1940s, the number of Koreans enrolled at middle schools and above in Japan would verge on 30,000. In 1919, there were only a few hundred. Investigating their schooling experience and subsequent whereabouts will help us see what they expected of education and what came of it. Less imaginative and more prefatory, this paper is mostly limited to charting trends in overt activism: how far, as the years passed, did Korean students in Japan act upon their rejection of Japanese rule; for that matter, did they reject it at all?

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¹ For a full text of the declaration (plus supplementary resolution and petition) as recorded by the police, see Naimushō 1920, 101–104.

The historiography of colonial Korea has come a long way. Beyond the rigid mold of oppression versus resistance, more and more inquiries point to Koreans' active engagement with their society at hand and the socioeconomic changes that came with it. Yet, with unabated fierceness, the collective memory of victimhood informs and often dictates Koreans' understanding of the past and of the present. Such single-mindedness, ironically, has been reinforced by democratization. In the past two decades or so, its advocates have dominated political discourses on transitional justice. Often eliciting sympathetic responses from the judiciary, their initiatives have garnered much popular support in tackling the excesses of the past regimes and, backtracking further, the sufferings under Japanese rule, all under the dignified slogan of "settling (*ch'öngsan* 清算, a term with a strong connotation of expurgation) the past." In keeping with its peremptory overtones, those who indict Japan for wartime inhumanities in particular have tolerated little dissent.

In tandem, demands for stern judgment of "collaborators" have soared. In November 2009, those demands were taken to new heights at both state and societal levels. Pursuant to a special law passed in 2004, a presidential commission finalized on its list of 1,000-odd Koreans who had been engaged in "pro-Japanese, anti-national activities." The list was longer among non-state initiatives. Bringing together tens of thousands of donors and riding out a series of petitions for court injunctions, the tenacious Minjok Munje Yön'guso (民族問題研究所, whose official English name is "Institute for Research in Collaborationist Activities") carried through on publication of its *Ch'nil inmyöng sajön* (親日人名事典 Biographical dictionary of pro-Japanese figures) in the same month. In stating its purpose of profiling 4,389 individuals, the chief compiler self-assuredly called for "justice" via squarely facing the "shameful history" of colonial subjection—all the more shameful in his view because the contemptible "pro-Japanese" elements continued to thrive with impunity after 1945. As the Institute's chairman of the board put it, supporters of the project had been waging the nation's "second" independence movement (1: 4–9).

Amidst the centenary of 1919, rife with pungent punditry, the nation at the moment is bristling more than ever with exaltation of independence fighters and condemnation of "collaborators." Objectors call for a more sedate examination of the colonial past, but to little avail. Their calls remain impaired, in my view, partly because they have tended to dismiss the old chestnut of resistance as an insular affair of nationalist scholarship (which in actuality continues to fare much better with the general public) and, in disengaging from the old battle, have prematurely dispensed with the task of substantiating the extent of resistance. When that extent becomes clearer, and when trajectories of resistance have been placed in a perspective of measured appraisal in relation to the many contemporary concerns of those who have supposedly been an important part of it, we may be able to move on more securely to approach the issue of national betrayal and other aspects of Koreans' colonial experience with dispassion.

No doubt, Koreans of 1919 were very passionate about resistance. And students in Japan were at the forefront. From the standpoint of their overlords, they also constituted Korea's "future mainstay class," whose "state of thought (*shisō* 思

想) bore great relevance to the future of our rule of Korea.” As of 1920, potential for activism still seemed very much immanent in their thought: as many as 151 (141 in Tokyo) of 212 Koreans under police surveillance in Japan were students. They were “firmly united,” “well informed about international relations,” “disgruntled about being treated as inferior to Japanese,” and “hopeful for Korean independence” (Naimushō 1920, 85). No more collective action was imminent, however. More often than might be expected, for all their warnings about latent menace, even the police would soon find reasons to be assured of the limits to resistance.

“Desk-Bound Outcries”

Under the highhanded “military rule” of the Government-General of Korea (hereafter GGK), education was set out to be “in accordance with the conditions of life and the level of culture.” Since Korea remained “backward,” the school system was built around the rudimentary rung of “common” (*futsū* 普通) schools, with vocational training allotted to “industrial” (*jitsugyō* 実業) schools. Given no provision for universities, “special” (*senmon* 専門) schools covered the post-secondary level. As the former education advisor for the Korean court Shidehara Taira 幣原坦 (1870–1953)—the older brother of the famed diplomat and politician Shidehara Kijūrō 幣原喜重郎 (1872–1951) and the first president of Taipei Imperial University—prescribed, education of Koreans was to proceed from the “cultivation of moral character” and “diffusion of the national language [Japanese]” Like other observers, he held that the country had been benighted because its people only wanted to become officials and looked down on practical trades (Shidehara 1919, 86–87, 204).

It was indeed common to impute Koreans’ industrial failings to their mentality of “putting officials above commoners” and an attendant penchant for effete literary pursuits. In the view of Korean critics (whose self-criticism often echoed the Japanese view), the GGK in its own way was also trying to keep Koreans benighted. As one commentator observed in 1925, “public schools are designed to Japanize us . . . and make us subservient to GGK rule,” with “skills only sufficient to make us serve as their underlings” (So 1925, 52).

Those seeking to learn more, despite official discouragement, would increasingly flock to Japan. Countenanced by the GGK were such “practical” disciplines as agriculture, forestry, fishery, and engineering which, in its view, could be studied only in Japan. The fields of specialization of the Koreans who were awarded GGK scholarships to study in Japan (Abe 1976, 35–37) starkly reflect the official priorities. A much larger number of Koreans who were on their own, however, were not complying with those priorities: law, social science, and other literary fields were most popular among them. Even more distasteful to the GGK had been the multitudes of students “aimlessly” leaving for Japan only to languish at remedial prep programs (Sōtokufu 1915, 78–80).

The GGK was wary of Koreans’ study in Japan, as the eminent liberal critic Yoshino Sakuzō 吉野作造 (1878–1933) reported in 1916, also because of their propensity, once in Japan, to “adopt ardent patriotism” (Yoshino 1916, 85). Their presence was always a homeland security concern, as the police noted the

same year: “Koreans under surveillance, most of whom are students, harbor anti-Japanese sentiments and propagate dangerous thought . . . in the hope of recovering national sovereignty” (Naimushō 1916a, 48).

A stock phrase of the day, “recovering national sovereignty” (*kokken kaifuku* 國權回復; K. *kukkwön hoebok*) would likewise be taken for granted today as a generic expression of yearning for independence. Interestingly, historian Kim Söngsik (1974, 25–26, 32) has been struck by its exiguousness: discharged with the traditional histrionics of “grief and indignation” (*hifun kōgai* 悲憤慷慨; K. *pibun kanggae*), the expression evinces a distinct strain of “pre-modern patriotism . . . without ideological structure.” Even more interestingly, the police had been under the same impression. Their 1920 report, in retrospect, characterized Korean students’ activism before World War I as “desk-bound outcries devoid of concrete plans,” stagnating at utterances of nothing more than “grief and indignation” (Naimushō 1920, 85).

Indeed, there had been little in the way of concrete plans. Earlier, when Itō Hirobumi 伊藤博文 (1841–1909) was gunned down in Harbin, according to one memoir, students in Tokyo could not even breathe loudly around their angry hosts. Faced with Korea’s total loss of sovereignty the following year, most students felt helpless and decided to “continue with their studies in preparation for the future” (Paek 1968, 98–106). Among cadets at the Army Military Academy in Tokyo, there was angry talk of withdrawing from school or immolating themselves in protest, but, in the end, calls for forbearance prevailed (Yi Kidong 1982, 24). No one today (or, for that matter, among the prudent students themselves) should be chagrined that they did not take bold actions under such forbidding circumstances; I merely note that they did not.

The police remained heedful, nevertheless, particularly of the Korean YMCA: “No matter where they live, anti-Japanese Koreans are followers of religion, mostly Christianity” (Naimushō 1916, 54). Missionaries in Korea had tried to instill in Koreans a strong sense of their cultural and historical distinctiveness since the closing years of the Chosön dynasty. The result was apparent among young Koreans in Tokyo, who would gather at the YMCA and celebrate their Korean heritage by, for example, posing as Korea’s historical heroes in costume parades and on field days (Naimushō 1918, 65–67). From its humble beginning in August 1906 in a rented room of the Japanese YMCA, the Korean YMCA was able to build its own hall nearby in 1914 with donations from the YMCA in New York. In the words of its former manager, the place was newcomers’ “home away from home” and “a microcosm of Korea’s thirteen provinces” (Paek 1968, 121–125). The hall was lost during the Great Kantō Earthquake and was rebuilt in the vicinity in the late 1920s again mostly with donations from the American YMCA (Ch’oe 1985, 181).

Also based in the YMCA was the umbrella student association of Tokyo, the Chae Tonggyöng Chosön Yuhaksaeng Haguhoe (在東京朝鮮留學生學友會 “Korean Student Fraternity of Tokyo,” hereafter Haguhoe), which the police accused of propagating anti-Japanese thought through a variety of activities. Membership was mandatory for all Korean students in Tokyo, which meant most of Japan especially in early years: as of June 1920, for example, 682 of 828 Korean students in Japan

were in Tokyo. Those who remained aloof were blackballed as “national enemies” (Naimushō 1920, 85, 88).

The Haguho's bulletin *Hakchigwang* 學之光 usually printed 600 to 1,000 copies per issue at irregular intervals and had readers even in Korea. It was in this bulletin, as Wells (1989, 9–11) points out, that students like Yi Kwangsu set forth their rejections of the past and the corollary of self-strengthening that would emerge as all-out gradualism in the 1920s. In his 1916 essay on Koreans’ “deficiencies,” to add another example, Hyōn Sangyun 玄相允 (1893–1950: another well-known gradualist bound for the stigma of “collaborator”) reflected that, because Koreans had ignored modern advances in technology, held little sense of purpose in life, and failed to pursue self-betterment in earnest, they had inertly veered from the course of civilization. Students, he urged, should be the nation’s pathfinders (Hyōn 1916, 11–15).

Hyōn, like Yi Kwangsu, was under police surveillance, “Class A” (*kōgō* 甲号), along with others whose anti-Japanese thought and ability to sway other likeminded individuals were deemed particularly threatening. Under “Class B” (*otsugō* 乙号) were those who harbored or might be harboring anti-Japanese thought, or those whose disposition, personal history, acquaintances, or reading habits suggested receptiveness to anti-Japanese thought. The lists, and any changes therein, were to be shared with the GGK. “Indirect” surveillance through monitoring of writings, correspondence, and meetings was supposed to be the norm. Those suspected of disquieting schemes were to be tailed (Naimushō 1916b, 23–24).²

Yet no disquieting schemes were in the offing. Turnouts at student gatherings, according to another *Hakchigwang* writer in 1916, had been declining (Kim Chōlsu 1916, 16–17). Though occasionally confiscated, the bulletin’s contents as late as 1917 were judged by the police to be “generally moderate.” Although, as the police documented, students could sound less moderate in more private and colloquial settings, hard-headed plans for direct action hardly emerged. On their course of action, one student observed at a Haguho gathering in November 1917 that there were three options for them: self-strengthening, obtaining self-rule with the aid of sympathetic Japanese, and recovering national sovereignty. The latter two being “not easily attainable,” he concluded that they should strive for self-strengthening in preparation for the future (Naimushō 1918, 69, 73).

1919

The same police report also noted an unsettling sign of change, however. At another gathering in December 1917, the same Hyōn Sangyun who had fulminated against Koreans’ “deficiencies” was now drawing attention to the ongoing upheavals in Europe, which in his view were essentially a “clash between democracy and tyranny.” The peoples of the world were so eager for liberty and equality that, even if immediate repercussions were limited, he foresaw, oppressive imperialism in

² In practice, especially in early years when there was a relatively small number of students, surveillance seems to have been up close and personal with little pretense of stealth (Paek 1968, 102; Ch’oe 1985, 76–77).

the Orient would give rise to a great conflict for which the Korean nation should be prepared. When surveillance lists were brought up to date in May 1918, they showed a total of 179 Koreans. Though 58 fewer than the previous year, the drop was hardly reassuring to the police because only 14 had been delisted while 79 had returned to Korea (Naimushō 1918, 62, 73–74).

In a matter of months, the apprehension proved warranted. According to the recollections of February Eighth participants (Kim Toyōn 1967, 68; Ch'oe 1985, 80), students in Tokyo were galvanized by a *Japan Advertiser* report of December 1918 that Syngman Rhee 李承晩 (1875–1965) and two others were headed to the Paris Peace Conference to demand independence. As the police later confirmed, “Korean students’ anti-Japanese sentiments intensified with the news of the armistice in Europe in November 1918 and became even more bullish alongside the growing calls for liberty, equality, and national self-determination.” In January 1919, something was definitely afoot. An “action committee” was formed in Tokyo. A declaration of independence was drawn up and was wildly received by students at the YMCA. After breaking them up two days in a row, the police were in pursuit of committee members who continued to press their cause. On the morning of February 8, from several districts of Tokyo, they mailed out their declaration of independence and resolution (both written in Korean, Japanese, and English) and petition (in Japanese) to foreign embassies, Imperial Diet members, the GGK, newspaper and magazine publishers, and several scholars. At around 2 p.m., they regrouped at the YMCA on the pretext of holding a Haguho election and read out their statements to a boisterous response from some 300 students. Charged with violation of the Press Law, nine committee members were sentenced on February 15, and upon appeal, again on March 21, mostly to nine months in prison. Their final appeal was dismissed in June.³

With the even greater shock of the March First Movement (led in no small part by Korean clergymen), the Christian influence on nationalism was not to be given free rein. In early 1920, Yoshino Sakuzō reported a “rumor” that the authorities were trying to place a Japanese pastor from the Japan Congregational Church (of which Yoshino himself was a member) at the helm of the Korean YMCA and have students move into a new dorm under GGK management. Yoshino, who had become Korean students’ best friend in Tokyo, rejected the idea as “bureaucrats’ facile thinking” and urged his readers to show sincerity to the Koreans by paying respect to their national cause and by supporting the “justice” they upheld (Yoshino 1920a, 256–262).

Maruyama Tsurukichi 丸山鶴吉 (1883–1956) of the GGK’s police bureau (to become its chief in 1922), immediately denied Yoshino’s allegation but not categorically: the GGK was not scheming to reduce the YMCA to submission but, since seditious intrigues tended to revolve around the YMCA, there had been some

³ The account here is summarized from Naimushō 1920, 98–100. One former defendant reminisces that he had braced himself for at least seven years in prison for insurrection. He proudly speculates that, in the face of the students’ undaunted attitudes, the judges were trying not to draw attention to the trial (Kim Toyōn 1967, 81–82).

discussion among the authorities and other concerned individuals over possible measures to facilitate “understanding” between the students and the authorities. Under contemplation, far from the old-fashioned supervision, was promotion of open intercourse based on “kind care and consultation” (Maruyama 1920, 2–5). Yoshino again rejoined that, if truly seeking rapport with Koreans, Japanese could start by showing some respect (Yoshino 1920b, 280–281).⁴

While Yoshino and Maruyama wrangled, students in Tokyo were becoming restless. On February 22, Haguho president Kim Chunyön 金俊淵 (1895–1971) met with three other students at a church and drafted a commemorative statement to be sent to Korea and Shanghai. Another student blocked it, citing intense surveillance. A week later, on the first anniversary of the March First Movement, the students were less inhibited. Fifty students who had assembled at the YMCA were dispersed by the police, but as they moved to Hibiya Park the crowd grew to hundreds, shouting “Long Live Independence.” Fifty-three participants were detained (Naimushō 1920, 104–105).

The second anniversary, however, saw a turnout of only about 100 students at the Park. Although there followed some attempts in November to make appeals to the Washington Conference, the police would conclude in early 1922 that almost no one now believed in the possibility of Korean independence (Naimushō 1922, 122–123).

Then in 1923 the slaughter of Koreans in the aftermath of the great quake put the authorities on edge. As the GGK police bureau’s Tokyo office reported in May 1924, “gradualists have the potential to surpass radicals but, faced with the oppressive treatment following the earthquake, their thought has been stirred to the point of rousing antipathy.” Emotions then appeared to stabilize, and “almost no one speaks or acts openly on the issue.” The majority of the student population was found to be centrist “gray” elements, and among them moderates, whose “innermost feelings, in the light of world trends, favored leaning on Japan,” were increasing in number. Outdoor commemorations of 1919 had also dwindled to a negligible scale and seemed sure to cease sooner or later (Sōtokufu 1924, 137, 149).⁵

The metropolitan police were relieved, too. In fact, they were already looking back on the February Eighth Declaration as an episode of bygone days: it was an “epoch-making” event, but that epoch ended abruptly in 1921 after the Korean issue was dismissed at the Washington Conference as an internal affair of Japan. With the illusion of American aid dispelled, the police added, students were opting for prudence and were regrouping around the gradualist cause of self-strengthening (Naimushō 1925, 324–326). Of course, unlike the way the police

⁴ The rumored plan failed to materialize (Matsuo 1973, 467). Although Yoshino fell short of enunciating “independence,” his moral approval of the students’ cause was strong enough to convince contemporary observers like Maruyama that he was prepared to “relinquish” (*hōki* 放棄) Korea (Maruyama 1920, 11–12). For a sympathetic reading of Yoshino’s position on Korea, see Matsuo 1968; for a more exacting interpretation from a Korean standpoint, see Han 2004.

⁵ Though with emotions held down, those in Tokyo would publicly remember the tragedy. During his trip to Korea in 1934, a former student was surprised to find that the press remained reticent whereas students in Tokyo were annually holding memorial services for victims on September 1 (Ch’oe 1985, 163).

categorized the students, one could be committed to the cause of gradualism and at the same time, given a propitious set of circumstances, militantly rise to the occasion. Nevertheless, collective action comparable to that of February 1919 seemed unlikely.

“Cultivation of Virtue”

Although Wilson did not come to the rescue of Korea, the high-minded promise of world renovation that he stood for made headway in the worldview of Koreans. And the students in Tokyo continued to seize on the language of the times as they reaffirmed their longstanding call for self-strengthening. In January 1920, on the first page of the first *Hakchigwang* issue since the February Eighth Declaration, the foreword (“Sinsidae” 1920, 89) saluted the inauguration of an “Age of Renewal” which called upon humankind to obliterate “all defects” of “the depraved past” as “its most urgent task.” In the subsequent July issue which was dedicated to recent graduates, the outgoing Haguho president Kim Chunyön directed the same grand vision for change onto Korea. Kim, who only five months earlier had dared to plot a commemorative statement of 1919, was reaffirming the gradualist cause of reformation. Wielding an acrimonious pen, he rejected the last few centuries of Korean history as “closed, depraved, and devoid of lofty ideals,” and urged participation in “world reconstruction,” beginning with the “fundamental reconstruction of Koreans’ own selves” through the “cultivation of virtue” (Kim Chunyön 1920, 270–279).

That summer, Kim and his fellow Haguho members went on a lecture tour around southern Korea. Reporting back at the Haguho in September, he reflected that most of their audiences might actually have been disappointed with what they heard. Instead of offering “a solution to the more pressing problem” that had been raised since March 1919, the students stressed the urgency of “learning and understanding the spirit of the times.” He was nevertheless confident that those prepared to plod toward a self-sustaining way of life must have agreed with the students and that their efforts were “contributing to the development of the peninsula’s culture” (“Kangyöndan sosik” 1921, 393–394).

Apparently, many back home agreed. Demand for education surged, far outstripping official supply. In 1923, enrollments at “common” schools overtook those at *södang* (traditional village schools run by locals). Only 83,503 of 127,958 would-be students who applied could be admitted that year (Furukawa 1993, 43–48). Higher education remained even thinner on the ground. While Koreans’ own campaign to build a university floundered, Keijō Imperial University opened in 1926 but only with faculties in legal, literary, and medical studies, where Japanese students would remain the majority.⁶ Spillover to Japan would grow. Already in 1926, in just three years, the number of Korean students in Japan had rebounded to the pre-Great Kantō Earthquake level (GGK records in Abe 1976, 50).

⁶ Although many have suspected a cap on the share of Koreans, it may be pertinent to note that the majority of the Japanese entrants, except for the first two years, were from Korea and not Japan (Tsüdo 2009, 61–64).

With gradualism in motion again, Koreans were still unprepared to tolerate public statements that seemed to accept the reality of Japanese rule in a straightforward fashion. Yi Kwangsu learned this the hard way in 1924. Serialized in *Tonga ilbo* 東亞日報 editorials in January, his essays on “National Statecraft” proposed to build a trilateral “great association” of politics, industry, and education in order to develop Koreans’ capacity for a viable nationhood through legitimate means. In doing so, much to his readers’ indignation, Yi relegated the nonconformist agenda of raising the masses’ national consciousness to a more universal purpose of cultivating their proficiency in government (Robinson 1988, 137–141).

Students in Tokyo were particularly critical. The Haguho resolved on a boycott of the newspaper, and, in league with other Korean organizations in Japan, sent several thousand copies of a denunciatory statement to Korean organizations in Korea and Japan. (Copies sent to Korea were confiscated.) Some even traveled to Korea and joined demonstrations, which forced the newspaper’s management to resign en masse. In light of this backlash, the police cautioned, it was not yet certain that students were willing to confine themselves within legal limits (Sōtokufu 1924, 148–149; Naimushō 1925, 331–332).

Little action followed, however. Even when the last crowned head of the Chosōn dynasty died in April 1926, while disturbances (for instance, the “June Tenth Movement”) took place in Korea, students in Japan remained generally calm. (Several students plotted, in anticipation of the police muscling in, to escalate their memorial service into a clamor for independence but were arrested beforehand.) Though mournful in appearance, the police observed, students were reproaching the old monarchy for its despotic rule and loss of sovereignty. If they had something to grieve over, they seemed to hold, it was the concomitant feeling of coda to Korea’s hoary past. And, the police continued, moderates of the learned class were in favor of pursuing “cultural development” toward elevation of nationhood (Naimushō 1926, 223).

In the eyes of Japanese who were bound to interpret Koreans’ thought and behavior in the derisive terms of *jidai* (事大; K. *sadae*), or “serving the great,” even their nationalism could only be spineless and wavering: since America had proved unreliable, they were now deferring to the superior power of the empire. Another great power, however, was emerging into view: the Communist movement.

Dissolution of the Haguho

Speaking to a national congress of reporters at Chosōn Hotel in May 1923, the GGK police chief Maruyama Tsurukichi remarked that, with no hope of independence in sight, some Koreans were turning to radicalism. Imported mostly via Japanese magazines, he sneered, it rarely translated into genuine conviction (Maruyama 1923, 278–279). His patronizing view was apparently shared by Japanese radicals who, according to the GGK police in Tokyo, scorned Koreans’ activism as a mere child’s play and tried to manipulate them to their advantage. The scorn, the police added, was mutual. The Koreans saw their Japanese counterparts’ engagement as perfunctory and were displeased at not being taken seriously enough to be in touch with their top brass leaders (Sōtokufu 1924, 145).

As for students, the police assessed that, directed by only a small handful of leaders and mostly impulsive, their involvement did not yet pose a serious threat (Sōtokufu 1924, 137). It was, however, serious enough to cause schism among students themselves. According to Ch'oe Sŭngman 崔承萬 (1897–1984), a February Eighth participant who served as the YMCA's manager for a good part of the mid-1920s and again in the early 1930s, radical tendencies did appear in the wake of the 1923 quake, with a number of students identifying with laborers' interests and expressing antipathy toward Christian influence (Ch'oe 1985, 187–189, 261).

Still, as of 1925, the police found that students in general preferred bipartisan unity. In a *Hakchigwang* article cited as an illustration, the author stated that, while nationalists could be bent on parochial self-glorification, their socialist critics were also to be faulted for being divorced from reality. Far from a borderless utopia, a conquered people are subject to merciless economic exploitation by foreign capitalists. Political freedom is thus crucial, all the more so because their “cultural development” suffers greatly: their language is not taught, their religion and customs ignored, and their history rewritten from the perspective of the conqueror. Thus, the cause of national self-determination should be supported by the socialist camp in order for the nation to stand as a viable cultural unit (Naimushō 1925, 327–330).

The balance was tipping in a direction away from unity, however. As the police continued its report, Haguho members had a noisy fight over a gift of money from the *Tonga ilbo*. When some of it was set to be diverted to a Korean labor organization, poor students who had been anxious to have a new dorm built protested. Laborers then crowded the Haguho's extraordinary general meeting, and there ensued accusations of undue outside influence, resulting in a revision of Haguho bylaws to fortify it as a strictly student organization (Naimushō 1925, 334). According to another account (Chōng 1970, 138), infiltration by Communists only grew, and tension mounted as they also tried to gain control of the Haguho from its flank by luring several members to join their study group.⁷

By 1928, according to the Justice Ministry's count, Korean Communists in Japan came to boast seventeen organizations with 8,200 members. Since those individuals usually had triple or even quadruple overlapping memberships, their actual number was estimated to be below half that figure. Again, their new ideological engagement was belittled as merely the latest in their succession of attempts to “rely on the great” (Shihōshō 1928, 247–251). The trend was alarming, nevertheless. In 1929, the number of Koreans in Japan who were under Class A surveillance (Naimushō 1929, 68–69) as “Communists” (203) overtook and almost doubled that of “Nationalists” (117). Now, the police warned, Koreans' puerile intellect and susceptible character had to be factored in as the very basis for alarm: “Given their extremely low level of ideological grasp, Koreans can be easily

⁷ Its author Chōng Ch'öl 鄭哲 (dates unknown) had been an anarchist whose own involvement with the student community is unclear. He was a leader of the pro-South Korean Mindan 民團 so he might have been motivated to blame the Communists and the pro-North Ch'ongryŏn 總聯 for the history of division. Granted, as Dae-Sook Suh confirms, the study group was a front organization for the Korean Communist Party (Suh 1967, 167).

inflamed by a small leadership cadre” (Naimushō 1930, 175).

By then, with several members incriminated in Communist incidents in both Japan and Korea, the Haguho also partook of radicalism (Naimushō 1930, 117). So had its former president Kim Chunyōn, who in 1920 had urged “cultivation of virtue in the new age of reconstruction.” After graduating from Tokyo Imperial University, he went on to study at the University of Berlin (through the good offices of his mentor Yoshino Sakuzō) and worked for the *Chosōn ilbo* 朝鮮日報 as its Moscow correspondent between 1925 and 1926, during which time he apparently saw the potential for an even newer age. Apprehended in 1928 during a crackdown in Keijō (Seoul), he was sentenced to seven years in prison. In 1966, about to run for the South Korean presidency near the end of his venerable career (a key architect of the 1948 constitution, Minister of Justice, and five-term lawmaker), Kim recounted that his published travelogue of his trip to the Soviet Union had led the Communists to approach him. His real motive, he insisted (and as the Japanese police would have had it), did not stem from ideological conviction but from the perceived expediency of using Soviet power for effecting Korean independence (Kim Chunyōn 1966, 9, 17–18).⁸

As it happened, following the Comintern’s disapproval of united front experiments, pan-Korean organizations in both Korea and Japan disbanded. Harried by Communist inroads, the Haguho’s non-Communist members were fighting a losing battle. As late as 1929, the police had classified it as a “Nationalist” group. It was, at least outwardly, still professing “to elevate Korea’s culture in preparation for independence” (Naimushō 1929, 32). Internally, however, it was incapacitated. When members managed to put together a “revival issue” of *Hakchigwang* (which had lapsed in 1927) in April 1930, it opened with the editor’s regretful commentary on the “chaotic” state of the student community: “I am fully aware that even greater hardships await us on our path ahead” (“Kaengsaeng ūi sa” 1930, 687).

The revival issue turned out to be the penultimate one. At the end of 1930, Communist members of the Haguho succeeded in passing a resolution, by a vote of twelve to nine, to dissolve the organization. Their statement, issued in February 1931, made the ideological orientation of the administration’s new majority clear: proclaiming a transition to “the true class liberation movement,” they resolved to “pulverize reformist and opportunist elements, and bring students and the masses together into the realm of our daily struggle” (Naimushō 1931, 302–304).

“Wait and See”

In 1932, the police concluded, the movement for independence now had its “mainstream” subsumed under the Communist movement (Naimushō 1932, 512–513). Be that as it may, the same year, their reports under the rubric of the enfeebled

⁸ When interviewed earlier by Robert Scalapino in 1957, in reminiscing about his recruitment, Kim had cited his translation of Stalin’s work on Leninism—written even before Stalin’s rise to dominance (Scalapino and Lee 1972, 85 n34). If he had been downplaying his past Communist connection, Dae-Sook Suh (1967, 208, 295) was not pleased: “Kim Chun-yōn, blinded by his political ambition in the South, not only renounced communism but also emphatically pledged his loyalty to the cause of capitalism.”

“Nationalist movement” also had to cover the sensational attack in January by Yi Pongch’ang 李奉昌 (1900–1932), who threw a hand grenade at the Emperor’s procession near the palace. It is uncertain how other Koreans in Japan felt about his action or hardline militancy in general at that point (in the wake of the Japanese takeover of Manchuria), but they—“Communist” or “Nationalist”—certainly had nothing to do with the incident: as the police found, Yi had been directly incited by Korean nationalists in Shanghai and had no accomplice inside Japan (Naimushō 1932, 514).

Soon, the Communist movement itself would be brought to heel. By 1937, there were no more major activities (Suh 1967, 205). In 1938, the number of Korean organizations listed under the police nomenclature of “Radical Leftist of the Communist Line” dropped to “zero,” having steadily declined from 86 in 1932 (Naimushō 1932, 390–393; 1940, 487).⁹ Moreover, the annual total of Koreans arrested in violation of the Peace Preservation Law (PPL) had fallen off from the exceptional peak of 1,820 in 1933 to 117 in 1938 and would fluctuate in the range of several dozen to a couple of hundred.¹⁰

As PPL enforcers preferred to avail themselves of administrative pressure to keep lawbreakers under their watch, they were seldom given a definite judicial judgment (Mitchell 1976, 114–119). Of 884 Koreans arrested in 1934, for example, only 54 were indicted. While 81 received “suspended indictment” and 30 “charges withheld,” 686 were released (Naimushō 1934, 105–111). By the year’s end, 96 of 120 Koreans in custody gave in to pressures for *tenkō* (転向 “conversion”), the preferred outcome of an interrogation technique through which the police tried to argue the accused into recanting their professed views. As the police self-servingly exclaimed, Koreans may have finally recognized “the lofty ideal of securing everlasting peace in the Orient.” Or the police themselves may have just tightened the fetters an extra notch. While suspecting that some “converts” were angling for parole and other favors, the police were nonetheless pleased with the results (Naimushō 1934, 103–104).

Between 1932 and 1937, the number of Koreans arrested totaled 3,611.¹¹ Only 313 were students. And only about a dozen of them were indicted (Naimushō 1932, 430–434; 1933, 640–647; 1934, 105–111; 1935, 324–329; 1936, 517–519; 1937, 700–702). Then, after the outbreak of the China War in 1937, the police detected an apocalyptically seditious hopefulness among students who, ever infected with “parochial national prejudices,” looked on the war as “Japan’s imperialistic

⁹ There still remained three non-radical Korean Communist organizations in 1938. Upon the “progressive dissolution” of 1929, Korean Communists in Japan would join the Japan Communist Party. Although they no longer had organizations of their own, the police still counted those organizations where Korean members’ strength was deemed significant (Naimushō 1932, 388).

¹⁰ For an early work noting these numbers on the basis of the same police records (before they became available as published reprints), see Mitchell 1967, 68–71.

¹¹ The educational backgrounds of these Koreans are not entirely clear. Concerning 211 Koreans indicted between 1930 and 1934, who were mostly laborers, the Justice Ministry (Shihōshō 1934, 862–879) reported as follows: *senmon* school level and above (8 percent), middle school (34 percent), primary school (45 percent), and no schooling (10 percent). The China War years, with a relatively large share of students among those arrested, may show a higher profile of educated individuals.

aggression destined to fail under international isolation and economic hardship” (Naimushō 1937, 714). Indeed, reports for subsequent years (Naimushō 1938, 103–108; 1940, 399–400 and 444–445; 1941, 612–613 and 663; 1942, 808, 864–869) showed an upturn in students’ share of PPL arrestees: 1938 (57 of 117), 1940 (72 of 165), 1941 (154 of 257), and in 1942 (86 of 168). In 1943, too, students accounted for 44 percent of thought-related Korean criminals (Naimushō 1945, 512).

The frequency of arrests alone may convey a misleading impression of agitation, however. The police were quick to react, especially in wartime, and sometimes made arrests on trumped-up charges. Researchers who emphasize Koreans’ resistance also note this aspect (for example, Cho 2008, 249–250). The seriousness of the offenses, too, is open to question. What emerges from a perusal of allegations is a picture of grandiloquence in a conclave, usually of some half-dozen participants iterating their commitment to national liberation. In fact, since Koreans’ activities often fell short of “associations,” which the PPL had targeted, there were voices among the authorities to revise the law to be more inclusive and, further, to expressly cover the “independence movement” (Tōkyō Keiji 1939, 1100–1101).

That is, in the late 1930s, Korean activism had become fragmentary in form and, as the police would repeatedly add, was again turning “pure and simple nationalist” in orientation (Naimushō 1940, 399; 1941, 612). In their count, “Communist” organizations became defunct in 1942, but “Nationalists” were still afloat with some 160 organizations, which were mostly student unions (Naimushō 1942, 941–942). While, as the police saw, Korean movements of all inclinations were in any case nationalist at heart, general sentiments of being Korean had apparently shown their promise anew as the main rallying axis. For instance, as cited annually in police records throughout the later 1930s, students had been at loggerheads with the authorities over their injunctions against the use of Korean in public functions. Those in the Kyoto area appear to have been particularly unyielding. The triumph of two Korean marathoners at the Berlin Olympics in 1936 had also fired up national pride and heightened the mood for unity. Police references to students’ speech around this time indicate that they, like those before them, were posing as the elite custodians of their nation, again toward cultivation of “culture.” There was even talk of resurrecting the Haguhoe in Tokyo (Naimushō 1936, 544–551).

There was no resurrection, however. The police deemed that the timing was too inauspicious with the advent of the China War fervor taking over (Naimushō 1937, 714–715). As organized activities came to a standstill, Korean publications also became marginal. Their language must have tamed as well: between 1939 and 1942, no cases of suspension were reported. Illegal publications had virtually disappeared following the “progressive dissolution.” What remained was essentially reduced to leaflet propaganda (Naimushō 1936, 601; 1937, 775–776; 1938, 136; 1939, 317; 1940, 519; 1941, 741; 1942, 961).

Wartime pressure against organized activities only intensified as the authorities dragged Koreans in Japan under their official umbrella. Concerning Koreans’ capacity for collective action, the police jeeringly and formulaically

cited “Koreans’ characteristic enviousness, factiousness, and craftiness,” which “graphically show up in their group life” as they “band and disband harum-scarum in constant discord.” While underwhelmed, the police could nevertheless be unnerved by the protracted war. Then, they regurgitated another line of platitudes on Koreans’ insidiousness: always prone to *jidai*, students in general were taking a “wait-and-see attitude,” quietly hoping that the China quagmire would lead to Japan’s defeat and then to a sweeping opportunity to fan insurrection (Naimushō 1941, 572; 1942, 833).

There was no insurrection, however. Most students were apparently busy finishing school, finding jobs, or just staying alive. Toward the war’s end, few could have afforded to think about more than themselves.

Coping with War

To recapitulate, after their vociferous demands for national self-determination in 1919, students at large became more discreet, with a number of them, it appears, in basic agreement with the gradualist proposition of self-strengthening. Moving into the 1930s, those who envisioned a more radical solution along the line of class struggle won out in politically active circles, but their prominence as well as organized activities in general would ultimately subside, confined mostly to small and obscure gatherings, all of which, under circumstances of wartime mobilization, had become even less tolerable to the authorities. Collective self-identification as Koreans could again occasionally bring students together but would fall short of an organized movement.

In distilling source materials on those long-term trends, this paper has relied heavily—perhaps too heavily—on police records. They may tell us more about the bigoted authors and their likeminded readers than about the subjects under their watch. In their renditions, Koreans in any event could only be toadyish: if emboldened by new developments in world affairs, Koreans were being slavishly opportunistic; if inanimate, Koreans were being deferent, again slavishly so, in acquiescence to the empire’s superior power. Some may object, then, that police records may overemphasize Koreans’ submissiveness. By the same token, however, as Koreans were also looked upon as being deceitful, those reports are just as liable, if not more, to convey a lopsided impression of seditiousness. Such interpretive biases notwithstanding, given their compendiousness over a sustained time span, the substance of the reports does point to attenuation of activism. Although the police may have distorted the reason for this attenuation, their documentation of it is less open to doubt.

In the first half of 1945, Koreans apprehended for PPL violations numbered merely fifty-seven in twenty cases. Only in three cases were students the main conspirators, the rest being mostly laborers with elementary- or middle school-level education (Naimushō 1945, 503). The paltry share of activism near the end of the war may be unsurprising since, by then, the physical presence of students had dwindled. Still, the police continued, Koreans’ national consciousness was so pervasive that even school children (though usually older than their Japanese classmates) were infusing one another with seditious thoughts and expressing ill

will toward Japan's war efforts (Naimushō 1945, 512–513). It may be tempting to cite this sort of admonition as evidence of resistance, and another historian may even be able to construct, however qualifiedly, a tale of insubordination using the same source materials (as does, in fact, Cho Kyōngdal 2008, 254). Given the limited and fragmented cases of transgressions, however, the distrustful police may have been just looking further and deeper for traces of activism to confirm their suspicions.

Intended for internal audiences, the police reports could be candid, too. From the introduction of a lead-in “volunteer” program for Koreans in 1938 to the initiation of conscription in 1944 (announced in 1942), the specter of being herded off to the battlefield was becoming real. While the spiraling number of Korean “volunteers” was heartening, the police wrote, most of them had been “coercively induced” and only rarely did they act out of their own conviction. While, according to naysayers, parents of the learned class were sending their sons to schools in Japan to evade such coercion, letters monitored by the police showed that some simply spurned being lumped together with “those who had barely graduated from primary school” (Naimushō 1941, 668–669).

Although those of the learned class have been most visibly implicated in “pro-Japanese” speeches and activities because of their eminence and leadership, they were also the ones whose allegiance to Japan, as habitually noted by the police, was most in doubt. They were found to be particularly unwilling to engage in military service. In fact, only two of the 11,364 Koreans enlisted under “volunteer” schemes between 1938 and 1942 had a *senmon* school diploma. Most had little more than primary education (still a relatively privileged demographic for their generation) and were from rural Korea (Higuchi 2001, 160–164). Even if the “pro-Japanese” elite had been hypocritically urging the less privileged to enlist themselves, many of those enlistees in their own right were working to make the most of their few opportunities under Japanese rule. Apart from all the pressure, they were seeking economic and social advancement through soldiering (Palmer 2013, 74–83). Suspicious police may have been right about the lack of conviction but, given their ingrained distrust of Koreans, may also have overly discounted their own volition.

By all accounts, still, students were not amenable to enlisting. In October 1943, another “volunteer” program set in, now specifically targeted at them. Given a short application period (from October 25 to November 20), as of November 10, only 200 of 2,830 eligible in Japan had applied (Palmer 2013, 51–52). In the end, however, the police were able to report that, as a result of concerted efforts at “the utmost encouragement,” 774 students in Japan had applied and another 1,388 did so upon returning to Korea. The rest were forced to withdraw from schools, to be either assigned to factories or sent back to Korea (Naimushō 1944, 326–327; for more, see Kang 1997, 326–338). As the year of 1944 drew near, especially for those who were about to turn twenty, the certain prospect of being conscripted must have added a material disincentive to evasion. (Conscription of Koreans was limited to only twenty-year-olds, as noted in Palmer 2013, 113.)

Those who evaded conscription continued to find themselves hemmed in on

the home front. Labor mobilization aside, the Allies' strategic bombing campaign in Japan was taking its toll on Koreans, too. As damages mounted, the police noted, Koreans' "peculiar parochialism and selfishness" resurfaced. Students assigned to factories often went missing. Evacuees in the Japanese countryside, with no connections, had only their cash to rely on. Accused of buying up daily necessities, such Koreans were faced with hostile local Japanese who refused to rent rooms. The old habit of blaming and stoking disdain for Koreans must have resurfaced, too, and very bluntly. Even the police were dismayed that some Japanese were unnecessarily provoking Koreans by treating them all like foreign spies or, again gratuitously, by somehow bracketing the current tribulations with "the Korean issue from the Great Kantō Earthquake" (Naimushō 1945, 506–509).

Under the Imperial Reach

Rebounding from the brutal pogrom of 1923 and well before the official labor mobilization plans of 1939, legions of Koreans had migrated to Japan with a strong resolve to seek their fortunes there. While some shamelessly sent their children to factories, a Korean magazine reported in 1939, the rest were willing to share in the benefits of compulsory education in Japan. When a school had recently tried to turn Korean children away, it added, the police stepped in with a warning (Song 1939, 302). As Jeffrey Bayliss (2013, 231–237) confirms, Koreans in Japan were settling in for permanent residence and were keen on their children's schooling. Although he qualifies the trend by noting their low enrollment figures as an indication of minority isolation, being an isolated minority in Japan on this account may have been preferable to being under GGK rule. When compulsory education for Korea was announced in late 1942 (to commence in 1946), enrollment rates of school-age children hovered below 50 percent (Furukawa 1993, 40–41). For school-age Korean children in Japan, the rates topped 80 percent at that time (Naimushō 1942, 786).

Those children were moving on and up. The student population more than sextupled between the late 1920s and early 1940s, and the bulk of the increase took place at middle schools, where 22,044 of 29,427 were enrolled as of 1942 (Naimushō, 1929b–1942b). While much of the inflow must have resulted from the shortage of post-primary schools (or, positively put, the expansion of primary schools) in Korea, more and more children of settled migrant families in Japan were apparently advancing from primary schools.

Students who had just arrived needed time to settle in. To the authorities, they were troublemakers bound to indulge in the distractions of Japan's freer environment, threaten "public morals" by dallying with Japanese women, and suffer from tuition and rent arrears. Dropouts could run wild with "thought" movements, too (Naimushō 1940, 361). Ever since earlier years, the police had taken a dim view of poor students because they seemed relatively susceptible to extremism. Their neediness was certainly a perennial problem. In 1924, for instance, 102 of 224 Korean students at Meiji University were expelled for unpaid tuition. Students working their way through school, commonly referred to as *kugakusei* (苦学生, the established word for self-supporting students also in

Korean: *kohaksaeng*), could find only physically taxing jobs and were found to be simply too tired to study. Most newcomers also intended to work (Sōtokufu 1924, 134). As one Japanese observer had noted in the early 1920s, Koreans were so eager to study in Japan that many poor students jumped on the bandwagon and, upon their arrival, had to work their way through school whereas, he added, not one from Taiwan or mainland China did so (Gotō 1922).

In fact, Korean students were heavily concentrated in Tokyo because, apart from the large number of schools, they could expect to find jobs in the city (Kang 1997, 46).¹² In 1925, the police estimated that about one-third of Korean students in Tokyo were *kugakusei*. A quarter of them were running papers routes, a few more were peddling ginseng, *nattō*, or sweets, with the rest mostly working as day-laborers in various lines of work (Naimushō 1925, 335–337). A typical, overwhelming day of a *kugakusei* delivering papers was reported by a Korean magazine in 1929 as follows: get up at 3:30 a.m.; pick up papers by 4:30 a.m.; finish a route by 7:00 a.m.; eat breakfast; solicit new readers while collecting subscription fees . . . and run another route for evening editions between 4:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. His monthly pay was eighteen yen, of which thirteen was spent on food (Saeng 1929, 59). A decade and a half later, students were still hard pressed. According to a classified 1943 survey, 118 of 190 respondents cited “study” or “school expenses” as “their personal anguish,” and only 23 “thought” (Shōgakukai 1943a, 133–134).

Conducting the survey was the Chōsen Shōgakukai (朝鮮奨学会 “Korea Scholarship Foundation”) which, as the GGK revamped its supervision of students in Japan, took over the operations in 1941. With offices in Tokyo and Keijō (initially in the GGK building), this little-studied organization set itself up as “surrogate parents” to “look after” Korean students in their school selection, housing accommodation, job search, and of course, “thought.”¹³ To begin with, applications for high schools and above in Japan were centralized under the GGK, upon whose screening, those approved—on the basis of their “thought,” physical fitness, academic records, and finances—were then “certified” by the Shōgakukai for study in Japan. (Applicants already attending middle schools in Japan would also be brought under its purview in 1944.) When the scheme was initiated in the fall of 1941, only 1,696 of 2,949 applicants passed (Shōgakukai 1942b, 98). The number of new entrants would shortly fall to 1,127 in 1942 from 3,042 of 1941 (Miyamoto 2014, 32).¹⁴

¹² As of June 1926, of the total of 3,375 Korean students in Japan, 2,366 were in Tokyo, 204 in Osaka, and 187 in Kyoto (Naimushō 1926, 204). In 1942, while about a half of the 22,044 middle school enrollees were now scattered over the rest of Japan, the vast majority of those at universities, high schools, and *senmon* schools (6,157 of 7,383) remained in Tokyo (Naimushō, 1929b–1942b).

¹³ For details on its founding and designs, see Miyamoto 2014. Its Tokyo operations were salvaged after the war and, at the initiative of the Ministry of Education, came under the joint management of Mindan and Ch’ongryōn. (On its website, the foundation extends its history to the Chosōn court’s student supervision office of yore.)

¹⁴ University applicants had also borne the brunt of changes in conscription laws for Japanese men: as the age cap of moratorium for those in school was lowered in 1941, many of those who had been studying for a second chance for admission rushed to secure a school affiliation instead of clinging to their first-choice schools, leaving fewer chances for Koreans. (This effect is also noted in Shōgakukai 1942b, 106–107.)

Working closely with other authorities, the Shōgakukai kept tabs on students after their arrival in Japan. At each school, at least one student was designated as a “liaison agent.” The elaborate network thus formed, especially from late 1943 onward, would come in handy for mobilizing students for the war effort. For the time being, it set out to bring not only newcomers but also soon-to-be graduates under its sway by insisting on assistance. Hundreds would participate in its “training camps,” after which its brochures would print participants’ cloying appreciation for their “spiritual” experiences at those camps (Shōgakukai 1943c). When invited to speak freely in a bull session, however, students laid bare their disgruntlement at all the prejudice and discrimination they had encountered, including the imperious presence of policemen at that very session (Naimushō 1941, 573–576).

Irrespective of their innermost thoughts, they were compliant and receptive if not forthcoming in the face of the Shōgakukai’s intercession, especially in job searches. The authorities had always been anxious lest the “thought” situation be exacerbated by bleak job prospects. Although official aid in this area was not unprecedented, the Shōgakukai was raising the bar much higher and did record considerable success. In 1942, there were as of August a total of 1,354 Koreans about to graduate from universities, high schools, and *senmon* schools in Japan. As many as 1,229 who graduated in September reportedly requested the Shōgakukai’s help. By the year’s end, 515 of them had been hired: 278 in Korea, 180 in Japan, and 57 in Manchuria and China (Shōgakukai 1942b, 106, 112–116).

Cho Kyōngdal (2008, 258) dismisses those numbers as a “mere 42 percent” of applicants. What he fails to mention is the forecast of job availabilities the Shōgakukai had made earlier: after surveying (or soliciting) hiring plans from as many as 1,266 prospective employers, it had projected a total of 485 jobs available. That is, the “mere 42 percent” exceeded the original projections. (And this was despite an untimely streamlining of government posts that year.) A later Shōgakukai report (1943d), apparently with omissions added, would show 686 of 1,283 hired. In 1943, with a total of 1,027 hired, the rate would jump to over 70 percent (Shōgakukai 1944). During the five years prior to its founding, the Shōgakukai (1943d) proudly noted, the number of those hired had averaged only 171 per year.

While the hiring rates reflect the Shōgakukai’s capabilities and the strong appeal it must have held, that almost all prospective graduates had requested its help is rather remarkable. Given its officiousness, as job placement proceeded according to a uniform schedule (beginning with the collection of individual preference surveys in February), they may have been pressured into signing up for assistance regardless of their wishes and, in some cases, perhaps even into taking unwanted jobs. The 70-percent mark for 1943 especially needs to be taken with caution. Since September graduates were subject to the student “volunteer” enlistment (Shōgakukai 1944), some may have opted to work at factories and then have been counted as newly employed by the self-promoting Shōgakukai.

The Shōgakukai (1943d) stated that it preferred to have students find employment in Japan because, in its view, Korea’s job market could not absorb

them all. But more found jobs in Korea where, upon return, those with a referral from the Shōgakukai were to be given priority by the GGK (Shōgakukai 1943d). Was this what they had wanted? Of 1,332 prospective graduates surveyed by the Shōgakukai (1943b) in April 1943, as many as 941 wanted to return to Korea. Only 207 wanted to work in Japan. The remaining 184 wanted to work in Manchuria or China. Figures from the previous year (Shōgakukai 1942a) show similar preferences. Many of them, however, may have been compelled not to seek jobs in Japan because they did not expect to find any. Personal encounters with discrimination during job searches had been angrily recounted at the Shōgakukai itself (Naimushō 1941, 573).

While occasionally venting their frustrations, students by and large appear to have been law-abiding subjects. The Shōgakukai in 1942 found that, of 1,419 students seeking its aid, 862 were found to be “good” in demeanor, 512 “average,” and only 45 “bad.” In “thought,” 855 were “moderate,” 498 were “average,” and fewer than 70 had been involved in “trouble” (Shōgakukai 1942b, 108–109). Most of these students must have come to Japan before the Shōgakukai scheme began to filter out dubious applicants. Since background checks extended to prior police records in their hometowns, the Shōgakukai was hard to fool. If they had been mindful to present themselves in a manner passable to the authorities, their mindfulness was a far cry from the peer pressure of the 1920s when one could be shunned for receiving aid from Japanese sources (as reported, for example, in Naimushō 1925, 322).

The same can be said of their daily language use. In the 1943 survey, 220 of the 300 graduates replied that they spoke only Japanese with other Koreans at school, 67 both Korean and Japanese, and just 13 only Korean. Even outside school premises, 33 spoke Korean only, compared with 125 Japanese only, and 142 both (Shōgakukai 1943a, 133–134). Even assuming they had discreetly understated their use of Korean, their discretion was certainly not evocative of the language row of the late 1930s. Speaking of which, the police’s annual reports had ceased to mention this issue in 1940. That year, relenting to official pressure, the Korean alumni association of Kyoto Imperial University changed the language of its bulletin from Korean to Japanese. The editor was relieved to report that, “for the sake of the greater good” (maintaining their fraternity), the members had made peace with the issue (Kyōto Teikoku 1940, 311, 575).

All this, perhaps unsurprisingly, may reflect just how crafty, beguiling, or downright forceful the wartime state had become in exacting acquiescence from its colonial subjects. While giving in, for their part, the colonial subjects tried to turn the table around by importunately pressing for nondiscriminatory treatment in return. Telling Koreans to claim their rights only after fulfilling their duties is absurd, one student spoke out at the aforementioned Shōgakukai bull session: when a baby cries, candy is usually given “before, not after,” crying stops. Another student chimed in, brashly lecturing the instructors on the government’s pace of assimilation: with only piecemeal accommodation of Koreans, the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere would never take hold; unless Koreans advanced to high places (since he himself aspired to become Prime Minister), Korea and

Japan could hardly become one (Naimushō 1941, 574–576). There were more abrasive assertions at this session, which Cho Kyōngdal (2008, 258) cites as an indication of uncontainable national consciousness. Some do indeed appear to be so, while others, as I read them, bespeak sheer frustration, and still others, as suggested above, evince purposive remonstrance to wring concessions from their listeners.

Koreans' loyalty, when conditioned on expectations of reciprocity, was not deemed "true" to the authorities. Even if dismissible as false obedience, at the very least, it was premised on their willingness to accept and negotiate on the basis of their Imperial membership. When push came to shove on the subject of conscription, there followed still more demands for nondiscrimination such as the franchise, abolition of travel restrictions, and compulsory education for Koreans (Naimushō 1942, 887–888). Students, being students, had always had their own real-life concerns in muddling through school and beyond. And the watchful state was extending its reach with both aid and coercion. Lured or coerced, with or without loyalty, their placement within Japan's Imperial fold seems to have been well underway by the closing years of the colonial period.

"The Mainstay Class"

All throughout this period, Koreans' demand for education remained resilient. Citing, time and again, budgetary reasons, the GGK failed to meet that demand. While singing the praises of Japan's "benevolent rule and the consequent rise in Koreans' cultural level, which then lifted their zeal for learning," the authorities were well aware of school shortages in Korea (for example, Monbushō 1941, 1212). Koreans then sought outlets for their zeal by crossing the sea. When historians delve into such dynamic aspects of the colonial past, especially when they do so in the positive language of "modernity" or "modernization," many Koreans react angrily. As the editors of the noted volume on "colonial modernity" have observed, the prevailing view in Korea takes colonialism as something that fundamentally "hinders the creation of a 'true' modernity or at best produces a 'distorted' development" ("Introduction" to Shin and Robinson 1999, 10–11).

Parallel queries have been raised in Korean-language scholarship, too, but not without obstacles. One major example from 2006 suffered delays after two publishers in a row exited midway ("Foreword" to Pak et al. 2006, 12–13). Both were apparently apprehensive about the prospects of backlash, which did in fact ensue. The purpose of exploring "colonial modernization," its leading proponent pleads, is not to suggest the beneficence of Japanese rule but to elucidate the *colonial* mechanism of how Japan came to own Korea and, just as importantly, of how Koreans chose to *change* themselves in response to the new regime of law and order (Yi Yōnghun 2007, 94–95). Concerned more with quotidian facets of life, another coterie of historians have focused on points of contact between the ruler and the ruled, a certain "colonial public-ness" where, however limited in scope, Korean subjects' rights and privileges were negotiated. The direction of change that accrued from the process, in their view, was as modern as it was colonial and practically signified an engendering of politics in the colony (Namiki 2010, 144,

150–154).¹⁵

To critics, the whole process could only have been consistent with the Japanese-designed regime, and was thus inescapably “pro-Japanese” in its direction. So whatever public-ness there was, Cho Kyöngdal retorts, was really a GGK-dominated colonial sphere, a downward conduit of violence through which the learned class channeled their demand for the sacrifices of “the people” (*minshū* 民衆; K. *minjung*). Resisting the colonial rulers’ attempt at hegemony, he contends, “the people” held on to national consciousness in its “primitive and artless form” and survived as an autonomous and impervious reservoir of Korean “sensibilities.” If the learned class thought they had been working for the nation, he concludes, it was “self-deception” at best (Cho 2008, especially 2–23, 188–190). Incidentally, “self-deception” is the exact word Carter Eckert (1991, 235, 240–243) has used to characterize the post-1919 thought process of the Korean bourgeoisie who, in his view, falsely equated their class interests with those of the nation and, in pursuing these within the confines of the system, were from the beginning set to gravitate toward “collaboration.”

As Miyata Setsuko’s earlier study (1985, 156–164) makes clear, the “collaborators” consciously sought to enable Koreans to “escape from discrimination” through bald conformity, which they knew had to be even balder under wartime exigencies, and remained convinced of its cogency under the grim reality of colonial subjection. Whether the Japanese side was ready to grant equality and respect, as questioned by Miyata herself and further explored by other historians, is another issue to be considered. Moreover, as Cho (2008, 168–170) stresses, conformity meant cultural co-optation to the point of losing national distinctiveness. However limited the efficacy of the conformist path may have been, still, its advocates seem to have held that it was still the best they could do. Yi Kwangsu (1948, 267–283), for one, saw little reason for contrition. In 1948, about to be interrogated for his “anti-national” activities, he insisted that he had been most sanguine about his choice: regardless of the outcome of the war, Koreans could preserve themselves against discrimination and claim a greater say in the colonial system only through active participation in it.

Skeptics will adduce Yi’s other writings as evidence of his sincere faith in Japan’s Imperial cause rather than of mere savvy. All the same, when it comes to identifying Koreans’ interest with their participation in the system, even the most skeptical will be hard pressed to ignore the same implacable demands of assimilative colonialism, under which discrimination grounded in Koreans’ putative inferiority—the hallmark of Japanese rule that Koreans find so reprehensible till this day—could be offset only by pursuit of excellence.

And there were many who were doing just that. And some did in fact join Korea’s “mainstay class.” Writing in the mid-1970s, and taking what we today might call a “trans-war” approach, historian Abe Hiroshi (1976, 7–11) troubled

¹⁵ Studies in this vein are usually aggregated under the “colonial modernity” school which, in the view of those who feel compelled to differentiate it from the “colonial modernization” school, does not explicitly posit modernization as an affirmative reference point for situating South Korea’s prosperity on the continuum of developments from the colonial period. For a succinct overview of historiographical trends, see Mitsui 2008.

himself to check all 3,336 entries in a 1970 edition of a who's who of South Korea. As many as 1,708, he found, had studied abroad: 1,093 in Japan, more than 80 percent of whom did so most likely before 1945.

North Korea, too, did not start from scratch. The distinguished Yi Sŭnggi 李升基 (1905–1996), the inaugural head of the Yŏngbyŏn research center credited with laying the groundwork for the DPRK's nuclear weapons development program, was a notable alumnus of Kyoto Imperial University. Earning his doctorate in 1939 and co-inventing Japan's first synthetic fiber the same year, Yi made his compatriots proud. Asked to write for his alumni bulletin, he responded with a solemn encouragement of incessant learning. As nature rewards human exertion by opening its doors to new possibilities, he asserted, human society should work much the same way: "My dear young students! Never be content with the present. Move courageously ahead along your own paths" (Yi Sŭnggi 1939, 183–184).

And "the People"

As a scientist from a colony, Dr. Yi added thirty years later (1969, 12–33), he had persevered in spite of discrimination to prove Koreans' worth and sought to "use Japan" for his nation. When his research was being redirected to military use, as further recounted in his memoir (which reads more like a propaganda piece against the South Korean regime at the time), he stalled, and was later incarcerated for privately speaking of Japan's downfall. Indignant at the likes of Yi Kwangsu who "sold out the nation," and guided by his "national conscience," he had idolized "General Kim Il Sung" whose triumphant return would finally let him serve his nation by providing clothes from the fibers he created. Whatever actually sustained him under Japanese rule, his self-strengthening efforts would be redeemed by the mass production of Vinylon (to be known as the "self-reliance fiber") in the 1960s.

However they felt about their nation's colonized plight, a growing number of other Koreans in Japan did move courageously along their own paths of learning, too. Where were they from? Long ago, drawing on the Shōgakukai's 1943 records of 1,332 prospective graduates, Wonmo Dong (1965, 432–434) suggested that the northern provinces of Korea were more likely to have students at upper-level schools in Japan by virtue of having higher percentages of their populations in nonagricultural occupations in comparison with southern provinces.¹⁶ Earlier records, however, indicate that northern provinces had stood out as students' home origins in per-population terms already in the mid-1920s when there was little nonagricultural population to speak of anywhere in Korea. Then and later, other sparse records suggest, the southernmost provinces held their own with sizable shares, too. To take another look at the 1943 Shōgakukai survey of 300 students (1943a, 126–127), however limited the sample may be, as many as 191 identified their family vocation as the "farming business," and 16 as "landlords," with the

¹⁶ One notable anomaly was North P'yŏngan which had more students in Japan than to be expected. More relevant perhaps was the longer and comparatively large presence of missionaries propagating education there. One might backtrack further to the Chosŏn state's exclusion of northerners from high office and the consequent pool of reform-minded individuals predisposed to invest in new teachings. See Hwang 2004, chapter 6.

rest being an array of commercial and white-collar occupations. While Dong's reconnaissance work still awaits thorough investigation to bear out interregional variations and changes over time, it seems fair to say that, wherever they hailed from, Koreans' zeal for learning proved robust.

The authorities could not dampen it. Nor, while harping on the nefarious tradition of "putting officials above commoners," could they steer Koreans' schooling to their liking. Koreans' demands for literary studies and post-primary education were so unyielding, a GGK education inspector reflected in 1944, that "practical" studies had been regretfully demoted (Okamoto 1944, 30–31). The prevalence of literary fields had likewise persisted among those studying in Japan although the authorities from time to time were noting its moderation. It was only under the extraordinary circumstances near the end of the war that the official preferences could be imposed. As late as 1943, literary fields comprised 85 percent (5,542 of 6,533) of Korean students' specializations at universities, high schools, and *senmon* schools, to be suddenly overtaken in 1944, given the very small number of students remaining, by science and engineering: 597 versus 793 (Miyamoto 2014, 47–48). The overbearing Shōgakukai had just issued a guideline (1943f) axing entrance slots in literary fields, too.

Whether the Korean students in literary studies had borne a peculiarly cultural inclination to "put officials above commoners" is a question of less immediate concern here—the blanket opprobrium was a reflection of the self-image the Japanese themselves had grappled with—than whether, for whatever reasons, those students in fact aspired to join the Japanese officialdom which, as we shall see below, quite a few of them evidently did. Even "the people," even when sequestered in a subaltern realm of "primitive and artless" national sensibilities, may have had high hopes for their children if not for themselves. Not so high, Cho Kyōngdal finds: obstinately averse to Japanese rule, those in Japan dismissed upward mobility under that rule with unvarnished antipathy and wanted their children to stay away from "pro-Japanese" jobs, above all, in government (Cho 2008, 242).

However they looked on office holding then, it was becoming an undisguised part of the career path among educated individuals back in Korea where, already in 1933, one-third of university and *senmon* school graduates became GGK officials (Hashiya 1990, 141). Select individuals were achieving success even with the *kōtō shiken* (高等試験, "higher exams"), the main gateway into the *kōtōkan* (高等官, "higher official") track reserved for the cream of the imperial bureaucracy. Researchers have had trouble identifying the Koreans who passed the exams, given that those of the later years changed their names in Japanese fashion and also given confusion with Taiwanese names. In the *gyōseika* (行政科, "administrative group") of the exams, according to a recent count, there were 137 Koreans. At least 82 of them had been students in Japan. The rest were mostly Keijō Imperial University graduates (Tsūdō 2009, 72–93).¹⁷ Though few, beginning in the late

¹⁷ There were even more Koreans in the *shihōka* (司法科, "judicial group"): 273 (Chōn 2012, 70–72). In the remaining *gaikōka* (外交科, "diplomatic group"), a Tokyo Imperial University graduate by the name of Chang Ch'ōlsu 張徹壽 (1908–1955) is reputed to have been the only Korean to pass (as confirmed in Hata 2001, 168).

1930s, there were even cases of being posted to the home government in Japan (Okamoto 2008, 294–295). Unlike the first-generation *kōtōkan* who had come from well-connected families, Hashiya Hiroshi (1990, 142–145) finds, the regimented cohorts of exam passers were grooming themselves along with another group of seasoned predecessors who worked their way up the ladder as a new generation of “technocrats.”

Technocratic and, of course, “pro-Japanese.” All of the erstwhile *kōtōkan* have been categorically picked out by the compilers for inclusion in the *Ch’nil inmyōng sajōn*. Integrated at the center of the governing apparatus, in the compilers’ view, those officials were inevitably involved in executing Japan’s colonial and wartime policies (1: 29–30).

Yi Ch’anggūn (李昌根, 1900–?), a Meiji University graduate, was the first Korean to pass the exams. Details of his Tokyo days are scanty, but he seems to have been rather active in the student community: the same name appears on the Haguho’s 1920–1921 staff roll, and his name definitely appears on the Class A surveillance list (marked as a 1923 exam passer) as of 1924 when he was about to return home (Sōtokufu 1924, 143). A dedicated and promising bureaucrat in the GGK, according to a 1937 account, Yi was held in favorable repute (despite “a minor thought gap”) even among “cerebral and somewhat radical” Korean journalists (Suma 1937, 406–407) who could be particularly ill-disposed to Japanese rule.¹⁸

Most cerebral and somewhat radical Korean journalists today are less reserved. They are poised to set those successful Koreans out as exemplars of “collaboration.” Researchers working on the subject have largely shared in the reproach. Even in less reproachful accounts, emphasis is placed on their preoccupation with personal success and elitist camaraderie, deemed erringly devoid of national consciousness (for example, Chang 2007). The researchers’ own findings, however, suggest that their success was a source of immense pride for many other Koreans than just themselves, their families, or their fellow alumni.

After Liberation, too, many people appear to have acknowledged Koreans’ colonial-era official qualifications with approval. In South Korea’s first general election, a substantial number of elected candidates were former GGK functionaries (Namiki 1993, 48–49). To be sure, top-tier ones such as *kōtōkan* of third rank and above were barred from candidacy. Some might also question the integrity of the incipient electoral process or its representativeness since it was shunned by those who opposed a South-only legislature. It is nonetheless difficult to imagine that, only a few years earlier, those elected had been unreservedly snubbed by others simply on the grounds of being part of the colonial regime.

How about all the *kugakusei* in Japan? Was there, in their view of life after school, a fault line against “pro-Japanese” careers? When self-made *kugakusei* occasionally passed the *kōtō shiken* and other government certifications, their

¹⁸ With few salaried jobs available, the vernacular press had been a haven for lettered nationalists. Journalists topped the list of those arrested for Communist incidents (Scalapino and Lee 1972, 123–131). Hashiya (1990, 145) cites a 1938 report saying that Yi was not so favorably regarded by Korean elders, but no reason is given. Yi’s promotions, mostly to regional posts, may strike some as peripheral in comparison with his Japanese colleagues’ (Okamoto 2008, 297–299).

inspiring personal histories and photos would appear in vernacular dailies in Korea, which regularly carried lists of the successful examinees. When surveyed by the Shōgakukai (1942a; 1943a; 1944), office holding was a distinct category of post-graduate objectives among a large share of hopefuls, many of whom did in fact land government posts. In 1943, for example, as tallied in October, 205 of 503 hired in Korea and 115 of 295 in Japan were by the government (Shōgakukai 1943e). Further research in this regard may show that taking “pro-Japanese” jobs was an accepted pursuit for Koreans of all socioeconomic backgrounds, even if, as often suggested, most *kōtō shiken* passers came from the families of the “*yangban* landlord class” and new commercial industrialists.¹⁹

The story of Im Munhwan (任文桓, 1907–1993), an assiduous *kugakusei* who went on to carve out a career as a *kōtōkan*, may clue us into the frame of mind among at least some of the aspiring Korean youth. He went to Japan in 1923 at the age of sixteen and made his way up by pulling rickshaws, delivering milk, cleaning toilets, housekeeping, tutoring, receiving help from Japanese benefactors, and even taking admission tests in place of unscrupulous students for money. After entering Tokyo Imperial University, he set his mind on passing the exams and, throughout his official career, equated his advancement in the GGK with that of Korean representation in government. He held that cultivation of individual capabilities was the precondition for independence, the kind of belief that, according to his recollections, was commonly shared by others who reached adulthood in the later 1930s (Im 1973, 52–63, 72–74, and 117–138).

Those recollections may well be fraught with self-rationalization. Im faced charges against his “pro-Japanese” career shortly after 1945. But even then, he was repeatedly called to serve the nascent republic and was even appointed to a cabinet post during the Korean War. Confiding in Im, his recollections continue, a sober-faced Syngman Rhee foretold a vital role for the “pro-Japanese” Koreans as point men against the Japanese (who he was sure would come back in one way or another), for they were the ones best informed about Japan and the Japanese. The former Haguhoe president Kim Chunyōn, who headed the constitution-writing team at the time, was another leader who solicited Im’s service (Im 1973, 159, 170, 247).

In the time-worn perspective of those who anathematize the republic’s “pro-Japanese” connection and Rhee’s complicity, however, Im’s career will easily become yet another case in point—just another ignominious entry in the *Ch’inil inmyōng sajōn*.

“True Independence”

Cleansing the nation—again, *ch’ōngsan*—of the “pro-Japanese vestiges,” President Moon Jae-in reiterated at the March First centennial, remains a “long overdue task” in “rectifying history.” For those who have followed Korean politics, the history he and his kindred “progressives” want to rectify will be familiar enough: just

¹⁹ For a sample of predominantly landed and well-to-do parental profiles, see Chōn 2012, 145–166. Their lineages, however, are not altogether clear. Focused mostly on office-holding in years before the emergence of *kōtō shiken* passers, Hwang (2004) spotlights the rising families of “secondary status groups” (on the fringe of the *yangban* estate and immediately below it) from late Chosōn.

as America's "reverse course" resuscitated Japan's militarist clique, the pressures of the Cold War allowed Syngman Rhee to connive in impeding retribution for the traitorous elite who, capitalizing on the anti-Communist alliance between illegitimate "dictators" and intrusive "outside forces," would lead the people further astray from the path of "self-reliant" oneness; acquiescing to the unrepentant Japan under American pressure, as Park Chung Hee 朴正熙 (1917–1979) did in 1965 (and, a half century later, his daughter on the "comfort women" agreement), southern regimes unconsciously failed to seek amends for colonial victimhood.

Independence will be "truly" consummated, as Moon wrapped up his speech, only when the nation becomes one again, as had been the case in 1919 on the newborn promise of the Provisional Republic of Korea Government in exile which, according to the preamble of the current constitution, is to be upheld as the Republic of Korea's rightful progenitor.²⁰ The "progressives" never found the idea of the 1919 origin palatable because it alienates the North. At present, however, some of its staunchest defenders can be found in their camp. For them, 1919 is much more palatable than 1948, in which "conservatives" of recent years have anchored a more clear-cut chronicle of the Republic of Korea. Dubbed the "New Right," they are trying to ennoble the southern republic and reinstate it in textbooks as a brand-new chapter of independent statehood ushered in by Syngman Rhee—hence their affirmation of "national founding" (*kön'guk* 建國) in 1948²¹—and brought to prosperity under Park Chung Hee, both of whom, along the movement of world civilization, carried on with constructive legacies of the colonial past and paved the way for liberal democracy and a market economy in thorough contrast to the dynastic tyranny of the destitute North.

Spearheaded by scholars of the "colonial modernization" camp (some of whom are former "progressives" disenchanted with "self-reliant" views of history), the "conservative" counteroffensive seemed to begin gaining official ground only a few years ago, as the Park Geun-hye administration went ahead with its plan to reinstitute government-commissioned history textbooks. Though subject to its own screening, the Ministry of Education explained, the existing batch of mass-market textbooks was invariably "biased." Far too long, its "conservative" allies alleged, classrooms had been injected with "pro-North" versions of history by a cartel-like network of "progressives" (for whom the new official plan was a regression to the statist authoritarianism of the senior Park's days to say the least).

²⁰ The reference to the Provisional Government as the definite origin was inserted in 1987. The initiative for the insertion is often attributed to those personally associated with the Government (especially two prominent men, a former member and a grandson of another). More crucial, probably, was the ROK regime's eagerness at the time to bolster its legitimacy against the growing popular perception of the southern state's "pro-Japanese" pedigrees (Yun 2018, 396–400).

²¹ On dating the founding to 1948, Yi Yönghun (2013, 179–182) emphasizes the importance of locating key terms in the context of the immediate post-Liberation years: he notes that, though commonly spelled out as "the return of light" today, the word *kwangbok* (光復) in its standard usage had always been a transitive verb meaning "to resplendently reclaim," usually entailing "fatherland" or "independence" as its object; in the contemporary Korean parlance, he finds, "independence" took place not in 1945 but in 1948; consistent with that finding, he adds, *Kwangbokchöl* (光復節) originally referred to anniversaries of that event, not August 1945.

Although the hastily delivered textbooks were aborted along with the impeached presidency, the acute partisanship in history writing will endure along with the peninsula's division. While the southern half stands prosperously consonant with the open trading regimes and security assurances of the Pax Americana, it will always be only a half, a dependent and adulterated half sustained by "outside forces," quite unlike the "self-reliant" North whose reputed forthrightness in purging the "pro-Japanese vestiges" adds an extra luster of integrity. Unmindful of its unflinching dependence on China (the original *sadae* suzerain, no less), "progressive" activists will continue to campaign for solidarity with the northern half in their quest for "true independence" and hail any display of amicable inter-Korean relations as a joint step closer to peaceful reunification which, if actually reckoned to be within reach, will prompt their "conservative" contenders to contemplate transitional justice for all the wrongdoings of DPRK leaders. Meanwhile, great many nationalists of all persuasions will envision the day of pan-Korean unity not merely as the beginning of a glorious new era but as the full restoration of the nation's native course of historical development. Japan, for having violated that course, will ever remain most repugnant; the period of violation and those who "collaborated" with it cannot be remembered otherwise.

In remembering the past, it may be only natural to focus on eventful years and weigh the choices individuals made against the events of those years. Certainly 1919 is a year to remember for its mass challenge against alien rule and its exuberant validation of the post-World War I ideals. Some historians may feel justified to amplify its significance further by situating the upsurge of nationwide energy it occasioned in line with an array of nationalist pursuits in ensuing years. As far as overt activism is concerned, nevertheless, the stridency of 1919 diminished, and with it, its relevance as the frame of reference for the choices many young Koreans made in subsequent years. Among their choices, across class lines and regions, pursuit of learning and excellence remained salient. Along the way, the aspersions once cast on Yi Kwangsu's call to work within the system seem to have largely receded.²² What appears to have come in their stead, as students became inured to the prolonged reality of Japanese rule, was a matter-of-fact outlook on life under that reality.

All too often, historical judgment of those who "collaborated" with Japan has been passed on the basis of whether their choice was strategically viable in effecting political independence or in upholding Korea's national distinctiveness. Much less attention has been paid to the question of the extent to which the gradualist cause of self-strengthening was manifested, if not explicitly endorsed, by other Koreans who, whether barely eking out a living or pursuing individual ambitions, had to live through Japanese rule. After all, the gradualists were the ones—not the intransigent heroes in prison or in exile—who were bound by the immediate demands of life and whose nationalist credentials were bound to suffer.

²² Despite retrospective accounts of castigation, what students in general thought of Yi in wartime is uncertain. Some reportedly did inveigh against his taking the lead in adopting Japanese names (Naimushō 1942, 853).

Education being part and parcel of gradualism, the growing presence of hard-working students in Japan is in and of itself telling, as are the trails of their level-headed endeavors in pursuit of opportunities and success. Were more successful careers, integrated as they were with the system in positions of responsibility, more conformist and more “pro-Japanese” than others? Maybe. Almost all, nevertheless, were tied to, if not part of, the vigorous pursuit of self-betterment which, one might find, did not in the end deviate from the gradualist pleas for working within the system.

Even after 1945, weathering the tide of repatriation, young Koreans would still look to Japan. Although the number of schools in Korea and enrollments would soon soar, some could not wait. Soured by shortages of teachers and political turmoil on campuses, herds of student stowaways crossed the sea well into the 1950s (Pak 2012, 103–106). Life went on. And, as it did, the dramatic events of 1919 came to pale against the sustained day-to-day strivings of self-strengthening Koreans during the rest of the colonial period and beyond. Most of their hard-working progeny, too, despite the ease with which they condemn “collaborators” today, seem to resonate more with that later part of the past in their ceaseless one-upmanship and assertive yearning for international recognition of their national worth. All along, they may also have been quite a bit more self-reliant than they tend to think.

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