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# NATIONALIST MOVEMENTS IN KOREA AND TAIWAN UNDER JAPANESE COLONIALISM

*Homogeneity and Diversity*

*Korea and Taiwan had both been occupied and colonized by Japan during the first half of the twentieth century. Japan established a replica of the Japanese bureaucracy, police, education, and judicial system in two colonies but pursued contrasting domestic colonial policies in the degree of exploitation and assimilation. While the colonial policies in Korea were more abrupt and aggressive, those in Taiwan were accredited by more cooperative and mutually beneficial features. Such different ruling approaches resulted in the varying levels and political orientations of nationalist movements toward the Japanese colonial rule. Koreans had a much stronger sense of anti-Japanese prejudices and the nationalist resistance persisted throughout the whole colonial period. Taiwanese, on the other hand, adopted a more compliant course and kept their goals moderate enough to avoid open confrontation with the colonial government. This paper examines the reasons for such homogeneity as well as diversity in the ways Japan ruled its colonies through a comparative study of nationalist movements in Korea and Taiwan.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Korea and Taiwan were the two most prominent colonies of Japan. The Qing Dynasty ceded Taiwan to Japan in 1895 following the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95, while Korea became a Japanese colony informally in 1905 and formally in 1910. Both countries gained independence from Japanese colonization after Japan's defeat in World War II in 1945.

Among all the colonies of Japan, Korea and Taiwan were the only two colonies that organized nationalist movements,<sup>1</sup> although both nations gained some economic development under Japanese rule. However, Korea presented a greater nationalist resistance to Japan than Taiwan did.<sup>2</sup> During the colonial period, Taiwanese adopted a more restrained course and kept their goals moderate enough to avoid open confrontation with the colonial government.<sup>3</sup> Koreans, on the other hand, used every means - moderate as well as radical - to achieve their goal of national independence. Even today, Korea has reserved its nationalist point of view towards Japan. As a result, Korean historiography tends to regard any positives deriving from Japanese imperialism as incidental to the ruthless pursuit of Japanese interests.<sup>4</sup> Many Taiwanese, in contrast, have looked upon their colonial experience as a reasonably happy and nostalgic, while welcoming the Japanese presence as a favorable alternative to a Chinese one.<sup>6</sup> Thus, Taiwanese consider Japanese acts as having improved the quality

of life in Taiwan, and thereby hold a much more pro-Japanese sentiment.

Why was the Japanese occupation of Korea ultimately met with high levels of resistance and national animosity by the Korean masses? Why did the Japanese occupation of Taiwan not generate the same anti-Japanese prejudices that existed in Korea, but instead intensified the fervor of existing anti-Chinese sentiments, ultimately creating a uniquely Taiwanese identity?

In ruling Korea and Taiwan, the Japanese had adopted identical systems but different policies. Korea and Taiwan too held almost identical political structures, education systems and policy agendas. However, there were several differences in the colonial policies adopted by the two colonial governments. This paper aims to examine such homogeneity as well as diversity through a comparative study of Japanese rule in Korea and Taiwan.

## KOREA AND TAIWAN AS COLONIES OF JAPAN

As the first colony of Japan, Taiwan was the third largest colony within the empire. The island was important to Japan in two ways. First, it served as an important training ground for numerous colonial officials who provided the empire with valuable experiences in administering the other colonies. The success of Japan in ruling its first colony, Taiwan, set an

example for other colonies to follow. Moreover, Taiwan was the most profitable colony within the Japanese empire. Taiwan's sugar industry enabled Japan to become the fourth largest cane sugar industry producer of the world. As a result, Taiwan achieved the goal of financial self-sufficiency within seven years. Meanwhile, other Japanese colonies took a longer time to achieve this status, and Korea never stopped receiving subsidies from Tokyo throughout the thirty-five years of Japanese rule.<sup>7</sup>

Korea was the largest colony within the Japanese colonial empire. Its uniqueness lay in the fact that it was annexed not as a result of victory in foreign war but by a treaty agreement, which guaranteed "equal treatment" for Koreans. An unusually large number of Koreans served in the colonial government at all levels - even the police force. Korea was also a unique colony to Japan, as it was the only colony of Japan, which possessed a strong cultural identity and a history of more than two thousand years as an independent nation.<sup>8</sup>

The Koreans and Taiwanese both shared similar origins and values with their colonial rulers. Korea and Taiwan, like Japan, received strong influences from Confucianism, which spread from China. This in turn created a sense of cultural affinity between the colonizers and the colonized. Thus, the Japanese vigorously promoted its assimilation policy in these two colonies. In the 1930s, the Japanese intensified its efforts in assimilating the Koreans and Taiwanese and inaugurated the *Kominka Movements* (*ko-minka undō* 皇民化運動) in both colonies around the same time. They were also the only two colonies where nationalist movements were organized setting the two colonies apart from the rest of the Japanese colonies.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the similarity of the colonial experience of the two colonies and their uniqueness within the Japanese colonial empire provide us with good cases for a comparative study.

#### REACTION AND RESPONSE OF KOREANS AND TAIWANESE

The Taiwanese reaction and response to the Japanese imperial undertakings differed dramatically from the situation in Korea, and for many people of Taiwanese background, the Japanese occupation manifested itself in the form of a pro-Japanese, anti-Chinese prejudice, rather than the undeniable anti-Japanese sentiment generated

in Korea. This is supported further by the argument below:

"Unlike the Koreans, who vehemently detested and tenaciously opposed the Japanese and their colonial occupation, the Taiwanese are said to have retained a fairly positive image of the Japanese and recollected approvingly the virtues of Japanese rule. If the Koreans speak of oppression and resistance, the Taiwanese speak of modernization and development... Although the supposed contrast between colonial Taiwan and colonial Korea has more to do with their respective precolonial and postcolonial histories than Japanese rule per se, it is undeniable that Japanese colonialism has had a profound impact on the subsequent developments of these former colonies."<sup>10</sup>

Consequently, there were striking differences between the Korean nationalist movement and the one in Taiwan. First, the two colonies had different goals in their nationalist movements. Taiwanese nationalists mostly worked towards the goal of home rule, as the nature of their movement was reformist.<sup>11</sup> They showed a willingness to stay within the Japanese empire if Japan accepted their demand for home rule. In the course of their struggle, they were willing to make major concessions and narrow their goal. In the 1930s, they fought for a mere local autonomy and nothing else. This attitude contrasts sharply with that of the Koreans. To the Koreans, anything less than independence was unthinkable.<sup>12</sup> They used various means and formed dozens of organizations to fight for their national independence without compromise. Whether they were cultural nationalists in Korea or independence fighters in Manchuria, they all worked for the same common goal - the independence of Korea.

Second, while Taiwanese nationalist leaders chose to take a moderate course and work within the legal framework set up by their colonial rulers, Korean nationalist leaders chose to work without this legal framework and take a radical and violent course of actions in achieving their aims. Some of them even chose exile as they found it difficult for them to carry on their work

under Japanese rule.<sup>13</sup> As such, there were many Korean nationalist leaders who continued their struggle with the Japanese in China, Manchuria, Siberia and the United States.<sup>14</sup> Those who stayed in Korea tended to work outside the system set up by the Japanese. Thus, the colonial government had to adopt a repressive policy in dealing with them. On the other hand, most of the Taiwanese nationalist leaders had limited themselves to the political opposition by law.<sup>15</sup> They tried very hard to persuade the Japanese government to meet their demands by petitioning the Taiwan Government-General as well as the Japanese Government. They were even willing to end their political movement when the colonial administration asked them to. The Taiwanese were in essence more ready to compromise.

However, both nationalist movements of the Koreans and the Taiwanese failed and had been successfully suppressed by the colonial government in the end. Nonetheless, nationalist movements in Korea and Taiwan showed that the Koreans and Taiwanese were far from passive objects who awaited Japanese assimilation. They had struggled actively against the colonial rule, though by various means.

#### WHAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE?

##### *Geography and Topography*

The first reason is concerned with geography and topography. Geographically, Korea occupies a strategic place in the waters of the Sea of Japan, Korea Strait, and Yellow Sea, and any conflicts on the Korean peninsula would have the potential to influence the neighboring countries. Taiwan, on the other hand, is not so geographically close to the Japanese homeland compared with Korea. In this sense, Korea was more important to Japan than Taiwan. Taiwan was a colony acquired by Japan as a prize for its victory over China and a way to glorify the army. Some Meiji leaders, in the early colonial period of Taiwan, thought that the island was a burden rather than a treasure and felt a need to sell it to other colonial powers when they faced the strong resistance put up by the islanders. This showed that the Japanese did not think Taiwan as vital of a colony as they did with Korea. Throughout the colonial period, Taiwan yielded the most profit to Japan but never served as the most strategically important colony of Japan until the late 1930s when Japan started

its all-out expansion in Asia. From the very beginning, Japan acquired Korea out of the question of national security. The peninsula was geographically proximate to Japan, and a hostile power gaining control of Korea could potentially threaten Japan's security. Therefore, the Japanese never loosened its control over Korea and the military remained influential in ruling the peninsula throughout the colonial period.

Nevertheless, geographical differences alone cannot explain why resistance to Japanese rule was stronger in Korea than Taiwan, since both countries suffered similar levels of political repression at the hands of the Japanese.<sup>16</sup>

##### *Social Structure*

The second important difference was the varying levels of native social structure between two nations. Taiwan was an agrarian economy characterized by small farms and relatively weak native elites. Immediately after the occupation of Japanese colonial ruler, many Taiwanese elites escaped to the Mainland. Taiwanese emigrants were primarily wealthy and from the upper gentry.<sup>17</sup> Their exodus deprived Taiwan of much of the potential leadership of a nationalist movement, thereby establishing new elites who depended on the Japanese government and showed a willingness to collaborate.<sup>18</sup>

In contrast, Korea was a much more polarized society with a strong and well-entrenched elite group -- the yangban. The yangban, consisting of the top ten percent of the population, had centuries of aristocratic legitimation.<sup>19</sup> Specifically, they monopolized positions in the government and military establishment. However, after Japan assumed control in Korea in 1910, the yangban had suffered an enormous loss of class status and privilege by Japanese egalitarian policies and by its removal from government offices.<sup>20</sup> Only a very small segment of this local elite collaborated with the Japanese ruler. Consequently, Korea had an ample supply of native leaders to mobilize a nationalist resistance movement against Japanese rule.<sup>21</sup>

In addition, the existence of *bǎojiǎ* (保甲) system in Taiwan and the lack of a similar system in Korea also helped Japanese ruler to monitor and control Taiwan with ease. *Bǎojiǎ* system consisted of a community-based structure of law enforcement and civil control, in which crimes committed by one family would result in punishment for all families in that community. By having the police supervised the traditional native system and by holding the people of an entire community responsible

for a crime, the Japanese were able to force the natives into submission in a relatively short period.<sup>22</sup>

### **Governance**

Whereas the Japanese government instituted a form of direct and militaristic rule in Korea, it exercised a more indirect one in Taiwan, leaving little room for native elites to participate in governance.<sup>23</sup> According to Hechter, indirect rule inhibits nationalism by reducing the demand for sovereignty. When the central ruler had no capacity to impose his will on distant territories directly, he essentially relied on the indirect rule of local representatives who were responsive to local values. This not only kept demand for nationalism low but also made the collective action that is essential to nationalism extremely difficult.<sup>24 25</sup>

Before 1919, Japanese colonial rule in Korea and Taiwan was militaristic in character. The posts of Governor-General in both Korea and Taiwan were only opened to high ranking military officers on active service. The military men ruled the two colonies without the interference of the civilian officials in Japan. But after 1919, the Japanese still maintained military men as governors in Korea, while Taiwan had enforced a civilian rule from 1919 to 1936. Accordingly, the power of the Taiwan Governor-General was reduced. The Japanese Government tightened its control over the administration of Taiwan at that point. The Taiwan Governor-General was placed under the direct supervision of the Japanese Government, leading to a deprivation of the right to command the garrisons on the island. On the other hand, Korea was still out of the control of the civilian government in Tokyo. Since the military men still occupied the post of Korean Governor-General, his power had not been reduced in any sense. He was only responsible to the Emperor through the Prime Minister, meaning the Korean Governor-General enjoyed a higher status than his counterpart in Taiwan. As such, a civilian governance system in Taiwan utilized local elites and indigenous practices to control the local population and thus effectively prohibited organized popular resistance to Japanese rule while a direct rule in Korea gave rise to many Korean resistance movements.

Moreover, the Japanese government introduced local autonomy to both Korea and Taiwan but it was only a gesture rather than a real concession. In theory, the Koreans enjoyed larger autonomy in local affairs and thus gave some spaces for the emergence of nationalist

movements. Local autonomy was introduced to Taiwan only in 1935, five years later than Korea, and was far more limited in scale than the one introduced in Korea. It does not, however, mean that the Koreans enjoyed more freedom than the Taiwanese. The colonial administration remained authoritarian even with the introduction of local autonomy in the two colonies. In fact, according to Edward I-te Chen, Japan “decided to relax control somewhat in the hope that the Koreans might be reconciled to ‘autonomy’ and abandon their demand for independence.”

### **Economy**

Japanese rule in Taiwan brought the island greater economic progress than in Korea. During its occupation, Japan devoted a considerable part of its budgets on Taiwan’s infrastructure, roads, harbors, railroads, power plants and irrigation system.<sup>26</sup> Expenditures on agriculture, education and public works accounted for over 60% of budgetary outlays for most years from 1910 to 1938.<sup>27</sup> For example, the Japanese colonial government heavily financed the constructions of many irrigation systems, with the Chia-Nan Reservoir system constructed during 1920s and early 1930s as the biggest project. The system greatly increased the agricultural productivity in the irrigation area. Before the project, paddy land area consisted of 35% of total cultivated land in Tainan. After the project was completed, the ratio increased to 70% in 1937. The productivity of paddy land was much higher than dry land, and the irrigation project greatly enhanced Taiwan’s agricultural production.<sup>28</sup>

Accordingly, Taiwan’s economy was boosted enormously, which led to a greatly improved quality of life; “by the 1920s the consumption of meat, vegetables, and fruits was higher than that” anywhere in China, and “even higher than in some parts of Japan”.<sup>29</sup> Also, “the death rate dropped to 33 per 1000 in 1906, and to 19 per 1000 by 1940” due to better “hygienic measures introduced by the [Japanese] government”.<sup>30</sup> As the economy grew rapidly, Taiwan people enjoyed a relatively higher standard of living and thus were more inclined to maintain a peaceful and cooperative relationship with colonial ruler.

In Korea, by contrast, economy also benefited from Japanese improvement in the economic, administrative and educational infrastructures, but with relatively small growth, as a larger share of budgetary had been expended on public order and administration for much

of the period from 1911 to 1938.<sup>31</sup> By examining national income and other statistics to document the economic development of Taiwan and Korea, Cha and Wu finds that Taiwan’s development during the Japanese era was more successful than Korea. Mizoguchi and Yuzo compared Taiwan and Korea’s capital formation during the colonial period, and also found that Taiwan’s investment to GNE ratio was significantly higher than Korea. In essence, colonial economic policies in Korea were characterized by more exploitative and impoverishing elements, which largely contributed to a much stronger sense of anti-Japanese sentiment among Koreans.

**Education Policy**

The Japanese actively promoted the assimilation policy in both Korea and Taiwan. The most effective means was the introduction of Japanese-style education in the two colonies. In Korea and Taiwan, Japan set up Japanese-style common and ordinary schools, inducing Korean and Taiwanese children to study in these schools. The curriculum of these schools strongly emphasized the learning of the Japanese language and history, as the main purpose of the education for colonial youth was to make them loyal subjects of the Japanese Emperor.<sup>32</sup> In both colonies, the Japanese exploited their common cultural heritage such as Confucian values with the colonial charges to promote the assimilation policy.<sup>33</sup>

The education systems of the two colonies, however, were still based on the separatist approach despite its strong flavor of assimilation. First, whereas the Japanese colonial administration took central control over Korean education immediately after annexation, this did not occur in Taiwan until twenty-four years after annexation. As a result, the shift in Taiwan’s education system was gradual rather than instantaneous, and the gradualism of this shift reduced the resistance to Japanese assimilation.<sup>34</sup> Secondly, Japanese youth in Korea and Taiwan attended separate schools which were opened only for them. Their schools were higher in standard, and post-elementary education in the two colonies was in favor of the Japanese. In Taiwan, no single private college or university was allowed to be established. The Taiwanese had to compete with the Japanese on unfavorable terms for the limited places provided by the public post-elementary institutions. In Korea, the Japanese tried hard to control the private institutions, elementary and secondary schools. Nevertheless, still there were many private schools

and colleges for the Koreans. They provided the Koreans with an alternative to the public schools and significantly contributed to the promotion of native education. Traditional schools flourished in Korea even under the strict control of the colonial administration. This was not the case in Taiwan where traditional schools declined and were finally abolished by the colonial government. Consequently, the Japanese assimilation policy through education bore better fruit in Taiwan than in Korea. From table 1, one can see that the spread of the Japanese language in Taiwan clearly indicated a higher degree of colonial assimilation than in Korea. Thirdly, indigenous culture in Taiwan was not suppressed as it was in Korea. The Taiwanese were allowed to practice many of their indigenous customs, and they were taught about Chinese geography, history, and culture, just as were students in Japan.<sup>35</sup> In Korea by contrast, Korean history was revised to show that the Koreans were racially akin to their rulers and were destined to be ruled by the Japanese.

Table 1. Knowledge of Japanese in Korea and Taiwan

Korea		Taiwan	
1913	0.7%	1915	1.6%
1922	3.3%	1920	2.7%
1929	7.6%	1930	8.2%
1933	8.0%	1935	29.7%
1938	12.4%	1939	45.6%
1941	17.6%	1941	57.0%

Note: percentage of the total native population<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, there was a compulsory policy for Koreans to discard their ancestral names and adopt Japanese ones.<sup>37</sup> Those who did not comply were expelled from school, denied mail and train services, and given decreased rations. In Taiwan, however, the shift to Japanese names was optional. By 1942, only about ten percent of the population had adopted Japanese names, while in Korea, more than eighty percent of the population had been forced to do so.<sup>38</sup>

**National Identity**

Nationalism was also important in making the two colonial administrations different. Korea was

an independent nation before it was annexed by the Japanese for more than twelve centuries. The Joseon Dynasty, overthrown by the Japanese government, had been established in the late fourteenth century. The Koreans were proud of their long history and was able to isolate itself for centuries from foreign influence up to the mid-19th century. The colonial rivalries among the powers over the peninsula had already helped foster in the minds of the Koreans a sense of national identity with their own country. The emergence of the Korean identity made it more difficult for the Japanese to rule the colony at will. Furthermore, Koreans have often felt themselves superior to Japan, or at least equal within the Chinese sphere.<sup>39</sup> Having been conquered by the “inferior” Japanese crippled Korean national pride and created a major anti-Japanese sentiment.

In contrast, Taiwan was only a province of the Qing dynasty before Japanese annexation in 1895. The population of the island was divided into the Chinese and aborigines, and a modern identity similar to national identity had not yet developed on the island. The islanders were far from a homogeneous group. Their resistance to the Japanese rule in the early colonial period was scattered and sporadic. Japan could thus rule the island with ease. Moreover, the poor treatment by the Qing government prior to 1895 also largely weakened the Taiwanese attachment to the country. During the Qing rule, Taiwan was notorious for the frequency of uprisings; some of them lasted for years. For example, in 1888 a severe rebellion had erupted in central Taiwan, when Governor Liu Ming-chuan pushed for a land reform.<sup>40</sup> However, after the Japanese took over, the physical, social, and economic landscape of Taiwan changed dramatically as the disorder and lack of organization and centralized control was replaced by a proven formula for social order and efficiency. This helped develop a pro-Japanese sentiment in Taiwan and facilitated an eased transition process into Japanese colonial rule.

The presence of the royal family of the Joseon Dynasty in Korea also had adverse effects on the Japanese colonial rule. The Japanese were obligated to treat the royal family with respect and generosity. The members of the royal family received peerage from the Japanese Government. Their presence reminded the Koreans that their country was once an independent country and was annexed by Japan illegally. In fact, during the early colonial period, they became the focal point for the

Korean nationalists to rally the support of the Koreans in their straggle against the Japanese. In Taiwan, the Taiwan Government-General did not have to face such a problem. The Qing dynasty had given up its hope to regain control of the island at the very beginning. After the conclusion of the Treaty of Shimonoseki in 1895, the Qing government had already recalled its officials from the island. After the failure of their half-hearted resistance against the Japanese rule, the Qing officials in Taiwan withdrew almost immediately. The Taiwanese were left to face the Japanese on their own. The Republic of China, which was established in 1912, was troubled by the internal instability and was unable and unwilling to help the Taiwanese in their straggle against the Japanese. The Taiwanese were well aware of their limitations, and thus they did not resort to radical means which would only induce Japanese repression.

#### CONCLUSION

The colonial systems of Japan in Korea and Taiwan, to a large extent, were identical to each other. The colonial policy helped the Korean and Taiwan Governments-General to suppress revolts, supervise local administrative units, carry out census, and promote the policies which aimed at solving economic issues with the colonial peoples. Yet they were not uniform or homogeneous. The social structures, political administrations, economic models and education systems exhibited great diversity. Japan ruled the two colonies as separate entity with different domestic ruling approaches, while assimilating and exploiting the peoples in the two colonies. Such diversity was responsible for the varying levels and political orientations of resistance movements toward the Japanese colonial rule. This was a result of the difference in the local conditions of each colony as well as relative strategic importance of Korea to Taiwan within the Japanese Empire. The difference in the colonial systems in Korea and Taiwan had produced different results which could be expected: Koreans had stronger nationalist resistance than Taiwanese throughout the colonial period.

Even today, much of the legacies of Japanese colonial infrastructures continue to function. Korea still struggles to wither away its colonial experience to prize its national culture and identity, whereas Taiwan has adjusted itself to it with a unique Taiwanese identity and more varied ethnic

preconceptions. Especially in Korea, the history of vehement resistance against the Japanese rule nurtures a strong sense of ethnic unity and nationalist sentiment. For example, Koreans repeatedly lodge severe mass protests against visits by Japanese high-rank officials to the Yasukuni Shrine, which is seen as glorifying the Class A war criminals during the World War II. The territorial dispute between Korea and Japan with respect to Liancourt Rocks is a nationalist focal point and adds fuel for anti-Japanese sentiment. In essence, Korean people

tend to go completely over the top whenever there is any similar type of contest between Korea and Japan emerging in the future with great potential to separate the two countries diplomatically. As for Koreans, “historical memory and feelings of resentment run deeply and can influence Korea’s relations with its neighbors, allies, and enemies in ways not easily predicted by models of policy-making predicated on *realpolitik* or other geo-strategic or economic concerns” .<sup>42</sup>



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