

# Korea and japan



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

By the end of 19th and the beginning 20th century nationalist agenda of Korean intellectuals was built around the “civilization and enlightenment” tenet. The sweeping pace of European penetration made Koreans aware of their backwardness. Redemption of the past and reformation of the present was a primary aim of Korean intellectuals, which grouped in publicists’ coteries and promulgated a Gospel of “Civilization and Enlightenment.” Touted as universal and praised by the writers who dominated public opinion the nationalistic reform project was shaped and started to exert mighty influence upon virtually every stratum of society. Unrivaled by any other distinct opinion the newspapers and magazines’ writers pushed the country towards “Civilization”.

The early calamity and unrest was an indication of the power crisis in Korea. The peasant uprising of 1894 almost overthrew the King’s authority (p. 25) and inspired subsequent massive Gabo reform program (p. 30, 104). Frailty of King’s power and imminent intrusion of China troops made Japan promptly assume the Liberating role. The tone of Gabo reform and the prominent political figures bore a Japanese touch. The young politics engaged in reforms were Koreans who recently fled to Japan and returned on the wave of national revivalism. The outcome of Sino-Japanese war evidenced Japanese industrial and military superiority and underscored the “new knowledge” associated with West exclusively in the past and Japan and West presently. (p. 57)

Though journalists and intellectuals did not endorse the internal mutiny and emphasized a deliberative and civilized passage to the aim, the symptoms of the crisis may only contribute to the credibility of the much-professed “

"Civilization and Enlightenment" tenet. The internal issues occupied the most of the papers' space. Self-abasement and derision on the deep rooted Korean parochialism made the agenda of the day. In general, it was the pundits of the nation that revealed the vices of Korean individuals. "The people were the basis of national power." (p. 39) "Family was juxtaposed with nation, the former being the source of superstition and the latter associated with "civilization and enlightenment." (p. 40).

The individuals were building blocks of the nation. Korean intellectuals deemed progress and enlightenment to be within their reach. The nations, in their turn, became the units of globalized world, sharing the common trajectory and destined for further Enlightenment and development. The atmosphere of alien, European presence inside Korea would only incite their country's progress. Notably, the concept of social Darwinism, inherent with modern science, was not endorsed by Korean authors. Instead, they pursued the model of Idealistic Globalization with themselves as men "of this internationalized age" (p. 42) speaking for the nation.

The "self-strengthening logic" penetrated the entire spectrum of nationalist press which in effect was but "the cacophonous voice of intellectuals committed to "Civilization and Enlightenment" (p. 46). Korean newspapers prior to 1905 were rather popular but almost always in straitened conditions. (p. 51) Nevertheless, they "brought together leading government officials with its nonofficial members." (p. 49). "Reimagining of the nation away from the conceptual framework" inherited from the early regime as well as from spatial network with China in the center was new nationalist agenda.

To detach from Chinese origin and return to own culture meant to vindicate the national grace. "To be sure, writers did differ in their representations of China as barbarous. But in a press that, despite divergent political stances, uniformly defined its mandate as enlightening the people, these differences were mainly a matter of tone." (p. 59). At the time, China seemed to lose all of its past cultural significance and turned to "the laughing stock of the world."

The revering of the foreign and the loss of national dignity was ascribed to early Chinese culture's intrusion which, in the terms of social reformism, might only mean the call for cultural purification as a means of attaining national purity. The language issues were the first to be addressed. "As the 'new knowledge' intruded into Korea along with the guns and capital of the imperialist powers, the privileged relationship between knowledge and characters was increasingly challenged." (p. 66) The influence of Chinese patronage was cut off by the hand of King which vested into the yellow robes of emperors in October 1897, thus undermining the exclusiveness of titles which belong only to China and Japan ruler. (p. 74).

Nevertheless, the cultural proximity and the feeling of shared destiny called for East countries' alliance against the West. Though China was dethroned, the newly emerged category of the West pooled Chinese positive features along side with those of Japan and Korea. "According to the logic of decentering the 'Middle Kingdom,' what was Chinese, and thus rejected, was in this fashion subsumed into the category of the East, to which these Korean authors could still lay claim." (p. 82). "The three countries of our

yellow race are mutually dependent, like an axle and cart or lips and teeth.” (p. 89).

The regional identity was based on the intrinsic fears of the West civilization. The threat of Russians which will subdue Korea was exploited by Japanese. (p. 92). “ The dilemma for the editors was how to reconcile this historic vision of an East-West struggle with the contemporary reality that it was a fellow Eastern nation that presented the most immediate threat to their sovereignty” was never surmounted.

The vivid symbol of the fire which engulfed the neighborhood and, incited by the severe winds of the Western imperialism, tends to spill into the bordering areas instigated a perception of the common cause and inseparability of China, Korea and Japan. (p. 90) Gradually, Korea turned into a colonized country by its protector. The production of national knowledge was compromised by Japanese censors activity. The information and literature tended to be of Japanese origin. The translated works were available only in Japan.

The intellectual dependency became possible because “ both structured their respective political projects around “ civilization and enlightenment.” and the overlapping of strategies only emphasized the affinity Korean and Japanese reform agenda. (p. 105) Some go on denouncing Japanese achievements and the righteousness of the fact that Japan sided with the civilized countries of the West. The most defied profile was a cultural authenticity of Japan and did not give in to colonialists powers. “ The material civilization of Japan, which it boasts leads the East, all came with

the arrival of Western ships. And what Japan boasts to the world as its own unique culture was all once imported from our country.” (p. 109).