

24: TWENTIETH CENTURY KOREA¹

a. Why was it all but inevitable that Korea would become a Japanese colony? In what ways did the Japanese impose an excluding revolution on Korea? How did Korea's development under Japan anticipate development of the later North Korea and South Korea? How did the post-colonial consequences of Japan's behavior in Korea compare with the post-colonial consequences of America's behavior toward its Philippine colony?

b. How did Russian, American, North and South Korean behavior after 1945 lead to the Korean War? Why did the war end so inconclusively? How and when did North Korea eventually become far less viable a state than South Korea? What seems to be the likely fate of each?

A. Korea's Potential Alternatives To Japanese Domination After 1860

We have already seen (chapter 19) how unlikely it was that Korea could have begun a successful equivalent of the Meiji Restoration by 1860. Its economy finally only began to approach the threshold of early modernity after 1600, and then only because Hideyoshi's 1592-98 invasion made the Yi state too weak to continue to use political exchange to inhibit the belated appearance of a significant amount of economic exchange.

Indeed, by the middle of the 19th century, so weak had the central authority become that the Yi Dynasty's rulers had to retake control over the central government from runaway factions before they could even begin to think of fundamental reform. By the time that was done, external constraints foreclosed all possibility of reform of Korea by Koreans before one of the contending powers swallowed it up.

1. The post-traditional tributary Chinese alternative

By the turn of the century, Korea probably could not ward off even a Japanese takeover. During the previous generation, though China and Russia each thought they had a chance to prevail on the peninsula, neither managed to do so.

When the ten year old King Kojong ascended the throne in 1863, his father, the Taewon'gun (Regent) faced a rebellion led by the Tonghak (Eastern Learning) Society. For the better part of a decade, these opponents of Western influences ran amok in southeastern Korea, once the center of Silla, originally the most backward and traditionalistic of the Three Kingdoms of ancient times.

Based as much on Chinese as on Korean culture (a number of 18th century Korean intellectuals seemed drawn to Jesuit Catholicism when they accompanied tributary missions to China), the Tonghak movement appealed to anti-Western and anti-Christian biases at all levels of Korean society. To prevent the Tonghaks from gaining a monopoly on anti-Western sentiment, the Taewon'gun dared not use Western ideas to inspire reforms resembling those of the Meiji Renewal.

The Tonghak Movement's sinophilia reinforced the traditional Korean impulse when in trouble to imitate China or at least to yell for help to China. That was why the Taewon'gun was originally pro-Chinese. He counted on Chinese help against the Tonghaks as he tried to secure his young son's grip on the throne during the '60s. The Regent faced not just intra-court factionalism at the center, but also the rivalry of locally based *yangban* aristocrats. Both central and localized factional quarrels had been getting worse since the early 1600s..

Unfortunately, China was in so much trouble itself by the 1860s that it could give little help to Korea. If anything, it got in the way of the Koreans helping themselves by attempts to gain American or Japanese aid.

China was, as usual during a time of decline for a dynasty, worried about "barbarians" on its fringes. The main northern barbarian states were Russia, and for the first time since the late 16th century, Japan. China still expected, or at least piously

hoped, that Korea would do what China traditionally expected of it as a loyal tributary. It hoped Korea would remain the anchor of China's northeastern flank, helping it keep at bay one or both of these new rank and frowzy smelling barbarian peoples of the north.

Unfortunately, only China and Korea accepted the rules of traditional tributary diplomacy, but could only bluff when its exercise was challenged. When one of the European nations asked for help from China in opening up Korea to trade, China would decline, saying that Korea was independent, and advise them to talk directly to the Koreans. When the weak foreign power went to talk to Korea, or tried to, the Koreans would insist that they were in fact a Chinese tributary, brusquely tell them to talk to China, and perhaps start shooting.

The stronger powers exerted muscle on the Koreans, and the latter would have to call on the Chinese for help. The Chinese would then have to stonewall the foreigners themselves, or, as a last resort, advise the Koreans to make concessions.

Li Hongzhang began as one of the civilian officials who had turned army commander so as to put down the internal rebellions in mid-century China. He eventually became the boss of subzone B2, and by default the Chinese tributary boss of the continental parts of the adjoining part of subzone A3, which included Korea. Li was a master at talking out of both sides of his mouth on occasions such as those outlined above. He behaved as we expect diplomats to do: he was an honest man prepared to lie for his country.

Li eventually sent his trusted deputy, Yuan Shikai, to Korea as resident governor-general. Though both Chinese and Koreans tried not to admit it, this was something new in the thousand-year-old tributary relationship. Korea was less a tributary now and more a protectorate, as defined by the European imperial powers.

Under a protectorate, the protector state could intervene in the domestic governance of the state being protected. As the Chinese defined it, a tributary state enjoyed complete internal autonomy once it adopted a Chinese form of government.

Governor-General Yuan sometimes behaved or pretended to behave like a Chinese ambassador to an independent Korea, but more often acted as a Chinese governor-general would toward the Chinese provinces he ruled. He would bully

¹ 1st draft, 8/89; 9th rev., 9/99, by Edward Kaplan..

the Koreans whenever he felt he had to in order to keep them in line and foreigners out of Korea. His bluff was soon called.

2. The Russian and American alternatives to Chinese domination

a. the abortive Russian challenge

England, preoccupied by the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 and its aftermath in India, was a satiated imperial power by the 1860s. It would acquire new colonies only grudgingly and only to check the expansion of its European rivals. France and Germany were operating at the very ends of their tethers in Northeast Asia, but Russia seemed to potentially have more power there. Northeast Asia was part of Russia's back yard. Hence it seemed a serious rival to both China and Japan for control over Korea. The Russians had sold Alaska to the U.S. in 1867. A few years before that, they "bought" (under duress) Eastern Siberia (formerly northern and northeastern Manchuria) from China. This was during the Second Opium War between China and England and France.

As the Russians finally began their run toward industrial takeoff during the last years of the 19th century, they also began to contemplate economic exploitation of this new East Asian frontier. As a second generation industrializer, they were eager to use the state actively and self-consciously to help industrialize Russia. When their government decided to begin a Trans-Siberian Railroad project, it wanted to take a short-cut through the rump of northern and central Manchuria so that they would not have to loop all the way around the remainder of Manchuria to get down to Vladivostok (Lord of the East), the main port of their new Eastern Siberian province.

The Russians faced problems similar to those confronted by our transcontinental railroad builders. Whether crossing the Great American Desert (the high plains and Rocky Mountains), as they called it then, or the empty expanse of Siberia, there are too few stops along the line at which to drop off and pick up goods at a profit, unless the railroad itself creates towns and economic activities to generate traffic for it. The Russians also needed to discover and take over nearby places where they could cheaply and quickly produce or acquire railroad ties for build-

ing this railroad.

For all these reasons, by the turn of the century, Russia was casting covetous eyes on the Chinese-held rump of Manchuria and on the Yalu River valley of northwestern Korea. Manchuria was already filling up with millions of Chinese settlers who might want to take a railroad trip or ship a sack or two of soybeans by rail. Northwestern Korea was full of big trees. These could, the Russians hoped, be logged, floated down the Yalu to tide-water, sawed up into railroad ties by sawmills yet to be built, treated with creosote, and shipped around the Korean peninsula to Vladivostok and from there sent up to the Trans-Siberian railhead.

Manchuria was indeed filling up with potential railroad customers, but since they were all Chinese, over the long run they were not likely to be obedient colonial subjects of either Russia or Japan.

As for railroad ties, the Russians eventually found it cheaper and quicker to go to places like Bellingham (then Whatcom, Sehome and Fairhaven) to acquire them, because the infrastructure for felling and sawing up trees was already in place there. Captain Roeder built the first sawmill on Whatcom Creek in the 1850s.

God knows there were plenty of trees in Whatcom, originally coming right down to the high tide mark! Since they were firs, there was also plenty of pitch to preserve them. Ships could come right up the Straits into Bellingham Bay to pick up the ties from the tidewater sawmills, and carry them cheaply all the way around the great circle route to Vladivostok.

In fact, the Whatcom and Sehome mills could deliver ties to Vladivostok more cheaply than the Russians could by going to the trouble and expense of conquering Korea, building the infrastructure to collect the trees and saw them up into railroad ties there.

But the Russians would not let themselves think about how irrelevant such economic alternatives rendered a Korean empire. So they were still muscling their way further into Northeast Asia at the turn of the century, blathering about these unneeded northern Korean trees. This inevitably brought them into conflict with China and Japan.

b. court factionalism and the abortive opening to the Americans

Within Korea, neither the Tonghak Movement nor the pressures from

would-be imperial powers made domestic politics any more rational. Though he managed to put the Tonghaks down, the strain of doing so weakened the Taewon'gun, the Regent-father of young King Kojong, and strengthened the position of the main opposing faction, clustered around the clan of the royal consort, Queen Min.

The Korean court was, as always, ensnared in factionalism. The Taewon'gun was originally pro-Chinese because he thought that would help him to recover power for the royal clan from the Queen's family's faction and from the factions of provincial aristocrats. The Chinese traditionally backed Korea's central government.

After the Regent put the Tonghak revolt down, his main court rival, the family of Queen Min, drove him out of power. He lost because putting down the Tonghak patriots and losing several confrontations with foreign powers discredited him.

Once out of power, the Taewon'gun turned anti-Chinese. Queen Min and her faction took the reverse course. She had been anti-Chinese when out of power. When her faction got into power, it turned pro-Chinese for the same reasons the Taewon'gun had. It does not help to have a score card to follow 19th century Korean court politics! You need a slate so that you can erase and change the players' allegiances moment by moment.

Poor King Kojong was a young adult by the 1870s, nominally ruling in his own right. However, puppet strings still connected him to his father, even though his father was out of power. He dared not cut them because he needed his father to counter those marital strings tying him to his queen's faction.

There was no love lost between the king and queen. Royal marriages were no more love matches in Yi Dynasty Korea than elsewhere; they were made for reasons of state, mainly to try to keep one of the key factions at court at least nominally loyal to the royal house by having the king marry one of its daughters.

The King saw that it would do him no good to jump to either the Chinese or the Japanese side. To do so would throw domestic power either into the hands of his father or his wife, and he did not want to be owned by either. So he tried to find a third foreign policy alternative. Alas for Korea, the United States was the only alternative he could find.

A few American filibusterers appeared off and on at the Korean court during the last third of the century. The King tried to link up with these fellows, but that never worked because (as in Central America during the mid 19th century) such men could never deliver the American government to any deal they hoked up. This was less because of the American federal government's federalist virtue than because the U.S. did not have (or need) a serious foreign policy at this stage of its history.

Even when the best American post-bellum president, Grover Cleveland, was in office during 1885-89 and 1893-97, his idea of a serious foreign policy was simply to preserve America's traditional avoidance of foreign alliances.

During 1889-1893, the Republican, Benjamin Harrison, was president. His Secretary of State, James G. Blaine (after whom Blaine, Washington is named), had a more adventurous policy, but was not backed by Congress or by public opinion, which correctly judged him to be a silly man. Just when Blaine began to make his move to become Korea's protector, Cleveland returned to office, and definitively abandoned any Korean-American connection.

Later on, even the more dedicated American imperialists—Presidents William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt—realized that after 1900 there was no future for America in Korea. They recognized that Korea was becoming part of Japan's imperial sphere, and that recognition of this was in the interest of their new American empire. Roosevelt and Taft worked out a quid pro quo arrangement with Japan: you keep out of our back yard in the Philippines, and we'll reciprocate in Korea.

As it had with the Monroe Doctrine in Latin America earlier, Great Britain was content to let the U.S. be its surrogate in Northeast Asia. Both were content to cut a deal with Japan at Korea's expense.

Hence King Kojong's American initiatives were doomed to failure. By the 1890s, China was fading from the picture, and could be eliminated with not much difficulty by either Russia or Japan. Japan seemed weaker than Russia, but Russia was overextended, Japan had powerful friends in England and America, and it was closer to the scene of action in Northeast Asia, so it could bring more power to bear on the peninsula.

3. The Japanese alternative

Japan's Satcho Clique played the empire-building game much more consistently than did Russia. Even during early Meiji times, a Japan on its way to full industrial takeoff had much more economic power at its disposal in and near Korea than did Russia. But Japan's economic dominance was clearer than its military superiority.

Japan also had as much understanding of Korean conditions as had China (Koreans had visited Japan regularly during Tokugawa times), and Japan soon possessed more real military power than China. Japan's aim was to gradually edge China out of Korea while keeping Russia at bay. It would sweet talk America and Britain so as to keep them from becoming seriously involved in the first place.

At first, Japan's aim was to induce the Koreans into initiating a Meiji Restoration-style internal reform themselves. This was not entirely for altruistic reasons. Japan hoped internal reform would keep other foreigners at arm's distance and bind Korean reformers to their Japanese analogs and mentors. In this respect, the Japanese attitude toward Korea resembled the 19th century American attitude toward Latin America under the Monroe Doctrine.

Some Japanese undoubtedly already held imperial ambitions from the beginning, but that point is moot. Prospects for autonomous reform by the Koreans soon proved bad. The logic (perhaps we should say the illogic) of Korean factional politics sucked Japan ever deeper into Korea as the Japanese tried (and inevitably failed) to find a faction to promote a Meiji Restoration in Korea. This was at least roughly analogous to the way the illogic of Caribbean politics sucked America into the Cuban Revolution of the 1890s.

Hence what seemed highly imprudent in 1873 seemed not just perfectly plausible, but inevitable by 1893-94. In 1873 Saigo Takamori proposed providing an occasion for a Japanese expedition into Korea to avenge his murder by Koreans (which he would goad them into committing). At the time, Saigo's fellow Satcho oligarchs rejected this as imprudent and premature. Eventually, however, the logic of Sino-Japanese competition for influence in Korean politics brought China and Japan into direct military conflict.

Japan eagerly fought a "splendid little

war" (to borrow Theodore Roosevelt's characterization of the even shorter 1898 Spanish-American War) with China during 1894-95. Japan won that war surprisingly easily, thanks to its much better ability to coordinate its military.

To Japan's chagrin, however, Russia, Germany and France in the Tripartite Intervention jointly bullied Japan out of one of the key fruits of victory: control over Korea and southern Manchuria as Japanese spheres of influence.

King Kojong quickly realized that this foreign intervention had at least bought him a little time. Korea might, he hoped, at last be able to carve out an independent space for itself. China and Japan were both out of the way, Russia was clumsy and France and Germany too remote to play much of a role. The King even called himself "emperor" rather than just "king," since he was no longer a tributary "vassal" of the Chinese emperor.

In an attempt, thirty years too late, to imitate the Meiji Restoration, Kojong welcomed back the handful of Koreans who had studied abroad, including a fellow whom Americans might claim as one of our own. This was Philip Jaisohn as they called So Chae-p'il when he was getting his medical degree in the U.S. at the end of the '90s.

Jaisohn subsequently went back to Korea, founded Korea's first modern newspaper and briefly played a role analogous to that of Fukuzawa Yukiji in Meiji Japan.



So Chae-p'il and the *Independent*. (Han, pl. 68.)

Unfortunately, it was too late for the king's maneuvers to restart a "Kojong Restoration." Though the "Emperor" had his ministers try to bolster Korean inde-

pendence by making a deal with American traction companies to build the Seoul streetcar line, the Japanese used their surrogates within the Korean court to edge the Americans out of this project.



A trolley car going through the Great West Gate of the Seoul city wall. (Han, pl. 70.)

Though Japan was only at the edge of achieving an industrial takeoff, while the Americans were approaching industrial maturation, the Japanese made up for this developmental gap through proximity to Korea and greater understanding of the Korean market. Some 4,000 Japanese merchants (compared to mere hundreds of Americans) flooded the Korean market with lower priced goods. The Japanese were also ready to exercise military power to back their entrepreneurs, a determination wholly absent on the American side.

Independence for Korea was no longer possible. By 1895 it was only a question of whether Japan or Russia would take over the peninsula. For a few years, Russia put on a good show, but thanks to the 1902 alliance between the Japanese and the English, Russia was fatally isolated. Under the 1902 pact, England promised to enter a war between any European power and Japan should a *second* European power come in against Japan. This kept the French and the Germans out of the next round of the competition for Korea.

The Japanese took on the Russians alone in 1904, and beat them decisively in the early battles of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905. Then, Theodore Roosevelt helped end the Russo-Japanese War before the Japanese lost the effects of their initial victories through exhaustion. The Treaty of Portsmouth was negotiated on Roosevelt's presidential yacht.

Even before then, the onset of the 1905 Revolution in Russia removed any possibility that Russia would want to fight a long war in northeast Asia. Roosevelt had already concluded that the Koreans

were not civilized enough for their independence to be worth preserving. Japanese control would, he felt, do them good.

From 1905 on, therefore, nothing could stop the Japanese from dominating and then reducing Korea to a colony.

B. The Transformation of Korea by Japan into a Protectorate and Then a Colony via an Excluding Revolution

1. Exclusion of the yangban

Japan's contribution to Korea's development into the fully modern stage was rather more fundamental than Theodore Roosevelt might have anticipated. Japan proceeded to hold an excluding revolution for (and against) the Koreans and thereby unintentionally freed the Koreans for an ultimate transition into political and economic full modernity.

Of course the Japanese did not ask the Koreans' permission to do this or anticipate its consequences. Absent Japan's imperial takeover, the Koreans might well have eventually followed China in inflicting on themselves an equally nasty excluding revolution. Japan merely saved them the trouble. In the process of turning Korea into a colony, they gave the Koreans all the effects, good and bad, of an excluding revolution.

You may recall that such a revolution does away with the preexisting ruling class by at least declassing its members, i.e. throwing them out of the ruling class. It may also kill many of them, or at least run them out of the country. The Koreans did not have to do any of these things to themselves. The Japanese did the job for them between 1905 and 1920.

And nobody was going to stop Japan. The Treaty of Portsmouth did not even mention Korean sovereignty. The Japanese promptly broke all the diplomatic links Korea had so recently forged with the Western powers. The Americans and the European powers obediently recalled their diplomats from Seoul. Japan then proclaimed a Western-style protectorate over Korea.

Next, in December 1905, the Japanese appointed the chief surviving civilian figure of the men of 1868, Ito Hirobumi, as resident governor-general in Korea. They

disbanded the Korean army and began to integrate some of its soldiers into an enlarged Japanese garrison.

The Japanese also opened the Korean door wider for many more Japanese human flotsam and jetsam² to "float" into Korea. There were already 120,000 Japanese resident in Korea as of 1905. By 1910 there were 170,000 of them. They all wanted land, or monopoly franchises in various businesses or at least jobs with the new Japanese-run government.

All these moves by the Japanese drove the *yangban* class batty. A big wave of suicides ran through their ranks after 1905. Japanese offers to them of patronage co-opted some *yangban*, but also exacerbated intra-*yangban* factionalism. If *yangban* did not kill themselves, they killed each other in these snowballing factional conspiracies.

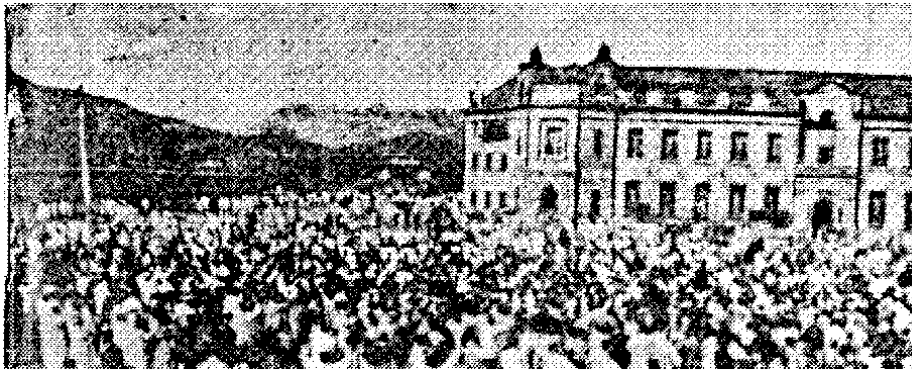
The Japanese forced King Kojong to abdicate in July 1907. They put his idiot son Sunjong on the throne, thereby allowing Ito to make all government appointments in Korea without paying any attention to the Korean court.

The Koreans were now all mad as hell, and many of them just weren't going to take it any more. In October 16, 1909 while Ito was walking through the Harbin, Manchuria railway station, a Korean nationalist jumped out of the crowd and shot him dead. This was merely a logical extension of the escalating intra-Korean factional quarrels. Since the *yangban* had been shooting each other, why not shoot Ito Hirobumi as well?

Ito did involuntarily in 1909 what Saigo Takamori had been willing to volunteer for in 1873. His assassination gave the Japanese an excuse for intensifying employment of bloody and ruthless measures in putting down the armed revolts that had already begun to break out in the rural areas. The ensuing slaughter by the Japanese military created a big wave of Korean exiles and a big pile of Korean bodies to arouse more intense nationalism in the exiles.

The Japanese co-opted many of those capable of armed resistance by recruiting Koreans for an auxiliary police to help fight their countrymen. As usually happens in such situations, this divide and rule tactic worked. The armed but uncoordinated rural rebellions ebbed away before the outbreak of World War I.

² The German word for such people, *luftmenschen*—air persons—is shorter and much more expressive.



The last and biggest of the urban riots began after March 1, 1919, just a couple of months before the more famous Chinese May 4 riots. They were motivated by the same event—the betrayal of the hope for decolonization by the representatives of the victorious imperial nations meeting at Versailles.

The active remnant of the *yangban*, like the Chinese students later that spring, hoped that Professor-President Wilson would live up to the promise he made in his Fourteen Points to provide self-determination for the world's colonial peoples. They soon realized, however, that Wilson would not keep that promise. On the

A March 1 Movement demonstration at the Toksu Palace in Seoul. (Han, pl. 75)

Those who rioted at the old King's funeral, as it turned out, were not really agitating to restore the Yi Dynasty. In a sense, they were memorializing its passing with ceremonious violence. The old king's feeble-minded son, Sunjong, remained nominally the king, though when he in turn died in 1927, the Japanese failed to appoint even a nominal successor. There had really been no Yi Dynasty since Japan's 1905 takeover.



ground, he seemed an even worse (because less rational) imperialist than Roosevelt or Taft.

As the patriots rallied their forces, the Japanese announced that King Kojong had died. Rumors spread among the demonstrators that he had been poisoned by the Japanese. The demonstration fused with the King's funeral. The Japanese fired on the demonstrators.

King Sunjong, King Kojong, Sunjong's Queen in 1910. (Lee Ki-baek, *A New History of Korea*, after p. 200.)

That the rioters had not merely been memorializing the passing of the old order, but were trying to launch some sort of new order, however abortively, was understood by the Japanese, who put this new wave of riots down ruthlessly, forcing its surviving ringleaders into becoming a second wave of exiles.

At first, the more well-off of these agi-

tators, like their *yangban* ancestors on tribute missions, ran away to China. The steamships from Pusan dropped them off first in Shanghai. But some of them could afford to move on to Honolulu, where Koreans had been settling since 1901.

One of those who made it to Hawaii was a member of the royal clan and a Methodist convert, Syngman Rhee (Rhee is an alternate spelling of Yi). Rhee then moved on to Princeton, New Jersey, the New World "Rome" of Presbyterianism, where he married an East European refugee and gradually rallied his fellow Korean exiles in the West. Eventually, in 1945, he became South Korea's leader.

Not so well-off exiles who could not afford the price of a steam-ship ticket, particularly if they hailed from the north, found it easier to walk or run still further north into Manchuria. Ultimately (after the Japanese moved up from Korea to take over more direct control of Manchuria), some of them fled into Eastern Siberia. A steady flow of such exiles followed this path during the 1920s and 1930s.

After the Russian Revolution conquered Siberia early in the '20s, these pedestrian revolutionaries easily adopted the forms and substance of revolutionary organization of their Soviet hosts. Such was the early career of Kim Il-sung, destined to become leader of North Korea.

2. Christianity and Korean nationalism

At first, most exiles were from what had been (but was no longer) the *yangban* class. Disproportionately, however, particularly those who drifted toward Shanghai, were also young men who had gotten Christian educations. A 19 year old hot-head rioting to commemorate King Kojong in 1919 was disproportionately likely to have attended a Catholic school in southwestern Korea or a Presbyterian or Methodist school near Seoul or somewhere else in the southern part of Korea, and probably one run by American missionaries.

Christians were disproportionately present among these ex-*yangban* exiles because the Japanese respected the extra-territorial privileges held by the teacher-missionaries who came from fellow-imperialist nations like the U.S. or France. The Japanese did not close down their schools for some time, even when they taught subversive doctrines defend-

ing nationalism and democracy. The Japanese did not want to offend Presidents Teddy Roosevelt or William Howard Taft. After all, the two nations had signed the Taft-Katsura Agreement in 1905 to give each other a free hand over Korea and the Philippines respectively. So the Japanese did not want to be nasty to American missionaries.

Anyway, Prince Ito thought, Christianity was a namby-pamby faith which would just further weaken the wills of the Koreans, making it easier for the Japanese to sit upon their heads and beat Shintoism into their minds. Ito miscalculated.

The students in these mission schools not only learned the English language, American and modern European history, and science, but also the rhetoric of American and European political democracy, including the rhetoric of the American excluding revolution of 1776. All of this reinforced their anger against the Japanese. Since even in exile these *yangban* retained their Korean culture too, they did not forget any of the traditional ways of despising Japan.

People attending traditional Neo-Confucian schools were much more likely to be co-opted by the Japanese, who both threatened and subsidized these schools' proprietors. The Japanese assured the traditional schools' proprietors that Japanese too still believed in Neo-Confucianism, which teaches ministers to be loyal to rulers and inferiors to defer to superiors. The Japanese were the Koreans' superiors now, and the Koreans had best, therefore, learn to be loyal to Japan, or else . . .

Those who attended these traditional schools tended to become loyal to the Japanese, or at least learned to keep their mouths shut. A young man who went to a Presbyterian or even a Catholic school was far more likely to raise bloody hell in public about Korea being turned into a Japanese colony. He would also have gone some distance toward supplanting his traditional Korean values with a Western world view, a distinctly revolutionary outcome.

During the 1960s, American certain officials debating the wisdom of entering the Vietnam War made many analogies between the histories of Korea and Vietnam. Few of them, however, mentioned the differing role of Christianity in the two countries. The Catholic French took over Vietnam a generation before the Buddho-Confucian Japanese took over

Korea. Thereafter, a Christian in Vietnam was perforce turned into a fellow traveler of the French imperialists, the people who brought Christianity to Vietnam. A Christian in Korea, however, was automatically an enemy of the Japanese imperialists. This may account for a great deal of the difference in the later fate of the Korean-American as compared with the Vietnamese-American alliance.

Though the Japanese were just trying to pacify the Koreans by persecuting them, they wound up doing something much more profound. The declassed and disproportionately Christianized young *yangban* of 1919 refused to stay in line. The Japanese had to either kill them or kick them out. The latter returned after the Japanese lost World War II against the Americans, and took over the two post-Japanese governments. The former served as martyrs for the two Korean revolutions that followed departure of the Japanese.

Whether they killed or expelled the ex-*yangban*, the Japanese were committing an excluding revolution on the former Korean ruling class. To be sure, they were doing this *to* the Koreans rather than letting them make their own revolution, but the effect was the same. The old ruling class and its original vision of Heaven was being killed or forcefully excluded from their former position of power.

The Japanese were also creating at least two new Korean ruling classes in part from the ranks of these exiles: one Christian and Americanized through stays in Chinese treaty ports, Hawaii or America, and one that ultimately became Communist and Sovietized through stays in Manchuria or Soviet Siberia.

3. The Japanese colons

In a sense, the Japanese understood that they were making a revolution. It is just that they did not intend it to turn out the way it ultimately did after 1945.

The Japanese intended to remove the old ruling class, but were confident that the members of the new Korean ruling class would be none other than themselves, with a few traditionalistic Korean fellow travelers retained to run errands for the Japanese.

The would-be new Japanese rulers of Korea on site were the equivalents of the French settlers moving into Algeria during roughly the same time. These were called *colons* (colonists/colonials) in

French. The Japanese "colonials" were also, like their French analogs, drawn from the flotsam and jetsam of their society back home:

They were disproportionately younger landless sons of farmers, fishermen without good locations to fish, townsmen with more ambition than success in business, or graduates of lesser colleges who could not find decent government jobs in Japan. In short, losers and potential losers.

These casualties of the shift to full modernity were quickly joined by elite Japanese bureaucrats, proposing to make careers out of empire. The Japanese *colons*, led by such lords of merit, constituted the new ruling class of this Korean excluding revolution, at least during its first, Japanese, phase in the 1920s, '30s and early '40s.

I have used the French term *colons* for them, but you could also analogize them to the Anglo-Irish—i.e. the English in Ireland, when England was still ruling over all of Ireland—or, more recently, and closer to home, to the privileged American workers in the Panama Canal Zone.

There were nearly 200,000 of these privileged Japanese foreigners in Korea by the beginning of the 1920s. Add in their relatives back home in Japan and you have a considerable constituency backing Japan's attempt to maintain control over this Korean colony.

All these foreign interlopers, particularly those who had been culled out of the domestic Japanese meritocracy, wanted to keep the Koreans "in their place." Even the new public schools, which (in contrast to the traditional academies) offered Koreans a Japanese version of a modern education, were disproportionately primary schools. Secondary and tertiary education was mostly reserved for Japanese settlers. The Koreans were to be little more than partly educated hewers of wood and drawers of water for a foreign colonial establishment. No wonder post-Japanese occupation Koreans still resent Japan.

The Japanese had behaved much more magnanimously toward the Taiwanese after Taiwan became their colony in 1895. (See chapter 32.) We are not altogether sure why this was so. Was it because the Japanese were more inclined to be nice to Chinese than their ethnolinguistic cousins, the Koreans? Possibly. Near likes fight more than truly alien cultures. Was it because Taiwan was Japan's first major colony, and they had not yet been corrupted

by empire? That is plausible too. Was it because the Taiwanese, disenchanted with Qing Dynasty rule, did not fight the Japanese takeover? Perhaps. All of the above? Why not?

C. Northern & Southern Korea's Economic Development Diverges Under the Japanese

When we examine Korean economic development under the Japanese empire, we can only conclude that it was really the best of all possible times economically, except that it was also, as Charles Dickens said of the French Revolution, the worst of all possible times.

Agriculture, particularly in the south, became far more marketized, as did the cities. But many farmers became virtually serfs to Japanese landowners, and all farmers were at the mercy of the non-market forces generated by the Japanese to intervene in these new markets much more than the Korean market and the colonial government's interventions in that market.

Agriculture in the north was too marginal in its climatic and terrain aspects for marketization to be profitable. Japanese industrial investment in the north of the peninsula reached significant levels, but these government investments had little spillover into a private sector hardly developed beyond the modest late Yi level.

1. Commercialization of the south

The most productive agriculture was (and still is) confined to the southern half of the peninsula. That is where most of the flat land is, and that is where the best climate and hence the longest growing season is found.

The Japanese soon put in a new Western (i.e. modern Japanese style) land survey system to find out and record who owned what land and for what purposes they used it. It turned out that one-fourth of rural land was still commons land. This village commons was not in the market. Nobody owned it, but everyone in the village got to use (and abuse) it.

The Japanese plausibly concluded that preserving commons land was no way to run the agriculture of a modern industri-

alizing society. All land had to be owned by someone if its use was to be economized. If no Koreans claimed it, the Japanese government would take title to it, and would then sell it for a fraction of its market value to those *colons* coming into the peninsula clamoring for land, lusting for the chance to become even small-time landlords.

From a purely economic perspective that was fine. At least it brought this hitherto irrationally used land into commercially rational use within the market economy. However, there were soon other, less wholesomely derived sources of land for the *colons*.

Many Korean farmers had never paid taxes in money before, and so had no occasion to enter the market. Now they had to do both, since the Japanese land taxes were mainly levied in money. If Korean farmers could not raise the cash to pay their taxes, the authorities confiscated their land and sold it to the *colons* too. The former owner of this land might then become the tenant of its new Japanese landlord.

For this reason, but also because of commercialization in general, tenancy became ever more common. This was not necessarily altogether a bad thing. In the long since highly commercialized parts of southern China and Taiwan, even under the Japanese, tenants earned above average incomes. Well-developed early industrial East Asian markets awarded the premium of low rents and long leases to tenants skilled at growing irrigated rice. But South Korea's markets were only beginning to become developed, and the potentially good effects of marketization were being blunted by the unfair political privileges enjoyed by Japanese landlords.

But at least the rural areas of South Korea were being brought more fully into a market economy. That process had gotten under way the last time the Japanese had stimulated the Korean economy, also the hard way, during the decade before 1600. Now marketization was being completed in the 1920s and '30s, again thanks to a rather brutal stimulus from Japan.

You may recall that Toyotomi Hideyoshi's two invasions of 1592 and 1598 caused so much destruction and so diminished the Yi Dynasty government's resources that after 1600 it had to free its servile artisans and allow and in some places even encourage commercialization. Hitherto servile farmers, in short supply

thanks to the Japanese slaughter, were able to take advantage of their scarcity to become much less servile, though they still did not become much commercialized. Under the 20th century Japanese, however, the whole of the Korean, particularly the South Korean, countryside was finally brought fully into the market sector, albeit still the hard way for the Koreans.

A small but growing number of South Koreans were forced off the land altogether. They drifted into the cities and became laborers within and proprietors of a small but growing transitional sector of the Korean economy. As in Japan, this transitional sector was engaged in producing both traditional and modern goods using mostly traditional technologies.

Though hardly noticed at the time, this urban transitional sector represented the real beginnings of both southern Korea's early industrial revolution and its run to full industrial takeoff. As is characteristic of derivative civilizations, the two economic stages were telescoped together.

2. The north's sterile statist industrialization

The north is where most of or at least the most visible aspects of colonial Korea's industrialization took place. That industrialization is contemporary North Korea's heritage from the colonial era.

The north does not have much agriculture because of its short growing season and disproportionately mountainous terrain. Furthermore, northern Korea is really, in terms of its economic geography, a part of southern Manchuria. If you put a dam and turbines on the Yalu, you can as easily pipe the electricity produced into North Korea as into Manchuria. All the auxiliary enterprises that either require or service an electric power grid can just as easily be put in northern Korea as in southern Manchuria. That is what the Japanese did. Some of the Yalu and Tumen hydroelectric power and its industrial spin-offs, though originally intended for the more populous Manchuria, also bled south into northern Korea.

At least from a Keynesian macro-economist statistician's perspective, this had a visibly positive effect on the whole Korean economy. For example, from 1925 to 1931, manufactured goods as a percentage of the total industrial output went from 17.7 to 31.3 percent, nearly doubling in

half a dozen years. Much of this industry was in the north.

But a micro-economist, particularly if influenced by the ideational determinist Austrian School, would try to peek inside these bundles of numbers to see what they actually represented. He would find that they mostly referred to big hard goods produced by and for the state, mostly military goods or raw materials, and few goods that anybody either consumed or processed further inside Korea.

The Japanese industrialization of northern Korea turns out to have been strikingly analogous to what the U.S. federal government did to the Pacific Northwest during roughly the same period—the 1930s. The feds built the Grand Coulee Dam and enticed into the area a number of electricity-eating enterprises, mainly projects geared toward warfare.

One of these was the Hanford Reservation for building atomic weapons, which created an unviable trio of cities blooming like hothouse flowers out in the middle of a desert. If you cannot make plutonium for the feds in such places, you have to close them down and have everyone (or at least many of them) move away.

A lot of electricity is required for making aluminum, and so aluminum smelters were also enticed into that general area. What to do with aluminum? You can make a bit of it into aluminum foil and beer cans nowadays in America, but it originally mostly went for airplanes used to bomb Japan and Germany during World War II.

You can also use the electricity to help make warships in Kaiser's and Lockheed's shipyards on the coast. This shipbuilding industry, like aluminum smelting and atomics, granted wages that were high enough to discourage the development of more modest but in the long-term more viable industrial activity.

Pacific Northwest shipbuilding has remained utterly dependent on maintaining an imperial-sized American navy, the aluminum industry (though to a lesser degree) on building and maintaining a massive air force, and the Hanford reservation on fueling atomic bombs for use by that air force. None of the three was able to sustain itself after the war was over or once the subsequent cold war ended, and the terms of warfare changed, and the fleets of ships and planes and supply of atomic bombs could safely be reduced.

As a consequence, over the forty years since their creation by the American state, the shipbuilders *et al* have slowly gone bankrupt, with nothing much appearing to replace them in the interior. The coastal region is something else again.

Though you may find it difficult to confront the economics of the situation, particularly if you are from east of the Cascades, the feds without doubt nearly ruined the economy of the Pacific Northwest interior during the 1930s in the process of ostensibly saving it.

Japan did much the same sort of thing to northern Korea from the '20s through the early '40s. Though, as was the case for the Pacific Northwest, it took until the '70s for this to become obvious, the north's fate was sealed once its chief industrial goods market—the Japanese warfare state—disappeared in 1945.

If anything, northern Korea was even worse off than eastern Washington. At least the latter remained linked to a nearby market economy which allowed its participants to rationally calculate costs, and move west of the Cascades whenever it seemed profitable to do so. Northern Korea was much more isolated from much less advanced nearby markets.

After the colonial era, North Korea found it easy to abandon the market altogether at home, and trade mainly with the non-market economies of Soviet Russia and post-1949 China. Neither of these states could calculate the costs of what they were doing either. Also, like East Germany with its Berlin Wall, North Korea kept its people penned up behind its heavily garrisoned borders.

By contrast, South Korea was virtually bereft of large scale industry under Japan, which preferred to sell the southerners Japanese industrial goods in exchange for southern Korean rice. At least, however, it learned to operate under market discipline. When Japan disappeared from the scene in 1945, the southern transitional industrial economy quickly exfoliated into full industrialization from its precursors in the south's urban and village market-places.

When an industrially mature Japan returned to the Korean market in the 1960s, it could dovetail its activities with the maturing southern Korean industrial market, and encourage the further development of that market by investing in it, as did the Americans on a smaller scale.

3. A premature fully modern state's costs

In the short run of 1905-45, however, both south and north suffered grievously from colonialism's perversities. The good outcomes, even for the south, lay far in the future. Worst of all, the Japanese imposed a fully modern state structure on all of the Koreans, both north and south, before Korea could develop a fully modern economy that could afford to pay the heavy, fully modern level of taxes to support that state.

This meant that the real standard of living of the Koreans either did not rise as fast as its economy modernized or (as seems more likely) living standards actually went down a bit as the economy grew. (They could not have gone down much or population would not have continued to grow so rapidly as it did, more than doubling under the Japanese.)

Productivity of agriculture went way up, but half the rice was shipped to Japan directly, via taxes, or unofficially, through the market. In Japan, cheap Korean rice lowered prices and artificially depressed the Japanese agricultural economy. In Korea, these artificially induced sales to Japan created an unsustainable dependence on cultivating rice in southern Korea. Once the South Koreans got fuller control over their own economy after the late '50s and '60s, farmers spontaneously somewhat de-emphasized growing rice. This indicates how artificial the earlier focus of the southern economy on rice actually was, even though it was accompanied by greater resort to the market.

A fully modern commercial sector to the Korean economy did appear even before colonial times. Even by 1911 there were already 110 modern corporations, but 101 of them were Japanese owned. Such traditional industries as ginseng and mining remained government monopolies, only now the government was Japanese rather than Korean.

Fishing was no better off. There were 90,000 Japanese fishermen operating in Korean waters during the first decade of the century, and 30,000 of them were living in Korean fishing ports. Imagine if we did the equivalent to Canada. If as high a proportion of the Canadian fishing fleet was composed of Americans fishing in Canadian waters and a third of those Americans were living in Canadian fishing ports, we would never hear the end of

it from Ottawa. No wonder the Koreans were mad as hell, and have stayed chronically exasperated with Japan ever since.

Still, when you have said the worst about Japan's role, it is hard to imagine the post-colonial industrialization of Korea, particularly of South Korea, having occurred as rapidly as turned out to be the case without the changes brought about by the colonial experience. Of course this does not justify Japanese imperialism, it just shows one of its less morbid consequences.

D. Japanese and American Colonial Behavior Contrasted

1. *The American and Japanese colonial "end games," 1937-1945*

In chess, the "end game" comprises the final set of moves that either determine or reveal the previously predetermined outcome of the match.

During the 1930s, a decade after they started seriously talking about doing so under President Harding, the Americans began under President Franklin Roosevelt to wind down their experiment with empire and revert to the colonial policy of Grover Cleveland. In 1934 they withdrew the Marines from Central America, rescinded the Platt Amendment which had compromised Cuba's independence, and in 1936 they promised the Philippines independence by 1946.

The Japanese "end game" in Korea was a far less edifying spectacle. Beginning in 1937, the Japanese unwittingly mimicked in Korea what the French would later do with Algeria in the last years of their control of that North African colony during the '50s. The results were similarly disastrous.

As France did with Algeria later, Japan formally adopted an assimilationist policy for Korea. The Koreans were to become even more Japanese than Algeria later was to become French. After 1937, only Japanese was to be used in the schools. The Korean and Japanese languages are similar enough to have made that exceedingly annoying to the Koreans. That would be like passing a rule saying that all North Americans have to speak Jamaican English in their schools. In 1939

the Japanese compounded the insult by decreeing that all Koreans use the Japanese pronunciation of the characters for their names.

Next the Japanese compelled the Koreans to worship or at least register at Shinto shrines rather than at Buddhist or traditional ancestral shrines. Of course many Koreans, particularly Christians, simply refused to do this, and a fair number of them were imprisoned for their defiance.

By 1942 the Japanese were conscripting Koreans into the Japanese army. But even that was rather perverse in its effects. While they were sending better than a million Korean laborers and poorly trained conscript soldiers abroad, the Japanese had to send well over a third of a million highly trained Japanese troops into Korea. Their job was to repress the 2.5 million Korean forced laborers working in Korea and the several dozen million other Koreans who were mad as hell by this time at all the other things that the Japanese had been doing to them.

By the time the Japanese lost the war and had to give up their Korean colony, virtually nobody in Korea wanted them to stay on, or regretted their departure.

By contrast, most Filipinos continued to aid or at least sympathize with the Americans during the Japanese occupation of the islands, 1942-45. When the Americans departed the Philippines for the second time in 1946, it was voluntary, and during the half century since then, the U.S. has remained the most popular foreign nation among Filipinos.

That, however, is not the end of the story. Post-independence, the Philippines produced as authoritarian a set of governments as South Korea did, but gradually slipped from its position of having the highest GNP in Southeast Asia and fell ever further behind South Korea (which started out very low) in rate of economic development.

Apparently, American influence was not so wholesome on the economic side as was Japan's. (See ch. 25, part B.2.c for some of the reasons why that happened. In a nutshell, the Americans permitted the Filipino ruling class to participate in politics, thereby encouraging them to neglect the market, just the opposite of the much crueler Japanese policy. The Overseas Chinese in the Philippines found it easier to abandon the market and intermarry with the tolerant Filipino ruling class.)

2. *Occupation and division*

The American performance in Korea since 1945 has not been very impressive either, and goes far toward justifying in retrospect the strict hands-off American policy toward Korea of the preceding 75 years. Though the intent of American policy was honorable, its execution was deeply flawed by ignorance and a naive faith in the efficacy of idealistic interventionism.

The infamous 38th Parallel border, which has served to divide North Korea from South Korea ever since 1945, originated by a foolish accident.

An American staff officer, Col. Dean Rusk,³ wholly ignorant of Korean geography and history, was advising an even more ignorant committee of diplomats soldiers and sailors preparing plans to occupy the peninsula one hot Sunday in Washington, DC, late in August 1945. The two atomic bombs had already been dropped. Japan had offered to surrender. The Russians were already advancing south onto the peninsula from Manchuria. The Americans would soon have to land from the sea somewhere in the south. Both Russia and the U.S. would have to stay at least long enough to accept the surrender of the Japanese troops in Korea.

Rusk found an administrative map that divided Korea into two superprovinces at the 38th Parallel. This was the only map of Korea Rusk could scrounge up. (The State Department Map Room, which was unattended by a geographer on Sunday, lacked a terrain map of the peninsula.) Rusk thought the 38th Parallel a prudent place to divide the country into equal-sized zones, and was pleased that it would leave the Americans controlling Seoul, the capital.

During the next few weeks, the Russians accepted the surrenders of Japanese troops north of and the Americans south of that rather arbitrary line. That the Russians were in Korea at all was an accidental corollary of the American wartime policy of doing everything necessary to eventually bring the Russians actively into the Pacific theater of World War II so as to avoid having to invade Japan itself.

The geopolitical effect of this acci-

³ Col. Rusk, a Ph.D. in political science, had just returned from service as chief of staff to the American commander of the China-Burma-India Theater; later he became Secretary of State to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson.

dental demarcation line was then and still is disastrous. It institutionalized military and hence political instability in Korea since it ran athwart the strategic Han River valley. Once (as seems to have been inevitable) the Parallel became a quasi-permanent political boundary, at best there was going to be an unstable equilibrium between the Russian and Chinese influenced northern half of the country and the American and Japanese influenced southern half.

One reason why reunification of the peninsula soon became a hopeless prospect was a rather absurd early policy put forward by the Americans. This policy came entirely out of Franklin Roosevelt's somewhat whimsical brain. Roosevelt suggested setting up for Korea a "trusteeship" of the sort championed during World War I by his hero, Woodrow Wilson. Under Anglo-American domestic law, immature or otherwise incompetent heirs to fortunes would have their affairs run by lawyer-trustees. Under League of Nations-sponsored new international law, backward or at least immature colonies would in a similar fashion have their affairs run by trustee nations. These trustees would in turn be supervised by an international body that would play the role assumed by a civil court in American domestic law.

Roosevelt wanted the Americans and the Russians to serve as joint trustees over Korea for a five to twenty-five year period, during which time the Koreans presumably would "grow up" and become ready for independence.

This, of course, gave fits to both the Korean public and to South Korean politicians. The North Korean politicians were no doubt equally hostile to it. But for reasons of state, the Russians told them to keep quiet about it. So they did and kept the northern public quiet as well. As a consequence, the Russians could blandly agree to negotiate the issue, thereby encouraging the Americans to further out-range the South Koreans.

The Americans, who would not be aware of the Cold War they were already in for another two years, were delighted at Russia's cooperation. But, the South Korean politicians continued to hold riots over the issue, and eventually dragged the Americans over to their point of view. This allowed the Russians to say that they, at least, had tried to be cooperative, but that the Americans were inconsistent.

In practice, the result of this stalemate was to allow the two great powers to back into defacto acceptance of the existence of two separate Korean states without having to say that was what they wanted. Nevertheless, South Korean nationalistic hostility (partly inspired by Communist agitators from the north; but also partly evoked from a spirit of revolutionary patriotism) evoked from the public more blame for America than for Russia.

From 1945 to 1950, the Koreans on both sides of the mid-peninsular border must have gone around muttering to themselves about the inscrutable Americans with far more justification than silly occidentals have when they talk about the inscrutable Orient.

I am not sure I can scute American foreign policy toward Korea myself, even after a lifetime of trying. I suspect the problem is simply that American interests are still not fundamentally engaged on the peninsula. We are still there now mainly because we involuntarily inherited the responsibility for running Japan's empire when we conquered Japan in 1945, and Japan had almost as small a stake in controlling Korea than we have had.

3. *The drift into a stalemated war*

a. *the drift into war*

It is also a still insoluble mystery whether, in 1948, the Americans actually knew what they were doing when they brought the United Nations into the picture. The UN was supposed to hold a pan-Korean election to elect the constituent assembly which was to set the rules for establishing a unified, independent Korean state. I suspect this was too brilliant a move in its effects to have been intentional on the part of the American diplomats.

The South Korean rulers, grateful to at least be quit of the threat of a trusteeship, accepted UN jurisdiction, even though they feared losing the election. Syngman Rhee, who had returned from his long exile in Princeton, and then bullied his way into taking charge of the south, had many radical student opponents. Many South Korean politicians despised him for his snobbery and for his foreign wife.

Fortunately for Rhee, and for South Korea, the northerners did not accept UN jurisdiction. Perhaps they worried that

their population was so much smaller than the south's, and so they would have failed to win a majority for a Communist-led coalition in such an election.⁴

Nevertheless the Communists would surely have done well enough to at least have been participants in a pan-Korean government. After both the Russian and American armies withdrew in 1949, they might have eventually engineered a defenestration of Rhee in Seoul analogous to the defenestration of the non-Communist Premier Masaryk in Prague that gave Stalin's Czech Communist minions control of Czechoslovakia in 1948.

We may never know why Stalin missed this chance, but his failure to take part in the election granted a significant measure of legitimacy to the southern regime which did take that chance and which was subsequently elected under a mildly free and more or less fair election held under UN auspices only in the south. The north, mostly justifiably, had to bear the odium thereafter of being considered a Russian satellite.



Syngman Rhee taking the oath as first president of the Republic of Korea. (Han, pl. 80.)

The next year, 1949, the Russians were so confident about their North Korean satellite's reliability that they pulled their forces out of the peninsula. The embarrassed Americans hastily withdrew their garrison to Japan. They soon also withdrew their guarantee of South Korea's security.

⁴ This assumes that the north would have fixed the election in their home areas at least as much as South Korean politicians in fact did in the south.

To explain why this seeming withdrawal of commitment occurred, there exists a National Security Council position paper, then secret, but its conclusions hinted at by two public speeches, one in December 1949 by the Supreme Commander in Japan, General MacArthur, the other by Dean Acheson, the American Secretary of State, delivered before the National Press Club at the beginning of 1950. Both of these seem to clearly exclude South Korea land the Nationalist Chinese last redoubt of Taiwan from the American sphere of defense.

Why did Acheson, in other respects a hard line liberal anti-Communist do this? Why did the hard-line anti-Chinese Communist MacArthur anticipate him? To this day, nobody knows. Almost all the relevant official papers have been public since the beginning of the '80s, when the American government's thirty-year secrecy rule expired for documents dating from the early '50s. Ardently New Left revisionist historians like Bruce Cummings have gone over these papers with a finely honed bias, and have not been able to find any reason, nefarious or innocent, why the Americans abandoned South Korea both verbally and in writing.⁵

Apparently, however, such betrayals weren't worth the public paper they weren't written on. Within twenty-four hours after North Korea launched its invasion of the south on June 25, 1950, less than six months after Acheson's speech, the Americans suddenly realized that a South Korea in hostile hands would indeed (as Moltke put it in the 1870s) be a dagger pointed at the heart of Japan. President Truman ordered fragments of a division of infantry from the Occupation forces to be rousted out of the saloons and bawdy houses of Kyushu and sent pell mell to Korea.

The most likely (though undocumented) explanation, according to Cummings, for the failure to make this near deathbed

⁵ Just recently the CIA's assessment reports to the president for these years have been published and may shed further light on Acheson's behavior. In January 1950 the CIA predicted that North Korea would not invade South Korea. After the north did in fact invade the south the CIA predicted with equal lack of accuracy that China would not intervene in the war. Perhaps Acheson and President Truman gave their confidence to the CIA in 1950 because it had accurately predicted in 1948 that Stalin would not invade Germany. See Woodrow J. Kuhns, *Assessing the Soviet Threat: The Early Cold War Years* (Washington: National Technical Information Service, 1997).

burst of intelligent thought six months earlier is that back in January 1950 the State Department's Acheson, and MacArthur before him, on this point at least, were yielding to the far more dovish Pentagon which had influenced the contents of the NSC position paper. The American military may not have relished the prospect of taking on additional responsibilities in Northeast Asia when it was not even ready to fight Russia in Europe. All the hawks (as they were not yet known then) were in the State Department, not in the Pentagon. Of course it is also possible that the State Department was attempting to head off some adventure in Korea by MacArthur.⁶

b. snatching stalemate from victory

For whatever reason, the Americans did go in when the North Koreans launched their surprise attack against the south on June 25, 1950. Since Russia was boycotting the UN at the time, there was no veto of the UN's prompt vote to back the American intervention.

The Americans almost lost the war between late June and late August 1950 as they were forced back into a narrow perimeter surrounding Pusan in the southeast corner of the peninsula, the core of the territory of ancient Silla.

⁶ I. F. Stone, the late left-wing journalist, in 1952 provided another possible, if unlikely, explanation for American behavior in his *The Secret History of the Korean War*. Naturally, Stone did not have anybody's archives at his disposal then, but he speculated that the South Korean leaders joined with Douglas MacArthur (the American General in charge in Japan), and Chiang Kai-shek (the Chinese leader, by then holed up in Taiwan after losing the Chinese civil war to the Communists) in a conspiracy to bring the United States and Communist China into war with each other in Korea so that the Americans would then have an excuse to help Chiang return to the mainland from Taiwan.

The Americans, Stone surmised, either lied that North Korea had invaded the south or suckered the northerners into launching their attack. This is a very intriguing thesis. Now that the American archives are mostly open, however, we find that there is no trail of paper that provides any evidence for it. This did not prevent Stone from reprinting the book during the Vietnam War, with a broad hint added that similar American mischief was being practiced in Southeast Asia. And yet, noting how many people spilled out everything they knew during the Watergate and Iran-Contra scandals, it does not seem plausible that the chronically leak-ridden American government could have for very long covered up so extensive a conspiracy as Stone postulates.

Documents from Soviet archives and memoirs by Korean generals retired in former Soviet territory have recently established North Korea's guilt for the attack. At least one Soviet archival document also suggests that Stone was a paid Soviet agent.

Then MacArthur won his last big lucky-skillful gamble: the Inchon landings. At the beginning of September, he took the enormous risk of landing an amphibious force at Inchon, the port city of Seoul near the mouth of the Han. Tides at Inchon varied by thirty feet between low and high. A few hours delay would have ruined the landing by forcing the soldiers to walk across an exposed tidal mudflat. Fortunately, the amphibious force stayed on schedule. The American motorized columns, once landed, quickly moved up athwart the Han River system, duplicating (however unconsciously) in reverse ancient Silla's strategy of taking the Han valley from Koguryo by the land route. Both the ancient and modern moves gained their makers dominance over most of the peninsula.

This takeover of the Han valley completely outflanked the North Koreans whose units were still clustered around the Pusan perimeter. During their ensuing retreat the North Korean army disintegrated as badly as the South Korean army had during the original invasion. Before the end of October, the Americans liberated virtually all of South Korea. American troops charged into the north, heading toward the Taedong River. By early November they had crossed the Taedong, and were moving in widely separated columns toward the Yalu.

Also by October, the Chinese Communists were sending out what the Americans took to be bluffing or at least ambiguous signals. These came indirectly, by way of India. The Chinese seemed to be threatening to enter the war if the Americans came too close to the Yalu.

MacArthur and even Washington chose not to believe these Chinese threats, MacArthur because he had too much self-confidence, Washington because it did not believe the Indian messenger, V. K. Krishna-Menon, an obnoxiously anti-American socialist with a well-earned reputation for mendacity.

In fact, however, the Chinese were preparing to intervene unless the Americans halted their advance, preferably at the 38th Parallel. Mao Zedong admitted privately to some of his colleagues, however, that he would at least have to delay intervention for six months if the Americans stopped at the Taedong.

Since knowledge of Korean history and geography was virtually non-existent within the American government, it was

easy for American policymakers to posit false alternatives for themselves: either stop at the 38th Parallel or go all the way to the Yalu.

Without knowing anything about the analogy they were unconsciously acting out, the Americans imitated medieval Koryo rather than early Unified Silla, and made for the Yalu rather than the Taedong. None of the American policymakers even considered the prudent middle path adopted by ancient Unified Silla. Faced with the recently established Tang China's power, 7th century Silla stopped at the line of the Taedong.

MacArthur sent his columns rushing headlong toward the Yalu, their flanks quite uncovered, and the equally ignorant civilians back in Washington were too impressed by the general's prestige to call him to account until after the disaster.

The Chinese quietly slipped a number of small units into the north during November. During December they outflanked MacArthur's columns and attacked them at their front, flanks and rear. The American armies reeled back, then discovered they would have to fight their way to the rear before they could even begin to run away.

They did so, in one of the great battles in American military history. Unlike the South Koreans in July or the North Koreans in September, the Americans managed the difficult feat of keeping their units intact in the course of a forced retreat under fire. The harshness of the North Korean winter made this feat all the more impressive.

That retreat could not, however, stop until the Americans were nearly two-thirds the way down the peninsula.

At that point the Chinese were overextended. This allowed the UN forces to fight their way back roughly to the 38th Parallel by the summer of 1951.

For the next two years neither side could or would push the other any further back. The new line (slightly south of the 38th Parallel in the west, a bit north of it on the east) was the scene of fixed position warfare resembling that on the western front during World War I.

Long before then, in April 1951, MacArthur was recalled and retired, nominally for disobeying a particular minor order, but really because his last bold strategic move had backfired. President Truman, even more discredited by the stalemate than MacArthur, did not run for

reelection. In 1953, another World War II hero, Dwight Eisenhower, assumed the presidency, threatened the Chinese with nuclear weapons if they did not cut a deal, and thereby won a "truce" along the line of the stalemate, a truce that still holds.

Thanks to the traditional inability of American diplomats and military leaders to do two intelligent things in succession, a very great opportunity was lost.

If, instead of racing to the Yalu, the UN forces had prudently gone up only as far as the Taedong running across the western portion of the narrow waist of North Korea, that line could have easily been extended across the hills to the northeast, and anchored on the east coast's only major port, Wonsan. This would have proved just as stable a border with China in 1950 as it had a millennium earlier for Unified Silla. Having fortified that easily defensible line at the narrowest part of the peninsula, the Americans might have tacitly let the Chinese come in to occupy the land between the Taedong and the Yalu.

Loss of the far north would have had limited effect because in the meantime, most of the Koreans left in the rump of the north could have fled south. The greatest tragedy of modern Korean history, the separation of many Korean families for nearly half a century, could have been avoided. Sooner or later, probably sooner, China would have disgorged the far north as part of a larger deal with the Americans.

c. *cui bono?*

Who benefited from what actually happened instead? The Korean people did not. The Americans certainly did not. Neither did the Chinese people. The Chinese government was something else again. At the time China's rulers gave the appearance of having been as surprised as America by North Korea's invasion.⁷ Previous to this, the Americans had been edging toward opening talks with the new Chinese Communist government, and while the latter rather forcefully rebuffed these first overtures, the Chinese did not then *seem* to have desired war.

⁷ In 1993, undocumented accounts from Beijing suggested that Mao Zedong not only knew of the attack, but was eager to join in the war, partly for domestic reasons. He wanted to isolate China's American-influenced intellectuals from their American contacts. A 1994 account based on Russian archives fully confirms China's prewar involvement in planning for the war.

Nevertheless war came, and as a consequence, the American-Chinese rapprochement was postponed for twenty years. All this because of what happened between the Taedong and the Yalu in November-December 1950.

Though the war was certainly not in the interests of either of these two nations as such, the right wing opposition in America and the left wing in China (which actually controlled the Chinese government) were able to use this hostility to serve their own domestic interests, but neither really needed a war to make the other country a credible bogeyman.

Though they knew about Stalin's plan for war, the Chinese did not take the initiative in calling for hostilities. That was North Korea's doing.

Despite I. F. Stone's claim that it was a co-conspirator, South Korea's government was by June 1950 too frightened to launch a war. It had not even talked very tough for months preceding the outbreak, so apparent to its leaders was its vulnerability.

However, North Korea had much to gain from what it hoped would be a quick war of conquest. It stood to gain control over the whole peninsula. Russia had armed it with enough tanks to render such an invasion's success a good bet, particularly since the Americans had not armed the South Koreans to a comparable extent.

Acheson's National Press Club speech must have persuaded Stalin that his risks were minimal for pursuing so promising an opportunity to nibble at the edges of Japan's zone of security.

So it seems plausible that if anyone conspired to bring on war in 1949-50, it was these two—Russia and North Korea—rather than the Americans, South Koreans, or even the Nationalist Chinese on Taiwan who were much weakened by their recent loss of the mainland. The Communist Chinese on the mainland were at least accessories to Stalin's aggressive scheme, but did not take the main initiative in planning or supplying it.

Whatever the several parties had intended, the results for both Koreas were disastrous. Bombing, artillery fire and repeated occupations by infantry and purges conducted by bloody-minded northern political agitators created as grimly smoking and chaotic a ruin in both North and South Korea by 1953 as Hideyoshi's campaigns had in the 1590s.

The Americans, like China in the

1590s, caused as much damage to their southern Korean friends as to their northern enemy. America alone had enough air and fire power to reduce the whole peninsula to a smoking ruin. Such a strategy was nothing new for the Americans. It dated back to W. T. Sherman's and U.S. Grant's campaigns in the 1860s. It did at least as much damage to Korea during 1950-53 as it did to Virginia in the 1860s or Germany and Japan in the 1940s.

E. North Korea

1. The Manchurian-Siberian connection

By its behavior in Korea during the interwar years, Japan in some key ways anticipated what went on after the war in contemporary North Korea. A previous section discussed the 1920s-1930s centralized Japanese-sponsored hydro-electrified industrialization of northern Korea that focused on military production. With hindsight we can see that the Japanese anticipated by nearly a decade Stalin's centralized heavy-industry makeover of his empire.



The ruins of central Seoul. (Lee, after p. 200.)

This form of industrialization linked the economies of northern Korea and Manchuria by creating centralized hydro-electric facilities that served both regions. It also moved redundant Koreans up into Manchuria as factory workers and settlers. After 1945, the dams and power lines and Korean settlers were still linked to Manchuria, even after the two regions came to belong to separate sovereign states. That is part of what drew China into the Korean War in 1950.

North Korea continued to emphasize state-centered and military-linked heavy

industry as it began its Russian-sponsored but admittedly small-scale industrialization from 1945 to 1950. Having inherited this pattern from the Japanese, and with Stalin's Russia as its mentor, it is not surprising that North Korea resumed going that way as it began to put the pieces of its shattered economy together again after the truce was signed in the summer of 1953.

Kim Il-sung, until his death in July 1994 the one and only leader of North Korea, was one of the early nationalists who the Japanese chased up into Manchuria and then Siberia during the 1920s and '30s. Though his origins are shrouded in mystery, one story making him a Christian convert, Kim seems not to have been rich enough or high enough in class origins to take the boat to Shanghai and hang out there with ex-*yangban* exiles like his older contemporary, Syngman Rhee.

Once in Manchuria, Kim established links with local Chinese Communist guerrillas. Then, when the Japanese launched serious anti-guerrilla campaigns in Manchuria during the '30s, he fled further up into Russia's Eastern Siberian province, delivering himself directly into the hands of Stalin's minions.

Japan not only began to industrialize the north in a way that anticipated Stalinism, it had created that portion of the Korean revolutionary elite that would be allied predominantly with Russia, but also tangentially with China after the success of the Chinese revolution.

2. Preserving North Korean independence

Only after World War II did Kim come back into North Korea, his way cleared by Russian bayonets. As quickly as the Japanese garrisoned in the north surrendered to the Russians (and were trundled off to camps in Eastern Siberia, where some of them were kept for several years or more before finally being repatriated to Japan), the Russians gave the captured Japanese arms to Kim's Communist militia.

Kim's reward for not raising hell about FDR's trusteeship proposal was formal control of the government of North Korea when the trusteeship scheme inevitably failed. Stalin, though not the Chinese, delivered lots of military aid to Kim during the several years before his invasion of the south. The Chinese Communist leaders were still preoccupied with

managing the last stages of their own civil war from 1947 through 1949.

By 1950, with the Chinese Communists having won their civil war without much help from Russia, Stalin must have felt grateful for the trustworthy Kim, who would have been nothing without Russian aid. That is likely why Stalin was willing to take the gamble of pulling Russian troops out of the north in 1949, thereby goading the U.S. into withdrawing from the south. The much distracted Americans, as we have seen, did not need much encouragement to leave South Korea.

Kim was not so much doing Stalin's bidding when he invaded South Korea in June 1950 as he was building his own little department of the Soviet Empire. There is no doubt, however, that by the spring of 1950 he had won Stalin's full approval for his idea of mounting the attack on the south. There is no question that the idea for the attack was Kim's. Stalin, however, made sure he was the senior partner and assigned several high Soviet officers to Kim to take over final planning for the invasion.

The subsequent Chinese intervention, however necessary once the initial invasion of the south had failed and the Americans hurtled themselves toward the Yalu, represented a potentially significant threat to North Korean independence. China's political center was much closer to Korea than was Russia's, and there were many more Chinese than Russians. However, the Chinese intervention at least guaranteed North Korea's survival, and this was apparently all that China intended to do. Once North Korea's army disintegrated after Inchon, the original Stalin-Kim-Mao plan to conquer the south was no longer achievable.

China, as always since Tang times, preferred a reliable flank-protecting tributary on the peninsula to an expensive colony. A few years after the 1953 truce, the Chinese withdrew their forces. The 1950-53 intervention was at least as expensive, and less successful than the 1590s Chinese intervention, but more successful than the last Chinese intervention in defense of Korea during the 1890s.

The fact that post-1953 North Korea seemed to be patterning its behavior more on China than Russia no doubt made the post-1953 withdrawal seem safe. North Korea's domestic policy was probably in part intended to reassure the Chinese of his loyalty and orthodoxy.

The death of Stalin in March 1953 removed Kim's most important friend in the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, Kim made sure to also keep up a tributary relationship with all subsequent Soviet leaders as well. Only the disintegration of the Soviet Empire in 1991 ended that relationship.

3. *The illusion and reality of independence*

During the decades after the 1953 truce Kim proved to be an insistent, though not very subtle, propagandist. He spoke Orwellian Newspeak like a native. His greatest Newspeak slogan was *juche*, which means "independence," political, economic and cultural. Since this is Newspeak, Kim's insistent use of this word really means North Korea was not very independent or original at all.

Kim kept his independence from China partly at the price of aping Chinese practices in North Korea's domestic life. Indeed the North Koreans mimicked virtually every silly stage of Mao Zedong's odyssey toward the Promised Land of Pure Communism, though not the reforms that have followed Mao's death.

But Kim had to juggle the obligations of a dual tributary relationship. He had to also echo Russia's interests, at least in foreign policy.

So what *juche* really came down to, at least until the beginning of the '80s, was to ape China domestically, and Russia in foreign policy. That may have been the only way for North Korea to enjoy any sort of "independence."

Despite the fervor of the cult of personality that surrounded him, Kim was even less of an original thinker than was Mao Zedong himself, since he had to imitate Mao to be a good tributary of China. This is not to say that Mao himself was very original.⁸

If this is true, if North Korea is merely a provincial version of China and Russia when both were still operating in the Stalinist mode, that gives us a hint as to what

to make of the very wild claims of enormous and rapid development which came out of North Korea from the 1950s through the '70s. Supposedly, North Korea was making everything on its own, from steel to ladies ready to wear. It allegedly even overcame climate and terrain to become self-sufficient in food.

North Korea no longer makes such claims. The memory of them now evokes only an embarrassed silence from those Western sympathizers including academic consensus types who also accepted these claims without much if any evidence!

Once we began to obtain a pretty accurate picture of how ruinous was the situation of North Korea's models—China and Russia—it became obvious that the claims of their provincial variant—North Korea—must have been just as phony. At least since the late '70s, it has become evident that North Korea could barely feed itself, and that it depended heavily on the Soviet Union for a number of key industrial goods at concessionary prices.

North Korea is now, it is generally conceded, well behind South Korea in economic development, and was probably never as far ahead of it or ahead of it at all, as official figures once seemed to suggest. The post-1953 economic figures put out by North Korea were, even when not faked, inherently just as misleading as were those showing the superior development of the north under the Japanese during the '20s and '30s.

Command economies always look better statistically than they actually are, since it pays for their statisticians to exaggerate their production, whereas tax-dodging independent firms in a market economy have equally great incentives to minimize what they report to their government's statisticians, who may snitch on them to the tax collectors.

The fragility of North Korea's economy has been shockingly revealed by the crop and food distribution failures since 1995-96. (See sections G1 and G3.)

F. South Korea

1. *South Korea's messy run toward full industrial takeoff*

South Korea's experience under the Japanese also prefigured, albeit in some peculiar ways, its behavior since the end

of Japanese rule.

You may recall that the main economic effect of the Japanese empire on the south was to complete the commercialization of its agriculture and town life, even though at the price of much tenancy, much poverty (or at least much slower growth out of poverty), and enormous amounts of anguish among Korean nationalists.

You may recall also the disproportionate incidence of Christianity and Christianity-based nationalism in the south under Japanese overlordship. Pietistic Christianity, in both Protestant and Catholic forms, helped create new bases for community-building for their parishioners during and after the Japanese occupation as these parishioners were being thrust into new, socially atomized, urban-industrial situations.

In such contexts Korean Pietism has functioned much as did American Pietism during the several "Great Awakenings" that accompanied 19th and 20th century American industrialization, and as Central American and Brazilian Pietism is now functioning. The Nichiren Buddhist Soka Gakkai sect functioned the same way in 20th century Japan. All of these pietistic sects have comforted their adherents with promises of salvation in Heaven and shared community on Earth during the upheavals of rapid full modernization.

Even during the colonial period, the disproportionately Christian south produced a disproportionately Christian class of intellectuals and genteel businessmen *rvrm* among those members of the *yangban* aristocracy who remained in Korea. These people joined a disproportionately Christian new ruling class of civilian and military meritocrats and plutocrats of the new industrial age type after 1945.

The career of Syngman Rhee, summarized previously, illustrates this pattern almost perfectly. Rhee (also transliterated as Yi) was from a cadet branch of the Yi Dynasty's ruling family, got a Methodist education in Seoul, went into exile in Shanghai, then in Honolulu, and finally in Princeton. He spent most of World War II in Princeton, presumably learning how to add Princetonian arrogance to the snobishness of the royal family of Yi Dynasty Korea.

Rhee came back to southern Korea with the U.S. army of occupation in 1945. Playing the role of a civilian Korean DeGaulle, he bullied his way to dominance

⁸ I will be arguing in chapter 31 that Mao was no more than the Chinese Stalin, and that both Mao and Stalin were themselves merely localistic glosses on Lenin, who made the only original contribution to Marxism since Marx himself. Lenin was the one who figured out how to justify the imposition of totalitarian socialism on an undeveloped country, something quite contrary to what Marx and Engels had intended. All Stalin, and Mao, and Kim did was apply the Leninist model of Marxism-Nativism locally to their own underdeveloped countries.

over the bemused American military authorities. They did not quite know what to make of this fellow, who was clearly their social superior, both as Korean aristocrat and haughty Princetonian. He grabbed firmer control of the provisional government by raising hell with the Americans over the trusteeship issue.

The UN-supervised elections let Rhee fully legitimize his control over the South Korean government. Before long, a fair amount of corruption surrounded Rhee, but without quite touching him personally. It did not prevent him from presiding over a tolerably successful land reform in 1949 and the beginning of 1950, one of only three successful land reforms since World War II.

Of course it was not too hard for him to pull off this trick, given how much South Korean land had been in Japanese private and public hands up to 1945 and was now in the hands of his government. It was, therefore, easy for him to give most of it away to its tenants without upsetting the land market by taking property away from Koreans. In fact, a fair amount was left over for his friends and their sisters and their cousins and their aunts.⁹

Despite the qualified success of the initial land reform, Rhee gradually lost popularity, especially among young agitators inside and outside the schools, some of whom were likely northern agents. He regained something of his earlier heroic status during the Korean War when, again like a Korean DeGaulle, he became a great patriotic symbol around whom the South Koreans could rally, particularly those who were Christians. Thereafter, however, he entered a slow drift toward senility and increasing unpopularity.

Nevertheless, the war turned the southerners into a nation, a change which I will symbolize by henceforth referring to their nation as "South Korea."¹⁰

⁹ We will see in chapter 32 how the same sort of thing happened in another ex-Japanese colony, Taiwan, 1950-1953, and have already noticed a successful land reform in defeated postwar Japan. In all three cases, the reform succeeded because it involved redistribution of property confiscated by defeated and expelled foreigners or (as in Japan) owned by a defeated ruling class. Land reform elsewhere (as in the Philippines, El Salvador and South Vietnam) has failed because to provide land for redistribution it required confiscation of property held by still powerful local people. This was politically risky, and even if successful, would have undermined market relationships in general.

¹⁰ The south's official name is "Republic of Korea." The north's is "Democratic People's Republic of Korea."

But unbeknownst to everybody, including most Koreans, the South Korean economy was also girding its loins for full industrial "takeoff" even in the midst of Syngman Rhee's postwar near decade-long personal decline during the 1950s. The macro-economic statistics of the time simply failed to capture data from the many small firms functioning in the economic no-man's land of the urban transitional economy which operated invisibly between the "traditionally modern" and Western styles of economic activity in post-Korean War South Korea.

Nor could the economic moralists who condemned the corruption of Rhee's subordinates distinguish between those larger firms bribing their way to privileged positions in the import-export trade and those firms, small and large, who were making side payments to admittedly corrupt South Korean politicians merely to gain permission to engage in capitalist acts with consenting adults at home in South Korea, and overseas with Japanese and North American capitalists.

Everyone noticed how poor and hard working Korean peasants were. Hardly anyone noticed that American in-kind foreign aid in grain was pushing down grain prices in Korea, and so was making these hard working farmers even poorer than they otherwise would have been. Their lack of success with rice was beginning to suggest to some of them that they had perhaps best try growing something else.

2. South Korea's politically unstable run from takeoff toward maturation

Student riots built to a crescendo during the late '50s. Such student political activism echoed the tradition of young *exyangban* class riots against the Japanese during the first two decades of the century. Those in turn had grown out of the violent aspects of Yi Dynasty factionalism. These riots of the 1950s in turn served as models for later riots in 1980 and then again in 1987-88, and the many lesser riots since then. Participation in political street riots has become a widely practiced rite of maturation for South Korean college students.

In 1960, the students finally pushed Rhee into retirement and exile to Honolulu for his last years of life. He was re-

placed by a good, decent, Catholic intellectual named Chang Myon (John Chang). Unfortunately, Chang proved to be the classic ineffectual liberal politician. He could not even stop the students from rioting. That failure prejudiced voters against later decent Catholic politicians as ineffectual. As before, some of these rioting students were almost certainly linked to the North Koreans. Most of them were not, but the majority were tainted in the minds of the general public by the acts of those who were.

One of the generals becoming uneasy in the face of the continued urban unrest was Park Chung-hee. Park belonged to the new military meritocracy. First recruited into the Korean army set up by the Japanese during World War II, after the war he won admission to the new American-style Korean West Point. He became one of the fit who survived the Darwinian hell that was the first months of the Korean War, and subsequently rose to become one of the rebuilt South Korean army's top officers.

Contemptuous of the pseudo-aristocratic pretensions of the civilian Christian meritocrat politicians, this commoner, Buddhist military meritocrat determined on a Bonapartist putsch. When public opinion was ripe he quickly moved his divisions from the front to Seoul.

He threw Chang Myon out of office and bullied the remaining civilian officeholders as contemptuously as Napoleon Bonaparte disposed of the Directory in 1799. He squashed the student rioters with the 20th century equivalent of a Bonapartist whiff of grapeshot, then turned to the Americans and dared them to do something about it. The Americans did not call Park's bluff, mainly because they strongly suspected he was not bluffing.

But the outbluffed Americans did go into a kind of pout, especially after the activist Kennedy succeeded the principled non-interventionist Eisenhower in the presidency. To punish the new South Korean dictator, the Americans cut back drastically on foreign aid, which had been tapering down anyway during the late 1950s. The result? Since most of the aid was in cheap American rice, the economic aid was perverse in its effects anyway, and so its reduction (military aid long continued) simply accelerated South Korea's industrial takeoff by allowing agricultural prices to rise.

By the spring of 1965, Walt Whitman

Rostow, the political science professor from MIT who was the father of the concept of industrial “takeoff,” was serving on President Johnson’s National Security Council. Much to the discomfort of his fellow liberals, midway through General Park’s first decade in power, Rostow proclaimed in the newspapers that South Korea’s industrial economy had just taken off.

Still more infuriating to academic liberals, Rostow has proved to have been right! South Korea’s accelerating economic growth during the next several decades demonstrated that the South Korean full industrial economy must indeed have “taken off” some time around 1965.

Of course, because he was a political scientist and not a historian, Rostow soon spoiled his success on the economy by making some bad historical analogies on the political side. He compared the Christian President Rhee of South Korea in the ‘50s with the Christian President Diem of South Vietnam in the ‘60s. Both could, Rostow argued, unite their nations as allies of Christian America. North Vietnam could be staved off just as North Korea had been. Eventually, South Vietnam would take off industrially, just as South Korea had.

Poor Rostow missed the historical difference between being allied with a Christian in South Vietnam as opposed to a Christian in South Korea. President Diem’s Christianity linked him to the French imperialists rather than to national patriotism as was the case in Korea, and Diem’s new American allies were quickly equated with the French as well.

Nor did Rostow anticipate having to fight in an ongoing war that would last for more than twice the length of the three years of the Korean War.¹¹

Though his political judgment proved faulty (and he paid the price for this by being exiled from MIT to University of Texas-Austin when he returned to academic life in 1969), by all the statistical measures that we have at our disposal, Rostow’s contemporary recognition of

South Korea’s 1965 industrial takeoff was a remarkably accurate call.

Some very good statistics for the recent economic history of South Korea come from an eight volume series put out by Harvard, *Studies in the Modernization of the Republic of Korea*. You don’t have to read all eight volumes. You can cheat, the way I did, and read just volume eight, which is the “Reader’s Digest” summary volume, written by the economic historian Dexter Perkins, and still get lots of good stuff (just as when you read a *Reader’s Digest* Condensed Book version of some tome that lacks literary appeal).

Perkins makes the point that South Korean statistics probably underestimate most of South Korea’s accomplishments since businessmen are loath to tell their government too much about their businesses lest their taxes increase. Hence the numbers perhaps misleadingly suggest that the north was probably still ahead as late as 1965, when Rostow proclaimed takeoff for the south. However, the statistical trend lines suggest that the south was catching up.

The north’s 1965 Gross National Product (GNP) per capita was supposedly c. US\$581, and the south’s was US\$564. As of 1984, however, the south was ahead in per capita GNP by US\$1560 to US\$889 for the north. By 1988, when South Korea hosted the Olympics, people who had also attended the Tokyo Olympics of 1964 were writing that Korea seemed just as much developed in 1988 as Japan did in 1964. If literally true, that would mean that South Korea had reached maturation in just two decades.

Actually, however, full maturation took hold only around the end of the century in 1997 (and was, as is usual, accompanied by a deep bust). It is just that recent technical innovations in electronics and auto production make immature economies look more mature than they actually are, especially if they are growing at about a 7-10 percent rate, compounded annually, as South Korea was between the mid-‘60s and 1997-8.

This rapid growth began under Park Chung-hee’s dictatorship, but was only partly his doing. Park merely provided an orderly society within which people already habituated to operating in markets came to feel more secure in gathering to market their goods and services ever more frequently. Park used his power most conspicuously to keep riots from happening

when he pushed through a peace treaty with Japan in 1963 that opened prospects of Japanese investment.

Though bloody-minded when he had to be, Park was personally honest, and so avoided giving too much subsidy to the government’s plutocratic members, with whom, as a bitter-hearted first generation military meritocrat, he was not particularly sympathetic.

Some credit must also go to Syngman Rhee for not getting too badly in the way of the post-1945 and then the post-1953 first exfoliation of this market.

Some credit must also go to the Japanese for the many things they did, wittingly and unwittingly, to hasten the commercialization of agriculture and indirectly stimulate the transitional urban economy in southern Korea during the colonial era of the ‘20s and ‘30s.

Considerable credit should even go to the Americans, in spite of their many diplomatic blunders, for sacrificing some four dozen thousand young American lives to preserve South Korea’s independence, and then for being sufficiently unfaithful to stop intervening in the South Korean economy during the ‘60s after a decade of interventionist fussbudgetry.

Post-Occupation Japan also deserves considerable credit for signing a peace treaty with South Korea at almost the moment of the Korean takeoff, and subsequently pouring substantial amounts of investment into South Korea. Note that this Japanese investment was mostly private, and began *after* South Korea’s takeoff.

President Park deserves even more credit than the Japanese for his courage in signing the highly unpopular treaty with Japan. Of course it was easier for him to do so since he had the ability and willingness to shoot or jail the most obstreperous of his opponents. Nevertheless, some dictators are too timid to take such risks.

3. Contemporary South Korea

Unfortunately, by the end of the ‘70s Park began to lose his touch. A North Korean assassin shot and killed Mrs. Park while aiming at the general, and Park was never the same man thereafter. He had a falling out with the head of his CIA in 1979 not long after the KCIA was revealed to have been bribing American

¹¹ Actually, the Americans did better than precedent might have indicated. The U.S. stuck it out in Vietnam for seven years, fighting there longer than in any previous American war, but finally got discouraged and withdrew altogether in 1972, losing everything three years later. Perhaps if the American government had required an Historical Impact Statement (HIS) from one of political scientist Rostow’s historian colleagues, the flaws in his analogy might have been discovered in time to avoid this disaster.

Congressmen.¹² When Park pointed out the diplomatic trouble this was causing him, the KCIA Chief invited him to dinner and shot him dead before dessert. Park's bodyguards then shot dead the KCIA chief himself.

Another general, Chun Doo-huan, took over. He remained in office until the beginning of 1988. In 1980, a Catholic opposition politician, Kim Dae-jung, who had been cheated out of the presidency by Park in the mid-'70s, had his friends riot back home in southwest Korea when Chun seemed getting ready to once more rig the vote in the upcoming elections. General Chun mowed them down by the hundreds or thousands in Kwangju city. Southwest Koreans are still furious about that massacre.

That atrocity came back to haunt Chun in 1987 when, almost on the eve of the South Koreans' hosting of the 1988 Olympics, he tried to railroad selection of his successor, a retired general named Rho Tae-wu. A new wave of student riots occurred, and this time many adults appeared to be sympathizing with the students. A consensus was being forged that South Korea had outgrown authoritarian government by generals.

Eventually, even Rho pressed for a fairer set of election arrangements, if only so as to quiet his respectable opponents and the Americans. Chun finally had to back down and guarantee what came fairly close to being an honest presidential election at the beginning of 1988.

Kim Dae-jung ran, but so too did his sometime partner, Kim Young-sam, as well as another Kim, Kim Chong-pil, an ex-ally of General Chun, stiff-armed out of government by Chun earlier.

Thanks to the divided opposition and a little ballot-stuffing, Rho won the presidential election, but then his party, the Democratic Justice Party (DJP), lost its majority in the ensuing parliamentary elections.

The students continued to riot next to ex-President Chun's house after the 1988 election, demanding that he be tried for corruption, and in 1989 Chun retired to a

Buddhist monastery, symbolizing thereby admission of his guilt.

This symbolic cleansing proved to be the prelude to a consolidation of parties comparable to and inspired by the coming together of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party in 1955. The DJP and Kim Young-sam's party came together to form the Democratic Liberal Party. The DLP nominated Kim Young-sam for the presidency in the December 1992 elections, and Kim won by 42 percent to Kim Dae-jung's 34 percent in what is generally conceded to have been an honest election.

However, Kim Young-sam's term proved to be more hectic than most observers anticipated. Completing the last bits of industrial maturation has also proved to be more destabilizing than anticipated, partly because of the lag in maturation of the financial system and the long-run consequences of the government continuing the colonial era Japanese policy encouraging producers' cartels.

The financial system's maturation was delayed because informal banking (often run like traditional moneylending, with powerful little old ladies making loans and political donations in cash unpeeled from rolls carried in their stockings) was also the main source of financing for the political system. Cleaning up the banks and quasi-banks inevitably revealed how the banks, quasi-banks and cartels "corrupted" the major politicians and parties.

Kim Young-sam was happy to see his old rivals, Generals Chun and Rho arrested, tried, convicted and sentenced to death for taking bribes to finance their political activities. He was almost as happy to commute their sentences to life imprisonment. But it was another thing when his own new umbrella party, the DLP came under scrutiny and his son faced corruption charges.

The DLP changed its name to New Korea Party and (Kim Young-sam being constitutionally barred from a second term) in August 1997 picked a "Mr. Clean" candidate, Lee Hoi-chang, to run for the presidency. Since Lee had an unassailable reputation for honesty and intelligence, he shot up to the top in the early public opinion polls.

By October, however, Lee had fallen to third place in the polls, trailing not just Kim Dae-jung but a Ross Perot-type named Rhee In-je. There were two causes for this dramatic fall: The minor cause was the revelation that Lee's two sons had

dodged the draft by losing massive amounts of weight. The major cause was that the scandals had cut back on campaigning money for all parties, obliging them to rely on free television debates. The chronic loser, Kim Dae-jung, turned out to be a tv natural, as did the young (age 49) Mr. Rhee. Lee, however, proved a horrible tv performer, worse even than Bob Dole. Kim Dae-jung finally won a presidential election on December 18, 1997 after a relatively riot-free campaign. Perhaps the 1997 election will mark the maturation of South Korean national politics as well as the beginning of its industrial maturation.

Even at its worst, the level of violence and factional turbulence in recent South Korean politics lay well within the norm for Korean political violence going back to the murder of Chang Pogo in the 9th century. Though the students still riot frequently, the current government seems to enjoy a legitimacy that will protect it against both students and military coup-makers. Like Taiwan, South Korea appears to have matured into a parliamentary market society.

In the last revision of this chapter, written before the economic crisis began half way through 1997, I said the following:

As it approaches maturation, the South Korean economy has slowed down, and is beginning to pay the price in lost efficiency for the excessive privileges given to the monopoly licensed *chaebul*, the Korean equivalent to the *zaibatsu* of Japan, by Park's successors.¹³

G. Will South or North Korea Prevail?

1. The north

Prognostication is hard for a historian. Historians normally do not face forward. They tend to back into the future, looking at where they came from. Still, they are no worse at forecasting the future than political scientists, even if no better. Having savaged poor Walt Rostow for his erroneous historical analogy between Korea and Vietnam, I ought to stick my neck out a few inches at least and take my medicine if I prove wrong too.

The taxonomy of the ruling class that I

¹² This was the quickly forgotten "Koreagate" scandal. Though merely aiming at preventing Congress from backing President Carter's premature policy of withdrawing American forces from Korea, and done economically (apparently only Democrats were bribed since they had all the power), many Americans objected to the exercise, since it was driving up the price of Congressman beyond the level American bribers and side payment makers could afford to pay.

¹³ See Mark L. Clifford, *Troubled Tiger: Businessmen, Bureaucrats and Generals in South Korea* (NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1994).

have been employing in this text may provide some hints about the future of the two Koreas. In the north, as in other totalitarian socialist states, political stability is provided by a Communist Party aristocracy, jealously guarding the state and its own prerogatives from a tame lower Party and non-Party meritocracy. There is no plutocracy at all. In principle and from historical experience, we would expect such a state to be highly stable, indeed exceptionally rigid, until it suddenly disintegrates because of the inevitable failure of a non-market economy.

And in fact exceptional rigidity has been the case so far. Until his death in July 1994, Kim Il-sung was the only ruler that North Korea had ever known, and had named his own son as his successor in 1974, establishing a Kim “royal family”—the Kim Dynasty as wags in South Korea put it.

This pre-mortem selection of a successor is something that was more commonly done in imperial China when the royal family was confronted with a predominantly meritocratic ruling class. Strong aristocracies have tended to postpone selection of a successor until the old emperor was dead, leaving the choice in the hands of a council of aristocrats.

A “pillow edict” by the old emperor (i.e. written nomination of his successor by the old ruler concealed by him within the pillow on his deathbed) worked for some of the Manchu emperors in China, but not for the First Red Emperor in Communist China. Hua Guofeng, the man supposedly named in Mao Zedong’s pillow edict, lasted less than four years.

Kim Il-sung’s pre-mortem named successor might also get caught up in the “crisis of the first succession” that one should expect at the beginning of a new dynasty. The odds are, therefore, that there will be trouble now that the senior Kim has departed from the scene. Four years after the elder Kim’s death the younger Kim has finally been formally installed as his successor, though he still does not hold all the positions long occupied by his father.

Repeated attempts in the ‘80s (some successful) to murder South Korean politicians and sabotage South Korean airliners suggest a certain instability at or near the top of the North Korean political hierarchy, or at least an inability to transcend traditionally violent Korean political habits. Both China and Russia are said to

have insisted that North Korea behave itself during the 1988 Olympics, and such good behavior has mostly been maintained during the years since then.

Though still politically stable (at least on the surface), North Korea is economically at least as enfeebled as were the other unreformed totalitarian socialist states which suddenly collapsed in November 1989, and its condition shows signs of growing worse. A series of bad rice crops during the ‘90s reduced it to begging South Korea and Japan for large donations of grain. As part of the negotiations to end North Korea’s supposed atomic weapons program, the U.S. agreed to deliver large amounts of fuel oil to the North and arrange for Seoul to build it two nuclear power plants. Despite grain donations by the West and China, at least a million people have starved to death during the middle years of the 1990s.

North Korea’s success in its negotiations with the U.S. suggest that economic feebleness need not much (if at all) influence its domestic political situation, even during a possible crisis of succession, at least in the short run. But there are no grounds in economic theory for expecting the material situation to improve.

North Korea’s population is not large enough for it to practice economic autarchy. Small states *must* participate in international trade to prosper. Contemplation of the comparative prosperity of pre-1991 Albania and Switzerland must convince you of the plausibility of this generalization. North Korea is, unfortunately, still much more nearly like pre-1991 Albania than Switzerland.

2. South Korea

The south has preserved the spirit of traditional Korean factionalism, including all of the traditional regional rivalries, and the competition between the regions and central authority. This factionalism no longer, however, merely involves a slightly meritized aristocracy, the *yangban*, but a complexly graded civilian and military meritocracy. Due to the burgeoning industrialization of the south, a growing plutocracy is present as well.

Nearly half of the meritocratic wing of this ruling class and a lesser but still disproportionate number of the new plutocracy are descended from the old *yangban*. However, there is no aristocratic component to the South Korean ruling

classes as such. The Japanese colonial occupation took care of that.

The military meritocracy is both more non-*yangban* in its origins and more homogeneous in the templates of merit to which it fits its members than is the civilian wing of the meritocracy. Many of the postwar ruling elite of generals were first recruited into the military by the Japanese. Some of these, and all their successors went to the new military academy set up by the Americans after World War II. Most officers come from the southeast, the old territory of Silla, and most came from non-Christian as well as non-ruling class families. Christians and ex-*yangban* did not usually collaborate with the Japanese.

Though their several usurpations make them look superficially like Central American “colonels,” these South Korean military meritocrats were much more serious men than that. The several ruling generals from 1960 to 1992, after all, presided over the creation of a now mature modern industrial market economy. Only one of the Latin American caudillos—not even the generals who used to rule Brazil—has yet succeeded in doing that! Only General Pinochet of Chile matches the record of developmental encouragement of the economy by the South Korean military, and Pinochet started from a Chili at a rather higher level of development.

General Park’s Bonapartist putsch in 1960 was no more than what the Union General McClellan toyed with doing just before Lincoln relieved him from command of the Army of the Potomac in 1862. McClellan might even have managed to succeed Lincoln with a patina of constitutional legality in the 1864 election but for a few timely battlefield successes by the Union armies. For that matter, the Americans have often elected generals as presidents after wars. South Korea, one might argue, simply used other methods to gain similar results with similar leaders.

South Korea’s civilian meritocrats are somewhat less homogeneous than its military meritocrats in training, if not in background. They are far more likely to be Christians than the military men, and somewhat more likely to be from old *yangban* families.

The Catholics among them tend to be from the southwest, the old Paekche territory. The Presbyterians and Methodists tend to come from Seoul area *yangban* backgrounds. Both tend to have had

secular educations abroad. Indeed their “old boy networks” tend to form along lines that strike Americans as Northeast Asian branches of the alumni associations of the American Big Ten and Pac Ten universities.

Historians of traditional Korea are reminded by the behavior of the contemporary civilian meritocracy of how factions used to form around the traditional Neo-Confucian academies. Knowledge of English and Political Science now tends to provide the sort of advantages that knowledge of Chinese and of Neo-Confucianism tended to provide during the Yi Dynasty.

The South Korean plutocrats are of mixed origin. The largest single bloc within them (though only constituting roughly a third of the total number) comes from the same mixed *yangban* and/or Christian background as does the civilian meritocracy. In fact, many plutocrats are related to influential civilian meritocrats, upon whose influence they depend.

The majority of plutocrats, however, are new men, who have risen on the market through energy, intelligence, and good luck, as well as (like their better-bred brethren) through political connections.

For both wings of the plutocracy, skill in the market appears to carry more weight than political clout. These men more often make side-payments (i.e. payment of extortion) than bribes to politicians. If these men were mostly not able businessmen, South Korea would be exporting cars like the Yugo rather than like the Hyundai.

3. A “hopeful monster” and a “panda’s thumb”

In 1980, I would have predicted that, absent American influence, factionalism would render the south vulnerable to conquest by the more stable northern aristocratic political structure. Not now.

Southern factionalism seems at long last have sorted itself out into the stable parliamentary politics of a mature market capitalism, Japanese style. The arrest and conviction of Generals Chun and Rho seems to have blunted the power of both the military meritocracy and the deep pockets of the mature industrial plutocracy who eased the transition by making side-payments to politicians and both civilian and military bureaucrats wherever and whenever it was expedient to do so.

South Korea can now afford a very large and well-equipped army and air force to counter any threat from the north. The northern Party aristocracy may be falling into a crisis of the first succession.

Its failing economy may be unable to buffer this political crisis. A combination of bad weather and the compounded consequences of Mises’ socialist calculation hypothesis being realized created anticipation of widespread famine by spring 1997. I suggested in the 1989 version of this chapter that the southern plutocracy might use side-payments to put the north on pension, much as West Germany did with East Germany, but East Germany, bad off as it was, never faced famine. The agreement between the Clinton administration and North Korea in October 1994 to bribe North Korea into ending its atomic weapons program by having Japan and South Korea bankroll light water atomic reactors (which do not produce plutonium pure enough for bombs) may have been overtaken by events. The real problem may be how to manage North Korea’s total collapse without war or wholesale starvation.

The Marxist paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould has argued in his essay “The Panda’s Thumb” that some creatures inadvertently evolve into dead ends. The panda’s ancestors were originally omnivores, but the panda evolved into a highly inefficient herbivore whose single stomach could not digest much of the bamboo that became the staple of its diet. Even though it evolved a kind of pseudo-thumb to help it grasp the bamboo, it never became smart enough to use that thumb to do the sorts of things the great apes learned to do with a similar finger.

North Korea may be a kind of historical panda. Started on the road to an economic dead end by Japan, it evolved so much further in that direction that it will never be able to retrace its path on its own.

South Korea may be more like what Gould calls a “hopeful monster.” Our putative anthropoid ape ancestors—upright and nearly hairless apes like us, but retaining the heads (and brains) of chimpanzees—were in some ways less efficient and no brighter than those unchanged apes who could still easily climb trees because their lower hands had not turned into feet.

And yet these ape “monsters” had “hopeful” futures. All they had to do was

evolve fronts and tops to their brains, discover Heaven, and then re-present their successively more complex visions of Heaven onto Earth as the several stages of civilization. Then they could become the rulers of the planet.

It may be that South Korea is that sort of “hopeful monster.” Japan inadvertently started it evolving a market economy. Nothing in its post-colonial history seriously interfered with that trend, and it is maturing into a seemingly stable parliamentary market society.

Even the economic crisis since the summer of 1997 has tended to confirm this stability. In February 1998, South Korea held its presidential election on schedule. No coup occurred when Kim Daejung, the military’s least favorite candidate won. Even before taking office Kim was successfully negotiating with the world bankers a rollover of the first fourth of the \$100 billion short-term debt of his country, and winning generous terms. The South Korean banks were guesstimated during late spring 1998 to have either \$30 or \$80 billion in non-performing loans. Despite this rather large discrepancy, the task of combining and selling off defunct banks’ assets appears to be making as much progress as one can expect (which is to say not much at all). Though unemployment is up drastically, social peace seems to be being preserved and widespread wage cuts are minimizing unemployment.

The consensus is that unless the Japanese banks suffer a quick and complete crackup (which could happen), South Korea will get through the current crisis and may well use it as the occasion to reform its own still primitive banking system into something more like America’s, which also causes busts, but supposedly does so in a more genteel fashion.

Heavy busts seem to hit market economies as they reach full industrial maturation. The Panic of 1893 was long remembered as such a heavy bust, and it occurred just after the closing of the American frontier and American heavy industry’s reaching both maturation and passing the British economy in degree of industrialization. America did not fundamentally reform its economy after 1893, and probably South Korea won’t either once it realizes that it can survive the Panic of 1997 without doing so. EHK