

# 04

## Nature and Impact of Reforms under the Korean Empire

### IB Lines of Inquiry

### Inquiry Questions

- Gwangmu Reforms (1897–1904)
- Modernization of the state

To what extent did the Gwangmu Reforms (1897–1904) lead to change in Korea?

Independence Club (1896–1898)

To what extent did the Independence Club impact Korean politics and society?

Korean resistance to Eulsa Treaty

To what extent did Korea resist Japanese efforts to establish a protectorate?

## Introduction

As seen in Chapter 3, by 1896 Queen Min had been assassinated, the period of Gabo Reform had come to an end and King Gojong had sought refuge in the Russian Legation. He re-emerged in early 1897, and within a matter of months, Korea had been transformed from a kingdom into an empire. In this period of transition, concern about the interests and influence of foreign powers in Korea continued to preoccupy its leaders.

This chapter will explore the rise and fall of the Korean (**Daehan**) Empire at the turn of the 20th century. It will investigate the impacts of another series of reforms, the **Gwangmu Reforms**, which were instituted to establish a new political system and modernise Korea. By examining the extent to which these efforts to **modernise** the state were successful from various **perspectives** – including from political, economic, social and cultural standpoints – it will become clear that this period encompassed both **continuity and change**.

The chapter will then introduce a key actor in calls for modernisation: the **Independence Club**. This organisation promoted greater democracy and challenged the authoritarian power of **Emperor Gojong**, ultimately contributing to its demise after just two years. Despite its brief period of existence, many would argue that the Independence Club remains historically **significant**.

In the final part of the chapter, the path to the eventual downfall of the **Daehan Empire** will be explored with consideration of **cause and consequence**. Increasing Japanese encroachment on Korean independence, in particular through the 1905 **Eulsa Treaty**, prompted resistance efforts from Emperor Gojong and other elements within Korean society. Despite this resistance, Emperor Gojong abdicated his throne in 1907 and, with the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910, the Daehan Empire would cease to exist.

## Timeline

|                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1895                | King Gojong announces the Education Edict.                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 1896                | King Gojong goes into internal exile in the Russian legation after the assassination of his wife Empress Myeongseong.                                                                                                                |
| 1896                | The Independence Club is established.                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| 1897 (October 13th) | Korea is declared an Empire (Daehan jeguk) and Gojong performs the Rites of Heaven to become an emperor. The Gwangmu Reforms begin.                                                                                                  |
| 1898 (December)     | Emperor Gojong definitively outlaws the Independence Club and arrests many of its key members. This included Syngman Rhee, who would later become President of the Republic of Korea.                                                |
| 1899 (August 17th)  | The State Law of the Daehan Empire is enacted, affording Emperor Gojong absolute power.                                                                                                                                              |
| 1904–1905           | The Russo-Japanese War is fought, in which Japan will emerge victorious. In the early stages, the <i>Japan-Korea Protocol</i> and <i>The First Japan-Korea Agreement</i> form key steps in formalising Japanese domination of Korea. |
| 1905 (June)         | The Taft-Katsura agreement pledges US support for Japanese interests in Korea in exchange for Japanese recognition of US interests in the Philippines.                                                                               |
| 1905 (November)     | The contested Eulsa Treaty makes Korea a Japanese Protectorate.                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 1906–1907           | Emperor Gojong tries to gain international support in opposition to the Eulsa treaty including sending many letters to foreign powers and three emissaries to the Hague Peace Convention.                                            |
| 1907 (July 19th)    | Under duress, Emperor Gojong declares that he will abdicate the throne and pass power to his son, Sunjong.                                                                                                                           |

## Key Terms

|                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Gwangmu Reforms</b>                     | A wide range of political, economic and social reforms enacted from 1897-1904 associated with the establishment of the new Korean Empire. These reforms mostly aimed to modernise Korea, though many also served to increase the power of the Royal House.                                                              |
| <b>Daehan jeguk (The Great Han Empire)</b> | The new name given to the Korean state as it established itself as an empire rather than a kingdom in 1897.                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Independence Club</b>                   | A club of political and social activists who sought a strong, proud, modern, and independent Korea as well as a reduction in authoritarian rule.                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Eulsa Treaty</b>                        | Also known as the Second Japan-Korea Agreement by the Japanese and the <i>Forced Treaty of the Eulsa Year</i> by many Koreans, this treaty officially made Korea a protectorate of Japan.                                                                                                                               |
| <b>memorialise</b>                         | A process within the Korean monarchy's system wherein the Korean people could make formal requests or petitions to the king.                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>hangeul</b>                             | The Korean alphabet. Most documents and publications used the Chinese alphabet throughout the 19th century rather than this one.                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>modernisation</b>                       | A process which involves movement away from traditional social, political, economic, and cultural structures towards greater urbanisation, industrialisation, and systematisation. In this period, modernisation was also typically associated with Westernisation and integration in an increasingly globalised world. |

## Key People

|                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Emperor Gojong</b> | As of 1897, Korea's monarch became known as Emperor Gojong. His reign would end with his abdication in 1907.                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Prince Sunjong</b> | Emperor Gojong's son and heir. Prince Sunjong became Emperor following his father's abdication. Some contemporary observers described him as having cognitive or developmental difficulties, though historians remain uncertain about this. |
| <b>Philip Jaisohn</b> | A prominent political figure involved in the failed coup of 1884. Jaisohn later became an advisor to Emperor Gojong and founded the Independence Club in 1896.                                                                              |
| <b>Syngman Rhee</b>   | A student and active member of the Independence Club from 1896, Rhee would later become the first President of the Republic of Korea.                                                                                                       |
| <b>Ito Hirobumi</b>   | Japan's lead envoy, responsible for the signing of the Eulsa Treaty. Ito would become the first Resident-General of the Japanese Protectorate in Korea, later assassinated by Ahn Jung-geun.                                                |



## Source Activity One

### ATL: Thinking Skills

### Map of the Korean Empire's Telegraph System in 1905



The map beside shows the extent of the Korean Empire's telegraph network by the end of the modernising Gwangmu Reforms in 1905. The first telegraph line was set up in 1885, and by 1902, there were approximately 23,000km of telegraph lines in Korea.

« **Source:** Map of the Imperial Telegraphs of Korea, by J. de Moidrey, 1905. Illustration *La Géographie*, a French Geography Society bulletin, volume 12, 1905.

### Question

1. How could you use the map as evidence to show both the successes and limitations of modernisation efforts up to 1905?

# I. Context: From Kingdom to Empire

## Inquiry Question

### Why did Korea become an Empire in 1897?

Demands for the establishment of an Empire had begun in the immediate aftermath of Queen Min's assassination by the Japanese. In 1895, Gojong's cabinet had **memorialised** (petitioned) the king and urged him to take on the role of emperor. They argued that establishing Korea as an Empire was necessary in order to demonstrate the shift in its relationship with China from that of a tributary state to an equal counterpart. Advocates showed a strong desire to avoid Korea being seen as inferior to its powerful neighbours, Japan and China, both of which were Empires at this time. By repositioning itself in this way, Korea could also show the rest of the international community that it was moving out from under China's sphere of influence and taking a more active role as a player in the modern world.

It is clear that the establishment of a Korean Empire was closely tied up with Korea's concerns about maintaining its independence from growing external threats to its autonomy. Supporters used the slogan "No Emperor, No Independence" to advocate for the change. Once Gojong eventually agreed to take on this role, he stated that he was accepting it in order to "lay the groundwork for accomplishing the country's complete independence and to exercise its autonomous rights."

Some Korean political commentators, on the other hand, were critical of the idea of Gojong's elevation to Emperor. Politician Yun Chi-ho, for instance, was a reformer who advocated for greater democratisation. He argued that too much national energy was being spent on a measure that was essentially symbolic rather than being channelled towards more meaningful change in the management of the country's affairs both domestically and internationally.

Nonetheless, on October 12, 1897, in a lavish and highly ritualised ceremony, Gojong was crowned emperor. He performed rites and adopted yellow, rather than red, robes, which had previously been reserved for Chinese emperors. Korea was no longer to be known as Joseon wangguk (The Kingdom of Korea) and would henceforth be called **Deahan jeguk (The Great Han Empire)**. Emperor Gojong announced the beginning of a new era, Gwangmu, meaning 'Glorious Military.'



## Skills & Competencies of a Historian

**Considering Diverse Perspectives:** Identify the perspectives of those that supported and opposed the move to establish a Korean Empire in the text.

1. What reasons do they give to support their perspective?
2. Do you find one perspective more compelling than the other? Why?



« A portrait of Emperor Gojong wearing yellow robes created sometime after 1902, now housed in the National Museum of Korea.



## Source Activity Two

### AtL: Research Skills

This is an official portrait of Emperor Gojong. Using the information from the text above and a close inspection of the image itself, consider the following questions.

#### Questions:

1. What impressions does the official portrait give the viewer of Emperor Gojong?
2. How does it create these impressions? Give specific examples.
3. Why do you think the Emperor would have wanted his official portrait to convey these impressions in particular?
4. What are the limitations of this source for a historian?

## II. The Gwangmu Reforms & Modernisation the State

### Inquiry Question

To what extent did the Gwangmu Reforms (1897–1904) lead to change in Korea?

Shortly after the creation of the Great Han Empire, Gojong introduced a series of reforms. These reforms had two main goals: to strengthen the position of the royal house and to move the Korean state towards **modernisation**. Modernisation was viewed by its advocates as critical to strengthening Korea economically, militarily, socially, and geopolitically in order to maintain its independence. More radical efforts to modernise had been proposed under the Gabo Reforms (see Chapter 3) but had received significant backlash from conservative elements. This new initiative, which would be known as the **Gwangmu Reforms**, therefore took a more restrained approach. Emperor Gojong's edict of October 20, 1897 announced a focus on "adopting the new on the basis of the old." This phrasing seemed designed to reassure more conservative leaders within the empire that Korean tradition was not being abandoned. The edict, nonetheless, marked the launch of a series of changes, many of which were designed to help bring Korea into the modern age.

### Political Changes

#### Absolute Power

In the first year of his reign as Emperor, Gojong appeared to oscillate between the idea of pursuing a semi-democratic model of government, closer to that of a constitutional monarchy, and an approach in which he would hold absolute power. Ultimately, the Emperor decided to establish an absolute monarchy. This was cemented with the introduction of a new central legal document – the State Law of the **Daehan Empire** – in 1899. While this did serve to markedly expand the powers of the monarch, some historians such as Hyunmo Park suggest that this decision was also driven by a belief that it would improve the efficiency of the system of government.

The State Law granted the Emperor the ability to have laws enacted and enforced, to reorganise the civil service, and to decide on all Korean military matters and foreign affairs. Gojong not only increased his personal power in this period, but his reforms also empowered the ministry that supervised the affairs of the royal family as well. By 1907, there had been 150 legal amendments giving new powers to the Royal Household Ministry.



## Skills & Competencies of a Historian

### Articles 1-5 of the State Law of the Daehan Empire 1899

**Context:** The State Law was enacted almost two years after the establishment of the Daehan Empire. After an initial period of consultation with a People's Assembly, Emperor Gojong decided against pursuing a constitutional monarchy and instead sought a system of absolute rule. This document was drafted by the Legislation Correction Board. They deliberately chose not to call it a 'constitution' but rather a 'state law' because its power drew directly from the Emperor, not a process of parliamentary approval. Emperor Gojong promulgated this law on August 17, 1899.

**ARTICLE 1:** The Daehan Empire is an autonomous, independent empire, officially recognized by all nations in the world.

**ARTICLE 2:** The Daehan Empire is an autocratic monarchy, which has continued over the past 500 years and will continue unchanged forever.

**ARTICLE 3:** The Great Emperor of the Daehan Empire shall have infinite imperial authority. This is, as in international law, an establishment of the polity of his own exertion.

**ARTICLE 4:** Any citizen who makes any attempt to violate the Great Emperor's imperial authority shall be regarded as being devoid of citizenship, regardless of whether he actually committed the act or not.

**ARTICLE 5:** The Great Emperor of the Daehan Empire shall have supreme command of the military and naval forces, decide the formation of the forces, and may have the power to proclaim or terminate martial law.

**Source:** Cited in Park Hyunmo, 'How and when the Gyeongguk daejeon System Dismantled?: A Study on Political Meaning of the Daehan Empire's Birth', *The Review of Korean Studies* Volume 12 Number 3 (September 2009): 197-221. P. 205-6.

### Tasks

1. Summarise each of the articles above in your own words.
2. What do you think is the main goal of each article? Why has it been included?
3. Using this source, describe the political system of the Korean Empire.

### Considering Diverse Perspectives

Consider the demands voiced by supporters of the Donghak Peasant Revolution and the Gabo Reforms (Chapter 3). How do you think they would view this 'state law'?

## Voices of the People

Gojong's power was subject to fewer checks and balances than under the Joseon kingdom. Furthermore, while previous kings had put measures in place to allow the people to voice their opinions to the monarch through formal processes like **memorials** and *petitions*, these were removed in the Empire. Some argue that the lack of opportunity for direct communication between the people and the Emperor caused many to turn against him.

## Political Classes

Traditionally, ministers and members of the civil service had all come from yangban families (see Chapter 1). As the Gabo Reforms had done away with the requirements to pass the traditional entrance exam to enter the civil service, Emperor Gojong increasingly favoured ambitious members of the lower classes during the imperial period. He viewed the members of these classes as being more adaptable to Western ideas and technologies than their yangban counterparts and therefore more aligned with his modernising efforts. This marked a significant shift in political power and brewed tensions between conservative and progressive elements within the government.

## International Relations

One of the key political developments as a result of the Gwangmu Reforms was a significant increase in Korea's international engagement. The Korean Empire signed a treaty of commerce with China which was an important step in establishing itself as an equal rather than a tributary state, particularly in comparison to previous agreements such as the 1882 treaty which had put Korean trade under Chinese control. They also established an embassy there in 1899 and, over the course of the late 19th century, Korean legations were set up in the USA, Russia, France, England, and Germany. Notably, Korea became a signatory to the Geneva Convention, a set of international humanitarian laws, in 1903. Korea also joined the Universal Postal Union in 1899, while the expansion of the telegraph network allowed 1000 messages to be sent internationally in 1902 alone.



### Skills & Competencies of a Historian

#### Considering Diverse Perspectives

1. Which groups might have viewed these political changes positively? Why?
2. Which groups might have viewed these political changes negatively? Why?
3. Why might removing avenues for public petition have fuelled opposition to Emperor Gojong? Can you think of parallels in other historical contexts?

## Military Changes

The Gwangmu Reforms focused heavily on growing and modernising the military in order to protect Korea from foreign threats. Prior to the establishment of the Daehan Empire, ministers of the King's government had greater control of military affairs, but the State Law of 1899 gave Gojong direct command of the military and navy. He established a Supreme Military Council, which acted on his orders rather than those of other government bodies such as the Supreme Council and the Ministry of War. A new military academy was created to train soldiers and 40% of the government budget was allocated to acquiring modern weaponry. Foreign advisors were brought in to train Korean soldiers in the use of the new technology and their presence was sometimes cause for protest (see Independence Club section below).



## Skills & Competencies of a Historian

### Source A

**Context:** The source is a photo of Korean soldiers training in archery. The photo was taken in 1904 towards the end of the Gwangmu Reform period for a book written by British journalist, Angus Hamilton, about Korea.



« Hamilton, Angus. En Corée. Translated by Léon Bazalgette. Paris: Félix Juven, 1904.

### Source B

**Context:** The source is a photo of Korean soldiers of the Imperial Army holding modern rifles in the guard barracks in front of Gwanghwamun Gate in Seoul. The exact date and origin of the photograph is unknown but it is archived within the Gwangmu period by the National Institute of Korean History.

» **Source:** National Institute of Korean History (국사편찬위원회). "한국사 이미지 자료." Accessed November 23, 2025. [https://contents.history.go.kr/front/ki/list.do?pageIndex=7&pageUnit=20&blockSize=10&sortColumn=A.LEVEL\\_ID&sortDir=ASC&listType=card&periodCode=ki\\_age\\_60&typeCode=&fieldCode=#self](https://contents.history.go.kr/front/ki/list.do?pageIndex=7&pageUnit=20&blockSize=10&sortColumn=A.LEVEL_ID&sortDir=ASC&listType=card&periodCode=ki_age_60&typeCode=&fieldCode=#self).



**Analysing Concepts: Continuity & Change**

1. How can the photographs in Sources A and B be used to argue that there was both continuity and change in the Korean military during the Gwangmu period?

**Using Evidence**

1. What might explain the different impressions each photograph gives of the nature of the Korean military during the Imperial era?
2. Evaluate each source's usefulness to a historian studying the modernisation of the military in the Gwangmu period.

Despite a significant proportion of government spending being directed to the military, an overall lack of funds seems to have prevented the realisation of further reforms. This included the failure to fully implement a plan to establish conscription in 1903. When the Japanese landed thousands of troops in Korea in 1904 as part of their preparations for war with Russia, Korean military officials could mount little resistance to their demands. This episode appeared to suggest that efforts at reform had failed to create the 'Glorious Military' for which the Gwangmu period had been named. This would have far reaching consequences for Korea's ability to maintain its independence.

**Economic Changes****Land Ownership**

In order to modernise the system of land ownership, two new institutions were created: the Bureau of Land Survey and the Bureau of Land Ownership. Land ownership in the late Joseon era had been complex and sometimes inconsistent; multiple people could all claim partial ownership of overlapping areas of land and ownership documents were privately managed without state control. Moreover, it had been 180 years since a national land survey had been carried out in Korea. Western experts in surveying supported Korean officials to create more accurate measures of land holdings and to issue standardised private land title documents to landowners.

These improved and formalised land ownership records strengthened the state's control but were also designed to ensure that land tax was applied more consistently throughout the country. Approximately two thirds of Korea's land was successfully recorded in this way.



## Source Activity Four

### ATL: Thinking Skills

#### GDP/person, Major East Asian Countries

(Gear-Khamis dollar, calculated by the average prices of dollar in 1990)

|                    | 1700 | 1820 | 1850 | 1870 | 1911  | 1912  | 1913  | 1914  | 1915  | 1916  |
|--------------------|------|------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Korea</b>       |      | 600  |      | 604  | 815   | 843   | 869   | 902   | 1,048 | 1,018 |
| <b>China</b>       | 600  | 600  | 600  | 530  |       |       | 552   |       |       |       |
| <b>Japan</b>       | 570  | 669  | 679  | 737  | 1,356 | 1,384 | 1,387 | 1,387 | 1,430 | 1,630 |
| <b>India</b>       | 550  | 533  | 533  | 533  | 691   | 689   | 673   | 673   | 691   | 710   |
| <b>Indonesia</b>   | 580  | 612  | 637  | 578  | 839   | 838   | 874   | 874   | 866   | 870   |
| <b>Philippines</b> |      | 584  |      | 624  | 913   | 911   | 938   | 938   | 875   | 1,003 |
| <b>Thailand</b>    |      | 570  |      | 608  |       |       | 841   | 841   |       |       |

**Source:** Angus Maddison. 2012, "Historical Statistics for the World Economy: 1-2008 AD," (<http://www.ggdc.net/MADDISON/oriindex.htm>). Angus Maddison is an economic historian, publishing historical global economic data with the OECD Development Centre (Yi, 2025).

**Caption:** Hwang Tae-yeon (2017) argues that Korea's economic rise until 1915 was driven by the success of the Gwangmu land reforms, a modernizing initiative by the Daehan Empire that stabilized land ownership and boosted agricultural productivity. However, this growth was halted and eventually reversed by the Japanese Land Survey Program (1910–1918), discussed in Chapter 5. By dismantling the Gwangmu reforms and implementing predatory administrative changes, the Japanese colonial government effectively expropriated the achievements of the Korean empire, shifting the economic benefits away from the Korean population and toward the colonial administration, resulting in the per capita income decline observed starting in 1916 (Yi, 2025).

### Questions:

1. What does this data suggest about the impact of the Gwangmu land reforms and other modernization efforts led by Emperor Gojong?
2. What are the strengths and limitations in using data to identify causal relationships?
3. What does the 1916 drop suggest about the long-term impact of colonial land policy changes compared to the original Gwangmu reforms?

## Currency

Another feature of the Gwangmu reforms was the effort to standardise the currency being used in Korea. This was done with the goal of strengthening the Empire's position in global trading and to stabilise the economy. One key change was to move away from using the yang which was based on silver and instead implement the Korean won, a currency that would align with the global gold-standard. The 1901 Ordinance on Currency actioned this change and was followed by an ordinance to establish a Central Bank in 1903 that would oversee all minting and the issuance of bank notes.

Despite these important steps, by 1905 it was clear that the creation of the Central Bank proved difficult to fund and, while the groundwork had been laid, the Empire had been unable to successfully standardise the currency. This process was also made challenging due to the ongoing dominance of Japanese banking systems in Korea (see page 131).

## Government Monopolies

A number of different government-owned companies were created in the Gwangmu period. For example, the Samjeongsa corporation was founded to maintain a monopoly of Korea's ginger industry. The Royal Household Ministry also strengthened the economic power of the Emperor's family by securing control of mining and fishing rights, the national mint, the production of red ginseng, and the rail sector.

## Industry & Infrastructure

Traditional cottage industries and handicrafts were increasingly replaced by manufactured goods as modernisation picked up pace. Factories and plants were established for iron and brass products, pottery, and paper, as well as for the processing of consumables such as rice, beer, and tobacco. Prominent politician and moderniser Yi Yongik was one of many Koreans who played a key role in these efforts. He established factories for glass, porcelain, weaving and arms as well as advancing coalmining and railways projects.

Major infrastructure projects such as these created considerable transformation in various aspects of Korean life. This included the significant expansion of services such as the postal and telegraph systems (see map on page 119). Emperor Gojong established the Hanseong Electric Company with his own funds in 1898 and entrusted to it major projects in electricity, plumbing, and telephone networks.

The company was also responsible for the construction of new tramlines. The first of these opened in 1899 and was the second tramline in Asia, behind only that of Kyoto. By 1904, at least 16km of electric streetcar lines had been constructed. In 1898, the government established a railroad company, and Korea's first ever train line was constructed between Incheon and Seoul in 1899. At the same time, electric streetlights began to illuminate the city of Seoul, and an emphasis was placed on the development of energy industries such as oil and coal to fuel the introduction of widespread electricity use in Korea.



## Skills & Competencies of a Historian

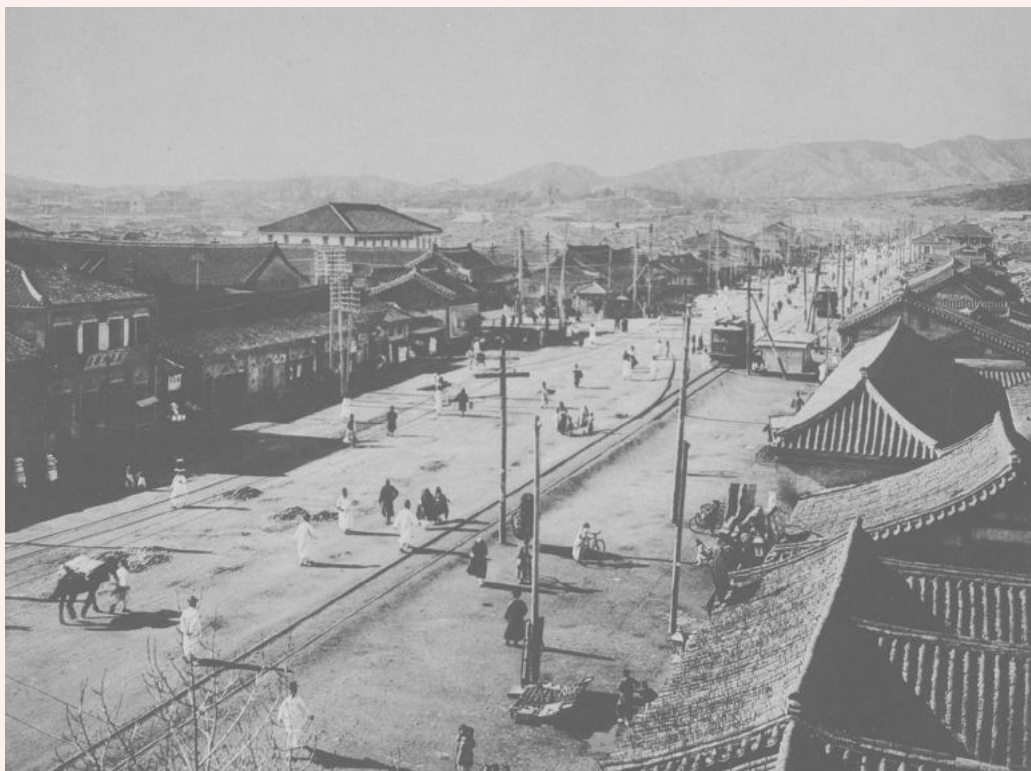
### Source A: Description of Seoul (1904)

**Context:** Angus Hamilton was a British journalist who spent several months working as a correspondent in Korea. During his stay, he wrote a book simply entitled 'Korea' which was published in 1904. In this excerpt he describes changes to the city of Seoul during the period of Gwangmu Reforms.

"Old Seoul, with its festering alleys, its winter accumulations of every species of filth, its plastering mud and penetrating foulness, has almost totally vanished from within the walls of the capital. The streets are magnificent, spacious, clean, admirably made and well drained. The narrow, dirty lanes have been widened; gutters have been covered, and roadways broadened; until, with its trains, its cars, and its lights, its miles of telegraph lines, its Railway Station Hotel, brick houses and glass windows, Seoul is within measurable distance of becoming the highest, most interesting, and cleanest city in the East. It is still not one whit Europeanised, for the picturesqueness of the purely Korean principles and standards of architecture has been religiously maintained, and is to be observed in all future improvements."

**Source:** Hamilton, Angus. Korea. London: W. Heinemann, 1904, p. 34.

### Source B: Photograph of Seoul (1905)



Photograph of Jongno Street in Seoul taken in 1905.

**Inquiry question: To what extent had the city of Seoul been modernised by the end of the Gwangmu Reforms?**

### Explaining Content from Historical Sources

1. Compare and contrast what the sources reveal about the **modernisation** of the city of Seoul in the early 1900s. Do they entirely corroborate one another? Can you suggest reasons for any points on which they differ?
2. What is different about what a historian can learn from a photographic source versus a written source? Support your thinking with examples from sources A and B.

### Analysing Concepts

1. Emperor Gojong had stated that the objectives of the Gwangmu Reforms were “adopting the new on the basis of the old.” Using both sources A and B, look for evidence of change (modernisation) and continuity (tradition).

Create a T-Chart like the example below to record your examples.

| Change (Modernisation) | Continuity (Tradition) |
|------------------------|------------------------|
|                        |                        |

## Paper 3 Practice

Imagine you are writing an essay on the following question:

**To what extent do you agree with the view that efforts to modernise the Korean Empire had been unsuccessful by 1905?**

Using Sources A and B as evidence, as well as your own knowledge, write one structured body paragraph for this essay with the city of Seoul as its main focus.

## Foreign Trade and Investment

Many of these economic changes were brought about with significant intervention from foreigners. Emperor Gojong employed 200 foreigners who worked both as government advisors and technicians for the major industrialisation and infrastructure projects he had launched. As more foreign workers, missionaries, and diplomats arrived in Seoul, hotels and shops catering to an international market began to appear in certain areas of the city. Korea's formerly isolationist stance was also markedly changed as

foreign loans and investment were not only allowed but actively encouraged. Similarly, foreign trade, especially with Japan, began to impact the agricultural sector with farmers increasingly producing rice, soybeans and other products for export. While some viewed foreign economic involvement as important for modernisation in Korea, others were concerned about growing foreign influence and Korean dependency.

## Examples of Foreign Investment

| USA                                                                                                                   | Russia                                           | England                                 | Japan                                           |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Gold mines                                                                                                            | Coaling stations on two islands                  | Coaling station on the island of Komun  | Two coaling stations                            |
| Seoul's infrastructure: rail & tram lines, waterworks, telephone networks, electric power lines, and main power plant | Timber production rights in the northern forests | One gold mine, shared with a US company | Railway construction from Seoul to Pusan        |
|                                                                                                                       | Smaller gold mines                               | Small timber production concessions     | Daiichi Ginko bank with branches all over Korea |
| Near monopoly on kerosene for lamps                                                                                   | Smaller banks such as the Russo-Korean Bank      | Smaller banks such as HSBC              | More than 200 businesses operating in Korea     |
| Hospitals and schools                                                                                                 |                                                  |                                         |                                                 |

## Social and Cultural Changes

### Education

To meet the demands of a modern society, reforms in the area of education were also deemed necessary. Vocational and medical schools were established to train technicians and doctors, while a wider range of foreign language schools were created to improve the ability of young Koreans to engage in global networks. Gojong's government increased the number of primary and secondary schools and began producing modern textbooks to support an improved standard of education. Between 1895-1905, they published 106 different types of textbooks.

The government did not, however, support the establishment of educational institutions for girls. In 1898, a group of yangban women established an organisation which petitioned Emperor Gojong to allow them to create a school for girls by appealing to his commitment to modernity: 'It is time for us to eradicate old customs and to strive for enlightenment and progress. For this, we need to establish girls' schools and to send out daughters so that they can become a group of talented women like in other countries.' The emperor eventually allowed the group to establish a school using their own funds. This school, along with a handful of girls schools established in or near Seoul by US missionaries, remained the only institutions available for girls education in the Great Han Empire.

## Cultural Changes

Western influences were felt in the fashions adopted under the Gwangmu reforms. Emperor Gojong and his male family members began to wear Western-style military uniforms more often than their traditional robes. Such uniforms were also to be used by the Empire's military forces. From 1900, civil servants were required to wear Western-style suits and hats on official business in an effort to reduce the visible influence of Confucianism in the political sphere. Western habits were also much more visible in other aspects of the Emperor's lifestyle, including the drinking of coffee and champagne and the hosting of banquets with Western-style foods.

While the Short Hair Act had originally emerged under the Gabo reforms, it was reinstated in 1900 to mandate that men cut off their traditional topknots. Emperor Gojong and Prince Sunjong had both been wearing their hair short since 1895, but now even some conservative leaders and military officials followed suit. Certain Confucian scholars and traditionalists continued to oppose the measure, however, and it was not heavily enforced.



### Skills & Competencies of a Historian



« **Source:** Emperor Gojong in approximately 1907 in Western-style military dress with short hair.

### Considering Diverse Perspectives

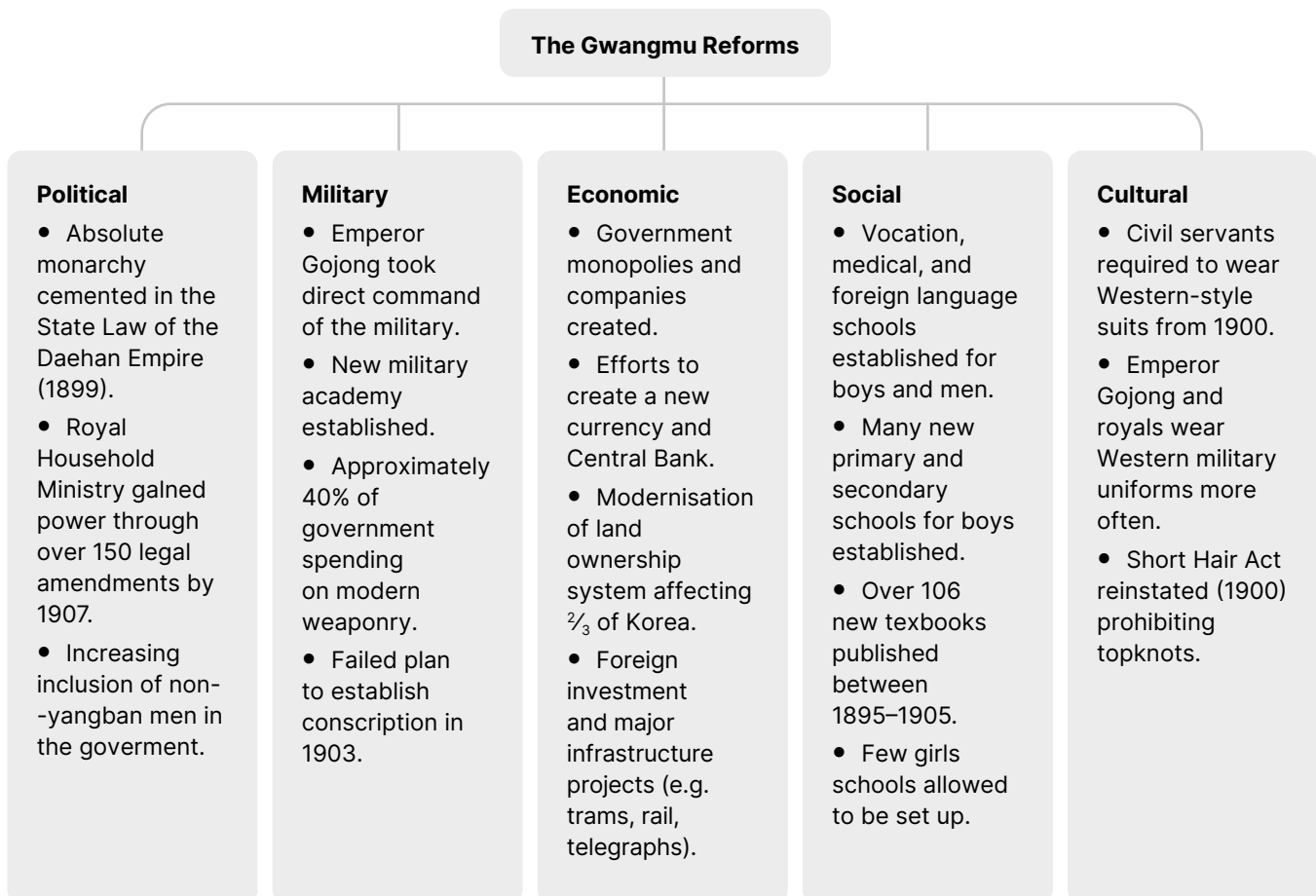
1. Why might some members of Korean society have felt so strongly opposed to changing their hair and clothes in the way Emperor Gojong had in the photo above?

## End of the Gwangmu Reforms

The Gwangmu Reforms were brought to an end when Korea became a protectorate of Japan in 1905. Between 1897-1904, Emperor Gojong had pursued significant reforms that had seen changes in the government, military, economy and culture of Korea.

Historians disagree on how significant these changes were, given that many of the reforms had fallen short of their ambitious modernising goals by the time that Japanese intervention halted their progress. Despite advancement in many areas, there were notable limitations. Land surveys were incomplete, the currency had not been standardised, military reforms appeared to have limited impact, and infrastructure changes mainly affected the capital rather than the rest of the Empire. Moreover, while some changes in the government moved it more towards meritocracy than a class-based system, many others had strengthened the position of the royal family rather than shifting Korea towards modern democracy. Many at the time believed that Korea had not been strengthened as hoped during the Gwangmu period, with one Korean newspaper article describing the Empire as a “a flimsy ship crossing a raging river.”

There is little consensus on the reasons why the reforms were unable to fully achieve their aims. Scholars point to a variety of factors such as a lack of capital to fund the reforms, inconsistency in Emperor Gojong's leadership, resistance from local leaders, and limitations as a result of foreign influences.



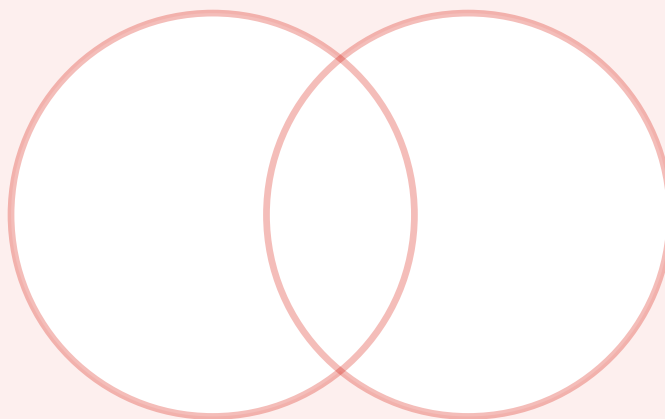


### Skills & Competencies of a Historian

#### Check your Understanding

The two main objectives of the Gwangmu Reforms were to strengthen the position of the royal house and to modernise Korea with a view to maintaining its independence.

1. Review the various reforms mentioned in the text and decide where they belong in the Venn diagram below: did they strengthen the royal house, modernise the Korean state, or both?



#### Considering Diverse Perspectives

1. Were the reforms successful at achieving their goals or were they unsuccessful? Use evidence to evaluate these two perspectives.
2. Draw a line to represent a scale of success. Add specific examples of reforms from the text above where you believe they belong on the line.



Now read the arguments of two different historians below.

### Secondary Sources (Historiographical Perspectives)

#### Source A

**Context:** Michael Seth is an American history professor specialising in the history of Korea. This excerpt is drawn from his book 'A concise history of Korea: from antiquity to the present.'

"Although many scholars have viewed the attempts by the state to carry out needed reforms in its late decades as pathetically inadequate or carried out only by Japanese intervention, some recent research has suggested that the late Choson state at times acted independently

to rationalize administration and carry out social change. The modernization that took place under Japanese colonial rule can be seen as a continuation of these earlier efforts. However, Chinese interference, Japanese expansionism, and Russian intrigue, along with the indecisive leadership of the king and the petty self-interest of many members of the elite all hampered these attempts to carry out reform and maintain sovereignty."

**Source:** Seth, Michael J, A concise history of Korea: from antiquity to the present, Lanham; Boulder; New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016, p.273.

## Source B

**Context:** Andre Schmid is a Canadian history professor with expertise in Korean and East Asian studies. This excerpt is drawn from his book 'Korea Between Empires, 1895-1919.'

"By 1907, when King Kojong was forced to abdicate, it was clear that in the last ten years of his reign, immense changes in both the apparatus and ideology of governance had taken place. That the designs for reform were often bolder than their implementation was a common critique. How effectively these changes were carried out by a state that could not confidently impose its will on the localities remains a question of much debate. The difficulty of extending reforms outside the capital is one reason that questions of local governance were discussed so widely in these years. Whatever the answer, it is clear that even in the more conservative Kwangmu reforms, the assumptions about governance had shifted as dramatically as the old balance of forces that had maintained the stability of the dynasty for more than half a millennium had been undermined."

**Source:** Schmid, Andre. Korea between Empires, 1895-1919. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002, pp. 29-30.

*Note: The romanised spelling in this source has been preserved from the original version. Current official romanisation would use the spelling 'Gojong' rather than 'Kojong' and 'Gwangmu' rather than 'Kwangmu'.*

## Understanding Arguments

1. Summarise the main argument about the success of the Gwangmu Reforms made by each historian in one sentence:

*Michael Seth argues that...*

*Andre Schmidt argues that...*

2. Identify at least 3 points made by each historian to support their argument.
3. Compare and contrast these two historians' arguments and reasoning about the success of the Gwangmu reforms. On which points do they agree and on which do they diverge?
4. Do you find one argument more convincing than the other? Why?
5. How do their ideas differ from or add to your own evaluation of the Gwangmu reforms in Activity 2? What would be your overall evaluation now?

## Paper 3 Practice

1. "The Gwangmu Reforms (1897-1904) led to significant change in Korea." To what extent do you agree with this claim?
2. To what extent do you agree with the view that efforts to modernise the state of Korea were successful between 1897-1904?

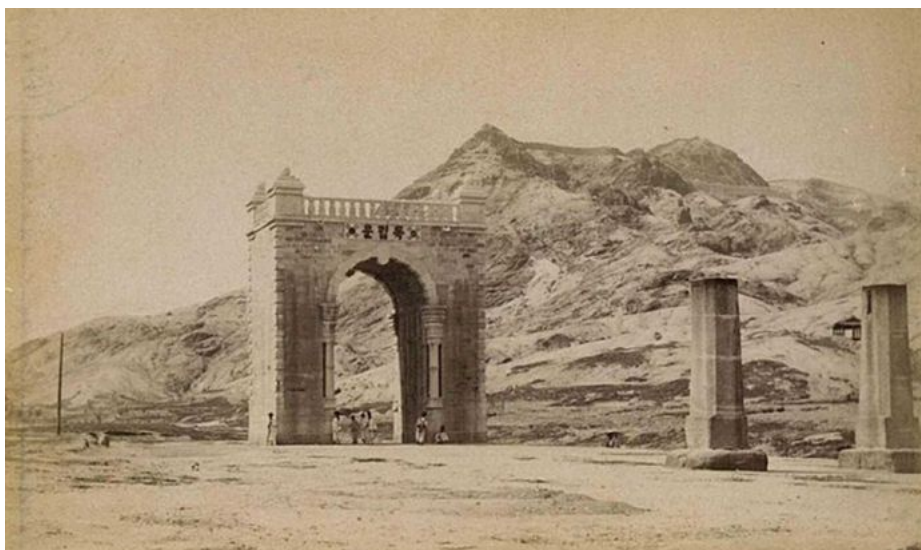
## III. The Independence Club (1896–1898)

### Inquiry Question

To what extent did the Independence Club impact Korean politics and society?

### What was the Independence Club?

As Korea was experiencing a range of changes in its move towards Empire and modernity, some groups in particular sought to seize on the opportunities this change presented. The Independence Club was a nationalist organisation supported and funded by King Gojong and established in July of 1896 by Philip Jaisohn (Seo Jaepil) and Yun Ch'i-ho. Within approximately three months, the Club had attracted 10,000 members. The leadership was made up primarily of progressive politicians and activists, including many youths from the Baejae Hakdang, a school established by an American Methodist missionary in 1885. The group's first main focus was the removal of the Imperial Welcome Gate in Seoul, which had long been used as a point to welcome Chinese ambassadors to whom Korea had traditionally been subservient prior to the Treaty of Shimonoseki in 1895. Instead, they campaigned for the construction of the Independence Arch.



« The Independence Arch in the early 1900s. The Arch still stands in Seoul today.

## Ideology

The club's activities and ideology quickly expanded far beyond the construction of this symbolic structure which had already begun in late 1896. Its main objective was to develop a strong sense of Korean national identity and a commitment to maintaining Korean sovereignty and independence. The official slogan of the Independence Club was "loyalty and patriotism."

The philosophy of the club was not always clear and consistent but some key threads emerged. In general, the club:

- supported the monarchy which they viewed as an institution to unify Korea
- criticised authoritarian rule, advocating for reform and wider political participation in some form of constitutional monarchy
- championed modernisation and showed great admiration for Western civilisation
- sought to bolster respect and pride for Korean traditions

## Publications and the Hangeul Language

One of the main activities of the club was the regular publication of a newspaper. *The Independent* (*Dongnib Sinmun*) had been set up by Philip Jaisohn just prior to the establishment of the club in April 1896 and was disseminated in all eight provinces of Korea. As well as acting as an unofficial mouthpiece for the club's ideas, the newspaper sought to publish the views and works of everyday Koreans. It encouraged readers to submit patriotic songs and letters to the editor where they could express their concerns about the government.

Rather than using the Chinese script favoured by elites, as almost all publications did at the time, *Dongnib* was published using the more common Korean **hangeul** language as well as English. It was the first Korean newspaper to be published in these two languages. The use of the **hangeul** script was a deliberate effort to strengthen a sense of pride in Korean culture and identity. Club member Ju Si-gyeong went even further in advancing **hangeul** language by writing the first major grammar book in 1898.

Chinese dominance, not only in terms of language but also history, was a concern of the club. They believed that because Koreans traditionally studied Chinese history far more than their own, their ability to develop a sense of national identity had been limited. To combat this trend, Club members authored a five-volume Korean History entitled *History of the Great Eastern State* in 1896.



## Skills & Competencies of a Historian

### Source A: Editorial in the Dongnip Sinmun, 1897

**Context:** The following excerpt appeared in an editorial in the newspaper of the Independence Club, the Dongnib Sinmun, in April 1897. The editorial was written by Chu Si-gyong, the author of the first grammar book of the **hangeul** language.

“Independent nations unify their people with their own language and writing. When the nation's language which provides mutual understanding in daily life and the realm of ideas falls into disorder and is dominated by another people's language, then the thought and organization of the nation is disordered accordingly [...] The Korean alphabet, the work of our illustrious forefathers, can be learned in a day by our children. It is something all Koreans, men and women, have as a common gift. Learning and using the alphabet is the most urgent task before us, especially in this age of enlightened government.”

**Source:** Dongnib Sinmun, April 7th 1897, cited in Robinson, Michael F., and Michael E. Robinson. “Nationalism and the Korean Tradition, 1896—1920: Iconoclasm, Reform, and National Identity.” *Korean Studies*, vol. 10, 1986, pp. 35–53. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23718830>.

### Check your Understanding

1. According to the source, what was the significance of using the hangeul language to forge an independent Korean identity?

### Understanding Arguments

1. Summarise the main argument of Chu Si-gyong expressed in this passage. List all the reasons provided in the source to support this argument. Do you think this argument is well-justified? Why or why not?

### TOK Connections (Knowledge & Language):

With reference to the ideas in the text above and Source A, consider:

1. How important is the role of language in creating a shared identity?
2. What is the relationship between language and power?

## Political Action

A former guest house for Chinese diplomats was repurposed by the club into a headquarters known as the Independence Hall. Every Sunday, they would organise political lectures or debates in the hall on topics of ‘national concern.’ A key figure in the debating society of the club was a student at the Baejae Hakdang, a young Syngman Rhee.



## Syngman Rhee

Syngman Rhee enrolled at the Baejae Hankdang school in 1894 and in 1897 became the leader of the student branch

of the Independence Club, known as the Mutual Friendship Debating Society. During this time, he worked closely with Philip Jaisohn and became a prominent figure in the club.

When Emperor Gojong outlawed the Independence Club in 1898, Rhee was arrested and imprisoned until 1904. During his imprisonment, Rhee was supported by the American missionary community and converted to Christianity. He authored a book entitled the 'Spirit of Independence' which was published in 1904 as a seminal work of nationalist literature. It called for greater self-reliance in Korea as well as **modernisation** and civic responsibility.

Rhee was released by the Japanese as they began to dominate Korea after the Russo-Japanese war and travelled to the USA where he earned a Master's degree

in international relations from Harvard University and a PhD in political science from Princeton University. From the United States, Rhee played a significant role in leading and supporting the March First movement in 1919, which sought an end to Japanese Rule (see Chapter 5). Also in 1919, he gained international attention for advocating Korean independence at the Paris Peace Conference, though ultimately failed to secure recognition. Rhee became President of the Korean Provisional Government – established in the same year – and continued to campaign for Korean independence. In his 1941 publication *Japan Inside Out*, Rhee warned the U.S. of Japanese militarism. After Pearl Harbor, he insisted it was America's moral duty to support Korean independence, citing past U.S. failures in 1882 and 1905.

After Korea's liberation from Japanese rule in 1945, Rhee was brought back by the US military government overseeing the region at the time. He became President of the Republic of Korea, a role in which he served from 1948-1960. Rhee's rule as President and his role in the Korean War remain controversial with differing perspectives on his impacts on Korea.

The Independence Club also played an important role in organising popular protest. For example, in March of 1897 the Club opposed a scheme in which Russian officers were given significant training responsibilities in the Korean military. They viewed this as a threat to Korea's independence and ability to defend itself. Following the Club's first 'People's Joint Association Assembly,' over 10,000 people gathered in front of the Emperor's palace to petition the Emperor to end the contract. After days of unrest, and despite threats from Russia of dire consequences, the Emperor eventually agreed to their demands.

At a debate in April of 1898, the Independence Club also proposed the creation of a legislative assembly for Korea. This was followed by an editorial published in the *Dongnip Sinmun* and, in July, a direct memorial to Emperor Gojong. The proposal put forward the idea of a form of constitutional monarchy in which an assembly of 'wise and erudite men' would debate and develop laws for the approval of the Emperor.

The proposed assembly was not designed to be a representative body of the entire Korean population, nor was it to be publicly elected. The club, however, suggested that by making the assembly's debates open to the public, wider Korean society would have more access to the political process.



### Skills & Competencies of a Historian

#### Considering Diverse Perspectives

1. From a present-day perspective, would this be considered a democratic form of government?
2. How might our present-day perspective differ from the perspectives of Independence Club leaders in Korea at this time?

## How did Korean rulers respond to the Independence Club?

### Support

Gojong had initially supported club leader Philip Jaisohn. Whilst still in internal exile at the Russian Legation in 1896, he made Jaisohn an official advisor and even sponsored the creation of The Independent (*Dongnip Sinmun*) newspaper. In turn, some of the earliest campaigns of the club were advocating for the return of the king from exile and a change of title to Emperor.

Similarly, the Crown Prince Sunjong agreed to donate 1000 won to support the establishment of the Independence Hall and even agreed to write the signboard for the headquarters. Club leaders emphasised these acts to show royal support, in principle at least, for the concept of an Independence Club.

Although Emperor Gojong did not accept the club's proposal for a legislative assembly in 1898, he did eventually agree to update the role of the so-called 'Privy Council.' Many of the new responsibilities that this organization gained were similar to those requested for a legislative assembly and Independence Club members were ultimately given 17 seats on the council. These 17 members elected by the Club sat alongside 4 bureaucrats and 29 representatives of the Imperial Association, an organisation dominated by peddlers (traders) who typically sided with conservatives.

### Opposition

Many conservative elements within the Korean government and imperial court were concerned by the club's reform agenda and its increasing profile. At times, they sought to limit the Club's actions. For example, while the Independence Club had planned to print 2000 copies of the *History of the Great Eastern State* (see *Publications and the Hangeul Language* above), this was never achieved. The Education Ministry blocked its dissemination in 1896, likely because it challenged traditional Confucian approaches, and the book would not be published until 1905.

The Korean government also used a ruse to remove the club's most influential leader, Philip Jaisohn, in May 1898. They sent a false telegram which said that Jaisohn's mother-in-law, an American, was gravely ill. Jaisohn and his wife quickly returned to the USA, only to find her in good health and to find themselves effectively in exile.



### Philip Jaisohn

Philip Jaisohn was a progressive political figure who played a central role in the coup that took place in 1884 (see Chapter 2?). Following the coup's failure, Jaisohn spent a decade in exile

in the United States where he became a doctor and married an American.

Jaisohn returned to Korea in 1895 as a teacher at the Paichang Hankdang school run by US missionaries.

He became an official advisor of King Gojong during his time in the Russian Legation in 1896-1897 and the king funded the establishment of his newspaper, the *Dongnip Sinmun*. In mid-1896, King Gojong supported his cofounding of the Independence Club.

When Emperor Gojong disbanded the Independence Club under increasing Japanese influence in 1898, Jaisohn was removed from his role as advisor and tricked into returning to the United States (see above). Philip Jaisohn would never return to Korea but would continue his nationalist efforts by founding a range of organisations and publications.

Opposition escalated in November 1898 when anonymous posters appeared around Seoul claiming that "The Independence Club is attempting to change the state regime to a republic." Historians believe that the Imperial Association of conservative peddlers was behind the poster campaign. Emperor Gojong, fearing the claims to overturn the monarchy to be true or perhaps using them as a pretext, ordered the club to be dissolved and various leaders arrested. A period of protest and violence ensued between supporters of the club and the peddlers in the streets of Seoul.

### Abolition of the Club

Described by some historians as 'fickle' or 'capricious', Emperor Gojong demonstrated his characteristic changeability throughout the club's existence, wavering between support and total opposition to it. While the Emperor gave in to pressure arising from the violent outbursts in November 1898 and briefly reinstated the club, by December 26th he had banned it once and for all. Gojong ordered the club's "strict suppression," brought in soldiers to clear the streets of protesters, and saw that many Independence Club leaders were imprisoned or punished.

Many historians still argue that, despite its short-lived existence and vague ideology, the Independence Club played a significant and symbolic role in spearheading Korean nationalism, cultivating a generation of new leaders and advocating for a more modern, democratic system of government and society.



### Source Activity Five

#### ATL: Thinking Skills

#### The Demise of the Independence Club

#### Source A: Excerpt from the *Dongnip Sinmun* (English Version), November 10th, 1898

**Context:** This excerpt is drawn from an article published in the English language version of the Independence Club's newspaper, *Dongnip Sinmun* on the 10th of November 1898. The article recounts the accusations raised against the Club and the public protests that followed which had occurred a few days prior.

"In the meanwhile, the crowd grew in number and determination. Yu Kuiwhan, the Acting Minister of War ; Yi Kuitong, the Vice Minister of War ; Cho Pyengsik, the Acting Premier, and Minister of Law ; Nam Jungchul, Min Yongkui, etc., were busy in the Palace concocting all sorts of stories against the Club. They had the cheek to inform His Majesty that the Independents had planned to turn this little empire into a republic with Mr. Pak Jungyang for the President, and T. H. Yun the Vice President of the new regime. His Majesty seems to have believed the miserable but exceedingly convenient lies. On 6th Nov. counsels of the cabal so far prevailed that a violent dispersion of the multitude was ready to be ordered. The streets and approaches to the Police Station were strongly guarded by soldiers and none of the crowd was allowed to go out. The people, being informed of the infernal plot, became excited and said they would set fire to the whole city as they wanted to leave nothing for their persecutors. Fortunately, His Majesty, listening to the wiser advice of General Min Yongwhan and a few others, forbade any violence on the part of the Cabinet so-called."

**Source:** "In the meanwhile, the crowd grew in number and determination", Independent Newspaper (English), 18981110, National Library of Korea, "Korean Newspaper Archive" – <http://www.nl.go.kr/newspaper/>.

*Note: The romanised spelling in this source has been preserved from the original version. Current official romanisation would use different spelling for the names of the people mentioned.*

#### Source B: Historian Vipin Chandra on the demise of the Independence Club

**Context:** This excerpt is drawn from a peer-reviewed journal article written by Historian Vipin Chandra. Chandra was an expert on Korean history and wrote many journal articles focused specifically on the Independence Club.

"Enlisting the Korean monarch in the movement for change was a dangerous gamble. Monarchical cooperation could have become a durable prop only through reduction of the monarch's authority and status to a figurehead, but only a revolution could have accomplished

this goal. As the example of Japan illustrates, the institution of monarchy can serve as a force mediating the acceptance of change by a nation only when the forces of modernity are in firm command of the situation. The club's design essentially was to operate within the existing system, but what Korea needed most was an entirely new political system. The program of change was neither solidly anchored in effective grass roots organization, nor cemented by an integrative ideology, nor supported by a grand strategy and a resourceful and dedicated leadership willing to endure the worst. It gave no thought to revolution or forging an alliance between its supporters and the military in order to effect a firm takeover of the government. In consequence, it headed, unalterably, toward its own demise."

**Source:** Chandra, Vipin. "The Independence Club and Korea's First Proposal for a National Legislative Assembly." Occasional Papers on Korea, no. 4, Sept. 1975, pp. 19–35. Duke University Press, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41490135>.

**Inquiry Question: What was the most significant cause of the Independence Club's demise?**

### Check your Understanding

1. In your own words, make a list of all the reasons Sources A and B suggest for the demise of Independence Club.

### Analysing Concepts (Cause & Consequence):

1. Using the text above, identify any other causes you see as important and add them to the list you made in Activity 1.
2. Rank the causes from the one you think was most important to the one you think was least important in leading to the demise of the Independence Club. Justify your response.

## Paper 3 Practice

1. To what extent do you agree with the argument that the Independence Club had a significant impact on Korean politics and society?
2. 'The Independence Club was successful in achieving its goals by 1898.' To what extent do you agree with this view?

## IV. Decline of the Korean Empire

### Inquiry Question

To what extent did Korea resist Japanese efforts to establish a protectorate?

As Emperor Gojong and the imperial elites struggled to contain internal challenges to their rule such as the Independence Club, external threats began to grow. In particular, Japan began taking increasingly decisive steps towards the annexation of Korea in the early years of the 20th century.

### Protocols and 'Agreements'

#### The Japan-Korea Protocol (1904)

The Japan-Korea Protocol was signed in February of 1904. At this time, tensions over the Korean Peninsula between Japan and Russia were reaching a boiling point. In order to secure their advantage, the Japanese coerced Korean diplomats into signing this agreement. It enabled the Japanese to place military bases at strategic points in Korean territory, although the Protocol included an article that guaranteed Korean Independence.

#### The First Japan-Korea Agreement (1904)

In August of the same year, with the Russo-Japanese War underway, the Japanese imposed a new 'agreement' on Korea. This document afforded greater control of Korean foreign affairs to the Japanese Empire. It required Korea to accept financial and diplomatic advisors sent by the Japanese and to consult with the Japanese government before signing treaties with any other foreign nation. Historian Yi Tae-Jin describes this document as a 'memorandum' from the Japanese rather than an agreement or a treaty, since it did not include important features for formal diplomatic agreements. For instance, it did not have translations in both languages, nor details of the representatives authorised to sign it.

#### The Taft-Katsura Agreement (1905)

In July of 1905, U.S. Secretary of War William Howard Taft and Japanese Prime Minister Katsura Tarō met in Tokyo. The two diplomats met and drew up a memorandum which summarised their discussions; this has come to be known as the Taft-Katsura Agreement. They had reached an important understanding in this meeting: that Japan would not challenge US sovereignty in the Philippines and the US would not challenge Japanese domination in Korea. Aware that such bilateral meetings were imminent, Syngman Rhee had appealed to President Theodore Roosevelt to check growing Japanese power, which he argued was required by the 1882 US-Korea Treaty (see Chapter 2). These efforts were, however, in vain. Once the notes from the meeting were cabled back to Washington D.C., President Roosevelt – without consulting Congress – wrote to Taft to assure him that he would “confirm every word you said.” These documents were then kept secret for almost 20 years until they were discovered by historian Tyler Dennett in 1924 who published the first work referring to them as an ‘agreement.’

Many historians today challenge the view that this memorandum and cable constituted an agreement. The various documents recorded diplomatic exchanges but had none of the formal features of a signed agreement or treaty. Nonetheless, the memorandum shows that Taft told Katsura that the US was so firmly in support of Japanese policy that it “could be counted on by them quite as confidently as if the United States were under treaty obligations.”

In November of 1905, President Roosevelt mediated peace negotiations between Russia and Japan. The outcome was the Treaty of Portsmouth, in which Russia recognised that “Japan has predominant political, military, and economic interests in Korea.” Roosevelt was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize for his role in negotiations.



### TOK Connection

#### Knowledge & Language

##### Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with reference to the First Korea-Japan Agreement and Taft-Katsura Agreement described above.

1. **Defining terms:** What constitutes an ‘agreement’ between nations or leaders? Formulate your own definition. How does your definition compare with others in your class? Which of the ‘agreements’ above fit into your definition? Is this the same for others in your class?
2. **Perspectives:** Who appears to favour the use of the term ‘agreement’ in the examples above? Why do you think this is? What is similar or different about the possible motivations for using the term ‘agreement’ in each example?
3. **Interpretation:** How does the choice to use the term ‘agreement’ when describing the First Japan-Korea Agreement and the Taft-Katsura Agreement affect the way you, as a learner, acquire knowledge about these historical events?
4. **History as an Area of Knowledge:** How significant is the role of language in the communication of knowledge in history?

## The Eulsa Treaty (1905)

The Eulsa Treaty was called the *Second Japan-Korea Agreement* by the Japanese and is known by many Koreans as the *Forced Treaty of the Eulsa Year*. It was signed on November 17, 1905, and officially made Korea a protectorate of Japan, though significantly the treaty was not signed by Emperor Gojong and was seen as a coerced treaty. The treaty further limited Korea’s control of its own foreign affairs and allowed Japan to appoint a Resident-General with authority over diplomatic matters.

### The Signing of the Treaty

When the treaty was first proposed by the Japanese, Emperor Gojong and his ministers were staunchly opposed to it, with many making statements about preferring death to signing. Emperor Gojong initially told Japanese lead envoy, Ito Hirobumi, that he could not sign without consulting with the Privy Council

and his Korean subjects. Ito contended that such an argument was invalid, as the Korean Empire was an absolute monarchy in which Gojong had the ultimate authority. He was, nonetheless, unable to compel Gojong to sign.

On November 17th, the Japanese convened eight Korean cabinet ministers in the Deoksu palace. Ito was accompanied by the Japanese military commander and a contingent of Japanese military police to threaten those present. The Japanese leader was able to coerce five ministers, including Foreign Affairs minister Pak Chesoon, into signing the treaty. Theories about the reasons these ministers signed the document vary amongst both primary and secondary sources. They include: fear of violence to themselves, desire to avoid war with Japan, bribery by the Japanese, and agreement on the condition they could negotiate the terms of the treaty in a way that would allow Korea to retain some autonomy. Whatever their true motivations, the group became known across Korea as the 'Eulsa Traitors.'



### Source Activity Six

#### ATL: Thinking Skills

#### Source A: Editorial in Korean Newspaper, 1905

**Context:** This excerpt is drawn from an editorial in the Hwangsŏng Shinmun (Capital Gazette) newspaper on November 20, 1905 discussing the role of the Eulsa Traitors. It was entitled 'I Wail Bitterly Today' and authored by the newspapers editor-in-chief Chang Chi-yŏn.

"Without warning, a proposal containing five clauses was laid before Emperor Gwangmu, and we then saw how mistaken we were about the object of Marquis Ito's visit. However, the Emperor firmly refused to have anything to do with these proposals and Marquis Ito should then, properly, have abandoned his attempt and returned to his own country.

But the Ministers of our Government, who are worse than pigs or dogs, coveting honours and advantages for themselves, and frightened by empty threats, were trembling in every limb, and were willing to become traitors to their country and betray to Japan the integrity of a nation which has stood for 4,000 years, the foundation and honour of a dynasty 500 years old, and the rights and freedom of twenty million people."

**Source:** Translation published in McKenzie, Frederick Arthur (1920). *Korea's Fight for Freedom*. Fleming H. Revell. pp. 96–97. ISBN 978-1-4142-4914-8. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I\\_Wail\\_Bitterly\\_Today](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I_Wail_Bitterly_Today).

#### Questions:

1. According to Chang's view, why did five ministers decide to sign the treaty?
2. Consider Chang's use of dehumanising language ("worse than pigs or dogs"). How does this language convey the nature of the views of some nationalists at the time? How does this language affect your own interpretation of the source and the perspectives expressed?
3. To what extent do you agree with Chang's conclusion that these ministers were 'traitors'? Justify your response.



## Skills & Competencies of a Historian



⚠ This photograph was taken as a souvenir from the signing of the Eulsa Treaty in November 1905. The image shows the Japanese dignitaries present at Toksu Palace, including Ito Hirobumi. Image Courtesy of the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

### Explaining content from historical sources

1. Who is present and who is absent from this photograph at the signing of the Eulsa Treaty?
2. What might we infer about the signing of the treaty from this source?

### Analysing the context of a source

1. Who do you think took this photograph and why?
2. How might this context affect the usefulness of the source for a historian studying the signing of the Eulsa treaty?

## Political steps towards the establishment of a Japanese Protectorate in Korea



## Resistance from the Emperor

Emperor Gojong made immediate efforts to resist the treaty by appealing to the international community for support. Unaware of the secret Taft-Katsura 'agreement,' Gojong sent emissaries to the US with an imperial letter appealing for their support on the basis of an 1882 treaty between Korea and the USA. The 1882 treaty suggested that the US would intervene in case of threats to Korea's sovereignty, though the wording was ambiguous (see Chapter 2). On November 23, 1905, President Roosevelt refused to provide help to Korea and withdrew the US Legation to Korea the following day. These decisions were regarded by many Koreans as an act of treachery.

Emperor Gojong continued his campaign of letter writing to foreign nations, writing to nine different powers in 1906 to seek their support in declaring the Euisa Treaty null and void. In 1907, he secretly sent three aides to the Hague Peace Conference in an effort to appeal to the 44 countries meeting there. They were denied entry.

Most foreign powers refused their support and many followed the US in closing their legations in Korea. The United Kingdom, for example, declined to intervene largely because they had formed the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1902 in an effort to protect their colonial holdings in Asia. This treaty had specifically recognised Japanese interests in Korea. Even countries such as Russia and France who appeared more amenable to Gojong's claims distanced themselves and offered no meaningful support.



### Source Activity Seven

#### Source A: Emperor Gojong's Letter to the Korean Minister to Germany, November 24, 1905

**Context:** This letter is the first example of many sent by Emperor Gojong to leaders of foreign powers in an effort to gain their support in declaring the Eulsa Treaty invalid. This was sent to Korea's minister to Germany, Min Cheol-hun, in the days after the signing of the treaty and was translated from Korean and submitted to the German foreign ministry.

**Content:** "Japanese officials came to the palace with their army and forced me to sign a document they had prepared. After that Japan named a governor and forced us to give up our diplomatic rights. Such a crime is unacceptable under international law. You [Min Cheol-hun] have to alert Germany and ask for help. The last hope for me and for the empire is Germany and international law."

**Source:** Lee, Hang-bok. "The king's letter." Korea JoongAng Daily, 21 Sept. 2009, <https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/2009/09/21/features/The-kings-letter/2910347.html>.

#### Question

1. What does this source reveal about the methods used by Emperor Gojong to resist the Eulsa Treaty? Consider both the context and the content of the source.

### Resistance from the Korean People

The Emperor was not alone in his fight to resist the Eulsa Treaty. Korean people also came together to resist in different ways. For example, in the years following the treaty, a number of nationalist associations and schools were established. From 1905, a guerilla force known as the *Righteous Armies* also began confronting the militarily superior Japanese forces. In 1907, it was announced that Emperor Sunjong was dissolving the Korean Imperial Army. Commander Park Seung-hwan committed suicide in protest, proclaiming "This is not the Emperor's will, but an enemy's forgery of the Imperial order. I would rather die than accept the order." Enraged, several Imperial Army units rose up against the Japanese in the Battle of Namdaemun. At the same time, many former army officers joined the *Righteous Armies* whose numbers swelled to 70,000 by 1908. They sought recognition as a legitimate army from foreign powers but none agreed.



⚠ This photo shows a company of Korean rebels from the Righteous Armies photographed 1907 by F.A. McKenzie, a Canadian Journalist.

## Japanese Repression

The Japanese government found many means of repressing efforts to resist the Eulsa Treaty. In 1905, the Post Office and Telegram Service in Korea had come under Japanese control, which enabled them to monitor and censor communications. They closely surveilled Korea's politicians and diplomats, including Emperor Gojong, to limit their ability to seek outside support.

The Japanese also used violent methods to exert control. When British reporter Douglas Story met with the Emperor's emissary in 1906 and was provided with documentation to support the claim that the Eulsa Treaty was invalid, he only narrowly escaped assassination by Japanese agents. Moreover, in 1909, the Japanese military launched a sustained offensive against Korean guerilla forces and effectively quashed the armed resistance.

Perhaps one of the most impactful political tactics employed by the Japanese in this period was the forced abdication of Emperor Gojong in 1907. On July 20th, in response to his efforts to send envoys to the Hague Conference, the Emperor was dethroned through an abdication ceremony under coercion by Japanese officials and certain members of his own cabinet. He handed power to his son, Crown Prince Sunjong, who some sources describe as having cognitive or developmental difficulties.

## The 1910 Annexation Treaty

On July 24th 1907, the Japanese introduced the Third Japan-Korea Treaty which gave them control of Korea's internal affairs. However, there is evidence that not only this treaty from 1907 but also those

from 1904 and 1905 were coerced because none included the instrument of ratification by the Emperor, undermining the validity of these treaties and the claims of the Japanese. Then, on July 31st, 1907, they coerced Sunjong into announcing the dissolution of the Korean Army. With the Korean Empire effectively rendered a puppet state, Sunjong's reign would last for only three years until the formal annexation of Korea in 1910, another treaty that was made under duress and also did not include the signature of the Emperor. The 1910 Annexation Treaty was the final step in a series of treaties that were forced on Korea. The point is underscored in this final treaty because not only did it not include the seal or Sunjong's signature but his oral will, later published overseas in San Francisco in 1926, stated that Japan had ratified the treaty and that he had not. The consequences of this 1910 treaty were significant and elicited equally significant responses from the Korean people as their country was forced to be part of the Japanese Empire.

## Conclusion

The turn of the 20th century was a tumultuous time for Korea. It was clear to those living through this period that external pressures – especially from Japan, Russia and China – posed serious threats to Korea's independence. There was disagreement, however, on how best to address these challenges. Conservatives, for instance, advocated a deepening commitment to Korean traditions while the Independence Club sought **modernisation**, international connections and further democratic processes within the monarchic system. Thus, events both outside and within Korea created increasing conflict and instability. Gojong's efforts to strengthen the Korean state by establishing an authoritarian empire and by enacting the Gwangmu Reforms ultimately had limited success in staving off these threats. While efforts to modernise the state had progressed in some domains, particularly in the city of Seoul, many of the ambitious goals had not been reached. Meanwhile, Gojong's oscillating position on many matters often fuelled social and political tensions and at times alienated elements of Korean society. Internal tensions and weaknesses were compounded as Japan took both political and military steps to increase its domination of the Korean peninsula. The Japanese establishment of a protectorate in 1905 was a key turning point in Korea's colonisation and Korean resistance was severely suppressed.

## Historiographical Debates

Historians dispute the extent to which Gojong should bear the blame for Japan's eventual domination of Korea. Some, like Jae-Ho Kim, argue that he was a weak and indecisive leader who prioritised his personal power and did little to resist increasing Japanese imposition. Others, such as Tae-Jin Yi, view him as an 'enlightened monarch' and suggest that progress was being made in the Gwangmu period until it was cut short by the Japanese. Many also point to Gojong's consistent campaign to seek foreign support in opposing the Eulsa Treaty as evidence of his commitment to Korean independence. Similarly, there is limited consensus amongst historians about whether Korean **modernisation** occurred only after it was made a protectorate by the Japanese or if it had already truly begun locally as part of the Gwangmu reforms prior to colonisation. Finally, there also remains historiographical and public debate about whether or not the United States 'betrayed' Korea by failing to intervene on its behalf in this period of Japanese encroachment. Many in Korea continue to hold this view, although defenders of Roosevelt point to a lack of clarity in the 1882 treaty as well as the necessity of the US policy for the nation's interests at the time.

## Paper 3 Practice

1. “Korean resistance to the Eulsa Treaty was limited.” To what extent do you agree with this argument?
2. To what extent do you agree with the view that the failures of the Gwangmu Reforms contributed to the establishment of a Japanese protectorate in Korea in 1905?

## Paper 3 Practice

### Essay Skills Builder

#### Focus: *Synthesing different arguments*

#### Practice Question

*To what extent do you agree with the argument that the Independence Club had a significant impact on Korean politics and society?*

#### AtL: Collaboration

#### Learning Focus

By the end of this activity, you should be able to:

1. Collaboratively plan and write a Paper 3-style essay
2. Articulate relationships between arguments and perspectives by using connectives and tentative language
3. Ensure an essay is coherent and effectively synthesises arguments throughout

#### Step 1 – Work with your group to collaboratively unpack the question

- **Main claim:** The Independence Club had a significant impact on Korean politics and society
- **Key terms:** significant, impact, politics and society (→ both need to be attended to)
- **Ask:**
  - How might you evaluate significance?
  - Would your evaluation for politics and society be the same or different?
  - How might you categorise different impacts (e.g. short vs long-term)?

#### Step 2 – Brainstorm Relevant Factors

Brainstorm relevant arguments that can both **support** and **challenge** the claim – considering both is a requirement for ‘to what extent’ responses.

### Step 3 – Develop an Essay Outline

As practiced in Chapter 2, work collaboratively to create an outline for the essay. Work together to agree on:

- A well-formulated **thesis** that clearly addresses the question
- A **logical order** for the body paragraphs so that they can build on each other
- A draft **Point sentence** for each body paragraph, and
- Bullet points of the key **evidence** and **arguments** each body paragraph would include

### Step 4 – Drafting the essay

Write an initial draft of the essay either by working through all parts as a group or by delegating different parts of the essay to individual members. Remember that one way you can help structure your writing is by using the strategies explored in earlier chapters like PEEL paragraphs and developed conclusions.

### Step 5 – Consider the role of connectives and tentative language

It is important for an essay to be coherent throughout but it can be difficult to consider different perspectives and arguments without contradicting yourself or making them seem disjointed.

Connectives and tentative language can be helpful to show the relationship between these different arguments and perspectives. These can be used both between and within paragraphs. See examples below:

| Connectives                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Tentative language                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>To introduce one argument or perspective:</b><br/>On one hand,...<br/>Firstly,...</p> <p><b>To add new points to the same argument or perspective:</b><br/>Secondly,...<br/>Furthermore,...<br/>Moreover,...<br/>In addition,...<br/>Similarly,...</p> <p><b>To introduce a contrasting argument or perspective:</b><br/>On the other hand,...<br/>However,...<br/>Conversely,...<br/>In contrast,...<br/>Although,...</p> | <p><b>Phrases:</b><br/>It could be argued that...<br/>Another possible interpretation...<br/>This may suggest that...<br/>This indicates that...<br/>... appears to show that...<br/>... may also have ...<br/>In some ways...<br/>To a certain extent...</p> <p><b>Adverbs:</b><br/>Possibly, potentially, likely, probably, generally, more, less, moderately</p> <p><b>Verbs:</b><br/>May, might, could, appears to, indicates, suggests, implies</p> |

These two types of language can be used together to help show relationships between arguments and perspectives whilst avoiding contradiction. For example, compare these two sets of Point sentences:

| Weak synthesis                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Strong synthesis                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>Body Paragraph 1:</b><br/> <b>Point:</b> The Independence Club did not have a significant impact on Korean politics given its role on the People's Council lasted less than a year.</p> <p><b>Body Paragraph 2:</b><br/> <b>Point:</b> The Independence Club did have a significant impact on Korean politics, especially by acting as a training ground for future political leaders.</p> | <p><b>Body Paragraph 1:</b><br/> <b>Point:</b> On the one hand, the fact that its role on the Privy Council lasted less than a year may indicate that the Independence Club's impact on politics was limited in the short-term.</p> <p><b>Body Paragraph 2:</b><br/> <b>Point:</b> On the other hand, however, the club's role as a training ground for future political leaders suggests that it did have a more significant impact on Korean politics in the long-term.</p> |

### Step 6 – Practice Task – Add connectives and tentative language

- Start by collaboratively reviewing the point sentences of each paragraph considering the examples above. Look for opportunities to add connectives and tentative language to better show the relationships between arguments and perspectives.
- Reread the rest of the essay and identify more opportunities to synthesise different arguments and ideas with connectives and tentative language.

### Step 7 – Final Review

- Once finished, read the entire essay as a group and check:
  - Is the relationship between the different arguments in the essay clear?
  - Are there any places where arguments contradict each other?
  - Are there any places where arguments seem disconnected from each other?
- Make any final adjustments you deem necessary to maximise synthesis of arguments.

## Paper 1 Practice

**Inquiry Question:** To what extent was Emperor Gojong responsible for the fall of the Korean Empire?

### Full Practice Paper 1: Gojong's Leadership

#### Source A

**Context:** Kim Ki-Seok (Kim, Gi-seok) is Professor of Education at Seoul National University. He has a Ph.D. in education from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. This excerpt is from a peer-reviewed article in the Korea Journal in which he responds to the arguments of US historian Dennett about the roles of both Emperor Gojong and Theodore Roosevelt in Japan's colonisation of Korea.

**Content:** "Due to the negative assessment of the ill-fated Emperor Gwangmu, many scholars of modern history in Korea and especially a few historians of Korean-American relations frequently lampooned him and even disgraced him as a traitor who sold his own empire. A cross-examination of diplomatic records of the U.S. State Department with new evidence recently recovered since 1993, however, reveals that the Emperor consistently and systematically explored diplomatic measures to protect the sovereignty of the Empire from Japanese military aggression. These measures proceeded as follows: 1) preemptive measures against foreign aggression, 2) proclamation of the forced treaty as null and void, and 3) public denouncement. [US Historian] Dennett was not right in his presumptuous claim that the Emperor's actions were a play at some sort of crooked diplomacy, and his reasoning is flawed in stating this in his defense of Roosevelt's betrayal of a treaty obligation to the Emperor. American strategic diplomacy focused on maintaining the balance of power for the "peace" of the Far East, conceived and well executed by the President, led to the passing of Korea into colonial rule and to Roosevelt's being the first American to win a Nobel Peace Prize."

**Source:** Kim, Ki-Seok. "Emperor Gwangmu's Diplomatic Struggles to Protect His Sovereignty before and after 1905." Korea Journal, Summer 2006, pp. 237-255.

#### Source B

**Context:** Chu Chinoh is a professor of History at Sangmyung University in Korea. He has authored several books on Korean history. This excerpt is drawn from a peer-reviewed journal article about Korean-Japanese relations at the turn of the 20th century.

**Content:** "Gojong might be considered most responsible for the nation's loss of sovereignty. By not taking into account the ideas of opposition forces, including refugees and the Independence Club, he failed to exercise good political judgment. He also failed to establish an adequate military force, despite the dire need to do so at a critical time and made a serious error in not maintaining stable diplomatic ties to protect Korea from outside forces. He lacked the ability to be a strong leader, for during a crisis his only solution was to flee and take refuge at a foreign

legation. In his position as emperor, his duty was to protect national sovereignty and not rest the blame on officials who were inclined to favor Japan. However, Gojong was not entirely at fault for the Japanese colonization of Korea. It would be unfair to describe Gojong as a monarch without any will for reform. But equally, it would be false to acclaim Gojong as a king who was completely dedicated to protecting national sovereignty. Historical examination reveals that Gojong must share some, but not all, of the responsibility for the downfall of the Great Han Empire."

**Source:** Chinoh, C. H. U. (2011). Korean perceptions of Japan during the Great Han Empire and the Japanese annexation of Korea. *Korea Journal*, 51(4), 89-109.

### Source C

**Context:** This article published in the New York Times presents an interview with the Korean delegates turned away from the Hague Conference in 1907. In the article, the delegates who had been secretly sent by Emperor Gojong discuss the fact that the Korean leader had denied sending them and officially criticised their presence.

**Content: "Don't Blame Korean Ruler: Envoys at The Hague Say He Had to Repudiate Them."**

THE HAGUE, July 6.—The members of the Korean delegation here say they consider it quite natural that the Emperor of Korea should have officially repudiated them in his interview with the Marquis Ito, the representative of Japan at Seoul, who questioned him on the subject of their mission. The Koreans here add: "To have admitted that he instructed us to represent him at The Hague would perhaps have meant his being dethroned, or even murdered".

The delegates suggest that if the United States or a European power had made a similar inquiry of the Korean Emperor the answer would have been different.

To keep order and assure the maintenance of peace in the Far East, the United States and the European powers, the Koreans say, should uphold the independence of Korea by declaring that country to be a neutral State.

**Source:** The New York Times. "Koreans Appeal to Hague for Help: Three Delegates, Their Passports Signed by the Emperor, Try to Get Hearing." 7 July 1907, p. 3. <https://nyti.ms/4iQGKAs>. Accessed 31 July 2025.

### Questions:

1. Explain how the content of both source A and source B can be used to answer the inquiry question. (6 marks)
2. Analyse how the context of source C influences how it can be used to answer the inquiry question. (6 marks)
3. Examine how the perspectives in all the sources can be used to answer the inquiry question. (12 marks)

## Korean War: Connections to the Cold War in Asia (Regional Study 11)

A number of threads that would ultimately connect to the Korean War are apparent in the period from 1897-1907.

**Foreign Relations:** The imperial period witnessed increasing competition for power and influence over Korea. Russian influence increased as emperor Gojong had used their legation to seek refuge in 1896-1897, and they sought to benefit from Gojong's encouragement of foreign investment by gaining additional trading rights and footholds in Korea, especially in northern regions near Manchuria. While the Russo-Japanese War put an end to Russian aspirations in the short-term, this period reflects their keen interest and sense of entitlement in Korean affairs well before the establishment of the Soviet Union. The imperial period also witnessed growing American interests in Korea. Through significant investment in infrastructure, diplomatic advice and the work of missionaries, the United States built an increasing presence in Korea and particularly in Seoul. In some ways, therefore, the Gwangmu period was important in laying the foundations for Russian and American interests in Korea, with a focus on the North and South respectively. This is relevant for understanding the context of the role of the USA and USSR in the Korean War.

**Japanese Colonisation:** The imperial period essentially ended with the establishment of the Japanese protectorate in Korea in 1905. This was a turning point in the formalisation of Japanese colonisation and domination of the peninsula. As Chapters 5 and 6 will show, Japanese colonial rule, and resistance to it, would create the conditions for internal conflict in Korea following Japanese withdrawal. Japanese colonisation therefore lays the groundwork for the later division of Korea and disagreements over free elections.

**Emerging Nationalist Leaders:** The late 19th century in Korea also witnessed the emergence of a more clearly articulated sense of nationalist ideology, led particularly by groups such as the Independence Club. Significant individuals, such as Syngman Rhee, gained political experience and prominence during this time. Nationalist leaders, and Rhee in particular, would go on to play important roles in the conflict over the governing of an independent Korean nation. Thus understanding the imperial era can provide insights into the early development of his leadership.



### Conceptual Connections

| IB Concepts                    | Relevant examples from this chapter                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Cause &amp; Consequence</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reasons for the establishment of the Korean Empire</li> <li>• Political, military, economic, social and cultural effects of the Gwangmu Reforms</li> <li>• Impacts of the Independence Club and reasons for its demise</li> <li>• Reasons for the creation of a Japanese protectorate in Korea</li> </ul> |
| <b>Continuity &amp; Change</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The extent of both change and continuity as a result of the Gwangmu Reforms</li> <li>• The extent to which modernisation efforts were successful in achieving change</li> </ul>                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Perspectives</b>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Views and experiences of different groups impacted by the Gwangmu Reforms</li> <li>• Changing views and responses of the government to the Independence Club</li> <li>• Controversy regarding the legitimacy of the Eulsa Treaty and other 'agreements'</li> <li>• Historiographical debates</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Significance</b>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The significance of the Independence Club despite its short period of existence</li> <li>• The significance of individuals such as Emperor Gojong and Philip Jaesohn</li> <li>• The significance of the Eulsa Treaty as a turning point in Korean history</li> </ul>                                      |

### Activity: Preparing for Paper 2

- Practice responding to these Paper 2 style questions using your choice of the examples above:
  - Analyse how historical events can be seen from different perspectives. Use one example from the thematic study to support your response.
  - Analyse how historical events can have historical significance. Use one example from the thematic study to support your response.
  - Analyse how historical events may result in continuity. Use one example from the thematic study to support your response.
- Create your own table with the four concepts in the left column like the one above. Complete your table by looking for relevant examples that could be used to explore each of those concepts in one of the other chapters in this textbook. Repeat for as many chapters as you can.

## Paper 2 Practice

### Authoritarian Rule

See below for ideas of ways you might use the material in this chapter to address questions for the Paper 2 **Thematic study 3: Authoritarian rule (from 1750 CE onwards)**.

In this chapter, one authoritarian system you might examine is the Daehan Empire (a continuation of the authoritarian rule which emerged while Korea was still a Kingdom). The main inquiry question is **How was authoritarian rule maintained?** This chapter is focusing more specifically on the role of legal methods and the question:

#### **How effectively were legal methods used to secure authoritarian control in the Daehan Empire?**

Changing the status of the Korean nation from a kingdom to an empire in 1897 presented an opportunity to reconfigure the entire legal system of the state in such a way as to cement the authoritarian power of the emperor. For example, the State Law of the Daehan Empire, introduced in 1899, gave the Emperor absolute power in political and military affairs, while outlawing dissent (see extract on page 122). While Gojong had already been monarch, this legal method enabled him to maintain, and even strengthen, authoritarian rule following threats that had arisen with the Donghak Peasant Revolution and the Japanese assassination of Queen Min. Similarly, over 150 legal amendments in the early imperial period strengthened the power of the royal household. Korea used legal methods to stave off external threats as well. For instance, they formulated a new – more balanced – treaty of commerce with China and signed international treaties such as the Geneva Convention in 1903. Joining these international legal agreements was intended to build stronger bonds with the international community to maintain the independence of the empire.

The Emperor and his government also used different legal methods to limit opposition, particularly from the Independence Club. Whilst it might be argued that the new powers provided to the Privy Council, and the initial promised inclusion of representation from the club on the council enabled and empowered them. Nonetheless, legal methods were also used to undermine their activities such as government censorship by blocking the publication of their *History of the Great Eastern State* books. Perhaps more significantly, legal methods were eventually used to prohibit the club altogether via the imperial edict to dissolve the club in 1898 and the subsequent arrest of many of its members.

For this inquiry question, it would be relevant to consider how successful these legal methods were at staving off both external and internal threats in order to maintain the authoritarian rule of the emperor.

### Comparative Case Studies

Case studies of other forms of authoritarian rule which may be helpful points of comparison include:

- Brazil in the 1960s
  - In particular, compare and contrast the impact of the 1968 AI-5 law under President Artur da Costa e Silva with the imperial edict to dissolve the Independence Club.
- Chile in the 1980s
  - Specifically, compare and contrast the role of Pinochet's 1980 constitution and the State Law of the Daehan Empire.
- South Africa in the 1950s-1960s
  - In particular, compare and contrast the government's 'bans' on anti-Apartheid activists and organisations with the imperial edict to dissolve the Independence Club.
- Italy in the 1920s-1930s
  - Specifically, compare and contrast Mussolini's participation in international treaties and organisations such as the League of Nations, Lateran Treaty and Pact of Steel with the Daehan Empire's efforts to gain international legitimacy via treaties such as the Geneva Convention or the treaty of commerce with China.

### Practice Paper 2 style questions: Section B

**Part 1:** Explain how legal methods were used to maintain authoritarian rule.  
Use one example from the thematic study in your response. (4 marks)

**Part 2:** To what extent did legal methods succeed in maintaining authoritarian rule?  
Use at least two examples of authoritarian rule from at least two regions to support your response. (15 marks)

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