

05

Nature Of, and Social, Economic and Political Impact of Japanese Rule

IB Lines of Inquiry

Inquiry Questions

Political impact of Japanese annexation and colonial government

To what extent do you agree with the perspective that annexation transformed Korea's sovereignty and political life?

Repression and resistance, including Samil Independence Movement (1919)

To what extent do you agree with the claim that Koreans resisted repression under Japanese colonial rule through political, cultural, and armed struggle?

Social impact of assimilation, including education, language and religion

To what extent do you agree with the argument that Koreans resisted assimilation policies in schools, language, and religion?

Economic developments in banking, industry and infrastructure

To what extent do you agree with the statement that economic changes under Japanese colonial rule affected Korean farmers, workers, and entrepreneurs?

Introduction

After examining the nature and impact of reforms under the Korean Empire, including the Gwangmu Reforms (1897–1904), efforts to modernize the state, the activities of the Independence Club (1896–1898), and Korean resistance to the Eulsa Treaty, the focus now shifts to the subsequent period of Japanese rule.

Korea shifted from an independent monarchy to a colony under Japanese authoritarian control, fundamentally altering its government and societal structures. The Japanese annexation and establishment of a colonial government in Korea brought significant social, economic, and political changes. This period was marked by both repression and resistance, including the notable Samil Independence (1st March) Movement of 1919, a widespread protest against Japanese rule that demonstrated Korea's persistent nationalism, and desire for self-determination. Despite Japanese efforts to suppress Korean identity, resistance movements continued throughout the colonial period.

In response to Korean opposition, Japan's rule over Korea was not static but instead evolved, shifting imperial priorities and responding to international pressures. Through assimilation policies, economic restructuring, and political repression, the Japanese sought to entrench their control and eliminate Korean autonomy. However, Korean efforts to preserve their cultural identity, assert political independence, and resist through various forms continuously challenged this control. Understanding the methods of Japanese rule and the responses they provoked reveals important insights into the dynamics of authoritarian colonialism and the resilience of national identity under foreign domination.

Timeline of Key Events

1909 (October 26)	Korean independence activist An Jung-geun shoots Ito Hirobumi, killing him in the Harbin Railway Station in Manchuria.
1910	Korea formally annexed by Japan; Emperor Gojong forced to abdicate.
1910–1918	The Land Survey Program dispossessed many Korean farmers, creating widespread tenancy and significantly impacting Gogung's land reforms.
1919 (January 21)	Emperor Gojong was found dead with symptoms of being poisoned, igniting national demonstrations against Japanese colonial authority.
1919 (March 1)	Samil (March 1st) Movement: nationwide protests; about 2 million participants, thousands arrested or killed.
1919 (April)	Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea established in Shanghai.
1919	Kim Kyu-sik appeals for Korean independence at the Paris Peace Conference.
1919–1920 (October)	Battle of Cheongsanri: Korean Independence Army under Kim Jwa-jin defeats larger Japanese forces; Japan retaliates with the Gando Massacre.
1926	Na Seok-ju bombs Japanese institutions in Seoul.
1929	Wonsan General Strike: thousands of Korean workers protest exploitation and discrimination.
1932	Yun Bong-gil kills Japanese officers with a grenade in Shanghai and gains admiration in China.

Key Terms

Annexation Treaty (1910)	Formally ended Korean sovereignty and began 35 years of Japanese colonial rule, framing all subsequent resistance as a fight for survival.
Battle of Cheongsanri (1920)	Battle where 3,000 Korean fighters held off nearly 30,000 Japanese troops under Kim Jwa-jin. This battle became a legendary victory in nationalist memory, though followed by brutal Japanese reprisals (Gando Massacre).
Cultural Rule (1919–1937)	Period after March 1st Movement when Japan allowed limited cultural expression (Korean newspapers, associations). This period gave space for cultural nationalism and modern literature. At the same time, the colonial government tried to win over wealthy and powerful leaders while hiding the fact that ordinary people were still being controlled and oppressed.
Gando Massacre (1920)	Mass killing of thousands of Korean civilians in Manchuria following Cheongsanri. The brutal massacre demonstrated Japan's readiness to use collective punishment and fueled international criticism of colonial brutality.
Korean Independence Army (founded 1919, active in Manchuria)	Armed forces of the Provisional Government, most famous for victory at Cheongsanri in 1920. The army provided the strongest example of organized military resistance, proving that Koreans could inflict real losses on Japan.
Land Survey Program (1910–1918)	Required land registration under Japanese authorities, dispossessing countless peasants and consolidating land into the hands of landlords and colonial companies. This program deepened rural poverty, fueled tenancy, and created the social base for later protests and strikes.
Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea (1919)	Established in Shanghai after the Samil (March 1st) Movement, it was the first modern republic in Korean history, symbolizing Korea's continuing claim to sovereignty despite Japanese rule. Though plagued by factional divisions and lacking formal recognition from major powers, it coordinated international lobbying, published declarations, and supported armed resistance groups in Manchuria and China. Its survival gave legitimacy and continuity to the independence movement in exile.
Samil (March 1st) Movement (1919)	A nationwide protest involving nearly two million Koreans, brutally suppressed with thousands killed or arrested. Its significance lay in revealing the breadth of nationalist sentiment across classes, inspiring both diplomatic and militant strategies, and forcing Japan to shift from harsh "Military Rule" to the more controlled "Cultural Rule." The movement was also strongly influenced by Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points on self-determination, which gave Koreans hope that international principles could support their independence.
Wonsan General Strike (1929)	Major labor protest involving about 10,000 Korean workers. This strike revealed how nationalism and class struggle were intertwined; economic grievances fed into broader resistance to colonialism.

Key People

An Jung-geun	His 1909 assassination of Ito Hirobumi, Japan's Resident-General in Korea, symbolized militant resistance and offered Koreans a heroic model of sacrifice. He underscored that violence could be used as a political tool, inspiring later nationalist militants.
Emperor Gojong	Forced to abdicate in 1910, his dethronement marked the symbolic end of the Korean monarchy. His death in 1919 provided a rallying point for mass protests, helping trigger the Samil (March 1st) Movement.
Kim Kyu-sik	By presenting Korea's case at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, he internationalized the independence cause, even though his appeal was rejected. His effort gave Korea's struggle diplomatic legitimacy on the world stage.
Syngman Rhee	As president of the Provisional Government in exile, he lobbied the United States for recognition of Korea's sovereignty. Though he achieved little immediate success, his advocacy kept Korea visible in American political discourse and foreshadowed his later leadership role.
Kim Gu	A central figure in the Provisional Government, he emphasized armed struggle and helped coordinate with Korean fighters in Manchuria. His leadership embodied the more militant strand of exile nationalism, ensuring that armed resistance remained part of the movement.
Kim Jwa-jin	As commander of the Korean Independence Army, he led the force to victory at the Battle of Cheongsanri (1920). This moment, though followed by brutal reprisals, gave Koreans a powerful symbol that armed resistance could succeed against overwhelming odds.
Na Seok-ju	His bombing campaign against Japanese institutions in Seoul (1926) was militarily minor but politically significant, inspiring younger radicals and demonstrating that resistance persisted inside Korea itself.
Yun Bong-gil	His grenade attack in Shanghai (1932), which killed Japanese officers, drew admiration in China and international attention. His act linked Korea's independence struggle with broader Asian anti-imperial movements.
Yu Gwan-sun	As a teenage Christian activist, she organized Samil (March 1st) protests and died in prison under torture. Her martyrdom highlighted the critical role of women and youth in the nationalist movement and became a lasting symbol of resistance.

I. Political Developments: Japanese Annexation and Colonial Government

Inquiry Question

To what extent do you agree with the perspective that annexation transformed Korea's sovereignty and political life?

Koreans lost sovereignty in 1910 when Japan formally annexed the peninsula, abolishing the monarchy and declaring Korea part of the empire. Although Japanese military and political involvement in Korea began years earlier, the official annexation of Korea by Japan commenced on August 22, 1910. At this time under duress Emperor Gojong was forced to abdicate, "righteous armies" were crushed in the countryside, and sovereignty was extinguished in a single stroke of a pen. This sudden loss of sovereignty illustrates a cause and consequence dynamic in that Japan sought to expand its empire for geopolitical security and prestige, but the consequence for Koreans was the end (for a time) of their nation.



TOK Connection



Map shows Korea (dark red) within the Empire of Japan (light red) at its furthest extent in 1942.

The Power of Naming

Look at a world map. The water between Korea and Japan is often labeled the “Sea of Japan.” But Koreans call it the “East Sea.” Why does this matter so much?

How It Started

Before the 1900s, maps used all kinds of names: “Sea of Korea,” “Oriental Sea,” “Sea of Japan.” There was no single standard. When Japan colonized Korea (1910–1945), it promoted the name “Sea of Japan” on international maps and in world organizations. Because Korea had lost its independence, it had no power to argue for its own name, “East Sea.”

After World War II

When Korea was freed in 1945, it began calling the sea the “East Sea” again. But by then, “Sea of Japan” had already become the international norm. Korea has pushed for dual naming, but Japan has resisted.

Why the Name Matters

- **Naming = Power:** The name on a map is not just a word—it shows which country had the power to decide. During colonization, Japan had that power, while Korea was silenced.
- **Identity:** For Koreans, “East Sea” is about protecting their culture and reclaiming their voice after colonization.
- **Global Politics:** Map names are political. They can confirm or deny a people’s history.

Key Lesson

Names on maps are never neutral. They tell us who controlled the story at the time. For Korea, pushing for “East Sea” is not only about geography, it’s about undoing the legacy of colonization and claiming their place in the world.

Question

1. How does the map visually communicate dominance or control?

Government and Political Control

Korea’s sovereignty ended with the Annexation Treaty of 1910. The monarchy was dissolved and the peninsula was declared part of the Japanese Empire, though the validity of the treaty remains in question. Historian Ki-baik Lee describes this event as the culmination of decades of humiliation, from unequal and coerced treaties to Emperor Gojong’s forced abdication. For Koreans, annexation was not simply a political transfer but the symbolic death of their nation.

The colony was governed through the office of the Governor-General of Chosŏn, appointed directly by the Japanese emperor. The Governor-General concentrated every major authority (executive, military,

and judicial) in one office with no Korean input or oversight. Japan adopted a system of direct rule, a significant choice that contrasts with other colonial models such as the British reliance on indirect rule in parts of India. This decision was rooted in a profound distrust of Korean officials and a persistent fear of uprisings. As a result, Koreans were systematically excluded from meaningful political life, with fewer than two percent of higher bureaucratic posts held by Koreans, who were typically confined to low-ranking or clerical positions. This policy not only extinguished Korean sovereignty at the national level but also prevented the development of a Korean administrative class, ensuring total Japanese control over the colony's governance.

During the first phase, known as “Military Rule” (1910–1919), over 70,000 Japanese troops and police occupied the Korean peninsula. Public gatherings required permits, newspapers were censored before publication, and Koreans faced imprisonment or worse for dissent. Arrests could be made without trial, and detention could last months or years with little legal recourse. Historian Bruce Cumings describes this system as a form of “bureaucratic authoritarianism,” meaning Japan used modern, organized government methods to control the population through fear, surveillance, and strict order. King Gojong died suddenly on January 21, 1919, at the age of 67 while under house arrest. His death remains one of the most significant events in Korean history due to the suspicious circumstances and the massive political uprising it triggered just months later with the Samil (March 1st) Movement.



Skills & Competencies of a Historian

Explaining Content from Historical Sources: The Mystery of the Death of Emperor Gojong

The sudden death of Emperor Gojong remains one of the most significant mysteries in modern Korean history. While official Japanese reports at the time failed to investigate the cause, historical evidence from the diaries of Yun Ch'i-ho and Kuratomi Yūzaburō, as well as the autobiography of Princess Masako, strongly suggest he was poisoned. Eyewitness accounts describe the Emperor dying in violent contortions shortly after drinking a beverage, with his body later showing physical signs consistent with poisoning, such as severe swelling and rapid discoloration. In their article “The Mystery of Emperor Gojong’s Sudden Death in 1919: Were the Highest Japanese Officials Responsible?” Yong-ho Ch’oe and Tae-jin Yi state that the Japanese Government-General likely ordered the assassination through a court physician named An Sang-ho to prevent the Emperor from sending secret emissaries to the Paris Peace Conference to plead for Korean independence where calls for the principle of self-determination were made following World War I by leaders including President Woodrow Wilson of the US. This posed a significant threat to Japan’s continued political control of Korea. Gojong’s death, therefore, served to eliminate both a symbolic and practical challenge to Japanese colonial authority at a critical moment in international diplomacy.

Question:

1. In this research, historians have relied on personal documents including diaries and autobiographies rather than official government documents and statements. Why might historians consider these personal documents credible in this case?

Paper 3 Practice

1. To what extent did Japanese annexation transform Korea's political system in the period from 1910–1945?
2. To what extent were long-term Korean political traditions and nationalist movements able to endure and adapt under Japanese colonial rule between 1910 and 1945?

Cultural Suppression and Symbolic Domination

Annexation was marked by overt attempts to undermine Korea's cultural and symbolic foundations. In 1921, a royal Joseon dynasty cemetery was converted into a golf course, with graves still visible as players teed off. This deliberate insult demonstrated Japan's contempt for Korea's dynastic traditions. When Koreans protested, the colonial government dismissed their concerns as "superstitious," highlighting their cultural insensitivity and the imperial tendency to belittle Korean culture as backward or irrational.

The construction of the General Government Building in 1926 made Japan's intentions clear. Built directly in front of Gyeongbok Palace which was the traditional seat of Korean kings, it was deliberately placed off-center, breaking Korea's geomantic principles (pungsu-jiri) that linked the royal site to its mountain backdrop and blocking access to the palace. For many Koreans, this was more than an architectural and/or aesthetic disruption and instead symbolized an intentional attempt to sever their connection to royal legitimacy and the Confucian cosmology and worldview of the Joseon dynasty. The conversion of royal cemeteries and construction of the Government-General Building were significant not just as insults but as deliberate strategies to sever Korea's connection to dynastic legitimacy and Confucian cosmology.



Source Activity One

ATL: Thinking Skill

Source A

"Introduction to Geomancy" based on Dr. Jongwoo Han's *Power, Place and State-Society Relations in Korea*.

When geographers and historians explain South Korea's economic miracle and its simultaneous democratic development, they often focus on political or economic factors. However, Confucian doctrine and indigenous Korean schools of thought, such as geomancy (pungsu jiri sasang in Korean or feng shui in Chinese), are rarely examined. Geomancy, often dismissed as superstition, is crucial to understanding Korea's cultural, political, and economic systems.

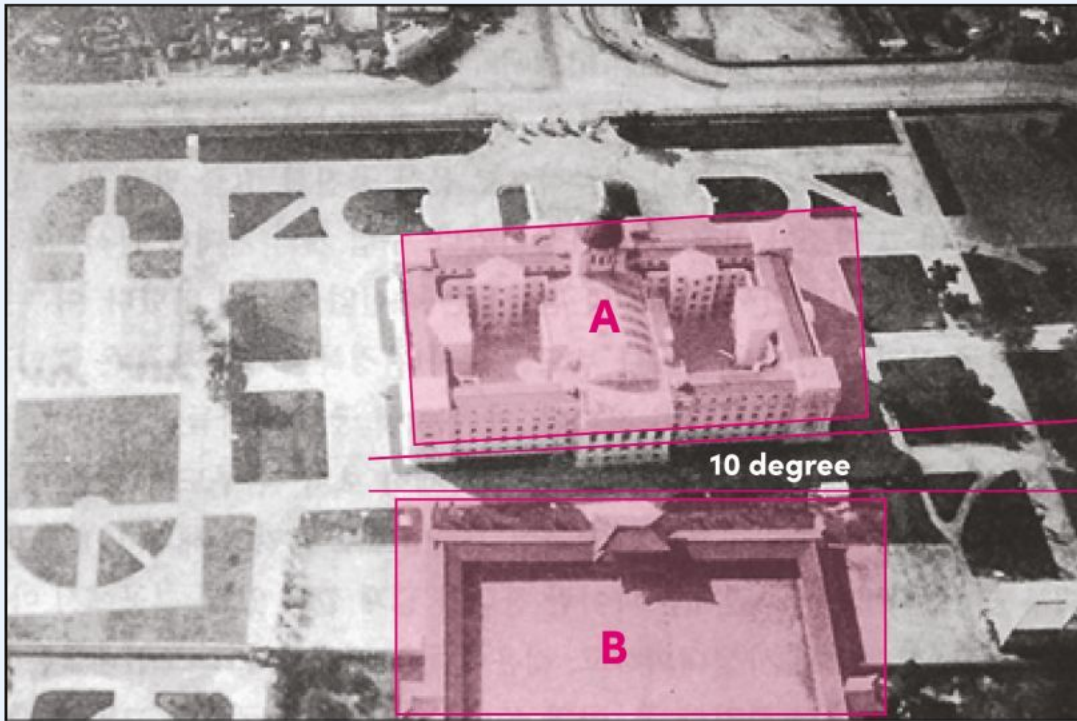
Ancient Asian cities, unlike Western ones that emphasize economic functions, focused on religious or mystical characteristics. Geomancy was used to find the perfect place where heaven's power is reflected on earth. Governing elites in ancient Asian cities set up national capitals and sacred places based on geomantic principles, such as mountains to the north or water in front of the city. Political buildings were valued more than economic ones, aligning with Confucian principles, and were placed along the north-south axis to communicate power.

Geomancy explained how "Heaven's will" was reflected in the natural world through geographical features and combined with human actions. Success depended on harmony with social, cultural, and political situations, and required knowledge of cosmology, astronomy, and astrology to position buildings correctly. Confucianism, a political ideology promoting strong state leadership and meritocracy, also played a role. People were willing to sacrifice for the state due to their Confucian and geomantic understanding of the world. Proper arrangement of buildings and the environment communicated a powerful message to anyone in the city, both in the past and today.

Source B



The General Government Building (pictured above) was the main colonial administration building used by the Japanese colonial government of Korea. The building was constructed on the Gyeongbok Palace site, which was designed according to geomantic principles, with mountains to the north and water in front, reflecting the ideal placement for harnessing heaven's power on earth.



⏏ Jongwoo Han, Power, Place, and State–Society Relations in Korea.
The Japanese General Government Building distorts the *axis mundi* of the Confucian Joseon Dynasty by 10 degrees.

- A. The General Government Building
- B. The *Geunjeongjeon*

Questions:

1. According to Source A, what role did geomancy play in the political and social organization of pre-modern Korean cities?
2. With reference to Source A, explain how Confucianism and geomantic principles were connected to ideas of political authority and legitimacy.
3. Using Source B and its caption, explain how the location and construction of the General Government building can be understood as a symbolic act of power.
4. Using Sources A and B, explain how the construction of the General Government Building by the Japanese colonial government might affect Korean cultural identity.

Even the environment was reshaped. Japanese cherry blossoms and kaizuka junipers were planted across public parks and boulevards, altering Korea's ecological landscape. These ornamental plantings were not merely aesthetic but served as seasonal reminders of colonial presence, making Seoul appear more like Tokyo. This strategy was not unique to Korea; colonial regimes elsewhere similarly imposed their own symbols. The French in Hanoi lined streets with European trees and built French-style boulevards to "civilize" the city. Such global parallels highlight how Japan sought to overwrite Korea's environment as part of a broader imperial project.

Land Reform and Rural Dispossession

One of the most consequential policies was the Land Survey Program (1910–1918). Farmers were required to produce written deeds to prove ownership, but most Korean peasants only had customary claims passed orally through generations. Land lacking documentation defaulted to the state, which redistributed much of it to Japanese settlers and landlords. By the 1930s, about two-thirds of Korean farmers were tenants, paying 40–50 percent of their harvest as rent. Over 400,000 hectares of land had passed into Japanese hands. While some Korean landlords consolidated property and benefited from the new legal order, the vast majority of peasants were impoverished. This “land reform” which reversed Gojong’s effective land policies during the Gwangmu reforms was clearly designed to benefit the colonial rulers and consequently sharpened class divisions within Korean society, as rural elites sometimes collaborated while tenant farmers sank deeper into poverty.

According to Korean historian Ki-baik Lee, author of *A New History of Korea* (1984), this change destroyed the traditional village economy and became a turning point that broke Korea’s farming system, leading many people to resent Japanese rule. Michael Robinson (1988), in *Cultural Nationalism in Colonial Korea*, adds that these disruptions also inspired new kinds of cultural nationalism. As rural life declined, educated Koreans in cities began promoting cultural reform and national pride as ways to preserve their identity under colonial control. Together, Lee and Robinson show how economic hardship and cultural response worked hand in hand to shape Korean nationalism in the early 1900s.

Korean Migrations

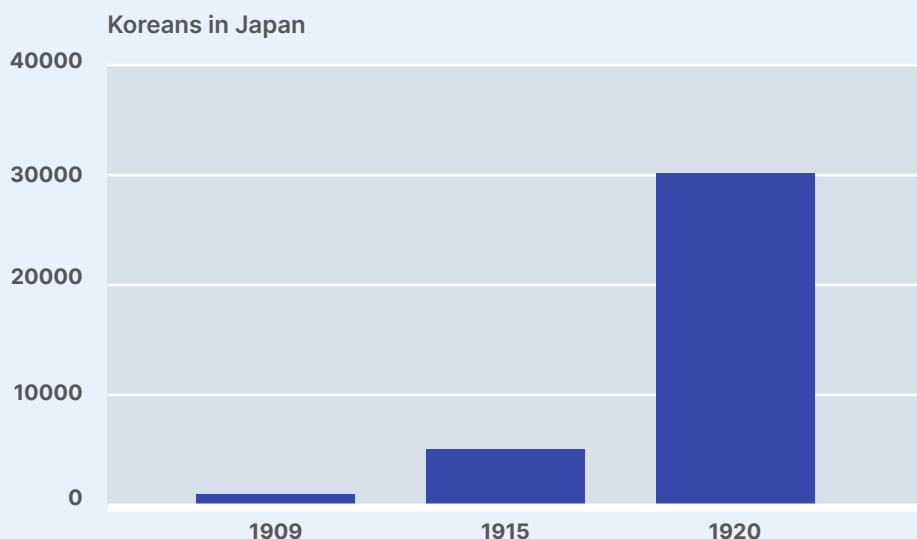
As Koreans came to understand the goals and nature of Japanese colonial rule, some decided to leave Korea. Initially, many Koreans migrated to Manchuria (China) for economic reasons, as many Korean farmers became landless due to not understanding the need to register their land during Japanese land surveys. Therefore, they migrated to find new land to farm. Some Koreans also migrated to Manchuria in order to organize various kinds of resistance against Japanese rule including schools, guerrilla bases, and nationalist associations.

Surprisingly, starting in 1909, one of the most common destinations for these migrants was Japan (see chart), which offered new opportunities. Most Korean migrants to Japan were looking for jobs in Japanese industries, while a smaller number went to pursue education in Japanese universities. Since Koreans were considered Japanese subjects under colonial rule, it became easier for them to migrate to Japan. These opportunities provided chances for economic improvement, social mobility, and stability, despite facing challenges and discrimination. The Korean diaspora community in Japan, known as Zainichi Koreans, preserved their cultural traditions. The impact of this migration continues today, with Koreans remaining the largest ethnic minority in Japan.



Source Activity Two

ATL: Thinking Skills



Graph showing the number of Koreans in Japan in 1909, 1915, and 1920.

Questions:

1. What trend is shown in the number of Koreans living in Japan between 1909 and 1920?
2. Using your contextual knowledge and the source, assess the extent to which Japanese colonial policies were responsible for Korean migration to Japan in the period 1909–1920.

Migration reflected multiple perspectives as some saw it as economic opportunity in Japan while others as nationalist resistance in Manchuria. Diaspora networks would later play a key role in sustaining Korea's independence movement.

The Samil (March 1st) Movement (1919)

Resentment exploded in the Samil (March 1st) Movement of 1919, Korea's first nationwide independence demonstration. Sparked by Emperor Gojong's funeral and global talk of self-determination by Woodrow Wilson, 33 Korean leaders – including religious figures, intellectuals, and businessmen – signed a Declaration of Independence and organized coordinated protests. The signatories included Buddhists, Christians, and Confucian scholars, showing that nationalism cut across religious lines and united otherwise divided communities.



Source Activity Three

ATL: Thinking Skills

Source A: Selected Excerpts, Wilson's 14 Points

5th: "A free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims, based upon the strict observance of the principle that in determining all such questions of sovereignty the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight with the equitable claims of the government whose title is to be determined."

6th: "The evacuation of all Russian territory and such a settlement of all questions affecting Russia as will secure the best and freest cooperation of the other nations of the world in obtaining for her an unhampered and unembarrassed opportunity for the independent determination of her own political development and national policy and assure her of a sincere welcome into the society of free nations under institutions of her own choosing; and, more than a welcome, assistance also of every kind that she may need and may herself desire. The treatment accorded Russia by her sister nations in the months to come will be the acid test of their good will, of their comprehension of her needs as distinguished from their own interests, and of their intelligent and unselfish sympathy."

10th: "The peoples of Austria-Hungary, whose place among the nations we wish to see safeguarded and assured, should be accorded the freest opportunity of autonomous development."

14th: "A general association of nations must be formed under specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike."

Source B: Selected Excerpts, March 1st Korean Declaration of Independence

"We hereby declare that Korea is an independent state and that Koreans are a self-governing people."

"We make this declaration on the strength of five thousand years of history as an expression of the devotion and loyalty of twenty million people."

"We claim independence in order to restore the natural rights of the people and to ensure their happiness."

"We proclaim it to the nations of the world in affirmation of the principle of the equality of all nations."

"We appeal to the conscience of humanity and the principles of justice and righteousness."

"We believe that this is the only way to rectify the injustices of the past and to establish a new order of peace and justice."

Questions:

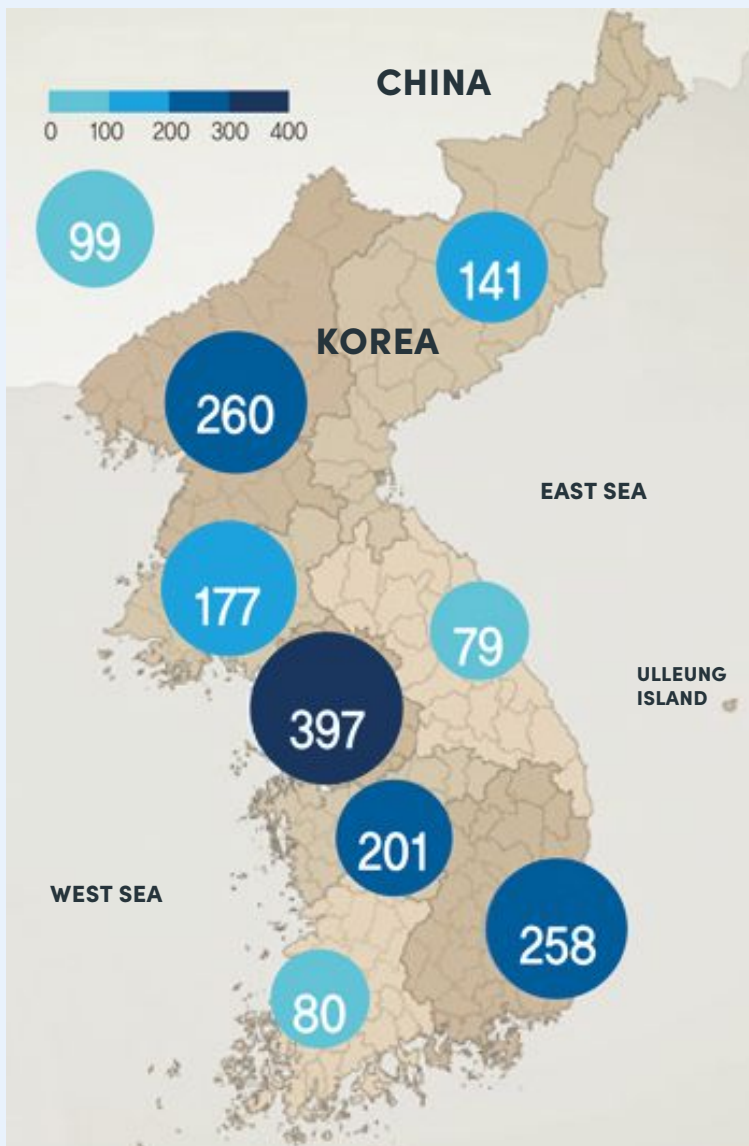
1. Analyze the extent to which Wilson's 5th, 6th, 10th, and 14th points influenced the Korean independence movement.
2. To what extent were Wilson's ideals realized in Korea's Declaration of Independence?

Over the following weeks, nearly two million Koreans participated in rallies across the peninsula (see map), shouting “Manse!” (“Long live Korean independence!”). The protests were notable for the variety of people involved- farmers, merchants, women, and students all took part, reflecting the diffusion of nationalist sentiment.



Source Activity Four

ATL: Thinking Skills



« Number of participants in the 1919 Samil Movement by region in Korea.

Questions:

1. What does this source indicate about protests across urban centers and rural areas?
2. How can this source be used to analyze the significance of the protests in Korea?

Japan's response was brutal. Approximately 7,500 Koreans were killed, 16,000 were wounded, and 46,000 were arrested. Entire villages were destroyed in collective punishments. Historian Michael Robinson, author of *Cultural Nationalism in Colonial Korea, 1920–1925* (1988), explains that the March First Movement was significant because it showed how nationalism had spread beyond the educated elite to include students, farmers, and workers across the country. In the United States Congressional Record from July 17, 1919, accounts from the Samil Movement from a 19-year-old student who was shot in the leg, a 61 year old man also shot in the leg and then mistreated, and a 27 year old man who was shot in the arm as he fled from Japanese soldiers breaking up a gathering are just three of 22 stories of violence. Each was treated at Severance Hospital, a missionary-run hospital in Seoul, as many avoided Japanese-run hospitals out of fear. Ki-baik Lee, one of Korea's most respected historians and author of *A New History of Korea* (1984), interprets the movement as proof of Korea's enduring national spirit. The aftermath of the uprising convinced many activists that peaceful protest alone would not achieve independence, pushing some to turn toward armed resistance based in Manchuria, Shanghai, and other parts of East Asia.

Though suppressed, the Samil (March 1st) Movement is significant as the first truly mass nationalist uprising since it involved millions across class, gender, and religious lines.



Source Activity Five

ATL: Thinking Skills



Red Cross account of the Samil (March 1st) events (1919).

International reports publicized Japan's crackdown with deaths and mass arrests.

Question

1. How useful is this source to assess the impact of international reporting on foreign governments, missionary networks, and/or Korean activists overseas?



Conceptual Connections

Concept Focus: Cause & Consequence, Significance

Essential Question: Why did the Samil Movement occur, and why does it remain historically significant even though it failed to win independence?

Using the information about the movement in the text along with the selected excerpts (provided previously) from the Korean Declaration of Independence, create a two-column causation and consequence map:

CAUSES (Why it happened)	CONSEQUENCES (What it led to)

In what ways was Samil a failure? In what ways was it a turning point? Explain using IB language about historical significance (transformative, symbolic, foundational, galvanizing).

Paper 2 Practice

Authoritarian Rule

As this thematic study focuses on Authoritarian Rule from 750 CE onwards, the material on Korean resistance can be used as a case study of how **authoritarian rule was challenged**. The Lines of Inquiry for this inquiry question focus on internal opposition, popular resistance, impact of policies and external threats.

The Samil Movement represents an example of a nationwide Korean independence uprising challenging Japanese colonial rule. It represents a non-violent resistance across different sections of Korean society with the participation of both youth and women, including Yan Gwan-sun, and included elements such as nationalist sentiments and sacrifice for the greater cause. It helped unify dispersed resistance providing it with clear direction.

Other case studies that focus on how colonial rule was challenged are:

- The 1919 Amritsar protests in India against British colonial rule
- The Mau Mau Uprising (1952-60) in Kenya against British colonial rule
- The Cuban War of Independence (1895-98) against Spanish colonial rule

The comparative studies can focus on the following factors:

- Mass participation of the colonized population across different societal groups
- The connected concepts of questioning legitimacy, identity and power
- Comparing short-term vs long-term impacts

Paper 3 Practice

1. To what extent was the Samil Independence Movement (1919) significant for Korean nationalism and the shaping of long-term resistance strategies?
2. To what extent did the Samil Independence Movement pose an immediate threat to Japanese colonial rule in Korea?

“Cultural Rule” (1919–1937)

In response to the global criticism following the Samil (March 1st) Movement, Japan introduced a period of so-called “Cultural Rule.” Japan presented Cultural Rule as change as limited newspapers were permitted, cultural associations allowed, and censorship was loosened. Korean athletic clubs, youth groups, and cultural journals flourished briefly under this opening.

These changes were more cosmetic than substantive though, and the continuity of repression continued. The police retained ultimate authority and organizations could be shut down at any sign of disloyalty. The Peace Preservation Law of 1925 was a key tool used to suppress opposition. Initially introduced in Japan to combat social unrest, the law was extended to colonies like Korea. It targeted groups and individuals seen as threats to the state and its imperial vision. Strict censorship ensured that only government-approved

messages could be spread through newspapers, literature, and broadcasts. Censors repeatedly suspended the *Dong-A Ilbo* newspaper, and in 1940 they closed it entirely after editors omitted the Japanese flag from a photo of a sporting event.

By the 1930s, enforcement of the Peace Preservation Law escalated. Colonial authorities pressured individuals to abandon their beliefs and practices and thousands were arrested, often without trial. Surveillance was intensified with networks of secret police and informants who monitored dissidents. Those caught opposing Japanese rule faced harsh punishments, including arrests, imprisonment, and even torture. These measures created a climate of fear, stifling some open resistance but also fueling efforts to resist Japan's domination.

According to Michael Robinson, Tokyo alternated between concession and coercion, a 'carrot-and-stick' routine, while Ki-baik Lee argues that Koreans soon saw the supposed freedoms as merely tactical. Some newspapers, cultural associations, and political organizations were permitted. Koreans were allowed to publish limited magazines and establish cultural societies, and censorship appeared to relax.

However, the Governor-General retained ultimate control, and the police continued to monitor, censor, and arrest activists. Robinson describes these reforms as largely cosmetic, aimed at improving Japan's international reputation rather than granting Koreans genuine freedom. Lee emphasizes that Koreans quickly recognized the limits of Cultural Rule given that cultural activity was tolerated only so long as it did not challenge imperial authority.

Summary

Japan abolished Korea's monarchy in 1910 and ruled directly through the Governor-General. Few Koreans held government posts, and strict censorship and military surveillance defined "Military Rule" (1910–1919). This direct system mirrored other empires but left Koreans with no sovereignty. Cultural suppression extended beyond policy into the manipulation of sacred sites and public spaces, with palaces obstructed, cemeteries desecrated, and even landscapes remade as symbols of colonial power. Land reforms dispossessed millions of farmers, producing widespread rural poverty. Resistance erupted in the Samil (March 1st) Movement, which demonstrated the breadth of Korean nationalism but was met with violent repression. "Cultural Rule" softened appearances but left the structure of domination intact.

Some scholars including Carter Eckert have argued that annexation introduced modern institutions such as centralized bureaucracy and modern property systems, but this interpretation is widely challenged. Most historians instead emphasize that, for Koreans, annexation was experienced as domination, humiliation, and cultural erasure but it also laid the foundation for resilience and renewed nationalist struggle.

II. Social Developments: Education, Language, and Religion Assimilation Attempts

Inquiry Question

To what extent do you agree with the argument that Koreans resisted assimilation policies in schools, language, and religion?

Education

Korea's schools were transformed into tools of assimilation. The Joseon (Chosen) Education Ordinance (1911) created a two-track system with limited schooling for Koreans. This system focused on basic literacy and vocational skills for Koreans and created more advanced schools for Japanese settlers. By 1930, less than three percent of Korean children advanced beyond primary education, while Japanese students in Korea enjoyed far greater access to higher schooling. This imbalance ensured most Koreans were trained only for subordinate roles in the colonial economy.

The curriculum reinforced loyalty to the empire. By the late 1930s, more than two million Korean children were enrolled in colonial schools, yet much of what they were taught served Japan's imperial goals. In boys' common schools, almost 40 percent of class time focused solely on Japanese language instruction, while Korean history, literature, and language were deliberately removed. Students were required to memorize the *Imperial Rescript on Education*, which reinforced loyalty to the emperor and the moral duty of self-sacrifice to the Japanese Empire. Schools offered literacy and technical skills, but at the cost of identity. In effect, education created Koreans who were literate in Japanese ideology but alienated from their own traditions.

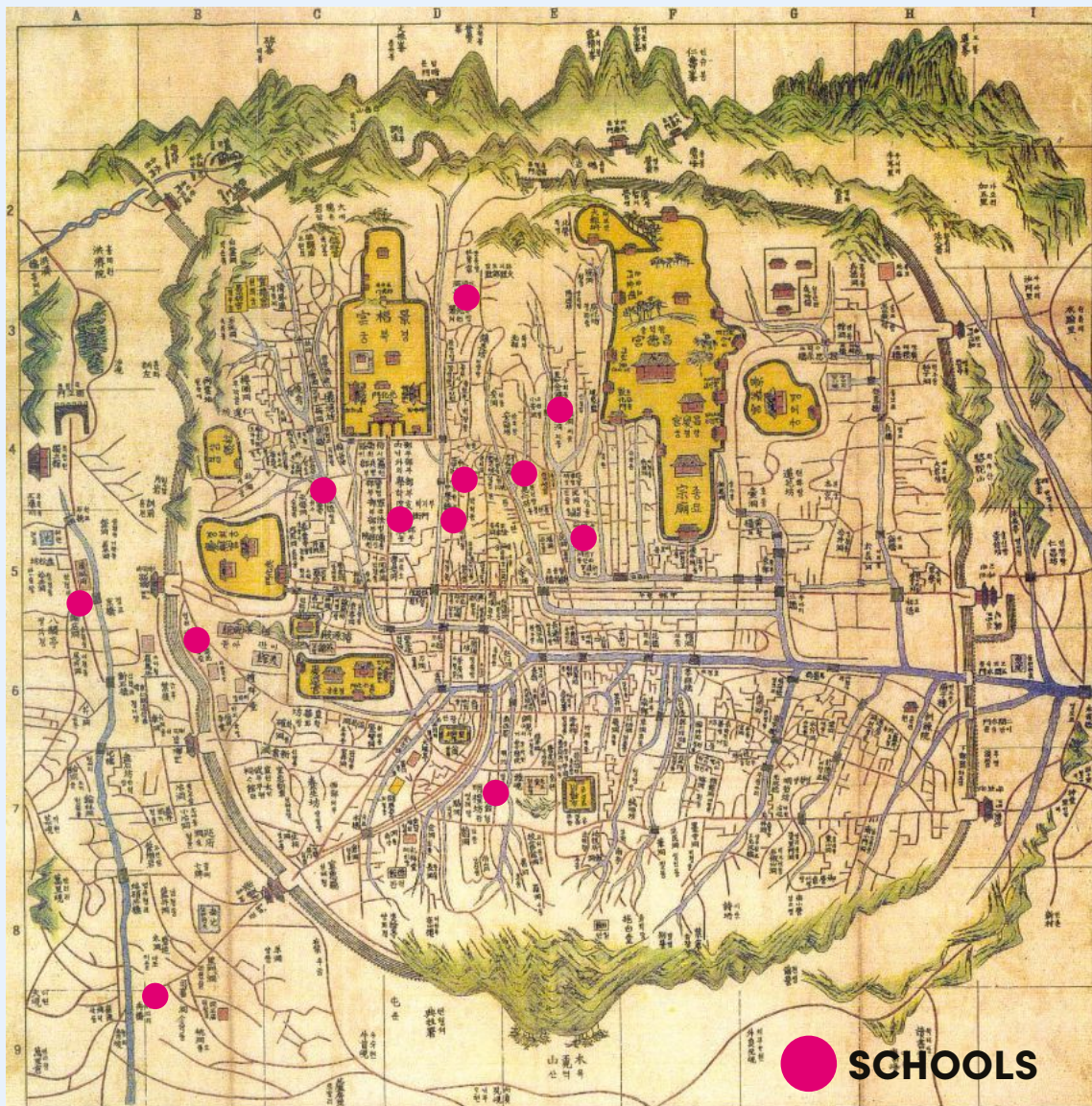
Schools thus became sites of indoctrination rather than opportunity. The lack of access to higher education hindered the intellectual and professional development of Koreans, contributing to social and economic disparities. Without access to higher education, most Koreans were excluded from professions in law, medicine, academia, and government. This contributed to persistent income gaps, limited social mobility, and a delayed emergence of Korean-led institutions after liberation.

But education was not only about what was taught but also about where it happened. Many of the missionary schools that gave Koreans alternative opportunities, such as Ewha, Yonhi, and Pai Chai, were built in Hanyang (Seoul), the sacred capital laid out by the Joseon dynasty. This city was designed according to p'ungsu-jiri (geomancy) to embody royal legitimacy and the spiritual center of the nation. By placing new schools in this space, missionary institutions were not just offering lessons but also reshaping the geography of Korea's most symbolically important city. In the eyes of many Koreans, this tied modern education to the lineage of Korea's sacred space and served as a reminder that learning itself was connected to national identity and survival.



Source Activity Six

ATL: Thinking Skills



⏏ Locations of Liberal Educational Institutions in the Early 20th Century (Lee, Young-Han (1992). p. 101.

Questions:

1. What does the map suggest about the geographical distribution of liberal educational institutions in early 20th-century Korea with regards to the spread of nationalist ideas and organizations during the colonial period?
2. Using the map and your own knowledge, assess the extent to which liberal education contributed to political and social change in Korea in the early 20th century.

For Korean families, education represented both hope and betrayal. Parents recognized that literacy and technical training might provide mobility, but at the cost of cultural identity. Many resisted by sending children to private Han'gŭl schools or church-run academies, which preserved Korean language, history, and traditions. Some of these schools operated in secret, with teachers risking arrest to keep Han'gŭl alive. Their survival shows how education became both a weapon of assimilation and a site of resistance. Historian Ki-baik Lee emphasizes that parents saw education as a "cultural battlefield," since parents recognized that modern education could provide hope for social mobility, but they also saw it as a source of betrayal since it cost their children their cultural identity.

Nationalist leaders emphasized education as a path to freedom from colonial rule. Through the Young Korean Academy (Hŭngsadan) founded in 1913 in San Francisco and later extended to Korea, An Chang-ho (Dosan) taught that disciplined study and moral reform were essential preparation for liberation. The Academy was not a school in the usual sense, but a civic organization where young Koreans pledged to live honest, industrious lives and to put the nation above themselves. Its curriculum blended lessons on ethics, self-discipline, and community service with discussions about independence, creating a space where character development and patriotism were inseparable.

For Koreans inside the peninsula, the Hŭngsadan provided a model of how education could be reclaimed as a national duty rather than a colonial tool. Families running local Korean schools, church schools teaching Han'gŭl, and students in protests all echoed the same principle- learning was about preparing to serve Korea.



Source Activity Seven

ATL: Thinking Skills



しにやる能も重況の村はは先んか子央村 える人及婦十二は長生へぞいそ千八萬一はなは堂前之資教風式屋小寺へ此内 堂新る壁にまい
るもは所長ぬせ品製を民園にうやの秋華の今もてれはいとれくあ代駒へとれ えるけ校に的人注を突満るな縦縦つつしかやびそを初るもを勤

« A seodang (traditional village school) class in 1930, Seoul. The setup illustrates how some traditional educational practices persisted, even under growing Japanese pressure on imperial school systems.

Questions:

1. Identify two features of the classroom that suggest continuity with traditional Korea education.
2. Identify one limitation of the source for understanding education across Korea as a whole.
3. Explain how the persistence of seodang schools challenges the view that Korean education was completely replaced by Japanese colonial systems.
4. Analyze what this source suggests about the reach and limits of colonial control at the local level.

Paper 2 Practice

1. Compare Korean cultural-educational resistance with another Asian case (e.g., Chinese New Culture Movement, Vietnamese Quốc Ngữ schools). In what ways did education become a tool of both control and resistance?

Language

Korea's language was steadily suppressed. From the start of colonial rule, Japanese was made the language of administration and law. The growing Japanese settler population, which reached over 420,000 by the mid-1920s, further accelerated the cultural shift in urban centers where Japanese-language media dominated. By the 1930s, restrictions intensified under the 1938 Education Ordinance, which banned Korean from schools entirely. Newspapers in Korean were closed, leaving only Japanese-language publications. Writers and publishers who attempted to produce content in Korean faced strict censorship or punishment if their work was seen as non-compliant with Japanese standards. These language policies ensured that Japanese ideas and culture dominated public and private life, reinforcing the broader strategy of erasing Korean identity and facilitating assimilation into the Japanese Empire. By 1938, approximately 12.4% of the Korean population could speak Japanese, and that number would continue to increase in subsequent years as the Japanese wartime efforts intensified.

This policy created lasting consequences. Generations of Korean children grew up unable to read or write fluently in their own language. Agencies such as courts, businesses, and government, were inaccessible without being able to fluently speak Japanese. The irony was that by banning Han'gŭl (the Korean vernacular), the colonial state inadvertently transformed it into a nationalist symbol, uniting elites and commoners behind a shared written language. The Korean Language Society, founded in 1921, labored to standardize spelling and compile a modern dictionary. Later, dozens of its members were arrested, tortured, and imprisoned, simply for their work on a dictionary, demonstrating that the colonial state equated cultural preservation with rebellion.

Despite these risks, Koreans continued to use Han'gŭl in diaries, letters, and private publications. Historian Andre Schmid notes that the very act of defending Han'gŭl became synonymous with defending Korea itself. Ki-baik Lee stresses that the silencing of Korean in schools and the press was felt as cultural trauma, deepening resentment toward colonial rule while galvanizing underground efforts to keep the language alive.

Religion

Korea's religious life was also transformed by assimilation. The colonial state mandated Shinto shrine worship, presenting it as a patriotic duty rather than a religious act. Koreans were required to bow at shrines, and schoolchildren were marched to ceremonies as part of their education. Refusal could lead to expulsion, loss of employment, or imprisonment. Although Japanese officials claimed that shrine rites were "non-religious," most Koreans saw them as acts of loyalty to the Japanese emperor, and worshipping at a shrine felt like a forced betrayal of their own beliefs.

The colonial government also worked to marginalize Korean religions and philosophies. Confucian ancestor rites that connected families to their ancestors and reinforced social harmony were discouraged. Buddhism was reorganized under state control, which reduced the independence of temples and monks. Indigenous beliefs such as shamanism and geomancy were labeled "superstitions" and pushed to the margins. These efforts cut deeply into Korean identity because they attacked the values, rituals, and spiritual connections that had long shaped family life and cultural continuity. By weakening these traditions, Japan sought not only political dominance but also to reshape how Koreans understood themselves as a people.

Despite repression, Christianity became one of the most important areas of both spiritual life and resistance. Linked to American missionary networks, Korean churches functioned as more than places of worship. They provided literacy programs in Han'gŭl, offered access to modern education, and served as safe meeting places for activists. For many Koreans, especially women and youth, the church was one of the few spaces where leadership and education opportunities were still accessible under colonial rule.

Even as the colonial government attempted to suppress Korean language and reshape cultural life, Christian missionary schools such as Ewha Haktang (later Ewha Womans University, founded by Mary Scranton) and Yonhi College (later Yonsei University, shaped by the work of missionaries like Horace Underwood) educated both boys and girls and directly challenged Japanese restrictions on Korean education. In these classrooms and youth circles, Korean students encountered not only Western ideas but also a renewed sense of national dignity grounded in literacy, moral purpose, and community responsibility. These schools weren't just religious or academic and instead also about civic vision even at a time when direct political organization was dangerous.

Churches also nurtured future nationalist leaders. Many who later led protests or joined the Provisional Government began their activism in Christian youth groups or Bible study circles. Christianity's ties to the United States meant that reports of repression, such as the torture or imprisonment of Korean pastors, reached Western newspapers, which created embarrassment for Japan.

Christianity's political role was undeniable. During the Samil (March 1st) Movement of 1919, pastors and congregations provided the organizational backbone of demonstrations. Out of the 33 signatories of the Declaration of Independence, 16 were Christians, reflecting how deeply church networks were tied to nationalism. Students from missionary schools like Ewha and Yonhi helped distribute leaflets and organize rallies. International press coverage of Christian leaders arrested or tortured further amplified Korea's plight, which linked local resistance to global sympathy. Thus the church acted simultaneously as a sanctuary and megaphone.

Churches also supported anti-Japanese organizations beyond worship. For example, Christian networks helped channel funds to independence activists abroad, provided cover for secret meetings, and kept alive a sense of moral purpose in the face of forced assimilation. For women especially, churches offered rare spaces to lead literacy classes, organize relief, and inspire political activism.

Mission hospitals and universities represented another dimension of this influence. Horace Allen Newton, Oliver Avison, Horace Underwood, and other missionaries worked to establish medical and higher-education institutions that combined scientific instruction with service and national self-strengthening. For example, Avison, a Canadian Christian medical missionary, restructured and then opened Severance Hospital and College in 1904.

Although colonial authorities did attempt to limit or stop Christian education (for example with the 1915 Private School Regulations that controlled curricula), mission leaders persisted and fostered a generation of Koreans who were not just academically trained, but also grounded in cultural pride and duty. Furthermore, institutions such as universities and hospitals also remained, another testimony to Korean resistance. It was a complicated entanglement of being foreign-established, but shaped by Korean nationalism and challenging colonial authority. Christianity therefore acted as both a vehicle of Western religion and also a vehicle of the Korean imagined community.



TOK Connection

TOK Concept: Power, Perspectives

AOK: History

Context: During Japanese colonial rule, education and culture became key battlegrounds. Japan attempted to reshape Korean identity through language, schooling, and state ideology. At the same time, Korean Christians used missionary schools and church networks to preserve Korean language and culture, expand literacy, and mobilize resistance.

After reading the information in this chapter on education and religion, answer the following:

In what ways can “foreign knowledge” become a tool for national identity rather than a threat to it?

1. Create a claim that explains how foreign knowledge could threaten national identity in colonial Korea.

- a. Outline evidence supporting the claim
 - b. An example starter sentence is- Japanese attempts to control language and education show how external knowledge can be used to dominate a population...
2. Create a counterclaim that explains how Koreans adapted and used foreign knowledge to strengthen their own identity and resistance.
 - a. Outline evidence supporting the counterclaim
 - b. An example starter sentence is- However, Korean Christians transformed mission schools into spaces for literacy, leadership, and nationalism...
3. Explain how the case of Korea helps think about knowledge as a whole.
 - a. An example starter sentence is- This example from Korea shows that knowledge is not neutral; communities can transform outside ideas into resources for empowerment...

History as an Area of Knowledge

Focus: Perspective, Interpretation, Narrative

Knowledge Question: How do perspectives and present-day narratives influence interpretations of the past in History

Context: The history of colonial Korea (1910-1945) has been interpreted differently by various groups at the time and by historians writing later. These interpretations are shaped not only by historical evidence but also by values, purposes, and present-day contexts.

Task 1: Identifying Perspectives

Consider how each of the following groups might interpret Japanese rule in Korea:

- Korean nationalists
- Japanese colonial officials
- Foreign missionaries and observers
- Later historians (Korean, Japanese, international)

Task 2: Interpretation and Bias

Discuss the following questions with your neighbor:

1. Why might the same historical event be interpreted differently by members of the above mentioned groups?
2. To what extent does bias necessarily undermine historical knowledge? Can bias, on the other hand, reveal important insights?

Task 3: Evaluation

Answer the following question:

To what extent can historians ever produce an 'objective' account of colonial Korea?

Summary

These policies collectively created a generation of Koreans who were educated mainly in Japanese language, history, and loyalty to the emperor, which caused a deep weakening of Korean cultural identity. Many children grew up reading Japanese textbooks, reciting Japanese songs, and celebrating Japanese national holidays, while traditional Korean stories, customs, and even the use of Han'gŭl were discouraged or banned in schools. After the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937, assimilation efforts became even more extreme. Through "imperial subjectification", the colonial government sought to turn Koreans into loyal subjects of the Japanese empire by requiring them to adopt Japanese names, speak only Japanese, and participate in Shinto worship. School lessons were rewritten to emphasize obedience, sacrifice, and service to the emperor, while older students were trained for military duty or factory labor to support Japan's war effort. These measures embedded imperial ideology into everyday life and reshaped the values of Korean youth to fit Japan's wartime needs.

By targeting education, language, and religion the Japanese colonial government sought not only to dominate Korea politically but also to erase its unique national character. Yet Koreans resisted through underground schools, preservation of Han'gŭl, church-based activism, and the quiet defense of traditions within families. Assimilation deepened Korea's cultural trauma, but it also strengthened the determination to preserve and defend national identity.

Paper 3 Practice

1. To what extent did Japanese assimilation policies result in lasting social and cultural change in Korea during the period of colonial rule?

III. Economic Developments: Banking, Agriculture, Industry, and Infrastructure

Inquiry Question

To what extent do you agree with the statement that economic changes under Japanese colonial rule affected Korean farmers, workers, and entrepreneurs?

Banking and Currency

Korea's financial system was overhauled soon after annexation. In 1911, the Bank of Chosŏn replaced the short-lived Bank of Korea and became the central financial authority of the colony. As the central bank, The Bank of Chosen controlled monetary policy and helped increase the flow of money to Japanese businesses

operating in Korea. The introduction of the Korean yen, tied to the Japanese yen, further demonstrated Japanese economic control over Korea. This shift gave Japan full control over Korea's financial landscape, including interest rates, credit access, and currency value.

While the new system introduced modern banking, it overwhelmingly favored Japanese settlers and corporations. By the 1920s, more than half of all loans went to Japanese borrowers, while fewer than ten percent went to Koreans. Korean entrepreneurs, including small manufacturers, shop owners, and farmers hoping to modernize, found it nearly impossible to compete. The reason was structural. Access to credit required collateral, land titles, and written applications in Japanese, conditions that most Korean farmers and small business owners could not meet. Even qualified Koreans often faced discriminatory lending practices and higher interest rates. As a result, Japanese firms such as the Oriental Development Company and major conglomerates like Mitsui and Mitsubishi gained easy access to capital, allowing them to expand rapidly into rice milling, textiles, and transportation, while Korean enterprises stagnated.

Nationalist writer Sin Ch'ae-ho condemned this system as a form of "economic warfare" meant to erode Korean autonomy and ensure colonial dependence. In practice, the banking network became an instrument of control, concentrating economic power in Japanese hands and cutting most Koreans off from opportunities for growth or modernization. This exclusion deepened resentment and reinforced the sense that Japanese rule sought not only to occupy Korean land but also to dominate the nation's economic future.



Source Activity Eight

ATL: Thinking Skills



« Korean Yen issued by the Bank of Chōsen, used 1910–1945.

Following the annexation, Japan replaced the Korean won with Korean yen.

The Bank of Chōsen was a colonial financial institution controlled by Japan. This meant that Korea was integrated into Japan's imperial economy and help Japan to control Korea economically.

Questions:

1. Identify two visual or textual features on the banknote that indicate colonial authority or control.
2. Explain what the replacement of the Korean won suggests about changes to Korea's economic sovereignty.
3. To what extent is the source useful for understanding Japanese colonial control over Korea?

Paper 2 Practice

Authoritarian Rule

As this thematic study focuses on Authoritarian Rule from 750 CE onwards, the material on Korean resistance can be used as a case study of **how authoritarian rule affected people's lives**. The Lines of Inquiry for this inquiry question focus economic and social effects, the experiences of women and marginalized groups.

The example of **Japanese banking policy** can be used to demonstrate how credits and loans favoured overwhelmingly Japanese settlers, companies and zaibatsu. Korean farmers and entrepreneurs had to deal with higher interest rates and limited access to capital which meant that Korean companies experienced limited economic growth. This in turn meant that the Korean economy was structurally dependent on Japanese capital, thus showing how colonial economy functioned based on extraction rather than developing the local population economically.

This impacted Korean society directly, and more specifically Korean farmers who were disadvantaged by the practices of formal land registration based on both the availability of capital and knowledge of the legal system. When Korean farmers were not able to repay loans, their land was confiscated and they became tenant farmers or landless labourers. This led to serious social consequences by widening the gap between rich and poor, rural poverty and large-scale migration to urban centers in Manchuria and Japan.

Other case studies could include the following examples:

- British banks in India with the creation of the Reserve Bank of India
- The French Baque de l'Arcique Occidental in French West Africa
- The Dutch De Javasche Bank in the Dutch East Indies
- The Belgian Banque du Congo Belge

The comparison can focus on the following factors:

- Who controlled the capital?
- Who benefited from the colonial banking system?
- Who was excluded?
- What was the social impact?
- How did this create resistance to the economic control of colonial powers?

Another focus for this line of inquiry can be **Japan's rural land policies** in Korea. Other case studies can include:

- The land revenue and tenancy system in British India
- The settler land seizure in French Algeria
- The cultivation system in the Dutch East Indies
- The White Highlands policy in Kenya (British East Africa)

The comparison can focus on these criteria:

- Legal frameworks
- The economic shift from subsistence farming to production for export or settler use
- The social changes from turning peasants into tenants or labourers
- How this created social instability, migration and resistance to colonial rule

Agriculture and Rural Hardship

Agriculture, the livelihood of over 70 percent of Koreans, was reshaped through the Land Survey Program (1910–1918). Farmers had to produce written deeds to confirm ownership, but many peasants had cultivated land for generations without documents. As a result, land often defaulted to the state, which transferred it to Japanese settlers or absentee landlords. By the 1930s, over two-thirds of Korean farmers were tenants forced to give up as much as 50 percent of their harvest as rent. Ki-baik Lee emphasizes that this process destroyed the traditional village order, producing widespread poverty and dependence.

Colonial agricultural policy also emphasized exports to Japan. The Rice Production Increase Program (1920s–1930s) encouraged the cultivation of high-yield strains, but much of the surplus was shipped abroad. By 1935, nearly half of Korea's rice harvest was exported to Japan, leaving rural communities short of food. This imbalance sparked the Rice Crisis of 1919–1920, when prices soared, exports continued, and Koreans faced shortages despite good harvests. Rural Koreans sometimes went hungry even as they watched trainloads of rice leave for Japanese ports, a clear reminder that they were producing for the empire, not for themselves.

Bruce Cumings stresses that Korea was locked into a peripheral role, supplying food to Japan's urban population at the expense of its own. This also tied Korean diets to colonial priorities, with more Koreans forced to consume barley and millet as rice was exported.

Industry and Labor

Korea industrialized rapidly in the 1930s, especially in the north, where hydroelectric power and coal deposits were abundant. Japanese corporations such as the South Manchuria Railway Company and Mitsui invested in steel plants, chemical factories, and mining. By the late 1930s, Korea had become an important supplier of raw materials and manufactured goods for Japan's war economy.

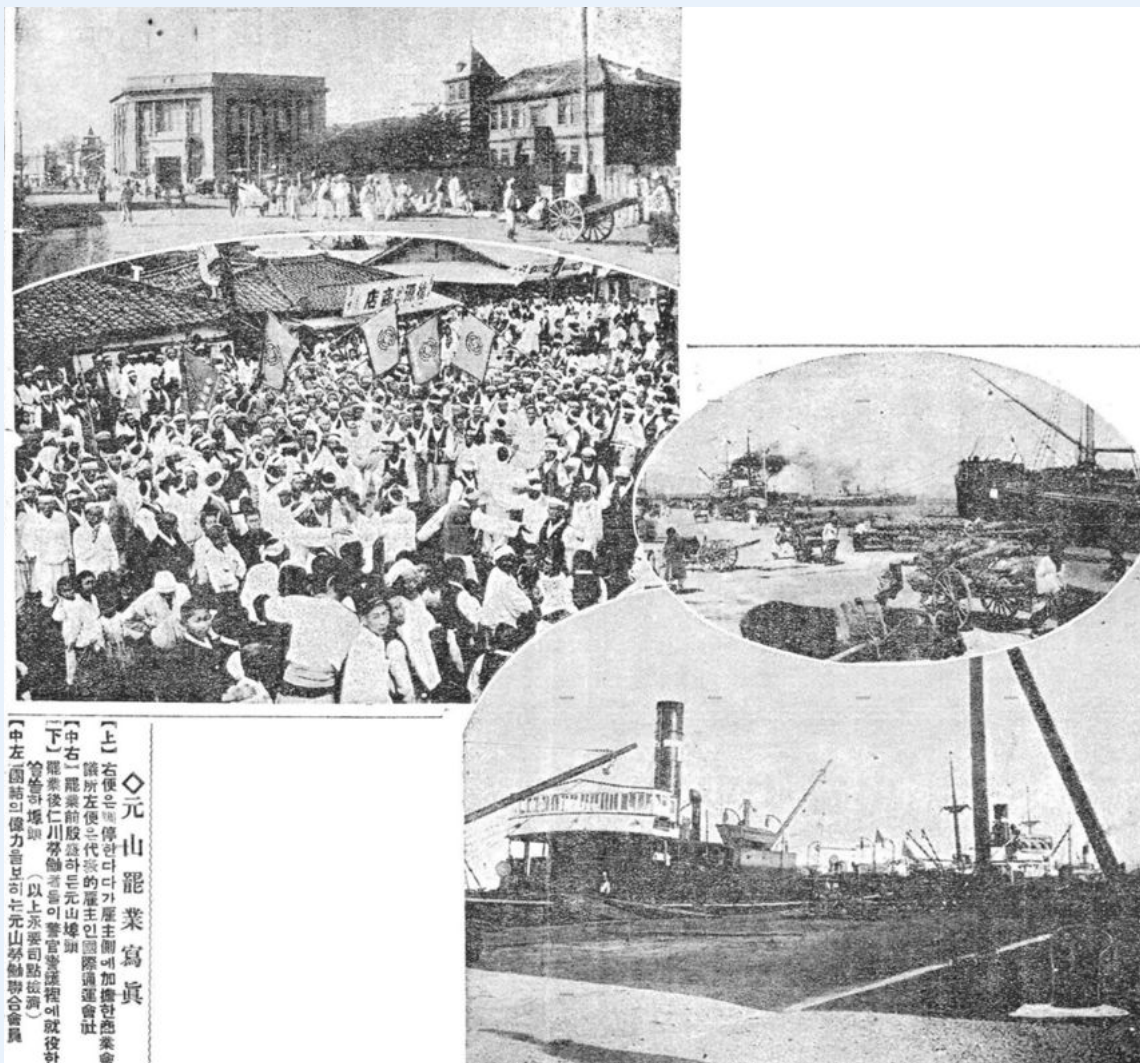
But industrialization excluded Koreans from its benefits. Koreans were rarely promoted to managerial positions and consistently earned less than their Japanese counterparts. Wage discrimination was stark: Koreans were often paid 30–50 percent less for the same work. They were also assigned the most dangerous jobs, such as mining or construction. Discrimination was institutionalized as evidenced by Koreans and Japanese workers living in separate housing, eating in different canteens, and having unequal access to medical care.

This inequality fueled labor unrest. The Wonsan General Strike of 1929, which shut down a major port for nearly three months, was triggered by wage discrimination and unsafe working conditions. It spread to involve over 10,000 workers, making it one of the largest labor actions of the colonial period. Michael Robinson highlights this strike as evidence that Korean workers connected economic exploitation with national subjugation. For many, demanding fair wages became inseparable from resisting colonial domination.



Source Activity Nine

ATL: Thinking Skills



⏏ Newspaper coverage of the Wonsan General Strike (1929).
Labor grievances and national oppression converged in port cities such as Wonsan.

Questions:

1. What does the newspaper image suggest about the scale and nature of the Wonsan General Strike?
2. How do the visual elements of the source (crowds, location, industrial setting) convey the relationship between labour grievances and colonial authority?
3. How might Japanese officials, Korean workers, and foreign observers interpret this event differently?

Paper 2 Practice

Authoritarian Rule

As this thematic study focuses on Authoritarian Rule from 750 CE onwards, the material on Korean resistance can be used as a case study of **how authoritarian rule was challenged**. The Lines of Inquiry for this inquiry question focus on internal opposition, popular resistance, impact of policies and external threats.

A main characteristic of the labour-based nationalist movement in Korea is that it was led by dockworkers, railway workers and industrial labourers. The combination of economic hardship and grievances caused by low wages, long working hours and discrimination and nationalist opposition to colonial exploitation and incorporation into a wider independence struggle as exemplified in the Wonsan General Strike can be compared with other case studies such as:

- The Indian labour movement with textile and railway workers as well as dockworkers in the 1920s-1930s combined with the Indian National Congress and Ghandi's campaigns
- The Egyptian revolution of 1919 against British rule carried out by tram and railway workers as well as civil servants
- The Dakar-Niger railway strike in French West Africa against French colonial rule
- The Indonesian labour movement when labour unions combined nationalist ambitions against Dutch colonial rule in 1945

The comparison can focus on these criteria:

- The link between economic exploitation and national oppression
- The exclusion of urban and industrial workers in political decision-making processes
- The (negative) effects of these strikes on the colonial economies
- The short- and long-term impact of these labour-led resistance movements

Infrastructure

Infrastructure development was a key factor in allowing the Japanese to maintain authoritarian rule in colonial Korea. Before Japanese colonization, Korea's infrastructure was relatively limited and primarily focused on traditional and agricultural needs. The Japanese colonial government invested heavily in infrastructure projects, including the construction of modernized railways, ports, and roads.

By the 1940s, Korea had nearly 5,000 kilometers of railroads, along with new ports, hydroelectric dams, and telegraph lines. These projects created the appearance of progress, but these projects served imperial extraction. Railways connected mines, rice-growing regions, and factories to ports for shipment to Japan, often bypassing Korean towns. Hydroelectric plants powered Japanese-owned industries, not Korean homes. Railroads linked coal mines, rice-producing regions, and industrial sites to coastal ports for shipment to Japan. Hydroelectric dams in the north supplied power for Japanese-owned factories and for Japan itself, not for Korean households. Like railways in India or Indochina, they were not built to integrate local economies but to extract resources. Ki-baik Lee underscores that Koreans rarely gained

direct use of the infrastructure, as trains carried rice out of villages even as local families went hungry. To ordinary Koreans, “modernization” looked like railroads that took their crops away and factories where they worked for half the pay of Japanese laborers.

The intensive extraction of resources such as iron ore, coal, gold, and timber also led to environmental harms. The focus on resource extraction and industrial output for Japan's benefit meant that Korea's economic development was unbalanced and unsustainable. This created long-term challenges for the Korean population, including economic instability and social inequality.

Summary

Korea's economy was transformed under Japanese colonial rule, but not for the benefit of Koreans. The banking system excluded them from credit, land surveys dispossessed farmers, and agricultural exports left villages hungry. Industrialization enriched Japanese corporations but discriminated against Korean workers, while infrastructure projects tied the peninsula tightly to Japan's economy without serving local needs. For Koreans, economic “modernization” was experienced as exploitation and dependency. Yet these hardships also created alliances between peasants, laborers, and intellectuals that led to nationalist resistance.

Paper 3 Practice

To what extent do you agree with the view that Japanese economic development in banking, industry, and infrastructure primarily served Japanese imperial interests rather than benefiting Korea?



Skills & Competencies of a Historian

Japanese colonial officials framed the development of railways, banks, and industrial projects as “modernizing” Korea. Yet many Koreans experienced these developments through the loss of their land, factory exploitation, and capital extraction.

Historians must judge the impact of these changes and not simply describe them. This means asking questions such as- “Who benefited, who controlled the resources, and whose story is recorded?”

What it means to make a historical judgement

- Weigh competing interpretations
- Evaluate the quality of evidence
- Evaluate the context of evidence

- Decide which interpretation is best supported
- Acknowledge complexity
- Explain your criteria
- Make a reasoned evaluation

Using the evidence in this chapter, make a historical judgment using the following prompt.

1. To what extent did Japanese economic policy in Korea build a Korean economy versus building an economy for Japan?

IV. Repression and Resistance

Inquiry Question

To what extent do you agree with the claim that Koreans resisted repression under Japanese colonial rule through political, cultural, and armed struggle?

Political Repression

Korea became one of the most tightly controlled societies in the modern world due to the methods of Japanese rule. The Governor-General of Chosŏn held unchecked power, combining military, judicial, and administrative authority in a single office. This concentration of power was enforced by an expanding police force. By the 1930s, there were more than 80,000 Japanese officers and hundreds of thousands of Korean auxiliaries used for local intelligence, translation, and neighborhood policing. Neighbors were often compelled to report on each other, creating a climate of fear where privacy was nearly impossible. Press censorship silenced dissent. Independent newspapers such as *Daehan Maeil Sinbo* were closed, and surviving publications required official approval of their content. Even cultural journals risked seizure if they hinted at nationalist themes. Public gatherings were banned unless granted a permit, which was rarely given for anything other than officially sanctioned events.

The Peace Preservation Law (1925) criminalized activities deemed as threatening to the imperial state, including peaceful demonstrations, labor organizing, and speaking of any doctrine the authorities judged a threat to imperial order. Thousands of Koreans were arrested under this law. Police used torture routinely, including beatings, waterboarding, and electric shocks, to extract confessions. Historian Bruce Cumings notes that the colonial bureaucracy rested on systematic violence disguised as legal order, using surveillance, interrogation, and torture to enforce obedience.

Cultural Resistance

Despite pervasive repression, Koreans found creative ways to sustain their identity. Cultural nationalism flourished in the 1920s and 1930s, and intellectuals recognized that if political independence was temporarily impossible, the preservation of culture could keep the idea of the nation alive.

The Korean Language Society, founded in 1921, exemplified this resistance. Members labored to standardize Han'gŭl spelling and compile dictionaries at a time when Korean was being driven out of schools and public life. Arrests of some members in 1942 on charges of nationalist conspiracy turned them into cultural martyrs, galvanizing further underground work to preserve the language. The fact that lexicographers were treated as criminals demonstrates how Japan equated cultural preservation with rebellion.

Literary activity also became a quiet but powerful channel of protest. Journals like *Kaebiyok* and *Dong-A Ilbo* published essays, fiction, and poetry that sometimes disguised nationalist critiques with allegory and symbolism. Even sports coverage offered a subtle message of resistance as cheering for Korean athletes in colonial competitions was an expression of shared pride that otherwise couldn't be voiced. Writers such as Yi Kwang-su initially inspired cultural nationalism with works promoting self-strengthening, though his later collaboration with the Japanese highlighted the moral dilemmas faced under repression. His trajectory illustrates how colonial pressure could turn early nationalists into reluctant collaborators.

Everyday practices reinforced identity too. Families taught Han'gŭl privately at home, passed down oral folktales, and continued Confucian ancestral rites despite discouragement. Ki-baik Lee emphasizes that such small acts were not trivial but vital, ensuring continuity of Korean traditions under colonial assault.

Organized Nationalist Movements

During Japan's colonial rule over Korea, nationalist leaders worked relentlessly to make their voices heard on the world stage. After the suppression of the Samil (March 1st) Movement in 1919, many turned to diplomacy and exile politics as alternative strategies for independence. That April, Korean leaders established the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea in Shanghai. Although divided by factional disputes and lacking formal recognition, it was significant in that it represented Korea's continuing claim to sovereignty and provided a base for coordinating diplomacy and armed resistance.

Korean leaders pursued different paths abroad. Kim Kyu-sik traveled to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, where he called for Korea's independence and exposed the reality of Japanese occupation. Although the request was denied since Japan was one of the victorious Allied powers, Kim's appeal gave visibility to Korea's struggle and lent credibility to its diplomatic campaign. Syngman Rhee, serving as president of the Provisional Government, took a longer route through years of advocacy in the United States. He met with officials, published articles, and gave public speeches urging American support for Korea's freedom.

Other leaders stressed that armed resistance was necessary alongside diplomacy. Kim Gu, a prominent figure in the Provisional Government, emphasized armed struggle, working with guerrilla forces in Manchuria and training youth in exile schools. Even with limited resources, the government in exile ran schools and training programs to keep younger generations politically engaged.

While neither diplomatic lobbying nor armed struggle secured immediate independence, these efforts built international awareness, kept Korea's claim to sovereignty alive, and laid essential groundwork for future recognition. The Provisional Government's survival became a moral symbol demonstrating that Korea's claim to independence remained alive.



Source Activity Ten

ATL: Thinking Skills



⏏ Photo of leaders at the establishment of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea in 1919, a key moment in Korea's journey toward independence and self-determination.

Question:

1. What does the formal setting and attire suggest about how these leaders wanted to present Korea to the world?

Inside Korea, nationalists faced constant police scrutiny. Moderates pursued cultural nationalism, promoting education, cooperatives, and economic self-strengthening as preparation for eventual independence. More radical groups, including communists and socialists, tied Korean liberation to the wider anti-imperialist struggle. Labor strikes, tenant protests, and youth organizations in the 1920s and 1930s revealed how everyday grievances over wages or rents were increasingly linked to resistance against Japanese rule. Michael Robinson stresses that these divisions reflected strategic debates – whether to confront Japan directly or to preserve national identity until global conditions shifted.

Armed Resistance

Some Koreans concluded that only armed struggle could secure independence. Guerrilla units formed in Manchuria and Siberia, taking advantage of easily crossed borders to launch raids. These guerrilla groups saw their struggle as a mission of liberation whereas the Japanese perspective was that they were bandits. The Korean Independence Army, established after the Samil (March 1st) Movement, operated from bases in Manchuria and became the most organized military force of the exile movement. In October 1920, its fighters under Kim Jwa-jin joined other nationalist units in the Battle of Cheongsanri, the most celebrated episode of armed resistance. Roughly 3,000 Korean soldiers held out against nearly 30,000 Japanese troops, inflicting significant casualties. Japan retaliated with the Gando Massacre, killing thousands of Korean civilians in Manchuria. Though tragic, Cheongsanri became a powerful symbol of Korean resilience and the possibility of sustained armed resistance.

Individual acts of militancy also captured the nationalist imagination. An Jung-geun's assassination of Ito Hirobumi in 1909 remained an enduring source of inspiration. Later, in 1926, Na Seok-ju carried out bombings against colonial institutions in Seoul, and in 1932, Yun Bong-gil killed Japanese officers with a grenade at a Shanghai ceremony. These actions, though militarily small, drew international attention and inspired wider movements in China as well as Korea. They also signaled that resistance was not confined to Korea itself but part of a transnational struggle.



« An Jung-Geun, who assassinated Ito Hirobumi, is remembered as one of the greatest Korean independence freedom fighters during the colonial period. He is pictured here with his handprint and the statement, “I am a citizen of the Korean State.”

By the late 1930s, Japan's total mobilization for war brought new repression (see Chapter 6). Koreans were conscripted into labor battalions and, eventually, the Japanese army. Students staged boycotts against forced Shinto worship, while workers launched strikes and sabotage campaigns in mines and factories. Ki-baik Lee emphasizes that these acts of resistance, though scattered, revealed the depth of nationalist sentiment across all classes by the late colonial period.

Women and Resistance

Korean women played indispensable roles in resistance, both public and private. The participation of women in resistance challenged earlier male-centered narratives of nationalism. During the Samil (March 1st) Movement, women students organized demonstrations and distributed declarations. Yu Gwan-sun, captured and tortured for her leadership, died in prison at age 17 and became a national martyr. Her struggle also illustrates how religion, youth, and gender sometimes intersected in resistance.



Source Activity Eleven

ATL: Thinking Skills

Yu Gwan-sun

Source A

“Even if my fingernails are torn out, my nose and ears are ripped apart, and my legs and arms are crushed, this physical pain does not compare to the pain of losing my nation. My only remorse is not being able to do more than dedicating my life to my country.”

— Yu Gwan-sun

Source B

Yu Gwan-sun's Identity Card, 1919



Source C

Statue of Yu Gwan-sun in Seoul



Task:

1. Using all sources, analyze how Yu Gwan-sun's actions and the commemoration reflect both resistance to Japanese colonial rule and the construction of Korean national identity.

In your analysis, consider the following questions:

A. Perspective:

- How can Yu Gwan-sun's identity as a young, educated Korean woman under colonial rule enhance our understanding of resistance and personal sacrifice?

B. Values and Ethics:

- How does her statement reflect the emotional and ethical dimensions of resistance to oppression?
- What does it reveal about the broader fight for national independence?

C. Theory of Knowledge:

- To what extent do symbolic representations—such as monuments, documents, and personal testimony—shape our knowledge of historical resistance movements?
- How do symbolic representations such as a monument influence how individuals like Yu Gwan-sun are remembered as national symbols?

Women also supported armed resistance networks, smuggling food, intelligence, and weapons across borders. Some directly joined guerrilla groups, taking part in sabotage and combat. In urban centers, women participated in underground student organizations, printed pamphlets, and aided labor strikes. For example, women in Pyongyang helped distribute illegal newspapers and organize textile strikes, showing that activism extended beyond symbolic protest. In private life women preserved identity by teaching children Han'gŭl, maintaining Confucian rituals, and passing down folktales. These quiet forms of cultural continuity were arguably just as vital as public protest, ensuring the survival of Korean traditions in the face of assimilationist pressures.

Paper 1 Practice

Case Study: Competing Strategies in the Korean Independence Movement

Inquiry Question: How did diplomatic activism and armed/mass-mobilization strategies differ in advancing Korean independence during Japanese colonial rule?

Source A

Context: Shin Chae-ho, a radical nationalist who had turned toward anarchist ideas after fleeing Japanese repression, wrote this declaration while working with militant anti-colonial groups in China and Manchuria (1923).

Content: "Burglar Japan violently usurped our independent right and deprived our nation's right to live... Therefore we reject the begging of diplomats and the reform schemes of the elites. We shall rely upon direct action by the masses. The revolution must strike at the heart of the robber-state and its lackeys; we shall destroy the machinery of oppression, topple the traitors who feed upon the people, and reclaim our freedom by our own hands. Let the youth be the vanguard; let righteous men unite in fearless deeds. Only a fierce struggle can awaken the sleeping nation and break the iron chains that bind it."

Source: Shin, C.-h. (1923). Declaration of the Korean revolution. The Anarchist Library. <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/shin-chaeho-declaration-of-the-korean-revolution>

Source B

Context: This 1929 directive came from the Comintern, the Moscow-based organization coordinating global communist movements and setting ideological priorities for colonial struggles at a moment when Korean communist groups were fragmented.

Content: "To the Revolutionary Workers and Peasants of Korea. Dear Comrades! ... Without the restoration and consolidation of the Communist Party a consistent and determined struggle for the emancipation of the country from the yoke of Japanese imperialism and for carrying out the agrarian revolution is impossible. The E.C.C.I. earnestly hopes that the Korean Communists will... establish the iron cohorts needed for this severe struggle demanding great sacrifices,

unshakable firmness, unbounded revolutionary devotion and readiness for struggle...Only through the mobilization and leadership of the working class and poor peasants can the national-liberation movement advance to victory."

Source: Executive Committee of the Communist International. (1929, February 15). Resolution on the Korean question [In International Press Correspondence, Vol. 9, No. 8]. Marxists Internet Archive. <https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/inprecor/1929/v09n08-feb-15-1929-inprecor.pdf>

Source C

Context: An extract from Korea's Appeal to the Conference on Limitation of Armament (1922), published by the Korean Mission in Washington, D.C., aligned with the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea. Led by Syngman Rhee, the Provisional Government pursued international diplomacy, appealing to the United States and League of Nations. The appeal was submitted during the Washington Naval Conference, a major post-World War I diplomatic gathering aimed at limiting naval buildups and creating a new structure for Pacific security.

Content: "All of the conferee nations, with one exception, are in a similar situation to the United States, for they have agreed by treaty with Korea to use their good offices in case of her oppression. Assuredly, we can assume that all of the ambassadors, delegates and advisors who participate in the grave responsibilities of your task are familiar with those treaties and with the interpretative diplomatic correspondence relating to them. However, for convenience of reference we have prepared an abstract of the governmental records, documents and treaties pertaining to the relations of each conferee nation with Korea, which is attached as Appendix No. 2 under the title 'What the conferee nations have said and pledged'. We solemnly affirm that justice to Korea constitutes an indispensable requisite to the permanent adjustment of far eastern affairs. How can there be peace in the Orient if a nation of 25,000,000 people are left to smart with the injustice of treaties "unkept"? When Her Majesty, the Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and Empress of India ... said in the treaty of 1883 that there shall be perpetual peace and friendship with Korea, and that in case of difference with a third power Great Britain would step in to exert its good offices to bring about an amicable arrangement, Korea saw back of those covenants the integrity of England."

Source: Korean Mission to the Conference on Limitation of Armament. (1922). Korea's appeal to the Conference on Limitation of Armament. United States Government Printing Office. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/06/Korea%27s_appeal_to_the_Conference_on_limitation_of_armament._%28IA_koreasappealtoco00korerich%29.pdf

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)

Summary

Korea experienced repression through authoritarian governance, pervasive surveillance, censorship, and violence. Yet resistance persisted in many forms, like secretive cultural work, nationalist organizing, guerrilla warfare, and women's activism. The Provisional Government in Shanghai symbolized Korea's claim to sovereignty, while the Battle of Cheongsanri and acts of militancy demonstrated armed determination. Writers, churches, and families sustained traditions under constant threat. For Koreans, repression was both daily suffering and a constant reminder of the need to resist, ensuring that nationalism endured and expanded throughout the colonial period.

Conclusion

After examining the Japanese annexation and colonial rule over Korea, including repression, resistance like the Samil Independence Movement, assimilation efforts, and developments in banking, industry, and infrastructure, we now shift to the Second Sino-Japanese War.

This war had significant impacts on Koreans, including forced labor, conscription, and the exploitation of comfort women. It also spurred the growth of nationalism and communism as Koreans resisted Japanese exploitation of their resources. The war's end led to Korea's liberation and the establishment of separate governments under Kim Il-Sung in the North and Syngman Rhee in the South.

Paper 3 Practice

Essay Skills Builder

To what extent do you agree with the claim that Japanese colonial rule transformed Korea politically, socially, and economically.

Your essay must incorporate:

- Your understanding of long-term historical development
- Evidence from the chapter (political, social, economic long-term factors)
 - **Specifically you must include the Samil Independence Movement (1919), assimilation policies, and the colonial economy (banking, industry, infrastructure)**

Your response must have the following:

Knowledge & Content	Accurate, relevant knowledge of colonial Korea
Concepts	Show cause & consequence, continuity & change
Regional study skill	Evaluate arguments & perspectives
Argument	Develop a clear, evaluative judgment

Stage 1 – Annotation

When annotating, mark directly on the document using highlights, margin notes, and symbols.

Annotate your partner's paper for:

- Thesis & argument- highlight the thesis in yellow, comment if it answers “to what extent” and states an evaluative stance
- Use of evidence- highlight evidence in blue, comment whether the evidence is specific and effectively uses
- Continuity/long-term consequences- highlight these moments in green, comment on whether they clearly link to pre colonial Korea changes or long-term impacts
- Counterargument- underline, comment on the effectiveness with which they evaluate alternative perspectives and/or limits to their argument
- Conceptual language (cause, change, significance)- bold these terms, comment on whether these concepts are used meaningfully (not simply named)

Your annotations should help your partner see which parts are strong and where deeper analysis or clarity is needed.

Stage 2 – Apply IB Paper 3 Rubric

Model Thesis Frame

Although Japanese colonial rule introduced economic and infrastructural development in Korea, these changes primarily served imperial interests and required harsh assimilation policies that suppressed Korean identity. The Samil Independence Movement of 1919 reveals that Korean resistance grew in response to repression, suggesting that the transformation of Korea under Japan was significant in scale but limited in benefit for Koreans themselves.

Checklist Aligned to IB Markbands

- Clear, evaluative thesis answering ‘to what extent’
- Explicit and sustained line of argument
- Accurate, relevant historical regional study content knowledge – accurate use of Samil Movement, assimilation policies, economy
- Incorporation of historical concepts (cause, continuity/change, consequence, significance)
- Balanced analysis of long-term factors and other causes
- Use of specific evidence (from colonial Korea)
- Evaluation of competing interpretations and factors
- Clear structure, academic tone, and historical vocabulary
- Clear paragraphs and analytical topic sentences
- Conclusion offers a reasoned final judgment

Peer Feedback Stems

- The most convincing part of your argument is...
- To strengthen continuity/change, connect this more to pre-1910 context by...
- Your strongest use of evidence is when you reference...

- Your analysis of assimilation could be deepened by considering...
- Your continuity/long-term connection works when you...
- This moment in your essay effectively links Samil to larger nationalist resistance because...
- You could evaluate the economic changes further by explaining whether...
- To improve evaluation of arguments, try...

Selected Embedded Approaches to Learning (ATL)-

Task Component	Matching ATL
Build a sustained thesis about the extent of transformation.	Draw conclusions and generalizations
Select evidence: Samil movement, education decrees, banking/industrial data, infrastructure.	Use critical-analysis skills to select and evaluate sources
Line of argument judged by HL Paper 3 rubric.	Develop coherent, logical arguments
Peer-mark using Paper 3 descriptors; highlight strengths and growth areas.	Give and receive meaningful feedback
Review rubric results and adjust argumentation and evidence depth.	Reflect on strengths and areas for improvement

Paper 3 Practice

Additional Paper 3 Style Questions (Regional Study: Asia & Oceania)

1. To what extent do you agree with the perspective that Japan successfully eliminated Korean sovereignty through direct colonial rule?
2. To what extent do you agree with the view that Japanese assimilation policies in education, language, and religion were effective in consolidating colonial control in Korea?
3. To what extent do you agree with the claim that Korean cultural identity ultimately survived Japanese assimilation efforts?
4. To what extent do you agree with the statement that the Samil (March First) Movement of 1919 was a turning point in the development of Korean nationalism?
5. To what extent do you agree with the argument that Korean resistance strategies—including armed struggle, labor protest, and exile diplomacy—were effective in challenging Japanese colonial rule?
6. To what extent do you agree with the view that memory, martyrdom, and symbolism (e.g., Yu Gwan-sun, the Battle of Cheongsanri) were essential in sustaining the Korean independence movement?
7. To what extent do you agree with the claim that the Samil (March First) Movement was a crucial symbolic victory rather than a failed uprising?

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

To what extent did colonial legacies contribute to the causes of the Korean War (1950–1953)?

The decades of Japanese colonial rule shaped the trajectory of modern Korea and laid the groundwork for the eventual division and conflict that resulted in the Korean War. The authoritarian legacy of colonialism intensified nationalist movements and ideological divides. The repression and forced assimilation policies implemented by the Japanese not only suppressed Korean identity but also ignited widespread resentment and resistance. Events such as the Samil (March 1st) Independence Movement of 1919 did not merely symbolize a rejection of foreign rule, but also nurtured an enduring spirit of nationalism that later informed both communist and nationalist visions for an independent Korea.

During the colonial era, Japan's aggressive assimilation efforts of eradicating the Korean language in schools, enforcing the worship of Shinto, and rewriting history in favor of Japan's imperial narrative left a deep cultural scar. Cultural suppression under colonial rule persisted in memory and influenced later ideological clashes. These attempts to erase Korean heritage, though ultimately unsuccessful, generated a backlash that manifested in divergent movements for Korean sovereignty after Japan's defeat in 1945. The North, under Kim Il-Sung, capitalized on the narrative of revolutionary resistance against both colonial and capitalist oppression, while the South, led by Syngman Rhee, emphasized national restoration through anti-communist, Western-aligned policies.

Japan's development of Korea's infrastructure and industry further complicated postcolonial recovery. Though railways, ports, and factories had modernized parts of Korea, these were built to benefit the Japanese empire. After liberation, the South inherited much of the colonial economic infrastructure, while the North, having suffered greater destruction during the war with Japan and later occupation by Soviet forces, prioritized state-led industrialization. Economic disparities between North and South were both a result and a cause of political division. Furthermore, Korea's banking and agricultural systems had been reorganized to exploit rather than empower the Korean people, fostering social inequality and fueling revolutionary sentiment, particularly in the North.

The legacy of resistance under colonial rule also translated directly into the militarization of post-liberation Korea. Guerrilla fighters who had once battled Japanese forces, including those trained in Manchuria or aligned with communist China, became the foundation of the North Korean military and leadership. In contrast, the South Korean government, supported by American military advisors, attempted to suppress leftist movements that had roots in anti-Japanese activism.

Ultimately, the Japanese colonial period was not an isolated episode, but a force that shaped Korea's postwar identity crisis. The repression, assimilation, and economic exploitation endured by Koreans under Japanese rule produced lasting ideological, social, and economic

divisions that erupted into full-scale war in 1950. The Korean War was both a departure from colonial rule and a direct consequence of unresolved colonial legacies. Understanding the colonial experience is essential to understanding why the Korean peninsula, once united under a shared identity, became the site of one of the 20th century's most compelling divisions.

COLONIAL POLICY/RESULT	LONGER-TERM IMPACT TOWARD WAR
Forced assimilation	Generated anti-colonial nationalism; delegitimized foreign rule
Suppression of political rights	Radicalized factions; encouraged underground movements
Industrial and rail development	Post-1945 regional economic imbalances (North = industry, South = agriculture)
Land and banking restructuring	Tenant grievances lead to revolutionary appeal in the North
Guerrilla resistance (esp. Manchuria)	Basis of North Korean military leadership and ideology
Police networks and collaboration	South inherited colonial policing methods and elites



Conceptual Connections

Concepts Integration Chart

IB Concept	IB Style Student Thinking Task	Sample Thesis Starters	Chapter Evidence
Cause & Consequence	Explain how Japanese imperial goals and Korean structural weakness shaped annexation AND how resistance evolved.	Japan's annexation stemmed from... while its consequences included... driven by both state policy and Korean resistance.	• Decline of monarchy • Geopolitics • Japanese military rule & censorship • Land Survey-peasant tenancy • Samil Movement suppression & diaspora activism

Continuity & Change	Identify long-term continuity in coercion but also shifts in methods (military rule to “cultural” rule to wartime mobilization).	Although repression remained a constant, Japanese rule shifted from military to “cultural rule,” reflecting...	Continuities: hierarchy, repression, cultural control Changes: shift to “Cultural Rule,” student activism, industrial development, urbanization, Korean proletarian and agrarian activism
Perspectives	Compare and evaluate legitimacy of competing claims: modernization vs domination; reform vs coercion.	While Japanese officials framed annexation as modernization, Korean nationalists and later historians such as... argue...	Japanese narrative: modernization mission Korean moderates: cultural survival & education Korean radicals: armed struggle needed International observers: self-determination betrayed
Significance	Decide why Samil & cultural resistance matter today – not just immediate effect, but identity & memory in Korea.	The Samil Movement was historically significant because it... despite failing to...	Samil Movement = symbolic and strategic turning point Assimilation = identity suppression & resilience Industrialization = modernizing infrastructure for Japan, unequal benefits

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)**.

Inquiry Question 4: How was authoritarian rule challenged?

Cause and Consequence: When Repression Ignites Resistance

Korea's takeover by Japan was brutal and complete. After signing the annexation treaty in 1910, Japan installed a military-led government that stripped Koreans of their political rights, overhauled laws, and rewrote school curricula to serve imperial goals. Even language became a target as Japanese officials worked to replace Korean identity with imperial loyalty. These policies created immediate resentment and set conditions for backlash.

Internal opposition soon emerged among educated elites, students, and reformers who sought ways to preserve Korea's voice. **Popular resistance** exploded in 1919 with the Samil Independence Movement, triggered by Emperor Gojong's death and inspired by global talk of self-determination. Over two million Koreans marched peacefully and they expected to be heard. Instead, Japan responded with military force, arrests, and public violence.

The Samil Movement didn't succeed in creating an independent Korea, but it still revealed the **impact of policies**. Brutal repression showed how far Japan would go to maintain control, yet it also forced the colonial government to shift toward a façade of "Cultural Rule." Outwardly censorship loosened and limited Korean-language education returned, but surveillance and repression intensified beneath the surface. These contradictions planted the seeds for resistance that carried forward in classrooms, villages, borderlands, and exile.

Continuity and Change: Evolving Resistance in a Tightening Regime

When mass protests failed, **internal opposition** was adapted. When public protest became dangerous, Koreans shifted toward quieter but persistent cultural defense. Educators secretly taught Han'gŭl, and writers published banned works. Organizations like the Korean Language Society protected culture under attack. **Popular resistance** continued in smaller everyday acts, including refusing to bow at Shinto shrines, preserving rituals, and sharing Korean stories at home.

External threats also reshaped resistance. Leaders abroad formed the Korean Provisional Government in Shanghai, lobbied foreign powers, and coordinated with militias in Manchuria. Guerrilla units, later including Kim Gu and Kim Il-sung, crossed borders to raid Japanese forces. These transnational efforts ensured the independence cause could not be contained inside Korea's borders. Continuity existed in the determination to resist and change appeared in the strategies used, with a shift from public protest to decentralized underground activism, international lobbying, etc.

Significance: What Resistance Meant Then and Now

The defiance of Koreans mattered far beyond the 1930s and 1940s. The Japanese tried to erase Korean culture, but popular resistance in daily life including families teaching Han'gŭl and mothers preserving history ensured the "imagined community" survived. Resistance came from every sector, including students, farmers, laborers, and women like Yu Gwan-sun. **The impact of policies** meant repression failed to break Korea's identity; instead, it reinforced the determination to resist.

After 1945, both North and South Korea built their legitimacy around these memories of **internal opposition** and **popular resistance**, while the role of **external threats** (Manchurian guerrillas, exile governments) helped shape Cold War politics.

Potential Paper 2 Comparisons to Explore

- Internal Opposition
 - Japan in Taiwan – police networks, suppression of local political groups
 - Stalin's USSR – secret police, censorship, liquidation of rival elites
 - Chiang Kai-shek's China – crackdown on student protests, repression of left-wing groups
 - French Algeria – limitation of Indigenous political rights, surveillance of Muslim leaders
- Popular Resistance
 - India under Britain – mass civil disobedience, student mobilization, moral protest language
 - Vietnam under France – student associations, clandestine presses, urban radical networks
 - Burma (1920s–30s) – student strikes and anti-colonial boycotts, youth networks
 - Poland under Nazi occupation – underground schools, cultural preservation & covert resistance
- Impact of Policies
 - French Indochina – plantation economy and rail lines geared to export profits, limited local uplift
 - Stalin's USSR – centralized planning, industrial output expansion tied to regime power
 - Poland under Nazi occupation – cultural suppression, language bans, identity control and forced assimilation
 - Meiji Japan – state-led industrial development and rail expansion, but nationalist benefit
- External Threats
 - Vietnamese exiles in China – cross-border organizing, safe bases in Guangzhou and later Yunnan
 - Irish nationalist diaspora (U.S. & Britain) – fundraising, press campaigns, lobbying abroad
 - Cuban dissidents under Batista (U.S. & Mexico) – exile organizing in Mexico/U.S., targeted as regime threat
 - Chinese KMP vs CCP – competing claims of legitimacy and political recognition overseas

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