

06

Social, Economic and Political Impact of the Sino-Japanese War

IB Lines of Inquiry	Inquiry Questions
Political developments, including growth of nationalism and communism	To what extent did the Second Sino Japanese War intensify political control over Korea from 1937-1945?
Economic impact of exploitation of industry and resources for Japanese war effort Independence Club (1896–1898)	To what extent did wartime mobilisation during the Second Sino-Japanese War drive industrial and economic change in colonial Korea?
Economic impact of exploitation of industry and resources for Japanese war effort	To what extent did Korean society change as a result of the Second Sino-Japanese War?
Liberation and establishment of the governments of Kim Il Sung and Syngman Rhee	To what extent did the circumstances leading up to and during Korea's liberation in 1945 enable the establishment of Syngman Rhee and Kim Il Sung's regimes?

Introduction

In 1910, Korea was annexed by Japan and subjected to a repressive colonial government that attempted to stamp out Korean national identity through aggressive assimilation policies. This produced significant reactions of Koreans both at home and abroad, demanding Korean independence. Key examples include Syngman Rhee and the Treaty of Versailles, the March First Movement, student protests, communist guerrilla fighters, and the Provisional Government. This colonial time period had waves of repression and loosening in response to Korean reactions and protest. The Korean population continued to resist, as well as sought to survive, colonial rule up to 1937 and the outbreak of the Second-Sino Japanese War.

This chapter focuses on the consequences for Korea of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937. This triggered the mobilisation of the Japanese Empire, including its colonial possession, Korea, to fight on Japan's behalf. The war had profound and multifaceted impacts on Korean society politically, economically, and socially. Korea was forced to contribute to the Japanese war effort through military conscription, forced labor and

the institutionalized system of sexual slavery, also called the “comfort women” system. These abuses were possible because Koreans were denied citizenship rights and political agency, which allowed Japan to strengthen its authoritarian control over the peninsula. A key focus is on how Korea’s political, economic and social landscapes changed as a result of the Sino-Japanese war. These elements fueled both nationalist and communist mobilization and later division.

Timeline of Key Events

Year	Sino-Japanese War — Stages	Korea
1931	Japanese invasion of Manchuria after Mukden incident	
1932-1937		Increased militarization and cultural suppression by Japan
1937	Marco Polo Bridge Incident Japan invades China development of full-scale war	
1938	Stalemate and war of attrition	National Mobilisation Law extended to Korea
1939		Korean language banned from public schools Draft ordinance
1940		Koreans organized into “Patriotic Neighborhood Associations” Forced name changes
1941	Globalization of the conflict Start of the Pacific War	
1942	Allied Counter-offensive	
1943		Koreans drafted into Japanese military All Korean cultural expressions banned
1944	Nov. 27: Cairo Declaration Full Scale Total War	
1945	February: Yalta Conference June/July: Potsdam Conference Aug 8: Soviet Union invades Manchuria Aug 15: Japan surrenders December: Moscow Conference	Aug 10: Soviet Union was invited by the US to occupy the Northern half of Korea Sept 2: US Army 24th Corps occupies Southern half of Korea

Key Terms

Assimilation	The process of forcing one culture to adopt the customs and language of another.
“Comfort women”	Girls and women from Korea and other occupied territories that were coerced into forced “sexual slavery” by the Japanese military during WWII.
Comintern	The Communist International was an international organisation run through Moscow with the aim of promoting world communism through revolution and halted during WWII.
Euphemism	A mild or indirect word used to replace a word considered harsh.
Government General of Korea	The colonial government of Japan over Korea from 1910–1945.
Greater East Asia Co Prosperity Sphere	Japanese wartime propaganda campaign promising for Asian unity and “prosperity” while exploiting colonies for people and resources.
Kim Il Sung	Korean guerrilla leader who fought against the Japanese forces in Manchuria during the late 1930s and 1940s, he was later supported by the USSR and became leader of North Korea.
Kim Ku	An independence activist, guerilla and president for the Korean Provisional government.
Korean Provisional Government	The government in exile formed in 1919 to advocate for Korean independence from Japan.
Lyuh Woon-hyung	A left wing Korean nationalist and independence leader who was a major part of the The Committee for the Preparation of Korean Independence. He worked to unify the factions.
<i>Naisen Ittai</i>	Meaning Japan and Korea as one body was Japan’s assimilation policy used to justify erasing Korean culture under occupation.
National General Mobilisation Law	1938 Japanese law that granted the state total control over people and resources for war.
Operation Napko	The OSS and Korean independence fighters’ 1940s plan to infiltrate and attack Japanese wartime facilities.
Second Sino-Japanese War	Major conflict between China and Japan after full-scale invasion of China in 1937. It later merged with World War II in the Pacific and ended with the Japanese surrender in 1945.
Shamanism	Traditional Korean spiritual practice as a part of indigenous religions that was suppressed under Japanese rule but still secretly observed.
Shinto	The Japanese state imposed religion focusing on ancestor and emperor worship.

Sōshi-kaimei	The assimilation policy that stipulated name changes for Koreans from 1939-1940.
Syngman Rhee	Exiled Korean independence activist who lobbied for American and allied support for the Korean Provisional Government against Japanese colonial rule.
The Committee for the Preparation of Korean Independence	An organization that was formed in August 1945 to organise Korea's self rule after Japanese surrender before American occupation forces arrived.
Totalitarianism	A political system where the state holds absolute control over all areas of life.

REGIONAL MAP OF KOREA DURING THE SECOND SINO-JAPANESE WAR



I. Political Developments in Korea during the Second Sino-Japanese War

Inquiry Question

To what extent did the Second Sino-Japanese War intensify political control over Korea from 1937–1945?

To implement and consolidate political control over the Korean population and promote cultural and ideological integration, the Government General of Korea (GGK) or the Japanese colonial government, employed a variety of strategies. These efforts rapidly intensified with the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, and the GGK adapted its policies to further align with Japan's expanding imperial ambitions.

In 1938, the GGK issued a White Paper and administrative directives outlining guidelines and goals for the colonial government. These documents emphasized the importance of Korea's forced cooperation in the effort to defeat China. This was to be achieved by stricter assimilation policies as well as increased control of economic and political decisions. A range of measures including strict censorship and intensified economic exploitation of Korea were implemented. The political policies became more oppressive and exclusionary as the war progressed to a colonial form of totalitarianism.

By the 1940s, approximately a quarter million Japanese civil servants were part of the Japanese colonial administration that ruled over roughly 21 million Koreans, according to Bruce Cumings. Although a small number of wealthy Koreans were part of provincial and city assemblies, the upper echelons of Korean society were systematically excluded and their influence was diminished. The majority of the Governor-Generals, or heads of the colonial government, were Japanese military leaders.

Colonial Ideology and Assimilation Policies

The GGK followed a strict assimilation policy based on the Japanese authority assertions that they were racially superior and hence entitled to lead Asia. While accepting ethnic similarity between the two cultures, Koreans were still considered inferior by the Japanese. Following *Naisen Ittai* policies (meaning Japan and Korea as one body), Koreans were expected to accept their 'true identity' as imperial subjects. This in turn was used as an ideological basis to justify the incorporation of Korea into the Japanese "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere," which was Japan's plan to control much of Asia. After October 2, 1937, Koreans had to recite the "Oath as Subjects of the Imperial Nation" during public events. This ritual reinforced the expectation that Koreans should abandon their national political identity and accept being a part of Japan's empire. Assimilation policies will be more deeply explored under the segment on social effects of colonial rule.



Source Activity One

ATL: Thinking Skills

The Oath as Subjects of the Imperial Nations

Context: This document embodies the ideological ultra-militaristic and ultra-nationalistic atmosphere of wartime Japan in 1937. The Japanese engaged in aggressive expansion across East Asia and supported this through domestic campaigns on the home island as well as in Korea, to encourage service for the empire. The oath occurred in civic and educational settings to shape the public's behavior and attitudes for social cohesion and mobilisation for war. However, the oath was not instituted in Taiwan, another country that was forced under long term Japanese colonisation.

The Oath as Subjects of the Imperial Nations

1. We are the subjects of the imperial nation; we will repay His Majesty as well as the country with loyalty and sincerity.
2. We the subjects of the imperial nation shall trust, love, and help one another so that we can strengthen our unity.
3. We the subjects of the imperial nation shall endure hardship, train ourselves, and cultivate strength so that we can exalt the imperial way.

Quoted in Chou, "The Kominka Movement," 43.

Questions:

1. What were the causes behind the creation and distribution of the Oath in Japan's empire?
2. What were the consequences of imposing oaths on Korean citizens during Japanese colonial rule?
3. How and why might Japanese officials and Korean citizens have viewed this oath differently?
4. What is the significance of the Oath in understanding the role of ideology and education in authoritarian states?

TOK Connection: To what extent can language shape, justify or obscure during colonial rule?

Research Task: Explore the "Greater East Asia Co Prosperity Sphere" in depth: How did the Japanese utilise this terminology in not only Korea but other lands they controlled during the Second Sino Japanese War?

Limits of Political Participation

Throughout the colonial period, Koreans were largely excluded from meaningful political participation. A small group of pro-Japanese Korean elites, like the Koshi Club, attempted to gain some political representation in the 1930s, through means such as electing Korean aristocrats to the Japanese Diet or attempting to create a Korean Legislative Assembly in 1938. However, these efforts were limited and abandoned with the start of the Second Sino-Japanese War. For the vast majority of Koreans, political rights were severely restricted. According to Jun Uchida, in 1935, only 2.4% of the population could vote in local elections due to strict property and class requirements which favored only the elites.

To enforce control and compliance, the GGK divided the country into about 350,000 Neighborhood Patriotic Associations, each including 10 families. These groups monitored their communities and reported anyone who disobeyed Japanese rules, creating a society under constant surveillance. The Associations also promoted Japanese education and Shinto religious practices. In rural areas, the GGK worked closely with both elite Korean leaders (yangban) and ordinary local leaders to maintain order, weakening Korea's traditional social structures and ensuring loyalty to the Japanese colonial government. This in turn hurt the chances of yangban as leaders for resistance. About half of the police force was made up of Korean nationals from lower classes tasked to carry out GGK directives. Together, these political restrictions and surveillance systems limited Korean self-governance and strengthened Japanese authoritarian control.



Source Activity Two

ATL: Thinking Skills

Hong Eul Soo describes his experiences under Japanese colonial rule.

“In the early 1940s, the colonial government put more and more restrictions on Korea. If three adults wanted to get together, they had to have a permit to assemble, or else they would get hauled into jail for anti-Japanese activities. About this time, I met a newspaper reporter, and we struck up an immediate friendship. We shared frustrations over the suffering inflicted by the Japanese and in spite of the restrictions, decided to form a secret society.... As a goal, we planned to educate and sensitize others about the oppressive Japanese rule.... To meet like this was extremely dangerous and required great secrecy and preparation. At each meeting we shared information about the domestic and war situations, the forced draft, unfair taxation, and changing names from Korean to Japanese. Then we tried to find ways to publicize all this information.” Mr. Hong was warned by a friend in the police that his name was on a black list of educated and anti-Japanese Koreans and the Japanese intended to round up and execute him. As a result, he retreated to the countryside.”

Questions:

1. How does Mr. Hong's willingness to risk his life for spreading information reflect the values or priorities of many Koreans living under occupation?
2. What can we infer about the overall strength and reach of Japanese control from both the strict regulations and the fact that some Koreans still found ways around them?

Political Resistance: The Growth of Communism and Nationalism Inside and Outside Korea

During the earlier formalised independence movement in Korea, the nationalist groups took two separate ideological forms: the liberal Nationalists (Korean Provisional Government or KPG) and the Communists. As a result of the preparations for war and the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, Imperial Japan quelled resistance with increasing force with the arrests peaking in 1940. This resulted in the independence groups moving abroad to orchestrate underground attacks or by lobbying help from sympathetic countries abroad to further the Korean Independence movement.



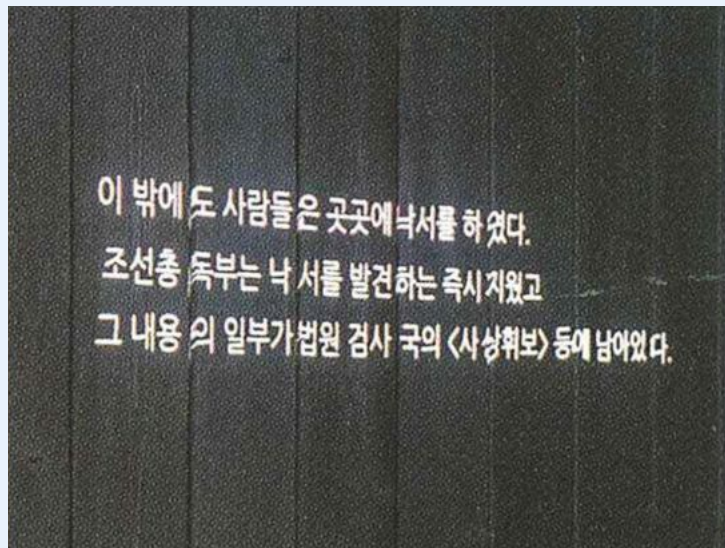
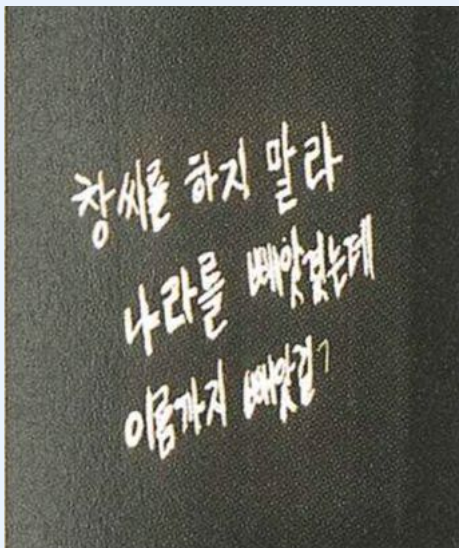
Source Activity Three

Everyday Resistance

ATL: Thinking Skills

Context: During the colonial time period, Korean nationalists and ordinary citizens secretly scrawled messages, slogans, and symbols on walls, fences, and public buildings to express opposition to Japanese rule. These writings often included calls for independence, encouraged resistance, praised Korean identity, or displayed the banned Taegukgi (Korean national flag). Graffiti was quick to create, easy to spread, and difficult for Japanese officials to completely suppress. Even after the colonial authorities attempted to remove the graffiti, the residual messages stayed to inspire resistance.

Pictures of Anti-Japanese Graffiti (1940s):



⤴ Left: "Big Josun Country Victory (Mansei)"

Right: "Don't change your name. We already lost the country, how can we lose the name?"



1940s – A volunteer from the Korean Volunteer Corps
 Translation “Let's make an alliance between Koreans and Chinese to overthrow Japan”
 From: Museum of Contemporary Korean History page 101, 107, 2011.

Question:

1. What does this anti-Japanese graffiti suggest about the nature and extent of resistance within Korea from 1937–1945?

The Groups and Strategies

The Korean Communists sought independence through class revolution, aiming to establish a socialist state aligned with international Marxist movements or Comintern. The hope was to build a grassroots revolutionary movement. The 1934 *Platform of Action* outlined four main goals:

1. Complete national independence by violent overthrow of Japanese rule
2. Establishment of a workers' and peasants' Soviet government
3. Confiscation (without compensation) and distribution of all land and property of landlords
4. An eight hour work day and a radical improvement in labor conditions

Quoted in Suh, Dae-sook. *Korean Communist Movement 1918–1948*. Princeton University Press, 1967, 200.

The Liberal Nationalists was a coalition with diverse constitutionalist and republican strands formed in April 1919 after the harsh Japanese repression of the 1919 March First Movement. Their efforts centered on anti-Japanese sentiment and promoting Korean patriotism, often without specifying the structure of a future independent Korean government. They mainly advocated for Korean independence based on national Korean identity, often appealing to western democratic ideals. However it is unclear whether they envisioned a fully democratic postcolonial Korea.

Some activists remained in Korea in the 1930s and 1940s to resist directly, while others, such as the nationalist KPG operated in exile, most notably in China and the United States. Kim Koo, the KPG president, operated in China while Syngman Rhee, a prominent figure in the KPG, lobbied the US government for support (see photo below). Within both the nationalist and communist movements, divisions existed over whether to pursue armed struggle or seek international diplomatic recognition. However, Japanese repression, especially through the “submission campaign,” weakened both movements. Between 1937-1940, widespread arrests, torture, and surveillance dismantled many resistance networks and imprisoned key leaders.



► See Chapter 4 page 139 to see the leader profile of Syngman Rhee.

« A photo of Syngman Rhee and Kim Ku, key leaders of the Korean Provisional Government in the 1940s. Wikimedia, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a5/Syngman_Rhee_and_Kim_Koo.jpg

The Korean Provisional Government in the 1930s-1940s

The Korean Provisional Government ran into financial issues operating from Shanghai and later Chongqing, and also had leadership disputes prior to the outbreak of war. After 1937, there was a gradual shift towards forming a united front with the communist influences of Kim Won-Bong and the Korean Volunteer Army. The KPG aligned itself with the Allied powers and declared war on Japan and Germany in 1941. During World War II, Kim Ku sought international recognition, ultimately gaining support and recognition of Jiang Jieshi and the Chinese Nationalists (GMD). However, the KPG struggled with limited resources and manpower, as well as poor connections to the diverse classes within Korea and intense factionalism due to their position abroad and a lack of centralized leadership. Furthermore, the Japanese targeted the KPG headquarters and forced multiple moves, which showcases the ongoing persecution the KPG faced, even while in exile, as illustrated by the photo below.

The Korean Liberation Army was the military arm of the KPG. Initially, it started with guerilla operations but shifted towards conventional warfare after 1940. There were around 3,000 troops and coordinated limited operations with the USSR and China, mainly remaining behind the front lines. The KPG requested

weaponry from the US in 1944, but the USA refused to supply and declined to recognize the KPG. In 1945, the KLA broadcasted shortwave radio messages into Korea, calling on people to resist Japanese forced labor and military mobilisation. Rhee also delivered nationalist messages via these broadcasts, which enhanced his status as a politician.

Over the course of the war, the KPG sought multiple times for the US to acknowledge Korean independence. According to Dr. David Fields, in 1942, Rhee requested for the KPG to be recognized as the legitimate government but the United States declined, fearing it would alienate the USSR and China. The U.S. doubted Korea's ability to defend itself if granted independence prematurely and were concerned of igniting a balance of power politics in the region over the strategic location of the Korean Peninsula. Again in 1944, Kim Ku reached out to Roosevelt to acknowledge Korea as an independent nation, but Roosevelt ignored Ku's query.

In 1943, the Office of Strategic Services (forerunner to Central Intelligence Agency, CIA) reached out to Rhee, and the KPG to train Koreans for clandestine operations in the Pacific as a part of Operation Napko. The goal was to disrupt Japanese intelligence and sabotage as well as advance soldiers for the US invasion of the home islands, Manchuria and Korea. However, the USA dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6-9, 1945. This was a significant factor for Japanese surrender before Operation Napko could go into effect. Despite the fact that the operation did not occur, it still gained some American influence for Rhee, Kim Ku and the KPG as allies. However, the KPG leaders were concerned about the extent of control over the future of Korea they could exert.



Source Activity Four

ATL: Thinking Skills

In his diary, Kim Ku, a founder and the president of the KPG from 1940–1944, expressed concern about the amount of action that the KPG accomplished during World War II on August 10, 1945.

“This felt less like happy news and more like the sky was falling. Years of trials and tribulations preparing for a war in vain. [...] [W]hat worries me is that because we have done nothing in this war, our voice on the international stage will be weak.”

Kim Ku, Diary of Kim Ku Vol. II August 10, 1945

Questions:

1. What is the context around the date August 10, 1945?
2. How does the intended audience of this source affect the content? Does it make the source more or less reliable? Justify your response.
3. What can historians learn from this source regarding Kim Ku's perspective on the Korean Independence movement in August, 1945?

Rise of Communism in Korea

The 1917 Russian Revolution inspired many Koreans to pursue communist ideals. Disillusioned with the failures of the peaceful March First Movement, they searched for an alternative path of liberation that would allow for a social revolution that broke with Confucianism. The communists had a potentially large base of dissatisfied peasants, younger generations, intellectuals, and workers that welcomed revolution for a new classless society. However, the violent Japanese crackdowns in the later 1930s resulted in a shift towards underground resistance.

Korean communists worked to rebuild the Korean Communist Party, with some success at placing members in GGC institutions such as the Ministry of Communication, Seoul Electric Company, and the National Broadcasting Company. They hoped to sabotage the colonial overseers, however, the colonial police arrested most members by 1941. Within Korea, underground communists organized strikes, sabotage, and supplied intelligence to comrades abroad. But, as historian Suh argues, "For the most part the communist movement within Korea slowly faded away" during World War II due to severe repression.

Communists Guerrilla Warfare

Kim Il Sung, a key leader in the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army, rose as a communist guerrilla leader in Manchuria. Operating with limited Chinese and Soviet support, Kim Il Sung led small mobile units that attacked the Kwantung Army and then integrated into local peasant communities for survival.



Photo of Kim Il Sung from 1946.

Kim Il Sung

Kim Il Sung was born Kim Song Ju in 1912, near Pyongyang. As a youth, he and his family fled to Manchuria to escape oppressive colonial Japanese rule. His family was active in anti-Japanese resistance, which resulted in his father being imprisoned for activism. As a student in Manchuria, Kim Il Sung was influenced by political radicals, especially communists. He joined an underground Marxist group, was arrested as a youth, and came to believe that Korean independence required collective action and armed struggle based on Marxist

Leninist ideas. In 1931, he formally joined the Chinese Communist Party.

In the mid-1930s, Kim Il Sung was involved in guerrilla warfare against Japanese forces in Manchuria. In 1935, he adopted the name Kim Il Sung ("Kim the Sun") which was also the name of a legendary Korean nationalist. This created a mythic persona that he later used to bolster his authority.

After increasing Japanese pressure, Kim and his unit retreated into the USSR where he received military and ideological training. By the end of WWII, he became a Soviet trained Korean leader, whom the USSR viewed as a suitable figure to help shape postwar Korea under communist influence.

Historiographical Note: The name Kim Il Sung is disputed by some historians. Consider researching this further and debate why this name is contested.

Paper 1 Practice

Inquiry Question: To what extent did Kim Il Sung affect the outcome of the Battle of Pochonbo?

Source A:

Context: Published in 1972 during the Cold War, *Communism in Korea* earned Robert Scalapino and Chong-Sik Lee the prestigious Woodrow Wilson Foundation Award for the best book on government, politics, or international affairs.

Content: ““On June 4, 1937, Kim Il-song led a small force of partisans in an attack upon the village of Poch'onbo, Crossing the Yalu, Kim's band struck at about ten in the evening, destroying the police station, town office, forestry branch office, agricultural experiment station, post office, and other government buildings. Seven policemen were killed, and seven others wounded. Propaganda leaflets were distributed and supplies collected. The village residents were then assembled to hear Kim deliver an impassioned speech, after which the guerrillas retreated across the river ...to Manchuria.

No doubt this raid bolstered partisan morale. The costs involved in such bravado were high. Naturally, the Japanese conducted the most painstaking investigation. The result was to expose Communist informers and sympathizers, making it possible to identify underground agents and uncover the local apparatus. Indeed, so many arrests followed the raid that local Communist activities practically ceased. Despite the praise that the North Korean Communists now lavish upon this operation, it was undoubtedly harmful to the movement in general. In fact, it was another example of 'blind adventurism.'”

Source: Robert Scalapino, and Chong-Sik Lee, *Communism in Korea*. 1: The Movement, pages 241–242.

Source B

Context: Prominent American historian, Bruce Cumings excerpt from his 1997 *Korea's Place in the Sun* is known for his revisionist approach on Korean history.

Content: “Outside of North Korea hardly anyone has heard of this clash, but it consisted of a brief takeover of the town by Kim and his guerrillas. P'och'onbo held one of seven branch agricultural stations that Japanese technicians used to improve farming; this one dealt especially with fire-field farming, a group of peasants that was very important to Kim's slim base among Koreans in Manchuria. They were among the poorest but also the freest of Koreans during the Japanese period, escaping into the mountains to live a hardy existence.” ...

There are ridiculous myths about this guerrilla resistance in both Koreas today: the North claims that Kim single-handedly defeated the Japanese, and the South claims that Kim is an imposter who stole the name of a revered patriot. Nonetheless, this experience is important for an understanding of postwar Korea. The resistance to the Japanese is the main legitimating doctrine of the DPRK; the North Koreans trace the origin of the army, the leadership, and their

ideology back to this founding moment. Today the top North Korean leadership still includes core leaders who fought the Japanese in Manchuria, even if most of the others have died by now."

Source C

Context: An excerpt from North Korean leader Kim Il Sung's autobiography written in the early 1990s during a period of transition for his country. The collapse of the USSR cut off critical political and economic support, leaving the country struggling to adapt. Kim's domestic and international legitimacy was increasingly questioned. By documenting his life story he hoped to solidify the ideological foundation of his regime and shape the historical narrative. He died in 1994.

Content: "As one who organized and commanded this battle [of Pochonbo], I clearly recall my mental processes, together with the events that took place. Scenes of battle from half a century ago still unfold clearly before my eyes. The Battle of Pochonbo can be compared to the reunion of a mother and her children who have been separated by force. The gunshot at Pochonbo precipitated the reunion between my motherland and her loyal sons and daughters who had loved her most. In other words, this battle marked a decisive turning point in the liberation of my conquered nation.

In a broad sense, our attack was designed to bring about the revival of the nation; in a narrow sense, it was to open up a decisive stage and make a leap forward in the revolutionary struggle against the Japanese. The history of the Korean nation had been streaked with blood and tears, brought about by the Japanese imperialists. It was in reaction to this that our nation started its resistance. Armed struggle not only expressed the will of the sons of Korea to fight against Japan but it was a means to an end as well. Under the banner of anti-imperialist, anti-feudal democratic revolution, we waged the armed struggle; at the same time we promoted the building of the party and launched a united-front movement and an anti-imperialist common front movement..."

Source: Kim, Il Sung, *With the Century: Reminiscences of Kim Il Sung*. Volume 6. Foreign Languages Publishing House, 2007. Page 141.

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)

The 1937 Battle of Pochonbo, in which Kim Il Sung briefly took control of a small Northern Korean town, became the foundational myth of DPRK ideology. In reality, the battle had limited strategic importance. However, North Korean propaganda elevated it as a turning point in communist resistance history.

Kim Il Sung was one of the few resistance leaders who remained active in the border areas of North Korea. According to Japanese Kwangtung Army reports, there was a special task force sent out to stop both nationalists and communist rebels in Manchuria. Kim Il Sung was mentioned by name and it was ordered that he should be captured or killed. In 1940, Kim Il Sung and his men retreated to the USSR, training and consolidating forces until the war's end. His work in the training camps led to Kim Il Sung gaining the trust of the Soviets and ultimately for him to become a part of the short list to lead in North Korea at the end of the war.

Kim Il Sung and his new group of communists crushed the original more Marxist ideological communists that arose after the March First Movement. This new communist group focused on plotting on how to consolidate their power over the peninsula after the Japanese defeat.

Everyday Resistance

The leaders in exile and resistance groups pushed back against the Japanese and hoped to form new ideological systems for a future independent Korea. At the same time, there were individuals that sought out to continue political resistance through everyday actions. Some supported the resistance fighters through providing intelligence, funds, food, or shelter. Or they would create underground networks to spread the ideas for Korean liberation through graffiti, underground schools, or continuing to learn Hangul (Korean script). The people faced a great cost of jailtime, loss of rations, jobs or even facing collective punishment as a community. The idea of *gwangbok* (liberation) became a powerful hope, even for those that had little national political voice. Everyday resistance was not only spurred through political motivations but also as a response to the assimilation policies and the fight to maintain Korean culture and identity.

Conclusion

Between 1937 and 1945, Japanese political wartime policies transformed Korea into a highly controlled colony. The Second Sino-Japanese War intensified political domination, forcing the independence movements abroad and driving resistance underground. While Japan achieved significant levels of control, the persistence of both nationalist and communist networks both in exile and in everyday life ensured that the spirit for independence endured.

Paper 3 Practice

There were other nationalist groups and leaders that were active in exile including Kim Ku and the Korean Independence Party, and Kim Won-bong and the Korean Volunteer Corps. After completing additional research, along with the information you have learned about Kim Il Sung and Syngman Rhee, create an ideological continuum of Korean independence leadership.

1. “Colonial Korea during the Second Sino-Japanese War developed considerable political autonomy.” To what extent do you agree with this statement?

Create an essay frame based upon this prompt. Consider the role of Korean resistance and how far the colonial government was able to control Korea politically at an international, national, local, and individual level.

II. Economic Developments in Korea during the Second Sino-Japanese War

Inquiry Question

To what extent did wartime mobilisation during the Second Sino-Japanese War drive industrial and economic change in colonial Korea?

Before the Second Sino-Japanese War, Korea was developed by Japan as both a logistical base for military expansion into Manchuria and as a market for Japanese goods. Korea absorbed only a small portion of Japan's industrial output, approximately 10% of cotton textiles and 3% of total manufactured goods. Its role in Japan's imperial strategy was pivotal. Governor-General Minami, who oversaw Korea's industrial development, emphasized the need for coordinated economic policies between Japan, Korea, and Manchuria. He likened Japan to a living body, with Korea as the arm and Manchuria as the fist, suggesting Korea's role was to develop industry, be Japan's rice bowl and facilitate the transport of Japanese goods and troops. More broadly, Japan aimed to extract raw materials and Korean economic surplus to sustain its total war effort.

Forced Labor Mobilisation as a “Population Hemorrhage”

Historian Bruce Cumings describes Korea's wartime labor mobilization as a “population hemorrhage,” or an uncontrolled loss, with approximately four million Koreans sent to work outside the peninsula by 1944. The Japanese accomplished this through enforcing the 1938 National General Mobilization Law (NGML) and the 1939 National Draft Ordinance which coerced millions of Koreans into forced labor and military mobilization until the end of Japanese colonial rule in 1945, as shown by the chart.



Source Activity Five

ATL: Thinking Skills

Chart 1

Estimates of Korean Population “Relocation”

Manchuria	Japan	Sakhalin	Occupied China	Other occupied areas
1.475-2.16 million	1.45- 2 million	40,000-45,000	100,000	Taiwan – a few thousand Dutch East Indies; Philippines; Hong Kong – noted as a few hundred with at most a few thousand in each region

Source: US Joint Intelligence Report quoted in “Occupations of Korea and Japan and the Origins of the Korean Diaspora in Japan,” Mark E Caprio and Yu Jia in *Diaspora without a Homeland Being Korean in Japan* pg. 21.

Caprio and Jia note that these numbers are probably too low as it does not account for Korean births abroad.

Questions:

1. Where were most Koreans forcibly relocated during the war?
2. What other factors could contribute to this being an “under count”?
3. What does this undercount suggest about the challenges of tracking displaced people during wartime?

As a result of the 1938 NGML edict, the imperial government retained full control over the empire’s economy, including labor and its disbursement within Japan. Japan had legal means to enforce “mobilisation” although some labor recruitment had occurred prior to the NGML. There were three stages of “recruitment” that align with the intensification of the war.

Between 1938 and 1945, Japan's labor recruitment system for wartime industry evolved through three distinct stages. Initially the 1938–1941 recruitment was company-directed under the NGML and relied on informal methods like advertisements and word of mouth. Most workers were young men who were “volunteers” in theory and could quit, although pressure to remain working was growing. By 1942–1943, the government directed recruitment took a more active role alongside private companies. Legal frameworks expanded with registration laws, and recruitment became more formalized. Movement was increasingly restricted, especially for men aged 16 to 40 and unmarried women ages 16 to 25, with false promises and national duty used as incentives. By 1944–1945, forced labor conscription was in full effect under centralized government control. Recruitment was conducted through legal conscription notices, mobility was heavily restricted via a two-passport system, and coercion was extreme. Males aged 13 to 50 were targeted, quitting was illegal, and fulfillment quotas were met entirely through legal force and surveillance.

Colonial authorities used the Chosen League Patriotic Units and police to enforce labour quotas. Food rations were often withheld from families who resisted. Some Koreans were tricked into signing contracts, with illiterate men particularly vulnerable. There were even some reports of kidnapping. Compliance often stemmed from fear of starvation or threats to one's family and livelihood. Additionally, the “recruiters” received bonuses for each person that they signed up, which monetarily incentivised coercive measures.

The atomic bomb that contributed towards ending the war also took a toll on Koreans. The bomb killed around 80,000 Koreans, including an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 Korean forced laborers working at the Mitsubishi Heavy Industries at the Nagasaki Shipyard and the Kawanami Industry plant. The remaining Korean survivors received no support from either the Japanese or post-war Korean governments.

At the end of the war, many Korean forced laborers were stuck far from home. Many could not afford to pay for their return trip, and in some cases, were sent away from work sites without receiving wages. A few Koreans managed to find passage on a ship called the *Ukishima Maru* to return to Korea, but on August 24, 1945, the ship exploded, killing almost everyone on board. This tragedy discouraged some from trying to return home by sea. While there were a few rare cases, like workers at the Nakajima Aircraft Plant who were helped with transport, most forced laborers across the former Japanese Empire were left to survive on their own, forgotten by both the wartime authorities and the governments that followed. For example, the Korean miners on Sakhalin Island remained there until the end of the Cold War.

Wartime Industrialisation and Exploitation

Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 and the shift to total war, industrial production intensified. Korean foreign trade grew from 35 million yen in 1931 to 229 million yen in 1939, with most trade occurring with Manchuria and Japan. Overall, industrial production rose sharply with the establishment of hydroelectric power plants, railroads, chemical, fertilizer, and metal factories. Korea was tasked with supplying raw agricultural and mineral resources to support Japan's militarism but also to enrich the wealthy Japanese that owned 90% of the large businesses in Korea.



TOK Connection

History as an Area of Knowledge

Historical methods include utilizing qualitative (interpreting perspectives, narratives and meanings) and/or quantitative (numerical or statistical data) methods to decide what evidence to use. As you read through the segments on wartime industrialisation and economics, consider the following questions:

- What are the values and limitations of quantitative methods including statistics for understanding late colonial Korean economic history?
- What ends up being left out when trying to understand events in this manner?
- How can a more comprehensive understanding of Korean economic history during the late colonial period be found?

Chart 2

Manufacturing Output by Industry in Percentages

Industry	1930	1936	1939
Textile	12.8	12.7	13.0
Metal	5.8	4.0	9.0
Machine and Tool	1.3	1.0	4.0
Ceramic	3.2	2.7	3.0
Chemical	9.4	22.9	34.0
Lumber and Wood	2.7	2.7	1.0
Products	3.1	1.8	1.0
Food	57.8	45.2	22.0
Gas and Electric	2.4	5.6	2.0
Others	1.5	1.4	11.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Ki Baik Lee, A New History of Korea, pg. 351.

From 1911 to 1938, Korea's industrial output grew at 3.57% annually. However, profits primarily flowed to Japanese companies. The Japanese zaibatsu (large Japanese business conglomerate), working with the GGK, monopolized key industries. They developed infrastructure that encouraged raw material extraction but restricted Korean access to capital, confining Koreans to small, local manufacturing ventures. This is evident in chart 4. Even these local ventures were often taken over by the Japanese due to the heavy borrowing they required from Japanese banks.



Source Activity One

ATL: Thinking Skills

Chart 3

Capital Investment in Manufacturing Industries by Nationality, 1938.

unit: 1,000 yen

Industry	Paid-up capital (and percentage)				Average capital per company	
	Korean Companies (and %)		Japanese Companies (and %)		Korean Companies	Japanese Companies
Textile	6,075	(20.8)	23,103	(79.2)	164	593
Metal and Machinery	1,852	(7.3)	23,654	(92.7)	32	249
Brewing	12,054	(46.7)	13,772	(53.3)	38	107
Pharmaceutical	1,676	(64.2)	934	(35.8)	51	37
Ceramic	432	(2.7)	15,791	(97.3)	36	395
Flour and Rice Celaning	2,526	(20.4)	9,860	(79.6)	27	141
Processed Food	217	(2.2)	9,621	(97.8)	13	128
Lumber and Woodworking	594	(5.3)	10,553	(94.7)	31	129
Printing	625	(30.0)	1,461	(70.0)	14	35
Chemical	2,954	(2.8)	100,736	(97.2)	80	1,340
Others	1,193	(18.6)	5,220	(81.4)	18	39
Total	30,198	(12.3)	214,705	(87.7)	41	267

Source: Ki Baik Lee, A New History of Korea, pg. 354.

Questions:

1. Using the information from chart 3, identify two industries in which Japanese companies dominated paid-up capital in Korea in 1938.
2. According to the chart, which Korean companies held a comparatively higher share of capital?

Between 1929 and 1941, Korean industrial output rose 267%. Heavy industry concentrated in the north, while the south remained mainly agrarian with light industry. Most managerial and technical positions were held by Japanese. Only 12–20% of Korean workers were skilled, and a limited mobility existed for Koreans, with only 1–6% holding supervisory roles.



TOK Connection

Ethical Considerations on Interpretations of Korea's Economic Developments in the Late Colonial Time Period

The question of economic development under colonial rule can be seen as complex and problematic as it can intensify existing tensions and underscores painful experiences for colonised peoples such as the Egyptians under the British, the Algerians under the French, or indigenous populations under the Spanish. This is no different for Korea's rapid economic development. Several historians have offered differing interpretations and perspectives of Korean economic development, notably Kijimuri Hideki, Pak Kyong-Sik, Carter J. Eckert, Brandon Palmer, and Mitsuhiro Kimura. These different approaches raise intense debates and are contested in the present.

As a class think about the following questions:

1. Who benefited from Korea's economic development under Japanese rule?
Did Koreans benefit directly, or was the economy structured to benefit Japan?
2. Can one consider forced labor and resource extraction a form of "development"?
Is it appropriate to describe economic growth under these conditions in positive terms?
3. How can economic outcomes be separated from political oppression? Is it possible to acknowledge economic progress without justifying the negative impact of colonial rule?
4. Do you think Japan's economic legacy had a lasting impact on Korea after 1945?
What parts (infrastructure, factories, trade systems) lasted? Which did not?
5. How should historians talk about development under authoritarian or colonial rule?
Should we evaluate development by the results, the methods used, or both?

Conditions within Forced Labor Mobilisation in both Korea and Abroad

Around two million Koreans were employed in waged labor by 1944 as shown by Chart 4. Factory workers and miners typically worked 12-16 hour shifts, seven days a week and were paid 60 – 80% less than Japanese workers. These wages made it difficult for families to maintain a decent standard of living. Many suffered malnutrition and abuse, and withheld wages prevented Koreans abroad from returning home.

Koreans were treated as expendable, with over 10% of the workforce dying during forced labor. Korean miners made up two-thirds of the workers who worked the extraction point to extract the minerals, which is the most dangerous area. For example, a coal dust explosion in 1944 killed 33 Koreans at the Mitsubishi Iisuka coal mine. As a result of the harsh, dangerous conditions, mass desertions occurred, with 40%-60% of workers from Fukuoka and Aso Mines fleeing to urban ghettos where many pre-war Koreans had migrated. Companies responded by utilizing local police forces and soldiers to track down and forcibly return some workers. Koreans were estimated to be 20% more likely to die while working than their Japanese co-workers.

Chart 4

Composition of Korean Wage-Labor Force by Industry from 1943-1945.			
Industry	Number of laborers	Percentage	Date of report
Manufacturing	591,494	27.9	1945
Mining	346,424	16.3	1944
Construction	437,752	20.6	1944
Forestry	205,911	9.7	1944
Marine products	211,520	10.0	1944
Transportation	198,896	9.4	1944
Agriculture	130,377	6.1	1943
Total	2,122,374	100.0	

Source: Ki Baik Lee, *A New History of Korea*, pg. 358

Many Korean laborers resisted the forced labor mobilization that occurred in 1944 with 12,000 violations of missing conscription orders reported by the police to the GKK. Others protested by threatening officials, striking for better conditions, or slowing their work to sabotage production. Some even damaged tools and machinery to hinder industrial output in the mines. Resistance by the forced laborers came at a high cost. In May 1945, Korean workers at the Nakajima Aircraft Handa plant rioted after demanding more food. The military police suppressed the uprising, then beat the original demonstrators to death, underscoring the potentially severe consequences for resisters.

Agricultural Exploitation

80% of Koreans were a part of agriculture as Korea was primarily an agrarian economy before the war. The systemic inequality that Japan employed intended to keep Koreans in crushing poverty. Although agricultural output increased six fold by the late 1930s, it was due to Japan's need to solve food shortages on the home island and not to feed the local population.

Additionally, Korean tenants were expected to pay for fertilizer, irrigation, and the costs for transporting the harvest. What little harvest was left was seldom enough to support the peasant family for a month. As a result of the combination of these factors, rural livelihood was uprooted, and many farmers were forced into a nomadic lifestyle with 1,469,000 migrants moving to Manchuria by 1941 with the hopes of a better life.

Korean consumers were left with lower grade Manchurian grains while the superior Korean rice varieties were exported to Japan. Korean farmers were expected to deliver their rice harvests directly to the GKK, Mitsuhiro Kimura referred to this as "starvation exports," noting that rice exports to Japan often exceeded domestic rice production and left most peasants at near starvation levels.



Source Activity Seven

ATL: Thinking Skills

Source: Excerpt from Cho'oe Chonghui, author of *The Cry of the Harp and Other Korean Stories*, 1983. She grew up during the Japanese occupation. She wrote her autobiography based on experiences during the war years and described tenant farmers' experiences. Quoted in Kornel Kang, *A Fractured Liberation*, 24

"They had worked this land which belonged to the landlord and each year had returned his quota of rice. What remained was far from enough for one year, six months, or two months. In fact, it wasn't sufficient for even one month... When someone died the only comment made by those who watched the funeral procession was 'now you won't have to starve, that's good.' These conditions, resulting from colonial policy, drove hundreds of thousands of Korean rural families off the land. Uprooted, they wandered to Japan, Manchuria and Siberia in search of work or food."

Questions:

1. What does the passage reveal about the power relationship between landlords and tenant farmers under Japanese colonial rule?
2. How do the farmers' experiences reflect broader social or economic patterns of the colonial period?
3. In what ways do the farmers' struggles expose larger consequences of colonial exploitation?
4. What are the strengths and limitations of this source?

In 1939, the textile industry was the third largest industry based upon the value of output in Korea. This was mainly focused on weaving the raw cotton produced in Korea. As a result of the war, there was a decrease in production for Korean consumption.

From 1937, rural workers were increasingly conscripted for industrial labor. By 1942, 80% of new labor recruits came from the countryside. Southern peasants were often relocated to the north to sustain industrialisation, yet the remaining agricultural workers were expected to maintain agricultural output. Crop failures from 1939 to 1942 worsened food insecurity, prompting many peasants to accept conscription due to poverty and false promises of education and higher wages. In 1944, food was continually extracted from Korea and sent to Japan, worsening the conditions for Koreans.

Mining and Resource Extraction

Korea played a role in sustaining the Japanese war effort and industrial output, especially since Japan lacked key wartime resources. This resulted in Japan extracting valuable resources like coal and heavy chemicals from Korea.

Chart 5

Extraction of Korean Mineral Resources

Value of output of Korean mines over time in Yen.

1930	1936	1942
24,650,000	*110,430,000	445,420,000

*About half of the worth of the 1936 mines (59,350,000 yen) was extracted in gold.

Source: Ki Baik Lee, *A New History of Korea*, pg. 352.

Korea had significant gold reserves that Japan wanted to finance their purchases abroad to fully fund their war machine. After the war with the US broke out in 1941, there was a shift towards mineral extractions for war material. Chart 6 shows the extent of resources extracted for use by the Japanese.

Pyongyang, known as the “Coal Capital,” held vast coal reserves, including 500-600 tons of coal dust in the 1930s. This was transported to Japan and turned into briquettes to heat homes and fire locomotives for rail transport. The Sanchoku Tanko Mine was the only mine in Korea that had the right type of coal to produce weaponry. This mine fed the Heijo Heiki Seizosho munitions plant in Pyongyang, a facility under direct Japanese military control that employed 450 workers to produce artillery shells, bombs, rolling stock, leather goods, and materials for military equipment.

Heavy chemical industrialisation became central to Korea’s wartime economy, accounting for 37% of total industrial output. Chemicals used in fertilizer, such as ammonium sulfate, were also essential for bomb production, while chlorine soda, vital for batteries and fertilizer, was used in military vehicles. This provides further evidence of the exploitation by Japan of Korean resources. The chart below shows the extent of increased production before and during the war years.

Chart 6

Increased Production of Major Minerals from 1930-1944

unit: metric tons

Year	Gold	Iron ore	Coal	Tungsten	Graphite	Molybdenum	Magnesite
1930	5,876	532,497	884,138	12	20,073	26	—
1940	22,060	1,185,426	5,740,941	4,218	94,581	195	73,540
1944	0,598	3,331,814	7,048,776	8,333	103,306	760	157,745

Source: Ki Baik Lee, *A New History of Korea*, 352.

In 1965, Korea and Japan signed the Treaty of Basic Relations, under which Japan provided \$800 million in grants and loans to support Korea's economic development as a form of compensation for its colonial rule. The Treaty stipulated that this payment would settle all claims, preventing individuals from seeking further compensation. However, the amount was far from sufficient to address the extensive economic damage, exploitation, and suffering endured by Koreans under Japanese occupation. Chart 6 demonstrates the extent of the increase of mining in Korea. The Treaty failed to account for the extensive loss of non-renewable resources extracted. This unresolved issue continues to hinder progress for bilateral relations between the two nations.

“Volunteer” Soldiers and Military Conscription

Korean Soldiers were accepted in the Japanese Imperial Army starting on April 3, 1938. Japan introduced a special army “volunteer” system allowing men, aged at least 17, over 160 cm tall, physically fit, educated, and fluent in Japanese to enlist in the Imperial Army. These soldiers were placed within existing Japanese units, occasionally even outranking Japanese troops. However, due to mistrust, the majority of Koreans were incorporated into the rear units rather than frontline combat. The Japanese feared that front-line combat experience would cultivate Korean military nationalism, potentially fueling future uprisings upon soldiers' return. Although 802,047 Koreans “volunteered,” only 17,664 were actually enlisted over the course of the war. This disparity may reflect both Japanese reluctance to train Koreans and Korean resistance, with some Koreans volunteering to meet quotas while knowing they were ineligible due to age, physical impairments or not speaking Japanese. This system “recruited” 17,664 soldiers, and it was replaced by military conscription in 1944. By war's end, over 200,000 Koreans forcibly served in the Japanese Army and another 20,000 served in the Japanese Navy.

Some Koreans sought equal treatment or hoped military service would lead to political advancement. For example, an officer named Park Chung Hee, graduated from the Manchurian Military Academy as an outstanding soldier. His story was utilized to encourage other Koreans to become model cadets like him. He became South Korea's president after a 1961 military coup. Park Chung Hee was among Koreans who joined the army for strategic reasons in the hopes of being a future leader within the independence movement. Other Korean officers included the Korean Princes, although they avoided combat roles.

While some Koreans joined out of fear of punishment for their families, some joined due to conscription but then deserted after facing harsh discipline and discrimination for minor infractions. Furthermore, Koreans experienced the most dangerous assignments and were often denied battlefield rescue or medical care. Towards the war's end some Japanese officers forced Korean soldiers into suicide missions. As a result of the war, at least 22,182 Korean soldiers died in service to the Japanese Imperial Army. Most historians agree that the numbers were most likely much higher, especially if considering the military civilians and soldiers. Higuchi Yuichi estimates that the combined deaths and missing in action were 50,884 of the 363,465 (14%) military civilians and soldiers.



Source Activity Eight

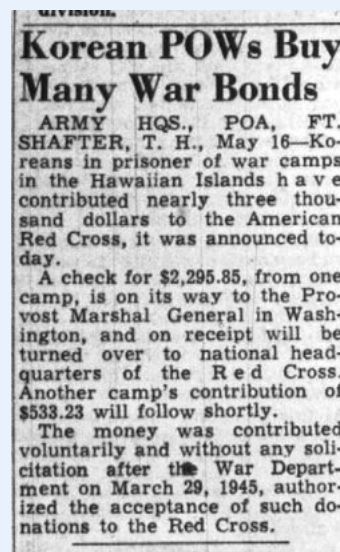
ATL: Thinking Skills

Source A:



⏏ Kwajalein Island; Korean laborers help Americans to locate Japanese troops. 2 February 1944, US Army in World War II, Seizure of the Gilberts and Marshalls, 1993
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Korean_laborers.jpg

Source B:



⏏ "Korean POWs Buy Many War Bonds," The Honolulu Advertiser, May 17, 1945, Morning edition.

Note: Captured Koreans were placed into US prisoner of war (POW) camps in Hawaii and were provided with jobs where they were paid \$1 a day.

Questions

1. Using Source A, identify two details that reveal the role played by Korean labourers during the US military campaign in the Pacific.
2. What message does Source B convey about Korean prisoners of war in US custody? In your answer consider
 - a. the language used in the article
 - b. the emphasis on financial contribution and voluntarism
3. Using the sources and the information from this chapter, how do both sources reflect the complex situation of Koreans under Japanese rule during World War II?

Conclusion

The Second Sino Japanese War had a multifaceted impact on the Korean economy, transforming it into a militarized arm of Japan's imperial war machine for both material and human resources. While industrial output in Korea expanded rapidly, this growth was neither autonomous nor equitable. Ki Baik Lee notes, "Korea's industrial economy was built in pursuit of Japanese goals, on a foundation of Korean suffering and sacrifice." It overwhelmingly served Japanese strategic interests by creating a system of exploitation with profits flowing to Japanese companies and colonial administrators. The war accelerated industrialisation but did so under coercive conditions, including forced labor (both militarily and for factories,) restricted mobility, and harsh working environments, resulting in widespread suffering and the death of thousands of Koreans.

By the end of World War II, the Korean economy was severely strained. U.S. military observers reported that factories were in poor condition due to the intense pressure to maximize wartime production. Equipment had deteriorated from overuse and insufficient maintenance. Additionally, extensive chemical production, particularly nitrogen-based compounds used for fertilizers and explosives, led to significant soil nutrient depletion, negatively impacting agricultural productivity. Overall, most Koreans found themselves trying to survive and improve their lives under an authoritarian colonial regime that prioritized the extraction and exploitation of labor and resources. Submission to colonial demands was often the only viable path under a system designed for economic exploitation, not development.

Paper 3 Practice

1. To what extent do you agree with the perspective that wartime mobilisation during the Second Sino-Japanese War had detrimental effects on the economic and industrial development of Korea?
 - Consider both short- and long-term effects.

III. Social Impact on Korea of the Sino-Japanese War

Inquiry Question

To what extent did Korean society change as a result of the Second Sino-Japanese War?

During wartime, the Japanese sought to incorporate all Koreans into the empire, which warrants an investigation into how gender roles shifted and particularly how women experienced the Second-Sino Japanese War. Furthermore, Korean identity was suppressed by the Japanese through an imperialisation

policy aiming to secure Korean support for its war goals. As Korea's economic role grew, Japan expanded its assimilation policies to impose Japanese values, language, and institutions. Strategies included educational reform, religious control, and language control, with the intent to destroy Korean national and social identity. Consider the extent of success that Japan had enforcing these policies and consider researching how many of these policies continued once the Japanese lost control of the peninsula.

Gendered Experiences

Gender roles and experiences are a key way to view and measure societal change. Women's history is integral to understanding Korea from 1937-1945, especially in light of the horrific experiences of "comfort women" while still recognising that this sexual slavery does not represent all Korean women's experiences.

Korean Women under Japanese Forced Sexual Slavery

An estimated 80,000 to 200,000 Korean girls and women experienced the system of sexual slavery, known euphemistically as the "comfort station" system. Yoshiaki Yoshimi defines it as, "...a system of officially recognized sexual violence that victimized particular women and trampled upon their human rights." The "comfort system" was not the wartime experience that all Korean women had, however, it is important to acknowledge the significance of this human rights abuse and war crime. The consequences of the Japanese military actions and the failure of the Japanese government to acknowledge legal responsibility as well as the government's refusal to grant compensation to these victims continues to affect Japan and Korea's international relationship to this day.



TOK Connection

Language and Knowledge

How does contested language shape the way historical narratives are constructed and promoted?

Task

With your neighbour, discuss these following:

1. Consider the term "comfort women" – what are the connotations of this word?
2. Does this align with the reality of what these girls and women experienced?

In this chapter, the terms "comfort women" and "comfort station" have been placed in quotation marks to emphasize the fact that these terms have been used as a euphemism, which conceals and normalises the violence used against the women and girls in this system.

There are many survivors who reject this terminology being used to describe their experiences.



Skills & Competencies of a Historian

Investigating Historical Methods

Historians use a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods to understand arguments. In this segment you will see how both qualitative and quantitative data is used to support analysis of the system of forced “sexual slavery.” Consider Yoshimi's usage of Hata Ikujiro's statistics in his book *Comfort Women* pages 91–93 in the chart below.

The Japanese Imperial Army attempted to cover up the “comfort women” system by destroying documents, which makes it difficult to know the number of women affected. Hata Ikujiro created a formula to try to grasp how many women were affected by using survivor testimony and military planning documents to show upper and lower limits. Ikujiro averaged the number of army soldiers as 2.3 million in 1942 and 3.51 million in 1945. It is important to consider the turnover assumption, as the conditions were so horrific that many women died, fled, or were rotated out of the stations. This resulted in the following estimates by Ikujiro.

Chart 7

Estimates of Number of “Comfort Women”

Location Or Context	Soldiers	Ratio of Soldiers to women	Turnover assumption	Calculation method	Estimated number of women affected
General overseas Troops in Asia- Pacific War	3,000,000 (rounded average from 1942-1945)	1:50	none	3,000,000 divided 50	60,000
General Overseas Troops in Asia-Pacific	3,000,000	1:50	50%	60,000×1.5	90,000
Lowest possible Adjusted for smaller unit procurement	3,000,000	1:100 *Underestimate*	50% turnover	45,000 + ~5,000	Estimated 50,000
Upper limit assumption Based upon 1:29 slogan	3,000,000	1:30	100% turnover	3,000,000 divided by 30×2	~200,000
Occupied territories	Army movements so no fixed numbers	Not fixed but reports of kidnapping and sexual violence	Several hundred percent turnover	Reported captivity from days to 2+ years	Unknown but potentially very high number of additional victims

Questions:

1. What surprises you about the data?
2. When using quantitative data, why might historians provide both minimum and maximum estimates?

Source A

A “comfort woman’s” testimony from 1944 quoted in Yoshimi, *Comfort Women*, 148.

“I was deceived by an agent from the Korean Peninsula. I thought that comfort for the army meant comforting the troops by dancing and singing, and that would be all right. And the agent told me the same thing. When we crossed the border into China, [he] ordered me to “Take customers.” Without understanding what “taking customers” meant, I went to a customer’s house. With no warning, they raped me. I became desperate.”

Questions

1. What does the testimony in Source A reveal about the recruitment and coercion of “comfort women”?
2. How does this source challenge Japanese claims that women “volunteered” during the war?
3. What power dynamics between the agent, the army, and the women are made visible here?
4. How does this account help us understand the broader system of “sexual slavery” during WWII?
5. How should historians deal with highly traumatic sources?

Being a Historian

Historians work to synthesize the data from primary and secondary sources as well as from quantitative and qualitative data to develop a more complete analysis and understanding of events.

Questions:

1. How do historians balance the interpretation of qualitative narratives with the quantification of data taken from incomplete records?
2. In what ways can qualitative data underscore the social, cultural, or psychological impacts of historical events?

Established in 1931, the Japanese military set up 400 to 2,000 “comfort stations” across Asia as places for Japanese soldiers to have sexual relationships with girls and women. Girls as young as twelve were entrapped in this system that lasted the duration of the war. The majority of the girls and young women came from Korea. They were deceived or coerced into these stations under false promises of education or work [See source above] that were supported by the GGK and local police. Some survivors later testified that they were kidnapped and sold into enslavement. Once the women arrived in the military camps, the girls and women endured harsh and dehumanising conditions. Survivors reported being forced to have sexual intercourse from 10 to 60 times per day, depending on if battles were occurring. If women resisted, they were physically beaten into submission. This repeated sexual violence and physical abuse left many with deep and lasting trauma.



TOK Connection

History as an Area of Knowledge – Ethical Considerations

1. What responsibilities do historians have when teaching or discussing testimonies of sexual violence?
2. How does the sharing of personal testimony raise ethical tensions between re-traumatization, remembrance, justice, and healing?

Furthermore, many girls and women were required to pay off loans for their living expenses. They were required to pay exorbitant prices for food, clothes, make up, and daily living expenses, and 40 to 60% of their wage was garnished illegally. For most women, there was no money left after the fees, if they received wages at all.

Some Korean “comfort women” attempted to escape from the stations. It was quite difficult, because if they were located in other parts of the empire, they were easily identified as non-native citizens and ran the risk of being killed as an enemy combatant. Most did not speak the local languages or know where to seek shelter. If caught, they were severely beaten, punished or even killed. Some sought to escape the physical and mental torment through the use of illegal drugs. Others attempted to fight back by kicking, screaming, and physically fighting and as a result, were often beaten harder.

At the end of the war, most “comfort women” were abandoned wherever they were located within the Japanese empire. There were a few instances where the US army helped to relocate women, but for the most part, many women stayed where they had been left to try to create a new life. Many women suffered lasting effects from sexually transmitted diseases and sterility as well as lasting mental health issues.



« Photo of “Comfort women” taken by the US Army with a Chinese soldier in 1945. The pregnant woman, Young-shim Park, on the far left was one of the first women to testify in the 1990s about her experiences. She, along with others, sought justice for the thousands that could not speak up.

Source: US War Department, “Prisoners of War—Japanese Women”:, September 3, 1944, Photo, September 3, 1944, SC-230417, US National Archives.

The Japanese government listed the women as “military material” rather than by name and destroyed almost all records of the “comfort women” system. This erased their identities and obscured the scale of abuse. Testimonies by survivors like Gyeonsaeng Lee and Youngsook Kim first shared in the 1990s revealed the inhumanity they endured and challenged Japanese efforts to ignore or deny the past. This experience was not a uniquely Korean experience, as women from other conquered territories also experienced similar conditions while under sexual enslavement. The issue of forced sexual slavery remains a point of political contention between Japan and Korea.



TOK Connection

History as an Area of Knowledge: Historians and shaping of historical narratives

The work of Japanese historian Yoshimi Yoshiaki on comfort women and sexual slavery in the Japanese military provides a significant example of how historians can question predominant historical narratives.

After the former victims of sexual violence came forward in 1991, Japanese historian Yoshimi Yoshiaki grew frustrated with his government’s denial of legal responsibility for compensating the victims of sexual violence from the Second Sino-Japanese War. Aware that most records of the “comfort system” had been destroyed at the end of the war, he turned to the archives of the National Institute for Defense Studies Library in search of surviving evidence. There, he initially discovered six documents that the Japanese government and military had organised and maintained this system of sexual slavery. Over time, 62 additional documents were

discovered. The document's discoveries combined with victim testimonies brought this issue to the forefront of public debate. In response, the Japanese government issued a later walked-back apology in 1993.

Reflect on Yoshimi Yoshiaki's discoveries and consider these knowledge questions:

1. How do ethical questions shape modern debates about historical injustices, apologies or reparations?
2. What ethical questions emerge when a government or organizations within a country try to deny or revise history for their own narratives?
3. What is the responsibility for historians on shaping historical narratives and creating knowledge by shaping the narratives?



Source Activity Nine

ATL: Thinking and Research Skills



This “comfort woman” statue is located in Seoul across the street from the former Japanese Embassy. It has its own police that guards the statue and is encircled by a protective barrier.

Questions:

1. Why are particular locations chosen for the placement of these statues?
2. What form of symbolism is present in these statues, how are they intended to be interpreted?
3. How do these statues function simultaneously as memorials and as political statements?
4. How does the physical and political location of the statue impact the meaning and reception?
5. How can statues keep historical memory alive when official records, acknowledgements, or apologies remain incomplete or contested?

Extension: “Comfort Women Statues”

Research “comfort women” statues – consider using The Contested Histories Initiative, “Statue of Peace in South Korea”, Contested Histories Case Study #142 (January 2022), retrieved from <https://contestedhistories.org/resources/case-studies/statue-of-peace-in-seoul/>.



Source Activity Ten

ATL: Thinking Skills

Fighting for Justice - Hak-sun Kim's Story

"I couldn't come out and speak out when I was young, because of the shame. Shame was the first thing in my mind then. Now I'm older and it's easier for me... since I've overcome those thoughts. But when I was younger, I was ashamed.. Wouldn't you feel the same? The fact that you were taken to the Japanese military and used as a "comfort woman" instead of leading a life as others do. Is it acceptable? No, never! It's ridiculous. Then the Korean people should've understand it and the high officials should've have done something about it. But instead, people disdained us, ignored us, treating the victims to be disgraceful and worthless. That's why I kept weeping day and night behind the closed doors. I wept in secret; I had no one to talk to. That's how we lived... Because we survived, now the whole world (will know)..."



Now [2016] my mind is simple. All I want is revenge. To hear the words of repentance from those Japanese... that they are truly sorry for what they did to us. That is my only wish. I have nothing else."

Questions:

1. Why is Hak-sun Kim's testimony significant for understanding wartime sexual violence?
2. How did Kim's decision to testify publicly transform public awareness, memory and activism surrounding the issue of 'comfort women'?
3. Why is knowledge of the historical context essential for interpreting Kim's statements in 1991 and 2016?
4. How can Kim's expressed desire be understood as pursuit of restorative justice?

Source: Park, Jeongnam, dir. TS-2. Hak-Sun Kim, a Korean Survivor Who First Broke Silence Publicly. UCLA CKS - Comfort Women Resource Center, 2016. Video Transcript. https://international.ucla.edu/cks/care/comfortwomen_speakup/267562.

Photo Source: Wikimedia Open Access, 1991 Kim Hak-sun testifies about the Japanese military comfort women on MBC's "PD Notebook" aired on February 20, 1991. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%EA%B9%80%ED%95%99%EC%88%9C.jpg>

To What Extent did the Roles of Korean Women Change Under Japanese Rule?

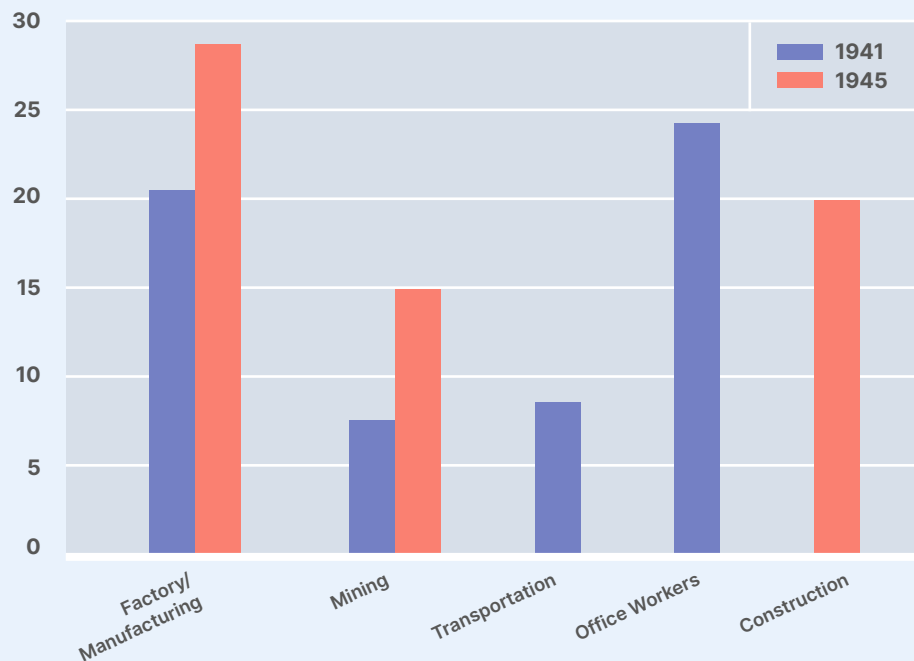
Between 1937-1945, the role of women in Korea shifted in some areas and remained the same in others. While women under forced sexual slavery faced immense change and trauma in their experiences, this was not the experience for all Korean women. The Japanese continued to encourage Koreans to dismantle traditional Confucian gender separation, gain Japanese gendered education, and work for the Japanese war aims. Despite the coercion of colonial capitalism, there were Korean women that worked to further their own wellbeing and improve their station in life.



Source Activity Eleven

ATL: Thinking Skills

Chart 8



⏏ The Change of Percentage of Korean Women in Industries on the Korean Peninsula 1941-1945. This chart represents available data found in, *Fighting for the Enemy*, Palmer, 169.

By 1945, there were 1.2 million Korean women employed in industry within Korea.

1. What factors can help to explain the changes over time for Korean women workers in Korea during the Second Sino-Japanese War?

Women were increasingly integrated into wartime industries, filling the positions of men sent to other parts of the Japanese empire. By 1945, over 1.2 million Korean women worked in areas such as mining, manufacturing, and construction as well as expanded roles in society such as teachers, shopkeepers, midwives, nurses, and radio announcers. Women tended to be placed into labor that was seen as more female in nature such as textiles, light industry, or food processing. As the war intensified, the GGK mandated women aged 13 to 50 to be called up for labor. This was especially harsh for rural female agricultural workers as they were expected to maintain levels of production, raise children, and work on the communal farms with less support as the men in their communities were mobilized for war. Furthermore, the poorest classes experienced the largest levels of mobilization showing an uneven experience of women from different classes. The semi-skilled and unskilled female workers had extremely low wages due to their gender and ethnicity.

As a direct result of the introduction of the “volunteer” labor system, more families returned to the early marriage system after 1937. This meant that more girls and women were placed into arranged marriages to avoid conscription. The GGK allowed this because they hoped that Korean women would have more children to serve the Japanese empire. The purpose of empowering Korean women into the “modern” way was to ensure that these women became obedient, productive imperial citizens who produced obedient productive imperial citizens. Even though women gained skills and some education they previously did not have access to, were able to leave strictly domestic roles, and earn wages, the extent of change depended on class for many women.



Source Activity Twelve

ATL: Thinking Skills

Source A: Chŏng, Hyŏn-baek. *A History of Korean Women*. The Academy of Korean Studies, 2021.

“Women were also included in the Navy. Subjugated by the state and the military as “second-class citizens (female),” women with healthy bodies and special skills could be employed with the permission of the pertinent minister. Nurses constituted the largest group, and most women who were mobilized were brutally overworked as office workers, telephone operators, and as women who prepared meals, did the laundry, and handled cargo.”

https://www.aks.ac.kr/ikorea/cms/usr/wap/selectAplctnData.do?siteAplctnId=koreaReferenceCiaEng&referenceSeq=5301188&menuNo=5010110000&lang=eng_page_192.

Source B: Yi Okpun lived in the Kyonggi Province and was a part of the urban poor. This woman describes her experiences of trying to survive the war in a city.

“They sent my husband to Nagasaki, to a coal mine. He was gone for about a year. While he was away, we really had a hard time. Aigo, it was hard. If it hadn’t been for my mother’s mother, on

the farm where I grew up coming up to Seoul and bringing with her some rice and other farm produce, we really would have starved. In those days, there were a lot of checkpoints and they were very careful and checked everything, but grandmother somehow got past them all and brought us food.”

Under the Black Umbrella, 131.

Source C: Kim Il Sung’s Autobiography – Written based upon earlier manuscripts and notes, his 7th volume of *With The Century* was finished and published after Kim Il Sung’s death.

“In the days of the anti-Japanese revolution, women guerrillas also worked harder. They took part in every battle and cooked meals in addition. They carried most of the cooking utensils and provisions. When the men guerrillas sank with fatigue and fell asleep around the campfire, women did the needlework to mend the torn uniforms of the men. Tears could be stitched up, but burnt parts had to be patched. When pieces were not available, they cut the edges off their own skirts to patch the holes... They overcame difficulties as persistently as men guerrillas. In some aspects, they were even more persistent.”

Kim, Il Sung, and The Central Committee of the Worker’s Party of Korea. *With the Century: Reminiscences of Kim Il Sung*. Foreign Languages Publishing House, 2007, 152–153.

Questions:

1. According to Source A, what roles did Korean women perform within the Japanese war system?
2. What does Source B reveal about the impact of war on the daily lives of Korean women, particularly those from urban and poorer backgrounds?
3. How does Source C present the role of women in the anti-Japanese struggle?

IV. Continuity vs Change in Japanese Assimilation Policies

Inquiry Question

To what extent did Japan succeed in socially transforming Korea?

Japan attempted to assimilate Koreans in all areas including taking their brassware dishes to create weapons for the war and replacing them with ceramic dishes and utensils (See photos). The social policies expanded outside of the home and into attempted control of religion, naming, language, and education policies. The question for you to consider is how far these policies created lasting change in Korea.



Source Activity Thirteen

ATL: Thinking Skills

Source A:



Source B:



◀ ▶ Source: Photo Delivery of Brassware and replacement ceramic cup, Museum of Contemporary Korean History, 95.

Koreans were forced to “donate” their tableware and brassware to help the Japanese war effort, and that was turned into torpedoes as shown above. People were then provided with ceramic replacements that had “decisive war” in Chinese characters and a torpedo stamped on them.

Question:

1. How did Japan’s wartime requisitioning of Korean household metalware function as a form of authoritarian control over everyday life and identity?
2. How does the symbolism stamped on the ceramic bowl (Source B) reflect the political and ideological aims of the Japanese wartime regime?

Religious Assimilation Policies

Starting in 1937, Japan intensified its effort to erase Korea’s spiritual and cultural identity for attempted unification with the Japanese Empire. The GGK labeled Confucianism, Shamanism, and Christianity as “uncivilised,” promoting Shintoism to center Korean identity on loyalty to the emperor.

Shinto shrine worship became mandatory by 1938, and it was framed as a patriotic act to force participation. Shaman shrines were converted into Shinto shrines and cultural rituals were replaced with imperial rites. Children in schools were forced to bow to the east, pray for Japan’s success, and revere the emperor as a divine figure. Even ration coupons were distributed at shrines to link survival with submission.

Christian doctrine, which emphasized the worship of one God, directly conflicted with enforced participation in Shinto rituals. Christians viewed this as idolatrous. Refusal of Shinto worship led to church closures, arrests, and torture. In 1938, the Presbyterian General Assembly was coerced into passing a resolution declaring shrine worship a “patriotic” act rather than a religious one. Over 2,000 Christians were arrested and at least 50 ministers died in prison. There were some religious leaders that complied while under duress. Shamanistic and Confucian traditions were also dismantled as shrines were destroyed or absorbed into the imperial cult.

Japan’s religious policies aimed to break communal identities and enforce submission. Resistance, especially in urban areas, was met with harsh repression through school closures, arrests, prison, torture, and social exclusion. Ultimately, the Japanese regime’s religious policies were a tool of cultural erasure and control, and religious groups bore the brunt of state violence for their refusal to abandon their faiths. However, after Japan’s surrender, most Shinto shrines in Korea were abandoned or destroyed.



Source Activity Fourteen

ATL: Thinking Skills

Hildi Kang describes an interview with a Korean man about his experiences with liberation in Korea in August of 1945

“Another person, remembering that day [August 15] seemed to speak for all Koreans. ‘I never talk about it,’ he said. ‘To talk is to remember - dare I remember? Even after all these years, I will see and hear it again.’ His gaze became unfocused, he paused, and finally continued. ‘Surprise - Joy- anticipation- fear - pathos- anger! All of them. All at once. I remember...’ Tears began to slide from his eyes to his cheeks.

‘I remember the bonfires,” he said. “Many Shinto shrines quickly became objects of that anger. Crowds rushed up the steps, past the Torrii gates, carrying axes and ropes. They tore down the wooden shrines, hacked them to pieces and right there on the wide courtyards they burned them to the ground.’

Bonfires! What an appropriate way to help extinguish the gloom cast for over thirty-five years by the black umbrella of Japanese rule.”

Under the Black Umbrella, 147.

Questions:

1. How does the destruction of shrines represent a change from the past and what continuities may have remained after liberation?
2. How might the sudden collapse of Japanese authority have contributed to both celebration and anger for Koreans in August 1945?

Name Change Policies

In 1939, GGK issued Ordinance number 19, ordering Koreans to create a Japanese style family name or *sōshi*. This was followed by Ordinance number 20, or *kaimei*, in February 1940 to encourage Koreans to change their first names prior to August 1940 to Japanese style. Although these policies were voluntary, there was increasing coercion carried out by the Japanese. The Japanese discriminated against those that did not adopt the new system by connecting the naming policies with being able to have waged labor, access to healthcare, and attending schools. The Japanese goal was to try and break Korean ancestral ties that is normally a key part of Korean naming conventions as a form of erasing Korean cultural identity.

Some Koreans complied by finding ways to incorporate their Korean name into the new Japanese one, either by translation or finding a similar character. Rural Koreans often ignored the policy, while others mocked and resisted the policy by adopting absurd or demeaning names like “dog,” or “cow.” Some used subversive names like *Sungil* meaning “victory over Japan,” though they were quickly forced to change them. The name law had little lasting impact, as resistance was widespread and the timeframe was too short to erase the long term kinship naming traditions. Choe Yisan stated that the day after liberation, teachers took roll at school and changed student names back to Korean. Furthermore, the US military government legally reinstated Korean names in 1946.

NAME CHANGES — KOREAN TO JAPANESE		
Korean Name Character and Meaning	Japanese Name and Meaning	Reason for Choice
Kim 金 gold	Kanekuni 金國 gold country	Retain “gold” 金 but use its Japanese pronunciation
	Kanczawa 金澤 gold pond	Retain “gold” 金 A popular Japanese name
	Kaneshiro 金城 gold castle	Retain “gold” 金

⚠ Some Koreans took Japanese names in an arbitrary fashion, often defiantly illogical. In the name changes that follow, however, one can see the effort made by interviewees to hold on to their Korean heritage.

Education Policies

The largest assimilation policy in colonial Korea focused on education and language to unify Korea and Japan. In 1937, only a third of Korean children attended school, but GGK policy expanded public education and mandated Japanese as the sole language. Korean was banned in schools and after the war, some students had to relearn it. The GGK linked Hangul to nationalism, punishing those who used it. In 1942, 33 leaders of the Korean Language Society were arrested and tortured for promoting Hangul.

Students were trained to be loyal Japanese subjects, taught to value the group over the individual, revere the emperor, and embrace the Japan-Korea “brotherhood.” Education reinforced Korean “inferiority,” stressing cooperation, industrial labor and obedience to colonial law as patriotic duties. Japanese language instruction aimed to prepare Koreans as soldiers and workers, while martial arts was introduced after 1940 to foster military spirit. However, these policies were undercut by wartime disruptions, for example, schoolchildren were mobilized into working in factories in 1944 and 1945. Many Koreans were illiterate or left school or attended secret Korean language schools, raising doubts about how effective GJK’s language assimilation policies truly were.

Despite pervasive attempts at cultural assimilation and profound wartime suffering, especially among women, the fundamental fabric of Korean society, including both its language and national identity, proved resilient. This indicated that the social changes, though deeply felt, were not wholly enduring.

Paper 3 Practice

Essay Skills Builder

Timed Full Essay Practice

Approaches to Learning Skills: Self Management and Planning

Up to this point, you have learned how to plan, outline, develop well reasoned arguments and how to apply the paper 3 rubric. The final step is to be able to accomplish these steps in an hour time frame as required for your IB exam. Time management is essential for success in the paper 3 exam. Depending on your writing speed, this is a suggested time breakdown for one essay.

Suggested Time Breakdown for Paper 3

2 Minutes	Reading and selecting the question carefully
8 Minutes	Brainstorming and planning your answer
5 Minutes	Write introduction with thesis statement
35 Minutes	3-4 body PEEL paragraphs ensuring inclusion of a counter argument (around 8-11 minutes per argument)
5 Minutes	Reasoned Conclusion
5 Minutes	Review and Edit

Select One of the Paper 3 Practice Questions:

1. “Korean society was fundamentally transformed by the Second Sino-Japanese War.” To what extent do you agree with this statement?
2. To what extent did lives change in Korea during the Second Sino-Japanese War?

V. Liberation and New Governments

Inquiry Question

To what extent did the circumstances leading up to and during Korea's liberation in 1945 enable the establishment of Syngman Rhee and Kim Il Sung's regimes?

By 1942, Korea's strategic location made it central to US, Soviet, and Chinese interests, but each envisioned a different postwar future. The US, wary of Soviet influence and mistakenly estimating 30,000 communist guerrillas in Manchuria, feared a failed trusteeship and prepared for full military occupation, asserting the need for primary control of Korea and ousting the Japanese colonizers. The consequences of the decisions starting in 1942 had long term consequences for Korea.

Allied Planning and the Conferences

Korea had a long history of capable self rule and governance of which Americans were quite ignorant. According to Kornel Chang, President Roosevelt claimed that Korea would "need some period of apprenticeship before full independence might be attained, perhaps forty years." The idea was that a more "civilized" nation would "tutor" another nation. Roosevelt had already followed the 47 year tutelage in the Philippines, which guided his thought process. Therefore, he wrongly believed that colonised peoples were not prepared to rule themselves. Furthermore, in 1942, Roosevelt wrote a letter to Jiang Jieshi stating that China, the US, Britain, and the USSR would become the "four big policemen of the world" after the war and would require all nations to be involved in a trusteeship with Korea. This was reaffirmed at a meeting in March 1943 with British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden and Roosevelt as they prepared for the December Cairo Conference.



Source Activity Fifteen

ATL: Thinking and Research Skills

Cairo Declaration

Tasks

1. Read the different draft versions of the Cairo Declarations and identify the differences between the versions.
2. Conduct further research to explain why Roosevelt and Churchill supported these proposed changes.
3. Analyze the final wording of the Cairo Declaration and assess its significance for Korea.

American First Draft — Cairo Declaration: "...Japan will also be expelled from all other territories which she has taken by violence and greed. The aforesaid Three Great Powers, mindful of the enslavement of the people of Korea, at the earliest possible moment after the downfall of Japan, Korea shall become free and independent."

Quoted in Chang *A Fractured Liberation*, 58

Roosevelt Second Draft – Cairo Declaration: “...Japan will also be expelled from all other territories which she has taken by violence and greed. The aforesaid Three Great Powers, mindful of the enslavement of the people of Korea, are determined at the proper moment after the downfall of Japan, Korea shall become free and independent..”

Final Version with British Input, December 1, 1943–Records of the Department of State Relating to World War II, 1939–1945.

“...Japan will also be expelled from all other territories which she has taken by violence and greed. The aforesaid Three Great Powers, mindful of the enslavement of the people of Korea, are determined that in due course, Korea shall become free and independent.”

Recognizing it could not defeat Axis powers alone, the US coordinated wartime and postwar strategy with its allies. At the 1943 Cairo Conference, Roosevelt, Churchill, and Jiang Jieshi pledged that Korea would “in due course” become “free and independent,” though the vague timeline reflected Korea’s low priority. The Allies agreed to place Korea under tutelage after Japan fell. Stalin’s absence and US officials’ unfamiliarity with Korea underscored a lack of concrete planning from the series of allied conferences.

Atomic Bombings and Liberation

The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, combined with the Soviet invasion of Manchuria on August 8, 1945, accelerated Japan’s surrender. On August 15, 1945, Korea was freed from Japanese imperial rule, but without an allied plan for immediate self-governance.

The Soviet advance forced the US to act quickly. On August 24, the Red Army crossed the 38th parallel. To prevent total Soviet control, American planners proposed dividing the peninsula at the 38th parallel, securing Seoul. Debate persists over whether this was a hasty military decision or the result of lobbying by Korean exiles such as Rhee to bring American support. When US forces arrived on September 8, 1945, the Soviets returned to the 38th parallel. At this point, both powers assumed the division was temporary.



Skills & Competencies of a Historian

Research and Reflection

1. Which countries were occupied and divided in the European and Asian theatres of World War II?
2. Which additional countries did the Allied powers plan to occupy, and for what reasons?
3. Research the main theories explaining why and how Korea was divided.
 - Consider the roles of wartime agreements, beginning Cold War tensions, and decisions made by external powers.

Political Vacuum and Factionalism: The establishment of Syngman Rhee and Kim Il Sung's Governments



⏏ A photo of released prisoners from colonial jails after Japan's surrender was announced. "Prisoner Release" August 16, 1945. Wikimedia open Access https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Liberation_Day_of_Korea#/media/File:Prison_Release_of_Korean_activists.JPG

Post-liberation Korea faced economic devastation and social dislocation. Widespread unrest followed, driven by returning Koreans demanding political and land reforms.

In September, nationalist leader Lyuh Woon-hyung was approached by the GGK to set up a new government. The Committee for the Preparation of Korean Independence formed local people's committees across the peninsula. These bodies, backed by the Soviets, enacted reforms and chose Rhee as president to unite the different factions. The newly declared Korean People's Republic had 145 people's committees that issued a 27 point program for social, economic, and political reforms, including land redistribution. These committees, while having socialist leanings, represented what the Korean people wanted and were democratically elected, which showed a unified front government. The old guard Korean communist leaders remained in and around Seoul, which allowed for Kim Il Sung and the Yanan Korean Communists to gain more power influence with the Soviets.

The US made a number of missteps in the early liberation period. The first was the rejection of this self-declared government, preferring exiled nationalists like Rhee and supporting the conservative, elitist Korean Democratic Party to ascend after the American military government. The second was the US military retained Japanese colonial structures, including 80% of the hated colonial police force as the US reversed the decolonisation processes. This ultimately caused further unrest among the Korean people.

Rhee, seen as pro-American and anti-communist, gained American support. Meanwhile, Kim Il Sung, backed by the Soviets, emerged as the North's leader. Though neither leader was easily controlled by their patrons, both eliminated moderates and entrenched hardline ideologies, making compromise difficult as both sides wanted complete control of a unified Korea.

In late 1945, the US diverged from the trusteeship plan, creating the US Army Military Government in Korea (USMGIK) under the rigid General Hodge. This military government had been trained to occupy Japan but ended up being diverted to Korea. Civil servants arrived a month late with only one hour of training on the history of Korea, which resulted in Korea being treated as an enemy nation to be occupied, rather than as a nation that had suffered under exploitative colonial rule. The USMGIK outlawed Korean governments including the KPG and the Committee, while backing Rhee and rightist parties as future leaders. This deepened divisions. Furthermore, the military government reversed the reorganisation of factories and revoked the ability to strike. They also repossessed the 875,000 acres of formerly Japanese owned land that had been redistributed through the People's Committees and insisted that the land had to be bought at a fair price. The USMGIK could not provide adequate responses when Koreans asked why they had to pay when the Japanese had seized ancestral lands without payments. The unpopular military government treated Korea with an undeserved heavy hand for a country that was under occupation for 35 years, and anti-American sentiment continued to grow.

Entrenched Division and The Moscow Conference

The increased divisions on the peninsula prompted General Hodge to recommend that the US come to an agreement with the Soviet Union. The agreement stated both sides should withdraw from Korea and allow for Koreans to find their own path forward. Hodge did not believe that the situation would improve with both sides on the continent, and Hodge's advice was ignored by the US government.

The December 1945 Moscow Conference formalized a reduced five year joint trusteeship between the US and USSR. The US did not want to be responsible for a permanent division of Korea, which is why they compromised for a five year trusteeship, as the Soviets wanted immediate Korean freedom. Koreans across the political spectrum opposed trusteeship, saw the Moscow Communiqué as a betrayal, and demanded immediate independence. Ordinary citizens peacefully protested, with some ripping down American flags at night.

Meanwhile, the US and USSR continued to back rival governments, Rhee in the South and Kim Il Sung in the North, reinforcing the division. As Bruce Cumings notes, by then it was "too late," US support for elites and rejection of grassroots movements contrasted with Soviet support for local committees and reforms. This divergence cemented the political and ideological split on the peninsula.

The circumstances surrounding Korea's liberation, the wartime planning that excluded Korean voices, and the sudden absence of clear government authority created a power vacuum in August 1945 and the rapid US-Soviet occupation enabled the post war rise of Syngman Rhee and Kim Il Sung. Both men were products of external selection shaped by Cold War foundations. Yet their consolidation of power reflected the dynamics of Korean factionalism and resistance towards imposed trusteeship. The liberation process created conditions where superpower backed regimes emerged in 1948 and laid the foundation for division and the future ongoing conflict.

Paper 3 Practice

1. To what extent did internal domestic factors, rather than external influences, determine the political systems established under Syngman Rhee and Kim Il Sung in post-liberation Korea?

Conclusion

Korea experienced increased exploitation during the Second Sino-Japanese War. This time period deepened political repression, economic extraction, and attempted social assimilation policies. However, this time period also became a catalyst for Korean leaders abroad to redefine the Korean independence movement and position themselves as future leaders with Kim Il Sung in the North and Syngman Rhee in the US. Despite the social and economic repression Koreans resisted through underground movements and cultural preservation efforts. Ultimately, the consequences of the Second Sino Japanese War have had long lasting repercussions for the Korean peninsula.

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

To what extent was the Korean War a result of long term colonial legacies and post-liberation power dynamics rather than a sudden manifestation of Cold War rivalry?

The Korean War, which broke out in 1950, had roots extending well before World War II. From 1937–1945, Korea experienced political upheaval, social division, economic exploitation, and international decision-making that largely excluded Korean voices. Although the conflict started after the establishment of two rival governments, many causes were already in place at the end of World War II. Examining this period through political, social, economic, and international lenses reveals that the cause of the Korean War was not a sudden outbreak, but rather a combination of long- and short-term historical processes.

Socially, Japanese assimilation policies created widespread resentment and trauma. Forced labor and military mobilisation and displacement created hardship for most of the population. Yet, for some, collaboration with the colonial state was a path for advancement or survival, which led to stark political and social divisions post liberation. In the North, land reform and decolonisation efforts carried out by People's Committees were seen as addressing social needs more directly. In contrast, the South retained many colonial-era elites and collaborators, now backed by the US, which essentially halted the decolonisation processes and land redistribution. These social inequalities, combined with ideological and class tensions, made Korean society increasingly volatile and prone to conflict.

Economically, Korea's rapid industrial growth during the Second Sino-Japanese War had served Japan's imperial needs rather than Korea's development. The North became an industrial base while the South remained largely agricultural. Koreans were conscripted to work at home and across the Japanese Empire. By 1945, this left Korea economically imbalanced. The division at the 38th parallel further separated the industrial North from the agricultural South, creating two interdependent but politically opposed economies. This caused each regime to become, to a certain extent, reliant on its occupying power – Soviet support in the North and American support in the South – that caused a deepening of rivalry in the Cold War context.

Politically, Korea remained under Japanese colonial rule with little room for autonomous governance until the end of World War II. Nationalist groups were suppressed or forced into exile. Although some Koreans tried to work within the system, no single group emerged as a legitimate postwar government. Allied powers discussed the postwar fate of Korea at Cairo, Yalta, and Potsdam conferences, but without Korean representation. When Japan surrendered in August 1945, Korea was abruptly divided by the US and USSR at the 38th parallel. This division laid the groundwork for two separate regimes that claimed legitimacy over the entire peninsula. However, Koreans were not passive in this process, as Syngman Rhee and Kim Il Sung positioned themselves as national leaders to pursue reunification on their own terms. Their ambitions, supported by superpower backing, played a central role in escalating tensions into the 1950 war.



Conceptual Connections

Cause & Consequence

The concepts of cause and consequence examine both long- and short-term outcomes of historical decisions and actions. In the case of Korea under Japanese colonial rule the following points can be made:

- Korea faced exploitation in both labor and economics to fuel the Japanese industrial war machine.
- Developed mining, hydroelectricity and factories, but overuse caused equipment breakdown, rundown factories, and ecological damage.

Continuity and Change

The concepts of continuity and change focus on what changed and what persisted over time. Change can be qualified by time (the pace with which change happens) and intensity (how strong or profound the change is). Change and continuity can be evaluated as either positive or negative depending on the perspective.

Japanese rule brought significant changes to Korea's economy, education system, and social roles (particularly for women).

In order to evaluate change and continuity these points can be helpful:

- Forced religious, language and name changes were painful but largely reversed after liberation.
- 200,000 "comfort women" suffered lifelong trauma from sexual slavery.
- Women gained limited education and wage labor opportunities, yet social and gender hierarchies persisted.
- Continued industrialisation from the pre-colonial era accelerated further due to the Second Sino-Japanese War.

Significance

Historical significance explores why certain events or developments matter, both at the time and in the long term. In the case of Korea, the exclusion of Korean voices after World War II when decisions were made by the Allies had great significance for its short- and long-term development. When evaluating the significance these points should be taken into account:

- Korean agency was ignored by the Allied powers during the decision making process for Korean post-war independence.
- The political developments contributed to Korea's division and the 1950 Korean War and leads to continued division today.

Perspectives

This concept emphasises the existence of multiple viewpoints which are shaped by context, position, experience, and ideology. Multiple perspectives are visible in the context of Korean history:

- Korean responses varied: some collaborated and many resisted.
- Syngman Rhee focused on diplomatic resistance while Kim Il Sung and the communists focused on armed resistance.
- The economic, social and political consequences of Japanese colonial rule for Korea.
- Ordinary citizens resisted by preserving language, history, creating secret graffiti or slowing work.

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: How did authoritarian rule affect people's lives?

Investigating how authoritarian rule affects people's lives focuses on the **consequences** and how deeply it changes people's lives. From 1937–1945, Korean society was tightly controlled under Japanese authoritarian rule. This period was marked by increasingly harsher attempts to erase Korean identity and culture and assimilate the population into the Japanese Empire.

Religion and Cultural Control

Korean religious practices were forced to change to state Shintoism which demanded loyalty to the Emperor. Christians faced persecution for refusing to bow at Shinto shrines with many pastors being imprisoned. Churches went underground, operating on weeknights with people singing songs in their head for fear of being discovered. Buddhist temples were reorganised to reflect Japanese institutions. Confucianism was discouraged as outdated and seen as a direct clash with imperial ideology.

Social Hierarchies

Koreans became second class citizens in their own land as Japanese settlers received preferential treatment in housing, jobs, and education. Koreans received strict surveillance and discrimination, often being paid half of a Japanese worker. Many Koreans were coerced into labor or the military as the war effort expanded. Furthermore, some Koreans experienced starvation levels of food rationing.

Naming and Identity

The 1939 naming policies coerced Koreans to adapt Japanese style names. The Korean names held special ancestral meaning by linking the name to a location. These were replaced or modified to follow the Japanese naming structures to create a new history linked to Japan. Many Koreans complied out of necessity, however, it was a deeply painful process.

Everyday Life and Resistance

Despite oppression, quiet acts of resistance persisted. Koreans found ways to dodge conscription notices. Some churches met in secret, while families continued to pray at home, and taught their children Korean history and Hangul. Underground cultural movements kept Korean identity alive.

Global Connections Case Studies to consider (1750-present)

Europe : Fascist Italy; Great Britain over Ireland

Americas: Augusto Pinochet in Chile; Papa Doc in Haiti; French in Haiti; Fidel Castro in Cuba

Africa: Belgium's Colonial Rule over Congo; Great Britain colonial rule over Kenya

Australia and Oceania: Australia's treatment of Indigenous peoples; Papua and New Guinea under Australian Administration 1906-1975; Fiji under British rule 1874-1970; Overthrow and annexation of The Kingdom of Hawaii

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