

The Japanese Occupation of Korea (1910–1945)

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National Korean Studies Seminar
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19th Century Imperialism

- England, France, Russia and the United States develop imperial interests in East Asia.
- Japan responded to Western imperialism during the Meiji Restoration (1868-1889) by transforming Japan. The government became centralized around the figure of the emperor. Japan underwent rapid modernization to protect the country from colonization. This led to its rise in military power.
- The U.S. victory in the Spanish-American War led to U.S control over the Philippines in 1898. At about the same time, the Japanese became convinced that control over Korea was critical to their strategic and economic interests.
- President Theodore Roosevelt feared that Japan might interfere in the Philippines. In the 1905 Taft Katsura Agreement, Japan promised that it would not interfere in the Philippines; however, the agreement paved the way for Japan to annex Korea in 1910.

Japanese occupation (1910-1945) and its impact on Korea

Economic:

- Large land owners increased their wealth
- Japan dominates banks, industries, transportation and communication. Despite the emergence of a Korean entrepreneur class, the economy was dominated by Japanese firms.
- During WWII, Koreans were forced to serve in the military and work in mines and factories in Japan.



Parade to recruit
Korean men to
serve the Japanese
empire



Koreans had to ship rice to Japan

Political:

All authority invested in the Governor-General who was appointed by the emperor

No freedom of press; political parties abolished; public gatherings disallowed.

Koreans were to obey the laws of Japan.

Police had the power to sentence those arrested for minor offenses. For severe offenses, a judge had the authority to order executions.



Social:

Mandatory attendance at Shinto shrines

Children had to adopt Japanese customs, culture and language.

Koreans were forced to take Japanese names, the most cherished source of family identity and ancestor worship.

Approximately 200,000 Korean women were forced to serve the sexual needs of Japanese troops.

In order to succeed and provide for their families, many Koreans collaborated with the Japanese.

Cultural:

Japanese occupation forces attempted to eliminate Korean culture by imposing restrictions on art, dance, film, language, music and the theater.

Annexation inspired a wave of nationalism that further legitimized han'gul as the literary language of all Koreans.

Music education was generally more Western along with Japanese style music.

Artists used many different styles and techniques to express their despair at the fate of their country.

The Japanese were particularly harsh with Christian organizations involved in nationalist activities.

“Does Spring Come to Stolen Fields!” (an excerpt)
Yi Sang-hwa’s poem in response to occupation

“What am I looking for? Soul,
my blind soul, endlessly darting like children at play by the
river,

answer me: where am I going?

Filled with the odor of grass, compounded of green
laughter and green sorrow,

Limping along, I walk all day, as if possessed by the spring
devil:

for these are stolen fields, and our spring is stolen.”

To destroy national spirit Koreans were forced to bow at Shinto shrines



Korean children could not speak their own language and had to read from Japanese textbooks. The Korean language was banned in schools starting in 1938. The children in this photograph are Japanese.



Photo of Japanese children practicing calligraphy (All Korean children were forced to learn Japanese calligraphy and could not practice Korean calligraphy)





Almost 200,000 Korean women were forced to serve Japanese soldiers as “comfort women.”

The conditions under colonial rule led to the rise of Korean nationalism, the formation of the independence movement, and the growth of Christianity.



Nationwide Demonstration for Korean
Independence on March 1, 1919



Yu Kwansun, age 16, one of Korea's most famous independence fighters. She was arrested, tortured, and died in prison.

The Legacy of Japanese Occupation

Japanese politicians continue to visit a controversial WWII memorial

Omission of information about occupation in Japanese textbooks

Lingering memories of Japanese brutality

Tension between the Korean people because some Koreans collaborated with the Japanese

The devastating experiences of comfort women during WWII

The Japanese continue to discriminate against Koreans in Japan

Japan and Korea both claim Dokdo Island

Most Koreans do not really believe that Japan has fully repented.

Peace Statue, Glendale, California

Comfort Woman Statue



Independence Hall

The Spires represent North & South Korea



Literature to augment the study of the Japanese Colonial Period.

Lost Names: Scenes from a Korean Childhood. Kim, Richard. ***Lost Names***, is an outstanding literary selection for junior and senior high school students. Lee recounts his own childhood and the suffering and insults inflicted on his village during the period of Japanese occupation. The writing is simple, but poetic. The story is very touching, memorable and relevant. A comparison might be made to the experience of Native Americans as a result of the Dawes Act and Indian school policies.

When My Name was Keoko. Park, Linda Sue. Inspired by her own family's stories of living in Korea during Japanese occupation, Newbery Medal-winning author Linda Sue Park chronicles the compelling story of two siblings, 10 year old Sunhee and 13 year old Taeyul and their battle to maintain their identity and dignity during one of Korea's most difficult and turbulent times. Her account is carefully researched and will be captivating for children between the ages of 10 to 14.

Bibliography

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Korea: Old and New: A History. Carter Eckert, Ki-baik Lee, Young Ick Lew, Michael Robinson, and Edward W. Wagner

A Concise History of Korea: From Antiquity to the Present. Michael J. Seth

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When My Name was Keoko. Linda Sue Park