



BMUN LXXII



KOREAN IMPERIAL COURT



LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome to BMUN 72's Korean Imperial Court!

My name is Ted Kim and I will be the Head Chair for this committee. I'm a junior studying Computer Science, but if I had the time and energy, I'd like to explore my interests in math, philosophy, history, and political science more. Outside of BMUN, I enjoy making (and eating) desserts, buying books I will never read, and playing on my Nintendo Switch. I'm also involved with Computer Science Mentors, a student organization here at Berkeley where mentors assist small groups of students in lower-division computer science courses. Education is a core value of mine, and I hope that the dais can offer a wonderful learning opportunity for you all in history, public speaking, and diplomacy.

During your time researching and our three days together, we will explore another victim of the Age of Imperialism. This committee is set during October of 1897, when Korea transitioned from kingdom to empire. On the surface, it appears to be a triumphant moment for the nation; in reality, it changed nothing. Foreign nations competed with each other over bringing Korea into their own sphere of influence and even fought two bloody wars on a land that belonged to neither side. We also see a different conflict between liberal and conservative values, a showdown between newly popularized Western ideas and culture and the traditional Neo-Confucian way of life preserved for hundreds of years. With two distinct but intertwined conflicts, delegates will need to engage in committee-wide diplomacy and personal scheming to determine the fate of Korea.

As you read through this topic synopsis, try to identify the main takeaways the dais wishes you to keep in your mind. These will guide your own research and your actions in committee. And as you do your own research, you may find it difficult to find resources on some of these topics, especially characters. The dais encourages you to be creative and resourceful with the information you have along with the information from the topic synopsis to craft a brilliant course of action for your character.

I am thrilled to be joined by my amazing Vice Chairs for this committee. You may read about them below:

Timothy Yue is a fourth-year History major at UC Berkeley. In the past, he has acted as the Vice Chair for BMUN 70's Security Council committee and Head Chair for BMUN 71's 23rd Session General Assembly committee. He enjoys watching anime and playing games on his PC and switch, and has an academic interest in Japan in the 19th and 20th centuries. This is his first time chairing a Crisis committee in earnest at BMUN, and is thrilled to take part in such a dynamic and fascinating topic such as this one.

Robert Gan is a Junior studying Political Science and Public Policy. He is a former Vice Chair for BMUN 70's Agra Summit Crisis and BMUN 71's SNCC Crisis. He is extremely excited about the unique historic situations that this committee will explore and is incredibly excited to see what kinds of crisis arcs this committee's delegates create. Outside of school and MUN, he enjoys playing video games, drawing, and spending time with friends and family.

Rafael Kaye-Lew is a Junior majoring in Political Science and minoring in Data Science. This is his first time chairing a crisis committee for BMUN, and his first time chairing MUN. Rafael is also a member of Political Computer Science, a Berkeley club that focuses on the intersection of these two fields. In his free time, he enjoys playing soccer for his IM team, listening to different music, and cooking for his housemates. He is thrilled to be a part of BMUN this year and hopes to be an effective staff member to make the delegate experience as good as it can be.

Janna Yae-Rin Lee is a Freshman majoring in Environmental Economics and Policy and Political Science. They are a huge nerd in anything related to the history of comic books and will talk about it nonstop if you ask. Though this is their first year in BMUN they are looking forward to overseeing scholarly debate, timely decisions, and the chaos that will ensue during committee. Outside of school, they like creating their own cartoon show, gaming, creating fashion designs, and adding to their knowledge of marine life.

We are all looking forward to meeting each and every one of you this upcoming March!

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ted Kim". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Ted Kim
Head Chair of Korean Imperial Court
Email: tkim@bmun.org



KOREAN IMPERIAL COURT

GLOSSARY OF IMPORTANT KOREAN & JAPANESE TERMS

This topic synopsis contains many foreign words, people, and places, and you might feel overwhelmed by all of these terms. We will collect the relevant ones (i.e. terms in the Current Situation and important terms throughout the synopsis) here and provide definitions for them.

For Korean and Japanese terms, we don't expect you to become fluent in either language by the time you come into committee, but try to learn the general pronunciation using a translator's pronunciation feature. Other terms not listed in this glossary should have their pronunciations in the topic synopsis. We will provide their native spellings to help with that.

Joseon (K. 조선) – a state ruling the Korean Peninsula from the late fourteenth to early twentieth centuries.

Sadae (K. 사대) – “serving the great,” the Neo-Confucian idea that the small nation (Joseon) should serve the large nation (China) in a relationship similar to that of a big and little brother.

Uibyeong (K. 의병) – “righteous armies,” irregular militias rising at times of crisis during Korean history.

Played an important role during the Japanese invasions, but appeared during the time period of this committee as well.

Silhak (K. 실학) – “practical learning,” a movement centered around challenging the current Neo-Confucian status quo through promoting reforms and studying new ideas.

Gojong (K. 고종) – the current emperor of the Korean Empire.

Seikanron (J. 征韓論) – “Advocacy of a punitive expedition against Korea,” the debates of the Meiji government over an invasion of Korea during the first half of the nineteenth century.

Imo (K. 임오) Incident – A military altercation where Joseon forces, upset by the reforms and increasing involvement of Japan in Joseon attacked the government and the Japanese legation.

Donghak (K. 동학) – “Eastern learning,” a religion combining traditional Korean shamanism, Neo-Confucianism, and Christianity. Its adherents demanded social reform, but the government’s brutal suppression of the religion led to a rebellion in 1894

Gabo (K. 갑오) Reforms – A series of reforms passed by the pro-Japanese government installed during the First Sino-Japanese War.

bunmei kaika (J. 文明開化) – “Civilization and Enlightenment,” an important tenet of Japanese Westernization. Emphasis on adopting Western culture and values.

fukoku kyōhei (J. 富国強兵) – “Enrich the Nation, Strengthen the Army,” an important tenet of Japanese modernization. Emphasis on developing a strong economy and military in tandem to ward off Western encroachment.

yangban (K. 양반) – The traditional ruling class of Joseon, aristocrats. Formally, class distinctions were outlawed in the Gabo reforms, but they still held wealth and prestige.

Seoul (K. 서울) – the capital of Joseon and the Korean Empire, located around the middle of the peninsula. The capital of Joseon and the Korean Empire took upon many names, but for the sake of consistency we will refer to it as Seoul throughout this topic synopsis.

Ganghwa (K. 강화) – an island barely off the coast of Korea, west of the capital Seoul. This was the location of the royal family’s retreat during the Manchu invasions, the site of battles with the French, Americans, and Japanese, and the location of the Treaty of Ganghwa with Japan, which opened up Joseon to the world.

Pyongyang (K. 평양) – city in the northern Korean Peninsula. Important administrative city, former capital of many other Korean states.

Busan (K. 부산) – city in the southern Korean Peninsula. Important port city and the main connection historically between Japan and Joseon.

MAP OF KOREA, 1897



(The Dragon Historian)

Note: Ganghwa is the large island just off the western coast of Korea west of Seoul and south of Kaesong. Dongnae is Busan.



MODERNIZING KOREA, 1897

A HISTORY OF JOSEON, 1392-1876

In 1392, a military commander named Yi Seong-gye, today referred to as King Taejo overthrew the ruling state of Goryeo and established his own state, Joseon (Pratt, 118). This new state would rule the Korean peninsula for the next five hundred years. As a side note, we will refer to the Korean kingdom ruling the peninsula from 1392 up until 1897 as Joseon, and the state ruling the peninsula from 1897 onwards as the Korean Empire or more simply Korea. Regardless of the time period, we will refer to the people living in the peninsula as Koreans.

Neo-Confucianism

One of the major changes King Taejo introduced to Korea was a shift away from Goryeo's Buddhism to-

wards Neo-Confucianism to align the dynasty closer to the Ming (Pratt 118). Neo-Confucianism, known as "scholarly teaching" or "the Way" to Koreans, came about in the tenth and eleventh centuries in China in an attempt to relive the glories of the past sages during a time of great uncertainty (Pratt 126). In a similar fashion, it was a way to have a fresh start out of the recently chaotic period of the Goryeo dynasty (Lee 90).

For King Taejo, Neo-Confucianism was a way to legitimize his rule. A prominent tenant of Neo-Confucianism is the right to revolution, a transfer of heaven's approval to rule from one incompetent ruler to a capable one (S. Kim 83). Joseon made sure to portray the recent kings of the previous Korean state

as corrupt and sinful individuals. One writer accused King Gongyang, the last king of Goryeo, of punishing the noble and favoring the crooked (“womenfolk and eunuchs”) and ruining the institutions of the day (S. Kim 85).

However, Neo-Confucianism was not just a political convenience; it made its way into everyday life. One way it did so was through education. Neo-Confucians greatly valued education—one scholar even wrote that “Since the [Qin] and Han dynasties... there have been few who did not see that schooling was important and that the vigor or decline of the schools was the key to the success or failure of the government” (Napoli 3). Scholars across the Korean peninsula established “writing courtyards”, places where educated men (not women) could engage in debate, partake in Confucian rituals, and publish and collect books. By the seventeenth century, almost four hundred of their “writing courtyards” were spread across the nation (Pratt 128). Despite this romantic view of education, purges of Neo-Confucian scholars plagued Joseon scholarship in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Factionalism among Joseon’s scholars within the government resulted in banishments and even executions as they vied for influence (Pratt 129).



Modern example of Neo-Confucian scholars (Korea Herald).

One of the most important consequences of Neo-Confucianism’s adoption in Joseon Korea was the *sadae* policy. *Sadae*, or “serving the great”, referred to Joseon’s ready acceptance of its subordinate status to China (Chandra 16). It embodies a Sino-centric view of the world, that the “Son of Heaven” rules over the civilized China and “all under Heaven”, including Joseon (S. Kim 82–83). Joseon idolized the Ming dynasty as the restorers of a proper Confucian world order after expelling the barbaric Mongol rulers of the Yuan dynasty (Chandra 16). Not only did *sadae* become a centerpiece of Joseon’s foreign policy, it also bled into Korean culture and thought. Instead of glorifying the native Korean origin myth, Joseon extolled the virtues of the ancient Chinese sages, and instead of writing in the native *hangul* script developed by King Sejong, elites stubbornly insisted on *hanmun*, or classical Chinese (Chandra 19).

Japanese Invasions

In the sixteenth century, Japan was engulfed in its Warring States period. It was a period of constant warfare and shifting alliances between feudal lords as they vied for control over all of Japan. An ambitious Toyotomi Hideyoshi, hailing from a peasant family, eventually rose to feudal lord status and in 1590, he completed his last subjugation campaign to finally unify the warring states under his control (Kuwata). However, the Japanese archipelago was not enough to satisfy Hideyoshi’s dreams. He had been eyeing China even before he finished his conquest of Japan, and in order to do so, Hideyoshi contemplated using Joseon as a stepping stone to China. In the same year that he unified Japan, Hideyoshi wrote to Joseon to belligerently demand Korea open its land for Japanese troops to cross (Lee 108). While King Seonjo refused Hideyoshi’s demands, the royal court was unsure whether Hideyoshi posed a true threat (Pratt 132).

By the time the nation began preparing defensive measures, on May 23, 1592, Hideyoshi sent 158,000

troops led by Konishi Yukinaga and So Yoshitoshi to attack the southern port city of Busan (Lee 108).



A battle between Japanese and Joseon forces (Council on East Asian Studies).

Joseon's internal bickering prevented any substantive defensive measures from coming to fruition. One Joseon commander lamented that "our forces . . . are nothing more than [an] ill-trained rabble ignorant of combat" (Pratt 132). Japanese troops, armed with firearms known as arquebuses acquired from Portuguese traders, easily mowed down the unprepared Joseon forces with their bows and arrows, and in twenty days, they captured the capital of Seoul while the royal family fled north to Pyongyang (Pratt 132). The Ming dynasty, seeing Joseon's incompetence in repelling the Japanese, assumed they were colluding with the Japanese to expedite Hideyoshi's conquest of China (Lee 108).

As the Joseon army crumbled under the pressure of the rapidly advancing Japanese troops, a new force would rise to try and take on the role of Joseon's defenders. Before Seoul fell in June, King Seonjo issued

an edict casting blame on himself for Joseon's disastrous predicament and implored the populace to take up arms to repel the invaders (Haboush 34). This was an unusual deviance from Joseon's strict adherence to Neo-Confucian principles, which scorned citizen armament. Thus sprung up the "righteous armies" (uibyeong), informal militias often led by, ironically, Neo-Confucian scholars but consisted of patriotic Koreans from all the different classes (Haboush 33). Righteous armies appealed to Neo-Confucian values of protecting their civilized Confucian state from the barbaric Japanese invaders along with a romantic message of martyrdom to recruit thousands of Koreans and mounted a considerable defense against Japanese soldiers (Haboush 47, 50).

However, Hideyoshi was still making incredible progress, and only when Pyongyang fell in July, the Ming dynasty decided to finally step in. The Ming emperor

sent an initial force of three thousand into Joseon, but when the Japanese troops swiftly vanquished them, the Ming dynasty sent an ambassador to negotiate with the Japanese and to gather intelligence on the Japanese military (Lee 108). However, negotiations broke down when the Ming and Japanese negotiators conspired to forge a letter from Hideyoshi to the emperor requesting to be crowned as King of Japan (Lee 110). So when the Ming envoy came to Japan to commence the crowning ceremony, Hideyoshi was expectedly furious; the man who unified Japan did not need someone to crown him (Lee 111).

In this breakdown of negotiations, Hideyoshi ordered a second invasion of Korea in 1597. Despite a successful incursion into Joseon, Hideyoshi's progress was hindered by a joint Joseon-Ming force on land and sea that pushed his forces further and further south. However, Hideyoshi died in 1598, and his advisors, unwilling to prolong this second invasion, withdrew his troops, bringing a conclusion to this bloody war.

Manchu Invasions

The Ming dynasty's heavy contribution to the Joseon dynasty's war efforts came at a heavy price. As the Ming became militarily and financially weaker, a new power in northeast Asia came to power: the Manchu. A man named Nurhaci of the Jurchen tribe united the various nomadic tribes of the region via conquest under a new Manchu identity and, similar to Hideyoshi, sought to conquer the Chinese throne (Kallander xi).

Soon, Joseon became entangled in this Manchu-Ming conflict. Tension between those who supported the Ming and those who supported the Manchu culminated in a coup in 1623 that removed the pro-Manchu king and installed King Injo,

who became the puppet of the pro-Ming ministers (Kallander xl). These ministers gave the Ming great privileges in Joseon, allowing Ming armies to access Joseon's territory and build bases across Joseon's islands (Kallander xli).

Threatened by the increase in Ming presence, the Manchu invaded Joseon in 1627. Manchu forces, joined by some Koreans that surrendered in the 1616 battle, swept across the country. After deliberations, Injo ordered the military to hold down two locations: Ganghwa Island, west of the capital, and Namhan Mountain, south of the capital (Kallander xliii).

Three weeks into the invasion, Injo abandoned Seoul and withdrew to the safety of Ganghwa Island. With Injo's safety secured, the court began opening negotiations with the rapidly advancing Manchu forces, agreeing to meet them at the entrance to Ganghwa Island. And so in the second month of the invasion, Joseon signed a friendship alliance with the Manchu. This severed Joseon's relations with the Ming dynasty and came with a Manchu vow to destroy the dynasty should Joseon break this alliance (Kallander xlvi).

However, Joseon was not willing to take this peace seriously, firmly believing in their own superiority over the barbaric Manchu tribes. In 1636, Hong Taiji, the leader of the Manchu, crowned himself as the emperor of a new dynasty, the Qing dynasty. The Qing attempted to coerce the Joseon envoys sent to Hong Taiji's coronation into partaking in the congratulatory procession, but they ardently refused. In response to these growing tensions, the new Qing emperor sent a letter mocking the Joseon king and court, writing "Those who argue for war in your honorable country are Confucian officials, but can they wield their brushes and fend me off?" (Kallander 6-7)

The following year, the Manchu launched a second invasion of Joseon. Unlike their earlier invasion a

decade prior, the Manchu were intent on the subjugation of Joseon. The lightning advance of the Qing army blocked the royal family from seeking shelter on Ganghwa Island once again, and thus the royal family holed up in Namhan Mountain. After a lengthy siege by the Qing army, Injo surrendered once hearing news of the surrender of Ganghwa Island to the Qing. As part of Qing demands, Injo and the crown prince kowtowed to Qing leaders, an embarrassing show of Joseon submission to their new barbarian overlords, and Joseon begrudgingly erected a stele commemorating the Qing victory (Kallander liii - liv). Satisfied with seizing Joseon as a tributary state, the Qing left and would not militarily interfere with Joseon's affairs, for the time being.

The Silhak Movement

The Japanese and Manchu invasions set the stage for a new movement to arise and challenge the status quo. Known as *silhak*, or “practical learning,” its subscribers believed that Joseon's dogmatic adherence to Neo-Confucianism with its strict formalities and naive idealism held the nation back from improving society in the aftermath of two devastating invasions (National Institute of Korean History). However, it is important to note that *silhak* scholars did not necessarily dislike Neo-Confucianism; in fact, some relied on the wisdom of the ancient Chinese sages as inspiration as part of the Neo-Confucian tradition (Seth 212).

Many *silhak* scholars used their learning as a foundation to champion reform in order to correct the social and political wrongs they saw across Joseon. For instance, the scholar Yu Hyeong-won published a treatise called “Planning a Fair Country” in 1670, in which he heavily analyzed Joseon's political institutions, landowning system, education, and military.

Pointing out potential weaknesses and flaws along the way, he proposed a series of reforms to address these issues (Seth 210). Kim Yuk, another prominent *silhak* scholar, proposed the Taedong tax reform which cleaned up the messy tax code by doing away with redundant taxes and compounding the remaining taxes into a single tax that could be paid in rice (Michael 31). Yi Ik even went so far as to suggest guaranteeing land for all peasants within his broader plan of establishing an equitable society (Seth 211).

An interesting area *silhak* reforms focused on was economic development, something Neo-Confucianism traditionally looked down upon as only “small men” would be so foolish as to be swayed by profit. Thus, commerce in Joseon was highly controlled and in the hands of shopkeepers licensed by the government (Pratt 144). But within this one hundred year timeframe, Joseon began challenging this traditional concept of commerce. In 1786, *silhak* advocate Pak Chega promoted the expansion of maritime trade. He believed maritime trade would lead to expanded Joseon's knowledge of the world and its people, which would crush the narrow-mindedness of Neo-Confucian scholars (Pratt 144). The rise of independent merchants challenged the authority of the licensed merchants, and eventually the king would slowly strip away the privileges afforded to these licensed merchants, further diminishing their monopoly over their respective industries. In 1791, King Jeongjo approved the Commercial Equalization Act, establishing new markets within Seoul and promoting the proliferation of markets across the nation (Pratt 144).

The *silhak* movement illustrates the frustration some Koreans had at the time with their excessively traditional government. Later on, a new generation of Koreans would share similar frustrations at their government and usher in a wave of new radical changes to reform their nation.

KOREA FACES THE WORLD

Joseon was a largely isolationist country, interacting primarily with China and on occasion Japan. However, the hermit kingdom would fail to keep up its walls forever, as foreign powers and their warships rocked closer and closer into the domain of the king of Joseon, pressuring the nation into opening its borders to the world.

France

Joseon had long known of the West prior to the mid-nineteenth century. While not engaging in regular formal trade directly, they were in contact with European goods and ideas through silhak scholars seeking new knowledge in the Qing dynasty. One of the European ideas that came over to the Korean peninsula was Catholicism via exposure to Jesuit missionaries in China. Despite budding interest in the religion, Catholicism became increasingly at odds with Neo-Confucianism, reaching its apex with the pope's 1742 declaration of ancestor worship as a heresy incompatible with Catholicism (Seth 229). Ancestor worship was a key component of Neo-Confucian practice, and as a result Joseon's kings reacted harshly to the pope's declaration. In 1785, King Jeongjo outlawed the practice of Catholicism, deeming it heretical, and in the next year he banned all Christian books coming from Beijing (Seth 229). Yet missionaries worked in secrecy throughout Joseon, and by 1866, there were about 23,000 Korean Catholic practitioners, despite the series of persecutions of Catholics ordered by the court (Pratt 194).

In the same year, anti-Christian ministers became aware of three French Catholic missionaries operating within Seoul. Immediately, they pressured the Grand

Prince, who was acting as regent for the child-king Gojong, to launch another persecution, convinced that they were scheming French plans to interfere in Joseon (Seth 231). Starting with the arrest of a Korean servant of one of the priests, Simon-François Berneux, on February 19th, this persecution claimed the lives of Berneux, eight other French Catholics, and thirty to forty Koreans converts by March 23rd (Choe 96).

In response, on October 14, 1866, Admiral Pierre-Gustave Roze launched an invasion of Ganghwa Island, beginning the French punitive expedition. Easily overpowering the Joseon defenders, Roze and his troops pillaged texts and looted silver (Choe 101). Two days later, the Grand Prince summoned an emergency council that established a special defense force to expel the barbarian French. Fighting consisted of small skirmishes around Ganghwa Island, but as time progressed, Roze grew concerned about a growing Joseon army along with the harsh winter which would hamper French military efforts (Choe 108). On November 11, 1866, Roze and his troops withdrew from Joseon, only after burning the island's government buildings down. Elated by this victory of the civilized Korean state over the barbarian French invaders, the Grand Prince began pursuing a more aggressive anti-Western foreign policy, and this victory would lead him to misjudge the true power of the Western powers (Choe 108).

The United States

When the French missionary Felix-Clair Ridel was in China to demand a punitive expedition to Joseon, he reported hearing of a Western ship having been de-

stroyed at Pyongyang. This ship was soon identified as the General Sherman, an American vessel attempting to conduct trade in Pyongyang (Choe, 114). After the General Sherman captured a Joseon deputy commander and terrorized the people of Pyongyang, the governor of Pyongan ordered the destruction of the ship and its crew. On September 2, 1866, Joseon troops destroyed the vessel and killed every crew member (Choe 114).

The United States initially pursued a peaceful solution, first attempting to locate survivors of the General Sherman, and when their search found none, focused on establishing treaties with Joseon to ensure the safety of shipwrecked American sailors (Choe 119). But with Joseon resisting foreigners, especially in the aftermath of the failed French expedition, the United States chose to resort to more aggressive tactics.

On May 21, 1871, American ships led by the American ambassador to the Qing Dynasty, Frederick Low, arrived in Joseon's waters to supposedly negotiate with Joseon and explore the seas. Joseon refused to permit either and began fortifying Ganghwa Island once again. On June 1, Rear Admiral John Rodgers sailed up the passage between Ganghwa Island and the Joseon mainland in an attempt to survey it. The Koreans at Gwangseong Fortress fired upon the ship, as the waters beyond were off-limits due to the prior French invasion, and forced Rodgers to retreat (Choe 132). In a retaliatory strike, Low ordered American troops to seize forts up the passage, which they did with ease as the Joseon defenders fled to Gwangseong. At Gwangseong, the Joseon troops put up stiff resistance, but the Americans prevailed, killing the deputy commander of Ganghwa and the commander of the fortress (Choe 132).



United States soldiers posing in front of a captured Joseon battle flag (Nye).

Despite his losses, the Grand Prince furiously insisted on continuing the fight. He granted special awards to fallen soldiers (he gave the dead deputy commander of Ganghwa the posthumous title of Minister of War and a state funeral, and he gave his sons positions in the government) and sent more troops and weapons to Ganghwa (Choe 132-133). With a stubborn Grand Prince unwilling to negotiate, Low chose to leave Joseon on July 3 to return to China.

Japan

After Toyotomi Hideyoshi's invasion in the late sixteenth century, Japan would not look to invade Korea for the next two hundred years. Only with the threat of Western encroachment, especially the Russian Empire's expanding dominance in East Asia, did Japan once again look to expansion, this time under the guise of securing its own stability (K. Kim 77-78). For the most part, deliberations over another invasion of Joseon were restricted to hypotheticals that did not result in action.

However, with the Meiji Restoration in 1869 deposing the ruling Tokugawa Shogunate and installing the Japanese Emperor Meiji at the head of the nation (for more information on the Meiji Restoration and Meiji-era modernization, see section "Case Study:

The Meiji Restoration and Japanese Reforms”), these discussions became more serious in political life. It did not help that Joseon refused to recognize Emperor Meiji as an emperor, as that would mean recognizing the Japanese emperor as an equal of the Chinese emperor (Seth 232). The new reform-minded Meiji government sought out to consolidate its power in the region, colonizing the northern island of Hokkaido in 1869 and conquering the island of Okinawa to its south in 1873 (Seth 232-233).

In the same year, Japan came extremely close to invading the Korean peninsula. After a tough crackdown on Japanese smuggling in Busan, conservatives in the Meiji government eagerly took this opportunity to demand a punitive expedition against Joseon. In the ensuing seikanron, or “Advocacy for a punitive expedition against Korea,” debate, the Meiji government settled on a devious plan despite the vehement opposition of the anti-war faction. They would send the provocative samurai-turned-politician Saigō Takamori as an envoy to Joseon, where he would provoke the Koreans into murdering him in order to grant Japan a “valid” reason to go to war (K. Kim 179). But before Saigō could leave for Joseon, the pro-war chancellor who approved Saigō’s request became incapacitated and his anti-war acting chancellor immediately appealed to Emperor Meiji to grant another edict revoking Saigō’s position, thus bringing an end to an invasion that never started. (K. Kim 184).

In an attempt to restore relations with Joseon, Japan sent the envoy Moriyama Shigeru in 1875 to Joseon. Once again, talks between the two sides broke down, as Joseon took deep offense with Japan’s break with traditional diplomacy. Moriyama refused to participate in the traditional ceremony for Japanese envoys in the past and insisted on wearing newly-adopted Western attire. He wrote his communications all in

Japanese rather than classical Chinese, and he used the Chinese character for “emperor” as well, a right reserved only for the Chinese emperor (K. Kim 221). No progress having been made, the Japanese government withdrew Moriyama on September 20, 1875.

Meanwhile, Japan was preparing for a more confrontational approach to Korea. One of the anti-war faction’s biggest concerns during the seikanron was the involvement of foreign powers, specifically Russia. However, Russia just signed a treaty with Japan on May 7, 1875, and on top of that, China was involved in a diplomatic dispute with Great Britain over the murder of a British diplomat (K. Kim 227). On the same day that the Japanese government recalled Moriyama, the Western-built Japanese ship *Unyō* reached Ganghwa Island, the same setting of the French and American expeditions. Well-aware of the fate of the French and American ships, the ship’s commander, Inoue Yoshika, set off in a smaller vessel to Ganghwa’s shores, only to be shot at. In retaliation, he ordered the *Unyō* to fire back. The *Unyō* sailed up north near modern-day Incheon to seize a small fort and slaughter its defenders on a nearby island. Victorious, Inoue returned to Japan, landing in Nagasaki on the 28th (K. Kim 231).

Outraged by Joseon’s attack on the *Unyō*, Japan sent a mission to Joseon to demand an official apology along with a formal treaty of friendship between the two nations (K. Kim 242). Landing in Busan on January 15, 1876, the Japanese mission invited themselves into Ganghwa Island with the help of four hundred Japanese soldiers on February 10th to begin negotiations. Many prominent Koreans detested the idea of signing such a treaty with Japan: the Grand Prince, no longer regent as his son Gojong recently assumed the throne, issued a letter to the State Council condemning their weak stance against Japan on

February 12, and the well-respected Confucian scholar Choe Ik-hyon led a protest with fifty other scholars throughout the cold winter night in front of the royal palace on February 17 (K. Kim, 247-248). Despite their efforts, Joseon signed the first of many treaties to come with Japan on February 27. The Treaty of

Ganghwa declared Joseon to be independent of China, opened more of Joseon's ports outside of Busan to Japan, granted Japan consular powers in these ports, and allowed Japanese ships to freely sail in Joseon's waters (K. Kim, 252-253). The tightly-shut gates to Joseon were now pried open.

A TIME OF REFORM AND FOREIGN ENTANGLEMENT

Engaging with the Outside

With the adoption of the Treaty of Ganghwa, Joseon could no longer isolate itself from the outside world. From May to June of 1876, the same year as the adoption of the Treaty of Ganghwa, King Gojong sent Kim Ki-su to study Japan's modernization under the Meiji government (Chandra 30). Kim's reaction to Meiji modernization was lukewarm. The engine of Japan's modernization, observed Kim, was foreign trade, an unreliable source subject to fluctuations. Furthermore, he became wary of Japan's heavy modernization of its military, taking it to be a sign of another Japanese invasion (Chandra 30).

Despite Kim's unenthusiastic reaction, Joseon would continue to study its eastern neighbor and the West. In an 1880 visit to Japan, the Koreans were approached by a Chinese diplomat with a plan for Joseon's foreign policy. It encouraged Joseon to cooperate with Japan, China, and the United States to act as a counter to the growing influence of the Russian Empire (Seth 235). Gojong was extremely impressed with this plan, but conservatives in the court were

dismayed by this blasphemous proposal for Joseon to cooperate with barbarians. Nevertheless, this plan became a key component of Gojong's foreign policy aspirations (Seth 235). Gojong also came under the influence of the Chinese diplomat Li Hongzhang's views. Li took on a policy of "self-strengthening," in which China would strike a balance between traditional and Western values by adopting only necessary Western technology, mostly military technology. He also advocated for Joseon officials to maintain friendly relations with the West to strengthen Joseon (Seth 235).

Not all Koreans were welcoming of this foreign encroachment. Upset with Gojong's pro-reform stance and Japanese organization and training of a Joseon special military unit, reactionary Koreans launched an attack, known as the Imo Incident, on the government and Japanese legation in Seoul in July of 1882. Unwilling to risk a Japanese invasion of Joseon, resulting in increased Japanese influence, Li Hongzhang sent a Qing military force to crush the rebellion and restore power to Gojong while maintaining a smaller force of three thousand in Seoul

(Chandra 35). Japan also responded to the rebellion by forcing a treaty onto Joseon, which, among many

stipulations, provided for Japan to maintain a six thousand-strong force in Seoul (Chandra 36).



Japanese illustration of the Imo Incident (Fuji Arts).

Once staying out of Joseon's foreign affairs, the Qing now became an influential advisor with regards to Joseon's foreign policy, sending ministers to Joseon to assist with navigating treaties and managing its relations with Western nations and Japan (Chandra 36). With Chinese guidance and organization, Joseon entered into a treaty with the United States in 1882, granting special rights to Americans in Joseon and offering support should a foreign nation threaten Joseon (Seth 235). In the same year, Joseon would enter a treaty with Germany, in 1884 with Italy and Russia, and in 1886 with France (Chandra 36).

With increased foreign presence in the nation, Western influence became more evident. A Danish company set up a telegraph cable linking Japan and Joseon, Western businesses slowly began popping up, Christianity became legal to practice, and the army

began westernizing with the help of Chinese and Japanese advisors (Chandra 38-39).

The Enlightenment Party

While some Joseon envoys were unimpressed with Japan and the West, others saw in these nations a glimmering beacon of hope for Joseon. For example, after an 1883 visit to the United States, the head diplomat, Min Yong-ik, compared his return to Joseon to "returning to the world of darkness" (Chandra 40). Inspired especially by the quick progress made by Japan along with Japanese political thinkers, reform-minded Koreans like Kim Ok-kyun, Park Yeong-hyo, and Seo Jae-pil banded together to form the Enlightenment Party. The main goal of these individuals was to assert independence from China and completely overhaul Joseon's political, social, and

economic institutions (Chandra 40). By rethinking Joseon's institutions and values, the Enlightenment Party believed they could bring about more effective and far-reaching reforms to keep Joseon afloat in a sea of imperialist predators tearing away at the small nation (Chandra 41).

With some of their members in the Joseon government, the Enlightenment Party went to work promoting their values. One of their earliest and notable steps was to establish a modern national newspaper. Known as the *Hanseong sunbo*, it sought to inform readers about the West with topics on the United States' Declaration of Independence, Western cosmology, schools, businesses, and technology (Chandra 44). Initially, the founders of the paper wished for contributors to write in a mixed Chinese and Korean script, but the pro-Chinese Min clan seized the paper and had it written in classical Chinese, restricting readership to the upper class (Chandra 44).



The major leaders of the Gapsin Coup, from left to right: Park Yeong-ho, Seo Gwang-beom, Seo Jae-pil, and Kim Ok-gyun (Hwang).

Of course, a complete upheaval of Joseon's institutions and values would not come without its opponents. Many reforms, such as the establishment of a new Japanese-style military training academy, were less successful, as conservative and pro-Chinese elements of the government led fierce opposition to their radical ideas. Because of these towering obstacles, the Enlightenment Party believed a coup was necessary in order to effectively implement its reforms. So on December 4, 1884, with the help of the Japanese legation in Seoul, they seized control of the government in an event known as the Gapsin Coup and hid the royal family with Japanese troops (Seth 239). The new government soon got to work implementing its ambitious plans. Their fourteen point plan, mirroring the reforms conducted in the early days of the Meiji government, announced among many things an end to the traditional Korean social hierarchy, changes to the tax code to help the poor, and a modernization of the police and military (Seth 239). The new government only lasted a mere two days, as the Min clan expelled the Enlightenment Party with the assistance of Chinese troops. The Chinese troops clashed with the Japanese soldiers defending the royal family and killed some of the members of the Enlightenment Party, with those that escaped fleeing to Japan (Chandra 47). With many progressive reformers in exile, the reform movement began losing its momentum, as the coup strengthened the influence of a reform-wary China (Seth 239). In an attempt to defuse tensions, China and Japan agreed to the Convention of Tianjin on April 18, 1885. China and Japan both agreed to pull their military forces out of Joseon, and if they ever needed to have troops within Joseon, they would notify the other nation before doing so (Seth 239).

The Donghak Rebellion and the First Sino-Japanese War

In 1860, a man named Choe Je-u gave birth to a new religious movement known as Donghak, or “Eastern Learning.” A synthesis of Christianity, Korean shamanism, and Neo-Confucianism, this religion importantly called for political and social reforms to transform Joseon into a more righteous and equitable society (Seth 243-244). The government executed Choe in 1864, threatened by the message he was spreading among the peasants, but the religion continued to thrive underground.

Meanwhile, peasants’ lives were continually worsening. New taxes arose, local government officials dismissed peasant complaints, and foreign competition, specifically with Chinese and Japanese merchants, made Korean business difficult (Chandra 73). This aggravated Donghak adherents and began pushing them towards a more aggressive stance with regards to their calls for reform. Eventually, their peaceful protests escalated into violence. In January of 1894, a recent Donghak convert named Jeon Bong-jun led a protest against his local magistrate for levying exorbitant taxes and forcing peasants to build a new reservoir without compensating them (Seth 245). It quickly evolved into an armed uprising in Jeolla province, involving as many as ten thousand armed civilians. By mid-1894, large swaths of southern Joseon were controlled by these Donghak peasant armies. (Chandra 74).

Overwhelmed by the rebels, on June 4, Joseon pleaded with China to send troops to rout the peasants. China, in accordance with the Convention of Tianjin, notified Japan of its duty to help vassal states in need of help, but in response, Japan sent its own troops to Joseon as well (Seth 245). Japan

decided this was the moment to bring about a series of reforms in Joseon, but both China and Joseon rejected this proposal. With the two nations rejecting its peaceful solution, Japan resorted to force. On July 24, Japanese troops seized the royal palace and forced Gojong to adopt a new pro-Japanese government, and the next day, on July 25, 1894, a Japanese fleet fired upon Chinese ships outside Asan, a town south of Seoul (Paine 21).



Japanese troops fire upon Qing soldiers (Yang).

Thus began the First Sino-Japanese War. From the start, Japan had the advantage over China, having extensively modernized its military, an elaborate railway system and navy to improve transportation, and had already cracked China’s encryption system for its telegrams (Paine 24-25). Leaving Seoul, the Japanese troops trekked south to fight Chinese troops stationed along Asan Bay. On July 28, Japanese and Chinese soldiers clashed at Seonghwan, and the Chinese troops fled north to Pyongyang, effectively consolidating Japanese control of Seoul (Paine 28). Pushing north, the Japanese troops fought with the Chinese troops at Pyongyang from September 15 to 16. Once again, the Japanese troops routed the Chinese troops, this time forcing them out of the Korean Peninsula into Manchuria (Paine 29). Japan and China continued to fight in Manchuria and Taiwan, with the additional task of Japan to subdue the remaining Donghak rebels in Joseon. Exhausted, China sued for peace, and on April 28, 1895, signed

the Treaty of Shimonoseki with Japan. China agreed to pay and cede territory to Japan, but most importantly was forced to end its centuries-long control over Joseon, transferring Joseon into Japan's sphere of influence (Paine 38).

New Government, New Reforms

With a newly-installed pro-Japanese government, Joseon experienced a sweeping wave of reforms known as the Gabo Reforms. From just July to October 1894, the government passed two hundred and ten different acts (Pratt 183). One of their first targets was the political system. The ambitious reformers replaced the old State Council with a new cabinet consisting of a prime minister, who took away much power from the king, and ministers from seven ministries: foreign affairs, home affairs, finance, justice, education, defense, and agriculture, commerce, and industry (Chandra 76). They established an elaborate judicial system consisting of multiple tiers of courts along with an appeals system to petition a court to reconsider a decision and abolished torture, guilt by association, and punishment of a criminal's innocent family (Seth 274). The reformers separated police powers from local officials' duties, building a capital police system in Seoul and provincial police systems across the different provinces (Chandra 76).

The new government also made significant strides in social reform as well. They banned the legal distinction between the different Korean social classes, ending special privileges afforded to the aristocracy, and the ban on slavery, officially recognized earlier in 1886, was reasserted. With the elimination of class distinction, government positions were offered on the basis of merit rather than social rank, at least on paper. Child marriage was banned, and widows were allowed to remarry. Schools were built in Seoul along

with a standardized curriculum and textbooks (Chandra 77). Social reforms also sought to promote a Korean identity separate from China. The government introduced a new holiday, Korean Independence Day on June 6, promoted the use of hangul, the native Korean alphabet, in government documents, and shifted away from the traditional Ming calendar to the Western calendar (Seth 247).

By the spring of 1895, Joseon essentially became Japan's puppet. Japan had Japanese advisors control almost every bureau and pressured Gojong to expel all foreign advisors except for the Japanese advisors, drilled the army, and even had land surveyed according to Japanese standards (Weems 121-122). But Joseon still hid pockets of resistance against Japanese influence, which became more vocal after Russia, France, and Germany pressured Japan to return critical land in Manchuria it seized during the First Sino-Japanese War (Seth 248). A notable thorn in Japan's side was Queen Min, who used her own influence to remove pro-Japanese government officials. Annoyed by the Queen's troublesome plans, the Japanese minister in Seoul, Miura Gorō, devised a plan. Reflective of his samurai background and lack of formal diplomatic experience, Miura organized an assassination plot against the Queen, and on October 8, 1895, Japanese assassins assisted by sympathetic Koreans murdered her and burned her corpse (Seth 248). Miura would not stay in Joseon for much longer. The assassination of Queen Min outraged the international community, and this harsh reaction forced Japan to recall Miura in January of 1896 (Weems 130).

With Queen Min no longer a threat, the pro-Japanese government churned out reform after reform. One of these was a ban on the topknot in December, a knot of hair at the top of the head. To Koreans, the

topknot was an embodiment of the Neo-Confucian value of filial piety; cutting one's hair is desecrating the body gifted by one's ancestors (Chandra 81). This, compounded with the recent assassination of Queen Min, enraged Koreans across all social classes. They banded together into "righteous armies," echoing the uibyeong armies of the past that fiercely resisted Japanese and other foreign invasions, and attacked government officials and the Japanese (Chandra 81).

Taking advantage of Japan's growing weakness, anti-Japanese officials sought to free Gojong from Japanese influence and, on February 11, 1896, fled to the Russian legation in Seoul. Immediately, Gojong and his new conservative government revoked most of the Gabo reforms, branded the pro-Japanese government leaders as traitors, and called upon patriotic Koreans to kill them for their barbaric ban on the topknot (Chandra 81). This surprising upheaval forced Japan to withdraw many of its own troops from Joseon, and Russia almost effortlessly became the dominant power in Joseon (Weems 133).

CASE STUDIES

The Meiji Restoration and Japanese Reforms

First, we will briefly look at Korea's eastern neighbor that also underwent a period of reformation. While Japan for most of its modern history nominally had an emperor, real power rested with the shōgun, essentially a military ruler, ruling over Japan as a shogunate. But in 1868, angry lords upset with the shōgun's inability to fight back against Western encroachment forced the shōgun of the ruling Tokugawa shogunate to resign and the lords restored power to the Japanese emperor Meiji (Stalker 209).

Japanese modernization took on two mottos: "Civilization and Enlightenment" (bunmei kaika) and "Enrich the Country, Strengthen the Army" (fukoku kyōhei). The first pushed for an adoption of Western

culture and attitudes, while the second advocated a strong economy and military to keep Japan, threatened by imperialist Western powers, independent (Stalker 209).

As a result, Japanese modernization sought to change all aspects of Japanese society. Japan adopted a new constitution establishing a constitutional monarchy on February 11, 1889, inspired by Western political thought (Stalker 222). Government officials abandoned traditional garments in favor of Western attire, and eventually commoners (but mostly men) began doing the same (Stalker 223-224). Western foods like bread and ice cream were introduced into the Japanese diet, and Western-style buildings cropped up in Tokyo (Stalker 224). Railways were built to connect the nation together, starting with Tokyo and nearby Yokohama in 1872 (Stalker 226). Japan invested



Tokyo during the modernization period (Wong).

heavily in its textiles industry, which provided much of the currency needed to fuel its rapid modernization. It adopted European practices and exploited a recent disease killing off European silkworms to mass produce silk and other textiles for a lucrative foreign market (Stalker 229).

One of the defining aspects of Japanese reformation was its military modernization. It was its military superiority that crushed the Qing armies and navies and asserted Japanese control over Joseon. They took inspiration from the German military model, began

production of domestic firearms based on Western guns, and introduced a conscription law; at maximum mobilization, Japan could muster a two hundred thousand-strong army (Olender 42). Japan also possessed an incredible naval force. The nation bought ships from foreign nations like the United Kingdom, but also invested in domestic ship production as well, funded in part by new taxes on goods like sake (rice wine) and tobacco (Olender 50-51). By the time the First Sino-Japanese War started, the Japanese consisted of 22 warships and 18 torpedo ships (Olender 51).

CURRENT SITUATION

In February of 1897, Gojong left the Russian legation after a year in exile. In a bold assertion of Korean independence, Gojong crowned himself the Emperor of the Korean Empire on October 13, 1897 (Seth 250). Now Gojong and Korea, at least nominally, stood as equals with China and Japan.

Foreign Relations

With Korea opening up after the 1876 Treaty of Ganghwa, many countries became involved, to varying degrees, in Korean affairs. Here, we will be discussing the status of three of the nations you can expect to deal with in committee.

Japan

Despite Japan no longer wielding the most influence over Korean affairs at the time committee begins, it still exercises considerable power. Russia chose to negotiate with Japan on May 14, 1896 on the Korean issue. Their agreement allowed for Japan to still provide advice to Gojong regarding minister appointment, guard the telegraph lines connecting Seoul and Busan with military police, and keep a military presence across the nation (Seth 249). Japan and Russia later agreed that both sides must consent in order to pass suggested reforms.

Japan also exerted significant economic influence in Korea; by March of 1895, Japan had loaned to Korea considerable amounts of money and received railway, mining, and trading rights (Chandra 79). With the decline of Japanese influence after Gojong's exile in the Russian embassy, Joseon seized and redistributed some of these concessions to other nations.

Russia

With Gojong's retreat to the Russian legation, the Russian Empire began exerting greater influence over the nation. When the current Russian minister, Alexis de Speyer, took office, Joseon had been coerced into accepting Russian military instructors, filling in the gap Japanese military advisors had left, and had a Russian, Kiril Alexiev, installed as chief advisor to the finance ministry but with total control over Korean finances (Chandra 156-159).

However, Korea is not the only matter Russia is concerned about in Asia. Guided by a policy of "conquest by railways," the Russian Empire was eager to consolidate its power in Asia through the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway which would connect the corners of the vast empire (Zvetina 96). Russia sought to utilize the newly-established Russo-Chinese Bank to pressure China to grant Russia railroad concessions, helping assert control over Manchuria (Zvetina 97). With other issues at hand, Russia could not concentrate all of its resources into turning Joseon into a puppet of sorts. This, compounded with Gojong's leaving the Russian legation in early 1897 gave Japan an opening to begin meddling in Korean affairs once again.

The United States

Although not involved to nearly the same extent as Japan and Russia, the United States still held some sway in Korean affairs. The United States, like many nations, held concessions across the nation. In 1895, the United States obtained a right to gold mining in Unsan, Pyongan Province, and in 1896, Joseon

granted the United States the former Japanese right to build a railway between Seoul and the crucial port city of Incheon (Seth 250).

One area in which the United States helped promote reform was in the legal and justice system. The American legal advisor to Joseon, Clarence Great-house, aided the Minister of Justice, in creating a more progressive practice of justice and law in Korea, illustrated by the torture-free trial of the Koreans that assisted Miura in assassinating Queen Min, a major milestone in the nation's history (Weems 141).

The Joseon Military and its Background

Joseon's journey to modernization cannot be understood without considering its military history, and Joseon Korea's military history is, primarily, a story of change and conquest — but not in its favor. Joseon's armed forces would fluctuate in size, preparedness, and resources as the nation faced new challenges, social trends, and leaders. These fluctuations would leave the nation vulnerable and at times unprepared for outside threats, weaknesses which ambitious empires capitalized on regularly.

Origins, Organization, and Administration

Joseon Korea's military began in the 1400s when King Taejong and his successor, Sejong the Great, issued a series of reforms that standardized recruitment and centralized the nation's disjointed private armies into a single state-controlled military (Seth 151). By 1464, their system coalesced into the Owi Toch'ongbu, or the Five Military Commands. This organizational system and hierarchy assigned five brigades, called pu, into Korea's North, South, East, West, and Central regions. A pu consisted of four regiments

called t'ong, a t'ong consisted of many companies called yo, and yo consisted of many platoons, or tae.

At the same time, the new military had localized regional defenses under the chin'gwan system. Each of Korea's eight provinces maintained their own sets of army and navy commands (pyongyong and suyong, respectively) controlled by local magistrates and officials that were appointed by, and would report to, the central government. These forces would defend the province and any of its naval territories, but required Central Army-level officials present to respond to larger national-level threats (Park 14-18).

The entire military, both the Owi Toch'ongbu and the chin'gwan forces, was controlled by the king and high-ranking civil officials. Demographics of military leadership admittedly became more diverse in terms of both nationality and social class by the twentieth century, a major point of political controversy; but before such developments, virtually all officials were of the yangban ruling class (Park 49-52).

As for Joseon's kings, however, the extent of control they had over the military varied from regime to regime. Kings who didn't prioritize military affairs would naturally delegate such tasks to the noblemen officials, granting them significant military power that sometimes rivaled the king himself. Several successful coups throughout the Joseon dynasty attest to this push-and-pull dynamic between kings and yangban at the top of the Joseon military's power structure (Park 20-22). In fact, despite a well-established hierarchy, rebellion remained a concern for almost all tiers of leadership, their frequent causes including unequal treatment of soldiers, xenophobia towards foreign officials, and internal strife over broad social divisions that permeated both society and the military in the Late Joseon period (Park 183; Peterson &

Margulies 110-112).

After this foundational reorganization, skirmishes with pirates and smaller border-encroaching tribes would constitute the majority of Joseon Korea's military campaigns for the next two hundred years or so. The groundwork for a well-equipped national defense had been laid, but for a majority of the Joseon period, most Joseon leaders were uninterested in expanding upon it due to Neo-Confucianism's anti-military philosophies. Such resistance to military expansion was especially high during periods of peaceful relations with Japan and China (Petersen and Margules 94). As a result, Korea's professional soldiers, who were mostly conscripted from peasantry, remained relatively untrained, underpaid, and inexperienced (Seth 151). Isolationism and apathy towards military affairs would continue to drive the Joseon military's weaknesses while rivals, especially Japan, ambitiously prepared for military conquest (Seth 93-95).

The Late Joseon Military

Joseon Korea continued to build upon the Five Commands system first established in the 15th century. As a result, the term "Joseon military" may encompass multiple generations of personnel, laws, systems, and structures across nearly six centuries of time. It is thus worthwhile to closely examine the status of Joseon's military in the Late Joseon dynasty, a period of unrest and extensive change throughout the late 1800s.

Components of the Army

In the 1890s, the Joseon military struggled to maintain relevance beyond Joseon's borders. However, its personnel structure remained complex, and were it not for widespread corruption and incompetence amongst its yangban officials, its organization would

suggest a robust, well-ordered military. With its fighters numbering in the several thousands, Joseon kept the organization of Five Military Commands with five regional battalions and a semi-federal system of a central army and local-level provincial forces.

Over the centuries, new forces and administrative bodies were added, as well as a complex rank system denoting officials in both Central and Provincial Armies. These titles could be granted by the king or obtained through examinations. The Royal Guard was greatly expanded to contain many subdivisions that guarded different types of government property and personnel. Chief among these was the addition of a Special Skills Force, their first modernized military force who had much higher salaries and were trained by foreign officers, often Japanese or Russian, to use modern weaponry and military tactics. Their unequal treatment and foreign influence were controversial to average army troops, and even led to a violent mutiny killing many of these Japanese officers in 1882, but they represent Joseon's most significant commitment towards military modernization (Seth, Park).



Rank-and-file soldiers remained a mixture of mostly peasantry and common non-noble citizens. Divided broadly by their specialties into footsoldiers, cavalry, archers, and gunners, they remained relatively loyal to Joseon, though not always to their yangban superiors, who often treated them with contempt. Mobilizing

these troops required a highly bureaucratized, rank-based Jeseungbangryak system that was slow and insufficient for speedy, effective military responses to foreign threats (Turnbull 17-18). Furthermore, the generals and higher commanding officers that utilized the system varied considerably in leadership quality, since much of the Neo-Confucian ruling class viewed academics, literature, and art as more important endeavors than military tactics and training (Park 21-28).

Elite forces of the Central Army were known as Gapsa. While the methods of entering this selective group varied across the centuries, they were generally reserved for soldiers who either distinguished themselves in combat or were part of yangban families and received special training for many years. They mainly guarded the royal palace and received high pay, special tax privileges, and other advantages that often bred resentment amongst their underpaid counterparts in the common infantry (Seth 160).

Learning from the sixteenth century Japanese invasion, Joseon's army also had a Sogo system which allowed the military to raise militias if necessary, recruiting members from all families and villages. They gave the military a last-resort option should Joseon's numbers prove ineffective, but raising them was a calculated risk because the quality of soldiers gained from these militias were inconsistent (Haboush 33-34).

The military's physical defenses consisted of strategically placed fortresses and walls across Joseon Korea, especially on borders, important cities, and travel routes. These attempted to take advantage of the Korean peninsula's naturally mountainous terrain (Kwang-gyu). Thus, a majority of Korea's military capabilities were defensive in nature, not offensive.

This asymmetry, especially its lack of naval presence, rendered the nation serviceably-defended yet poorly-equipped. Mounting prolonged, large-scale assaults into enemy territory was almost never realistic throughout the Joseon dynasty without aid from Qing China or other military powers.

Recruitment and Training

Since the Qing invasion, Joseon established universal conscription, requiring military service from all citizens. Recruits were housed and trained in dozens of garrisons dispersed across Joseon, but the training most soldiers received was outdated compared to modern Westernized battle tactics and drilling. As such, the Joseon military occasionally relied on foreign officers from Russia, Japan, and the United States to train recruits for sections of the military that demanded more highly-trained members (Neff). This was a dependence that, while effective at producing well-drilled soldiers, was very unpopular with the common troops as well as citizens due to anti-Western, nationalist sentiments at the time. Such foreign influence in the military was the subject of several revolts and internal conflict within the military and Joseon in general.

Technology

The Joseon army had, in the past, made numerous attempts to modernize their military and adopt the use of gunpowder since being exposed to such technology through trade routes. They had access to standard-issue Mauser rifles, small cannons, mortars, and rocket-propelled arrows. However, during the 1890s, many troops save the Special Skills Force remained more reliable with bows, swords, spears, and shields than modern rifles (Neff). Their equipment was still relatively outdated, and firearms were acquired from

foreign powers, most notably Germany. There was yet to be significant industrial production of firearms within Joseon borders.

Economy

The Korean economy during this tumultuous period was itself experiencing a wide array of technological and institutional changes reminiscent of the experiences of its neighbor Japan, just a few decades prior. However, it is of paramount importance to keep in mind the context surrounding these changes and the previously existing ways of life that invariably dictate the nature of the economy.

Joseon Economy

For much of Joseon's history, the Korean economy consisted of an agrarian economy with a strictly embedded bureaucracy and little change, to the point of being declared stagnant by outside observers. One key factor for this would be the dominance the yangban bureaucrats held over the common farmer and the high amounts of taxes that the yangban would extort from the farmer. This was a form of "illegal taxation" that paid for many privileges enjoyed by the upper class, such as the right to travel to other areas without paying for residence. In addition, the state tax was levied based on land, meaning that a heavy portion of tax revenue was shouldered by the already poor farming class. Historical records indicate that throughout the 1800's, the agricultural output per unit area of rice paddy steadily dropped. A major factor for this decrease in productivity was deforestation. Deforestation occurred as a result of the increasing population of Korea and the subsequent demand for timber and other wooden materials, though some attribute the summertime flooding and lack of water supply management to be causes for the deforestation. (Park and Yang, 315-317)

TABLE 4
RICE PRODUCT PER HECTARE IN 3 EAST ASIAN COUNTRIES

	Year	Harvest products	Products per hectare
Chosŏn	early 17 th century	30 <i>du</i> per <i>durak</i>	1,712 kg
	end of 19 th century	10 <i>du</i> per <i>durak</i>	571 kg
Japan	early Edo period	1 <i>koku</i> per <i>tan</i>	1,425 kg
	late Edo period	1.9 <i>koku</i> per <i>tan</i>	2,565 kg
China	mid-16 th century	2.5 <i>shi</i> per <i>mou</i>	3,000 kg
	early 19 th century	3 <i>shi</i> per <i>mou</i>	3,600 kg

Note: For Chosŏn, harvest product unit is in terms of unmilled rice which reduced to 40% if milled.

Agricultural productivity fell throughout the 1800s (Park and Yang).

This booming population, coupled with a weak institution of property rights, led to an instance of the "tragedy of the commons" occurring with the forest land in which communal overuse of the shared forest land resulted in overexploitation and the decline of the forest. Scholars also point to the collapse of the state-run granaries which had insulated economic shocks and stabilized the agricultural economy. Throughout the 18th century, the state granaries were a form of a safety net that enabled peasant investment and innovation. At one point in time, the per capita grain storage in Korea was more than five times that of Qing China (Rhee). The collapse of this system due to decreases in agricultural output led to a grain shortage and increased taxes, leading to political instability in the form of the Donghak rebellion, as explained earlier in this synopsis.

This would create a deprived and psychologically downtrodden peasant class, which limited the energy and innovation of the common Korean people, according to outside observers. Other contributing factors to the stagnation typically attributed with the Korean agricultural economy post 1876 would be the failure to fully irrigate optimally, the lack of an artisan class, and a failure by the government to create an infrastructure consisting of roads, schools, and other public facilities.

Reform

Following the 1876 Gangwha treaty, however, Korea went through multitudinous reforms and attempts at Westernization, some of which occurred through the Gabo reforms brought on by the pro-Japanese government. As explained earlier in this synopsis, the Gabo reforms were a wide array of political and societal reforms that sought to modernize Korea.

The increased presence and significance of foreigners, from both the West and Japan, was of great significance following the signing of the Ganghwa Treaty in 1876 and later, the Treaty of Amity and Commerce in 1882, in which Korean-American relations were established. Japan quickly became a pivotal cultural and economic force within the country, establishing Japanese-style districts and towns. The opening up of the Korean economy led to an increase of imports from 70,000 yen in 1875 to 20 million yen in 1904 (Chung). In addition to Japan, Korea also traded with China and the West, importing textiles, capital goods, and other manufactured goods, and exported food items and precious minerals to Japan and the West (Chung).

Japan and the West invested large amounts of capital in various industries into Korea in the form of foreign direct investment into industries such as banking, land speculation, and mining. The mining industry in particular may be of interest to delegates concerned about the extraction of natural resources from Korean land; the Wunsan gold mine, an American-owned operation, reportedly yielded nine million tons of ore, with a value of over USD 56 million at the time. (Chung). The Korean government implemented a host of incentives and programs to attract foreign investors. In addition to hefty tax exemptions, the government also promised cheap labor from the native Korean workforce. The American establishment of the Wunsan gold mine faced intensive native opposition, in which the Koreans protested the economic, environmental, and cultural damages that would be wrought by the establishment of the mine, not to mention the demeaning of their labor (Chung). Throughout the course of committee, delegates are encouraged to consider the advent of the economic opportunities facing Korea in the present era and evaluate the impacts they may have on the native population and weigh their values accordingly.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Should there be an attempt to find a middle ground between Korea's traditional values and Western ideas?
2. How can you leverage foreign powers to further your character's reforms and ambitions? What foreign powers can you look to, if any?
3. What are some foreign (not Korean) threats to your plans for Korea? Domestic threats?
4. As you have read in the topic synopsis, Joseon faced numerous invasions during its five hundred year history. What lessons can your character take away from these invasions?
5. Bonus Question: this will not count towards your two questions you must answer, but might be worth thinking about. In 1910, Japan formally annexed Korea. Research the events leading up to annexation. Do you think annexation was preventable? Provide some justification for your answer.

TIMELINE OF IMPORTANT EVENTS

- 1392 – Yi Seong-gye overthrows the Goryeo dynasty and establishes the Joseon dynasty.
- 1592 – Toyotomi Hideyoshi launches his invasion of Joseon.
- 1598 – Toyotomi Hideyoshi passes away, ending the Japanese invasion of Joseon.
- 1627 – First Manchu invasion of Joseon.
- 1637 – Second Manchu invasion of Joseon. The new Qing dynasty takes Joseon as its own vassal.
- 1785 – King Jeonjo bans Catholicism in Joseon.
- 1860 – Choe Je-u creates the Donghak religion.
- 1866 – French expedition to Joseon to avenge the killing of French missionaries in a purge. France leaves with no real gains.
- 1871 – American expedition to Joseon in response to the earlier sinking of an American ship, the General Sherman, and to open up the nation. Similarly with France, the United States leaves with no real gains.
- 1875 – The Japanese ship Unyō attacks Ganghwa Island after provoking a Joseon attack.
- February 27, 1876 – Japan and Joseon sign the Treaty of Ganghwa, beginning the process of opening up Joseon to the world.
- 1882 – Joseon soldiers attack the Japanese legation in Seoul along with government buildings in response to reforms and increasing Japanese influence in the Imo Incident.
- 1884 – The Enlightenment Party launches a coup with the partial assistance of the Japanese legation in Seoul and begins to enact a series of radical reforms in the Gapsin Coup.
- 1885 – The Qing dynasty and Japan sign the Convention of Tianjin, promising to withdraw their troops from Joseon and to notify the other side if they wish to send troops into Joseon.
- 1894 – Donghak adherents, angered by government oppression and a worsening economic situation, launch rebellions across Joseon.
- July 24, 1894 – Japanese troops occupy the royal compound in Seoul and establish a new pro-Japanese government. This new government began enacting a sweeping wave of new reforms known as the Gabo Reforms.
- July 25, 1894 – Japan attacks a Qing fleet off the coast of Asan, beginning the First Sino-Japanese War. The fleet, along with other Qing troops in Joseon, were sent to assist Joseon in suppressing the Donghak Rebellion.
- April 28, 1895 – The Qing dynasty and Japan sign the Treaty of Shimonoseki, ending centuries of Chinese domination over Joseon.
- October 8, 1895 – Assassination of Queen Min under the orders of Miura Gorō, the Japanese minister in Seoul.
- February 11, 1896 – King Gojong escapes to the Russian embassy.
- October 13, 1897 – Establishment of the Korean Empire, the setting for this committee.

CHARACTER PROFILES

A Note on Research

As you begin researching your character, you may find it difficult to find English-language resources about your character. This will make research difficult, but at the same time the dais sees this as an opportunity to demonstrate your mastery of the topic background and current situation. We encourage you to creatively apply what you have learned from this topic synopsis and what you have separately researched for your research paper. For characters with specific roles, it is also sufficient to give details on the role itself rather than the person. We will also be providing some information about the characters this committee will feature. You may use this information as a guide for your creative research and as a directory identifying potential allies and rivals in committee.

SHIM SOON-TAEK (K. 심순택):

Shim Soon-taek occupies the position of Cabinet Minister due to a lifelong career in the upper echelons of the Korean bureaucracy, an opportunity afforded to him by his affluent upbringing. He commands great influence over the ministers of the cabinet as the Cabinet Minister, and is the face of the government that for better or for worse, is the first thing the citizens think of when they hear of government policy. He is staunchly anti-Japanese.

MINISTER OF DEFENSE:

A well-educated Yangban strategist raised under Neo-Confucian teachings, the Minister of Defense has firmly held an academic approach to military affairs, prioritizing border security and internal administrative matters over enhancing the military's fighting capabilities. That being said, growing threats from foreign powers and Joseon's dependence on foreign military aid have concerned the Minister as of late. While still weighing yangban values against Joseon's practical security needs, the Minister cautiously supports limited military expansion so Joseon can sufficiently defend itself, especially the navy.

MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS:

The Minister of Foreign Affairs is a keen student of the Japanese response to Western intervention, and due to his overseas education in Japan, is well-informed on Japanese policy towards both the West and Korea. He holds high hopes for the advent of modernization in Korea.

MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS:

Korea's Ministry of Home Affairs was modeled after similar officials in Meiji Japan. As such, the Minister oversees some of Korea's basic functions, such as the census, public works, land surveys, postal service, building codes, social welfare, and other infrastructure. The Minister of Home Affairs distrusts foreign powers and rapid social change, believing that Korea should rely on its natural resources, Neo-Confucianism ideals, and the strength of its people to prosper.

MINISTER OF FINANCE:

The Minister of Finance highly values stability, and prefers traditional models of taxation. Unlike his counterpart, the Minister of Agriculture, Commerce, and Industry, the Minister of finance is skeptical of the globalization of the Korean economy and the increasing foreign presence in Korea.

MINISTER OF JUSTICE:

The Minister of Justice is Korea's chief legal officer, whose responsibilities include helming the judicial system, reviewing legal standards, appointing judicial officials alongside the King, and overseeing Korea's police forces. After numerous rebellions and recent periods of social unrest, the Minister strongly believes that Korea must crack down on subversive elements, corruption, and political violence while modernizing itself so that Koreans have fewer incentives to cause such unrest.

MINISTER OF EDUCATION:

The Minister of Education is an avid student of the Chinese tradition of Neo-Confucianism, designing many of Korea's civil service exams after the Chinese model. He is skeptical of Western ideologies and religion, and is hesitant to update the curricula to match these new standards.

MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, COMMERCE, AND INDUSTRY:

As the government's representative for Joseon's general economy, the Minister of Agriculture, Commerce, and Industry regulates food production, business, manufacturing, travel, trade, and labor. After witnessing technology from Western nations, the Minister pursues a more globalized Joseon, hoping to invigorate its economy with new technologies, trading partners, industries, and labor pools. As such, the pro-business Minister strongly supports advancing Korea's scientific research and opening Korea to foreigners.

CROWN PRINCE SUNJONG (K. 순종):

The Crown Prince of the Korean Empire and the son of King Gojong. As someone who grew up within a Korea rapidly changing with the advent of Westernization and modernization, the Crown Prince is well-educated in these new ideological trends. As a face of the royal family, the Prince is well-known by the common populace and has a reputable social network throughout high and low society. He is supportive of his father's policies and character.

HEUNGSEON DAEWONGUN (K. 흥선대원군, OR JUST 대원군):

Heungseon Daewongun, also known as the Grand Prince, is the former regent and father of Korea's current king. As a political veteran, the Grand Prince retains extensive influence throughout all levels of government. A considerable portion of citizens and officials alike still look to him for cultural, social, and political leadership. His reputation also makes him a powerful emissary for Korea's interests abroad. The Grand Prince is an isolationist who wishes to crack down on corruption, strengthen the royal family, and preserve Korea's traditions. Unfortunately, this agenda frequently pits him at odds with his more moderate son, with whom he shares a cold and sometimes adversarial relationship.

SEO JAE-PIL / SOH JAIPIL (K. 서재필):

Seo Jae-pil is remembered for his brand of radical liberalism, participating in the Gapsin Coup in the name of his liberal beliefs. He has deep ideological ties to the United States, having fled there after the failure of his coup and taking on the name Philip Jaisohn overseas. He established his newspaper, The Independent, and is a founding member of the Independence Club, a new political organization that pushes for, as indicated in its name, independence of Korea.

AHN CHANG-HO (K. 안창호):

Ahn Chang-ho is a young, passionate activist with a missionary-sponsored Western education. He leads the Pyongyang branch of the Independence Club, where he publishes many varieties of media supporting democracy, public education, and reforming the royal family into a constitutional monarchy. He is the most active Independence Club member after its founder, Seo Jae-pil. While a radical, Ahn's powerful oration, youth, and appeal to individual freedoms has found strong footholds in most of Joseon's major cities. His background with Western missionaries also grants him a favorable influence with Western powers.

YI HAK-GYUN (K. 이학균):

Yi Hak-gyun is a highly decorated military official, serving as an official translator and ambassador to the Qing in addition to his position as commander of the royal guards. As the commander of the royal guards, he is responsible for ensuring the safety of the royal family and the royal household. He holds deep ties with the Russians and Americans due to their assistance in his tumultuous life.

CHOE IK-HYEON (K. 최익현):

A seasoned Neo-Confucian scholar, Choe Ik-hyeon is one of the most important voices of nationalism and conservatism in Joseon. He is a former righteous army commander, leading armed resistance against Japanese imperialism in 1895. He publishes frequent commentary on political events. He is well-respected amongst intellectuals and members of the military, and finds a supportive audience with citizens of all classes due to his anti-Japan, nationalist, Confucian stances. He distrusts foreign powers, and calls for isolationism with strong borders.

KIM HONG-NUIK / KIM HONG-RYUK (K. 김홍록):

Being born along Korea's border with Russia meant Kim Hong-Nuik was sufficiently fluent in both Russian and Korean — a rare skill set that quickly granted him strong connections in both governments as a translator and ambassador. A cunning political opportunist, Kim Hong-nuik quickly rose the ranks and is now one of the most influential and controversial members of the King's court, a non-yangban holding the attention of Korea's leaders in one hand and Russia's in the other. He remains essential to Russo-Korean relations, and can uniquely leverage the geopolitical resources of both nations to his favor.

HYUN HEUNG-TAEK (K. 현흥택):

Hyun Heung-taek is the Minister of the Office of Crown Properties, a product of the Gabo Reforms. The Office of Crown Properties is charged with managing the finances of the royal family, which are separate from the finances of the government. Hyun is an ardent supporter of the king, even assisting a failed attempt to bring him to the American legation before the king's exile in the Russian legation. He is eager to economically strengthen the royal family, especially in the face of international pressure on Korea — and by extension, the royal family.

HONG JONG-U (K. 홍종우):

Hong Jong-u is an influential conservative rising up the ranks in the imperial court, becoming an important consultant of the king himself. He traveled around France, translating Korean stories for the first time into a Western language. Despite his exposure to the West, Hong is skeptical about reform movements in Korea and is especially wary of Japan's intentions. Hong has also personally dabbled in assassination, killing the reformer Kim Ok-kyun for his role in the Gapsin Coup.

KIM CHONG-HO (K. 김종호):

Kim Chong-ho is an enterprising young man who created the Kaesong (K. 개성) Electric Company, bringing electricity to the city of Kaesong after a partnership with Japanese companies. However, he is eager to not confine his business to Kaesong. He sees wonder potential and profit in the science and technology of the West and is eager to introduce them to the rest of Korea, in order to both better his country and make a fortune in a new market.

YUN YONG-SEON (K. 윤영선):

Yun Yong-seon is the head of the Sungkyunkwan (K. 성균관), a higher education school formerly teaching only Neo-Confucian dogma but now slowly incorporating more studies. While under the Minister of Education, Yun has broad control over the administration of the Sungkyunkwan. Yun is eager to introduce Western studies, especially in the sciences, to Korea.

MAYOR OF BUSAN:

The mayor of Busan wields broad executive power over the crucial southern port city of Busan. Historically, Busan has been home to many Japanese merchants, and Japan continues to have a noticeable influence in the city with its merchants spread all over.

MAYOR OF PYONGYANG:

The mayor of Pyongyang wields broad executive power over the city of Pyongyang, an administrative center and the capital of former Korean dynasties. Recently, there has been an influx of Western missionary activity in the city ever since the ban on Christianity was lifted, leading to a greater Western presence in the city.

MINISTER TO THE UNITED STATES:

The minister to the United States is an American-educated man stationed at the legation in Washington, D.C. He is an important middleman between the imperial court and the United States. The minister is keen to establish a good relationship with the United States to better the state of Korea.

MINISTER TO JAPAN:

The minister to Japan is a Japanese-educated man stationed at the legation in Tokyo. He is an important middleman between the imperial court and Japan. The minister has close ties to Japan, having been installed by the Japanese during the First Sino-Japanese War. As a result, he is eager to improve Korea through fostering close ties with Japan.

MINISTER TO RUSSIA:

The minister to the United States is a Russian-educated man stationed at the legation in St. Petersburg. He is an important middleman between the imperial court and Russia. Escaping with Gojong to the Russian embassy, he has grown increasingly fond of Russia and envisions a future where Korea achieves modernization with Russian assistance.

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