



# KOREA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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# TOPIC:

## MODERNIZING KOREA, 1897

Korea under the Joseon dynasty can be best summarized as a country rooted in Neo-Confucianism and tradition that mostly kept itself closed off to the outside world, with the exceptions of China and, on a very limited scale, Japan. Despite Japanese invasions from 1592 to 1598 and Manchu invasions in 1627 and 1636, Korea resisted foreign control and maintained its closed borders policy. However, this did not deter other nations from attempting to open up the hermit kingdom. In 1876, the gate to Korea was finally swung wide open with the Treaty of Ganghwa signed with Japan, after Japan provoked a Korean attack on a Japanese ship. From 1876, foreign nations like the United States and Russia poured in, signing treaties, seizing different concessions, and attempting to control different aspects of the Korean government. During this time, Korea also sent expeditions to foreign nations, sending some of its brightest to observe the modernization Japan underwent after the Meiji Restoration and understand the way of life in the United States. These visits left a profound impression on many of the Korean visitors, and they became the first people to pave the path for reform in Korea, challenging the traditional Neo-Confucian status quo. Meanwhile, foreign countries, seeking to exert and expand their own influence in Korea, also promoted various reforms within the nation alongside Korean allies. However, this would create tension between the vying foreign powers, in one instance leading to war between the Qing dynasty and Japan in 1894.

This committee will begin on October 1897 when King Gojong of Joseon established the Korean Empire in an attempt to elevate Korea's status. The Russian Empire is currently the dominant power in Korea, replacing Japan after a series of extremely unpopular reforms and its assassination of the Korean queen, and essentially controls important aspects of the Korean government including its military training and economy. The delegates will have to advise King Gojong, now the Gwangmu Emperor, in an uncertain time for the nation and grapple with a clash between modernization and tradition within Korea.

This is a fascinating time in Korean history where two worlds collide. It provides important context for Japanese colonization of Korea in the first half of the twentieth century, and from a broader perspective serves as a prime example of empire-building during the age of imperialism. Furthermore, this time period in Korea is a key example of the conflict between progressivism and conservatism, and also the ways in which progressive and conservative ideas can be reconciled. Lastly, this setting is overlooked in school, but is still very much worth discussing. I hope that this exposure to a new yet familiar setting will improve delegates' understanding of the ideas and themes I discussed above and encourage them to discover more fascinating and overlooked periods of history.

To the delegates: as you begin your research journey, I hope that you will keep in mind the topics and themes the dais has discussed in this executive summary and the topic synopsis. Please be sure to read both thoroughly and thoughtfully. While you research, I encourage you to explore academic sources, as they may provide more details than what you might normally be able to find with an Internet search. Come to committee prepared with a solid understanding of the topic background and current situation, your character's role in committee, and a plan to take advantage of the current situation to fulfill your character's goals and ambitions.

I'm excited to see what you all bring to committee!



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