

**How did the ramifications of foreign influence by Japan, The United States and The Soviet Union on Korea during and after colonization in 1910 lead up to the Korean War in 1950?**

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**Abstract**

\* Korea always refers to a unified Korea; North and South Korea are always specified.

This paper will investigate how the ramifications of foreign influence by Japan, The United States and The Soviet Union on Korea during and after colonization, in 1910 led up to the Korean War in 1950. When we review historical events that took place throughout the 1900s, we often brush over events preceding WW2. However, it is often the events preceding the war that lead up to such great catastrophes. A prime example is Japanese colonization of Korea from 1910–1945. This event may have been a primary cause for the division of Korea during the Korean War in WW2. During Japanese colonization, Koreans were stripped of their freedom, rights and dignity. When the Korean War broke loose, Japan left Korea—and after 35 years of dependent governing, the country broke out into chaos and disorder. With no power and little knowledge of events taking place, Korea became an easy target to use and persuade as an additional source. The United States and The Soviet Union quickly saw this opportunity. Once the two powers arrived, rather than fighting over Korea, The United States and The Soviet Union agreed to split Korea at the 38th parallel. Ironically, Korea had no say in the matter. It is obvious that a complex chain reaction of events occurred concerning Korea in the 1900s. However, it is evident that Japanese colonization sparked these events and may have been the sole cause for the division of the nation.

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## Introduction

Among the vast waters of the East and Yellow Sea lies a humble promontory. No larger than the state of Virginia, the peninsula supports two nations. At first glance these two nations look roughly the same size, however, they are astonishingly divergent from one another. The South region of the peninsula is home to over 50 million residents. These citizens are led by a constitution veering towards a full democratic society. The North, home to roughly 29.4 million people, is governed by a strict ideology referred to as *Juche*. In a nutshell *Juche* has been described by as:

...being the master of revolution and reconstruction in one's own country. This means holding fast to an independent position, rejecting dependence on others, using one's own brain, believing in one's own strength, displaying the revolutionary spirit of self-reliance, and thus solving one's own problems for oneself on one's own responsibility under all circumstances. (Lee, 2003, p.105)


These once identical nations have changed so drastically from one another that they are currently heading in opposite directions. Year after year the South flourishes, financially, socially and economically, while the North struggles, unable to provide all of their nationals. Evidently these two nations are none other than South and North Korea. How did these two nations that were once a unified country drift in opposite directions? The ramifications of foreign influence by Japan, The United States and The Soviet Union on Korea during colonization, in 1910 may have set the groundwork for the Korean War in 1950. In order to more clearly understand South and North Korea, it is essential to address Korea before the division and Korea before the Korean War.



**Japan's Violent History**

A Korean proverb states, “When whales fight, the shrimp’s back is broken” (“Korean,” 2015). Surrounded by Japan, Russia and China—three superpower countries, Korea appeared to be a “shrimp” among the vast waters. Being a small, undeveloped country in the middle of flourishing nations, resulted in Korea as an elementary target and desirable location. Japan clearly recognized this and quickly acted to colonize Korea. Before Korea became a colony of Japan, Japan had been known for their swift, aggressive attacks. Shortly before colonizing Korea, Japan had targeted and conquered several nearby countries. For instance, in 1876 to 1905, Japan had taken advantage of countries competing for imperialist powers. The Sino-Japanese war occurred in 1895 concerning China and Japan. Japan succeeded and detached China from Korean businesses: “Japan then attacked Russia from 1904 to 1905. Known and the Russo–Japanese war, Japan oppressed Russia in renouncing their expansionist policy in the Far East” (“Russo–Japanese,” 2014 ). On a conquering streak, Japan saw Korea as a easy target in 1910.

In 1910, when Japan and Korea first signed the annexation treaty the Japanese colonial rule was overtly strict. The colonial government consisted of mainly Japanese and the government began to tax land. Since Korea was such an agricultural state, the government made large quantities of money off of this action. The regime also conducted inclusive Land Surveys from 1910 to 1918. These land surveys resulted in several problems, one being that the landowners were not always in possession of required documents. In consequence, many Korean farmers and landowners lost their land. These first ten years were incredibly harsh and



violent. Japanese representatives, teachers and workers carried swords and weapons with them, to control civilians.

In the 1930s, colonialism took a turn for the worse. During 1931-1945 colonialism affected nearly every Korean citizen, whether it led Koreans with no choice but to migrate to surrounding countries, young women being tricked into becoming sex slaves, or forcing Korean's to change their names, religion and even their own native language. The Japanese attempted to completely eliminate Korean language and culture, by forcing Korean people into a Japanese lifestyle. The negative affects Japan imprinted on Korea ultimately scarred Korean history and damaged the nation politically, economically and socially. The Japanese treated Koreans very poorly and often inhumanely. Japanese harsh rule and cruelty towards Korean men, women and children lingered unfavorably within the country. The Japanese did not leave Korea without a reputation. Even today, many Korean citizens resent the Japanese.

### **Influences that Initiated the Division of Korea**

The liberation of Korea under Japanese colonization was followed by a historic event that perpetually changed the lives of Korean citizens—the division of a nation. The division of Korea was ultimately a result of several considerations. Three elements which were directly linked to the division include: contingencies of the allies as World War II was coming to an end, the Japanese government fleeing Korean territory, and the emerging rivalry between the Soviet Union and United States.

In the early 1940s, as the Korean Provisional Government was recovering from its downfall during colonization, the KPG became affiliated with Chiang Kai Shek—Chinese



political and military leader—and his Nationalist regime. As Chiang Kai Shek and his regime promoted and sponsored the KPG, KPG officials were able to reassemble the government. History recalls, “In April 1942, Chungking [a major city in China] proposed that all the allies recognize the KPG as the government of Korea. But this was ignored by the United States” (Seth, 2010, p. 83). It was later decided in 1943 by United States, President Roosevelt and British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, that Korea would be appointed under China, the United States, Britain and Russia. Later in the year, President Roosevelt, Chiang Kai Shek and Cairo’s Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, held several conferences throughout November and December of 1943. During the Cairo conference, the chairpersons discussed their concerns of Japan and the future of Asia: “Mindful of the enslavement of the people of Korea, we are determined that in due course Korea shall become free and independent.” (Cho, 1967, p.19) The Cairo conference—marked as a point of recognition—was the first public declaration the allies had made regarding the future of Korea. The United States executives discerned the U.S. as a paragon of freedom and independence. Preparing Korea to be self reliant, the Allies intended full independence of Korea by 1946. When Korean nationals gained knowledge of the statements made during the Cairo conference, many interpreted “in due course” as rapid and even sudden liberty.

A major change was taking place throughout Korea. In Korea, Japanese rule was no longer adamant. Japan had earlier bombed Pearl Harbor in 1941, and as an act of vengeance the United States dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. Two days succeeding the calamity, the Soviet Union proclaimed war on Japan and directly attacked Japan's northern border. On the August 9th, a second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. The heap of



assailments resulted in Japan surrendering almost immediately. Along with their surrender, Japan had no choice than to flee Korea in order to assist their home nation. Abe Nobuyuki, Japanese governor general attempted to make amends during the post war transition to domesticate and purge any anti-Japanese violence. To do so, he approached several Korean figures whom he thought would be willing to work with him and his conditions. Nobuyuki approached Yo Un-Hyong, who agreed to work with him only after “insisting that the Japanese release all political prisoners, allow Koreans to carry out peacekeeping and independence-preparation activities without interference, and ensure food supplies” (Seth, 2010 p.85). While Korea was building back its democracy and coming out of the “dark ages”, the Korean citizens were informed of Japan’s relinquishment. Initially, Koreans were ecstatic with the absence of Japanese authority. Koreans commemorated by throwing parties, playing music and destroying symbols of Japanese rule. At this time a wave of independence washed over the general Korean population. However, they were ignorant of the agreements that were made between the allies concerning the nations future.

These sudden changes resulted in disorder and confusion between the Allies. The Soviet units began to enter the Northern border of Korea, while United States assigned colonel Dean Rusk and Charles Bonesteel to divide Korea for the tenancy of the United States and Soviet Union. It is important to recognise,

“C.H. Bonesteel and Dean Rusk (later a US Secretary of State), were ordered to fix a line in Korea north of which Soviet forces would receive the surrender of Japanese forces in Korea and south of which the Americans would do the same.





The line was drawn quickly, and on a map it appeared to segment Korea into two roughly equal parts” (Sandler, 1999, p. 22).

This line was drawn on the 38th parallel and took only into account equal land territory. The ramifications of this demarcation was Korea’s resources and population unequally divided.

During colonization the Japanese had established prime manufacturing plants and hydroelectric complexes which did not run to the lowest part of Korea. On the other side of the border was majority of the population. South Korea had roughly 21 million residents while North Korea had only 9 million residents. The climate in North Korea was much more drastic and less desirable. Hence, North Korea was robust industrially and resourcefully while South Korea remained with majority of the general Korean population. The opinion of Koreans were not taken into consideration while the border was being drawn: “Korea had been a unified country since the seventh century; no Korean had ever proposed a division of their land” (Seth, 2010, p. 85).

### **The Role of The United States and The Soviet Union in South and North Korea**

When the United States received word of the Soviets entering Korean territory subtle tension began to build between the two (supposed) confederate nations. Though the United States was not prepared or planning on chiefly supporting Korea, they rushed there as soon as they were informed of the USSRs involvement, through the fear that Soviets would promulgate communism in Korea. In North Korea, Stalin took control, providing the North Korean residents with weapons and teaching them how to combat. Perhaps his greatest influence was the ideology of Marxism-Leninism. Stalin first introduced the idea of independence and social change according to economic conditions. Kim Il-Sung (North Korea’s leader) agreed with the Marxist



theory and built off of those principles to form his own national government, *juche*. The english translation of *juche* is self reliance:

“Establishing *juche* means, in a nutshell, being the master of revolution and reconstruction in one’s own country. This means holding fast to an independent position, rejecting dependence on others, using one’s own brains, believing in one’s own strength, displaying the revolutionary spirit of self-reliance, and thus solving one’s own problems for oneself on one’s own responsibility under all circumstances” (Lee, 2003).

In North Korea, the Soviets ruled strictly, eradicating freedom of the media and press. North Korea deemed 28 year old, Kim Il-Sung as their first leader. In North Korea, “Kim was a legendary Communist military leader who had fought the Japanese even before World War II in an effort to win his country’s freedom” (Uschan, 2001, p.36). Stalin provided Kim with a surplus of weapons and indoctrinated him, and later the country, that it was necessary for them to overcome South Korea in order to have consensus among the bordering nations (being China and the USSR).

In the South, the U.S. was not as prepared to assist Korea. General John R. Hodge was in charge of helping South Korea. Naturally, him and his team scouted for a democratic leader with ideas similar to the U.S. Syungman Rhee was at the top of their list, being the only well known Korean leader in America. As a young man, Rhee had always been an activist. He quickly learned English at a methodist school in Korea and was the first Korean to receive his doctorate in America by attaining his Ph.D. from Princeton University. The main form of aid from the U.S. was financially. The U.S. helped rebuild South Korea’s government from 1945 to 1948 by



supporting the South Korean democracy with \$141 million in materials and \$354 million economic assistance. After supporting South Korea, the U.S. kept its distance and encouraged Rhee to predominantly run the nation.

It is evident that in the North Stalin was taking a different approach than General John R. Hodge. Just as North and South are complete opposite directions, the perspective and ideology of each Korea began to drift farther apart. There is no doubt that all Koreans wanted Korea to be reunified. However, Stalin instilled in Kim's mind, that war was necessary for reunification. Kim was further persuaded by Pak Hon-Yong and his South Korean associates that a good percentage of the South Korean population would support an annexation by the North in order to gain union between the two countries. Still skeptical, Kim and Pak went to Moscow to consult Stalin and gain his support in 1949 and 1950. Initially, Stalin was hesitant to get involved in another war. However, it was believed that he later agreed, in order to distract the U.S. and get them involved in another war as well. With Stalin's agreement, Kim went on with his plan and set a date for North Korea to attack the South. Because Seoul, the capital of South Korea, was so close to the border between the two Korea's, Kim's strategy was to quickly seize the metropolis. He believed that once the capital was conquered the rest of South Korea would quickly collapse.

### **The Korean War**


On June 25, 1950 the Korean War took place. With the support of other communist countries, North Korea underwent a full blown attack on the border of South and North Korea. This was taken by complete surprise by the ROK and United States. North Korea had obvious supremacy with finer artillery, tanks and trained veterans. Within two days, North Korea had



captured Seoul. The Korean War also known as the “June 25th Incident”, was the brutalist conflict in the dawn of the civil war. This war resulted in the death of thousands. Merely the destruction of the Han River Bridge killed hundreds of South Korean men, women and children as they were fleeing farther south. As each day prolonged, it became clearer and clearer that North Korea would take over all of Korea. Under unpremeditated circumstances, the United Nations Security Council appealed for the removal of DPRK forces, simultaneously requesting for UN associates assistance to the ROK. History suggest, “Eventually sixteen nations contributed forces. By the spring of 1951, this included 12,000 British, 8,500 Canadian, 5,000 Turkish, and 5,000 Filipino troops” (Seth, 2012, p. 102). However, it was the United States that supplied most of the soldiers with roughly 100,000 American forces in Korea.

### **How can Japanese Colonization be Related to the Korean War?**

When the division of Korea is explained, events occurring prior to the civil war are crucial. Japan’s 35 year colonial rule of Korea greatly influenced preceding affairs including the sudden incertitude between Korea and the Allies regarding sudden Korea authority, government and society. After being a colony for 35 years, Korea had lost all jurisdiction. As the Japanese fled Korea in 1945, Korea was left damaged. We must consider, “Certainly events in Korea impinged little on American military planning and prognostication; political leaders in the South increasingly felt isolated from the United States” (Sandler, 1999, p.36). After being colonized by Japan, Korea was not immediately open to aid. In reality, neither side was ready to work together. The U.S. kept their distance from Korea by quickly sponsoring elections and Syungman Rhee was elected as the first ROK president. North Korea was in a similar position



but rather than keeping their distance from the beginning, Stalin decided to immediately get involved then leave once he felt the North was stable.

Korea and Japan are separated by East Sea and have had a tangled history, unfortunately with more hostile than amiable years. Sixty-nine years have passed since Korea was a colony of Japan. The thirty five years that Korea spent as a colony of Japan are looked back as traumatizing and the darkest years for many Korean citizens lives. Though a multitude of changes have occurred and both South and North Korea have utterly transformed, how were they influenced by Japanese colonization? In what ways did Japanese rule in 1910 to 1945 lead to the division of Korea and will the two nations ever reunite? These are questions that many Koreans have been pondering. In many ways, time will only be able to convey the truth regarding unification.

### **South and North Korea's Current Relationship With Japan**

The impact that colonization had, has affected current ties between South and North Korea with Japan. Japan has made several apologies to Korea regarding colonization and one apology regarding comfort woman. When the apology was made on June 23, 1996, it seemed to cause more harm than good.

“It wasn’t until the late 1970s that this issue [the issue of comfort women] became widely known. A woman from Okinawa was the first to tell about it. Then later, women in Korea, Indonesia and the Philippines began to come forward. It took so much courage for them to do so. In the 1960’s and 70’s, student activists were concerned with governmental change, but in the 1980’s they, too, were more



aware of issues of torture, sexual abuse and worker exploitation.” (“Leader,” 1996)

The colonial period in Korea ended in 1945. This means that it took twenty-five years for the issue of comfort women to be known publicly and many years more for Japan to officially apologize. The subject of comfort women is a touchy subject and it has resulted in tension between Korea and Japan that is still and may forever be unresolved. After World War II in 1965, The Republic of Korea and Japan signed a treaty called, The Treaty on Basic Relations. The treaty on Basic Relations included several articles which created a mutual bond between the two nations. Along with the treaty the Korean government demanded a compensation for Japanese war crimes, survivors, deaths, and invalids. In total, Japan’s government paid 800 million dollars in grants and soft loans. However, many Koreans and the ROK government were not satisfied with the Japanese government. Many Koreans feel as though Japan has not formally apologized and addressed their wrong doings. However, the Japanese government states that they have already made amends with Korea in 1965. This has decreased the tension. However, many Koreans continue to feel bitter towards their past negative history with Japan. Majority of Koreans feel as though the Japanese are not being sincere and are trying to bury the past. D.S Law supports these claims in his book, The United States and The Far East. “The proximity of Japan and Korea, six hours by boat ferry, lends itself easy intercourse. However, relations between the two countries have deteriorated to a very low point.” (Law, 1956, p. 94) Unfortunately Korea and Japan do not appear to come to peace concerning the past. The fault lies on both sides. Koreans hold tightly onto memories and event of the past, teaching and reminding the youth of Japan’s harsh and cruel acts. While Japanese citizens and officials have



tried to forget what they did in the 1900s. Japanese children are not taught about colonization in school. Memories of the event have been swept under the rug. In recent years more trading, importing and exporting has been occurring between these nations, however hostile tension permeates the air. It is important to recognise, “Nevertheless, there is no fundamental obstacle in the way; in fact, it is to their mutual advantage that Korea and Japan live at peace and carry on trade with each other” (Law, 1956, p. 94). Being two small countries, it would be quite beneficial to become confederates resulting in political, economical and societal harmony.

### **Japanese Influence In Korea**

When Korea was overruled by Japan and in 1910, Korea resulted in many economical and cultural changes. These changes most likely sparked a ripple of events that have influenced even current society. Economically, Japan’s colonial rule helped Korea’s economy. When Korea’s railway was developing, it created many jobs not only constructing the railway but also lots of mining was involved. Gold, silver, iron, tungsten and coal were mined. Korea’s rice fields also successfully brought in a considerable income. Japan also introduced new technology and helped Korea catch up with progressions around the world. Now Korea’s subway system has been noted to be world's longest multi-operator metro system. The system was rated the world's best subway system by [CNN](#) and BBC nicknamed it the "super highway".

Culturally, Korea had to undergo extreme transfigurations. Japan did not only censor Korean writings, artwork, music and culture. However, in 1936 to 1943, the Japanese forced Koreans to change their Korean names to Japanese. Ultimately, eighty-four percent of the Korean population had adopted a Japanese name. The changing of names from Korean to



Japanese was one of the most humiliating aspects of the Japanese colonial policy. Giving the Koreans a random name was completely degrading and embarrassing. Their deep roots, ancestors feats and amazing experiences dissipated when their family name was eradicated. Furthermore, the Japanese built many Shinto shrines and required Korean people turn to Shintoism and embrace the new religion. Lastly, Japanese officials demanded that Korean people were no longer permitted to speak Korean. Korean newspapers were no longer published and by 1943 students and civilians were punished for speaking their native language.

In summary, Japanese colonial rule benefited Korea in several ways. Foremost, it aided the Korean economy. It also forced many Korean citizens to become bilingual and internationally rounded. For example, many Korean nationals went to Japan or other countries for college and a better education. Japan also exposed Korea to Western science, technology and values. When the Japanese gained control, they also established a type of government that was stricter than Korea had ever known.

## **Conclusion**

The influence that Japan, The United States and The Soviet Union had on South and North Korea has greatly influenced their current circumstances. If Korea had not undergone colonization, its likely that today they would still be a unified country. However, if that was the case, would Korea be flourishing as profusely as South Korea is presently? Most likely not. It is likely that North Korea would be in much better shape, while South Korea would not be as advanced politically, economically and socially. The conflicts and events in our past are what shape our future. Though Japan caused much conflict in both South and North Korea it is





relieving to see that the tension between the countries has lessened with time. There is still some obvious rigidity between the two nations when dealing with political issues. There is a proverb that says, "Forget the past and lose an eye; dwell on the past and lose both eyes!" (Cossa, 2012)

The Japanese hope to forget the past, ashamed of the events that occurred between them and South and North Korea. For Koreans, it may be more difficult. However, hopefully as time continues to pass they will soon be on agreeable terms with one another. After the dark events that occurred in Korea during the 1900s, South Korea has developed a very agreeable relationship with the U.S. while North Korea associates well with The Soviet Union. It is relieving to see that they have been able to achieve a certain level of peace and endorsement.

The colonial rule was a difficult stage in Korea's history. Though antagonizing and cruel, it has configured Korea into a stronger and more adaptable nation.



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