

Trends in the Study of the Russo-Japanese War in Korea and Future Tasks -Third-party perspective on the origins of the war-

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Introduction

Recent world history has witnessed three wars, the Sino-Japanese War, Russo-Japanese War and the Korean War, that unfolded in and around the Korean peninsula that were ostensibly launched under the premise of preserving the independence of Korea and the freedom of the Korean peninsula. In the end however, all three of these conflicts failed to achieve their declared objective. Exactly one century ago, the Korean peninsula and Manchuria served as the background of the Russo-Japanese War, whose outcome would seal Korea's fate as a Japanese colony. Giambattista Vico once observed that while God may have created nature, it is humans who are responsible for making history. In this regards, wars are also the responsibility of humans. Therefore, who should bear responsibility for the Russo-Japanese War, Japan or Russia? Or perhaps even the 'Korean or Manchurian problems?' The multitude of studies that have been conducted on the topic of the Russo-Japanese War over the last 100 years, and the international conferences held both in Korea and abroad on the subject, have yet to yield a satisfactory answer as to the question of who is responsible for the outbreak of the war.¹

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Why did the Russo-Japanese War break out? On one hand, one must clearly identify who is responsible for the outbreak of a war, and what were the factors that led to it, in order to develop a proper recognition of the system that ushered in the said conflict. Moreover, the importance of the above tasks is further amplified by the need to avoid the outbreak of another such conflagration on the Korean peninsula. What's more, such an exercise may also provide certain clues to resolving some of the outstanding historical issues that remain potential sources of conflict in Northeast Asia, such as the distortion of history and territorial disputes.

This study analyzes some of the main trends of the studies on the Russo-Japanese War that have been conducted to date in Korea. Thereafter, based on these analyses of the causes of the Russo-Japanese War as identified by Korean scholars, an attempt is made to single out the problems associated with the overall study of the Russo-Japanese War in Korea and to suggest alternatives. The rivalry over the Korean peninsula, and the so-called 'Korean problem' were in reality as much the tinderboxes from which the Russo-Japanese War ignited as the rivalry over Manchuria. This study attempts to refocus on the role that series of events which occurred on the Korean peninsula in 1903 the competition for the concession rights for the construction of the Seoul-Ŭiju Railway; the Yongampo Incident; and the opening of Ŭiju and Yongampo in the Yalu frontier played in the eventual outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War.

Trends in the study of the Russo-Japanese War in Korea

Korean scholars' perception of the Russo-Japanese War is very different from that of the warring parties, but also from that of other concerned parties such as the U.S. and England. Korea was in essence a victim of the Russo-Japanese War. That being the case, studies on the war conducted in Korea, have, by necessity, focused on the results of the war- the colonization and eventual annexation of Korea and the rise of the Righteous Armies- rather than on its origins.

These trends in the study of the Russo-Japanese War have developed in accordance with the changes that have taken place in the political situation on the Korean peninsula and in Koreans' perceptions of history. While in the 1950's these studies were influenced by the advent of the post-colonial era and the outbreak of the Korean War, in the 1960's the Cold War ideological structure and the overwhelming focus on economic development were the main factors affecting the study of the Russo-Japanese War in Korea. On the other hand, in the 1970's these studies were affected by the rise of a new perception of socio-economic history, modernization, and a nationalism-based concept of history, as scholars attempted to overcome the colonial view of history using positivist methodologies.² Meanwhile, the advent of a more progressive view of social history and the emergence of post-Cold War and post-modern thought from the 1980's onwards has resulted in expanding the horizon of Korean history.

In terms of the study of the Russo-Japanese War in Korea, two main streams can be identified. The first approach is one that is based on the indigenous development view of modern Korean history. The studies conducted based on this mindset have tended to single out the violent nature of Japanese imperialism, the tactics employed by Japan to facilitate their imperial designs, Japan's aggressive colonization efforts, and the unjust nature of imperialism. Such studies have focused on the aggressive imperialistic wars launched by Russia and Japan, and the *Minjung's* (Korean people) resistance to Japanese aggression. A wide variety of studies have been produced based on this approach.

The second approach to the study of the Russo-Japanese War has been focused on the identification of the causes of the war and who should bear responsibility for its outbreak. Studies conducted based on this approach have been inclined to focus on the international aspect of the conflict, especially, the dynamics of the relationships between the warring parties, i.e. Russia and Japan, and other concerned parties such as the U.S., England, France, and Germany. However, the overwhelming focus of the majority of these studies has been on the historical dispute between

Russia and Japan.³ Scholars using this approach to the war have also been greatly influenced by the work conducted by domestic scholars in the field of politics and diplomacy, who in turn based their own work on the studies of the history of international relations carried out in the West. Thus, to date, studies on the causes of the Russo-Japanese War carried out in Korea have naturally tended to overlook the role of Korea and focused on Manchuria. In other words, no in-depth studies of the role of Korea in the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War have been conducted.⁴ This is the main reason why the competition for the concession rights for the construction of the Seoul-Ŭiju Railway; Yongampo Incident; and the opening of Ŭiju and Yongampo have not been analyzed in-depth.

From a periodic standpoint, the 1980's can be used the standard with which to demarcate the various trends in the study of the Russo-Japanese War in Korea. Studies conducted prior to the 1980's tended to be carried out at the individual level and to deal with the annexation of Korea; meanwhile, studies on the war based on the standpoint of international relations or diplomacy during this period were for the most part ignored.⁵ The expansion of Korean's perception of history and the growing Japanese distortions of history during the 1980's resulted in a widening of the scope of the studies on the Russo-Japanese War to include those that approached the subject from the viewpoint of politics, socioeconomics, diplomacy, international relations, and social history.⁶ Moreover, joint studies began to increasingly be carried out as well.⁷ These include *100 Years of the Diplomatic Relationships* series published by the Han'guksa yŏn'gu hyŏpŭihoe,⁸ research forums on the subject of international relations on the Korean peninsula carried out by the Korean Association for Political and Diplomatic History⁹, as well as studies on the Japanese aggression of Korea carried out by the Korean Historical Association.¹⁰ The most noteworthy study carried on the topic of the Russo-Japanese War was the one conducted by the Korean Historical Association with Ch'oe Munhyŏng at the forefront.¹¹

At the beginning of the 1980's, as a debate over the methodologies that should be used and tasks which should be addressed was raging,

Kajimura Hideki entered into the fray by suggesting that when viewed from the standpoint of Korean history, the Russo-Japanese War could be perceived as an imperial conflict which saw Russia and Japan go to war with one another for control of the Korean peninsula and Manchuria. Therefore, he argued, Japan could be perceived as an expansionist power cut from the same mold as Russia.¹² However in 1985, Han Sangil argued in papers entitled, “80th anniversary of the Russo-Japanese War” and “Analysis of the Russo-Japanese War”, that this conflict was a momentous historical event that had greatly influenced Korea’s modern history; and that although Korea had not been a direct participant in the war, the colonization of the peninsula was in fact a direct result of its outcome.¹³ Moreover, Han argued that the outcome of this war greatly facilitated Japan’s ability to turn Korea into its colony without having to have recourse to Koreans’ opinions on the topic. In this regards, Han maintained that the study of the Russo-Japanese War should be taken in the following direction: previous descriptive studies should be done away with in favor of more multidimensional analyses which would in turn facilitate the reanalysis of the Russo-Japanese War from the standpoint of Korea’s situation at that time, as well as how this war influenced Korea’s modern history.¹⁴

In the 1990’s, several other scholars conducted studies that were based on the approach first developed by Han Sangil.¹⁵ Here, Kim Yongku and Ha Yōngsōn’s work, which consisted of collecting basic materials and translating primary sources as part of the wider effort to reestablish the basic foundation of the study of Korean diplomatic history and to remove Korean scholars’ subordination to the field of international relations as it developed in the West, can be singled out for special praise.¹⁶ At the end of the 1990’s Ku Taeyōl presented his opinion on the state of the study of the Russo-Japanese War in Korea. He argued that the domestic academia had adopted an overly simplified way of analyzing the conflict. Ku argued that first, scholars tended to focus on the Russo-Japanese War as an extension of the two countries competition for Korea. Furthermore, Ku stressed the fact that domestic scholars tended to regard the following

series of events- Queen Min's assassination in 1895, King Kojong's flight to the Russian Legation, the Rosen-Nische Protocol, Yamagata-Lobanov Protocol in 1896, the Masanpo and Yongampo incidents- as precursors of the Russo-Japanese War.¹⁷ However, Ku maintained that such a limited view focused solely on the Korean peninsula could not lead to a proper understanding of the true nature of the Russo-Japanese War.

Second, Ku also argued that there were some scholars who perceived the Russo-Japanese War as being the result of these two countries' expansionist policies coming into conflict not only in Korea, but in East Asia as a whole; as exhibited by the fact that the brunt of the fighting took place in Manchuria, and that the latter was also perceived by the belligerents as the main prize. Ku stressed that this kind of approach tended to be one that was based on the analysis of history not at the Korean peninsula level, but at the East Asian one. Moreover, he maintained that this explained why more studies on the subject had been carried out by scholars in the field of East Asian diplomatic history than by those specializing in the field of modern Korean history. Viewed from this perspective, the Russo-Japanese War was not an issue related to Korea, and even if it did, Korea was not the main source of conflict between Japan and Russia. However, here Ku stressed that if the Russo-Japanese War was somehow directly related to Korea's destiny, then the causes, development process, and outcome of the conflict between these two countries inevitably involved Korea. In other words, while Ku accepted the Russo-Japanese War as being one with regional and global significance, he also pointed out the need to analyze the war from the viewpoint that it was also closely related to Korea.¹⁸

The above section clearly proves that during the 1990's Korean scholars began to move beyond the previous focus on the war from the domestic perspective and analyze the Russo-Japanese War at the East Asian level. Moreover, these scholars increasingly linked aspects of their regional and global perspective-based studies on the Russo-Japanese War, such as its origins, development process, and aftermath, to the Korean problem. However, scholars have continued to dance around the role of

the Korean peninsula as the main cause of the Russo-Japanese War, choosing rather to remain discrete on this question and to put forward various hypotheses.

More recent studies on the Russo-Japanese War have also been carried out.¹⁹ In 2002, Korea University's Institute of Korean Culture carried out a joint study entitled, "The Russo-Japanese War and Japan's Annexation of Korea" whose objective was that of analyzing the modern-day perceptions of history which prevailed within individual East Asian nations. Furthermore, in 2003 the Korean Historical Association and the National History Compilation Committee joined forces to carry out a study entitled, "War and the International Order", while Hallym University's Institute of Asian Culture hosted an academic conference on the topic of the Russo-Japanese War and East Asia.²⁰

The year 2004, which marked the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War, naturally saw a significant number of academic conferences and studies on the topic be respectively convened and published. Examples of such conferences included the Historical Education Association's, 'The Russo-Japanese War and Historical Education'; The Institute of Japanese Studies', 'Reflections on the 100th Anniversary of the Russo-Japanese War and Japan in the 21st Century'; Korea University's Institute of Korean Culture's 'The Russo-Japanese War and Korea: As viewed throughout Korean history'; The Korean Political Science Association and the Institute 21 for Peace Studies', 'The Russo-Japanese War and the International Order in East Asia: Its historical and modern significance; and Myongji University Academia Koreana Research Center's 'The Russo-Japanese War and the Subsequent Changes in Northeast Asia.' As far as studies were concerned, the Institute for Military History Compilation published a special volume commemorating the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War²¹ as well as a compilation of historical data related to Russo-Korean military relations²²; while the Institute for Korean Historical Studies published the "100th Anniversary of the Russo-Japanese War: Korea/Russia/ Japan".²³ What's more, media outlets such as the

Chosun Ilbo²⁴, JoongAng Ilbo²⁵, Monthly Chosun²⁶, and Monthly JoongAng²⁷ also dealt with the Russo-Japanese War.

In short, Korean scholars have attempted over the last 50 years or so to search for the influence which the Russo-Japanese War had on Korean history and to assess this war from the standpoint of Korean history. These attempts have resulted in several noticeable achievements not only in the field of history but in related fields as well.

Here, certain factors should be pointed out. First, one of the major achievements of the studies on the Russo-Japanese War conducted by Korean scholars has been that these scholars have been at the forefront of the movement to reassess the illegality of Japan's annexation of Korea from the standpoint of international law, while also being predominant in pointing out the war's colonial origins.²⁸ Second, these Korean scholars have attempted to restructure the origins, development, and aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War, and the related Korean problem, from the standpoint of world history.²⁹ In this regards, the study of military and strategic history conducted by the Institute for Military History Compilation stands out as another outstanding achievement in the field. All of these studies have made a significant contribution to the widening of the scope of the study of the Russo-Japanese War in Korea.

However, as mentioned above, several limitations have emerged with regards to the studies on the Russo-Japanese War conducted in Korea. The first, such limitation revolves around the fact that while studies designed to define the characteristics of this war have been invigorated, and thus several significant breakthroughs have been achieved, there have been virtually no in-depth studies which have attempted to uncover the actual origins of this war or who should bear responsibility for it. The second, such limitation has to do with the fact that efforts to restructure the Russo-Japanese War from the standpoint of Korean history have been for the most part uneven. Put differently, studies on Korean history have dealt with the Russo-Japanese War as a secondary theme, in that, there have only been a limited number of studies on the subject of the Russo-Japanese War that have been conducted under the wider banner of Korean

history, especially when compared with the multitude of studies that have been carried out by Korean history scholars on the subject of the Sino-Japanese War or Korean War.

While this may be the result of the rapid changes that have taken place in terms of Korea's political situation or of the warped perception of history that has emerged as a result of the Cold War, there has been a tendency amongst Korean scholars dealing with the Russo-Japanese War to either display an overly ethnocentric approach to the war, to perceive it as something that has no relation to Korea, or to simply apply jumbled theories to its analysis. Although the importance of analyzing the Russo-Japanese war within the wider sphere of Korean history cannot be discarded altogether, ethnocentric methods should be removed in favor of a more globalized approach to its study. Scholars who believe that a comprehensive analysis of the war is possible using solely a Korean studies, East Asian studies, or even international studies approach are in essence deceiving themselves. In order to develop a truly globalized approach to the Russo-Japanese War, the interactions between the warring parties and other concerned foreign powers during this period should be analyzed, as should Korea's own policy.

**Future tasks for the study of the Russo-Japanese
War based on the perspective of Korean history
As it pertains to the origins of war**

Although some epistemological and methodological jumbling has been evident, a look at the trends in the studies on the Russo-Japanese War in Korea over the last fifty years reveals that such studies have been carried out with a clear direction in mind. In this regards, scholars have tended to characterize the war as an imperialistic war of aggression. The recent studies on such topics as the illegality, compulsive, deceptive and flawed nature of the Japanese annexation of Korea are clear evidence of this trend.³⁰

However, problems have been clearly exposed in terms of those studies that have attempted to uncover the origins of the war and who should bear responsibility for it. It is a well known fact that Manchuria and the Korean peninsula served as the backdrop for the war that pitted Japan against Russia 100 years ago, and that the biggest victim of this war was Korea, which was subsequently colonized by Japan. Nevertheless, a century later there continues to be no debate either domestically or internationally over which party should bear responsible for the war and the war's origins, at least as far as it pertains to Korea.

Moreover, it should not be expected that time will fix everything when it comes to such phenomena, as this issue is closely related not only to the history of the warring states, but also to that of the other concerned parties. What's more, these issues continue to affect the concerned parties today. More to the point, one of the main tenets of Japan's, who emerged victorious from the Russo-Japanese War, attempts to distort history has involved its interpretation of the origins and characteristics of the Russo-Japanese War.

In July 1982, the Japanese Ministry of Education authorized textbooks, which began to be used in April 1983 for elementary, middle, and high schools, that contained clear distortions of history. In particular, the sections dealing with Japan's modern and contemporary history, especially in relation to its history of aggression towards Korea, contained several telling distortions.³¹ Since then, the Japanese right-wing has all but made the spouting of outrageous historical claims an annual event. In 2001, the issue of history once again came to the forefront with the release of another textbook containing clear distortions of historical facts. Thus, the issue of Japanese historical distortions remains a salient one even in this day and age.³² One of the most common Japanese distortions contained in such textbooks revolves around the origins and nature of the Russo-Japanese War. The Korean government has adamantly demanded that the Japanese government right these historical wrongs.

The Korean government repeatedly demanded that the Japanese rectify the following four sections contained in the description of the Russo-

Japanese War found in the textbooks published in 2001: first, the Japanese textbooks depicted what were in reality logging camps as military bases; second, they described the Russo-Japanese War initiated by Japan as having been the result of the threat to Japanese security which the Russian encroachment on the Korean peninsula engendered; third, these textbooks described the war as being one between races while glossing over the true objective of the war, which was to expand Japan's control over Korea and Manchuria; and finally, that the Japanese seizure of the Korean peninsula had been welcomed by Koreans, and provided hope for independence to all oppressed peoples.³³

However, in <*The Comprehensive History of Japan*> published by Yamakawa Publishing Company, which is the most popular history textbook for high school students in Japan, the Russo-Japanese War is described as having its origins in the following factors: first, the Western powers had used the excuse of the Boxer Rebellion of 1900 to interfere in Chinese politics, with the eventual objective of conquering China; second, this western encroachment into Chinese affairs had the unintended result of increasing the Taehan Empire's diplomatic independence from China; third, as a result of the above, Russia and Japan began to compete for influence on the Korean peninsula. Moreover, from the standpoint of the dynamics of imperial power relations during this period, as Russia and England were at odds with one another, Japan, as a result of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902, was put in a position of assuming responsibility for stemming the southward expansion of Russia. In conclusion, faced with such circumstances, Japan had no choice but to go to war once negotiations with Russia broke down.³⁴

The problem here is that this description of the Russo-Japanese War as stemming from Russia's actions represents an attempt by Japan to shift responsibility for the outbreak of the war from itself to Russia. Japan's attempts to do so are made evident by the fact that the above-mentioned textbook traces the origins of the Russo-Japanese War as far back as the Boxer Rebellion. Such a description is intended to prove that Russia's ambitions to conquer Manchuria can be traced back to 1900; thus, Japan's

intention is that of placing the blame for the Russo-Japanese War on Russia's aggressive policy towards Manchuria and Korea.

However, such an discourse of the causes of the Russo-Japanese War becomes even more of a serious problem when we consider that a similar version can be found in the Korean case as well. Korea's own textbooks deal with the issues of the Masanpo and Yongampo incidents as being part of the so-called 'Korean problem' that eventually led to the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War. Moreover, Korean textbooks have tended to describe these two incidents as having been caused by Russia's aggressive policies, policies to which Japan had no choice but to respond with the kind of force that led to the Russo-Japanese War.³⁵ In addition, the refusal on the part of certain groups to accept the results of studies on the Russo-Japanese War that do not mesh with their own has emerged as another problem of note. As mentioned earlier, there have been studies on the Russo-Japanese War that have adopted a more globalized approach as well as those who have argued that the 'Korean problem' was in fact the main cause of the war. However, those involved in the field of history in Korea have refused to accept the merits of such studies, which has all but ensured that such views will not be represented in Korean textbooks. This is the main reason why this writer has asserted that the time has come to reconsider the study of the Russo-Japanese War from the standpoint of Korean history, especially as it pertains to the background and causes of this war.

Here I would like to make it clear that Korean academia has plainly spelled out its position on the Russo-Japanese War, a position which can be summarized as follows:

“The claim that the Russo-Japanese War was a conflict that originated from attempts to stem Russian encroachment on the Korean peninsula and preserve the independence of Korea is based on Japan's attempts to distort history in order to justify its colonization of Korea.... Such claims serve as the basis of Japan's self-righteousness, which is well reflected in their description of

Russia's 'aggressive acts' towards the Korean peninsula at the beginning of the 20th century, including their seizure of the land surrounding the Masampo and Yongampo areas, their building of various facilities in these areas, their stationing of a select number of troops there, as well as their aggressive pursuit of timber concessions in the Yalu River area, as the proof of Russia's designs in Korea. However, such assertions represent nothing more than outright lies that are not supported by actual facts. Moreover, there exists little proof to support the assertion regarding Russia's colonial ambitions in Korea."³⁶

Nevertheless, although scholars have stressed that the rivalry for control of Manchuria and Korea was the main cause of the Russo-Japanese War, the majority of the studies conducted on the origins of this conflict, both domestically and abroad, have focused almost exclusively on the role of Manchuria. However, this kind of approach involving the chronicling of events which occurred in Manchuria and Korea leading up to the war reveals problems with this practice of focusing on Manchuria as the cause of the war. This is because during the 18 months between the 1st stage of the agreement with China to evacuate its troops from Manchuria signed in April 1902 and its refusal to carry out the 3rd and final stage of this agreement in October 1903, the conflict between Russia and Japan over Manchuria enjoyed a lull of sorts; however, the Korean peninsula was an entirely different matter, a fact which scholars have tended to overlook.³⁷ Therefore, a comprehensive analysis of the actual causes of the Russo-Japanese War should include an in-depth examination of the events which unfolded in Korea during this period as well.

Of course, there have been a wide range of studies that have dealt with the issue of the Japanese and Russian rivalry for concessions in Korea from 1902-1903; however, in this case as well no comprehensive study linking together the series of events which unfolded on the Korean peninsula during this period have been carried out. For example, while certain studies have dealt with one or another of these issues, such as the

rivalry over the securing of the concession rights to the Seoul-Ŭiju Railway³⁸, the Yongampo incident³⁹, and the opening of Ŭiju⁴⁰, these have failed to link these incidents to the wider chain of events unfolding in Korea at that time.

A comprehensive linking of the events which occurred in Korea right before the outbreak of the war, namely, the rivalry over the securing of the concession rights to the Seoul-Ŭiju Railway, the Yongampo incident, and the opening of Ŭiju, clearly illustrates how the first two were directly related to the actual outbreak of the war.⁴¹ The securing of the concession rights for the Seoul-Ŭiju Railway was perceived as the key to the control of Korea and Manchuria as it ran all the way to the Manchurian border, and as the subject of a heated rivalry between the warring states who saw this as a chance to open up Korea under their own auspices. As such, Japan's attempts to secure this concession for itself was met with firm opposition from the Russian side who also wanted to acquire this right, which led Russia to put in motion its own step-by-step plan to gain control of Korea and the rights to the Seoul-Ŭiju Railway, a plan that included the securing of timber concessions in the Yalu River area⁴², the seizure of the Yongampo area, and their encroachment into Ŭiju as well.⁴³

In short, the Yongampo incident, which has been widely regarded by scholars as the fuse that set off the Russo-Japanese conflagration, was Russia's only possible response to Japan's efforts to expand its influence into northern Korea and Manchuria by linking the Seoul-Ŭiju Railway to the Chinese Eastern Railway following the 1st stage of the withdrawal of Russian troops, a withdrawal which was not rewarded with the promised guarantees. Therefore, when we consider the facts that led up to Russia and Japan coming into conflict with one another in northern Korea, it becomes evident that although both parties should shoulder some of the responsibility for the outbreak of the war, it is Japan, and not Russia as previously thought, that must bear the lion's share of the blame because it was the one who orchestrated the events that set off the war.⁴⁴

In other words, Russia's response to Japan's attempts to expand its influence in Korea, by seizing Yongampo and Ŭiju under the cloak of

protecting their timber concessions, was an *ex post facto* measure. Moreover, Russia's new course, exemplified by its seizure of Yongampo, can also be seen as a response to Komura's new more aggressive approach to securing the concession rights to the Seoul-Ŭiju Railway. Therefore, previous studies' tendency to describe the Yongampo incident as stemming from Russia's aggressive policy towards Manchuria and Korea, and as having been the result of Russia's naked aggression of Yongampo, needs to be reanalyzed.

Based on the above historical facts, Russia's attempts to seize Yongampo can rightfully be seen as the response of an actor who had its back up against the wall, and as an attempt to stem the Japanese from getting their hands on Ŭiju, which represented the last stop on the Seoul-Ŭiju Railway. As such, the actual objective of both nations was in fact not really Yongampo, but Ŭiju. While Tyler Dennett stressed that after 1898 the Korean peninsula ceased to be an object of rivalry between Russia and Japan, it should be clear that the final objective of both sides was in fact the Korean city of Ŭiju.⁴⁵ As such, Manchuria was not the only source of conflict between these two countries as Korea was also a sticking point between the two during the period leading up to the war.⁴⁶ Thus, a new assessment of the role of the railway concession issue and of the opening of ports in northern Korea in the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War should be undertaken.⁴⁷

However, the incidents which occurred on the Korean peninsula during this period should not be perceived as being solely related to the interpretation of the causes of the Russo-Japanese War. This is because the so-called 'Korean problem' affected not only the flow of Korean and Northeast Asian history, but world history as well.

By 1903 this Russo-Japanese rivalry over Korea, exemplified by the struggle over the concession rights to the Seoul-Ŭiju Railway, Russian seizure of Yongampo, the opening of Ŭiju and Yongampo; as well as the interest of other foreign powers in this rivalry, were events whose influence extended well beyond the Korean peninsula and Manchuria. These events, which had already moved beyond the regional East Asian

level as well, in effect pitted world powers against one another, with each party trying to gain supremacy amidst the new world system which began to take shape at the beginning of the 20th century. This argument is supported by the fact that Roosevelt's adoption of a pro-Japanese and anti-Russian diplomatic platform, Edward VII and French President Loubet's exchange of visits marking the onset of Anglo-French negotiations and the Russian led Tripartite Intervention all occurred during the same timeframe in which the Yongampo incident unfolded. In other words, the situation on the Korean peninsula during this period was a part of the developing diplomatic struggle at the global level, with the Korean peninsula being at the center of these changes in the world diplomatic structure.

Thus, the rivalry which emerged over control of the northern part of the Korean peninsula, which began with the issue of securing concession rights for the construction of the Seoul-Ŭiju Railway but expanded to include the Yongampo incident and the opening of Ŭiju and Yongampo, does not represent a simple episode which originated between the conflict between Russia and Japan. The fact that these events led directly to the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War, and eventually resulted in providing Japan with the opportunity to annex Korea, means that they should be perceived as important historical incidents on a scale similar to the Morocco Crisis which eventually resulted in the advent of World War I. Moreover, these incidents can be perceived as the direct precursors of the eventual crises which engulfed East Asia.⁴⁸ This is the reason why the 'Korean problem' was important enough to result in the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War, which has been referred to as a mini-world war, and why the incidents which emerged on the Korean peninsula 100 years ago should be analyzed not only at the Korean history level but at the level of world history.

As mentioned above, I am of the mindset that the limitations of the arguments put forward by Japanese and Russian researchers with regards to the war can be overcome when further emphasis is placed on the 'Korean problem.' Moreover, modern issues such as the opening of North

Korea and the reconnection of the Kyōngūi Railway can be seen as being a continuance of the problems which 100 years ago resulted in the Russo-Japanese War. Thus, the opening of North Korea and the reconnection of the Kyōngūi Railway should be perceived as containing global characteristics just as their predecessors did 100 years ago. In other words, this should be understood as the lesson which the events of 100 years ago hold for us, and as a clear indication of the significance and practicality of the study of history for the contemporary world.

Conclusion

100 years ago, the Korean peninsula was the eye of the diplomatic storm that was raging on the global stage, and found itself becoming the unwilling colony of Japan following the conclusion of the Russo-Japanese War. The so-called 'Korean problem', exemplified by the struggle over the concession rights for the construction of the Seoul-Ŭiju Railway, the Yongampo incident, and the opening of Ŭiju, was the direct cause of the Russo-Japanese War. The effects of the events of 9/11 and the subsequent global war on terror have created challenges for Korea not only on the foreign stage, in the form of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, but also at home in terms of such matters as the North Korean nuclear crisis and the chaos created by the dispatch of Korean forces to Iraq. Viewed from this perspective, Korea's present position is not that different from the one it found itself in 100 years ago. My biggest fear is that just like 100 years, we are ill-prepared to deal with such a situation.

Seen from the present standpoint, Korea was neither an assistant, actor, staff, member of the audience, or even a simple extra in the Russo-Japanese drama that unfolded 100 years ago. This utterly absurd situation has made it so that the time has come for Korea to delve into the questions of on whose behalf the war was fought and for what. In order to do so, a new perception of history must be developed that is based on a globalized, diversified, and regional-based view of contemporary history;

and this view should be used to teach the general public. These days, the gap between Koreans and the rest of the world's perception of Korea has been greatly bridged. There is a need for Korean historical studies to establish its identity based on the principle of positive reflexive scepticism by employing a more objective method of analyzing history from a globalized standpoint.

What's more, history education should be focused on the respect of individuals' historical perspectives rather than an ideology-based education curriculum that is designed to serve the interests of the current government in power. Put differently, teaching and learning methods and the compilation of textbooks should be carried out in a manner that facilitates students' ability to develop a more exact perception of history by promoting individuals' ability to develop their own perceptions of history rather than being dependent on the state for the direction of history education. By doing so, new dynamism can be introduced into the field of history.

Studies on the Russo-Japanese War should be carried out from diverse standpoints that include Manchuria and the Korean peninsula, but also incorporate the global policies which emerged during the early period of the 20th century. This kind of approach is needed to develop a comprehensive understanding of the characteristics of the Russo-Japanese War. In this regards, there is a particular need to develop a broader understanding of the process which led to Japan's annexation of Korea. To achieve this, first, more efforts should be put into uncovering the actual nature of the incidents which unfolded on the Korean peninsula during the period surrounding the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War. Furthermore, the unilateral and uniform Cold War-based perception of history that has long oppressed Korean society should be done away with once and for all, while the scope of the study of the Russo-Japanese War broadened to include cultural and global studies, new cultural history, and the study of postcolonial history. Such efforts will greatly enhance Korea's ability to clearly perceive the current reality in which it finds itself in, that is, surrounded by great powers, and to develop a strategy

that will ensure not only its survival but its prosperity as well. These are the lessons which history, in this case in the form of the 100th anniversary of the Russo-Japanese War, holds for us.

Notes :

- 1 The studies on the origins of the war carried out by Russian and Japanese scholars have tended to run in a parallel fashion. Moreover, scholars from countries other than these two have also had their ability to formulate objective analyses of this question severely limited by the fact that they have had to rely on either Russian or Japanese sources to conduct their studies.
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- 3 For more on the causes of the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War please refer to: Toriumi Yasushi, Matsui Masato, and Kokaze Hidemasa (eds), *日本近現代史研究事典 (A Dictionary of Research into Modern Japanese History)*, Tokyo: Tokyodo Shuppan, 1999; Chiba Isao, *日露戦争の國際政局 (The Russo-Japanese War and International Relations)*, 1999
- 4 Kim Kwangsu, "Background of the Russo-Japanese War and its influence on the Korean peninsula (*Rõ- Il chõnjaengüi paekyõngkwa hanbandoe mich'in yõnghyange keanhan yõn'gu*)", *Haksul Nonch'ong*, Vol. 17, 1994; Park Huiho, "The causes of the Russo-Japanese War- with a special focus on the role of the western powers (*Rõ- Il chõnjaengüi wõnin yõn'gu- kaechõne mich'in kumiyõlkangüi yõnghyangryõke chumokhayõ*)", *Sahak yon'gu*, Vol.48, 1994; Kim Wonsoo, *Reconsidering the Causes of the Russo-Japanese War- With a special focus on the Yongampo incident and the opening of Üiju (Rõ- Il chõnjaengüi wõnine Taehan chaekõmt'o-Yongampo sakõnkwa Üijukaesirül chungsimüro)*, PhD Dissertation, Hanyang University, 1997, (hereafter referred to as *Reconsidering the Causes of the Russo-Japanese War*)
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- 6 Park Chunkyu, *The History of International Politics as it Pertains to the Korean Peninsula (Hanbando kukche chŏngch'isaron)*, Publishing Department of Seoul National University, 1986; Choi Munhyŏng, *The Major Powers' East Asian Policy*, Ilchokak, 1979
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ilbonüi kyöngjehöck ch'imnyakkwa han'guküi pyönmö"), *Japan's Aggression of Korea before and after the Russo-Japanese War*, Korean Historical Association (Yöksa hakhoe), 1986; Kwon Taeök, "Japan's agricultural policy for Korea during the era of the Residency-General (*T'onggambu sikiüi ilcheüi taehan nongöp sich'aek*)", *Japan's Aggression of Korea before and after the Russo-Japanese War*, Korean Historical Association (Yöksa hakhoe), 1986; Chöng Changryöl, "Korea's response to the Russo-Japanese War (*Rö· Il chönjaenge taehan han'gukinüi taeüng*)", *Japan's Aggression of Korea before and after the Russo-Japanese War*, Korean Historical Association (Yöksa hakhoe), 1986; Ko Chönghyu, "King Kojong's diplomatic policy before and after the Russo-Japanese War (*Rö· Il chönjaeng chönhuüi Kojong oekyo*)", *The History of the Korean Independence Movement (Hanminjok tongnip undongsa)*, Vol.1, National History Compilation Committee, 1987; Kim Wonsoo, "The Russia-Japanese rivalry over the opening of a port in Üiju-Based on the perception of this incident as one of the main causes for the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War", *Compilation of Essays Published by Seoul National University of Education*, Vol. 20, 1987; Yang T'aechin, "Documents pertaining to the espionage war between Russia and Japan during the Russo-Japanese War- Reports from the Korea-Manchurian border compiled by the Japanese Intelligence Office (*Rö· Il chönjaeng ch'öppoki-ilbonkun chöngbowönüi manhan kukkyöng chosa kirok*)", *Military History*, Issue 17. 1988; Kang Yöngsim, "Russia's acquisition of the timber concession rights and the deforesting activities conducted by Russian companies at the end of the Taehan Empire (*Kuhanmal Russia üi samrim ikwön hwikdükkwa samrim hoesaüi ch'aepöl silt'ae*)", *Ewha Historical Studies (Ewha sahak yön'gu)*, Vol. 17,18, 1988; Yi Paeyong, *The History of the Japanese Plunder of the Korean Mining Industry (Han'guk kündae kwangöp ch'imt'alsa yön'gu)*, Ilchokak, 1989; Kim Wonsoo, "The Russo-Japanese War and changes in international relations (*Rö· Il chönjaengkwa kukche kwankyeüi pyönhwa*)", *Susönsahoe*, Vol.4, Social Studies Department of Seoul National University of Education, 1989; Kim Wonsoo, "Analysis of Russia's New Course (*Russia üi sinnosöne kwanhan ilkoch'al*)", *Compilation of Essays Published by Seoul National University of Education*, Vol. 22, 1989

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- 11 Korean Historical Association, *The Japanese Aggression of Korea Before and After the Russo-Japanese War*; Ilchokak, 1985
- 12 Kajimura Hideki, “朝鮮からみた日露戦争 (The Russo-Japanese War as viewed from the standpoint of Chosön)”, *史潮 (Shicho)*, Vol. 7, Kobunkan, 1980
- 13 Choson Ilbo, February 24th, 1985 pp.6-7
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