

14. KOREA UNDER JAPANESE OCCUPATION

GRADE LEVEL: 9-12

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SUBJECT: Global Studies, World History

TIME REQUIRED: 3-4 class periods

OBJECTIVES:

1. Understand the influence of geography on Korean history and culture.
2. Develop an appreciation of literature as a medium of learning history.
3. Interpret attitudes and behaviors of cultures and peoples in conflict.
4. Compare historical experiences of three small nations under occupation (Korea 1910-45, eighteenth-century Poland, Biblical Israel).

MATERIALS REQUIRED:

- Copies of Richard Kim, *Lost Names: Scenes from a Korean Boyhood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998)
- Handout: "The Struggle for Independence and the Birth of Rival Regimes: Japanese Colonial Rule and U.S.-Soviet Occupation (1910-48)" by Young-Ick Lew
- Historical maps and brief background of (a) Korea 1910-45; (b) partition of eighteenth-century Poland; (c) Middle East (Biblical and/or Roman period)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

In the context of a year-long world history course, by late spring students will have previous knowledge of both Middle Eastern and Central European history. As they learn of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Korea could serve as a case study for issues of nationalism, imperialism, conflict, and racism. A constant theme in history is the suffering that people of small, militarily weak nations face because of their location among regional superpowers, thereby making them targets of aggression, repression, and occupation. Eighteenth-century Poland, situated on a broad, flat plain between Russia and the German-speaking states, and Biblical Israel, caught in the narrow coastal plain between Egypt and Assyria, have many elements in common with Korea, with its position between Japan, China, and Russia. In all three cases, occupiers attempted to subjugate captive peoples through indoctrination, intimidation, physical atrocities, and cultural repression. In each instance, these attempts were countered with resistance to the loss of cultural, religious, national, and personal identity.

PROCEDURE:

Have students read Kim's autobiographical novel *Lost Names* over a one-week period.

Class period 1

Divide class into four groups, which should remain intact throughout the duration of the lesson, and have all groups analyze the following themes in the novel:

- a. Why does the author fictionalize the account of his life?
- b. How does the fourteen-year-old boy perceive the occupation?
- c. How does each student in the class think he or she would have resisted, if at all?
- d. How do the students' responses compare to the boy's coping mechanism ("You can get used to anything")?
- e. Compare the flat, placid tones of the Korean characters with similar language used by American slaves or by

colonial subjects of European imperialists. Describe the tones, emotions, and motivations behind the words.
f. Have each group report their findings and follow with a class discussion.

Class period 2

Handout and have the groups read *The Struggle for Independence and the Birth of Rival Regimes: Japanese Colonial Rule and U.S.-Soviet Occupation (1910-48)*. Then have them analyze the following geopolitical issues of the Korean occupation:

- a. Why did Japan want to occupy and colonize Korea? What were the motivating issues in the early twentieth century for the Japanese? What had occurred in the East Asia region fifty years previous to the Japanese occupation of Korea?
- b. What were Korea's historical experiences in its relationships with China, Japan, and Russia?
- c. What stereotypes did the Japanese have of Koreans and vice versa?
- d. What specific methods did the Japanese use in attempting to impose their culture on the Korean people?
- e. What role did the Christian missionaries play in the novel?
- f. What is the significance of the title *Lost Names*?

Class period 3

Have the groups compare the three case studies (Korea 1910-45, eighteenth-century Poland, and the Middle East during Biblical and/or Roman periods):

- a. Distribute appropriate historical maps to each student.
- b. What geographical similarities and differences existed in each situation?
- c. What were the political, economic, and military motives in each case? Note any similarities.
- d. What specific attempts were made by each occupying power to alter or to modify the culture of their victims?
- e. In each case, compare the resistance and ultimate success of each group to endure, survive, and finally thrive after the occupation.

Class period 4

1. Have the class discuss and react to the boy's statement about the Japanese occupiers, "It must be terrible to be an occupier, to be hated, to be sensitive to every slight or insult."
2. Have each student assume any character in the novel in order to write a two- to three-page letter to his or her American cousin describing the occupation.

EVALUATION:

Students will be evaluated on an ongoing basis. Grading will be determined by students' cooperation, attitude, and participation, and by the mechanics and organization of the written assignments.

Handout
THE STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE AND THE BIRTH OF RIVAL REGIMES:
JAPANESE COLONIAL RULE AND U.S.-SOVIET OCCUPATION (1910-48)
by Young-Ick Lew

In 1905, in the wake of the Russo-Japanese War, the Japanese government unilaterally declared that Korea would henceforth be a Japanese protectorate. In August 1910, this status was altered, and Korea became a formal colony of the Japanese empire. This event was the first time in Korea's long history that the entire country and its people were subjugated under alien rule. What made this situation even more galling was the fact that historically the Korean people had always considered themselves Japan's cultural mentors.

The untimely Japanese occupation stymied Korea's modernization process just as the country was taking steps to implement self-initiated reforms. Some historians who condone Japanese policy toward Korea claim that considerable progress was made in Korea's economic and educational systems during the colonial period. They argue that the Japanese occupation was in the long run beneficial to the modernization of Korea. Although it cannot be denied that there was some degree of economic progress between 1910 and 1945, the main beneficiaries were the Japanese and a handful of Korean collaborators. The majority of the Korean populace was reduced to a state of impoverishment and illiteracy.

Japan ruled Korea through the office of a governor-general, who was usually a military man from the Japanese army or navy. During the first stage of the occupation (1910-19), the Koreans were controlled by a draconian gendarmerie-police system, which deprived them of many basic civil freedoms. The stringent social controls finally produced a massive, nation-wide demonstration on March 1, 1919, referred to as the March First Movement. It compelled the Japanese to loosen their constricting grip on the Korean populace. During the second phase of colonial rule (1919-32), the governor-general permitted the Korean people a degree of freedom of expression and assembly. In the early 1920s, for example, three Korean newspapers were published in the vernacular, and in 1927, a Korean political party composed of both rightist and leftist nationalists, the Sin'ganhoe (New Korea Society), was established. Because of the relatively tolerant political climate, even the socialists were able to get away with forming a clandestine Korean Communist Party in Seoul in 1925. It was also during this period that some modern colleges, including the Japanese-sponsored Keijo [Seoul] Imperial University and two private Korean colleges were organized with public or private funding.

The third phase of Japanese rule (1932-45) saw a return of draconian rule to Korea as the Japanese ruthlessly exploited Korean manpower and resources to support their war efforts in Manchuria (after 1932), mainland China (after 1937), and the Pacific (after 1941). The Korean people were forced to stop using their own language, to adopt Japanese names, and to worship at Shinto shrines. In the end, however, such ruthless measures served only to further incense the Korean population and to fuel nationalist fervor.

The Japanese occupation period was marked by Korea's refusal to accept its protectorate status and annexation. The massive March First Movement inspired people from all rungs of society to fight for independence; its leadership was heterogeneous and consisted of members from Ch'ôndogyo (formerly Tonghak), Protestant, and Buddhist organizations. The size and intensity of the movement stunned the Japanese who had assumed that their brutal policies would eventually break the backbone of the Korean national spirit, not strengthen it. Although the movement subsided after 1919, Korean resistance at home continued in many forms: student demonstrations, labor strikes, tenancy disputes, and boycotts against Japanese goods. Despite renewed Japanese efforts to squelch political resistance, Korean nationalists and communists continued to agitate against the Japanese in scattered movements throughout the country. In August 1944, for example, a clandestine political coalition,

the Korean Independence League, was formed under the leadership of Yô Un-hyông, a leftist nationalist. It was this league that later formed the Committee for the Preparation of Korean Independence (CPKI), the interim government that was established in Seoul immediately after the Japanese surrender in August 1945.

Korean expatriates in Shanghai, China, organized the Korean Provisional Government (KPG) in the wake of the March First Movement with Dr. Syngman Rhee as president. The KPG was the center of nationalist rightist activity, and it received financial support from Chiang Kai-shek's (Jiang Jieshi's) Nationalist Government in China as well as from Korean emigrant communities in the United States and Russia. It functioned from the 1930s until Korea's liberation in 1945 under the leadership of Chairman Kim Ku. When Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941, the KPG tried to gain formal Allied recognition of its legitimacy. Its representatives in Washington, D.C., including Syngman Rhee, lobbied the U.S. government. The KPG also enthusiastically supported the U.S. Army Office of Strategic Services in north China. Unfortunately, all this effort proved futile, and the government-in-exile was largely ignored by world powers until the end of World War II.

The communist Yen'an Faction was another expatriate Korean group in China, which had fought the Japanese with Mao Zedong's Red Army in northwestern China. This group shaped the Korean Independence League and the Korean Volunteer Army in 1941 under the leadership of Kim Tu-bong and Mu Chông. Like the KPG, it also held as its ultimate objective the restoration of Korean independence. There was also another group of Koreans in China, identified in history as the Kapsan Faction or the Partisan Faction. This group conducted guerrilla attacks against the Japanese Kwantung Army in southwestern Manchuria after 1932, and the group's activities were part of the Northeast Anti-Japanese Allied Forces organized by the Chinese Communist Party. One of its leaders was Kim Sông-ju, later known as Kim Il-sung. Kim's guerrilla unit, which numbered about 300 at most, was composed mainly of Korean residents of Jiando (Kando in Korean) in southeastern Manchuria. In the early spring of 1941, it sought refuge from the Kwantung Army attacks in Vladivostok in the Russian Maritime Province. There, Kim and his band were incorporated into the Eighty-Eighth Regiment, a special task force of the Far Eastern Command of the Soviet Army. They received special training at the Okeanskaya Field School in Vladivostok and later at other similar institutions in Khabarovsk while awaiting the end of World War II.

When the war ended with the Japanese surrender on August 15, 1945, the Korean people received the news of their liberation with both jubilation and dismay: they were overjoyed that they were freed from the Japanese yoke but dismayed because their country was to be divided along the thirty-eighth parallel into two military occupation zones. The thirty-eighth parallel decision was masterminded by U.S. policy makers in Washington, D.C., throughout the nights of August 10 and 11 as the best means of preventing the Russians from occupying the entire peninsula of Korea (a likelihood considering the fact that the Soviets had declared war on Japan on August 8, one day after the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima).

President Harry S. Truman secured Marshal Joseph Stalin's promise to honor the thirty-eighth parallel on August 16 without ever having consulted a Korean. Apparently, neither of these Allied leaders fathomed that their rash decision would result in the permanent division of the country, which had been a unified political entity since 668, or that it would pave the way for a devastating war within five years. Below the thirty-eighth parallel, South Korea was occupied by the United States armed forces in September, a month after the Soviet military had begun to occupy the North. The U.S. occupation forces organized a military government, the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK), in Seoul and ruled South Korea for three years with the support of the Korean Democratic Party, a conservative party comprised of landlords and the bourgeoisie. The USAMGIK refused to recognize the Korean People's Republic, an indigenous Korean government that had been hastily formed on September 6 by leftist nationalists and communists to replace the CPKI, which had been under the leadership of Yô Un-hyông. Consistent with the virulent distrust of communism, which characterized U.S. foreign

policy at the time, the USAMGIK outlawed the Korean Communist Party, which had emerged under the leadership of Pak Hôn-yông, a veteran communist agitator of the so-called Domestic Faction. It also refused to recognize the KPG, and its leaders were allowed to return to Korea as private citizens, not as government officials. (Kim Ku and his group returned to Korea in November 1945, three months after the liberation.)

In the Cairo Declaration, issued on December 1, 1943 by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, the three Allied leaders, in anticipation of Japan's defeat, promised to grant independence to the Korean people "in due course." Marshal Stalin showed his support of this declaration in July 1945 when he signed the Potsdam Declaration. Although the world powers professed to give priority to Korean independence, it was never clear just how Korean autonomy was to be reinstated, as the phrase "in due course" connoted. During World War II, American leaders had entertained the idea of placing Korea under a joint trusteeship of four powers, the United States, the USSR, China, and Great Britain, for an unspecified period of time before granting Korea full-fledged independence. It was this idea that ultimately became the basis of the Moscow Agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union. Finalized in December 1945, four and a half months after the end of World War II, the Moscow Agreement clarified the procedure by which the Korean transition to autonomy would be conducted. The initial stage was entrusted to a U.S.-Soviet Joint Commission, which was to meet in Seoul to consult with Korean political leaders. The Joint Commission's mandate was to organize a provisional Korean democratic government.

All Koreans, with the exception of communists under Soviet influence, opposed the trusteeship plan as it was seen as a new type of colonialism. The Korean nationalists demanded immediate independence and engaged in various campaigns to frustrate it. Unperturbed, the U.S.-Soviet Joint Commission met in Seoul in the spring of 1946 and again in May 1947. It failed to agree on a feasible model for a unified Korean government because the U.S. and Soviet delegations could not agree on which Korean political group should be consulted in creating a new Korean government. In retrospect, it seems clear that the intensifying distrust in the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union made a negotiation of a bilateral agreement in Seoul unlikely. Finally, unable to break the impasse in the Korea situation through the Joint Commission, the United States opted to refer the issue to the United Nations. This action was taken in September 1947, forsaking its trusteeship plan in total.

The General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a resolution in November 1947 calling for the establishment of a united Korean government through a general election that the UN would supervise. It organized a nine-nation commission, the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK), and authorized it to take necessary measures to hold a nationwide election in Korea. The Soviet Union, which had vetoed the UN resolution, refused to cooperate with the UNTCOK's activities on the peninsula. UNTCOK nevertheless recommended that the proposed election be held in the areas where it was feasible, that is, only in the southern half of Korea. The Interim Committee (Little Assembly) of the UN General Assembly approved this recommendation in February 1948, and the proposed general election was eventually held in South Korea in May 1948. A Korean National Assembly thus formed and adopted the constitution in July, and elected Syngman Rhee as the first president of the Republic of Korea (ROK). President Rhee proclaimed the birth of the ROK on August 15, 1948. The UN recognized the ROK on December 12, 1948 as "a lawful government having effective control and jurisdiction over the part of Korea where the [UN] Temporary Commission was able to observe and consult." The United States recognized the ROK on January 1, 1949, and withdrew its troops from the peninsula by late June of that year.

SOURCE:

Lew, Young-Ick. "The Struggle for Independence and the Birth of Rival Regimes: Japanese Colonial Rule and U.S.-Soviet Occupation (1910-48)," in *Brief History of Korea: A Bird's Eye View* . New York: Korea Society, 2000, pg. 33-41.