

# 33. JAPANESE COLONIALISM IN KOREA 1910-1945: A DOCUMENT-BASED ESSAY EXERCISE

**GRADE LEVEL:** 10-12

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**SUBJECT:** World History II/ A.P World History

**TIME REQUIRED:** 1–2 class periods

## **OBJECTIVES:**

1. Examine the effects of Japanese colonialism in Korea.
2. Use evidence to make plausible arguments; use documents to analyze point of view, context, and bias; and understand and interpret information.
3. Formulate and support an essay from documentary evidence.

## **MATERIALS REQUIRED:**

- Handout 1: The Japanese Occupation of Korea 1910–1945
- Handout 2: Documents on Japanese Colonial Period in Korea
- Scoring Rubric—Reading and Writing for Critical Analysis

## **BACKGROUND:**

The purpose of this activity is to introduce students to the effects of Japanese colonialism in Korea through the analysis of primary source documents. Little is mentioned in textbooks to cover this topic other than the dates of annexation and the date of liberation. This is also good material for the students to compare with Western imperialism. It is appropriate for high school and a good activity for the new Advanced Placement World History course.

## **PROCEDURE:**

1. Give background lecture on Japanese colonialism in Korea using Handout 1 (from *Korea Lessons for High School Social Studies Teachers* (New York: Korea Society, 1999 ).
2. Distribute Handout 2, which contains primary source documents, and have students answer the questions in Part A.
3. Ask students to complete Part B by using the evidence in Part A to draw conclusions and then to write an essay.

## **EVALUATION:**

Students will be assessed on the depth of understanding of their essay, using the criteria in the scoring rubric.

## Handout 1

### THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION OF KOREA 1910-1945

In the late nineteenth century, there was a general race for colonies among the major imperial powers as each nation tried to carve out spheres of influence for trade and pursued colonial ambitions. Korea was caught in the conflict among China, Russia, and Japan as each sought to make it a colony. Other powers, like Britain, France, and the United States also were involved. Korea, which was just emerging from its self-imposed isolation, faced the rival ambitions of these countries.

In the past, when Korea was faced with danger, it had chosen to be the "younger brother" of China. But by the late nineteenth century, China had been buffeted by western powers, particularly by Britain and Russia, and it faced a major threat in the growing power of a rapidly industrializing Japan. Japan created a modern army and navy and viewed Korea and Manchuria as areas for industrial and agricultural expansion. The Korean government, under the Choson Dynasty, moved more slowly toward reform and still looked to China for protection. This protection, however, looked less promising after China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese War (1895). Japan further established its influence over Korea when it triumphed in the Russo-Japanese War (1905). Western powers, like the United States and Britain, did little to interfere with Japan's efforts to establish its sphere of influence in Korea. The Koreans, however, resisted attempts to limit their independence.

Through a series of maneuvers, which included the assassination of members of the Korean royal family, the Japanese gained influence in Korea. In 1910, Japan officially took control of Korea and renamed it Chosen. Japanese occupation of Korea lasted until 1945 when the Japanese were defeated in World War II. Following the war, Korea was divided by Western powers. Russia occupied Korea north of the thirty-eighth parallel, and the United States occupied Korea south of the thirty-eighth parallel.

Under Japanese rule from 1910 to 1945, Koreans struggled to maintain their culture. The Japanese banned the teaching of the Korean language and history and burned many historical documents. Koreans were forced to take Japanese names and to speak and teach in the Japanese language. Many Korean farmers were forced off their lands while others had to fulfill grain quotas for Japan's needs. Buildings were taken over for Japanese military and government purposes, and Korean businesses were handed over to Japanese officials.

The Japanese occupation of Korea went through several phases, sometimes relatively benign but often very oppressive. Korean nationalists were divided and could not maintain a united policy of opposition. Some groups wanted close ties to the West and called for reforms based on western ideas. Other groups sought a return to Confucian values and Korean traditions. Still others, influenced by the 1917 Russian Revolution, preferred a Korea founded on Marxist (communist) ideals. These divisions are still present in Korea today, but they were especially difficult to reconcile during the Japanese occupation.

Early in the occupation, it seemed possible that Korean nationalists might unite to oust Japan. On March 1, 1919, the independence movement erupted as students in Seoul protested against Japanese rule, and a declaration of independence was read. Support for the movement was widespread, but two factors were especially critical. One was the death of the last Korean king and rumors that he too, had been assassinated by the Japanese. His funeral, and Japanese restrictions on mourning by Koreans, set the stage for the uprising.

Another significant factor for the March 1 movement was the attempt by Koreans to appeal to the world community. The Treaty of Versailles had been recently negotiated to end World War I. During the negotiations,

President Woodrow Wilson of the United States had asserted that self-determination should underpin the new world peace and had called for a League of Nations. These ideas appealed to Koreans who claimed the right to govern themselves as a sovereign nation. The Japanese government took a different view and harshly put down the uprising. Thousands of people who had demonstrated or were thought to be sympathetic to the independence movement were arrested and imprisoned. Many Koreans died from beatings, torture, and poor prison conditions. Others went into exile and continued to work for Korean independence in Manchuria, Shanghai, or the United States.

In the 1920s the Japanese government responded to criticism of its harsh rule in Korea by easing some of its restrictive policies. They allowed the publication of some books and magazines in Korean and began to invest in education, roads, and government buildings. The Japanese claimed that they were modernizing Korea and providing opportunities for trade. But by the 1930s, the Japanese government itself was increasingly under the control of the military. Assassination of moderate officials, both in Korea and Japan, removed those who advocated lenient measures in Korea. As Japan began its conquest of Manchuria and China, it increasingly perceived Korean independence as a threat. Koreans, the government proclaimed, were part of the Japanese empire, so their language, religion, and culture had to be the same as those of the Japanese.

During World War II, Japan employed Koreans in its military efforts. Koreans were drafted into the Japanese army or had to work under dangerous, slavish conditions. The Japanese military kidnapped thousands of Korean girls and women and forced them to serve as comfort women who were raped by Japanese soldiers. Japan still refuses to accept responsibility for this policy, creating a bitter issue between Korea and Japan.

After the defeat of Japan in 1945, Korea recovered its independence. But the long and painful history that Korea and Japan share remains a cause of contention to this day. Many issues left over from the colonial era have not been resolved nor have the feelings of Koreans been healed. The legacy of this era still affects how these two major countries view their roles in the Pacific Rim.

## Handout 2

### DOCUMENTS ON JAPANESE COLONIAL PERIOD IN KOREA

This task is based on the thirteen accompanying documents. Some of these documents have been edited for the purpose of this task, which is designed to test your ability to work with historical documents. As you analyze the documents, take into account both the source of each document and the author's point of view.

**Directions:** Read the documents in Part A and answer the questions after each document. Then read the directions for Part B and write your essay.

**Historical Context:** The Japanese occupation of Korea from 1910 to 1945 went through several phases, some relatively benign, others often very oppressive. Many political, social, and economic changes occurred in Korea during this period.

**Task:** Using information from the documents and your knowledge of global history, write an essay in which you:

- Compare and contrast the effects of Japanese colonial rule in Korea, and
- Describe political, economic, and social change that occurred during this period.

#### PART A

##### SHORT ANSWER

**Directions:** Analyze the documents and answer the questions that follow each document in the space provided.

##### Document 1

##### **Protocol Signed Between Korea and Japan, February 23, 1904**

(Source: Andrew Nahm, *Korea: Tradition and Transformation*)

Article 1. For the purpose of maintaining a permanent and solid friendship between Korea and Japan and firmly establishing peace in the Far East, the Imperial Government of Korea shall place full confidence in the Imperial Government of Japan and adopt the advice of the latter in regard to improvements in administration.

Article 2. The Imperial Government of Japan shall in spirit of firm friendship ensure the safety and repose of the Imperial House of Korea.

Article 3. The Imperial Government of Japan definitively guarantees the independence and territorial integrity of the Korean Empire....

1. What is the point of view of the Japanese from this document?

##### Document 2

##### **Treaty of Annexation, August 22, 1910**

##### **The Proclamation**

(Source: Andrew Nahm, *Korea: Tradition and Transformation*)

Notwithstanding the earnest and laborious work of reforms in the administration of Korea in which the Governments of Japan and Korea have been engaged for more than four years since the conclusion of the Agreement of 1905, the existing system of government in that country has not proved entirely equal to the

duty of preserving public order and tranquility; and in addition, the spirit of suspicion and misgiving dominate the whole peninsula.

In order to maintain peace and stability in Korea, to promote the prosperity and welfare of the Korean people, and at the same time to ensure the safety and repose of foreign residents, it has been made abundantly clear that fundamental changes in the actual regime of government are absolutely essential. The Government of Japan and Korea, being convinced of the urgent necessity of introducing reforms responsive to the requirements of the situation and of furnishing sufficient guarantee for the future, have with the approval of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan and His Majesty the Emperor of Korea, concluded, through their respective plenipotentiaries, a treaty providing for complete annexation of Korea to the Empire of Japan...

2. How has the view point of the Japanese changed from the previous document?

### **Document 3**

#### **Declaration of Independence, March 1, 1919**

(Source: Andrew Nahm, *Korea: Tradition and Transformation*)

We hereby proclaim the independence of Korea and the liberty of the Korean people. We announce this to the nations of the world in order to manifest the principle of the equality of man, and we pass it onto our posterity in order to preserve forever our people's just rights to self-preservation. ...

For the first time in the history of several thousands of years, our people for the past ten years have suffered, under alien domination, tyranny and oppression, which are the legacies of antiquity. How much of our right to life has been plundered? How much of our spiritual progress has been barred? How much of our honor and dignity have been violated? And how much of our opportunity to contribute to the cultural progress of the world without new visions and creativity has been lost?

If we are to make known to the world our past grievances, to deliver ourselves from our past sufferings, to remove future threats, and advance our national dignity and nobility, to cultivate the character of individual citizens, to prevent our children from an inheritance of shame, to assure a full and happy life for our posterity, our first urgent task is to secure the independence of the people...

3. What has happened to the Koreans under Japanese rule? What do they want?

### **Document 4**

#### **The Women's Movement and Politics**

(Source: Yung Chung Kim, *Women of Korea: A History from Ancient Times to 1945*, pp. 259–61)

The Christian gospels served in awakening nationalism which developed into a resistance movement against Japanese colonialization. After the Ulsa Treaty (1905) Ewha students stopped studying at 3 p.m. every day to pray for national independence. Some of them organized an underground society called Patriotic Women's League. ...They made a plan to send a woman representative to the Peace Conference to be held in Paris in January 1919 to disclose the inhuman oppression of the Japanese colonial rule and to appeal to the whole world for Korea's independence. But because of the imprisonment of Pak In Dok and Sin Chul-lyo their move ended in failure.

It was not a coincidence that the Ewha students took an active part in the March First Movement in 1919. They served as a forward guard standing at the very front of the procession. Many were wounded or killed. On March 19, Hwang Ae-dok and many others were arrested and imprisoned for three years.

Among the student participants the most notable, perhaps, was Yu Kwan-sun (1904-20) who was a secondary school student at Ewha Haktang at the time...When the governor-general issued orders to close all

schools because of the student unrest, Yu returned to her hometown where she, her brother, and several friends decided to hold a rally similar to the one held in Pagoda Park. They secretly made contact with the people in the surrounding area and arranged to have the gathering on the first of March by the lunar calendar. On that day Yu addressed the crowd assembled in the marketplace. They waved the national flag and shouted for national independence. The incident at once brought in the Japanese military police who shot down many people. Yu Kwan-sun's parents were among the first to be killed. Yu was arrested and after a long period of torture and suffering she died in 1920 at the age of sixteen. (Her unflinching resolve, even in the face of death, has often earned her the title of Korean Joan of Arc.)

4. What strategies did the Koreans use to combat the Japanese oppression?

#### **Document 5**

##### **Statement by National Council of Korea, April 22, 1919**

(Source: F.A. McKenzie, *Korea's Fight for Freedom*, p. 305)

We, the people of Korea, represented by thirty-three men, including Son Pyeng Heui, have already made the Declaration of Independence of Korea, founded on the principle of righteousness and humanity....we have organized the Korean National Council and hereby proclaim it to the world.

We, the people of Korea, have a history of over forty-two centuries as a self-governing and separate state, and of special creative civilization and are a peace-loving race...

The world knows that Japan has violated the sworn treaties of the past and is robbing us of the right of existence...This council demands with all earnestness that the government of Japan abandon as early as possible the inhuman policy of aggression and firmly safeguard the tripod relationship of the Far East and further duly warn the people of Japan.

Can it be that the conscience of mankind will calmly witness the cruel atrocities visited upon us by the barbarous military power of Japan for our actions in behalf of the rights of life founded upon civilization?...If Japan does not repent and mend her ways for herself our race will be obliged to take the final action, to the limit of the last man and the last minute which will secure the complete independence of Korea...With our utmost devotion and best labor we demand before the world our national independence and racial autonomy.

5. What further strategies have the Koreans organized?

#### **Document 6**

##### **Education Policy**

(Source: Andrew Nahm, *Korea: Tradition and Transformation*, p. 250)

The colonial government issued an education ordinance in August 1911 which stated that the purpose of education in Korea was to produce "loyal and obedient" and useful subjects of the Japanese emperor. It adopted a system of four-year primary education, a four-year secondary school program for boys, and a three-year secondary curriculum for girls. However, only a handful of schools were established during this time while a large number of private schools were closed. The ordinance made the study of the Japanese language compulsory at all approved schools and banned instruction in Korean history and geography. All textbooks which had been previously used in Korean schools were confiscated and only those approved by the government were allowed.

6. What changes did the Japanese make in the Korean education system?

## Document 7

### Korean Student Bulletin, December 1928

(Source: Andrew Nahm, *Korea: Tradition and Transformation*, p. 253)

...every position of possible income here is occupied by the Japanese. Even the running of a street car is done mostly by the Japanese...In turn, masses of able Koreans are out of work. Even many of the well-educated Koreans just returning from abroad are lingering around, simply because there is no place to work...All this economic and political pressure has led the people to a state of unrest and anarchy.. Education means nothing here. The young people are going to school because they have nothing else to do in the village or the city...Their graduation from a school in itself brings them nothing... (Chances for Koreans who graduated from unapproved private high schools to higher educational institutions were very poor throughout the colonial period. Most graduates of private colleges became teachers in private schools.)

7. How did the Japanese colonial period increase discontent in social, economic, and educational issues?

## Document 8

### Poem by Ch'oe Nam-son

(Source: Andrew Nahm, *Korea: Tradition and Transformation*, p. 218)

We have nothing  
Neither sword nor pistol,  
But we do not fear.  
Even with an iron rod  
They cannot prevail.  
We shoulder righteousness  
And walk the path without fear.

We have nothing to call our own.  
Neither dagger nor [gun] powder  
But we do not fear.  
Even with the power of the crown  
They cannot prevail.  
Righteousness is the spade.  
With which we maintain the path.

We have nothing to hold in our hands,  
Neither stone nor club,  
But we do not fear,  
Even with the all the wealth of the world,  
They cannot prevail.  
Righteousness is the sword  
With which we watch over the path.

8. Describe the mood of the poem.

## Document 9

### Education Ordinance, March 4, 1938

(Source: Andrew Nahm, *Korea: Tradition and Transformation*, p. 255)

In the name of assimilation, Korean language instruction was first simply discouraged while the movement for the use of Japanese was stepped up; in 1938 it was abolished in all public schools. By both covert and overt means the use of the Japanese language was forced upon the Koreans. Failure to speak Japanese denied the Koreans many rights and privileges, including that of securing ration cards and public certification.

After 1935, compulsory attendance at Shinto ceremonies created numerous problems for Korean Christians. An increasing number of ministers and members of Christian churches were imprisoned because of their refusal to participate in the Shinto rituals, and a growing number of Korean private schools and social and cultural organizations were closed.

On March 4, 1938, another new educational ordinance was issued...This ordinance brought about the following changes: the names of Korean primary and secondary schools were made identical to those in Japan; schools for Koreans and Japanese were put under unified regulations; and separate normal schools for Koreans and Japanese were replaced by integrated normal schools...

9. Summarize the cultural and social changes brought about by these ordinances.

## Document 10

### Pledge of the Imperial Subjects, October 1937

(Source: Andrew Nahm, *Korea: Tradition and Transformation*, p. 255)

The memorization of these pledges was required of all Koreans.

#### Type A

1. We are the subjects of the great empire of Japan.
2. We shall serve the Emperor with united hearts.
3. We shall endure hardships and train ourselves to become good and strong subjects.

#### Type B

1. We the Imperial subjects shall serve the nation loyally and faithfully.
2. We the Imperial subjects shall, through trust and love, cooperate to strengthen our unity.
3. We the Imperial subjects will endure hardships and train ourselves to promote the Imperial way.

10. Analyze the impact of reciting this pledge upon the Korean people.

## Document 11

### Seizures, Suspensions and Closures during the Japanese Occupation

(Source: *Chosun Ibo* booklet, pp. 18-19)

Soon after the start of World War II the *Chosun Ibo* refused to comply with "voluntary closures" as suggested by the Japanese, who had sought to wipe out Korean language newspapers. Finally on August 10, 1940, the *Chosun Ibo* met with the fate of forced closure and published its last edition No. 6923. Four short lines from a regular *Chosun Ibo* column called Palmyunbong described the grave atmosphere of that fateful day. They allude to the despair of undergoing long hardship without fulfilling one's destiny and bid farewell to readers.

"Enduring stormy weather, the *Chosun Ibo* has voiced my opinion each day for twenty springs and twenty



autumns. My mission is over today. I am going, going. May all you former and future readers enjoy the best of health and luck."

11. What aspect of life has been violated here?

### **Document 12**

(Source: F. A. McKenzie, *Korea's Fight for Freedom*, p. 199)

Some Koreans in China sent a petition to the American Minister in Peking that dealt with some moral aspects of the Japanese rule of Korea. They said:

"The Japanese have encouraged immorality by removing Korean marriage restrictions and allowing marriages without formality and without regard for age. There have been marriages at as early an age as twelve. Since the annexation there have been 80,000 divorce cases in Korea. The Japanese encourage, as a source of revenue, the sale of Korean prostitutes in Chinese cities. Many of these prostitutes are only fourteen and fifteen years old. It is part of the Japanese policy of race extermination by which they hope to destroy all Koreans...

"The Japanese Government has established a bureau for the sale of opium, and under the pretext that opium was to be used for medicinal purposes has caused Koreans and Formosans to engage in poppy cultivation. The opium is secretly shipped into China. Because of the Japanese encouragement of this traffic, many Koreans have become users of the drug."

12. What social aspects are covered in this document?

### **Document 13**

#### **National Labor Mobilization Ordinance 1939**

(Source: Andrew Nahm, *Korea: Traditions and Transformation*, p. 250)

The National Labor Mobilization Ordinance depleted the labor force from rural areas and light industries in order to meet the increasing demands for labor by newly established heavy war industries. Those who hid were hunted out and forcibly shipped from villages and town to various industrial sites. ...

In addition many Korean workers were mobilized to meet the labor shortage in Japan. From 1939 to 1945, close to one million Korean youths were shipped to mines and factories in Japan. As a result, the Korean population in Japan jumped from 690,502 in 1939 to 2, 400,000 at the end of the colonial period. Moreover, tens of thousands of young Korean women were sent to war fronts to provide sexual services to Japanese troops.

When Korea's twenty-five million people were liberated from Japan, Korea was an exhausted land. Its natural resources and manpower had been ruthlessly exploited, and its energies had been sapped for Japan's vain dream of dominating all of Asia.

13. What caused the decline of Korean population?

### **Sources for Parts A and B:**

Eckert, Carter. *Korea: Old and New*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990.

Kim, Yung Chung. *Women of Korea: A History from Ancient Times to 1945*. Seoul: Ewha Womans University Press, 1976.

McKenzie, F.A. *Korea's Fight for Freedom*, Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1969

Nahm, Andrew, *Korea: Traditions and Transformation*, Seoul: Hollym, 1996.

## **PART B**

### **ESSAY**

#### **Directions:**

1. Write a well-organized essay that includes an introduction, several paragraphs, and a conclusion.
2. Use evidence from the documents to support your response.
3. Do not simply repeat the contents of the documents.
4. Include specific related outside information.

#### **Historical Context:**

Korea was occupied by Korea from 1910 to 1945. Many political, social, and economic changes occurred in Korea during this period.

**Task:** Using information from the documents and your knowledge of Global History, write an essay in which you:

1. Discuss political, economic, and social changes that occurred during this period.
2. Compare and contrast the impact of these changes on the Korean people.

