

COLONIAL STATE AND SOCIETY

Pacification and the Mechanisms of Power

WHILE THE CHOSŎN STATE is usually described as bureaucratic, centralized, and authoritarian, its powers had been limited in a number of ways, and its reach into local affairs had been always circumscribed. This was not the case with the Government General of Korea (GGK) as the new colonial state came to be known. The GGK penetrated Korean society more thoroughly than had any previous traditional government, and by the end of their rule the Japanese had left their mark everywhere. They used their experience building the Meiji state and twentieth-century technology to advance their strategic, economic, and political goals with breathtaking single-mindedness and rigor. Not content with simple compliance, the colonial state not only dominated Korea following the usual paternalistic logic of colonialists, but they also believed they could actually “assimilate” Koreans culturally. Indeed, the Japanese attempts to efface Korean culture, even its language, exacerbated colonial exploitation, repression, and racism. And the poignant memory of this experience continues to plague Japanese–Korean relations more than half a century after Liberation.

Japan was the only non-Western nation to assemble its own colonial empire. The geographical proximity of metropole and colony was also unique in the annals of modern colonial history, a feature it shared with only France and its North African colonies. This proximity encouraged settlement of large numbers of metropolitan émigrés and facilitated colonial migration into the metropole. By 1942 over 1.5 million Koreans were living and working in Japan, and the Japanese population of the colony was approaching 800,000, almost 3 percent of the total population (see Table 2.1). But unlike France and its colonies, Japan and Korea shared a racial and cultural affinity and a long, complex historical relationship. The relationship was analogous to that of England and Ireland where England’s domination of Ireland produced the bitter and seemingly intractable legacy of distrust apparent to this day. The Japanese colonialists mobilized archeology, ethnography, and historical studies to justify their rule in Korea as a matter of lifting up a wayward sibling culture and returning it to its proper course as part of the destiny of the Yamato race. This was all the more galling because Koreans had historically considered themselves culturally superior to their new colonial masters.

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Terauchi Masatake (1910–1918), protégé of the powerful Meiji elder statesman Yamagata Aritomo, became the first steward of the state-building process as governor general. His tenure exemplified the enormous power and prestige vested in this office. The home government appointed the governors general from amongst the highest ranks of the Japanese leadership. In all cases save one, Saitō Makoto (1919–1927, 1929–1931), who was a retired admiral, they were high-ranking generals in the Japanese army. Other appointments held by governors general included minister of war, commander-in-chief of the Kwantung Army, army chief-of-staff, and even prime minister. The Japanese prime minister appointed the governor general, and oversight of the office was placed variously in the Diet (budgetary issues), the Home Ministry, and the Ministry of Colonial Affairs. But throughout the period the governor general reported to the emperor directly, creating an ambiguity in the lines of authority that gave this office considerable autonomy. All of Japan’s other colonies—Taiwan, Karafuto (Sakhalin), the Pacific Islands (Nanyō), and the Kwantung Lease Territories (Kantōshū)—remained firmly under the thumb of the home government. This was no mere satrapy; he governed 25 million subjects, controlled enormous tax revenues, commanded Japanese military forces in Korea as well as the colonial gendarmerie, issued laws, and directed a bureaucracy that by 1945 employed 246,000 people.¹ This was a state of enormous size, particularly compared with other colonial regimes; France, for example, ruled Vietnam with a 2,920 bureaucrats and a small army of 11,000. The British famously ruled India

TABLE 2.1 POPULATION OF KOREA: 1900–1944

Year	Korean	Japanese	Japanese Population as % of Total	Seoul
1900	12,000,000*	15,829	0.1	190,000*
1910	14,766,000	171,543	1.3	197,000
1920	17,764,000	347,900	2.0	251,000
1930	20,438,000	501,900	2.5	677,000
1940	24,326,300	712,583	2.9	935,464
1944	25,133,352	752,830 (1942)	3.0	988,537

Sources: *Estimated; Korean population statistics prior to 1945 are based on Japanese Government General Yearbooks; Japanese residents in Korea taken from Japanese Resident General and Japanese Government General statistics used by Andrew Grajeda (1944) and Peter Druus (1995).

with several thousand civil servants, and the ratio of officials to population was much smaller than that of the French in Vietnam (Cummings, *Origins of the Korean War*, 1981). The governor general was not equal in rank to the prime minister, but the position was almost as prestigious and came with considerable autonomy of action.

The first task of the GGK after annexation was to pacify the colony. The colonial military police and Japanese army regulars worked until mid-1912 to subdue the remnants of righteous army resistance. Concurrently, the GGK gave stipends and titles in the Japanese peerage to 84 high Choson officials and *yangban* and pensioned off another 3,645 officials in the old Korean government (Henderson, 1968). The upper *yangban* were stripped of political power, but they were left with their lands intact and considerable residual social prestige. While the Japanese carried favor with the traditional elite, they began sweeping arrests using lists prepared earlier of “malcontent and rebellious Koreans” (*futei serjin*). The police arrested 700 people including the core leadership of the New People’s Association (including moderate reformers such as An Ch’angho and Yun Chi-ho) in connection with a blatantly fabricated plot to assassinate the governor general in 1911. Ultimately 105 were prosecuted (only 5 received prison sentences) in the first major political show trial in the colony. Cases of torture and abuse were common among the tens of thousands of arrests between 1910 and 1912, establishing a pattern of brutal policing that continued to the end of the colonial period.

With armed resistance at an end and virtually the entire leadership of Korean society either mollified, in jail, or under surveillance, the Japanese established the institutions of their rigid, highly intrusive administrative colonialism. They counted everything and created a myriad of regulations governing daily life from slaughtering a worn-out draft animal to the placement of a family grave; they established new land and family registers, health regulations, detailed sanitation procedures in the reorganized city administrations, fishery regulations, rules concerning water rights and irrigation ditches, standard operating procedures for periodic markets, and licenses and permission forms for just about everything else. The gendarmerie—swords dangling from the men’s uniforms as symbols of their authority—was given summary powers to enforce the regulations. This allowed the police to be both judge and jury, deciding punishments on the spot for minor infractions. Nothing could have prepared the Korean population for such an invasion into what had heretofore been matters of local and customary practice. In addition, the Japanese renamed geographic features of the peninsula and its cities and towns. For a generation after Liberation Western maps frequently still used the Japanese names.²

The GGK built upon a base of administrative law already promulgated during the Residency General to create what became in effect a dual system of jurisprudence. Unlike native Koreans, Japanese residents in Korea retained their rights as citizens under the Meiji Constitution as well as those granted by special laws in

the colony. This meant two sets of laws and punishments, one for Japanese residents, another for the Korean population. Perhaps the most obnoxious feature of this legal apartheid was the use of traditional punishments, such as whipping, for Koreans, while the practice was deemed too barbaric for Japanese citizens. One Japanese official fatuously explained the practice as “culturally sensitive,” asserting that Koreans would more readily accept their own “traditions” in this arena (Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism*, 1988, p. 60). To enforce the new legal and regulatory structure, the Japanese created an expanded judicial system, with all judges appointed by the governor general, except for high judges, who were appointed by the emperor. As with most middle and high ranks in the bureaucracy, the majority of judgeships were held by Japanese until the very end of the colonial period, when more Koreans were appointed to the higher courts.

The lion’s share of enforcement for all GGK regulations, laws, and special orders lay with the colonial police. The numbers and reach of the colonial police expanded rapidly in the first decade of Japanese rule. At this time the police were still a military police, this meant the entire Japanese army garrison (roughly 40,000 troops in 1911) was available for security work. Gradually, a centralized police system emerged as the GGK created civil police bureaus in all thirteen provinces and then extended the placement of stations, substations, and police boxes downward into the counties, the rural districts and urban wards, and then into urban neighborhoods. Between 1910 and 1920 the police were organized as a military police; after 1920 it became a civilian force, but it was still organized as a colony-wide structure. The police force grew rapidly from 6,222 in 1911, to 20,771 in 1922, and to roughly 60,000 in the 1940s (a ratio of 1 to 400 of the Korean population). If we add to this the small army of informers who worked for the High Police to covertly monitor political behavior, the numbers would be even more impressive. Over half of the police force were Koreans, and these people became the most reviled group of collaborators after Liberation. But for many Korean men without family connections, resources, or land, and with little education, careers in the colonial police became one avenue of mobility during the period.

The GGK extended its regulatory and legal penetration of Korean society by conducting, at enormous expense, a comprehensive cadastral survey of land ownership and use on the peninsula between 1910 and 1918. The survey was designed to establish a broad tax base and to rationalize ownership and title to all agricultural land (paddy and dry field), untilled upland, river floodplains, tidal basins, and forest land. It plotted, assessed, and fixed ownership for every piece of land on the peninsula. The Land Survey Ordinance required all landowners and tillers to register with the government documentary proof of any claims to ownership or other cultivation rights. The new land laws swept away centuries-old local practices, informal cultivation rights, seasonal claims on land of ambiguous provenance, and informal customs that had mitigated landlord-tenant relations in traditional Korea. Hereafter, land was to be governed by a strict and rational

system of title in order to fix tax obligations and to rationalize land transfers and sales. Postwar nationalist historians claim that the survey was no more than a vehicle for a massive expropriation of land—that thousands of peasants lost their land because they did not understand the new registration procedures, or because they filed claims improperly. Certainly, many did lose their land, but probably not in the massive numbers claimed. Other studies indicate that there was considerable continuity in landownership before and after 1910 (Grager, 1994). It was the colonial takeover itself that was the real land grab; the GGK assumed control of all Choson state agricultural, forest, and mountain lands as well as a large portion of the Royal Household's holdings. Large tracts of the agriculturally useful portion of these lands were sold to individual Japanese and Korean investors and private land companies such as the Fuji Land Company or the huge semigovernmental Oriental Development Company. When the land survey was completed in 1918, the government controlled 21.9 million acres or almost 40 percent of all farm and forest land in Korea.

While the survey expropriated land from peasants and placed what had been in effect common land under strict government control, the new rationalized land system was a boon to landowners and landlords of whatever ethnicity. While large Japanese land companies and individual investors did control enormous areas of the best paddy land, large and medium Korean landlords also increased their holdings during the period, and they made up the majority of the landlord class. Rent for paddy land customarily was paid as a percentage of the harvest, with tenants assuming the bulk of cultivation expenses. In bad years or at times of depressed rice prices landlords still received 40 to 50 percent of the harvest, but tenants might not have enough left to cover expenses, let alone enough rice for subsistence. Over time, population increases drove up rents, rice prices were increasingly tied to the volatile world market, and the world depression after 1930 drove rice prices down, further increasing peasant indebtedness. Exposure to the extractive effects of world capitalism and upward pressure on rents caused an alarming rise in landlessness in Korea during the 1930s. By the end of the colonial period, tenancy rates approached 80 percent in the densely populated and most productive rice-growing areas of the Cholla provinces in the southwest. And many peasants chose to leave the land altogether, ending up in the cities in search of jobs.

Land and the rents therefrom remained one of the safest investments in Korea during the colonial period. Over time, Korean landowners, Japanese investors, and the large land companies expanded their holdings, causing increased concentration of landownership in the hands of the few. Absentee landlords living in the growing cities worked through agents in the countryside, and they became a staple of satire and loathing. It is likely that the odious Master Yun, archetypal absentee landlord and protagonist of Ch'ae Mansik's serialized novel *Peace Under Heaven* (1930–1931), seemed to readers like many landlords, Korean or Japanese, when he

waxed eloquent in praise of the law and order brought to the countryside by the Japanese police; speaking to his captive servant audience at his palatial compound in Seoul, he notes with great satisfaction how he no longer has to consider the incessant demands of his tenants for relief, rent breaks, or gratuities depending on yearly conditions—he could live under his motto of “let everyone else go to hell” (Ch'ae Mansik, 1993, p. xx). The new land system with its advantages for owners encouraged quiet support for the GGK among the landlord class, but it set in motion the gradual rise in tenancy and rural immiseration that created the explosive class conflict that emerged in the era immediately following Liberation.

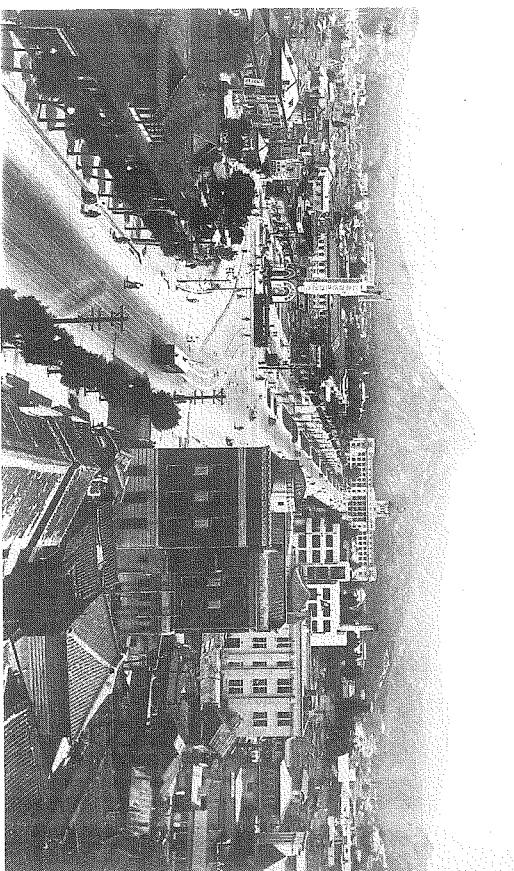
The GGK regulated finance and business activity through the Company Law of 1910 and its close control of the Bank of Choson and later the Choson Industrial Bank. The Bank of Choson became the central bank for the colony; it issued currency and provided capital for GGK projects (mostly agricultural development) and infrastructure development (railroad and port construction). Over time the Bank of Choson grew to assume great importance in the regional economy of Northeast Asia by providing loans for Japanese investment in Manchuria and north China. The Choson Industrial Bank, established in 1917, rivaled its sister bank in size and dominated capital inputs for the industrial development in Korea during the 1930s. The GGK's initial economic policy focused on “underdeveloping” Korea, that is, restricting investment to raw materials extraction and increasing rice production for the Japanese market. The Company Law required all businesses, including those of the Japanese, to be licensed by the GGK. In effect, the GGK stifled business development in Korea in the face of loud complaints from Japanese businessmen, not to mention its almost complete refusal to charter Korean corporations of any kind.

Between 1910 and 1920 the colonial state restricted cultural and political life in Korea. All privately run newspapers were closed down, and the presses of the largest pre-colonial paper, the *Korea Daily News*, were impressed to print an organ paper for the GGK of the same name. The GGK fine-tuned its system of publication permits and prepublication censorship begun during the Residency General with the 1907 Newspaper Law and 1909 Publication Law. All private organizations were abolished, and another permit system was created to regulate public assembly of any kind. Only religious organizations escaped the crackdown, and, as we shall see, Christian, Buddhist, and Ch'ondogyo (the modern church of the Tonghak religion) churches provided the only available organizational cover for a major political upheaval in 1919. National histories refer deservedly to the first decade of colonial rule as the “dark period” (*amhukki*), and with particular reference to any overt political expression, the term is apt. A limited number of publications did, however, see the light of day. Small and short-lived academic, literary, and religious publications survived the blackout. Perhaps most notably, Ch'oe Namson's magazine *Youth* (*Chi'ongch'ün* 1914–1918) continued his project

begun with Boys (*Soyyón*, 1908–1911) to pioneer new style vernacular prose and poetry as well as politicized “educational” features on national heroes in Western and Asian history.

Finally, this early period inaugurated a sustained building boom as the Japanese invested millions of yen in the bricks and mortar of colonial rule. Cumulatively the government buildings, shrines, railroads, motor roads, power and telephone lines, hydroelectric dams, barrages, and irrigation works transformed Korea’s visual geography and became potent symbols of Japan’s domination of the modern sector of society. In the 1920s a colonial architectural style emerged, an eclectic and grandiose style that might be described as beaux arts authoritarian, as the GGK raised imposing edifices for the new Seoul (renamed Keijō) City Administration Building, the Bank of Chōsen, and a new capitol. The capitol, completed in 1926, dominated the Seoul skyline and its placement directly in front of the south gate (Kwanghwamun) of the Kyōngbok palace was deliberately calculated to efface any symbolic residue of the ancient regime.³ The GGK built large shrines in Korea’s major cities as sites for extending centralized state Shinto into the colony. After 1937 these became sites for obligatory—and for Koreans despised—rituals promoting loyalty and devotion to the Japanese emperor. The shrines, principally among them the enormous Chōsen Jinkō on Namsan in the middle of Seoul, represented the most objectionable reminders of Japanese power, and of all the colonial-built structures, they were the first to be destroyed after Liberation.

Even more important to the GGK than buildings was the communications



Overview of Seoul looking north to the new Capitol Building in 1927. Source: The Norman Thorpe Collection.

infrastructure of the colony. Over the thirty-five years, from 1910 to 1945, the Japanese laid thousands of kilometers of railroad track, north-south lines that linked Korea’s southern ports to Seoul and Manchuria, and, on the bias, east-west lines that connected the mines and rice-producing areas in the interior to the newly built ports along the coasts. Viewed as a whole, the entire grid quickly conformed to the strategic and extractive logic of Japanese colonial policy. By the time the Korea Railroad Corporation was amalgamated with the huge Southern Manchurian Railway Corporation in the 1930s, Korea was the strategic and economic center of Japanese-dominated Northeast Asia. The railroad also altered the human geography of Korea. Towns and cities sprang up at important railroad junctions or at the new ports, drawing population and economic activity from the hinterland. Small villages such as Iri on the Honam plain, Taejōn in central Korea, Najin in the extreme northeast, and Ūju, now Sintūju, on the Yalu River and Chinese border grew topsy-turvy; all have become major centers in contemporary Korea. Telegraph and telephonic systems connected the colonial administrative centers and, ultimately, every police box in Korea to the center. In 1945 Korea possessed an impressive communications infrastructure—an unintended legacy of Japanese strategic, economic, and political control policies.

Cultural Control and the Ideology of Empire

The Japanese relied on coercion and tight control of public life in the first nine years of their rule, and the first decade of Japanese rule has become known as the period of Military Rule (*budan seiji*). The global repression of Korean society ultimately backfired, for it provoked major upheavals in 1919 that forced the GGK to modify its control policies in a series of reforms under the third governor general, Saitō Makoto, after 1920. These policy changes ushered in the so-called era of Cultural Rule (*bunka seiji*), with culture here referring to limited Korean cultural autonomy.

From the beginning of their colonial rule, the Japanese had intended that Korea would not be absorbed just politically by the empire but that it would also be culturally assimilated (*āōka*), to become one with Japan in all respects. At first glance this seems completely preposterous. How could the Japanese contemplate the deracination of twenty million Koreans and the effacement of a culture and historical memory thousands of years in the making? Such questions seemed not to bother leading Japanese statesmen such as Count Okuma Shigenobu, who commented in the preface of Yamamichi Jōichi’s *The Korean Peninsula (Chōsen hanto*, 1910):

From ancient times, our country’s race and that of Chōsen have been the same. . . . Furthermore, in the past we have had frequent contact, especially since last year when the peninsula became a part of our empire. In order to

rule, many political, economic, and educational issues must be resolved. Compared to other, Western imperial powers who have encountered innumerable problems in their attempts to rule over very different races, however, in our case, the path to *dōka* (assimilation) will transform the Koreans into loyal and obedient subjects. (Pai, 2000, p. 37)

The logic behind this belief was grounded in the scientific racism of the turn of the century and the emerging discourse on Japan's manifest destiny to lead Asia against the white race. Assimilation of Korea was the political expression in colonial ideology of the theory of the "common ancestral origin of the Korean and Japanese races" (*Nissen dōsoron*). Japan had already evoked this shared background to legitimate their late-nineteenth-century drive for ascendancy on the peninsula. With the advent of colonial rule an array of research institutes, both private and GGK-sponsored, burgeoned to prove how the two cultures were linked by race, culture, and history, with Japan being the more advanced culture and thus the natural one to absorb the lesser (Korea) into itself. For the first twenty years of Japanese rule assimilation remained a long-term goal, and the Japanese were content to lay the historical and archeological foundations of assimilation theory while doing what was possible to spread Japanese language use and inculcate the proper values of good imperial citizens among their Korean subjects. Only after 1935, and with a vengeance after the outbreak of war in China in 1937, did assimilation become an urgent priority, realized in the Movement to Create Imperial Citizens (*Kōminka undō*), the general mobilization for war, and the attempts to efface Korean culture of the late colonial period (see Chapter Four).

To Koreans the first decade of colonial rule must have seemed like a massive inventory project because not only was the cadastral survey in full swing, but the GGK had also begun a comprehensive cataloguing of archeological sites, historical relics, tombs, artwork, and temples. In retrospect this was part of a vast cultural control project, to find, name, and integrate the entirety of Korea's physical historical legacy into a Japanese version of Northeast Asian history (Pai, 2000). The state mounted a number of research and publishing projects, extending archaeological, ethnographic, and historical studies already begun by 1900. In copious detail, the studies advanced two fundamental propositions: that Korean and Japanese had evolved fundamentally from the same prehistoric ancestors, and that the Japanese had developed to a higher level to which their less-developed Korean cousins could certainly be assimilated. Between 1932 and 1937 the GGK published a *History of Korea* (*Chōsenshū*) in thirty-seven volumes that rewrote the entire history of the peninsula into an elaborate justification of colonial rule. Korean intellectuals fought back with their own studies even though they were hampered by lack of resources and Japanese scrutiny. In spite of Japan's massive cultural and historical production, the assimilation program ultimately failed along with Japan-

nese colonialism, but because of the professionalism and sheer volume of studies the Japanese produced, they continue to influence debates on the early history of Northeast Asia. Contemporary historians and archeologists in Korea and Japan still fight over the interpretation of the colonial materials as they try to unscramble this narrative in an academic climate still dominated by nationalist passions (Pai, 2000).

Education was a prime means of social and cultural control, but in the 1910s school expansion was very slow. As with the legal system, the GGK created separate schools for Japanese and Koreans. Japanese residents in Korea could send their children to school in Japan proper or they could use equivalent schools established for Japanese in the colony. For Koreans, the GGK created a separate but not equal system of four-year primary and four-year secondary schools for boys (three years for girls). The Korean schools' avowed purpose was to create "good and loyal subjects of the Emperor" (Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism*, 1988). The Educational Ordinance of 1911 also placed a number of new regulations on and required the use of GGK-approved textbooks at the roughly 1,200 private schools established before the Japanese takeover. These regulations caused the number of these schools to drop to less than 700 by 1920. Japanese language study was compulsory in all accredited schools, and the Korean secondary system stressed vocational and technical education. The only higher liberal arts education available to Koreans was in private religious or secular colleges; in short, opportunities for Koreans in Korea to study law, medicine, engineering, and the humanities remained very limited. Ambitious students with financial backing began to go to Japan for upper-level schooling in increasing numbers during the 1910–1918 period. By 1919 only 84,306 Koreans (3.7 percent of eligible children) attended primary school. The rate of growth for primary and secondary schools was painfully slow and hardly served the tremendous latent demand for education. The competition for slots in the few colleges was very intense. Over time the GGK was constantly under pressure to expand the educational system, and by 1944 about 40 percent of Korean children between the ages of seven and fourteen were attending either a two- or four-year primary school. Yet in spite of the increase in secondary schools (public and private), the 1944 data show only 13 percent of the total school population received secondary education and 7 percent some college (Nahm, *Korean Tradition*, 1988).

Between 1910 and 1920 the new colonial rulers relied heavily on systematic, repressive policing of all aspects of daily life. The administration sucked the life out of the public sphere by banning newspapers and other publications with political content, prohibiting public assembly, and outlawing most private-interest organizations. But its treatment of the landed elite and its land policies encouraged tacit support by a large proportion of the upper class. More insidiously, the Japanese dominated all aspects of early modernization in the colony. Almost all prestigious,

modern, white-collar jobs were in Japanese-dominated enterprises: banks, large companies, trading houses, land corporations, public schools, the railway corporation, and the huge bureaucracy of the GGK itself. To work in the modern sector meant getting at least a secondary school degree, if not a college education. The route to the best jobs lay in upper education in Japan. Therefore, from the beginning, attaining Japanese cultural and linguistic skills became *de rigueur* for the ambitious sons of the elite and Korea's tiny middle class if they were to have any chance at even the middle- and low-level, white-collar jobs in the cities.

The draconian repression of the first decade had limited opportunities for educated Koreans to cultural production or journalism, and by 1919 the tremendous political tension in the colony exploded in a political upheaval that ultimately compelled the Japanese to rethink their policies of rule in Korea. After that, however, the selective inclusion of educated Koreans in the modern sphere tended to remove potential political leaders from the nationalist independence movement. Even worse their modern schooling, which emphasized how to survive in a Japanese-dominated world, alienated this educated class from the masses of uneducated, ordinary Koreans toiling in the fields, menial service jobs, or factories. Over time this came to have significant political implications.

By 1919 the Japanese appeared to have successfully pacified their Korean colony and created a draconian state that put them in total control. But their policies had sealed a lid over political and cultural expression while turning up the heat under the pot; ultimately the Korean pressure cooker exploded. After ten years of Japanese rule, the increased physical mobility provided by the railroads, the intensifying economic contacts stimulated by the increasing influence of the international rice market, and a steady internal migration to the new administrative centers and cities brought Koreans from all walks of life and all regions together on a scale never before possible. This, combined with the relative increase in education, literacy, and use of the vernacular, helped mobilize Koreans and create awareness of politics on a nationwide basis, what Benedict Anderson refers to as the imagined community of the nation (Anderson, 1991). The severe military rule, the blatant legal and educational discrimination, and the arrests of political and intellectual leaders ensured that resentment and loathing of Japanese colonialism were shared by all members of this imagined community. Even at the level of the peasantry, ten years of colonial rule had galvanized anti-Japanese consciousness. The new power disrupted life in villages and urban neighborhoods that had previously been governed by local custom. Moreover, the arbitrary exercise of summary powers, not to mention the use of flogging by the hated gendarmerie, further heightened Korean consciousness of collective discrimination. As the Japanese public in the metropole followed news of the Versailles Peace Conference ending World War I and wondered what spoils might accrue to Japan for their late entry into the war on the Allied side, Japanese colonial policy and Korean resentment of colonial rule at all levels of society were on a collision course.

A Brief Shining Moment: The March First Uprising

The March First Uprising of 1919 was a defining moment in modern Korean history. And the memory of this uprising plays a significant role in the narrative of modern Korea and the evolution of Korean nationalism. The Japanese today have little reason to note this event, since they have spent the better part of the last fifty years trying to forget that they colonized Korea. But for Koreans the March First Uprising marks a shining moment of national unity during the long dark night of Japanese rule. Moreover, the movement was connected in important ways to global flows of information and the movement of people; it placed the plight of the Korean people briefly on the world stage, precipitated a major shift in Japanese control policies, and was a public relations disaster for the Japanese.

In January of 1918 the stage had been set by the publication of Woodrow Wilson's famous Fourteen Points, which outlined the American agenda for the Versailles Peace Conference. To the consternation of his allies, all colonial powers, Wilson declared that the principle of humanism, respect for the self-determination of peoples, and international cooperation must become the basis of a new era of peace. Although Wilson's comments were made in the context of the postwar disposition of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the remaking of political boundaries in Eastern Europe, Asians struggling under colonial rule felt they had found a world power willing to guarantee political self-determination for all people. Thus the American propaganda machine indirectly encouraged a number of petitions to the conference from Asian nationalist groups demanding self-determination for their nations. Korean nationalists exiled in Shanghai, the Russian Far East, and the United States all tried to send delegations to Versailles. Simultaneously Korean students in Tokyo drafted an independence declaration and sent it to the Japanese Diet. By February of 1919, Korean students returning from Tokyo had joined with students in Korea to plan a nationwide demonstration to appeal to the powers at Versailles.

Student activists gained the cooperation and financial support of Ch'ondogyo leaders, and further work brought Christian and Buddhist activists on board. Recruiting an older generation of moderate religious leaders was important because the planners needed the churches' nationwide networks to successfully stage their demonstrations and spread their message. Important leaders of various women's groups in the 1920s, both moderate and radical, such as Kim Maria (1891–1944), Hwang Hedok (Esther Hwang 1892–1971), and Na Hyesok (1896–1948), were central in the effort to mobilize girl students for the demonstrations. The leaders of the various church organizations, however, insisted on a nonviolent demonstration. The movement's declaration, authored by Ch'oe Namsón, asserted Korea's "natural" right to nationhood by evoking Korea's long history of political and cultural autonomy. In mildly Confucian fashion the declaration declared the start of an "age of restoration and reconstruction" that would fulfill Korea's promise as a

nation in the world community; it closed by enjoining Koreans to eschew violence and to carry out the demonstration in an “orderly and solemn” manner, with an “honorable and upright” attitude.

In contrast to the idealistic, radical motivations of the movement’s student organizers, the March First Declaration expressed the more moderate ideas of the senior religious leadership who became the public leaders of the movement—men such as Son Pyöng-hui, Yi Sünghun, Pak Hui-do, and Han Yong’-un. But the tactical logistics depended on the energy of younger students, many of whom were still teenagers. The planners had originally chosen March third for their demonstration, the day of former king Kojong’s funeral, when large crowds would be gathered in Seoul to pay their respects. To avoid police detection, however, the date was moved back to March first. Copies of the March First Declaration were printed and secretly distributed. On March first the thirty-three signatories to the declaration, all well-known intellectual, religious, and social leaders, gathered at a downtown Seoul restaurant for a formal reading of the document; simultaneously throughout Korea crowds gathered in parks, markets, city squares, and school grounds for public readings, followed by parades of celebration, with people chanting, “Long live Korea.”

The size and number of the demonstrations caught the Japanese police by complete surprise. Perhaps as many as a million people from all walks of life took part in the marches or were swept into spontaneous demonstrations that continued into the early summer of 1919. The Japanese response bordered on hysteria; they used brutal force to contain the demonstrations and Koreans fought back in kind. By mid-April rioting was widespread, and police violence led to a number of well-documented atrocities: the burning of villages, shooting on crowds, mass searches, arrests, and the disappearance of demonstrators. The police also seized printing presses, closed schools, and declared a colony-wide curfew. Still the rioting continued sporadically into the summer of 1919 and was controlled only after additional troops arrived from Japan. Korean historians claim that over 7,500 people died, 15,000 were injured, and over 45,000 arrested; even the GGK admitted to 553 deaths, 1,409 injured, and 12,522 arrests, a serious conflagration by any estimate. Notably, the statistics list 471 arrests of women and girls participating in the movement. This is strong evidence of the increased participation in nationalist activities of a new generation of women who attended or had graduated from the new schools for women that mushroomed in the 1910s.

The movement failed in the sense that it neither dislodged the Japanese nor gained the attention of the Western powers. But it did demonstrate to Korean nationalists of all political stripes that it was possible to organize a mass following around appeals to nation and anti-Japanese sentiment. Within months a number of disparate and, seemingly, politically incompatible exile organizations had come together in Shanghai to form a government in exile, the Shanghai Provisional Government, with high hopes of unifying their efforts to regain Korean indepen-

dence. The Japanese lost face internationally as word leaked out of atrocities and the martyrdom of young students, both boys and girls. Missionaries published eyewitness accounts in the American press, and funds were collected to help Koreans injured in the riots. In Japan by mid-summer of 1919, the first party cabinet headed by the newly elected liberal Prime Minister Hara Kei met to assess the situation in Korea. A new governor general was appointed and charged to reform colonial policy under the softer label of *nisen yūhwā* (harmony between Japan and Korea). Indeed, while the March First Movement did not unseat the Japanese, it did succeed in forcing the Japanese to ameliorate their most obnoxious policies in Korea. But it was a Pyrrhic victory. With their will to hold Korea unchanged, the Japanese replaced naked coercion with a softer but even more effective policy of manipulation and co-optation.

Course Correction: The Cultural Policy

Punctuating the tense situation still prevailing in December 1919, the new governor general, Saitō Makoto (1858–1936), and his administrative team were greeted at Seoul Station by radical nationalists’ failed attempt to detonate a bomb. Saitō was an urbane, well-traveled diplomat with strong ties to the new party government as well as the Japanese military establishment. He brought with him former Home Minister Mazuno Rentarō and another technocrat, Maruyama Tsurukichi, whose job it would be to reorganize the colonial police system. The Cultural Policy (*bunka seiji*), as the Saitō reforms came to be known, reformed the overtly abusive practices used by General Terauchi and his successor, Hasegawa Yoshimichi. The overall objectives in Korea remained unchanged, but the colonial administration replaced naked repression with a softer—in retrospect, more effective—policy of manipulation. The GGK reorganized its administrative structure and increased the size and number of local and provincial advisory boards staffed by prominent Koreans in order to create more “participation” in government affairs. In legal matters, the Japanese concentrated on areas where Korean cultural sensibilities could be mollified without diluting colonial authority.

Responding to Korean outrage at obviously discriminatory laws, Saitō abolished whipping as a punishment for minor offenses. He modified unpopular laws regulating traditional burial practices as well as police interference with rural markets. A new pay scale for civil servants responded to Korean demands to reduce the difference between Korean and Japanese employees of equal rank.

The Cultural Policy also featured several fundamental changes in economic policy. There had been massive protests in Japan over the sharp increase in rice prices at the close of World War I. The Rice Riots of August 1918 had already stimulated increased interest in raising Korean rice production. Saitō inaugurated a new program for investment in irrigation works and agricultural extension activities in order to increase rice yields and make more rice available for export. During

the 1920s rice production rose by 40 percent, with most of the increase finding its way into the export market. The millions of yen invested in agricultural production stimulated the rural economy of Korea, and the 1920s turned out to be a period of relative prosperity for farmers and landlords. This helped to reduce tension in the countryside. On the other hand, rapid expansion of rice-growing raised water rates for peasants, and while the extra rice helped lower rice prices in Japan, the per capita rice consumption in Korea continued to fall as peasants substituted cheaper grains in their diet in order to market the more valuable rice.

A second major economic change was the rescinding of the 1910 Company Law. Thereafter companies, whether Korean- or Japanese-owned, had only to register their existence; they did not need government permission to come into being. While this encouraged native entrepreneurs, the main intent was to open Korea to private investment from Japan. Flush from the economic boom of World War I, Japanese companies greedily eyed the cheap, abundant labor in Korea. Concurrently, tariff barriers between Japan and Korea were largely eliminated, anticipating the regional autarkic economy that developed in the 1930s. However, Japanese firms already in Korea complained that fledgling colonial companies needed subsidies to protect them from larger, well-financed competitors from the homeland. The issue of subsidies was explosive, because if Korean-based Japanese companies were granted subsidies, then Korean capitalists, although few in number, would point to the new slogan of *nisen yūhwa* and demand equal treatment.

Saitō went so far as to promote policies that would promote a “bridge between

Japanese and Korean capitalists.” In 1921 he invited important Korean businessmen to participate in the Chōsen Industrial Commission. Ultimately, selected Korean companies received subsidies; one well-documented example was Kim Sōngsu’s Kyōngsōng Spinning and Weaving Company, a firm that would later become one of the largest pre-1945 Korean-owned companies (Eckert, *Offspring of Empire*, 1991). The subsidies came at a time when Korean nationalists were promoting a Korean Production Movement, a campaign to spur the development of native manufacturers. It is clear the subsidies were intended to dilute Korean entrepreneurs’ enthusiasm for this program, even those devoted to the development of national (Korean) capital (see Chapter Three).

Other important reforms completed Saitō’s program of Cultural Rule, but that of the police system was perhaps the most significant. The semiautonomous military gendarmerie was abolished. In its place Saitō established a purely civilian police authority; civilian uniforms without swords replaced military dress both for policemen and colonial officials. Simultaneously, Saitō announced measures to expand the education system with the ambitious goal of one primary school in every district (*myōn*), more secondary schools, and the creation of an imperial university. The press blackout was broken, as the GGK relaxed its censorship standards and offered permits for vernacular newspapers and journals with political content. Throughout the reform process, Saitō held meetings with foreign

residents and a broad spectrum of Korea’s social, political, and economic elite. He expanded the Central Advisory Council (Chusuin) to assist the GGK in policy formulation on all cultural matters, and the elected provincial, prefectoral, and village councils were expanded in order to give the appearance of reinvigorated Korean self-governance. Prospective publishers negotiated with the police to establish the guidelines and mechanics of the new press system. Thus the Cultural Policy created an aura of change and moderation by showing the GGK as open and sensitive to the needs and opinions of important residents in the colony; they also publicized the changes abroad with a new propaganda offensive to redress their flagging public relations in world opinion.

The Cultural Policy strategy was to mollify public opinion through administrative reshuffle, selected legal reforms, cosmic changes in police practices, and the currying of favor with Korean elites. Behind the face of conciliation, however, they reinforced their entire control apparatus. The police got new uniforms, but suddenly their numbers were also greatly increased. Promises for new schools turned out to be bait and switch. While Saitō discussed expansion of the school system, the GGK had, by the end of 1920, increased the number of police stations from 151 to 251 and quadrupled the number of substations to 2,495 to cover every subdistrict and neighborhood in Korea. Moreover, the administration added a new police bureau, the High Police (Kōtō Keisatsu), that was in charge of covert surveillance, censorship, thought control, and counterterrorism. In short, the new cultural policy was about tone and appearances; it gave up nothing in the important area of control.

Nonetheless, the reforms were significant concessions. In particular, the new freedom to publish and organize immediately expanded the public sphere, and for the next few years an atmosphere of excitement and experiment prevailed as Koreans tested the new boundaries and as administrators contemplated the limits of their tolerance. And if the Cultural Policy led to a dramatic increase in nationalist activity in the colony, it also stimulated the national independence movement abroad.

Scholars who see conspiracies everywhere will dismiss the new policies as calculated and Machiavellian, and in hindsight they do appear to have been a brilliant political maneuver. The reforms were not, however, as calculated as it might appear in retrospect. Saitō did meet with a broad spectrum of Korean opinion-makers, most of them moderate to conservative intellectuals, publishers, and religious leaders. He worked tirelessly to gain the trust of moderate, middle-of-the-road nationalists, those who most directly benefited from the new climate of tolerance in the crucial areas of speech and assembly. Saitō’s diary is mostly silent on the substance of these negotiations, but clearly he was granting favors even if we will never know the exact quid pro quo. Although the growing leftist element within the intelligentsia was not invited to the table, they did take advantage of the new rules to organize students, youth groups, and peasant associations. Par-

ticularly between 1920 and 1925, it appears that the GGK was groping to find the middle ground between complete repression that had characterized the Military Rule period and tolerance for relatively benign activities. In short, the new freedoms were calculated to blunt overt dissent and encourage a cooperative attitude in Korea. This was a considerable gamble, given the ferocity of the disturbances that had precipitated the reforms in the first place. Colonial rule thus evolved into a flexible rule of divide and conquer. In hindsight, the policy worked very well—by providing outlets for mild forms of dissent and by making the governance and economy slightly more inclusive of Koreans, the Japanese strengthened their hegemony. But in 1920 it was unclear whether it would work at all.

Exiled Nationalist and Students Abroad

The harsh repression that accompanied the advent of Japanese rule drove many political activists into exile after 1910. Although overt political resistance had been stymied inside Korea, a growing number of organizations emerged abroad, many of them supported by large Korean communities in Manchuria and the Russian Far East, and by a smaller number of émigrés in the United States. The movement in exile continued throughout the period of Japanese rule, and although it was fragmented by political differences and personal ambitions, it kept the flame of resistance alive and provided some international awareness of Korea's plight as a colony. When these activists returned to Korea in 1945, they brought with them the legacy of this divided and contentious movement. The complexity of post-Liberation politics was in no small part driven by the competing, and often grandiose, claims of the exile leaders.

Worsening economic conditions and continued political instability between 1905 and 1910 had led to increased Korean emigration, especially into southeast Manchuria. In 1910 there were already 109,000 settlers in the Kando (Jiandao) region, and by 1913 they were joined by an additional 60,000 refugees. Moreover, tens of thousands of Koreans had crossed the Tumen River into the Russian Maritime Province. The Korean community in the United States grew from the roughly 7,000 Koreans recruited for labor in Hawaiian sugar plantations between 1902 and 1910; subsequently many of the original contract laborers moved to the west coast of the United States, where they settled around Los Angeles and San Francisco. These communities provided funds and manpower for a number of exile nationalist groups that burgeoned between 1910 and 1920.

The political and tactical orientation of all these exiles varied widely. In Manchuria Yi Siyōng (1882–1919) organized a military school to train future independence fighters. In the Russian Far East Yi Tonghwui (2–1928) established another military unit called the Government of Korea Restoration Army. Manchuria and Russia provided cover for numerous small groups who were able to cross back and forth over the Korean northern frontier to communicate with the underground

resistance or commit small-scale acts of sabotage. This region proved to be the most fertile region for Korean nationalist activity; by the late 1920s it had become home to early Korean socialist groups allied with either the new Soviet government to the north or the nascent Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to the south. In the mid- to late 1930s socialist Korean-led guerrillas, among them and most famously a group led by the later leader of North Korea, Kim Il Sung (Kim Il-sōng, 1912–1994), fought the most enduring armed struggle against the Japanese until they were either subdued by Japanese encirclement campaigns or escaped into Soviet territory as did Kim Il Sung and his band in 1941. During World War II Koreans fought with units of the Chinese Communist Party against the Japanese. Some even stayed on in China after 1945 and contributed to their victory in the civil war.

More moderate groups that were focused on diplomatic maneuvers or long-term training of future leaders emerged in China proper and the United States. Sin Kyusik's (1880–1922) Mutual Assistance Society forged the first ties with the early Chinese nationalist movement led by Sun Yat Sen. Thereafter, various Korean nationalist groups worked on and off with the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) for the next twenty years. During World War II, moderate and conservative Korean nationalists found succor with the KMT and organized a small liberation army in common cause against Japan. The man who would become the first president of South Korea, Syngman Rhee (Yi Sungman, 1875–1965), had been living outside of Korea since his release from prison in 1904. He had been arrested in conjunction with the disbanding of the Independence Club in 1897. In 1909 he organized the Korean National Association in San Francisco before returning to his original Hawaiian base in 1913; he was picked as president of the Shanghai Provisional Government in 1920 and continued working for the independence movement until the end of the Pacific War. An Ch'angho (1878–1938), a founding member of the New People's Association, left Korea and eventually arrived in southern California in 1902. After the March First Movement he was drafted into the Shanghai Provisional Government and became a leader of a nonviolent, gradualist faction within this conglomeration of exile groups. His most enduring contribution to the national cause was his founding of Hungsadan, an organization devoted to the cultivation and training of future leaders that continues to thrive today.

Of greatest import to the continuing struggle against Japanese rule within Korea was the steady stream of returning students from Japan. In 1909 there were already 790 students studying in middle schools, high schools, and universities in Japan. By 1912 this number had swelled to 3,171; the limited educational opportunities in Korea fostered this exodus of students who were mostly privately financed although there were also a number of scholarship programs offered by the Ch'ondogyo, youth associations, other churches, and the GGK itself. One of the most important intellectual leaders in the 1920s, Yi Kwangsu (1892–1950?), received his university training at Waseda University on a Ch'ondogyo scholarship

without which he would never have been able to study abroad. The new generation of Korean professionals, intellectuals, and political activists overwhelmingly received their advanced education in the metropole. A tiny minority left to study in Europe or the United States, but Japan remained the destination of choice for most students going abroad. Japanese language knowledge was key to good jobs upon return as well as for gaining access to the huge literature on Asia and the world produced during the Meiji period. Only after Liberation did the United States become the new Mecca, and English the new power language, for ambitious students with means to study abroad.

Around the time of the March First Movement, many of these students being educated in Japan began to fall under the influence of radical ideologies popularized by the simultaneous disenchantment with the West (caused in part by the bloodbath of World War I) and the enthusiasm for the Russian Revolution. Korean nationalist groups in Russia were the first to be influenced by Bolshevik ideology. This was manifest in the founding of Yi Tonghwī's Korean Socialist Party (Hanin saboedang) and Nam Manch'ūn's "Korean Section" of the Communist Party in Irkutsk, both in 1918. Korean and other Asian students in Japan—the largest group was from China—studied subversive literature together and bonded in their common experience of ethnic discrimination as outsiders. They made common cause as well with young Japanese radicals who were disenchanted with the politics of their older generation. Moreover, the students were in Japan during the postwar recession, when labor and tenant strife had become widespread. Ironically, the more open intellectual climate and less rigorous censorship in Japan fostered political organizations of all types. One group with the awkward name of The Korean Self-Supporting Students' Fraternal Association (Chosön kohaksaeng tong'uhoe) even published its own magazine *Comrade* (*Tongmu*), an early source of Korean leftist thought and one that would have never passed the censor in Korea.

In the 1910s, as Japan clamped down on Korean organizational and political life, the movement of students became the most important conduit of information and transnational knowledge in Korea. By the time of the March First explosion, students were the couriers between the underground nationalist movement in Korea and the widely dispersed exile groups. For example, one contingent of students who were deeply involved in the March First planning moved to Shanghai in 1920 to participate in the planning of a united government in exile. Among them was Yi Kwangsū, author of the 1918 Student Declaration, who returned to Korea two years later to begin his influential career. Indeed, it was this generation of students who fostered the cosmopolitan colonial culture of the 1920s and 1930s in Korea. With the unfolding of the Cultural Policy at home, students returned to a broader array of opportunities in Korea: in journalism, publishing, education, even business.

Upon returning to Korea, however, students faced difficult choices. They returned to the high expectations of families who had invested heavily in their

schooling and had, no doubt, already made plans for their futures. On the one hand, an education abroad provided entrée into elite society in colonial Korea. It meant access to jobs in the growing modern sphere, which in turn usually meant working in Japanese institutions. On the other hand, to engage in nationalist projects of whatever political orientation meant insecurity and potential danger, while working for a bank, company, or even the colonial bureaucracy meant relatively good wages and potential mobility.

The tension between youthful idealism and mature practicality would work itself out in thousands of ways for this generation of Korea's best and brightest. Whatever choice each made, they all experienced the culture shock common with students moving back from the developed economy of the metropolitan power to their poorer, subjugated homelands. Students returning on the Shimmonoseki ferry from long sojourns in Japan were greeted by the dismal sight of bare hills along the Korean coast, a stark contrast to the verdant Japanese mountains. Disembarking amidst the coolies and porters swarming over the quay to offload cargo, they must have also thought of the contrast provided by the more mechanized ports of Japan.⁴ They returned to a Korea in the throes of change. And they added their youthful enthusiasm to what was to become an intellectual renaissance under the Cultural Policy in 1920s Korea.

CLASS AND NATION IN COLONIAL KOREA

The 1920s



AT LEAST FOR KOREA'S middle-class intellectuals, the early 1920s marked a time of hope and renewed cultural and political activity. The Cultural Policy permitted new avenues of expression for writers and ideologues of all stripes in the form of vernacular newspapers and journals. The reforms also inaugurated an era of frenetic organizational activity as a new generation of Korean leaders emerged to create local, provincial, and national associations formed around interest groups of all kinds. Readers of the inaugural editorials in the new press or the charters of the new organizations have to be struck by the optimism and expansiveness of the rhetoric. It was as if an entirely new era had begun for Korean society, an era of cultural construction, education, and social reform. Notwithstanding the fact that Korea was still a colony and that the new press had emerged under a strict censorship regime, within its first year one of the new vernacular papers, the *East Asia Daily* (*Tonga ilbo*), was bold enough to have proclaimed itself the "voice of the nation" on its masthead.¹

We must remember that this intellectual ferment and organizational innovation remained on the surface of Korean society. For the most part it expressed the views of the urban, literate minority in Korea only. This minority could say they spoke for the masses, but their papers and journals were still not accessible to the vast majority of Korea's preliterate population. The experience of Korea's agrarian masses in the 1920s differed profoundly from that of the intelligentsia. Given the differences in class and social status that separated elites from those working on the land, this was not unusual. Moreover, during the 1920s the remnants of the old "moral economy" in the countryside disappeared. Rationalized land laws, the explosion of the export market for rice, and the commercialization of agriculture brought most peasants under the dominance of capitalist market relations. But in the short term, the decade was a relatively good time for agriculture and peasants because the new Cultural Policy had increased GGG investment in rice production for the Japanese market. During the 1920s rice prices quadrupled, and agricultural productivity increased.² Conflicts between tenants and landlords, therefore, were forward-looking, that is, peasants were more interested in bettering their situation within the improving agricultural economy. This was in contrast to the defensive

and more desperate conflicts that characterized the post-1930 depression years, when peasants struggled to keep what little they had in the face of increasing tenancy rates and rising rents (Gi-Wook Shin, 1996).

The divide widened between the experience and concerns of peasants, whether small owners, partial owners, tenants, or agricultural laborers, and absentee landlords, the scions of Korea's elites, and the small urban middle class. To read the glowing accounts of national unity surrounding the March First Movement, we might assume that Korean nationalism had become that bridge. Common loathing of Japanese rule, however, was a negative bond, and it was some time before such sentiments reached the unified intensity characteristic of contemporary Korea's fierce nationalism. After all, while there had been significant changes in Korean society since 1900, the lives of most Koreans were still more informed by the class relations, values, and habits of traditional Korea. Indeed, the 1920s may be viewed as a pivotal decade in which the hold of the old society gave way to startling new ways of thought and action as well as new forms of economic behavior as changes in the class structure of society became manifest. To the extent this was true, at least in the realm of politics and ideas, was due mostly to the post-1920 cultural and nationalist renaissance and the effort of Korean ideologues to provide shape and form to a national unity. But the rising political consciousness was complicated by an emergent class politics that would challenge the nationalist vision. The discourse that emerged in the 1920s became a struggle over who would claim leadership of the nation and what class of Koreans defined the nation. In terms of political debates, the 1920s were the beginning of a fundamental ideological schism between left and right that continues to plague a divided peninsula eighty years later.

The Nationalist Renaissance and Reopening of the Public Sphere

Renaissance is an apt description of the outpouring of essays, commentary, literature, and political analyses that fueled the reemergence of a Korean press after 1920. It was a renaissance because the cultural production of the 1920s revived the nascent journalistic and literary movement of the period between 1896 and 1910 as well as the discourse on national identity and social reform. Moreover, the Cultural Policy's relaxation of publication controls permitted Korean journalism to exploit a market of readers that had expanded during the first ten years of Japanese rule. Even though there had been no Korean-owned newspapers between 1910 and 1920, educational opportunity had continued to expand during that time in the private and colonial schools. Furthermore, Korean linguists had continued to experiment with and standardize the vernacular, and their work had been adapted in the small number of Korean-owned publications published between 1910 and

1919. The period had been "dark," but not completely devoid of progress in this arena.

The magnitude of the 1920s publishing boom was enormous in relative terms. The Japanese had issued permits for only forty magazines and journals during the entire 1910–1920 period, but in 1920 alone, they granted permits to 409 different magazines and journals, not to mention the coveted "current events" (*sisa ilbo*), and almost half a dozen politically oriented journals.³ In 1910 the combined circulation of Korean daily papers and important journals probably did not exceed 15,000; by 1929 the circulation of the two Korean newspapers alone had increased tenfold to 103,027. The *sisa* permit allowed discussion not only of current events, but also of political and social commentary. Moreover, no cumbersome change in the legal system that governed publishing had been necessary. Suddenly permits that for the most part had been denied Koreans for a decade were forthcoming. There was no lag between policy and practice, and given the youth and energy of the new publishers—the founder of the *East Asia Daily*, Kim Sōngsu, was only thirty and his reporters were in their twenties—new publications hit the streets weekly in the early years of the 1920s.

In the early 1920s the new publications were poorly financed; there was plenty of patriotic enthusiasm but little business sense. With journals it did not matter; the goal was to get ideas and plans into the open for discussion. Many of the political journals were supported by donations, and they almost always lost money. The newspapers did not make money for several years, but they were sustained by investors' patriotic fervor. By the mid-1920s, however, increasing advertising revenues (ironically from Japanese commercial sources) brought them into the black, and by the early 1930s each was publishing successful entertainment monthlies aimed at segmented audiences such as youth, women, sports fans, and children. Publishing was becoming a profitable business that competed with other enterprises for a share of the expanding market for entertainment. This called forth lamentations from political activists, who decried the commercialization of the press and the corresponding enervation of its political commitment.

The new journals' disinterest in profits in the early 1920s insulated them from the threat of the censor in interesting ways. Seizure of an issue only increased readers' interest in obtaining the banned goods. The daily press also took many more chances during their early years for political reasons, such as building a reputation for resisting Japanese pressures to conform. At the same time, however, the Cultural Policy expanded the police organs charged with oversight of publishing and organizational activity. Originally, the GGK Publication Department (Toshoka) had administered the prepublication censorship system that vetted all publishing in Korea.⁴ After 1920, the new High Police Bureau inherited the responsibility for overseeing the vastly expanded amount of material seeking approval. Once a

publication permit was granted, each publication (a book, each issue of a journal, each issue of the daily newspaper) required screening before it was actually distributed. Books and periodicals were controlled more easily with such a system, but practical problems made this cumbersome for the daily press. Ultimately, a system emerged in which the newspaper publisher provided the censors with a galley while simultaneously beginning its print run for the day. The memoirs of early journalists tell wonderful stories of tricks that evolved to avoid or subvert the system. When the editors knew a certain article would draw attention or be prohibited, they would plan for an early press run and hire more delivery people to get as many copies out before an order banning an issue could be issued. Once the papers were distributed, they were virtually impossible to recover.

It is important to note here that colonial censorship was a work-in-progress in the first years of the Cultural Policy. By 1925 the system was easily handling the volume of publications, for by then it had created a general framework for interpreting the law. Application of the standard was quite subjective and varied over time; had the censors followed the letter of the law, practically everything published could have been questioned. But in the early years, particularly between 1920 and 1922, there was considerable negotiation between publishers and the High Police. The most serious issues for the police were statements critical of or demeaning to the emperor, outright advocacy of class warfare, the revealing of military information, or anything that impugned the legitimacy of the GGK itself. If this was not enough, there was always the catch-all last article in the law: "... and anything deleterious to the general welfare and moral health of society" (Robinson, "Colonial Publication Policy," 1984). The High Police reserved their most potent weapons—seizure, suspension, abolition, and prosecution—for the most serious thought crimes such as advocacy of class warfare or disparaging the emperor. Most frequently, they simply used erasure; working from an ever-changing list of offensive words, the censors would simply delete portions of text and replace it with dashes or broken lines. The result would be pages that resembled a brick wall, hence the contemporary slang *pyǒkdol simmun* (brick-wall newspapers) used during the period. Mechanically effective and easy, this technique was ludicrously simple to subvert by any reasonably educated reader, who had only to try a few substitutions to understand such violated passages. The erasures, moreover, alerted readers to the proscribed and illicit.

Associations, Clubs, Unions, Leagues, and Parties

Perhaps even more startling than the outpouring of publishing after the Cultural Policy thaw was the mushrooming of organizations of all types. In 1920 there were 985 organizations of all types registered with Colonial Police. These were local youth groups, religious organizations, educational and academic societies,

and social clubs. Two years later this number had swelled to almost 6,000. These included occupational groups, tenant and labor associations, savings and purchasing cooperatives, temperance unions, health and recreational clubs, and groups clustered by Japanese statisticians into a vague category called “self-improvement.” The Cultural Policy clearly set loose an enormous pent-up demand for association life in the colony. And while most groups restricted their activities to politically innocuous social, enlightenment, or self-help projects, even a cursory glance at their charters reveals that many linked their goals to national self-strengthening. There were, however, many groups who forsook nationalism altogether in order to promote social reform among Koreans themselves, most notably, early feminist groups and the movement to eliminate discrimination against the traditionally low status *paekchöng*.⁵ In the short term the Japanese chose to ignore the potential for nationalist mischief that these organizations represented, but they were very keen to monitor and selectively suppress what they saw as class-based—and therefore more dangerous—tenant and labor organizations.

In addition to the rapidity of organizational growth, there was a significant structural change in the interrelations between groups. With increased operational freedom similar groups began to coalesce into nationwide federations and leagues. This trend was most obvious within the Korean youth movement. In June 1920, 600 groups joined together to form the Korean Youth League (*Chosón ch'öngyon yonhaphoe*); by the mid-1920s there were similar tenant and labor federations. Such organizations became the instruments through which major nationalist projects were mounted during the decade. The organizational boom of the 1920s fulfilled the promise of the earlier growth of nationalist associations before annexation. A decade of colonial rule, expanded education, urban growth, and development of communications had only increased the Koreans’ capacity for collective action.

Another important feature of the organizational boom was the increasing participation of women in public life. Women’s clubs and educational associations had appeared on the heels of the Independence Club’s activities in the late 1890s. Thereafter aristocratic and middle-class women took the lead to establish schools for women and to reform oppressive customs such as child-marriages and the prohibition of widow remarriage (some of these customs had been outlawed already by the Kabo social legislation of 1894–1895). Before annexation, women in the Christian churches had formed groups around a number of social reform issues. Soon the number of patriotic women’s associations (*aegukk puinhoe*) burgeoned, and they played an important role in the largest private campaign mounted in Korea before annexation—the National Debt Repayment Movement. After March First the term “new woman” (*stayösöng*) became standard usage in the press to describe modern, educated women who had become a very visible part of public life. By the 1920s more radical demands for a true liberation of women emerged in Korea’s first avowedly feminist journals, Kim Wönju’s *New Woman* (*Sin yösöng*)

and Na Hyesök’s *Women’s World* (*Yijagye*). In these publications women’s issues were not justified by merging them with the agenda of national self-strengthening. Instead, for the first time, Na and Kim directly confronted the inequity and oppression of Korean patriarchy. Radical feminism, however, was ultimately marginalized, while the less confrontational agenda of Christian-dominated, reformist women’s groups found favor within the male-led nationalist movement (Wells, “Price of Legitimacy,” 1999).

Cultural Nationalism: Working within the System

As the 1920s wore on, political activists of differing ideological and strategic orientation struggled to gain control of the larger federations in order to use them as a mass base for opposing Japanese rule. And this struggle exposed major rifts within the Korean nationalist movement. A number of educational, social reform, and national cultural movements emerged in the 1920s that were unified around the idea of transforming Korean society from within in order to prepare for full nationhood. The leaders of these projects believed it was possible to work within the political limits of the colonial system in order to establish the strength for future independence. While more radical activists mocked the idea that anything could be accomplished under the oppressive weight of the colonial system as hypocritical and accommodationist, nevertheless these moderate projects came to dominate the domestic nationalist movement during the 1920s.

The contemporary press used “cultural movement” (*munhwad undong*) to describe these moderate nationalist projects, and “culturalism” (*munhwajuit*) became the code for the movement’s generally shared ideology. Another code word for this nationalist self-strengthening ideology was reconstructionism (*kaejojut*), a term derived, probably, from the title of a well-known tract, “The Treatise on National Reconstruction” (“Minjok kaejiron”) by Yi Kwangsu that first explicated these ideas.⁶ Yi elaborated a conservative approach to nation-building through long-term social and economic reforms as a prerequisite to Korean independence. Moreover, in a move criticized by many, he asserted that for now Koreans had no alternative but to work within the confines of colonial society. This pragmatic stance outraged radicals who wanted to directly challenge Japanese colonialism with peasant and worker mobilization. While this agenda earned the unwavering contempt of the radicals, it provided a loose ideological frame that at least the Japanese police viewed as harmless. Most probably the GGK hoped that these moderate programs would ultimately self-destruct.

Clearly the basic program and tactics of the cultural nationalists were offshoots of the earlier turn-of-the-century enlightenment ideology. The culturalists’ efforts to spread education and literacy, raise national consciousness, and cultivate a cadre of future leaders resonated strongly with the ideology of the Independence

Club in the 1890s and other organizations such as the New People's Association and the Self-Strengthening Association that followed in the 1900–1910 period. The later fall of Chosön had confirmed in the leaders' minds that enlightenment, social change, and economic strengthening were the only solution for Korea's future. Added to this was an emphasis on gradualism and nonconfrontation that unified what otherwise was a diverse set of projects and movements within the moderate camp.

Yi Kwangsu's "Treatise on National Reconstruction" was perhaps the most coherent elaboration of the cultural movement's agenda. Interestingly, it appeared immediately after Yi's return from Shanghai, where he had been working with a moderate faction in the self-proclaimed Korean government in exile, the Shanghai Provisional Government. Yi's essay faithfully reflects many of the early ideas of his mentor, An Ch'angho, not to mention the fact that at times it seems cribbed verbatim from the prominent Chinese liberal ideologue Hu Shih. And Hu Shih's moderate and gradualist agenda had also been savaged by more youthful and radical elements of China's May Fourth era. Nevertheless, it provided a common vocabulary for several major projects mounted by moderates in the early to mid-1920s.

The first, the National University Movement led by the Society for the Establishment of a National University, was the natural outcome of the intelligentsia's interest in educational issues. Korean intellectuals were outraged from the beginning by the colonial school's stress on the acquisition of Japanese language, cultural values, and a Japanized version of Korean history. Even more galling was the fact that opportunities for higher education were limited to a small number of technical and vocational high schools that offered agronomy, sericulture, or commerce. College-bound Koreans had few choices. They could fight for a spot in one of the small Christian or private colleges or go abroad (the primary destination being Japan) at considerable expense to complete their educations. Thus it was thought that creating a Korean university would respond to a number of current problems. It would provide more space for bright students to study a broad array of subjects without leaving the country; it would serve as a base for the best Korean scholars as teachers; and it would counter implicitly the undesirable effects of Japanese education.

In November 1922 the venerable enlightenment reformer Yi Sangje was chosen to front the new Society for the Establishment of a National University. Led by Song Chinu, then editor-in-chief of the *East Asia Daily*, the organization built an impressive national network of offices that mobilized support by working through existing networks established by youth and other local organizations. The goal was to raise ten million yen to build the university by relying on large numbers of small contributions. The society also sent representatives to Manchuria and the United States to solicit funds. Within six months, however, the project began to falter. Mismanagement of donations, infighting between chapters, and with-

drawal of support from the important All-Korean Youth League, slowed the early momentum. Moreover Japanese authorities further diluted interest in the project when they announced with great fanfare plans to open an imperial university in Seoul (Keijo Imperial University) by 1926. This seemed to co-opt any residual public interest in the fund-raising campaign, and before long the movement had become moribund.

A second important movement coalesced around the issue of national economic development. A combination of the worsening economic conditions, economic reforms that augured more Japanese investment, and renewed discussion of Korea's economic dependence engendered in 1923 what would become the largest nationalist project of the early 1920s in terms of numbers of participants and the breadth of its organizational networks. The Encouragement of Korean Production Movement (Chosön mulsan changnyo undong; hereafter, Korean Production Movement). Korean businessmen were already fighting for subsidies and freedom to participate on an equal footing with Japanese enterprises, but the moderate nationalists approached the problem on a different tack. Their plan was to mobilize national sentiment in support of Korean industry and handicrafts, and thus encourage self-sufficiency and the development of national capital in competition with Japanese capital. Korean businessmen quickly grasped how this movement benefited their own interests and enthusiastically supported the new organization.

Linking patriotism to economic development was not a new idea. Nationalists had been quick to see the link between economic power and political autonomy; the Repay the National Debt Movement (1907–1910) during the Protectorate period had raised money using just such appeals. The first Korean joint stock company, the Masan Porcelain Company (1908) in P'yongyang was a project of An Ch'angho's New People's Association. In fact, the company's founder, Yi Sünghun, became one of the leaders of the Korean Production Movement. The situation in the early 1920s was peculiarly suited to the launching of a large, sustained economic movement. Korean enterprises were reeling under competition from large Japanese companies. Korean goods could not compete with the cheaper, higher-quality imports from Japan and the West. Moreover, the discrimination inherent in the 1910 Company Law had seriously inhibited the growth of Korean corporations between 1910 and 1919. With the upsurge of nationalistic fervor after 1919, the time seemed ripe for a movement that would combine patriotism with the promise of Korean-generated economic growth.

The idea of self-sufficient national economic development had already fostered a number of consumer cooperatives. In P'yongyang Cho Mansik, often called Korea's Gandhi, had created the Society for the Promotion of Korean Production in July 1920. Cho had absorbed Gandhian ideas of nonviolence and self-sufficiency while attending college in Japan. In addition, there had been a spate of articles in

the press describing Gandhi's Swaraj movement in 1922 and 1923. Clearly Gandhi's ideas inspired the leaders of the Korean Production Movement; his emphasis on nonviolence, self-sufficiency, and national unity across class lines supported their culturalist agenda. Cho Mansik brought together others who had already begun to organize cooperatives and small Buy Korean groups, and in December of 1922 formed the nationwide Korean Production Movement.

The addition of businessmen to the usual coalition of intellectuals, students, and journalists was unique. Kim Söngsu, president of the *East Asia Daily* and the Kyōngsōng Spinning and Weaving Company, and Kim Tongwŏn, president of the Kyōnggi Spinning Company, both played important roles in the genesis of the project. The leaders recognized that women, as primary consumers, had to be involved as well. Ultimately women created an auxiliary association, the Women's Local Products Promotion Association ('T'osan aeyong puinhoe), in order to mobilize at the grassroots level. The appeal was simple: all must patronize Korean stores and use Korean-produced clothing, textiles, foodstuffs, and other daily necessities whenever possible. There was a strong emphasis on the spiritual benefits of consuming native products, and the leaders were also aware that by focusing on an affirmation ("buy Korean"), they avoided the confrontation a boycott of Japanese goods might provoke. The movement organized provincial chapters and published a journal, *Industrial World (San'öpge)*, as a clearinghouse for ideas and to advertise various campaigns.

At its height in the summer of 1923, the movement became the most successful mass mobilization of Koreans since the March First demonstrations. Consumption of Korean-produced goods increased to the extent that certain items became unobtainable. Understandably, prices of Korean-made goods rose, demanding, ironically, further financial sacrifice for the patriotically inclined. Clearly the movement heightened mass awareness of economic issues, and it altered, at least temporarily, Korean consumption habits. However, economic and political realities blocked its sustained growth, and by 1924 the movement was in steady decline.

The movement threatened the Japanese in a curious way. It was not illegal or tactically confrontational. But at its core it was still deteriorious to the long-range goals of the colonizers. The police decided to control it indirectly by censoring publicity and prohibiting rallies in the capital. Perhaps more effectively, they continued to implement tariff restructuring, negotiate subsidies for select Korean companies, and discuss economic concessions with key business leaders in a behind-the-scenes campaign to undermine the resolve of the movement's leadership. The first such subsidy, to Kim Söngsu's Kyōngsōng Spinning Company, helped it at a crucial time; Kyōngsōng Spinning went on to become one of the largest Korean-owned companies during the period (Eckert, *Offspring of Empire*, 1991). Subsidies were important because they allowed Korean businesses to compete on a level field with Japanese corporations. Of course, subsidies were also more attractive than the uncertain market, even with a Buy Korean campaign in

progress. In this way, by alternating intimidation and conciliation, the Japanese successfully drove a wedge between large businessmen and the nationalist leaders of the movement.

There were other problems as well. Korean merchant cooperation was vital to the movement's success, but many merchants felt threatened by consumer cooperatives, fearing competition for customers. Importers worried that the movement would drive them out of business. And, finally, a number of highly publicized scandals challenged the integrity of the entire enterprise. In March 1924 it was discovered that several textile merchants had been importing cheap Japanese broad-cloth from Osaka and representing it as "Korean-made" in order to profit from the higher price. Such gouging and other exploitative practices were demoralizing to people who were making sacrifices to patronize Korean stores exclusively.

These problems opened the movement to growing criticism from within the ranks of the nationalist movement. Leftists charged that such an economic movement could never succeed in a colonial situation and that only Korean capitalists would profit in the struggle with Japanese monopoly capitalism. Even more to the point, critics declared that the very leadership that exhorted the masses to use native goods were, themselves, the most Westernized group in Korea, in dress, style, and education. Why should the masses sacrifice to enrich a small group of Korean capitalists at the behest of foreign-educated intellectuals? The arguments attacked not only the project itself but also the underlying idea of working within the colonial system. In 1924 and 1925 the Korean Production Movement became the focus of a bitter ideological struggle between moderate and more radical nationalists that anticipated the deepening rift in the movement. The polemical warfare ended in a stalemate, but the damage had already been done to the morale of leaders at the grassroots. The Korean Production Movement declined steadily in its second year. By the end of 1924 it was having problems meeting the rent for its central offices in Seoul. Although the movement continued to organize New Year's parades and enjoyed a brief revival during the depression years, its mass appeal and significance waned after its first year. The organization did maintain, however, an official presence and continued publishing *San'öpge* until the abolition of all nationalist organizations following Japan's invasion of China in 1937.

The Flowering of Korean Language and Literature

The Korean University and the Buy Korean movements were large nationwide projects coordinated by centralized organizations. Both failed to sustain the broad consensus among Koreans of all classes that might have led to a more successful outcome. Nevertheless this was also a time when the cultural production of small academic associations, scholars, artists, and writers increased dramatically. With more and more students returning from abroad to a generally restricted job market for intellectuals, this underemployed group turned to literary and aca-

demic pursuits. They often self-consciously thought of or organized their work as a defense against the torrent of Japanese cultural influences that was pouring into Korea. The large mass projects of the moderates tended to invite the attention of the Japanese police, but this was less of a problem for individuals and groups engaged in more purely academic subjects. Although they were still subject to censorship, novels, poems, and histories that were not explicitly political found their way through the system to a modest but growing audience.

On the part of the Japanese colonial administration, what was evolving during the 1920s was a policy that only became explicit during the later period of forced cultural assimilation. Assimilation policy intended to inculcate Koreans with the core values needed to be a good subject of the Japanese emperor, but it recognized that Korean ethnic identity could not be quickly effaced. Japanese bureaucrats discussed this ethnic identity in ways similar to how Americans might think of ethnicity within the broader identity of citizenship. At the height of the later forced assimilation campaigns, Japanese officials were discussing how to speed up assimilation by emphasizing the values and habits that they believed were most important, while accepting as inevitable the annoying background noise of their subjects' residual "peninsular consciousness" (*han'gō ishiki*).

The language movement was, more than any other cultural project in the 1920s, tied directly to the effort to maintain and foster a strong national identity. The Independence Club in the late nineteenth century had placed a premium on the spread and use of the vernacular as a means of defeating the traditional divide between elite Sino-centric cultural norms and the culture of the common man. For nationalists the language itself was the means to unify a Korean identity and to give voice to its unique sensibilities. In contrast to more highly politicized movements in the era before annexation, the Vernacular Language Movement survived the early repression of 1910–1919, reorganized itself in the 1920s, and even continued to work during the height of the Japanese policy to discourage Korean language use of the early 1940s. By the first decades of the twentieth century, the Korean vernacular movement pioneered by Chu Sigyōng in 1897 had grown into a national network of scholars and writers. Chu's students came of age in the early 1920s and created the Korean Language Research Society (*Chosón'g yǒn guhoe*, 1921) in the aftermath of the Cultural Policy reforms. This organization, the precursor to the present Korean Language Society (*Han'gǔl hakhoe*), continued the work of systematizing rules for grammar, orthography (1933), and the transliteration of foreign loanwords (1940). It published a dictionary of standard vocabulary in 1936 and began the compilation of the first comprehensive Korean language dictionary (*K'ǔn sajōn*).

On the surface these activities seemed to be the exclusive provenance of linguists and intellectuals, with little connection to the political drama of colonial life, but they made one of the most important, and perhaps the most permanent,

contributions to the future of Korean national and cultural life. In addition to their scholarly work, the society worked closely with Korean publishers and newspapers to implement unified usage. Another primary activity was the society's effort to urge Japanese education officials to accept changes in Korean-language texts and to upgrade Korean language instruction in private and colonial schools. Although frustrated by Japanese official resistance to their suggestions for editing textbooks already in use in the colonial schools, the society staged a series of training institutes for Korean language instructors to improve their teaching techniques. The society also created texts on the language for the growing student population and for distribution at circuit lectures in the provinces.

The language movement survived and prospered throughout the 1920s and 1930s because it connected itself to the projects of both moderate and radical nationalists. As specialists and intellectuals, leaders of the language movement worked easily with publishers, journalists, and educators, and the goals of the society fit comfortably into the moderate and gradualist cultural nationalist philosophy. Yet the Language Society also worked with radicals. In spite of their opposition to the general cultural nationalist program, radicals supported the language movement because they were interested in the link between mass literacy and the creation of a truly mass culture in Korea. With the help of the two Korean newspapers, the society created special materials for and helped to organize a very successful, multivear literacy campaign in rural areas. Students went to the countryside during their summer vacations to teach basic reading skills. The movement, known as the *punarodu*, a transliteration of the Russian "*v narod*" (to the people), found support in the Korean socialist camp as a means for direct action and connection with the Korean masses. Interestingly, these summer campaigns anticipated similar programs to merge with and learn from the peasant masses that were organized by college students in the 1980s. In the 1980s, however, it was the students who were trying to absorb from the peasantry the essence of national consciousness that they believed had been lost in the rush to economic modernization (see Chapter Six).

By the end of the colonial period, work in the language movement became a progressively more dangerous act of political defiance. As part of the intensified cultural assimilation program after the outbreak of war with China in 1937, the GKG gradually restricted the use of Korean in public: first in government offices (1937), then schools (1938), and finally by eliminating private vernacular publications (1939). The society continued its work on the comprehensive Korean dictionary in spite of the increased pressure. But in 1942 the police purged the society by arresting fourteen members for violating of the national security law with their work as lexicographers. The police seized the incomplete manuscript of the dictionary, the product of twenty years of research, as evidence for the later trial. In the confusion at the end of the colonial period the manuscript was lost for several

years until rediscovered in a warehouse at Seoul Station. The list of charges against the language society read at the subsequent trial provided a suitable tribute to their efforts. The scholars in the dock were undoubtedly proud to hear their crime described as “working to ensure the future independence of Korea by reviving the national spirit and fostering national strength through a cultural movement” (Hiseung Lee, 1973, p. 41).

Literary output exploded in tandem with the language movement. Modern Korean literature traces its origins to the 1910s and the experiments in new-style vernacular poetry, short stories, and essays that filled the pages of magazines such as *Boys* (*Sonyōri*) and *Ch'ōngch'ün* (*Youth*). With the publication of Yi Injik's (1854–1915) *Tears of Blood* (*Hyoł'ui nyu*) in 1915, followed shortly thereafter by Yi Kwangsu's *Heartlessness* (*Mujöng*) in 1917, the modern Korean novel was born. By the mid-1920s poetry and serialized novels could be found in the daily press and virtually all monthly journals and magazines. Young authors like Ch'oe Namson and Yi Kwangsu not only pioneered the production of new literary forms, they were influential stylists as well. They were joined by other talented writers whose work in the rapidly evolving vernacular expanded its expressive possibilities and gave voice to a diverse set of experiences and ideologies. Indeed, the new literature movement quickly split into a number of different artistic and political groupings. In 1922 one group of authors began publishing the journals *White Tide* (*Paeckho*) and *Ruins* (*P'yeho*) as vehicles for “pure” literature—a literature divorced from political and social reform ideology. Two of the leading writers in this group, Yōm Sangsōp (1897–1963) and Kim Tong'in (1900–1951), experimented with naturalist and romantic forms in reaction to the heavily didactic tone of earlier so-called “enlightenment” novels.

Shortly thereafter, there was a reaction to the “art for art's sake” movement by

leftist writers, who believed that literature should serve the cause of class liberation. By 1925 this group had consolidated to form the Korean Artists Proletarian Federation (KAPF). The KAPF attracted writers, painters, actors, and musicians who experimented with “socialist realism” as a device to promote class-consciousness among the intelligentsia as well as expose the abysmal condition of the proletarian masses (*minjung*).⁷ Among the well-known works that emanated from within this school were Cho Myöng-hüi's *The Nakdong River* (*Naktonggang*) and *Fire Field* (*Hwajön*) by Yi Kiyoung. Many of the young intellectuals associated with KAPF were also organizers with the Korean Language Society of the summer literacy campaigns in the Korean countryside as well as teachers in night schools in Seoul and provincial cities. KAPF writers also translated the major works of Marx and other socialist classics. The KAPF suffered constant Japanese police harassment—its members under surveillance and liable for arrest; its publications heavily censored. KAPF managed to continue as an organizing focus for leftist intellectuals into the 1930s but collapsed after the mass arrests of its membership in 1935.

Radical Nationalism and Social Revolutionary Thought

The KAPF writers were part of a large movement of leftist intellectuals and radical activists who in the 1920s were attracted to social revolutionary thought. Throughout Asia the cataclysm of World War I had begun a process of disenchantment with the West in general and liberal thought and governmental models in particular. Nor was this disenchantment assuaged by the calls for global cooperation, internationalism, and pan-humanism as the fundamental bases of a new world order that emanated from the Versailles Peace Conference of 1919. Such abstractions rang particularly hollow in the ears of colonial intellectuals and political activists in Asia, who felt betrayed by the failure of the imperialist powers to apply any of their high-minded ideas in their overseas colonies. Indeed, the great powers at Versailles had already ignored the March First leaders' moderate appeals for Korean self-determination. They had also refused to recognize the fledgling Shanghai Provisional Government. Socialism and the dream of an international alliance of anticapitalist forces liberating people in the colonial world offered a potent alternative ideology. The Bolshevik victory in the Russian Revolution, the later formation of the Communist International (Comintern), and the evolving Leninist doctrine of an Anti-Imperialist United Front fostered an entirely fresh set of ideas and tactics that could be applied to the problems of the colony. By the early 1920s, these ideas were solidly entrenched among Korean exile nationalist groups as well as among the younger intelligentsia in the colony.

The Russian Far East and Tokyo provided a breeding ground for Korean

socialists. Yi Tonghwí formed the first Korean Socialist Party (1918) in Khabarovsk, and a rival organizer, Nam Manch'un, created a communist party in Irkutsk in 1919. They drew their supporters from among Korean partisans who had made

common cause with the Bolsheviks against the remnants of the czarist forces and their Western and Japanese allies fighting in the Russian Far East. These groups and others that followed ultimately established themselves in Soviet territory and Manchuria, and they became a constant irritant to the Japanese and an important source of support for their colleagues inside Korea well into the 1930s. The Japanese metropole, however, was by far the most important source of socialist and radical ideology for Korean intellectuals during the 1920s.

By the early 1910s the trickle of Koreans traveling to Japan for schooling had become a river; by the mid-1920s it was a flood. Middle- and upper-class families saw that their mobility and status maintenance was directly linked to their children attaining advanced degrees from Japan. Even poorer students were supported by GGK scholarships or fellowships offered by Korean social and religious organizations.⁸ In Japan, Korean students encountered a society that was beginning to feel the effects of a generation of rapid economic and social change. The post-World War I recession brought significant hardship to both industrial laborers and farmers, and labor and tenant strife increased; 1920–1925 was a period of prolific leftist

organizing, the origins of the Japanese labor and tenant movements, and increased urban unrest. It was also an era of “isms.” Popular journals such as *Reconstruction* (*Kaizo*) and *Liberation* (*Kaihō*) were samplers of diverse ideologies. The doctrines of democracy, Bolshevism, social democracy, syndicalism, guild socialism, anarchism, Fabianism, and National Socialism whirled about in an atmosphere of experimentation. Korean students became caught up within these organizations and ultimately brought home the ideas and organizational techniques learned firsthand in Japan. For example, Kim Chunyōn, whose career included work for both of the major Korean nationalist newspapers and who was later first secretary of the Third Korean Communist Party (1926), was introduced to socialism as a member of the left-leaning New Man Society (*Shinjinkai*) at Tokyo University.

Thus many of the early Korean socialist organizations can be traced to student organizations in Japan. These overseas Korean student groups began as self-help organizations that provided a community for isolated students far from home. The obvious futility of the March First Movement, as well as the impotence of the putative Korean government in exile, encouraged a leftward shift of student activism. One group in particular, the Korean Self-Supporting Students’ Fraternal Association (*Choson kohaksaeng tong’uhoe*), became the first openly socialist organization among the students. By 1922 the group was publishing its own periodical, *Comrade* (*Tongmu*), and shifting its attention away from student and worker relief to foment class struggle directly. Returning students became leaders in the youth movement that had appeared after the Cultural Policy reforms, and toward the end of the decade they provided much of the energy for creating a United Front Movement that would bridge the gap between nationalist and leftist radicals.

While the vast majority of radicals within the colony dabbled in socialist ideology and informally carried its message to youth, tenant, and other organizations established for workers and peasants, a more organized Korean communist movement had emerged within the exile movement. Yi Tonghwui joined forces with the recently formed Korean government in exile in Shanghai. His group soon to be known as the “Shanghai faction,” quickly came into conflict with other Korean communists who traced their origins to the Irkutsk group organized by Kim Man-ch’ün. By 1922 these two groups were competing for the patronage of the newly established Communist International (Comintern) in Moscow, setting the stage for the endless factional struggles that would plague the Korean communist movement throughout the 1920s.

At the urging of Comintern, the exiled Korean communist movement tried to organize a base in the colony between 1920 and 1925, but factional disputes and Japanese police vigilance made this difficult. It was not until April 1925 that the first official Korean Communist Party in Korea was formed. Unfortunately this coincided with an increase in Japanese police pressure on radical organizations of all types. The police crushed the first Communist Party and four successive attempts

to create a formal party apparatus met the same fate in the following years. In spite of the organizational ineptness of the Korean Communists, they had already in the early 1920s competed successfully for the hearts and minds of Korean youth. They gained positions in the important All-Korean Youth League, led by conservative nationalists O Sanggūn and Chang Tōksu. And Communists were an important part of a radical youth movement that coalesced under the banner of the Seoul Youth Association (1921). Ultimately they dominated an important conference of youth leagues in 1923, writing into its position statement a pledge that committed the league to leading and helping the Korean masses.

In 1924 the rising socialist movement in Korea also gave birth to the Korean Women’s Socialist League (*Choson yǒsōng tonguhoe*). Women’s liberation was seen as a logical corollary to socialism, so the issue of women’s liberation was directly linked to class liberation. The problem for socialist women resembled that of the mainstream women’s movement and its relationship to the nationalist movement. Women’s issues were subordinated to national liberation on the one hand or class liberation on the other. Since men dominated the press, women’s liberation was most often viewed through the lens of nationalist or socialist politics. Indeed, Korean men, already subjugated under the Japanese, were sensitive to loss of any prerogatives in their own homes (Wells, 1999).

The growing split between moderate and conservative nationalists and Korean Communists and leftist sympathizers was very bitter. Leftists criticized the moderate wing for playing into the hands of the Japanese by avoiding confrontation. Even more vehemently, leftist journalists such as Kim Myōngsik and Sin Il-yong lambasted moderates like Yi Kwangsu for daring to suggest that Koreans must work within the colonial system to prepare the groundwork for future independence. Others attacked the University Movement as a project that would only benefit the sons of landlords and middle-class elements, while it ignored the ignorance and poverty of the masses. The Korean Production Movement came under attack as a transparent device that used patriotism to enrich Korean capitalists. Leftists mocked as completely specious the Production Movement ideologues’ argument that national capital was in competition with foreign capital. To them, capital was capital and ethnicity was not relevant, and they attacked the patriotism of Korean businessmen by asserting that the movement simply served the class interests of rich Koreans at the expense of the poor.

The United Front

The growing split within the nationalist movement coincided with a renewed crackdown by the Japanese Police. The Peace Preservation Law of May 1925 provided police with broadened powers to control political life in the colony. In November of the same year they arrested a number of Korean Communists and leftist leaders. In June 1926 the funeral of the last Choson emperor, Sunjong, was

the focal point of widespread anti-Japanese riots that precipitated additional police reprisals against nationalist organizations. Concurrently, the High Police began to eliminate radical publications as well as increase censorship actions against the nationalist newspapers. Because both the right and left had failed repeatedly to sustain any broad movement, each side realized that the nature of the liberation movement had to change from one driven by elites to one powered by a mass base. Finally, early in 1927, the decisive move for a united front came from the forces of the left.

The New Korea Society (*Sin'ganhoe*), active between 1927 and 1931, was the culmination of the search for a united front organization. Founded in 1927, with top posts going to prominent moderate nationalists, the *Sin'ganhoe* provided a common base for moderates, radicals, and Korean Communists. The Japanese tolerated the organization because of its moderate leadership, and they undoubtedly took advantage of its formation as a means to further penetrate the nationalist movement. Once formed, however, the leadership, especially at the branch level, fell to radicals and Communists. By 1930, according to nationalist sources, the *Sin'ganhoe* claimed 386 branches and 76,939 members. It coordinated the activities of youth, labor and peasant groups, and intellectual societies, and it had become a vehicle for coordinated nationalist activity that served the ends of both the right and left.

The rise of the *Sin'ganhoe* stimulated a similar joining of moderate and more radical women's groups in the establishment of the Friends of the Rose of Sharon (*Künuhoe*), a "sister" body to the *Sin'ganhoe*. The *Künuhoe* brought together mainstream reformists with women socialists in an attempt to bring women's issues to the fore of united-front politics. This was an uphill battle; like the struggles within the *Sin'ganhoe* proper, there was a constant battle for control within the divided leadership of the women's movement. The *Künuhoe* continued the social work and reformist agenda of the mainstream movement, returning to "safer" projects after the Japanese crackdown following the 1929 demonstrations initiated by the Kwangju Student Movement. In 1929 the *Künuhoe* had 2,970 members, evidence of the increasing participation of women in public affairs. Ultimately the *Künuhoe* suffered the same fate as the *Sin'ganhoe* because its socialist leadership campaigned for and succeeded in dissolving the organization in 1931 (Wells, "The Price of Legitimacy," 1999).

The Japanese police carefully watched the *Sin'ganhoe* from the beginning. They prohibited it from holding national conventions, and their periodic roundups of leftists within the leadership exacerbated factionalism within its ranks. Factional struggle had arisen in its first year when leftists had proposed a number of radical amendments to the society's original charter. They had called for the waiving of student fees for the poor, the withdrawal from Korea of Japanese companies such as the notorious Oriental Development Company—it was the largest landlord on

the peninsula, and the abolition of all laws inhibiting free speech and assembly. The *Sin'ganhoe*'s support of student demonstrations in the southwest provincial capital of Kwangju in 1929, and its role in levering them into a nationwide disturbance, was the beginning of the end of the United Front. In the wake of the demonstrations, a number of Communists were arrested, bringing a shift to the right in the *Sin'ganhoe* leadership. The generally Communist-led local branch leadership, already directed by Moscow's Comintern (December Thesis) to resist domination by reformist elements, began to consider dissolving the organization.⁹ In May 1931, the first national conference of the *Sin'ganhoe* to be allowed by the police was convened. The moderate leadership fought to save the organization, but they were defeated by radicals who voted for dissolution. Ironically, the Japanese police watched the process with relief, for their interests coincided with those of the Communists.

Beyond Nationalist Politics

As with all political histories, this discussion highlighting activities in the intellectual and political world of the colony has emphasized the activities and ideas of only a small percentage of the population. Standard historical narratives give disproportionate attention to political movements, highly publicized campaigns, and dramatic personal struggles and martyrdom. While the debates between nationalists, whether of conservative or radical bent, were important and established new ideas of collective action and new ideologies of national belonging, most of the Korean population continued their daily lives and coped with the continuous and accelerating pace of social and economic change. It is not certain to what degree the poorly educated and overwhelmingly rural population understood or even cared about the high-minded calls for cultural and social reform in the name of nation-building. And it was also unlikely that the abstruse doctrine of class warfare advocated by socialists made much sense initially to conservative peasants mired in the daily struggle to survive another growing season. Certainly, almost all felt the reality of colonial rule, but we cannot assume that simple resentment over foreign rule automatically turned all Koreans into nationalist patriots.

Foreign rule, as opposed to centuries of independence and autonomy, was certainly an unnatural situation for Koreans after 1910. But probably it was more unnatural for those who had traditionally ruled. The Japanese simply completed a process that disenfranchised the traditional elites that had begun in 1895. Yet however resentful they may have become, the upper *yangban* could fall back on their landed wealth. What of other groups in Korean society long blocked by the barriers to social mobility policed by the upper aristocracy? The secondary status groups—the lower (middle class if you will) aristocracy—had seized opportunities that came with the reforms of the Choson administration after 1895,

and many continued their upward rise as the colonial bureaucracy expanded. These groups no doubt looked on Japanese colonialism with ambivalent feelings (Hwang, 2004).

But what about the vast majority of Koreans who composed the peasantry? Certainly the rule of foreigners was distasteful, and the colonial state was much more intrusive than the old Chosön government. Nevertheless, the peasantry had long suffered under the domination of the Korean upper class, tilled its fields, paid rents, and put up with labor service and other indignities. Was not the colonial government just a new and more efficient version of traditional oppression? The answer is certainly yes, it was. In a negative sense, the very presence of the Japanese as foreign oppressors was the major source of national consciousness formation. But I would submit that by the late 1920s, this negative sense of being Koreans, bound together by outside oppressors, had not yet been fully transformed into a positive sense of belonging to the Korean nation.

In fact, more was going on in the countryside than this discussion of Korean nationalists and Japanese occupiers may suggest. During the late 1910s and first half of the 1920s an economic boom occurred based on rising rice prices and increased production for the Japanese export market. Landlords, small owners, and even partial tenants were doing better, but tenants and landless peasants were also spurred to fight for an increasing share of the expanding rural economy. The Cultural Policy reforms made it easier to organize, and the 1920s witnessed an increase in landlord tenant disputes. Given the fact that most landlords were still Koreans, this meant that for many peasants the most important drama was with their own people, not with the larger political struggle between Korean nationalism and Japanese occupation. These disputes in the agricultural sector were reformist and practical, not revolutionary or ideological. The economic downturn and later depression of the 1930s brought increased class polarization; disputes at this point became more defensive, indeed, a matter of survival (Gi-Wook Shin, 1996, p.74).

The fact was that Japanese colonialism brought new oppressions and new opportunities in Korean life. The opportunities arose out of the new economic, social, and cultural patterns that had emerged since Korea's inclusion in the nation-state system and its global capitalist economy, and they brought new opportunities and political realities to all Koreans. By the late 1920s all Koreans were enmeshed in a system of economic and social relations embedded in a new, highly uneven modernity. The new modernity provided opportunities heretofore absent in Korea. To take advantage of education, service in the colonial bureaucracy, employment in Japanese companies, investment in the Japanese dominated colonial economy, or profiteering in the new international export markets meant stepping into the Japanese-dominated sphere of modernity. To do so required deemphasizing one's identification with Korean nationalism and its fierce anti-Japanese logic in favor of cultivating the colonial system to one's advantage. In the end, Japanese colo-

nial rule succeeded insofar as many Koreans chose to passively include themselves within the colonial system.

By the 1930s, to which we turn next, the vast majority of the population still lived in a similar fashion to that of the pre-colonial era. The growth and complexity of the state and its interventions in society, the domination of capitalist market rule, urbanization, and the cultural expressions of modernity existed, but were unevenly distributed in the colony. The most obvious examples could be found in the new administrative centers and the growing cities of the colony.