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**Korean Neutralisation Attempts (1882-1907): Retracing the Struggle for Survival and  
Imperial Intrigues**

**Sang Pil Jin**

**Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in Korean Studies**

**2016**

**Department of Japan and Korea  
School of Oriental and African Studies  
University of London**

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### **Abstract**

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century was a turbulent period in East Asia. Aggressive imperial powers challenged the traditional regional order, changing the relationships between the nations in the region and ushering in a period of imperialism and intense international rivalry. The subject of this study is Korean neutralisation attempts in this period, initiated by Koreans as well as by international actors, in an effort to fully understand how Korea endeavoured to preserve its sovereignty and how major powers pursued their interests in the Far East. Arguing that previous scholarship has dealt with Korean neutralisation in a too piecemeal fashion, this study utilises previously overlooked diplomatic documents, examines influencing factors previously disregarded, and covers a longer time period (1882-1907) than prior scholarship to provide a comprehensive and multilateral analysis of Korean neutralisation. Whereas previous scholarship has downplayed the historical significance of these attempts, based on such comprehensive analysis, this study argues that Korean neutralisation was possible on at least one discrete occasion. To facilitate a better understanding of the factors that influenced these neutralisation attempts, the study introduces examples of successful neutralisation in Europe and compares these with the Korean case. The structure of the study is chronological, describing attempts within the context of domestic and regional historical developments, focusing on the time periods surrounding major domestic and international events such as the Imo Mutiny, 1882, the Gapsin Coup, 1884, the British occupation of Port Hamilton (Geomundo), 1885-87, the Sino-Japanese War, 1894-95, and the Russo-Japanese War, 1904-1905. Although comparisons with successful European cases show that a lack of essential requirements made all Korean neutralisation attempts discussed in this study infeasible, this study re-evaluates their historical significance and illustrates that neutralisation can only be realised through the candidate's own will and strength combined with international respect and support.

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### **Note on Romanisation, Citation, Dates, and Name Order**

Chinese terms are romanised according to the *pinyin* system; Japanese, the Hepburn system; and Korean, the revised Romanisation system. When referring to secondary sources written by Western scholars, I use the McCune-Reischauer system. For the sake of brevity, unpublished primary sources exclude the names of compilers. Dates are listed according to the day-month-year order (text) or year-month-day (footnotes), using the Gregorian calendar. All Chinese, Japanese, and Korean names use the local convention—surname first, to be followed by given names.

## **Chapter I. Introduction**

### **• Aims**

The late nineteenth century saw an aggressive expansion of Western major power imperialism into East Asia. Benefiting from the economic and technological advancements derived from the Industrial Revolution, Western powers flexed their military and diplomatic muscles to carve out spheres of influence in weaker East Asian countries and then obtain valuable concessions there. Struggling to survive in this period of imperialism, Korea, on the one hand, maintained traditional relations with China, but on the other, concluded unequal treaties with Japan and Western powers pressuring Korea to open its doors. Regretfully, however, the rivalries for hegemony among the nations bordering Korea, which culminated in two wars, the Sino-Japanese War (1.8.1894-17.4.1895) and the Russo-Japanese War (8.2.1904-5.9.1905), resulted in Korea's loss of sovereignty as the country was unable to read and navigate the contemporary currents.

During this transition period, Korea became an object of major maritime and continental powers' interest for the geostrategic reason that it could act as a bridgehead into the Asian continent and the Pacific for them. With Korea's future imperilled, many options were considered and put forward, some by Korea alone, some by foreign countries, and others as joint efforts between Korea and outside parties. Such options included for Korea remaining a vassal state of China, declaring itself independent, transforming Korea into a neutralised state, attempting a Russian-led partitioning, and becoming a protectorate of Japan. Among these options, the main concern of this study is Korean neutralisation, which, although it has received both domestic and international attention for many years, still has not been studied in detail. Though Korea was initially uninterested in neutralisation, it reluctantly advocated such a course after being completely excluded from the Sino-British negotiations on the Geomundo Incident (15.4.1885-27.2.1887). Korean neutralisation eventually failed, but it is worth re-examining to understand its significance in Far Eastern diplomatic history and to broaden the historical understanding of neutralisation as a policy tool, one that is still discussed as a possible solution in certain parts of the world today. Therein lie the primary aims of this study.

### **• Review of Previous Studies**

Up until now, most scholars who have studied Korean neutralisation in the late 19th and early 20th centuries treated it as a minor issue in Korean diplomatic history, assuming that neutralisation

was not an official government policy, but rather a temporary measure to save Korea from foreign interference or threats. Most studies have also downplayed the importance of Korean neutralisation in East Asian geopolitics, and research conducted in Korea and Japan, which analyse neutralisation more meticulously, focus mainly on individual neutralisation proposals and therefore fail to give a fuller picture of the larger historical significance of these efforts.

The study of these efforts by Korean scholars began in earnest in the 1980s, focusing on individual neutralisation proposals. Kim Wuhyeon<sup>1</sup> employs vital British and German documents to scrutinise Paul G. von Möllendorff's proposal and how the British government approached the Geomundo issue. Gu Daeyeol<sup>2</sup> scrutinises Korean diplomat Yi Haneung's multi-dimensional neutralisation proposal. His article provides a useful context for understanding Britain's Korean policy and intimating how his Western-style education helped him devise a complex plan reflecting Western powers' interests.

Conversely, two scholars in the field of politics cover a wide range of time frame when dealing with Korean neutralisation in their doctoral dissertations. Gang Gwangsik's dissertation<sup>3</sup> encompasses the period from the late Joseon to the 1980s of modern Korea. This study contains a comprehensive interpretation of neutralisation-related theories and examples of neutral states guaranteed by major states. Within the theoretical context of neutralisation, some important neutralisation proposals suggested officially or privately during late Joseon and modern Korea are discussed, thus demonstrating the durability of neutralisation in modern Korean history.

Yu Myeongcheol<sup>4</sup> should be credited for including the internal and external causes of the failure of Korean neutralisation and analysing neutralisation proposals based on key events (late Joseon) and for three time periods—the post-1945, the post-1960s, and the post-1970s (modern Korea). By discussing the internal and external requirements of Korean neutralisation, Yu shows

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<sup>1</sup> Kim Wuhyeon, "P. G. von Moellendoreupeu ui Joseon jungniphwa gusang [P. G. von Mollendorff's Plan of the Neutralisation of Joseon]", *Pyeonghwa yeongu* 8 (1983): 47-151.

<sup>2</sup> Gu Daeyeol, "Yi Haneung gwa Han-Yeong gwangye: geu ui Hanbando jungniphwaan eul jungsim euro [Yi Haneung and Anglo-Korean Relations: Focusing on His Neutralisation Proposal]", *Seonggok nonchong* 16 (1985): 493-527.

<sup>3</sup> Gang Gwangsik, "Gukje cheje ui seryeok gwalli bangan euroseo jungniphwa e gwanhan yeongu: Hanbando ui jeokyeong ganeungseong mosaek gwau gwallyeon eseo [A Study of Neutralisation as a Means of Power Management in the International System: With Respect to the Feasibility of Korean Neutralisation]" (PhD diss., Gyeonghui University, 1987).

<sup>4</sup> Yu Myeongcheol, "Hanguk jungniphwaron yeongu [A Study of Korean Neutralisation Discourses]" (PhD diss., Gyeongbuk University, 1989).

how the development of this complicated issue was shaped by various internal and external forces over time.

Despite these merits, Kim fails to use Russian sources to check for responses to Möllendorff's proposal. Gu's study does not tackle other factors that undercut neutralisation efforts, only focusing on Britain's Korean policy. Furthermore, the long time span makes it impossible for Gang to delve into Korean neutralisation attempts more deeply and at times, he does not provide relevant primary sources for some of the important proposals discussed. Yu's study suffers from the omission of many neutralisation proposals as well as crucial factors affecting them, such as the pro-neutralisation faction and international agreements. Moreover, compared to Gang, Yu devotes scant space to illustrating the theoretical nature of neutralisation, which undermines his dissertation's value as political science research.

In the 1990s, Korean historians adopted a more active interest in Korean neutralisation. Gwon Yeongbae<sup>5</sup> surveys the debates and specific conditions surrounding key neutralisation proposals both within Korea and from abroad from late Joseon to the Korean Empire. He carefully stresses that Korean neutralisation proposals coincided with rising tensions between major powers. Seo Yeonghui,<sup>6</sup> by expanding her scope of analysis to include Gojong, convincingly shows how Korean neutralisation was perceived among governing circles in Korea and how the incessant factional quarrels amongst the political establishment undermined it even as they struggled to contend with the fierce Russo-Japanese rivalry.

Pak Huiho's dissertation,<sup>7</sup> based mainly on Japanese and Anglo-American sources, is the most comprehensive study addressing neutralisation proposals covering the period from late Joseon to the Korean Empire (1882-1904). Pak first methodically evaluates the internal and external causes of Korean neutralisation's failures and then uncovers several factors affecting Korean neutralisation domestically and abroad, making his study an ideal example of historiography. Seok Hwajeong's

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<sup>5</sup> Gwon Yeongbae, "Hanmal Joseon e daehan jungniphwa nonui wa geu seonggyeok [The Discourses of Korean Neutralisation in Late Joseon and Its Nature]", *Yoksa gyoyuk nonjip* 17 (1992): 25-68.

<sup>6</sup> Seo Yeonghui, "Reoll jeonjaenggi Daehan Jeguk jipgwon seryeog ui siguk daeung [The Korean Empire Governing Group's Response to the Situation During the Russo-Japanese War]", *Yeoksa wa hyeonsil* 25 (1997): 177-217.

<sup>7</sup> Pak Huiho, "Gu Hanmal Hanbando jungniphwaron yeongu [A Study on the Proposals for Neutralisation of the Korean Peninsula During the Period from 1882 to 1904]" (PhD diss., Dongguk University, 1997).

meticulous study<sup>8</sup> of the Russian czar and officials' stances towards Manchuria illustrates the background of why Russia would support Korean neutralisation. To preserve its sphere of influence in Manchuria, Russia considered neutralisation of the Korean peninsula an inevitable corollary, though it became a thorny issue during Russo-Japanese negotiations.

However, Gwon's study neglects the vital roles that France and Russia played in Korean neutralisation. Even though her research stresses the harmful impacts of Korean political factions on neutralisation, Seo fails to fully address the role of Russia and the close link between it and the pro-Russia faction in Korea. Pak's research, on the other hand, despite being the most comprehensive, still overlooks a number of crucial factors: the roles played by communication, foreign advisers, international agreements, and foreign loans, omission of the neutralisation proposals attempted between 1905 and 1907, and an inability to pinpoint the failures of some neutralisation proposals due to a limited use of Russian and French resources. Seok also overlooks a third power's views on Russian neutralisation policy, though Russia allied with France, on which Gojong depended to advance Korean neutralisation.

In the twenty-first century, the research on Korean neutralisation has shown a new trend of studying both neutralisation proposals and their historical backgrounds. Gang Changseok<sup>9</sup> vividly portrays how the neutralisation proposals put forward by major powers from late Joseon to the Korean Empire were designed to thwart Japanese control of Korea. To strengthen his arguments, he incorporates the geopolitical situation, Japan's Korean policy, and Korea's diplomatic relations with the outside world into his work. Eom Chanho<sup>10</sup> specifically focuses on the issue of Korean neutralisation during the Geomundo Incident, recognising that this was a pivotal moment for the direction of Korean neutralisation. Though he uses limited primary sources, he still manages to highlight Korean perspectives on neutralisation discourse during the Geomundo fiasco.

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<sup>8</sup> Seok Hwajeong, "Reosia ui Hanbando jungniphwa jeongchaek—Witte ui dae Manju jeongchaek gwa gwallyeonhaeyo [Russia's Neutralisation Policy on the Korean Peninsula—In Connection with Witte's Manchurian Policy]", *Jungso yeongu* 83 (1999): 161-187.

<sup>9</sup> Gang Changseok, "Gu Hanmal jungniphwaron e daehan yeongu [A Study of Neutralisation Discourses in Late Joseon]", *Busan sahak* 33 (2002): 55-89.

<sup>10</sup> Eom Chanho, "Geomundo sageon gwa Joseon ui jungniphwaron [The Geomundo Incident and Neutralisation Discourses of Joseon]", *Gangwon sahak* 17/18 (2002): 237-258.

<sup>11</sup> Hyeon Gwangho, *Daehan Jegug ui daeoe jeongchaek* [The External Policy of the Korean Empire] (Seoul: Sinseowon, 2002), 77-126.

Hyeon Gwanho's research monograph<sup>11</sup> presents a comprehensive account of the formation and activities of pro-neutralisation forces in Korea by examining previously neglected proposals such as that by Jeon Byeonghun and demonstrates how major events such as the Boxer Uprising affected Korean neutralisation attempts. Yi Hangjun's well-organised survey<sup>12</sup> of prominent Russian neutralisation proponents, such as Sergei Witte, stands out since Witte was a major figure in Russia's Far Eastern foreign policy. Kim Hyeonsuk<sup>13</sup> uses previously ignored personal documents of American adviser William Franklin Sands to provide a detailed analysis of his rationale for Korean neutralisation amidst the growing rapprochement between Britain and Japan.

Nonetheless, Gang neglects the vital roles that France and Russia played in Korean neutralisation. Eom overlooks the connection between the Geomundo Incident and the Anglo-Russian rivalry in Afghanistan, thereby failing to place it within the wider context of imperialistic competition. Furthermore, over-utilising Anglo-American and Japanese sources leads Hyeon to devote too little space to revealing the role of France and Russia in Korea's neutralisation, despite their lively interest in Korean affairs. Yi also does not factor in American and British officials' views on Russo-Japanese negotiations and their impacts on Korean neutralisation, even though both the U.S and Britain tacitly recognised Japan's influence over Korea. Besides, Kim pretermits Gojong's growing distance from the U.S. owing to Russia's emergence as Korea's patron, thus undermining her meticulously analysed study.

Japanese scholar Obinata Sumio<sup>14</sup> comments on the Japanese-led neutralisation proposals, while keeping in mind the geopolitical changes that shaped them. Ōsawa Hiroaki's research<sup>15</sup> links

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<sup>12</sup> Yi Hangjun, "YeongIl dongmaeng gwa jejeong Reosia ui geukdong jeongchaek: 1902 nyeon Ilbon ui daeReo hyeopsangan gwa Hanguk jungniphwa bangan eul jungsim euro [The Anglo-Japanese Alliance and Imperial Russia's Far East Policy—Focusing on Japan's Negotiating Plan Towards Russia in 1902 and the Joseon Neutralisation Plan]", *Sarim* 31 (2008): 349-371.

<sup>13</sup> Kim Hyeonsuk, "Daehan Jegukgi gungnaebu gomungwan Saenjeu (W. F. Sands) ui gaehyeokron gwa jungniphwaan ui seonggyeok [The Royal Adviser W. F. Sands' Reformist Ideas and the Nature of Neutralisation Proposal in the Korean Empire Era]", *Yeoksa wa damnon* 51 (2008): 69-103.

<sup>14</sup> Obinata Sumio, "CheongIl jeonjaeng jeonhu Ilbon jeongchi eseoui Dongasia jilseo gusang [The Concepts about East Asian Order of Japanese Politics Before and After the Sino-Japanese War]", in *CheongIl jeonjaenggi Han·Jung-Il sangug ui sangho jeollyak* [The Interactional Strategies Among Korea, China and Japan During the Sino-Japanese War], Wang Hyeonjong et al. (Seoul: Dongbuga yeoksa jaedan, 2009), 110-247.

<sup>15</sup> Ōsawa Hiroaki, "CheongIl jeongjaeng ijeon ui Ilbon ui Joseon jeongchaek [Japan's Joseon Policy Before the Sino-Japanese War]", *Dongbuga* 7 (1998): 75-93

<sup>16</sup> Omura Shūjū, "ReoIl jeonjaeng gwa Joseon ui jungniphwaron [The Russo-Japanese War and Joseon's Neutralisation Discourse]", in *Hanguk geundae jeongchisa yeongu* [A Study on the Political History of Early Modern Korea], ed. Yang Sanghyeon (Seoul: Sagyejeol, 1985), 337-366.

permanent neutralisation with Korea's internal reform and shows an understanding of the impact of the Japanese navy on Japanese foreign policy. Omura Shūjū,<sup>16</sup> who believed there was neither a pro-Japanese nor pro-Russian faction in Korea in regards to neutralisation, scrutinises Korean sources. Moriyama Shigenori<sup>17</sup> traces the origins of official Korean neutralisation policy back to the Boxer Uprising and rightly stresses the important roles of Japan and Russia in Korean neutralisation.

Yet for all their merits, these studies are marred by incompleteness. Obinata fails to include Korean reactions to Japanese initiatives. Osawa's research suffers from a lack of information on key Japanese political opinion makers regarding neutralisation, while Omura's study overlooks the significance of Russo-Japanese agreements. Moriyama disregards Russian approval of Korean neutralisation, despite the importance of the Russian stance in Japan's Korean policy. Above all, none of them directly deals with Korea's responses to Japanese infringement of Korean sovereignty. Additionally, their studies neglect Korea's pro-active efforts, for example, its diplomatic diversification efforts. Besides, though Japanese scholars are good in presenting the historical background surrounding neutralisation proposals, they still disregard important external factors, such as major power rivalries, international agreements, and foreign loans that affected Korean neutralisation proposals. A more comprehensive approach that overcomes the above limitations would have given a more balanced account of Japan-originated Korean neutralisation discourses.

Meanwhile, several academic studies on diplomatic history with broader scopes further a more astute comprehension of the Korean neutralisation issue. Ian Nish, exploring the strategic and political aspects of the Anglo-Japanese alliance, notes that both Britain and Japan desired the balance of power in the Far East to protect China's sovereign rights, but neither defended it due to their selfish interests. In the same vein, Korean independence was no longer recognised after the Second Anglo-Japanese Alliance, a victim of its collision with Japanese ambition.<sup>18</sup> In his research about Chinese policy towards Japan prior to the Sino-Japanese War, Dai Dongyang, accepting the basic premise that China adopted an active stance in its foreign policies but a passive one in its

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<sup>17</sup> Moriyama Shigenori, *Geundae IlHan gwangyesa yeongu* [A Study of Modern Korea-Japan Relations], trans. Kim Semin (Seoul: Hyeoneomsa, 1994), 159-194.

<sup>18</sup> Ian Nish, *The Anglo-Japanese Alliance: The Diplomacy of Two Island Empires, 1894-1907* (London: The Athlone Press, 1966).

military affairs, contends that, desperate to avoid war with Japan, China continued to adjust its Japan policy by offering numerous concessions to Japan.<sup>19</sup> Kim Gijeong approaches the issue of Korea's early twentieth century relations with the U.S. from a theoretical perspective, and in his world-system based analysis, Korea's struggle for survival is portrayed as a peripheral issue in an international system dominated by core states such as the U.S.<sup>20</sup> Kim Munja, having combed Japanese military files, confirms it was the Japanese army that assassinated Queen Min, who had taken a pro-Russian stance to oppose Japan and was an impediment to Japanese securement of Korean telegraph lines.<sup>21</sup>

Acknowledging the power of words in international relations, Alexis Dudden looks beyond the common perception that Japan's military might trumped Korean independence. She instead analyses how Japan successfully employed international law to annex Korea with international consent, making Korea's protest to major powers at the Hague Peace Conference futile.<sup>22</sup> Andrew Malozemoff's research on Russian Far Eastern policy provides a convincing picture of the situation in the Far East and in Korea. Disputing the claims that Russia was mainly responsible for Korea's suffering from the Russo-Japanese War, Malozemoff blames Japan instead because Manchuria was the core of Russian Far Eastern policy. Nevertheless, Korea still retained a significant value for Russia, as his in-depth investigation of the Russian court's debates surrounding Russia's concessions on the Yalu River shows.<sup>23</sup> George A. Lensen focuses on the multi-faceted major power rivalries surrounding Korea,<sup>24</sup> Gordon V. Kiernan enquires into the impact of Britain's

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<sup>19</sup> Dai Dongyang, "Gabo JungIl jeonjaeng gigan Cheong jeongbu ui daell jeongchaek [The Qing Government's Policy Toward Japan During the Gabo Sino-Japanese War]", in *CheongIl jeonjaengi Han-Jung: Il samgug ui sangho jeollyak* [The Interactional Strategies Among Korea, China and Japan During the Sino-Japanese War], Wang Hyeonjong et al. (Seoul: Dongbuga yeoksa jaedan, 2009), 249-352.

<sup>20</sup> Kim Gijeong, *Migug ui Dongasia gaeib ui yeoksajeok wonhyeong gwa 20segi cho Han-Mi gwangye yeongu* [The Historical Prototype of the U.S. Intervention in East Asia and a Study of Korea-U.S. Relations in the Early 20th Century] (Seoul: Munhak gwa jiseongsa, 2003).

<sup>21</sup> Kim Munja, *Myeongseong hwanghu sihae wa Ilbonin* [The Assassination of the Joseon Queen and the Japanese], trans. Kim Seungil (Seoul: Taehaksa, 2010), 405.

<sup>22</sup> Alexis Dudden, *Japan's Colonisation of Korea: Discourse and Power* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005).

<sup>23</sup> Andrew Malozemoff, *Russian Far Eastern policy 1881-1904, with special emphasis on the causes of the Russo-Japanese War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958).

<sup>24</sup> George Alexander Lensen, *Balance of Intrigue: International Rivalry in Korea & Manchuria, 1884-1889*, 2 vol. (Tallahassee: University Presses of Florida, 1982).

<sup>25</sup> V. Gordon Kiernan, *British Diplomacy in China, 1880 to 1885* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939).

<sup>26</sup> Kim Keyhiuk, *The Last Phase of the East Asian World Order: Korea, Japan, and the Chinese Empire, 1860-1882* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

relations with China on Korea,<sup>25</sup> and Kim Keyhiuk sketches out Korea's turbulent transition from the tributary system to the treaty system.<sup>26</sup>

To sum up, previous studies on Korean neutralisation partly shed light on key neutralisation proposals, theoretically, chronologically, and geopolitically, by utilising somewhat underutilised primary sources and influencing factors to analyse them. Thus, Korean neutralisation is regarded as a game changer that could have potentially upset the geopolitical nature of the Far East. However, these studies suffer from some drawbacks; they neither comprehensively identify vital factors that affected Korean neutralisation nor sufficiently diversify the use of primary sources to enable a balanced analysis of Korean neutralisation.

While acknowledging the values of previous research, this dissertation takes the position that what is needed now for a more comprehensive understanding of Korean neutralisation attempts and the significance of Korean neutralisation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is an in-depth study that, while focused on Joseon, covers a longer time period (1882-1907), that additionally takes into account hitherto unexplored factors that affected Korean neutralisation attempts and that utilises multinational primary documents for maintaining a balanced perspective.

#### · **Research Questions**

Though there have been some studies on Korean neutralisation, it still has not received the scholarly attention it deserves for two main reasons: the excuse that comparatively few primary sources are available for research and the preconceived idea that Korean neutralisation was destined to fail since major powers adopted a largely lukewarm attitude, a finding that the aforementioned studies have reached over the years. To escape these well-worn ruts and approach Korean neutralisation anew, the following research questions will be considered:

- What were the internal and external factors that affected Korean neutralisation attempts, who proposed Korean neutralisation, when, why, how, and where was it proposed, and why did it not materialise?
- What conditions/factors enabled the successful neutralisation of states in Europe and why was this not possible in the Korean case?
- How did Korean attempts for neutralisation differ from cases of neutralisation in Europe?

#### · **Methodology**

In an attempt to produce a study that in a dynamic and interactive manner provides an analysis of both more factors and a longer time period, this study will in detail discuss the neutralisation proposals chronologically to demonstrate how the interest in Korean neutralisation changed over time and to determine whether any proposal was plausible, by minutely investigating the various factors that influenced each proposal and its outcome. This study will attempt to answer the above research questions in the following manner:

- A survey of European neutrality, examining the backgrounds and factors behind its success, and of Korea's neutralisation attempts, to enable a comparison of European and Korean neutrality.
- A more multi-faceted scrutiny of neutralisation efforts through additional exploration of the internal and external factors affecting neutralisation attempts, such as communications and infrastructure, diplomatic capacity, international agreements, and foreign loans.
- Departure from the heavy dependence on American, British, and Japanese sources, by using unpublished French documents and underutilised German and Russian sources to provide relatively unknown details that furnish a more balanced reading of Korean neutralisation diplomacy.
- The division of neutralisation proposals into five periods to reflect the impacts of major events on neutralisation, covering from just after the Imo Mutiny to shortly after the Second Hague Peace Conference, to observe how Korea, as the subject and object of such proposals, was involved.
- An appropriate analysis of newly revealed neutralisation proposals, while highlighting proposals that are considered more important than others.

• **Sources**

With the exception of the *Gojong sillok* 高宗實錄 (Veritable Records of Gojong), Yi Beomjin's report from Russia, and Gojong's personal letter to the Italian king, no official Korean government documents deal directly with neutralisation. This lack of official sources that deal explicitly with the issue of neutralisation makes it difficult to get a picture of the various responses towards neutralisation among Korean officialdom. This study will try to overcome this weakness by paying attention to the impact of political factions on neutralisation. *Ilseongnok* 日省錄 (Records of

Daily Reflections) and diplomatic documents collected in *Gu Hanguk oegyō munseo* 舊韓國外交文書 (Old Korean Diplomatic Documents) address neutralisation indirectly by reporting on issues such as Korean military reforms and bilateral relations. These sources, however, fail to relate the dynamics of Far Eastern geopolitics, and this study will try to fill this gap with an analysis of major power rivalries. Materials on relations between China and Korea and compiled documents on Qing foreign relations are used to look into Sino-Korean relations and Korea's efforts to adjust to the Western-oriented treaty system, though they inevitably have a pro-China bias and are imbued with a Sino-centric mindset. Inevitably, these documents disregard Japanese and Western opposition to Chinese policy in Korea. That, however, can be chronicled by investigating the transformed international system.

Japan offers many primary sources on Korean neutralisation, such as the Japanese Foreign Office's diplomatic documents related to neutralisation proposals and selected documents compiled by Itō Hirobumi, Kim Jeongmyeong, and Ōyama Azusa that focus on Korea's relations with Japan and the Japanese establishment's thoughts on Korean neutralisation. These documents do not fairly tackle other countries' perceptions of Japan's relations with Korea and other major powers, and thus ignore the suspicions such powers held towards Japan's motives in Korea. The survey of Japan-originated proposals that were opposed by major powers provided by this study will reveal these reactions. Russia, another major influence on Korean neutralisation, holds some diplomatic and government documents valuable for exploring Korean economy, foreign policy, military, and politics, sourced from the Russian National and State Naval Archives. In particular, they mention the origins and backgrounds of neutralisation proposals from Russian officials and the Russian newspaper *Moskovskiye Vedomosti*. Russian documents describe Korea's thorny problems with major powers, albeit from a Russian angle, and thus become overly critical of Japan's schemes in the Far East while camouflaging Russia's ulterior motives in Korea. Consequently, Russia is portrayed as a disinterested player in Korea, which can be disproved by examining the post-Boxer Uprising Russian proposals.

Unlike the documents from the above three countries, those from the U.S., Britain, France, Austria-Hungary, Italy, and Germany take a relatively more neutral view. The U.S. possesses diplomatic documents pertaining to U.S. diplomats and officials' reports and analyses of Korean

neutralisation, such as U.S. State Department documents compiled by Scott S. Burnett, George M. McCune, and David Jules, and dispatches from U.S. ministers in Korea. The role of Britain in mediating between major power disputes over Korea can be traced through its Foreign Office files, trade reports, and diplomatic documents collected by G. P. Gooch, Ian Nish, and Pak Ilgeun.<sup>27</sup> Despite their merits, U.S. and British documents often downplayed Korea's commitment to independence, devoting too much space to the Sino-Japanese and later Russo-Japanese competitions surrounding Korea while depicting it as merely a dependent variable. Efforts for institutional reforms that affected Korea's diplomatic capacity challenge such perceptions.

Both published and unpublished French diplomatic documents are crucial for a more balanced comprehension of the impact of internal factors, such as communications, political factions, and military reforms, on neutralisation. In particular, the unpublished diplomatic documents supply vital details on French diplomats' analyses of Korea's position under Chinese domination and later regarding the open hostility between Russia and Japan. These sources lay bare France's role in Korea's wartime neutrality declaration. However, by not demonstrating its full support for Korean neutrality, they underestimate France's involvement in Korean affairs. Scrutiny of France's role in Korean military reforms and its loan negotiations with Korea will show instead its positive impact on Korean neutralisation.

Austro-Hungarian documents reveal the intricacies of major power competitions surrounding the Korean peninsula. Even if only one Italian source is used in this study, the Italian's king's letter to Gojong is testament to the importance of major power support for Korean neutralisation. German diplomatic documents show how Germany played a marginal but nonetheless meaningful role in Korea's modernisation and neutralisation. These documents validate Japanese and Western neutralisation proposals and include German perspectives on the Russo-Japanese rivalry over Korea. Austro-Hungarian, Italian, and German sources, however, neglect the Korean role in Far Eastern

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<sup>27</sup> G. P. Gooch and Harold Temperley, ed., *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1894-1914 IV* (London: H. M. Stationary Office, 1926-1938); Ian Nish, ed., "Korea, the Ryukyu Islands, and North East-Asia, 1875-1888", in *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print*, ed. Kenneth Bourne, and D. Cameron Watt (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1989-1994); Pak Ilgeun, ed., *Anglo-American Materials Relating to Korea 1866-1886* (Seoul: Shinmundang, 1982); *Anglo-American and Chinese Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1887-1897* (Busan: Institute of Chinese Studies, Busan National University, 1984).

diplomacy, while overemphasising major powers' roles in Korean foreign policy. Such views can be shown to be false by using under-examined sources such as Gojong's letters.

Personal documents both within and outside Korea also deal with neutralisation, though they do not necessarily mirror the formal stances of proponents' home governments; in Korea, Kim Yunsik, Yu Giljun, and Kim Okgyun's personal documents flesh out their roles in neutralisation. In Japan, Konoe Atsumaro and Inoue Kagorō's records are devoted to Japanese reactions to Korean neutralisation proposals and the tense Korea-Japan relations that dominated Korean foreign policy. In China, Kang Youwei's manuscript introduces a Belgian-style neutralisation for Korea. In the West, Paul G. von Möllendorff left writings that epitomise his Russia-led Korean neutralisation proposal, and Owen Nickerson Denny's documents describe his neutralisation proposal. In particular, the *Allen Papers*, *Allen Diary*, *Sands Papers*, and *Sands' Undiplomatic Memories* further widen the scope of study into Korean neutralisation. The insights on Korean economy, politics, and foreign policy of Horace Newton Allen, author of the *Papers* and *Diary*, are especially perceptive. The latter two works depict Sands' futile attempts to push for Korea's permanent neutrality and the harmful impact of concession diplomacy on Korean independence. Finally, the *Mutel Diary*, the personal record of Seoul-based French Bishop Mutel, includes extensive entries about foreign diplomats' activities and their interactions with Korean officials. Though it is difficult to gauge whether these authors represented the majority view of their countries, cross-checking diplomatic documents validates their findings.

Newspapers supply a batch of neutralisation proposals that are unavailable in government and personal documents. The Japanese newspapers *Tokyo yokohama mainichi shimbun* 東京横浜毎日新聞 (Tokyo Yokohama Daily), *Yūbin hōchi shimbun* 郵便報知新聞 (Postal News), *Japan Daily*, and *Yomiuri shimbun* 読売新聞 (The Daily Yomiuri) formulated their own versions of Korean neutralisation, each representing Japan's strategic anxieties surrounding Korea. The Russian newspaper *Moskovskiye Vedomosti* and the Tianjin-based English-run newspaper *Chinese Times* also linked Korea's fate with neutralisation. In addition, many newspapers reported on other neutralisation proposals: the *Kobe Chronicle* on the proposals from British and American ambassadors in St. Petersburg, the Chinese newspaper *Shēn bào* 申報 (Shanghai News) on

European governments' wartime neutrality of Korea, the Japanese newspaper *Ōsaka mainichi shimbun* 大阪毎日新聞 (Osaka Daily) on Ernest Bethell's proffer, the Korean newspaper *Daehan maeil sinbo* 大韓毎日申報 (Korea Daily News) on Yi Sangseol's contention, and the *New York Times* and the Dutch newspaper *Het Vader Land* on Yi Wijong's assertion. Nevertheless, as do most government documents, Japan and Russia-based newspapers attempt to tie national interests to Korean neutralisation and depict Korea as a helpless actor in the international system. Detailing Korea's neutralisation diplomacy at critical moments can ameliorate this tendency.

• **Structure**

This study is organised into eight chapters. After Chapter I's introduction, Chapter II will briefly survey general neutralisation theory, give an overview of neutralisation attempts in the imperial age, examine the background and contributing factors behind successful cases of neutralisation in Europe, and give an overview of neutralisation attempts in Korea to compare with the European cases. Chapters III-VII will chronologically scrutinise all neutralisation attempts, discussing them within the context of Korea's internal and external factors caused by the rivalries between continental and maritime powers. Chapter VIII will review Korean neutralisation by comparing it with European neutrality and probing its historical significance as a lesson for future neutralisation candidates and conclude with an epilogue.

## Chapter II. Neutralisation Theory and Application

### • General Neutralisation Theory

Neutralisation refers to an international status designed to enable stakeholder countries to grant neutrality to countries, territories, and waterways through agreement. Such neutralised countries are armed only for self-defence and are exempt from any treaties that might infringe upon their neutrality.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, neutralised countries can maintain political independence and contribute to regional stabilisation. Neutrality was conceived in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and codified in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries into international law through judicial rulings and international conventions which established rights and duties for countries choosing to refrain from participating and fighting in a war.

To adopt neutralisation, a candidate country must be located in an area suitable for neutralisation and meet subjective, objective, and international requirements.<sup>2</sup> The subjective requirement, the most vital for neutralisation, necessitates that the country's leaders and people support neutralisation. Furthermore, a neutralised country must independently demonstrate its political, economic, and diplomatic abilities and its willingness to fulfil domestic and international rights and duties. Objective requirement denotes a country's geographical position, which must contain strategic assets that could increase national and neighbouring countries' interests. Overall, a newly established country, a divided but independent country, a country subject to intervention or potentially subject to intervention from a neighbouring major power, or a country that could serve as a bridge linking one major power to another, could opt for neutralisation.<sup>3</sup>

Though fulfilling the subjective requirement might be enough to effectuate the customary neutralisation of a country, permanent neutralisation requires an international guarantee through an agreement between a candidate country and the neighbouring countries which will act as guarantors. A permanently neutralised country must also possess a military strong enough to protect itself.<sup>4</sup> A neutral country is furthermore required to abide by international expectations. If a neutral

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<sup>1</sup> Cyril E. Black, Richard A. Falk, and Oran R. Yeong, *Neutralisation and World Politics* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Graham Evans and Jeffrey Newnham, *Dictionary of International Relations* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 366.

<sup>3</sup> Gang Jongil and Yi Jaebong, *Hanbando ui yeongse jungnipwha tongil eun ganeunghanga* [Is a Permanently Neutralised Unification of the Korean Peninsula Possible?] (Seoul: Deulnyeok, 2001), 237.

<sup>4</sup> Roderick Ogley, *The Treaty and Practice of Neutrality in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 10.

country violates its duties, such as by giving assistance or providing any advantages to warring countries, neutrality will no longer be valid. The principle of neutrality is also linked to maintaining the status quo, passively and flexibly.<sup>5</sup>

Apart from the above requirements, a neutralisation candidate's internal and external factors must be additionally considered; the ruler's decision-making style, ruling class cohesion, control of communications and concessions, and role of foreign advisers (in the case of Korea) could influence neutralisation internally. As a candidate's geopolitical position was a factor highly regarded by guarantors, its neutralisation was also affected by external factors—the international system, foreign powers' perceptions, major power rivalries, foreign loans, and international agreements.

Banned from becoming involved in armed conflicts, neutral countries, by sustaining the status quo, allow larger powers to maintain the prevailing balance of power, the even distribution of power, and equal allocation of major powers' influence. Balance of power can be categorised as either the policy of Britain that held a largely non-interventionist stance in Europe from the sixteenth to early twentieth century or the European state system (1648-1789) and (1815-1914). Its principle originates from Italian scholar Francesco Guicciardini's *History of Italy* (1573). First mentioned at the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), balance of power became a fundamental prerequisite for peace.<sup>6</sup> From the Congress of Vienna (1815), it emerged as a mainstay of foreign relations, with Britain and Russia the two main axes. After the Beijing Treaty (1860), East Asia encountered the Western principle of balance of power. W. A. P. Martin, the translator of Henry Wheaton's book on international law, thought that balance of power might be similar to the East Asian *ijjei* 以夷制夷 (using one barbarian to check another).<sup>7</sup>

Neutralism, together with neutralisation, is a legitimate policy option for weaker countries seeking to protect their territory and sovereignty and defend themselves from conflicts between larger powers. In selecting neutrality as a security guarantee, such countries must pledge not to join any type of political bloc.<sup>8</sup> Neutrality is divided into customary and permanent. In customary

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<sup>5</sup> Gang and Yi, 235.

<sup>6</sup> Evans and Newnham, 42-43.

<sup>7</sup> Kim Yonggu, *Manguk gongbeop* [International Law] (Seoul: Sohwa, 2008), 149

<sup>8</sup> Evans and Newnham, 36

neutrality, a country remains neutral during wartime, neither directly taking sides nor indirectly abetting warring countries. At war's end, neutrality can be terminated. The position of neutrality can become more obvious during hot wars. Nevertheless, due to the existence of psychological warfare and cold wars, the status of neutrality can be more ambivalent, because such conflicts make it more difficult to differentiate between belligerents and non-belligerents.

Under permanent neutrality, a neutral country and other relevant countries agree on one-off rights and duties through treaties. While customary neutrality is only applied during wartime, permanent neutrality exists during both peacetime and wartime, its status guaranteed by agreements between a subject country and the surrounding major powers.<sup>9</sup> The relations accorded to a neutral country and the countries acting as its guarantors shape the legal status of permanent neutrality. Collective agreements and treaties are needed to grant permanent neutrality, but this is not an absolute requirement. (Whereas permanent neutrality is only applied to countries, neutralisation can be applied to a territory where a possible conflict between major powers could occur.) Permanent neutrality was widely used as a method of conflict management under the balance of power system in the nineteenth century. Switzerland was the first example, but the case of Belgium might be more applicable. Belgium's neutrality and independence were established in the 1830s, when Britain was keen on giving Belgium the status of a buffer state.<sup>10</sup>

#### • **Overview of Neutralisation Attempts in the Age of Imperialism**

In the age of imperialism, when Western powers competed with each other to extend their influence through colonisation, efforts to apply neutralisation were widespread. From the early nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, Western imperial powers attempted neutralisation around the globe (Diagram 1). Basically, major powers singled out for neutralisation areas whose size and location made them prone to potential conflict to frustrate the territorial ambitions of expansionist powers, preserve their respective commercial interests, and maximise their influence over strategic areas without excessive economic and military costs. Among several attempts at neutralisation during this period, the success of neutralisation in Switzerland and Belgium and the role of Bulgaria

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<sup>9</sup> Gang and Yi, 236.

<sup>10</sup> F. R. Bridge and Roger Bullen, *The Great Powers and the European States System 1814-1914* (Harlow: Longman, 2005), 368.

as a buffer state are already well-known in academic circles, but Korea's neutralisation attempts failed to replicate these successes.

As for other neutralisation attempts, the major powers opportunistically trained their sights on contested areas which they viewed as strategically valuable. Each neutralisation objective was the by-product of Western powers' desires to outstrip potential competitors by cementing geostrategic and commercial footholds in selected locations around the world. To begin with, the Polish city of Krakow (1815) gained neutrality after the Treaty of Vienna with the consent of major powers.<sup>11</sup> Britain and the U.S., to protect their commercial interests and reduce unnecessary tension between them, agreed to neutralise the Great Lakes (1817).<sup>12</sup> Other U.S. interests led to a bilateral treaty with Columbia to neutralise the Isthmus of Panama (1846),<sup>13</sup> and the U.S. concluded another treaty with Britain to neutralise the Nicaragua Canal (1850).<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, through a series of treaties, European powers neutralised the Black Sea (1856),<sup>15</sup> Aland Islands (1856),<sup>16</sup> Ionian Islands (14.11.1863),<sup>17</sup> Corfu, Paxo and their dependencies (29.3.1864),<sup>18</sup> and Luxembourg (1867).<sup>19</sup> Some Americans, to preserve U.S. commercial interests, proposed neutralisation of Hawaii (1881<sup>20</sup> and 5.1895<sup>21</sup>). The neutralisations of the Congo Basin (1885) and the Samoan Islands (7.1889) were also suggested to prevent any one colonial power from dominating Central Africa or the southern Pacific Ocean.<sup>22</sup> Owing to the Suez Canal's strategic and commercial value, it was neutralised through a multilateral treaty (29.10.1889) with Britain in a leading role,<sup>23</sup> but Honduras was

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<sup>11</sup> George G. Wilson, "Philippine Neutralisation", *The American Journal of International Law* 29, No.1 (January 1935): 82.

<sup>12</sup> Erving Winslow, "Neutralisation", *The American Journal of International Law* 2, No.2 (April 1908): 367.

<sup>13</sup> Crammond Kennedy, "Neutralisation and Equal Terms", *The American Journal of International Law* 7, No.1 (January 1913): 30.

<sup>14</sup> John R. Procter, "The Neutralisation of the Nicaragua Canal", *Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection* (1900): 4.

<sup>15</sup> Henri La Fontaine et al., "The Neutralisation of States in the Scheme of International Organisation", *Proceedings of the American Society of International Law at its Annual Meeting (1901-1917)* 11 (April 26-28, 1917): 138.

<sup>16</sup> Fred Greene, "Neutralisation and Balance of Power", *The American Political Science Review* 47, No.4 (December 1953): 1044.

<sup>17</sup> "Neutralisation of the Ionian Islands", *The American Journal of International Law* 3, Vol. 2 (April 1909): 116.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 117.

<sup>19</sup> Greene, 1042.

<sup>20</sup> Winslow, 381.

<sup>21</sup> Edward Atkinson, "The Neutralisation of Hawaii", *The Advocate of Peace (1894-1920)* 57, No.6 (June 1895): 12-127.

<sup>22</sup> Malbone W. Graham, "Neutralisation as a Movement in International Law", *The American Journal of International Law* 21, No.1 (January 1927): 83-84.

<sup>23</sup> Procter, 13.

<sup>24</sup> Greene, 1043.

neutralised (1907) by a U.S. initiative to forestall European intervention in the Panama Canal.<sup>24</sup> Though the possibility of neutralisation of the Philippines was debated several times in the U.S. (1906,<sup>25</sup> 9.1907,<sup>26</sup> 2.1908,<sup>27</sup> 4.1908,<sup>28</sup> and 24.3.1934<sup>29</sup>), it did not succeed. Germany, France, and Russia approved a partial neutralisation of Norway (1907).<sup>30</sup> U.S. Secretary of State Philander Chase Knox proposed the neutralisation of the Manchurian railways to ensure equal commercial rights for all major powers in China (2.1910).<sup>31</sup> Finally, Austria-Hungary, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and Russia neutralised Albania (1913), though the action proved to be toothless against major power rivalries.<sup>32</sup>

#### • **Switzerland, Belgium, and Bulgaria**

To settle conflicts under balance of power, major powers allowed Switzerland and Belgium to become permanently neutral countries through international agreements. In the same vein, Bulgaria, a buffer state, achieved autonomy. These three European countries, viewed as models for Korean neutralisation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, are worth studying to understand all the factors that contributed to the international acceptance and domestic success of their neutrality or autonomy. A continent away, Gojong looked favourably toward the Belgian and Swiss permanent neutrality and sent envoys to both countries, opened diplomatic relations with Belgium, hired a Belgian adviser to help prepare for Korean neutrality, and requested the support and advice of the Belgian king regarding Korean neutrality.

#### <Switzerland>

Switzerland's neutrality originated in Switzerland's defeat at the Battle of Marignano (1515) and became its established policy (1647) when the Federal Diet of Switzerland declared that the Swiss confederation would regard itself as a neutral state. Swiss neutrality was made permanent at the Congress of Vienna (1815) where the great powers (Austria, Britain, France, Prussia, and

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<sup>25</sup> Winslow, 89.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 384.

<sup>28</sup> Alpheus H. Snow, "Neutralisation Versus Imperialism", *The American Journal of International Law* 2, No.3 (July 1908), 563.

<sup>29</sup> Wilson, 82.

<sup>30</sup> Winslow, 86.

<sup>31</sup> "The Commercial Neutralisation of Manchuria", *The Advocate of Peace (1894-1920)* 72, No.3 (March 1910): 52

<sup>32</sup> Greene, 1044.

<sup>33</sup> Pak Hujung, *Jungniphwa noseon gwa Hanbando ui mirae* [Neutralisation Line and the Future of the Korean Peninsula] (Seoul: Seonin, 2007), 46.

Russia) formally acknowledged and promised to uphold Swiss neutrality.<sup>33</sup> Owing to this covenant, Switzerland remained relatively safe from the revolutionary wars embroiling neighbouring countries (1848-1849) and escaped the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871).

## **Background**

A multilingual and multiethnic country, Switzerland needed a foreign policy that incorporated the Swiss people's various cultures, customs, and beliefs. Religious differences between Protestants and Roman Catholics were one potential barrier to a unified Swiss foreign policy. Swiss Protestants had long held a close affinity with Germany, England, Holland, the Huguenot parts of France, and Poland. Alternatively, Swiss Catholics remained on good terms with France, Spain, some states in Italy, and the German Catholic territories. These conflicting religious loyalties were one reason Switzerland pursued permanent neutrality.

The emergence of cosmopolitan ideals centred on Switzerland's economic development, coupled with no desire for territorial expansion, contributed to neutrality's success there in the late nineteenth century. Many Swiss thought that the newly established international organisations based in Switzerland, such as the Red Cross, confirmed their country's reputation as an honest broker in international affairs,<sup>34</sup> and that a non-aligned Switzerland was more than entitled to permanent neutrality.

Without a stable political system such as direct democracy, the general public generally will not put sufficient faith in government policies. Permanent neutrality was no different. Swiss policymakers instituted a system of referendums to give people their say on laws passed by parliament.<sup>35</sup> To resolve the dilemma between the needs of individuals and the necessity of having a unified foreign policy, federalism was seen as the ideal option. Determined to avoid further political mayhem, Swiss leaders approved a new constitution that granted all cantons full autonomy except in national defence, international trade, and federal law.<sup>36</sup>

Swiss permanent neutrality was recognised as part of international law at the Congress of Vienna, secured through intense diplomacy by the Swiss plenipotentiary Pictet de Rougemont, who capitalised on Switzerland's cooperation during the Napoleonic Wars to win the Congress's

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<sup>34</sup> Edgar Bonjour, *Swiss Neutrality: Its History and Meaning*, trans. Mary Hottinger (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1946), 99.

<sup>35</sup> Pak Hügeon, 53.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

approval. This body formally recognised Switzerland's self-declared neutrality,<sup>37</sup> the validity of which, Switzerland strongly held, could not be questioned by the major powers. When Austria tried to replace France as the dominant influence in Swiss foreign policy, Pictet made sure that the provision that Swiss neutrality was the common goal of Europe was inserted.

Switzerland has long prided itself on being a stronghold of free expression. At times, this cherished freedom would put Switzerland in a conundrum. Political refugees have urged their Swiss hosts to side with democratic forces in the rest of Europe, abandon its neutrality, and support those rebelling against abusive governments. Some even demanded the Swiss declare war on royalist Europe and attempted to launch armed raids in order to overthrow neighbouring monarchies.<sup>38</sup> Though freedom of expression made Switzerland vulnerable to external agents, its neutrality was sustained.

Although neutral, the Swiss government assigned a high priority to national defence, forming a national defence force (1647). Despite this, it was evident that Swiss neutrality depended on major powers' support, of which Britain and Prussia shouldered the main burden of maintaining balance of power between Austria and France.<sup>39</sup> However, this is not to suggest Switzerland needed the assistance of outside powers to defend itself. During the Franco-Prussian War, when 80,000 retreating French troops crossed into neutralised Switzerland, Prussian troops, aware of Switzerland's military capabilities, did not dare enter Swiss territory to pursue them.<sup>40</sup>

### **Success Factors**

Though Switzerland lacked natural resources, had a small population, and was a late participant in industrialisation, by the late nineteenth century it was thriving economically. Financially able to fund both domestic prosperity and defence, Switzerland could fend off any economic penetration of major powers that might impede its path to permanent neutrality.

The effective and transparent decision-making process of the Swiss government was another asset of Swiss neutrality. Its tradition of local autonomy, coupled with its nascent federalism, resulted in flexible and speedy decision-making. Irrespective of internal political differences, when

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<sup>37</sup> Bonjour, 55.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>40</sup> Pak Huiho, 24.

it came to major foreign policy, the federal government could act to counter the schemes of major powers.

Initially, Swiss politics was comprised of factions that aligned with their favourite countries and suffered from foreign domination, including a brief occupation by French troops (1798-1802).<sup>41</sup> Switzerland was also troubled by religious differences but rose above such disadvantages to enact electoral reform and minimise political infighting, which in combination with the prevalent cosmopolitanism among the Swiss populace helped to realise the country's permanent neutrality.

### <Belgium>

After the 1830 revolutions protesting some aspects of the 1814-15 European peace settlement, which was seen as biased towards conservative aristocrats and monarchs, many liberals and nationalists wanted to replace the old order with one that emphasised the will of the people and independent states. Belgian politics was no exception. The Catholic Belgian uprising against the domination of the Protestant Dutch paved the way for the affirmation of Belgian independence at the London Conference (12.1831). Subsequently, five powers (Austria, Britain, France, Prussia, and Russia) pledged to guarantee the neutrality of Belgium, and the signing of the Treaty of London (4.1839) legalised this arrangement.<sup>42</sup>

### Background

Similar to multilingual Switzerland, Belgium was a bilingual society divided into a French-speaking majority and a significant Flemish-speaking minority. Its economy was saddled with numerous problems; as soon as the major powers sanctioned Belgian independence (12.1831), the country's dependence on Rothschild loans began<sup>43</sup> due to a simultaneous end of support from its colonies, the termination of Dutch economic assistance, the closing of markets in the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies, and hostile Dutch industrialists. Nevertheless, the Belgian economy took off in the area of overall investment, especially in the iron and coal industries and in railway construction, greatly helping the mining industry's growth. The banking sector also flourished, extending large loans to industry and establishing investment trusts to further industrial growth.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Pak Hugeon, 42.

<sup>42</sup> Bridge and Bullen, 90.

<sup>43</sup> E. H. Kossman, *The Low Countries: 1780-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 174.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 176-178.

Internationalisation of the Belgian economy was an important legacy of Belgian neutrality. Belgian entrepreneurs overcame Belgium's small population and competition with major European powers to be successful in overseas markets. In the 1870s and 1880s, the Belgians vigorously engaged in the construction of railways and tramways in France, Austria, Germany, and Italy. During the 1890s, Belgian manufacturers were involved in steelworks in Russia and even constructed Chinese railways.<sup>45</sup> Given that both railways and steel constituted crucial components in foreign policy during the nineteenth century, neutralised Belgium helped security sensitive countries feel relatively assured when engaging the services of its companies.

Though the new Belgian constitution sought to create a transparent political system, the conservative-friendly monarch exercised a strong hand in foreign policy because the main issues of concern for Belgian politicians were national unity and defence. Belgium ultimately succeeded in maintaining its neutrality owing to its monarch's strong leadership, though this was also partly a consequence of the major powers' balance of power game.

Take for instance a proposed customs union with France (1842), which would have led to the presence of French customs officials in Belgium. Britain and Prussia, worried about a potential loss of influence in Belgium, pressured both countries to scrap the proposed union. Their success in having France abandon the proposal<sup>46</sup> reflected the degree of interest the major powers had in Belgium. Similarly, there was Germany's botched attempt to persuade Belgium to revise its judicial system when Germany found the Belgian press's opinions on German religious policy meddlesome.<sup>47</sup>

Had France refused to relinquish its territorial ambitions, and had Britain adopted a hands-off approach towards Europe, the perpetual neutrality of Belgium might have been elusive. Instead, Britain vigorously backed Belgian neutrality with the threat of war against France during the stationing of French troops (1831),<sup>48</sup> but the French were fighting against the Dutch in Belgium and were honoured for doing so by King Leopold I. When war between France and Prussia grew imminent, Belgium's diplomatic overtures to both countries successfully ensured that neither party

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 419.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 419.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 51-52.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>49</sup> Bridge and Bullen, 90.

would violate the conditions of Belgian neutrality when fighting began.<sup>49</sup> Belgium's neutrality would later be violated by Germany during WWI, but the longevity of Belgian neutrality was nevertheless remarkable.

Since Belgium's neutrality was a product of major power calculations, the country was not expected to pursue armed neutrality. Nevertheless, the Belgian government placed significant interest in a strong military. Belgium could count on a well-armed and trained force of 100,000 men (1839) to defend its territorial integrity and permanent neutrality status. Military specialists viewed Belgian armed forces as a respectable fighting force until 1870, but later the quality of its forces markedly deteriorated. While other European countries were increasing their military readiness through conscription, Belgium's Defence Law (1902), which entrusted national defence mainly to volunteers, led to a weakening of Belgian forces.<sup>50</sup>

### **Success Factors**

The renewed emphasis on legitimacy and treaty rights as the basis of international order in the post-1871 system powered a resurgence of conservative European diplomacy.<sup>51</sup> Belgium could thus rest assured that its permanent neutrality status was safe from major power intrusion. After more than two decades of faithfully implementing permanent neutrality (1866), Belgium was rewarded when Britain, France, and Prussia met in London and reaffirmed the Treaty of London.<sup>52</sup> This demonstrated that even lightly armed countries like Belgium could survive geopolitically, as long as neighbouring powers valued and practised balance of power and were committed to honouring their neutrality.

Colonial expansion was an important characteristic of neutral Belgium. Under the aegis of Leopold II and at the urging of men like Émile Banning, Belgians were persuaded to embrace colonialism. Economic benefits and national prestige were on the table, but they were subordinate to the recognition of other European powers.<sup>53</sup> Yet not even its acquisition of Congo could remake Belgium's weak status.

The longevity of Belgian neutrality needs to be assessed differently when drawing a comparison to a Swiss-style neutrality. Belgium's experience as an independent state was not long,

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<sup>50</sup> Frank Lord Warrin, Jr., *The Neutrality of Belgium, 1918*, (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1918), 56-57.

<sup>51</sup> Bridge and Bullen, 177.

<sup>52</sup> Warrin, 42.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 377.

but it was able to acquire and maintain its neutralisation through external means. Maintaining independence, not to mention permanent neutrality, was by no means an easy task. Unlike Switzerland, Belgium was unused to such an approach to foreign policy. Whereas Switzerland could summon a formidable military to counter any foreign infringement upon its neutrality, Belgium depended on foreign acquiescence, especially Britain's. Still, Belgium's weak military strength could not support its neutrality amidst a shift in the regional balance of power, as evidenced by WWI.

### <Bulgaria>

Bulgaria was regarded by Korean intellectual Yu Giljun as an appropriate model for Korean neutrality, but the country was never actually neutral. In the late nineteenth century, as the once powerful Ottoman Empire was weakening, Russia emerged as a hegemonic power in the Balkans. Exploiting British sympathy with Christians and hostility toward Muslims, Russia deflected the Austrian attempt to utilise its alliance with Britain to prevent Russian encroachment. Eventually, though Austria was unwilling to consign Bulgaria to the status of Russian vassal, it relented to Russian ambitions, and the Treaty of San Stefano was signed (3.3.1878), establishing an autonomous Bulgarian state. This was followed by the Treaty of Berlin (7.1878), after which Bulgaria's autonomous status as a buffer state was protected from the Ottoman Empire by major powers aiming to check Russian expansion. Finally, Bulgaria declared its official independence (1908).

### **Background**

For a weak buffer state like Bulgaria, building a healthy economy was a daunting task. But Bulgaria's economic prospects seemed bright at the time of semi-independence. Svishtov served as a major point of trade along the Danube, acting as a gateway for European commerce. Bulgarians could also point to their expertise in textiles, productive and fiercely independent guilds, and agricultural production (especially grain). Few, however, would have predicted that the Bulgarian economy would encounter a series of roadblocks. In the late nineteenth century, when the Bulgarian government shifted its modernisation efforts into high gear, the introduction of a land tax and the reduction of customs and excise taxes decreased government revenues. A Franco-Austrian-German consortium loan and a sharp increase in indirect taxation also undermined the Bulgarian economy.

The bitter rivalry between conservatives and liberals did nothing to stabilise Bulgaria either. Conservatives, representing the wealthy ranks of the guilds and trading communities, held a paternalistic view of peasants in Bulgaria. They favoured the formation of a senate to act as a restraint against the excessive enthusiasm of the masses and to prevent the prince from pursuing policies that might jeopardise Bulgarian autonomy. Liberals, holding egalitarian views, possessed a different opinion, seeing peasants as the progressive embodiment of autonomous Bulgaria.<sup>54</sup> These differences, however, did not deter Bulgaria from achieving its quest for autonomy.

Despite its fragile status in politics, Bulgaria possessed all the trappings of a self-governing country. Overcoming fierce debates and violent confrontations, Bulgarians narrowed their differences, such as the dispute over the Bulgarian prince's rights and duties, in their constitution. As the chief diplomat and commander-in-chief of the armed forces, the prince could appoint and dismiss ministers, name the president, convene and dissolve the national assembly, and attach his seal of approval to any legislation before passage.<sup>55</sup>

Although it was the Ottoman Empire's vassal, Bulgaria was never free from Russian political intrusion, which forced Bulgaria to tread carefully. When Russia registered its disapproval of Ferdinand, Bulgaria's newly elected prince (1888), Bulgaria tried to ignore Russia's complaint but was forced to swallow its pride and assent to Russian involvement in its affairs. Only then could Bulgaria pursue modernisation and transform Bulgaria into the "Belgium of the Balkans".<sup>56</sup>

The country's enfeebled military faced a tough test early on. Bulgaria's union with Eastern Rumelia elicited Russian hostility and gave Serbia a rationale for furthering its own expansion. Overjoyed at the prospect of unification, Bulgaria was shocked by Serbia's sudden invasion. A chastened Bulgaria, painfully realising its vulnerability, signed The Constantine Agreement (4.1886) to settle the dispute with Serbia, painfully; without major powers' support, Bulgarian foreign policy was destined to fail.<sup>57</sup>

The rivalry between the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Russia also factored into Bulgarian geopolitics. Bulgaria, as did Romania, functioned as a buffer state for Austria-Hungary, protecting Hungary from foreign invasion. Austria-Hungary expected Bulgaria to derail Russia's intention to

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<sup>54</sup> R. J. Crampton, *Bulgaria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 98.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

appeal to Pan-Slavism to buttress its policy of expansion in the Balkans. Due to its vassal status, Bulgaria was barred from attending the Hague Peace Conference (1907) and thus could not present its case to the international community.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, ultimately the principality was able to use the favourable geopolitical situation (the preservation of peace in Southeast Europe over territorial expansion) and Austria-Hungarian goodwill, rather than Russian cooperation, to gain its independence from the Ottoman Empire. Though never given the status of neutrality, Bulgaria overcame its geographical weakness and went from a buffer state to a fully independent one in three decades.

### **Success Factors**

Ever since its inception as an autonomous buffer state, Bulgaria had to face foreign (primarily Russian) intervention in its domestic and foreign policies. Nevertheless, Bulgaria skilfully played its cards to expand its hard-won power and was not stymied by its exclusion from the Hague Conference. Instead, it utilised its geopolitical situation to its advantage by proclaiming its independence and ending its dependency status vis-à-vis the Ottoman Empire and Russian intervention, demonstrating that it was possible for a buffer state to overcome its geopolitical handicaps. Bulgarians were able to skilfully use one vital issue (a railway line takeover) as a means to an ultimate goal (independence) and to entice the support of one major power (Austria-Hungary) to block opposition from other powers. Furthermore, Bulgaria benefited from Russia's defeat in the Russo-Japanese War, which, at least for a time, stopped the Bear cold in its tracks.

Bulgarians were divided between the Pan-Slavic pro-Russian party and the expansionist pro-independence party. The former wanted to align Bulgaria's foreign policy closely to Russia's, and the latter favoured the incorporation of Eastern Rumelia and other surrounding regions. Such division had a debilitating effect on Bulgarian politics until Bulgaria managed to reduce the gulf between political factions and agree to a common foreign policy.

A late participant in industrialisation, Bulgaria, like other non-industrialised countries, lacked capital and technological know-how. At one point, the country became so dependent on external loans that its foreign policy was centred on obtaining such loans. For instance, 30% of government

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 174.

revenue went to paying off foreign debt (1901).<sup>59</sup> As a part of its solution, the Bulgarian government patiently worked to raise tariff rates, set up government monopolies in key areas like railways, and shored up domestic industries through various state programmes to minimise major power infiltration into the Bulgarian economy, which eventually strengthened Bulgarian independence.

#### • **Neutralisation Attempts in Korea**

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the historical trajectories of the three Far Eastern countries were very different. China, a victim of Western imperialism like Korea, declared wartime neutrality during the Russo-Japanese War to prevent the conflict from spilling over its borders, but its government was never strongly committed to its neutralisation; Western powers' significant interests in China made them easily embrace its wartime neutrality and thus the issue of neutralisation went no further except for Knox's later neutralisation attempt on Manchurian railways. As for Japan, neutralisation was unnecessary for protecting itself from external aggression. Instead, armed with a strong economy and formidable military, Japan was much courted by France, Britain, and the U.S. as an ally. However, Korea, pinned in between major powers looking out for their own interests in East Asia, did not have the luxury of waiting for suitors to emerge. Thus, Korean neutralisation was reasonably put forward as one way to release itself from the rivalry between continental and maritime powers or was suggested according to their needs.

Seemingly, Korea had many chances to become a neutral country—some volitional and some not of its own making or choice—and to potentially be freed from the volatile and ultimately violent machinations of China, Japan, and Russia. However, the Sino-Japanese War collapsed the balance of power between China and Japan on the Korean peninsula, which, according to Morton A. Kaplan's balance of power theory, is competitive behaviour in international politics caused by a hegemonic conflict to gain control.<sup>60</sup> Thus Pak Yeongho warned against assigning too much goodwill to balance of power, pointing out the demise of Poland and Turkey. Without the power to sustain itself, no country could hope to fully adopt such a concept.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>60</sup> Gang Jongil, *Gojong ui daeMi oegyo: galdeung, gidae, jwajeol* [Gojong's Diplomacy with the U.S.: Conflict, Hope, Frustration] (Seoul: Ilwolsa, 2006), 251.

<sup>61</sup> Kim Yonggu, "Manguk gongbeop", 170.

After the Russo-Japanese War, the balance of power between continental power Russia and maritime power Japan was again lost on the Korean peninsula. Now, victorious Japan could, with American and British blessings, colonise Korea, effectively ending the prospect of neutralisation. Therefore, the result of Korean neutralisation attempts differed sharply from European ones; the aforesaid backgrounds and success factors of Switzerland, Belgium, and Bulgaria facilitated neutralisation or independence under agreements between major powers. Conversely, the breakdown of balance of power between China and Japan or Japan and Russia, and the struggle for major powers' interests made Korean neutralisation impossible. While the breakdown of balance of power certainly played a key part, other factors also affected Korean neutralisation attempts. As Chapters III-VII chronologically investigate the development of neutralisation attempts for Korea, they will explore these factors in relation to historical events and to European neutrality precedents.

## Chapter III. Neutralisation Attempts from the Post-Imo Mutiny to the Pre-Geomundo

### Incident (1882-1885)

The Imo Mutiny strengthened China's position in Korea under the international law system, initiating the Sino-Japanese rivalry and causing the Gapsin Coup. Given this situation, this chapter explains how Japanese and Westerners came to feel that Korean neutralisation was necessary for accomplishing their respective aims in Korea after the Imo Mutiny and around the time of the Gapsin Coup.

### • Neutralisation Initiatives After the Imo Mutiny (1882-1885)

East Asian countries began to be exposed to Western imperialism in the mid-nineteenth century. After the Treaty of Nanjing (29.8.1842) following China's defeat in the Opium War (1840-1842) opened China to Britain, imperial Western powers compelled Ryukyu and Japan to adopt the Western-centric international system through the conclusion of unequal commercial treaties with them in the 1850s. These development in turn prompted China to sign the Sino-Japanese Friendship and Trade Treaty (13.9.1871) with Japan, which signalled its first acceptance of the international treaty system in its relations with the Japanese, stipulating mutual equality and benefits between the two countries.<sup>1</sup> Interpreted as a Chinese denial of the Sino-centric tributary system, the treaty paved the way for East Asian countries to implement a treaty-based international system with each other and in particular served as a positive catalyst for Japan to conclude new treaties with neighbouring countries.<sup>2</sup>

Having established the foundation of a modern state through the Meiji Restoration (3.1.1867), Japan contemplated a new direction for its foreign policy. As part of this process, Saigo Takamori, one of its leading statesmen, initiated *Seikanron* 征韓論 (Debate on the Conquest of Korea) in mid-1873.<sup>3</sup> Iwakura Tomomi, Okubo Tomishichi, and Kido Koin, however, questioned Saigo's plan, contending that Japan should focus first on internal affairs.<sup>4</sup> While these officials temporarily halted a more assertive Korean policy, the political environment began to change in Korea—Gojong's

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<sup>1</sup> Kim Keyhiuk, 144-150.

<sup>2</sup> The Sino-Japanese Friendship and Trade Treaty put both China and Japan on an equal footing, but placed Japan above Korea. *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 日本外交文書 (Japanese Diplomatic Documents) 6, No.88, 144-145; No.96, 195, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Andre Schmid, *Korea Between Empires 1895-1919* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 26.

<sup>4</sup> Delmer M. Brown, *Nationalism in Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955), 122.

father Daewongun, who had pursued a policy of seclusion for nearly ten years (1863-1873), was forced to step down after Korean official Choe Ikhyeon's memorial (25.10.1873) attacking the Daewongun encouraged Gojong to declare his self-rule (4.11.1873).<sup>5</sup> Two months later, Iwakura and Okubo shifted their stance and adopted a gunboat diplomacy.

Before carrying out this strategy, Japan thoroughly investigated the East Asian geopolitical situation through diplomacy or by force. When Sōyama Taneomi, a member of the Japanese delegation, visited China to ratify the Sino-Japanese Friendship and Trade Treaty in April 1873, he corroborated China's non-intervention policy in Korea's external affairs, despite the tributary relations between the two countries.<sup>6</sup> In March 1874, Japan, wanting to draw Russia's attention away from Korea, dispatched Enomoto Takeshi as a pretext for discussing the Sakhalin issue.<sup>7</sup> In April, Japan invaded Taiwan in response to the murder of the Ryukyu shipwrecked on Taiwan in December 1871,<sup>8</sup> seeking as well to test China's commitment to its vassal state. Locked in disputes with Western powers in Xinjiang and other regions and the Muslim rebellion in Central Asia,<sup>9</sup> China could not react forcefully to this action, which gave the Japanese the confidence to extend their influence into Ryukyu and later Korea. In November, the Japanese government received the information from Enomoto that the Russians would not meddle in Japan-Korea disputes.<sup>10</sup> Japan eventually signed the Treaty of St. Petersburg with Russia, stipulating that the former would give up Sakhalin on the condition that the latter hand over the Kuril Islands to Japan (7.3.1875).<sup>11</sup>

Emboldened by China's weak response and Russia's disinterest towards Korea, Japan began to mount a more aggressive Korean policy; the Japanese survey vessel *Unyō* ventured close to the coast of Ganghwa Island and was fired on by Korean batteries (20.9.1875). Japan responded by

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>6</sup> Pak Huiho, 29.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 27-28.

<sup>8</sup> Kim Keyhiuk, 190-202.

<sup>9</sup> Xinjiang was in a dispute with Russia. Kim Yonggu, *Imo gullan gwa gapsin jeongbyeon: sadae jilseo ui byeonhyeong gwa hanguk oegyosa* [The Imo Mutiny and the Gapsin Coup: the Transformation of the Sino-centric Order and the Diplomatic History of Korea] (Won: Incheon, 2004), 11-15. China's southwestern region was exposed to British threat after it consolidated Burmese rule. Seong Hwangyong, *Geundae dongyang oegyosa* [A Diplomatic History of Modern East Asia] (Seoul: Myeongjisa, 2005), 66-67. Central Asia was grappling with Muslim rebellion. Kirk W. Larsen, *Tradition, Treaties, and Trade: Qing Imperialism and Chosŏn Korea, 1850-1910* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 60.

<sup>10</sup> Pak Huiho, 29.

<sup>11</sup> *Joint Compendium of Documents on the History of Territorial Issue Between Japan and Russia II: Period Before 1905*, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/russia/territory/edition92/period2.html>.

sending a flotilla at the end of January 1876 to demand an open treaty with Korea.<sup>12</sup> Eager to avoid an unnecessary confrontation with Japan, Li Hongzhang, the governor-general of Zhili Province, urged the *Zongli yamen* 總理衙門 (Foreign Affairs Office) to advise Korea to negotiate with Japan<sup>13</sup> and echoed the sentiment in his personal letter to Yi Yuwon, a chief Korean state councillor. Influenced by Li's recommendation and Yi's advice for the opening of Korea, Gojong agreed to negotiate with Japan,<sup>14</sup> thus resulting in the conclusion of the Treaty of Gangwha (27.2.1876).

While this treaty stipulated Korean independence and accorded it the same status as Japan, it contained many unequal clauses: Korea was required to open two ports of trade with Japan, to give the latter control over its consular jurisdiction in said ports, and to allow Japanese ships to survey the Korean coast at will.<sup>15</sup> To top it all, whereas Korea interpreted Article 1 of the treaty as not only freeing it from Chinese suzerainty, but also granting it full autonomy in the new international law system, Japan regarded it as a device to deter Chinese intervention in Korea, mirroring France's acknowledgement of Vietnam's independence in the Second Treaty of Saigon (15.3.1874) to deter Chinese intrusion.<sup>16</sup> The Treaty of Ganghwa prompted Russia to ponder signing a treaty with Korea as well to protect its border trade and future commercial interests there, provided that Korea sign treaties with other Western powers.<sup>17</sup>

As the Sino-Japanese tensions surrounding the Ryukyu kingdom came to a boil in September 1878, Japan, having settled the Korean issue, decided to annex Ryukyu militarily, and Matsuda Michiyuki, the Chief Secretary of Japan's Interior Ministry, mobilised police and military forces to do just that in March 1879. Still locked in a territorial row with Russia over Xinjiang, Li Hongzhang could only complain that Japan's annexation of Ryukyu, China's vassal and an autonomous state,

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<sup>12</sup> Hayashi, a Japanese envoy to China, having confirmed that China regarded Korea as its vassal but would not interfere in Korea's internal affairs and would thus allow autonomy in Korea's foreign policy, secretly advised his government to conclude a Serbia-style unequal treaty with Korea. *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 9, No.41, 163-164, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Academia Sinica. Institute of Modern History, ed., *Qingji Zhong-Ri-Hán guānxì shǐliào* 清季中日韓關聯史料 [Historical Materials on the Relations Between China, Japan and Korea at the End of the Qing Dynasty], Li Hongzhang to Zongli yamen, 1876.1.22 (Taipei: Academia Sinica, Institute of Modern History), 1972 276-278.

<sup>14</sup> Kim Gyeongchang, *Dongyang oegyosa* [East Asian Diplomatic History] (Seoul: Jipmundang, 1982), 123-124.

<sup>15</sup> In addition, the treaty did not mention tariffs on Japanese goods. Larsen, 63.

<sup>16</sup> Pak Huiho, 30.

<sup>17</sup> D. M. Pak, *Reosia wa Hanguk* [Russia and Korea], trans. Min Gyeongheon (Seoul: Dongbuga yeoksa jaedan, 2010), 298.

was an affront to China and ask for a quick end to this action, but Japan rejected his request, arguing that Ryukyu was its vassal.<sup>18</sup>

After the Treaty of Gangwha, Korea's foreign policy underwent a significant change. Gojong, partly influenced by Huang Zunxian's essay, *Cháoxiǎn cèlüè* 朝鮮策略 (*A Strategy for Joseon*), was willing to enter treaty relations with Western powers, despite protests from Confucian-minded traditionalists such as Yi Hangno and Choe Ikhyeon.<sup>19</sup> Around this time China began to have doubts about the traditional tributary system, knowing that Western powers could subjugate militarily weak Korea by force. The potential loss of Korea, which was described in terms of “the loss of lips [Korea] makes teeth [China] cold [danger] (脣亡齒寒)”<sup>20</sup> could threaten Chinese security and prestige. China, as such, intended to use the *Zongli yamen* to preserve its tributary relationship with Korea, while incorporating some elements of Western-devised international law, a start to transforming the tributary system. Aside from this formal diplomatic channel, China also opened informal diplomatic channels to advise Korea on its relations with the West.<sup>21</sup>

However, some political factions in China had different ideas about how to defend Chinese interests in Korea. For example, the Purist Party, composed of officials and scholars, was opposed to accommodating Western powers' demands and favoured aggressive actions as Zhang Peilun argued (1882).<sup>22</sup> Another faction was the treaty-port community, comprised of compradors, merchants, and entrepreneurs. Faction members Zheng Guanying and Tang Tingshu convinced Li Hongzhang to consider commerce in dealing with Korea.<sup>23</sup>

Whereas China identified the Western-led international system as a threat to the tributary system, Japan conversely decided to challenge it in Korea. Extremely troubled by socioeconomic

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<sup>18</sup> Pak Huiho, 30.

<sup>19</sup> Martina Deuchler, *Confucian Gentlemen and Barbarian Envoys: The Opening of Korea, 1875-1888* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977), 104-105.

<sup>20</sup> Larsen, 51.

<sup>21</sup> During 1876-1880, Li Hongzhang and Korean State Councillor Yi Yuwon exchanged letters addressing various issues, including the question of Korea signing treaties with the West. Gwon Hyeoksu, *Geundae Han-Jung gwangyesa ui jaejomyeong* [Review on the History of Modern Korean-Chinese Relations] (Seoul: Hyeon, 2007), 105.

<sup>22</sup> Zhang Peilun joined Zhang Jian in urging the Chinese government to post a high commissioner to Korea to oversee Korean affairs, permanently station Chinese garrisons in Korean ports, promote modernisation of the Korean army, and facilitate a greater degree of cooperation between Chinese and Korean troops. Deuchler, 138-139.

<sup>23</sup> Larsen, 59-60.

problems and political instability, Korea had limited capability to implement an effective foreign policy. Having its eye on Korea since the Meiji Restoration, Japan kept a close watch on its neighbours as well, worrying that powers like China and later Russia would impose their agendas on Korea. Extremely sceptical about Korea's ability to preserve its territorial integrity, Japan resolved to increase its leverage there.

Meanwhile, China had adopted a stance of close vigilance towards Japan ever since its annexation of Ryukyu, with the Chinese Foreign Affairs Office commenting in August 1879 that in the near future Korea would become the target of Japanese expansionism.<sup>24</sup> Concerned about Korea's approach to Japan,<sup>25</sup> Japanese designs in Korea, and, to a lesser extent, a possible Russian incursion there, Li Hongzhang encouraged Korea to enter treaties with Western powers to hold each other in check amidst the weakening tributary system.<sup>26</sup> The good offices<sup>27</sup> of Chinese officials Ma Jianzhong and Ding Ruchang bore fruit with a series of treaties, such as the Treaties of Commerce and Amity with the U.S. (22.5.1882),<sup>28</sup> Britain (6.6.1882), and Germany (30.6.1882).<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Frederick F. Chien, *The Opening of Korea: A Study of Chinese Diplomacy, 1876-1885* (Hamden: Shoestring Press, 1967), 63.

<sup>25</sup> Gojong dispatched a "Gentlemen's Mission" to Japan (1881.2) to observe its institutional and material changes since the Meiji Restoration. Peter Duus, *The Abacus and the Sword: the Japanese Penetration of Korea, 1895-1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 53.

<sup>26</sup> Li told Yi Yuwon that as Japan's influence had penetrated Korea, it would have to sign treaties with Western powers to counter Japan and Russia (1879.7). Kim Jongwon, "Jo-Cheong sangmin suryuk muyeok jangjeong ui chegyeol gwa geu yeonghyang [The Ratification of the Regulations for Maritime and Overland Trade Between Chinese and Joseon Subjects and Its Impact]", in *Joseon hugi daeoe gwangye yeongu* [A Study of External Relations in Late Joseon], Kim Jongwon and Yi Yangja (Seoul: Hanul, 2009), 128. Gojong, demonstrating the foresight to anticipate that Korea's diplomatic horizons would be widened, also endorsed Korea's conclusion of treaties with other countries (Larsen, 74).

<sup>27</sup> No Korean representative negotiated the treaty with the U.S., and even negotiations for treaties with Germany and Britain were led by Ma. Larsen, 76; 79. The U.S. representative Commodore Robert W. Shufeldt even stated that he "gave the credit of the treaty to Li and Ma". Frederick C. Drake, *The Empire of the Seas: A Biography of Rear Admiral Robert Wilson Shufeldt, USN* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1984), 298.

<sup>28</sup> The good office clause, modelled after a very similar clause in the Sino-American Treaty (1858), was included in this treaty, but the U.S. had no intention of committing itself to maintaining Korean independence and was merely interested in advancing U.S. commercial interests and extending its civilisation in Korea. Gojong and his adherents assumed that the U.S. was not only legally but also morally committed to Korean independence. Kim Seungyoung, *American Diplomacy and Strategy Toward Korea and Northeast Asia, 1882-1950 and After: Perception of Polarity and US Commitment to a Periphery* (New York: Palgrave, 2009), 15.

<sup>29</sup> Britain, however, refused to ratify this treaty as the Regulations for Maritime and Overland Trade Between Chinese and Korean Subjects gave China special privileges not granted to other powers. In late 1883, Parkes obtained a new treaty from Korea, giving Britain much lower tariff rates, allowing British merchants to purchase land and build factories in Korean ports, and permitting British warships to call in Korean ports. Germany also followed suit, and the U.S. obtained the same benefits enjoyed by Britain as well by invoking most-favoured-nation status. Larsen, 93.

In negotiating these treaties, Li and Ma insisted on inserting a 'Chinese suzerainty clause' to exert China's influence over the Korean government. In addition, since China had been engaged in a serious confrontation with the French regarding Chinese suzerainty over Vietnam, they calculated that confirming their suzerainty in Korea could work in their favour when negotiating with France, although their insistence on it was based in treaty logic. However, Li and Ma failed to have the suzerainty clause included within the treaty itself and could only convince Korea to attach a letter<sup>30</sup> to the text of treaty that acknowledged the special Korea-China relationship.

However, upon reading the attached letter, British Minister to China Sir Harry Smith Parkes questioned the nature of Anglo-Korean relations. Under Western-dominated international law, Korea tried to maintain two systems of international relations, which sanctioned the continuation of tributary relations between Korea and China, as well as aligning Korea with Japan or Western powers, unwittingly gave Korea dependency status, not independence. Parkes thus raised this issue: "How are we to recognise this quasi-dependent condition and at the same time to treat Korea as an equal...appears to me to be a puzzling problem."<sup>31</sup> Parkes' misgivings notwithstanding, the Chinese, in trying to protect Korea, had instead left it vulnerable; Korea's treaties with Western powers signalled the advent of multilateral imperialism on the peninsula.

The Imo Mutiny (23.7.1882) represented the conflict between the conservatives and progressives within the Korean military. Unhappy with the special treatment and better pay enjoyed by the Special Skills Force, an elite army trained by Japanese military officer Horimoto Reizō, Korea's old-style military units, having discovered sand and chaff in their overdue rice stipend, snapped. Relying on Daewongun's private sympathies, soldiers stormed the royal palace, destroyed the Japanese legation in Seoul, and killed Horimoto and a number of high-ranking Korean

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<sup>30</sup> The text of the letter attached to the Treaties of Commerce and Amity with the U.S. reads as follows:  
The Chosen country (Korea) is a dependency of China, but the management of her governmental affairs, home and foreign, has always been vested in the sovereign.

Now, as the Government of the United States and Korea are about to enter into treaty relations, the intercourse between the two nations shall be carried on in every respect on terms of equality and courtesy, and the King of Korea clearly asserts that all the articles of the treaty shall be acknowledged and carried into effect concerning the laws of independent States.

In the matter of Korea being a dependency of China (in) any question that may arise between them in consequence of such dependence the United States shall in no way interfere.

Lee Yurbok, "Establishment of a Korean Legation in the United States, 1887-1890: A Study of Conflict Between Confucian World Order and Modern International Relations", *Illinois Papers in Asian Studies* 3 (1983): 11-12.

<sup>31</sup> Cited in Lisa Chung, "Somnolent in Korea: Korean-British Trade at the Turn of the 20th Century", Unpublished Paper, George Washington University, 2005, 5.

officials.<sup>32</sup> This event marked the turning point of Sino-Korean relations and facilitated China's superior position there.

China, astonished by the dispatch of Japanese troops to Korea, also sent troops despite its tense stand-off with France in Vietnam, rapidly intervening to avoid a repeat of Japan's military intervention in the Ryukyu case.<sup>33</sup> Korea's strategic importance and the settlement of the military conflict in Xinjiang with Russia through the Treaty of St. Petersburg (24.2.1881) also led to Chinese troops quickly marching into Seoul.<sup>34</sup> These forces stabilised the situation by transporting Daewongun to China and punishing the plotters of the mutiny. More importantly, China saw this intervention as a chance to transform Korea's status as China's nominal vassal to a real dependency of China.<sup>35</sup>

Contemporaneously, Japan was undergoing serious political turmoil due to the civil rights movement spearheaded by the opposition parties and groups threatening the stability of the Meiji regime. Externally, Japan's expansionist drive was constrained by China's growing influence in Korea, which was viewed as a "dagger pointed at the heart of Japan"; if Korea remained "backward" and "uncivilised", it would remain weak and become game for foreign predators.<sup>36</sup> Facing these challenges, the Japanese government sought to defuse the civil rights movement by shifting national attention to its response to the consequences of the Imo Mutiny.

After the Imo Mutiny, Japan, believing that the Min clan regime would survive, initially adopted a moderate stance, but the collapse of the Min clan regime and the re-installation of the Daewongun administration (until he was dispatched to China) prompted it to contemplate a tough

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<sup>32</sup> *Gojong sillok* 高宗實錄 (Veritable Records of Gojong), 1882.7.23, <http://sillok.history.go.kr>. Kim Yonggu also underscores how the underlying anti-Japanese sentiment among the populace also affected the mutiny, since people felt their living conditions had deteriorated after the Ganghwa Treaty. Kim Yonggu, "Imo gullan gwa gapsin jeongbyeon", 10.

<sup>33</sup> Pak Huiho, 32.

<sup>34</sup> This treaty stipulated returning a majority of occupied Xinjiang to China and, in return, Russia receiving reparation of 9 million roubles from China. Kim Gyeongchang, 246-256.

<sup>35</sup> Eun Jeongtae, "CheongIl jeonjaeng jeonhu Joseon ui daeCheong jeongchaek gwa Jo-Cheong gwangye ui byeonhwa [Joseon's Diplomatic Policy for Qing and the Change for Joseon-Qing Relations Before and After Sino-Japanese War]", in *CheongIl jeonjaengi Han-Jung-Il sangug ui sangho jeollyak* [The Interactional Strategies Among Korea, China and Japan During the Sino-Japanese War], Wang Hyeonjong et al. (Seoul: Dongbuga yeoksa jaedan, 2009), 88.

<sup>36</sup> Duus, 49.

<sup>37</sup> Pak Huiho, 36.

stance.<sup>37</sup> After Foreign Minister Inoue Kaoru headed to Shimonoseki to supervise Japanese Minister to Korea Hanabusa Yoshimoto, who had been involved in implementing the government's countermeasures to the Imo Mutiny in Korea,<sup>38</sup> Vice Foreign Minister Yoshida Kiyonari held a meeting in Tokyo with Li Shuchang, Chinese Minister to Japan, in which suzerain-vassal relations between China and Korea emerged as a major issue. Li noted that since China's vassal (Korea) had violated the Japanese legation, China would dispatch its soldiers as protection for the Japanese legation. (When dispatching troops to Korea, China tried to use the Imo Mutiny as an excuse to prove that the tributary system was still relevant in the Western-style international order by claiming that it had been "obliged to interfere as a father does when his son has gotten into some ugly scrape".<sup>39</sup>)

Yoshida, however, insisted that since Japan had already recognised Korea as an independent country in the Treaty of Gangwha, China must accept that any further response to the Imo Mutiny be based on this treaty and that Korea should be responsible for the protection of the Japanese legation.<sup>40</sup> As the two countries squabbled and Japan appeared to be losing the argument, both those in and out of the Japanese government showed strong interest in what was happening across the sea. While China worked to undermine Korean autonomy, several Japanese newspapers and officials, seizing on Korea's recent entry into the international system, adopted a new stratagem (i.e. Korean neutralisation) to counter or refute the Sinocentric tributary system that overshadowed Korea's foreign relations.

To begin with, in September 1882, several Japanese newspapers, representing various political affiliations, devoted leaders to the Imo Mutiny, reflecting contemporary Japan's internal political atmosphere and holding Korea responsible for the damages to Japan's prestige caused by

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<sup>38</sup> The result of this countermeasure was the Treaty of Jemulpo (1882.8.30). For details of this treaty, see *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 15, No.110, 208, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>. Illustrating Japan's efforts to win the favour of the Korean court, Japanese Minister Takezoe Shinichirō later informed Gojong (1884.11) that the Japanese government had decided to forgive Korean indemnity payments to Japan, which were included in the treaty, and Takezoe suggested that the money should be used for Korean modernisation projects like the establishment of a postal service or reform of the military organisation. Duus, 57.

<sup>39</sup> Nish, ed., Hall to Parkes, 1882.12.11, Vol. 2, 116. For its part, the Korean message of gratitude to China for its intervention showed that Korea still adhered to the tributary system, with Gojong addressing himself as a humble servant, who had executed the duties of the post to which he was appointed by the Chinese emperor. Kiernan, 101.

<sup>40</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 15, No.102-107, 163-166, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

the incident in Korea. But when China quelled the disturbance with its dispatched troops, the newspapers changed their tune to focus on the suzerain-vassal relations between China and Korea and eventually took up the issue of how Korean independence could be formally acknowledged.

The pro-liberal newspaper the *Jiyū shimbun* not only denied the suzerain-vassal relationship between Korea and China,<sup>41</sup> but also expressed through the leader entitled “Continental Relations” its fear of a Russian invasion of Korea. Believing that China alone could not protect Korea from Russia, the *Jiyū shimbun* argued for its independence, proposing that Japan explain to the Chinese the mutual benefits each could reap if Korea were acknowledged as an independent country and allowed to enter into treaty relations with Western powers, which would enable the latter to prevent the southern expansion of Russia.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, according to the *Jiyū shimbun*, Korea, though it remained within the Sino-centric world, could not be considered China’s vassal, and its real independence should be secured by an expedient involving the Western major powers.<sup>43</sup>

Another Liberal Party-leaning newspaper, the *Chōya shimbun*, argued that although China regarded Korea as its vassal, Japan and the Western powers had already acknowledged its independence because Gojong had been exercising his sovereignty by autonomously implementing the internal and external affairs of Korea. Furthermore, this newspaper readily overlooked China’s previous intervention in the Korean issue, regarding it as a bilateral issue between China and Korea. But it also contended that Japan should devise a scheme to guarantee permanent peace,<sup>44</sup> which could well imply Korean neutralisation.

Known for its pro-bureaucracy stance, the *Tokyo nichichi shimbun* tried to prove Korea’s independent status by questioning its vassal status under the tributary system within the context of international law.<sup>45</sup> After all, China’s laws and treaties did not apply to Korea, even if the country obtained investiture from China and sent tributary envoys there, and, furthermore, Japan and Western powers were willing to sign treaties with it.<sup>46</sup> Accordingly, even if Korea maintained tributary relations with China, because both its internal and external affairs were autonomous, it was

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<sup>41</sup> *Jiyū shimbun* 自由新聞 [Freedom Newspaper], 1882.9.2; 1882.9.10.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 1882.9.13.

<sup>43</sup> Pak Huiho, 44.

<sup>44</sup> *Chōya shimbun* 朝野新聞 [Whole Nation Newspaper], 1882.9.7.

<sup>45</sup> *Tokyo nichichi shimbun* 東京日日新聞 [Tokyo Daily], 1882.9.27-30.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 1882.9.27; 1882.9.29.

neither a semi-independent state nor a Chinese vassal<sup>47</sup> but an independent country, a sentiment later echoed by Yu Giljun.<sup>48</sup>

Two other Japanese newspapers presented concrete ideas regarding Korea's future status: the *Tokyo yokohama mainichi shimbun* and the *Yūbin hōchi shimbun*. Determined to clarify the nature of Korea-China relations, the pro-constitutional revisionist party newspaper *Tokyo yokohama mainichi shimbun* compared the status of Korea to that of Bulgaria in the international system on 10 and 17 September 1882, asserting that it could imitate Bulgaria's example in its quest for neutralisation. Since Bulgaria, despite its status as a tributary of Turkey, was invested with the rights of internal politics and diplomacy through the Treaty of Berlin (1878), Korea should also be accorded the same rights through a joint agreement between China, Britain, and the U.S.,<sup>49</sup> which meant that Korea's independence could be secured by a compromise among major powers. The weakness of this suggestion, however, was that as a part of a Confucian-oriented tributary system, Korea's situation was not truly analogous with the one in Bulgaria, a European state in the international system.

Another pro-constitutional revisionist outlet, the *Yūbin hōchi shimbun*, highlighted Korea's geostrategic importance in the scramble between East Asian countries and Russia as a rationale for China and Japan putting its protection at the centre of their East Asia political strategies.<sup>50</sup> Thus, to end the confusion surrounding Korea's status as either Chinese vassal or independent state, this newspaper concluded Korea could hold the same position as Switzerland and Belgium. The newspaper asserted that its status vis-à-vis China did not matter and would not affect the relationships between Korea, China, and Japan<sup>51</sup> since Korea could be regarded as an independent country under international law thanks to its autonomy in internal and foreign affairs.<sup>52</sup> To neutralise Korea, the newspaper suggested holding a meeting in Tokyo to have China, Britain, the U.S., Germany, and France certify Korea's position as "an actual independent state under the nominal tributary system" (20.9.1882).<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 1882.9.30.

<sup>48</sup> Kim Yonggu, "Imo gullan gwa gapsin jeongbyeon", 29.

<sup>49</sup> *Tokyo yokohama mainichi shimbun* 東京横浜毎日新聞 [Tokyo Yokohama Daily], 1882.9.10; 1882.9.17.

<sup>50</sup> *Yūbin hōchi shimbun* 郵便報知新聞 [Postal News], 1882.9.13.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 1882.9.19.

The gist of these two newspapers' arguments was that without completely refuting its tributary relation with China, Korea's internal and diplomatic independence could still be secured by major powers' support. But given that these newspapers did not adequately consider the contemporary Korean situation (i.e. its insufficient self-defence capabilities, no consensus within Korea on neutralisation,<sup>54</sup> and the dominance of the tributary system within Korea), their schemes could not succeed.

In the same month, Inoue Kowashi (1843-1895), a prominent member of the *Daijō-kan* (Council of State) and later Chief Secretary to the House of Peers, floated his own proposal, which seemed far more likely to receive the Japanese government's attention. Known for his contributions to Japanese legal reforms, Inoue also left an important mark in foreign policy. Prior to his proposal, he had participated in Sino-Japanese negotiations on Ryukyu and the revision of treaties signed by Japan, served alongside Gustave Emile Boissonade and Itō Hirobumi as a member of the investigative committee convened by the Japanese government to explore Japan's relations with Korea after the Ganghwa Incident, and composed diplomatic documents for Japanese negotiators after the Imo Mutiny and the Gapsin Coup.<sup>55</sup>

With this rich diplomatic experience under his belt, Inoue proposed a comprehensive Korean neutralisation plan driven by four motivations: First, the current situation of the Korean government and people would make independence there impossible at least for several decades and thus Korea would inevitably become another Vietnam or Burma if Britain, the U.S., Germany, and especially Russia occupied its strategic areas and intervened in its internal affairs.<sup>56</sup> Second, if Korea, as a geopolitically strategic locus of the East Sea, were invaded like Vietnam and India, it would be disastrous not only for China and Japan, but for East Asia. Its protection should thus be the main element of any East Asian strategy since Chinese protection was deemed insufficient.<sup>57</sup> Third, Japan would need to logically respond against the vassal theory of China and develop a credible alternative to it. As a suzerain, China constantly intervened in Korea and demanded the latter to

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 1882.9.14.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 1882.9.20.

<sup>54</sup> Pak Huiho, 45.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>56</sup> Kawaoko Nakatani, "Migogunrango no nippon no Chosen chūripka kōsō [Japan's Conception of Neutralisation After the Imo Mutiny]", *Chōsenshi kenkyūkaibon bunshū* 32 (1994): 144-145.

<sup>57</sup> *Inoue Kowashi bunsho* 井上毅文書 [Inoue Kowashi Documents], Microfilm No. A-856.

offer apologies to foreign countries, thereby granting opportunity and excuse to these countries, which was unreasonable for Korea and unfavourable to Japan.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, Japan had to solemnly pledge to refute the vassal theory of China.<sup>59</sup> Finally, he found Japanese adviser Boissonade's Triple Alliance between China, Japan, and Korea<sup>60</sup> unworkable for thwarting Russian aggression due to Korea's relative powerlessness and China's unwillingness to cooperate. Therefore, Inoue, though affected by Boissonade's Triple Alliance, devised his neutralisation plan as an alternative means to preserving peace in East Asia.<sup>61</sup>

In his proposal, after critiquing Boissonade's Triple Alliance scheme, Inoue directed his attention to the international law concepts of autonomy and semi-autonomy to lay out a logical basis for Korean neutralisation: while an autonomous country is an independent country that possesses equal rights to negotiate with a third country, a semi-autonomous country has autonomous rights in its internal affairs, but its foreign affairs are conducted by its suzerain. Since Korea had signed treaties with other countries and dispatched ministers to them, it was an autonomous, not a semi-autonomous, state. Even the term "vassal," based on "righteousness" in the old tributary system, was incompatible with present international law.<sup>62</sup>

The timing of Inoue's proposal was fortuitous since Korean envoys to Japan Pak Yeongho<sup>63</sup> and Kim Okgyun had already requested Japanese assistance for Korea's enlightenment and independence and, in response, the Japanese government planned to hold a cabinet meeting in late October 1882.<sup>64</sup> Thus, when Inoue proposed Korean neutralisation (17.9.1882) in his *Chōsen seiryak* 朝鮮政略 (Strategy for Joseon), he had reasons to be optimistic.

In this written commentary, Inoue Kowashi entertained the hope of transforming Korea into a Belgian- or Swiss-style neutral state under the joint guarantee of China, Japan, the U.S., Britain, and Germany through a conference. If any one of the five countries failed to abide by this arrangement, it would be condemned by the remaining powers, and if any other state violated the pact, the five

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<sup>58</sup> Kawaoko, 145.

<sup>59</sup> *Inoue Kowashi shiryōhen* 井上毅史料編 [Documents on Inoue Kowashi] 4, 659-660.

<sup>60</sup> Since the Russian threat to Korea was considered more dangerous than Chinese suzerainty over Korea, Boissonade suggested a Triple Alliance between China, Japan, and Korea to counter Russia. *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 15, No.106, 172.

<sup>61</sup> Pak Huiho, 39.

<sup>62</sup> *Inoue Kowashi bunsho*, Microfilm No.A-856.

<sup>63</sup> Pak also asked for and obtained a ¥170,000 loan from the Japanese government. While ¥50,000 went to finance a Korean indemnity payment to Japan, the rest was used to support the pro-Enlightenment faction. Duus, 55.

<sup>64</sup> Pak Huiho, 40.

countries would form an alliance to defend Korean neutrality. Although China was Korea's superior country, the latter was not the dependency but the tributary state of the former, as well as being an independent state. As one of Korea's protectors, China could not intervene in its domestic affairs alone without the agreement of the remaining four powers. If the above conditions were achieved, the surrounding areas would be stabilised, Korea, as a permanently neutral state, could free itself from Chinese suzerainty and China, saving face as Korea's suzerain, could preserve both its honour and benefits.<sup>65</sup> However, by excluding Russia as a potential guarantor of Korean neutralisation, this proposal served as an extension of Japan's policy to counter Russia in the Far East,<sup>66</sup> and it seemed inevitable that Russia would oppose it.

After justifying his Korean neutralisation plan in *Chōsen seiryak*, Inoue now contacted influential Japanese government figures in order to realise his goal; first, he sent a letter to Yamagata Aritomo, who viewed China as a potential adversary and had thus called for the strengthening of the Japanese army and navy after the Imo Mutiny, to win support for his proposal (23.9.1882). In his letter, he mentioned that it was impossible to predict whether Chinese intervention in Korea was temporary or permanent and until this became clear, it might be difficult to decide on the direction of Japan's strategy. The only way for Japan to combat China's intervention in Korea was to put aside petty conflicts over short-term profits there and to construct a long-term political strategy; a permanent neutrality along the lines of Belgium and Switzerland through joint protection of Korea was Japan's best alternative. Some days later, Inoue sent his *Chōsen seiryak* to Hanabusa Yoshimoto to get his support. He also sent *Chōsen seiryak* to Itō (9.11.1882) when the Japanese government was discussing the aid requested by Pak Yeongho and Kim Okgyun.<sup>67</sup>

Inoue's scrupulous neutralisation plan was designed to stave off Chinese intervention in Korea for ultimately promoting Japan's national interests. With Western powers' entry into East Asia, Japan initially wanted to weaken Korea-China relations (i.e. the vassal-suzerain relationship) through the Treaty of Ganghwa by stipulating that Korea was an autonomous and independent state.

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<sup>65</sup> Kawaoko, 145.

<sup>66</sup> Kim Yonggu, "Imo gullan gwa gapsin jeongbyeon", 82.

<sup>67</sup> *Inoue Kowashi shiryōhen* 4, 614-615. Inoue Kowashi tried again to neutralise Korea in May, June, and July 1883 against the background of Sino-French tensions over Vietnam and the possible restoration of the Ryukyu king, privately urging Yamagata to persuade Chinese Minister to Japan Li Shuchang on Korean neutralisation. *Inoue Kowashi shiryōhen* 1, 355-356.

The deployment of Chinese troops to Korea after the Imo Mutiny, however, served as momentum for strengthening the Sino-centric tributary system in Korea, thus tilting the balance in China's favour and forcing Japan to reluctantly accept its superior position there. Under these circumstances, Inoue chose Korean neutralisation as the most reasonable strategy to practically refute, though nominally acknowledging, the tributary system. Furthermore, by proposing it when he did, he tried to take advantage of the resuscitation of the Sino-French conflict over Vietnam and lump it together with the resolution of the Ryukyu issue.<sup>68</sup> Yet, mindful of Japan's national interests, he asserted that if China demanded the restoration of the Ryukyu king, Japan had no choice but to jettison plans for a diplomatic solution and to instead quickly shore up its military to confront China,<sup>69</sup> intimating duplicity in his proposal.

Whereas the two Japanese newspapers and Inoue contemplated Korean neutralisation in order to counter Chinese control over Korea, Gustave Emile Boissonade (1825-1901) had Russia in mind when he devised his neutralisation proposal.<sup>70</sup> Credited for introducing the theory of natural law to Japan, the French legal scholar served as a legal adviser to the Japanese government from 1873 to 1895. He assisted with the enactment of Japanese legal codes, accompanied Okubo's mission to China after Japan's expedition to Taiwan, advised Inoue Kaoru not to hire foreign judges, thus benefiting Japan's treaty revision process, and taught at Japanese schools specialising in law.<sup>71</sup> Even before his neutralisation initiative, he contributed to Japan's Korean policy; after the Imo Mutiny broke out, he urged Inoue Kowashi to send Japanese troops to protect Japanese residents in Busan and Wonsan and to notify countries that concluded treaties with Korea—China, the U.S., and Britain—of the occupation of Ganghwa Island and Songdo as collaterals.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> *Inoue Kowashi shiryōhen* 4, 617-619. 1882.7.7

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* 1882. 6.14

<sup>70</sup> Though Russia's interest in Korea increased after its treaties with Western powers, Boissonade's concern seemed to have been overblown considering that before the Geomundo Incident, Russia was preoccupied with extending its influence in Western Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia, and only a few Russians were familiar with China, Korea, and Japan. Kim Yonggu, *Geomundo wa Beulladiboseutok—19segi Hanbando ui pahaengjeok segyehwa gwajeong* [Geomundo and Vladivostok—The Crippled Globalisation Process of the Korean Peninsula in the 19th Century] (Seoul: Seogang daehakgyo chulpanbu, 2009), 20.

<sup>71</sup> Pak Huiho, 52.

<sup>72</sup> Itō Hirobumi, ed., *Hisho ruisan-Chōsen kōshō shiryō tsū* 秘書類纂-朝鮮交渉資料 中 [Collected by the Secretary—Materials on Negotiations with Korea Volume 2] (Tokyo: Genshokyoku, 1970), 187-188.

Boissonade's close involvement in Korea differed substantially from France's indifference towards Korea at the time. After unsuccessfully invading Korea to avenge the deaths of French Catholic priests killed for proselytising there (*Byeongin yangyo* 丙寅洋擾 French campaign against Korea) in October 1866, France refused to become entangled in Korean affairs. France, engrossed in colonising Vietnam and Madagascar, limited its involvement in Korea to protecting the few French missionaries there. It was the last Western major power to recognise the kingdom, in May 1886, choosing to remain on the sidelines until major powers began scrambling for Korean concessions after 1895. Nevertheless, considering his prior activities mentioned above, Boissonade might have suggested Korean neutralisation in his capacity as an adviser for Japan.

Refusing to accept Korea's subordinate relationship with China and viewing it as an independent state,<sup>73</sup> he claimed that Russia was undoubtedly the common enemy of China and Japan and that if Russia invaded Korea, Japan's independence would be harmed. If China and Japan united, however, Russia would not be able to annex Korea. Furthermore, even if Korea was completely subordinated to China, it would not have the same negative ramifications for Japan that Russian domination there might. Pointing out that the three countries shared the same religion, script, culture, and thought, Boissonade believed the recent incident in Korea (i.e. the Imo Mutiny) could facilitate his idea of a Triple Alliance.<sup>74</sup>

Boissonade's take on permanent neutrality was grounded in the issues described above and was first set forth in "an opinion about permanent neutrality" (22.9.1882), five days after Inoue Kowashi penned *Chōsen seiryak*. In it, Boissonade explained that Belgium, Switzerland, and Luxembourg had achieved permanent neutrality through consensus among various countries and could maintain their neutral status even if one country participating in the conference objected. As long as the conference did not dissolve, the decision to grant neutrality to the states remained in effect, and one state boycotting the conference could not reverse the resolution on neutrality.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Boissonade argued that Japan, having considered Korea independent, had signed the treaty with it and thus did not need to worry about Chinese intervention there, facilitating direct negotiations with Korea to appease it. He pointed out that Britain and France intervened in Egypt despite Egypt's deeper relations with Turkey than Korea's current relations with China. Itō, ed., "Hisho ruisan-Chōsen kōshō shiryō tsū", 203-212. Similarly, Inoue Kowashi told Yoshida that Korea was a semi-independent tributary state like Turkey, which enabled Japan to deal directly with a semi-independent Korea that possessed autonomous rights. *Inoue Kowashi shiryōhen* 4, 658-659.

<sup>74</sup> Itō, ed., "Hisho ruisan-Chōsen kōshō shiryō tsū", 230-237.

To disseminate his thoughts on neutralisation, Boissonade sent another opinion, “A Theory of Permanent Neutrality” (恒守局外中立化論) (29.10.1882), composed in the form of a catechism, to Inoue Kowashi. First, he asked whether it would be possible to announce neutrality even if Korea did not demand or approve it, and if it were announced, which country should make the declaration. Second, if Korea did desire neutrality, from which countries should it obtain a neutrality guarantee and what would its outcome be?

In answer to the first question, he insisted that neutrality could be declared without Korea’s consent, and as the most important stakeholders there, China and Russia<sup>76</sup> should announce it. Although Korea was not subject to the announcement of neutrality, the major powers that concluded the treaty would be bound by the announcement, and if any one power invaded Korea, the remaining powers would punish the invader. But if Korea signed an offensive and defensive alliance with one power, the remaining powers would be unbound from the announcement. For his second question, he reasoned that if Korea voluntarily recognised neutrality and called for guarantors, China, Russia, and Japan should offer to act since those responding should be the powers that most feared other countries’ wrongful actions regarding Korea. However, if Russia did not accept neutrality and invaded Korea, as long as Korea stayed neutral, the related powers should react either diplomatically or militarily. Considering this possibility, the best option for Korea would be to persuade all Western powers, which so far had been unwilling to participate in Korean neutrality due to a lack of sizeable interests there, to guarantee Korean neutrality at a conference.<sup>77</sup> He listed Switzerland, Belgium, Serbia,<sup>78</sup> and Luxembourg as models and contended that their successful neutralisations were heavily indebted to neighbouring countries discovering that neutralisation was beneficial to preventing the annexation of said countries by another power.<sup>79</sup>

Though Boissonade meticulously supported his opinion and theory about Korean permanent neutrality, his proposal ultimately functioned as a stratagem to contain Russia, even though he

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<sup>75</sup> Itō Hirobumi, ed., *Hisho ruisan-gaikōhen jō* 秘書類纂-外交編 上 [Collected by the Secretary-Compilation on Diplomacy Volume 1] (Tokyo: Hisho ruisan kankōkai, 1934), 618-620

<sup>76</sup> Although Japan had a larger stake in Korea than Russia had, Boissonade seemed to have misinterpreted the informal Russo-Korean relations.

<sup>77</sup> Itō, ed., “Hisho ruisan-Chōsen kōshō shiryō tsū”, 223-229.

<sup>78</sup> Some argue that Serbia was not a neutral state but an autonomous one, despite being Turkey’s vassal. Kawaoko, 149, footnote 59.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 223-224.

valued Korean independence. He considered potential Russian aggression toward Korea more dangerous than Chinese suzerainty over Korea, which was a markedly different perspective from those of the Japanese newspapers and Inoue Kowashi. On the other hand, by stressing that the application of the successes of neutral countries in Europe in Korea would be difficult, he implied that there was no consensus among the neighbouring powers over whether Korean neutralisation was needed,<sup>80</sup> despite first considering a balance of power.

Whereas Japanese newspapers and the Japanese political elite like Inoue Kowashi or even Boissonade championed Korean neutralisation, the Japanese government approached the issue more cautiously since China, wanting to exploit the Imo Mutiny, sought to intervene in Korea's internal affairs by concluding the Regulations for Maritime and Overland Trade Between Chinese and Korean Subjects (4.10.1882). Article 1 of the regulations stated that in the event of a dispute Chinese commissioner Li and Gojong could consult each other to resolve it. By intimating that Gojong was equal to Li, this agreement literally reaffirmed Korea's status as China's vassal. Article 2 granted Chinese unilateral extraterritoriality in Korea without applying it to Koreans in China. China also levied a tariff barrier in Korea on Japanese and Western goods; this imposing of discriminatory tariff rates provided a pretext for the revision of the existing Anglo-Korean treaty.<sup>81</sup>

While the regulations were designed to strengthen China's suzerainty over Korea<sup>82</sup> and to secure exclusive commercial privileges there, they reflected other intentions as well. Korea wanted to boost its economy and counter Japan by linking with China while Korea's pro-China faction sought to employ Chinese power to resolve domestic issues. China longed for an opportunity to exercise its suzerainty over Korea after Japan's advance into Korea and Western powers' refusal to endorse Chinese suzerainty over Korea.<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, Li Hongzhang worried that this might provoke a Japanese response.<sup>84</sup> Thus, under Li's order, Möllendorff (foreign affairs), Ma Jianchang (customs), Chen Shutang (commerce), and Ding Ruchang (mining) were dispatched to advise the Korean government, and Li appointed Admiral Wu Changqing to secretly monitor all political activities there.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Obinata, 131.

<sup>81</sup> For more information on the regulations, see Kim Jongwon, "Jo-Cheong sangmin suryuk muyeok jangjeong ui chegyeol gwa geu yeonghyang", 140-156. China's tariff barrier in Korea is mentioned in Larsen, 92-93.

<sup>82</sup> Due to the assertion of Zhou Fu, Tianjin Customs Daotai, the regulations excluded the clause of most-favoured-nation status and instead stipulated a vassal clause between Korea and China to protect the former from deception or

Under these circumstances, the Japanese government's Korean policy was bound to be constrained. One way to comprehend the contemporary situation is to trace the diplomatic activities of the then Japanese Foreign Minister and other practitioners of front-line diplomacy who were involved in these issues, which will enable us to judge how Korean neutralisation was handled by at least some Japanese government officials.

Inoue Kaoru (1836-1915) was the then Japanese Foreign Minister. Having studied in England to learn about the Western world during 1863-1864, Inoue was responsible for reorganising government finances on modern lines after the Meiji Restoration (1868) as Vice Minister of Finance in 1871. In 1876, he was involved in the conclusion of the Treaty of Ganghwa as vice-ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary and became Japan's first Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1885.<sup>86</sup> Respected as a *genrō*,<sup>87</sup> Inoue greatly contributed to the field of finance and diplomacy. Given this illustrious background, his political influence in the Japanese government was likely to be much greater than Inoue Kowashi's.

At first, Inoue Kaoru was not a natural supporter of neutralisation. His Korean policy centred on advocating Korean independence based on the Ganghwa Treaty and abetting Japan's active expansion into Korea by repudiating Chinese suzerainty over Korea. In late July 1882, when Chinese Minister to Japan Li Shuchang brought up Korea's status as a dependency of China, Inoue strongly insisted that Korea was not a dependency.<sup>88</sup> His view was also shared by his ministerial colleagues; three months later, Minister of the Right Iwakura Tomomi proposed to Chancellor

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humiliation at the hands of other countries. He insisted on such a clause because the Treaty of Saigon had omitted defining Vietnam's status as China's vassal and thus enabled France to annex Vietnam. Kim Jongwon, "Jo-Cheong sangmin suryuk muyeok jangjeong ui chegyeol gwa geu yeonghyang", 145.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 165-168.

<sup>84</sup> Li instructed Chinese advisers Wang Bogong, Tang Shaoyi, and Wu Zhongxian to emphasize that they were dispatched to Korea at the explicit request of Gojong. Larsen, 105.

<sup>85</sup> Kim Yunsik, *Eeumcheongsa* 陰請史 [Diary], 1882.10.7; 10.14; 10.16 (Seoul: Tamgudang, 1971).

<sup>86</sup> For more on his biography see, William G. Beasley, *The Meiji Restoration* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972).

<sup>87</sup> *Genrō* referred to retired elder Japanese statesmen who played pivotal roles in the Meiji Restoration, serving as official advisers to successive Japanese emperors in the late 19th to early 20th centuries. Itō Hirobumi, Kuroda Kiyotaka, Ōyama Iwao, Inoue Kaoru, Saigō Tsugumichi, Matsukata Masayoshi, Yamagata Aritomo, Katsura Tarō, and Saionji Kinmochi were considered *genrō*.

<sup>88</sup> Obinata, 117. Inoue also confided to British Minister to Japan Parkes that he hoped the Western countries that had concluded treaties with Korea could provide moral support to guard it against exterior aggressions, examples of which were found in Europe where countries like Belgium depended on major powers' goodwill to maintain their neutrality. *Foreign Office: Consulates and Legations, Japan: General Correspondence*, FO 46/288, Parkes to Granville, No.128, Secret, 1882.9.12, 75-76.

Sanjō Sanetomi that to undermine China's vassal theory Japan should consult with other countries to demonstrate international support for Korean independence.<sup>89</sup> Yamagata (who was serving as Field Marshal) in turn called for Japan to marshal its powers in support of Korean independence, to encourage Korean efforts at building sufficient strength to suppress rebellions, and to curry favour with Korean officials seeking independence.<sup>90</sup>

The sudden outbreak of the Imo Mutiny, however, poured cold water on Inoue's original Korean policy, and in order to resolve this conundrum he sounded out the thoughts of other statesmen like Itō Hirobumi by submitting three plans for a Korean strategy to Sanjō: the first, recognition of Korean independence through cooperation with related major powers; the second, direct discussion of the dependency issue between China and Korea; and the third, aid to Korea's pro-Enlightenment faction to expedite independence.<sup>91</sup> The opinions of the *genrō* were divided. Concerned that the second plan could lead to a direct confrontation between China and Japan, Iwakura called for the adoption of Inoue's first and third recommendations. But even these measures, if quickly implemented, might risk creating friction between China and Japan. To avoid this worst-case scenario, Iwakura asserted that Korea should be guided slowly, starting with the field of culture.<sup>92</sup> A more proactive approach came from Itō; he argued that because Korean independence was needed urgently, Japan should offer support if Korea desired it and force it to declare its independence, asserting that Gojong's previous statements (i.e. Korea was China's vassal state) should be withdrawn.<sup>93</sup>

Taking into account these opinions and acknowledging that only a minority in Korea desired Japanese assistance for its independence,<sup>94</sup> Inoue concluded that it was impossible for Japan to persuade Korea to end its traditional suzerain-vassal relationship with China and declare itself independent. Besides, the Japanese government, to initiate Korean independence, would have to interfere in Korea's internal and external affairs and play a leading role in ending the suzerain-

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<sup>89</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 15, No.133, 253-254, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>90</sup> Kim Yonggu, ed., *Han-Il oegyo migan geukbi saryo chongseo* 韓日外交未刊極秘史料叢書 [Historical records collection of the unpublished and secret diplomacy between Korea and Japan] 47 (Seoul: Asea munhwasa, 1996), 3-4.

<sup>91</sup> Itō Hirobumi, ed., *Hisho ruisan-Chōsen kōshō shiryō jō* 秘書類纂-朝鮮交渉史料 上 [Compiled by the Secretary-Materials on Negotiations with Korea Volume 1] (Tokyo: Hisho ruisan kankōkai, 1933), 251-254.

<sup>92</sup> Pak Huiho, 46.

<sup>93</sup> Itō, ed., "Hisho ruisan-Chōsen kōshō shiryō jō", 251.

<sup>94</sup> In his letter to Itō (1882.11.17), Inoue Kaoru divulged that according to Kim Okgyun, only Gojong, Pak Yeongho, and Kim Okgyun were interested in Korean independence. Kim Yonggu, "Imo gullan gwa gapsin jeongbyeon", 79.

vassal relationship between China and Korea, which would inevitably lead to a head-on collision with China. Therefore, he judged the case for direct Japanese action weak and questioned whether Korean independence was worth the risks involved. With the U.S. on the verge of ratifying its Treaty of Amity and Commerce with Korea, recognising Korean independence, Inoue selected his first plan, and the Japanese government accordingly adopted a passive Korean policy after October 1882. Inoue recognised that China held the upper hand owing to the Regulations for Maritime and Overland Trade between Chinese and Korean Subjects and that therefore Japan should pertinently set about coaching the Korean government to sign treaties with Western powers and to gradually consolidate its position as an independent country<sup>95</sup> without openly refuting Chinese suzerainty.

Inoue concluded that neutralisation was the best answer to Japan's new aims on the peninsula. His first plan, revealed in German Minister to Japan Zedtwitz's report (1.12.1882) to German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, began from the principle of recognising Korea's independence by employing a treaty to make it permanently neutral like Switzerland or Belgium.<sup>96</sup> According to Zedtwitz, Inoue, in his role as Japanese Foreign Minister, probed the French Minister to Japan, Arthur Tricou, about Chinese suzerainty over Korea and whether the European powers were willing to guarantee Korean neutralisation and create a "Belgium-style country in East Asia," but Tricou responded evasively. The report does not explain Tricou's diffidence, but he might have felt that Korea, as China's dependency, could not be considered a truly sovereign state like Belgium. Nevertheless, Inoue retained enough interest in Korean neutralisation to have pursued it as his passive Korean policy after the Imo Mutiny.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Itō, ed., "Hissho ruisan-Chōsen kōshō shiryō jō", 251-254.

<sup>96</sup> Gang Changseok, 67.

<sup>97</sup> Goryeodae Dogil munhwa yeonguso, ed., *Joseon jujae Dogil oegyo munseo jaryojip* [The Collection of German Diplomatic Documents in Joseon] I (Seoul: Wusam, 1993), 118. Inoue Kaoru's neutralisation efforts continued even after the Gapsin Coup as follows: 1) On his visit to Korea as a special envoy to sign a post-coup treaty with the Korean government, Inoue wanted to neutralise Korea as a pretext for withdrawal of Chinese and Japanese forces from Korea. 2) Upon receiving German Vice-Consul in Korea Herman Budler during the aforesaid Korean visit, Inoue consented to Budler's permanent neutrality proposal. *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 18, No.202, 1885.1.19, 357-369, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>. 3) As Budler's letter on neutrality theory delivered to Li Hongzhang (2.1885) revealed, Inoue concurred that Budler's theory was a good idea, saying that Japan might adopt it or would suggest it to China as soon as possible. Goryeo daehakgyo, ed., *Gu Hanguk oegyo munseo 15: Deogan* 舊韓國外交書: 德案 [Korean Old Diplomatic Documents: Pertaining to Germany] 1, No.95 (Seoul: Goryeo daehakgyo, 1970), 49-50. 4) Inoue dispatched a document to Japanese Consul in Tientsin Hatano Shōgorō, which stated that "if Joseon were to be neutralised, it would be a good strategy for her and the whole of Asia". *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 18, Confidential No.41, 1885.9.15, 390, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

In the same month, another Korean neutralisation effort was attempted under Inoue Kaoru's influence by a front-line diplomatic practitioner, Japanese Minister to China Enomoto Takeaki (1836-1908), who as the Navy Minister was a founder of the Imperial Japanese Navy. As a means to follow Japan's passive policy in Korea, Enomoto approached British Minister to China Parkes, and U.S. Minister to China John R. Young to sound them out on his neutralisation proposal (28.12.1882) via an international conference in Tokyo, where Britain, Germany, Russia, France, the U.S., and Japan could discuss Korean issues. Although Enomoto wanted to propose a guarantee of Korean independence through permanent neutrality, adding that Parkes had already obtained tacit approval from his government for Enomoto's plan, Young replied that such a proposal had to come from the Japanese Minister in Washington instead.<sup>98</sup> Despite his unwillingness<sup>99</sup> to consent to Enomoto's proposal, Young seemed to have been aware that it could place Japan on an equal footing with Western powers while declaring China's semi-civilised status by excluding it from the proposed conference in Tokyo.<sup>100</sup> Enomoto's plan could not have induced Germany either, since German Minister to China Max von Brandt shared Young's opinion and believed that Bismarck would agree with him.<sup>101</sup>

One of Inoue Kaoru's subordinates, Tanabe Taichi (1831-1915), an international law expert in Japan's Foreign Office, also tried to realise Korean permanent neutrality as part of Japan's passive policy. During his meeting with Chinese Minister to Japan Li Shuchang, Tanabe brought up a plan to neutralise Korea (16.8.1883), suggesting that China, Japan, and the U.S. should provide joint protection of it to make it a Swiss- or Belgian-style permanent neutral state.<sup>102</sup> Tanabe's inclusion of China as a guarantor of Korean neutralisation showed that not all Japanese officials agreed with

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<sup>98</sup> Jules Davids, ed., *American and Diplomatic and Public Papers: The United States and China, Series II, The United States, China, and Imperial Rivalries, 1861-1893*, Vol. 10, Young to Frelinghuysen, 1882.12.28 (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1979), 325-347.

<sup>99</sup> At the same time, the U.S. had no intention to intervene actively in Korean affairs ab initio; Young observed that "we [U.S.] have very little to lose whether Corea becomes a province of China or is annexed to Japan or remain independent". United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States: 1883*, Young to Frelinghuysen, 1882.12.26 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1883), 172-173. On the U.S. disinterest towards Korea, see Kim Yonggu, "Imo gullan gwa gapsin jeongbyeon", 127-136.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>101</sup> Brandt also revealed that Enomoto suggested Belgium and Luxembourg as models for his neutralisation proposal. *Joseon jujae Dogil oegyo munseo jaryojip I*, 122. True enough, there is no German diplomatic document that provides any official response to Enomoto's proposal, even though copies of this document were secretly sent by the German government to German diplomats in Paris, London, and Washington. *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> *Qingji Zhong-Ri-Han guānxì shīliào*, No.763, 1882.9.4, 1201.

Enomoto, who had excluded China. In fact, Tanabe's conciliatory approach towards China resembled Boissonade's, who also included China as a potential guarantor of Korean neutralisation.

As seen above, Korean neutralisation attempts by Inoue Kaoru and his diplomats cut no ice with China and other major powers. Accordingly, Inoue now sought an authority on Chinese affairs who had both diplomatic and political skills and could implement his contradictory and two-sided Korean policy artfully (i.e. acknowledge the suzerain–vassal relationships on the one hand and make Korea free from it on the other). Takezoe Shinichirō (1841-1917), a Confucian scholar who had previously served as the Japanese Consul in Tianjin and the Secretary of the Japanese legation in Beijing, seemed an ideal candidate for this job. Inoue anticipated that Takezoe's friendships with Beiyang officials in China and rich experience in negotiating with Chinese officials would ease any unnecessary tension with China. Takezoe did not disappoint; upon his arrival in Korea (1.1883), he consorted with Möllendorff, Chinese Admiral Wu,<sup>103</sup> and his subordinates, dealt with Japan's pending issues and remained vigilant for an opportunity to put forward his neutralisation proposal.<sup>104</sup>

Unfortunately, the internal affairs of Korea did not work in Takezoe's favour. Determined to maintain the centuries-old suzerain-vassal relationship that governed Korea's ties with China, the pro-China faction favoured the status quo in Korean politics and opposed any geopolitical volatility that might challenge stability and their grip on power. In fact, by August 1883, Korean officials like Min Taeho, Min Yeongik, and Min Ungsik controlled many government positions related to finance and the military.<sup>105</sup> The faction cooperated in Yuan Shikai's scheme to dominate the Korean military as well. When Yuan established four Western-style military barracks in Korea (1884), he named pro-Chinese officials Han Gyujik, Yun Taejun, Yi Joyeon, and Min Yeongik to serve as commanders.<sup>106</sup> In contrast, the pro-Enlightenment faction, which counted Kim Okgyun, Pak Yeongho, and Seo Gwangbeom as members, was not strong enough to check the pro-China faction's domination in Korean politics. Gojong's unfortunate tendency to overly rely on a major power (i.e. China)<sup>107</sup> brought little comfort to Takezoe as well.

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<sup>103</sup> Inoue Kaoru informed Miyajima Seiichirō (1883.7.7), an official at the Imperial Household Department in Tokyo, that Takezoe had advised Wu Changqing to reconsider the stationing of Chinese troops in Korea due to high costs. Takezoe then informed Wu that since the peace was restored in Korea and internal rebellion was unforeseeable, Japan had withdrawn half of its troops from Korea. Wu responded favourably, observing that China and Japan should make Korea neutral and that with the U.S. signing a treaty with Korea, there was no doubt that Britain and Germany would

Notwithstanding these facts, Japan still strived to compensate for its inferior position on the Korean peninsula. The opportunity came when China and France fought over control of Vietnam (8.1884-4.1885). During the war, while displaying an ambiguous attitude towards the French request to form an alliance against China, Japan sought to maintain amicable relations with China to resolve the division of Ryukyu.<sup>108</sup>

As China's international status took a hit from the Sino-French War and the ensuing power struggle within the Chinese government, Korea, encouraged by the geopolitical change, decided to cooperate with Japan.<sup>109</sup> This coincided with Japan's own modification of its Korean policy. Takezoe, who returned to Korea after an eleven-month holiday (30.10.1884),<sup>110</sup> was eager to exploit this change of thinking to test his neutralisation idea. He declared, "I intend to make Korea a permanent neutral state. Making Korea become a permanent neutral state like Switzerland and Belgium was always anticipated by Foreign Minister Inoue Kaoru."<sup>111</sup>

Takezoe finally put his initiative into action during his audience with Gojong (2.11.1884). Providing him with an outline of the Sino-French War<sup>112</sup> as a pretext for explaining the necessity of

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follow suit. Under this scenario, China would be left on the outside looking in, even if it continued to consider Korea a vassal state. To implement Korea's neutrality, Wu suggested Takezoe persuade Chinese Minister to Japan Li Shuchang and have him consult with Li Hongzhang. Obinata, 140-141.

<sup>104</sup> Pak Huiho, 48.

<sup>105</sup> Pak Eunsuk, *Gapsin jeongbyeon yeongu* [A Study of The Gapsin Coup] (Seoul: Yeoksa bipyeongsa, 2005), 292.

<sup>106</sup> Yi Yangja, "Wonsegae reul tonghan Cheong ui ganseop [China's Intervention in Joseon Through Yuan Shikai]", in *Joseon hugi daeoe gwangye yeongu* [A Study of External Relations in Late Joseon], Kim Jongwon and Yi Yangja (Seoul: Hanul, 2009), 207.

<sup>107</sup> Gojong's support for signing trade regulations with China reaffirmed Korea's vassalage to China in return for its defence, which might explain his hostility towards Takezoe's plan. Hamashita Takeshi, "Maritime Asia and treaty port networks in the Era of Negotiation: tribute and treaties, 1800-1900", in *China, East Asia and the Global Economy: Regional and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Linda Grove and Mark Selden (New York: Routledge, 2008), 98.

Gojong's decision-making style had both affirmative (persistent, cautious, and shrewd) and negative (overly dependent, short-sighted, and indecisive) sides.

<sup>108</sup> Pak Huiho, 34

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>110</sup> During his holiday in Japan, Takezoe composed a document on Japan's Korean strategy; he argued that Japan, willing to protect its interests, should intervene in assisting Korea's independence. Though Korea's independence should be instigated by the countries that concluded treaties with it, its lack of self-defence and self-governing capabilities made it impossible. Thus, he claimed that weaponry and drill instructors to train a force capable of repressing internal rebellions must be sent to Korea quickly and called for close relations between China and Japan to maintain stability in Asia. Since the Taiwan and Ryukyu problems had made China question Japan's expansionist policy, China was watching carefully how Japan would react to any incident in Korea. For the sake of stability in Asia, Takezoe commented that it was imperative for Japan to sacrifice its interests in Korea and to resolve China's jealousy towards Japan. Kim Yonggu, "Imo gullan gwa gapsin jeongbyeon", 80-81.

<sup>111</sup> Inoue Kagorō, *Seoul ae namgyeodun kkum* [A Dream Left in Seoul], ed. and trans. Han Sangil, 44.

Korean neutralisation, Takezoe, contriving to alienate Korea from China, argued that as long as China and France did not enter a formal conflict, the neighbouring countries (i.e. Korea/Japan) would be unaffected, but if they officially declared war, the relations between France and Korea/Japan or China and Korea/Japan would be affected. In such a case, siding with France would mean fighting against China or siding with China would mean fighting against France. In either case, the Western powers would maintain wartime neutrality to protect their security. Nevertheless, if Korea were forced to take sides, it could face severe attack from another country. Therefore, Korea should carefully consider what it could do to guarantee its safety. But Gojong responded coolly to Takezoe's recommendation, commenting that he really hoped for peace between China and France and thus would not accept wartime neutrality for Korea.<sup>113</sup>

Since Gojong's personal affection for China was indisputable,<sup>114</sup> it was very difficult for him to adopt any measure that could damage Korea's traditional relations with China. Gojong also sought advice from his high-ranking officials on the issue. The Japan-friendly pro-Enlightenment faction members Kim Okgyun, Hong Yeongsik, and Seo Gwangbeom claimed that Korea should cut its ties with China and declare its independence. However, pro-China faction members like Min Yeongik, Min Taeho, and Han Gyujik, all serving in important government positions at the time,<sup>115</sup> opposed Takezoe's proposal since Korea did not possess the ability to maintain neutrality and should thus rely on China.<sup>116</sup> Except for several pro-Enlightenment faction members, the majority of the Korean elite claimed that Korea was better off staying loyal to China.<sup>117</sup>

As seen above, although their plans never materialised, Inoue Kaoru and his men at the Foreign Office repeatedly expressed their desire to neutralise Korea. Reflecting Japan's relatively weakened influence in Korea after the Imo Mutiny, these proposals epitomised Japan's passive Korean policy.<sup>118</sup> But these Japanese proponents of neutralisation, although steadfastly committed

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<sup>112</sup> Unlike the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars, this war was not a result of a rivalry between continental and maritime powers.

<sup>113</sup> Itō, ed., "Hisho ruisan-Chōsen kōshō shiryō jō", 260. Takezoe did not seem to mind that this plan went against his stated desire to make Korea a permanent neutral state.

<sup>114</sup> Larsen, 87.

<sup>115</sup> Min Yeongik and Han Gyujik occupied senior-level posts in recently created Chinese-style Korean military units, and Min Taeho worked for another Chinese-inspired government body, *Tongni gunguk samu amun*. Pak Eunsuk, 57; 109.

to it, were not up to the daunting task of winning over foreign sceptics, and unfortunately, Western major powers, China, and Korea remained unconvinced.

In the end, Japan-originated initiatives did not command much attention since they overplayed Japanese interests in challenging the Chinese suzerainty over Korea, neither adequately considering the balance of power nor properly reflecting Korea's willingness to remain China's vassal. In addition, the purported Russian threat towards Korea, which might have raised the level of concern, had not yet emerged. In contrast, Boissonade's plan showed more potential value.

#### • **Neutralisation Proposals Around the Time of the Gapsin Coup (1884-1885)**

In addition to Boissonade, other Western parties expressed their interest in Korean neutralisation after mid-1884. While the above Japanese neutralisation initiatives were designed to compensate for its weakened position in Korea, the aims of Westerners' proposals ranged from advancing their national interests in the Far East to breaking the cycle of single major power dominance in Korea through joint guarantee. Although most of them did not represent the official views of their governments, they provided some meaningful insight into Korea's contemporary situation since they came from an influential newspaper, a foreign adviser, and Western diplomats, and reflect the geopolitical dynamics surrounding Korea.

Russia, having seen Britain's ratification of a treaty with Korea (26.11.1883) and having appointed Baron Andrei Nikolaevich Korf as governor of the Priamur region in early 1884, adopted a more active Far Eastern policy. In early May 1884, Gojong dispatched Kim Gwanseon to N. G. Matiunin, Novokievski-based Southern Ussuri Region Border Administrator, to pass him a letter expressing his desire to sign a Korea-Russia Treaty.<sup>119</sup> Against this background, the Korean government, ignoring Li's warnings about a potential Russian occupation of Korea, directly negotiated with Russian Consul in Tianjin Karl Ivanovich Weber, whom foreign adviser Möllendorff had invited.

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<sup>116</sup> Sin Giseok, "Anjeon bojang gwa Hanmal jeongguk: (Imo gullan-Cheong-Il jeonjaeng) [Security Guarantee and the Political Situation of Late Joseon: (the Imo Mutiny-the Sino-Japanese War)]", *Gukje beophak nonchong* 11-1 (May1966): 289-290.

<sup>117</sup> Inoue Kagorō, 43.

<sup>118</sup> Pak Huiho, 51.

<sup>119</sup> Kim Okyun had already discussed the possible treaty between Korea and Russia with Russian Minister to Japan A. P. Davydov (1883.12). Song Geumyeong, *Reosia ui Dongbuga jinchul gwa Hanbando jeongchaek (1860-1905)* [Russia's Advance into Northeast Asia and Its Policy on the Korean Peninsula (1860-1905)] (Seoul: Gukhak jaryowon, 2004), 91.

By 1884, the development of capitalism and the emergence of a bourgeoisie in Russia had culminated in Siberia and the Far Eastern region becoming financially attractive. But the Russian government had not yet been captivated by the regions' charms, and the expansion of British and U.S. influence in East Asia through treaties with Korea rather than economic opportunity prompted Russia to enter diplomatic relations with Korea. This led to the conclusion of the Treaty of Commerce and Amity (7.7.1884), thereby creating a balance of power among the major powers in Korea.<sup>120</sup> Russia welcomed this treaty since it feared that Japan might occupy Korea in the event of a Sino-French War.<sup>121</sup> Moreover, the signing of the treaty marked Russia's debut on the peninsula's political stage, joining China, Japan, the U.S., and Britain,<sup>122</sup> and enabled Korea to utilise a third power to counter China, which might have been Gojong's new strategy to manoeuvre round China.

However, before the Geomundo Incident occurred (15.4.1885), expansion into Western Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia remained Russia's priorities. Thus, only a few politicians and diplomats were dispatched to Northeast Asia and even those posted there were often on holiday, leaving unprofessional secretaries to serve as chargé d'affaires in the region. Given that very few Russians were familiar with China, Korea, and Japan and that Russian Foreign Minister Giers was largely unfamiliar with the Far East, this was not entirely unexpected. Nevertheless, the appointment of Karl Weber as Chargé d'affaires to Korea demonstrated the Russian government's acknowledgement of the Korean peninsula as a necessary supplier of commodities for Russians in the region; Russia's newly acquired Maritime Province was located far from the country's central region and suffered from poor transportation. However, a limited presence of Russian military in the Far East and its comparatively weaker economy vis-à-vis other Western powers made it impossible for Russia to pursue an assertive policy in Korea.<sup>123</sup>

Undaunted by their government's passive stance towards the Far East and Korea, prominent Russian newspapers exhorted it to develop Russia's ties with the Maritime Province and several East Asian countries (especially Korea) and demanded the central government devote more interest

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<sup>120</sup> D. M. Pak, 257.

<sup>121</sup> Malozemoff, 25.

<sup>122</sup> Pak Huiho, 33.

<sup>123</sup> Kim Yonggu, "Geomundo wa Beulladiboseutok", 20-21. In fact, Giers telegraphed Russian Minister to Japan Davydov that maintaining the status quo in Korea was very beneficial to Russia (1884.12.29). Lensen, 34.

to the Far East.<sup>124</sup> In September 1884, the *Russkii Vestnik* contrasted Russia's cautious Korean policy with Germany's success in winning various concessions from Korea, which greatly benefited German ships and merchants, notwithstanding Russia's geographical advantage of being Korea's closest neighbour. It argued that building close ties with Korea could in the same way benefit Russia's industry, trade and to some extent, navigation in the Pacific. The newspaper also suggested the pursuit of an alternative to the current strategy that would generate, develop, and maintain the relationship between Korea and Russia because although Russia was striving to expand the reach of its navy, it had restrained itself for almost two years, taking only the small step of signing a treaty with Korea.<sup>125</sup>

The *Novosti* also joined the fray (10.4.1884), commenting that Korea had a large hard-working population, boasted a geopolitically strategic position, had recently appealed to the civilised countries, and had ratified commercial treaties with the U.S., Britain, Germany, and Russia. As a result, these countries' cargo ships freely entered and departed various ports in Korea. Two months later, the *Novoe Vremya*, also stressing the geopolitical position of Korea, argued that Russia must not disregard Korea with its population of eight million and should consider which country, China or Russia, would have greater influence there. Because Korea directly bordered Russian territory along the Pacific, it was very important for it to prevent China from occupying Korea. Politically, Korea had to be separated from the Chinese sphere of influence, and the Russian government had to assert its right in Korea, utilising its navy stationed along the Pacific. The *Novoe Vremya* further contended that (9.12.1884) if any powers other than Russia occupied a superior position in Korea, it would be wrong and harmful for Russia's interests. Therefore, the Russian flag must be run up higher than other countries. Subsequently, the newspaper went on to emphasise how Korea occupied a central position among its three neighbouring powers (i.e. China, Japan, and Russia) (29.12.1884).<sup>126</sup>

Meanwhile, encouraged by Japanese Chargé d'affaires in Seoul Shimamura Hisashi's promise of assistance and Japanese Minister to Korea Takezoe Shinichirō's critical comments towards the

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<sup>124</sup> Hong Unggho, "19segi huban Reosia Dongasia jeongchaeg ui byeonhwa [The Change of Russia's East Asian Policy in the Late 19th Century]", in *Sugyo wa gyoseob ui sigi Han-Reo gwangye* [The Korea-Russian Relations in the Period of Establishment and Negotiations of Diplomatic Relations], Hong Unggho et al. (Seoul: Seonin, 2008), 35.

<sup>125</sup> Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe, ed., *Reosia haegunseong munseo* [Russian State Naval Archive] I (1854~1894) (Gwacheon: Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhow, 2007), 13-15.

<sup>126</sup> *Reosia haegunseong munseo I (1854~1894)*, 15.

pro-China faction<sup>127</sup> and disenchanted by the pro-China faction's hold over the Korean government, the pro-Enlightenment faction instigated the Gapsin Coup (4.12.1884). Li Hongzhang believed that the coup was the work of the pro-Japan political faction in Korea and regarded this incident as more important than the Sino-French War, arguing that China should dispatch its military to smash Japan's plot to invade Korea.<sup>128</sup> Despite the faction's high hopes, the coup failed, putting Japan in a tight spot; Yuan Shikai,<sup>129</sup> one of the Chinese officials dispatched by Li to advise Korea, swiftly led Chinese and Korean troops in quelling the coup and drove the pro-Enlightenment faction from power. France, still at war with China, tried to exploit the Sino-Japanese confrontation during the Gapsin Coup to enter into an alliance with Japan,<sup>130</sup> but to no avail.

Given the above factors, Korea, if incorporated into the sphere of the civilised peoples, would naturally use its favourable situation and advantages to exert its influence over neighbouring countries both commercially and politically. For this reason, if a certain Western power established its position in Korea, it would be entirely undesirable as a neighbour to Russia's territorial waters along the Pacific. Thus claimed the *Novoe Vremya*: Russia, having absolutely no intention to attack or return Korea, must actively oppose a Western power invasion of Korea and pursue the increase of its influence in Korea, which would hopefully prevent Britain and/or Germany from establishing a base of operations in Russia's backyard.<sup>131</sup>

Sharing other Russian newspapers' concerns about Russia's passive Korean policy and worried about perceived U.S., British, and German expansion into the Korean peninsula, the *Moskovskiye Vedomosti* made a case for Korean neutralisation (29.12.1884) as a way of strengthening Russian influence in the country and checking other powers' expansion into Korea. The newspaper complained that Russia was a mere bystander in Korean affairs, despite Korea being located on the doorstep of the Ussuri domain and just "two steps" away from Vladivostok. It too raised the possible impact of British, Chinese, Japanese, and German warships moored at Korean

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<sup>127</sup> Seong Hwangyong, 186-187. Takezoe also spread the rumour of a Franco-Japanese joint attack on China. Pak Huiho, 34.

<sup>128</sup> Li Hongzhang, *Li wenzhong gong quanji* 李文忠公全集 [The Complete Works of Li Hongzhang] (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1962), 345-346.

<sup>129</sup> Unlike other Chinese officials in Korea, Yuan seemed to have anticipated a coup, ordering his soldiers "to sleep in their tunics and boots" two weeks before the coup. Chien, 11.

<sup>130</sup> Ferry to Sienkiewicz, 1884.12.15, quoted in Richard Sims, *French Policy Toward the Bakufu and Meiji Japan, 1854~1895* (Richmond: Japan Library, 1998), 131-132.

<sup>131</sup> *Reosia haegunseong munseo I (1854~1894)*, 16-17.

ports and the prospects of Korea becoming a strategic base for foreign military and commercial units poised to invade Russia. Quoting Shanghai newspaper articles calling Korea the key to controlling the Sea of Japan, the *Moskovskiye Vedomosti* stressed the importance of controlling Korea. As for Russia, a neutral Korea would have the same significance as a neutral Turkey. Therefore, Russia could not afford to ignore it, given that all European powers had been competing successfully for the expansion of their colonial policies.<sup>132</sup>

Frustrated by the Russian government's enervated Korean policy, the *Moskovskiye Vedomosti* proposed Korean neutralisation to potentially strengthen Russian influence in Korea and to counter other Western powers. Since Russia was already at loggerheads with European powers over geoeconomic interests in Central Asia, Europe, and parts of the Far East, Korean neutralisation could have been used to facilitate Russian hegemony in the Far East. But as long as the Russian foreign ministers stuck to their "wait and see" approach, the newspaper's entreaties would fall on deaf ears and any form of Russian-sponsored Korean neutralisation was bound to fail. In fact, just a day before this proposal, Russian Foreign Minister Nikolai Karlovich Giers advocated strict Russian neutrality amidst Sino-Japanese tension over Korea.<sup>133</sup>

During the early 1880s, Germany was experiencing rapid economic growth owing to the Second Industrial Revolution and national unification. Encouraged by this, Bismarck and the majority of conservative German politicians assumed that continued economic development would bring political and social stability to Germany. It did not take long for their judgement to be called into question, however, as Germany faced over-production, a gap between the rich and poor, and periodic economic crises.<sup>134</sup> Feeling exasperated, a growing number of German elites, including Bismarck, looked for alternate measures to solve these problems. As a result, the invigoration of trade through colonisation to resolve the country's economic, political, and social discontents came into favour. Even after Germany jumped on the colonisation bandwagon, however, its main focus lay in Africa and the Southern Pacific, where many German companies were already operating. In

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<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>133</sup> Song Geumyeong, 105. Giers' cautious stance in Korea was also shared by the Russian chief of staff who, fearful of complicating Russia's relations with China, rejected Governor Korf's proposal for the dispatch of Russian land forces to Korea in the event of the Sino-Japanese War. Lensen, 34.

<sup>134</sup> Yi Yeongwan, *Joseon gwa Dogil* [Joseon and Germany] (Seoul: Gukhak jaryowon, 2002), 27.

contrast, the German government demonstrated little interest in Northeast Asia, even if it maintained trade relations with China and Japan and had signed a treaty with Korea.<sup>135</sup>

This general disinterest towards Northeast Asia did not prevent German diplomats from commenting on Korean affairs. German Minister in Tokyo Zedtwitz submitted a report to Bismarck about Inoue Kaoru's neutrality idea, and German Minister to China Brandt, who worried about possible Russian intervention into Korea after the joint withdrawal of Chinese and Japanese forces from Korea, called for the joint Sino-Japanese protection of Korea as well.<sup>136</sup> Despite attempts to draw the government's attention to Korea, these two reports did little to transform Germany's Korea policy due to Bismarck's scant interest in colonial policy.

Although Germany itself might have been a minor player in Korea, Paul G. von Möllendorff (1847-1901) played a pivotal role in Korean foreign affairs as the first Western adviser.<sup>137</sup> Having studied law, linguistics, and East Asia studies at the University of Halle, Möllendorff moved to China in 1869 to work at Chinese customs and later, as German Vice-Consul in Tianjin, befriended Li Hongzhang. In December 1882, with Li's recommendation,<sup>138</sup> he came to Seoul and worked as Gojong's foreign policy adviser and the head of Korean customs until his resignation.<sup>139</sup>

Soon after his arrival in Korea, Möllendorff was named Vice-Minister of the *Tongni amun*, which was established in 1882 by Li Hongzhang's advice as an independent unit to handle diplomatic and commercial affairs with Japan and the West. As an adviser, Möllendorff was tasked with linking Korea's foreign policy to China's<sup>140</sup> and thus became closely involved in treaty negotiations with Britain, Germany, Russia, and France. In his early days there, Möllendorff, in line with Li's Korean policy, reckoned that Korea was too weak to retain its autonomy independently<sup>141</sup> and earned Gojong's ire by claiming that the "Korean king [Gojong] was a nominal servant of the Chinese emperor."<sup>142</sup> Möllendorff thus aligned himself with pro-China figures such as Kim Yunsik,

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>136</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 18, No.169, 317, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>137</sup> There were other advisers who were involved in Korean neutralisation efforts (Table 3).

<sup>138</sup> Li Hongzhang confided to Kim Yunsik his reasons for recommending Möllendorff: "The Japanese fear Germany the most and dislike Möllendorff, so we will send him to Korea in order to prevent their licentiousness." Chien, 42-44. Separately, Sir Robert Hart, the Inspector General of the Chinese Imperial Maritime Customs, concerned that Möllendorff's appointment proved that German influence was in the ascendant in Korea, recommended to Li Hongzhang two British subjects as alternatives to Möllendorff. Li refused his recommendations. Wayne Patterson, *In the Service of His Korean Majesty: William Nelson Lovatt, the Pusan Customs, and Sino-Korean Relations, 1876-1888* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 16.

who wanted Korea to exercise its internal and external affairs autonomously under the protection of its suzerain, China. This changed in early 1884 when Möllendorff started to drift from his pro-China outlook, based on his presumption that China's defeat in the Sino-French War exposed a weakness that could lead to its withdrawal from Korea.<sup>143</sup> During this period the tension over Korea between China and Japan began to mount; Möllendorff, knowing that Gojong had taken great pains to secure Korean independence and sovereignty<sup>144</sup> and now wanted him to counter Chinese and Japanese intervention in Korea, had to devise a new strategy to ease Gojong's anxiety.

Möllendorff considered sound economic reforms one way to support Korea's independence and ultimately realise its neutralisation. To this end, he attempted to cultivate commercial plants like bamboo by employing advanced agricultural technologies, build factories to produce glass, matches, and ceramics with modern technologies,<sup>145</sup> and with China's encouragement<sup>146</sup> used a loan worth 200,000 taels from the China Merchants Steamship Co. and the Kaiping Mines<sup>147</sup> to establish Western-style customs in Korea—all to no avail.<sup>148</sup>

Meanwhile, displeased with China's growing interference, Gojong turned to the U.S. to free Korea from China's yoke.<sup>149</sup> He, however, seemed to have misread U.S. intentions toward Korea as

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<sup>139</sup> Kim Hyeonsuk, "Hanguk geundae seoyangin gomungwan yeongu (1882~1904) [A Study of Western Advisers in Early Modern Korea (1882-1904)]" (PhD diss. Iхва University, 1999), 57.

<sup>140</sup> According to a message from the Japanese minister to Korea to the Korean Minister of Rites (1883), the *Tongni gyoseop tongsang samu amun* (統理交渉通商事務衙門) (changed from the *Tongni amun* 統理衙門) did little good in terms of Korea-Japan relations. Kim Suam, "Hanguk ui geundae oegyo jedo yeongu—oegyo jedo wa sangju sajeor eul jungsim euro [A Study of Korea's Modern Diplomatic Institution: Focusing on Diplomatic Institution and Permanent Envoys]" (PhD diss., Seoul National University, 2000), 98-99.

<sup>141</sup> Rosalie von Möllendorff, *Moellendoreupeu munseo* [Möllendorff Documents], Shin Bokryong and Kim Ungyeong trans., 67.

<sup>142</sup> Yun Chiho, *Yun Chiho ilgi* 尹致昊日記 [Yun Chiho's Diary] 1, 1884.2.10 (Seoul: Guksa pyonchan wiwonhoe, 1973), 43.

<sup>143</sup> Kim Hyeonsuk, "Moellendoreupeu ui oegyo jeongchaek gwa gyeongje gaebal jeongchaeg ui seonggyeok [Möllendorff's Foreign Policy and the Nature of Economic Development Policy]", *Hoseo sahak* 34 (2003): 89-90.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>145</sup> Kim Hyeonsuk, "Hanguk geundae seoyangin gomungwan yeongu (1882-1904)", 66-67.

<sup>146</sup> Li Hongzhang and Yuan Shikai recognised that loans could potentially increase Chinese influence on Korea and thus encouraged it to borrow from China. Larsen, 147.

<sup>147</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 28(1), No.222, 336, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>148</sup> Lee Yurbok, *West Goes East: Paul Georg von Möllendorff and Great Power Imperialism in Late Yi Korea*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988), 50.

<sup>149</sup> Gojong confided to U.S. Minister to Korea Lucius H. Foote that the U.S. argued China into withdrawing its troops from Korea. Yun Chiho, "Yun Chiho ilgi 1", 1884.4.23, 59.

<sup>150</sup> Kim Seungyeong, "American Diplomacy and Strategy Toward Korea and Northeast Asia, 1882-1950 and After: Perception of Polarity and U.S. Commitment to a Periphery", 16.

the State Department and Congress remained aloof from Korean affairs.<sup>150</sup> In fact, instead of actively working to buttress Korea's national interests, the U.S. merely adopted an ambiguous attitude of offering its good offices to Korea while refraining from formally intervening<sup>151</sup> and staved off a request from Seoul for the dispatch of an American foreign affairs adviser and military instructors to Korea.<sup>152</sup> These actions by the U.S. inevitably let Gojong down badly, which made him sense that by mid-1884 Korea could no longer secure its independence by counting on American goodwill alone.<sup>153</sup>

To make matters worse, Japan tried to regain some of its lost prestige in Korea due to the failure of the Gapsin Coup through the Treaty of Hanseong (9.1.1885),<sup>154</sup> though Yuan's action checked its expansion into Northeast Asia for the next decade.<sup>155</sup> Just as had happened following the Imo Mutiny, the coup's failure brought about the emasculation of the pro-Enlightenment faction by the Korean government and thus further bolstered China's suzerainty over Korea, which forced Korea to in response seek a rapprochement with Russia.

Against this backdrop, Möllendorff envisaged neutralisation because he thought that, due to the political strength of China and Japan and Korea's virtual incapacity to stand independent, a third country other than China and Japan had to be enticed to protect Korea<sup>156</sup>: The U.S. was too far away and its military strength was inadequate, France was concentrating on its expansion into Indochina and maintained cool relations with China after the Sino-French War (1885), Germany was not

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<sup>151</sup> R. T. Pollard, "American Relations with Korea, 1882~1895", *The Chinese Social and Political Science Review* Vol. XIV, No.3 (1932): 471.

<sup>152</sup> Lee Yurbok, "Korean-American Diplomatic Relations, 1882~1905", in *One Hundred Years of Korean-American Relations, 1882~1982*, ed. Lee Yurbok and Wayne Patterson (Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1986), 59.

<sup>153</sup> Pak Huiho, 33. It turned out Gojong was right to doubt the U.S. commitment to Korea because the U.S. government downgraded Foote's ranking from Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to Minister Resident and Consul-general (1884.7.14). *Diplomatic Instructions of the Department of State I, 1883~1900*, Frelinghuisen to Foote, 1884.7.14, 59.

<sup>154</sup> The treaty involved reparations from Korea to compensate Japanese victims, an official Korean apology, and an increase in the Japanese legation guard to 1000 men. *Gojong sillok*, 1885.1.9, <http://sillok.history.go.kr>.

<sup>155</sup> Larsen, 127.

<sup>156</sup> Möllendorff, 67; 85. Such a view contradicts U.S. Chargé d'affaires George Clayton Foulk's assertion that prior to the Gapsin Coup, Möllendorff was "unquestionably the Agent of China". George M. McCune and John A. Harrison, ed., *Korean-American Relations: Documents Pertaining to the Far Eastern Diplomacy of the United States. Volume I: The Initial Period, 1883~1886*, Foulk to Secretary of State, No.211, 1885.8.4 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 121. Möllendorff switched to a pro-Russia posture because immense Sino-Japanese influences over Korea violated its independence. Though he tried to facilitate Korean independence by negotiating with Britain and the U.S., they either sided with China (Britain) or just looked on (the U.S.), doing nothing to put a brake on Sino-Japanese policies in Korea. Kim Hyeonsuk, "Moellendoreupeu ui oegyo jeongchaek gwa gyeongje gaebal jeongchaeg ui seonggyeok", 90.

playing any significant role in international politics, and Britain was rivals with Russia over Southwestern Asia and was Japan's ally.<sup>157</sup> In contrast, Russia maintained normal relations with China, was hostile to Japan since its eastern boundaries bordered the Pacific, and hoped that Korea, located between it and Japan, would become an independent country and function as a buffer state.<sup>158</sup> All things considered, Russia was ideally suited to be the third country Möllendorff sought,<sup>159</sup> an understandable decision given Chinese suzerainty over Korea and Japanese ambition to challenge the Chinese position in Korea.

To see how Russia could best act to protect Korea, Möllendorff weighed the unilateral protection of Korea by Russia against its joint protection by China, Japan, and Russia. To avoid giving preference to Russia, he recommended joint protection, which would treat all involved states equally under a strict neutral status. To effectuate this, Korea should conclude treaties with major powers in order to guarantee the continued presence of their diplomats, which had enabled Korea to regain internal stability even amidst the Sino-Japanese confrontation.<sup>160</sup>

In fact, Möllendorff had already attempted to arrange financial support for Korean neutralisation; during his August 1884 visit to Beijing, he asked Russian military representative Shneur for capital investment from Russia, China, and Japan to transform Korea into a Belgian-style neutral state. Möllendorff explained that the interests of these three powers were intertwined on the Korean peninsula and hoped that their mutual relations could be fulfilled peacefully rather than hostilely and that in doing so these countries would guarantee a Korean independence similarly to Belgium's. He added that since other powers would intervene in Korea in case one power occupied it militarily, it would be good to have the country open, allowing capital and investment to compete freely. Schneur replied to Möllendorff that Japan and China would not agree to this suggestion and asked Möllendorff to suggest it to the Russian government directly.<sup>161</sup> However,

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<sup>157</sup> Actually, Britain was not yet Japan's ally, but Möllendorff regarded their relations as an alliance in all but name.

<sup>158</sup> Möllendorff, 67-68.

<sup>159</sup> Lensen, 32. Möllendorff's rapprochement with Russia reflected Gojong's pro-Russia sentiment because Gojong had dispatched Kim Gwanseon to Novokievski (1884.5) to inform Matiunin of Korea's desire to sign a treaty with Russia. Song Geumyeong, 91.

<sup>160</sup> Möllendorff, 68.

<sup>161</sup> After receiving Shneur's report about Möllendorff's suggestion, the Russian Foreign Ministry decided not to respond to it since Russia, lacking detailed information regarding Korea's internal situation, could neither check whether Gojong requested Russian protection nor fathom Möllendorff's real intentions. Besides, if Russia were to officially stand behind Korea, Western powers and especially China could misunderstand Russia's intentions. Song Geumyeong, 103.

when Shneur disapproved of Japan as a creditor, Möllendorff responded that he would ask Parkes for Britain's unilateral protection or for the joint protection of Korea by various European powers that feared a Russian occupation of Korea. Möllendorff then told Russian Rear-Admiral A. E. Kroun in September that although Britain promised to protect Korea in exchange for Geomundo, Korea desired the joint protection of Britain, Russia, and Japan.<sup>162</sup>

Though he made the above overtures in 1884, Möllendorff regarded the year 1885 as the best point in time to neutralise Korea because the withdrawal of Chinese and Japanese troops stipulated by the Tianjin Convention (18.4.1885)<sup>163</sup> had lessened China's intrusion into Korea's internal affairs and Japan's sabre-rattling there, creating room for Korea to manoeuvre.<sup>164</sup> To bring his neutralisation plan to fruition, he observed that it should be Russia-led, provided that Russian involvement was proportionate to its interests in Korea. Accordingly, Russia, not Korea, should be entrusted with stipulating such a proposal, though approval from the Korean government was a precondition.<sup>165</sup>

He believed that a Russian-led Korean neutralisation should proceed thusly: First, China and Japan would jointly guarantee Korean neutrality and non-aggression and maintain the relations of mutual guarantee of Korea vis-à-vis its relations with them. Second, a military defence relationship would be formed. Third, a guarantee of the general relationship concerning non-aggression of Korean territory would be agreed upon.<sup>166</sup> His proposed military defence relationship included the invitation of Russian officers and non-commissioned officers to train Korean forces and envisioned using Russian power to block Chinese intervention and Japanese ambition.<sup>167</sup> The inclusion of a

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<sup>162</sup> Kim Jongheon, "Syupeiyereu wa Reosia gongsa Bebereu ui Joseonnae oegyo hwaldong [De Speyer and Russian Minister to Joseon Waeber's Diplomatic Activities in Joseon]", in *Sugyo wa gyoseob ui sigi Han-Reo gwangye* [The Korea Russian Relations in the Period of Establishment and Negotiations of Diplomatic Relations], Hong Ungu et al., (Seoul: Seonin, 2008), 151.

<sup>163</sup> This convention encompassed a simultaneous withdrawal of the Japanese and Chinese militaries from Korea, training of Korean military by a trainer from a third country, and notification to another signatory if both or one of the signatories' troops were dispatched to Korea in the event of rebellion or a serious incident in Korea. Kim Gyeongchang, 337.

<sup>164</sup> Kim Wuhyeon, 50.

<sup>165</sup> Pak Huiho, 57.

<sup>166</sup> Möllendorff, 85.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 86. After the Gapsin Coup, Möllendorff came to doubt the ability of the Korean military and concluded that only when it was reformed under the sponsorship of a foreign power could a more serious conflict between China and Japan be avoided. Eugene C. Kim and Kim Hangyo, *Korea and the Politics of Imperialism, 1876-1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 61.

military defence relationship testifies that Möllendorff acknowledged the importance of Korea's self-defence capabilities to its accomplishing neutralisation.<sup>168</sup>

Möllendorff's neutralisation plan also caught the attention of German diplomats in the Far East. In his report (14.1.1885) to the German government, Herman Budler (1846-1894) mentioned that Möllendorff wanted to implement a Belgian-style neutralisation through an international treaty with China, Japan, and Russia acting as guarantors of Korean neutralisation. Budler presumed that this plan had received the Japanese foreign minister's blessing and speculated that it would be discussed at a future meeting between China and Japan.<sup>169</sup> German Minister to China Brandt made a similar report (18.2.1885) to Berlin, detailing Möllendorff's plan of having Russia, Japan, and China as guarantors of Korean neutrality, just as major powers have done for Belgium.<sup>170</sup> German Consul-general in Korea Otto Zembush also mentioned (29.6.1885) that he, having been visited by Kim Yunsik, had learned that Korea wanted to pursue a Belgian-style neutrality as outlined by Möllendorff.<sup>171</sup>

Möllendorff's neutralisation proposal was aimed at tying Korea closer to Russia and blocking China to strengthen Korean independence, using the praiseworthy concept of self-defence. Möllendorff's plan seemed sensible, but did not accurately gauge Korea's ongoing dependence on China. Besides, even if he managed to obtain Japanese consent, it was questionable whether Russia would follow suit since it had just entered Korea and was busy consolidating its foothold there.<sup>172</sup> Also, rather than weaken as he predicted, Chinese suzerainty over Korea had strengthened after the British occupation of Geomundo. What is more, there was no power that was ready to initiate and lead the neutralisation, and there was no balance of power on the Korean peninsula.<sup>173</sup> When Möllendorff resigned as Korea's foreign adviser (27.7.1885) due to the rumour of the Russo-Korean secret pact surfacing in 1885, his neutralisation plan sank with him.<sup>174</sup>

Around the same time as Möllendorff's proposal, Budler also came up with a more detailed neutralisation plan, fearing that in the event of a Sino-Japanese war, Korea's geopolitical

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<sup>168</sup> Pak Huiho, 58.

<sup>169</sup> Kim Wuhyeon, 63.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 76-77.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>173</sup> Kim Hyeonsuk, "Moellendoreupeu ui oegyjo jeongchaek gwa gyeongje gaebal jeongchaeg ui seonggyeok", 97.

<sup>174</sup> Möllendorff, 88-90.

vulnerability would be exposed. Budler's ties with the Far East were many; he worked as a customs officer in the Chinese Imperial Customs (1869-1874), served as an interpreter at the German legation in Amoy (1874-1883), and accompanied Yokohama-based German Consul Zappe during the Korea-German Treaty negotiations. Subsequently, he was appointed by the German government to serve as the vice-consul in Jemulpo (2.4.1884) and began work there (24.6 1884). After Zembsch became Consul-general to Korea (14.10.1884), Budler was posted to Seoul as vice-consul and acted as a window on German foreign policy in Korea until he was transferred to Swatow as vice-consul (27.1.1886).<sup>175</sup>

As one of the most energetic foreign diplomats stationed in Korea, the ambitious Budler worked hard to acquire German interests there. Thus, the German company Heinrich Constantin Edward Meyer & Co. won the exclusive right to purchase and transport machinery to set up the telegraph office in Korea, and the company lent a steamship to the Korean government to help transport rice paid as taxes from Mokpo to Incheon.<sup>176</sup> Besides, he also put Carl Wolter, the head of the Korean branch of Edward Meyer & Co and the so-called 'King of Jemulpo,' in a position to make inroads into Korea's mining development and commerce.<sup>177</sup> His avid desire to maximise German economic interests in Korea was matched by his enthusiasm for Korean neutralisation, which he proposed to Inoue Kaoru, Kim Yunsik, and Li Hongzhang. At the time, German consuls' duties usually did not go beyond protecting German citizens and securing economic interests for Germany, but Budler intervened actively in Korea's political issues.<sup>178</sup> After the Gapsin Coup erupted,<sup>179</sup> Budler was asked by Gojong to join American and British representatives and the Japanese Minister at Jemulpo to find consensus for avoiding war between China and Japan.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Na Hyesim, "Gaehanggi Hanguk ui Dogil gonggwan yeongu [A Study of German Consulate in Korea During the Open-Ports Period]", in *Gaehanggi ui jaeHan oeguk gonggwan yeongu* [The Foreign Legations in Korea During the Open-Ports Period], Ha Wonho et al. (Seoul: Dongbuga yeoksa jaedan, 2008), 81.

<sup>176</sup> Yi Yeonggwon, 114.

<sup>177</sup> Pak Huiho, 59.

<sup>178</sup> Na, 82.

<sup>179</sup> The start of the Gapsin Coup is either May 1884, when Min Yeongik, a member of the first Korean delegation to the U.S., returned from the U.S., or 30 October 1884, when Takezoe returned to Korea. Kim Yonggu, "Imo gullan gwa gapsin jeongbyeon", 146-158. The causes of the coup are also debatable. Kim Yeongjak, "Hanmal nasyonallijeum gwa Kim Okgyun [Nationalism in Late Joseon and Kim Okgyun]", *Beopjeong nonchong* 4 (February 1982): 231-232; Kim Yonggu, "Imo gullan gwa gapsin jeongbyeon", 163-174.

<sup>180</sup> Choe Jonggo, *Hangang eseo Rain kkaji* [From the Han River to the Rhine] (Seoul: Euro, 2005), 99-100.

Sensing that the coup had opened the way for Germany to obtain ascendancy in Korea as the neck-and-neck race between China and Japan advanced, he visited Japanese Foreign Minister Inoue Kaoru several times to propose the permanent neutrality of Korea and won his agreement. To demonstrate the advantages of neutralisation through historical example, Budler submitted to Korean Foreign Minister Kim Yunsik *A Written Opinion advising Joseon to remain as a Neutral Spectator in the Sino-Japanese Skirmish* (7.2.1885), which explained how in Europe, two or three weak countries had benefited greatly from major power treaties that protected them and provided permanent peace to all parties. During the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, 80,000 French troops retreated into Switzerland across its French border. Prussian troops were stopped from invading the weaker Switzerland to pursue those troops, because Switzerland had concluded a treaty which clearly stated it was not to lend its land, even in case of war. Thus, although it would have been strategically practical for the German military to attack the French military by crossing over into Switzerland, the German forces ultimately took a longer route to advance rather than violate the treaty.<sup>181</sup>

To explain the necessity for neutralisation, Budler highlighted Korea's geopolitical vulnerability—Korea was in China's backyard and linked along its edges to Russia and Japan. If war occurred, he wondered who and what could protect Korea, even if China had 10 million men stationed there, and then suggested his neutralisation plan. According to Western example, the treaty for neutralisation would compel China, Russia, and Japan to agree to the permanent protection of Korea. Accordingly, even if war broke out in the region, Korea would not be used as a base for aggression. Korea would have to play its part by dispatching thousands of troops to defend its coast and borders, by having troops patrol the whole country, and by trading with countries that signed treaties with it. If the above were accomplished, Korea would then be able to enjoy permanent protection and the broad benefits of neutrality, and China, with its anxieties assuaged, would have no reason to object.<sup>182</sup> By lending his weight to a permanently neutral state under joint guarantee of China, Russia, and Japan, implementation of self-defence, and friendship and trade with major powers, Budler followed in the footsteps of Möllendorff.

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<sup>181</sup> *Gu Hanguk oegyoo munseo 15: Deogan 1*, No.95, 49-50.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

Simultaneously, Budler sent his proposal to the Korean government and foreign diplomats in Korea as well, calling on China, Russia, and Japan to approve neutrality of Korea.<sup>183</sup> However, the Korean government rejected his proposal, received through Kim Yunsik just before the meeting between Itō and Li Hongzhang in Tianjin, which led Korea to believe that China would not chance provoking the suspicions of its neighbours by increasing its military presence in Korea unless it was an obvious necessity and that Japan was intent on maintaining peace and thus would commit no rash acts.<sup>184</sup> Budler revisited Korean neutralisation with the Korean government, informing them that Japan favoured his ideas, but his plan received little support, not least because of the sway that conservative pro-China officials such as Kim Yunsik held over the Korean bureaucracy.<sup>185</sup> Not surprisingly, Kim asked Budler to withdraw his proposal since both China and Japan were keen to preserve peace.<sup>186</sup>

Later in February, after a botched overture to Kim, Budler pitched his Korean neutralisation plan to Li in a letter, claiming that spurred on by Inoue Kaoru, Japan favoured neutralisation and might propose it in the upcoming Sino-Japanese negotiation.<sup>187</sup> Budler insisted that China's failure to diplomatically protect its vassal from a strong neighbouring country could expose Korea to aggression and thus force China to take military action on its behalf. He claimed that the current Chinese military alone was enough to protect the Korean king and contain internal rebellions in Korea. Furthermore, since Japan had no desire to occupy Korean territory and only sought to trade with Korea, China did not need to worry about Japan and any Chinese effort to move Japan out of Korea could provoke a Japanese invasion of Korea.<sup>188</sup> Suspecting that Budler might join hands with Japan and worried that his plan was disadvantageous to both China and Korea, Li rejected his advice.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Pak Huiho, 60.

<sup>184</sup> *Gu Hanguk oegyo munseo 15: Deogan 1*, No.95, 50.

<sup>185</sup> Yi Yeongwan, 68.

<sup>186</sup> Na, 83.

<sup>187</sup> *Gu Hanguk oegyo munseo 15: Deogan 1*, No.95, 49-50.

<sup>188</sup> Xiāo Yishān, *Qīng dài tōngshǐ* [General History of the Qing Dynasty] 3 (Taipei: Shang wu yin shu guan, 1963), 1144.

<sup>189</sup> Gùgōng bówùyuan, ed., *Qīng guāngxù Cháo-Zhong-Ri jiāoshè shǐliào* 清光緒朝中日交涉史料 [Materials on Negotiations Between Joseon, China, and Japan During the Qing Guangxu Era] 8, No.369, 1885.3.1 (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1970), 2.

While Möllendorff's Belgian-style neutrality proposal was designed as a means to link Korea with Russia, counter China, and realise Russian-led Korean neutrality under joint guarantee from among Russia, China, and Japan, Budler's Swiss-style plan, judging the contemporary East Asian situation objectively, was devised for Korean neutrality under an equal joint guarantee between the three countries.<sup>190</sup> In effect, he was questioning China's intention and ability to protect Korea and felt that Japan and Russia were on the alert for a chance to seize it.<sup>191</sup> Despite its merits—use of a Swiss style-neutrality and the formation of self-defence—the timing of his proposal was problematic; not only were Kim Yunsik and the Korean government against it, but China was also in no mood to accept Korean neutrality, as Li's stance demonstrated.

Meanwhile, how did Britain, the leading power, perceive Korea? In the early 1880's, Korea was off most British officials' radar screens; the British Foreign Office had virtually no Northeast Asian, let alone Korean, experts. Under Secretary of Foreign Affairs Julian Pauncefote, who had some knowledge regarding China, had no time to devote to Northeast Asia, and Foreign Secretary Earl of Granville was uninterested despite some debates about Chinese issues in the House of Commons.<sup>192</sup> However, a handful of Korean experts in the front lines of Britain's foreign policy were the exception. Among them, Ernest Satow, the secretary at the British legation in Tokyo, was fluent in Korean, and his reports on Korea were treated as confidential and circulated among a few high-ranking officials in the British Foreign Office. The British Consul in Kobe and future Consul-general to Korea William G. Aston was not only a fluent Korean speaker but also served as a secret channel for the signing of the treaty between Britain and Korea.<sup>193</sup> Unlike Japan, the U.S., and Germany, Britain acknowledged Chinese suzerainty over Korea to deter the southern expansion of Russia and advised China on ways to strengthen its suzerainty. Accordingly, when China sounded out British opinion on the dispatch of Chinese forces to Korea after the Imo Mutiny, the British Minister to China Sir Thomas Francis Wade recommended China send them to decisively suppress the mutiny.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Pak Huiho, 61.

<sup>191</sup> Yi Yeongggwan, 68.

<sup>192</sup> Kim Yonggu, "Geomundo wa Beulladiboseutok", 19.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>194</sup> F. C. Jones, "Foreign Diplomacy in Korea 1866~1894" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1936), 331-332. Later, Britain's Chargé d'affaires to Korea E. Baber advised China not to allow the dispatch of Pak Jeongyang as Korean minister to the U.S. since Korea might become another Vietnam. Pak Huiho, 62.

But when Korea and Russia concluded the Treaty of Commerce and Amity in 1884 as a by-product of Russia's strategy to secure an ice-free port and increase inland trade with Korea and of Korea's desire to counter and alleviate Chinese political pressure on it, which apparently increased penetration of Russian influence into Korea, Britain wondered whether China's Korean policy was effective in counteracting the increasing Russian influence there. Instead of wagering on the tributary system, Britain looked for new ways to guarantee the territorial integrity of Korea against Russian infiltration as a joint-withdrawal of Sino-Japanese forces from the Korean peninsula was in the cards.

Britain's concern notwithstanding, Russia's "wait and see" policy towards Korea remained largely unchanged. However, in either January or February 1885, the contents of Korea's allegedly secret agreement with Russia, which involved the dispatch of Russian military advisers and Russia's protection of Korea in case of a clash between China and Japan in exchange for Russia's leasing of Korea's Yeongheung Bay (Port Lazarev), became known.<sup>195</sup> This alleged agreement caused quite an unintentional stir since it was interpreted by major powers such as Britain as signifying continental power Russia's aggressive encroachment into Korea. Maritime powers Japan and Britain, in particular, had to change their Korean policies. Japan now viewed Russia as a more serious threat than China and began the Tianjin Conference with China,<sup>196</sup> exploiting its defeat in the Sino-French War.

As China and Japan were preparing for the Tianjin Conference to resolve the problems of post-Gapsin Coup readjustment, British Chargé d'affaires to China Nicholas Roderick O'Connor called for the joint protection of Korea by China and Japan in February 1885 to head off the expansion of Russian influence onto the Korean peninsula.<sup>197</sup> He claimed that China and Japan had to protect Korea until it became autonomous and that only after that was achieved could a Swiss- or

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<sup>195</sup> Chien, 176-177. The allegedly secret agreement would have enabled Russia not only to counter Britain and Japan through the acquirement of an ice-free port as its naval base in Korea, but also to get its foot in the door to manage Korean internal affairs through the dispatch of its military advisers there. Choe Munhyeong, *Hanguk eul dulreossan jeguk juui yeolgang ui gakchuk* [The Competition Between Major Imperial Powers Surrounding Korea] (Seoul: Jisik saneopsa, 2001), 61.

<sup>196</sup> Jones, 451.

<sup>197</sup> O'Connor's proposal also coincided with the rumour over the secret pact between Korea and Russia, which alarmed foreign powers like Britain.

<sup>198</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 18, No.114, 1885.2.8, 192; No.169, 1885.5.6, 317, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

Belgian-style permanent neutrality be applied.<sup>198</sup> Such a recommendation arose from O’Conor’s fear that the simultaneous withdrawal of Chinese and Japanese forces from Korea could trigger Russian intervention there.<sup>199</sup> Basically, O’Conor hoped that the countries with the greatest influence over Korea (China and Japan) could provide it joint protection and to this end, joint protection took priority over neutralisation in his proposal, while other Western proposals focused on neutralisation.

O’Conor’s “joint protection first and neutrality later” proposal was presented to Japanese Foreign Minister Inoue Kaoru through Japanese Minister to China Takeshō, who was on the same page as O’Conor concerning neutralisation, but was rejected by Inoue (8.2.1885). Inoue observed that though there were many eminent families in Korea trying to seize political power, none had sufficient resources to do so and thus desired Chinese or Japanese protection. However, if both countries protected Korea jointly, a seed of discontent would be sown among those Korean families since, with Chinese and Japanese political strategies poles apart (i.e. Japan wanted Korean independence, whereas China desired to continue its suzerainty over Korea), no one could expect mutual cooperation between the two countries to last. Hence, Inoue opined that to maintain Korea’s peace and secure public order internally, a paramilitary organisation like a military police comprised of 4-500 men per unit should be set up and trained under the supervision of officers dispatched by countries with minimal interest in Korea, such as Britain, Germany, or the U.S., all of which could be achieved within six months.<sup>200</sup>

Nonetheless, after the Tianjin Convention was signed, Takeshō, commenting on the impracticality of Inoue’s plan for self-defence, retorted that after Chinese and Japanese troops had been withdrawn from Korea, they had had to be sent right back to quell Korea’s internal uprisings because the Korean military could not (6.5.1884).<sup>201</sup> Moreover, considering an intolerable burden of hiring foreign instructors to build up a military force of only 500 to 600 men, fostering an elite force

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<sup>199</sup> Pak Huiho, 62.

<sup>200</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 18, No.114, 192, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>201</sup> Considering that Korea’s army was acknowledged to be too small to resist foreign invaders—the Russian diplomat Poggio found that of 1.2 million men only 10,000 were properly in arms—Takeshō was right to feel sceptical of Korean military strength. Mikhail A. Poggio, *Reosia oegyogwan i barabon geundae Hanguk* (Features of Korea) trans. Yi Jaehoon (Seoul: Dongbuga yeoksa jaedan, 2010), 118-119.

<sup>202</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 18, No.169, 317, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>.

of more than 10,000 men to cope with internal uprisings and external invasions would be impossible for a cash-strapped Korea.<sup>202</sup>

O'Connor's "joint protection first and neutrality later" proposal reflected his concern that the joint withdrawal of Chinese and Japanese troops could lead to Russian intervention, but his reasoning appears flawed because the current state of Russo-Korean relations revealed no concrete evidence of Russian intervention in Korea and Russia's Korean policy was centred on maintaining the status quo there. Moreover, the overlooking of Inoue's above assertions and the underestimation of China's commitment to preserving its suzerainty made O'Connor's proposal impossible.<sup>203</sup>

Two months after O'Connor proposed neutralisation, Japan and China, despite Japan's hawkish public sentiment and China's claim for its suzerainty over Korea, finally concluded the Tianjin Convention, which put Japan on an equal footing with China on the Korean peninsula.<sup>204</sup> But the situation of the Korean peninsula was now no longer a regional issue between China and Japan and was thus creating a worldwide confrontation between Britain and Russia. As for Britain, it had been contemplating a war with Russia over the Afghanistan border to safeguard India, Britain's jewel in Asia ever since Russia's annexation of Turkistan in 1865. Coincidentally, the allegedly secret agreement between Korea and Russia gave a good pretext for Britain's occupation of Geomundo.<sup>205</sup>

All in all, while most Westerners' proposals were designed based on the balance of power and were to a degree recognised internationally, they could be neither regarded as important nor acceptable under the political situation in Korea because of its inability to embrace neutralisation, the Russian government's "wait and see" policy, and Chinese dominance there.

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<sup>203</sup> Pak Huiho, 63.

<sup>204</sup> Immanuel Hsu commented that this convention effectively made Korea a co-protectorate of China and Japan. Immanuel C. Y. Hsu, *The Rise of Modern China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 331.

<sup>205</sup> F. C. Jones, 451.

#### **Chapter IV. Neutralisation Attempts During the Geomundo Incident (1885-1887)**

The British occupation of Geomundo, halting the Sino-Japanese rivalry temporarily, inaugurated a new rivalry between Britain and Russia on the Korean peninsula and brought into question the Sinocentric tributary system with regard to Korea's security. Under this situation, the historical process of how Korea, China, and Japan developed their interests in Korean neutralisation to cope with the Geomundo Incident and how Britain attempted to use it to prevent Russia from gaining influence on the Korean peninsula to maintain its hegemony in the Far East will be investigated.

##### **• Neutralisation Trials as Counter-strategies to the British Geomundo Occupation (1885-1886)**

Throughout the nineteenth century, Britain had opposed Russian encroachment into the Near East, Central Asia, and the Far East. Yet this did not prevent Russia from expanding into Central Asia and Siberia, even annexing the Maritime Province in 1860. Having turned its attention to Central Asia, it was only a matter of time before Russia came into conflict with Britain in the region, especially over Afghanistan. In November 1884, British and Russian commissioners attempted to adjust the disputed boundary between Russia and Afghanistan, but failed to reach an agreement. More alarmingly, Russian forces led by General Kanasov drove out Afghans from the disputed areas and created the Panjdeh Crisis. In Britain, the parliament voted to approve 11,000,000 pounds, and William Ewart Gladstone's government mobilised the reserves for preparation of a possible Anglo-Russian War.<sup>1</sup>

Between 1880 and 1885, avid to tap the markets of China, Britain backed China's policy in Korea. Though the potential value of Korea as an export market for British goods was considered, the Chinese market held a much greater interest for Britain, which accordingly accepted the status quo on the peninsula. The British government's policy of marginalising Korea was the main cause behind the Korean peninsula remaining on the West's geopolitical periphery.<sup>2</sup>

Russia too, even after entering into diplomatic relations with Korea, preferred the status quo on the Korean peninsula, maintaining its "wait and see" policy. Möllendorff's proposals to Schneur and Kroun did not affect the Russian government's Korean policy in any way, even if he alluded to Britain's possible occupation of Geomundo. After reviewing them, the Russian Foreign Office

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<sup>1</sup> Lensen, 113.

<sup>2</sup> Kim Yonggu, "Geomundo wa Beulladiboseutok", 19.

concluded that it was unclear whether Möllendorff's ideas were his or had originated with Gojong and that they did not possess enough information about the political situation in Korea. They also felt that the relationship between Korea and Britain had to be investigated further. Therefore, determining that Möllendorff's schemes could create misunderstanding between Russia and West European powers or China and transform Korea's international environment, the ministry opted not to honour his request. Instead, Russian Foreign Minister Giers entrusted the Russian Minister to Japan Davydov with full powers to recommend to Gojong that he not lease Geomundo to Britain (1.10.1884)<sup>3</sup> and then to inform the Japanese government that Russia would cooperate with it to guarantee Korea's international status (8.10.1884).<sup>4</sup>

Möllendorff continued to make overtures towards Russia,<sup>5</sup> however, and this prompted the Russian government to dispatch First Secretary Alexis de Speyer at the Russian legation in Tokyo to Korea to investigate precisely what demands and requests Korea had made and to persuade Möllendorff that bargaining with major powers was dangerous. During his stay in Korea (30.12.1884-6.1.1885), De Speyer learned that Möllendorff's demands to Russia had indeed come from Gojong, who pleaded for the dispatch of Russian officials to Korea in accordance with the treaty. Möllendorff then made another request for Russian protection of Korea; if Russia did not want this role, it could suggest another country to offer a Belgian-style guarantee to Korea.<sup>6</sup> Giers responded by calling for Russia to remain a spectator unless Korea's status was threatened,<sup>7</sup> but Russian Emperor Alexander III still hoped that Russia could act as Korea's protector.<sup>8</sup>

In February 1885, at the request for Russian protection of Korea against Japanese threats and Chinese suzerainty over Korea from both three Korean officials (Shin Byeongyeo, Kim Gyogam, and Baek Rangcheong) and Gwon Dongsu and Kim Yongwon, the Russian government indicated its stance; a Russian official delegate would be dispatched to ratify the treaty between Korea and

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 22-23.

<sup>4</sup> Lensen, 33.

<sup>5</sup> In mid-December 1884, Möllendorff asked the Russian consul in Nagasaki for Russia's protection and guidance of Korea and the dispatch of a Russian warship and 200 troops to Incheon. *Reosia haegunseong munseo I (1854~1894)*, 91-92.

<sup>6</sup> Kim Yonggu, "Geomundo wa Beulladiboseutok", 24-25.

<sup>7</sup> *Reosia haegunseong munseo I (1854~1894)*, 93-95.

<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, Giers secretly sent a telegram to Davydov saying that the question of Russia's protection of Korea would be discussed between the Russian diplomat to be dispatched to Seoul and Korea when it would not cause a clash between China and Japan. Kim Yonggu, "Geomundo wa Beulladiboseutok", 26.

Russia, review the regulations for the overland trade between the two countries, and devise a scheme to effectively protect Korea from outside invasions. Additionally, the government directed the Russian navy in the Pacific Ocean to monitor the Korean coast.<sup>9</sup> In March 1885, Möllendorff approached Davydov to explore Russian protection of Korea<sup>10</sup> and called for a Russian occupation of Geomundo, but received no reply.<sup>11</sup>

While Russia vacillated, Britain looked for a way to impede Russia's progress in the Far East and duly occupied Geomundo (15.4.1885-27.2.1887). Britain was not the only major power that had recognised the importance of the island. In fact, the U.S. was the first country to show its interest in Geomundo. The U.S. Commander of the Asiatic Fleet H. H. Bell advised U.S. Secretary of Navy Gideon Welles to use Geomundo as a base to occupy Seoul from in order to ascertain the facts in the General Sherman Incident (14.12.1866)<sup>12</sup> and ordered Commodore Shufeldt to reconnoitre the island. Shufeldt likened Geomundo to Gibraltar, which guards the entrance of the Mediterranean, and judged it to be a superb naval base. Since Koreans had held foreign countries in contempt, he recommended Bell launch an operation targeting the coast of Korea's South Sea to give Korea its just deserts.<sup>13</sup> Thirteen years later, Shufeldt again urged the U.S. Secretary of Navy Richard Wigginton Thomson to occupy Geomundo (31.5.1880),<sup>14</sup> yet it was Britain where concrete discussions on the possible occupation of Geomundo first surfaced (7.1875).<sup>15</sup> In particular, the Commander of the British fleet in China George Ommanney Willes asked the Korean government to stipulate a clause designating Geomundo the moorage of British warships during the process of concluding the Anglo-Korean Treaty (6.1882).<sup>16</sup> Eventually, Britain aspired to achieve two things by occupying Geomundo: first, its presence could secure the strategic sea lanes south of Korea and the possibility of a British blockade of the Vladivostok-based Russian fleet could discourage Russian adventurism, especially in Afghanistan. Second, Britain hoped to pre-empt a Russian occupation of a Korean harbour such as Port Lazareff, near Wonsan.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 26-28.

<sup>10</sup> Lensen, 35-36.

<sup>11</sup> Kim Yonggu, "Geomundo wa Beulladiboseutok", 29.

<sup>12</sup> Davids, ed., Bell to Welles, 1884.12.14, 42-45.

<sup>13</sup> Kim Yonggu, "Geomundo wa Beulladiboseutok", 31.

<sup>14</sup> Frederick C. Drake, *The Empire of the Seas: A Biography of Rear Admiral Robert Wilson Shufeldt, USN* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1984), 243-244.

<sup>15</sup> British Minister to Japan Parkes and the commander of the British fleet in China, Admiral Sir Alfred Philips Ryder, suggested that Britain should occupy Geomundo in view of the tensions between Japan and Korea, the Russo-Japanese

Meanwhile, deeply embedded in the existing Sinocentric world order, Korean authorities thought that Korea's security should depend on China because the latter would not accept the former's autonomous diplomacy. However, opposed to China's intensified intervention in domestic affairs after the Imo Mutiny, the pro-Enlightenment faction frequently advocated independence and clashed with the pro-China faction. After the Gapsin Coup, Gojong too had a tendency to defy China while looking to bring Russia over to Korea's side to preserve its autonomy, making China and Japan nervous. However, the sudden occupation of Geomundo by Britain put Korean authorities in a dilemma, creating the impression that the Korean peninsula was surrounded by four major powers: China, Japan, Russia, and Britain. Although its action had already hurt Korea's pride, Britain treated it lightly and had O'Connor issue a secret memorandum to the Korean court eight days after its occupation of Geomundo, explaining the necessity of this measure.<sup>18</sup> For this reason, Korea had to first adopt a new strategy to protect both Korean territorial integrity and its independence: neutralisation of Korea.

The Korean government's official stance on neutralisation was first revealed by the then Korean Foreign Minister Kim Yunsik (1835-1922). After passing the civil examination in 1874, Kim, a product of classical Confucian learning, served in various positions before being sent to Tianjin in January 1882 as a royally appointed adviser to oversee a Korean student group studying at the Tianjin Arsenal. While staying in China, he also relayed Gojong's request that the Chinese emperor order the negotiation of a treaty with Western countries as a means of circumventing the intense opposition within Korea to dealing with Westerners.<sup>19</sup> Along with Eo Yunjung, he agreed with the dispatch of Chinese forces to Korea after the Imo Mutiny and later signed a treaty with Russia as Gojong's Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary. Moreover, as Li Hongzhang

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consensus on their Korean offensive, and the surveying of Korea's west coast by Japanese and German vessels. Pak Ilgeun, ed., "Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866-1886", FO 405/35, Confidential No.1, 1885.2.5, 488.

<sup>16</sup> As Willes knew that his predecessors had been paying attention to Geomundo, he seemed to suggest this condition, but Ma Jianzhong did not agree to include it. Kim Yonggu, "Geomundo wa Beulladiboseutok", 39.

<sup>17</sup> Lensen, 54-55.

<sup>18</sup> Pak Ilgeun, ed., "Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866-1886", FO 405/35/11, No.84, Confidential, Ext.15, Granville to O'Connor, 1885.4.23, 492. The Chinese and Japanese governments received the secret memorandum first (1885.4.20), but the Korean government did not receive it until almost a month later (1885.5.19).

<sup>19</sup> Larsen, 75.

pointed out, Kim, holding office as a government minister, maintained close ties with Yuan,<sup>20</sup> which further cemented his status as a pro-China policy maker.

However, though Kim was a well-known member of the pro-China faction, he, having perceived Korea's diplomatic isolation, explored the opportunity for Korea to establish formal diplomatic relations with the U.S., actively interacting with Chinese officials in Beijing.<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, while he acknowledged Korea's tributary status vis-à-vis China, he insisted that Korea not be a vassal of China<sup>22</sup> to maintain its sovereignty. His anti-Russian sentiments<sup>23</sup> after the rumour of the secret Russo-Korean agreement also drove Kim to consider another stratagem to defend Korean autonomy from potential threats. Eventually, the Geomundo Incident forced him to adopt a more concrete measure to boost Korean security amidst the fierce Anglo-Russian rivalry.

Few would have expected then that Kim would emerge as the first Korean advocate of neutralisation. Nevertheless, his doubts about the tributary system in regard to China's role of protecting Korea against foreign invasion led him to embrace neutralisation. Even though he had rejected Budler's neutralisation proposal, Kim, asking Zembsch how the Korean government should respond to the British occupation of Geomundo, intimated his wish to neutralise Korea (20.5.1885). Kim argued that since Korea was too weak to defend itself from attacks by strong neighbouring countries, it, in his opinion, would be better off possessing a similar status to Belgium in Europe as Möllendorff had once planned.<sup>24</sup> Kim's statements meant that, at least for the time being, he would jettison his pro-China stance and adopt an alternate strategy now that the existing tributary system had proven to be toothless in protecting Korean territory amidst the simmering tension between Britain and Russia.

Spurred into action, Kim delivered on the same day two official documents to Britain; one was a simple document sent to O'Connor, asking Britain not to borrow Geomundo as a temporary

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<sup>20</sup> Chien, 33.

<sup>21</sup> Kim Yunsik, *Kim Yunsik jeonjip ha* 金允植全集 下 [The Complete Works of Kim Yunsik Vol. 2] (Seoul: Asea munhwasa, 1980), 515.

<sup>22</sup> Kim Yunsik, *Eumcheongsa* 陰晴史 [Diary] (Seoul: Tamgudang, 1971), 94-95.

<sup>23</sup> To avoid Russian demands for overland trade, Kim Yunsik sought to encourage increased Chinese commercial activity in northern Korea by abolishing restrictions on Chinese merchants; Kim Yunsik, "Eumcheongsa", 131.

<sup>24</sup> Kim Wuhyeon, 76-77.

residence.<sup>25</sup> The other was a strongly worded note sent to British Acting Consul-general William Richard Carles, which demonstrated just how determined he was in resolving the Geomundo crisis:

Of late rumours from the sea have arrived declaring that your government had designs on the Island of Komun, or Port Hamilton. This island belongs to Corea, and ought not to be taken possession of by any other Power...We cannot understand how, with your country's regard for friendly relations and the principles of international law, it can have taken such an unexpected step...a step which is entirely contrary to anything that we had looked for, and which has surprised us more than we can express. If your Government will, in the interests of friendly relations, change its plans and at once withdraw from this island, not only will this country rejoice, but you will secure the respect and applause of all nations. Otherwise, self-respect will prevent our Government from remaining silent, and will oblige it to appeal to the Treaty Powers for their opinion. This matter is urgent, and, therefore...I now write a plain statement of the case, with the request that you will favour [me] with an answer at once.<sup>26</sup>

Kim did not stop there. On the same day, he met with Carles to restate his opposition to the British occupation of Geomundo. Illustrating exactly how Korea was viewed by the British, Carles claimed that the British presence in Geomundo was only temporary and had been necessitated by Korea's powerlessness to protect the island against seizure by other powers, especially Russia, which might occupy it if Britain departed.<sup>27</sup>

The next day, Zembsch sent Kim an unofficial letter specifying a solution to the Geomundo issue: If Britain occupied Korean territory to defend itself against Russia, Russia and its allies could issue separate statements and explore ways of responding to the British action after considering the circumstances. In other words, Korea had to first remonstrate with the British government directly that the occupation was illegal (under international law). If Britain would not admit its illegality, Korea should inform allied countries and seek their cooperation in a compromise with Britain over the Geomundo occupation.<sup>28</sup> Encouraged by Zembsch's reply, the Korean government hinted at its intention to neutralise itself unofficially. Zembsch reported to Berlin (25.5.1885) that Korea intended to neutralise, writing that the British occupation of Geomundo had not only pushed Korea

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<sup>25</sup> Pak Ilgeun, ed., "Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866-1886", FO 405/35, No.80, Plunkett to Granville, 1885.6.5, Inclosure 4, The President of the Corean Foreign Office to O'Conor, 1885.5.20, 536.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., FO 405/35, No.80, Plunkett to Granville, 1885.6.5, Inclosure 3, The President of the Corean Foreign Office to Acting Consul-general Carles, 1885.5.20, 535-536.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., FO 405/35, No.80, Plunkett to Granville, 1885.6.5, Inclosure 2, Acting Consul-general Carles to O'Conor, 1885.5.21, 535.

<sup>28</sup> *Gu Hanguk oegyō munseo 15: Deogan 1*, No.117, 58-60.

to pursue neutralisation, but had also given it a real opportunity to realise it under the joint guarantee of treaty powers. Zembsch could not have stated it any more clearly than in his telegram (1.6.1885) to Berlin via Shanghai: “Joseon wants to neutralise itself.”<sup>29</sup>

Finally, Korea officially expressed its intention to neutralise, sending documents under Foreign Minister Kim Yunsik’s name to the treaty powers in Korea (25.6.1885):

In the event of conflicts amongst other countries, Joseon has to remain neutral, by neither lending its territory to any country nor permitting a temporary occupation of its territory. Such actions are not allowed at all under international law. For these reasons, I [Kim Yunsik] am sending you [name of a representative of each treaty power in Joseon] this document. After reviewing the contents and reporting it to your government, please pass the fair judgement of your government on this issue.<sup>30</sup>

Kim sent a second document to foreign representatives two days later, withdrawing the first ones sent on 25 June. The second document was similar, but was changed to:

In the event of conflicts amongst other countries, Joseon has to remain neutral, by neither lending its territory to any country nor permitting a temporary occupation of its territory. Such actions are not allowed at all under international law. I am sending all representatives of treaty countries in Seoul this document to inform them of the Geomundo occupation. After reviewing the contents and reporting them to your government, please help them follow entente article 1. Entente 1 stipulated that if any one of the treaty signatories were engaged in a conflict with a third country, another treaty signatory was obliged to intervene to resolve the conflict and demonstrate its friendship upon receiving such a request from any one treaty signatory. Please reply sympathetically.<sup>31</sup>

In reality, the two documents contained no detailed information about neutralisation, and only the second document emphasised the duties of the powers mentioned in the treaties, referring to Article 1 of an entente signed between Korea and Western powers. Korea was indirectly incorporating neutralisation into part of its diplomacy, looking for a logical basis from the entente.<sup>32</sup>

Kim was only able to privately consult with Zembsch about neutralisation; conscious of Korea’s tributary status, he could not explicitly call for Korean neutralisation. Moreover, aware of Li’s past opposition to Budler’s neutralisation plan, the Korean government could do nothing to rile

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<sup>29</sup> Kim Wuhyeon, 66.

<sup>30</sup> *Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts*. [Political Archives of the Foreign Office, Korea] 2, Bd.2 A 6923 pr.24. August 1885 p.m. (Söul, den 25. Juni 1885) Anlage 3.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, August 1885 p.m. Nachschrift.

<sup>32</sup> Pak Huiho, 68.

China. For example, if Korea could settle the Geomundo Incident by treaty signatories' efforts and become a Belgian-style neutral state, this would signify that Korea was escaping from Chinese protection. Under such circumstances, Korea could only ask for friendly efforts from pact members.<sup>33</sup> But Britain preferred to settle the Geomundo issue through China (not Korea directly),<sup>34</sup> and other treaty signatories would not discharge their treaty duties and stand against Britain. U.S. Chargé d'affaires to Korea Foulk's response epitomised this tendency; upon receipt of a communication from the Korean Foreign Office requesting U.S. mediation to end the British occupation of Geomundo, Foulk did not seem to treat Korea's protest seriously, merely commenting that "the Korean government makes no distinction between the temporary and the permanent occupation".<sup>35</sup>

Kim's feeble gambit failed. Peering over his shoulder at China, Kim had taken a roundabout route toward a Belgian-style disarmed neutrality under major powers' consensus only, instead of a Swiss-style neutrality which would have required the massive funding of a self-sufficient military.<sup>36</sup> Kim's idea sounded logical, but given China's influence over Korea and insufficient Western interest,<sup>37</sup> his proposal could not be implemented.

The failure of Kim's proposal did not deter the Korean government from continuing diplomatic activities to resolve the Geomundo crisis; it dispatched letters to request major powers' mediation (7.7.1885).<sup>38</sup> However, this effort had been already overshadowed by China's previous interventions, which could bolster its suzerainty over Korea. In fact, between 16 and 30 April 1885, Chinese Minister to Britain Zēng Jizé, together with Li, acquiesced in the British action to gain official approval of Chinese suzerainty over Korea from Britain and received the draft of a mutual

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<sup>33</sup> *Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts.* 2, Bd.2 A 6926 pr.24. August 1885 p.m.

<sup>34</sup> Larsen, 175. O'Connor for one asserted that China would welcome negotiations with Britain on the grounds that this was "an opportunity to rehabilitate their position in Corea, somewhat lessened by the late Convention with Japan [Tianjin Convention]". Pak Ilgeun, ed., "Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866-1886", FO 405/35, No.118, O'Connor to Granville, 1885.5.26, 565.

<sup>35</sup> McCune and Harrison, ed., Foulk to Secretary of State, No.189, 1885.6.29, 80. Similarly, in Japan Foreign Minister Inoue Kaoru and other government ministers, as well as the media, remained reticent in regard to the Geomundo issue. Pak Ilgeun, ed., "Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866-1886", FO 405/35, No.65, Plunkett to Granville, 1885.5.25, 515-516.

<sup>36</sup> Pak Huiho, 69.

<sup>37</sup> For instance, while Giers recognised the need for joint action from major powers to protest the British occupation of Geomundo, Bismarck was reluctant to intervene on behalf of Korea. Kim Yonggu, "Geomundo wa Beulladiboseutok", 150-151.

<sup>38</sup> Kim also conveyed another note of complaint to Britain (1886.7.4). *Ibid.*, 129.

agreement related to Geomundo from Granville (28.4.1885) as follows: 1) China would not oppose the British occupation of Geomundo, agreeing to Britain's legal occupation of it, 2) Britain would pay an annual lease fee for Geomundo to the Korean government every 12 months during its occupation, and 3) From the total lease fee, the amount that Korea should pay as tribute to China would be directly settled by Britain. However, he suddenly opposed signing it due to stiff opposition from the Chinese court (1.5.1885) and the telegram from the *Zongli yamen* (6.5.1885), which mentioned that because of the Russian Government's possible occupation of "some other island or portion of the Kingdom of Korea" and "the possibility of Japan following in the same course", China hoped Britain would not occupy Geomundo.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, Li Hongzhang finally cautioned against leasing Geomundo to Britain, dispatched Möllendorff and Ding Ruichang to Geomundo to evaluate the situation,<sup>40</sup> and put out feelers to Britain, Russia, and Japan to explore a possible bilateral or multilateral guarantee of Korea's security and territorial integrity.<sup>41</sup>

Notwithstanding O'Connor's claim that Itō Hirobumi privately preferred to see Port Hamilton (i.e. Geomundo) taken by England rather than Russia, for the English occupation would be "for a time", but a Russian one "for good",<sup>42</sup> Japan did not view the British action favourably. Even before Korea officially lodged a protest with the British government, Enomoto had agreed with Li that China and Japan should join forces to prevent the occupation of Korea by a third country.<sup>43</sup> Foreign Minister Inoue Kaoru also asked Japanese Minister to Britain Masataka Kawase to call Britain's attention to the following possibilities: If the British presence in Geomundo was lengthy, Russia would in turn definitely try to occupy Wonsan, Busan, or Jeju Island and entice other powers to follow suit by invoking a most-favoured-nation status clause. This would lead to the division of Korea and make peace in East Asia difficult to maintain.<sup>44</sup>

The British occupation of Geomundo stretched every nerve of Russian authorities, who

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<sup>39</sup> Pak Ilgeun, ed., "Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866-1886", FO 405/35, No.15, Granville to Tseng, 1885.4.28, 493; *Ibid.*, No.16, Granville to O'Connor, 1885.5.6, 494.

<sup>40</sup> *Gojong sillok*, 1885.5.4, <http://sillok.history.go.kr>. Later, they also visited Japan to meet with Sir William Dowell, the commander of Britain's Far Eastern fleet. Lensen, 37.

<sup>41</sup> Chien, 174; Deuchler, 215.

<sup>42</sup> Pak Ilgeun, ed., "Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866-1886", FO 405/35, No.53, O'Connor to Granville, 1885.4.21, 508.

<sup>43</sup> Kim Jeongmyeong, ed., *Nikkan gaikō shiryō shūsei* 日韓外交資料集成 [Compilation of Japanese-Korean Diplomatic Sources] 7 (Tokyo: Gannado, 1964), 581-582.

<sup>44</sup> Seong Hwangyong, 201.

perceived it as tantamount to waging war on Russia. The next day (15.4.1885), when the British government ordered its navy to occupy Geomundo, Director General of the Russian Navy I. A. Shestakov urged Giers to face the British action head on, and the Russian media even called for the capture of an ice-free port in Korea.<sup>45</sup> Though Giers did not take up these demands, he still advocated British withdrawal from Geomundo and instructed Russian Minister to China Sergei I. Popov to consult with Li about rebuking Britain's action (22.8.1885).<sup>46</sup> With little interest in Korea, the German and U.S. governments had little to say about the Geomundo Incident,<sup>47</sup> and the burden of responsibility fell on their representatives' shoulders. German Consul-general Zembsch urged Kim Yunsik to state that Korea should not consent to the occupation.<sup>48</sup> Despite his intimacy with Korean officials, Foulk did not side with Korea but instead alluded that he shared Britain's view that Geomundo was occupied to deter Russian aggression. Carles' report to Granville mentioned that Foulk had reminded Korean officials of the powerlessness of Korea to protect Geomundo against Russia and forced them not to denounce the British action in Geomundo.<sup>49</sup>

As Russian officials were busy grappling with what Britain's occupation of Geomundo meant for Russia, Britain began to contemplate withdrawal from the island by opening negotiations with China. Thus, British Foreign Secretary Marquess of Salisbury cabled O'Connor to enquire whether China could prevent Geomundo from being occupied by Russia, France, and Germany if Britain were to withdraw.<sup>50</sup> All things considered, it now seemed apparent that the Geomundo issue had reached a tipping point with Britain seeking an exit strategy.

Though the allegedly secret agreement between Korea and Russia was a trial balloon that never got off the ground,<sup>51</sup> it triggered the British occupation of Geomundo and facilitated discussions between China and Japan over their concerns for Korea<sup>52</sup> by provisionally halting the Sino-Japanese rivalry. Li, meeting with Enomoto, tried to direct his attention to the gravity of the Geomundo issue by illustrating its proximity to Japan and asked for cooperation in securing Britain's withdrawal from Geomundo. Concerned that Russia might emulate Britain by occupying Yeongheung Bay, Ulleung Island or Geojae Island,<sup>53</sup> Enomoto eventually concurred that China and Japan should work together to prevent the occupation of Korea by Russia.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Kim Yonggu, "Geomundo wa Beulladiboseutok", 84-85.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

Against this background, Austrian Minister in Japan Zaluski mentioned to his foreign minister that Enomoto's real mission in Tianjin was not to supervise the withdrawal of Chinese troops from Korea but to ask Li to attend a Tokyo conference for neutralising Korea under the joint guarantee of major powers (9.8.1885). Zaluski did not think the Chinese government would immediately accept Enomoto's second proposal under Chinese suzerainty over Korea. But since his proposal could check Russian expansion into Korea, it opened up the possibility of discussion between China and Japan on Korean neutralisation.<sup>55</sup> However, considering China's well-known desire to uphold its suzerainty against the Japanese challenge in Korea, Enomoto's neutralisation proposal had little chance of succeeding.

However, a month after Enomoto's neutralisation trial, new momentum for negotiations grew once the Anglo-Russian dispute over Afghanistan was resolved in September 1885. This prompted Li to approach O'Connor (13.10.1885) to end the British presence in Geomundo.<sup>56</sup> Eventually, the British Foreign Office took up Li's offer and instructed O'Connor that Britain would withdraw from

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<sup>47</sup> According to one source, however, the U.S. seemed to have explored a possible lease of Geomundo if Britain could be persuaded to leave. Spencer J. Palmer, ed., *Korean-American Relations: Documents Pertaining to the Far Eastern Diplomacy of the United States. Volume 2: The Period of Growing Influence, 1887-1895*, Rockhill to U.S. Secretary of State, 1887.1.13 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 240.

<sup>48</sup> *Gu Hanguk oegyo munseo 15: Deogan 1*, No.117, 58-60. Zemsch was personally more sympathetic to Kim Yunsik, favourably replying to Kim's circulated letter on 21 May (*Gu Hanguk oegyo munseo 15: Deogan 1*, No.117, 58-60) and criticising the British action at his meeting with Carles on 23 May (Pak Ilgeun, ed., "Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866-1886", FO 405/35, No.108, Inclosure 2, Carles to Granville, Memorandum of Conversation with Captain Zemsch, 1885.5.23, 554-556).

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, FO 405/35, No.109, Carles to Granville, Confidential, 1885.5.22, 556-557.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, FO 405/35, No.98, Salisbury to O'Connor, 1885.7.13, 549.

<sup>51</sup> When De Speyer was dispatched to Seoul by Davydov between 9 June and 7 July 1885 to check what way had been made for Britain by Korea and whether the Korean King had invited any military instructors other than Russian ones, he contacted Kim Yunsik several times to realise the dispatch of Russian military instructors, but to no avail, thereby failing in the realisation of the allegedly secret agreement between Korea and Russia. Kim Yonggu, "Geomundo wa Beulladiboseutok", 89-96.

<sup>52</sup> The allegedly secret agreement chivvied Japan, fearing Russia more than China, into concluding the Tianjin Convention. (See footnote 197 page 75.). To prevent the recurrence of such a secret agreement between Korea and Russia, Japanese Foreign Minister Inoue Kaoru proposed an eight-clause Korean reform plan to Li Hongzhang through Enomoto Takeaki (1885.7.3), but Li rejected it because China would not customarily intervene in its vassal (Korea)'s internal affairs and the long distance between Tianjin and Tokyo made the plan impossible to implement. *Ibid.*, 110-111. For the contents of the eight-clause Korean reform plan, see Seong Hwangyong, 205.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>54</sup> Kim Jeongmyeong, ed., "Nikkan gaikō shiryō shūsei 7", 581-582.

<sup>55</sup> Seoul daehakgyo Dogilhak yeonguso, ed., *Hanguk geundaesa e daehan jaryo: Oseuteuria Heongari Jeguk oegyo bogoseo (1885-1913)* [Sources on Early Modern Korean History: The Diplomatic Reports of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1885-1913)] (Seoul: Sinwon munhwasa, 1992), 61.

<sup>56</sup> Pak Ilgeun, ed., "Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866-1886", FO 405/35/203, No.429, Confidential, O'Connor to Salisbury, 1885.10.14, 645-646.

Geomundo as long as China promised that no other country would occupy it.<sup>57</sup>

In the vortex of the Sino-British negotiations about the British withdrawal from Geomundo, Yu Giljun (1856-1914) had kept watch against Russia. While Kim Yunsik was the first Korean to officially suggest neutralisation, Yu privately approached the issue in a more theoretical way. As the first Korean to receive a Western-style education in Japan in 1881, Yu moved to the U.S. two years later to continue his education.<sup>58</sup> As a result, he became quite familiar with international law, Western customs, and the complexities of geopolitics compared to many of his countrymen. Since Korea was embroiled in major power rivalries that threatened its stability and autonomy, its foreign policy could have benefited from Yu's expertise. But he could not contribute his talents to the Korean government after his return from the U.S. Instead, he became a victim of Yuan's interventionist Korean policy, which deliberately sidelined anti-China faction figures like Yu from the political decision-making process. Despite undergoing house arrest in Korea, Yu, having observed the international situation in his travels through Japan, the U.S., and Europe and having responded to Han Gyuseol's request about Kim Yunsik's previous refusal of Budler's neutralisation proposal,<sup>59</sup> single-handedly attempted to apply his knowledge of international relations to make a case for Korean neutralisation.

To explain the reasons for Korean neutralisation, Yu, in his *Theory of Neutrality* (12.1885) and other writings, analysed the current state of affairs on the Korean peninsula and in surrounding areas: He branded Russia the greatest threat to Korea, claiming that "violent Russians like a tiger or a wolf, had already been vigilantly awaiting an opportunity for several years, but they did not make a move just because there was no pretext of intervention".<sup>60</sup> Yu continued in the same vein: "Russians were also viewed as tyrannical...powerful...people having an eye on a time."<sup>61</sup> He later stated, "Though Russian people were especially notorious for their wickedness, pegging them as greedy and vicious in the world, their cruelty was rather getting serious steadily."<sup>62</sup> As for other countries, Yu wrote:

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., FO 405/35, No.208, Salisbury to O'Connor, 1885.12.12, 648.

<sup>58</sup> As the letter to his teacher E.S. Morse (1884.12.27) demonstrated, Yu's interest in neutralisation began in the U.S. Yi Gwangrin, *Gaehwapa wa gaehwa sasang yeongu* [A Study of the Pro-Enlightenment Party and Enlightenment Thought] (Seoul: Iljogak, 1989), 225.

<sup>59</sup> Kim Hakjun, *Hanmar ui seoyang jeongchihak suyong yeongu* [A Study on the Acceptance of Western Political Science in Late Joseon] (Seoul: Seoul daehakgyo chulpanbu, 2012), 264.

Though Japan will have an intention to invade Joseon, it, sensing its inferior position and weaker power compared to China's, is preoccupied with protecting itself. In reality, Japan is causing Joseon more inconvenience than China does, and although it will withdraw from Joseon in accordance with the Tianjin Convention, Japan will stand a chance of invading Joseon someday. Meanwhile, though some people might say that "Joseon deserves U.S. assistance because Joseon is close friends with the U.S.," the U.S.'s location far away in the distance over the ocean, lack of relations with Joseon, and the Monroe Doctrine<sup>63</sup> that prevented the U.S. from intervening in Asian and European affairs, force the U.S. not to support Joseon militarily, but help Joseon verbally, even though Joseon is in danger of its security. Thus, the U.S. can only be relied on as a commercial partner, instead of a friendly nation to save Joseon in an emergency. In contrast, China can be a true Joseon ally in regard to the traditionally friendly relations and advantageous geographical conditions between the two countries.<sup>64</sup>

Yu's comments were based on the following: His perception of Russian as a threat seemed to have been influenced by Huang Zunxian's *Cháoxiǎn cèlüè*, which urged Korea to remain friendly with China, to connect with Japan, and to link with the U.S. to defend itself against Russian aggression. The cross-continental Anglo-Russian confrontation culminated in a British action to counter Russia in the Far East; Britain justified its Geomundo occupation by claiming that, otherwise, Russia would invade the island.<sup>65</sup> Over-dependence on the U.S., for example the pro-U.S. remarks expressed by Yun Chiho and Kim Yunsik, sowed doubt in Yu's mind about the good offices clause that was read as promising automatic U.S. intervention in Korea. Japan's frivolous attitude (i.e. deliberately staying neutral without supporting Korea's pro-Enlightenment faction during the Gapsin Coup), Japanese control of the telegraph line linking Busan and Nagasaki,<sup>66</sup> and

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<sup>60</sup> Yu Giljun jeonseo pyeonchan wiwonhoe, ed., "Eonsaso 言事疏 [A Memorial on State Affairs]", in *Yu Giljun jeonseo* 俞吉濬全書 [The Complete Works of Yu Giljun] IV: *Jeongchi gyeongjepyeron* 政治經濟遍 [On Politics and Economy] (Seoul: Ilhogak, 1971), 68.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>62</sup> Yu Giljun jeonseo pyeonchan wiwonhoe, ed., "Jungnipnon 中立論 [Theory of Neutrality]", in *Yu Giljun jeonseo* IV: *Jeongchi gyeongjepyeron*, 321.

<sup>63</sup> The Monroe Doctrine is a basic tenet of American foreign policy originating from President James Monroe's State of the Union Address to the Congress (1823.12.2): separate spheres of influence for the Americas and Europe, non-colonisation, and non-intervention.

<sup>64</sup> *Jungnipnon*, 323-324.

<sup>65</sup> Kim Yonggu, "Geomundo wa Beulladiboseutok", 65.

<sup>66</sup> Japan early on understood the valuable role of telegraph cable in its diplomatic relations with Korea and obtained an agreement from it to connect Busan with Nagasaki via submarine cable in 1883. Built and operated by Japan, this telegraph line gave Japan a 25-year monopoly on communications in and out of Korea and became part of Japan's long-term design to exert control over telegraph lines in the southern part of Korea. Larsen, 136-138.

after the publication of *Datsuaron* 脫亞論 (Escape from Asia), the apathy (toward Korea) of Fukuzawa Yukichi, who had previously wished to spread the virtues of civilisation to Korea, must have increased Yu's suspicions of Japanese intentions. On the other hand, Yu held a favourable view of China, whose influence over Korea had reached its peak with the stationing of troops in Korea after the Gapsin Coup. China also shared Yu's concerns that Japan would advance into Korea and that Russia would be the primary threat to China.<sup>67</sup>

However, since the geopolitical situation surrounding Korea was becoming ever more dangerous, it was too risky to rely on the goodwill of any one major power to protect Korean security. Therefore, Yu considered Korean neutralisation under the guarantee of major powers, especially one in which China would lead, good policy.<sup>68</sup> Since China's prestige had suffered profoundly during the British invasion of Burma and the French invasion of Vietnam despite China's having close relations with neither Burma nor Vietnam, a Russian invasion of Korea would do more than merely damage Chinese prestige; it would be, in Chinese parlance, as if the teeth had lost their lips. Consequently, China would have to shed Chinese blood to preserve Korea as a means of protecting itself. To avoid doing exactly that, China had maintained relations with Korea for four thousand years, and, as its suzerain state for several hundred years, had rescued Korea from even small rebellions. Yu reasoned that China would do much more if it believed a foreign invasion was putting Korea's existence at stake.<sup>69</sup>

Declaring that "prevention is the best solution", Yu contended that if China dispatched its troops to counter a Russian invasion of Korea, the outcome would be unclear. Even if Russian troops were pushed back across the Korean border, the loss of Chinese blood and treasure could be costly. On the other hand, if Chinese troops were stationed in Korea in preparation against a Russian invasion, they could provide Russia a pretext to flex its military might and prompt Japan to react rashly, creating unnecessary conflict.<sup>70</sup> Faced with such grim scenarios, China, according to

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<sup>67</sup> Jeong Yonghwa, *Munmyeong ui jeongchi sasang: Yu Giljun gwa geundae Hanguk* [A Political Idea of Civilisation: Yu Giljun and Early Modern Korea] (Seoul: Munhak gwa jiseongsa, 2004), 181-183.

<sup>68</sup> Gang Mangil, *Bundan sidae ui yeoksa insik* [The Perception of History in the Era of Division] (Seoul: Changjak gwa bipyeongsa, 1978), 108.

<sup>69</sup> *Jungnipnon*, 325.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 325-326.

<sup>71</sup> Pak Huiho, 72.

<sup>72</sup> *Eonsaso*, 63.

Yu, had no choice but to actively back neutralisation for the sake of stability on the Korean peninsula.<sup>71</sup>

Yu also believed Korea's internal conditions necessitated it becoming Asia's neutral state:

All countries around the world were proclaiming their friendship through treaties, pursuing their wealth by expanding commerce, and strengthening their defences by enlarging military power. Thus, if the country's internal affairs were mismanaged, other countries would not consider it a state, if its foreign relations were untrustworthy, other countries would not enter into friendly relations, and if its military and commerce were desolated and could not prosper, such a country would become indigent and weak, unable to stand on its own feet.<sup>72</sup>

Korea's inability to execute internal reform and make strenuous efforts warranted neutralisation as an option for its security. Yu observed that since Korea was not in a position to propose neutralisation, the burden should fall on China. Roughly, Korea should request China to act as a sponsor for a treaty, then meet with Britain, France, Japan and Russia—countries that had stakes in Asia—who would jointly make a treaty in the presence of Korea.<sup>73</sup>

Kim Yunsik had proposed a Belgian-style neutralisation for Korea, but in Yu's opinion, a Korea neutralisation should be a compromise between the Belgian- and Bulgarian-style models because Korea's internal and external circumstances and its international political position resembled those of both Belgium and Bulgaria:

Geographically, our country [Korea], being located in the throat of Asia, is like Belgium in Europe, and as our country's international status is regarded as China's vassal, this relationship is like the one between Bulgaria and Turkey. However, whereas Bulgaria did not have a right to conclude treaties on an equal footing with others, our country does. Although standing as a vassal and obtaining investiture from a foreign country did not apply to Belgium, our country was used to having this case. For these reasons, our country's existence makes a precedent of both Belgium and Bulgaria.<sup>74</sup>

If Korea neutralised, Yu predicted that the international contribution would be high; the treaty that neutralised Bulgaria was the by-product of a European powers' scheme to prevent Russia from expanding southwards, and the treaty that neutralised Belgium was to foster the mutual protection of European powers. Similarly, Korea, by becoming a neutral Asian state, could check Russia and act for the mutual protection of Asian powers.<sup>75</sup> Yu also suggested that after 1885, when the

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<sup>73</sup> *Jungnippon*, 326-327.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 320-321.

competition among China, Japan, Russia, and Britain had reached a peak with a purported secret agreement between Korea and Russia, the Tianjin Convention, and the British Geomundo occupation, the time and mood for neutralisation were ripe.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, Yu asserted optimistically that if Korea requested China to step in, it was possible to realise neutrality, the internal and external effects of which, he predicted, would be great:

Korean neutralisation could change the hostile relationship between Korea and Russia to a friendly one in which smiling discussions are available by eliminating Russians' evil mind naturally through friendly foreign relations, enable China to permanently settle its Eastern worries without using its military, and give our country a reliable long wall enabling it to earn benefits permanently.<sup>77</sup>

In sum, Yu, recognising the vulnerability of Korean security under the traditional tributary relationship between Korea and China, championed neutralisation to counter Russia under the international system.

His closely-considered neutralisation plan notwithstanding, Yu's logic of neutrality and views on the forces surrounding Korea gets mixed reviews. For example, Gang Mangil re-evaluates Yu's understanding of neutrality, by systematising the degree of Western impact on Yu's neutrality theory and contrasting his proposal for Korean neutralisation with Budler's initiatives.<sup>78</sup> Yi Hojae is baffled that Yu's ambiguously pro-Chinese standpoint led him to propose neutrality without an ample understanding of mutual antagonism and balance of power.<sup>79</sup> Kim Hakjun wonders whether an extreme Russo-phobia had undermined Yu's case for neutrality.<sup>80</sup> Jeong Yonghwa stresses that neutralisation represented Korea's move towards becoming a small country bent on protecting itself rather than a nation with aspirations for growth.<sup>81</sup> A more plausible explanation would be that Yu wanted to direct China's attention to Korean neutrality by showing that it could counter Russian expansion into Northeast Asia.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 321.

<sup>76</sup> Gang Mangil, 916.

<sup>77</sup> *Jungnipnon*, 327-328.

<sup>78</sup> Gang Mangil, 111-116.

<sup>79</sup> Yi Hojae, *Hangugin ui gukje jeongchigwan* [International Political Views of Koreans] (Seoul: Beopmunsa, 1994), 49.

<sup>80</sup> Kim Hakjun, 272-273. Therefore, Kim contends that Yu's theory of neutrality based on excessive vigilance toward Russia might have been problematic from the outset. Ibid., 273.

<sup>81</sup> Jeong Yonghwa, 187.

Yet, considering his membership in the pro-Enlightenment faction, Yu's choice of China as a sponsor for Korean neutralisation might appear odd. Nonetheless, after recognising the limits of Chinese military power and U.S. involvement against the spectre of Japanese and Russian invasions of Korea,<sup>82</sup> Yu came to believe that the traditional tributary relations between China and Korea could not protect Korean security. In addition, he might have been shocked by the failure of the Gapsin Coup and conscious of how dominant Chinese influence was after the Tianjin Convention. Accordingly, Yu wanted to establish new relations between the two countries according to international law by applying the theory of balance of power.<sup>83</sup> Thus, Yu proposed Korean neutralisation to transform its tributary relations with China, claiming that since a tributary state could independently sign treaties with other countries, dispatch minister-level diplomats abroad, and declare war and ceasefires, it could also be a neutral state. Furthermore, that Korea had already concluded treaties with major powers testified to its becoming an independent country under international law, and thus it could be a neutral state, as Yu insisted that "non-independent country can-not enjoy the right of neutralisation".<sup>84</sup>

But Yu's assertions didn't logically add up. Since Korea's traditional tributary relationship with China was incompatible with international law, which stressed equality between states, Yu attempted to combine elements of the Belgian and Bulgarian neutrality models for his neutralisation proposal. But Bulgaria was not recognised as a neutral state by international law, and the guarantors of Belgian neutrality were all equal, even though Britain did act as a sponsor. Moreover, his plan was bound to face objections from the pro-Chinese faction and raise the ire of Gojong and Queen Min, who were seeking rapprochement with Russia to counter China, as well as the opposition of Yuan Shikai as Li Hongzhang wanted to transform the traditional tributary relationship between Korea and China into a modern dependency.<sup>85</sup> For these reasons, Yu could not divulge the existence of his writings,<sup>86</sup> and thus his proposal was not made public at the time.

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<sup>82</sup> Gang Mangil, 110-111.

<sup>83</sup> Pak Huiho, 75.

<sup>84</sup> Yu Giljun jeonseo pyeonchan wiwonhoe, ed., "Gukgwon 國權 [National Sovereignty]", in *Yu Giljun jeonseo IV: Jeongchi gyeongjepyeon*, 29, 37.

<sup>85</sup> Pak Huiho, 76.

<sup>86</sup> *Jungnipnon*, 319.

Meanwhile, the British action in Geomundo had China, as Korea's suzerain, put its influence over the country to the test. Thus, having learned of the British occupation of Geomundo from O'Connor, Zēng Jizé protested to British Foreign Secretary Granville, emphasising that Geomundo belonged to Korea, China's vassal state, and that its occupation was intolerable.<sup>87</sup> Increasingly fearful of Western challenges to its tributary relations with Korea, China suspected treaties between Korea and Western powers of ending old Chinese privileges. Accordingly, Li, using Hong Kong as an example, warned Gojong not to lease Geomundo to Britain.<sup>88</sup> Besides, even if the British occupation was purportedly to counter Russian expansion into Korea, this was deemed unnecessary because Yuan, His Imperial Chinese Majesty's Resident in Seoul, had already been working to block rapprochement between Korea and Russia. Chinese Minister to Russia Liu Ruifen begged to differ, however.

In 1886, he wrote to Li that Korea was the only remaining vassal state of China. Emphasising Korea's geographical position near the three provinces of Northeast China, Liu tried to draw China's attention to the importance of Korea. Criticising the harmful impact of the dishonest political factions in Korea, he noted that these groups were acting as if they were mostly interested in self-destruction—taking “poison pills” in Liu's words—or in the demise of Korea. Though considering this a difficult disease to cure, he suggested that China first incorporate Korea into its new province and then request countries such as Britain, the U.S., and Russia for its joint protection, neither allowing anybody to invade nor occupy a single square metre of Korean territory.<sup>89</sup>

Owing to Liu's information that he had already found American and Russian ministers willing to back Korean neutrality, Li replied favourably to the former's idea, commenting that the Anglo-Russian joint protection [without the U.S.] of Korea was well thought out. This was a startling admission, considering Li's non-reaction towards Enomoto's second proposal. Although Li forwarded Liu's scheme to the Office of Foreign Affairs for its approval, the possibility of the Chinese government endorsing it was slim because the Chinese court viewed Korea as its vassal

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<sup>87</sup> Xu, 120.

<sup>88</sup> *Gojong sillok*, 1885.5.4, <http://sillok.history.go.kr>.

<sup>89</sup> In effect, Liu was calling for neutralisation of Korea, saying that there was a risk that other countries would plunder Korea and that the repercussions of such actions would be grave. Xiāo, 1144.

and requesting the protection of a neighbouring country was seen as incompatible with the usual system and custom.<sup>90</sup>

As the decline of the Ottoman, Persian, and Qing empires in the 1880s created a power vacuum in parts of Asia, the two rivals, Britain and Russia, were tempted to exert their influence on Asia. A head-on confrontation between these two European countries temporarily brought the Sino-Japanese rivalry to a standstill, placing the tributary system in question from Korea's point of view. Mindful of this geopolitical shift, the reform-minded intellectual Kang Youwei (1858-1927), despite not holding any government post, advocated neutralisation to secure Chinese interests in Korea. Kang initially undertook Confucian learning to prepare for civil service examinations but eventually adopted an eclectic approach to Confucianism, believing that it negated human development and progress. In addition, influenced by Buddhism, Kang saw himself as a new sage who could save the Chinese people. His interests were not restricted to Eastern thoughts; after visiting Hong Kong and Shanghai, where he was exposed to Western technical urban developments, he henceforth immersed himself in readings on physics, electricity, and optics,<sup>91</sup> thus demonstrating his desire to learn from the Western world. Though not explicitly stated, his experiences in both cities and his yearning to protect his countrymen may have induced him to explore a new way to shield fragile China from Western powers, while also keeping in mind that the tributary system could no longer protect Korea from foreign intrusion.

Kang's alternate Korean strategy for China, which included a neutralisation option, was divided into three parts: The first, incorporating Korea and placing it under direct Chinese rule, would bring it a mid-level benefit. The second strategy, resting on the assumption that China was powerless, posited that the best option was for Korea to become a "public sphere" which various powers could jointly protect in the Belgian-style. The third, considered the worst strategy, was to have Korea remain China's vassal while allowing it to conduct trade autonomously. Since Korea was a small country with a poor people, he claimed that it would take 30 years for a reform-driven self-strengthening of Korea to succeed, but repeated incursions there made this unfeasible. Rather than feeling ashamed for watching Korea lose its independence, China should request its joint

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<sup>90</sup> Xu, 87.

<sup>91</sup> Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013), 217-218.

protection for China's sake.<sup>92</sup> However, although Kang was the only Chinese to formally propose Korean neutralisation, there was no evidence that the Chinese authorities, let alone other major powers, backed his proposal.

Around the time of Kang's proposal, another Korean opinion maker, Kim Okgyun (1851-1894), weighed in with his neutralisation proposal. A scion of an illustrious family, Kim was initially schooled in traditional Confucian learning. Although he did not study abroad as Yu Giljun did, he was, however, exposed to Western-influenced enlightenment by befriending progressive intellectuals like Yu Honggi, Oh Gyeongseok, Yi Dongin, and Pak Gyusu. Kim's pro-enlightenment views gained impetus after he visited Japan in June 1883 to negotiate a loan of ¥3,000,000 with the Japanese government to pursue modernisation in Korea.<sup>93</sup> Upon his return, he, along with Pak Yeongho and Yu Giljun, played an instrumental role in publishing the government-run newspaper *Hanseong sunbo* to enlighten the public and propagate their vision of a wealthy and powerful country.<sup>94</sup>

Having witnessed China's extensive intervention in Korea's internal affairs after the Imo Mutiny, Kim, utilising the Sino-French War as an opening to thwart Chinese aims to make Korea its vassal, claimed to stand for a fully autonomous and independent Korea established through prosperity and a strong military. During the Gapsin Coup, he, as a member of the staunch anti-China pro-Enlightenment faction, confronted the entrenched pro-China faction, ushering in a new era of Japan-inspired modernisation in Korea. Moreover, he adopted an innovative platform to abolish the tributary relationship with China and even called for the repatriation of Daewongun, his arch-enemy, from China.

Kim then unrestrainedly stressed independence, criticising Korea's dependency on China for undermining Korea's efforts to join the Western-led world order as an equal, full-fledged partner. Kim added that since Japan was attempting to act as a "Britain of the East", he wished to build an independent, rich, powerful, and modern country by turning Korea into a "France of Asia".<sup>95</sup> He

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<sup>92</sup> Kang Youwei, *Kang Youwei yigao* 康有為遺稿 [Posthumous Manuscripts of Kang Youwei] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1986), 34.

<sup>93</sup> Duus, 56.

<sup>94</sup> Kim Yeongjak, "Kim Okgyun: Sidae reul apjilreogan gaehyeok uiji [Kim Okgyun: His reform-mindedness that kept ahead of his time]", *Hanguksa simin gangjwa* 31 (August 2002): 80-83.

also claimed, “From a geopolitical perspective, if Japan were regarded as the Britain of the East, Korea should assume Italy’s role due to the similarities between the two countries in topography, area, and population.”<sup>96</sup> He then explored cooperation between Korea, China, and Japan to defend Asia from Western aggression.<sup>97</sup>

Kim’s pet theory was that all Western states were independent and that any country should first achieve its independence and only then could it build amicable ties with other countries. This drove his efforts to build an independent Korea through national prosperity and defence and to have it join the international order. Evidence suggests that Kim was interested in neutralisation from early on,<sup>98</sup> but until the Gapsin Coup, he never publicly mentioned it. When Kim met Japanese Minister to Korea Takezoe (9.11.1884), he did not use the word “neutralisation” even though he informed Takezoe that he had used the Netherlands, Belgium, and Switzerland as examples to convince Gojong why Korean independence was needed.<sup>99</sup>

After the Gapsin Coup failure, though the Tianjin Convention produced a balance of power between China and Japan on the Korean peninsula, China still enjoyed its suzerainty there, which enabled Kim to think that only China had the power and prestige to guarantee Korean independence, not opposing its dispatch of advisers to Korea.<sup>100</sup> But witnessing that the Geomundo Incident led to a British and Russian confrontation, Kim changed his anti-China sentiment, believing that China could not protect Korea from Britain’s Geomundo occupation, and urged Gojong to cultivate amicable relations with the West, reform Korean politics, boost commerce, and build an army capable of protecting Korea from foreign invasion.<sup>101</sup> Kim’s transformation from an anti-China stance to a more conciliatory attitude towards China shows that late Joseon Korea was a period of great turmoil which required new political approaches to cultivating self-reliance.

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<sup>95</sup> Min Taewon, *Gapsin jeongbyeon gwa Kim Okgyun* [The Gapsin Coup and Kim Okgyun] (Seoul: Gukje munhwa hyeophoe, 1947), 87-88.

<sup>96</sup> Yi Gwangrin, *Gaehwadang yeongu* [A Study of the pro-Enlightenment Party] (Seoul: Iljogak, 1980), 186-188.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 187-190.

<sup>98</sup> Sin Yongha, “Kim Okgyun ui gaehwa sasang [Kim Okgyun’s Enlightenment Thought]”, *Dongbang hakji* 46/47/48 (June 1985): 201.

<sup>99</sup> Itō, ed., “Hisho ruisan-Chōsen kōshō shiryō Jō”, 276.

<sup>100</sup> Kim Okgyun, *Kim Okgyun jeonjip* 金玉均全集 [The Complete Works of Kim Okgyun] (Seoul: Asea munhwasa, 1979), 151.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 146. This was not an easy task since Korea had already borrowed from China to fund its military build-up, using the loans to purchase weapons, munitions, and military equipment. Larsen, 101.

Kim, from his exile in Japan, abandoned his hostility towards China and proposed Korean neutralisation in July 1886 by major powers' consensus under China's leadership to Li Hongzhang through *A Letter to Li Hongzhang* 與李鴻章書:

Why doesn't your Excellency honour his majesty the Emperor of Great Qing by placing him as the hegemonic protagonist of the world, communicate public opinions to Western major powers, build Joseon as a neutral state by continuously banding together with them, and thereby make Joseon completely safe?<sup>102</sup>

His idea in the above offer was to make Korea a secure region by neutralising it through diplomatic compromise between major powers under the leadership of China, which had influence within the Korean government. If Korea could become a neutral country, its ripple effect, he insisted, would be beneficial for China:

If your Excellency's seasoned methods continuously facilitate a close friendship between China and Joseon and pursue a strategy in East Asia by truly concluding a mutually close pact, this would not only be beneficial to Joseon, but perhaps prove to be a boon for your honourable country [China] as well.<sup>103</sup>

The complex rivalries among China, Japan, Russia, and Britain, and China's extensive intervention in internal Korean affairs had placed Korea between a rock and a hard place. Kim, feeling the necessity of a bold and lasting measure to protect Korean independence,<sup>104</sup> mapped out a Korean neutralisation using the balance of power between major powers. Nevertheless, considering his widely-acknowledged anti-China stance, Kim's call for China to assume a leadership role in it was quite striking, even more so than Yu's, and it showed that Kim was shrewd enough to grasp geopolitical realities. At any rate, considering China's devotion to upholding the traditional tributary system,<sup>105</sup> it was highly unlikely that China would accede to Kim's call for neutralising Korea.

As Britain and China were planning their exit strategy for the Geomundo issue, the high-handedness of Chinese resident Yuan,<sup>106</sup> the return of Daewongun to Korea, and slow progress on

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<sup>102</sup> Kim Okgyun, 152.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Kim Yeongjak, "Hanmal nasyonallijeum gwa Kim Okgyun", 238-239.

<sup>105</sup> Pak Huiho, 82.

<sup>106</sup> Arriving in Seoul to take up the post of commissioner of trade of the third rank (1885.10.5), Yuan was referred to as "resident" by Western observers. One noted that "he was *de facto* King of Korea. Nothing was done without consulting him, nor without his sanction". Joseph H. Longford, quoted in Chien, 34.

negotiations surrounding Geomundo compelled some members of the Min clan to revisit Korean policy towards China. After Weber began his assignment as Russian chargé d'affaires in Seoul (21.10.1885), pro-Russia Min clan members requested he have Russian warships dispatched to Korea to facilitate its independence. Weber responded by demanding an official document bearing the royal seal and Juksan magistrate Jo Jundu and other Korean officials passed on a secret document containing the stamp and seal of State Councillor Shim Suntaek, thus concluding the second Russo-Korean pact (13.8.1886).<sup>107</sup> Incensed at this decision, Yuan recommended Li force Gojong to abdicate and place Daewongun in charge of Korean affairs,<sup>108</sup> but when Weber denied the existence of the pact, Li ordered Yuan not to pursue the matter further.<sup>109</sup>

After Möllendorff was summoned back to Tianjin for his role in the aborted Russo-Korean secret agreement, Li recommended that Owen N. Denny (1838-1900) fill his shoes. Denny studied law at Willamette University and later served as a judge in Wasco and Portland from 1862 to 1874. His diplomatic career actually began in 1874 when he was appointed U.S. consul in Tianjin. There, he built up a rapport with Li, and this helped him secure his position as Korea's foreign adviser from May 1886 to February 1890, where he, contrary to Li's wishes, became famous for his anti-China crusade.<sup>110</sup>

During Denny's tenure, Korea was exposed to an unprecedented level of Chinese interference in its affairs, interference which went beyond the traditional suzerain-vassal relationship. Above all, that China considered Korea as a sacrificial lamb to further its journey toward becoming a late imperial power shows at a glance what set the tone for any relations between them. For this reason, it was imperative for Gojong and like-minded Korean officials to fully mobilise national strengths to deter China, which could not but affect Denny's activities within Korea.<sup>111</sup>

Before arriving in Korea, he was instructed to report to Li on his work and the situation there and to receive assistance and specific work guidelines from China. Under the guise of reinvigorating its relationship with Korea, the Chinese government sought to maintain its traditional

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<sup>107</sup> Seong Hwangyong, 207.

<sup>108</sup> Kim Gyeongchang, 350.

<sup>109</sup> Seong Hwangyong, 208-209.

<sup>110</sup> Kim Hyeonsuk, "Hanguk geundae seoyangin gomungwan yeongu (1882-1904)", 69.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

tributary system by utilising Denny's diplomatic expertise.<sup>112</sup> Though content with Denny's legal and diplomatic experiences, Gojong was unhappy that Li appointed Denny without properly consulting him, prompting Gojong to express his displeasure.<sup>113</sup> He also worried that Denny might use his rich knowledge of Western law to link Korea with China under terms of international law.<sup>114</sup> Thus, Gojong sought to restrain Denny's rights and monitor his activities after assigning him to the *Naemubu* 內務府 (Interior Ministry), which was founded in 1885, and implemented external policies directly.<sup>115</sup> The efforts of Gojong and anti-China forces within the Korean government, however, failed when Li, concerned that such restrictions on Denny might reduce the Chinese influence in Korea, intervened.<sup>116</sup> Unrelenting on the matter, Gojong and anti-China forces contemplated a strategy to drive a wedge between Denny and Yuan Shikai and turn the former pro-Korea, and if this did not materialise, to fire Denny and ask the U.S. government to send another adviser to safeguard Korean autonomy.<sup>117</sup>

While this idea was put to the test, Denny was feeling the heat from China, and the British occupation of Geomundo threatened to escalate the existing Anglo-Russian rivalry in Asia. With its sore lack of military, economic, and diplomatic strengths, the Korean government could not resolve the Geomundo issue on its own. While it could have appealed to treaty powers to exercise their good offices to intervene on its behalf, Britain tied Korea's hands by negotiating with China. It was in this context that Denny was tasked by Gojong to resolve the Geomundo problem.<sup>118</sup>

After discovering what he considered to be secret documents belonging to Weber, Denny warned Li that Russia could use Geomundo as an excuse to occupy Yeonghung port<sup>119</sup> and called for a rapid response from China. To facilitate the withdrawal of British forces from Geomundo, Denny urged China to inform Britain that it would guarantee the territorial integrity of Korea from intrusion by any country. Only decisive Chinese action in the Geomundo crisis could keep Korea

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<sup>112</sup> Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe, ed., *Denny munseo* [Denny Documents], Letter 45, Denny to Li Chung Tang, 1886.6.29 (Seoul: Sisa munhwasa, 1981).

<sup>113</sup> George Clayton Foulk, *Foulk Papers*, 1885.10.13.

<sup>114</sup> Kim Hyeonsuk, "Hanguk geundae seoyangin gomungwan yeongu (1882-1904)", 70. While his diplomatic expertise was impeccable, Denny also had a penchant for money as well. *Foulk Papers*, 1886.5.14.

<sup>115</sup> Han Cheolho, *Hanguk geundae gaehwapa wa tongchi gigu yeongu* [A Study on the Governing Body of Pro-Enlightenment Faction in Early Modern Korea] (Seoul: Seonin, 2009), 273.

<sup>116</sup> *Foulk Papers*, 1886.3.7.

<sup>117</sup> Kim Hyeonsuk, "Hanguk geundae seoyangin gomungwan yeongu (1882-1904)", 70.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>119</sup> Lensen, 77.

under China's shadow and bolster its position in Korea, he added.<sup>120</sup> Denny's diplomatic manoeuvring in concert with Li had just begun.

Setting the furore over the second Russo-Korean pact aside, China soon had to sit down at the negotiating table with Russia after Li received Chinese official Wu Changqing's telegram (27.8.1886) stating that Russia would not occupy Geomundo in the event of British withdrawal.<sup>121</sup> Meanwhile, acting under Gojong's instructions, Denny met with Li in Tianjin to resolve the Geomundo issue as Korea's principal (3.9.1886). Then, Li met with Russian Chargé d'affaires to China Ladyzhensky for a more in-depth discussion on Geomundo (25.9.1886).<sup>122</sup> After a series of talks (29.9.1886 and 6.10.1886), Li was able to obtain Ladyzhensky's agreement that Russia would not seek any Korean territory (7.10.1886).<sup>123</sup> Finally, Li informed the *Zongli yamen* of his intention to send a document requesting British withdrawal from Geomundo now that Russia had promised not to seize Korean territory (27.10.1886).<sup>124</sup>

Reflecting the fact that Britain had already expressed its desire to withdraw as long as the island did not fall into enemy hands, Denny now asserted that major powers should be ready to guarantee Korea's territorial sovereignty. The three alternatives he put forward for effectuating British withdrawal were (14.11.1886): first, all countries that signed treaties with Korea should guarantee Korean territory; second, the three countries that had the most interest in Korea—Britain, China, and Russia—should support territorial integrity; and third, China and Russia needed to provide a guarantee of Korea's territory.<sup>125</sup> The first alternative was suitable for producing a demilitarised Korean neutralisation, the second was ideal for reducing the international tension surrounding Korea and preserving its territory, and the third would realistically fulfil Britain's prerequisite for withdrawal from Geomundo.

The first alternative, which resembled Möllendorff's Belgian-style neutrality, could be realised without the creation of a strong military. But Li, determined to strengthen Chinese suzerainty over Korea, settled on the third alternative as a resolution to the occupation. That choice,

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<sup>120</sup> *Denny munseo*, Letter 35, "Private and Confidential", 1886.6.12; 6.29; 8.12.

<sup>121</sup> Wang Yanwei, ed., *Qingji waijiao shiliao* 清季外交史料 [Diplomatic Documents During the Qing Dynasty] 3 (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1934), 98-99.

<sup>122</sup> Kim Yonggu, "Geomundo wa Beulladiboseutok", 175.

<sup>123</sup> *Qingji Zhong-Ri-Han guanxi shiliao* 4, No.1177, 2139.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, No.1179, 2167.

<sup>125</sup> *Denny munseo*, Letter 40, Denny to Frazar, 1886.11.14.

and the fact that Britain had decided Geomundo was unsuitable for a naval base and was already contemplating withdrawal,<sup>126</sup> put an end to Denny's neutralisation plan.

To sum up, the above neutralisation proposals were suggested as counterstrategies to the British Geomundo occupation. Among them, two proposals stood out: While Kim Yunsik's plan, though suggested somewhat ambiguously due to Chinese suzerainty over Korea, was the first Korea-originated proposal officially sponsored by its government, Yu Giljun's theory-centred proposal was well-thought-out, carefully crafted to be compatible with the tributary system between China and Korea.

#### • A Neutralisation Trial as the British Exit Strategy From Geomundo (1886)

As mentioned above, Britain justified its occupation of Geomundo to pre-empt Russia's southern expansion, including Russia's possible occupation of a Korean harbour like Port Lazareff (Heungnam). A memorandum by Sir Edward Hertslet, a Foreign Office librarian, drove home the point, mentioning that Russia had had its eye on Lazareff, which one British visitor had already described as "one of the finest harbours in the world",<sup>127</sup> as a basis of operations against China since the early-1880s. In fact, the British occupation had little do with alleged Russian designs on Lazareff; First Lord of Admiralty Earl of Northbrook thought Geomundo could serve as "a base for the blockade of the Russian forces in the Pacific, Port Hamilton [Geomundo] being advantageously situated for the command of the Corean channel".<sup>128</sup> The Royal Commission on the Defence of British Possessions also endorsed a British occupation of Geomundo, saying that this could reinforce the British position vis-à-vis Russia and protect British trade north of Hong Kong.<sup>129</sup> The threat of a blockade in the Far East would keep Russia from advancing into Afghanistan. The idea, in the metaphor of Lord Curzon, was to "make the dog drop his bone by squeezing his throat".<sup>130</sup>

Faced with the British occupation of Geomundo, the Russian government protested the action through its legation in London in May 1885, declaring it would not look on idly and alerting the Chinese government that if the British decision went unchallenged, Russia would occupy other

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<sup>126</sup> Pak Ilgeun, ed., "Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866-1886", FO 405/36, Inclosure in No.45, Vice-Admiral to the Secretary of the Admiralty, 1886.6.1, 680.

<sup>127</sup> Pak Ilgeun, ed., "Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866-1886", No.9, 1886.2.4, 661.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., No.29, 1885.5.20, 499.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., Inclosure in No.29, 1885.5.20, 500.

<sup>130</sup> Lensen, 55.

<sup>131</sup> Song Geumyeong, 117.

Korean ports.<sup>131</sup> With regard to this matter, Russian Minister in Beijing Papov's secret telegram (21.9.1885) to the Russian Foreign Office defined China's position; Li, who had never agreed to the British occupation of Geomundo, duly considered the protection of Korea, China's vassal, the duty of China and believed fully that Britain would leave Geomundo as long as Russia guaranteed not to occupy it. However, another Russian report (5.11.1885) said that it was astonishing that China, as the biggest stakeholder on the peninsula, had not protested at that time, raising the possibility of a secret deal between China and Britain over the island.<sup>132</sup> Therefore, the Russian government, though never putting such plans into action, seriously contemplated occupying Wonsan and Ulsan Bays to counter the British strategy.<sup>133</sup>

Unlike Russia, Japan did not launch a formal protest to denounce the British action in Geomundo, but nevertheless felt insecure due to the potential ramifications of such a manoeuvre. Japanese Foreign Minister Inoue, for instance, told British Minister to Japan Plunkett that the occupation of Geomundo could tempt Russia to follow suit by seizing another Korean territory.<sup>134</sup> On the other hand, French Minister to Japan Sienkiewicz reported to his foreign minister that Inoue had come to think that the British move was "an excellent means of keeping Russia in check and of protecting Korea". O'Connor also touched on Itō Hirobumi's comment about Britain's occupation of Geomundo.<sup>135</sup> Yet, on balance, Japan still remained concerned about the British action and Plunkett surmised that Japan's mere acknowledgement of the British occupation of Geomundo could be misconstrued by Russia as Japanese approval.<sup>136</sup> Russian Minister to Japan Davydov reported on an anxious Inoue, who thought that Japan would eventually suffer from the British action;<sup>137</sup> the latter even feared that Russia or another power might seize the Goto Islands.<sup>138</sup>

In his dispatch to Granville, Plunkett had questioned whether Japan really opposed the British presence in Geomundo and actually thought China was to blame for it.<sup>139</sup> Unbeknownst to him, Inoue did try to bolster China's opposition to the British move. Masataka was instructed by Inoue to impress upon a Chinese minister, who consoled himself that occupation of Geomundo was temporary, that "temporary" could mean ninety-nine years.<sup>140</sup> At this point, Sienkiewicz learned

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<sup>132</sup> Pak Jonghyo, ed., *Reosia gungnip munseo bogwanso sojang Hanguk gwallyeon yoyakjip* [Abridged Collection of Korea-related Russian Documents at the Russian National Archives] (Seoul: Hanguk gukje gyoryu jaedan, 2002), 212.

<sup>133</sup> Song Geumyeong, 118

<sup>134</sup> *Correspondence Respecting the Temporary Occupation of Port Hamilton By Her Majesty's Government, Part I*, 1885: FO 405/35, No.10, Plunkett to Granville, 1885.4.9, 2.

from Davydov that Britain had indeed tried to draw Japan into an understanding with it regarding Korea, but had received an unfavourable reply. Although the latter predicted that Japan would remain strictly neutral in the event of war between Britain and Russia over Afghanistan, the former still questioned how absolute Japan's neutrality would be; it had indirectly contributed to Britain's occupation of Geomundo by allowing hundreds of Japanese workers to build the fortifications of the port on the island and would favour Britain in case of an Anglo-Russian war.<sup>141</sup>

Perhaps encouraged by the lack of formal protest from China and Japan, British Prime Minister Salisbury might have felt confident in expressing his views as to the retention of Geomundo and its importance to Britain.<sup>142</sup> Yet China now began to shift its stance towards the issue in consideration of the possible occupation of other Korean islands by countries such as Japan and Russia.<sup>143</sup> China further complained that the British occupation of Geomundo brought about rapprochement between Korea and Russia and indicated that only if Britain could guarantee the integrity of Korea would the Chinese government recognise the former's possession of Geomundo.<sup>144</sup>

Japan and Russia also went the way of China. Through its envoy Admiral Enomoto, the Japanese government tried to entice Li into jointly opposing the British occupation of Geomundo.<sup>145</sup> In Russia, the *Novoe Vremya* cried foul about the British presence on Geomundo, believing that it challenged Russian interests in the Pacific. The newspaper even claimed that the Russian

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<sup>135</sup> Lensen, 55.

<sup>136</sup> *Correspondence Respecting the Temporary Occupation of Port Hamilton By Her Majesty's Government, Part I, 1885*: FO 405/35, No.11, Confidential, Plunkett to Granville, 1885.4.23, 4.

<sup>137</sup> Lensen, 57.

<sup>138</sup> *Correspondence Respecting the Temporary Occupation of Port Hamilton By Her Majesty's Government, Part I, 1885*: FO 405/35, No.121, Plunkett to Granville, 1885.4.27, 16.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, No.153, Plunkett to Granville, 1885.6.5, 47. Plunkett was right to be suspicious. China had already declined to endorse a British occupation of Geomundo because Russian Minister in Beijing Popov informed the *Zongli yamen* that if China consented to the British occupation of the island, Russia "would feel it necessary to occupy some other island or portion of the Kingdom of Corea". *Ibid.*, Granville to O'Connor, 1885.5.6, 7.

<sup>140</sup> Lensen, 57. Inoue's finding did not seem far-fetched, given that Li Hongzhang demanded O'Connor remove the cable strung between Geomundo and Saddle Island as soon as possible and thought it should not serve "more than a temporary and special purpose". *Correspondence Respecting the Temporary Occupation of Port Hamilton By Her Majesty's Government, Part I, 1885*: FO 405/35, No.217, Confidential, O'Connor to Granville, 1885.5.9, 31.

<sup>141</sup> Lensen, 58.

<sup>142</sup> *Correspondence Respecting the Temporary Occupation of Port Hamilton By Her Majesty's Government, Part I, 1885*: FO 405/35, No.69, Very Confidential, Sir P. Currie to Sir T. Farrier, 1885.7.4, 31.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, No.218, Very Confidential, O'Connor to Granville, 1885.5.9, 32.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, No.331, O'Connor to Salisbury, 1885.7.1, 111.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, No.182, Very Confidential, Plunkett to Salisbury, 1885.7.14, 112.

annexation of Quelpart (Jeju) Island would be “the simplest and most natural answer to the occupation of Port Hamilton by England”.<sup>146</sup> Coupled with the Seoul-based Russian agent’s purported threat to settle account with the Korean government once it agreed to the British occupation of Geomundo,<sup>147</sup> this article showed just how serious the British action was viewed in St. Petersburg.

Meanwhile, China’s anxiety over the continued British presence in Geomundo grew. Though Yuan apparently thought there was no need to press for an immediate settlement,<sup>148</sup> Chinese ministers in the *Zongli yamen* informed O’Conor that Russia would take another Korean island if Britain held onto Geomundo.<sup>149</sup> “Harassed and worried” by a possible Russian occupation of a Korean port, Li also pressed for British withdrawal from Geomundo in return for Russia assurance that it would not seize the island.<sup>150</sup> Popov urged the Chinese government several times to obtain a British withdrawal from Geomundo, prompting China to ask Britain whether the latter’s occupation of Geomundo was really a temporary measure.<sup>151</sup>

Coincidentally, the newly inaugurated Liberal government in London proved to be more pragmatic than its Conservative predecessor. Prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone stated that based on the sound basis of law and economy, British foreign policy had to be pursued on the condition of peace. He also added that within the structure of European cooperation, unnecessary intervention had to be avoided and that the equality of all races had to be recognised.<sup>152</sup>

Against this backdrop, influential British statesman the Earl of Rosebery (1847-1929)<sup>153</sup> initiated a diplomatic offensive to prepare for Britain’s withdrawal from Geomundo, putting

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., Sir E. Thornton to Salisbury, No.161, 1885.8.21, 112.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., O’Conor to Salisbury, No.187, 1885.7.22, 132.

<sup>148</sup> *Further Correspondence Respecting the Temporary Occupation of Port Hamilton By Her Majesty’s Government Part II, 1886*: FO 405/36, Inclosure in No.17, O’Conor to Salisbury, 1885.12.4, 13.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., No.16, O’Conor to Salisbury, 1886.1.7, 12. The British government did not seem troubled by this warning, however, since it toyed with the idea of leasing or buying Geomundo from the Korean government, seeking to take advantage of its financial difficulties. Pak Ilgeun, ed., “Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866-1886”, No.19, Confidential, O’Conor to Salisbury, 1886.1.21, 666.

<sup>150</sup> *Further Correspondence Respecting the Temporary Occupation of Port Hamilton By Her Majesty’s Government Part II, 1886*: FO 405/36, No.109, Confidential, O’Conor to Rosebery, 1886.3.27, 20.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., No.79, Rosebery to O’Conor, 1886.4.1, 15.

<sup>152</sup> Kim Hyeonsu, “Yeongjeguk oegyoreog ui soetoe wa ‘Poteu Haemilteon’ sageon ui sanggwan gwangye [The Decline of the Diplomatic Capability of the British Empire and Its Correlation with the ‘Port Hamilton’ Incident]”, *Yeongguk yeongu* 7 (June 2002): 71.

<sup>153</sup> A Liberal imperialist, Archibald Philip Primrose, fifth earl of Rosebery, was named as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs by Gladstone (1886.2.6). Though he confessed to “have no knowledge of diplomatic practice or forms”

forward a formal proposal (14.4.1886) for Korean neutralisation after Salisbury responded to Li's query on Geomundo that the British navy would withdraw, provided that China could guarantee it would not be occupied by other countries<sup>154</sup>:

Her Majesty's Government have no desire to prolong the occupation of Port Hamilton in opposition to the wishes of the Chinese Government...If the Chinese Government are prepared to guarantee that no such occupation shall take place, one of the chief objects which Her Majesty's Government had in view in taking possession of Port Hamilton would be accomplished. Should the Chinese Government be unwilling to undertake such a responsibility, Her Majesty's Government would suggest that China should propose to Russia and to the other Powers interested to enter into an international arrangement guaranteeing the integrity of Korea. If this proposal is accepted, Her Majesty's Government would be ready to become parties to the arrangement, and to retire at once from Port Hamilton on the understanding that it should be recognized as forming part of the guaranteed territory of Korea.<sup>155</sup>

Rosebery's intervention could not have been better timed; just a day after he called for an international guarantee of Korea, an official at the Russian Naval Ministry advised Giers that the government should file a protest with Britain requesting it close a military base in such close proximity to Russia's Pacific fleet. Russian Governor-General in the Amur region A. N. Korf also commented (18.4.1886) that if Geomundo was annexed by Britain, Russia would be completely isolated militarily in the East Sea.<sup>156</sup> Undoubtedly, the British presence in Geomundo was provoking a strong Russian reaction, and to placate the latter's concern about its intentions in Korea, Britain had to concoct a scheme to secure Korea's territorial integrity.

Rosebery again asked O'Connor about the Chinese government's thoughts on obtaining an international guarantee for Korea including Geomundo,<sup>157</sup> revealing his sincere desire to realise his proposal. Coincidentally, similar thoughts were being expressed both inside and outside Britain; as British Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs James Bryce remarked, for Britain, the invasion

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and possessed "many deficiencies of temper and manner", he commanded an absolute authority at the Foreign Office. Robert R. James, *Rosebery: A Biography of Archibald Philip, Fifth Earl of Rosebery* (London: Weidenteld and Nicolson, 1963), 180; 255.

<sup>154</sup> Seo Jungseok, "Geundae Geukdong gukje gwangye wa Hanguk yeongse jungnipnon e daehan yeongu [A Study of International Relations of the Far East in the Early Modern and Discourses on Permanent Neutrality of Korea]", *Gyeonghuidae nonmunjip* 4 (April 1965): 302.

<sup>155</sup> *Further Correspondence Respecting the Temporary Occupation of Port Hamilton By Her Majesty's Government Part II, 1886*: FO 405/36, Inclosure in No.23, Sir P. Currie to Sir H. MacCartney, 1886.4.14, 15-16.

<sup>156</sup> Pak Jonghyo, ed., 213.

<sup>157</sup> *Further Correspondence Respecting the Temporary Occupation of Port Hamilton By Her Majesty's Government Part II, 1886*: FO 405/36, No.113, Rosebery to O'Connor, 1886.4.30, 17.

or occupation of Korea by any country would be equivalent to the conquest of Belgium by an external power.<sup>158</sup> Moreover, *The Times* article touching on Li's plan for a tripartite joint protection of Korea by Japan, Britain, and China<sup>159</sup> might have attracted Rosebery's interest.

Rosebery's proposal fit hand in glove with the British government's formal Far Eastern policy. In addition to allowing Britain to pursue its strategy of maintaining the balance of power by countering Russia's southward expansion in this region, this plan gave cause for Britain to justify its navy's activities in Geomundo.<sup>160</sup> Unfortunately for Rosebery, China did not reply to his proposal, showing its indifference towards a Korean neutralisation that could threaten its suzerainty.<sup>161</sup> As mentioned above, China also might have felt little need to accept Rosebery's proposal since Li was trying to obtain Ladyzhensky's pledge that Russia would not seek any part of Korean territory.

As China and Russia reached a consensus over Geomundo, Britain's Admiralty was now calling for withdrawal from the island, claiming that due to its weakness in the Siberian region, Russia would not have the capacity to occupy a Korean port for several decades.<sup>162</sup> About a month later, British Minister to China Sir John Walsham received a document from the *Zongli yamen* asking for Britain's swift withdrawal from Geomundo.<sup>163</sup> He then advised Foreign Secretary Earl of Iddesleigh that 5 November 1886 would be a suitable date for Britain to pull out from Geomundo,<sup>164</sup> upon which Iddesleigh instructed Walsham to inform the *Zongli yamen* that Britain would withdraw from Geomundo.<sup>165</sup> Finally, Britain vacated Geomundo (27.2.1887), ending a nearly two-year long British presence there.<sup>166</sup> Accordingly, Rosebery's proposal petered out.

Its failure notwithstanding, Rosebery's proposal was a golden opportunity to realise Korean neutralisation because, backed by a hegemon, it deserves being considered the most realistic proposal proffered if only Britain had followed through with it prior to the decision to withdraw from Geomundo. Within the context of the intense Anglo-Russian rivalry in Asia, Britain was anxious to counter Russian expansion into the Far East, knowing that the Russians were preoccupied with gaining access to an ice-free port. The advice from the Admiralty to Rosebery gave him another reason to seek an exit strategy for Britain.<sup>167</sup> His plan should have appealed to

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<sup>158</sup> Itō, ed., "Hissho ruisan-Chōsen kōshō shiryō tsū", 176.

<sup>159</sup> See the *The Times*' article (1886.6.27); Itō, ed., "Hissho ruisan-Chōsen kōshō shiryō jō", 688.

<sup>160</sup> Seo Jungseok, 302.

<sup>161</sup> During the 1880s, Li Hongzhang was determined to maintain and enhance Chinese suzerainty over Korea, while promoting multilateral imperialism there. Larsen, 176.

Russia, which suspected that the British occupation was a means to frustrate the country's Pacific interests, as evidenced by the *Novoe Vremya's* article and warnings from Russian diplomats in Seoul and Beijing. Considering that the Russian government maintained its "wait and see" policy in Korea, it might have favoured Rosebery's proposal.

As for Japan, it tacitly admitted the British proposal was an excellent means to contain Russia and protect Korea, as seen in Inoue's thoughts. Thus, had it been tactically implemented, this proposal could have shielded Japan from perceived Russian threats.<sup>168</sup> That Enomoto also suggested Korean neutralisation to China to prevent Russian occupation of a Korean territory further increased Japan's support for the British-initiated plan. Judging from the Chinese government's concern about a Russian countermove to the British seizure of Geomundo, the growing rapprochement between Korea and Russia, Li Hongzhang's attempt to jointly protect Korea, and that within China Kang Youwei was suggesting that Korea be neutralised, China, if Rosebery had pursued his proposal more vigorously, would have embraced Korean neutralisation.<sup>169</sup> Furthermore, if major powers would accept Chinese suzerainty over Korea by mutual agreement, similar to the one between Bulgaria and Turkey (as Yu Giljun argued), China might have supported Rosebery's proposal more positively.

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<sup>162</sup> Nish, ed., No.322, Inclosure 1, Admiral Hamilton to Walsham, 1886.9.29, 366-367.

<sup>163</sup> *Qingji Zhong-Ri-Han guānxì shìliào* 4, No.1181, 2171-2172.

<sup>164</sup> Pak Ilgeun, ed., "Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866-1886", FO 405/36, No.102, Walsham to Iddesleigh, 1886.11.5, 715.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, FO 405/36, No.108, Iddesleigh to Walsham, 1886.11.19, 720.

<sup>166</sup> Kim Yonggu, "Geomundo wa Beulladiboseutok", 180.

<sup>167</sup> The Admiralty argued that unless the British government was prepared to fortify and garrison the island, "It was not advisable to retain the possession of Port Hamilton." *Further Correspondence Respecting the Temporary Occupation of Port Hamilton By Her Majesty's Government Part II, 1886*: FO 405/36, No.19, Secretary of the Admiralty to Sir P. Currie, 1886.3.19, 14.

<sup>168</sup> British Minister to Japan Plunkett noted that Japan was very afraid of Russia. Pak Ilgeun, ed., "Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866-1886", Inclosure 3 in No.162, Confidential, 1885.7.14, 610.

<sup>169</sup> This can be inferred from the following: Chinese ministers at the *Zongli yamen* enquired whether Britain was willing to guarantee the integrity of Korea during their meeting with O'Connor, subject to Chinese recognition of British possession of Geomundo (1886.6.30). *Correspondence Respecting the Temporary Occupation of Port Hamilton By Her Majesty's Government, Part I, 1885*: FO 405/35, No.331, O'Connor to Salisbury, 1885.7.1, 111.

<sup>170</sup> For instance, in late January 1886, having waited for months in vain to receive an answer to his earlier note to O'Connor protesting the British occupation of Geomundo, Kim Yunsik clamoured for action: "my Sovereign, who values every inch of his territory, cannot permit the case to hang over unsettled into another year... and [he] has specially directed me to come to a speedy settlement and not incur further delay". Pak Ilgeun, ed., "Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relations to Korea, 1866-1886", Inclosure in No.25, 1886.1.23, 669.

Korea had no reason to reject Rosebery's idea, considering that Kim Yunsik's neutralisation gambit testified to Korea's doubts about the effectiveness of the Sino-centric tributary system in safeguarding its territorial integrity. Kim's repeated protests to British diplomats to obtain their country's withdrawal from Geomundo<sup>170</sup> also showed, that in a bid to resolve the issue quickly, the Korean government would have welcomed Rosebery's plan. In a way, Yu Giljun's neutralisation assertion to counter Russia might also have helped to win agreement with Rosebery's proposal.

As it turned out, this proposal would have profound ramifications for Korea. Specifically, the proposal was suggested as a British exit strategy from the Geomundo Incident and thus closely presaged the changes in the Far East after the British withdrawal. As for China, now that the chance to achieve neutralisation with the blessing of the pre-eminent major power had perished in Korea, it was able to bolster its suzerainty there. Having dispatched Yuan as a resident to Korea, Li directed the transformation of the Sino-centric tributary system, which increased Chinese interference in Korea to an unprecedented level.<sup>171</sup> Britain acknowledged Chinese suzerainty over Korea as a means to deter Russia's southern expansion.

Stung by the sudden British action in Geomundo, Russia's drive to expand its influence over Korea stalled for nearly a decade, just as the Crimean War (1853-1856) checked the Russian expansion into the Mediterranean for almost twenty years.<sup>172</sup> Within this context, a special committee convened by Grand Duke Mikhailovoch during 1886-1887 concluded that seizing a Korean port would weaken Russian defences in the Far East.<sup>173</sup> Thus, Russia chose to continue its "wait and see" policy in Korea, as Giers' letter to Shestakov made clear.<sup>174</sup> Another Russian report (8.5.1888) by General Baron Korf, Russian Governor-General of the Priamur region, and Ivan. A. Zinovief, director of Asia in the Russian Foreign Ministry, detailed a similar Korean policy: Russia's non-occupation of Korea to preserve current peaceful relations with China, Britain, and Japan, Russia's worry about China's new Korean policy of trying to transform Korea to Chinese

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<sup>171</sup> Yuan Shikai was said to have threatened Gojong with a Chinese declaration of war against Korea if the monarch went ahead with plans to establish a Korean legation in the U.S. Kim Wonmo, ed., *Allen ui ilgi* [H. N. Allen's Diary], 1887.9.23 (Seoul: Danguk University Press, 1991), 516.

<sup>172</sup> Kim Yonggu, "Geomundo wa Beulladiboseutok", 183.

<sup>173</sup> Malozemoff, 33.

<sup>174</sup> Giers emphasized that Russia should not extend its influence into Korea and that in Northeast Asia only China and Japan were the main political fixtures. *Reosia haegunseong munseo I (1854~1894)*, 161-164.

<sup>175</sup> Kim Yonggu, "Geomundo wa Beulladiboseutok", 184-185.

province, and Russia's appropriate action against China's possible occupation of Korea.<sup>175</sup> Russia's policy to make light of Korea, however, would change in 1891 after it decided to construct the TSR, which meant that Russia emphasised its army rather than its navy in its Northeast Asian policy.

Forced to take a cautious stance after the British occupation of Geomundo and concerned about Russian intentions in Korea, Japan, while increasing its military build-up, remained a wary spectator until Britain withdrew from the island. Once Britain pulled out, however, Japanese renewed its engagement in Korea and moved to strengthen its military through the conscription system adopted in 1889. In December 1890, Prime Minister Yamagata Aritomo included the Korean peninsula as a part of Japan's essential "line of advantage" for its security.<sup>176</sup>

After Britain's withdrawal from Geomundo, the dynamics of the geopolitical situation surrounding the Korean peninsula basically ended the Anglo-Russian rivalry. However, Japan's reinvigorated interest in Korea was bound to collide with China's desire to retain its suzerainty there, restarting in the Sino-Japanese rivalry, one that ended in the Sino-Japanese War. After this war, victorious Japan's increased intervention in Korea's domestic affairs forced the Korean government to reach out to Russia, initiating the Russo-Japanese rivalry, which culminated in the Russo-Japanese War. While many neutralisation proposals would follow, none of them could touch Rosebery's proposal when it came to the possibility of success. Consequently, the breakdown of balance of power during and after the two wars paved the way for Korea to become Japan's protectorate.

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<sup>176</sup> Duus, 64.

## **Chapter V. Neutralisation Attempts from the Post-Geomundo Incident to the Pre-Korean Empire Era (1887-1897)**

While the British withdrawal from Geomundo mainly ended the Anglo-Russian rivalry on the Korean peninsula, the renascent Sino-Japanese rivalry led the two countries into war, thereby drawing Korea into Japan's embrace and commencing the Russo-Japanese rivalry. This chapter illustrates how the Korean or Far Eastern policies of China, Britain, Russia, and Japan respectively prompted attempts to neutralise Korea to protect its independence and to further their individual aims before and after the Sino-Japanese War.

### **• Neutralisation Proposals Before and During the Sino-Japanese War (1889-1894)**

The withdrawal of Chinese and Japanese troops from Korea according to the Tianjin Convention, the suspension of the Sino-Japanese rivalry due to Britain's Geomundo occupation, Yuan's arrival in Korea to take control of its domestic affairs, and China's leadership role in the resolution of the Geomundo Incident resulted in strengthening Chinese suzerainty over Korea. Thus, although it seemed like peace had been restored on the Korean peninsula, Chinese interference in Korea's internal affairs reached its zenith. Moreover, this situation became entrenched due to the different interests major powers had in exploiting the dynamics surrounding Korea.

Russia established its Korean policy via a conference between Korf and Zinovief (26.4.1886); it decided not to annex Korea, leaving it in Chinese hands, due to Korea's geographically and commercially marginal status and Russia's financial inability to develop Korean resources and support the stationing of 15,000 Russian troops in the Maritime Province to protect the Korean coastline.<sup>1</sup> Besides, to facilitate the British withdrawal from Geomundo, Russia promised in the Li-Ladyzhensky oral agreement in October 1886 not to occupy any part of Korea nor attempt to change its political status, in effect accepting Chinese suzerainty there. Russia was, in reality, buying time until it could complete the TSR<sup>2</sup> and use it as military transport to employ its army in

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<sup>1</sup> A. L. Popov and S.R. Dimant, ed., "First Steps of Russian Imperialism in Far East, 1888-1903. From Krasny Archiv, Vol. LII., 55-124", *The Chinese Social and Political Science Review*, Vol. XVIII, No.2 (July 1934), 236-237.

<sup>2</sup> Malozemoff contends that Russian discussions concerning the construction of the TSR first began in 1886. Malozemoff, 33-35.

<sup>3</sup> Chinese loans were relatively favourable to Korea, owing to their lower interest rates than other foreign creditors' loans (Larsen, 150-151). Furthermore, China did not aggressively press for their repayment. In the late 1880s, Yuan Shikai even suggested that Korea delay repaying a loan from the China Merchants Steamship Co. (Ibid., 152).

<sup>4</sup> Tyler Dennett, *Americans in eastern Asia: a critical study of the policy of the United States with reference to China, Japan and Korea in the 19th century* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1922), 482-483.

place of its toothless navy; blocked by the British Geomundo occupation and the Japanese blockade of the Tsushima Strait, Russia was denied access to the Pacific Ocean. Chinese influence trumped Russian in Korea since, despite Gojong's pro-Russia sentiments, the pro-China faction strongly dominated Korean institutions until the Sino-Japanese War.

Though the Tianjin Convention enabled Japan to restore its position in Korea, its inferior position vis-à-vis China forced it to refrain from directly challenging China on the Korean peninsula until the Sino-Japanese War. Moreover, pro-China Korean officials had coerced their government into depending on China financially by working for Chinese interests on behalf of Yuan.<sup>3</sup> Unhappy with this development, Japan thus shifted its role of checking China onto Russia and agreed with efforts for Korean independence spearheaded by U.S. diplomats (i.e. Foulk and Denny) in Korea. In addition, Japan competed with other major powers over Korean concessions, revised its unequal treaties with Western powers, and strengthened its armed forces.<sup>4</sup>

Ever since the 1882 Treaty with the U.S., Gojong and his adherents viewed the good offices clause not only as a legal commitment but also as a moral one to defend Korean independence. But the U.S. maintained strict neutrality in Korean affairs due to its limited commercial interests there and the sheer distance between it and Korea, leaving it a non-factor in checking Chinese suzerainty over Korea. Britain accepted Chinese suzerainty over Korea since Korean independence could transform the country into a Russian dependency. Its acquiescence also discouraged any Chinese intervention in British-run Burma.<sup>5</sup>

The major powers' decision to yield to China severely undermined Korea's sovereignty. In particular, Chinese Resident Yuan Shikai<sup>6</sup> took a greater role in directing Korea's internal affairs. For example, in foreign policy matters, he used the Overland Trade Convention between Korea and Russia (20.8.1888), which stemmed from Russia's desire for an alternate trade route in the Far East, as a pretext to question whether Korea and Russia might conclude a secret pact in which Russia promised to protect Korea in return for some form of concession and then asked Gojong to fire Denny and Min Yeongik (3.11.1888). After 1885, Yuan attempted to take control of Korea's foreign trade to increase China's commercial influence there.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> John W. Cassey, "The Mission of Charles Denby and International Rivalries in the Far East, 1885-1898" (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1959), 255-256.

<sup>6</sup> His official title was "His Imperial Chinese Majesty's Resident, Seoul". Larsen, 131.

<sup>7</sup> Seong Hwangyong, 209, 214.

To keep Korea under its thumb without having to assume direct responsibility for guaranteeing its security, China welcomed potential rivals onto the peninsula as junior partners, a move that might stave off Korea's annexation by a third power since "in the 1880's, the world stood on the brink of a wave of 'beat-them-to-it' acquisitions of territory".<sup>8</sup> This strategy led to Britain appointing a consul-general who was subordinate to the British minister in Beijing, giving the impression that it supported Chinese suzerainty over Korea. Similarly, France (commissaire) and Germany (consul) sent non-minister-level representatives to Seoul, though they reported directly to Paris and Berlin. Japan and the U.S., in contrast, were represented by ministers. The Japanese government, though, also dispatched a charge d'affaires and ambassador plenipotentiary as suited the situation, and had a minister resident serving in Seoul.<sup>9</sup>

If the major powers would not come to Korea, Korea would go to them, or so Denny and Foulk advised. As U.S. Secretary of State Thomas Francis Bayard put it, "The reciprocal sending and receiving of diplomatic and consular officers is provided for in the treaty between the United States and Korea. No act of national sovereignty is more express and decided than this."<sup>10</sup> Gojong thus, informed by Denny and Foulk that stationing Korean ministers in the West would create a balance of power in Korea,<sup>11</sup> authorised the dispatch of Pak Jeongyang<sup>12</sup> as Korean minister to establish a Korean legation in the U.S (18.8.1887). But before this diplomatic link could be established, Gojong unfortunately encountered stiff resistance from Yuan.<sup>13</sup> Even after Pak arrived in Washington, the Chinese government told him to abide by the three protocols,<sup>14</sup> as if to prove that Korea was a Chinese vassal.

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<sup>8</sup> Larsen, 176.

<sup>9</sup> Dennett, "Americans in Eastern Asia: a critical study of the policy of the United States with reference to China, Japan and Korea in the 19th century", 475.

<sup>10</sup> Lee Yurbok, "Establishment of a Korean Legation in the United States, 1887-1890: A Study of Conflict Between Confucian World Order and Modern International Relations", 13.

<sup>11</sup> Kim Suam, 185.

<sup>12</sup> Along with reform-minded officials Yi Wanyong and Yi Haeong, Pak Jeongyang was one of the earliest pro-U.S. faction members. Han Cheolho, "Hanguk geundae gachwapa wa tongchi gigu yeongu", 152-153.

<sup>13</sup> He sent Chinese officials to stop Pak outside the wall of Seoul. Palmer, ed., Dinsmore to Secretary of State, 1887.9.30, 101-104.

<sup>14</sup> The three protocols that the Chinese government coerced Korean ministers into submitting to were to first call on the Chinese ministers, take a lower position than their Chinese counterparts at official engagements, and consult with the Chinese legation on important issues. Robert R. Swartout, *Mandarins, Gunboats, and Power Politics: Owen Nickerson Denny and the International Rivalries in Korea* (Honolulu: Asian Studies Program, University of Hawaii, 1980), 94. Pak Jeongyang initially opted to adhere to the three protocols set forth by China, but an exasperated Horace N. Allen (informal foreign policy adviser to Gojong) stopped him by threatening to resign. Larsen, 181.

Irrespective of China's continued interference, some Westerners still paid close attention to Korean affairs. French Commissaire Collin de Plancy epitomised this, frequently reporting on Korean foreign policy matters related to Korean sovereignty, including a Korean neutralisation proposal from the *Chinese Times*. De Plancy reported his meeting with Min Yeonghwan to French Foreign Minister Eugène Spuller (23.2.1889). Quoting an article about the imminent landing of Chinese troops in Korea from the Shanghai newspaper *Shēn bào* to update De Plancy and inquiring of him about its possible repercussions, Min wondered whether France would intervene to protect Korea. De Plancy implied that France would try to find peaceful means to assist Korea in coordination with other major powers.

Stressing that Korea looked to French support for its security due to never having concluded its secret treaty with Russia, Min asked De Plancy to provide European examples of major powers guaranteeing a weak country's security. De Plancy listed Belgium and Switzerland as examples of a weak country's neutrality being buttressed by consent among several major powers, but did not think their success was transferable to Korea as no major powers had any substantial interest in the Korean border issue nor could easily intervene in the Sino-Korean issue due to its special situation.<sup>15</sup>

Despite downplaying the possibility of Korean neutralisation, De Plancy did not abandon his interest in it, as his report (3.4.1889) to Spuller about the *Chinese Times* article (6.3.1889) on Korean politics and commerce attested to. Although a nervous Gojong had been counting on major powers' support to protect Korea's fragile sovereignty, this was not well received by the *Chinese Times*, which lampooned his clumsy efforts to reach out to foreign powers like Russia, thus weakening the credibility of Korea's foreign policy.<sup>16</sup> The article also condemned Seoul as a place full of plots, corruption, despotism, and mean savagery.<sup>17</sup> It then went on to enumerate Korea's many problems, including accumulated foreign debt, no reliable currency, a wasteful and inefficient government, an incompetent political class, and a fragile economy.<sup>18</sup> The Russian intellectual Garin

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<sup>15</sup> Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe, ed., *Peurangseu oemubu munseo* [French Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Documents] 3, *Joseon (2) 1889* (Gwacheon: Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe, 2004), 51-52.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 77-78.

Mikhailovskii's verdict was equally harsh: "They call the Koreans cowards...the Koreans are incapable of fighting...like swans, they can only sing their songs and tales."<sup>19</sup>

With so little going for it, Korea, according to an article in the *Chinese Times*, should place itself under the influence of Russia, China, Japan, and Britain, and become a neutral territory. This proposal by the *Chinese Times* thus reflected Korea's tendency to depend on major powers, which perceived Korea negatively. These major powers, possessing colonies or commercial and political interests in the Far East, should acknowledge the strategic importance of Korea and appreciate the necessity to preserve peace and the territorial integrity of Korea.<sup>20</sup>

Distinct from previously mentioned Western neutralisation proposals, this proposal did not represent any specific country's viewpoint. Notwithstanding this fact, the newspaper's rationale for Korean neutrality—peace and the territorial integrity of Korea—was similar to other Western neutralisation proposals. One snag was that although De Plancy included this article as part of his report to Spuller, De Plancy himself refused to endorse Korean neutrality. He might have reckoned that Korea did not have sufficient capacity to withstand challenges to its neutrality due to strong Chinese influence over Korea, not to mention Korea's weak economy; contemporary British trade reports described how Korea was saddled with wasteful government spending, a high level of government debt,<sup>21</sup> a lack of enterprising spirit, irregular taxation, and uncompetitive domestic industries.<sup>22</sup>

Though not representing the British government in an official capacity, Chesney Duncan, a former employee at Korean customs and a member of the China branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, shared the views expressed by well-known British officials such as Archibald Rose Colquhoun, commissioner in Upper Burma. In his lecture delivered at the Royal United Service Institution (12.1885), Colquhoun remarked:

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<sup>19</sup> German Kim and Ross King, "The Northern Regions of Korea as Portrayed in Russian Sources, 1860-1913", in *The Northern Regions of Korea: History, Identity, and Culture*, ed., Sun Joo Kim (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010), 287.

<sup>20</sup> *Peurangseu oemubu munseo 3, Joseon (2) 1889*, 79-80.

<sup>21</sup> Danguk daehakgyo dongyanghak yeonguso, ed., *Gaehwagi daeoe mingan munhwa gyoryu chongseo VII: Gaehwagi Hanguk gwallyeon Gumi muyeok bogoseo jaryojip* [External Exchange Series VII of Civilian Culture in the Time of Enlightenment: Korea-related Western Trade Report Sourcebook in the Time of Enlightenment] (Seoul: JNC, 2006), 81-82.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 94-95.

The question of supremacy in Asia must be shortly decided in favour of one or another of the Powers, Russia, or Britain...The factors which could always be reckoned on with certainty was the irresistible, but not unnatural, ambition of Russia.<sup>23</sup>

Duncan wholeheartedly endorsed the observation that Russia was the chief rival of Britain in the Far East. While the Russian newspaper *Novosti*'s article (25.11.1888) covered Korean attempts to seek Russia's protection in 1884 and 1885 and considered how Russia would enjoy no special advantage by taking such a step,<sup>24</sup> he dismissed this view. To Duncan, "Corea has been, and still is, the chief aim of Russian ambition in the Far East region of Asia."<sup>25</sup>

For this reason, he indicated that Britain had to remain vigilant for Russian encroachment in the Far East. Although Russia could not endanger British commerce in European waters, it desired a seaboard and ports from which to cripple the commerce of Britain, Germany, China, and Japan in eastern seas. To resist further Russian expansion and protect peace in the Far East, Duncan insisted on Britain, China, and Japan maintaining a cordial understanding with a common policy protecting their interests since these three countries had a sharp awareness of Russian ambitions and policy through their past dealings with it. Accordingly, the three countries, holding Korea's strategic location, harbours, waterways, and coal beds in high regard, would welcome Korea becoming a neutral zone in order to maintain peace in the Far East irrespective of the Eastern Triple Alliance. Currently, Duncan thought the Russo-Korean Overland Trade Convention covering Gyeongheung County, which lay 30 miles northeast of the Korean frontier (i.e. the Tumen River), engendered Russia's virtual dominance in Korea. This convention clearly encroached upon a country within the British sphere of influence and was also a "distinct thrust at Chinese prestige in the capital of this peninsula", as well as a matter of concern for other major powers opposed to Russian predominance in the North Pacific.<sup>26</sup> Based on these observations, in his essay "Commercial and Political Conditions of Corea", which the *Chinese Times* published (16.3.1889), Duncan insisted:

That a policy of *strict neutrality* should be forced upon Corea, and Russia should be called upon to relinquish all privileges granted under the Overland Trade Convention

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<sup>23</sup> Chesney Duncan, *Corea and the Powers: A Review of the Far Eastern Question* (Seoul: Gyeongin munhwasa, 2001), 220.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 224-225.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 226-227.

(1888), i.e., Russia should be invited to respect a publicly declared policy of *strict neutrality*.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, criticising the common perception that Korea had to rely on the goodwill of major powers to survive, Duncan asserted that Korea itself could never expect to achieve real peace or prosperity without strict neutrality. As long as such a peace was guaranteed, Korea would be able to utilise it to discover and enjoy the full fruits of civilisation by withering away conservatism, corruption, and injustice. The Korean people could then greet a new and honourable dawn in their long history.<sup>28</sup>

Unlike the *Chinese Times*' proposal, Duncan's plan for the strict neutrality of Korea was not devised with Korea's good in mind. Under the atmosphere of the Anglo-Russian rivalry, to maintain the balance of power and stability in the Far East and to prevent Russia from challenging Britain's position as the dominant power in the region, he sought a permanent mechanism for British interests. To his credit, Duncan's advice that Korea could no longer depend on major powers' protection was sound since it was evident that no neighbouring power was willing to sacrifice its Far Eastern strategy to guarantee Korean independence.

However, considering Chinese steadfastness to preserve suzerainty over Korea, it was difficult for Korea to unilaterally adopt neutralisation. In fact, Duncan himself recognised this by touching on the alleged memorial from Li Hongzhang to Gojong in May 1884, addressing potential advantages and disadvantages that may arise from commercial transactions on the border area between Korea and Russia.<sup>29</sup> The *North China Herald* commented that the memorial showed "how thoroughly Li Hongzhang was determined to keep up China's control over Corea",<sup>30</sup> an opinion which Duncan also seemed to have shared, saying "I cannot omit this document, for it has an important bearing upon the question at issue."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>28</sup> Gang Jongil, 213.

<sup>29</sup> Duncan, 229.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 231-232.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 228.

Ultimately, his proposal fell far short of the mark because he did not mention Korea's vulnerable economy and feeble military strength,<sup>32</sup> let alone Britain's recognition of Chinese suzerainty over Korea, which could undercut Korean neutralisation. Ironically, despite his strong reservation about the adverse impact of a closer attachment between Korea and Russia, Duncan held a rather benign view of Chinese influence over Korea, even if this could potentially jeopardise the country's already fragile autonomy:

Providing Corea is allowed to follow, henceforth, a policy of strict *Neutrality*, its integrity may be preserved. Without neutrality it will soon fall into the hands of one of the Great Powers—possibly Russia. Of all the Powers, however, doubtless China has the best right to convert it into a province of her Empire. This is a destiny which would certainly be more acceptable to the world than the absorption of the peninsula by Russia.<sup>33</sup>

Meanwhile, although China's strong suzerainty over Korea, in a way, might have helped East Asia remain peaceful, Japan and China had been building up their military forces, which heralded the Sino-Japanese War. A stronger than ever Chinese power in Korea forced Japan to apparently give up its interference in Korea's domestic affairs, but Japanese both in and out of government had been pointing out the necessity of intervention in Korea from *Datsuaron* (1885) onward, which became an indirect cause of the Sino-Japanese War. The direct cause of the war was the ascension of Yamagata Aritomo (1.1888), a powerful backer of the military in Meiji Japan, whose first cabinet (12.24.1889-6.5.1891) went on increasing Japanese military might, moving Japan to throw off its apathy toward Korea and take a firm stance against Russia. A more powerful Japan was now ready for war and challenged Chinese suzerainty over the Korean rice ban issue in order to provoke one.<sup>34</sup>

While Korean neutralisation became a bone of contention in certain Western circles, it was in Japan that Yamagata Aritomo (1838-1922) revived interest on this issue in an official capacity. Like Inoue Kaoru and later Itō Hirobumi, the two other high-ranking Japanese advocates of Korean neutralisation, Yamagata was often referred to as *genrō*, though unlike them, his contributions lied

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<sup>32</sup> Despite the post-Gapsin Coup reforms, Korean officials such as Yi Donhwa disapproved of the new military command system instituted by the Korean government (Gyujanggak, ed., *Seungjeongwon ilgi* 承政院日記 [The Diaries of the Royal Secretariat], 1886.1.16, [http://kyujanggak.snu.ac.kr/sub\\_index.jsp?ID=SJW](http://kyujanggak.snu.ac.kr/sub_index.jsp?ID=SJW)). In response, Gojong formed three military bodies, the *Tongwiyeong* 統衛營, *Jangwiyeong* 壯衛營, and *Chongeoyeong* 摠禦營 (*Seungjeongwon ilgi*, 1888.4.19, [http://kyujanggak.snu.ac.kr/sub\\_index.jsp?ID=SJW](http://kyujanggak.snu.ac.kr/sub_index.jsp?ID=SJW)), but the Korean military could not claim to be an effective fighting force.

<sup>33</sup> Duncan, 309.

<sup>34</sup> Pak Huiho, 86-88. By 1889, Japanese public opinion also distrusted Russia, demonstrating that the “era of good feeling” between Russia and Japan was at an end. Malozemoff, 35.

primarily in the military arena. Deeply impressed by Prussia's success in Europe, Yamagata was in favour of adopting a Prussian strategy, advocating military expansion domestically and maintaining a hard-line policy abroad. Appointed war minister, he laid the foundation of the fledgling Japanese army, instituted Japan's national defence strategy against perceived threats from Russia and went on to become the fourth Prime Minister in 1889.<sup>35</sup> Ironically, to put the brakes on external challenges to Japanese interests in Korea, his hard-line foreign policy entailed the neutralisation of Korea.

Yamagata's neutralisation plan coincided with the Russian construction of the TSR as well. As early as January 1888, asserting that British and Russian interests differed and that the elements for conflict and discord between them were many, he predicted that the time for confrontation would approach as cross-continental transportation became a reality. Construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway would shorten the powerful British navy's Eastern sea route, and the Siberian railway would quicken Russian military movement into the East. As a result, Britain and Russia were bound to clash in Asia, and in the next few years a "great upheaval" would occur in East Asia. Korea would then not only be the scene of an Anglo-Russian collision but an "element of conflict" between China and Japan as well. Japan's strategy should transform Korea into an "autonomous and independent" country, completely separate from China, and ensure that no major European power would seize Korea in the scramble for control of East Asia. For this, an increase in military expenditure was the utmost priority for Japan.<sup>36</sup>

Yamagata further mentioned that although Japan acknowledged Korean independence based on the conditions of the Treaty of Gangwha and had concluded the Tianjin Convention with China, Korea's independence was in jeopardy due to the construction of the TSR. The more China was ready to oppose this development, the less he expected that China would maintain the Tianjin Convention. In these circumstances, Yamagata's concern was whether Japan's long-term strategy should be to merely maintain the Tianjin Convention or to take the further step of helping Korea gain permanent neutrality status under joint protection in the international system.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> On Yamagata's role in modern Japan, see Roger F. Hackett, *Yamagata Aritomo in the Rise of Modern Japan, 1838-1922* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).

<sup>36</sup> Ōyama Azusa, ed., *Yamagata Aritomo ikensho* 山縣有朋意見書 [The Written Opinion of Yamagata Aritomo] (Tokyo: Hara shobo, 1966), 175-185.

<sup>37</sup> Kawaoko, 155.

Fearful of the detrimental impact of the TSR, Yamagata tried his luck at testing neutralisation as a temporary measure, taking into account Inoue Kowashi and Boissonade's proposals.<sup>38</sup> Yamagata, having already received Inoue Kowashi's *Chōsen seiryak*, which outlined a Belgian- and Swiss-style neutrality proposal, was advised by Inoue to approach China to neutralise Korea based on international law. Against the background of the exigent Sino-French relations surrounding Vietnam and the restoration of the Ryukyu king between May and July 1883, he incorporated Boissonade's neutralisation ideas in his *Gaikō seiryakron* 外交政略論 (A Diplomatic Strategy).<sup>39</sup>

Yamagata insisted in *Gaikō seiryakron* that since it was impossible for Japan to stop Korea from becoming a Chinese vassal, Japan should acknowledge the substantial influence that China had obtained in Korea. He wrote that Japan should accept the consolidation of Chinese domination over Korea as fact, using the idiosyncratic thought that Japan was ready to forsake its control over Korea. In return, he sought permanent neutrality of Korea under the joint protection of China and Japan.<sup>40</sup> To neutralise Korea, he argued that irrespective of the request of a candidate country to be neutralised, stakeholder countries should bring up neutralisation, adopting Boissonade's methodology, and also mentioned the duties of signatory countries involved in neutralisation.<sup>41</sup>

Yamagata's plan for Korean permanent neutrality seemed similar to those of Switzerland, Belgium, Serbia, and Luxembourg (as did Boissonade's). This type of neutrality meant that if a country requested neutrality, another country would promise not to invade the neutral country to deter the occupation of the neutral country by a third country. This would benefit a neighbouring country, irrespective of the third power's opposition. He argued that Korea's neutrality was not only relevant to China but indirectly related to British and German interests, and that Britain especially considered Korea an "area of conflict" for the "cordon of interest" in East Asia. Yamagata had been exposed to the "cordon of sovereignty" and "cordon of interest" concepts in his meeting with German intellectual Lorenz von Stein at Vienna in 1888. Since Yamagata regarded Korea as Japan's "cordon of interest" and thought that it would be dangerous for Japan if its neighbour was

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<sup>38</sup> Pak Huiho, 94.

<sup>39</sup> Details of Boissonade's permanent neutrality scheme are found in Yamagata's neutralisation proposal. Kawaoko, 155.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>42</sup> Obinata, 154. Yamagata felt that if Korea fell under Western domination, Japan would be vulnerable to Western pressure. Duus, 17.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

occupied by another power, Korea had to be neutralised.<sup>42</sup> This also coincided with his call for more naval power and the creation of seven divisions to protect Japan's "line of advantage".<sup>43</sup>

Having contemplated the applicability of the concept of "line of advantage" for Japan's foreign policy, Yamagata in March 1890 formally proposed the permanent neutralisation of Korea through an international agreement that promised to protect it from foreign domination and to stop other countries from encroaching on Japanese interests. Yamagata insisted that Japan should try to persuade Britain and Germany, both of which had interests in Korea, to mediate a joint Sino-Japanese protectorate over Korea, creating a balance of power in East Asia and reducing the likelihood of conflict. This would result in an independent Korea under the tutelage of a joint Sino-Japanese protectorate.<sup>44</sup> If this were accomplished, permanent neutrality in Korea could be guaranteed through cooperation among Britain, Germany, Japan, and China. As for Russia, it was not considered as a possible guarantor since Yamagata devised his plan as a bulwark against it. Peculiarly, the U.S was excluded from the list of guarantors, despite it having been named in previous Japanese proposals.<sup>45</sup>

Like other Japan-originated neutralisation proposals, Yamagata's neutralisation proposal was a by-product of the comparatively weak Japanese influence in Korea, though his plan also used the balance of power to counter Russian expansion into East Asia by involving Britain and Germany.<sup>46</sup> Predictably, his proposal was unable to win support from China and Britain since Chinese suzerainty was at its peak and had British support, let alone from Germany, whose Far Eastern interests were minimal. Considering Yamagata's support for Japan's military build-up, his concern about Chinese intervention in Korea, and the possible negative repercussions of the TSR, this proposal should be interpreted mainly as a temporary measure to buy Japan time to ready itself for the Sino-Japanese War, and in the long run, a possible Russo-Japanese confrontation.<sup>47</sup>

By the late 1880s, threatened by China's dogged persistence to consolidate its suzerainty over Korea, Gojong increasingly leaned towards the U.S. as it was the only major power that seemed to

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<sup>44</sup> Ōyama Azusa, ed., 196-200

<sup>45</sup> Obinata, 154.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>47</sup> Pak Huiho, 96. On the contrary, Duus argued that Yamagata opposed Japan's pre-emptive military seizure of the Korean peninsula and opted for a diplomatic solution to secure Korean independence. This was because "Were Korea to suffer the same fate as Annam, Japan's 'cordon of sovereignty' through the Straits of Tsushima would be threatened." Duus, 64.

have no territorial ambitions in Korea. Gojong thus tried to entice the U.S. government to become more involved by granting valuable concessions to U.S. businesses and accepting U.S. capital. When Allen advised him to grant the rights to the Unnam gold mine (1887), hoping to resolve Korea's foreign debts and shield Korea from further Chinese intervention, Gojong acceded to Allen's recommendation in exchange for a \$2 million U.S. loan.<sup>48</sup> The proposed mining concession and loan did not materialise though, due to Chinese pressure.<sup>49</sup> Under Gojong's instruction, Denny also sought loans from U.S. financiers<sup>50</sup> but to no avail because of the "persistent and unscrupulous efforts" of Chinese officials and American underestimation of Korea's natural resources.<sup>51</sup> His efforts to strengthen the security relationship between Korea and the U.S. failed to make any headway either; after Gojong requested the dispatch of U.S. military advisers, just three were sent to Korea in 1888.<sup>52</sup>

If these failures were not sufficient enough to highlight U.S. disinterest towards Korea, Acting U.S. Secretary of State William F. Wharton declared that although Korea would be recognised as a sovereign state in accordance with the 1882 Treaty, the U.S. would not "interfere to raise any questions" regarding the relations between China and Korea (25.4.1890).<sup>53</sup> Moreover, while Gojong might have hoped that increasing trade with the U.S. could lessen Korea's dependence on trade with China, as the 1890 British report on Korea's trade noted, the American share of total Korean imports was just 3%, four times smaller than that of China.<sup>54</sup> On all counts, the geopolitical environment did not seem conducive to U.S. involvement in Korea. Nonetheless, Korean neutralisation attempts relying on the U.S. were put forward in Korea.

In a country dominated by the *yangban*,<sup>55</sup> Kim Gajin (1846-1922) was an outsider, coming from the *seoel* (descendants of concubines), a social class long barred from serving in high-level

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<sup>48</sup> Allen hoped that U.S. businesses could build on Korea's offer of mining concessions and make commercial headway there by loaning Korea U.S. \$2 million. Kim Wonmo, ed., 1887.11.17, 525.

<sup>49</sup> Denny tried to attract foreign capital through the development of mining, the opening of Pyeongyang to foreign trade, and advocating the construction of the Gyeongin Railroad, which he deemed profitable. He also calculated that Korea could offer telegraph concessions to Western creditors to obtain loans to fuel its economy and boost national strength. For more details, see Kim Hyeonsuk, "Hanguk geundae seoyangin gomungwan yeongu (1882-1904)", 94, 100, 234.

<sup>50</sup> Kim Wonmo, *Han-Mi oegyo gwangye 100nyeonsa* [A 100 Year History of the Korea-U.S. Diplomatic Relations] (Seoul: Chelhak gwa hyeonsilsa, 2002), 283.

<sup>51</sup> *Denny munseo*, Denny to Fraser, 1889.12.23; 1890.3.20.

<sup>52</sup> Chay Jongsuk, *Diplomacy of Asymmetry: Korean-American Relations to 1910* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 88.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>54</sup> Danguk daehakgyo dongyanghak yeonguso, ed., 109.

government posts in Korea.<sup>56</sup> Benefiting from Korea's opening of diplomatic relations with the West, Kim was able to work in the newly established Foreign Office in 1883 and, after passing the civil examination in 1886,<sup>57</sup> acted as a liaison between Denny and Gojong.<sup>58</sup> Gradually climbing the bureaucratic ladder, he served as a minister in Japan and subsequently became the president of the Foreign Office. As a member of the anti-China faction keen on averting further Chinese intrusion into Korean sovereignty, Kim, as Korea's Minister to Japan, collaborated with Min Yeongik to have Yuan sent back to China (1889) and began to establish a sea route between Korea and Japan to protect Korea from China's greed for economic concessions.<sup>59</sup> In effect, Kim counted on Japan to weaken the Chinese grip of suzerainty over Korean foreign policy amidst the fierce Sino-Japanese rivalry. When the opportunity arose for him to put his desire into action, however, he ended up making an unorthodox choice that reflected the fast-changing nature of international relations.

After assuming the presidency of the Foreign Office, Kim came to identify the predominant Sino-centric tributary system and Russia's territorial ambitions in Korea as threats to Korean independence and suggested neutralisation to Allen, the secretary at the U.S. legation in Korea, in November 1890. Kim told Allen that the U.S. was Korea's only true friend and called for a U.S.-led Swiss-style permanent neutrality<sup>60</sup> for which the U.S. could work to convince France, Italy, Germany, and Japan to sign an agreement before China, Russia, and Britain could also be included.<sup>61</sup> Unfortunately, Allen was unable to back this proposal because U.S. interests in Korea were much smaller than those in China and Japan, and the U.S. adhered to a non-interventionist

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<sup>55</sup> Yangban originated in the Goryeo dynasty and was comprised of the two branches of officials, the civilian and the military. Acting as the arbiters of Neo-Confucianism and regulators of bureaucratic access, *yangban* maintained or reinforced their social status by passing civil service exams, marrying with other *yangban*, receiving government posts, and earning a reputation for scholarship, virtuous behaviour, or the conducting of rites. They became members of local government associations such as Yuhangso as rural and agricultural elite. Hwang Kyugmun, *Beyond Birth: Social Status in the Emergence of Modern Korea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 23; James B. Palais, *Confucian Statecraft and Korean Institutions: Yu Hyŏngwŏn and the Late Chosŏn Dynasty* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 40.

<sup>56</sup> Compared to other *seoel*, Kim, a son of the minister of rites, Kim Eunggyun, could boast a distinguished lineage. Hwang Gyeongmun, 235.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>58</sup> McCune and Harrison, ed., Foulk to Secretary of State, No.3, 1886.9.8, 151.

<sup>59</sup> Han Cheolho, "Hanguk geundae gaehwapa wa tongchi gigu yeongu", 285.

<sup>60</sup> Gu Yeongnok and Bae Yeongsun, ed., *Han-Mi gwangye 1882-1982 jaryojip* [Collected Documents on Korea-U.S. Relations 1882-1982] (Seoul: Seouldae migukhak yeonguso, 1982), 24.

policy in Korea.<sup>62</sup> With the exception of Gojong's wartime neutrality proposal (8.5.1903) before the Russo-Japanese War (discussed later), Kim's plan was the sole Korean initiative that looked for Italy's assistance as a guarantor in Korea's neutrality, notwithstanding its marginal influence on the Korean peninsula. Yet Gojong again floated a Swiss-style permanent neutrality proposal under the guarantee of major powers (3.6.1891), thus demonstrating increasing enthusiasm for neutrality among court circles. Unfortunately, China adamantly opposed it, although Britain, Japan, Russia, and the U.S. were interested in the scheme.<sup>63</sup>

By this time, Russia had decided it needed to adjust to the changed geopolitical situation in East Asia. Reconsidering its regional defence strategy due to the British Navy's pressure in East Asia after Geomundo Incident and Japan's increased military strength in the late 1880's, it opted to depend on its army instead of navy. Thus in 1886, Russia started to discuss the construction of the TSR as a means of support for Russia's new defence strategy there. Once the construction of the TSR, conceived by Russian Emperor Alexander III (31.5.1891), began, it caused significant economic, military, and political ramifications in the Far East. The Russian government attached much importance to the railway since it would ease its expansion into the Pacific, a worrisome prospect for both Britain, which also had Russia's southern expansion to keep an eye on, and Japan.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, the completion of the TSR could facilitate transport of goods from Russia's heartland to the Far East, thereby increasing the country's influence in the region. In response to this Russian policy, Japanese policymakers strove to build amicable relations with Western powers to protect its cordon of interest.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, as British Minister to Japan Hugh Fraser mentioned, Japan had to settle its issues with China before the completion of the TSR.<sup>66</sup> War now seemed imminent in the Far East.

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<sup>61</sup> Gwon Yeongbae, 50.

<sup>62</sup> Gang Changseok, 71.

<sup>63</sup> *Despatches from the United States Ministers to Korea, 1883-1905*, M134, Allen to Blaine, 1891.6.3.

<sup>64</sup> Russian Finance Minister Witte later surmised that Russian construction of the TSR induced Japan to enter war with Russia. Pak Huiho, ed., 88.

<sup>65</sup> David J. Dallin, *The Rise of Russia in Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949), 36, Yamagata Aritomo, in his "A Written Opinion on Arms" in October 1893, asserted that since a major power was planning to invade East Asia in 10 years time, when the TSR would be opened, Japan had to go to war against China now to secure the strategically valuable Korea and to put Russia on notice regarding a possible war. Seong Hwangyong, 219.

<sup>66</sup> Kim Taejun, "Yeongll dongmaeng gyeolseong gwa Reoll jeonjaeng ui oegyosajeok bunseok [The Formation of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and an Analysis of the Russo-Japanese War Through Diplomatic History]", *Hanguk jeongchi oegyosa nonchong* 29(2) (February 2008): 11.

At this juncture, dark clouds began to form over Korea, which, on the one hand, had been reluctantly acknowledging the reinforced Chinese suzerainty over it after the Geomundo Incident, but on the other, had been struggling to overcome Chinese violation of its sovereignty and security. Nevertheless, Gojong and his officials might never have imagined that what had begun as a purely domestic issue—the Donghak Uprising—could end up exposing Korea’s strategic dilemma. Frustrated by high-handedness and unfair taxes imposed by local officials, farmers led by Jeon Bongjun and Kim Gaenam rose up against them in Gobu County, Jeolla Province, in February 1894. Two months later, this became a full-fledged revolt after Yi Yongtae, an inspector sent by the central government to resolve the situation, added fuel to the fire by solely blaming the Donghak movement for the recent troubles.<sup>67</sup> Still, as French Commissaire Lefèvre’s report intimated, the goals of the Donghak forces seemed quite modest,<sup>68</sup> and although their demands for reforms later became much more radical,<sup>69</sup> they had reasons to be angry.<sup>70</sup>

The Korean government, however, continued to suppress this movement instead of addressing the underlying issues. The Korean army was unable to tackle the rebellion on its own and lost Jeonju Castle to Donghak forces (27.4.1894).<sup>71</sup> Prodded by Min Yeongjun and other pro-China officials and keen to preserve his royal authority,<sup>72</sup> Gojong requested military assistance from China to suppress the Donghak forces (4.6.1894). China readily acceded to Gojong’s request for military assistance and also sent a diplomatic note to the Japanese government (6.6.1894), explaining that its dispatch of troops to Korea was undertaken in accordance with the suzerain-vassal relationship between China and Korea.<sup>73</sup> This compelled Japan to question whether Korea

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<sup>67</sup> Seong Hwangyong, 217.

<sup>68</sup> The Donghak forces hoped to win some tax concessions and recall corrupt officials. Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe, ed., *Peurangseu oemubu munseo 6, Joseon (5) 1893-1894* (Gwacheon: Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe, 2007), 154.

<sup>69</sup> For a full list of demands, see Pak Chanseung, *Geundae ihaenggi minjung undong ui sahoesa: Donghak nongmin jeonjaeng · hangjo · hwalbindang* [Social History of Modern Transitional Grassroots Movements: Donghak Peasants’ War · Hangjo · Hwalbindang] (Seoul: Gyeongin munhwasa, 2008), 257.

<sup>70</sup> By recommending the removal of the officials who had committed the worst forms of maladministration and the heavy punishment of rogue magistrates to quell the populace’s discontent during their audience with Gojong (1894.4.14), government ministers intimated that the people’s grievances were legitimate. Wang Hyeonjong, “Joseon gabo gaehyeok jeonggwon ui daeIl jeollyak gwa jongsog ui simhwa [Political Tactics of Joseon Gabo Reform Government and Subordination Toward Japanese Imperialism]”, in *CheongIl jeonjaenggi Han· Jung· Il samgug ui sangho jeollyak* [The Political Strategies by Korea, China and Japan During the Sino-Japanese War], Wang Hyeonjong et al. (Seoul: Dongbuga yeoksa jaedan, 2009), 25.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>72</sup> Gu Seonhui, *Hanguk geundae daeCheong jeongchaeksa yeongu* [A Study of Korea’s Early Modern History Toward China] (Seoul: Hyeon, 1999), 219-229.

was an independent state or a Chinese vassal<sup>74</sup> and, as Lefèvre pointed out, unintentionally forced it to contemplate a measure that could threaten Korea's security.<sup>75</sup> Despite having reservations about China's decision, Japan decided to invoke the Tianjin Convention and also send forces to the Korean peninsula to safeguard Japanese interests there.<sup>76</sup>

Immediately after the Korean government called for Chinese military assistance, Yu and his comrades weighed how to protect Korea, believing that the dispatch of Chinese troops to the Korean peninsula would be matched by Japan and even Russia. Fearing especially the dispatch of Russian troops to Korea, Yu and his comrades contemplated plans in June 1894 to either make Korea a neutral state or have major powers protect it jointly. Should Korea decide to adopt neutrality, China would be expected to act as a sponsor, with Britain as an additional participant.<sup>77</sup>

Despite their best intentions, Yu and his comrades' neutralisation proposal was destined to fail. Their apparent nonchalance over possible Japanese actions that could threaten Korea, something which was already evident to a neutral observer like the French commissaire, demonstrated that unlike Yu's first proposal, it was devised without properly weighing the Sino-Japanese rivalry in Korea. Like his earlier plan, this proposal focused more on the Russian threat to Korean independence than on Japan's possible domination of Korea.<sup>78</sup> Yu was not alone in this, as Kim Gajin's scheme also stemmed from his concern about Russia and not Japan. Above all, Yu clearly underestimated the transformed tributary system and failed to consider possible opposition from pro-China sympathisers and Gojong, who were keen to rely on China to preserve their own interests.

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<sup>73</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 27(2), No.518, 167, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>. Though the Japanese government was unhappy with the contents of the diplomatic note, it, reluctant to challenge suzerain-vassal relations between the two countries, did not protest. But the Japanese legation in Seoul believed otherwise. Mori Mayuko, "The Outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War and the Issue of Suzerain-Vassal as Viewed from the Standpoint of Chosŏn", *International Journal of Korean History* 17(1) (February 2012): 37.

<sup>74</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 27(9), No.518, 519, 168-169, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>75</sup> *Peurangseu oemubu munseo 6, Joseon (5) 1893-1894*, 157.

<sup>76</sup> There is no consensus on the exact number of Chinese and Japanese forces. They range from 1500 to 3000 Chinese troops and 8000 to 13,800 Japanese; Robert S. McCordock, *British Far Eastern Policy, 1894-1900* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), 79-80.

<sup>77</sup> Itō, ed., "Hisho ruisan-Chōsen kōshō shiryō tsū", 360-361.

<sup>78</sup> Yu's positive assessment of Meiji reforms spurred him on to uncritically accept Japan's Korean policy. Kim Hakjun, 273-274.

Four days after the Korean government appealed for Chinese military intervention, about 2,800 Chinese troops were sent to Asan and Japan dispatched nearly 8,000 troops to Incheon (10.6.1894), though the area was free from Donghak activities. Furthermore, although the Donghak forces led by Jeon Bongjun voluntarily withdrew from Jeonju Castle the next day, the Japanese government turned down Yuan and the Korean government's offer of joint-withdrawal of Sino-Japanese forces, claiming that Japanese forces had to remain in Korea to supervise the implementation of internal reforms.<sup>79</sup> Lefèvre questioned whether the presence of Japanese forces in Korea was really needed, however, now that the end of the Donghak armed activities meant the country was at peace.<sup>80</sup> Though he did not advocate withdrawal of Japanese forces from Korea, Japanese Minister to Korea Ōtori Keisuke telegraphed Foreign Minister Mutsu Munemitsu to stop the further dispatch of Japanese forces, saying that “under the present situation in 京城 [Seoul] I am afraid (of) there is no plausible reason for the entry of so many troops”.<sup>81</sup> This implied that, like Lefèvre, Ōtori wanted to de-escalate the situation in Korea.<sup>82</sup>

Undeterred by Japan's refusal to take up his offer, Yuan, during his meeting with Ōtori (17.6.1894), again brought up the joint withdrawal of their troops from Korea. When they failed to reach a consensus, Yuan asked other representatives in Seoul to break their deadlock. Thus, Weber and a commissioner at the French legation in Seoul jointly asked Ōtori to withdraw Japanese troops, drawing on the Tianjin Convention.<sup>83</sup> Two days later, Weber also joined U.S, British, and French representatives to protest to Ōtori about the Japanese military's occupation of the international settlement, arguing that this area should be free of military activities.<sup>84</sup> Sensing that Western diplomats disapproved of the Japanese military action in Korea, Ōtori invited Russian and French diplomats in Seoul to the Japanese legation (23.6.1894) to detect their true intentions and persuade them to accept Japan's stance towards Korea, but to no avail.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Mutsu Munemitsu, *Kenkenroku* 蹇蹇錄 [Kenkenroku: A Diplomatic Record of the Sino-Japanese War, 1894-1895] (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1938), 35-43.

<sup>80</sup> *Peurangseu oemubu munseo 6, Joseon (5) 1893-1894*, 159.

<sup>81</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 27(2), No.535, 184, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>. Later, he opined that “the landing of so many troops may cause diplomatic complications, and it is desirable that all soldiers except those deemed necessary in my view should be sent back to 對馬 to await further instructions”. Ibid., No.538, 186, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>82</sup> Ōtori had verbally agreed with Yuan to reduce the number of Japanese and Chinese forces in Korea. Duus, 68.

<sup>83</sup> Inoue Kagorō, 109. On the flip side, though he did not endorse Japan's military presence on the Korean peninsula, Lefèvre acknowledged that Chinese reinforcements sent to restore order there induced the Japanese government to dispatch a large number of troops to Korea. *Peurangseu oemubu munseo 6, Joseon (5) 1893-1894*, 160.

As the tug-of-war between regional rivals China and Japan stretched ever tighter, Western diplomats in Korea had to decide where they stood. Therefore, British Vice-Consul in Seoul Harry S. Fox and his counterpart in Incheon William H. Wilkinson suggested the wartime neutrality of the Incheon port to other foreign representatives in Korea in July 1894. At this critical juncture, Britain took the lead because of its dominant economic position in China. In 1894, Britain's share of major powers' trade with China was 64%, and 85% of all cargo ships handling export and import commodities were British.<sup>86</sup> Thus, British vice-consuls sought to designate the whole of Incheon port a neutral area on the grounds that it was the gateway to Seoul and an international settlement where various powers had profound interests. In addition, they simultaneously sought to hinder the landing of Japanese forces at Incheon and to disapprove of the Japanese expansion through military activities, including the transportation of military supplies and foodstuffs, so as to avert the calamity of a Sino-Japanese war that seemed likely to break out in the near future.<sup>87</sup>

With British diplomats' active backing, the proposal of wartime neutrality of the Incheon port was explored at a meeting of major power representatives at the Korean Foreign Office (7.7.1894). In this meeting, a refusal to provide lodging to Japanese troops in various countries' settlements was discussed as the majority of Incheon-based Japanese forces were staying at Japanese civilian homes within the concessions of various countries, which were located outside a Japanese settlement. In addition, a declaration of the entire Incheon port as a neutral area to stop the landing of Japanese forces was considered.<sup>88</sup>

Ōtori did not mince words in responding to these ideas. He said that unless major powers agreed that the landing and embarkation of Japan's troops and military commodities should not meet with any checks and accepted that Japanese forces could be stationed within the international settlement to protect the Japanese there, Japan could not consent to these demands. Apart from these conditions, he added the proviso that unless forces from Korea or foreign countries attacked

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 163-164.

<sup>85</sup> Pak Huiho, 100.

<sup>86</sup> William L. Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), 167.

<sup>87</sup> Incheon huchō, *Incheon hushi* 仁川府史 [A History of Incheon] (Keizō: Kinzashōten, 1933), 411.

<sup>88</sup> Inoue Kagorō, 109.

Japanese forces or harmed Japanese residents, Korea-based Japanese forces would not threaten the various countries' settlements.<sup>89</sup>

Consequently, although foreign representatives reached a consensus to refuse accommodation to Japanese troops in their settlements, they could not decide on the wartime neutrality issue at the first meeting (10.7.1894).<sup>90</sup> Unfortunately, because the second meeting coincided with the "Meeting of the Pavilion of the Elders" between Korea and Japan,<sup>91</sup> no decision was reached. Held at the Korean Foreign Office, the third meeting (16.7.1894), which barred Yuan from attending because his diplomatic rank was not ministerial level,<sup>92</sup> received a mixed reception from other powers.<sup>93</sup>

The U.S. representative gave the cold shoulder to this suggestion, refusing to side with either China or Japan and opposing a collective action such as wartime neutrality of the Incheon port. This could be attributed to the stance taken by U.S. Minister to Britain Thomas Francis Bayard, who declared that even if the U.S. agreed to strict neutrality, it would not participate in a treaty, alliance or any similar agreement.<sup>94</sup> In contrast, the German representative seemed more open to the suggested wartime neutrality of Incheon, informing other participants through Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Potentiary for Germany Baron Felix von Gudschmid that the German government had already indicated its willingness to observe wartime neutrality.<sup>95</sup> France was also ready to go along with this plan, having been urged to observe wartime neutrality against the coming Sino-Japanese War by British Foreign Secretary Earl of Kimberley.<sup>96</sup> But despite encouraging signs from Germany and France, Weber, the Russian representative, strongly opposed the plan, consequently extinguishing any chance to realise it.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> However, Ōtori did not mention to other foreign representatives that the Japanese government was not consulted in making these decisions. *Incheon hushi*, 412.

<sup>90</sup> Inoue Kagorō, 109.

<sup>91</sup> Korea and Japan met at the Pavillion of the Elders to discuss the internal reforms that the Japanese had forced Koreans to adopt. The meeting was terminated after Korea listed the withdrawal of Japanese forces as a precondition for accepting Japan's demands and when the Korean government established a body called Maejeongcheong to implement reforms on its own. *Ibid.*, 110-114.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>93</sup> Pak Huiho, 102.

<sup>94</sup> Yasumasa Nakayama, ed., *Shimbun shūsei Meiji hennenshi* 新聞集成明治編年史 [A Chronicle of the Collected Newspapers During the Meiji Period] 9 (Tokyo: Zaisei keizai gakkai, 1933), 123.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

Russia's refusal to endorse wartime neutrality of Incheon port was the most unexpected reaction, one that even Japan regretted it had no leisure to investigate.<sup>98</sup> Though Weber gave no reason for his veto, his visit (14.7.1894) to the Japanese legation in Seoul could offer a glimpse into his views. Weber, having met with Ōtori, covertly told Japanese Secretary Sugimura Fukashi that Japan could ill afford to ignore the strength of the Chinese military and therefore emphasized that Japan should not delay entering into war with China lest China further strengthen its forces. Weber even claimed that China was camouflaging its intentions by acting as if it only wanted peace while secretly rushing to boost its military spending.<sup>99</sup> Weber's reaction must have disappointed the Korean government and Yuan as they had expected him to provide them assistance; instead of siding with them, Weber was in effect calling on Japan to enter war with China.<sup>100</sup>

This proposal, though it failed, makes it possible to respectively evaluate Russia and Britain's contemporary strategies regarding China; having witnessed Japan's rapid military build-up, they viewed China's defeat as a distinct possibility and began thinking ahead. From a geopolitical perspective, as China's neighbour, Russia judged that China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese War would facilitate Russian advancement into China. In contrast, Britain worried that China's defeat would affect Britain's trade advantages, directly damaging its stores in Incheon port<sup>101</sup> and loosening its tight grip on markets in China. This analysis is supported by strong evidence from after the war, such as Russia's leading role in the Triple Intervention and Britain's comparative decrease in leverage after determination of major powers' respective spheres of influence in China.<sup>102</sup>

Meanwhile, even after Yamagata's botched neutralisation plan, Japan kept a watchful eye on its rival China in Korea. This of course did not mean that China and Japan were bound to clash over Korea. As late as mid-June 1894, less than two months before the Sino-Japanese War, Japanese Prime Minister Itō Hirobumi recommended that the Japanese cabinet cooperate with China for reforms in Korea. For this, Itō suggested that Japan and China should send several dozen commissioners to overhaul the Korean central government after suppressing the Donghak rebels in

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<sup>97</sup> Inoue Kagorō, 114.

<sup>98</sup> *Incheon hushi*, 412.

<sup>99</sup> Inoue Kagorō, 113.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Langer, 167.

<sup>102</sup> Pak Huiho, 104.

Korea. The Japanese cabinet backed his proposal, but Japanese Foreign Minister Mutsu Munemitsu (1844-1897)<sup>103</sup> doubted whether China would accept Itō's idea. Thus the cabinet chose to adopt two provisos based on Mutsu's recommendation: Japan would not withdraw its troops from Korea until negotiations with China had reached some conclusion, and if China refused to back a joint reform effort, Japan alone would compel the Korean government to pursue administrative reform. When China objected to these provisions, Japan, in the words of Itō, had "no policy but to go to war".<sup>104</sup>

The conclusion of the Anglo-Japanese Treaty of Commerce and Navigation (16.7.1894), which abolished extraterritoriality in Japan, allowed the Japanese government to focus more attention on preparation for war with China.<sup>105</sup> Ōtori asked for an immediate withdrawal of Chinese troops from Asan to President of the Korean Office Jo Byeongjik (20.7.1894), and this was followed by an ultimatum two days later, which threatened that Ōtori would take appropriate steps unless Jo gave him a positive answer.<sup>106</sup> Yuan's offer of joint withdrawal of Sino-Japanese forces from Korea, and Britain's mediation efforts,<sup>107</sup> could do little under such circumstances. Having received no reply from Jo, Japanese forces stormed the royal palace in Seoul<sup>108</sup> to establish a pro-Japan administration under Daewongun's leadership (23.7.1894).<sup>109</sup> Knowing that he would oppose Japanese-driven reforms, the Japanese legation favoured setting up a special deliberative council to speed up change and leave him as the nominal head of the new government. The *Gunguk gimucheo* (Military Deliberative Council) was thus established to discuss and draft new laws and regulations

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<sup>103</sup> Mutsu joined Itō Hirobumi and others to overthrow the Tokugawa bakufu. After the Meiji Restoration, he held important government posts such as a member of the Foreign Affairs Office and governor of Hyogo and Kanagawa prefectures and entered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs after touring Europe and the U.S. In 1888, he was appointed as Japan's Minister to the U.S., served as Minister of Agriculture and Commerce under prime ministers Yamagata Aritomo and Matsukata Masayoshi, and became Foreign Minister during Itō's second premiership (1892.8.8-1896.8.31). See Louis G. Perez, *Japan comes of age: Mutsu Munemitsu and the revision of the unequal treaties* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999), 19-46.

<sup>104</sup> Duus, 73.

<sup>105</sup> Obinata, 157.

<sup>106</sup> *Peurangseu oemubu munseo 6, Joseon (5) 1893-1894*, 178.

<sup>107</sup> Eager to protect its interests in China, Britain, hoping to preserve the status quo in the region, offered to assist China by working with other Western powers to force Japan to withdraw its forces from Korea if China approved internal reforms and guaranteed the territorial integrity of Korea. Finally, British Foreign Secretary Earl of Kimberley advised a joint occupation of Korea by China and Japan (1894.7.22), provided that a neutral zone was created in the middle of the Sino-Japanese occupation areas of these two countries. Mutsu, 76-77; 84-86.

<sup>108</sup> Obinata, 179.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

on official appointments, administrative procedures, tax and fiscal regulations, school and military systems, and matters related to industry and commerce (27.7.1894).<sup>110</sup>

Mutsu also instructed Ōtori to push for the inclusion of Japanese advisers within the new government<sup>111</sup> to consolidate its position there in readiness for the transformation of Korea into Japan's protectorate. His government having successfully swayed the Korean government to side with Japan, Emperor Meiji was able to proclaim an edict which declared Japan's intention to wage war on China. With the pieces in place, China and Japan engaged in a formal conflict when the Japanese navy attacked its Chinese counterpart. Soon afterwards, Japan informed Western powers about the onset of war with China and formally declared war (1.8.1894).<sup>112</sup> Despite these measures, in the early days of the Sino-Japanese War Japan could not adopt a firm Korean policy due to Japan's relations with major powers and the unforeseeable consequences of war.<sup>113</sup>

In these circumstances, Mutsu submitted his long-term or fundamental remedy for Korea comprised of four sections with his explanation of the advantages and disadvantages of each, to the Japanese cabinet (17.8.1894). He had originally expected to consult with the cabinet after the war, but he settled the plans for Korea in advance due to their interconnectedness to Japan's current diplomatic and military measures on the Korean peninsula. The first section of his plan called for the autonomy of Korea and the treatment of it as an independent state. Japan would neither intervene in Korea nor tolerate other countries doing so and would entrust Korea with its own destiny. This would follow Japanese statements made at the war's start. However, considering the current situation in Korea, the momentum for internal reforms would eventually peter out, necessitating Japan make the costly decision to send a military force there to stabilise matters. This

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<sup>110</sup> Duus, 77.

<sup>111</sup> Mutsu, 131. This led to the dispatch of 41 Japanese advisers to Korea, who were assigned in all government bodies except the Foreign, Imperial Household, and the Customs and worked closely with the Japanese minister in Korea, exchanging diplomatic instructions and intelligence with him. Kim Hyeonsuk, "Hanguk geundae seoyangin gomungwan yeongu (1882~1904)", 24.

<sup>112</sup> Mori, 43. The Japanese government also invoked "The Theory of East Asian Peace", claiming that the purposes of the Sino-Japanese War were East Asian peace and Korean independence. Hyeon Gwangho, *Daehan Jeguk gwa Reosia geurigo Ilbon* [The Korean Empire, Russia, and Japan] (Seoul: Seonin, 2007), 94. Inspired by this theory, Korean officials Kim Hongjip and Jo Huiyeon later told Gojong that Japan was waging war with China to recognise Korean independence and obtain peace in East Asia. *Gojong sillok*, 1895.2.12, <http://sillok.history.go.kr>. In 1898, Itō visited Beijing to propagate "The Theory of East Asian Peace" to call on China to ally with Japan to counter Western powers and later stopped at Seoul to win its support for this theory (1898.8.25). In response, some Koreans advocated cooperation among Korea, China, and Japan under Japan's leadership, provided that Korean sovereignty was secured. Hyeon Gwangho, "Daehan Jeguk gwa Reosia geurigo Ilbon", 95.

<sup>113</sup> Mutsu, 130.

could also give China an excuse to interfere in Korean affairs, potentially triggering another Sino-Japanese War.

The second section was the unilateral protection of Korea by Japan. This plan would involve Japan's recognising Korea as an independent state in name only and have Japan "support" Korean independence both directly and indirectly. Such actions, however, could attract criticism and resentment from other countries and cause "countless conflicts". Even if Japan could treat Korea as its protectorate, Mutsu worried that if countries like China and Russia, which had vested interests in Korea, would intervene to undermine Korea's independence, Japan alone could not defend its neighbour.

The joint protection of Korea by China and Japan was the third section. If Korea could not maintain its own independence and Japan could not take responsibility for Korea's protection, China and Japan could guarantee Korea's safety. However, Mutsu foresaw that China would not be able to relinquish a "consciously subordinate issue (i.e. Korea)" and that Japan would find it difficult to tolerate China possessing a more "superior perception" towards Korea than Japan. This would certainly lead to confrontation between China and Japan. Even if the Chinese government did not raise the issue of a subordinate relationship and joined Japan in sending commissioners or representatives to support Korea's state affairs and in stationing troops there, differing interests and any lack of caution on the part of politicians could still foment trouble between the two nations.

The final section of his plan was to transform Korea into a "world's neutral state". He envisioned Japan making a case for Korean neutrality to Western powers and China, aimed at having Korea placed in the same position as Belgium and Switzerland. However, unlike in Europe, since China and Japan possessed the greatest interests in Korea, the prestige and benefit that could come out of the Sino-Japanese War need not be handed over to European powers. Otherwise, the Japanese public would undoubtedly be dissatisfied with this move. If the Japanese government did not recoup the costs of dispatching a large military force to Korea,<sup>114</sup> it would be unable to avoid public criticism.

Though the final option, which would transform Korea into a "world's neutral state", just as Kim Okgyun's proposal would, was from Mutsu's viewpoint the best for solving the Korean issue,

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<sup>114</sup> Itō Hirobumi, ed., *Hisho ruisan-Chōsen kōshō shiryō ge* 秘書類纂-朝鮮交渉資料 下 [Collected by the Secretary-Materials on Negotiations with Korea Volume 3] (Tokyo: Genshokyoku, 1970), 91-96; 599-604.

it had to yield to Japanese public opinion, which revealed Japan's intention of launching the Sino-Japanese War. On the contrary, Mutsu personally admitted that some opinions favoured moderate reforms in Korea to allow it to save face as a small but independent state and so that Japan could guarantee Korea as a neutral state in the future if Japan experienced problems with China or Russia. In addition, though Mutsu admitted it was very rash, another of his opinions called for Japan to now assemble a major power conference to form a neutral Korea guaranteed by major powers, similar to Belgium and Switzerland in Europe.<sup>115</sup> Mutsu's idea was to first neutralise Korea by basically and rashly ignoring Chinese suzerainty over Korea and to later make it a protectorate of Japan.<sup>116</sup> Thus, Itō's cabinet did not take up Mutsu's neutralisation, but instead opted for his second option, under which Japan would provide the unilateral protection of Korea until the end of the Sino-Japanese War.<sup>117</sup> Accordingly, Mutsu asked Ōtori to conclude a tentatively joint clause with Korea (20.8.1894) to intervene in its internal affairs and a Japan-Korea military pact (26.8.1894).<sup>118</sup>

#### • Neutralisation Proposals From the Post-Sino-Japanese War to Gojong's Stay at the Russian Legation (1895-1896)

When the war was over, Japan had emerged victorious, thereby ending Chinese suzerainty over Korea. As a result, the Treaty of Shimonoseki (18.4.1895) forced the vanquished China to admit Korea's independence. Korea now became a hotbed of pro-Japan faction activity, and under the shelter of Japan,<sup>119</sup> the Deliberative Council under the leadership of Premier Kim Hongjip executed reforms ranging from reorganisation of the central government to the establishment of a royal guard staffed by Japanese-trained non-commissioned officers.<sup>120</sup> Through the said treaty, Japan acquired the Liaodong peninsula, Taiwan, and Penghu Islands from China, reparation of two hundred million taels, and a most-favoured-nation status there like that of Western major powers. Its victory enabled Japan to emerge as a new imperialistic empire<sup>121</sup> and served as momentum to

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<sup>115</sup> Mutsu, 47.

<sup>116</sup> Pak Huiho, 99.

<sup>117</sup> Obinata, 159.

<sup>118</sup> Seong Hwangyong, 231-232. This clause included Japan's construction rights of Gyeongin and Gyeongbu railroads and the ratification of telegraph lines built by the Japanese army. *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 27(1), No.285, 443, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>119</sup> Besides, Japan had obtained Korea's consent to a grossly unfair loan agreement (1895.3.30). Duus, 94-95. Though this loan never materialised, Japan understood that a loan was a "subtle but effective way to insinuate political influence over a weak state". Ibid., 158.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 82.

relegate China and Korea to semi-colonies ripe for plunder. China became the target of segmentation, concessions, leased territories, open ports, and unequal treaties by major powers.

While the post-war Shimonoseki Treaty seemed to have enabled Japan to join the ranks of Western powers as a new imperialistic power, one treaty condition—China’s cession of the Liaodong peninsula to Japan—caught Western powers, which were preparing for the partitioning of China, by surprise, especially Russia, which had been expecting to advance into Manchuria. Anxious to protect their interests in China, Western powers did not leave the field to Japan alone and instead entered the lists. Concerned that the Japanese acquisition of Port Arthur might worsen the relations between China and Japan and incessantly threaten peace in East Asia, the Russian government sent a note to various Western powers about forcing Japan to give up Port Arthur (8.4.1895). While France and Germany, determined not to lose out in contests among major powers for a possible carve-up of China and to draw Russia’s attention from Europe, backed the proposed move,<sup>122</sup> Britain, more worried about the southern encroachment of Russia than Japan’s advancement into continental Asia,<sup>123</sup> rebuffed the Russian offer.

Unfazed by Britain’s rejection, three European representatives in Tokyo, Russian Minister M. A. Hitrovo, French Minister Jules Harmand, and German Minister Baron Felix von Gudschmid, launched the Triple Intervention (23.4.1895) to check Japanese ambitions in the Far East, claiming that the Japanese concession in Liaodong threatened Beijing and rendered Korean independence meaningless.<sup>124</sup> Japan was forced to accede to Western demands, receiving thirty million taels of indemnity from China in return for giving up the Liaodong peninsula, demonstrating that Japan, despite its military victory, still had to bend to Western powers’ wishes.<sup>125</sup> Toeing Western powers’ line, Japan now saw Russia as its new rival in Korea. Sensing that Japan was in defence mode,

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<sup>121</sup> Pak Huiho, 89-90.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>123</sup> As Sir William Vernon Harcourt, Britain’s Chancellor of the Exchequer, made clear to Lord Kimberley, Britain should not join Russia in containing Japan, insisting that “It would be foolish on our [British] part to take leading action hostile to Japan—the rising power in the East—and allow Russia to appear as her friend.” *Rosebery Papers: Foreign Office Correspondence Between Lord Kimberley, the Foreign Secretary, and Sir William Vernon Harcourt, March 1894-June 1895*, MS.10134, Harcourt to Kimberley, 1895.4.5, 241.

<sup>124</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 28(2), No.671, 14-18, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>125</sup> Duus, 96.

Gojong<sup>126</sup> and his like-minded officials hedged their bets by befriending Russia. Accordingly, the pro-Russia faction emerged as a powerful political force in Korea, challenging the hitherto dominant pro-Japan faction.

While Korean politics was undergoing extensive transformation, the Russo-Japanese rivalry over the peninsula further intensified, thwarting the Korean government's efforts to maintain a pro-Russia stance. Such ambivalence did little to soothe Japanese concerns about the increasing influence of Russia in Korea. Queen Min, whose patronage of the Min clan signified her hostility to Japan and friendliness to Russia, especially became a liability for the Japanese government. Concurrently, Seoul was rife with rumours of plots against the moderate Korean cabinet headed by Kim Hongjip.

Against this background, it was not hard to imagine that despite winning the war, Japan would fear Russia might eat away at Japan's post-war gains in Korea. Interestingly, at least some in the U.S. seemed to have sympathised with this view, demonstrating that not all major powers were on the same page with Russia:

The majority of Americans believe that Japan has entered upon a righteous war, that it would be unfair to rob her of the fruits of her victories, and that the lesson which China is now receiving will in the end be beneficial to the Chinese and the whole world.<sup>127</sup>

Determined not to lose its hard-won influence in Korea, the Japanese government replaced Japanese Minister to Korea Inoue Kaoru with the more hard-lined Miura Gorō. Although Itō still expected Miura to adhere to the low-posture policy outlined in the cabinet resolution, Miura had his own agenda, revealing to Japanese reporters that “the post of Japanese Minister is one of great difficulty, but I believe it is a fit place to try my own theory of diplomatic methods”.<sup>128</sup> Fearing that the return of the Min faction backed by Queen Min, who had a deep antipathy to Japan but turned in favour of Russia, augured ill for Japanese influence in Korea, Miura opted for a more confrontational approach towards Korea.

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<sup>126</sup> Deeply influenced by *Cháoxiǎn cèlǜè*, which warned of the menace of Russian ambition in Northeast Asia, Gojong's initial perception of Russia was quite negative. This changed when Japan's increasing encroachment after 1894 obliged an embattled Korea to solicit Russian intervention for its protection. For more details on the impact of *Cháoxiǎn cèlǜè* in transmitting Russophobia into Korea, see Jeong Yonghwa, 100.

<sup>127</sup> *Morning Post*, 1894.10.6.

<sup>128</sup> *Japan Mail*, 1895.9.5.

Anxious to preserve Japanese influence on the Korean peninsula, Miura collaborated with Okamoto Ryūnosuke, a Japanese legation staff member, and Japanese military attaché Kusunose to plan a coup to oust the Min clan from power. Miura also asked Adachi Kenzō and Kunitomo Shigeaki, two Japanese patriotic society activists, to mobilise help for an attack on the Korean palace. This culminated in the assassination of Queen Min (8.10.1895) by civilian Japanese toughs (*sōshi*).<sup>129</sup> Aside from her anti-Japan stance, she was also seen as the highest hurdle to Japan's attempt to establish a virtual monopoly over Korea's telegraph lines.<sup>130</sup> Her death would have facilitated the Japanese government's scheme for a continuing military presence to control Korean telegraph lines since the Sino-Japanese War had made it clear that Japan required access to these lines for effective military operations.<sup>131</sup> However, Queen Min's close ties with Russia would have complicated Japan's strategy<sup>132</sup> because she could have utilised Russia's military might to block a Japanese takeover of Korean telegraph lines. Rather than preventing Korea's drift toward Russia, this incident added to Korea's political confusion, increasing Russian influence in Korea and arousing Western powers' hostility toward Japan, which put Japan's position at risk.

Austrian Minister to Japan Condohove's report (18.10.1895) to the Austrian Foreign Minister shed light on the political instability after the assassination of Queen Min, which posed a dilemma for Japanese policy makers. Although Condohove received no reports about the assassination from the Korean legation in Tokyo, he claimed that this "riot" showed Daewongun's notorious reputation as the former regent of Korea and that there were lingering suspicions about Japan's role in the assassination of the queen.<sup>133</sup> Regardless of the report's veracity, the death of Queen Min could not be easily dismissed. An article published by the *Japan Daily* (14.10.1895) illustrated this vividly. According to the newspaper, Japan was uninterested in annexing Korea and that to dispel foreign powers' fears regarding Japan's previously botched attempts to dominate Korea, Japan should work to reform Korea along Western lines. To ensure this end, it suggested

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<sup>129</sup> Duus, 110-111.

<sup>130</sup> Kim Munja, 395. Having defeated China in the Sino-Japanese War, Japan placed its own soldiers in charge of the Korean telegraph lines, thereby extending Japanese control over them. Pak Jonghyo, ed., 363.

<sup>131</sup> Mutsu had instructed Inoue Kaoru that it was imperative for Japan's future plans to acquire Korea's telegraph lines and keep them under Japanese control. *ChuKan Nihon koshikan kiroku* 駐韓日本公使館記録 (Records of the Japanese Legation in Korea) 5, Confidential No.13, 1895, 3.1, <http://db.history.go.kr/>.

<sup>132</sup> Kim Munja, 398; 405.

<sup>133</sup> Seoul daehakgyo Dogilhak yeonguso, ed., 255.

that the wisest course Japan could take was to invite Germany, Russia, and France to intervene so that the Japanese quest to reform Korea could proceed smoothly.<sup>134</sup>

The *Japan Daily* further asserted that until it was ready to challenge Western pressure, Japan had no choice but to either seek Western powers' cooperation for the neutralisation of Korea or convince them to entrust the task of civilising Korea to Japan. Though under such a plan Japan could not acquire any valuable acquisitions in Korea, it had to pay heed to the possibility that Russian could occupy Korea to protect itself. Korea seemed fated to become either a conflict zone or a neutral area.<sup>135</sup> Whereas previous neutralisation proposals from Japan took Korea's tributary relations with China into account, this plan was devised under the strong influence of the Western-centric treaty system and did not specify countries that could act as guarantors for Korean neutrality. While the *Japan Daily* was consumed with defending Japan's awkward position at that time and published more than a few opinions on how that should be done, there was no indication that this neutralisation proposal was seriously considered.

One way or another, the Japanese government had to readjust its Korean policy to extricate it from foreign hostility caused by the assassination of Queen Min. This led to the dismissal of Miura and the appointment of Komura Jutarō as his replacement as the voices in Japan calling for a review of the government's Korean policy grew louder. Reacting to the stormy political atmosphere produced by the incident, Prime Minister Itō Hirobumi (1841-1909)<sup>136</sup> suggested that Japan should adopt a non-interventionist stance towards Korea.<sup>137</sup> He argued that to preserve its future status in Korea, what Japan needed most was to eliminate any traces of its intrusion in Korea and to ensure that its actions would not prompt a related power to criticise Japan for ignoring Korean independence. Consequently, the Japanese government declared to major powers that Japanese

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<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

<sup>136</sup> Along with Inoue Kaoru, Yamao Yōzō, Endō Kinsuke, and Inoue Masaru, Itō enrolled at University College London (1863), where he learned Western-style modernisation. Having played a key role in the Meiji Restoration, he served in various government posts and visited Europe (1882) to study the constitutions of European powers. After his return to Japan, he negotiated the Tianjin Convention with Li, and he became Japan's first prime minister (1885.12). Itō's influence was also felt in the Meiji Constitution (1889), and his second premiership (1892-1896) saw the signing of the Anglo-Japanese Treaty of Commerce and Navigation and Japan's war with China, which concluded with the Treaty of Shimonoseki. Oka Yoshitake, *Five political leaders of modern Japan: Itō Hirobumi, Ōkuma Shigenobu, Hara Takashi, Inukai Tsuyoshi, and Saionji Kimmochi*, trans. Andrew Fraser and Patricia Murray (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1986), 3-12.

<sup>137</sup> Itō, ed., "Hisho ruisan-Chōsen kōshō shiryō ge", 158-162.

soldiers were in Korea only to guard a telegraph line there, and provided that stability was restored to the Korean peninsula, all Japanese forces stationed there would be withdrawn and pledged not to interfere in Korean affairs.<sup>138</sup>

Itō's call for a non-interventionist policy also shaped his two separate plans for a new Japanese policy in Korea (21.10.1895). The first plan raised three countermeasures for the fallout from the assassination of Queen Min: first, the prevention of Russian and U.S. intervention by informing them that Miura's speech did not represent the Japanese government's intentions. Second, Korea's permanent neutrality had to be suggested by Japan, Russia, Britain, France, the U.S., and Germany. Although this countermeasure could pose the question whether all the Japanese efforts in Korea had come to naught, it could prevent major powers, especially Russia, from violating the Korean border during wartime. Third, though giving Russia an opportunity to intervene in Korea might create a dust-up similar to Anglo-French relations in Egypt, Japan could employ amicable negotiations as a delaying tactic to give its military time to catch its breath from the just-ended Sino-Japanese War and replenish itself before immediately marching off to a Russo-Japanese war.<sup>139</sup> The countermeasures of the second plan recommended Korea's permanent neutrality, Japanese control of Korea, and the partitioning of Korea by Russia, Japan, and Britain.<sup>140</sup>

The current geopolitical situation was quite different from when Itō had made his recommendations in June 1894. Therefore, though he was much concerned about maintaining Japanese dominance over Korea, Itō thought that it was imperative for Japan to first resolve its diplomatic impasse and escape from the restraint of major powers. As it turned out, Itō's neutralisation proposal did not materialise due to increased Russian clout over Korea after the assassination of Queen Min, which reached its apex after Gojong escaped to the Russian legation in Seoul and the inauguration of a pro-Russia cabinet in Korea after the fall of the pro-Japan Kim Hongjip cabinet in February 1896.<sup>141</sup>

Meanwhile, returning to the Sino-Japanese War, though the conflict was still at an early stage, a Japanese victory seemed assured, which compelled the British government, worrying about Chinese defeat, to attempt to mediate the war in fear of directly damaging British interests in China.

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<sup>138</sup> Obinata, 166.

<sup>139</sup> Itō, ed., "Hisho ruisan-Chōsen kōshō shiryō ge", 163-168.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 169-191.

<sup>141</sup> Obinata, 169-170.

Britain suggested to the U.S., French, German, Russian, and Italian governments the joint mediation of a Sino-Japanese reconciliation, to be negotiated with the Chinese and Japanese governments (6.10.1894). The British-sponsored terms of settlement involved the joint guarantee of Korean independence by major powers and the payment of reparations to Japan by China.<sup>142</sup> In effect, Britain tried to play the role of regional balancer, as in the previous cases of the British Geomundo occupation and the Incheon port.

Much to Britain's dismay, there was no appetite for its initiative. Li Hongzhang was opposed to the British proposal because of the inclusion of reparations. Major powers also reacted negatively. Russia could not endorse joint intervention due to the illnesses of Czar Alexander III and Foreign Minister Giers. Germany worried that any diplomatic negotiations unaccompanied by concrete action could rile Japanese sensibilities. The U.S. reacted indifferently as President Grover Cleveland and Secretary of State Walter Q. Gresham did not think Japan's victory would harm U.S. interests. Besides, constrained by its tradition of non-intervention in foreign affairs, the U.S. government had to reject joint intervention with European powers.<sup>143</sup>

In Japan, having considered Foreign Minister Mutsu's three proposals (discussed earlier), the Japanese government opposed the proposed British mediation and settled on the following measures: Chinese recognition of Korean independence and cession of the Liaodong peninsula to Japan, Chinese reparation payments to Japan, and the signing of the Sino-Japanese Treaty modelled after the treaties between China and Western powers.<sup>144</sup> China, however, did not rule out the possible mediation of Western powers. Despite his early reservations about the British government's proposal, Li, believing that Russia's interests in the Far East would not allow the Japanese rule of Korea, ended up meeting Russian Minister to China Cassini and arguing that Russia should not turn a blind eye to the occupation of Korea by another country. Cassini, however, responded cautiously, telling Li that Russia would only intervene when Japan actually tried to occupy Korea, and so for the moment would remain neutral. Cassini also opined to Li, who had

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<sup>142</sup> Hilary Conroy, *The Japanese Seizure of Korea, 1868-1910: A Study of Realism and Idealism in International Relations* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1974), 287.

<sup>143</sup> Seong Hwangyong, 236-237.

<sup>144</sup> Conroy, 287.

asked for advice on the possible terms of settlement, that it was inevitable for China to be on the losing end.<sup>145</sup>

Though its 1894 mediation had failed due to Japan's three demands and the major powers' negative responses, Britain continued to pay close attention to Far Eastern affairs as British Foreign Secretary Earl of Kimberley's letter to British Chancellor of the Exchequer Sir William Vernon Harcourt shows:

There can be no doubt of the importance of the cession of Liaotung Peninsula and the adjoining territory on the mainland...Whether it is expedient to interfere in any way is another. I have no wish to interfere but the whole question requires the most careful and immediate consideration.<sup>146</sup>

Harcourt shared Kimberley's concern, and his letter in response portended Britain's refusal to join France, Germany, and Russia in intervening to check Japanese expansion on the Asian mainland:

I have a very strong opinion against our interference with the Japanese terms of peace. We have no direct interest in the question...I am quite as much as entering upon active operations in concert with Russia in this matter as I am against going into partnership with the Triple Alliance. The true strength of our position is absolute neutrality.<sup>147</sup>

As mentioned earlier, though Britain chose not to participate in the Triple Intervention, it still kept tabs on the situation in Korea. At this critical juncture, the assassination of Queen Min further worsened already strong anti-Japanese sentiment within Korea and strengthened support for Russia, which came to be seen as a reliable ally for Gojong. This view reached an apex during his exile at the Russian legation (11.2.1896-20.2.1897), which enabled him to replace a pro-Japan cabinet with an anti-Japanese (pro-U.S./Russian) one and to exercise more direct control over government affairs, doling out various concessions to major powers to create a balance of power, albeit under the influence of Russia.<sup>148</sup> Astonished by Russia's sudden primacy in Korea, Japan devoted all its

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<sup>145</sup> Seong Hwangyong, 237.

<sup>146</sup> *Rosebery Papers*, MS.10143, Kimberley to Harcourt, 1895.4.6, 248.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, Harcourt to Kimberley, 1895.4.6, 249.

<sup>148</sup> Besides Russia, Korea also had to distribute valuable rights and interests to Japan and the U.S. as well. Fred H. Harrington, *God, Mammon, and the Japanese: Dr. Horace Allen and Korean-American Relations, 1884-1895* (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1961), 144; 146; 156; 158.

<sup>149</sup> In fact, keen to dispel international suspicion of Russia exercising control over Korea, Russia's former Chargé d'affaires to Korea Waeber and his successor De Speyer refused to interfere in the formation of the new Korean cabinet. As a result, Gojong consulted mostly with Allen for this task, and the cabinet showed more of an anti-Japan tendency

energy to making preparations for war with Russia, increasing its defence spending. For its part, after Gojong took refuge in the Russian legation to counter Japanese expansion into Korea, the British government suspected that Korea had fallen under Russian influence<sup>149</sup> and called for neutralisation of Korea to counter this situation (1.5.1896). This began with a telegram to Japanese Foreign Minister Munemitsu delivered through the British legation in Japan:

There is a possibility that the present position of affairs in Corea may lead to Russia declaring it a protectorate. It is possible that the King of Corea may declare himself a vassal of China.<sup>150</sup> Would Japan be disposed to agree to a declaration of neutrality of Corea or a guarantee of independence of that Country by the Powers. Under these circumstances if Count Mutsu wishes to see Sir Ernest he will come back at once.<sup>151</sup>

Before sending his reply to London, Mutsu asked the British government to expound on its proposal through various channels including Japanese Minister to Britain Katō Takaaki and British Minister to Japan Ernest Satow. Mutsu wanted to know whether the British government was really ready to play a leading role to fulfil Korean neutrality, whether Britain had attempted to negotiate with other powers or would work with another country to fulfil Korean neutrality, to what extent Britain had obtained or would obtain permission from other powers on this issue, and what Britain knew about Russia's intentions regarding neutrality.<sup>152</sup>

The British government had mixed reactions. Its first response came from Satow (4.5.1896). Satow didn't reply directly to Mutsu's query, instead reassuring him that given the wording of the diplomatic instructions Britain would undeniably play a leading role in Korean neutralisation, insisting that the Russo-Japanese negotiations surrounding Korea would impede Japan from entering new negotiations with another country.<sup>153</sup> Around this time, both the Under Secretary and Assistant Under Secretary from the British Foreign Office jumped into the fray, telling Katō that with Japanese consent Britain would strive to bring about Korean neutrality and that Britain had already informed Germany and the U.S. of negotiations for Korean neutrality. Britain's only worry was that Russia might oppose the proposal. The Under Secretary was in particular concerned about

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rather than a pro-Russia one. Ibid., 307-308. This implied that Korea's subordination to Russia looked much less lopsided than it actually was.

<sup>150</sup> The British minister seemed to have mistaken Russia for China.

<sup>151</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 29, No.300, 582, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., No.301, 303, 304, 582-585, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., No.304, 584-587, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>.

Russo-Japanese negotiations based on information from a newspaper article about Yamagata being dispatched to Moscow for attending the coronation of Czar Nicholas II.<sup>154</sup>

The British Foreign Secretary chipped in, telling Katō that Britain did not expect Japan to assume a leadership role in facilitating Korean neutrality and just wanted to know whether Japan was willing to participate in a Korean neutrality project (13.5.1896). Furthermore, though Korea's recent instability required its neutralisation, minimal British interests on the Korean peninsula vis-à-vis Russia, China, and Japan made it inappropriate for Britain to act as a proponent of Korean neutrality. Britain was thus content to follow the lead of other powers and actively cooperate within the scope of their leadership. The best alternative would be negotiations among major powers including Germany, to which the Foreign Minister expected no Russian objections. Russia had promised to stay out of Korea in return for Britain's withdrawal from Geomundo; moreover, until the TSR was completed, Russia could only with great difficulty invade Korea.<sup>155</sup>

Rebutting the British Foreign Secretary's analysis, Katō insisted that Russia's assurances applied only to China and were now non-binding due to the decline of China's international status, which revealed Japan's lingering concern about Russian ambitions in Korea. The Foreign Secretary, disagreeing with Katō, argued that since Russia did not currently have the naval capability to invade Korea, it could not simply disregard its earlier agreement. Even if rumours about the Russian acquisition of the construction rights for the TSR were true, the railway's expansion could be solely for commercial purposes, and even if Japanese fears had a solid foundation, since Russia needed only China's approval to continue with the TSR, no other country, even if it wanted to, could prevent its construction. Besides, as a territorial nation-state with a gigantic landmass stretched across Europe and Asia, it was natural for Russia to seek a coastal passage. On the same day, the British Under Secretary of Foreign Affairs met with Katō again, disgruntled that Japan still did not seem to understand the pros and cons of Korean neutralisation and was preoccupied with Russo-Japanese negotiations.<sup>156</sup>

As described above, Britain's tireless efforts to draw Japan's interest to Korean neutrality had much to do with Gojong's flight to the Russian legation. Witnessing a situation that seemed to be

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., No.302, 583; No.305, 587, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., No.312, 583-595, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

benefiting Russia enormously, Britain worried that Korea might end up a Russian protectorate, which reflected its government's lingering concern about Russian designs in Korea, demonstrating that the Korean geopolitical situation remained largely unchanged since Rosebery's ambitious proposal. Britain also judged that Yamagata's trip to Moscow could act to accelerate Russo-Japanese negotiations and that it could not stand idly by while the dynamics in East Asia moved against it. Thus, Britain wanted to block Russo-Japanese negotiations and ensure that Korea did not lean toward any country by making it a neutral country under guarantee of major powers including Japan. Mutsu reassured Satow that no Russo-Japanese negotiations had taken place; in fact, a Japanese anti-government newspaper had merely disseminated falsehoods by commenting on Yamagata's trip to Russia. Mutsu said that Yamagata's trip was a separate consultation to resolve an imminent Korean issue (i.e. assassination of Queen Min) that the two countries could leave unsettled no longer and that since Japan and Russia had to refrain from direct action regarding Korea, especially considering Gojong's use of the Russian legation as his sanctuary, it might be more natural for Britain to lead in the realisation of Korean neutralisation.<sup>157</sup>

But the British government's neutralisation attempts had reached an impasse. With Gojong staying at the Russian legation, it was practically impossible for the Korean government to embrace any kind of proposal to neutralise Korea. More to the point, within the context of the Russo-Japanese rivalry, it would be rash for a third power (Britain) having no significant concessions in Korea to suggest neutralisation. Though Britain might put forward such an idea to prevent Korea from falling into either the Japanese or Russian camp and to maintain the status quo in the Far East, its success was inconceivable without support from those two countries. Henceforth, Britain had to change its Far Eastern policy to align itself with Japan, e.g. the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.<sup>158</sup>

Meanwhile, Gojong, feeling besieged by Japanese attempts to dominate Korean affairs, reached out to Russia to counterbalance Japan, sending a secret letter through Yi Beomjin to the newly appointed Russian Chargé d'affaires to Korea De Speyer and his predecessor Weber clamouring for Russian assistance and pleading with them not to ignore his wishes.<sup>159</sup> De Speyer

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., No.304, 586, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>158</sup> Pak Huiho, 108.

<sup>159</sup> Kim Yeongsu, "Agwan pacheon, 1896: Seoul, Dokyo, Moseukeuba [Gojong's flight to the Russian legation, 1896: Seoul, Tokyo, and Moscow]", *Sarim* 35 (February 2010): 63.

responded favourably, judging that Russian assistance could restore political stability in Korea.<sup>160</sup> This communication facilitated Gojong's escape to the Russian legation, but it was not all roses for Korean independence.

In April 1896, Min Yeonghwan visited Russia as a special envoy to Russian Emperor Nicholas II's coronation (26.5.1896) and passed on Gojong's request to Russia. To Gojong's disappointment, Min failed to win Russian assent for the dispatch and maintenance of Russian forces to protect Gojong after his return to the palace, a loan worth three million yen to repay a Japanese bond, the construction of a telegraph line between Korea and Russia, and the dispatch of financial and military advisers. Instead, he only managed to obtain 13 military instructors and an ambiguous response from Russia concerning the Korean government's demands (2.7.1896).<sup>161</sup>

Russian rejection of the Korean overture should be understood within the context of Russia and Japan's previous decision to reduce the tensions between them.<sup>162</sup> For Russia, Manchuria had a central place in its East Asian policy, and Japan was in a tight spot in Korea after the assassination of Queen Min and Gojong's escape to the Russian legation in Seoul. Then, Japanese politician Saionji Kimochi passed on a memorandum to Russian Minister to Japan Hitrov to initiate negotiations with Russia (24.2.1896). Saionji's offer was taken up by the Russian government and formal negotiations began when both Japanese and Russian ministers in Seoul were given instructions from their respective governments (3.3.1896). After Japanese Minister to Korea Komura Jūtarō recommended the first draft of his proposal to Russia (22.3.1896) and Weber presented his own plan to Japan (6.4.1896), both governments managed to bridge their differences to sign the Weber-Komura Memorandum (14.5.1896). This implied Manchuria, not Korea, was the main focus of Russia's Far Eastern policy until the completion of the TSR due to the impossibility of Russia attaining strategic predominance in Korea. Japan had no reason to reject Russia's olive branch, which freed Japan from its awkward position in Korea as mentioned above. Korea's sovereignty, however, was severely infringed upon when Russia consented to a Japanese military

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<sup>160</sup> Hanguk gyohoesa yeonguso, ed., *Mwitel jugyo ilgi* [Bishop Mutel's Diary] II, 1896.1.27 (Seoul: Hanguk gyohoesa yeonguso, 1993), 28-31.

<sup>161</sup> Kim Soyeong, "Seoul gwa Moseukeuba eseo geudeulman ui georae reul hada: Bebereu-Gomura gakseo (1896.5.14) wa robanopeu-yamagata uijeongseo (1896.6.9) [Deal Between Themselves in Seoul and Moscow: the Waeber-Komura Memorandum (1896.5.14) and the Lobanov-Yamagata Protocol (1896.6.9)]", in *Joyag euro bon Hanguk geundaesa* [Modern Korean History Through Treaties], Choe Deoksu et al. (Paju: Yeolin chaekdeul, 2010), 376.

<sup>162</sup> *ChuKan Nihon koshikan kiroku* 10, 1896, 2.11, <http://db.history.go.kr/>.

police presence in Korea (to guard the telegraph line between Seoul and Busan) while reserving its right to station an equal number of troops there to protect its legation and consulates, just as Japan did so to protect its settlements.<sup>163</sup> Nevertheless, this memorandum was interpreted as signalling Russia's political primacy in Korea by acknowledging the legality of the Korean cabinet formed at the Russian legation in Seoul and giving Russian troops the same access to Korea as Japanese troops in case of emergency.<sup>164</sup>

With the coronation of Nicholas II as momentum, Russia actively led the contemporary geopolitical situation. Russian Foreign Minister Lobanov, on the one hand, concluded the Secret Treaty of Alliance (3.6.1896)<sup>165</sup> with Li to maintain Russian primacy in Manchuria by engaging with China to counter Japan. On the other, he again discussed the Korean issue with Japan in the quest to wholly seize control of the peninsula,<sup>166</sup> thus signing the Lobanov-Yamagata Protocol (9.6.1896), which expanded upon the Weber-Komura Memorandum and paved the way for Japan and Russia to enjoy equal dominance over Korea, creating a balance of power between them in Korea. Both countries agreed to support Korea only after reaching a consensus,<sup>167</sup> back Korea's efforts to build up its military forces,<sup>168</sup> allow Russia to build a telegraph line linking Seoul to the Russian border,<sup>169</sup> and leave open the possibility of further negotiations to iron out any remaining differences over Korea.<sup>170</sup> This protocol thus seemed to provide plausible grounds for Korea neutralisation under balance of power because neither Japan nor Russia was willing to settle for a one-sided supremacy there. Korea, however, was left sitting on the sidelines of the diplomatic tug of

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<sup>163</sup> Kim Soyeong, 377.

<sup>164</sup> Seong Hwangyong, 268.

<sup>165</sup> Malozemoff, 80. Russian Finance Minister Witte also participated in this secret treaty, which enacted provisions of mutual assistance between China and Russia in case of a Japanese attack on Russia, China, and Korea, the opening of Chinese ports to Russian warships in military action against Japan, consent to Russia's railway construction in Manchuria to link the TSR, the stop right of the Russian military in peace time, and the validity of the treaty as 15 years.

<sup>166</sup> Yamagata suggested a partitioning of Korea along the 39<sup>th</sup> parallel to his Russian counterpart Lobanov, but because Gojong's stay at the Russian legation facilitated Russia's dominance in Korea, Russia, fearful of being denied access to the Yellow Sea, opposed the partitioning of Korea. Kim Soyeong, 377.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 382-383.

<sup>168</sup> Yi Minwon, *Myeongseong hwanghu sihae wa agwan pacheon* [The Assassination of Empress Min and Gojong's Escape to the Russian Legation] (Seoul: Gukhak jaryowon, 2002), 147.

<sup>169</sup> Even before this protocol, the Korean government had planned the construction of the *Bukno jeonseon* 北路電線, connecting Seoul and Wonsan, to entice Russian support for Korean independence. Kim Yeonhui, "Gojong sidae geundae tongsinmang guchuk saeop-jeonsin saeob eul jungsim euro [The Establishment Project of Modern Communications Network in King Gojong Period-Around the Telegraph Business]" (PhD diss., Seoul National University, 2006), 73.

war between Japan and Russia.

Moreover, this protocol also stipulated the following secret clauses: The decision over possible occupation areas for the two countries' troops in Korea and the reconfirmation of the Komura-Weber Memorandum (i.e. Gojong in the Russian legation could be protected by Russian troops until a reliable Korean palace guard was formed.),<sup>171</sup> which enabled Russia to hold a dominant position in Korea. Accordingly, Russia, not wanting to clash with Japan, gave minimal support to Korea in regard to Min Yeonghwan's assistance request and attempted to strengthen its influence on the Korean government.<sup>172</sup> However, Japan, begrudging the rapprochement between Korea and Russia, exposed the secret clauses of the said protocol to alienate Korea from Russia in February 1897,<sup>173</sup> but Russia still retained a competitive advantage in Korea, interfering in internal affairs there.

Ultimately, having reached a compromise through these agreements, Russia could now focus on Manchuria and Japan could free itself of its political responsibility for the assassination of Queen Min in Korea. As Korea's two neighbours were busy striking a deal while keeping the Korean government in the dark, Korean neutralisation was brought up in the heart of the Russian Empire. On 9 and 11 June 1896, the *Kobe Chronicle* reported on a démarche by British and American ambassadors in St. Petersburg, who had allegedly asked both Russia and Japan to safeguard Korea's neutrality<sup>174</sup> to uphold the balance of power in the Far East. Neither Japan nor Russia, however, was willing to accept Korean neutrality, and the two ambassadors' proposal was unsuccessful.

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<sup>170</sup> Kim Soyeong, 384.

<sup>171</sup> Kajima Morinosuke, *The Diplomacy of Japan, 1894-1922. Vol. 1, Sino-Japanese War and Triple Intervention* (Tokyo: Kajima Institute of International Peace, 1976), 432-447.

<sup>172</sup> Using Min Yeonghwan's premise as justification, Russia exerted its influence through military instructors and Dimitri Dimitrievich Pokotilov, an employee at the Russo-Chinese Bank, who were dispatched to Korea to train its forces and to dissuade the Korean government from signing a loan agreement with other countries before the arrival of a Russian financial adviser. Seong Hwangyong, 271.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> *The Independent* also reported their proposal in its Korean edition (1896.6.20) and later in its English edition (1896.6.22); Vladimir Tikhonov, "The Experience of Importing and Translating a Semantic System: 'Civilization,' 'West' and 'Russia' in the English and Korean Editions of the *Independent*—The Period of Kojong's Flight to the Russian Legation: 1896 April 7th to 1897 February 20th", in *Han-Reo gwangye wa minjok undong* [Korea-Russian Relations and Nationalist Movement], ed. Hanguk minjok undong sahakhoe (Seoul: Gukhak jaryowon, 2002), 74.

## **Chapter VI. Neutralisation Attempts in the First Half of the Korean Empire Era (1897-1903)**

Russian occupation of Manchuria during the Boxer Uprising intensified the Russo-Japanese rivalry, thereby causing the demarcation disputes with Japan over Korea and Manchuria and pushing Korea into a corner. This chapter describes how, under these circumstances, the tensions on the Korean peninsula drove Korea to pursue neutral diplomacy as its survival strategy, renders why Korean neutralisation was contemplated as part of Japan's Asian strategy before and during the Boxer Uprising, and concludes with how the Russian occupation of Manchuria forced it to adopt Korean neutralisation as its Far Eastern policy.

### **• Neutralisation Strategies Around the Time of the First Half of the Boxer Uprising (1899-1900)**

After returning to the palace from the Russian legation (20.2.1897), Gojong changed his country's name from Joseon to the Korean Empire and reascended the throne to demonstrate its status as an independent country (12.10.1897). The Korean Empire's two central missions were to prevent foreign intervention in its internal affairs and to engage in comprehensive reforms to build up strengths sufficient to withstand major power invasions. Owing to the conclusions of the Weber-Komura Memorandum and Lobanov-Yamagata Protocol,<sup>1</sup> which established a balance of power on the peninsula, the Korean government had the time and breathing room to accomplish said missions. The first step was to allocate a significant portion of the budget to national defence to boost national power.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, as Korea was still too weak to pursue an effective foreign policy without major powers' cooperation,<sup>3</sup> it also resorted to utilising concessions and loan agreements to leverage major powers' differing interests in the Far East, as well as recruiting advisers from various countries to maintain a balance of power.

Separately, to free Korea from harmful foreign influence and to enact social and political reforms for assisting Korean independence, the Independence Club, a progressive-minded civic

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<sup>1</sup> Allen thus claimed that there was no suzerain in Korea from 1896 to just before the Russo-Japanese War in 1904. Horace N. Allen, *Allen Papers*, 1906.6.

<sup>2</sup> Already in 1896, defence constituted 21.38% of government expenditures (the total government expenditure was 4,809,410 won and military spending accounted for 1,028,401 won). *Ilseongnok* 日省錄 (Records of Daily Reflections), 1896.11.15, [http://e-kyujanggak.snu.ac.kr/sub\\_index.jsp?ID=ILS](http://e-kyujanggak.snu.ac.kr/sub_index.jsp?ID=ILS). Except in 1902, Korea's military expenditures increased annually thereafter (Table 1).

<sup>3</sup> By the early 1890s, there was already a yawning gap between Korean military strength and major powers', which forced the Korean government to make a significant effort to upgrade its military forces (Table 2).

group, was founded (2.7.1896). Its goals were easier said than done, however, since the Korean Empire was plagued by Gojong's frequent cabinet reshuffles, which were prompted by pressure from major powers intent on making Korean ministers their pawns, thereby inducing the club to advocate neutrality diplomacy. Setting these constraints aside, the geopolitical background was ideal for the club to achieve its aims owing to the balance of power established by the conclusion of the Lobanov-Yamagata Protocol. This helped the Korean government execute autonomous diplomacy.

Though the club often criticised government officials for their close alignments with major powers, its own track record was far from perfect due to its infatuation with Japan. The club could not discern Japan's hidden ambition in the Treaty of Shimonoseki—putting Korea under Japanese influence as a pretext to making Korea independent—but instead revered Japan as the first civilised East Asian country, one that had fully absorbed Western products of civilisation. The club displayed its blatant pro-Japanese sentiment through the club's newspaper *Independent*, where, for example, it praised the rank of the Japanese representative in Korea being raised from minister to minister plenipotentiary.<sup>4</sup> Considering Japan the most enlightened Asian nation, possessing both prosperity and a strong military, the club managed to overlook the increased penetration of Japanese influence in Korea.

The club's views on Russia were not so sanguine. Russia's signing of the secret Treaty of Alliance with Li Hongzhang (3.6.1896) and Russian Foreign Minister Lobanov's pledge of support in response to Min Yeongwhan's assistance request seemed to signify the beginning of its southern expansion into China and Korea. For this reason, Chinese Prince Kong and the *Zongli yamen* suspected Russia's motives for signing the secret treaty, resulting in the delay of the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway<sup>5</sup> and a temporary hold on the Russian advance into China. Korea, a strategic location with ice-free ports, thus popped back up on Russia's screen. After the summer of 1896, Russian Finance Minister Witte attempted a new strategic policy: extending Russian capital to influence Korea's military and finances and placing Russian personnel, such as Colonel Putiata,<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Dongnip sinmun* [The Independent], 1896.4.18, <http://www.kinds.or.kr/>.

<sup>5</sup> Kim Hyeonsuk, "Daehan Jegukgi takjibu gomun Alekseyepu ui jaejeong jeongchaek gwa chinReo hwaldong [The Financial Policy and Pro-Russian Activities of Russian Financial Adviser Alexeiev in the Korean Empire Period]", *Hanguk geunhyeondaesa yeongu* 47 (Winter 2008): 83.

D. Pokotiloff, and Karl Alexeiev, in the Korean government as advisers. Among them, Alexeiev's role as Korea's Finance Ministry adviser was vital; he introduced a reporting system to account for all revenues and cut unnecessary expenditures,<sup>7</sup> ended the connection between Korea and Chinese customs,<sup>8</sup> and terminated the usage of *gakinbuen* 刻印付円, a Japanese-produced silver currency.<sup>9</sup> Witte also wished to link Jinnampo or Mokpo with the stalled Chinese Eastern Railway and use one of the ports for military purposes.<sup>10</sup>

As these events unfolded, the club's outlook on Russia fluctuated radically as it sensed the intimidation implicit in the Russian strategy, a growing anxiety shared by many Koreans. During Gojong's flight to the Russian legation, the club viewed Russia favourably, denying it was a threat to Korea and welcomed its involvement in Korea, citing three diplomatic benefits gained from Min Yeonghwan's trip to St. Petersburg and supporting its military instructors training Korean soldiers to suppress internal rebellions.<sup>11</sup> The *Independent* even disputed the Japanese media's criticisms of Korea's pro-Russia policy by detailing the background of Gojong's flight to the Russian legation.<sup>12</sup> The *Independent* also quoted the Russian newspaper *Novosti*'s comment that Russia did not infringe on Korea's rights and supported its independence.<sup>13</sup> Seo Jaepil, a prominent member of the Independence Club, went so far as to hope that Russian officers could boost discipline in the Korean army.<sup>14</sup> After Gojong returned to his palace, the club, however, criticised the Korean

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<sup>6</sup> Putiata brought three officers and ten non-commissioned officers with him when he arrived in Korea with Min Yeonghwan (1896.10.20).

<sup>7</sup> Kim Hyeonsuk, "Daehan Jegukgi takjibu gomun Alekseyepeu ui jaejeong jeongchaek gwa chinReo hwaldong", 95.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>11</sup> *Dongnip sinmun*, 1896.10.24, <http://www.kinds.or.kr>.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 1896.11.5, <http://www.kinds.or.kr>.

<sup>13</sup> Tikhonov, 71.

<sup>14</sup> Vipan Chandra, *Imperialism, Resistance, and Reform in Late Nineteenth-Century Korea: Enlightenment and the Independence Club* (Berkeley: University of California Press, Institute of East Asian Studies, and Center for Korean Studies, 1988), 153.

<sup>15</sup> *Dongnip sinmun*, 1897.11.18, <http://www.kinds.or.kr>. Seo also opposed his appointment on the grounds that it threatened Korean independence. Chandra, 159.

<sup>16</sup> *Dongnip sinmun*, 1896.7.2, <http://www.kinds.or.kr/>.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 1897.12.23, <http://www.kinds.or.kr/>.

<sup>18</sup> Hanguk gyohoesa yeonguso, ed., 1897.4.2, 156-159.

<sup>19</sup> Kim Jongheon et al., ed., *Reosia munseo beonyeokjip I: geundae Han-Reo gwangye yeongu* [Translated Russian Documents Collection I: A Study of Early Modern Russo-Korean Relations] (Seoul: Seonin, 2008), 69.

<sup>20</sup> Gojong might have reckoned that this important concession could help provide American support for Korean neutralisation. Sure enough, three years after the transfer of this concession, he appealed to Minister Allen for a U.S.

government's decision to appoint Alexeiev to supervise Korean finances, arguing that this was equivalent to surrendering the right of an independent state,<sup>15</sup> signalling the club's growing displeasure with Russia.

Conversely, the U.S. and Britain were regarded as friendly powers by the club, which praised the government's granting of the Gyeongin Railway concession to the American businessman James R. Morse as beneficial for the Korean people<sup>16</sup> and commended the British parliamentary debates between the Foreign Secretary and MPs in London on the Russian occupation of Manchuria. The club newspaper later claimed that since Britain's primary concern in the Korean Empire lay in trade, Britain could advance Korean independence and secure its territorial rights and internal rule,<sup>17</sup> to which it perceived Russia as a threat.

Another threat to Korean independence was the mad scramble for concessions among major powers (Table 6). On the surface, this was not necessarily harmful to Korean interests; De Plancy advised Gojong to grant foreign powers mining and railroad concessions that could draw their capital to Korea and swing their attention to Korean independence.<sup>18</sup> By 1898, foreign representatives in Seoul had succeeded in acquiring valuable concessions in Korea. While the American Morse obtained the railroad concession linking Seoul to Incheon (29.3.1896) (Diagram 4), the railroad construction rights stretching from Seoul to Pyeongyang were given to the French (1896) (Diagram 5), a coal mine was awarded to a German firm, and a gold mine in the north (4.1896) and lumber concession along the shores of the Yalu and Tumen rivers (9.1896) ended up in Russian hands.<sup>19</sup> The Unsan gold mine (4.1896), in line with the Korean government's pro-U.S. policy,<sup>20</sup> was assigned to Morse while the Danghyeon gold mine (4.1897) concession went to a German, Carl Wolter. In addition, Japan acquired the Gyeongbu (8.9.1898) and Gyeongin (1899) railroads rights, which it had strategic interests in (Diagram 4).<sup>21</sup>

In a way, such concessions helped to maintain Korea's independence by holding major powers in check, but they also aggravated tensions among them, especially between Russia and Japan. Through the *Independent*, the Independent Club asserted that Japan and Russia had already

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guarantee of Korean independence and territorial integrity. Scott S. Burnett, ed., *Korean-American Relations: Documents Pertaining to the Far Eastern Diplomacy of the United States, Volume III*, No.284, 1900.10.2 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989), 69-70.

<sup>21</sup> Seong Hwangyong, 275-278.

received much in the way of concessions from Korea. It concluded that in light of Japan's frantic efforts to reinforce its troops in Korea, Korea's diplomatic bias toward Russia would be detrimental, leaving it caught unprotected between the two in case of a possible Russo-Japanese War.<sup>22</sup> Korea should thus do all it could to avoid raising the ire of either country, and to that end, adopt diplomatic policies which were neutral in intent without bias towards Japan or Russia.<sup>23</sup> The club asserted the necessity of modernising the military to support such diplomatic efforts since only a self-reliant defence could prevent foreign invasions. As Russia, to counter Japan, interfered more and more in Korea's domestic affairs, the club held a *Manmin gongdonghoe* (people's joint association) (9.2.1898) and criticised Russia's meddling, exposing the heretofore secret Russo-Korean bank and insisting on the dismissal of the Russian finance adviser and military instructors. Coincidentally, Russia, worrying about possible Anglo-Japanese cooperation to counter its southern expansion,<sup>24</sup> decided to recall its adviser and instructors, shut down the Russo-Korean bank, and replace its minister to Korea (12.4.1898).

About two months later, Russia sought to maintain the status quo on the Korean peninsula by heading off military friction with Britain and Japan while switching its focus from Korea to Manchuria. Accordingly, Russia, led by Foreign Minister Muraviev's desire to soothe Japan's displeasure at its advance into Manchuria (i.e. acquirement of the Chinese Eastern Railway construction rights and lease of Port Arthur),<sup>25</sup> concluded the Rosen-Nishi Protocol (25.4.1898) with Japan, occasioning a temporary respite from their bitter rivalry over Korea. The Japanese government in turn urged the Russian government to respect Japan's right to uphold Korean sovereignty and independence in exchange for Japan's recognition of Manchuria as Russia's sphere of influence.<sup>26</sup> However, there was another side to this protocol, one that undermined Korean neutralisation; though both sides recognised Korean independence and vowed not to intervene in its internal affairs, Korea was still unable to shake itself free from Russian and Japanese influence owing to the advantages the protocol condoned. But Japan made full use of the opportunity to re-advance into Korea after acquiring Russia's confirmation of its economic primacy in Korea.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Dongnip sinmun*, 1897.1.14, <http://www.kinds.or.kr>.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 1897.5.25, <http://www.kinds.or.kr/>.

<sup>24</sup> Choe Munhyeong, 285.

<sup>25</sup> Song Geumyeong, 283.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

Although the Independence Club practised a selective vigilance over major powers (witness its change of heart towards Russia), it deserved to be credited for illuminating the importance of a balanced diplomacy, which it believed could best be served by seeking neutrality. The club's support for neutrality diplomacy was greatly influenced by the Jeongdong Club, an informal organisation composed of pro-Western reformers in Korea, U.S. Minister to Korea John M. B. Sill, missionaries, the French representative De Plancy, and American advisers Dye and Charles W. Le Gendre. The club's links to the multinational members of the Jeongdong Club and their close association with the major powers equipped it to critique the Korean Empire's foreign policy as, for example, when it sharply criticised the government for inviting a Russian adviser to manage its finances (18.11.1897).<sup>28</sup>

The Independence Club may not have won the government's support for its neutrality diplomacy, but not all was lost because a call for a more prudent foreign policy was soon to be heard at the court. A former head of the Royal Secretariat, Hong Jongwu, who was unhappy about Gojong's tendency to shift Korean allegiance from one major power to another willy-nilly, was one such voice. As the first Korean to study in France, he was familiar with Western imperialism and its ramifications for a weak country. Deftly grasping Russia's strategic importance, he closely monitored how major powers handled Korean independence and how Russia maintained cordial relations with Korea. Though Russia had offered Gojong a safe haven at its legation, it withdrew its forces from Korea in March 1898. Yet despite Japan's assassination of Queen Min, Japanese forces remained in Korea, which daily increased Koreans' doubts about Japan's intentions and provided a reason for Russia to potentially invade Korea. Hong thus insisted that the State Council should contact all foreign ministries and consuls to request the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Korea. He also advised that Korea contract with foreign countries to conscientiously abide by international law, earning it the right to independence while strengthening itself internally as it accommodated itself to international diplomatic methods.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Seong Hwangyong, 274.

<sup>28</sup> *Dongnip simmun*, 1897.11.18, quoted in Choe Deoksu, *Daehan Jeguk gwa gukje hwangyeong: sangho insig ui chungdol gwa jeophap* [The Korean Empire and the International Environment: The Clash and Join of the Mutual Perception] (Seoul: Seonin, 2005), 81.

<sup>29</sup> *Gojong sillok*, 1898.4.16, <http://sillok.history.go.kr>.

Another case which drew on international law was presented by Jeon Byeonghun (1857-1927).<sup>30</sup> Jeon, a former government official, in his memorial to Gojong (1.1.1899) referred to the *Gongbeop pyeollam* 公法便覽 (Handbook of International Law) to prove acknowledged cases for independence such as Belgium and Switzerland. He contended that Korea could emulate these examples by forwarding official documents to friendly countries and receiving their recognition within two or three years, thus preventing external aggression. Jeon's memorial was highly praised by Gojong, who considered it appropriate.<sup>31</sup> Basically, Jeon was arguing that Korea should adhere to international law to fulfil Korean neutralisation.<sup>32</sup>

By referring to the countries that Gojong, who had a tendency to vacillate,<sup>33</sup> was familiar with—Belgium and Switzerland—Jeon had little difficulty in capturing the monarch's sympathy for his proposal. Like Hong, Jeon did not explicitly mention neutralisation, but his proposal touched on the experiences of neutral nations and included a suggestion to obtain consent from friendly powers through diplomatic documents. Since neutrality required a binding agreement accompanied by major powers' consensus, Jeon's memorial closely resembled a typical neutralisation proposal. The Achilles' heel of his plan was that as a former government official and a non-faction member, he might not be able to muster enough support from Korea's faction-ridden bureaucracy, let alone predatory major powers.

In spring 1899, before Allen left for his vacation in the U.S. he had an audience with Gojong. At that time, Gojong, overly dependent on U.S. goodwill, asked Allen whether the U.S. could, as it had for China, guarantee the territorial integrity of Korea. Gojong's request was based on a newspaper report quoting U.S. Minister to China Edwin H. Conger's assertion that the U.S. "would maintain the integrity of China". Though Allen strongly expressed his disbelief in the veracity of the statement and was personally uncommitted to Korean independence, he agreed to speak to U.S.

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<sup>30</sup> Schooled in traditional Confucian learning, Jeon served as a royal inspector in 1892 and, after the Korean Empire was established, worked in various positions in the central government. In 1898, he submitted a book detailing reformation of Korean politics to Gojong. Yun Changdae, *Jeongsin cheolhak tongpyeon—Jeon Byeonghun seonsaeng ui saengae wa jeongsin eul jungsim euro* [A Collected Edition of Mental Philosophy—Focusing on the Life and Spirit of Jeon Byeonghun] (Seoul: Uri chulpansa, 2004), 31.

<sup>31</sup> *Gojong sillok*, 1899.1.1, <http://sillok.history.go.kr>.

<sup>32</sup> Hyeon Gwangho, "Daehan Jegug ui daeoe jeongchaek", 44.

<sup>33</sup> Gojong had situationally been approaching the U.S., Russia, Japan, France, and Belgium to protect Korean independence and realise its neutralisation and later contacted Italy too.

President William McKinley about this subject on Gojong's behalf.<sup>34</sup> Allen thus went to Lake Champlain to officially submit Gojong's formal request for Korean neutralisation to Hay and McKinley, but McKinley instructed Allen to "make a negative reply in a suitable form".<sup>35</sup> Concerned about decreased Korean dependence on the U.S. and hindrance to his country's protection and acquisition of concessions in Korea, Allen delivered his government's reply to Gojong vaguely.<sup>36</sup> Nonetheless, in compliance with Allen's request (21.10.1899),<sup>37</sup> the Korean government, maintaining its pro-U.S. stance, appointed Sands as an adviser in the Imperial Household Department in an effort to strengthen the emperor's power.

It was no surprise that the U.S. gave the cold shoulder to Korean neutralisation plan. Unbeknownst to Gojong, the U.S. was already leaning towards Japan as Theodore Roosevelt, the Governor of New York at that time, told his friend German Ambassador to the U.S. Hermann Speck von Sternberg: "I should like to see Japan have Korea. She will be a check upon Russia, and she deserves it for what she has done."<sup>38</sup> While Korea might have found this a bitter pill to swallow, it merely reaffirmed Roosevelt's long-held hope that Japan would become stronger to deter Russia in East Asia.<sup>39</sup> Meanwhile, after Allen's audience with him in 1899, Gojong began to turn away from his almost total affection towards the U.S. as it would not offer good offices to Korea, choosing instead to adhere to its "non-intervention" principle.<sup>40</sup>

Allen failed to convince his government to back Korean neutrality, but by this time, the ever-cautious Gojong, despite his early positive perception of Russia, began to suspect the true motives behind Russian policy in Korea. Not only did Gojong fear the repercussions of the Russian occupation of Manchuria, he also had to, according to newspaper reports in Seoul, cope with constant Russo-Japanese military movements around Korea since Japanese Minister Hayashi had

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<sup>34</sup> Burnett, ed., Allen to Secretary of State. No.284, 1900.10.2, 70.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> *Despatches from the United States Ministers to Korea, 1883-1905*, M134, Allen to Secretary of State, 1900.10.2.

<sup>37</sup> Goryeo daehakgyo, ed., *Gu Hanguk oegyo munseo 11: Mian* 舊韓國外交文書: 美案 [Old Korean Diplomatic Documents: Pertaining to the U.S.] 2, No.2070-2071 (Seoul: Goryeo daehakgyo, 1967), 661-662.

<sup>38</sup> Elting E. Morrison, ed., *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt*, Vol. II (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), 1394. Considering McKinley's previous rejection of Allen's proposal, the U.S. government seemed to agree with Roosevelt's pessimistic view of Korea.

<sup>39</sup> Choe Jeongsu, "Rujeubelteu ui daeHan jeongchaek sulip, 1897-1903—ReoIlgan ui sereok gyunhyeong gwa gwallyeonhayeo [The Establishment of Roosevelt's Korean Policy, 1897-1903—With Reference to Balance of Power Between Russia and Japan]", *Hanseong sahak* (1995): 106.

<sup>40</sup> Son Jeongsuk, "JuHan Miguk gongsa Allen ui oegyo hwaldong (1897~1905) [The Diplomatic Activities of U.S. Minister to Korea Horace Allen (1897~1905)]", *Ihwa sahak yeongu* 31 (2004): 133.

threatened to launch an all-out war against Russia. To complete this unfortunate turn of events, the regional environment was not developing in Korea's favour. The Russian acquisition of the Chinese Eastern Railway concession through the secret Treaty of Alliance provided a reason for major powers' competition for concessions (i.e. lease territories, railways, and spheres of influence) in China. The race for concessions reduced China to a semi-colony status, thereby prompting U.S. Secretary of State John Hay's "Open Door" policy (6.9.1899). Under this policy, all countries would agree not to deny others access to their spheres of influence, but in the absence of sanctions to enforce such a policy, it was difficult to dispel the growing fear among some Chinese that their country would be "carved up like a melon".<sup>41</sup> Eventually, this policy became one of the main causes behind the Boxer Uprising (2.11.1899-7.9.1901).

Taking the lay of the land and finding on it a tractor pull between Japan and Russia, Gojong hand-picked Sands (1874-1946)<sup>42</sup> in October 1899 despite facing pressure from these two powers; while Japanese Minister Hayashi had requested that Gojong appoint a Japanese national as his adviser, his Russian counterpart Stein declared that this was unacceptable unless a Russian was appointed to serve in a similar position.<sup>43</sup> Unlike his appointments of Denny and Möllendorff, whom the Korean government had failed to re-appoint as an adviser in an effort to promote neutralisation,<sup>44</sup> Sands was neither obliged to report to the U.S. government nor to consult with any other major power before implementing Korean foreign policy. Nonetheless, Sands' diplomacy with major powers was still dominated by Japanese and Russian ambitions in Korea since they refused to compromise.

Recognising how Korea's vulnerable geographical position endangered its sovereignty, Kim Hyeonsuk contends that Sands considered Japan Korea's top threat since Japan believed not only

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<sup>41</sup> Spence, 222. Hay's Open Door policy was proclaimed twice in the "Hay Open Door Notes"; the first note was delivered to major powers (1899.9.6-11.21), and the second one was circulated (1900.7.3). Seong Hwangyong, 301-303.

<sup>42</sup> Having been educated in Austria and obtained his PhD in law from Georgetown University, Sands started his diplomatic career as the second secretary at the U.S. legation in Tokyo and continued as the first secretary at the U.S. legation in Seoul (1898). He then worked as Gojong's adviser at the Imperial Household Department (1899.11-1904.1). Kim Hyeonsuk, "Hanguk geundae seoyangin gomungwan yeongu (1882~1904)", 166.

<sup>43</sup> *Peurangseu oemubu munseo 9: Daehan Jeguk II · 1899-1901*, 42.

<sup>44</sup> *ChuKan Nihon koshikan kiroku* 14, 1899.9.15; 9.23, <http://db.history.go.kr/>. Min Yeongseon was said to have consulted with Min Yeongik about inviting Möllendorff as a government adviser, an offer Möllendorff rejected, citing the frequent changes in Korean politics. *Hwangseong sinmun* 皇城新聞 (Capital Gazette), 1900.5.12, <http://www.koreanhistory.or.kr/>.

that Korea was indispensable for its economic development and was a desirable spot for an increasing number of Japanese to migrate to, but more importantly, that it was an ideal future base for Japanese domination over Continental Asia.<sup>45</sup> Sands also added that the Japanese government had been meticulous in pursuing a consistent policy without error. He found Japanese Minister Hayashi to be cold and shrewd, a career diplomat who pushed for the annexation of Korea from the belief that only by following such a path could Japan survive.<sup>46</sup> Though he perceived Russia as less of a threat than Japan, Sands also worried that Russia was in the process of becoming not only a major European power but also the strongest power in Asia. With Russia looking for an ice-free port in Korea, the peninsula was vulnerable to Russian invasion.<sup>47</sup> Still, Sands regarded Russia as a possible diplomatic counterpart, while viewing Japan in a negative light for its many schemes and threats.<sup>48</sup>

Taking these factors into account, Sands, wishing to stop any further encroachment of Russo-Japanese influence into Korea, presented his first neutralisation proposal to Gojong in January 1900.<sup>49</sup> Modelled after a Swiss- or Belgian-style permanent neutrality under the joint guarantee of major powers, his plan called for the signing of a neutralisation agreement between Korea and Western powers and the usage of those powers' good offices to include Russia and Japan as parties to the pact. The major powers could expect to receive two things in return. First, they could secure the status quo and an open door policy in Asia through peace on the Korean peninsula. Second, by throwing their weight behind Korean reform efforts, major powers could implement and lead reform programmes in Korea through a consultative body.<sup>50</sup>

Responsibility fell on Korea's shoulders as well because bold administrative, educational, and economic reforms were needed to overcome the country's economic vulnerability.<sup>51</sup> Basically, to gain major powers' confidence in its ability to sustain neutralisation, Korea had to demonstrate that it was both politically and economically stable. Sands' reasoning rang in perfect harmony with the

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<sup>45</sup> Kim Hyeonsuk, "Hanguk geundae seoyangin gomungwan yeongu (1882~1904)", 176.

<sup>46</sup> William Franklin Sands, *Undiplomatic Memories*, (Seoul: Gyeongin publishing, 1975), 210-213.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 56-57.

<sup>48</sup> *Sands Papers*, Box 3, Folder 7, Doc.48, 1900.5.14.

<sup>49</sup> Sands, "Undiplomatic Memories", 225.

<sup>50</sup> *Sands Papers*, Box 3, Folder 2, Doc.3, 1904.1.12.

<sup>51</sup> The Korean economy was reeling from low tax revenues, Japanese domination over Korea's commerce, agriculture, marine transportation, and foreign trade, and an over-reliance on foreign loans. Pak Huiho, 209-210.

view of foreign diplomats in Korea. Pavloff listed the guarantee of non-aggression by a foreign power and the respect of foreigners' rights in Korea as prerequisites for neutralisation. Allen noted that Korean neutralisation would be difficult to achieve because neither national order nor the conditions for maintaining independence were in place.<sup>52</sup> However, Sands often talked to Gojong at length about his plan, finally prevailing upon him to support it. The emperor then directed Sands to make neutralisation his main responsibility.<sup>53</sup> Thus, Sands was at the forefront of Korean neutralisation policy from early 1900 to December 1902 and placed the reform agenda at its centre.<sup>54</sup>

To advance his policy, Sands cooperated with pro-U.S. faction partisans such as Gang Seokho, Min Sangho, Min Yeonghwan, and Min Yeonggi and also counted on support from powerful figures in the court, foreigners based in Korea, and foreign advisers who worked for the Korean government.<sup>55</sup> While Min Sangho, Gang Seokho, and Yi Junyong were instrumental in Sands' appointment,<sup>56</sup> Min Yeonghwan, worrying about the absence of a reform advocate within the Korea government, stressed that Korea had to approach the U.S., which had no territorial ambition. Thus, he worked with fellow pro-U.S. officials Yi Hakgyun and Hyeon Sanggeon to acquire U.S. loans to launch reform programmes, including the establishment of a commercial bank.<sup>57</sup> Min advised staying always on the alert for any Japanese or Russian aggression,<sup>58</sup> a recommendation that Sands happened to share.

Sands' first proposal was a somewhat well-timed initiative for Korean neutralisation. The Lobanov-Yamagata and Rosen-Nishi protocols allowed Korea a chance to evade Japanese and Russian encroachment and to build relations with a third power like France, which was willing to extend loans<sup>59</sup> and supply arms to Korea. Having established foreign legations in several major European capitals,<sup>60</sup> Korea, supported by its ambitious military programme, could now make a case for its readiness for neutralisation to European diplomats. By this time, the Korean government had resumed running the *Mugwan hakgyo* 武官學校 (Military Officers School) to train officers,<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Pak Nobyeok, *HanReo gyeongje gwangye 20nyeon* [The Russo-Korean Economic Relations for 20 Years] (Seoul: Hanul, 1994), 113-114.

<sup>53</sup> Sands, "Undiplomatic Memories", 225.

<sup>54</sup> Kim Hyeonsuk, "Hanguk geundae seoyangin gomungwan yeongu (1882~1904)", 178.

<sup>55</sup> Sands, "Undiplomatic Memories", 120-121.

<sup>56</sup> Yun Chiho, *Yun Chiho ilgi* 5, 1900.12.14, 251.

circulating military texts incorporating advanced military training methods from France and Germany,<sup>62</sup> and had already established the *Wonsubu* 元帥部 (supreme command) to reconfigure all Korean military-related bodies.<sup>63</sup>

Moreover, as French diplomat Dubail aptly intuited, Korea could take comfort from the protocols by persuading surrounding powers to neutralise it for a regional balance of power. According to him, the lack of clear consensus between Japan and Russia on Korea forced Japan to reluctantly postpone the annexation of Korea so it could exist as a relatively independent country like Turkey until the changed interests of neighbouring powers created a new regional order.<sup>64</sup> Sands' proposal, however, was problematic<sup>65</sup>; he might have overlooked the potential loss of sovereignty resulting from major powers playing an instrumental role in Korean reforms.

Meanwhile, having witnessed the decline of its prestige in Korea due to Russia's aggressive involvement in Korean affairs since 1896, Japan treated the Boxer Uprising as an opportunity to advance its interests in Korea by forming a military alliance with it that placed the Korean military under its control.<sup>66</sup> However, Japan's idea was not easily implemented since France by this time

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<sup>57</sup> Allen, Vol. 6-2, 1900.4.28, 647. Along with Yi Yunyong, Min also ended up collaborating with Sands to borrow 10 million won from U.S. financiers to strengthen the Korean military. Larsen, 157.

<sup>58</sup> Min Yeonghwan, *Min chungjeong gong yugojeon* 閔忠正公遺稿 全 [The Complete Posthumous Works of Min Yeonghwan] (Seoul: Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe, 1958), 45-48; 66.

<sup>59</sup> France had long been mentioned as a possible creditor for Korea. In the autumn of 1884, Japan's Liberal Party leader Itagaki Daisuke suggested to French Minister to Japan Scienkiewicz that France loan 1 million won to Korea to buy influence there (Kim Yonggu, "Imo gullan gwa gapsin jeongbyeon", 165). In 1889, Gojong instructed Han Gyuseol to secure 2 million won from the French government for minting coins and upgrading the machinery hall (Grotte Pascal, "Daehan Jeguk oegyo jeongchaek sog ui Peurangseu (1886-1906) [The Role of France in the Diplomatic Policy of the Korean Empire]", *Hanguksaron* 45 (2007): 114).

<sup>60</sup> Previously, Gojong failed to appoint Jo Minhui as Korean minister to Russia (1888) due to budgetary constraints, the three protocols, and the non-existence of skilled interpreters (Kim Suam, 204-205) and Pak Jesun in 1890 because of Chinese interference (Ibid., 206). Only in 1899 was Gojong able to name Yi Beomjin as Korean minister to France and Russia (Jeon Jeonghae, "Daehan Jegug ui saneophwa sichaek yeongu—Peurangseu chagwan doip gwa gwallyeonyehayo [A Study on the Industrialisation Policy of the Korean Empire—Regarding Introduction of French Loans]" (PhD diss., Geonkuk University, 2003), 73).

<sup>61</sup> Cha Munseop, *Joseon sidae gansa gwangye yeongu* [A Study of Military Relations in the Joseon Era] (Seoul: Danguk U. Press, 1996), 301-304.

<sup>62</sup> Cha Munseop, "Gu Hanmal yukgun mugwan hakgyo yeongu [A Study of Army Military Officers School in Late Joseon]", *Asea Yeongu* 50 (1973): 194-195.

<sup>63</sup> Gu Hanguk jeongbu gwanboguk, *Gu Hanguk gwanbo* 舊韓國官報 [Old Korean Government Gazette] 7, No.1306, 1899.7.6 (Seoul: Asea munhwasa, 1994), 492-494.

<sup>64</sup> Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe, *Peurangseu oemubu munseo 9: Daehan Jeguk II · 1899-1901* (Gwacheon: Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe, 2010), 180.

<sup>65</sup> Only the French minister supported Sands' plan; the Russian and Japanese ministers strongly opposed it. Hyeon Gwangho, "Daehan Jeguk gwa Reosia geurigo Ilbon", 133.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 107.

developed an active Korean policy as its Far Eastern policy, anticipating the status quo there, which was in line with the Korean government's neutrality policy.<sup>67</sup> France, strategically aligned with Russia in its Far Eastern policy,<sup>68</sup> for instance the Triple Intervention, since the Franco-Russian alliance (17.8.1892), was useful to Russia's efforts to resist Japanese encroachment on Korean sovereignty.

In the spring of 1900, Russia, willing to avoid possible Japanese dominance in Korea by strengthening its military footprint there, expressed its interest in leasing Masanpo<sup>69</sup> and obtained the approval of Gojong, who sought to use this deal as an opportunity to purge the pro-Japan faction within Korea.<sup>70</sup> Russia could also count on the pro-Russia faction, such as Gojong's favourite Imperial Concubine Lady Eom and her supporters like Min Gyeongsik, Nam Myeongsun, and Yi Gyeongsik, whose desire to oust pro-Japan Korean cabinet ministers was known even to Japan.<sup>71</sup>

While Russia seemed to be making up ground in Korea, Japan did not remain an idle spectator. Sakatani Yoshio, head of the budget bureau in Japan's Ministry of Finance, and Matsuo Shigeyoshi, head of the ministry's finance bureau, called on Finance Minister Matsutaka Masayoshi to appoint as manager of the Seoul branch of the Japanese Dai-Ichi Bank the Japanese government's financial representative in Korea and to direct him to buy gold ore and expand the circulation of Japanese convertible notes in March 1900.<sup>72</sup> Two months later, Japan contemplated taking control of currency reform supervision and loans negotiations for the Korean government as other means to expand its influence over Korea.<sup>73</sup> Considering that the pro-Japan faction had borrowed 5 million yen from Japan in the past, which sowed the seed of Korea's financial dependency,<sup>74</sup> these plans did not seem far-fetched.

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<sup>67</sup> Hyeon Gwangho, "Daehan Jegug ui daeoe jeongchaek", 86.

<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, once Russia showed an interest in Masanpo, France, willing to gain a strategic foothold in the Far East, also contemplated the possible occupation of Geoje Island for a naval base (1900.6). *Peurangseu oemubu munseo 9: Daehan Jeguk II · 1899-1901*, 97.

<sup>69</sup> The Russian navy tried to lease Masanpo to have access to Korea's South Sea and stabilise its status in the Far East. Hyeon Gwangho, "Daehan Jeguk gwa Reosia geurigo Ilbon", 40. Subsequently, the winter military exercise by Russian ships at Masanpo reaffirmed Russia's rights there (1901.1 and 1901.2), and the contents of the Alexeiev-Tseng Agreement were unveiled (1901.2), which triggered "the Crisis in March 1901" between Russia and Japan. Choe Deokgyu, *Jejeong Reosia ui Hanbando jeongchaek, 1891-1907* [The Imperial Russia's Korean Peninsula Policy, 1891-1907] (Seoul: Gyeongin munhwasa, 2008), 82.

<sup>70</sup> Pak Jonghyo, ed., 572-573.

<sup>71</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 32, Confidential No.52, 936-939,

<http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>72</sup> Duus, 162.

By May 1900, though the Boxer Uprising, insisting upon 扶清滅洋 (“support the Qing, destroy the foreigners”), had spread to several regions, it backfired, resulting in even greater foreign intervention in China. Though the eight allied nations’ troops advanced toward Beijing to protect foreign residents’ lives and properties and suppress the Boxer Uprising (19.6.1900) and easily took possession of Beijing (14.8.1900), the Boxer Protocol (7.9.1901) between China and allied nations was forged with difficulty due to several pending issues, such as the punishment of the main culprits behind the Boxer Uprising, reparations disputes, and Russian domination of Manchuria. In particular, Russia’s occupation of Manchuria from June to October 1900 under the pretext<sup>75</sup> of the Boxer Uprising put the major powers into motion. To retain control of Manchuria, Russia forced China to first ratify the Alexeiev-Tseng Agreement (26.11.1900) and to later replace it with a twelve-article treaty in February 1901,<sup>76</sup> but such moves were met with stiff opposition from Britain, Japan, the U.S. and Germany, thereby resulting in, in fairly short order, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and the Russo-Japanese War.<sup>77</sup>

The expansion of the Boxers’ influence left Korea facing an acute dilemma. The Korean government informed foreign representatives in Seoul that Korea would not sympathise with the Boxer Uprising,<sup>78</sup> while Gojong hosted a meeting with foreign representatives to sound out major powers’ Korean policies in relation to it.<sup>79</sup> Gojong worried that if a Boxer Uprising-like rebellion were to erupt in Korea, major powers might send forces to repress it, thus opening the way for the partitioning of Korea, upsetting the balance of power on the Korean peninsula and thereby

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<sup>73</sup> In the end, it was decided that it would be more desirable to persuade the Korean government to allow the Dai-Ichi Bank to circulate convertible notes. *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 33, No.140, 166, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>74</sup> Seong Hwangyong, 264.

<sup>75</sup> Russian Army Minister Alexei N. Kuropatkin mentioned that the Boxer Uprising furnished Russia with the opportunity to occupy Manchuria. Burton F. Clyde and Paul H. Beers, *The Far East, A History of the Western Impact and the Eastern Response, 1830-1965* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1966), 211.

<sup>76</sup> Seong Hwangyong, 310-312.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 304, 307-308.

<sup>78</sup> Burnett, ed., Allen to Secretary of State, No.281, 1900.9.15, 197-198. The Korean government also tried to boost its regional military strength against an unsure future. Hyeon Gwangho, “Daehan Jeguk gwa Reosia geurigo Ilbon”, 106.

<sup>79</sup> Hyeon Gwangho, “Daehan Jegukgi juHan Reosia gongsa ui hwaldong—uihwadan sageon gwa YeongIl dongmaeng chegyeor eul jungsim euro [The Activity of the Russian Ministers in the Korean Empire Era—Focusing on the Boxer Uprising and the Anglo-Japanese Alliance]”, *Yeoksa hakbo* 190 (June 2006): 64. Gojong considered the punitive expedition by the eight powers and their occupation of Beijing as a way to protect their concessions and nationals (1900.8.15). Gaimushō, ed, *Komura gaikōshi* 小村外交史 [Diplomatic History of Komura] (Tokyo: Ganshobō, 1966), 164-165.

shattering Korea's hard-earned peace; this might be a scenario that could jeopardise Korea's neutralisation prospects. Sure enough, Russian Minister to Korea Alexandr Ivanovich Pavloff, likening the Russian military to a tiger and the Japanese forces to that of a monkey, warned Gojong that if Korea were to rely on Japan, it would only lead to national ruin (13.6.1900). In July, when news that the remnants of the Boxers were about to raid the northern part of Korea reached Gojong, the emperor feared that it was a prelude to a Russian attack on Korea,<sup>80</sup> a fear exacerbated by Pavloff's request for permission that Russian forces be allowed to enter Korea.<sup>81</sup>

The dispatch of Russian forces to Manchuria was not only part of the ripple effect from the Boxer Uprising, but also a long-awaited opportunity for the Russian government to implement its Korean policy. The going, however, wasn't all downhill for a diplomatic corps saddled with inefficiency and incompetence. All Russian policies required the emperor's stamp of approval, which ensured that its foreign policy was largely shaped by Emperor Nicholas II's favourites. In early July 1900, Russian Finance Minister Sergei Witte, one such favourite, requested the emperor's approval to send Russian forces to Manchuria for securing the Chinese Eastern railway and suppressing the Boxers. At the same time, Witte also had to be ready to send troops to northern Korea in case a Boxer incursion there led to Japan dispatching troops to the area to restore order.<sup>82</sup>

At this critical juncture, the Russian czar issued an edict ordering his officials to prepare the grounds for friendly negotiations with Japan in case the Boxers reached Korea. Russian Foreign Minister Vladmir Nikolaevitch Lamsdorff followed up on these instructions by ordering Izvolsky (15.7.1900) to inform Japan of the need to send Russian forces to the north of the peninsula to protect Russian territory. Lamsdorff also insisted that reaching an agreement with Japan by designating respective spheres was Russia's best course of action. On the same day, he instructed Pavloff to acquire Gojong's approval for Russian troops to cross the Korean border in case of emergency.<sup>83</sup> Therefore, four days later, Izvolsky suggested, basing his proposal on the Lobanov-Yamagata Protocol, the partitioning of Korea as well as the stationing of troops to protect the new

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<sup>80</sup> Pak Huiho, 109-110.

<sup>81</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 33 Supplement (2), No.1228, 390-392, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>. To add insult to injury, Pavloff even declared that Russia should be in charge of defending Korea's northern region. Ibid., No.1335, 394-396; No.1343, 401-402, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>82</sup> Seok Hwajeong, 165.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 166.

borders to Foreign Minister Aoki Shūzō, Prime Minister Yamagata, and Itō (23.7.1900).<sup>84</sup> Pavloff in turn proposed to Hayashi that a conference be held in Tokyo to finalise an agreement between the two nations that would place the defence of the north under Russian command and that would give leave for Japan's forces to land at Incheon and lay claim to its sphere on the peninsula.<sup>85</sup>

The necessity of a new agreement for the partitioning of spheres of influence in Korea was also being considered by Japan due to the dispatch of Russian troops to Manchuria and the action of the Boxers in proximity to northern Korea.<sup>86</sup> In particular, Japanese *genrō* responded positively to the Russian overture,<sup>87</sup> citing that if Japan took full control of Korea it could be the cause of open war with Russia and that Japan was unprepared financially and militarily to take on Russia. Prime Minister Yamagata later insisted that the spheres of influence be drawn along the Daedong River and the Wonsan Bay (20.8.1900).<sup>88</sup> But Aoki and a line-up of foreign ministers opposed the partitioning of the Korean peninsula into spheres of influence (21.7.1900),<sup>89</sup> and both Japanese Minister to Russia Komura (22.7.1900)<sup>90</sup> and Hayashi (23.7.1900)<sup>91</sup> submitted reports to Aoki recommending that Korea be exchanged for Manchuria on the condition that Japan control Korea completely.

Around this time, rumours were circulating within Korea that Japan and Russia had reached an agreement on the partitioning of Korea and that both powers were going to send forces to Korea. The *Hwangseong sinmun* revealed that Russia offered some type of deal to Japan<sup>92</sup> but that Japan rejected Russia's suggestion for the partitioning of Korea.<sup>93</sup> Unlike the *genrō*'s passive stance, the Japanese government's rejection of Russia's suggestion might have been profoundly affected by the

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<sup>84</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 33 supplement (2), No.1228, 390-392, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, No.1326, 385-386, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>86</sup> *Tokyo asahi shimbun*, 1900.7.24; 7.30; 8.22.

<sup>87</sup> Konoe Atsumaro, *Konoe Atsumaro nikki* 近衛篤磨日記 [The Diary of Konoe Atsumaro] 3 (Tokyo: Kashima kenkyujo shuppankai, 1968-1969), 247.

<sup>88</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 29, No.487, 834, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>89</sup> Konoe, 247.

<sup>90</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 33, No.522, 699-700, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

Komura insisted that using the Russian invasion of Manchuria as a starting point, Japan and Russia should confirm their spheres of influences in Korea and Manchuria and give each other a free hand in their own regions.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, No.1328, 389-391, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>. Hayashi's report stated that Japan should suggest to Russia that the Korean peninsula be its sphere of influence on the condition that no Japanese troops would be stationed in the north along the Pyeongyang and Wonsan.

<sup>92</sup> *Hwangseong sinmun*, 1900.7.30, <http://search.i815.or.kr/ImageViewer/ImageViewer.jsp?tid=ns&id=HS1901082802>.

Japanese Army and Navy; hard-liners within the Japanese military persisted in pushing for making Korea a protectorate of Japan by force or for considering the division of Korea into three parts (two northern provinces to Russia, three southern provinces to Japan, and three central provinces to Korea) (4.7.1900).<sup>94</sup> Other hard-liners pressed the Japanese government to decline the Russian suggestions and colonise Korea by dispatching Japanese troops to Korea or concluding the Korean-Japanese Military Alliance, as Konoe Atsumaro had recommended.<sup>95</sup> Finally, Aoki requested that “Manchuria be Russian sphere of influence and Korea be Japanese sphere of influence” to Lamsdorff via Komura, rejecting Russia’s suggestion (29.7.1900).<sup>96</sup>

Aoki pursued his plan to exchange Manchuria for Korea in secret negotiations with Germany and the U.S. in August and September 1900, where he obtained their reassurances that they would not object to Korea being drawn into the Japanese sphere of influence and that they would retain an amicable neutrality in the event of a Russo-Japanese clash.<sup>97</sup> Encouraged, Aoki sought to compensate Russia for its loss of influence in Korea by acknowledging Manchuria as Russia’s. For this reason, he later went on to reject Jo Byeongsik’s neutralisation proposal (see later), pushing him to have Korea rely on Japan, and was in turn bitterly rebuffed by Jo.<sup>98</sup>

Nevertheless, the Korean neutralisation issue was brought to the fore again around this time by some Japanese university figures, who subsequently threw their weight behind the Russo-Japanese joint rule of Korea. French Minister Jules Harmand, without deeply delving into the neutralisation proposal, reported to Foreign Minister Théophile Delcassé that these proponents desired to have it debated at a conference involving major powers.<sup>99</sup> The Japanese newspaper *Yomiuri shimbun* joined the debate by devoting an editorial to calling for the neutralisation of Korea (12.8.1900). The editorial began by describing the proposal of Japanese Minister to Korea Hayashi for the establishment of Japanese communication infrastructure in Incheon and the stationing of a Japanese military contingent in Korea in case a major incident broke out along the Sino-Korean

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<sup>93</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 33 supplement (2), No.1349, 415, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>94</sup> Konoe, 207-209.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 243; 289-290.

<sup>96</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 33, No.529, 705, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, No.526, 701; No.528, 702-703; No.529, 704,

<http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>98</sup> Seok Hwajeong, 168.

<sup>99</sup> *Peurangseu oemubu munseo 9 Daehan Jeguk II · 1899-1901*, 81.

border. Although Hayashi claimed to have received Gojong's approval for the dispatch of Japanese troops to Korea, the *Yomiuri shimbun* urged moderation, reminding its readers of the Russo-Japanese agreement that required Japan to inform Russia before taking any military action. It also illustrated the Russian position on the Korean peninsula and in Manchuria, expressing its fear about the growing Russian intrusion around the Korean border.

Moreover, this editorial wondered whether Russia would inform Japan in advance if Russian forces were to be stationed in Korea and feared a repetition of 1894 when the presence of Chinese and Japanese troops in Korea triggered war. This is not to suggest that war was imminent between Japan and Russia. No hostility existed between them after the bilateral commercial treaty (1894) that was revised two years later in Tianjin, and relations between both countries were mostly amicable. Although now could be the right moment for major countries having stakes in Korea to jointly formulate a new plan there, the future of Korea remained uncertain without any definite measures to protect its current status; Korea's small land mass, its weak military, and its strategic location between Japan and Russia made it vulnerable to attack under a variety of circumstances, even if the Russo-Japanese War were avoidable.

However, were Japan and Russia to enter into a conflict, its effects could spread, disrupting stability worldwide. For this reason, the *Yomiuri shimbun* contended that Korea should adopt either a Belgian- or Swiss-style permanent neutrality. With the permanent neutrality of Korea having already been discussed within Japan as the only viable option for Asian peace, the newspaper made its case before major powers, in the wake of the Boxer Uprising in China, were to hold a meeting on the future of China, suggesting the issue of Korea's fate could be added to the agenda. The editorial thus urged Japan to make a case for permanent neutrality of Korea to the major European powers, arguing as well that more discussions should take place within Japan on this issue.<sup>100</sup>

Unfortunately, this proposal did not seem to have been adopted since there was no evidence that the Japanese government took up the newspaper's suggestion. This was understandable considering Russia's unwillingness to cede Korea to Japanese control. Nevertheless, the neutralisation proposal was a worthwhile strategy for Japan to pursue because, as the *Yomiuri shimbun* aptly pointed out, Korea was at the centre of Asian stability. Ironically, despite its

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<sup>100</sup> *Yomiuri shimbun* 読売新聞 [The Daily Yomiuri], 1900.8.12.

awareness of Korea's weak military, the *Yomiuri shimbun* did not seem to believe that this undermined Korea's neutralisation prospects—the very same reason that later led Konoe to reject Jo's coming neutralisation offer.

Earlier, although the signing of the Rosen-Nishi Protocol heralded the relative decline of Russian influence over Korea, the Russian government had been reluctant to sanction any changes that would involve other major powers. Instead, Russia preferred to resolve any lingering problems surrounding the Korean peninsula by negotiating with Japan.<sup>101</sup> Russia's stance could not have sat well with Korea, however, since in addition to the protocol, pro-Russia official Kim Hongnyuk attempted to assassinate Gojong.<sup>102</sup> This forced Korea to seek a third country, and France, despite its close alliance with Russia, became an attractive option as mentioned above. This undoubtedly influenced Yi Beomjin's appointment as Korean Minister to Russia, France, and Austria (20.3.1899) and Korea's participation in the Exposition Universelle held at Paris in April 1900.<sup>103</sup>

Korea's growing ties with France also contributed to the neutralisation drive of Alphonse Tremule, who first came to Seoul in December 1899 to look for art pieces to be displayed at the upcoming world's fair in Paris. The death of his sponsor, however, unexpectedly prolonged his stay in Korea, which gave Tremule the chance to drum up business with the Korean government. Tremule struck a deal with the government, which signed on with him to purchase 10,000 rifles from France, but the sale stalled due to Korean government ministers' opposition.<sup>104</sup> In response, Tremule, who by then was serving as a mining engineer at the Imperial Household Department, approached Jo Byeongsik regarding another arms deal. Tremule made his sales pitch in response to Korea's obvious need for greater military capability in its drive toward neutralisation.

Later, thanks to Jo's recommendation, Tremule was allowed to attend a meeting at the palace, held during the evening to escape Japanese surveillance, at which he called on Gojong to suggest

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<sup>101</sup> Song Geumyeong, "Daehan Jegug ui jungniphwa oegyo jeongchaek (1897~1904): Reosia oegyo munseo bogwansir ui choegeun jaryo reul jungsim euro [The Korean Empire's Diplomatic Policy for Neutralisation (1897~1904): Focusing on Recent Documents at the Russian Diplomatic Archives]", *Oegyo* 36 (December 1995): 116.

<sup>102</sup> Kim Myeongseop, "Yureob ui Delkase chejega Daehan Jeguk gwa Peurangseu sai ui oegyo gwangye e michin yeonghyang [The Influence of the Delcassé System in Europe on the Diplomatic Relations Between the Korean Empire and France, 1898-1905]", *Yureop yeongu* 29(1) (Spring 2011):128.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>104</sup> Coincidentally, Tremule was not the only one who sought to sell French arms to Korea. During the summer of 1900, French Chargé d'affaires Lefèvre lobbied aggressively to have Korea purchase arms from France. *ChuKan Nihon koshikan kiroku* 14, Confidential No.127, 1900.12.28, <http://db.history.go.kr/>.

neutralisation to Japan<sup>105</sup> for preserving stability in the Far East. This seemed to strike a chord with Gojong, who, favouring a new direction in Korean neutralisation, dispatched Jo to Tokyo to obtain consent from major powers for Korean neutralisation. Tremule's plans never hatched, however, because Jo could not convince any major powers to back them.<sup>106</sup> Even though Pavloff disparaged Korea's neutralisation attempt by depicting it as a means for Tremule's personal profit, he should have realised that the measure was a new path being taken by Korea to prevent Japanese colonisation.<sup>107</sup> This was manifested clearly when Jo, as part of his mission to Japan, sought consent for Korean neutralisation from Aoki.

Jo's appointment as minister to execute diplomatic missions was also part of Gojong's hope to accommodate the pro- and anti-U.S. factions which were contesting for control of Korean foreign policy; while the pro-Japan faction showed little enthusiasm in Korean neutralisation as members like Pak Jesun maintained close links with Japanese ministers in Korea, a pro-U.S. faction member like Yi Hayeong regarded the U.S. as a country with no territorial ambitions in Korea.<sup>108</sup> Gojong, despite his previous disappointments with the U.S., still put great stock in the perceived U.S. goodwill towards Korea and now tried to pursue neutrality diplomacy through Allen, who, he assumed, could influence the U.S. government. Unfortunately, Gojong's efforts were stymied by the Korean political establishment's alignment with major powers. His response was to make Jo, a non-faction member,<sup>109</sup> his point-man on neutralisation,<sup>110</sup> His appointment demonstrated that despite the abolition of the old social status system, *yangban* scholar-officials continued to occupy the majority of high-profile foreign policy-related positions in Korea. Not only could he not speak any foreign language, he also possessed limited knowledge about Japan, though he served as foreign minister before the Sino-Japanese War.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Song Geumyeong, "Daehan Jegug ui jungniphwa oegyo jeongchaek (1897~1904)", 116.

<sup>106</sup> Pak Hyojong, ed., 270.

<sup>107</sup> Song Geumyeong, "Daehan Jegug ui jungniphwa oegyo jeongchaek (1897~1904)", 116.

<sup>108</sup> Han Cheolho, "Hanguk geundae gaehwapa wa tongchi gigu yeongu", 153.

<sup>109</sup> There is no consensus whether this was really the case as some group him, along with Min Jeongmuk and Jeong Nakyong, as a pro-Russia faction member. Hyeon Gwangho, "Daehan Jeguk gwa Reosia geurigo Ilbon", 36.

<sup>110</sup> Jo's appointment was also dominated by factional discord between the neutralisation-supporting pro-U.S. faction, who rallied behind the crown prince Yi Cheok and the anti-U.S. coalition (including pro-Russia faction), which threw its weight behind Prince Yi Eun and advocated the Korea-Japan military alliance. Pak Huiho, 124.

<sup>111</sup> In 1894, while serving as Foreign Minister, Jo requested Western powers' assistance to preserve the peace and territorial integrity of Korea, arguing that the unauthorised Japanese military presence was illegal under international law. Accordingly, a joint proposal by British, French, German, and American ministers in Seoul was put forward to call

But Gojong's appointment of Jo as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to Japan to win favour of Japan and the U.S. regarding neutralisation (7.8.1900) was less than straightforward.<sup>112</sup> For one, the editor of the Japanese newspaper *Kanjō shinhō* Kikuchi Kenzo had persuaded Gu Wanseo, a special attendant to Gojong, to recommend Jo to Gojong.<sup>113</sup> Omiwa Zoube, too, during an audience with Gojong, pressed for the dispatch of a Korean envoy to Japan and eventually accompanied Jo to Tokyo.<sup>114</sup> While behind the scenes, Hayashi worked to ensure that Jo would be appointed, regardless of his anti-Japan views, and played a critical role in shaping Korean neutralisation policy to Japan's advantage. When Gojong was despondent about the failure of Sands' aforesaid neutralisation proposal to gain a hearing, Hayashi suggested Gojong have a high-level government official attend a major powers' envoy session in Tokyo to obtain Korean neutrality and independence with Japanese and British assistance.<sup>115</sup>

Though Allen reckoned that Hayashi recommended Jo to Gojong to strengthen Japanese influence over the Korean court,<sup>116</sup> he missed his tip; Hayashi's real interest lay in the Japan-Korea military alliance. Covertly assisting Kikuchi and Omiwa's activities in Seoul, he reported to his superiors that Gojong was contemplating a military alliance with Japan in exchange for Korean political exiles currently in Japan.<sup>117</sup> Hayashi calculated that once Jo was in Japan, he could outmanoeuvre Jo so that his reports to Gojong would influence the emperor to agree to the military alliance.<sup>118</sup>

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for the withdrawal of Chinese and Japanese troops from Korea. *Peurangseu oemubu munseo 6, Joseon (5) 1893-1894*, 167-168.

<sup>112</sup> According to British diplomat John Harrington Gubbins, an "arrangement of the kind reported had long been a cherished scheme of the Emperor [Gojong]". Unfortunately, Gojong "had spoken about it confidentially to an unofficial Japanese agent" before Jo's appointment, thus unknowingly leaking his neutralisation plan to Japan before it was officially suggested to the Japanese government. *Foreign Office: Political and Other Departments: General Correspondence before 1906, China: FO 17/1455, No.88*, Gubbins to Lansdowne, 1900.9.14, 149-150. In the summer of 1900, when Russo-Japanese tensions were simmering below the surface, Korean Minister to Japan Yi Haeong, Jo's predecessor, was said to have proposed Korean neutrality backed by Japan, which later forwarded his proposal to Washington through U.S. Minister to Japan Alfred Buck. Though Russia toyed with the idea of Yi's proposal, the U.S. and Japan never went along with it. Harrington, 322.

<sup>113</sup> Konoe, 284.

<sup>114</sup> *Gaimushō maikurofairum* 外務省マイクロフィルム [Japanese Foreign Office Microfilm] Tel.1900, 3121.

<sup>115</sup> *Despatches from the United States Ministers to Korea, 1883-1905*, M134, Allen to the Secretary of State, 1900.8.31, 1900.9.10.

<sup>116</sup> Allen, Allen to Fassett, 1900.11.3.

<sup>117</sup> Pak Huiho, 126.

<sup>118</sup> *Gaimushō maikurofairu*, Tel.1900, 2657.

While Japan readied itself for the prospects of such an alliance, the Korean government set its sights on implementing neutralisation. Once the Boxer Uprising in China opened up the possibility of major powers' dispatching forces to Korea, Gojong instructed Jo to suggest an international agreement to the Japanese government and foreign diplomatic representatives in Japan.<sup>119</sup> Jo told Prince Konoe that he was appointed solely to advance Korean neutralisation and that a military alliance between Korea and Japan was inconceivable (29.8.1900).<sup>120</sup> Konoe responded that to become a neutral state, Korea had to possess sufficient self-defence capabilities and had to obtain recognition of independence from Russia and Japan, since both had a substantial stake in Korea, regardless of other powers' interest in Korean concessions such as railroads and mining. If not, Korean neutralisation was impossible. To secure its independence, Korea should form a military alliance with Japan, and concentrate on its internal affairs to build a "wealthy country and powerful military". Jo was unswayed by Konoe's arguments, arguing that irrespective of a military alliance, Japan would send its forces to Korea, and that because he was tasked only with pursuing neutralisation he was unable to make any unilateral decisions.<sup>121</sup>

Undeterred, Jo sounded out Japanese Foreign Minister Aoki on whether Korea could follow in the footsteps of Belgium and Switzerland to realise neutralisation and requested Japan's assistance in doing so (14.9.1900).<sup>122</sup> Aoki first explained the economic circumstances and historical developments that allowed Belgium and Switzerland to maintain neutrality and preserve their independence amongst major powers, and asked Jo whether Korea's situation was really analogous. Jo replied to Aoki that Korea differed from them in certain aspects but thought neutralisation was still achievable. Aoki stonewalled Jo, but their neutralisation negotiations were covered in the Japanese press and eventually attracted attention from British Chargé d'affaires Whitehead and Izvolsky.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Burnett, ed., Allen to Secretary of State, No.272, 1900.8.23, 62-63; Allen to Secretary of State, No.275, 1900.8.31, 81-83; *Peurangseu oemubu munseo 9: Daehan Jeguk II · 1899-1901*, 103.

<sup>120</sup> Konoe, 282-290.

<sup>121</sup> Han Cheolho, "Daehan Jegukgi jull Hanguk gongsa ui hwaldong gwa geu uiui (1900-1905) [The Activities of Korean Ministers to Japan in the Korean Empire Era (1900-1905) and Its Significance]", *Sahak yeongu* 94 (June 2009): 82.

<sup>122</sup> *Gaimushō maikurofairumu*, Tel.1900, 1900.9.14, 1383.

<sup>123</sup> Dongguang chulpansa, ed., *Yeongguk oemuseong Han-Yeong oegyosa gwangye jaryojip* [Collected Documents on the Anglo-Korean Diplomatic History in the British Foreign Office] 9, No.159, 1900.9.18 (Seoul: Dongguang chulpansa, 1997), 312.

The Japanese government refused to support Korean neutralisation since extending its dominance over Korea took priority. A prominent politician and member of the *Tōa dōbunkai* 東亞同文會 (East Asia Common Culture Society), which pursued a Pan Asian political movement, Konoe thought that Russia was behind Jo's neutralisation proposal, believing that it had instigated it to buy time to consolidate its control over Manchuria before expanding into Korea.<sup>124</sup> The Japanese government therefore made a counterproposal to Jo to advance Korean neutralisation, putting forward a bilateral military alliance between Korea and Japan centred on the training of 50,000 Korean troops under Japanese command. Additionally, the Japanese government was willing to loan 10 million yen to Korea for internal reforms.<sup>125</sup>

Gojong, inspired by Sands' neutralisation plan above, which prioritised internal reforms, immediately accepted Japan's proposal, sending his personal letter co-signed by the Imperial Household and Foreign Ministers to Jo.<sup>126</sup> Subsequently, the Korean government sounded out major powers' intentions to guarantee Korean neutralisation, provided it would build up a modern standing army of 50,000 men and nominate two military officials to transform its military.<sup>127</sup> But before Korea could take these steps, Jo relayed the news that Japan, believing Korea could never accomplish the proposed military build-up, had reneged on its proposal.<sup>128</sup> Jo ascribed Japan's sudden volte-face to the pro-Japan faction within the court.<sup>129</sup> Allen, for one, suspected that Russian Minister Pavloff blocked the loan.<sup>130</sup> Russia was on Japan's mind as well; Itō Hirobumi, fearing a Japan-Korea alliance could antagonise Russia, demanded the prospective cabinet reject the loan proposal.<sup>131</sup>

After the efforts for a Japanese-led neutralisation proposal, military alliance, and loan agreement all failed, Gojong instructed Jo to return to Korea, who instead started another round of neutralisation negotiations. In late September 1900, fearing that conflict between Japan and Russia was imminent and that Japan was seeking to annex Korea, Jo requested U.S. Minister to Japan Buck

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<sup>124</sup> Konoe, 282-290.

<sup>125</sup> *Despatches from the United States Ministers to Korea, 1883-1905*, M134, Allen to Hay, 1900.9.10.

<sup>126</sup> Seo Jungseok, 307.

<sup>127</sup> *Gojong sillok*, 1901.9.22, <http://sillok.history.go.kr>.

<sup>128</sup> *Despatches from the United States Ministers to Korea, 1883-1905*, M134, Allen to Secretary of State, 1900.10.2.

<sup>129</sup> Like the Japanese government, the pro-Japan faction favoured a military alliance between Korea and Japan.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, Allen to Secretary of State, 1900.10.2; 1901.8.31.

<sup>131</sup> Konoe, 347.

have the U.S. lead Korean neutralisation.<sup>132</sup> Referring to Switzerland's success, Jo called for the U.S. to cooperate with other major powers to achieve an international guarantee of Korean independence and neutrality. Buck, however, refused Jo's request, explaining that it was improper for him to call for neutralisation and that the Korean minister in the U.S. should appeal directly to the U.S. government.<sup>133</sup>

Jo, for whatever reasons—overenthusiasm, inexperience, or cultural barriers—misconstrued Buck's intentions and reported to Gojong that the guarantee of Korean neutralisation could not be resolved through Japan and would be better served if the U.S. proposed it to other powers, and that Buck would suggest neutralisation to the U.S. president on returning home. Overjoyed at Jo's report, the Korean court presumed that the U.S. was now extending a helping hand, though in fact as Buck wrote to Allen, no such promise was ever made to Jo:

No assurance that I would take the matter up with the State Department and while expressing my kind feeling and that of the United States toward Korea, I gave him to understand that it would not be proper for me to do so: suggesting that, if the Korean Government desired to accomplish the ends he had in view, it could approach my Government on the subject through its representative in Washington.<sup>134</sup>

Undaunted, Gojong resolved to instruct Jo to pursue neutralisation together with the U.S. minister in Japan.<sup>135</sup>

After receiving Buck's account of his meeting with Jo, Allen worked to dampen Korea's enthusiasm for a U.S.-led Korean neutralisation, sharing Buck's telegram with Gojong to convince him that the court's reliance on U.S. backing was misguided.<sup>136</sup> Allen's actions were not unexpected; due to the U.S.'s traditional neutralism and hands-off policy, McKinley and Hay had already refused the guarantee of Korean territorial integrity and neutralisation Gojong requested in his handwritten letter as they did not wish to entangle the U.S. in Korea's political conflicts.<sup>137</sup> Although pro-U.S. faction leader Min Sangho had tipped Allen off about the court's interest in

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<sup>132</sup> Han Cheolho, ed., *Migug ui daeHan jeongchaek 1834-1950* [The U.S.'s Korean Policy 1834-1950] (Chuncheon: Hallym University Press, 1998), 35.

<sup>133</sup> *Despatches from the United States Ministers to Korea, 1883-1905*, M134, Enclosure No.1, Buck to Allen, 1900.10.1.

<sup>134</sup> Burnett, ed., Allen to Secretary of State, No.287, 1900.10.11, 71.

<sup>135</sup> *Despatches from the United States Ministers to Korea, 1883-1905*, M134, Enclosure, Allen to Buck, Allen to Hay, 1900.10.2; 1900.10.10.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, Allen to Hay, 1900.10.9; 1900.11.20.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, Allen to Hay, 1900.10.2; 1900.10.29.

neutralisation, Allen seemed to suspect that Pavloff was instrumental in persuading Jo to keep Allen in the dark about his dealings with Buck. Allen, however, discovered that through frequent audiences with Gojong, Pavloff had assured Gojong that Russia was Korea's only friend and would always work to protect it. Gojong also acknowledged that Japan had proposed neutralisation as a means to weaken Korea and that the U.S. was siding with Japan to oppose Korea.<sup>138</sup>

Having found out about Pavloff's assurances to Gojong, Allen assumed Russia favoured Jo's neutralisation proposal, but contrary to his assumptions, Russia's opposition to the proposal was just as adamant as the U.S.'s. In fact, Pavloff and Izvolsky were collaborating to stymie the Korean government.<sup>139</sup> According to Japanese intelligence, Pavloff, during his audience with Gojong (26.9.1900), told Gojong that the neutralisation proposal was futile since the contemporary Korean situation was unsuitable. Izvolsky was also hostile to this proposal, thinking the Korean government unable to implement and maintain neutrality.<sup>140</sup> After hearing that the Korean court was excited over Jo's meeting with Buck, Pavloff, quoting Izvolsky's telegram, asked Allen about the U.S. position on Korean neutralisation.<sup>141</sup>

Allen categorically denied that he or the U.S. was active in Korea neutralisation.<sup>142</sup> Relieved by this response, Pavloff put the blame on Japan, suspecting that it was masterminding Korean neutrality to bring Korea closer through a Japan-Korea defence alliance that involved Japanese command of Korean military training under the guise of guaranteeing Korea's territorial integrity.<sup>143</sup> He hence visited Gojong, who by now regarded Russia as a threat rather than as an ally, several times to explain Russia's position, warning him that Russia would not accept any political and diplomatic agreements between Korea and other powers if Russia were not first consulted.<sup>144</sup> British Minister to Korea John Newell Jordan added that Pavloff thought Jo's proposal impractical because,

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<sup>138</sup> *Despatches from the United States Ministers to Korea, 1883-1905*, M134, Allen to Hay, 1900.10.20.

<sup>139</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho 33 supplement (2)*, No.1361, 425,  
<http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>140</sup> Pak Huiho, 131.

<sup>141</sup> *Despatches from the United States Ministers to Korea, 1883-1905*, M134, 2 Enclosure, Allen to Hay, 1900.10.9; Buck to Allen, 1900.10.9.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 Enclosure, Allen to Buck, 1900.10.9.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, Allen to Hay, 1900.10.9. As Allen put it: "He [Pavloff] told me he had reason to believe that it was part of a plan arranged by Japanese, and that Japan had hoped to obtain an agreement with Korea whereby she should consent to allow Japan to preserve Korean neutrality with a large Korean army under Japanese control." Burnett, ed., Allen to Secretary of State, No.286, 1900.10.9, 70.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, M134, Allen to Hay, 1900.10.20.

as he had explained to Gojong, the Rosen-Nishi Protocol between Russia and Japan already established a certain kind of neutralisation in Korea<sup>145</sup> by confirming Korean sovereignty and the two countries' non-interference in Korean affairs.

Japan in turn pointed its finger at Russia. Not only did the *Tōa dōbunkai* suspect Russia openly, but the Japanese establishment did not get along with Jo, who three years earlier had been made a cabinet member under pressure from Russian Chargé d'affaires De Speyer. When Izvolsky asked Japanese Foreign Minister Katō Takaaki for his opinion on Jo's proposal (20.12.1900), Japan's suspicion of Russia grew,<sup>146</sup> even though Russia opposed the proposal. Jo's above neutralisation proposals were victims of negative reactions from Japan, U.S., and Russia and their mistrust; little wonder then that the Korean government had summoned him home (28.10.1900).<sup>147</sup>

#### • Neutralisation Strategies After the Russian Occupation of Manchuria (1901-1902)

After occupying China's Three Eastern Provinces in October 1900, pushing Russia to place Manchuria under its control, designed its new Korean policy against Japan, while proceeding with negotiations vis-a-vis China. To this end, the Russian emperor's confidant Witte weighed two options: one was to leave it as a bilateral issue between Korea and Japan, and the other was to discuss the neutralisation of Korea with major Western powers. He opted for the second, seeing it as advantageous in the contemporary East Asian situation.<sup>148</sup> Manchuria was central to Witte's Far Eastern policy and to protect Russian interests there the Korean peninsula had to be stabilised. For this, the following obstacles to Witte's Korean policy had to be overcome in advance.

Witte had to first deal with the court faction led by Aleksandr Mikhailovich Bezobrazov. Having convinced Nicholas II of the need for Russian influence and economic expansion in Korea, Bezobrazov's faction won his approval in March 1898<sup>149</sup> and took over a timber concession on the shore of the Yalu River from Iu. I. Briner, an original rights holder (23.5.1898).<sup>150</sup> They also sought a mining concession by sending an expedition to Gojong in June 1898,<sup>151</sup> and even tried to set up the East Asiatic Development Company to handle concessions in Korea in March 1900.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> *Foreign Office: Political and Other Departments: General Correspondence before 1906, China*: FO 17/1455, No.110, Gubbins to Lansdowne, 1900.11.5, 267.

<sup>146</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 35, No.199, 411-413, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>; *Foreign Office: China and Taiwan Confidential Print*: FO 405/33, No.99, Whitehead to Salisbury, 1900.9.18, 49.

<sup>147</sup> *Despatches from the United States Ministers to Korea, 1883-1905*, M134, Allen to Hay, 1900.10.29.

<sup>148</sup> Malozemoff, 144, 163-165.

However, the court faction soon encountered strong opposition from Witte and Foreign Minister Muraviev, who wished to take a softer stance towards Japan to reduce tensions. If not, war with Japan was possible.<sup>153</sup>

The contemplated dispatch of Russian military forces to Korea was another impediment to Witte's Korean policy. In case the Boxer Uprising made inroads into northern Korea, Emperor Nicholas II and Army Minister Alexei Kuropatkin considered sending Russian troops into Korea to pursue them.<sup>154</sup> This led to Pavloff requesting permission from the Korean government for Russian troops to cross over into its territory, and to argue that the defence of Korea's north might be better left to the Russian military.<sup>155</sup> Once again, the calming influence of Witte, however, gained the upper hand as he reminded the military that Russia could not afford to upset its relations with major powers over Korea until completing the TSR in Manchuria. Therefore, although Kuropatkin still believed that Korea should become a protectorate of Russia, he agreed with Witte to tread carefully and consider all ramifications before undertaking any military action.<sup>156</sup>

The transformation of the Japanese government's East Asian strategy added another twist to Witte's Korean strategy. As mentioned above, Aoki contended that if the Russian occupation of Manchuria persisted, Japan had no choice but to "protect" Korea; it would be more advantageous for both Japan and Russia to trade Korea (Japanese control) and Manchuria (Russian control). Komura had a similar view, pointing out to Aoki that if Russia desired an agreement with Japan, Japan should have a free hand in Korea similar to that of Russia in Manchuria. Ultimately, Komura contacted Witte to explicitly call for the exchange of Korea for Manchuria in October 1900, but Witte opposed this move because it would change the status quo in the region and so told Komura that Korean independence had to be recognised, and as for Manchuria, Russia's interests had to be respected.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 180-181.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 182-183.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 181-182, 184.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 144, 163-165.

<sup>155</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho 33 supplement* (2), No.1329, 391; No.1335, 394-396; No.1342, 401,

<http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>156</sup> Malozemoff, 135-142, 144.

The most serious impediment to Witte's Korean policy was the Japanese establishment's perception that Russia would occupy Manchuria permanently. In response to Russia's occupation of Manchuria, there were growing calls for the Japanese army and navy to use the Boxer Uprising as a justification for invading Korea and making it Japan's protectorate. This was also insisted upon by the anti-Russian *Tōa dōbunkai*—a pro-expansionist group—which rejected even the consideration of the establishment of Russo-Japanese spheres of influence in Korea.<sup>158</sup> To safely consolidate its position in Manchuria, Russia thus had to first stabilise its periphery, the Korean peninsula. To accomplish this in light of Japan's expansion into Korea, Russia had to find a way to ease the Russo-Japanese tensions without colonising Korea, a move Russian Emperor Nicholas II opposed.<sup>159</sup>

Under these circumstances, one possible way to reduce the tensions between Russia and Japan, in Witte's view, was to have Korea remain neutral. Unlike the *Moskovskiye Vedomosti*, which genuinely committed itself to permanent neutrality, Witte's neutralisation policy, by his own admission, was an ad hoc measure to temporarily protect Korea from Japanese invasion.<sup>160</sup> Witte, worried about Japan's possible invasion of Korea, in his letter to Russian Interior Minister Dmitry Sergeevich Sipyagin (1.10.1900) insisted that neutralisation could not only prevent a Japanese invasion of Korea but could also be a temporary option for protecting Manchuria and the Korean peninsula until Russia completed the TSR and solidified its presence in northern China, when it was assumed that Korea would fall into Russian hands.<sup>161</sup>

Around the time of Witte's message to Sipyagin, Poklevski, Russian councillor at the Russian legation in Japan, queried the moderates, Itō and Inoue Kaoru about the possibility of transforming Korea into a neutral state under the joint protection of Japan and Russia.<sup>162</sup> The formal suggestion of Korean neutralisation, however, came a few months later, when Lamsdorff instructed Alexander Petrovich Izvolsky (1856-1919)<sup>163</sup> to suggest Korean neutralisation to the Japanese government.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Pak Huiho, 138.

<sup>158</sup> Konoe, 207-209, 247, 251.

<sup>159</sup> Pak Huiho, 139.

<sup>160</sup> Seok Hwajeong, 165.

<sup>161</sup> Yi Hangjun, 362.

<sup>162</sup> Gang Changseok, 19.

<sup>163</sup> After graduating from the Imperial Lyceum at St. Petersburg, Izvolsky immediately entered the Foreign Office as attaché to the chancellerie of Prince Gortchakof and then served as first secretary of the Russian legation in Bucharest. Later he was transferred to Washington and next to the Vatican. His distinguished service at the Holy See led to his

After receipt of said instructions, Izvolsky first consulted with Itō and Inoue, and then formally proposed a guarantee of the permanent neutrality of Korea to the Japanese government (7.1.1901). Izvolsky asserted that the Russian government believed the neutralisation of Korea under the joint protection of major powers to be a wise policy. Before taking any further steps, though, the Russian government, weighing Japan's interests in Korea and the existing agreements between Japan and Russia, preferred to negotiate with its Japanese counterpart under the conditions that the neutralisation issue would be discussed confidentially and amicably.<sup>165</sup> He then told Foreign Minister Katō that Korean neutralisation could eliminate Japan's anxieties, namely Russia's occupation of Manchuria and the danger of a Russian invasion of Korea. Izvolsky added that Russian interests in Korea were passive and political and would not allow for a strong neighbouring country (Japan) to remain in Korea.<sup>166</sup> In other words, Russia wanted neutralisation of Korea under the joint guarantee of major powers while maintaining existing Russo-Japanese interests there.

Both Itō and Inoue looked favourably upon the proposal, judging it as beneficial for Japan, but Katō remained cautious. Katō informed Japanese ministers in Western countries, China, and Korea of Izvolsky's proposal<sup>167</sup> and instructed them to prepare countermeasures against it (8.1.1901). Japanese Minister to Britain Hayashi Tadasu replied that Russia's neutralisation proposal was an outgrowth of British and German connivance due to their respective interests in East Asia and mutual relationship. According to Hayashi, if Germany wanted to survive amidst an allied France and Russia, it could ill afford to alienate Britain. Britain, for its part, had to maintain close relations with Germany if it wanted to exploit the German-Austrian-Italian structure to its advantage.<sup>168</sup>

This could explain why, in Hayashi's view, Germany and Britain would support a Russia-sponsored Korean neutralisation. If Japan occupied Korea, this could lead to Russian primacy in China, forcing Germany to participate in another Triple Intervention, which it bitterly regretted

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being named Russian minister plenipotentiary at Belgrade and later at Munich, before taking up his post in Tokyo. Alexander Petrovich Izvolsky, *Recollections of A Foreign Minister*, trans. Charles Louis Seeger (Garden City: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1921), viii-xi.

<sup>164</sup> Malozemoff, 164-165.

<sup>165</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 34, No.393, 521, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>166</sup> Pak Huiho, 140.

<sup>167</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 34, No.395, 522, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>168</sup> The German Chargé d'affaires in London told the Japanese minister in London that Germany and Britain were

having done. Thus, it would be wise for Germany to remain neutral regarding a Russo-Japanese conflict on the Korean peninsula and accept Russia's neutralisation proposal. Britain had no reason to reject it either. Hayashi also opined that for a number of reasons—the close relationship between the British and Russian royal families, shared races, customs, religion, and trade—Britain was bound to be closer to Russia than to Japan. Practically speaking, Britain's engagement in the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) in South Africa forced Britain to remain strictly neutral in the East Asian conflict and support Russia's Korean neutralisation plan.<sup>169</sup>

Meanwhile, Japanese Chargé d'affaires to Korea Yamaza Enjirō expressed his scepticism of Russia's Korean neutralisation plan, as shown in his report (11.1.1901) to Katō. Yamaza asserted that there was no sign of negotiation between Korea and Russia, that relations between the two countries appeared less than ideal, and that the Russian government's proposal seemed to be a stalling tactic. Pavloff described Korea's real situation as hopeless, which, if accurate, ensured that the Russian neutralisation proposal, mentioned in the previous telegraph by Katō, would be impossible to implement.<sup>170</sup>

On the same day, Japanese Minister to China Komura delivered his thoughts on Korean neutralisation to Katō. Komura reckoned Russia's plan would pose serious obstacles. First, Korean neutralisation could keep Russia bottled up in Manchuria and would rob Japan of its present position in Korea. Second, the proposal would greatly impact Japan's determination and ability to retain maximum benefits, both politically and economically, in Korea. Since the Russian proposal was based on the presumption that Russia would retain freedom of manoeuvre in Manchuria, the Korean problem, if it was not inextricably linked with the Manchuria issue, could not be solved satisfactorily. Unless Russia agreed to designate Manchuria a neutral zone, the Japanese government would not, under any circumstances, condone the Russian plan to neutralise Korea. In that situation, Japan would have no choice but to push for a division of spheres of influence; Korea would become the Japanese sphere of influence and Manchuria would be Russia's.<sup>171</sup>

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preparing a treaty concerning East Asian policy and discussing the possibility of granting Japan a free hand in Korea, provided that Japan accede to the proposed Anglo-German treaty. Johannes Lepsius, ed., *Die Grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette* [The Great Policy of the European Cabinet], 1871-1914, Band 17, No.5036, Wedel to the German Foreign Office, 1901.4.15 (Berlin: German Foreign Office, 1924), 135.

<sup>169</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 34, No.395, 522, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, No.396, 523-524, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>.

The noteworthy aspect of Komura's report to Katō was his attempt to deal with the Korean problem by linking it with the Manchuria issue. This marked a radical departure from the strategy adopted by former Japanese Foreign Minister Aoki, who wanted to solve the Manchuria and Korea issues separately. Though it was the first time that a member of the Japanese diplomatic corps raised this scheme, Komura's thoughts may have subsequently induced Japanese diplomats to regard Manchuria and Korea as inseparable issues. As a part of the solution, Komura called for the simultaneous neutralisation of Manchuria and Korea, but he also suggested an exchange of Manchuria and Korea as a second alternative.<sup>172</sup>

Meanwhile, civic groups such as the *Tōa dōbunkai* and *Kokumin dōmeikai* 國民同盟會 (National League) opposed Russia's Korean neutralisation proposal, claiming that the current situation in Manchuria was endangering the status quo in China, a precondition to a successful Korean neutralisation.<sup>173</sup> Katō also opposed the Russian proposal because he believed the withdrawal of Russian troops from Manchuria must take precedence. More to the point, Japan's participation in the Anglo-German Agreement (16.10.1900) between British Foreign Secretary Marquess of Salisbury and German Ambassador to Britain Count von Hatzfeldt, which stipulated the open door policy and territorial integrity of China, clearly showed Japanese intentions to counter Russia in Manchuria. Moreover, if Japan accepted Russia's proposal for Korean neutralisation, it would create the impression that Japan planned to approve the Sino-Russian agreement on Manchuria.<sup>174</sup> Since both Komura and Katō were dead set against a Korean neutralisation that might solidify the status quo in Manchuria, which would put Russia in the catbird seat, Izvolsky's proposal seemed doomed to fail.

Katō then had to persuade people like Itō, who were receptive to the Russian proposal, that it was untenable. After borrowing Komura's idea, Katō sent a telegraph to Japanese Minister to Russia Chinda Sutemi as part of the official response of the Japanese government to Russia's Korean neutralisation proposal (17.1.1901). In its reply, the Japanese government began by reminding its Russian counterpart about Russia's right of usage to parts of the Liaodong peninsula.

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., No.397, 524, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>172</sup> Pak Huiho, 143. Japan established its basic policy to regard Manchuria and Korea as inseparable after mid-January, 1900. *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 34, No.174, 207, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>173</sup> Pak Huiho, 143.

<sup>174</sup> *Foreign Office: China and Taiwan Confidential Print*: FO 405/33, No.114, Hayashi to Lansdowne, 1901.1.29, 6-7.

Stressing that this was only temporary and applied to an area removed from Korea, Japan argued that Russia's Liaodong concession did not necessarily conflict with the spirit of the second article of the Triple Intervention, in which Russia, France and Germany opposed Japan's possession of Liaodong on the grounds that it permanently threatened Beijing, the capital of China, and rendered illusive the independence of Korea. This was why Japan did not hesitate in entering the Rosen-Nishi Protocol with Russia, but Russia's current actions in Manchuria did little to reassure major powers. The only consolation was Russia's previous announcement that it would withdraw its troops from Manchuria. Since Japan still viewed the protocol as binding, it, in Japan's view, should apply to the current issue. In this situation, to avoid any conjectures and arguments about Korean neutralisation, the Japanese government wanted to return to the previous state of affairs, a Manchuria not dominated by Russia, and to delay the discussion of this neutralisation plan until it could be reviewed freely without outside distractions.<sup>175</sup>

On the same day the Japanese government's message reached the Russian government, Katō met with Izvolsky to explain Japan's position on Korean neutralisation and exchange views on Manchuria. Katō told Izvolsky that since the Russian government had announced its retreat from Manchuria several times, it must be true to its word. Once Russia withdrew from Manchuria, there would still be plenty of time to discuss the neutrality of Korea. Izvolsky did not buy into Katō's argument, asserting that Manchuria and Korea were two different matters, but Katō contended that they were related and inseparable, saying that if Japan and Russia reached a consensus on extending the guarantee of neutrality to Manchuria or if they divided the spheres of influence, only then could Izvolsky's proposal be contemplated by Japan.<sup>176</sup>

Meanwhile, Chinda forwarded Katō's message to Lamsdorff (22.1.1900). Two days later Lamsdorff personally communicated Russia's position on Katō's telegraph to Chinda, indicating that Russia was satisfied with the existing Russo-Japanese negotiations and did not see any reason why a third power should intervene. Lamsdorff added that Russia had proposed Korean neutralisation without any hidden intentions because it felt that, as Komura had earlier stated, Japan

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<sup>175</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 34, No.399, 526-528, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>. The Japanese government rejected the Russian proposal because it distrusted Izvolsky and the Russian government's assertion that the Alexeiev-Tseng Agreement was a false report. *Ibid.*, No.97, 98, 115-117. Ultimately, Russia declared its abandonment of this agreement due to major powers' pressure (1900.4.5).

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, No.400, 529, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, No.401, 404, 406, 529-531, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>.

seemed unhappy with the current status of Korea. In this sense, Korean neutrality did not reflect Russia's own aspirations but was done out of goodwill for Japan. Therefore, if Japan was ready to exchange friendly opinions with Russia on the Korean issue, Russia was willing to take up the task immediately.<sup>177</sup>

When Chinda checked with Lamsdorff on whether Russia's favourable opinion involved other remaining issues besides Korean neutralisation, Lamsdorff assured him that Russia's neutralisation proposal was presented as a mere example of a negotiable issue. Still suspicious of Russia's true intentions, Chinda again asked whether Lamsdorff could explain the nature of the Russian government's instructions to Izvolsky on Korean neutralisation. Lamsdorff stayed on message, insisting that amicable opinions had to be exchanged. For this reason, "Korean neutralisation under the guarantee of major powers" might be a subject corresponding to Japan's expectations (about decreasing Russian influence in Korea) without doing Japan a disservice. As Lamsdorff grew more evasive, Chinda suspected whether Izvolsky's statements exceeded the instructions he had received.<sup>178</sup> However, no further progress was made because Japan requested Russia delay the discussion of its Korean neutralisation proposal. That Russia accepted this demand showed that its support for the neutralisation proposal was just a trial balloon sent up to confirm the possibility of a Russo-Japanese negotiation to maintain stability in Korea with the endgame of protecting Manchuria.

Izvolsky observed that his neutralisation plan failed partly because Russia appeared to be in a hurry; he reported to his superiors that he had prepared more than six months in advance to create an environment conducive for talks with Japanese officials on neutralisation. Nonetheless, he was still blindsided by the sudden deterioration in Japan's public opinion, Japanese officials' decision to cloak their strategy, and the false information they provided during neutralisation negotiations with Russia. Izvolsky acknowledged his missteps and claimed full responsibility for his failure. Concurrently, he was displeased with Itō's double-dealing and faulted Katō's aggressive and hostile attitude. He, however, concluded that, for Japan to provide its guarantee of security in Manchuria to Russia, it should receive in return whatever it might demand, as long as major powers did not disapprove. Though Japan did not name this quid pro quo, the object was Korea.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> *Gaimushō kiroku* 外務省記録 [The Record of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs], MT.1.4.1.30, 1901.1.28, 133-143.

Though Izvolsky's proposal foundered, Witte continued the Russian quest for Korean neutralisation. After the failure of Russia's secret negotiations with China and Japan over Manchuria heightened the crisis in spring 1901, Witte's neutralisation policy reflected his change in direction in regards to bartering Manchuria and Korea. This demonstrated that Russia's position on Manchuria was waning in response to Izvolsky's report that the Japanese government regarded Manchuria and Korea as inseparable.<sup>180</sup> Witte's change of heart stemmed from Komura's suggestion to him about the need for a new agreement based on exchanging Manchuria and Korea in October 1900, which he had earlier rejected since it would damage Korean independence.<sup>181</sup>

The outline of Witte's new Manchurian-Korean policy became evident in June 1901 when he replied to Lamsdorff's query about Russia's preparedness for a potential war with Japan. According to Witte, Russia would abandon its political designs on Manchuria and instead enable a private company to defend Russian interests related to the Chinese Eastern Railway. Even if Japan would move to annex Korea, Russia should only raise its objection internationally and would not consider it a *casus belli* for a Russo-Japanese war. Witte calculated that this way Russia could still secure its real interests, albeit privately, in Manchuria, withdraw Russian troops there, and internationally appeal to public opinion about the issue of Korean neutralisation. To facilitate these moves, Russian troops were to evacuate in three phases, but before the first evacuation from the Manchurian territory west of the Liao River, he hoped to obtain China's promise on the railroad concession stretching from the Great Wall to Beijing and the non-cession of Manchuria. Such a measure could prevent a major power's intrusion into Manchuria after Russian evacuation and ease a Russian advance into Beijing after the completion of the Chinese Eastern Railway.<sup>182</sup>

To achieve these purposes and prevent the progress of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance,<sup>183</sup> Witte suggested to Chinda that Korea should remain a neutral area (25.7.1901), but that Japan could put in place its own administrative and financial advisers there and take charge of policing the peninsula, in return accepting the Russian supremacy in Manchuria. Hayashi Tadasu informed German Chargé d'affaires to Britain Hermann von Eckardstein that the Japanese government rejected Witte's

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<sup>179</sup> Pak Hyojong, ed., 657.

<sup>180</sup> Seok Hwajeong, 172-173.

<sup>181</sup> Kim Jeongmyeong, ed., *Nikkan gaikō shiryō shūsei* 8, (Tokyo: Gannado, 1966), 406-407.

<sup>182</sup> Seok Hwajeong, 173.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

proposal because it was not made in good faith and believed that Korea could not govern itself.<sup>184</sup> Besides, considering that the Japanese, once the Katsura Tarō cabinet was established (2.6.1901), had been moving swiftly to sign an alliance treaty with Britain<sup>185</sup> and that Li Hongzhang had approached A. M. Pozdnev, the Russo-Chinese Bank representative in Beijing, to come to terms with Russia on Manchuria,<sup>186</sup> Witte's neutralisation proposal for Korea seemed to be heading towards an abyss.

Nevertheless, Witte again suggested Korean neutralisation to Itō, who visited St. Petersburg in order to persuade Russia to acknowledge that Japan should hold dominion over Korea.<sup>187</sup> In his meeting with Lamsdorff (2.12.1901), Itō pointed out that the Japanese people felt that Russia was trying to occupy Korea, which would endanger Japanese independence. To avoid such a scenario, Japan desired to eliminate another power's influence over Korea, wanted to aid and advise the Korean government, and hoped to assist it militarily if Korea faced internal disorder or war with another country. Citing the Lobanov-Yamagata Protocol that accorded Russia the right to send an equal number of soldiers to Korea, Lamsdorff refused Japan's absolute right to intervene militarily since this could alter the situation on the Korean peninsula. For his part, Itō stated that Russia should not have to worry about Japanese resistance in China and that if Russia yielded Korea to Japan, Russia's freedom of manoeuvre in Manchuria and its railroad construction right there would be respected.<sup>188</sup>

The next day Itō told Witte that if Russia accepted universal Japanese influence over Korea, Japan would consent to a Russian occupation of the Kwantung area and the construction of the South Manchuria Railway towards Port Arthur. Itō stated, however, that Russian troops, except for railroad guards, had to be withdrawn from Manchuria and that the Open Door Policy there had to be observed. In response, both Witte and Lamsdorff recognised Japanese superiority in Korea as long as it did not use Korean territory strategically. Itō then submitted his draft agreement (mutual

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<sup>184</sup> *Die Grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette, 1871-1914, Band 16*, No.531, Eckardstein to the German Foreign Office, 1901.7.26, 337.

<sup>185</sup> Kim Jongheon, "1900 nyeon ihu Reo·Ilgan ui Hanbando jungniphwa mit bunhwal nonui: Seoul jujae Reosia gongsa Ppabeulropeu ui yeokhwar eul jungsim euro [Discussions on Neutralisation of the Korean Peninsula and Its Partition Between Russia and Japan After 1900: Focusing on the Role of Russian Minister in Seoul Pavloff]", *Hanguk Dongbuga nonchong* 53 (2009): 36.

<sup>186</sup> Malozemoff, 169.

<sup>187</sup> Seok Hwajeong, 174-175.

guarantee of Korean independence, mutual guarantee of the non-use of Korean territory for strategic purposes, mutual guarantee that no military installation that could threaten the free passage of the Korea Strait would be established on the Korean coast, Russian recognition of Japan's free hand in political and commercial manoeuvre in Korea and Japanese control of advising and assisting Korea) to Russia and left for Berlin, telling Lamsdorff that he would wait for Russia's response.<sup>189</sup>

Lamsdorff asked Finance, Army, and Navy ministers' opinions for amendments and riders to Itō's draft. Army Minister Alexei Kuropatkin was the first to offer an amendment (10.12.1901). In his counteroffer, Kuropatkin argued that while it would be difficult for Japan to find a reason to start a war with Russia once it had withdrawn from Manchuria, there would be a price to pay if Russia were to completely yield Korea to Japan. He also added that because a rupture in relations would be made more likely if Japanese forces were stationed in Korea, Russia had to block their permanent presence there through whatever means and ensure that the northern part of Korea remained free from Japanese forces. Furthermore, Kuropatkin insisted that Japan should only dispatch a limited number of troops to Korea, would have to withdraw them immediately once the situation they responded to was eliminated, and must not intrude upon the boundary line already agreed upon along the Russo-Korean border. Most importantly, article five of his amendments contained a neutral area within the Korean peninsula.<sup>190</sup> Among the above conditions, two points (no complete abandonment of Korea by Russia and neutralisation of the northern part of Korea) coincided with the informal line taken by Bezobrazov, who supported Russia's active advancement into Korea.<sup>191</sup>

Witte believed a war with Japan over Korea was not desirable until pending issues such as the completion of the Chinese Eastern Railway, the settlement of Russian subjects in the Far East, and the consolidation of Port Arthur were resolved. Russia's revised proposal in which Witte made allowances for these issues and changed the "mutual responsibilities" mentioned in Itō's draft agreements to "Japan's responsibilities" was soon delivered to Itō (17.12.1901). Russia drew up its

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<sup>188</sup> Kim Jongheon, "1900 nyeon ihu Reo·Ilgan ui Hanbando jungniphwa mit bunhwal nonui", 37.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid. 37-38.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>191</sup> Sergei Witte, *The Memoirs of Count Witte*, trans. and ed. Sydney Harcave (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1990), 303.

<sup>192</sup> Kim Jongheon, "1900 nyeon ihu Reo·Ilgan ui Hanbando jungniphwa mit bunhwal nonui", 38-39.

proposal to limit Japan's activities within Korea.<sup>192</sup> Therefore, Witte's amendments, which included Kuropatkin's counter-offer, were no strategic use of the Korean peninsula by Japan, Japan's guarantee of Russia's free passage along the Korea Strait, the exclusion of Japan's political rights within Korea, and neutralisation of the area in the Russo-Korean border. Itō, however, rejected Russia's revised proposal, stating that Japan opposed any prior consultation with Russia in case of the dispatch of its troops or its advice on Korean issues, opposed creation of a neutral area where Korea and Russia shared a common border, opposed any restrictions on Japan's free hand over Korea, and opposed universal acknowledgement of Russian control over Manchuria. This situation reflected the strong stance of a Japanese government that was expecting the imminent conclusion of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Therefore, Witte's suggestions failed.<sup>193</sup>

Meanwhile, during the Russo-Japanese negotiations over Korea and Manchuria, Gojong continued his neutrality diplomacy to shore up Korea's fragile independence. In mid-January 1901, Gojong instructed Jo's successor Seong Giun to approach the U.S., French, and Russian ministers in Japan to revive the neutralisation process, though it is unclear whether the order was carried out.<sup>194</sup> After Seong's return to Korea, the post of Korean minister to Japan was vacant. Gojong later named ex-Foreign Minister Pak Jesun the new Korean minister and asked him to propose Korean neutralisation to Japan under a joint guarantee of major powers or a multilateral military alliance in November 1901. As a former high-ranking member of the Korean government, Pak carried symbolic weight in Japan. Yet his efforts to win Japanese support for neutralisation, like those of Jo before him, failed to yield any results.<sup>195</sup> Gojong's short-sighted decision to rely on the pro-Japanese Pak for advancing neutralisation was costly,<sup>196</sup> as it played into the hands of Japan which looked unkindly on neutralisation under a hard-line Katsura cabinet that considered Japanese control of Korea a non-negotiable issue. Instead, Japan strengthened its position by taking advantage of British and American concerns about Russian encroachment in Manchuria.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Seok Hwajeong, 177.

<sup>194</sup> *ChuKan Nihon koshikan kiroku* 16, Confidential No.9, 1901.1.18, <http://db.history.go.kr/>.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, Confidential No.119, 1901.11.1, <http://db.history.go.kr/>.

<sup>196</sup> That Gojong counted on Pak to obtain a possible Japanese loan (*Ibid.*, Confidential No.115, 1901.10.29, <http://db.history.go.kr/>) was a rash decision due to his failure to read Japan's hidden intention.

<sup>197</sup> Kim Seungyeong, "Russo-Japanese Rivalry Over Korean Buffer at the Beginning of the 20th Century and its Implications", *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 16(4) (2005): 635.

On the other hand, as the rumour that Japan and Russia would exchange Korea for Manchuria resurfaced in mid-1901, Gojong hoped Belgium would guarantee Korean neutralisation and then suggested it to Russia, Japan, Britain, and France.<sup>198</sup> Gojong had a reason to seek Belgium's assistance for Korean neutrality at that time. After establishing diplomatic relations with Belgium (1901), Gojong tried to become versed in Belgian-style neutrality and join Belgium-based international organisations that might aid Korean neutralisation. Coincidentally, a leading conservative daily newspaper, the *Hwangseong sinmun*, happened to be viewing Belgium positively; Belgium constructed schools and railroads nationally, established political, legal, educational, and military systems based on strong finances, and was proudly self-reliant among major powers.<sup>199</sup> Belgium's experience appealed to Gojong, who sensed that Korea could not achieve a self-armed neutrality like Switzerland, though he wished to overcome Korea's economic and military vulnerabilities. He also expected Belgium's cooperation on Korea's membership in the First Hague Peace Conference (1899), which could provide Korea a chance to obtain good offices from major powers during a conflict. Furthermore, he was well aware that to neutralise, Korea might have to emulate a well-armed Belgium by introducing conscription.<sup>200</sup>

A more pressing reason drove Gojong into considering Belgian-style neutrality: the above-mentioned rumour regarding the exchange of Korea and Manchuria prompted the emperor to discuss its impact on neutralisation with U.S. Minister Allen frequently.<sup>201</sup> Gojong tried to build close relations with the Belgian, French, and German legations in Seoul as well, thinking that Korea could not count on the U.S. alone for neutralisation. This led Gojong to send his personal letter to Belgian king Leopold II in January 1902 to explain his own neutralisation plan and acquire Leopold's consent. Encouraged by the Belgian monarch's assent to Korea adopting a Belgian-style permanent neutrality, Gojong turned to France, Germany, Italy, and the U.S. for their support of Korean neutralisation. Gojong's overture to these powers showed that he was willing to reach out to

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<sup>198</sup> Han Cheolho, "Daehan Jegukgi juIl Hanguk gongsa ui immyeong baegyong gwa gyeongwi (1900-1905)", 83.

<sup>199</sup> *Hwangseong sinmun*, 1900.11.29, <http://www.koreanhistory.or.kr/>.

<sup>200</sup> The supreme command tried to introduce conscription to Korea but failed due to strong opposition. Seo Inhwan, *Daehan Jegug ui gansa jedo* [The Military System of the Korean Empire] (Seoul: Hyeon, 2000), 219.

<sup>201</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 35, Confidential No.60, 395,

<http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>.

major powers other than Japan and Russia, which had direct interests in the peninsula, to pursue Korean neutralisation.<sup>202</sup>

As Gojong's energies were geared towards attracting Western support for Korean neutralisation, he had to correspondingly contend with a seismic shift in the Far East. Although Russia attempted to use Korea as a means to protect its control over Manchuria through negotiations with Japan, it failed. Fearful of Russian ambitions in Korea and Manchuria, Japan opted to sign the First Anglo-Japanese Alliance (30.1.1902) with Britain, which was duly perceived as a marriage between two maritime powers. Rejecting Britain's wish to extend the scope of their alliance to India, Japan successfully steered the alliance to focus on only China and Korea.<sup>203</sup> Article 1 of the Alliance, "a powerful factor in shaping the course of events in the Extreme East", according to *The Japan Times*,<sup>204</sup> stipulated that Japan had a special stake in Korean politics and economy and had the right to intervene in Korea if Japanese interests were threatened.<sup>205</sup> This provision could tip the balance in Japan's favour and damage prospects for Korean neutrality since it created the impression that Japan had acquired a license from Britain to challenge Russian support for Korean independence in the name of securing Japanese interests in Korea. Besides, as French Minister to Korea De Plancy indicated, this alliance bolstered Japan's prestige in Korea, where all officials except those from Gojong's immediate circle ended up toeing the line of the Japanese legation in Seoul.<sup>206</sup>

While some Korean officials thought the Anglo-Japanese Alliance could protect the territorial integrity of Korea and secure the Korean Imperial Household, others insisted that Korea had to approach a third power such as France to protect its security. (In fact, Korea had been doing so.) Nonetheless, as Russia and Japan intervened in Korean affairs heavily, the Korean government had to implement a neutral diplomacy by appointing a new cabinet composed of pro-U.S. faction

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<sup>202</sup> Gojong's alleged proposal collapsed, however, because only Germany responded that it was willing to consider his plan affirmatively. Hyeon Gwangho, "Daehan Jegug ui daeoe jeongchaek", 91.

<sup>203</sup> Hackett, 218.

<sup>204</sup> *The Japan Times*, 1902.2.13.

<sup>205</sup> Kim Soyeong, "Yeongguk gwa Ilbon, du seomnara ui jehyu: jeilcha Yeongll dongmaeng (1902.1.30) [Britain and Japan, the Alliance Between Two Island Countries: the 1st Anglo-Japanese Alliance (1902.1.30)]", in *Joyag euro bon Hanguk geundaesa* [Modern Korean History Through Treaties], Choe Deoksu et al. (Paju: Yeolin chaekdeul, 2010), 458.

<sup>206</sup> *Correspondance Politique et Commerciale/Nouvelle Série 1897-1910 Corée: Politique extérieure Étrangers en Corée III, 1902-1904* [Political and Commercial Correspondence/New Series 1897-1910 Korea: External Politics and Foreigners in Korea III, 1902-1904], De Plancy to Delcassé, 1902.4.30, 18.

members like Yi Yunyong, Pak Jeongyang, and Yi Wanyong,<sup>207</sup> who could maintain Korea's equidistance between Japan and Russia. Furthermore, the poor status of the *Oebu* 外部 (Ministry of the Foreign Affairs)<sup>208</sup> had Gojong dispatch special envoys to Europe and the U.S., instead of communicating through Japanese and Western legations in Seoul, to suggest neutralisation proposals directly.<sup>209</sup>

To this end, Sands was to be included in the delegation the Korean government dispatched to London for the coronation (9.8.1902) of the British monarch Edward VII. Before his departure, Sands, with Gojong's permission, sent telegrams to Korean ministers in Europe, advising them of the steps they must undertake to support his neutralisation efforts in England.<sup>210</sup> Unfortunately, Jordan, having already detected Sands' scheme, opposed Sands' visit to Britain, and his proposed diplomatic mission was aborted. Rubbing salt in this wound to Korea's major power diplomacy, the Japanese government released deliberately distorted contents of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance agreement,<sup>211</sup> inducing Gojong to believe that the Korean issue had been treated as a central subject in it and thus leading him to wrongly conclude that Korean neutrality was realised.<sup>212</sup> This brought the reform programmes that Sands had pursued to a stop while Korean government officials lost interest in neutralisation as they became preoccupied with court issues: The elevation of the status of Imperial Concubine Eom and the protection of Crown Prince Yi Cheok.<sup>213</sup>

Despite these adverse circumstances, Sands dabbled with his second neutralisation proposal in early 1902, meeting with Itō, who was visiting Korea regarding a military alliance between Korea

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<sup>207</sup> *ChuKan Nihon koshikan kiroku* 18, Confidential No.36, 1902.2.25, <http://db.history.go.kr/>.

<sup>208</sup> Consistently miniscule budgets, which made up only 2.1% of total government expenditures during 1894 to 1901, severely paralysed the operation of the *Oebu* (Yi Yunsang, "1894-1910 nyeon Jaejeong jedo wa unyeong ui byeonhwa [The Financial System and the Change of Management During 1894-1910]" (PhD diss., Seoul National University, 1996), 339). Gojong's over-reliance on his aides to win major powers' support for Korean independence marginalised foreign ministers from important decision-making, thus making them resemble a revolving door; Pak Jesun, for instance, became the 11th Foreign Minister of Korea (1898.1). Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe, ed., *Peurangseu oemubu munseo 8, Daehan Jeguk I · 1897-1898* (Gwacheon: Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe, 2009), 218.

<sup>209</sup> Japan's monitoring of Korea's postal system was another reason for the Korean government to dispatch envoys as any message related to neutralisation would be leaked to Japan. For example, Sands' letter to his mother reflected a dilemma that Korea was facing at that time: "I do not trust anyone, where my letters are concerned. The Japanese authorities may or may not read my letters." *Sands Papers*, Box 3, Folder 9, Doc.66, 1900.10.1.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, Box 3, Folder 2, Doc.1, 1904.1.2, Doc.3, Sands to Hulbert, 1904.1.12.

<sup>211</sup> *Korea Review* 2, 1902.6, 267.

<sup>212</sup> Burnett, ed., Allen to Secretary of State, No.470, 1902.5.31, 171-172.

<sup>213</sup> Kim Hyeonsuk, "Hanguk geundae seoyangin gomungwan yeongu (1882~1904)", 180.

and Japan, but receiving no definitive answer from him.<sup>214</sup> Sands' involvement in neutralisation diminished as the pro-U.S. faction's influence declined<sup>215</sup> and finally ended when Gojong appointed the Belgian adviser Adhémar Delcoigne to handle neutralisation policy in July 1903.<sup>216</sup> Most importantly, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance posed a major obstruction to any neutralisation proposal. In fact, given Britain's commitment to its alliance with Japan, under which Britain agreed to Japanese predominance on the Korean peninsula, it was highly unlikely that Britain would endorse Korean neutrality.

The Anglo-Japanese Alliance also spurred France on to review its Far Eastern policy, and it in turn proclaimed the Franco-Russian Declaration (16.3.1902) with Russia. The Russian Foreign Ministry calculated that this diplomatic counteraction could help preserve stability and peace in the Far East and potentially receive the support of major powers like Germany and the U.S.<sup>217</sup> French Foreign Minister Delcassé was equally enthusiastic, asserting that the U.S. had to be included as a joint participant.<sup>218</sup> For Korea's neutralisation advocates, this declaration could have provided the opportunity they were waiting for. Gojong thus hoped that the advent of the First Anglo-Japanese Alliance and the Franco-Russian Declaration would enable Korea to accelerate the process of neutrality diplomacy.<sup>219</sup>

Meanwhile, after the failure of indirect negotiations through the dispatch of a special envoy to Japan, Gojong tried to implement Korean neutrality diplomacy directly with European major powers, utilising France as a mediator, which dovetailed with France's revitalisation in the Far East. France had been adopting a friendly and energetic policy toward Korea since acquiring the Gyeongui railroad concession in July 1896. French Minister De Plancy's positive approach since 1897 to Gojong, who thus recognised France as Korea's protector from a neutral point of view, led to Gojong's dispatch of Min Yeongwhan to France for concluding a secret agreement as a hedge against the rumour of a Korean partition (3.8.1897). After the Rosen-Nishi Protocol, France's

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<sup>214</sup> Sands, "Undiplomatic Memories", 226-228.

<sup>215</sup> Sands' failure to broker a U.S. loan for Korea was a decisive factor. Kim Hyeonsuk, "Hanguk geundae seoyangin gomungwan yeongu (1882~1904)", 181.

<sup>216</sup> *Sands Papers*, Box 3, Folder 2, Doc.3, Sands to Hulbert, 1904.1.12.

<sup>217</sup> Pak Jonghyo, ed., 274.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

<sup>219</sup> Allen, Vol. 7-2, 1902.10.9, 486.

Korean policy was more actively developed to seizing the opportunity provided by Japan and Russia promising not to intervene in Korean domestic affairs.<sup>220</sup>

For these reasons, interactions between France and Korea picked up after 1900. The Korean government hired legal adviser Laurent Crémazy<sup>221</sup> to consult with Gojong on the issue of international law for neutralising Korea in May 1900 and concluded a ¥5 million Unnam syndicate French loan with Auguste Cazalis to reduce Korea's financial dependence on Japan's Dai-Ichi Bank and neutralise fears of Japanese intrusion on Korean diplomatic sovereignty (19.4.1901).<sup>222</sup> French Foreign Minister Delcassé elevated De Plancy<sup>223</sup> to Minister Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary from Chargé d'affaires and dispatched French Minister to China M. S. Pichon to Korea to advise Gojong on foreign affairs in May 1901.<sup>224</sup>

Separately, at the urging of De Plancy and his lieutenant, Commissaire Lefèvre,<sup>225</sup> the Korean government appointed several French advisers to key posts and granted concessions to France in September 1900. For example, two French technicians (J. de Lapeyrière and E. Bourdaret) were named to serve in the Northwestern Railroad Department under the earlier 1896 Gyeongui railroad concession agreement with the French company Fives-Lille, which stipulated that technical manpower and construction materials would be imported from France,<sup>226</sup> two French officers (G. Payeur and L. Louis) were appointed advisers to the Korean military,<sup>227</sup> and Gojong gave the

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<sup>220</sup> Hyeon Gwangho, "Daehan Jegug ui daeoe jeongchaek", 85-86.

<sup>221</sup> Crémazy had also submitted a report specifying the international legal aspects of Korean neutralisation and France's neutralisation policy to justice and interior ministers after the Boxer Uprising broke out. Hong Sunho, "Daehan Jeguk beopryul gomun L. Cremazy ui immyeong gwajeong bunseok—Peurangseu oemuseong migan oeyo munseo e uihayeo [The analysis of the appointment process of the legal adviser L. Cremazy: Based on the unpublished documents of the French Foreign Ministry]", *Hanguk munhwa yeonguwon nonchong* 36 (September 1980): 345.

<sup>222</sup> Unfortunately for Gojong, the advent of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance increased Japanese influence over Korea, and this forced him to terminate a French loan agreement and instead order government officials Sim Sanghun, Yu Gihwan, Pak Jesun, and Yi Jiyong to negotiate with Japan for a loan. Hyeon Gwangho, "Daehan Jeguk gwa Reosia geurigo Ilbon", 174.

<sup>223</sup> De Plancy recommended to Gojong that Korea dispatch a minister plenipotentiary to Europe in order to protect it from the Boxer Uprising. *Tokyo asahi shimbun*, 1901.3.4.

<sup>224</sup> Hyeon Gwangho, "Daehan Jegug ui daeoe jeongchaek", 86.

<sup>225</sup> Lefèvre himself became the director of the Northwestern Railroad Department (1900.9.3). *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>226</sup> The growing French involvement in Korea was also confirmed by Allen: "French interests seem to be advancing in Korea, with the fostering care of Russia." Burnett, ed., Allen to Secretary of State, No.355, 1901.5.30, 268.

<sup>227</sup> Hong Sunho, "Daehan Jeguk sidae ui Han·Bul gwangye [The Korea-French Relations in the Korean Empire Era]", in *Daehan Jeguksa yeongu* [A Study on the History of the Korean Empire], ed. Ihwa yeodae Hanguk munhwa yeonguwon (Seoul: Byeoksan jaryowon, 1999), 109.

French trader Pierre Marie Saltarel the rights to the Changseong gold mine (10.8.1901).<sup>228</sup> In addition, French language teacher Martel investigated the status of the Boxers in Tianjin at the request of the Korean government and was actively involved in Korean neutralisation policy.<sup>229</sup>

Even after the above developments, Japan still remained a formidable player in Korea, and France, a close Russian ally, was compelled to intervene. France thus participated in the Franco-Russian Declaration after the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Though British Ambassador to France Sir Edmund Monson reported that Delcassé took no real offence to the alliance, Monson may have misread Delcassé, who issued a veiled criticism of it when he asserted that like other great powers, Britain and Japan were obliged not to interfere with the status quo in the Far East.<sup>230</sup> Concern for stability in the Far East and its long-standing rivalry with Germany in continental Europe might explain why France sided with Russia while Germany and the U.S. responded favourably to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Despite its continued support for Russia, France earnestly wished that a Russo-Japanese war would be avoided. If Russia lost, France feared that it could be placed in a disadvantageous position in any confrontation with Germany in Europe and that French Indochina could be threatened by Japan.<sup>231</sup>

To avoid such a scenario, it was imperative for France to convince Russia to peacefully compromise with Japan over Far Eastern issues so that it could turn its attention to Europe. Consequently, during his visit to Russia in May 1902, French President Émile François Loubet tried to persuade the Russian emperor to agree to a settlement with Japan over Korea.<sup>232</sup> If Korea were neutralised successfully by major powers' guarantee, including Japan and Russia, the situation in the Far East would be stabilised, which would be beneficial to French interests in Indochina and Europe.

Around that time, France's Korean policy was geared towards supporting Korea's neutrality diplomacy directly and indirectly, domestically and internationally, protecting its interests there and in French Indochina and Europe from Japan and Germany by maintaining the balance of power in

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>229</sup> *Hwangseong sinmun*, 1900.6.23, 1902.9.30, <http://www.kinds.or.kr/>.

<sup>230</sup> *Foreign Office and Predecessor: Political and Other Departments: General Correspondence Before 1906, France: FO 27/3577*, No.98, Monson to Lansdowne, 1902.3.21.

<sup>231</sup> Seo Yeonghui, "ReoIl jeonjaenggi Daehan Jeguk jipgwon seryeog ui siguk daeung", 187.

<sup>232</sup> Loubet was said to have asked his Russian ally to consider either Korean neutralisation or handing Korea over to Japan in exchange for the Russian occupation of a Korean port. Ibid.

the Far East. For these reasons, despite its alliance with Russia, France had to maintain a relatively prudent stance in Korea, preferring to concentrate on obtaining concessions there. Thus, rather than promising to side with Russia in the event of war, France tried to convince Russia that the peaceful settlement of the Korean issue could help secure stability in the Far East. Therefore, France's Korean policy corresponded to both French and Korean desires; the maintenance of the status quo in Korea would protect not just French interests in Indochina and Europe but would also contribute to the preservation of Korean independence by ensuring that the Korean peninsula remained free from conflict.

Besides the proposals by Izvolsky and Witte, there was a joint proposal from three Russian diplomats which could be traced back to September 1901 when Komura took office as Japan's Foreign Minister. According to his analysis of the regional situation based on "An Opinion of Ten-Year Plan on Domestic and Foreign Affairs", it was high time that East Asia became an arena for imperial competition between major powers and that their intensified political and economic activities could be expected to disturb the regional peace.<sup>233</sup> As part of his hard-line policy, Komura suggested Japan use its control of the main railroads in Korea as a means to expand its sphere of influence. To claim its right of military dispatch to guard these railroads in emergency and to eventually achieve comprehensive control in the East, Japan needed to accelerate its military build-up. The Japanese acquisition of the Gyeongui Railway concession, if successful, could then pose a serious threat to Russia since the railway travelled through the north of Korea and ended at Manchuria—areas Russia considered its sphere of influence.<sup>234</sup>

Japan also contemplated extending a loan to Korea<sup>235</sup> to assist the country in constructing railroads on its own. Through such assistance, Japan could finally seize control of the Korean economy by asking for the concessions of the Gyeongui Railway and maritime customs revenue in return.<sup>236</sup> To acquire the Gyeongui Railway concession, Japan would try to link it to the consummations of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and the secret offensive and defensive alliance with Korea. Because if they were concluded, the former could secure British power to back Japan's play

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<sup>233</sup> *Komura gaikōshi*, 213. For more details about "An Opinion of Ten-Year Plan on Domestic and Foreign Affairs" see *Ibid.*, 206-215.

<sup>234</sup> Pak Huiho, 151-152.

<sup>235</sup> Eventually, Korea ended up borrowing ¥720,000 from Japan in short-term loans between 1902 and early 1905. Duus, 166.

<sup>236</sup> Moriyama, 102-103.

in Korea and the latter could mollify Korea's opposition and justify the dispatch of Japanese forces into Korea in case of emergency.<sup>237</sup>

With the successful conclusion of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, Komura's hard-line Korean policy gained strength, which led to the pro-Japan faction in the Korean establishment superseding the waning pro-Russia faction. In addition, Yi Yongik, though not a member of the pro-Russia faction, had been sidelined by Korean cabinet ministers due to his inability to implement the Unnam syndicate loan deal with France in April 1901.<sup>238</sup> After the conservative faction member Han Gyuseol formed a new cabinet (15.2.1902),<sup>239</sup> Minister of Finance Sim Sanghoon, with the blessing of Gojong and backed by pro-Japan faction members Yi Jiyong and Pak Jesun, quickly requested a Japanese loan through Hayashi.<sup>240</sup> In favour of the said loan, Komura submitted "a new demand about business expenses in Korea and China" to the Japanese cabinet council (29.9.1902).<sup>241</sup> It passed, and he was able to reinforce Japan's imperialistic policy.

As Komura's Korean policy acquired strength, Russia was at risk of losing its influence over Korea. Furthermore, the plausible acceleration of the open door in Manchuria with the signing of the Russo-Chinese Convention on the evacuation of Manchuria (8.4.1902) and possible American alignment with the Anglo-Japanese Alliance camp would make it difficult for Russia to maintain its influence in Manchuria.<sup>242</sup> To enable Russia to escape these dangers, Pavloff consulted with Izvolsky and Russian Ambassador to the U.S. Arthur P. N. Cassini (1836-1913) to mull over the neutralisation of Korea in September 1902.<sup>243</sup> Pavloff devised a scheme after his regular audiences with Gojong, and Pavloff and Izvolsky agreed in Tokyo that the only solution for the Korean

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<sup>237</sup> Pak Huiho, 152-154.

<sup>238</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 34, No.417, 548-552, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>239</sup> *Gojong sillok*, 1902.2.15, <http://sillok.history.go.kr>.

<sup>240</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 35, No.240, 456-465, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, No.268, 499-500, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>242</sup> Seok Hwajeong, 178. Before conclusion of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and around the time of the first withdrawal of Russian troops from Manchuria, *Novoye Vremya* spoke for the Russian government's consciousness of crisis in its articles, such as the necessity of a Russian alliance with the U.S. to counter the coalition of Britain and Japan (*Tokyo asahi shimbun*, 1900.9.20), the need for Russia's active advancement into Korea (*Ibid.*, 1902.8.1), Russia's suggestion of a friendship and negotiations with Japan to avoid a war (*Ibid.*, 1902.8.1, 8.29), and its severe criticism of the Anglo-American-Japanese growing influence on Korea's politics, military, and diplomacy (*Ibid.*, 1902.8.31). Hayashi mentioned that the U.S. was a powerful Japanese ally, like the Anglo-Japanese Alliance camp. Harrington, 316.

<sup>243</sup> Even before it was considered by Pavloff, Izvolsky seemed ready to embrace Korean neutralisation in his report to the Russian Foreign Office that the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was aimed at securing superior positions not just in China (1902.8.2), but in Korea and Thailand as well. Thus, Izvolsky proposed Korean neutralisation to protect the Russian concessions secured in Korea. Pak Hyojong, ed., 735.

problem was its neutralisation under the joint guarantee of Russia, Japan, and the U.S (31.7.1902). In early September, Pavloff headed to Paris to discuss Korean neutralisation with Cassini,<sup>244</sup> and the three Russian diplomats agreed that to execute their plan, it was necessary for the Russian government to first approach the U.S. government.<sup>245</sup>

By inviting American intervention, this plan differed from Izvolsky's. Whereas Izvolsky's called for neutralisation under the joint guarantee of major powers, this proposal would include only Russia, Japan, and the U.S. as potential guarantors.<sup>246</sup> Pavloff and his Russian colleagues might have sought to involve the U.S. because its economic interests in Korea were the second largest after Japan's, as well as the appreciable presence of the pro-U.S. faction there. In addition, the purported inclination of the U.S. to favourably recognise Russia's special interests in Manchuria might have convinced them that the U.S. would accept Russia's Korean policy as well.<sup>247</sup> This was because Cassini reported to his government that Hay had told him that as long as freedom of U.S. commerce and enterprises were guaranteed in Manchuria, the U.S. government would not interrupt Russian activities there.<sup>248</sup>

Once Buck tipped Komura off about the Russian diplomats' scheme for Korean neutralisation, the Japanese government responded immediately. With reference to the said scheme, Komura wired Japanese Minister to Russia Kurino Shin'ichiro to inform him of its current progress (19.9.1902). In his telegraph, Komura asked Buck to relay his hopes to the U.S. government that if it was approached by Russia about Korean neutralisation, it would consult with the Japanese government before taking any steps regarding the issue. In the same telegraph, he also declared that Japan would not accept any move to change its current position in Korea and that the Russian diplomats' plan could threaten Japan's superior position in Korea and hinder Japan from countering

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<sup>244</sup> After his meeting with Cassini, Pavloff, on his way back to Russia for a holiday, conversed with Izvolsky again to discuss neutralisation of Korea. *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 35, No.182, 393-394, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., No.190, 191, 399-402, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., No.182, 393-394, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>; *Foreign Office: China and Taiwan Confidential Print*: FO 405/33, No.129, Scott to Lansdowne, 1902.12.25, 29; *Dispatches from U.S. Ministers to Korea*, No.134, Roll No.19, Allen to Hay, 1902.11.6.

<sup>247</sup> Moriyama, 138.

<sup>248</sup> Edward H. Zabriskie, *American-Russian Rivalry in the Far East: A Study in Diplomacy and Power Politics, 1895~1914* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1973), 85.

Russia's activities in Manchuria.<sup>249</sup> The next day, he instructed Kurino to forward the contents of his message to other foreign ministers in France and the U.S., and ordered Japanese Minister to the U.S. Takahira Kogorō to keep an eye on Cassini and monitor the U.S. attitude towards the Russian proposition if it received the offer.<sup>250</sup>

Komura also divulged the Russian diplomats' neutralisation plan to Hayashi (22.9.1902) and expressed his concern about Weber's upcoming visit to Korea. Even though Lamsdorff assured Kurino that Weber's visit had nothing to do with Korean neutralisation,<sup>251</sup> Komura dreaded the possibility of having the neutralisation debate reinvigorated. To avoid this, Katō exploited the three Russian diplomats' plan in the Russo-Japanese negotiations to Japan's advantage, anticipating Russia's approval of the secret offensive and defensive alliance between Japan and Korea.<sup>252</sup>

Aware of the Japanese government's anxiety over Korean neutralisation, Takahira queried Hay about the U.S. government's stance towards it and was told by him that the U.S. had not received any request from Russia to consider Korean neutralisation (6.10.1902). In order to head off any chances of the U.S. and Russia discussing the issue, Takahira met with Hay three times to disrupt Russia's designs (9.10, 15.10, and 20.11.1902). From his meetings with Hay, Takahira learned that the U.S. had neither considered participating in the joint guarantee of Korea nor received a Korean neutrality proposal from either Cassini or Pavloff. Even if such a proposal were suggested, Takahira trusted that the U.S. government would reject it.<sup>253</sup> Finally, Takahira once again spoke to Hay about the Russian neutralisation proposal and came away convinced that the proposal had not been suggested to the U.S (2.9.1903).<sup>254</sup>

Meanwhile, in Korea, in his report to Komura in October 1902, Hayashi speculated about a possible neutralisation discourse between Korea and Russia coinciding with Weber's visit to Korea as Russia's special envoy to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of Gojong's accession to the throne. Unaware of Lamsdorff's instruction (i.e. no discussion of neutralisation during Weber's

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<sup>249</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 35, No.182, 393, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, No.183, 394-395, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>251</sup> There was a kernel of truth in Lamsdorff's assertion because the Russian Foreign Ministry instructed Waeber (1902.9.25) to refrain from discussing Korean neutralisation either during his audience with Gojong or conversations with Korean ministers, feeling the time was not ripe to discuss this issue. Pak Jonghyo, ed., 29.

<sup>252</sup> Pak Huiho, 158.

<sup>253</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 35, Confidential No.39, 399-404,

<http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>254</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 36(1), No.394, 448, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>.

visit), Hayashi conjectured that Weber might team up with some pro-Russian faction members<sup>255</sup> who wanted to recover their influence within the Korean government to raise the issue, but his suspicions were unfounded.

At that time, Hayashi was asked by Allen whether he had received any information about the three Russian diplomats' neutralisation proposal from Japan and, if he had, for his opinion on it. Hayashi acknowledged he knew of it, but said that Japan did not support it because the Russian government's intent (i.e. Witte's Korean neutralisation scheme in October 1900) was to secure its freedom of manoeuvre in Manchuria. On another occasion, he told Allen that since the Russian diplomats' proposal violated the open door policy that the U.S. and Japan unanimously insisted on in Manchuria and northern China and that the Russian proposal was in effect an end run around that policy, Japan would not accept it. He added that if the U.S. government agreed, it should approve of Japan's decision. Allen agreed with Hayashi's analysis.<sup>256</sup>

All things taken together, it seemed that the U.S. government never received any formal suggestion from the Russian government. Nonetheless, it can be argued that the three Russian diplomats, sensing a serious crisis due to Komura's new Korean policy and the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, formulated a joint proposal with the benefaction of the Russian government.<sup>257</sup> As for Russia, the proposal was a passive response to Japan's bolstering its position in the Far East under the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.<sup>258</sup> Yet, Japan tried to utilise it to conclude an offensive and defensive alliance with Korea as part of its preparations for the Russo-Japanese negotiation. But Japan's intention was not realised; Nicholas II's trip to Crimea and Witte's inspection of Manchuria from August to October 1902 made any preliminary talks between Japan and Russia impossible.<sup>259</sup> After his return, Witte ended up recommending non-confrontation with Japan over Korea (9.11.1902),<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> Hayashi conjectured that some members of the pro-Russia faction in Korea were intent on using Waeber's visit to Seoul to realise Korean neutrality. *Gaimushō kiroku*, MT.1.4.1.30, 1902.10.22, 198-204.

<sup>256</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 35, No.190, 194-196; 198-199; 202-203,  
<http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>257</sup> Since Izvolsky's Korean neutralisation proposal (1901.1.7) proceeded under imperial order (1900.12.30), this joint proposal also could be regarded as the consistent policy of the Russian government. Seok Hwajeong, 168, 181.

<sup>258</sup> Pak Huiho, 163.

<sup>259</sup> Malozemoff, 198-200.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, 200-201.

and on the same day the Korean issues never came up at a Yalta conference of four Russian ministers.<sup>261</sup>

On the contrary, assuming that the Russian government had formally proposed Korean neutralisation to both the U.S. and Japan, the result may well have been negative. Since “Japan’s special interests in Korea” had been already confirmed by the First Anglo-Japanese Alliance,<sup>262</sup> it moved to dominate Korea completely and, holding the upper hand in its negotiations with Russia, would have rejected Russia’s neutralisation proposal. Considering that Japanese Minister Kurino suggested the guarantee of Russia’s railroad concession in Manchuria and wanted to confirm Japan’s free hand in Korea in return (4.8.1902),<sup>263</sup> Japan had no reason to accept the proposal. As the U.S. wanted to maintain its open door policy in Manchuria and northern China and had vigorously protested Russia’s delay in evacuating its troops from the area,<sup>264</sup> it might also be opposed the proposal, as Allen conceded to Hayashi that Korea should not be a neutral area.<sup>265</sup> Besides, due to its traditional stance to maintain neutrality (i.e. the Monroe Doctrine), it was highly likely that the U.S. would have responded to the proposal unfavourably.<sup>266</sup> Distressingly, Korea was completely sidelined from the discussion process regarding this proposal since it originated from Russia’s desire to cement its position in Manchuria while protecting its flank (Korea) from Japan.

Emboldened by its close collaboration with Britain through the First Anglo-Japanese Alliance, Japan persistently opposed a rapprochement between Russia and the U.S. The U.S., as a third-party guarantor, neither stood with Russia nor agreed to a treaty to guarantee Korean neutrality, in line with its stated principles. As France swung its support to Russia, the Far Eastern geopolitical situation seemed balanced between continental (Russia, France) and maritime (Japan, Britain) powers, but Japan had actually gained an upper hand in Korea. As Allen observed, “Japan and England, since the recent alliance was announced, are in a much better position in Korea.”<sup>267</sup> Though the Franco-Russian Declaration was highly appropriate to counter the Anglo-Japanese

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<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 201-202.

<sup>262</sup> Gooch and Temperley, ed., II, No.110, 115, 125, 114-120.

<sup>263</sup> Seok Hwajeong, 181.

<sup>264</sup> Witte had to agree to sign the Russo-Chinese Convention on the evacuation of Manchuria in the face of the U.S.’s stern protest (1902.2.3), fearing that otherwise the U.S. would join with Britain and Japan in forming an alliance. Ibid., 179.

<sup>265</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 35, No.196, 410, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., Confidential No.39, 399-403, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>.

Alliance,<sup>268</sup> Loubet's suggestion to Nicholas II demonstrated that Korea could be used as a mere bargaining chip in Russia's negotiations with Japan in the name of preserving stability in the Far East. In other words, the degree of solidarity differed significantly between the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and the Franco-Russian Declaration; whereas the former was a strong alliance secured by British military assistance, the latter was, lacking French military backing, little more than words on paper.<sup>269</sup> Finally, the contemporary unbalance of power between Japan and Russia in Korea spoiled this proposal. Still, had the proposal succeeded, the result could have reduced the Russo-Japanese tension in the Far East and strengthened Korea's geopolitical standing.

Considering that the three Russian diplomats' proposal was designed from their desire to keep the U.S. from joining the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, that Japan persistently headed off the rapprochement between Russia and the U.S. in regard to the joint proposal, and that Witte's Manchuria inspection report (9.11.1902) included Korean neutralisation policy, the joint proposal could also be treated as an extension of Witte's prior neutralisation policy.<sup>270</sup> At a special conference for Russia's Far Eastern policy (7.2.1903), Witte again suggested "neutralisation of Korea",<sup>271</sup> but Kuropatkin and Admiral Tyrtov opposed it because Japan had already agreed not to use any Korean territory militarily or strategically and because Russia could not use Masanpo as a temporary naval station.<sup>272</sup> After Russian troops began their withdrawal from Manchuria, Russia's Korean policy gradually moved from Witte's neutralisation policy, which alluded to abandoning Korea temporarily to avoid a war with Japan, to Kuropatkin's policy insisting on never giving up Korea and Bezobrazov's policy advocating aggressively advancing into the Yalu River basin.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> Burnett, ed., Allen to Secretary of State, Confidential No.534, 1902.11.21, 177.

<sup>268</sup> Pak Jonghyo, ed., 274.

<sup>269</sup> Seong Hwangyong, 322-332.

<sup>270</sup> Seok Hwajeong, 179-180.

<sup>271</sup> Basically, Witte suggested guarantee of Korean independence, mutual non-use of Korean territory for military or strategic purposes, and guarantee of free passage in the Korea Strait. Yi Hangjun, 366.

<sup>272</sup> Malozemoff, 203.

<sup>273</sup> Seok Hwajeong, 180.

## **Chapter VII. Neutralisation Attempts in the Second Half of the Korean Empire Era (1903-1907)**

The fierce competition between Japan and Russia over Korea and Manchuria led to the Russo-Japanese War, in which Japanese victory broke the balance of power on the Korean peninsula, thus driving Korea into becoming Japan's protectorate. This chapter shows how the wartime neutrality efforts both in Korea and abroad progressed to protect Korean independence and major powers' interests from the Yongampo Incident to the Russo-Japanese War and how the permanent neutrality efforts in Korea were relaunched to safeguard Korea's independence around the time of the Second Hague Peace Conference.

### **• Neutralisation Efforts From the Yongampo Incident to the Russo-Japanese War (1903-1905)**

As the conflict between Japan and Russia deepened, the discord between the dominant pro-Japan and pro-Russia factions within the Korean Empire forced Gojong to seek alternate means to protect Korean independence. Specifically, he relied on special envoys and overseas Korean diplomats who lobbied Japanese and Western governments. In this process, the secret intelligence agency *Jeguk ingmunsa* was utilised to collect, analyse, and explore information from major powers,<sup>1</sup> which eventually allowed Korea to pursue wartime neutrality diplomacy.

In the spring of 1903, the suspension of the scheduled second-round withdrawal of Russian troops from Manchuria (8.4.1903), the suggestion of seven conditions for their withdrawal (18.4.1903), the Russian occupation of Yongampo (21.4.1903), and its construction of a strategic post there under the guise of logging (4.5.1903)<sup>2</sup> not only threatened the status quo in Korea, but brought about the possibility of a full-scale war between Japan and Russia. The Japanese government considered these moves part and parcel of Russia's expansionist policy<sup>3</sup> to grab both Manchuria and Korea. The Korean government, ascertaining that the goodwill of Japan or Russia alone was inadequate to secure its independence, initiated a diplomatic offensive to lure other major

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<sup>1</sup> *Jeguk ingmunsa* was a secret Korean intelligence agency founded in June 1902. Yi Taejin, "Jeguk ingmunsa bibo jangjeong: Daehan Jeguk hwangje jiksok daeIl jeongbo gigwan gyujeongjip [Jeguk ingmunsa bibo jangjeong: The Rulebook of the Imperial Intelligence Agency Toward Japan]", *Hanguksaron* 38 (1997): 240.

<sup>2</sup> Seong Hwangyong, 324.

<sup>3</sup> This was a by-product of Russia's expansionist policy (New Course) that the Russian government adopted after holding numerous special conferences (1903.4 to 1903.5). Hyeon Gwangho, "Daehan Jeguk gwa Reosia geurigo Ilbon", 203.

powers into counterbalancing Japan and Russia. This marked the beginning of the Korean Empire's wartime neutrality diplomacy.

Amidst the escalating Russo-Japanese tension, Gojong laboured to win support for Korean neutralisation from as many countries as possible. Though Italy maintained diplomatic relations with Korea, it had neither advisers nor concessions on the peninsula, leaving little impact on Korean politics. Nevertheless, persistent Gojong<sup>4</sup> turned to it for diplomatic assistance; he sent a personal letter to the king of Italy Victor Emmanuel III to ask for his support for Korean neutrality in the event of a Russo-Japanese war (8.5.1903).<sup>5</sup> Reversing the earlier trend of major powers' rejections (see later), the Italian king, through his letter to Gojong (28.2.1904), approved of Korea's decision to adopt neutrality prior to the Russo-Japanese War.<sup>6</sup> Gojong's decision to solicit Italian cooperation with his neutralisation proposal was ill-timed, however, since the Italian king's answer came after Japanese forces had entered Korean territory (8.2.1904)<sup>7</sup> and the Korea-Japan Protocol (23.2.1904), which gave Japan an immense advantage in Korea (see later). Given that Italy had a relatively low profile in East Asia,<sup>8</sup> its support, even if requested and received earlier, may well have done little to improve Korean fortunes.

After the First Anglo-Japanese Alliance, British Minister Jordan in Seoul and his Japanese counterpart Hayashi Gonsuke, utilising Chief Commissioner of Customs John McLeavy Brown,<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> An American missionary and Gojong adviser, Homer Bezaleel Hulbert saluted Gojong's dogged attempts to seek a diplomatic solution to ward off the threats to Korean security. Yi Taejin, *Gojong sidae ui jaejomyeong* [Review of the Gojong Era] (Seoul: Taehaksa, 2000), 99.

<sup>5</sup> "Itaeri e bonaeneun Daehan Jeguk hwangje chinseo [A Personal Letter Sent from the Emperor of the Korean Empire to Italy]", *Sajin yuri pilleum jaryo*, No. GF 0216 [03-21-03], <http://db.history.go.kr/> (accessed April 5, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> "Itaeri gukwang i Daehanguk gukwang ege bonaeneun chinseo [A Personal Letter Sent from the Italian King to the King of the Great Korea]", *Sajin yuri pilleum jaryo*, No. GF 1593 [13-123-05], <http://db.history.go.kr/> (accessed April 9, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Duus, 180.

<sup>8</sup> While Korea had maintained diplomatic relations with Italy since 1884, Italy's representative was the last Western diplomat to begin his service in Seoul (1901.12.16). Yi Heonju, "Gaenghange Yeonggug ui daeHan jeongchaek gwa juHan Yeongguk gonggwan [Britain's Korean Policy in the Open-Ports Period and the British Legation in Korea]", in *Gaehanggi ui jaeHan oeguk gonggwan yeongu* [The Foreign Legations in Korea During the Open-Ports Period], Ha Wonho et al. (Seoul: Dongbuga yeoksa jaedan, 2008), 218.

<sup>9</sup> As examples of his pro-Japan policy for Britain, Brown used reserve funds from Korea's Finance Ministry (2 million won) to pay back a Japanese loan to prevent a Russian loan, purposely delayed paying back a Japanese loan to extend the right of custom duties for the Japanese Dai-Ichi Bank, and allocated tariffs for port and water systems construction to stop Yi Yongik's attempt to facilitate a French loan. Kim Hyeonsuk, "Hanguk geundae seoyangin gomungwan yeongu (1882-1904)", 256. Brown also handed unpublished customs returns to British Vice-Consul Lay (1903) to advance British interests. Danguk daehakgyo dongyanghak yeonguso, ed., 423.

pressured Gojong into declaring the opening of the Yalu River to trade.<sup>10</sup> Of course, Russia was not exactly standing still; Bezobrazov argued (22.5.1903) that Japanese influence must not be extended into northern Korea and that Russia should receive concessions corresponding to Japan's construction rights for the Gyeongbu and Gyeongui railways and the construction rights for the telegraph line between Seoul and Uiju.<sup>11</sup> Six days later, having judged that Brown was acting as a conduit for Britain and Japan, Pavloff reported to his government that the commissioner was working with the Japanese minister to have the Korean government proclaim Yongampo an open port.<sup>12</sup>

By sheer coincidence, in May 1903, a report by the Japanese military attaché in Korea delved into the Yongampo issue, which induced the Japanese government to contemplate war with Russia. While top Japanese navy figures such as Admiral Yamamoto Gonnogyoe remained cautious, their army counterparts disagreed. Buoyed by perceived weaknesses of the Russian military, an army report from the Japanese Army Chief of Staff Ōyama Iwao judged that now was the time to settle the Korean problem, regarding Japan and Russia as being on an equal footing.<sup>13</sup>

For this, Japan had to bring Korea over to its side to prevent it from aligning with Russia, especially during wartime. There were two options to keep Korea under Japan's control: send in Japanese troops immediately once the war broke out to establish Japanese superiority in Seoul and sign an offensive and defensive alliance or a protectorate treaty with Korea. Favouring the first option, the army persuaded the Foreign Ministry to suggest to the *genrō* dispatching a large and powerful force to Korea before Russia followed suit since whoever reached Seoul first would be able to control Gojong and his government. At the *genrō* conference (9.6.1903), Yamagata suggested the immediate dispatch of two army divisions to Seoul before Russia reduced its military presence in Manchuria, but Yamamoto opposed his idea since this would provoke other major powers and damage international confidence in Japan amidst its negotiations with Russia.<sup>14</sup>

The second option was by no means easy either since the Korean government was likely to oppose it. Committed to independence, Gojong had already announced the institution of a

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<sup>10</sup> Hyeon Gwangho, "Daehan Jeguk gwa Reosia geurigo Ilbon", 208.

<sup>11</sup> Pak Jonghyo, ed., 735.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 601.

<sup>13</sup> Duus, 177.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 178.

conscription system in March 1903,<sup>15</sup> and four months later Korea's war minister proposed the establishment of a navy.<sup>16</sup> Constrained by deep fiscal problems, however, the Korean government found it difficult to arm itself sufficiently for self-defence<sup>17</sup> and thus regarded wartime neutrality as the only alternative in the event of a war between Japan and Russia.

The friction between Japan and Russia over the above concessions worsened the hostile relations between them, but also gave Gojong a chance to exploit the situation. For example, the Russian lease of Yongampo requested by Pavloff had been at first opposed by Yi Yongik, a leading figure of the pro-neutralisation faction,<sup>18</sup> for it could damage Korea's neutralisation policy by justifying Japan's expansion into Korea.<sup>19</sup> However, the contrary was to be supposed later. Gojong, who by now reversed his previous fear about Russian intentions in Korea, decided to have faith in Russia, hoping that its troops in Manchuria could check the advance of the Japanese military into Korea.<sup>20</sup> Gojong thus sent Jo Seonghyeop to Yongampo to sign a pact leasing it to Russia (20.7.1903).<sup>21</sup> That decision might have had to do with Gojong's desire to strengthen diplomacy with Russia in response to increased Japanese pressure on Korea due to the circulation of Japan's Dai-Ichi Bank notes.<sup>22</sup>

The Yongampo issue also prompted Japan and Russia to reignite negotiations to resolve their differences over Korea and Manchuria. After having decided on war with Russia at a council in the Royal presence (23.6.1903) and having obtained the British government's consent on the Russo-

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<sup>15</sup> Hyeon Gwangho, "Daehan Jegug ui daeoe jeongchaek", 237.

<sup>16</sup> Duus, 178.

<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, at the urging of Lefèvre, the Korean government could purchase 10,000 guns and 30,000 rounds of ammunition (Hyeon Gwangho, "Daehan Jegug ui daeoe jeongchaek", 246) and 12,000 pistol sets (*Hwangseong sinmun*, 1902.11.8; 1903.2.28, <http://www.koreanhistory.or.kr/>).

<sup>18</sup> *ChuKan Nihon koshikan kiroku* 21, No.128, 1903.5.14, <http://db.history.go.kr/>. Yi Yongik felt that Korea had to rebuff major powers' designs in Korea to maintain a neutral stance. In 1902, concerned about the economic impact of bonds from the Japanese Dai-Ichi Bank on Korean independence, Yi mobilised pedlars and merchant guilds to prevent their circulation. Nasawa Yuko, "Chungsukgong Yi Yongig ui daeoe insik yeongu—jungnip noseon ui hyeongseong gwajeong eul jungsim euro [A Study of Foreign Perception of Chungsukgong Yi Yongik—Focusing on the Neutral Line Formation Process]" (MA diss., Korea University, 1998), 48-49. However, in early 1903, he also opposed the Russian lease of Masanpo. *ChuKan Nihon koshikan kiroku* 21, No.53, 1903.2.12, <http://db.history.go.kr/>.

<sup>19</sup> Hyeon Gwangho, "Daehan Jeguk gwa Reosia geurigo Ilbon", 216.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>21</sup> *ChuKan Nihon koshikan kiroku* 19, No.24, 1903.7.20, <http://db.history.go.kr/>. In response, Japanese Foreign Minister Komura mentioned "The Theory of East Asian Peace" and thus requested that the Korean government resist Russian tyranny, pointing out that Korean independence would guarantee East Asian peace. Goryeo daehakgyo, ed., *Gu Hanguk oegyo munseo 6: Ilan* 舊韓國外交文書: 日案 [Old Korean Diplomatic Documents: Pertaining to Japan] 6, No.7463 (Seoul: Goryeo daehakgyo, 1969), 415-416.

<sup>22</sup> Hyeon Gwangho, "Daehan Jeguk gwa Reosia geurigo Ilbon", 217.

Japanese negotiations (28.7.1903), Japan passed its negotiation agenda through Kurino to Lamsdorff (12.8.1903).<sup>23</sup> The proposal encompassed the independence and territorial integrity of China and Korea, mutual recognition of Japanese interests in Korea and Russia's railway interests in Manchuria, non-interference in both Japan and Russia's commercial and industrial activities in Korea and Manchuria respectively, mutual commitment to military activities, and Russia's acceptance of Japan's exclusive rights in Korea.<sup>24</sup> Japan intended to place Korea under its exclusive influence, countering Russian designs to exploit Korea and Manchuria.

On the same day, Admiral Yevgeni Ivanovich Alexeyev was appointed Russian Governor General of the Far East, and Russia began to take a hard-line stance in its Far Eastern policy. Thus, Lamsdorff unilaterally requested that Japan change the location for Russo-Japanese negotiations to Tokyo (23.8.1903). After Komura and Baron Roman R. Rosen were designated as their respective countries' representatives for negotiations (23.9.1903), Rosen submitted Russian terms<sup>25</sup> to Japan (3.10.1903). The same month, to prepare an offensive and defensive alliance in Korea, Hayashi Gonsuke tried to bribe the Korean government with loans and key Korean government officials with direct payments and increased the Japanese garrison in Seoul.<sup>26</sup>

Despite his doubts, Komura, sat through a series of talks with Russia and sent Rosen and Lamsdorff Japan's revised proposal (30.10.1903), which designated a neutral zone on both sides (50km) of the Manchuria-Korean border and requested a guarantee on Japan's status in Manchuria based on an existing treaty. Japan's counter-proposal demonstrated its wish to avoid immediate war with Russia, though there was no quick response from the Russian government.<sup>27</sup> While Russo-Japanese negotiations were making little headway, the Japanese government approached Korea directly to increase its leverage there; Komura instructed Hayashi Gonsuke to discreetly float a

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<sup>23</sup> Gang Seonghak, *Siberia hoengdan yeolcha wa samurai: Reoll jeonjaeng ui oegyo wa gunsae jeollyak* [The Trans-Siberian Trains and the Samurai: The Diplomacy and Military Strategy of the Russo-Japanese War] (Seoul: Goryeo daehakgyo chulpanbu, 1999), 284.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 284-285.

<sup>25</sup> Russia did not want any part of Korean territory to be used for military purposes, desired free passage in the Korea Strait, called for accepting a neutral zone north of the 39th parallel of the Korean peninsula in return for recognising the Japanese position in southern Korea, and deemed that Manchuria and the coastal and insular areas lie outside Japan's line of advantage. *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 36(1), No.25, 22-23, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>26</sup> Duus, 179.

<sup>27</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 36(1), No.28-31, 25-28, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

secret alliance to Gojong through Ōmiwa Chōbei (20.11.1903).<sup>28</sup> After much delay, Russia sent its counter-proposal (11.12.1903), which did not address the Manchurian issue and only reiterated the Russian government's previous call for a neutral zone in Korea.<sup>29</sup>

By now, Japan considered that an exchange of Manchuria for Korea was rejected categorically, which made any peaceful resolution of the Manchurian and Korean issues appear far out of reach.<sup>30</sup> Japan was right to be sceptical of Russia's true intentions; Alexeyev had urged the Russian Foreign Ministry not to accept Japanese demands since this could turn Korea into Japan's protectorate and endanger Russian security.<sup>31</sup> Once again, Japan submitted its new proposal (21.12.1903) and Russia replied to it (6.1.1904), but each was only looking for a way to put the blame on the other.

Pending the secret negotiations between Japan and Russia as above, Gojong received the news by telegram (4.7.1903) from Korean Minister in Japan Go Yeonghui that Japan had decided to declare war against Russia.<sup>32</sup> Taken aback by the prospect of war commencing earlier than he had anticipated, Gojong dispatched his aides—Hyeon Yeongun<sup>33</sup> to Japan (3.8.1903),<sup>34</sup> and Hyeon Sanggeon<sup>35</sup> to Europe (21.8.1903)—to earnestly probe the possibility of wartime neutrality,<sup>36</sup> which led to the reactivation of Korean wartime neutrality diplomacy. Hyeon Sanggeon also carried Gojong's personal letter asking the Russian emperor for Russo-Korean cooperation to prevent a Japanese invasion in the event of the war.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Duus, 179.

<sup>29</sup> Hyeon Gwangho, "Daehan Jeguk gwa Reosia geurigo Ilbon", 213.

<sup>30</sup> Gang Seonghak, 287.

<sup>31</sup> Pak Hyojong, ed., 278.

<sup>32</sup> Hyeon Gwangho, "Daehan Jeguk gwa Reosia geurigo Ilbon", 220.

<sup>33</sup> Hyeon Yeongun was fluent in Japanese after studying there and was considered close to Japan because of his regular visits to the Japanese legation in Seoul. Seo Yeonghui, "Reoll jeonjaenggi Daehan Jeguk jipgwon seryeog ui siguk daeeung", 185.

<sup>34</sup> He also carried a secret letter (presumably from Gojong) to query Itō and Komura about the recent state of affairs, and Hyeon was tasked to accurately gauge the Japanese government's decision on Manchuria and to detect Japanese views on Korea as well. *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 36(1), No.129, 740-742, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>35</sup> Even before this mission, Hyeon Sanggeon, a well-known pro-neutralisation faction member, was entrusted by Gojong to carry out an important mission; in early 1902, he was instructed by Gojong to visit foreign legations in Seoul to find out the meaning of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, while working as an attendant at the Imperial Household Department. Hyeon Gwangho, "Daehan Jeguk ui daeoe jeongchaek", 58.

<sup>36</sup> *Hwangseong sinmun*, 1903.7.3, <http://www.kinds.or.kr/>.

<sup>37</sup> Seo Yeonghui, "Reoll jeonjaenggi Daehan Jeguk jipgwon seryeog ui siguk daeeung", 188.

However, Gojong had to rely on his abovementioned emissaries to send and receive diplomatic messages related to neutralisation as Korea's telegraph network (Diagram 2) was never free from Japanese surveillance.<sup>38</sup> Japan had been unwilling to relinquish its operation of the Korean telegraph cables, using them to its advantage both in Korea and Japan (though experiencing an occasional hiccup).<sup>39</sup> For example, while Russian Foreign Minister Lamsdorff was engaging in negotiations with his Japanese counterpart Komura concerning Korea and Manchuria, Russia's representatives in Japan and Korea were having trouble communicating via telegraph cables. The Russian diplomat in Japan Gagarin said that it had become almost customary for Japan to deliberately destroy Russia's secret telegraphic messages.<sup>40</sup> Since Korea counted on Russian support for its neutralisation policy, their inability to communicate due to Japanese interference could be a critical failing.

For these reasons, whereas Hyeon Yeongun's mission restricted him to lobbying for Korean neutrality in Japan, Hyeon Sanggeon's European endeavour involved ascertaining French and Russian views on Korean neutralisation and obtaining mediation from international organisations.<sup>41</sup> Upon his arrival in France, Hyeon tried but could not meet with French Foreign Minister Délcassé, and left Gojong's secret message regarding neutrality in the hands of Min Yeongchan, the Korean minister in France.<sup>42</sup> In the Netherlands, Hyeon sought to attend the International Peace Conference and visit the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague, but the conference did not convene and the court was adjourned. Failing to make any meaningful inroads there, he travelled to St. Petersburg where he conferred with Korean Minister to Russia Yi Beomjin about neutrality and met with former Russian Chargé d'affaires to Korea Weber. On his way back to Korea, Hyeon travelled to Lüshun, where he spoke with the Russian governor of the Far East.<sup>43</sup> However, Hyeon failed to win any qualitative support for Korean neutrality as Russia did not respond, major powers adopted a wait-and-see attitude, and support from the International Peace Conference was unavailable as it

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<sup>38</sup> Pak Jonghyo, ed., 363.

<sup>39</sup> In early 1900, Japanese Minister in Seoul Hayashi sought but failed to convince Korean Foreign Minister Pak Jesun to allow Japan to construct a telegraph office on the coast of Korea, ostensibly to communicate with ships at sea. *Peurangseu oemubu munseo 9, Daehan Jeguk II · 1899-1901*, 68.

<sup>40</sup> Pak Jonghyo, ed., 311.

<sup>41</sup> *ChuKan Nihon koshikan kiroku* 21, No.247, 1903.8.19, <http://db.history.go.kr/>.

<sup>42</sup> Min later appealed to the French government to induce Russia to help realise Korean neutrality. Hyeon Gwangho, "Daehan Jegug ui daeoe jeongchaek", 119.

<sup>43</sup> *Hwangseong sinmun*, 1903.8.20; 1903.9.12, <http://www.kinds.or.kr/>; *Tokyo asahi shimbun*, 1904.1.24.

had been in recess in 1899.<sup>44</sup> Japan also would not cooperate with Hyeon Yeongun; Komura tried to use the Korean overture to push a bilateral alliance between Korea and Japan.<sup>45</sup>

After Hyeon Yeongun departed for Japan, Gojong instructed Korean ministers to Japan and Russia (18.8.1903) to promptly obtain guarantees from the Japanese and Russian governments that neither country would violate Korean neutrality and infringe upon Korean territory in the event of war.<sup>46</sup> Accordingly, Korean Minister to Japan Go Yeonghui (1849-1916) submitted an enquiry letter under the name of Korean Foreign Minister Yi Dojae to Japanese Foreign Minister Komura (3.9.1903).<sup>47</sup> After much delay, Komura rejected Go's request on the premise that neutralisation could not be claimed on the basis of unfounded rumour. He suggested that if Korea wanted to ease growing hostilities between Russia and Japan, it should not grant Russia the Yongampo concession. Komura further advised Go that to become a neutral state, Korea needed to be able to defend and support itself. After demonstrating how unrealistic Korean prospects for neutralisation were, Komura offered to defend the permanent existence of the Korean imperial family and assist its finances and military.<sup>48</sup> Additionally, Japanese Minister to Russia Kurino indicated that Japanese public opinion was against Korean neutralisation and that the U.S. Chargé d'affaires to Russia had observed that his government would not support a Korean neutralisation that might wound Japanese susceptibilities.<sup>49</sup>

Korean Minister to Russia Yi Beomjin (1852-1911)<sup>50</sup> also explored the possibility of the Russian government guaranteeing Korean neutrality.<sup>51</sup> Despite his strong reservations,<sup>52</sup> Yi

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<sup>44</sup> Hyeon Gwangho, "Daehan Jegug ui daeoe jeongchaek", 120. Hyeon Sanggeon pursued Korean neutralisation under the guarantee of major powers and by international organisations, such as the Red Cross, the International Peace Conference, and the International Court of Justice. *Tokyo asahi shimbun*, 1904.1.24.

<sup>45</sup> Duus, 179.

<sup>46</sup> The drafts of Gojong's instructions to both Korean ministers were authored by Brown. *ChuKan Nihon koshikan kiroku* 21, No.268, 1903.8.26, <http://db.history.go.kr/>.

<sup>47</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 36, Confidential No.1, 1903.9.3, 723, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>48</sup> *ChuKan Nihon koshikan kiroku* 19, No.134, 1903.9.30; *ChuKan Nihon koshikan kiroku* 20, Confidential No.77, 1903.10.6, <http://db.history.go.kr/>; *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 36(1), No.700, Confidential Tel. No.7, 724-725; No.701, Confidential No.77, 725-726, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>49</sup> *Foreign Office and Predecessor: Political and Other Departments: General Correspondence Before 1906, Russian Empire*: FO 65/1661, Rice to Lansdowne, No.305, 1903.9.30, 241.

<sup>50</sup> Yi, born to a high-ranking military family, began to rise up the ranks after protecting Queen Min during the Gapsin Coup and supported the Russian-friendly foreign policy of Gojong and Queen Min throughout the mid-1880s. Yi's stature as a prominent pro-Russia figure grew after the Triple Intervention and enabled him to serve as Acting Minister of the Imperial Household and Minister of Agriculture and Commerce. With help from the pro-U.S. faction, he played a pivotal role in Gojong's escape to the Russian legation and after the Korean Empire was established, worked as Korean

submitted a written application on neutralisation to Prince Obolensky at the Russian Foreign Ministry. But Obolensky rebuffed the suggestion, claiming there was no risk of war between Russia and Japan.<sup>53</sup>

While Gojong's envoys Hyeon Yeongun and Hyeon Sanggeon and Korean ministers Go and Yi sought support for neutrality in Japan and Europe, Yi Geuntaek and his Russia-aligned faction plotted to enter a secret agreement with Russia to counter Japanese incursions into Korea. Following the advice of Weber, Yi Geuntaek tried to request additional Russian troops in Korea from the Russian governor of the Far East. Pro-neutralisation faction member Yi Yongik,<sup>54</sup> who was recently appointed a provost marshal, vigorously opposed this move, stating that the Russo-Japanese confrontation was entirely about China and did not involve Korea. He therefore stressed that it was natural for Korea to maintain its neutral stance<sup>55</sup> and recommended that Gojong seek refuge at the French or other foreign legations in time of emergency.<sup>56</sup> Accepting Yi's opinion,<sup>57</sup> the Korean government declared to all countries that if war were to break out between Japan and Russia, Korea would maintain neutrality (23.11.1903),<sup>58</sup> thus laying the basis for its wartime neutrality declaration later.

As the Russo-Japanese negotiations over Korea and Manchuria were nearing an end, Japan began active military activities to retain its strategic footholds in Korea by increasing its military

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minister in Washington and St. Petersburg to carry out Gojong's anti-Japan and pro-Russia diplomatic activities. Oh Yeongseop, "Eulmi sabyeon ijeon Yi Beomjin ui jeongchi hwaldong [Political Activities of Yi Beomjin Before the Eulmi Incident]", *Hanguk dongnip undongsa yeongu* 25 (December 2005): 31-32.

<sup>51</sup> *ChuKan Nihon koshikan kiroku* 21, No.268, 1903.8.26, <http://db.history.go.kr/>.

<sup>52</sup> Involved in the process of negotiating a secret agreement between Korea and Russia, Yi, just like pro-Japan faction members, was against neutralisation. *ChuKan Nihon koshikan kiroku* 18, Confidential No.49, 1904.5.7, <http://db.history.go.kr/>. In his report to Yi Dojae, Yi Beomjin reminded him that Korea could neither prevent the invasion of foreign troops during the Sino-Japanese War nor refuse foreign demands. He argued this proved that Korea did not have the ability to abide by neutrality and was concerned that even after Korea declared neutrality, if Korea did not or could not adhere to the rules of neutrality, neighbouring countries could interrogate Korea about its responsibilities based on international law (*JuA raegoan* 駐俄來去案 [Reports to and from the Korean Legation in Russia], No.18062 1903.11.28; *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 37(1), No.365, 327-328, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>).

<sup>53</sup> Moriyama, 193.

<sup>54</sup> Though the contemporary press reports described him as either pro-Russia or pro-France, Japanese Minister to Korea Hayashi Gonsuke disputed this view, noting that Yi was approaching many foreign powers to provide loans to Korea. *ChuKan Nihon koshikan kiroku* 16, Confidential No. 97, 1901.9.10, <http://db.history.go.kr/>.

<sup>55</sup> *Tokyo asahi shimbun*, 1903.10.24; *ChuKan Nihon koshikan kiroku* 18, Confidential No. 171, 1903.10.30, <http://db.history.go.kr/>.

<sup>56</sup> *ChuKan Nihon koshikan kiroku* 18, Confidential No. 171, 1903.10.30, <http://db.history.go.kr/>.

<sup>57</sup> Hyeon Gwangho, "Daehan Jegug ui daeoe jeongchaek", 120.

<sup>58</sup> *Gojong Sillok*, 1903.11.23, <http://sillok.history.go.kr/>; "向各國宣言 將來日俄開戰時, 本國局外中立."

presence there,<sup>59</sup> though it put forward a new proposal to Russia (21.12.1903). Exposing Japan's growing exasperation at Russia's persistent refusals, Komura remarked in his telegram to Takahira:

[Japan] finds it impossible to acquiesce in an exceedingly abnormal and precarious condition which would inevitably result from Russia's remaining indefinitely on the flank of Korea.<sup>60</sup>

Even so, Japan still had to tread carefully since Britain favoured it agree to Russia's terms. Faced with the possibility of involvement in war with Russia, British leaders were now much less enthusiastic for the alliance with Japan. Eight days after Japan's above proposal, Hayashi Tadasu sounded out Lansdowne on what support Britain might extend to Japan, but Britain offered no encouragement whatsoever. British Prime Minister Arthur Balfour had already decided, "Britain should do nothing to aid Japan except under the letter of the treaty."<sup>61</sup> Britain's cautious stance seemed to suggest that the Anglo-Japanese Alliance would be useful militarily only in preventing another power from entering a possible Russo-Japanese War on the side of Russia.<sup>62</sup>

In Korea, Hayashi Gonsuke was devoting himself to concluding a secret Japanese-Korean agreement after Komura's instruction (29.9.1903) to use Korea as an advance base in case of a Russo-Japanese war.<sup>63</sup> To achieve this, Hayashi, on the one hand, urged Komura to dispatch Japanese troops to Seoul if the Korean government did not respond favourably to Japan's overture,<sup>64</sup> but on the other, gathered his supporters within the court and the Korean government. After securing several high-ranking officials' support, Hayashi submitted a draft of a secret agreement to Gojong through Yi Jiyong, which stated that Japan would settle Korean political refugees<sup>65</sup> and assist in securing the safety of the Korean imperial household and Korean

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<sup>59</sup> Japan stepped up its military presence in Korea as dozens of Japanese troops repeatedly landed at Busan and Incheon for a variety of purposes ranging from relieving military police (*Nihon gaikō bunsho* 36(1), No.120, 771, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>) to guarding telegraph lines (Pak Hyojong, ed., 278).

<sup>60</sup> United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States: 1903*, Komura to Takahira, telegrams, 1903.12.21; 12.23, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), 619-621.

<sup>61</sup> George W. Monger, *The End of Isolation: British Foreign Policy, 1900-1917* (London: T. Nelson and sons, 1963), 147-153.

<sup>62</sup> Raymond A. Esthus, *Theodore Roosevelt and Japan* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1967), 20.

<sup>63</sup> Seo Yeonghui, "Reoll jeonjaenggi Daehan Jeguk jipgwon seryeog ui siguk daeung", 162-163.

<sup>64</sup> *ChuKan Nihon koshikan kiroku* 18, No.204, 1903.12.27, <http://db.history.go.kr/>.

<sup>65</sup> Hayashi was adhering to his government's determination to use the thorny issue of Korean refugees in Japan to bring the Korean government to the negotiating table (Hyeon Gwangho, "Daehan Jeguk gwa Reosia geurigo Ilbon", 277) so that Gojong would support a secret agreement (1903.12.27) (*Nihon gaikō bunsho* 37(1), No.339, 314-316; No.368-370, 333-337), <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>).

independence (30.12.1903).<sup>66</sup> (On the same day, the Japanese cabinet entered Japan into a state of war and soon decided to keep Korea under its influence through an offensive and defensive alliance or an agreement with Korea for its protection as a stratagem to get Japanese boots on the ground there.)<sup>67</sup> Gojong, however, believed that Japan would soon forcibly occupy Korea and thus tapped Pavloff's thoughts on escaping to the Russian legation in case of a crisis.<sup>68</sup>

At this critical moment, there was a specially designed wartime neutrality attempt at the Korean legation in London. Established in 1901, the legation, first managed by Min Yeongdon, was one of the ways for Gojong to showcase Korea's commitment to independence before the eyes of major powers.<sup>69</sup> Unfortunately, Min's tenure in London was cut short when he abruptly returned to Korea. Though Pak Yeonghwa was supposed to succeed Min in his post,<sup>70</sup> Pak did not take the position, and the Korean legation was now headed by Chargé d'affaires Yi Haneung (1874-1905), who had been posted to Britain as third secretary at the Korean legation in London in 1901.<sup>71</sup> Despite his young age, Yi seemed well qualified for the job. Concerned about the future of his country, Yi enrolled at the government-run Western-style school where he was schooled in English, history, and politics. After passing his civil examination in 1894, he worked as an official at the Hanseong Department and later became an officer at the government-sponsored English School. Possessing linguistic expertise and the appropriate knowledge to astutely analyse international affairs, Yi, by closely monitoring British media reports related to the Far East, suggested Korean neutralisation to the British Foreign Office on his own initiative.<sup>72</sup>

Yi first submitted a long memorandum concerning the current situation on the Korean peninsula to Britain's Foreign Office along with a note (13.1.1904). Six days later, he sent two additional memoranda to the Foreign Office to explain his previous one. Yi's note comprehensively described the positions of the Korean government on its internal circumstances and external relations. He stressed that conditions in the Far East were changing rapidly and requested that the

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<sup>66</sup> Seo Yeonghui, "Reoll jeonjaenggi Daehan Jeguk jipgwon seryeog ui siguk daeung", 168-169.

<sup>67</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 36(1), No.50, 41-45, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>68</sup> Pak Jonghyo, ed., 278-279. Fortunately for Gojong, Alexeiev argued that Russia could not turn down this request. Pak Hyojong, ed., 279.

<sup>69</sup> Gu Daeyeol, 498.

<sup>70</sup> Goryeo daehakgyo, ed., *Gu Hanguk oegyo munseo* 14: *Yeongan* 舊韓國外交文書: 英案 [Old Korean Diplomatic Documents: Pertaining to Britain] 2, No.2535 (Seoul: Goryeo daehakgyo, 1968), 611.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, No.2680, 693.

<sup>72</sup> Gu Daeyeol, 495-497, 517.

British government focus on matters there, especially the Korean peninsula problem. Yi predicted that if war broke out between Japan and Russia, the regional situation after the war would be completely different from that of before the war.

In his note, Yi demanded the British government provide a fresh guarantee of Korean independence, sovereignty, territory and special rights through a major powers compromise irrespective of the results of the war. He listed five tasks Britain should undertake: guarantee Korean independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity through the Anglo-Japanese Alliance; prevent any attempts by any country to dominate Korea by means fair or foul; forbid the dispatch of military forces into Korea by any aggressive country, even if there was a disturbance that could endanger the lives of foreigners and their property in Korea; reserve the right of the Korean government to exercise its sovereignty first if any disturbance or riot occurred in Korea; and in case of a Russo-Japanese war, the British government, irrespective of the results of the war, would strive to preserve Korean independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, with understanding from other major powers.<sup>73</sup>

Included in Yi's additional memoranda were several diagrams linking the politics of the Far East with the balance of power worldwide and proving, in his view, that Korean independence was indispensable not just for the Far East, but for world peace as well. As Diagram 6-1 in the appendix shows, he likened the world structure to a quadrangle. In the West (Europe), Britain and France constituted an axis of balance of power, and as they were increasingly tilting towards cooperation, both countries were meeting halfway. However, on the right-hand side of the diagram, Japan and Russia, the major powers determining the balance of power in the Far East, were allied with Britain and France respectively. Therefore, if the equilibrium in the East were to shift, the West's equilibrium could be disturbed, and the balance in both parts of the world would ultimately collapse.

The snag was that since Japan and Russia, emerging as world powers, were competing against each other in the Far East—especially in Manchuria and Korea—equilibrium in the East was fragile. If the balance of power were splintered through war between Japan and Russia, China and Korea could come under pressure and Britain and France could be engulfed in conflict. Besides,

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<sup>73</sup> *Foreign Office: Political and Other Departments: General Correspondence before 1906, China*: FO 17/1662, Yi Haneung to Foreign Office, 1904.1.13; 1904.1.19.

there were two third powers (one in the East and another one in the West) at work, seeking to promote their interests by encouraging the destruction of balance of power in both regions. Though Yi did not specifically mention these two third forces in Far East politics, it seems that he might have been referring to the U.S. and Germany. Therefore, to protect their positions in the Far East and world peace, he thought Britain and France should agree to cooperate.

If Britain and France formed an alliance in Europe (Actually, they signed the Entente Cordiale on 8 April 1904.), world politics could change, as seen in Diagram 6-2 in the appendix, where the balance of power in the West is focused into a single dot, but the distance in the East would grow due to the strife between Japan and Russia, making the quadrangle of Diagram 6-1 a triangle. In this arrangement, China and Korea would maintain their independence and Britain's position in the Far East would be strengthened, but the third powers in Europe and East Asia would be unable to pursue their interests in the Far East. As a power of the first rank, France would be involved in both Europe and the Far East in the case of war, so cooperation with Britain would be beneficial for it.

The problem was that while in the West, Britain and France could cooperate to form a single political entity, in the East, Japan and Russia were moving further apart. As Diagram 6-3 in the appendix demonstrates, the base of the triangle formed by Japan and Russia was inherently weak, which led to a weak triangle system. Since Japan and Russia were in constant motion, causing disharmony, this part could easily collapse. Accordingly, the British interests in the Far East (Manchuria, Korea, and China) which formed the middle bottom of the triangle could crumble despite the Anglo-French cooperation in Europe, which meant destruction of the global balance of power. To avoid this, the Russo-Japanese base of Diagram 6-3 should be reinforced. However, the discord between these two countries rendered the Russo-Japanese side of the triangle temporary. Moreover, as any room for compromise between Japan and Russia had recently disappeared, if the situation in the Far East were to be resolved, it would require the cooperation of Britain and France.

Yi thus proposed using the Anglo-Japanese alliance and the Franco-Russian alliance to reinforce the structure's base by additionally inserting an Anglo-French side alongside the vulnerable Russo-Japanese side, as shown in Diagrams 6-4 and 6-5 in the appendix. In this way, Britain and France could act as arbiters of any Russo-Japanese conflict in Manchuria or Korea, thereby strengthening the fragile Japan-Russia base and preserving the political balance of power system of the Far East. Furthermore, Yi offered a specific plan to qualify Britain and France as

arbiters, suggesting that they join Japan and Russia to sign a quadruple treaty. Since neither the Anglo-Japanese alliance nor the Franco-Russian alliance was permanent, to resolve the looming Far Eastern problem and avoid any spillover into Europe, now was the best moment for Britain and France to take the lead in such a treaty.

By signing such a quadruple treaty, Britain and France could play a dual role in current world politics; in completing a cooperative system between two countries in Europe, Britain and France could turn their attention to East Asia and solidify the power system of the Far East, constraining Russo-Japanese relations. As Diagram 6-6 in the appendix illustrates, the balance of power between Britain and France on the one hand and Japan and Russia on the other form respectively one axis, which could enable Britain and France to preserve stability by counteracting any shifts in the balance of power in the Far East.

Yi considered Britain and France as conservative forces intent on maintaining the existing world order, but regarded Japan and Russia as competing forces out to eliminate each other. Korea and China were seeking protection and two third powers were inciting a war between Japan and Russia in the Far East, hoping that Britain and France would become embroiled in such a war as well. Yi contended that Britain and France, by resolving suspicion and discord between the two rivals—Japan and Russia—peacefully and satisfactorily through a quadruple treaty, could protect Manchuria, Korea, and China, eliminate any danger of war in the near future, and solve world peace and the Far East issue together.

If the new order were to be configured like this, it would be a splendid achievement. Two up until now confrontational alliances would be replaced by one peaceful accord for the first time in world history (in Yi's opinion), and also would be recorded, from Britain's historical perspective, as a glorious chapter in the name of British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Lord Lansdowne's Far East policy. If a quadruple treaty were incompatible with British government policy, it, as the second-best option, was hoped that Britain and France would maintain the present Anglo-Japanese and Franco-Russian alliances. In this plan, Yi insisted that to preserve peace in the Far East, Korean independence and sovereignty, which were the key to Far Eastern politics from a geopolitical perspective, were indispensable necessities.

Although Yi's memorandum was reviewed thoroughly at the Far Eastern Department of the British Foreign Office, Superintending Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Francis

Campbell and Senior Clerk Walter Langley commented that the memorandum was not very clear. They assumed Yi was asking for “something like a guarantee of independence”, but figured Britain was unable to take measures to aid Korea. Moreover, Campbell argued that Britain could not make a decision to guarantee Korean independence, especially considering war had not broken out between Japan and Russia. Campbell and Langley recommended giving only a verbal response to Yi’s memorandum on his next visit to the Foreign Office, and Lansdowne concurred with this view. Judging that the memorandum was in effect requesting British assistance in protecting Korea from Japan and Russia, he made it clear that British policy in the Far East was based on the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, and that under the current situation, Britain could not take any measures to satisfy Yi’s request.<sup>74</sup>

Yi requested another meeting with Campbell to deliver the Korean government’s opinion regarding the situation on the Korean peninsula (15.1.1904).<sup>75</sup> The British Foreign Office accepted the request, and on his visit, Yi presented a second note, quite similar to the first one, stating that Gojong had instructed him to deliver the information in the first memorandum to the British government.<sup>76</sup> A third note including the same information as the second note followed (20.1.1904), and two days later, a fourth note was delivered, emphasizing that Korea would maintain strict neutrality, irrespective of the results of negotiations between Japan and Russia.

During their 19 January meeting, Yi told Campbell about the inflow of Japanese troops disguised as merchants into the Korean interior, which implied that a Russo-Japanese war was imminent. Yi informed Campbell that the Korean government would not transfer the rights to construct the Gyeongui Railway to either Russia or Japan and would itself start construction of the railroad. He then sounded out Campbell on the possibility of obtaining a loan from Britain for said construction.<sup>77</sup> Though Campbell informed Yi that Britain, as stated in the First Anglo-Japanese Alliance, supported Korean independence and the preservation of Korea’s territorial integrity, it would not offer Korea a loan. Britain hoped Japan would, to carry out its imperialistic push,

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., Minutes on Yi Haneung.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., Yi Haneung to Campbell, 1904.1.15.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., Yi Haneung to Foreign Office, 1904.1.19.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., Lansdowne to Yi Haneung, 1904.1.28.

construct the Gyeongui Railway with its capital and maintain the right of railway control. Yi's diplomatic activity continued until he committed suicide (12.5.1904).<sup>78</sup>

Yi Beomjin and Yi Haneung's diplomatic activities for wartime neutrality failed for quite different reasons. In Yi Beomjin's case, Gojong's mistake was to dispatch a pro-Russia faction member as Korean minister to Russia. Yi Beomjin would not willingly support Korean neutrality, opting to maintain good relations with Russia and asserting that Korea was not yet ready to secure its neutrality in the event of conflict since its weak military could not defend itself against Japan's professional, well-equipped forces. In contrast, Yi Haneung's neutralisation plan was based on signing a quadruple treaty using Britain and France as guarantors, since neither had grand territorial ambitions in Korea, to create a balance of power but was hampered by Britain's Far Eastern policy, which closely aligned Britain with Japan under the First Anglo-Japanese Alliance and recognised Japanese pre-eminence in Korea. Nonetheless, unlike other foreign-based Korean diplomats, Yi Haneung should be credited for voluntarily floating a creative neutralisation proposal which showed his wide understanding of the international situation.

Meanwhile, by early 1904, the situation had grown even more dangerous for Korea as the prospects for the Russo-Japanese War drew closer. Accordingly, despite the Korean Foreign Ministry's request to stop the increase of military forces, Allen<sup>79</sup> had U.S. troops enter Korea in the name of protecting the U.S. legation and Americans (5.1.1904), and the British, French, Italian, and German legations followed suit.<sup>80</sup> This caused a commotion in Korea's political world and serious disturbance of public sentiment, reflected in the rocketing inflation that hit Seoul.<sup>81</sup> In Japan, Japanese leaders met at the residence of Prime Minister Katsura Tarō (11.1.1904) to discuss the Russian proposal delivered five days earlier, which insisted upon a neutral zone north of the 39th parallel in Korea and refused to recognise China's territorial integrity with respect to Manchuria.

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<sup>78</sup> It is highly questionable whether his action endeared him to Britain since Jordan later advised Foreign Secretary Lansdowne to ignore Korea's protest against the Second Anglo-Japanese Alliance. *Foreign Office: Political and Other Departments: General Correspondence before 1906, China*: FO 17/1692, Jordan to Lansdowne, 1905.10.17.

<sup>79</sup> By this time, even Allen had become pessimistic about Korea's ability to protect its independence. As he explained to U.S. Secretary of State William Woodville Rockhill: "These people [Koreans] cannot govern themselves. They must have an overlord as they have had for all time...Let Japan have Korea outright if she can get it." Allen, Allen to Rockhill, 1904.1.4, 829.

<sup>80</sup> Seo Yeonghui, *Daehan Jeguk jeongchisa yeongu* [A Study of the Political History of the Korean Empire] (Seoul: Seoul daehakgyo chulpanbu, 2003), 179.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

While Komura wanted Japan to call off the negotiations with Russia and enter war, the navy argued that it needed more time.<sup>82</sup> Therefore, Japan decided to submit one more proposal repeating its position to Russia.<sup>83</sup>

On 13 January, Komura presented Japan's final proposal to Rosen, an ultimatum declaring that Japan could neither accept any compromise in Manchuria nor Russia's proposal of the establishment of a limited zone north of the 39th parallel in Korea. Upon learning this, British Minister to Japan Sir Claude Maxwell MacDonald remarked that unless Russia quickly made concessions, a Russo-Japanese war was almost certain.<sup>84</sup> Komura also showed a copy of the communication to U.S. Minister to Japan Lloyd Carpenter Griscom, saying that if Russia did not reply in a reasonable time, Japan would "decide what measures it may have to take to protect its rights and interests".<sup>85</sup> Griscom understood Komura's meaning and reported to Hay:

It is no exaggeration to say that if there was no war it will be a severe disappointment to the Japanese individual of every walk of life...Nothing but the complete backdown by the Russian government will satisfy the public feeling...it would require the most skilful handling on the part of the Japanese Government to mollify the war spirit which is now rampant.<sup>86</sup>

As Japan stepped closer to war, there was a growing sense of unease among the Korean establishment. On his return to Korea (11.1.1904), Hyeon Sanggeon brought a letter from the French foreign minister, who advised that Korea rely on Russia and France, which prompted Gojong to vacillate regarding entering an alliance with Japan.<sup>87</sup> However, knowing that Korean ministers at the state council were displeased with close associates of Gojong who were intimately involved in government administration and in response were on the verge of breaking with current Korean policy, Hayashi consulted with Min Yeongcheol and Yi Jiyong and coerced the previously pro-Russia Yi Geuntaek to enlist in the pro-Japan faction. Having taken these measures, Hayashi reported confidently to Komura that the three officials were busy bringing Gojong over to Japan's

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<sup>82</sup> Esthus, 20.

<sup>83</sup> Takeuchi Tatsuji, *War and diplomacy in the Japanese empire* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1936), 142.

<sup>84</sup> *Correspondance Politique et Commerciale/Nouvelle Série 1897-1917 Japon* [Political and Commercial Correspondence/New Series 1897-1917 Japan], Tel. No.37, 1904.1.14, 84.

<sup>85</sup> *Despatches from the United States Ministers to Japan, 1855-1906*, M133, Griscom to Hay, telegram, 1904.1.13.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, Griscom to Hay, 1904.1.21.

<sup>87</sup> Hyeon Gwangho, "Daehan Jeguk gwa Reosia geurigo Ilbon", 282.

side.<sup>88</sup> With the secret agreement not yet ready and Hayashi fearing that a Russian protest to Gojong could nix it, he reported to Komura that a Korean draft of the secret agreement would be first signed by Yi Jiyong and Hayashi around 22 January, and that he expected further revisions to include Japan's claims.<sup>89</sup> However, Yi Yongik strongly opposed this, stressing to Gojong that cooperation between the two countries would infuriate Russia and threaten Korean independence, and warned Yi Jiyong.<sup>90</sup>

Moving forward on the secret agreement, Hayashi also spied on Korea's pro-neutralisation faction to discover whether they were working with the Korean court and government and with Pavloff to realise neutralisation, but neither predicted the Korean government's wartime neutrality declaration nor procured any information about it.<sup>91</sup> But Gojong and the pro-neutralisation faction led by Yi Yongik had already been secretly planning to declare neutrality and to win over friendly powers for Korean neutrality. Ergo, Gojong and his aides maintained links with Russia and France. Hyeon Sanggeon informed Pavloff that Gojong felt relieved by Nicholas II's personal letter and expected the emperor's goodwill to result in a Russian guarantee of Korean independence (14.1.1904). Hyeon let Pavloff read Gojong's statement of his intentions to proclaim Korea's strict neutrality in the event of a Russo-Japanese war<sup>92</sup> and requested his cooperation in sending it via telegram, which would have to go through Shanghai to avoid the Japanese-controlled telegraph office.

Pavloff told Hyeon to wait until he had received instructions from his government and hinted that Shanghai was not a viable option for transmitting the telegram since no passenger ship was leaving for Shanghai until four days later. Fifth-ranked Russian official M. de Plancon telegraphed Pavloff and confirmed Pavloff's scepticism of the Shanghai option (17.1.1904). De Plancon advised that Gojong's telegram should be sent to the French consulate in Shanghai via the French legation

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<sup>88</sup> *ChuKan Nihon koshikan kiroku* 23, No.59, 1904.1.17, <http://db.history.go.kr/>.

<sup>89</sup> *ChuKan Nihon koshikan kiroku* 19, No.704, 1904.1.21, <http://db.history.go.kr/>. Korean negotiators insisted on putting the refugee issue ahead of other conditions in a secret agreement safeguarding the court, which were being used as bait by the Japanese government to induce the Korean government to sign it. Hyeon Gwangho, "Daehan Jeguk gwa Reosia geurigo Ilbon", 282-283.

<sup>90</sup> *ChuKan Nihon koshikan kiroku* 19, No.78, 1904.1.24, <http://db.history.go.kr/>; Yi Yongik recommended against Gojong signing the secret agreement until Japan acknowledged Korean neutrality. Duus, 180.

<sup>91</sup> Pak Huiho, 184.

<sup>92</sup> Pak Hyojong, ed., 429.

in Seoul. The next day, Pavloff telegraphed the Russian foreign minister, reporting that Korea's neutrality declaration would be announced from the French Consulate in Chefoo, China, by French Consul A. Guérin,<sup>93</sup> who had been serving as acting Korean consul since 1901. Pavloff also insisted that Gojong's neutrality declaration meant he had refused to sign a military alliance or protectorate treaty with Japan.<sup>94</sup>

France played a pivotal role in Korea's declaration of wartime neutrality. Working in concert with Yi Yongik, Gang Seokho, Yi Hakgyun, Hyeon Sanggeon, and Yi Yinyeong, Martel participated in key diplomatic negotiations and maintained contacts with Sands, Yi Hakgyun and others closely involved in neutrality policy.<sup>95</sup> Most importantly, French Chargé d'affaires Fontenay would later compose Korea's neutrality declaration and engineer its transmission abroad, as described below.

In his report (2.2.1904) to Delcassé, Fontenay wrote that he met with Pavloff in Seoul. Fontenay pointed out how the neutralisation of Korea, if it could be guaranteed by major powers, would help to defuse the ongoing tension between Japan and Russia and preserve peace in the Far East. While agreeing with Fontenay, Pavloff feared that Japan would oppose such a move, but his position soon changed; during his visit (14.1.1904) to Fontenay, Pavloff told him that with the Russian government's blessing, he was endeavouring to persuade Gojong to proclaim a declaration of neutrality. Pavloff believed that this would put an end to Japan's solicitations for Gojong to surrender to their demands. Following this meeting, Fontenay drafted a declaration of Korean neutrality to be sent to eleven countries that had signed treaties with Korea and to seven Korean ministers who were accredited abroad. The text of Fontenay's neutrality declaration statement was communicated to Gojong for his approval. However, the Russian government opposed transmitting the telegrams from the Russian-controlled Port Arthur because the Russian cabinet feared this could diminish the declaration's value by depriving it of the appearance of spontaneity. Furthermore, there was no question of entrusting these telegrams to the Japanese-controlled telegraph office. Thus,

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<sup>93</sup> Referred to as a vice-consul in the French diplomatic document.

<sup>94</sup> Pak Hyojong, ed., 430.

<sup>95</sup> *Hwangseong sinmun*, 1902.9.30, <http://www.kinds.or.kr/>.

Fontenay, remembering that French Consul Guérin in Chefoo was also serving as the consul of Korea, thought he could act on behalf of the Korean government to transmit its messages abroad.<sup>96</sup>

Despite this positive development, much was left to overcome. Instead of uniting behind the cause of wartime neutrality, in early January of 1904 the Korean court was still debating the need for Gojong to take refuge at a foreign legation. Yi Geuntaek of the pro-Russia camp reported to Gojong that since Russia would win in the event of the Russo-Japanese War, Gojong should escape to the nearby Russian legation. In contrast, pro-neutralisation faction members Yi Yongik and Gil Yeongsoo advised Gojong to seek refuge at the French legation. Hayashi reported that the French minister proposed to Yi Yongik that all Korean capital be withdrawn from Japanese banks and stored at the French legation.<sup>97</sup> Considering the Korean government's structural dependence on the Dai-Ichi Bank loans, this was a radical proposal that, if carried out, could weaken Japan's influence in Korea.

Their bickering notwithstanding, Gojong's closest aides—with the exception of Yi Geuntaek, who now aligned himself with Japan instead of Russia—turned their attention to the declaration of wartime neutrality. As Russian and French diplomatic documents demonstrated, neutralisation advocates could not freely communicate their intentions to declare neutrality via telegraph cable. Neither could neutralisation be discussed openly; high-ranking Korean officials like Foreign Minister Yi Jiyong<sup>98</sup> were known to hold pro-Japanese sentiments. Moreover, the presence of Japanese spies was so omnipresent that even the inner court was not immune from Japanese surveillance. To ensure Korea's plan for wartime neutrality was not leaked to Japan, it was secretly prepared under the direction of Yi Yongik and involved only a select number of Korean officials.

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<sup>96</sup> Up until now, scholars have relied solely on Japanese documents to hypothesize about French Chargé d'affaires Fontenay's role in the declaration of Korean wartime neutrality. However, this unpublished French diplomatic document reveals France's non-negligible impact on Korean foreign policy and the complex nature of major power Far Eastern policy. *Correspondance Politique et Commerciale/Nouvelle Série 1897-1910 Corée: Politique extérieure Étrangers en Corée III, 1902-1904* [Political and Commercial Correspondence/New Series 1897~1910 Korea: External politics and Foreigners in Korea III, 1902~1904], No.210, Fontenay to Delcassé, 1904.2.2, 16-18.

<sup>97</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 37(1), No.519, 440, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>98</sup> Despite serving as Korea's acting foreign minister for only a month, Yi Jiyong had become a useful instrument for Japan by maintaining close links with Japanese Minister Hayashi (*Correspondance Politique et Commerciale/Nouvelle Série 1897-1910 Corée: Politique extérieure Étrangers en Corée III, 1902-1904*, No.205, 1904.1.28, 192), and thus was being sidelined from the wartime neutrality declaration process.

Within the Korean court,<sup>99</sup> Gojong's palace aides—Hyeon Sanggeon, Gang Seokho, Yi Hakgyun, and Yi Yinyeong—worked with Martel and Delcoigne to prepare the neutrality declaration. Fontenay translated this into French and an interpreter at the Korean Foreign Ministry, Yi Geonchun, was reportedly sent to Chefoo to deliver the text and have the French vice-consul facilitate the declaration on behalf of the Korean government.<sup>100</sup> Under the name of Foreign Minister Yi Jiyong, the wartime neutrality of Korea was declared at Chefoo (21.1.1904), and telegrams announcing the declaration soon reached foreign capitals.<sup>101</sup> The contents of the telegram on wartime neutrality declaration, written in French, were as follows:

In view of the complications which have sprung up between Russia and Japan and in view of the difficulties which negotiations seem to encounter in bringing about a pacific solution, the Korean Gov. by order of H. M. the emperor, declares that it has taken the firm resolution of observing the most strict neutrality whatever may be the result of the pourparlers actually engaged between the two powers.<sup>102</sup>

The declaration of wartime neutrality by the Korean government took Japan by surprise. Yi Jiyong, who was exerting himself to conclude the secret agreement between Korea and Japan, did not realise that his name was used without his approval. But the next day he had to sign and stamp wartime neutrality declaration under the order of Gojong, who told him that a person would be immediately sent to Chefoo.<sup>103</sup> Komura thus instructed Hayashi to find out who had sent the telegram proclaiming Korea's wartime neutrality to major powers. Japan at first suspected Hyeon Sanggeon and Yi Hakgyun, but after confirming their absence from Chefoo, Japanese officials shifted their focus on responding to the neutrality declaration. Since Japan's primary concern lay in severing the close relationship between Korea and Russia, Japanese officials refused to recognise Korean neutrality if Korea tolerated Russian military activity at the Yalu River basin, predicting

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<sup>99</sup> Allen wrote that in his guess the preparation for Korean neutrality took place at the Russian legation, where Korean officials were supposed to have held numerous conferences. *Despatches from the United States Ministers to Korea, 1883-1905*, M134, Allen to the Secretary of State, 1904.1.30.

<sup>100</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 37(1), No.348, 319, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, No.332, 310-311, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>102</sup> The original French text was as follows: “Vu les complications qui ont surgi entre la Russie et le Japon et vu les difficultés que semblent rencontrer les négociations à amener une solution pacifique le Gouvernement Coréen, par ordre de Sa Majesté l'Empereur, déclare qu'il a pris la ferme résolution d'observer la plus stricte neutralité, quel que soit le résultat des pourparlers actuellement engagés entre les dites Puissances.” *Ibid.*, No.334, 311-312, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, No.340, 314-315, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>.

that the activities of the pro-neutralisation faction would be only a temporary distraction<sup>104</sup> and concluding that Japan did not need to acknowledge Korean neutrality.<sup>105</sup>

As expected, Russia willingly accepted Korean neutrality since its cabinet believed the declaration could stop Japan from imposing a protectorate on Korea,<sup>106</sup> and thus De Plancon ordered Pavloff to inform Gojong that the Russian government completely sympathised with Korea's neutrality declaration.<sup>107</sup> Russia's positive reactions rendered the Japanese assertion that Russia's responses varied<sup>108</sup> highly questionable. Japan's ally, Britain, responding to Korea's wartime neutrality declaration through its minister in Seoul (22.1.1904),<sup>109</sup> refused to endorse Korean neutrality, and just as it had with Yi Haneung's request in London, merely acknowledged it.<sup>110</sup> Following his government's instructions, Italian Minister to Korea replied with only an acknowledgement (27.1.1904),<sup>111</sup> notwithstanding his king's subsequent support for Korean neutrality.

The U.S., however, never responded to the Korean neutrality declaration, even though Allen wondered whether the U.S. government had:

There is a rumour today from the palace that you have so replied. I trust this is not correct. It tends to discredit your representative here when you reply direct to messages from the Korean Government, instead of doing so through your representative here.<sup>112</sup>

Considering Roosevelt's pro-Japan sentiments,<sup>113</sup> American possession of the Philippines, and its open door policy in China, that the U.S. had already declared Japan-friendly neutrality in the event

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid. No.343, 317, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., No.345, 317-318, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>106</sup> This unpublished document reveals the Russian government's hitherto unknown position on Korea's wartime neutrality. *Correspondance Politique et Commerciale/Nouvelle Série 1897-1917 Japon*, No.200, Fontenay to Delcassé, 1904.1.23, 135.

<sup>107</sup> Pak Jonghyo, ed., 430. The Japanese documents record that French Chargé d'affaires Fontenay was also sympathetic as well. *ChuKan Nihon koshikan kiroku* 18, No.80, 1904.1.24, <http://db.history.go.kr/>.

<sup>108</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 37(1), No.353, 321-322; No.360, 325,

<http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>109</sup> *Gu Hanguk oegyō munseo* 14: *Yeongan* 2, No.2549, 618.

<sup>110</sup> *Despatches from the United States Ministers to Korea, 1883-1905*, M134, Allen to the Secretary of State, 1904.1.30. Pro-Japan Jordan claimed the wartime neutrality declaration was meaningless since it could not stop belligerents from invading Korea. *Correspondance Politique et Commerciale/Nouvelle Série 1897-1917 Japon*, No.202, Fontenay to Delcassé, 1904.1.25, 148.

<sup>111</sup> Goryeo daehakgyo, ed., *Gu Hanguk oegyō munseo 21: Uian* 舊韓國外交文書: 義案 [Old Korean Diplomatic Documents: Pertaining to Italy], No.271, (Seoul: Goryeo daehakgyo, 1973), 118.

<sup>112</sup> *Despatches from the United States Ministers to Korea, 1883-1905*, M134, Allen to the Secretary of State, 1904.1.30.

of a Russo-Japanese war<sup>114</sup> was small wonder. While Hay instructed U.S. Ministers to China and Japan Conger and Griscom and U.S. Ambassador to Russia Robert S. McCormick to convey America's earnest wish that "the neutrality of China and her administrative entity" be respected by both Japan and Russia,<sup>115</sup> he excluded Korea, which had already declared its neutrality. This symbolised the U.S. government's current stance.<sup>116</sup> Cassini criticised Hay, saying: why would it not remonstrate with Japan over Korea, while the U.S. would try to deprive Russia of Manchuria? And why did the U.S. omit Korea from the list of those it would support, though Korea had also declared its neutrality as China had done?<sup>117</sup>

To make matters worse, while no foreign powers except Russia formally supported its neutrality, the Korean government interpreted their acknowledgements of the receipt of Korea's wartime neutrality declaration as their endorsement.<sup>118</sup> As Allen stated:

You will see from this telegram that the mere acknowledgement, by the Foreign Powers, of the receipt of this announcement, is having an effect that must be quite contrary to that intended by those powers.<sup>119</sup>

Allen's finding could also apply to the case of Yi Yongik, who misunderstood the process of neutralisation and thus wrongly believed that Korea had become a neutral state;<sup>120</sup> when British journalist Frederick Arthur Mackenzie asked him about the fate of Korea in the event of a Russo-Japanese war, Yi, demonstrating his limited grasp of international law, replied that the Korean government's declaration of wartime neutrality would protect Korea because major powers would uphold Korean neutrality.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Roosevelt believed that Japan's control over Korea would be better than Korean misrule, Chinese interference in Korean affairs, and Russian bureaucratic self-righteousness on the Korean issue. Tyler Dennett, *Roosevelt and Russo-Japanese War: A Critical Study of American Policy in Eastern Asia 1902-1905, Based Primarily Upon the Private Papers of Theodore Roosevelt* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1959), 97.

<sup>114</sup> United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to Foreign Relations of the United States: 1904*, Proclamation by the President, 1904.2.11 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1905), 32-35.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, Hay to Conger, telegram, 1904.2.10, 118; Hay to Gricom, telegram, 1904.2.10, 418; Hay to McCormick, telegram, 1904.2.10, 722-723.

<sup>116</sup> Dennett, "Roosevelt and Russo-Japanese War: A Critical Study of American Policy in Eastern Asia 1902-1905, Based Primarily Upon the Private Papers of Theodore Roosevelt", 27-28.

<sup>117</sup> Johannes Lepsius, ed., *Die Grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette, 1871-1914, Band 19*, von Alvensleben to the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, No.82, 1904.2.12 (Berlin: German Foreign Office, 1927), 106.

<sup>118</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 37(1), No.339, 347, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>119</sup> *Despatches from the United States Ministers to Korea, 1883-1905*, M134, Allen to the Secretary of State, 1904.1.30.

<sup>120</sup> Hyeon Gwangho, "Daehan Jeguk gwa Reosia geurigo Ilbon", 279.

<sup>121</sup> Frederick Arthur Mackenzie, *The Tragedy of Korea* (New York: E. P. Dutton Co, 1908), 109.

Though Korea's cautiously planned wartime neutrality was declared after secret negotiations with Russia and discreet advice and cooperation from French representatives, the results were quite limited. While most major powers did not mention why they would not endorse Korea's neutrality, its military weaknesses<sup>122</sup> might have been one of the reasons. To be sure, if they were ever to successfully defend Korea from external threats, Korean soldiers had to be tested in real combat. Unfortunately, the Korean military's combat experience was restricted to quelling internal uprisings, battling against the remnants of the Boxers, and engaging in skirmishes with Chinese forces in Manchuria.<sup>123</sup> Quantitatively, despite making undeniable progress, the Korean military still remained small even in 1904 (25,200),<sup>124</sup> and could not match other major powers' far bigger forces. Compare Japan. Having initiated a massive defence-strengthening programme in 1895, it boasted an 180,000-man army and a formidable navy composed mainly of British state-of-the-art cruisers and destroyers by 1903. The Russian army in turn fielded more than one million men, and its navy ranked fourth in the world in terms of total tonnage.<sup>125</sup>

Before simply acknowledging Korea's wartime neutrality declaration, Germany and France had tried to neutralise geopolitically important areas within Korea to safeguard their interests in the region. As a passive mediator in the rivalry between Japan and Russia,<sup>126</sup> Germany, through German Minister to Japan Arco, urged Russia not to compromise with Japan and encouraged Japan to resist Russian imperialism in Manchuria and Korea in the autumn of 1901.<sup>127</sup> While its East Asian policy seemed opportunistic, Germany still retained an interest in Korea, raising its representative in Seoul to the rank of minister resident in January 1903 and appointing highly-

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<sup>122</sup> An unpublished report by French military attaché Col. Clement de Grandprey laid bare the woeful status of the Korean military and demonstrated that Korea was perhaps too weak to defend itself from potential military aggression. *Correspondance Politique et Commerciale/Nouvelle Série 1897-1910 Corée: Armée-Marine (1901-1917)* [Political and Commercial Correspondence/New Series 1897~1910 Korea: Army-Navy (1901-1917)], 1902.12.20, 24.

<sup>123</sup> For instance, while a 5000-strong Korean military unit was formed to guard Korea's border with China (1900.7) (*Peurangseu oemubu munseo 9: Daehan Jeguk II · 1899-1901*, 100), it was difficult to see how this inexperienced force could face the highly-trained and battle-tested Japanese forces.

<sup>124</sup> Pak Huiho, 205.

<sup>125</sup> Gang Seonghak, 290.

<sup>126</sup> In fact, as early as June 1901, Germany had decided to observe a proper but friendly neutrality with respect to Japan in the event of a Russo-Japanese war. *Die Grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette, 1871-1914, Band 17*, No.35, Richthofen to Arco, 1901.6.27, 140-141.

<sup>127</sup> Gerhard Krebs, "German Policy and the Russo-Japanese War", in *Rethinking the Russo-Japanese War, 1904-1905 Volume II The Nichinan Papers*, ed. John W. M. Chapman and Inaba Chiharu (Folkestone: Global Oriental, 2007), 90.

experienced Conrad von Saldern to the post.<sup>128</sup> As France, Russia's ally since the 1890's, had become Russia's main creditor (1904),<sup>129</sup> it worried about the financial ramifications of a Russo-Japanese conflict. Since such hostilities could also endanger its interests in Korea and Indochina through possible Japanese intrusion,<sup>130</sup> France actively collaborated with Britain to prevent war between their respective allies.<sup>131</sup> Although Russia proposed neutralisation of an area within Korea to protect Manchuria against Japanese intrusion, the country, showing an active interest in wartime neutrality,<sup>132</sup> later supported Korea's neutrality declaration.

Though their Far Eastern strategies differed markedly, the three countries ended up suggesting wartime neutrality for specific areas within Korea. The Shanghai-based Chinese language newspaper *Shēn bào* (22.1.1904) reported that both Germany and France proposed that Seoul and Incheon be declared "neutral zones".<sup>133</sup> The next day, according to the *Shēn bào* report, Russia also requested the Korean government designate a northern frontier area of the Korean peninsula a neutral zone.<sup>134</sup> However, other major powers did not show any interest in the German and French proposal, and Korea did not respond to Russia's proposal.

Meanwhile, believing that Korea's wartime neutrality declaration had been successful, Gojong wanted to utilise it to declare permanent neutrality. He summoned Fontenay to discuss the necessary process for this measure and instructed Min Yeongchan to discuss rights and duties for neutrality with Louis Renault.<sup>135</sup> Gojong's optimism was also shared by Yi Yongik, who judged that the neutrality declaration could protect Korea from the dangers of war.<sup>136</sup> Moreover, some pro-Korea Westerners seemed to think Korea's security could also be secured by concessions diplomacy among major powers; in late January Delcoigne was working on a plan to divide Korean

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<sup>128</sup> Jeong Sangsu, "Manju wa Dogir ui segye jeongchaek [Manchuria and Germany's World policy]", in *Asia ui Balkan, Manju wa seogu yeolgang ui jeguk juui jeongchaek* [Asia's Balkans, Manchuria, and Imperialist Policy], Baek Jungi et al. (Seoul: Dongbuga yeoksa jaedan, 2007), 136.

<sup>129</sup> Patrick Beillevalaire, "Preparing for the Next War: French Diplomacy and the Russo-Japanese War", in *Rethinking the Russo-Japanese War, 1904-1905 Volume II The Nichinan Papers*, ed. John W. M. Chapman and Inaba Chiharu (Folkestone: Global Oriental, 2007), 78.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>132</sup> Pak Jonghyo, ed., 429-430.

<sup>133</sup> *Shēn bào* 申報 [*Shanghai News*], 1904.1.22.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 1904.1.23.

<sup>135</sup> Hyeon Gwangho, "Daehan Jegug ui daeoe jeongchaek", 122.

<sup>136</sup> Frederick Arthur MacKenzie, *The Tragedy of Korea* [Daehan Jegug ui bigeuk], trans. and ed. Shin Bokryong (Seoul: Jipmundang, 1999), 134-135.

mines into zones to be assigned to foreigners as concessions for attracting the interest of major powers to Korea.<sup>137</sup>

Nevertheless, the geopolitical situation still tilted against Korea; by late January, Japanese preparations for war were completed, and its government was determined to avoid further delay that would be detrimental to its cause.<sup>138</sup> Russia also adopted a tough policy at a council in the Royal presence (28.1.1904), thus preparing for war with Japan. Accordingly, Komura instructed Kurino (3.2.1904) to stop seeking a Russian reply to the Japanese counter-proposal, and the next day, a secret council in the Royal presence decided to go to war (4.2.1904).<sup>139</sup> Even then, France still hoped to find peaceful solutions to resolve the potential regional crisis, with Delcassé stressing the importance of the preservation of peace in the Far East (5.2.1904).<sup>140</sup> Finally, after Japan notified Lamsdorff via Kurino of the severance of diplomatic relations (6.2.1904), its navy launched a surprise attack on the Russian ships at Port Arthur, thus triggering the Russo-Japanese War (8.2.1904).<sup>141</sup>

Under these circumstances, the Korean government had to consider a more realistic measure. According to Hayashi's report (8.2.1904) to Komura, Hyeon Sanggeon frequently visited the French legation in Seoul, possibly in order to effectuate the neutrality of Seoul under the approval of various countries, a matter recently on the agenda for a meeting at the palace. In fact, Hyeon received orders from Gojong to convince Fontenay to propose the neutrality of Seoul, or failing that, have him request Pavloff do so. Both representatives, however, were reluctant to call for the neutrality of Seoul and make their stands known. Nevertheless, Gojong gave Yi Guentaek the authority to help make this happen,<sup>142</sup> which seemed to be short-sighted considering Yi's pro-Japan sentiment. Since Britain, U.S., and Japan had all rebuffed its neutrality declaration, Korea was making a desperate effort to realise at least Seoul's neutrality, pinning its faint hopes on the Franco-

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<sup>137</sup> Hitherto unknown, this unpublished report demonstrates Gojong's unyielding desire to secure Korean independence with major power support. *Correspondance Politique et Commerciale/Nouvelle Série 1897-1910 Corée: Politique extérieure Étrangers en Corée III, 1902-1904*, No.204, Fontenay to Delcassé, 1904.1.27, 190.

<sup>138</sup> Esthus, 21.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>140</sup> Beillevaire, 76.

<sup>141</sup> Seong Hwangyong, 329.

<sup>142</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 37(1), No.349, 319-320,

<http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

Russian Alliance. But Hyeon's attempt progressed no further due to the circumspect stance taken by the French and Russian ministers and Japan's expansionist policy towards Korea.<sup>143</sup>

While Korea was making little headway in its wartime neutrality, the Japanese victory in the naval battle of Incheon (9.2.1904) led to Japanese troops entering and occupying Seoul and to Pavloff's decision to leave the capital. The next day, Japanese adviser Katō Matsuo and Ōmiwa Chōbei had an audience with Gojong and pushed him to retract his neutrality declaration, saying that it could not prevent Russo-Japanese forces from entering Korea since no country's response would be strong enough to affect the actual situation on the ground.<sup>144</sup> Seoul being occupied, Gojong, having no choice but to give up his neutralisation policy, reluctantly decided to enter an alliance with Japan, ordering Yi Jiyong, Yi Yongik, and Ōmiwa to parley (17.2.1904).<sup>145</sup>

Korea's diplomatic isolation also played a part in forcing Gojong to consider the said alliance; on the eve of the Russo-Japanese War, Japanese Consul in Busan Shidehara Kijurō ordered Japanese consular policemen to prevent the Korean post office staff from sending a Russian diplomatic report about the start of hostilities and afterwards cut the Korean government-owned Busan-Seoul telegraph line. Japanese Minister in Seoul Hayashi also ordered all telegraph lines out of the Korean capital except Japanese-owned ones be put out of commission for three days. By imposing a "communication blackout" on Russia,<sup>146</sup> Japan stopped communications between Seoul and St. Petersburg and was able to pressure the Korean government to align itself with Japan at this critical moment.

Ultimately, in the teeth of fierce opposition from some officials like Yi Yongik, Hayashi managed to cajole acting Foreign Minister Yi Jiyong into signing the Korea-Japan Protocol (23.2.1904),<sup>147</sup> giving Japan the right to intervene in Korean foreign policy, granting permission for

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<sup>143</sup> Pak Huiho, 192.

<sup>144</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 37(1), No.131, 320, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>145</sup> Seo Yeonghui, "Daehan Jeguk jeongchisa yeongu", 195.

<sup>146</sup> Yang Daiqing, *Technology of Empire: Telecommunications and Japanese Expansion in Asia, 1883-1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 36-37.

<sup>147</sup> Duus, 180-181. Allen opined that this protocol not only made Korea Japan's ally, but effectively ended "any such fiction of neutrality". Burnett, ed., Allen to Secretary of State, No.736, 1904.5.10, 128.

<sup>148</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 37(1), No.376. 339-340,

<http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>. Allen commented that this agreement established the Japanese protectorate of Korea and intimated it would have far-reaching ramifications, describing the agreement as "very strong". *Despatches from the United States Ministers to Korea, 1883-1905*, M134, Allen to the Secretary of State, 1904.2.24.

the Japanese military to seize Korean land, and prohibiting both governments from signing any agreement that violated the terms of this protocol.<sup>148</sup> By allowing Japanese forces to use Korean soil for military purposes, Korea violated its duty as a neutral country—prevent the use of a neutral state’s territory as a military base for a belligerent—and thus its neutrality declaration ran aground.<sup>149</sup> To cap it all, Japan forced Korea to publish the secret protocol in Korea’s official gazette. The formal announcement severely restricted Korea’s latitude internationally.<sup>150</sup> Later, Japan forced Gojong to issue an edict renouncing all treaties and conventions between Korea and Russia (18.5.1904), but he would retract the edict at the first opportunity.<sup>151</sup>

Meanwhile, troubled by the course of the war, Carl Wolter, a German member of the Committee of the International Settlement in Incheon, proposed wartime neutrality for the international settlement there to Japanese Consul in Incheon Katō Motokunio (2.3.1904). Wolter sought to secure Katō’s assent to his proposal, arguing that the Korea-Japan Protocol had made Korea an ally of Japan. Thus, given the direction of the Russo-Japanese War, the status of the international settlements for various countries in Incheon had to follow the example set by the ones in Shanghai during the Sino-Japanese War. Wolter pointed out that once this step was taken, the lives and property of foreign and Japanese nationals in Incheon’s international settlement could be protected.<sup>152</sup>

Wolter’s proposal, however, failed to gain the sympathy of Japan for the following reasons: First, Japanese officials asserted that it was opposed to the national interests of both Korea and Japan by international law and was unaccompanied by any tangible benefits. Second, if the Russian military abided by international law, it would not shell or invade an undefended area (Incheon). If Russia disregarded international law, there was no way to prevent Russian forces from bombarding and invading Incheon. Third, since the international settlements bordered the Sino-Japanese

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<sup>149</sup> Pak Huiho, 193.

<sup>150</sup> Breaking its promise to ensure the secrecy of the Japan-Korea Protocol, Japan quickly made it public (1904.2.27) and pushed Korea to go public too. Korea reluctantly reported it in an extra edition of Korea’s official gazette (1904.3.8), thereby formally abrogating its neutrality policy. *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 37(1), No.377, 342; No.380, 345, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>151</sup> According to Fontenay’s correspondence in Russia’s Shanghai Consul Kleymenov’s report (1904.5.27) to the Russian Foreign Minister, Gojong issued the edict under duress from the Japanese Minister Hayashi and thus still believed in Russia, hoping that Yi Beomjin would not withdraw from Russia.

<sup>152</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 37(1), No.355, 322-323, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

settlement, even if they were declared a neutral zone, they would still be endangered.<sup>153</sup> Moreover, the German chargé d'affaires, vice-consuls of various countries in Incheon, and the American resident W. D. Townsend all opposed Wolter's idea.<sup>154</sup>

Meanwhile, Japan benefited from Roosevelt's pro-Japan stance. Though the U.S. declared strict neutrality, he strongly supported Japan. Takahira, seeking Roosevelt's goodwill, willingly replied to Russian accusations that Japan had committed acts in Korea which were illegal under international law in a telegram to Hay (8.3.1904):

The maintenance of the independence and territorial integrity of Corea being one of the objects of the present war, the dispatch of troops to the menaced territory was a matter of right and necessity and in taking this action the Imperial government have had the distinct consent of the Corean government.<sup>155</sup>

During a visit from Japanese envoy Kaneko Kentarō, Roosevelt expressed his confidence that Japan would win the war (26.3.1904), and at a lunch meeting with Kaneko and Takahira, he said he hoped that, as for Japan and its future role in the Far East, it would take its place as a great nation with "a paramount interest in what surrounds the Yellow Sea, just as the United States has a paramount interest in what surrounds the Caribbean" (6.6.1904).<sup>156</sup> He further patronised Japan in his letter to Hay: "The Japs have played our game of the civilised mankind... We may be of genuine service, if Japan wins out, in preventing interference to rob her of the fruits of her victory" (26.7.1904).<sup>157</sup>

Appreciating Roosevelt's views, Japan felt it was of "the utmost importance to have the goodwill and sympathy of the United States".<sup>158</sup> Relying on American support, Hayashi coerced Yi Haeong into appointing financial and diplomatic advisers recommended by Japan (6.8.1904),<sup>159</sup> which enabled Japan to dominate Korea without any interference. While Japan maintained amicable relations with France, despite the latter's alliance with Russia, Germany had an obvious partiality for Russia in the early months of the war, leading to Japanese fears that Germany would intervene

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., No.356-358, 323-324, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., No.361, 325, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>155</sup> *Notes from the Japanese Legation in the United States. to the Department of State, 1858-1906*, M163, Takahira to Secretary of State, 1904.3.8.

<sup>156</sup> Esthus, 41.

<sup>157</sup> Morrison, ed., Vol. IV, 865.

<sup>158</sup> Esthus, 43.

<sup>159</sup> Duus, 187. As a result, Hayashi and Yun Chiho concluded the Japan-Korea Protocol of August 1904 (1904.8.22) and recommended Megata Shutaro as a financial adviser (1904.10.15) and Durham W. Stevens as a diplomatic adviser (1904.12.27).

in the war or in the peace process.<sup>160</sup> Roosevelt once again came to Japan's rescue, telling German Ambassador to the U.S. Speck von Sternberg that a coalition of powers must not be formed to deprive Japan of the fruits of her victory (9.8.1904).<sup>161</sup> To Japan's relief, the German government replied that it would not interfere (14.8.1904) and acknowledged that if Russia were defeated, Korea would become Japan's possession (27.9.1904).<sup>162</sup>

After Port Arthur fell to Japanese forces (2.1.1905), the German government contemplated a peace settlement for the Russo-Japanese War.<sup>163</sup> Russia, however, would not take up this option as of yet, as some like Cassini asserted they should continue fighting.<sup>164</sup> Even so, Roosevelt wanted to maintain balance of power on the continent of Asia by preventing a lop-sided victory for either Japan or Russia<sup>165</sup> and outlined peace conditions to George von L. Meyer, the soon-to-be-appointed U.S. Ambassador to Russia (6.2.1905):

Of course the military mechanism may alter, but if peace should come now, Japan ought to have a protectorate over Korea (which has shown its utter inability to stand by itself) and ought to succeed to Russia's rights in and around Port Arthur, while I should hope to see Manchuria restored to China.<sup>166</sup>

Roosevelt's peace terms seemed to be in line with those of the Japanese government. Moreover, Japan soon had another reason to sue for peace as its victory from the Battle of Mukden (10.3.1905) had stretched its material and financial resources to the limit.<sup>167</sup>

In April, the momentum for peace picked up as first Delcassé<sup>168</sup> and later Roosevelt favoured direct negotiations between Japan and Russia to end the war, demanding Japan remain committed to the open door policy in Manchuria and the restoration of it in China.<sup>169</sup> Emboldened by this development, the Katsura cabinet formally decided to sign a protectorate treaty giving Japan full control over Korea's external relations and placing domestic affairs under the supervision of a

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<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>161</sup> *Hay Papers: Hay Diary*, 1904.8.10.

<sup>162</sup> Esthus, 47.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>164</sup> *Hay Diary*, 1905.1.3, 1.6.

<sup>165</sup> Seong Hwangyong, 333.

<sup>166</sup> Morrison, ed., Vol. IV, 1115-1116.

<sup>167</sup> Esthus, 62-63.

<sup>168</sup> With the Moroccan crisis threatening war between France and Germany, he was determined to extricate Russia from the war in the East to restore the balance of power in Europe. *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>169</sup> *Roosevelt Papers*, Roosevelt to Hay, telegram, 1905.4.20.

Japanese resident.<sup>170</sup> Afterwards, taking advantage of its victory at the Battle of Tsushima (28.5.1905), Japan requested that Roosevelt “directly and entirely on his own motion and initiative” invite Russia and Japan to open direct negotiations.<sup>171</sup> Accordingly, Roosevelt formally urged both countries to enter negotiations to end the war (8.6.1905).<sup>172</sup> Eventually, the Russian emperor accepted Roosevelt’s recommendation to hold peace talks with Japan (11.6.1905),<sup>173</sup> but Russia was still unwilling to yield completely to Japan; the Russian Foreign Ministry ordered its representative at the upcoming Russo-Japanese conference to mention how Japan had violated international law to occupy Korea without permission and had simultaneously contravened various treaties that guaranteed its independence and non-aggression (11.7.1905).<sup>174</sup>

While Russian officials were grappling with strategies for the forthcoming talks, the Japanese government secretly plotted to strengthen its bargaining position during the conference; Japan concluded the Taft-Katsura Memorandum (27.7.1905), which came after U.S. Secretary of War William Howard Taft suggested to Japanese Prime Minister Katsura Tarō that Korea should be prohibited from entering into foreign treaties without Japan’s consent, saying that this would contribute to permanent peace in the Far East.<sup>175</sup> The accord also reflected Katsura’s view that the U.S. East Asian policy should conform to British and Japanese designs there, and by agreeing to it, Taft accepted Japan’s exercise of diplomatic control over Korea at the end of the Russo-Japanese War.<sup>176</sup> In return, Japan disavowed any aggressive intentions towards the U.S. colony the Philippines.<sup>177</sup> This marked the end of U.S. support for Korean neutralisation. No longer could Korea officially count on the U.S. for its assistance through good offices to mediate Korea’s disputes with Japan. In the absence of any desire on the part of the U.S. to restrain Japan from

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<sup>170</sup> Duus, 188. Before this decision, Japan signed an agreement with the Korean government giving control over the Korean postal, telegraph, and telephone services to the Japanese government. (1905.4.1). *Ibid.*, 187-188.

<sup>171</sup> Morrison, ed., Vol. IV, 1221-1222.

<sup>172</sup> Kim Soyeong, “Miguk gwa Ilbon, Pillipin gwa Hangug eul georaehada: Gasseura-Taepeteu bimangnok (1905.7.27) [The U.S. and Japan Trade in the Philippines and Korea: the Katsura-Taft Memorandum (1905.7.27)]”, in *Joyag euro bon Hanguk geundaesa* [Modern Korean History Through Treaties], Choe Deoksu et al. (Paju: Yeolin chaekdeul, 2010), 504.

<sup>173</sup> Pak Jonghyo, ed., 317.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 318.

<sup>175</sup> Esthus, 103; Roosevelt also concurred with Taft’s views: “Your conversation with Count Katsura absolutely correct in every respect. Wish you would state to Katsura that I confirm every word you have said.” Morrison, ed., Vol. IV, 1293.

<sup>176</sup> Kim Soyeong, “Miguk gwa Ilbon, Pillipin gwa Hangug eul georaehada”, 510.

<sup>177</sup> Esthus, 104.

pursuing its objective in Korea (establishing a protectorate), engagement with Russia was the only realistic option for Korean neutralisation.

Japan's position was further bolstered when the Second Anglo-Japanese Alliance went into force (12.8.1905). Like the first alliance, this renewed alliance was aimed at winning the "goodwill and support of all the Powers in endeavouring to maintain peace in East Asia".<sup>178</sup> Through this agreement, Britain could also extend the scope of the alliance to include India.<sup>179</sup> More importantly, this agreement recognised Japan's paramount position in Korea, allowing Japan to pursue its political, military, and economic interests in Korea.<sup>180</sup> Unlike the First Anglo-Japanese Alliance, the Second Anglo-Japanese Alliance did not include any provisions guaranteeing Korean independence.<sup>181</sup> This agreement could not have come at a better time for Japan because the first alliance was seen as "a most inconvenient stumbling block" for Japan's effort to establish a protectorate over Korea.<sup>182</sup> Finally, since this alliance committed both parties to come to each other's assistance in case any of its interests, as specified by the treaty, were attacked by a third power, this ensured that Japan would be spared from another war with Russia.<sup>183</sup>

Basking in Anglo-American support, Komura, Japan's chief delegate, came to the conference (9.8.1905) with three conditions that were absolutely imperative for Japan: a free hand in Korea, withdrawal of the Russian army from Manchuria, and the transfer to Japan of the Liaotung lease and the railway line linking Harbin to Port Arthur. As for additional conditions that were not considered absolutely necessary, he was told to pursue the surrender of Russian warships in neutral ports, fishing rights along the coast of the Maritime Province, the cession of Sakhalin, and indemnity payments to Japan.<sup>184</sup> While Russian representative Witte was willing to concede all three of Japan's non-negotiable demands, he would not compromise on cessation of land and

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<sup>178</sup> *Foreign Office: Anglo-Japanese Agreement 1905 (Blue Book)*: FO 46/672, Lansdowne to Hardinge, 1905.9.8, 52.

<sup>179</sup> Duus, 188.

<sup>180</sup> FO 46/672, Lansdowne to Hardinge, 1905.9.8, 139.

<sup>181</sup> *Daehan maeil sinbo* 大韓每日申報 [The Korea Daily], 1905.2.15, <http://www.koreanhistory.or.kr/>.

<sup>182</sup> *Foreign Office: Anglo-Japanese Agreement 1905 (Blue Book) (Negotiations)*: FO 46/673, MacDonald to Lansdowne, 1905.6.29, 175.

<sup>183</sup> Esthus, 95.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

payment of indemnities to Japan.<sup>185</sup> Within a week, both sides had agreed on many of the terms, and Russia had recognised Japan's paramount political, military, and economic interests in Korea.<sup>186</sup>

As the peace conference between Russia and Japan progressed, Admiral Biriley at the Russian Navy Ministry put forward a new Korean neutrality proposal. Biriley commented to Lamsdorff that Korea's recent accord with Japan meant that Korea would soon be annexed by Japan, creating a Russo-Japanese border adjacent to Vladivostok. Biriley therefore suggested that during negotiations with Japan, Russia should persuade it to move the current Korean border further south. If Japan would not accept this idea, Biriley proposed turning the southern zone of the Korean border into neutral territory. To Biriley's disappointment, this suggestion seemed not to have been picked up on by Witte, whose subsequent telegram to the Foreign Ministry never mentioned it (3.9.1905).<sup>187</sup> Given that the Russian government had already proposed neutrality in the northern Korean frontier area, Biriley must have expected Lamsdorff's support. But even if the proposal were presented to Japan, with both Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Arthur Balfour having already agreed that Japan should remain in control of Korea,<sup>188</sup> Russia was looking down not one but three diplomatic barrels.

#### • **Neutralisation Efforts Around the Time of the Second Hague Peace Conference (1907)**

The Treaty of Portsmouth eventually went into force (5.9.1905). However, Russia clung to the belief that Korean independence was valid. In this treaty, Japan asked Russia to acknowledge its stake in the politics, military, and economy of Korea and its right to treat Korea essentially as a protectorate.<sup>189</sup> Russia accepted Japan's predominance in Korean politics and economy, but believed that Korea had not lost its independence.<sup>190</sup> Accordingly, at the special conference held at Witte's home by imperial edict it was confirmed that the Russian government would acknowledge

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<sup>185</sup> Witte, 135.

<sup>186</sup> Esthus, 81.

<sup>187</sup> Pak Jonghyo, ed., 330.

<sup>188</sup> Kim Seungyoung, "American Diplomacy and Strategy toward Korea and Northeast Asia, 1882-1950 and After", 55.

<sup>189</sup> Kim Soyeong, "Pocheumeoseu eseo Hangug ui unmyeong eul nonuihada: Pocheumeoseu joyak (1905.9.5) [Discuss the Fate of Korea at Portsmouth: the Portsmouth Treaty (1905.9.5)]", in *Joyag euro bon Hanguk geundaesa* [Modern Korean History through Treaties], Choe Deoksu et al. (Paju: Yeolin chaekdeul, 2010), 530.

<sup>190</sup> Pak Jonghyo, ed., 329. Still, it was hard to deny that the treaty markedly reduced Russian influence in Korea; Duus, 188.

<sup>191</sup> Pak Jonghyo, ed., 329-330. If the Treaty of Portsmouth had stipulated a clause confirming Korea's independence, Japan would have had more difficulty concluding the Protectorate Treaty under international law.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 755-756.

Korea's independence, and the Foreign Ministry was tasked with sounding out other major powers' views on it (4.10.1905).<sup>191</sup> Accordingly, Lamsdorff informed the Russian legations at Paris, Berlin, and Washington that Russia would never contemplate yielding Korea's independence to Japan because it would undercut Russia's Far Eastern policy and ordered them to determine whether France, Germany, and the U.S. would acknowledge Korea's international status and maintain their diplomatic positions as before (17.10.1905).<sup>192</sup> Of course, Korea also felt that Russia could support Korean independence, relying on its ally to win major powers' sympathy for its neutralisation. Thus, despite this treaty, Gojong and his associates counted on major powers to assist Korean independence and for a time it seemed Russia could come to Korea's rescue. Siding with Korea by inviting it to the Second Hague Peace Conference (3.10.1905), Russia tried to abet a Korean appeal for major powers' understanding of its independence.

Regardless of Russia's views on Korean independence, the Japanese government, having already obtained an Anglo-American understanding on its designs to establish a protectorate over Korea, pushed through the Protectorate Treaty (17.11.1905) with Korea, undeniably bringing Korea's long arduous journey for survival to a dark end. Despite Gojong's pleas, Itō presented him with Japan's five demands (15.11.1905), which included the abolition of Korea's Foreign Ministry and the instalment of the residency in Seoul. However, Gojong felt compelled to protest to Itō that if Korea were to lose its diplomatic rights, the country would end up becoming like Hungary, which was annexed by Austria, or Africa, which was colonised by major powers. He also insisted that since this was an important matter, he had to consult government ministers and his subjects before making a decision. Itō refused such a request because the fact that Gojong, as an absolute monarch, was gauging people's views on this matter was in effect provoking the public to resist Japan. Instead, Itō allowed Gojong to talk with his ministers on Japan's proposed treaty with Korea.<sup>193</sup>

Although Japan used the Protectorate Treaty to justify its control over Korea to major powers, the treaty, according to assertions by recent Korean scholarship, was legally flawed in several respects. The treaty had no commission of full powers and ratification instrument, which were required in every international treaty. Moreover, this treaty was not "a convention" but "an

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<sup>193</sup> Seong Sukgyeong, "Ilbon ui bohogug euro jeollakhada [Becoming Japan's Protectorate]", in *Joyag euro bon Hanguk geundaesa* [Modern Korean History through Treaties], Choe Deoksu et al. (Paju: Yeolin chaekdeul, 2010), 637.

agreement". The appellation "a convention" could be used formally in protectorate treaties between Western major powers and weak countries, but the appellation "an agreement" was legally less regarded for a formal diplomatic document. Although Japanese scholarship claims otherwise, Gojong, unwilling to consent to the treaty, refused to sign it. The treaty was concluded perfunctorily and under duress by only a few Korean cabinet ministers, without the inclusion of Gojong's formal name, signature, and the seal of the state.<sup>194</sup>

Gojong asked the U.S. to use its good offices for Korea since the treaty had been signed under duress,<sup>195</sup> but the U.S. would not. On the very day Japan announced the conclusion of the treaty, U.S. Secretary of State Elihu Root telegraphed U.S. Minister in Seoul Edwin V. Morgan to close the U.S. legation (24.11.1905),<sup>196</sup> which he duly complied with four days later.<sup>197</sup> Moreover, in response to a Russian enquiry, Root replied that the treaty had not harmed U.S. interests in any way (29.12.1905).<sup>198</sup> Gojong also sent personal letters to German Emperor Wilhelm II<sup>199</sup> and French President Loubet,<sup>200</sup> condemning the Japanese infringement of Korean sovereignty and asking for their support. Germany's response was highly disappointing, considering that it had recognised the importance of an independent Korea and had confirmed that it would maintain the rank of its

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<sup>194</sup> Seong Ingeun, *Gojong hwangje bimil guksae* [The Secret Seal of Emperor Gojong] (Seoul: Sowadang, 2010), 129; Saldern also questioned the validity of the treaty, noting that Gojong opposed the treaty, that Foreign Minister Pak Jesun did not sign it, and that the seal of the Korean Foreign Office was placed on the document by Japanese officials. Michael Finch, "German Diplomatic Documents on the 1905 Japan-Korea Protectorate Treaty", *Korean Studies* 20 (1996): 58.

<sup>195</sup> Institute of Asian Culture Studies, ed., *United States Policy Regarding Korea 1831-1941* (Chuncheon: Hallym University Press, 1986), 35.

<sup>196</sup> United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States: 1905*, Secretary of State to Morgan, telegram, 1905.11.24 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1906), 631.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, Morgan to Root, telegram, 1905.11.28, 632. The U.S. was the first country to close its legation in Korea, an action which was highly appreciated by Japan. *Ibid.*, Wilson to Root, 1905.11.30, 615.

<sup>198</sup> Pak Jonghyo, ed., 755.

<sup>199</sup> "Dogil hwangje ege bonaeneun Gojong chinseo [A Letter Sent from Gojong to the German Emperor]", *Sajin yuri pilleum jaryo*, GF 1172 [10-88-99], 1905, <http://db.history.go.kr/url.jsp?ID=fl>.

<sup>200</sup> "Peurangseu hwangje ege bonaeneun Gojong chinseo [A Letter Sent from Gojong to the French Emperor]", *Sajin yuri pilleum jaryo*, GF No.1174 [10-88-11], 1905, <http://db.history.go.kr/url.jsp?ID=fl>. For Gojong's further annulment, see: *Donga ilbo* [Donga Daily], 2008.4.5, <http://news.donga.com/3/20080405/8564065/1> (accessed January 20, 2011).

<sup>201</sup> Pak Jonghyo, ed., 756. Britain and Italy disappointed Gojong equally, claiming that they had not received any complaints from him. *Ibid.*, 759-760.

representative in Seoul (20.10.1905).<sup>201</sup> But, after the treaty, Germany, regarding Korea as Japan's dependency,<sup>202</sup> opted not to station the same ranking diplomat in Seoul.<sup>203</sup>

Having held a negative view of Japan's ambitions in Korea during the Russo-Japanese War, France considered prompting another Triple Intervention involving European powers to stop the Japanese advance in Northeast Asia. Eventually though, France, not wanting to get bogged down in a competition amongst major powers, chose not to intervene.<sup>204</sup> Still, in a reply to Russian Ambassador Aleksandr Nelidov, French Foreign Minister Maurice Rouvier said that France would not downgrade its legation in Korea, but Rouvier was flustered when Korean Minister Min Yeongchan informed him that the treaty was illegal (26.11.1905).<sup>205</sup> However, no follow-up on this issue was taken. In the end, unable to ignore the shifting geopolitics, France became the last major power to close its legation in Seoul (26.12.1905).<sup>206</sup>

Russia was the only power still in Korea's corner. It regarded the Protectorate Treaty as illegal, and the Russian Foreign Ministry ordered Russian Ambassador to U.S. Rosen to sound out the U.S.'s present Korean policy.<sup>207</sup> The ministry also instructed Russian ministers in London, Vienna, Rome, Berlin, and Paris to explain to their host governments that the Protectorate Treaty was signed illegally under duress and to ascertain if and how they would support Korea's claims (22.11, 24.11, 25.11, and 27.11.1905).<sup>208</sup> Later, Lamsdorff and the Russian emperor agreed to meet Yi Yongik, who would attempt to use Russian assistance to steer European opinions in Korea's favour for securing its independence (11.12.1905).<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Germany's change of heart could be attributed to its belief in Roosevelt's view (1905.9) that Korea could be ceded to Japan as long as it adopted an open door policy there. Won Cheol, "Jeguk juui sidae ui yeolgang gwa eulsa joyak [The Great Powers and the Ulsa Treaty in the Age of Imperialism]", *Yeoksahak yeongu* 27 (July 2006): 459.

<sup>203</sup> Pak Jonghyo, ed., 759.

<sup>204</sup> Won, 462.

<sup>205</sup> Pak Jonghyo, ed., 757.

<sup>206</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 38(1), No.339, 584, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>207</sup> Pak Jonghyo, ed., 755.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 756.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 761.

By late 1905, no major power except Russia was taking an active interest in Korean independence. Furthermore, according to the Protectorate Treaty, Japan had established a Japanese Residency-General of Korea in Seoul (20.12.1905).<sup>210</sup> This grim situation led most Western observers to concede that Korea had effectively become Japan's colony, but some Westerners still supported Gojong's efforts to safeguard Korean independence. British journalist Douglas Story eluded Japanese surveillance and conveyed a letter from Gojong calling for major powers to guide Korean foreign policy for five years under their joint protection to British Minister in Beijing Ernest Satow in January 1906.<sup>211</sup>

Another British journalist, Ernest Bethell, launched two newspapers, the *Daehan maeil sinbo* and its sister publication the *Korea Daily News*, to press the case for Korea's independence. His efforts did not stop at publishing anti-Japanese articles; according to the *Ōsaka mainichi shimbun*, sometime in March or April 1907 Bethell had an audience with Gojong and advised him to adopt a Belgian-style neutrality under the guarantee of major powers. The newspaper did not report how Gojong responded to Bethell's proposal. Instead, the newspaper quoted a telegram from Seoul saying that three Korean envoys were secretly dispatched by Gojong to join the Second Hague Peace Conference, expressing its embarrassment about this and labelling their presence in The Hague a farce.<sup>212</sup> However, the newspaper's opinions cannot diminish Bethell's courage in standing up for an independent Korea, a trait that Gojong shared,<sup>213</sup> even after the Protectorate Treaty had stripped Korea of its diplomatic sovereignty.

Realising that the case for Korean independence could be better presented at a major forum under international law, Gojong eagerly awaited the Second Hague Peace Conference, to which Korea had been invited by Russia to state the inviolability of its sovereignty.<sup>214</sup> Russia eventually realised, though, that its support for Korean independence was without substance due to no mention of Korean independence in the Portsmouth Treaty,<sup>215</sup> and unbeknownst to Gojong, was skillfully

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<sup>210</sup> The Japanese emperor's rescript allowed the Resident-General to command all Japanese forces, control Korean foreign affairs, oversee all Korean government business, and supervise all Korean and Japanese officials. Duus, 197.

<sup>211</sup> Douglas Story, *Tomorrow in the East*, trans. Gwon Minju (Seoul: Gulnaeum, 2004), 177-179.

<sup>212</sup> *Ōsaka mainichi shimbun* 大阪毎日新聞 [*Osaka Daily News*], 1907.7.6.

<sup>213</sup> Russian Consul-General to Korea De Plancon commented about Gojong's steadfast refusal to give up his fight for Korean independence despite having no international support (1907.1.11). Choe Deokgyu, 228.

<sup>214</sup> Park Jonghyo, ed., 753.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 766.

lobbied by the Japanese government to bar Korea from attending the conference (13.6.1906).<sup>216</sup> Moreover, Japanese Minister in Paris Kurino Shin'ichiro and French Foreign Minister Stéphane Pichon concluded the Franco-Japanese Convention (10.6.1907). According to De Plancon, the illegality of the Protectorate Treaty made Japan conclude this new agreement to legitimise its control over Korea.<sup>217</sup> France in return wanted to use this convention to trade its sphere of influence in Indochina and southern China for Japan's sphere of influence in Korea, Manchuria, and Fukien.<sup>218</sup> France, after Russia, was the most active player in Korean neutralisation diplomacy, as it mediated Russo-Japanese disputes during Gojong's flight to the Russian legation and assisted Korea's wartime neutrality declaration. With the Franco-Japanese Convention, France, though it was the last major power to recall its minister from Korea, finally acted as a true practitioner of realpolitik, subordinating Korean independence to its colonial interests. Around the same time, Russia too shifted course after the appointment of Foreign Minister Izvolsky (12.5.1906) and was preparing to use Korea as a sacrificial lamb to restore its working relationship with Japan.<sup>219</sup>

Such was the adversity that Yi Jun, Yi Sangseol (1871-1917),<sup>220</sup> and Yi Wijong (1887-?)<sup>221</sup> faced when they arrived at the Second Hague Peace Conference (15.6-18.10.1907) to appeal to major powers' political consciences (25.6.1907). Giving them diplomatic *carte blanche* with his personal letter, Gojong hoped they would convince major powers that the Protectorate Treaty was

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<sup>216</sup> Yun Byeongseok, "Manguk pyeonghwa hoeui wa Hanguk teuksa ui yeoksajeok uimi [The International Peace Conference and the Historical Significance of Korean Special Envoys]", *Hanguk dongnip undongsa yeongu* 29 (December 2007): 27.

<sup>217</sup> Choe Deokgyu, 225.

<sup>218</sup> E. W. Edwards, "The Far Eastern Agreement of 1907", *The Journal of Modern History* 26(1) (December 1954): 349.

<sup>219</sup> Choe Deokgyu, 216. Reeling from its defeat in the Russo-Japanese War and the Revolution of 1905, the Russian government had to compromise with traditional enemy Britain and former belligerent Japan for regime stability and internal reforms, which forced Izvolsky to withdraw Russia's support for Korean participation at the conference. *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>220</sup> A close associate of Gojong, Yi Sangseol filled various positions ranging from the Secretary of the Imperial Household Department to a minister of the State Council. His memorials to Gojong opposed Japan's reclamation of Korea's waste land and the conclusion of the Protectorate Treaty. Oh Yeongseop, "Yi Sangseol ui bohwanjeok minjok undong [Yi Sangseol's Emperor-protecting National Movement]", in *Baeknyeon hu mannaneun Heigeu teuksa* [Seeing Hague Special Envoys After 100 Years], Yi Taejin et al. (Paju: Taehaksa, 2008), 115-116.

<sup>221</sup> The second son of Yi Beomjin, Yi Wijong, educated in the U.S. and France, began his diplomatic career as the secretary of the Korean legation in Paris (1902.7.18) and eventually became the councillor of the Korean legation in St. Petersburg (1904.3.18). During the Russo-Japanese War, he worked with his father to assist Russia and retained his post until the closure of the Korean legation in early 1906. Yi Wijong was later decorated for his service to the Russian government. Ban Byeongryul, "Yi Wijong gwa hangIl hyeokmyeong undong—Reosia eseoui hwaldong eul jungsim euro [Yi Wijong and the Anti-Japan Revolutionary Movement—Focusing on Activities in Russia]", in *Baeknyeon hu mannaneun Heigeu teuksa* [Seeing Hague Special Envoys after 100 Years], Yi Taejin et al. (Paju: Taehaksa, 2008), 152-154.

illegal and that Korea was still an independent state.<sup>222</sup> Unfortunately for Korea, international opinion remained indifferent towards Korea as the conference focused on major powers' efforts to pursue a balance of power through arms control amidst the escalating Anglo-German naval arms race.<sup>223</sup>

In particular, Russia's reaction turned out to be a sore point with Korea. Though the issue of neutrality was considered one of the most important subjects at the conference,<sup>224</sup> De Plancon had told Yun Taekyeong in late April 1907 that the timing was not right to discuss the Korean issue since major powers' interests lay elsewhere. Though De Plancon confirmed the Russian emperor's affection towards Korea, he counselled Korea to be patient.<sup>225</sup> Russia rewarded Korea's patience with betrayal when it put its interests first,<sup>226</sup> and Izvolsky, so as to appease Japan, telegrammed the president of the conference Aleksandr Nelidov requesting Yi Jun and Yi Sangseol not be recognised as official representatives at The Hague (11.6.1907).<sup>227</sup> Not surprisingly, when the Korean envoys called on Nelidov, he refused to meet them, informing them that representatives who were not invited by the Dutch government could not attend the conference (29.6.1907).<sup>228</sup>

On top of everything else, the Russo-Japanese Agreement was concluded (30.7.1907), which signalled Russia's withdrawal of its support for Korean independence, making a political scapegoat of Korea for its interests. The origin of the agreement can be traced back to mid-1906, when Russia and Japan began negotiations on the settlement of the Russian sphere of influence in Manchuria and the Japanese sphere of influence in Korea.<sup>229</sup> In exchange for relinquishing its support for Korean independence, Russia secured its sphere of influence in northern Manchuria and Outer Mongolia.

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<sup>222</sup> Yun Byeongseok, 33.

<sup>223</sup> Han Cheolho, "Heolbeoteu ui manguk pyeonghwa hoeui hwaldong gwa Han-Mi gwangye [Hulbert's Peace Conference Activities and the Korea-U.S. Relations]", *Hanguk dongnip undongsa yeongu* 29 (December 2007): 203.

<sup>224</sup> Sergei C. Lebedev, "je2cha Heigeu pyeonghwa hoeui ui jeongchijeok baegyeong: Reosia ui ipjang [The Political Background of the Second Hague Peace Conference: Russia's Position]", in *Baeknyeon hu mannaneun Heigeu teuksa* [Seeing Hague Special Envoys after 100 Years], Yi Taejin et al. (Paju: Taehaksa, 2008), 237.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 243.

<sup>226</sup> At this stage, Russia's strategy was to deter Japan's belligerence due to its lost war and revolution. *Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>227</sup> Pak Jonghyo, "Heigeu teuksa wa Han-Reo gwangye [The Hague Special Envoys and the Korea-Russian Relations]", *Hanguk dongnip undongsa yeongu* 29 (December 2007): 159.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>229</sup> Choe Deokgyu, 225.

Japan, in return, officially won Russian approval of Japan's control of Korea and sphere of influence in southern Manchuria.<sup>230</sup>

Against Korea's expectations, the U.S. was also indifferent to its envoys. By early 1907, Japan's attempts at military and economic supremacy in Manchuria and the tensions surrounding Japanese immigration into the American West hurt U.S.-Japan relations.<sup>231</sup> The U.S. continued to give Korea the cold shoulder, however; the U.S., lacking overwhelming naval strength, would not upset Japan by intervening on behalf of Korea.<sup>232</sup> Nevertheless, the Korean envoys still retained pro-U.S. sentiments and attempted to capitalise on the anti-Japan immigration mood in the U.S. Yet they were unable to arrange a meeting with the U.S. representative John W. Foster and were told by his colleague Joseph H. Choate that the U.S. could no longer do anything for Korea (29.6.1907).<sup>233</sup> Even though Hulbert had been trying to gain U.S. sympathy for Korea's plight through his newspaper interviews,<sup>234</sup> the U.S. government dismissed him as an agitator (24.7.1907).<sup>235</sup>

France might have been the only power left which might show at least some interest in Korean independence before the Franco-Japanese Convention was concluded. When push came to shove, however, France chose to side with Japan rather than to assist Korea. When Gojong's American adviser Hulbert asked French consul to Korea Belin for its good offices to aid Korean envoys at the Hague Conference, the consul not only rejected this request, but informed Itō about it as well in May 1907.<sup>236</sup> Hulbert could not have possibly known that the French Foreign Ministry had already instructed Belin not to assist in any activity that the country (Korea) under protection would undertake against the country (Japan) that protected it.<sup>237</sup> The French representative joined

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<sup>230</sup> Edwards, 349.

<sup>231</sup> Han Cheolho, "Heolbeoteu ui manguk pyeonghwa hoeui hwaldong gwa Han-Mi gwangye", 202-203.

<sup>232</sup> Choe Joengsu, "T. Ruseubelteu ui 'segye jeongchaek' [T. Roosevelt's 'World Policy']" (PhD diss., Hanyang University, 2000), 228-240.

<sup>233</sup> Han Cheolho, "Heolbeoteu ui manguk pyeonghwa hoeui hwaldong gwa Han-Mi gwangye", 205.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>235</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 40(1), No.464, 440-441,

<http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>236</sup> Murase Shinya, "1907 nyeon Heigeu milsa sageon ui yusan [The Legacy of the Hague Secret Envoy in 1907]", in *Baeknyeon hu mannaneun Heigeu teuksa* [Seeing Hague Special Envoys after 100 Years], Yi Taejin et al. (Paju: Taehaksa, 2008), 254.

<sup>237</sup> Han Cheolho, "Heolbeoteu ui manguk pyeonghwa hoeui hwaldong gwa Han-Mi gwangye", 178.

<sup>238</sup> Pak Jonghyo, "Heigeu teuksa wa Han-Reo gwangye", 160.

<sup>239</sup> Gojong entrusted Hulbert with the mission to send his personal letters to the heads of states of the U.S., Russia, Britain, France, Germany, Austria, Italy, Belgium, and China to obtain their cooperation for Korean independence (1906.6.22). Kim Jiyeong, "Heigeu manguk pyeonghwa hoeui wa Ilbon jeongbu ui daechaek [The Hague Peace

his counterparts from the U.S., Britain, and Germany in not recognising Gojong's envoys at The Hague.<sup>238</sup>

Noting that Gojong had been pursuing anti-Japan activities abroad for the last year,<sup>239</sup> the Japanese government instructed Japanese Minister to the Netherlands Sato Aimaro to monitor Hulbert's activities in The Hague, wrongly assuming that he was Gojong's secret envoy to the conference in May 1907.<sup>240</sup> Japan feared that Korea could obtain the right to designate a judge at the Permanent Court of Arbitration, a right conferred by the Convention for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes (29.7.1899), which granted good offices and mediation to signatory countries.<sup>241</sup> Thus, once Japan learned of Gojong's involvement in The Hague, it moved swiftly to consolidate its control over Korea—Resident Itō, who had assumed Japan's first resident-generalship (2.3.1906), cabled Foreign Minister Hayashi Tadasu that this was a good opportunity to seize Korea's finance, military, and jurisdiction (3.7.1907).<sup>242</sup> Later, Itō told Gojong that the dispatch of envoys was a clear violation of the treaty between Korea and Japan (17.7.1907)<sup>243</sup> and that the Korean monarch had no choice but to abdicate (20.7.1907).<sup>244</sup> Adding insult to injury, under pressure from Itō, a new protectorate agreement was signed, giving the resident-general administrative control in Korea (24.7.1907). Add to this the disbanding of Korea's military (1.8.1907), thereby boosting righteous army movements throughout the country.

Despite being barred from attending the conference, Yi Sangseol, to execute the aforementioned missions Gojong had assigned to him, urged major powers to support Korean independence, condemned Japanese aggression toward Korea, and stressed the illegality and the violent nature of the Protectorate Treaty between Japan and Korea. Furthermore, he explained that

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Conference and the Japanese Government's Response]", in *Baeknyeon hu mannaneun Heigeu teuksa* [Seeing Hague Special Envoys after 100 Years], Yi Taejin et al. (Paju: Taehaksa, 2008), 208.

<sup>240</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 40(1), No.436, 427, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>241</sup> Kim Jiyeong, 216. This could invite international scrutiny of Japanese rule over Korea.

<sup>242</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 40(1), No.443, 430-431, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

<sup>243</sup> Kim Jiyeong, 209.

<sup>244</sup> *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 40(1), No.495, 470, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryo/archives/mokuji.html>.

in the interest of permanent peace in the Far East, Korea should become a neutral state like the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Belgium.<sup>245</sup>

Emphasising the importance of an international guarantee of Korean neutrality, Yi Wijong contended that only by becoming neutral under international guarantee could Korea be liberated from Japanese tyranny and have its independence restored.<sup>246</sup> Fearing neither assassination nor the death sentence handed down by Japan, Yi voiced his opposition to Japan's colonisation of Korea. During an interview (2.8.1907) with the *New York Times* in the U.S., Yi, emphasising that Korea's Hague envoys had received credentials from Gojong, insisted that Korea's Protectorate Treaty with Japan was signed without Gojong's consent and that the Korean delegation had succeeded in obtaining the world's sympathy for Korea's plight, reckoning that the U.S., Britain, France, and Germany were on Korea's side. He then added: "Korea, with the hand of Japan at her throat, sent us to The Hague in the hope that the strong nations would protect the weak one, and that Korea would be made a neutral country like Switzerland."<sup>247</sup> After his return to The Hague, Yi addressed reporters covering the conference, and argued that the process of making Korea a neutral state like the Netherlands and Switzerland to save itself from Japanese tyranny and exploitation had already begun (5.9.1907). He then took direct aim at the common European perception that Korean independence was just a pipe dream.<sup>248</sup>

Though Yi Sangseol and Yi Wijong made their proposals by specifically including the Dutch model along with Swiss- and Belgian ones to rouse the world's attention, they were met instead with indifference. Their idealistic dependence on and belief in international law were no match for Japan's skillful *realpolitik*.<sup>249</sup> No major power was willing to raise objections to Japan's domination over Korea by supporting these proposals during the imperialistic period when might outweighed legality. Thus, their neutralisation attempts quietly came to an end.

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<sup>245</sup> *Daehan maeil sinbo*, 1907.7.27; 1907.8.3; 1907.12.11.

<sup>246</sup> Koen de Ceuster, quoting *The Daily News*' article (1907.7.25). Koen de Ceuster, "1907 nyeon Heigeu teuksa ui seonggong gwa jwajeol [Success and Failure of the Korean Delegation at the 2nd Hague Peace Conference]", *Hanguksa hakbo* 30 (February 2008): 311.

<sup>247</sup> *New York Times*, 1907.8.2,

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F10A16FE3B5A15738DDDAB0894D0405B878CF1D3&scp=2&sq=Korea%20Hague%20Peace%20Conference&st=cse> (accessed July 14, 2011).

<sup>248</sup> The Dutch newspaper *Het Vader Land*'s article (1907.9.5) touched on Yi Wijong's assertions. Yun Byeongseok, 46.

<sup>249</sup> Besides, Japan's actions could not be faulted as the notion of implementing imperialist policies in the name of enlightened exploitation was widely accepted. Dudden, 12.

## **Chapter VIII. Review and Conclusion**

The confrontation between continental and maritime powers in the Far East engendered circumstances, both internal and external, which directly and indirectly influenced Korea's potential neutralisation. Taking all the affecting factors into consideration and looking at the longer period, we can identify one realistic opportunity for Korean neutralisation: Rosebery's proposal (14.4.1886) during the British Geomundo occupation. This proposal had a high possibility of success to neutralise Korea owing to the balance of power between Britain and Russia, with the support of contemporary proposals by several countries and the connivance of China. However, Korea's inability to defend itself, Britain's unwillingness to assert itself, China's dominance in Korea, and the lack of an international consensus made it impossible for this proposal to be materialised. Nonetheless, to newly situate Korean neutralisation in Far Eastern history, it is necessary to review its historical significance and comparisons between European and Korean neutrality before concluding.

### **· European and Korean Neutrality Compared**

The overview of neutralisation's historical applications in Europe and research of neutralisation attempts in Korea show that the socioeconomic, political, and geopolitical factors that shaped neutrality in Switzerland and Belgium, and that enabled Bulgaria to act as a buffer zone, were quite different from those affecting Korea. For one thing, those countries received greater support from major powers than did Korea, and for another, they possessed several advantages that Korea did not, as mentioned in Chapter II.

Both the major international forums for Switzerland and Belgium and the international treaty for Bulgaria allowed major powers to put aside their differences and support those countries' neutrality and autonomy. In Korea's case, not a single major forum was held to discuss its neutrality, thereby demonstrating that Korea, from major powers' perspective, did not hold the geopolitical importance European countries did.

Moreover, Switzerland and Belgium's success in having Britain, the world's superpower, as the ultimate guarantor of their neutrality, differed markedly from Korea, where no major power was ready to defend Korean neutrality, which was suggested by countries looking to defend their interests in the Far East. While Bulgaria's autonomy was sealed through an international treaty with backing from Russia, China, hanging onto Korea as its one remaining dependency, would not

accept Korea's independence, Britain occupied Geomundo, Japan started a war to sever Korea's tributary ties with China, and Russia competed with Japan to dominate both Manchuria and Korea and later to protect Manchuria, exploiting Korea as its bargaining chip in the Russo-Japanese negotiations.

In addition, there were quite substantial differences between European countries and Korea in the economic and military fields. While Switzerland's thriving economy, free from foreign interference, bolstered its neutrality, Korea's economic development was severely hampered by major powers' self-interests. The struggling nation became an unintentional victim of concession diplomacy when major powers tried to exploit its valuable resources and key infrastructure to maximise their interests there.

Whereas Switzerland and Belgium maintained sizeable and well-trained military forces to defend their territories, a woefully unequipped and untrained Korean military had major powers distrust Korea's ability to preserve its territory and neutrality. A fractious, splintered Korean ruling class also made Korean neutralisation impossible. Both the Swiss and Belgians managed to reach a consensus on neutralisation, but in Korea, only Gojong and a handful of his cohorts advocated neutralisation against the opposition of most Korean officials.

As a result, though contemporary Korean neutralisation attempts were clearly inspired by the success of Switzerland, Belgium, and to a lesser extent, Bulgaria, Gojong and his associates failed to replicate the conditions wherein a similar neutrality could take root.

### **. The Historical Significance of Korean Neutralisation**

Korean neutralisation was attempted as a survival strategy to preserve the nation's sovereignty against the imperialistic actions or policies of major powers who viewed the Korean peninsula as merely a stepping stone on their paths to power during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In that sense, it, though having failed, drew keen international attention as a multivalent tactic in the Far Eastern diplomatic history.

Given its setbacks, Korean neutralisation might be dismissed as a subject unfit for further discussion, but it deserves to be treated as a useful precedent for weak countries considering neutralisation. Looking back on contemporary mistakes is necessary to recognise exactly what is required for successful neutralisation: internal unity and power with international support. Today, for any country seeking to pull itself out of major powers' utilitarian orbit, appreciating Korean

neutralisation attempts can serve as a timely reminder regarding the potential benefits of becoming a neutral state.

## **. Conclusion**

Having considered Korea an independent country since the Treaty of Gangwha, maritime power Japan initially maintained an active policy toward Korea, but after the Imo Mutiny, its Korean policy turned passive as continental power China reinforced its suzerainty over Korea through its military presence and the Regulations for Maritime and Overland Trade Between Chinese and Korean Subjects. In response, Japanese proponents initiated Korean neutrality as their passive tactic for refuting the transformed Sino-centric tributary system and alienating Korea from China during the Sino-French War, notwithstanding Korea's apathy towards neutralisation. However, Boissonade, acutely mindful of possible Russian aggression toward Korea, also suggested his own neutralisation idea without the Japanese government's backing.

After Korea concluded treaties with Western major powers, its geopolitical drama moved to a multipolar setting. Specifically, the Treaty of Commerce and Amity Between Korea and Russia led Korea, having been disappointed with the U.S.'s disinterest, to approach Russia with foreign adviser's assistance to secure its independence under the Sino-Japanese rivalry. In this changed situation, Westerners, diversely perceiving Russia, Japan, and China as potential threats which could upset the region's balance of power, proposed permanent neutrality around the time of the Gapsin Coup. Despite their efforts, however, no government wanted to challenge the status quo through neutralisation.

Maritime power Britain's Far Eastern strategy to block continental power Russia's military power in the Pacific Ocean and, to a certain extent, the rumour of the Russo-Korean secret agreement, induced it to occupy Geomundo, making Korea the object of the geopolitical attention of major powers and an actor in the Anglo-Russian rivalry. Especially, the incident had Koreans and Chinese question the tributary system in regard to Korean security and prompted some Koreans to harbour suspicions regarding a Russian expansion into Korea. Accordingly, as counter-strategies to the incident, permanent neutrality was proposed for the first time in Korea and China. In particular, while Kim Yunsik blazed a trail in Korean neutrality by becoming the first official to advocate it, Yu Giljun approached it theoretically. Kang Youwei used it as China's trump card in Korea to maintain its primacy. Conversely, Rosebery suggested permanent neutrality as Britain's

exit strategy to end its occupation of Geomundo on a high note and sustain its strategy to counter Russia in the Far East. Considering that other contemporary proposals preceded it, this scheme could have succeeded if major powers had actively managed to accommodate each other's interests in the region.

The Tianjin Convention and China's leadership role in the resolution of the Geomundo Incident strengthened China's suzerainty over Korea, sparking a renewed Sino-Japanese rivalry. Moreover, the Russo-Korean Overland Trade Convention and construction plans for the TSR unleashed the Russo-Japanese rivalry again. This led multinational proponents to employ permanent neutrality with different strategies. During 1889-1891, Westerners looked to preserve Korea's territorial integrity or to counter Russia and protect Britain's interests in the Far East, but Japan's strategy was mainly to check Russia and conceal evidence of Japanese preparations for the Sino-Japanese War. Alternatively, Korea approached the U.S. for its neutralisation to counter Chinese and Japanese threats. Amidst the increasing tensions in the region, no proposal could be realised due to competing strategies.

As the prospect for a Sino-Japanese conflict drew closer, interest in neutralisation picked up. In 1894, the Donghak Uprising heightened the vague dread of a Russian military presence in Korea, which compelled Yu Giljun with his comrades to propose permanent neutrality to counter Russia since they felt more intimidated by Russia than Japan. By the time the Sino-Japanese War began, Fox and Wilkinson had proposed wartime neutrality of the Incheon port to block Japan's military from landing there and to protect Britain's commercial interests in China. During the war, Mutsu, with a long-term perspective, suggested Korean neutralisation to consolidate Japan's post-war position there.

China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese War ended its suzerainty over Korea, but Russia, filling China's strategic vacuum, exerted its influence there in earnest due to Japan's interference in Korea's domestic affairs, the assassination of Queen Min, and Gojong's stay at the Russian legation. Under these circumstances, neutralisation attempts were designed to extricate Japan from its diplomatic discomfiture after the assassination of Queen Min, to counter the increased Russian influence in Korea, and to maintain stability in the Far East on the strength of the Weber-Komura Memorandum.

In the Korean Empire era, after Russia's recall of its financial adviser and military instructors due to increased anti-Russian sentiment in Korea, Japan, driven to reassert itself in Korea after the Triple Intervention, concluded the Rosen-Nishi Protocol with Russia, which provided a temporary respite from the Russo-Japanese competition over Korea and allowed Korea to diversify its diplomacy with major powers. This ushered in a new phase in Korean neutralisation. In Korea, amidst a major powers' scramble for Korean concessions and the Russo-Japanese rivalry, the Independence Club first called for neutrality diplomacy to secure Korean independence. Their call was echoed in the permanent neutrality proposals from Korea to safeguard Korean independence from the machinations of Japan and Russia around the time of the Boxer Uprising. In the vortex of secret Russo-Japanese discussions surrounding the partitioning of Korea, the Russian threat to Korea arising from the Boxer Uprising prompted the *Yomiuri shimbun* to propose permanent neutrality to maintain Japanese influence in Korea regardless of Japan's official policy.

After ending its occupation of China's Three Eastern Provinces, Russia exploited Korean neutralisation under the leadership of Witte as a temporary measure to protect Manchuria from Japan's advance until completing the TSR. But Japan, its spine stiffened by the impending Anglo-Japanese Alliance, opted for a hard-line policy towards Russia, insisting that Korea and Manchuria should be Japanese and Russian spheres of influence respectively or dealt with as one issue after the crisis in March 1901: Japan refused Izvolsky's proposal to discuss neutralisation after the withdrawal of Russian troops from Manchuria; Witte's first proposal, designed for countering the development of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance to strengthen Japan's position in the Far East, and his second one, suggested as an alternative to Itō's private offer, were also rejected by Japan; the three Russian diplomats' proposal, designed for possible American alignment with the Anglo-Japanese Alliance camp with the Russian government's tacit backing, was met by a neutral U.S.'s disinterest. Nonetheless, during 1901-1902, more proponents in Korea pursued Korean neutralisation to secure its independence.

After the spring of 1903, both wartime and permanent neutrality were floated at long intervals. Before the Russo-Japanese War, the intensified Russo-Japanese rivalry caused by the Yongampo Incident culminated in wartime neutrality proposals: Gojong sought the assistance of Italy, a third-power country with limited ambitions in the Far East; Hyeon Yeongwun and Hyeon Sanggeon tried to win major powers' support in Japan and Europe as Gojong looked to special

envoy diplomacy that bypassed official diplomatic channels; Yi Haneung submitted several notes and memoranda, aiming to win British support as a benign hegemon for hapless Korea; and believing it the only realistic option, the Korean government declared wartime neutrality at the French consulate in Chefoo, China, thus displaying Korea's blind faith in an international system dominated by major powers' realpolitik. Though international reception to Korea's wartime neutrality declaration was noticeably cool, France, Germany, and Russia suggested wartime neutrality in certain areas of Korea to preserve their colonial interests against Japanese ambitions.

As the Russo-Japanese War loomed on the horizon, Hyeon Sanggeon, misreading France and Russia's ambivalent stances towards Korea, enlisted their ministers' backing for the wartime neutrality of Seoul. During the war, German citizen Wolter requested wartime neutrality to protect international settlements in Incheon, displaying Western anxiety about their Korean commercial interests being jeopardized. Hoping to compensate for Russia's loss of influence on the Korean peninsula, Russian Admiral Biriley envisaged a strategic neutrality of the southern zone of the Korean border.

Coming after the Protectorate Treaty, Bethell's permanent neutrality was meaningful since it showed that he still regarded Korea as independent and thus capable of neutralisation. However, possibilities for Korean neutrality decreased because Japan had already concluded diplomatic arrangements with Britain and the U.S., and the pro-Japan faction was dominating Korean politics. Undaunted, Gojong, still laying his hopes on international law, dispatched three special envoys to the Second Hague Peace Conference to appeal to major powers' consciences about Japan's infringement of Korean sovereignty, but their mission failed due to major powers' disinterest and Japan's interference. Accordingly, like Yi Haneung, Yi Sangseol and Yi Wijong independently proposed neutralisation to secure Korean independence and maintain peace in the Far East by convincingly drawing on European cases of neutrality.

Overall, Korean neutralisation attempts were proffered by eight countries encompassing all major powers, as Tables 7 and 8 in the appendix indicate. All the proposals, even the one which, had fate smiled at all, could have been successfully implemented, failed due to the omission of subjective (before the Geomundo Incident) and international requirements and for objective reasons, such as the transformed tributary system, major power rivalries, breakdown of a balance of power, and Korea's various internal problems. Unlike neutral European countries, Korea could

muster up neither major powers' support through international consensus nor the domestic wherewithal to make neutralisation possible.

· **Epilogue**

As history often turns back on itself, neutralisation discourse has resurfaced. The necessity of neutralisation is used even today in foreign policy discourse. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has suggested that to establish stability in Afghanistan, the U.S. should consider turning this conflict-prone country into a Belgian-style buffer state to avoid it being used as an arena for rivalries.<sup>1</sup> Given the dynamics between countries in and around Northeast Asia, neutralisation in Korea has also regained some interest<sup>2</sup> as the means to a peaceful reunification through the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. Korean neutralisation might have to be implemented through a strategic compromise between South and North Korea and major regional powers like China, Japan, Russia, and the U.S. that would transform a unified Korea into a buffer zone. In this way, the path towards a future Korean neutralisation may contribute to regional stability as well.

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<sup>1</sup> *Financial Times*, "Washington aims to turn Afghanistan into neutral buffer zone for stability", 2011.6.28, 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Pressian*, 2011.5.22, [http://www.pressian.com/article/article.asp?article\\_num=10110522094329&Section=05](http://www.pressian.com/article/article.asp?article_num=10110522094329&Section=05) (accessed July 23, 2011); *Hangyeore 21*, 2003.2.22, <http://h21.hani.co.kr/arti/COLUMN/33/7203.html> (accessed July 23, 2011).

## Appendices

<Table>

**Table 1: The Korean Military Expenditure (1897~1904)**

(unit: won)

Year	Annual revenue	Total expenditures	Military expenditures	Military expenditures/ Total expenditures	Budget balance
1897	4,191,192	4,190,427	979,597	23.4%	765
1898	4,527,476	4,525,530	1,251,745	27.7%	1,946
1899	6,473,222	6,471,132	1,447,351	22.4%	2,090
1900	6,162,796	6,161,871	1,636,704	26.6%	925
1901	9,079,456	9,078,681	3,594,911	39.6%	775
1902	7,586,530	7,585,877	2,786,290	36.7%	653
1903	10,766,115	10,765,491	4,123,582	38.3%	624
1904	14,214,573	14,214,298	5,180,614	36.4%	275

Source: Kim Daejun, *Gojong sidae ui jeajeong yeongu- geundaejeok yesan jedo surip gwa byeoncheon* (Seoul: Taehaksa, 2004).

**Table 2: The Military Strength of Nine Countries**

Country	Army (number of soldiers)	Navy (number of ships/total tonnage, in thousands)
Britain	120,000	84/738
China	40,000	17/80
France	534,000	26/223
Germany	502,000	33/153
Italy	255,000	26/223
Japan	63,000	11/57
Korea	10,000	None
Russia	844,000	46/304
U.S.	28,000	27/127

Sources: B. R. Mitchell, *International Historical Statistics Europe 1750~1980* (New York: Stockton, 1992); *International Historical Statistics The Americas 1750~1988* (New York: Stockton, 1993); *International Historical Statistics Africa, Asia & Oceania 1750~1988* (New York: Stockton, 1995);- Mikhail, A. Poggio, *Reosia oegyogwan i barabon geundae Hanguk* (Features of Korea) trans. Yi Jaehoon (Seoul: Dongbuga yeoksa jaedan, 2010).

Note 1: Army and naval strengths as of the early 1890s.

2: Korea's number is only an approximate estimate, since there is no reliable figure.

**Table 3: Key Foreign Advisers in Korea**

Name	Nationality	Responsibility	Appointment period
Paul von Möllendorff	Germany	Foreign policy	12.1882~9.1885
Owen N. Denny	U.S.	Foreign policy	5.1886~2.1890
Charles W. LeGendre	U.S.	Law	4.1890~10.1899
Clarence R. Greathouse	U.S.	Foreign policy, law, communications	8.1890~10.1899
John McLeavy Brown	Britain	Customs and finance	12.1894~8.1905
Karl Alexeiff	Russia	Finance	12.1897~4.1898
William F. Sands	U.S.	Foreign policy and domestic reforms	11.1899~1.1904

<b>Laurent Crémazy</b>	<b>France</b>	<b>International law</b>	<b>5.1900~8.1905</b>
<b>Adhémar Delcoigne</b>	<b>Belgium</b>	<b>Foreign policy</b>	<b>7.1903~1.1905</b>

Note: Only includes advisers that had a direct impact on Korean neutralisation attempts.

**Table 4: Foreign Advisers and their Contract Conditions**

<b>Name (Employment period)</b>	<b>Official Duties</b>	<b>Positions</b>	<b>Salary</b>	<b>Korean Contractors</b>	<b>Contract Period</b>	<b>Dismissal Clause</b>
<b>Paul von Möllendorff</b> (12/1882-9/1885)	Treaty negotiations, domestic reforms, and customs	Vice-Minister of the Foreign Office	300 taels	Foreign Office President Jo Yeongha	Not stated	Inform three months in advance (dismissal at will)
<b>Clarence R. Greathouse (1)</b> (4/1890-1894; 1895-10/1899)	Foreign legal issues	Official at the Legal Ministry	600 Mexican dollars (monthly)	Unknown	2 years	None
<b>Clarence R. Greathouse (2)</b> (8/1890- 1894; 1/1895-10/1899)	Foreign affairs	Adviser at the Foreign Ministry	300 Mexican dollars (monthly)	Foreign Minister Kim Yunsik	None	Inform three months in advance (dismissal at will)
<b>Karl Alexeiev</b> (12/1897-4/1898)	Monitor government expenditures, reduce budget deficit, and reform the customs	Adviser at the Finance Ministry and the Inspector General of the Customs	3000 won (yearly)	Foreign Minister Jo Byeongsik	Unlimited	Korea and Russia would discuss his dismissal first
<b>William Franklin Sands</b> (11/1899-1/1904)	Future foreign advisers should consult with Sands and report directly to Gojong	Adviser at the Imperial Household Department	300 yen	Imperial Household Minister Yi Geonha	5 years	Not stated
<b>Laurent Crémazy</b> (5/1900-8/1905)	Advise Minister of Justice and Vice Minister of Justice	Legal adviser at the Ministry of Justice	500 won [silver] (monthly) 1000 won [silver] for return to France	Director of Legal Affairs Seo Sangryong and the Director of Negotiations at the Foreign Ministry	1 year	Minister of Justice would notify to French Minister
<b>Adhémar Delcoigne</b> (7/1903-1/1905)	Work under the supervision of Minister of Interior	Adviser at the Interior Ministry	500 yen and 500 yen for trips, holiday, and return to Belgium	Minister of Interior and the Acting Foreign Minister	2 years	If he failed to return from Belgium due to incident in two months

Source: Kim Hyeonsuk, "Hanguk gundae seoyangin gomungwan yeongu (1882~1904)" (PhD diss., Ihwa University, 1999), 292~293.

Note: Information based on official contracts only.

**Table 5: Korea's Gold Export to China and Japan**

(unit: yen)

<b>Year</b>	<b>Gold Export to China</b>	<b>Gold Export to Japan</b>
<b>1897</b>	<b>1,086,543</b>	<b>947,536</b>
<b>1898</b>	<b>1,183,137</b>	<b>1,192,538</b>
<b>1899</b>	<b>883,905</b>	<b>2,049,477</b>
<b>1900</b>	<b>567,670</b>	<b>3,065,380</b>
<b>1901</b>	<b>136,150</b>	<b>4,857,201</b>
<b>1902</b>	<b>59,805</b>	<b>5,004,300</b>
<b>1903</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>5,456,187</b>
<b>1904</b>	<b>10,950</b>	<b>4,998,646</b>

Source: Danguk daehakgyo dongyanghak yeonguso, ed., *Gaehwagi daeoe mingan munhwa gyoryu chongseo VII: Gaehwagi Hanguk gwallyeon Gumi muyeok bogoseo jaryojip* (Seoul: JNC, 2006).

**Table 6: Korean Concessions to Major Powers (1883-1904)**

Country	Year	Concessions	Country	Year	Concessions
Japan	1883	Submarine cable in Busan	U.S.	1896	Gyeongin railroad
	1885	Telegraph line between Busan and Incheon		1896	Unsan gold mine
	1886	Busan Jeolyeong Island coaling station		1898	Tram, electricity, and water supply in Seoul
	1888	Fishing right on the coast	Britain	1896	Right to send financial adviser and supervise customs
	1891	Incheon Wolmi Island coaling station		1898	Eunsan goldmine
	1891	Fishing right on the coast of the Gyeongsang province	France	1896	Gyeongui railroad
	1898	Gyeonbu railroad		1901	Changseong goldmine
	1899	Gyeongin railroad (took over from the U.S.)			
	1900	Jiksan goldmine	Germany	1897	Geumseong danghyeon gold mine
	1900	Fishing right on the coast of the Gyeonggi province			
	1901	Exclusive right to export ginseng			
	1904	Fishing rights on the coast of Chungcheong, Hwanghae, and Pyeongan provinces			
	1904	Gyeongui railroad (extorted by Japan)			
	Russia	1896	Gyeongwon and Jonseong goldmines		
1896		Jongseong coal mine			
1896		Incheon Wolmi Island coaling station			
1897		Right to dispatch financial adviser and supervise customs			
1897		Busan Jeolyeong Island coaling station			
1898		Russo-Korean Bank			
1899		Whaling right on the east coast of Korea			

Source: Yu Myeongchol, "Hanguk jungniphwaron yeongu," (PhD diss., Gyeongbuk University, 1989), 120.

**Table 7: Korean Neutralisation Proposals**

(10/9/1882~11/12/1907)

Proponent (dates & sources)	Background (a) related affair (b) affecting factors (c) rivalry	Details (d) motives/purposes (e) guarantors (f) causes of failure	Remarks (g) models (h) feature
<b>1) The Imo Mutiny-post-Gapsin Coup (10/9/1882~2/1885)</b>			
<b>Tokyo yokohama mainichi shimbun</b> (10/9 & 17/9/1882)	(a) Imo Mutiny (b) Japan's challenge to tributary system (c) China vs. Japan	(d) Deny China's vassal theory (e) China/US/Britain (f) Tributary system and Japanese government's disinterest	(g) Bulgarian style (h) Permanent neutrality
<b>Inoue Kowashi</b> (17/9 & 23/9/1882)	(a) Imo mutiny (b) Japan's challenge to tributary system (c) China vs. Japan	(d) Refute China's vassal theory and check Russia (e) Japan/China/US/Britain/Germany (f) Tributary system and Japanese government's disinterest	(g) Belgian/Swiss style (h) Permanent neutrality

<b>Yūbin hōchi shimbun</b> (20/9/1882)	(a) Imo mutiny (b) Japan's challenge to tributary system (c) China vs. Japan	(d) Treat Korea as an independent country, free from Chinese influence (e) China/US/Britain/Germany/France (f) Tributary system and Japanese government's disinterest	(g) Belgian/Swiss style (h) Permanent neutrality
<b>Gustave E. Boissonade de Fontarable</b> (22/9 & 29/10/1882)	(a) Imo Mutiny (b) View of Korea as an independent country (c) China vs. Japan	(d) Contain Russia (e) China/Japan/Russia (f) Not match to Japanese strategy and Kowashi's opposition	(g) 1 <sup>st</sup> : Belgian/Swiss/Luxembourgian style 2 <sup>nd</sup> : 1 <sup>st</sup> styles + Serbian style (h) Permanent neutrality
<b>Inoue Kaoru</b> (1/12/1882)	(a) Imo Munity (b) Japan's challenge to tributary system (c) China vs. Japan	(d) Refute China's vassal theory (e) European powers (f) Tributary system and Western governments' disinterest	(g) Swiss/Belgian style (h) Permanent neutrality
<b>Enomoto Takeaki</b> (28/12/1882)	(a) Imo Mutiny (b) Chinese military presence & unclear Chinese policy in Korea (c) China vs. Japan	(d) Challenge Chinese policy in Korea (e) Britain/Germany/Russia/France/U.S./Japan (f) Tributary system and Western governments' disinterest	(g) Belgian/Luxembourgish style (h) Permanent neutrality
<b>Inoue Kowashi</b> (*5, *6, & *7/1883)	(a) Sino-French tension/Ryukyu issue (b) Attempt to shift Japanese public attention to abroad, Chinese intervention in Korea (c) China vs. Japan	(d) Counter Chinese suzerainty over Korea (e) China (f) Tributary system and pro-China faction's domination in Korea	(h) Permanent neutrality
<b>Tanabe Taichi</b> (16/8/1883)	(a) Sino-French tension (b) Japan's challenge to Chinese suzerainty over Korea (c) China vs. Japan	(d) Joint protection of Korea according to int. law (e) China/Japan/U.S. (f) Tributary system	(h) Permanent neutrality
<b>Takezoe Shinichirō</b> (2/11/1884)	(a) Sino-French War (b) Yuan Shikai's intervention in Korea (c) China vs. Japan	(d) Protect Korea from the potential Sino-French War (e) None (f) Gojong and pro-China faction's hostilities, tributary system	(h) Wartime neutrality
<b>Moskovskiye Vedomosti</b> (29/12/1884) <b>(Russian State Naval Archive)</b>	(a) Gapsin Coup (b) The expansion of the U.S., British, and Germany's influence in Korea (c) China vs. Japan	(d) Counter other Western powers/Sino-centric tributary system and strengthen Russian influence in Korea (e) None (f) Russia's wait and see policy in Korea	(h) Permanent neutrality
<b>Paul von Möllendorff</b> (*1885)	(a) Gapsin Coup (b) Chinese suzerainty over Korea & Japanese challenge to the tributary system (c) China vs. Japan	(d) Prevent Chinese intervention & check Japanese ambition in Korea (e) China/Japan/Russia (Russia-led) (f) Difficulty of consent from China and Russia.	(g) Belgian style (h) Permanent neutrality
<b>Herman Budler</b> (7/2/ & */2/1885)	(a) Gapsin Coup (b) Korea's geopolitical	(d) Pursue German ascendancy in Korea, protect Korea from external	(g) Swiss style (h) Permanent neutrality

	vulnerability (c) China vs. Japan	aggression, and deter Chinese interventions (e) China/Japan/Russia (f) Kim Yunsik and Li Hongzhang's opposition	
<b>Nicholas R. O'Connor</b> (*2/1885)	(a) Treaty of Commerce and Amity between Korea and Russia (b) Concern about China's poor control over Korea (c) China vs. Japan Britain vs. Russia	(d) Check Russian expansion into Korea (e) China/Japan (f) Chinese suzerainty over Korea	(h) Joint-protection and later Swiss/Belgian Permanent neutrality
<b>2) Geomundo Incident (25/6/1885~14/11/1886)</b>			
<b>Kim Yunsik</b> (25/6/1885)	(a) Geomundo Incident (b) Unreliability of the tributary system (c) Britain vs. Russia	(d) Protect Korea from Anglo-Russian rivalry (e) Treaty powers (f) Tributary system and Western powers' disinterest	(g) Belgian style (h) Permanent neutrality
<b>Enomoto Takeaki</b> (2 <sup>nd</sup> ---9/8/1885)	(a) Geomundo Incident (b) Russian expansion into Korea (c) Britain vs. Russia	(d) Counter Russia with China (e) Major powers (f) Possible objection from China	(h) Permanent neutrality
<b>Yu Giljun</b> (*12/1885)	(a) Geomundo Incident (b) Yuan Shikai's interventionist Korean policy (c) Britain vs. Russia	(d) Korean independence and check Russia (e) China (China led)/Britain/France/Japan/Russia (f) Possible objection of pro-China faction, tributary system	(g) Belgian and Bulgarian-style (h) Permanent neutrality
<b>Kang Youwei</b> (*/*/1886) ( <b>Kāng Yǒuwéi yígǎo</b> )	(a) Geomundo Incident (b) Weakening Chinese influence in Korea (c) Britain vs. Russia	(d) Prevent Korea from foreign incursions (e) China/other powers (f) Antithesis to Chinese policy	(g) Belgian-style (h) Permanent neutrality
<b>Earl of Rosebery</b> ( <b>Archibald P. Primrose</b> ) (14/4/1886)	(a) Geomundo Incident (b) Russian advance into the Far East (c) Britain vs. Russia	(d) Counter Russia and sustain British strategy in the Far East (e) Russia/other powers (f) Chinese disinterest	(h) Permanent neutrality
<b>Kim Okgyun</b> (*7/1886)	(a) Geomundo Incident (b) Tianjin convention side effects, Anglo-Russian rivalry, (c) Britain vs. Russia	(d) Korean independence (e) China (China-led)/other powers (f) China's upholding tributary system	(h) Permanent neutrality
<b>Owen N. Denny</b> (14/11/1886)	(a) Geomundo Incident (b) British withdrawal from Geomundo (c) Britain vs. Russia	(d) Territorial integrity of Korea (e) China/major powers (f) Denny's activity against Chinese interests in Korea	(h) Permanent neutrality
<b>3) The Post-Geomundo Incident-the Pre-Korean Empire (6/3/1889~11/6/1896)</b>			
<b>Chinese Times</b> (6/3/1889) ( <b>French Diplomatic Document</b> )	(a) <i>Shēn Bào</i> Article (b) Information on Chinese military troops' landing in Korea (c) China vs. Japan	(d) Preserve peace and the territorial integrity of Korea (e) Russia, China, Japan, Britain (f) Major power's disinterest	(h) Permanent neutrality
<b>Chesney Duncan</b> (16/3/1889)	(a) Russo-Korean Overland Trade Convention (b) Growing penetration	(d) Oppose Russian expansion and protect Britain's interest in Far East (e) None (f) No neighbouring power willing to	(h) Permanent neutrality

	of Russian influence in Korea (c) Britain vs. Russia China vs. Japan	abandon its Far Eastern strategy to guarantee Korean independence	
<b>Yamagata Aritomo</b> (*3/1890)	(a) Construction plan of The TSR (b) Russian threat to Korea (c) China vs. Japan vs. Russia	(d) Check Russia and conceal Japan's war preparation (e) Britain/Germany/Japan/China (f) Lack of major powers' interest	(g) Swiss, Belgian, Serbian, and Luxembourgian-style (h) Permanent neutrality
<b>Kim Gajin</b> (*11/1890)	(a) Chinese predominance in Korea (b) Tributary system and Russian territorial ambition in Korea (c) China vs. Japan vs. Russia	(d) Counter Chinese and Russian threats (e) U.S (U.S. led)/France/Italy/Germany/Japan/China/Russia/Britain (f) Limited U.S. interests in Korea and the U.S.'s non-interventionist policy there	(g) Swiss-style (h) Permanent neutrality
<b>Gojong</b> (3/6/1891)	(a) Chinese predominance in Korea (b) Chinese consolidation of its suzerainty over Korea (c) China vs. Japan	(d) Korean independence (e) Major powers (f) Adamant opposition of China	(g) Swiss-style (h) Permanent neutrality
<b>Yu Giljun and his comrades</b> (*6/1894)	(a) Donghak Uprising (b) Fear of dispatch of Russian troops to Korea caused by dispatch of Chinese troops to Korea (c) China vs. Japan	(d) Prevent Russian military presence in Korea (e) China (sponsor)/Britain (f) Transformation of tributary system, opposition of Gojong and pro-China faction	(h) Permanent neutrality
<b>Harry H. Fox &amp; William H. Wilkinson</b> (*7 & 16/7/1894)	(a) Sino-Japanese War (b) Block Japan's military landing to Incheon (c) China vs. Japan	(d) Protect Britain's market share in Asia & counter Japan (e) Treaty powers (f) Major powers' mixed reception (opposition of Japan/Russia, disinterest of U.S., acceptance by France/Germany)	(h) Wartime neutrality of Incheon port
<b>Mutsu Munemitsu</b> (17/8/1894)	(a) Sino-Japanese War (b) The consolidation of Japanese position in Korea after the Sino-Japanese War (c) China vs. Japan	(d) Secure Japanese interests in Korea (e) China/Japan/Western powers (f) Japanese cabinet's refusal to endorse the proposal	(g) Swiss or Belgian-style (h) Permanent neutrality
<b>Japan Daily</b> (14/10/1895) <b>(Diplomatic Reports of the Austro-Hungarian Empire)</b>	(a) Assassination of Queen Min (b) Worries of the possibility of Russian occupation of Korea (c) Japan vs. Russia	(d) Resist Western pressure towards Japan (e) Japan/Western powers (f) Western powers' suspicion of Japanese true intentions in Korea	(h) Permanent neutrality
<b>Itō Hirobumi</b> (21/10/1895)	(a) Assassination of Queen Min (b) Russia as a new challenger to Japan in Korea (c) Japan vs. Russia	(d) Extricate Japan from diplomatic quagmire in Korea (e) Japan/Russia/Britain/France/Germany/U.S. (f) Russia's growing diplomatic clout in Korea	(h) Permanent neutrality
<b>British government</b> (1/5/1896)	(a) Gojong's escape to the Russian legation	(d) Counter Russian influence in Korea (e) Britain/other major powers	(h) Permanent neutrality

	(b) British fear of increasing Russian influence in Korea (c) Japan vs. Russia	(f) Britain's status as a third power with limited interest in Korea and no Japanese and Russian support	
<b>British and American ambassadors in St. Petersburg</b> (9/6 & 11/6/1896) ( <i>Kobe Chronicle &amp; Dongnip sinmun</i> )	(a) Gojong's escape to the Russian legation (b) Weber-Komura Memorandum (c) Japan vs. Russia	(d) Balance of power in the Far East (e) Russia/Japan (f) No Japanese and Russian interest in Korean neutrality	(h) Permanent neutrality
<b>4) The 1<sup>st</sup> half Korean Empire (1/1/1899~*/9/1902)</b>			
<b>Jeon Byeonghun</b> (1/1/1899)	(a) Russo-Japanese competition (b) Major power threat to Korean sovereignty (c) Japan vs. Russia	(d) Korean independence (e) None (f) No support within the Korean bureaucracy as a former official	(g) Swiss or Belgian-Style (h) Permanent neutrality
<b>Horace Newton Allen</b> ( Spring 1899)	(a) Rosen-Nishi Protocol (b) A temporary respite of Russo-Japanese competition over Korea (c) Japan vs. Russia	(d) Korean independence (e) U.S. (f) U.S. President McKinley's opposition	(h) Permanent neutrality
<b>William Franklin Sands</b> (*1/1900)	(a) Russo-Japanese competition (b) Threat of Russo-Japanese war (c) Japan vs. Russia	(d) Stop further encroachment of Russo-Japanese influence in Korea (e) Major powers (f) Korea's economic vulnerability, 1 <sup>st</sup> Anglo-Japanese Alliance Agreement	(g) Swiss or Belgian-style (h) Permanent neutrality
<b>Yomiuri shimbun</b> (12/8/1900)	(a) Boxer Uprising (b) Rising Japanese concern on Russian influence in Korea (c) Japan vs. Russia	(d) Preserve Japanese influence and counter Russia (e) Japan (f) No Japanese consensus on Korean neutrality	(g) Belgian or Swiss-Style (h) Permanent neutrality
<b>Alphonse Tremule</b> (*/*/1900)	(a) Boxer Uprising (b) Possible dispatch of Japanese troops and perceived Russian threat to Korea (c) Japan vs. Russia	(d) Stability in the Far East (e) Major powers (f) Jo Byeongsik's failure to get approval from major power in Tokyo due to major powers' Disinterest	(h) Permanent neutrality
<b>Jo Byeongsik</b> (29/8/1900)	(a) Boxer Uprising (b) The possible dispatch of foreign military forces to Korea (c) Japan vs. Russia	(d) Korean independence (e) Japan/other powers (f) Konoe's opposition, Korea's weak Military, and major powers disinterest in Korea except Japan and Russia	(h) Permanent neutrality
<b>Jo Byeongsik</b> (14/9/1900)	(a) Boxer Uprising (b) The possible dispatch of foreign military forces to Korea (c) Japan vs. Russia	(d) Korean independence (e) Japan (f) Aoki's scepticism of the feasibility of Korean neutrality and no resemblance between Korea and Belgium or Switzerland	(g) Belgian or Swiss-style (h) Permanent neutrality
<b>Jo Byeongsik</b> (*9/1900)	(a) Boxer Uprising (b) The possible dispatch of foreign military forces to Korea (c) Japan vs. Russia	(d) Korean independence (e) U.S./other powers (f) U.S. reluctance to be entangled in Korean affairs and Pavloff's doubts on Jo's neutralisation proposal	(g) Swiss-style (h) Permanent neutrality
<b>Sergei Witte</b>	(a) Russian occupation	(d) Preserve Russian influence in	(h) Permanent neutrality

(* /10/1900)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>of Manchuria</li> <li>(b) Confrontation with Japan over Manchuria And Korea</li> <li>(c) Japan vs. Russia</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Manchuria and Korea and prevent the Japanese invasion of Korea</li> <li>(e) Western powers</li> <li>(f) Komura's call for Russian acceptance of Korea as Japanese sphere of influence</li> </ul>	
<b>Alexander Petrovich Izvolsky</b> (7/1/1901)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) Russian occupation of Manchuria</li> <li>(b) Russia's adoption of conciliatory tone towards Japan on Korea</li> <li>(c) Japan. Vs. Russia</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(d) Counter Japan</li> <li>(e) Major powers</li> <li>(f) Foreign Minister Kato and Japanese ministers' opposition</li> </ul>	(h) Permanent neutrality
<b>Sergei Witte</b> (25/7 & 17/12/1901)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) Russo-Japanese negotiations</li> <li>(b) Confrontation with Japan over Manchuria and Korea</li> <li>(c) Japan vs. Russia</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(d) Arrange neutral zone along the border between Korea and Manchuria</li> <li>(e) Japan/Russia</li> <li>(f) Japanese government's opposition</li> </ul>	(h) Permanent neutrality (Neutral zone in the border between Korea and Russia)
<b>Park Jesun</b> (* /11/1901)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) Russo-Japanese negotiations</li> <li>(b) Shaky foundation of Korean independence</li> <li>(c) Japan vs. Russia</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(d) Korean independence</li> <li>(e) Major powers</li> <li>(f) No interest from Japan</li> </ul>	(h) Permanent neutrality
<b>William Franklin Sands</b> (early 1902)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) Korea-Japan military alliance negotiation</li> <li>(b) Relaunch Korea's neutralisation diplomacy</li> <li>(c) Japan vs. Russia</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(d) Korean independence</li> <li>(e) Major powers</li> <li>(f) No response from Itō</li> </ul>	(h) Permanent neutrality
<b>A. Pavloff, Alexander Petrovich Izvolsky, and Arturo P. N. Cassini</b> (* /9/1902)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) Anglo-Japanese alliance</li> <li>(b) Japan's dominance in Korea due to Komura's new Korean policy</li> <li>(c) Japan vs. Russia</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(d) Preserve Russian interests in Manchuria and counter Japanese influence in Korea</li> <li>(e) Russia/Japan/U.S.</li> <li>(f) Japan's opposition and the U.S. apathy of Korean neutralisation</li> </ul>	(h) Permanent neutrality
<b>5) The 2nd half Korean Empire (8/5/1903~11/12/1907)</b>			
<b>Gojong</b> (8/5/1903)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) Increase of Russo-Japanese rivalry</li> <li>(b) Gojong's desire to receive international guarantee of Korean neutralisation</li> <li>(c) Japan vs. Russia</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(d) Protect Korea in the event of the Russo-Japanese War</li> <li>(e) Italy</li> <li>(f) Late response from Italian king (Japanese military presence in Korea and Korea-Japan Protocol)</li> </ul>	(h) Wartime neutrality
<b>Hyeon Yeongwun and Hyeon Sanggeon</b> (* /8/1903)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) Japan's decision to enter war with Russia</li> <li>(b) Threat to Korean independence due to the possibility of Japan's declaration of war with Russia</li> <li>(c) Japan vs. Russia</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(d) Protect Korean independence</li> <li>(e) Japan/France/Russia/international organisation</li> <li>(f) Japanese and Russian reluctance, French caution, the deferral of the Hague Peace Conference and the adjournment of the Permanent Court of Arbitration</li> </ul>	(h) Wartime neutrality
<b>Go Yeonghui</b> (3/9/1903)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) Yongampo Incident</li> <li>(b) The prevention of possible violation of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(d) Korean territorial integrity</li> <li>(e) Japan/Russia</li> <li>(f) Komura's objection, Japanese</li> </ul>	(h) Wartime neutrality

	the Korean border by Japan or Russia (c) Japan vs. Russia	concern of possible Russian concession at Yongampo, and inability of Korea to defend itself	
<b>Yi Beomjin</b> (* /10/1903)	(a) Russo-Japanese negotiations (b) To preserve Korean independence (c) Japan vs. Russia	(d) Preserve Korean independence (e) Russia (f) Russian official Obolensky's Opposition	(h) Wartime neutrality
<b>Korean government</b> (23/11/1903)	(a) Russo-Japanese negotiations (b) The increased military presence of Japanese and Russian forces in Korea (c) Japan vs. Russia	(d) Protect Korea in the event of the Russo-Japanese War (e) Major powers (f) No response from major powers and Korea's weak military	(h) Wartime neutrality
<b>Yi Haneung</b> (* /1/1904)	(a) Imminent war between Japan and Russia (b) Deteriorating Far Eastern geopolitics around Korea (c) Japan vs. Russia	(d) Korean independence (e) Britain/France/Japan/Russia (f) Campbell and Langley's cool reception, Lansdowne's pro-Japan sentiment, and Britain's disinterest towards Korea	(h) Wartime neutrality
<b>Korean government</b> (21/1/1904)	(a) Imminent war between Japan and Russia (b) Concern about Korea's unsafe territorial integrity and sovereign (c) Japan vs. Russia	(d) Korea's territorial integrity and independence (e) Major powers (f) Passive international response (Support from Italy & Russia, Acknowledgement from Britain, France, Germany, & U.S., No acknowledgement from Japan) and Korea's weak military	(h) Wartime neutrality
<b>Germany and France</b> (22/1/1904) ( <i>Shēn bào</i> )	(a) Imminent war between Japan and Russia (b) Possible regional war (c) Japan vs. Russia	(d) Stability in the Far East and safeguard their interests in China and Indochina (e) France and Germany (f) No reactions from other powers	(h) Wartime neutrality (Seoul and Incheon)
<b>Russia</b> (23/1/1904) ( <i>Shēn bào</i> )	(a) Imminent war between Japan and Russia (b) Japanese penetration into Korea (c) Japan vs. Russia	(d) Stability in the Far East and safeguard Russian interests in Manchuria (e) None (f) No response from Korea	(h) Wartime neutrality (Northern Korean frontier area)
<b>Hyeon Sanggeon</b> (* /2/1904)	(a) Imminent war between Japan and Russia (b) Potential foreign invasion of Korea (c) Japan vs. Russia	(d) Secure Seoul from foreign aggression (e) France and Russia (f) Fontenay and Pavloff's reluctance to back neutrality	(h) Wartime neutrality Of Seoul
<b>Carl Wolter</b> (2/3/1904)	(a) Russo-Japanese War (b) The unchecked Japanese domination over Korea (c) Japan vs. Russia	(d) Safeguard foreign commercial interests in Korea (e) Major powers (f) Opposition from the Japanese government, German Chargé d'Affaires, vice-consuls from other powers, and Townsend, no tangible Japanese benefits	(h) Wartime neutrality (international settlement in Incheon)
<b>Admiral Biriley</b> (* /*/1905) ( <b>Russian National</b> )	(a) Korea-Japan Protocol (b) The Japanese intrusion	(d) Protect Russian interests in Manchuria (e) Russia	(h) (Southern zone of the Korean border)

<b>Archives)</b>	of Russian border (c) Japan vs. Russia	(f) No response from Russian Foreign Minister	
<b>Ernest Bethell</b> (*3 or 4/1907) ( <i>Ōsaka mainichi shimbun</i> )	(a) Protectorate Treaty (b) Erosion of Korea's diplomatic sovereignty, Protectorate Treaty (c) Japan vs. Russia	(d) Korean independence (e) Major powers (f) No response from Gojong	(g) Belgian-style (h) Permanent neutrality
<b>Yi Sangseol</b> (27/7, 3/8, & 11/12/1907) ( <i>Daehan maeil shinbo</i> )	(a) Hague Peace Conference (b) Erosion of Korea's diplomatic sovereignty, Russo-Japanese agreement (c) None	(d) Korean independence and permanent peace in the Far East (e) Major powers (f) No interest from any major power	(g) Dutch, Swiss, or Belgian-style (h) Permanent neutrality
<b>Yi Wijong</b> (2/8/1907) ( <i>New York Times</i> )	(a) Hague Peace Conference (b) Erosion of Korea's diplomatic sovereignty, Russo-Japanese agreement (c) None	(d) Korean independence (e) Major powers (f) No interest from any major power	(g) Swiss-style (h) Permanent neutrality
<b>Yi Wijong</b> (5/9/1907) ( <i>Het Vader Land</i> )	(a) Hague Peace Conference (b) Erosion of Korea's diplomatic sovereignty, Russo-Japanese agreement (c) None	(d) Korean independence (e) Major powers (f) No interest from any major power	(g) Dutch or Swiss-style (h) Permanent neutrality

**Table 8: Neutralisation Proponents' Nationalities**

(10/9/1882-11/12/1907)

Stage (period)	Korea	Japan	China	Britain	France	Russia	U.S.	Germ.	Western Press	Joint proposal	Total
<b>Imo Mutiny-Post-Gapsin Coup</b> (10/9/1882-*/2/1885)		7		1	1	1		2			12
<b>Geomundo Incident</b> (25/6/1885-14/11/1886)	3	1	1	1			1				7
<b>Post-Geomudo-Pre-Korean Empire Era</b> (6/3/1889-11/6/1896)	3	4		3					1(a1)	1(a2)	12
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Half Korean Empire Era</b> (18/11/1897-*/9/1902)	3	1			1	3	2				10
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Half Korean Empire Era</b> (8/5/1903-11/12/1907)	9			1		2		1		1(a3)	14
<b>Total</b>	18	13	1	6	2	6	3	3	1	2	55

Notes: a1 = The British-run newspaper *Chinese Times* in Tianjin; 6 March, 1889, Source from the French Diplomatic Document

a2 = British & American ambassador in St. Petersburg; 9 & 11 June 1896, the *Kobe Chronicle* & *Dongnip sinmun*

a3 = German & French governments; 22 Jan. 1904, Source from the *Shēn bào*, Chinese newspaper in Shanghai

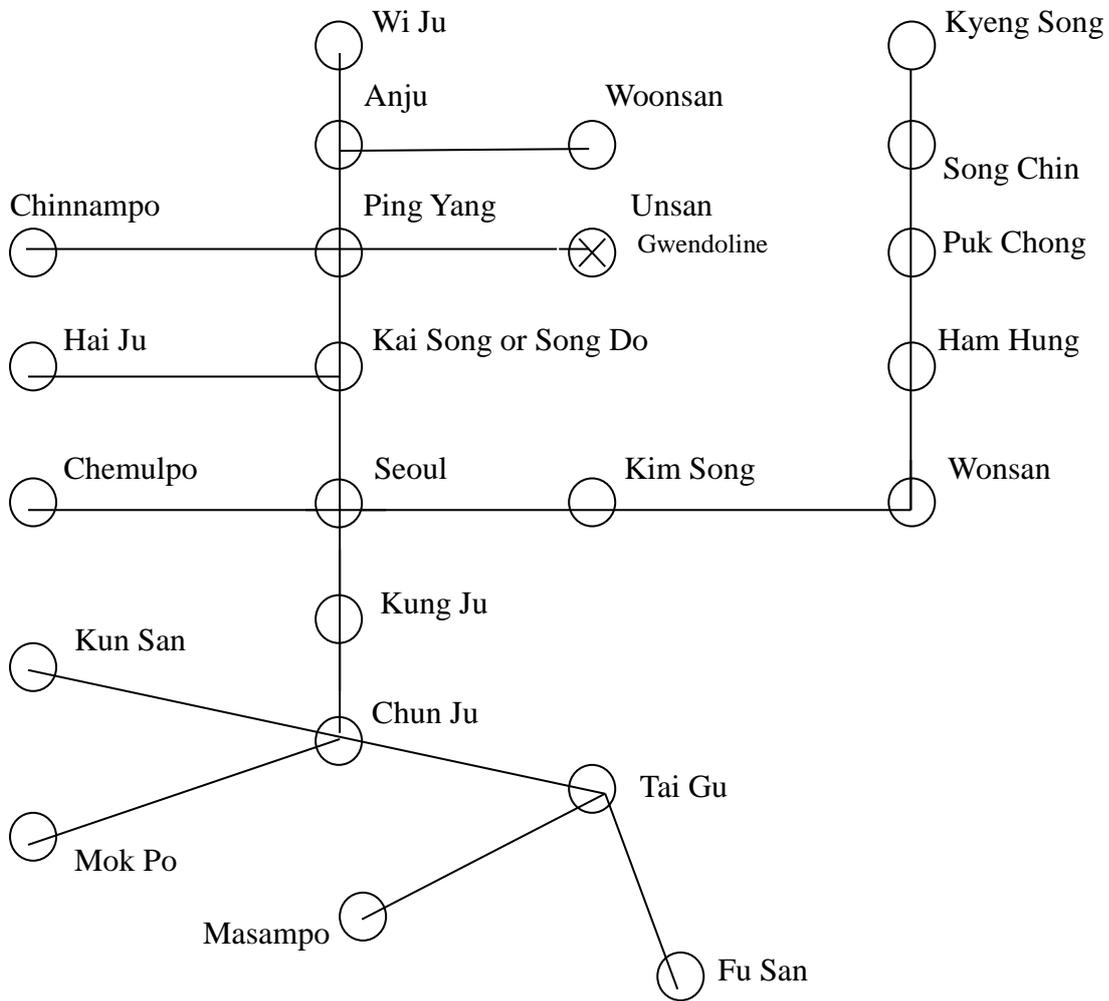
## <Diagram>

### **Diagram 1: Neutralisation Attempts in the Age of Imperialism**



**Note: This map illustrates neutralisation attempts around the globe and is author's own creation.**

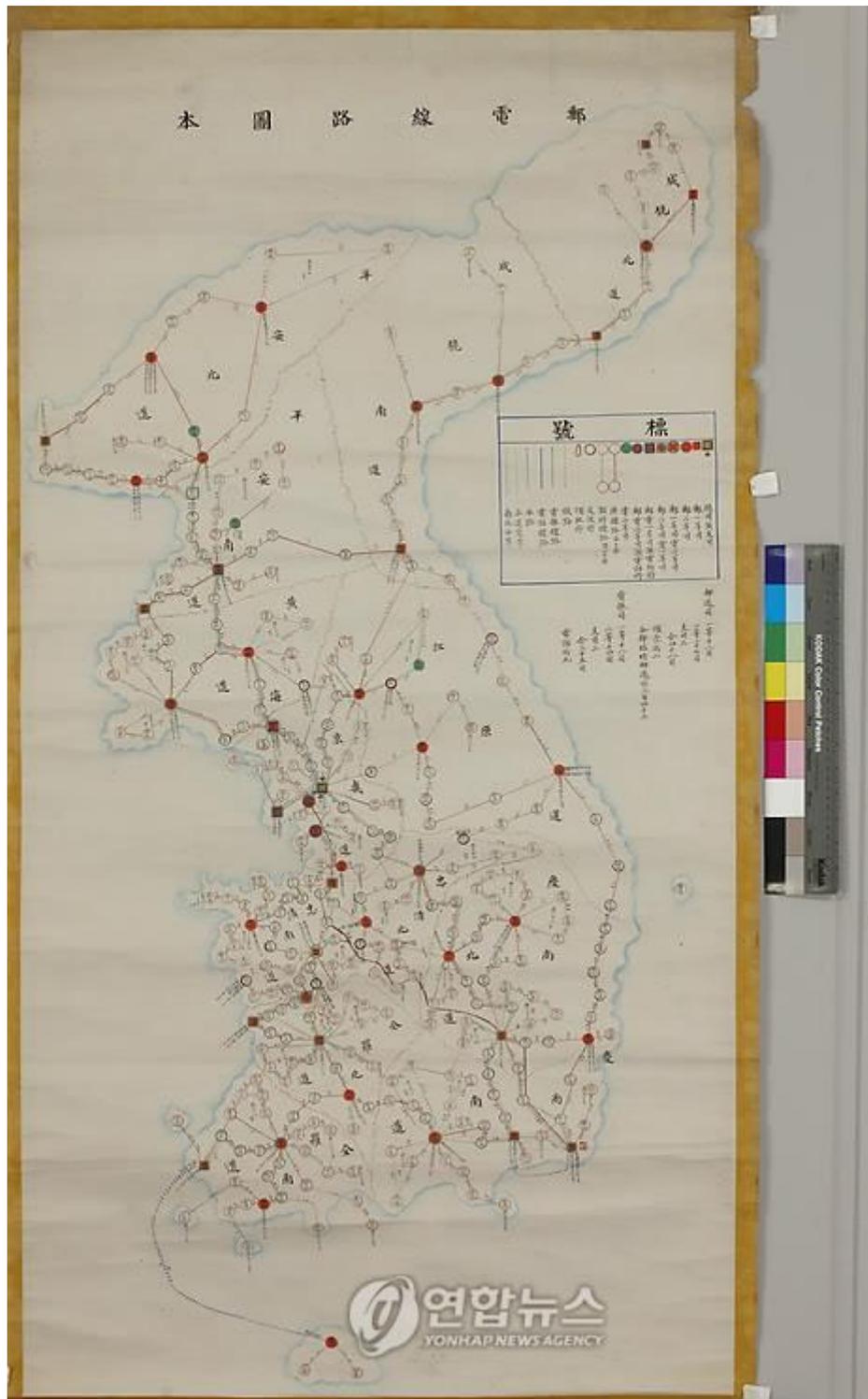
**Diagram 2: Korean Telegraph System (1900)**



**Note: All Korean names are based on British-style transcription.**

**Source: Danguk daehakgyo dongyanghak yeonguso, ed., *Gaehwagi daeoe mingan munhwa gyoryu chongseo VII: Gaehwagi Hanguk gwallyeon gumi muyeok bogoseo jaryojip* (Seoul: JNC, 2006), 349.**

### Diagram 3: Telegraph and Postal Networks of Korea (1905)

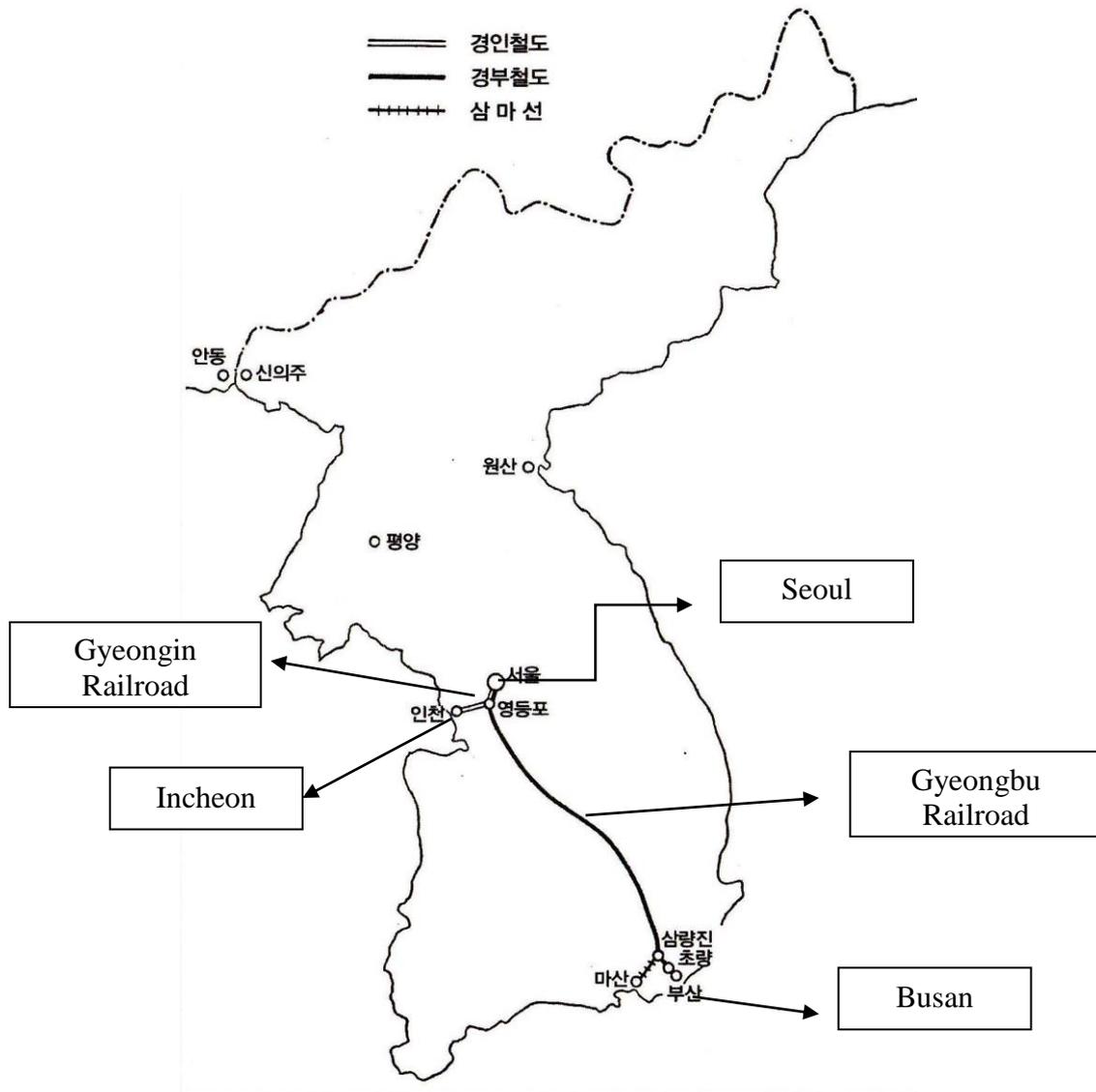


**Note:** This map depicts all telegraph and postal networks of Korea as of 1905.

**Source:**

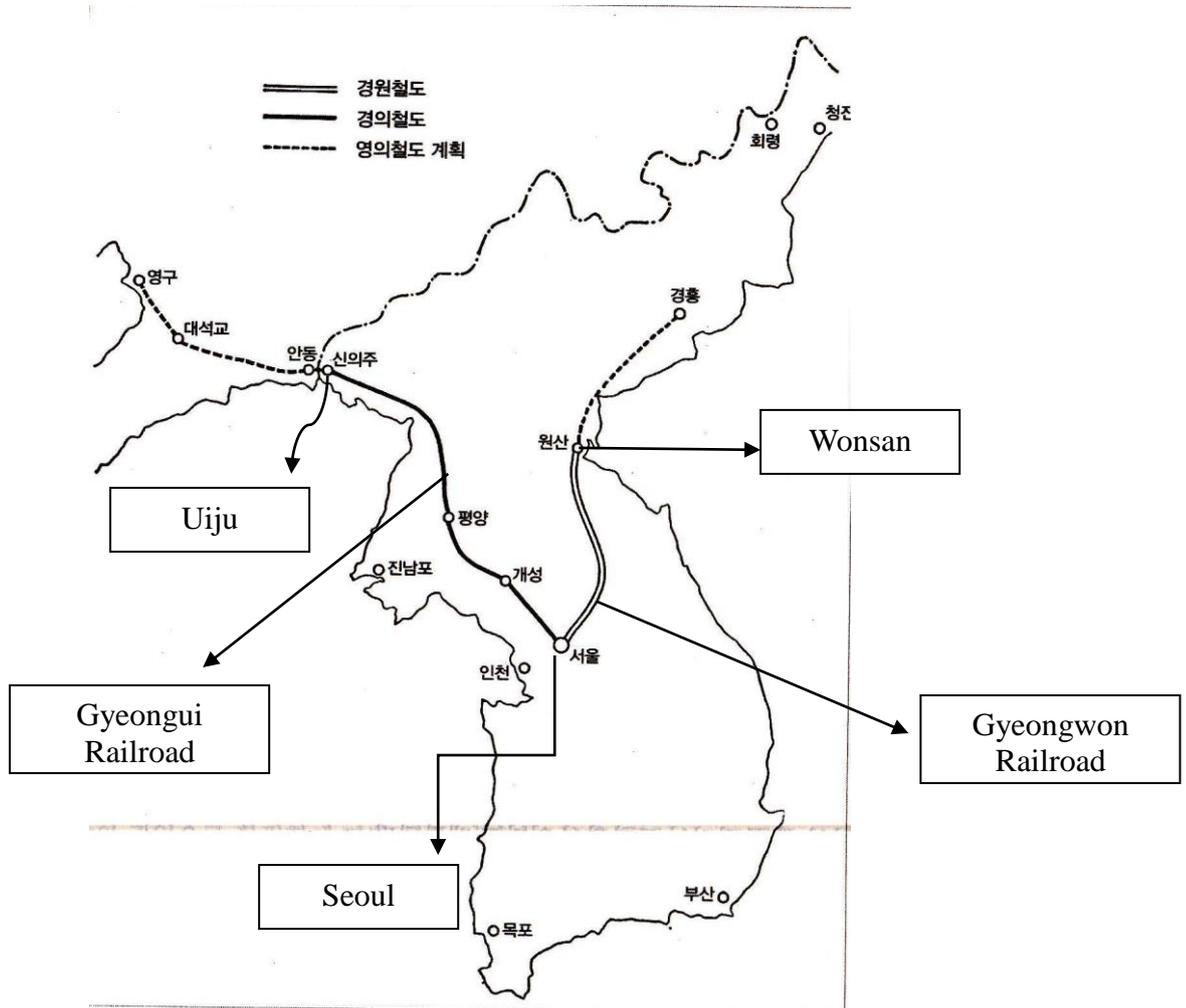
<http://news.naver.com/main/read.nhn?mode=LSD&mid=sec&sid1=103&oid=001&aid=0003350094>

**Diagram 4: Major Railroads in Korea (1905)**



**Note:** This map illustrates two major railroads, Gyeongin Railroad (Seoul to Incheon) and Gyeongbu Railroad (Seoul to Busan).  
**Source:** Gogung bakmulgwan, ed., *Baeknyeon jeon ui gieok, Daehan Jeguk* (Seoul: Graphicnet, 2010).

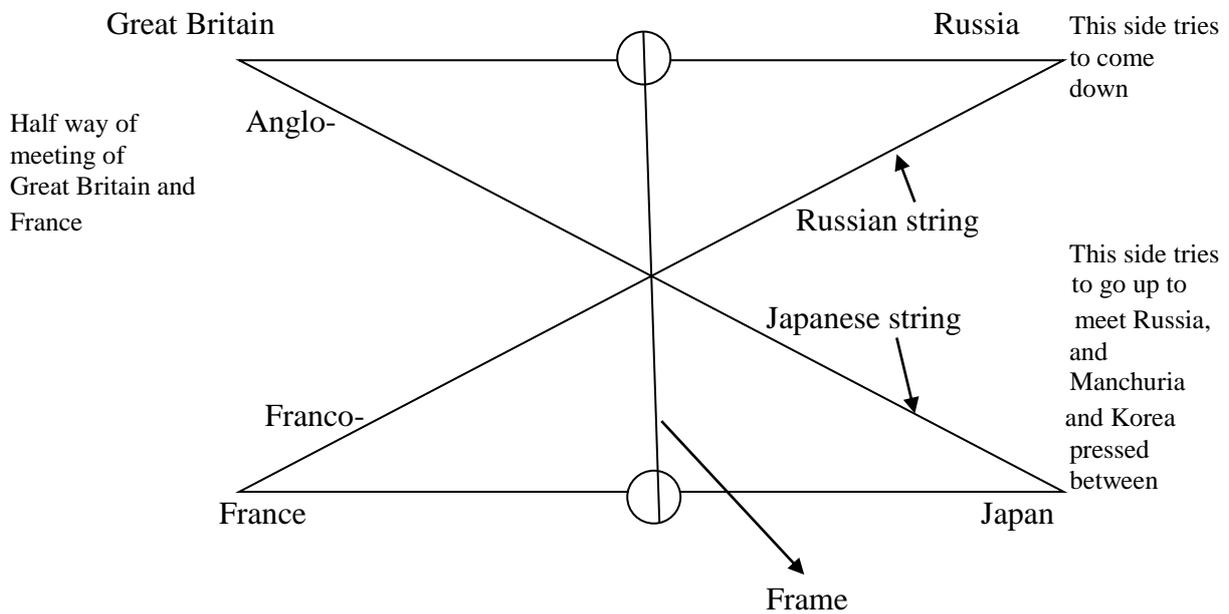
**Diagram 5: Major Railroads in Korea (1905)**



**Note:** This map shows two major railroads, Gyeongui Railroad, linking Seoul to Uiju and Gyeongwon Railroad, spanning from Seoul to Wonsan.

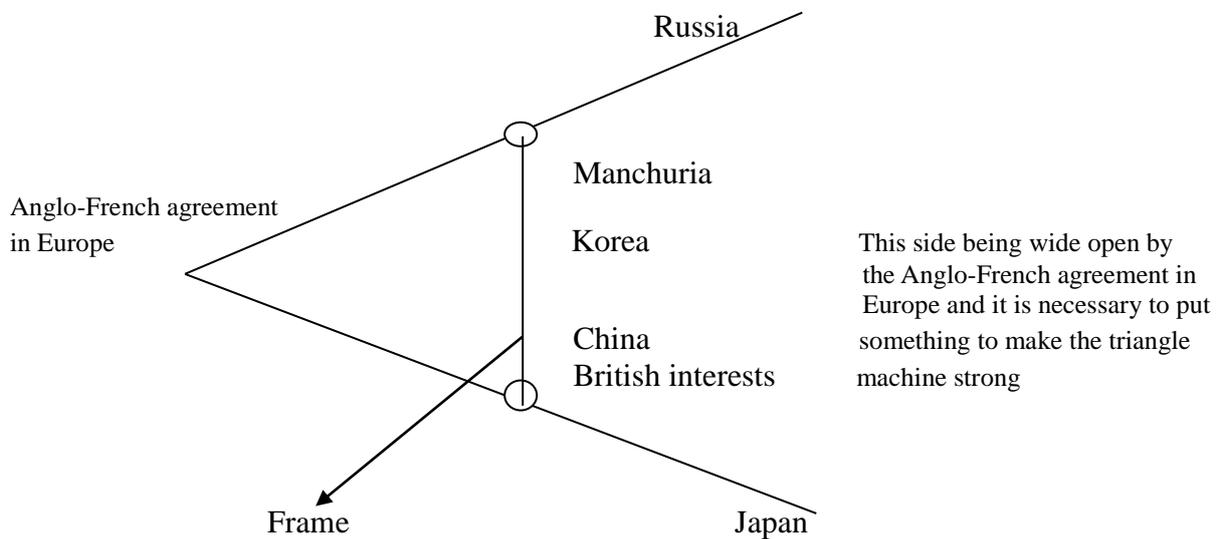
**Source:** Gogung bakmulgwan, ed., *Baeknyeon jeon ui gieok, Daehan Jeguk* (Seoul: Graphicnet, 2010).

**Diagram 6-1: Yi Haneung's Korean Neutralisation Diagram**



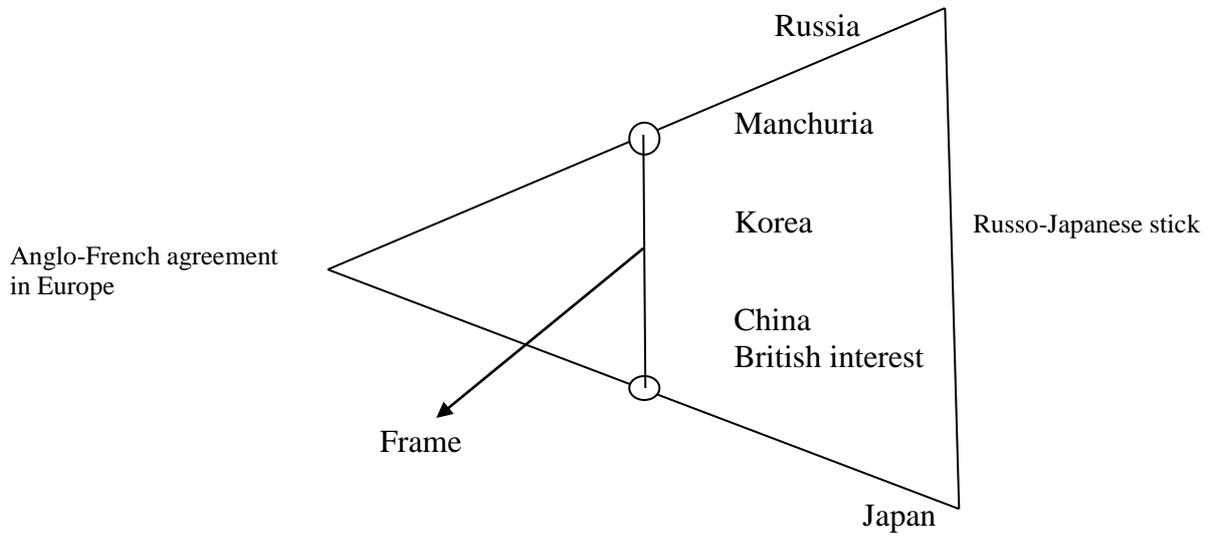
Source: F.O.17/1662, Yi Haneung to Foreign Office, 1904.1.13.

**Diagram 6-2: Yi Haneung's Korean Neutralisation Diagram**



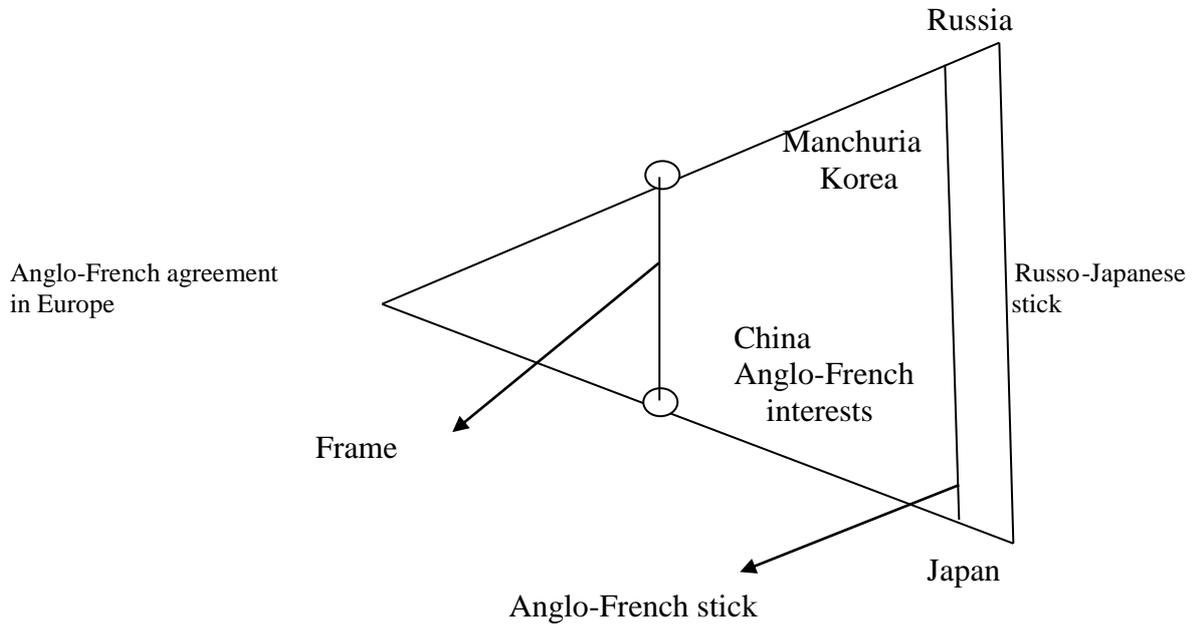
Source: F.O.17/1662, Yi Haneung to Foreign Office, 1904.1.13.

**Diagram 6-3: Yi Haneung's Korean Neutralisation Diagram**



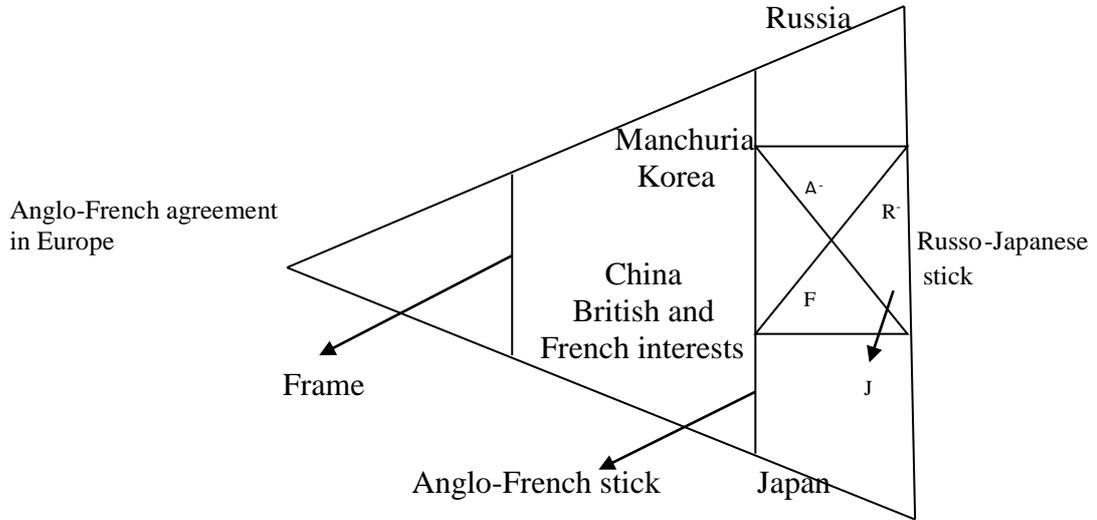
Source: F.O.17/1662, Yi Haneung to Foreign Office, 1904.1.13.

**Diagram 6-4: Yi Haneung's Korean Neutralisation Diagram**



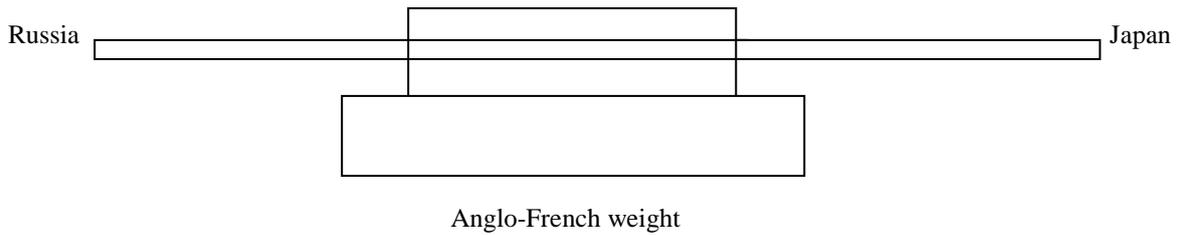
Source: F.O.17/1662, Yi Haneung to Foreign Office, 1904.1.13.

**Diagram 6-5: Yi Haneung's Korean Neutralisation Diagram**



Source: F.O.17/1662, Yi Haneung to Foreign Office, 1904.1.19.

**Diagram 6-6: Yi Haneung's Korean Neutralisation Diagram**



Source: F.O.17/1662, Yi Haneung to Foreign Office, 1904.1.19.

Note: All diagrams shown above were reproduced based on original illustrations in British Foreign Office files.

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