

# Why did Chosŏn Fall?

Oct. 7, 2014

# Review

- Did you learn anything new in the last lecture?
- Why did the Independence Club fail to transform Korea?
- What was the most significant point you took away from the last lecture?
- What were the different ways people reacted to the Korea's changing international environment?
- What is Pan-Asianism?

# Problems at late Chosŏn

- 1) lack of strong leadership at the central government level
- 2) lack of financial resources to purchase technology and weapons
- 3) lack of mass education in modern subjects
- 4) lack of modern nationalism
- 5) lack of any possible ally to turn to for help in resisting the Japanese. Japan defeated Russia in 1904-05, and then the US agreed to allow Japan to control Korea if Japan would leave the US control of the Philippines alone.

# Defining Korea

- “Korea” in premodern times usually referred to the court, particularly the royal family. In writing about defending Korea against foreign invaders, Koreans usually said they were defending the ruler and his family.
- Korea could also be defined geographically, although that definition got blurry around the edges. For example, it’s not clear that Tokdo was considered part of Korea until the 20th century. Much of the northern border was blurry as well.
- Korea was not usually defined culturally, though Koreans were becoming more explicit about distinctive elements of Korean culture starting in the 18th century.
- Only in the 20th century was Korea defined ethnically (“racially”) as the rightful home of the Korean people (minjok), and Korean history defined as the history of the Korean people rather than the history of the Korean government.

# Defining Koreans

- A variety of ways to define what it is to be Korean
- culturally, either as civilized (Confucian) or as distinctively Korean
- ethnically, either as a part of the “yellow race” or as a distinct “minjok.”
- politically, either identifying with the monarchy or with the nation. (Sources, pp.293-95)

# Forms of Resistance

- Nationalism appeared among the elite before 1910:
- The Righteous Armies --why did they fail? (Sources, pp.292-95)
- Education as resistance--Syngman Rhee and Pak Ŭnsik (Sources, 299-305, 309-12)
- Economic and cultural resistance (han'gŭl as a marker of Korean identity). The Shinminhoe
- Other forms of armed resistance: An Chung-gŭn, a terrorist or a patriot?
- Did many Koreans cooperate with the Japanese? (What was the Ilchinhoe?)

# Four approaches To dealing with this crisis

- a) pro-Japanese modernizers (including Ilchinhoe)
- b) pro-American modernizers
- c) traditionalists
- d) armed resistance:
  - Righteous Armies
  - An Chung-gŭn (An Jung-geun)

# An Chung-gŭn

- He assassinated Ito Hirobumi, whom he considered the architect of Japan's seizure of Korea.
- Did his assassination of Ito prevent or delay Japan's annexation of Korea?
- How did he reconcile his nationalism with his Pan-Asianism and acceptance of Japanese leadership of Asia?
- He is considered a hero in Korea. Is that only because of his intentions or because of what his act accomplished as well?

# An Chung-gŭn on working with Japan

(Writing about the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05), In his "Treatise on Peace in the East," An wrote:

The Japanese Empire had told all the nations in the world that it was fighting for "peace in the East" and "Korean independence" and everyone firmly believed it. Those lofty ideals sank deeply into the hearts of the people of Korea and China. ....

Now, as Western power expands into the East, even a young child knows that the best plan is for the people here to unite our power so that we can defend ourselves. However, for some reason, Japan, without considering the situation, blindly harmed Korea, its neighbor of the same race, ending the friendly relations the two countries had maintained. This is just like the case where the "fisherman profits from the battle between the mussel and the kingfisher." Japan's actions have shattered the hopes of the people of China and Korea.

# Religious Reactions

- Tonghak becomes Ch'ŏndogyo, a modern religion, and splits with Ilchinhoe.
- Buddhism--a few modernizing reformers (Han Yongun)
- Catholics are mostly quiet, but Protestants are modernizers and nationalists
- Taejonggyo--nationalism as religion. Based on worship of Tan'gun, the legendary first Korean/ first Korean king.
- Religions that worship Kang Chŏngsan.

# Yi Wanyong's immature nationalism

- He was unable to see the royal family as separate from the Korean nation, so he worked more to protect the royal family than he did to protect Korea's independence.
- Served as Korea's ambassador to the US from 1888 to 1890. Encouraged the king to flee to the Russian Embassy in Seoul after some Japanese killed the queen. He took refuge in the US embassy, but realized the US wasn't going to help Korea. But he was a leading figure in the Independence Club.
- Only became openly pro-Japanese after Japan defeated Russian in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05) when he gave up hope for maintaining full independence for Korea.
- He negotiated the 1910 treaty of annexation and got the Korean royal family recognized as royalty by the Japanese.

# Japan gets a free hand

- The Boxer Rebellion of 1900 in China
- The Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902
- The Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05 (What role did the Ilchinhoe play in the war?)
- Protectorate agreement of 1905  
Sources, pp. 312-313
- Taft-Katsura Agreement of 1906
- King Kojong forced to step down in 1907 --Korea refused admission to Hague Conference.
- What were the “Righteous Armies”? Why did they fail in their battles against the Japanese?
- 1910 Chosŏn becomes Chōsen, a Japanese colony

# 1910 Annexation

- Preceded by 1905 protectorate:
- The role of Yi Wanyong
- Was the Japanese seizure of Korea legal?
- How did the Japanese justify the annexation?
  - a) Koreans needed to be dragged into the modern world
  - b) Koreans were related to the Japanese, as little brothers.Most Koreans did not agree with either excuse.

# Before Assigning Blame, Ask:

- What could Korea have done to prevent absorption into the Japanese empire?
- Did Korea have the military power to resist the Japanese military?
- Is there any evidence that large-scale popular demonstrations against the Japanese takeover (no such demonstrations occurred in 1910) would have made any difference?
- Could the government of the Taehan Empire do anything that would have enlisted foreign support for Korea's independence?

# Why did Chosŏn fall?

- weak economy meant no financial wherewithal to acquire modern military technology.
- Lack of a strong military tradition.
- weak monarch for most of the 19th century
- system of balance of power between yangban and king that worked for almost 500 years did not allow the dramatic changes in policy needed to cope with a radically changing international environment.
- the only foreign countries interested in Korea were too weak to keep the Japanese out of Korea. Besides, Korea relied far too long on China for protection.

# Creating Nationalism

- ❑ What stimulates nationalism?
- ❑ A threat from another people or nation ✓
- ❑ technological and cultural developments creating a larger sense of community X
- ❑ a pre-existing sense of distinctiveness and a common history ✓
- ❑ a common government ✓
- ❑ urbanization X
- ❑ an elite teaching nationalism to the masses ✓ (Only at the end of the Chosŏn dynasty)