

Korean Response to the Japanese Demand for Land in the Pre-Colonial Korea

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1. Introduction

Since the opening of Korea in 1876, it had been subjected to the growing pressure from varying forms of foreign demand. This study chooses to see the Korean response to one particular economic form of demand by the Japanese ? the demand for land ? in the pre-colonial Korea, especially 1895 to 1905 when the Koreans witnessed the rapid increase of the Japanese presence around them.

The economic form of demands for land, labor, agricultural products, and natural resources tended to elicit quick and intense response from the peasantry, as the issues directly affected their day-to-day living, unlike political or diplomatic demands supposed to be handled by central officials. In a sense, the Japanese demand for land provided unfortunate but effective opportunities for the Korean peasants to express their conventional values, rules, and norms concerned with land through individual or collective petitions and protests. Hence, firstly, this research will be one effective way to get closer to what the Korean peasants on the eve of the Japanese colonial rule had in their mind about land which they possessed and tilled.

The second aim of this research is to see how the conventional values, rules, and norms upheld by the Korean peasants in their management of land affairs were relegated to secondary importance under the Japanese imperial enterprises in Korea. In their protests to the Japanese land acquisition, the Korean peasants demonstrated strong attachment to land as base for livelihood and as patrimony to be sustained by descendants, as well as their historical rights to private property. But to the chagrin of the Korean peasants, their appeals received only secondary consideration by the Japanese authorities in their drive for imperial undertakings like construction of railways, military operations, and land development in Korean peninsula. It is in correct to say that the Japanese in Korea blindly ignored Korean sentiment on land, well-established notion of private ownership, and land transactions practices. Still, the Japanese were ready to disrespect Korean sentiment and practices on land, as they interfered with their own imperial projects in Korea.

In the third, the research intends to distinguish conventional elements from innovative ones in the Korean reactions to the Japanese land demand, which have been subsumed under the same category of national resistance by the Korean nationalist historians. There appeared new intellectual elite and political groups who had acquired new approach on land. Their new view on land was pronounced at the time of national protest and debate triggered by the Japanese proposal to lease all Korean wasteland for agricultural development in the middle of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904. The new intellectual elite, especially new press editors supported for the development of land so as to build the economic foundation of an independent nation, departing from the conventional rationale

that the development of land had been to provide basic necessities for people's livelihood.

2. The Practice of Land Transactions in the Chosŏn Period

We know the land for sale in the Chosŏn society presupposed its private ownership, and also know the private ownership of land had universal claim against its encroachment. As this study emphasizes the conservative nature of the peasants' rejection to or compromise with the Japanese demand for land, it is important to understand their conventional notion about land affairs including land transactions.

The official ban on agricultural land transaction was lifted in the year of 1424 by the Chosŏn government. The government found the rationale for the liberalization of land sale in relieving grievances of the destitute who were forced to sell land to provide funds for parental funerals, debt payments, redemptions, living expenses, yet were subjected to get their properties confiscated by the authorities for their illegal sale of land. But, the measure represented most probably the realistic recognition of the government under King Sejong for what had been long and widely practiced in private.

The government legalized land transaction, yet, from now on, it should be reported to the authority which investigated the legality of the deal, and issued a certificate of official registration (*iban*) to new owner. The process to complete legal purchase of land had two stages: In the private stage, a form of contract (*sinmungŭ*) was written by a scribe under the presence of a witness, and it was delivered to the purchaser together with all of old sale contracts (*kumungŭ*) which indicated the transfer of ownership right from the original through the last owner (i.e. the seller). The possession of these documents was essential not only to gain official registration (*iban*) for the newly purchased land but also to claim the title in future legal disputes. In the official stage, all parties involved in the contract – the purchaser, the seller, the witness, and the scribe – reported before the magistrate within one hundred days from the contract, as stipulated in the 1485 version of the National Code (*Kyŏngguk taejŏn*), and confirmed the contents of the contract, then the magistrate legalized the case by granting official registration.

Initially, the Chosŏn government showed strong will to control land transactions by running the official registration system. Thus, it continued to order the concerned magistrates to investigate vigorously the reasons for land sale in light of the rationale of the system to relieve the pain of those in debt. However, the system defied its original intention. The system from the beginning was vulnerable to the conspiracies of the parties involved in contract, who collaborated to forge acceptable reasons for land sale, thus masking real motivations to escape the state's obligations or to dispose lands and houses under collective management or inheritance. Furthermore, the system was flawed by the cumbersome requirement for the applicant to bring all personnel involved in the contract on the same day to confirm its contents as well as by the burdensome charge levied for the service, which became a frequent source of official extortion. Therefore, the people in general tended to ignore the official stage of registration in land transactions, unless they were seriously worried about possible title disputes, and deemed private documents without official seals quite negotiable. In addition, land transactions used to take place between ready and reliable acquaintances, which also reduced the demand for the official registration system as a guarantee to protect land ownership right.

In particular, the loss of land documents and the general administrative disarray in the aftermath of the Hideyoshi Invasions (1592–98) and the Manchu Invasions (1626 and 1637) made the operation of the system hardly feasible. Hence, the government began to accept the private contracts as valid, provided that they were confirmed by reliable witnesses. Now, the government was more concerned with the problems accompanying private transactions, such as double selling and forgery of documents than the legitimate transfer of ownership, thus it continued to issue injunctions to hold the system. But by the early eighteenth century no body responded the government' s order to register the transfer of land ownership with the concerned authority except those who were in anticipation of legal disputes. Thus, the official registration system for the transfer of land ownership became optional in private land transactions, and subsequently the government abolished its compulsory provision to report them.

In sum, the positive policy to the Chosŏn government to supervise land transactions by instituting the registration of ownership transfer failed to function, as land transactions were conducted outside the jurisdiction of the government. As a result, the role of the government in land transactions were depressed to the piecemeal hearings of legal suits initiated by individual owners who decided to use the state' s authority in fighting against actual or potential violations of their private property. Thus, the registration system of land ownership persisted only in popular demand for its usefulness to provide individual applicants with legal authority necessary to defend his or her property.

3. The Problems of Land Acquisition outside the Treaty Ports

Until the establishment of foreign settlements in the late nineteenth century, Japan House (Waegwan) ? a closely guarded trade post between Korea and Japan – had remained the only foreign foothold allowed by the Chosŏn government since the early fifteenth century.

Since 1876 the Korean government reluctantly concluded a series of treaties with imperial powers for diplomacy and trade. According to those treaties no foreigner was allowed the right to reside or hold landed property outside the treaty ports or more precisely outside the radius of 10 Korean // from the treaty ports. But this regulation was overlooked by foreigners, so they settled and purchased land wherever they decided to set up businesses or missionary stations. The Korean government issued a number of injunctions for the local magistrates to stop foreigners' inland residing and land owning. But the foreigners in Korea were subject not to native but to consular jurisdiction. Hence, local officials used to punish Koreans who sold houses or land to foreigners.

The Problem of False or Stolen Land Documents

Depraved members of families forged or stole land deed of their families, sold the land to Japanese purchaser, and then ran away. Then, the Japanese simply seized the land in point by force. Thus, it was the Korean landowner not the Japanese purchaser who had to start a very tedious and costly litigation to prove his right to the land in dispute. The Japanese were also very sharp in money-lending business, which was typically secured by mortgaged land. They foreclosed the mortgaged land punctually on due date without allowing grace period of forced sale to the entire loss on the part of the mortgager (i.e. the borrower). In this way, many Korean borrowers who failed to meet the terms of the Japanese moneylenders were forced to surrender their mortgaged land to the Japanese at much lower price than its market price.

What chiefly irritated local officials was the practice to get loans from the Japanese moneylenders by handing over forged or stolen land deeds of close relatives as security. The most common fraudulent were wayward sons whose spending appetite outgrew their income. Enticed by Korean go-betweens, they delivered false or real land deeds of their fathers, uncles, or cousins in return for loans, which they spent away for some unprofitable commercial ventures or even for gamble and wine. The Japanese moneylenders showed up to original owners usually with threatening squad of their recruitment, demanding repayment of defaulted loans or transfer of ownership rights.

Case 1: Paek Y?ng-hwan in T' aean county was visited by the group of Paek S?ng-ok (his seventh-removed nephew), Paek Ch' i-w?n, and Yamamoto, one translator, and servants. Paek S?ng-ok was described by his uncle as a vagrant type deceiving people anywhere to extract money. Recently he had been in trouble spending Hongju county' s land tax amounting thousands cash. He together with Paek Ch' i-w?n forged the land register (*yang' an*) under the ownership of his uncle (i.e. Paek Y?ng-hwan), and sold the paper land to Yamamoto, receiving the first 15,000 cash from the total price of 55,000 cash. This visit was to show the land in point to Yamamoto, who had promised to pay the rest amount after the field investigation (*taph?m*).

Flatly denying the ownership of the land, Paek Y?ng-hwan argued that the possession of such large tract of land was not within the social knowledge of his villagers, and further cited Home Ministry' s order that "even son or younger brother cannot sell the land possessed by his father or older brother, and even father or older brother should not be responsible for his son or younger brother" Thus, Paek Y?ng-hwan denied any accountability for his nephew' s land transaction. The investigation of these men by the magistrate revealed that Yamamoto who was acting as an agent for other Japanese merchant, Eda, had been deceived by above two Koreans who had delivered the false land register to obtain the money they needed to pay the debt with the yamen.

Case 2: A widowed women, Mrs Son had been bothered by her late husband' s fifth-removed nephew, Son Sun-p' il who had the bad habit of borrowing any available money and then throwing the debt to his unfortunate aunt. This spring Son Sun-p' il spent the land tax of Hongju county amounting 1,000 cash. The magistrate put him in prison, and urged Mrs Son to pay on behalf of her nephew. Helpless with the stern order, she managed to pay back the sum.

Still, Mrs Son received another unwanted visit by Son Sun-p' il, this time accompanying two Japanese and translator. The Japanese said they had already purchased Mrs Son' s land, and paid the price of astonishing 210,000 cash to her nephew. This huge amount was apparently for blustering to make the widow comply with their scheme to obtain her land or money. The Japanese threatened her to surrender either land or money. In her petition, obviously written by her legal aid, she contended that it was normal to purchase all private properties directly from owner, therefore not to pay the price to his/her relative.

The Japanese became somewhat negotiable, acknowledging the trickery by Son Sun-p' il. Yet, they did not retreat until they extracted 2,500 cash from her for travel expenses. In turn, the woman obtained the forged land title and a written pledge not to transgress her property again. The dispute was thus settled, but Mrs Son brought the case to confirm before the magistrate in fear of the future trick by the Japanese and her Korean nephew.

Case 3: The official land certificate (*wanmun*) of a woman, Mrs Ch?ng was taken by her male cousin in-law. This man delivered the certificate to a Japanese money lender as collateral and borrowed money amounting 30,000 cash. When he failed to pay back the debt, the Japanese pressed her hard to pay on behalf of her cousin, threatening to foreclose her land otherwise. She managed to provide 2,200 cash, but that amount was hardly satisfactory to the Japanese, who later took her son as a hostage.

Case 4: The people of Taegu county lodged a collective petition (*t?ngso*) before their magistrate to the effect that they were suffering from the loans incurred by their relatives. Since the arrival of the Japanese railway workers, Korean vagrants harassed the people in various ways, utilizing their intimacy with the Japanese. For now, they induced the wasteful youngsters to get loans from the Japanese, usually with onerous rates of interest, by pledging forged titles to fields and houses owned by their relatives. The loans were spent for drinking and gambling revelries and on due dates thrown to their innocent relatives.

The peasant landowners who lost their land through either fraud or foreclosure requested their magistrates to urge the Japanese to return their land to them on receiving the original purchasing price. That action was in accordance with one traditional and popular practice in land sale, in which the seller could claim the redemption of his/her sold land on paying the original purchasing price. It was a kind of borrowing money with land as security. The popularity of the practice among the peasants in need of cash tells their strong attachment to land, as it was a sale of land with the reserved right to buy back. Therefore, in explaining the peasant owners' reaction against the Japanese land acquisition, it is a far-fetched characterization to call it 'nationalistic reaction,' since their action can be explained in terms of one convention in land sale. The peasants' request for recovery of lost land passed through tedious administrative and diplomatic channels of local magistrate to Foreign Ministry to the Japanese legation to local Japanese consul, neither of whom was enthusiastic in recovering their right to land.

The Problem of Land Purchase by Missionaries

It was well-known tactics for missionaries to buy interior land and houses in the name of native converts so as to avoid the treaty restriction that outlawed the purchase of land and houses outside the limits of treaty ports.

Case 1: In Ch' ?lw?n county, an American missionary attempted to purchase a house to use it as a church in the name of his Korean translator (Kim Y?ng-ok), a Christian himself, but was met with strong opposition from local people. The two contracting parties called upon the magistrate to suppress the intervention of villagers in the private deal between Koreans. The housing site in dispute became a highly sensitive point, for it had been marked by the monument dedicated to a loyal subject. The owner of the house was well-known yangban in his locality as a direct descendant of an illustrious ancestor. He maintained at first that he was at liberty to sell his private property, but later withdrew his claim under the pressure of the village.

The village petitioners charged that the sale of long-standing sites for ancestral honor not only disgraced the seller's own ancestor, but also gave rise to the growth of harm (i.e. the spread of Christianity in the village community). Not surprisingly, Korean officials denounced the intention of the owner, for it was to obliterate the honorable achievement of his ancestor as well as to commit illegal sale of house and its site to foreigners.

The Problem of Secret Sale of Land in the Cholla province

The Government officials detected that a large tract of land in the northern part of the Cholla province near the treaty port of Kunsan was in the possession of the Japanese. Obviously, the peasants in that region secretly sold their land to the Japanese. The Korean officials in charge of the investigation reported that immediate money gain motivated such illegal sale of land by the peasants. But the land problem in that area was not that simple. The area had had a history of prolonged ownership dispute between the peasants and the royal court.

The severe drought and flood in the late 1870's devastated that area, leaving the area uncultivated for more than a decade. In the early 1890's the royal court invested money and equipments for reclaiming the area. In order to encourage the labor service from the peasants, the royal court granted them tax holiday and reduced tax rate for a certain period. A number of peasant owners were willing to have their land registered under the title of the royal court so as to gain tax benefits, but over time the court acted like landlord, collecting tenancy rent of half crop instead of official land tax. In a series of protests, the peasants argued that they had no reason for paying high rate of rent, because the land was originally their own. The court continued to collect the rent. Thus, the conflict remained unsolved for years.

Under this unsettled condition, the peasants were approached by the Japanese who wanted to possess farms near the treaty port of Kunsan to secure rice for export to Japan. The peasants sold off the controversial land to the Japanese at the risk of severe punishment as well as social disdain from their communities. In a sense, this bold action amounted to a secret rebellion to the royal power on the part of the peasants. It was an aggressive exercise of their private ownership rights. Their action presupposes the well-established notion of private ownership to be protected from even the highest power in the country.

The local officials in charge of the investigation pointed to the pecuniary motivation of the peasant owners who turned blind eyes of the ban in a quest for sums of money. Considering over a decade old history of battles to regain their private land, this is too an easy explanation for the owners' action to sell off the disputed lands even to foreigners. Their action can be better understood in the light of their strenuous struggle to recover their ownership for the lands expropriated by the royal household. Since they never gave up the desire to redeem their titles to the disputed lands even after a series of lost battles with the royal power,

Some Korean scholars criticized their behavior as opportunistic. Yes, they were opportunistic in that they took the advantage of the Korean authorities' inability to curb illegal land transactions between the Koreans and the Japanese. Yet, their behavior was predictable in light of their firm notion that private properties could be disposed essentially at individual will.

The peasant owners' illegal sale of the controversial lands was certainly aided by the lax supervision by the local officials, but such rebellious action might have been impossible, if it had not been for their firm notion that the private ownership of land had a universal claim against its encroachment, even against the royal encroachment. The peasant owners were not without moral compunction for dispersing the bequeathed lands (*yut' o*)

to outsiders, but they insisted that only returning of the controversial lands to private ownership would stop their disloyalty – namely, secret selling of their lands to the Japanese – to the monarch.

4. Land for the Seoul–Pusan Railway

The Japanese leader had long cherished the plan to construct the railroad that would pass through the Korean peninsula. The prospective trans–Korean railway had much significance to them; The railway could be used to transport large military personnel and supplies in a quick way in cases of military conflicts in Korea and Manchuria. It could be used as an efficient vehicle to collect Korean agricultural products or to distribute Japanese manufactured products with much reduced transportation cost throughout Korea. The large train stations along the railway could be developed into major settlements of immigration, where the Japanese immigrants would engage in commercial and agricultural activities. And the construction of the railway in Korea would necessarily deepen the Japanese involvement in internal affairs of Korea.

On September 8 of 1898, the Korean government made a contract with the Seoul–Pusan Railway Company managed by the Japanese business leaders for land concession and other aids needed to construct the railway. The Korean government was responsible for compensating for seized land and removed houses, since it agreed to provide right of way to construct the railway in return for the future right to claim the ownership of the railway line. By granting land, the Korean government could claim the right to buy back the railway line fifteen years after its completion, however it got in return huge financial and political burdens for purchasing privately owned land (*minyujŭ*).

Now that the areas along the railway were viewed as the most desirable bases for commercial expansion and agricultural settlement, the Japanese planners wanted to secure as much land concession as possible from the Korean government. Initially, in April of 1900, the Seoul–Pusan Railway Company (*Kyŏngpu ch' ŏlto chusik hoesa*) requested vast tract of land for terminals and interior stations: 110,000 *pyŏng* for Seoul's South Gate station, 60,000 *pyŏng* for *Yŏngdŏngp' o* station, 160,000 *pyŏng* including sea land of 80,000 *pyŏng* for *Ch' oryang* station, 210,000 *pyŏng* for *Pusanjin* station, and average 200,000 *pyŏng* for interior stations. And the company requested 24 meter width of the right of way all along the line to build the double track. Thus, the Japanese made it clear that a string of Japanese enclaves were to be built along the railway line to function as centers for promoting trade and agricultural settlement.

The Korean government officials opposed this ambitious demand of the Japanese; The director of Korean Railway Bureau (*Ch' ŏlto wŏn*), *Min Yŏng-sŏn* opposed the double track, since his government had to reduce the size of the land to be purchased from private owners as much as it could due to its serious financial condition. Another director, *Pak Yong-hwa*, who had served in the Korean legation in Tokyo reminded that the size of *Sinkyō* or *Ueno* station in Tokyo was less than 30,000 *pyŏng* compared with 110,000 *pyŏng* for Seoul's South Gate station. The officials protested that the construction of such a large the station next to the city's gate interfered with the monarch's route to his ancestral worship, and entailed the removal of a large number of houses and tombs. They criticized the Japanese venture for lacking respect to the monarch's prestige and care for people's livelihood. And the removal of ancestral tombs was pointed as the violation of the contract of 1898, which dictated the detour of tomb sites.

The public revolt against the construction of Seoul's South Gate station was fierce. The digging of hills near the Southern Confucian Shrine was opposed for some popular geomantic reasons. And, in the summer of 1901, the residents near the gate staged a series of fierce protests in opposition to the removal of their living bases. On July 20, hundreds of them rushed to the office of the Seoul mayor, and demanded the move of the construction site to a remoter suburb (i.e. Yongsan area).

The Japanese directors of the Seoul-Pusan Railway Company argued that the stations in Tokyo should be extended in line with prosperous vicinities, and that the Seoul station should be large, because it would be on the great international railway that would reach as far as Europe. They expressed sorry about the Korean government's overly sensitive attitude toward private ownership of land, such attitude would encourage the public revolt against the seizure their land, because the Koreans unlike the Japanese had yet to nurture nationalism to support national projects. As a result, they anticipated the increase of compensation price for seized land, leading to the additional burden to the Korean government.

The Korean officials tried to reduce the size of Seoul station, asking the move coal deposit to another Yŏngdŏng station, and the negotiation went into standstill. But, as the agreed date for the start of construction – September 7, 1901 – was drawing near, the Japanese with support from the Japanese minister renewed the negotiation for defining the size of appropriated land. They offered to cut the size of Seoul by half, and much reduced others.' The Japanese minister Hayashi pressed the officials by giving them a warning that the Japanese would start the construction regardless of the negotiation in delay. And the Japanese also approached the close aids of the monarch with gifts and promises of favors in the construction.

After a year long negotiation, the concession for the size of land for the Seoul station was settled in July, 1902 between the director of Korean Railway Bureau, Kwŏn Chae-hyŏng and the Japanese Minister, Hayashi Gonsuke with much reduced scale of 51,819 pyŏng than the original proposal. Subsequently, other cases were settled; 41,000 pyŏng for Yŏngdŏng station, 50,000 pyŏng for Ch'oryang station, 30,000 pyŏng for Pusanjin station, and average 30,000 pyŏng for interior stations. The 18 meter width of land along the whole line was agreed to build single track.

The Korean government investigated the total amount of agricultural fields to be appropriated throughout 23 counties. The sum amounted 2,697,012 pyŏng with the total compensation cost of 456,707 yen. The land to be seized was overwhelmingly private, as the ratio between private and public land was 94.55 % to 5.45 %. It is not the size of the appropriated land but the number of registered owners that attracts our attention. The registered owners from 15 counties out of the total 23 counties within the appropriated fields numbered 9,875 legal persons. This meant that there were well over 10,000 cases of potential complaints against the land in appropriation for the Japanese railroad construction. In short, the Japanese railroad construction between Seoul and Pusan cut through the densely populated region of private owners at the great risk of entailing grievances from them in a striking contrast to other examples of trans-continental construction.

In compensating for seized land, the Korean government applied the conventional formula that the state purchased land from private owners at market price. Thus, the land seizure

took the form of land transaction between the state and the individual to respect private ownership of concerned individual. The Korean government provided a regionally varied scale of price based on fertility and type of land ? an obvious attempt to reflect market price of land. Thus, it can be said that the Korean government intended to keep the principle of good Confucian government to minimize disruption in the people' s livelihood by compensating the peasant owners in order for them to buy other land of equal value.

Nevertheless, the Korean government lacked the ability and the will to carry out such a standard plan. Firstly, it did not attempt any measure to secure the compensation fund on its own means. Instead, the Korean government sought for the Japanese loan. As the Korean government was in a perennial financial strait, so, in July of 1902, the Seoul–Pusan Railway Company agreed to lend a loan of 276,000 yen to the Korean government in order for it to pay for compensation to individual owner. Secondly, the Korean government did not manage the compensation affairs in any systematic or programmatic way. The compensation was a long drawn out process, more or less completed in October of 1907 after six years from the start of and two and ten months from the completion of the construction. The minimal amount was spent during the construction period mostly to silence the sporadic but continued protests by peasants owners demanding timely compensation based on market price (*sigae*) for their land and houses.

In seizing land and housing site for large train stations, the Japanese had little regard for the appeals made by marginal people living on subsistence farming or small commercial business around towns and cities. They requested for relocation of the station in defense of their livelihood, but their appeals could not elicit any favorable consideration on the side of the Japanese who had no leisure to engage in local concerns of secondary importance in pushing ahead with the urgent project of national importance.

From the start of the construction in September of 1901 to the final compensation in October of 1907, the central government agencies in charge were fed up with reports from local magistrates urging them to take measures to compensate peasants who came to harbor “piercing grievances” from the destruction of their land, houses, ancestral tombs, and forests, and to stop lawless actions of both Japanese and Korean construction coolies in villages. The central agencies in charge of compensation had been frequently crowded with throngs of angry peasants who requested for market–price compensation or other land of equal value for their lost land. Thus, while the Korean government could maintain a semblance of ownership of one important modern project in Korea, the Korean peasants owners along the railway line suffered the increased threat to their livelihood

5. Nagamori Proposal to Develop Uncultivated Land in Korea

In May of 1904 in the early month of the Russo–Japanese War, the Japanese cabinet decided key policies to be pursued with Korea in order to establish firmer political and economic control in the peninsula. The decision called for the defense operation in the peninsula, the supervision of foreign affairs, the management of financial administration, the control over rail lines and telegraph network, and the development of primary industries like agriculture, forestry, mining and fishing. The cabinet made it clear that the purpose of the agricultural development in Korea was to increase grain production for supply to Japan as well as to secure the agricultural colony for emigration of Japanese farmers.

“The most promising enterprise for our nationals in Korea is to engage in agriculture. As an agricultural country Korea in the past has provided our country mainly with foodstuffs and raw materials and in return received supplies of our manufactured goods from our country. We believe that future economic relations between the two countries must develop in accord with this principle. Furthermore, the population of Korea is small in comparison with its land area. If large numbers of emigrants from our country are permitted to move there and our farmers can penetrate the interior, we will acquire at a single stroke an emigration colony for our excess population and sufficient supplies of foodstuffs.”

To promote agricultural migration and agricultural development in Korea, both the Japanese government and private firms were eager to publicize the highly optimistic view on the potentials of Korean agricultural growth. One agricultural survey delegation in March 1904 from the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce presented a report about the land usage in Korea. In it, the total area of more than 1.4 million *ch²* was estimated as the potential land for new cultivation, which in the future could support the additional population of seven millions. And the report asserted that as the population density in Korea was far below those of Japan and China, the influx of seven million immigrants would not cause any land shortage for individual cultivators as long as the above vast tract of untilled land was to be opened fully to cultivation.

Furthermore, the climate and the terrain of Korea were similar to Japan, hence Japanese immigrants would have little difficulty in adjusting to the new environment. With respect to human advantages, the Japanese were superior to Koreans in terms of health, intelligence and capital equipment, therefore they would be in position to command Koreans' obedience and diligence. The annual land tax from newly reclaimed land was projected to increase by 8 million yen, the amount equal to the current total revenue of the Korean government. To ordinary people, the export of grains and raw materials would create effective demand for manufactured products of Japan.

By early June of 1904, the Japanese government's intention to develop Korean agriculture and to encourage agricultural migration was conveyed officially to the Korean government through the proposal by Nagamori Fujiyoshir^o, a former Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Finance official. Nagamori had been active in negotiating a concession to reclaim all Korean wasteland with Korean court officials since his retirement from Ministry of Finance post in December 1903. His land developing proposal together with the suggestion to monopolize several sale items like wine, tobacco, ginseng, etc, had been delivered to Kojong's close officials as a means to increase the revenue of the royal treasury.

The Nagamori proposal presented as a draft contract between Minister of Royal Household Department and Nagamori contained following provisions; All arable land, forest, and meadow not clearly under private or government ownership and at the same time not reserved for graveyards, shrine sites, and restricted forests by the court were to be exclusively entrusted to Nagamori for reclamation, rearrangement, improvement, and settlement. The Korean government continued to hold the ownership of the above wasteland. It was the duty of Nagamori not the Korean government to provide capital for the project. Nagamori possessed the right to use the land for a variety of profitable purposes such as growing grains, planting trees and fruits, grazing, fishing and hunting. The taxation of the land was to be suspended for the first five years after its development.

The contract was to be valid for fifty years, and could be extended under mutual agreement. At the termination of the contract, the Korean government would be obligated to reimburse all capital invested in the land as well as the interest of 5 percent annum for the investment. The right and duty of the contract could be passed to Nagamori's heir or trustee.

The Petition Movement by the Government's Officials

The Nagamori proposal was revealed to the public, though its secret negotiation had been agreed upon by Korean and Japanese authorities. On July 10, 1904, a junior official at Pongsangsa (Office of Sacrificial Rite), Yi Sun-pom together with several local literati presented a memorial to the throne, rejecting the Nagamori's plan to open Korea's wasteland to cultivation. Yi's memory was still green with the Japanese assassination of Queen Min in 1895, for which the Japanese government had not yet showed an apology, say, by delivering the murderers. Rather, the Japanese demands had become ever harsher. Now they desired to turn over almost nine tenths of Korean territory to their possession in the name of developing wasteland. The people deprived of the sources of natural and agricultural products were bound to disperse, leaving the king no one to support him. Yi lamented the absentmindedness of the king to neglect the territory passed down by Heaven and former kings thereby causing the flight of his people.

Despite Yi's legitimate warning that Japan's intention lay in the massive immigration of its farmers to Korea's interior, his measures to counter this unprecedented national crisis were not anything beyond traditional agricultural guidelines. Yi believed the Japanese greed for land could be frustrated by nurturing the solid peasantry who were to be carefully guided with such familiar means of agricultural management: to let plants and fishes grow by selecting the time for their exploitation, to lose no time for crops, to reduce spending, to work diligently enough not to leave land fallow, and so on.

Anything but innovative in agricultural policy, Yi's memorial was intended more for the moral indictment against the Japanese minister who tried to take Korean sovereignty on land as well as his servile Korean counterparts. Hence, he urged the king to take resolute action in rejecting the Japanese proposal to open wasteland and in punishing Korean traitors who were to sell their country to foreigners.

Yi presented the memorial with fifty cosigners, and had daily gathering at *soch' ŏng* (sit-in place for memorialists), at the house of one cosigner, waiting for the king's reply. Then, he was taken to the Japanese police bureau for interrogation. Yi stated there that he could not tolerate leasing such a large tract of land to foreigner, as it was gravely concerned with national sovereignty. Later Yi was again arrested by the Korean government on the charge of extreme words addressed to the monarch. Meanwhile, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Yi Ha-yŏng tendered resignation, as he saw growing criticism against him by memorialists including Yi Sun-pom.

The Opposition Movement

Song Su-man was one of cosigners of the heated memorial by Yi Sun-pom, who was arrested for extreme expressions addressed to foreign diplomat. After the arrest of the chief memorialist, cosigners surrendered themselves at P'yŏngniwon (the court under Ministry of Law) soliciting equal punishment. The law official replied that as the

punishment had been already meted out to the chief memorialist by the order of the royal court, there would be no further arrest for the rest of signatories. In defiance of the order of dismissal, they gathered at a guild house in Chongno Street. There, they issued circulation to convene sympathizers, thereby giving public magnitude to their protest. Thus, Song wanted his association at Chongno Street to be the center of public discourse (*kong?*) to preserve nation's territory.

After setting up the enlarged association, the members were going to place an official of high reputation as the president so as to lend further weight to their opposition to the Nagamori proposal. It was reported that the protest meetings at the Chongno Street from mid-July were led by Confucian literati under the name of Poan-hoe (Preservation Society), and were joined by three to four thousands of people on the peak day of July 21. Clearly, the opposition was on the move toward the mass movement.

The Korean government came to call the voices of the opposition inclusively as popular opinion (*yaron*), and invoked it as one key reason to turn down the Nagamori proposal, because the government should not run against the popular opinion in its high tide, lest it should lose people's mind (*minsim*). Yet in understanding the contemporary usage of popular or public opinion, we have to be content with the words of the leaders, because both official documents and press reports tell nothing about the content of ordinary speakers in the protest meetings. The debate between Song Su-man and Kokubun, a secretary of the Japanese legation on the topic of public opinion (*kongron*) is suggestive for understanding how they thought public opinion should be formed in a nation.

Kokubun dismissed the opposition as blank opinion (*kongron*) with no practical value (*muyong*), confined to the unproductive class of people (*yusig'in*). Song argued that in establishing the current public opinion his colleagues correctly followed the convention under which critical issues of the state had been determined by the opinion of Confucian literati class (*saron*). Moreover, since the current opposition was strongly supported by ordinary people, as had been demonstrated lately by the large crowd in Chongno Street, Song maintained that it surely merited public opinion.

Song: In our country, when controversial issues were under debate, the opinion of literati class had been adopted in determining the fundamental policies of the state (*kuksi*) for five hundred years. In Western countries, the people's rights (*minkwon*) decide the fundamental policies. Hence, the opinion of literati class is equivalent to the people's right in the West. ... With regard to the current issue even ignorant men and women know it unacceptable. Therefore, the opposition is sure to be the public opinion of entire nation.

Kokubun; This cannot be public opinion.

Song; What constitutes public opinion?

Kokubun; In case there exists the general opinion by men of considerable wealth and reputation, it can be called as public opinion.

Kokubun admonished that even though the opposition seemed like the public opinion of whole nation, it was unwise to follow it, because there could have been no progress in Japan' s wealth if the prevalent objection against modernization had not been adopted by the insightful minds in the government. Song insisted that Korean opponents against the opening of the country had been all upright and insightful minds.

Did Song Su-man have recourse to nationalist politics in mobilizing the opposition to what he thought was the gravest threat to the nation' s integrity? It was certainly true that he wanted broader participation of ordinary people in his opposition movement. Nevertheless, it did not occur to him that ordinary people ought to acquire new set of thinking in order to cope with such a national crisis.

Though upset by the strength of the protest movement, the Japanese leaders were hardly impressed by it. They relegated the protestors as "disorderly crowd (*nanmin*) inimical to Korea-Japan alliance at the critical time of war emergency. And they judged that the movement was led by conservative literati who were unable to entertain the concept of national economic development. The movement provide an excuse for the Japanese to take full control of policing task in Korea.

Insofar as the objective of the demonstration was confined to the denial of the land occupation by the Japanese settlers thus to maintain status quo in land management, it is unlikely that the demonstration was engineered by nationalist aspiration. Unless it did not occur to the leadership that the energy of the mass demonstration could be translated into popular enthusiasm to open new land thereby increasing economic resources of the nation, there was a severe restriction on the movement to depart from the traditional protests to claim for reinstatement of broken status quo.

The primary concern of a Korean nationalist historian, Yun Py?ng-s?k in his article on the Nagamori proposal is to emphasize the aggressive nature of the Nagamori plan and the determined opposition by Koreans, which succeeded in killing it albeit for a few years. Yun did not attempt to clarify the elements which might help us understand the nature of the opposition either as traditional reaction against foreign aggression or as modern nationalist reaction.

He summarizes the reasons for the rejection expressed in various protest documents in four points: Firstly, the Japanese were intent on seizing whole Korean territory in the end, starting from the wasteland; Secondly, the Japanese settlers would come Korea *en masse* under the slogan of agricultural development, but were bound to distress Korean peasants to dispersion; Thirdly, their mixed residency among Koreans severely would disrupt the civil order of the country, as had been clearly shown by the unlawful behaviors of the Japanese railway workers; In the fourth, those Koreans who lived on exploiting natural resources like fire-woods, timbers, grasses, fish, wild animals, and so on would lose their means of living.

In a sense, Yun' s four points were all in the stock of Confucian minds intent on defending people' s livelihood at the threat of foreign encroachment. Yun maintains that the initial protest took the form of conventional political remonstrance by central officials and local yanban through presenting memorials and distributing circulars. But as the Japanese were ever determined to push forward with the plan, the opponents set up the Poan-hoe under the slogan of "supporting the state and stabilizing the people." The

Poan-hoe provided a rallying point for the general public including high ranking officials as well as ordinary citizens. Thus, Yun argues that the traditional form of protest developed into “the popular movement to save the country” (*kuguk minjung undong*) for which he does not explain in light of either continuity with or departure from traditional form of popular movement. Yun highlights the participation of ordinary men united in their opposition with their social seniors.

Yet, the movement’s broader base per se did not necessarily indicate any change in the nature of the movement, unless one proves the presence of new set of people with unconventional ideological orientation. To nationalist historians including Yun, what engages them is the unity and the strength of Korean resistance against the weight of Japanese imperialism rather than analytical concepts useful to understand it. In figurative language, what matters is the size of whale, not whether it is fish or animal.

The Nationalist Discourse on Developing Wasteland

More programmatic than Yi Sun-p?m’s agricultural proposal marked by more vigorous adaptation to agricultural cycles was that offered by the former councilor (?igwan) of Chungch’ uw?n, Hong K?ng-s?p. Hong had been a member of the Independence Club in 1898, and later became a founding member of Yusin-hoe (Renovation Society), forerunner of Ilchin-hoe. His was based on realistic evaluation of general human propensities and current practices on land. In essence, Hong’s idea was that since the presence of untilled lands aroused the desire of foreigners to grab them, the government should encourage the reclamation through distributing cultivation rights (not ownership rights) among private parties, in fact, private corporations, which were to prevent foreigners’ land occupation by preemption.

Hong worried that as railway lines were going to reach every corner of the interior, mixed residency (*chapg?*) and immigration (*sikmin*) would be soon the order of the day. The lands and houses around railway stations as well as uncultivated lands were to be increasingly in the hands of foreigners (i.e. the Japanese). The problem of land seizure became worse, as the dishonest and the ignorant sold out their plots for immediate profits.

As to the reason for the poverty of the Korean peasantry, an interesting congruity of opinion between Hong and contemporary Western observers was that the lack of protection for private properties in Korea stifled individual peasant’s zeal for productive pursuits. Despite peasants’ natural tendency to open new land in pursuit of benefit, their enthusiasm died down, as soon as a host of landlords such as palaces, government agencies, military units, powerful families, and local big shots took away their products of hard toil.

Hong recommended the government had to take systematic approach to get rid of the poverty of the peasantry instead of occasional punishing of corrupt officials. Thus, All uncultivated land or wasteland should be placed under the control of the government not the court, thus from the Department of Royal Tribute (?gong-won) to the Ministry of Agriculture, Commerce, and Industry (Nongsangkong-pu). The rights to open, to construct dams and dikes, and to cultivate crops and plants were to be granted to the corporations consisting of local residents.

The uncultivated land or wasteland were under permanent joint ownership of the government and the people, hence no sale or transfer of the land would be allowed to either the Ministry or the corporations: Instead, the Ministry possessed merely the rights for administration and taxation, while the corporations had the right to cultivate and the duty to pay taxes: the corporations operated through the capital and labor contributed by local residents took initiatives in how to utilize the land growing crops, vegetables, plants, mulberry trees, or opening mines: The local or the ministry officials dispatched were subjected to punishment in case they forcibly transferred the established rights of corporations to other parties: The corporations in turn were prohibited from secretly selling or transferring their rights: The Ministry were to make manuals and tools for cultivators to use: Foreign technicians and tools might be introduced: As the first step of work, an umbrella organization was to be set up in Seoul in order to guide would-be local corporations how to organize themselves and how to start the enterprise as well as to guarantee the payment of taxes.

Criticism against the Japanese Intention

So far, the Japanese had forced the Korean government to grant the rights for timber cutting, fishing, and railway construction to them. Now they demanded the lease of all Korean wasteland for reclamation and development. By taking all Korean natural resources including mines, forests, seas, rivers, lakes, and bottom lands in their permanent possession, the Japanese not only deprived the Koreans of their basic means for living, but also of the chances for them to develop sources of national wealth in the future when their administration would be renovated and their intelligence enhanced. The real motivation of the Japanese in these instances were solely for gain profits from Korea and had nothing to do with the protection of Korean independence and territorial integrity, which had always been pledged in agreements between Korea and Japan.

The Japanese reasoning that Koreans did not realize the needs of developing natural resources, therefore the neglected task should be undertaken by them sounded apologetic and superfluous the editorialist. The Japanese, instead of forcefully taking the rights of Koreans to develop Korea's natural resources, confined their role to showing examples by furnishing Koreans with technical and personnel assistance. He asserted that if Japan had genuine intention to advice reform in Korea's administration ? the professed commitment by the Japanese ? it should foster the engagement of Koreans in order to effect such reform.

Criticism against the Government Officials

Although the current Japanese proposal called for the uncultivated land not under governmental or private ownership, there would be no question that the Japanese settlers, once permitted to reside interior land, were very likely to acquire private land by any means, as had been shown along the Seoul-Pusan railway line as well as in costal areas in the south and the west. And aggressive Japanese cultivators were bound to create violent conflicts with Korean farmers eventually bringing in Japanese soldiers in the name of protecting their citizens, yet nobody knew what thing happened next. Such a sequence was the order of these days in incidents precipitated by Japanese railway workers.

In retrospect, the apprehension derived from the delinquent acts by Japanese railway workers that Japanese agricultural settlers would migrate *en masse*, and likewise create disruptions in rural communities of Korea was somewhat unwarranted.

After a series of concession rights handed over to Japan, Korea came closer to the loss of national sovereignty with vast tract of the nation's territory at peril of foreign possession. The State Council should have turned down the Nagamori proposal instantly upon receipt. If the high officials had been resolute in their rejection, the current humiliation could have been avoided. Unless they engaged in serious self-criticism (*pansong*) about the duty they neglected and devoted themselves to the task of self-strengthening, the same humiliation as experienced would follow in succession.

Appeal to the General Public

The editorialist reminded the readers of the paper's lengthy treatise on improvement of Korean agriculture, in which it contended that the first priority should have been placed on the return of fallow land to cultivation to increase national income as well as to counteract foreigners' demand for it. More importantly, he cited himself as asserting the task was as much "the duty of society and individuals as that of government officials." Men of means (*chabonga*) should have set up corporations to invest in land development. After the attempt to grasp waste land had already made by the Japanese, people circulated letters and presented memorials to stop it, however this sort of reactions "hardly effectuated the patriotic project [of land development]."

"Alas, our fellow countrymen! In general, the way to protect sovereign rights and to preserve nation's territory lies only in just enforcement of laws and heartfelt enthusiasm of the people [for those goals]. Confronted with this world of competition wherein the superior prevail, while the inferior perish, if our politics and people's intelligence are not yet enlightened, how can we expect to protect sovereign rights and to preserve the territory of our nation. Of late, our Korea, its power waning and its fate being perilous, has been not only caught in widespread troubles within, but also beset with humiliations and threats without.

As foreigners' infringement upon our sovereignty for independence as well as their extortion of the nation's profits are ever growing day by day and year by year, what can be left after their exhaustive demands? Alas, upon inquiring into how this has come about, we realize that this is surely due to the ignorance of our government and people. Thus, we cannot but tolerate humiliations of foreign people and invite covetous attentions of foreign nations. Is this not deplorable and grieving?

The current issue of [the Japanese request for] the forest and riverside areas has the same origin. If our government did keep the fairness of laws and our people did have patriotic zeal, taking it our prime duty to protect national sovereignty and achieving mental and physical unit to preserve our territory, how could there be such demand and threat from foreigners? ... O our fellow countrymen! In what reason do you take the humiliation granted as if there were something inferior to Japan in our land and people? [Rather than accepting it], the humiliation should be the source to censure and to urge each individual. With the awakening of our intelligence and the growth of national power, there will be no more humiliation like this. At this humiliation, all should feel common indignation, and instead of being overwhelmed by the lament for our weakness, all should fully exert mind

and spirit to accomplish the unity for the great task of safeguarding national independence and territory. With no halt on this course, there will be sure chance for it.”

To nationalist editor, the responsibility to keep national sovereignty was no longer the task confined to the ruling elite of the society. The masses were also to have duty and ability for such task. Yet, the masses were not deemed to form such consciousness. Therefore, they should be aroused and educated to awaken to a political consciousness that their action would play key role in consolidating their nation’ s sovereignty.

In reclaiming the country’ s waste or neglected lands, ordinary peasants were encouraged to have patriotic zeal that their endeavor would contribute to building the economic foundation of the nation. In the past, Korean peasants had engaged in reclaiming waste land in order to expand their economic base. And the government had encouraged their enterprises by suspending taxation or granting ownership of reclaimed land. But the reclamation of land had been motivated by economic reasons on part of peasants who had anticipated the increase of income and private holding. For the government, the reclamation had been welcomed as a way to guarantee additional source of revenue as well as the well-being of the peasantry. Neither the peasantry nor the government had felt the need to have patriotic motivation in their reclamation attempts.

We are very curious about how this politically motivated nationalistic agriculturalist whom the editor offered as an ideal might behave under economically unfeasible circumstances. Nevertheless, whether real or imagined, such attribute bestowed on the ideal agriculturalist by nationalist intellectuals served as a critical standard to distinguish him from the rest of peasants, who lacked such qualification, thus were considered as “ignorant.” Therefore, to nationalist intellectuals, the peasants who worked on fields or by extension those who engaged in economic activities were required first of all to have clear political consciousness that what they were doing was for the consolidation of the nation’ s economic foundation.

The patriotic zeal for agricultural development which the editorial board of the *Imperial Capital News* were eager to foster among Korean populace were not given its concrete working plan. In other words, the editorialists did not present any national program which could translate the patriotic energy into a feasible enterprise. Their program was mainly intellectual venture. Still, their idea was an important precursor of economic nationalism that economic activities of individual were closely associated with political objectives of nation.

It was not until 1907 that Korean economic nationalism found its expression in the masses. Then, Korean nationalists launched a nationalistic campaign for material contributions based on individual’ s patriotic concern for the nation’ s economic progress. In 1907, the new Korean press circle launched a nationwide campaign to collect contributions from individuals in order to repay foreign debts owed mostly to the Japanese government, appealing to patriotic minds for eliminating the economic cause of foreign dependency, thus paving the road for economic self-development.

In the present study, our interest is not about the lack of concrete working plan for developing wasteland at the editorial board of the *Imperial Capital News*, but about the idea that the progress in national economy can be achieved through mobilizing voluntary contribution of patriotic masses, the idea shared by the organizers of the national debt

redemption campaign in 1907 and the Korean production movement of 1923–24. The editorialists thought that patriotism could function as moving force behind the growth of national agricultural production unlike Confucian economists who saw the best chance for it in the sturdy peasantry whose minds were not swayed by any concerns other than agricultural pursuits.

According to the definition of nationalism adopted in this study, it involves political awakening to the role of individuals in the achievement of nation's goals, the nation's wealth and strength in case of this study. The origin of modern nationalism in Korea dated from the moment when a certain group of the established elite began to feel the need to tell the ordinary people to have new consciousness that they should contribute something for the development of their nation.

6. Conclusion

In understanding the Korean peasants' rejections against or compromises with the Japanese land demand for land, it is critically important to appreciate their traditional notions about land. Such notions guided their line of argument and action. The land was important to them for economic as well as moral reasons. In their protests against the land demand, they demonstrated a strong attachment to land. To them, land was the most important means of livelihood, indispensable for keeping subsistence. They had firm notion that private property legally expressed in the form of land deeds should be protected to safeguard owner's means for livelihood. In their words, the loss of land was equal to the cut of life line (*my?ngmaek*). Besides this economic necessity for keeping land, they had a sense of moral obligation to preserve the integrity of the inherited land to continue what their ancestors had achieved and bequeathed to them. The dispersion of ancestral land to outsiders was deemed as moral depravation.

The Japanese did not build railways in Korea in wilderness. The prospective railways in Korean peninsula were supposed to pass through residential sites like cities and towns as well as land under cultivation. For example, the Seoul–Pusan railway was going to traverse agricultural land owned by more than 10,000 persons. Then, the Japanese and Korean authorities had to deal with supposedly more than 10,000 cases of complaints from Korean landowners.

Furthermore, the Japanese had a definite intention to seize vast tract land for each train stations, which was to be the center of agricultural and commercial development for each locality. Consequently, the construction of railroads in Korea was bound to create great disruption and threat to the normal life of Korean peasants and city dwellers. They appealed to the Korean and Japanese authorities to make market–price compensation for their seized land or to readjust the course of railway, so that their land could be substituted or saved. Their protests and petitions were for the defense of their livelihood rather than for the objection to the construction of railways per se.

But the money received by owner, usually after long overdue date, was just a fraction of initially agreed sum of compensation. The peasant owners protested, invoking that principle of timely compensation at market price so as to buy other land of equivalent value, necessary to continue their livelihood. The Japanese also charged the Korean government for its lack of ability to stop the obvious embezzlement by Korean lower officials of the money which they had lent for the purpose of compensation. But, the

compensation issue was a long drawn out contention between the Korean government and the peasant landowners, who were worn out eventually to accept what money to be offered.

The Japanese had a firm belief that agricultural land in Korea was underdeveloped. The Japanese government demanded the lease of entire uncultivated land in Korea for agricultural development for the next fifty years. The ultimate aim of this ambitious project was to settle a large population of Japanese agricultural immigrants ? as large as seven millions by one estimate. The Nagamori proposal was known to the public in early June of 1904, and it was met by a strong opposition from conservative literati. Those who spearheaded the movement were conservative minds. The conservative literati expressed their deeply held conviction that the integrity of Korean territory should be preserved even at maximum cost.

Over time the protest took the form of mass movement, and there was a eruption of debate for the usage of land. In the central or national level of the response, there emerged new intellectual elite and political groups who had acquired new attitudes about handling economic resources of the nation. They began to see them as the economic foundation of a modern and independent nation. Thus, their idea about the nation' s economic resources was not far from that of the Japanese nationalists. But the Korean counterparts insisted on the preemptive development and usage of economic resources for the nation' s political objectives, going beyond the conventional call to preserve the from foreign infringement on economic and moral grounds. With regard to the mass, they felt the mission in teaching them to learn their importance to the state. The mass were told that they had to realize their role to the state in developing agriculture into one of major industry of the nation.