

“Same Bed, Different Dreams”: The Difference of Views between Korea and Japan on the Construction of Seoul-Pusan Railway

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Abstract

This paper examines the dynamics of competition and cooperation between Korea and Japan in the process of constructing the Seoul-Pusan railway during the late 19th century. The railway construction was pursued by different motivations by Korea and Japan to secure their own agendas and interests in the Korean peninsula. For the Korean government, the railway construction was perceived as a critical element of modernization projects and one of the critical symbols of achieving civilization. For the Japanese government, the Seoul-Pusan railway was considered an important bridgehead to expand the Japanese influence towards the continent. Initially, the Korean government, wary of the Japanese motive, hoped to grant concessions to almost anyone but the Japanese. Although Korean government finally agreed that the Seoul-Pusan railway concession was granted to a Japanese syndicate, the Korean government still kept open the possibility of purchasing back the railway company as the agreement included conditions on what to do in case of government re-purchase. In this way, Seoul-Pusan railway, appearing as the darling of the age and the hero of progress, served the Japanese colonial power and enabled it to attain and maintain control over Korea and beyond. I will also discuss the formation of the railway in Korea, which stood at the centre of the paradox of “colonial modernity.”

Introduction

The story of railway in Korea during the open-port period is a complex one because the construction of railway, while a symbol and achievement of “modernity,” was intertwined with the issues of colonialism. For sure, the arrival of the railway in the Korean peninsula, during the “Railway Age” (Fullerton, 1975), was “in itself a revolutionary symbol and achievement, since the forging of the globe into a single interacting economy was in many ways the most far-reaching and certainly the most spectacular aspect of industrialization” (Hobsbawm 1962, p. 40). Consequently, the Korean government recognized railway as a symbol of modernity, which appeared as the darling of the age,

and the hero of progress in Korea.

However, the construction of railway at the time was an impossible task to achieve by Koreans on their own strength, since Korea had neither the capital nor the technical expertise to build railway lines. Thus, the first Korean railway was constructed by Japanese, and served the Japanese colonial power, enabling it to attain and maintain control over Korea and beyond. Thereby, railways in Korea became a “tool of empire,” serving as the means through which *colonial* powers could consolidate their *influence* over colonies, as Headrick argues that the construction of railways facilitated the penetration of colonial rule in Asia and Africa through capitalism and technology (Headrick 1981, 11). Therefore, the construction of railway in Korea should be understood in the context of modernity and colonialism.

Review of previous works

In the study of railway in Korea, there have been various studies and research conducted in Japan. The most representative work was “Nihon teikoku shugi Chosen shokuminchika katei no Tetsudō kensetsu o meguru shomondai jō-genin”(Issues of the Construction of Railways in Korea in the process of Japanese colonialization, 1962) by Ko Pyōng-un. In Korea, Chōng Chae-jōng’s ground-breaking work, entitled *Ilche ch'imnyak kwa Han'guk ch'ōldo* (Invasion of Japanese Imperialism and Korean railway), was published, focusing on the Japanese expansion of socio-economic influence in the process and management of railway in Korea. Chōng analysed the railways in Korea with rich primary sources, arguing that the construction and management of railway in Korea was a process of Japanese economic penetration and exploitation. Recent scholarship also offers various angles to analyse the issue. For example, Im Ch'ae-sōng, who has been studying the construction and management of Japanese railway in East Asia, notes that Japanese construction of railway network in Korea was deeply related to rice economy in Japan, and the Japanese domination of railway in Korea was not only a process of making Korea as a Japanese rice basket but also a process of colonizing

Korea (Im 1998).

In Anglo-phone scholarship, very few studies exist on the construction of railways in Korea. For example, Janet Hunter published an article entitled “Japanese Government Policy, Business Opinion and the Seoul-Pusan Railway, 1894-1906,” which examines the Japanese motivation behind the Korean railway network project, and argues that the Korean railway network project were deeply influenced by strategic and military considerations. Recently, Jun Uchida published an article entitled “‘A Scramble for Freight’: The Politics of Collaboration along and across the Railway Tracks of Korea under Japanese Rule,” which reveals economic conflicts as well as cooperation between Koreans and Japanese during the railway construction. Building on these previous studies, this paper examines the dynamics of competition and cooperation between Korea and Japan in the process of constructing the Seoul-Pusan railway during the late 19th century.

The dream of Seoul-Pusan Railway for Korea

The first Korean who encountered trains and wrote of his impressions was Kim Ki-su (金綺秀), the ambassador in the “Special Envoy” or *Sushinsa* (修信使) dispatched to Japan a couple of months after the signing of the Kanhwa Treaty in 1876.

[I] took the *hwaryunch'a* (the locomotive, literally translated as “fire wheeled car”) from Yokohama to Shinbashi. [I was told] that the vehicle was already waiting in front of the station, yet it was obscured even though [I] passed by scores of units. There are [only] long servants' quarters, which were forty to fifty units. [I] asked where the vehicle is [and was told that the unit before me] is the vehicle. What I saw, which was I thought of as [servants'] quarters, was a vehicle, not living quarters... It ran like thunder and lightning, moving like a rainstorm, running three to four hundred *li* per hour, yet the inside of the vehicle was peaceful, not shaking at all... While I had a smoke, [we] arrived in Shinbashi, which was as far as ninety *li* distant.

Kim Ki-su (originally published in 1877) 1958, 'Iltong kiyu' (日東記遊, Record of a journey to Japan), in *Sushinsa Kirok*(修信使記錄, Records of Speical Envoy)』Kuksa p'yonch'an wiwonhoe(국사편찬위원회), pp. 16-17.

Kim Ki-su called the train a *hwaryunch'a* (火輪車) or “fire wheeled car” and he had so little idea of

the train that he mistook the train carriages as “long servants” quarters” as described above. He illustrated the train and railway with curiosity and amusement—it did not shake at all even though it ran as fast as thunder and lightning. Kim and his party were greatly impressed these men initiated the first attempts to build a railway with Korean capital. Thereafter, the railway construction was perceived as a critical element of modernization projects for Korea and one of the critical symbols of Korea’s achievement in civilization.

In the similar manner, King Kojong, together with the progressive elites, considered the construction of railways as a major project for establishing the economic foundation of independent nation. As a part of modernizing project, King Kojong promulgated regulations on railway in 1896 to provide a legal basis upon which to construct and operate the railway in Korea. In the regulation, the first article vigorously expressed that “railways in each region of Korea will be established for the convenient transportation of the people and freight” (Kojong Sillok, fifteenth day seven month 1896). However, the Korean government was not able to construct the railway on its own, due to lack of finance and technology. Thus, in June 1896, the Korean government promulgated Royal Edict No. 31, which provided Regulations for Domestic Railways (*kungnae ch’oldo kyuch’ik*). The Edict was issued to delay the pressure of granting railway concession to the great powers. The Edict affirmed that the Korean government “attempted to collaborate the construction of railway with companies of America and France...[However,] due to lack of financial sources, the Korean government is not able to purchase the land for the railway. [The government] will not allow others to construct the railway in a form of collaboration for a year on the day of promulgation” (Kojong Sillok, seventeenth day seventh month, 1896; Hanmal kundae pōmnōng charyochip II). In other words, the Korean government sought to delay the construction of railway in order to take a lead in negotiation, such as by securing main economic assets, land and labour. In the meantime, some Koreans attempted to construct a short railway line from Fusan to Hadanpo (traditional trade centre in the south east region of Korea).

Certain Korean merchants of Fusan intend to build a railway between Fusan and Hadanpo, a distance of five English miles. They have applied to the Public Works Department for permission and received the Government sanction for the enterprise. Hadanpo is situated in Tongnai district and is West of Fusan. It is said to be a prosperous port and considerable export trade is carried on

at that point. A capital of \$100,000 is said to have been raised among the wealthy Koreans in Fusan and Hadanpo, and the principal leader of the scheme is a Korean named Pak Kijong (*The Independent*, 16 October 1897).

As the *Independent* described above, Pak Ki-jong, together with other businessmen in Pusan, established the Pusan and Southwest Perimeter Railway Company (Puha ch'öldo hoesa 釜下鐵道會社) in 1898 to build a six kilometre-long light railway from Pusan to the port of Hadan (下端), the so-called Hadan Railway. This was not merely motivated by the hope of a Korean-owned railway, but by economic and commercial considerations. Hadan was a port located at the mouth of the Naktong River. Not only was it an important transit route for rice shipments coming down the Naktong River, but it also possessed the largest salt farms in Korea.

With the failure of establishing railway on its own, the Korean government could not postpone the railway construction and other modernization project any longer, so the Korean government decided to grant massive concession for country's modernization projects, including railways, to the great powers (Hong, 2007). For example, on 2 July 1896, when the concession of the Seoul-Inch'ön line was taken over by American interests, the editorial in *The Independent* captured a great expectation and hope for the railway:

The introduction of railways in a country like Korea will have a twofold benefit to the people. The Koreans have heard many wonderful things of Western civilization, but they have not yet seen the reality of the wonders. When they see a locomotive that puffs out great volumes of smoke, and blows long, sharp, and sonorous whistles, and pulls away carloads of people and merchandise at the rate of thirty or forty miles an hour, it will surely wake up their slumbers of several centuries old; and their ideas of modern civilization will undergo a material change. It is *one of the best instruments for the education of the conservative people. As to the development of commerce and industry there is no better means than railways. It will cheapen the prices of the necessities of life for consumers, and it will enable the producers to dispose of their goods at higher rates in shorter time*; in other words they will have a market for their articles.

We rejoice with many others in the prospect of having the much needed railway between the Capital and the port in the course of twelve or fifteen months. When the road is completed we will see some wonderful changes in Korea. In fact, we consider the opening of the railway traffic between the two points to be the beginning of a new era for the commercial and industrial development of Korea. Also, it will be in a great measure the instrument of stirring up new ambitions in the hearts of Korean people.

We believe that *the Korean Government never did a better stroke of policy than granting the railway concession to the enterprising, energetic and large minded American, who promptly secured all the necessary funds for the building of the road, and with equal promptness took the necessary steps in making other arrangements.* The surveyors have been sent to work between the termini, and the work is almost completed. We have no doubt that the company will soon begin the building of the bridges across the river, and rails will be laid as soon as the grading work is finished.

In connection with the opening of the railway traffic in this country there is another important fact which must not be ignored. That is the foreign capitalists still hesitate to invest their money in Korea for various reasons. Above all, they do not know what result such an investment in Korea will bring forth. But the enterprising American took the initiative in an investment of considerable magnitude amongst the shouts of "bravo" from the more cautious investors of the world. We are sure that the company will not regret such a venture. Judging from the present condition of commerce in Korea, the railway will not be such a great paying institution at first; but by beginning this railway, other enterprises of a similar character will be followed by other capitalists of the world. Thus the commerce and industries will be gradually developed. To view the incoming of foreign capital in Korea from the Korean standpoint, we consider that it will have better influence in the politics of this country than maintaining a large standing army, or buying war ships (*The Independent*, 8 December 1896 [emphasis added]).

As the *Independent* reported, in Korea at the time the ways to transport were limited to horses for men, palanquins for women, wagons pulled by oxen, and goods carried by people. So the *Independent* strongly supported the Korean government's decision of granting the railway concession to international agent. This was an indirect way in which the Korean government invited foreign powers to invest. Of course, there were opposite opinions against the railway concession, as described in *Hwangŏng sinmun*.

Korea had relinquished massive concessions of railways, mining, forestry, fishery, and commerce to other countries. However, we, the Korean, are not ashamed or outraged. The Korean government and the people ought to stand indignantly [against the situation] (*Hwangŏng sinmun*, 19 September 1899).

Although granting concession to great powers was not the most ideal way, unfortunately it became the only realistic way to pursue the project. Moreover, the Korean government hoped to grant concessions to almost anyone but the Japanese, yet the Japanese government was most interested in obtaining railway concessions in Korea (Duus 1995, p. 139). Consequently, the Korean government granted to Japanese the right to manage the Seoul-Pusan line and to provide the land for the railway construction. The Korean government, however, still kept open the possibility of purchasing back the railway

company as the agreement included conditions on what to do in case of government re-purchase. For this purpose, the Korean government included Article XII in the “Agreement concerning the Seoul-Pusan line”:

Fifteen years after completion of the construction of the Seoul-Pusan line the Korean government could purchase back the line. But it could be only purchased back by Japanese or Korean nationals [no other nationals were allowed to purchase it]. If no price was agreed on, the concession would be extended by another ten years (*Chōsen Tetsudō Shi* 1937, p. 95).

At the same time, the Korean government made it possible for people to hold shares in the railway company. According to Article XIV of the Agreement, a Korean company or private person could buy stock in the Seoul-Pusan railway company (*Chōsen Tetsudō Shi* 1937, p. 95). Moreover, in the beginning, the Korean royal family was the second largest shareholder with 2,000 shares after the Japanese royal family, who became the largest shareholder with 5,000 shares at the price of fifty *wŏn* per share). In other words, although Korean government finally agreed that the Seoul-Pusan railway concession was granted to a Japanese syndicate, the Korean government still kept open the possibility of purchasing back the railway company as the agreement included conditions on what to do in case of government re-purchase. In particular, since the Korean royal family was the second largest shareholder, it was a strong statement of the Korean government’s intention to purchase back the railway line in the future (Chōng, 1994, p. 518).

The dream of Seoul-Pusan Railway for Japan

For the Japanese in the Meiji period, the steam engine was a popular iconographical symbol of “civilization” (Gluck 1985, p. 101). The example of a railway network for the Meiji government was Prussia, which was “a mixed approach of direct investments and subsidies plus overall planning and control of private lines” (Hirschmeier 1964, p. 137). The Japanese interest in developing railway construction was not confined to Japan itself, but it was extended to its neighbouring countries, including Korea. Japan attempted to acquire the concession of railway in Korea. Japan’s interest in a Seoul-Pusan railway traced back to 1892 since the Japanese consul at the request of the Japanese

military in Pusan conducted a preliminary survey of a possible route, which was following the route of Seoul-Yongin-Ch'ōngju. The security of Korean peninsula was of tremendous importance to Japan. The intention of the Japanese government to have railway concessions in Korea could be understood from two points of view: economic vs. military interests. These two views were not mutually exclusive; rather they pointed to the same objective, which was “the making of a sphere of influence” (Beasley 1987, p. 74).

Although the military concern loomed large, the link to economic benefit and the utility of having economic interests was not far behind. For instance, Inoue Kaoru's rationale to provide a loan and build the railway is “a classic example of economic imperialism” (Beasley 1987, p. 51), a textbook case on how to establish economic interests that would require political expansion.

If we [Japan] wish to *solidify* our position in Korea and establish a pretext for *intervention* in its internal affairs, we must obtain real interests there, whether through the railroad or through loans, and by financial means create pretexts for extending our [Japanese] intervention to other kinds of relationships.

Foreign Minister Inoue Kaoru (井上馨)

Nihon gaikō bunsho (日本外交文章), 27.1, p. 477; Re-quoted from Duus 1995, p. 92. [Emphasis added]

Itō Hirobumi, who was the Resident-General of Korea, expressed concern that attempting to manage the railway in Korea could be considered an act of provocation to Russia (Chōsen Tetsudō Yonju-nen Ryaku-shi 1940, p. 82). However, then Prime Minister Yamagata Aritomo (山縣有朋), and Ōkuma Shigenobu (大隈重信), a leading *genrō* (元老), considered the Seoul-Pusan line as the trade artery of Korea, which would reinforce capacity for trade and immigration from Japan. In February 1900, the House of Representatives and the House of Peers passed the ‘Proposal concerning the speedy construction of the Seoul-Pusan line in Korea’ (京釜鐵道速成案), which included the following statement:

The Japanese government should manage the Seoul-Pusan line so as to improve trading interests between Korea and Japan, because this line would pass through the three southern provinces where there are plenty of natural resources and would link the capital Keijō (Seoul) to the biggest

trading port Fusan (Shibusawa Eiichi denki shiryō (澁澤榮一傳記資料) vol. 16, p. 396).

Not only businessmen, but most politicians seemed to agree that the railway could possibly bring about business prosperity. For this reason, the ubiquitous Shibusawa Eiichi (澁澤榮一), together with a group of businessmen, established the Seoul-Pusan Company in 1901. Moreover, Marquis Itō Hirobumi (伊藤博文) made a visit to Seoul in August 1898 on a return trip to China and began pressing the Korean government for railway concession. Prior to Marquis Itō's visit, Shibusawa, the Japanese banker, came to Korea, and had a following intension for the visit:

The object of Mr. Shibusawa's visit to Korea is said to be not only seeking to establish a Japan-Korea bank, but also to obtain the concession for the construction of a railway from Fusan to Seoul. Mr. Shibusawa is said to have borrowed ten million yen of the silver from the Japanese treasury as a fund for constructing the railway. The line itself and the customs, it is proposed, shall be given as security (*The Independent*, 7 May 1898).

Shibusawa paved the way for Marquis Itō, and the visit of Itō pushed the Korean government towards concession. The government finally agreed that the Seoul-Pusan railway concession would be granted to a Japanese syndicate. The Japanese Minister in Seoul, Katō Masuo (加藤增雄), who negotiated for the concession, persuaded the Koreans to grant the concession to Japan "as a token of 'harmony between Japan and Korea'" (Chōsen tetsudōshi 1937, pp. 89-90; Duus 1995, p. 147). The same vision was reflected in an article in *the Independent*:

While urging the Korean Government to speedily grant a charter to the Japanese projectors of the Seoul-Fusan Railway since the enterprise is intended, observed the Osaka Asahi, to unite Japan and Korea in more intimate relations commercially and socially, the same paper advises Japanese capitalists to adopt a wider range in the pursuit of their enterprise and to project a similar undertaking in China (*The Independent*, 26 June 1897 [emphasis added]).

In this process, the government also played an important role by promising a state subsidy. As a matter of fact, the company was semi-governmental, closely associated with the Japanese government. This characteristic of the company was expressed at the ceremony of opening the Seoul-Pusan railway by those who were present, as the following quote illustrates:

At the ceremony of opening the Kei-Fu Railway [Keijō-Fusan railway] there were present from the Japanese House of Peers, Count Ohgimachi, Count Matenakoji, viscounts Juonye, Tsutsumi, Akabe, Torii, Joiye, Matsudaira, Makino and others to the number of twenty-eight, and from the House of Commons there were Mesars. Yebarar, Sugita, Morimato, Hoselbe, Ogino, Asano, Honai, Ando, Fuknoka, Takenchi, Iwamoto, Tsunada, Nagai, Ishida, Terada, Kimura, Haseawa, Matsumoto and others to the number of one hundred and seventy five, besides, bankers, editors, shareholders, contractors and railway managers. This distinguished company very strongly impressed the Korean officials and the foreigners of various nationalities in Korea with the substantial character behind Japanese commercial enterprises in Korea (*The Korea Review* 1905, p. 192).

In other words, the company kept distance from the government in principle to avoid diplomatic difficulties with Korea, but at the same time, the company closely worked with the Japanese government to get subsidies from it. Furthermore, The Japanese government provided technical assistance for the company. For example, the Japanese government sent a survey team to Korea to investigate possible routes of the Seoul-Pusan line five times from 1892 to 1903 (Chōsen tetsudōshi 1937, pp. 163-195; Chōng 1999, p. 51).

The Seoul-Pusan line carried high expectations of annual profit. The Japanese government expected to profit right after the launching of the line, and the fourteenth and fifteenth years of management, the Seoul-Pusan line was projected to return a six to seven percent net profit. Projections were based on expected trade between Korea and Japan. Referring to the prospect of the Seoul-Pusan line, the first objective was economic. For example, Ozaki Saburō (尾崎三良), the director of the company, said:

The Seoul-Pusan line is going through Taegu (大邱) and Pusan (釜山), which are the largest rice transporting areas of Kyōngsang province. Now the freight rate of rice between Taegu and Pusan is 2 *yen* per *koku*, but by railway it would only cost 50 *sen*, which is one fourth of the traditional freight rate for rice. Reducing the freight price would bring the market price down and push exports to one million *koku* in one year (Ozaki Saburō (尾崎三良) October 1901, 'Keifu tetsudō no zento' (京釜鐵道の前途) in Tōyō Keizai Shinpō (東洋經濟新報) vol. 210, pp. 9-10; Re-quoted from Chōng 1994, p. 515).

In other words, the Japanese government considered the Seoul-Pusan line as an economically beneficial project for Japan. However, Japanese intentions changed over time. Military objectives became the major reason for Japan to build a railway in Korea. As early as March 1890, Yamagata

Aritomo (山縣有朋), the founder of the modern Japanese army, made a speech on foreign policy in the Diet that defined Japan's geopolitical interests. Japan's "line of sovereignty" was Japanese national territory, the home islands, and its "line of advantage or interest" was Korea (Jansen 1984, p. 67; Gluck 1985, p. 118). Moreover, the military concern was clearly expressed in 1892 by Kawakami Sōroku (川上 操六), Assistant Chief of the Army General Staff:

In case of an emergency, when Japan has to take control, everybody agrees that transportation to the south of the peninsula from the middle [of the peninsula] is necessary. If the Seoul-Pusan line fell into the hands of a foreign country, trade between Japan and Korea would not only [become] disadvantageous, but the greater issue is that it could be a threat to the existence of our nation.

Chōsen tetsudōshi朝鮮鐵道史 1925, p. 9.

The Korean peninsula was a buffer zone and crucial for the security of Japan. Moreover, the reason why Yamagata advocated the building of a line from Pusan through Seoul to Ŭiju on the Manchurian border was that he considered railways not only as a way in which Japan could secure itself but also as a way in which Japan would be able to exercise hegemony in East Asia. According to Yamagata, the rationale for the controlling transportation in Korea from Pusan to Ŭiju ('Weiju' below) is as follows,

We should control transportation in Korea. Once something happens in the Far East, we should take this chance and should not lose the opportunity. In order to do this, the most important thing is the railway between Pusan and Weiju. Although we have a secret agreement over the concession of the Seoul-Pusan Line, if we cannot extend this line to Weiju, I cannot but feel depressed, because the line from Pusan to Weiju is the main route to the East Asian continent...In the longer term, this line will make up for the expense and add value for Japan.

Yamagata Aritomo Ikensho (山縣有朋意見書) 1967, pp. 224-225; Re-quoted from Shinohara 1990, p. 35.

Therefore, as 'the beginning of a great thorough fare across the Asian continent,' railways were necessary for defending Japan and also for strengthening it (Duus 1984, p. 139). Within four years of Yamagata's speech, the Sino-Japanese war was fought in and around the Korean peninsula. At the time of the war, no railways had been constructed that could provide logistical support to battlefields in Korea and China. The Japanese army experienced difficulties in transporting troops and equipment.

For example, Japan moved two main forces swiftly by shipping them through the Yellow Sea from the port of Ujina in Hiroshima to Inch'ŏn in Korea from the middle of June 1894, even before the declaration of war between China and Japan on 1 August 1894. From 1 to 8 August, Japan dispatched a third force to Korea to secure land supply lines for the army from Pusan to Seoul, but it took almost a month to complete the operation or until 29 August 1894 (Sakamoto and Kimura 2007, pp.156-157).

Moreover, in 1898 the Russian government took control of the construction in the Chinese Eastern Railway, which branched from the Trans-Siberian Railway and stretched across Manchuria reaching Lüshun and Darian in Shantung Province. This line would provide Russia with the capability to mobilize troops in Manchuria and overcome any disadvantages of distance (Sakamoto and Kimura 2007, p. 157). Moreover, after the Japanese government was threatened by the extension of Russian influence in Manchuria and in the Korean peninsula, the construction of the Seoul-Pusan line was a necessary project for Japan. It was often described that the Seoul-Pusan and Seoul-Ŭiju lines became a “military necessity for Japan’s prosecution of the Russo-Japanese War and for that reason Japan pushed through their construction with great urgency” (Lee 1984, p. 322).

Negotiating the concession for Seoul-Pusan Railway with the Japanese government

With the outbreak of Sino-Japanese war in 1894, the Provisional Agreement (Choil chamjŏng haptong chogwan, 朝日暫定合同條款), was concluded on 20 August 1894. According to the Provisional Agreement with Japan, the Korean government agreed to collaborate with the Japanese government or the Japanese cooperate due to the Korea’s government’s lack of financial means. The construction failed to launch on time because of the complicated circumstances that the Korean government encountered. However, Japan’s victory in the Sino-Japanese War put the Japanese in a better position on the Korean peninsula through the Treaty of Shimonoseki (*Shimonoseki Jōyaku* 下關條約). As Japan was ceded the territories of Formosa and the Pescadores and most of the Liaotung Peninsula (including Port Arthur and Niuzhuang), Japan became a rising power in Asia

between 1895 and 1900. In particular, the reason for securing control of Port Arthur and Niuzhuang (which is known as Yinkou now) was to prevent Russia from expanding its influence in China after the completion of the Trans-Siberian Railway and to forestall Russian access to an ice-free port (Storry 1979, p. 27). However, the Triple Intervention of Russia, France, and Germany temporarily stifled this rising power in Asia. These three powers pressed Japan to return Liaotung to China, which was achieved by 1895. Shortly afterwards, in the early months of 1898, the three main actors of the Triple Intervention acquired various Chinese cities through leases: Port Arthur and Talienwan (Dalian) for Russia (twenty-five year lease), Tsingtao for Germany (ninety-nine year lease), and Kwangchow Bay for France (ninety-nine year lease) (Storry 1979, p. 31). The fact that the Liaotung Peninsula was occupied by Russia, an overt threat to Japan, was sufficient to provoke Japanese suspicions of Russian intentions. Russo-Japanese rivalry then began to manifest in the form of a struggle for concessions in Korea. Korea became a battle ground, which Japan could not afford to lose. In order to turn the situation to Japan's advantage, a Japanese official, Miura Gorō conspired to murder the pro-Russian Queen Min (the so-called *ŭlmi sabyŏn* 乙未事變), but this plot resulted in the removal of the throne to the Russian legation (*Agwan p'ach'ŏn* 俄館播遷) in February 1896, a disastrous failure of policy from the Japanese point of view.

In the meantime, on 2 March 1896, the pro-Russian foreign minister, Yi Wan-yong (李完用), and the minister of Agriculture, Commerce, and Industry, Cho Pyŏng-jik (趙秉稷), granted construction rights for the Seoul-Inch'ŏn line to James R. Morse, an American businessman who enjoyed the support of the American minister, Horace Allan (Chōsen tetsudōshi 1937, pp. 43-49). With support from the Russian minister Karl Waeber, France, as a Russian ally, began to negotiate the rights to build a Seoul-Ŭiju line with a grant to a French company, Fives-Lille (Chōsen tetsudōshi 1937, pp. 49-50). Moreover, in the face of expanding Russian influence, the Japanese saw railways serving as a useful barrier. In 1898, Maejima Hisoka (前島密), director of several companies in Japan, stated:

It is a matter of the greatest emergency to gain as soon as possible the rights for building a railway through the heart of Korea. Not only is this railway in itself of vital importance in the

future for our trade and immigration, but it will be a control and a barrier to Russian encroachment and invasion, and must inevitably be a most important factor in the preservation of peace within our country and in East Asia.

Oda Takeo (小田獄夫) 1958, Maejima Hisoka (前島密), pp. 217-218; Re-quoted from Hunter 1977, p. 583.

Russian interest in obtaining the Seoul-Pusan concession was discovered by the Japanese in February 1898 and events began to move rapidly. The Nishi-Rosen Agreement in April 1898 concluded between Japan and Russia recognized Korean independence and sovereignty and stipulated that both countries would ‘refrain from direct interference in internal affairs of Korea’ (Kim and Kim 1967, p. 96). The Agreement was not as simple as it looked; rather, the complexities of a diplomatic exchange were hidden beneath the surface. Historians commonly refer to the Mankan-kōkan (滿韓交換, Trading Manchuria for Korea) policy in which Japan would ‘recognize Russia’s dominant interests in Manchuria in return for Russia’s acknowledging her own dominant interest in Korea’ (Hunter 1977, pp. 583-584). As a result, the April 1898 Agreement put the Japanese in a better position in Korea without the interference of Russia. Moreover, Japanese government financed, subsidized, and even nationalized major transport industries such as railways, ship building, and harbour construction, because private companies lacked capital, so the Seoul-Pusan railway was not an unusual combination. Moreover, in September 1898, Japan pushed further the Korean government to sign the “Agreement concerning the Seoul-Pusan line” with Sasaki Kiyomarō (佐佐木清麿) and Hoshinaga Jirō (乾長次郎), who were the representative of the Seoul-Pusan Railway Company (Kojong sillok eighth day ninth month 1898; Duus 1995, p. 147).

Tension heightened as relations between Japan and Russia deteriorated, and the probability of war with Russia became a certainty. Japan chose to ally with Britain in 1902, because the Anglo-Japanese Treaty of Alliance reflected the ‘logical outcome of British concern over Russian tensions regarding the British spheres of interest in China proper and of the Japanese fear of the Russian

menaces directed against Korea' (Kim and Kim 1967, p. 100). By the end of 1903, all Japanese were aware of a growing threat from Russia. In the *Tōkyō Keizai Zasshi* (東京經濟雜誌), one article stated its concern over the threat from 'the North', that is, from Russia:

In Korea there is one great force which acts as an obstacle to the progress of our [Japanese] benefit...This force [Russia] will try and get a third power to step in and take our right to construct this railway, and will hinder its progress, secretly or openly (Nakajima Tetsuya (中島哲哉), 'Keifu Tetsudō Kaisha no Shasai Bōshū ni tsuite' (京釜鐵道会社の社債防臭に就いて) in *Tōkyō Keizai Zasshi* (東京經濟雜誌), No. 1181, pp. 18-19; Re-quoted from Hunter 1977, p. 593).

In December 1903, the Japanese government took a decisive measure 'for the speedy completion of the Seoul-Pusan railway' or *Kei-Fu Tetsudō sokusei meirei* (京釜鐵道速成命令) in Japanese. Executives in the Seoul-Pusan Railway Company were replaced by government bureaucrats, even including the President of the company, Furuichi Kōi (Ericson 1996, p. 269). By the eve of the Russo-Japanese War, the Seoul-Pusan Railway was no longer mere transportation; the life and death of Japan depended on it (Sakamoto and Kimura 2007, p. 157). Therefore, the Seoul-Pusan concession 'shifted out of the hands of private entrepreneurs into the hands of the government' to prepare for the war against Russia (Duus 1995, p. 154). After the takeover of the Seoul-Pusan line by the Japanese government, the pressure was on for rapid completion to provide for military supply. The Privy Council, in December 1903, made extensive financial and technical assistance available for the railway line. The meeting of the Privy Council was reported as follows:

The Privy Council: An extraordinary meeting yesterday forenoon was attended by all the Cabinet Ministers. Marquises Itō and Yamagata and Count Matsukata were present simultaneously for the first time since their recent appointment to the councillorship. They all decided on the extraordinary measures necessary for meeting pressing State engagements, including possible war funds and the speedy completion of the Seoul-Fusan Railway (*The North China Herald*, 08 January 1904).

As the decision was made, Vice-Minister of Communication Den Kenjirō (田健治郎) contributed resources for the rapid completion of the Seoul-Pusan line and pushed for further railway nationalisation (Ericson 1996, p. 268). The Korean government was powerless to prevent the

nationalization of the Seoul-Pusan Railway Company because of war clouds hanging over the peninsula. After Japan's victory over Russia in 1905, the Korean government lost ground to negotiate with the Japanese government on the Seoul-Pusan railway, because the Korean government made the 'Agreement concerning the Seoul-Pusan line' not with the Japanese government, but with the company. As a result, the dismantlement of the company and nationalization of the railway made the Agreement a scrap of paper (Chōng 1999, pp. 49-50).

Conclusion

Korea's geo-political location was attractive to the Great Powers that surrounded the Korean peninsula, and when political pressure was brought to bear on the Korean government, granting concessions for large infrastructural projects was a convenient way to dissipate pressure. Also, the Korean government under King Kojong saw the potential for modernization, but it probably underestimated the investment involved in such enterprises. Since the construction of railway line was an important modernization project, the Korean government tried to avoid giving concessions to Japanese syndicate. Although the Korean government finally allowed the Japanese government to construct the railway, the Korean government secured the right to repurchase the line, which however never took place. Also, the Koreans' roles in the construction of the Seoul-Pusan railway were limited to passive ones, such as providing land and labour.

On the other hand, with strong backing from the Japanese government, the Seoul-Pusan Railway Company managed to construct 150 kilometres of track in two years (September 1901 to December 1903). At the end of 1903, the Meiji government engaged directly in the venture to establish the Seoul-Pusan Railway. In the process, the Seoul-Pusan railway became not only an instrument for the expansion of Japanese socio-economic influence, but also "line of advantage or interest" and "line of sovereignty" to protect Japan.

Without a doubt, the railway was a symbol of civilization, which enabled people, commodities, and even culture to be transported to far-flung areas, so that the Korean government

desired to achieve its ‘modern’ infrastructure. However, building ‘a symbol of civilization’ in Korea was costly, since the Seoul-Pusan railway served the interests of Japanese colonial power to attain and maintain control over Korea and beyond. Therefore, the process of constructing the Seoul-Pusan railway was characterized by complex interactions, disclosing the paradox of “colonial modernity.”

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