

# The Joseon Public's Perception of the War during the World War II Period

## -Differences in Views due to Generational Differences-

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During the Second World War, the people of Joseon lived under the control of Japanese Fascism which permeated into the web of everyday life. The Joseon people were legally regarded as “the second nation” or “half nation” of Japan and some cooperated with their war effort in the hope of possible Japanese triumph. Though many prospected the defeat of Japan, most of the Joseon people kept silent and passively adjusted themselves to Japanese rule. However, the discontent came out and most of it was related to wartime policy. There was also a certain degree of difference in this regard between the generations.

The “older generation” born before the coercive annexation did not experience the education and enlightenment of the Japanese style had a half-feudalistic mind and difficulties in transforming into the type of people required by Japanese Imperialists or “the modern type of men.” They had the tendency of trying to overcome the anxious life of wartime through superstition and religion. Under the condition of Japanese Wartime Fascism that sanctioned the Emperor system only, their behavior was interpreted as resistance against war.

On the other hand, the “younger generation” born after the annexation experienced Japanese institutional education and were different from the “older generation.” They experienced the process of colonialist capitalization, individualism, meritocracy, and rationalism, which were all embedded in their minds. Also, they fell into a “chauvinistic nationalism” as the effect of colonial policy and distorted modern consciousness and false political consciousness concerning the rights and responsibilities of “the nation” were formed. Their awareness of potential Japanese defeat in the Second World War encouraged them toward direct political practice in expectation of the liberation of Joseon and the building of a new nation. In addition, it provided the foundation of the younger generation’s selective participation in the nation building process of the north and south that developed under the conflict between the left and the right after liberation.

*Keywords: The Second World War, wartime fascism, older generation, younger generation, and war consciousness.*

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## Preface

Since July 1937, until the end of World War II in 1945, the world was forced to witness an unprecedented level of so-called “Wartime fascism” in action.<sup>1</sup> And the Asian situation was no different, as such phenomenon was also active full scale. The colonial policy of the Japanese Imperial authorities was designed to reconstruct not only the political and economical features of the colonized regions, but also redefine social, cultural, philosophical, and ideological aspects of those regions. In other words, they were trying to re-establish the characters and living styles of the souls residing in regions colonized by them. Most of the Joseon public at the time were forced to endure and undergo relentless central-based rule led by the Japanese military -- fascist policies, including economical and social control disguised under the name of “reasonable ruling,” and a fairly sophisticated ideology developed for the Japanese colonial regime, so-called Tenno-fascism. Through such systemized control, their bodies were trained, and their minds were reconfigured. The traumatic experience the people had to suffer back then is still with us today, imposing strong influence upon the people’s mind and behavior. Memories of that era are still pretty much alive even today, in which the escape from Modernity is already being discussed as a newly spotlighted issue, albeit in sporadic fashion.

But simply suggesting that the Joseon public that lived through that period passively accepted such a ruling mechanism were assimilated into “Citizens of the Empire,” and turned into fascist personalities would be over simplifying the case. In that regard, the general public’s perception of the on-going war back then could be consulted, to find out what really happened during that time. World War II was a time period which offered the Joseon public a great many possibilities and opportunities in their efforts toward Liberation, and the general public was also becoming increasingly aware of that fact through directly or indirectly acquired experience of the war. Understanding of the public’s perception of the war reveals to us how they perceived the Japanese “Assimilation” policy and the concept of “Assimilation” itself, and to what degree they were

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1. Usually September 1939 is considered to be the beginning point of the World War II, but if we stay away from the usual “European” perspective, July 1937, the year which marked the beginning of the Sino-Japanese War, is more likely to be considered as the actual starting point. From this point of view, we can say that both the beginning and the end of the World War II, directly involved the activities of Japan and its situation.

maintaining their identity as the Joseon people. The Assimilation concept which was supported and implemented by the Japanese Imperial authorities not only included assimilation at legal, administrative and systematical levels, but also assimilation at even the cultural, customary, and philosophical levels.

In this research, how the general public perceived the war at hand will be examined, and especially so will be the thoughts from people who continuously decided not to acknowledge the victories of the Japanese forces and only hoped for their defeat. Although there were certain portions of the population that believed in a favorable outcome for Japanese Imperialism and actively cooperated with it, most of the general public were basically against Japanese ruling policy due to their own national sentiment, even when they were in a position forced to comply with Japanese demands. This led to their perception toward the concept of "The Japanese Defeat" (Byeon 1999), which can be found and identified through rumor, hearsay, and criticism of the Japanese authorities at the time (needless to say, those who criticized them were undoubtedly apprehended by the Japanese for their "crimes"). Those who thought or acted in and advanced fashion are also particularly examined in this research.

The Joseon public's perception and understanding of the war gradually changed as the war itself progressed.<sup>2</sup> The understanding of the war situation was closely related to their understanding of the Japanese forces' ability to fight, the Japanese economical strength that would support such ability, and also the possibilities for Joseon's liberation. During the Sino-Japanese War that occurred during the late 1930s, the hopes for the defeat of Japan and the Liberation of Joseon still remained at a very simple level. But during the so-called Pacific War, such hopes were heightened, became stronger, and were becoming shaped in much more realistic terms, terms that included not only the defeat of Japanese Imperialism, but also the matter of constructing a new nation for the Korean people.<sup>3</sup>

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2. Regarding the Joseon people's perspective viewing the war during the Sino-Japanese War period, Miyada Sezko's (宮田節子) pioneering work can be consulted (Miyada Sezko 1985). Although this particular work is more concentrated upon examining events occurred in a limited time frame which would only be the "aftermath" of the Sino-Japanese War, it is notable nonetheless as it is examining the Joseon public's perspectives in terms of the Japanese authorities' theory of "Japan and Korea are one" (内鮮一體) and their policy of turning the Joseon people into "Citizens of the Japanese Empire."

3. How the Joseon public had perceived the changing situations of the war can be consulted in Byun 1999.

Regarding the changes that occurred within the general public's perception of the war, this research will concentrate more upon the issue of "generations" and "generational differences." How we should divide all those years of the Japanese occupation period and classify them into several "generations" defined by certain terms could be considered as a controversial matter by many people. Yet in this research, those years will be deliberately divided into two generations, one of which is comprised of a group of people who were born before 1910--the year of Japan's annexation of Korea--and one of which is comprised of a group of people who were born after 1910. The Annexation in 1910 was a crucial historical experience for the Koreans that must have defined individual thinking patterns and sentimentalities. Further examination of this matter will be dealt with in Chapter 2. And prior to that, also examined will be the physical and environmental conditions that each generation had respectively faced in forming their own sense of nationality. Such senses of nationality must have played an important role in the general public's forming their own perception of the war, and such senses and perceptions will have differed due to generational differences. This matter will be examined in Chapter 1.

The official reports or data created or collected by the Japanese imperial authorities at the time, rumors spread by the people, claims and arguments from persons apprehended by the Japanese authorities for their resistant actions either passive or active, were all duly consulted in this research.

## **Generational Differences in Surrounding Conditions Concerning the Public's Own Formation of their Perceptions toward the War**

### **1. The "younger generation," including students in their youth— influences from various publications**

Under wartime fascism reigning with immense power, students, or other young men and women, being fully aware of their national heritage and pride, established small-scale secret societies to fight the Japanese imperial authorities in their own ways. In the process, certain publications such as novels written in the Korean language or journals helped them do just that immeasurably (Byeon 2001: 280). These publications also helped students in their youth mold their own perception of the ongoing war.

The young students would only be ready to participate in national move-

ments if they were equipped with a certain understanding of the war, and also with a hope for the future. The general public did not have that much accessibility to newspapers or journals, and the elder population included many illiterates. On the other hand, the students and other young people were definitely in a different kind of situation.

But the Japanese imperial authorities' suppression of free publication, harsh censorship, and control of information only permitted a limited range of actions to young students. They were only allowed to accumulate or obtain a limited amount of education authorized by the Japanese authorities with their militarist and fascist ideologies. In order to block the students from heightening their own philosophical and ideological awareness, Japanese authorities enforced censorship over publications, and sent messages to libraries everywhere ordering them to establish restrictions over generally collecting data from those facilities (Kim Nam Seok 1991: 141-143, 212-223). Joseon students' chances of reading a book they wished to read in hope of elevating their intellectual state were being blocked at the source. This led to the inevitable (and also unfavorable) influences from fascist state-nationalism and patriotism when a Joseon student was trying to form his or her own sense of nationality (Byeon 1996: 243-251).

Exactly what kind of books would have influenced the students and the young generation in their own forming of a sense of nationality? To find an answer to this question, examining certain books or journals that were mentioned by young persons in their answers to the investigators after they were apprehended by the Japanese authorities for actively participating in the National movements or passively resisting Japanese rule would certainly be a good approach.<sup>4</sup> In many cases, such books or journals were being mentioned as publications that provided them with an actual "turning point" regarding the formation of their own sense of nationality, their sense of resistance, and certain understandings of their own involving the ongoing war.

Most prominently read were novels written in the Korean language, such as *Heuk* (The Soil) or *Mujeong* (Heartless) by Yi Kwang-su (Lee Gwang Su), or *Sangnoksu* (The Evergreen) by Shim Hun or *Sunebo* (The Love Story) by Park Gyaе Ju. Under the circumstances of the Korean language being officially barred from open usage, getting their hands on such novels written in Korean

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4. All these cases can be identified or confirmed through trial records, so related persons or sources of comments will not be revealed case by case.

and most of all being able to read them were particularly thrilling events for the students in their youth. These novels mirrored well the reality of Joseon agricultural society, and conveyed the important message punctuating the need for “Public enlightenment,” so they were bound to have heavy influence upon the Joseon youths’ sense of nationality. *The Soil* was a particular must-read for the students who had a nationality-based awareness, and most of the students in answering their investigators stated that they became aware of the dismal situation of the Joseon rural areas through this book. Like the very intellectuals featured in *The Soil* or *The Evergreen*, Joseon youths were encouraged and highly motivated to dedicate themselves to the task of enlightening the “ignorant” Joseon peasantry population and to provide them with pride as a Joseon(Korean) person along with generating a nationality-based awareness.

Other than these novels, History novels like *Danjong aesa* (The Sad Tale of King Danjong), *Maui taeja* (The Crown-Prince Who Wore Hemp), *Yisunshin* (General Yi Sun-shin), *Yichadonui jugeum* (The Death of Lee Cha Don), *Weonhyo daesa* (Grand Master Weonhyo) by Yi Kwang-su, and *Geumsamui pi* (The Blood Stain on the Royal Clothes) by Park Jong Hwa also served significantly in heightening the public’s sense of nationality. From time to time, students were also able to obtain journals written in Korean such as *Samcheolli* (三千里) or *Jogwang* (Morning Light, 朝光). These books and journals led students to believe that preserving the Korean language was a crucial and imperative move in preserving the national heritage and identity of the Joseon (Korean) people. All those publications also led them to harbor a certain amount of hostility toward the Japanese imperial authorities’ policy of obliterating the Korean people and everything they had stood for. And they also suggested the usefulness of literature as a genre, encouraging them to lead the public by writing poems or novels themselves.

Other influential sources that had impact upon the students’ or youths’ minds were Biographies. Certain secret societies even had it as an objective to analyze biographies of the world’s most important and heroic persons and use them as references in mobilizing the Joseon youth to rise up (Editing Committee, Documents regarding the National Liberation Movement 1971: 1370). Reading into the lives of such extraordinary persons, the Joseon youth had no other choice but to come to the conclusion that the current predicament that Joseon was going through by becoming a colony of the Japanese imperialism was because Joseon itself had currently lacked any significantly heroic historical figures for quite a long time.

Although figures like Bismark or Napoleon were also included as the objects of student admiration, more prominent influence came from two certain groups of historical figures that harbored distinctively different personalities and characteristics from each other. The first group of historical figures included Hitler and Mussolini who were leading the fascist part of the war. And the second group of historical figures included Gandhi and other colonial national leaders who were fighting imperialist oppression.

Quite interestingly, the first group seems to have had more influence upon the youth than the second. In fact, many students picked Hitler as their most revered historical figure, and "My Struggle," authored by Hitler, was apparently most prominently read by the students. Such a phenomenon was partially aided by the fact that news regarding the actions of Hitler and Mussolini were easier to come across through newspapers. A large part of the apprehended youth, including a person named Nam Jeong Jun (南廷俊), who was one of the head conspirators of the Mudeung-hwa incident (the so-called the Second "Students Revolt" in Gwangju), stated that their (the students') turning point for having certain sense of nationality was when they heard about Hitler, or read his book.<sup>5</sup>

Why had these figures become the object of admiration by students or youth in general? It is certainly an interesting question. But what should be noted is that Joseon youth was not at all enchanted by the fascist nature of these men. They were rather highly interested, especially in Hitler's case, in the procedures that Hitler took to unite the German people and motivate them to create a strong country. Such a concept was an irresistible one to the Joseon youth who were under colonial rule and also fascist oppression. Their predicament is what forced them to have the ideals and ambition that would motivate them in future tasks of national causes in the first place. As a result, the Joseon youth ended up developing a unique sense of nationality with unique characteristics. But such development also brought along a certain degree of vulnerability, as such senses were developed in a form that was inadvertently and unintentionally conglomerated with the education given to them based upon militarism or fascist ideology laid out by the Japanese authorities.

The second group of historical figures included Mahatma Gandhi of India, or Jiangjieshi and Ssunwon of China, who were all being sporadically featured in

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5. There is no doubt that the youth have told the truth. Because it was usual for them to confess in interrogations that they have read Korean novels or socialist texts which were then prohibited.

newspapers. Students and youths heavily identified themselves with Gandhi when they read books like *India*. And many young men and women stated that they started to be aware of their own national heritage and pride when they read books such as Ssunwon's biography, Arabian hero Ibn Saud's biography, the biography titled *34 Years of Bongcheon* (奉天34年) which dealt with Madam Curie's life, and also biographies depicting the lives of Neru or Chandra Bose, who were the leaders of the National Liberation movement in India.

Aside from general novels, Histories, and biographies, yet another field to be examined here that influenced the youth under the Japanese rule was the field of historical studies of the Joseon dynasty and its historical figures. There were many historical studies introduced to the public, including the *Joseon yeoksa* (Joseon History) authored by renowned scholar Choe Nam Seon. Surrounded by a dismal environment, the students studied the ancient history of the Korean people, or more recent histories of Koryo and the Joseon dynasties, and came to realize that the Korean people did have glorious days in the past, days which were enriched by cultural enlightenment and vast cultural achievement before the Korean peninsula was annexed by the Japanese and forced to endure insurmountable pain. Such realization naturally led to their having the hope of seeing such glorious days again by dedicating themselves to the task of liberating the Korean peninsula. War heroes like Yi Sun-shin or superior intellects such as Yi Ih or Yi Hwang, honorable vassals like Jeong Mong-ju from the ending days of the Goryeo dynasty all inspired them to have such faith. The heroic actions Ahn Jung Geun or Yun Bong Gil particularly led them to believe that the lack of current heroes was what was really hindering the Korean people from obtaining liberation and greatness. The tales of such heroic figures also inspired them to be heroes themselves. Commencing efforts to reach such achievements, the youth also tried to find out existing real-life heroes of their own to identify themselves with such heroes, and in the process expressed great interest in Anti-Japanese freedom fighters who were in action outside the peninsula, including factions such as the one led by Kim Il-sung.

The students and youth also had general access to newspapers published by the Japanese authorities such as *Maeil Sinbo* or *Gyeongseong ilbo* and were informed of the situation of the war and global ongoing events through such sources. Students studying overseas in Japan also read journals like *Jungang gongnon* (中央公論), *Munye chunchu* (文藝春秋) or *Kaizo* (改造). In the meantime, students who were interested in studying advanced theories beyond Nationalism, especially the students overseas, studied *Das Kapital* or Lenin's



*Imperialism*. Ssunwon's *The Threefold National Principle* (三民主義), and the literary achievements of Russia's Gogol from time to time. Several secret societies also obtained special studies authored by Japanese scholars and tried to understand the ongoing events of the world, politics, the economics of several foreign countries, and Japanese plans and strategies regarding the East Asian countries, through theories and references presented inside such studies or reports.

## 2. The “older generation,” including the peasant population--embracing, and depending upon “pseudo-religious instructions” and other superstitious concepts

Unlike the younger generation, the older generation, which included most of the peasantry population, did not have enough accessibility to newspapers, journals or books. Instead, they were heavily influenced by several rumors and superstitions, or traditional beliefs in the form of religious philosophy that was prevalent at the time. To them, the situation they were facing was nothing short of a “predicament,” or “dark age.” As usual, times like this witnessed the spreading of several religions, the expansion of certain religious orders, and also a number of pseudo-religions were in action in the general public's lives. Christianity, Buddhism, Cheondogyo (天道教), Daejonggyo (大倥教), Jeungsangyo (甌山教), and several other derivative forms of existing religions were in action at the time. What also had a profound effect on the peasants' or general public's lives was the Jeonggamnok (鄭鑑錄) text, which was known by many titles such as “Jeonggamnok” (鄭湛錄), “Jeonggammok” (鄭堪錄), “Gamnoncho” (堪論抄), “Seokseo” (石書), “Joseon bogam” (朝鮮寶鑑), “Yeoksae-yoram” (歷歲要覽) and “Jingbirok” (徵秘錄 and not 懲秘錄), titles that were showing similar themes with only trivial differences in content (Appellate Court, Prosecution Office, Ideology Division 1940b: 211).

The Japanese imperial authorities considered cases of apprehension related to these issues to be “pseudo-religion” cases. Apprehended or those suspected for being involved in such cases were mostly illiterate peasants, being of old age in most occurrences, and most of them were arrested and charged with violating the Security law. With regard to this situation, the Appellate Court's chief public prosecutor Masunaga (増永) said as follows in October 1939 at the Judicial officers' conference (Appellate Court, Prosecution Office, Ideology Division 1940a: 17-18).

The next thing you should be aware of regarding several phenomena that took place right after the war is the rapid increase in numbers of violation of the Security law. Most of the cases of offense are committed by persons related to the pseudo-religious orders. This situation is being taken care of thanks to the people's heightened sense of civility and also the firm hand of the authorities. These religious orders seem to believe that this time, while society is showing some symptoms of instability due to the ongoing war, is a perfect time for expanding their influence over society.

According to a survey conducted before the war in late 1935, aside of Christianity and Buddhism, the number of pseudo-religions that had more than thousand believers was fourteen. Considering there was some increase in the number of pseudo-religions after the breakout of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, it should have increased even more significantly during wartime. Naturally, the number of persons being apprehended and charged with Security law violation should also have increased dramatically. In religious characteristic, these pseudo-religions could not accept Tenno Imperialist fascism. Therefore this tendency naturally led to anti-Tenno Imperialist fascism and assumed nationalistic religions.

Pseudo-religions witnessed a steep rise in influence and social recognition in 1939 when a major drought caused an up-rise in the general public's mental state. The ever-destructive war and the effects from a horrible drought prompted the public to be reminded of concepts such as "the end of the world," or "the dawn of a new era." Due to continuous natural disasters, this kind of understanding of the world was only being strengthened.<sup>6</sup>

The religious text *Jeonggamnok* also began to draw a lot more attention as the influence of the pseudo-religions significantly increased. It served as another source of reference prophesying the defeat of the Japanese and the liberation of

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6. For example, a man named Kim Gyeong Ha (金景河) from Yangdeok region, South Pyeongan Province, age 42, told his cousin Kim Jin Ha (金鎮河, farmer) in the summer of 1941 that the *Baekjungryeok* (百中曆) text predicted that in the following half a dozen years draught will continue, and the rivers will be flowing blood instead of water, which is odd because of the fact that currently they already have had 3 years of actually severe draught in a row, and not to mention a war which had also already broke out, just as the text had predicted (Judicial Office Criminal Dept. 1941).

Joseon. For example, a person named No Byeong Jun (盧秉俊, unemployed, age 45, from Iksan region, North Jeolla Province) was arrested in 1941 for spreading rumors. The rumor in question is described in the quote below (Dept. of Alert Office Police 1941).

The world is upon a global turning point. Although Japan is achieving continuous victories, the hero Jiangjieshi will draw them into a slump. His ability is strong, his intentions are sincere, and Japan will be defeated in just a few years. The *Jeonggamnok* text also predicted that Japan will be defeated by China (鮮亡於日 日亡於胡 胡亡於朝鮮), making the year of Eulyu (1945) the year of victory and of liberation for the Joseon people; it will be the year China emerges again as the leader of the Asian society.

Around that time, persons named Daesan Yeongsul (大山英述, farmer, age 72) and Seogeum Hadong (瑞金夏東, farmer, age 67) were also arrested for uttering rumors such as, “Hundreds of thousands Japanese troops are moving to the Qing (清) dynasty but Jiangjieshi is a hero who could repel them all at once,” or “A man with the last name Jeong (鄭) will establish his own capital at Gyaeryong Mountain in 1943,” or “I am waiting for the capital of Joseon to be established but I’m not so sure I would live long enough to see that,” or “There is a tale saying that Gyaeryong Mountain would be the capital for the Jeongs, as current government is heightening taxes and prices while lowering the price of grains, killing the peasants in the process,” or “the Joseon dynasty will prevail the Qing threat, and the Qing will survive the Japanese threat,” etc. (Dept. of Alert Office Police 1941).

A certain line from the *Jeonggamnok* text was also interpreted in such regard. The line in question, “Samryung chilweol ihwarak (三隆七月梨花落), Yukdae guweol haeungae (六大九月海雲開),” was interpreted as prophesying the Joseon dynasty’s fall under the rule of the Lee House in July, during the third year of the Yunghi period in the first half and the end of the so-called Pacific war (a war which was literally going on “above the sea”) by September 1945 in the second half. Because the first half of the “presumed” prophecy turned out to be true according to real life events, the probability of the second half turning out to be true and becoming a reality as well was deemed high. The expectance for the liberation of Burma or the Philippines served as references of hope for the liberation of the Korean people as well (Editing Committee for the Documents regarding the National Liberation 1971a: 1124).

In the meantime, some people sought to stage liberation movements by reading Donghak-based texts such as *Donghak* (The History of Donghak, 東學), *Innaecheon* (人乃天) and *The History of the Opening of Cheondogyo Religion*. According to records, a person named Okcheon Suman (玉川守萬), from the Changnyeong area of the Gyeong-Nam province, moved to the Manju area in September 1942 trying to get a job, but could not because of discriminative practices against Koreans. Then he got to read the textbooks mentioned above, was deeply inspired by the teachings of the In-Nae-Cheon (“the People mirror the will of Heaven”) theories, and finally decided to dedicate himself to serving his fellow Koreans through certain activities (Gyeongseong Area Branch Court 1943: 955-956). One of many examples shows a couple of men named Yun Gyeong Su (尹慶叟, farmer, age 40) from the Cheongjin region and Lee Sun Doh (李順道, farmer, age 60) from the Gyeongseong area who were all related to the Bocheongyo religious order and apprehended in November 1940 in the original Jeungsangyo headquarters (元甑山教本闕) located in the Jeon-Buk province’s Jeongeub area for trying to establish and enlarge an organization named “Joseon Geongukdan” (朝鮮建國團, Alliance for the Liberation of Joseon) (Appellate Court, Prosecution Office 1941: 87-89).

A secret alliance named “Shinin Dongmaeng” (神人同盟) was also established under the collaboration of members from both the Bocheongyo (普天教) and Jeungsangyo religious orders. A person named Ahn Min Hwan (安民煥, farmer, age 46) who was one of the managers of the Jeongdogyo (正道教) religious order tried to resurrect the same order in order to motivate the order to support the liberation of Joseon based upon a book he previously worked on, titled *yeonmu-gyeong* (玄武經). A man named Kim Ju Hi (金周熙, farmer, age 80), who was one of the leaders of the Donghak religious order, spread rumors regarding “military issues” in hope of reconstruction of the order. And Jeong Seo Bok (鄭瑞福, farmer, age 44), in his efforts to rebuild the Cheongrimgyo Cheonglimgyo (靑林教) order in 1939, spread the rumor that China would achieve victory in its war with the Japanese, and after the victory it would march right down to the Joseon peninsula and liberate the Joseon people (Domestic Affairs Dept., Division of Alert Office, Security Division 1939: 25-29). A relatively new religious order called the Ilsimgyo (一心教) order also indulged itself in an anti-war liberation movement under the catch phrases like “A unified will can do anything (一心萬能主義), the unification between the secular world and spiritual beliefs (君教統一主義) and world peace (世界平和主義)” (Appellate Court, Prosecution Office, Ideology Division 1940b: 49).

As we can see, the general public over the age of 40 and living in agricultural rural areas perceived the teachings or theories coming from pseudo-religions or even superstitions as “signs of hope” indicating, predicting, or even prophesying the defeat of the Japanese and the liberation of Joseon. The Tenno ideology was the only authorized form of belief at the time, but was clearly unacceptable to the general public who refused to become “Citizens of the Empire,” so to the general population living in local areas without the luxury of obtaining modernized education or scientific information, the pseudo-religions and traditional beliefs served as the only exit of escape or hope for them.

## **Each Generation's Perception of War and Their Will to Resist**

There could be several standards that would be suitable to be applied to the task of dividing a society into certain generations, which would undoubtedly include the so-called “pre-existing generation” and the “Youth generation.” But as mentioned earlier, in this research the year 1910, when Joseon was annexed by Japan, is used as a crucial turning point. It cannot be denied that there would have been a fundamental gap in terms of thinking patterns or philosophical mind-sets between (1) those of a generation that directly witnessed how the colonized society they were forced to live in was created in the first place, and also bore the memory of the world before it was annexed, and (2) those of a generation which did not witness such change with their own eyes and had no memory of the preceding eras. Each generation was destined to view certain matters in a very different fashion, matters such as the ongoing war, the means to overcome the problems of the colonized state, and understanding of the post-war situation of the world etc. In this research, the tendencies in the bigger scale will mostly be examined.

### **1. The “Older Generation,” People who were born before the Annexation**

The term “older generation” used here refers to a portion of the population over the ages of 40 to 50 involved in agricultural production and in most cases, illiterate. Their perception of the war was well mirrored in the apprehended persons' statements for breaking the Security law or “paying disrespect” (impoliteness, 不敬罪) by spreading rumors or expressing resentment. The Japanese authorities

**Table 1.** Apprehension Reports regarding the Security Law Breach Cases

	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937(July)	1938	1939(Jan.-Apr.)
No. of Cases	18	9	5	11	19	41	6
No. of People	59	12	55	38	54	226	21

Source: Appellate Court, Prosecution Office, Ideology Division, 1939.6. “支那事變以後に於る保安法違反事件に關する調査”(1937.7-1939.4), *Sasang Hwibo* 19, 61-62.

themselves were also intent upon determining what the general public of Joseon was thinking, and what they were trying to do. In other words, they were trying to monitor the national philosophies streaming in Koreans' minds (Appellate Court, Prosecution Office, Ideology Division 1939b: 61-62).

According to Table-1, the number of offenders of the Security law in 1938 (one year after the breakout of the Sino-Japanese War) reached a total of 226, showing an increase in terms of four to five times. This dramatic increase would have been caused by the unstable nature of the population due to the beginning of the war. Among all those cases, cases related to pseudo-religions were “many,” to say the least. Aside of cases related to Christianity (21 persons), and Shamanism (69 persons), 66 persons were related to the Mugeuk Daedogyo Daedogyo (無極大道教) order, 34 persons to the Indogyo (人道教) order, and 25 to the Jeungsangyo order. In local terms, thirteen cases happened in the Daejeon area (marking the highest in terms of case numbers), and 87 persons were arrested in the Gwangju area (also marking the highest in terms of the person count). Statistics in local terms show heavy concentration in the traditional agricultural regions in the region below Gyeonggi province, while number of cases reported in the northern areas was actually diminishing. The reason for the Daejeon area marking the highest concentration of offences was because Gyaeryong Mountain was located inside that area. And regarding the decrease in the number of offences in the north-western areas, the Japanese authorities surmised that it was because pseudo-religions did not have the opportunity to spread its influences up to those regions at that time, but it should also be noted that the northern areas of the Korean peninsula still remained as regions under heavy influence from the socialist movement and also the anti-Japanese armed movements going on in foreign regions until the late 1930s.

In terms of ages, unlike ordinary cases involving the spreading of rumors or offenses in breaking the public safety law, the number of persons over the age of

50 was 132, and the number of persons serving in agricultural areas was 189. During the time period between 1937 and April 1939, among a total of 301 offenders, the number of persons under the age of 30 was only 37, which means that pseudo-religious teachings or philosophies did not have that much influences upon younger people. The Japanese authorities also perceived such phenomena accordingly and stated that “they (the Joseon youth) did not experience the Japan’s annexation of Joseon firsthand and were only indulged in Communist movements” (Appellate Court, Prosecution Office, Ideology Division 1939b: 61-83).

In the meantime, the members from the “older generation” were occasionally arrested for paying disrespect (or impoliteness). During the time period between July 1937 and September 1939, the number of such offenses was reported 47 times, and among a total of 89 arrested offenders, 36 were involved in agricultural occupations while 10 of them had no job at all. The number of persons under the age of 30 among those 89 was only 19. The education level was also low as 55 of them had only graduated from primary schools while 16 were totally illiterate. The objects (or targets) of such disrespect was in most cases, the Tenno Emperor himself (75 persons) and other members from the Japanese royal family (6 persons). Among all those cases, the number of persons related to pseudo-religions like the Mugeuk Daedogyo religious order, the Jushingyo (主神教) order, the Jeungsangyo order, and the Gyeongcheongyo (敬天教) and Mireukgyo (彌勒教) orders was up to 35 (while 22 persons among the total 89 were related to Christianity). Japanese authorities evaluated these religious offenders as being prejudiced by national sentimentality (Appellate Court, Prosecution Office, Ideology Division 1939c: 17-39).

All the examples reveal an interesting aspect of the Korean people’s perception of China. They all admitted that Joseon was placed in an inferior position to China in the past, but perceived such an inferior relationship very differently from the relationship they were then facing with Japan. They perceived the colonial situation forced upon them by Japanese imperial forces as a predicament caused by Japan’s fascist war crimes and that such was a distinct threat to the traditional concept of “The Country’s and the Public’s prosperity and stability.” They certainly hoped for the defeat of the Japanese troops. But there were also opinions that in the best interest of the Joseon people, the victory of China would not only be preferable but also idealistic, and some people were even thinking (or dreaming) about returning to the ways of the Joseon dynasty period or the Daehan imperial period, considering such thoughts a palatable idea.

For example, a man named Yu Yeong Han (劉永漢, unemployed, age 43) stated that the Joseon dynasty had been a subordinate state to China but never to Japan, and predicted that China would win in their battles against the Japanese and as a result, Joseon would be liberated and once again become a subordinate state to China (Appellate Court, Prosecution Office, Ideology Division 1939c: 67). A person named Kim Bong Sul (金鳳術, farmer, age 48, from Seongju area) also observed that China was the motherland of Joseon, and China, under the regime of Jiangjieshi, had the obligation to rescue Joseon by winning the Sino-Japanese War as the blood shed by the Joseon people would eventually be called the blood of the Chinese as well. He also evaluated the current situation as being very different from the Qing-Japan war or the Russo-Japanese War. People like Lee Byeong Jae (李炳材, farmer, age 54, from Haman area) and Gangbon Jongman (岡本鍾萬, farmer, age 72, from Changweon area) told their neighbor Lee Jong Gab (李鍾甲) in February 1941 that although Japan might seem powerful and invincible at the time, they would collapse in mere two or three years and the Joseon people would be liberated from their oppressive rule and become aware of their own glorious past (Dept. of Alert Office Police 1941). Lee Ik Gyo (李益教, farmer, age 52, from Seosan area) once expressed resentment regarding the Japanese production of military horns during the early 1940s and told the local community leader that for the benefit of the Joseon people and the resurrection of the traditional Yangban system China should win the war (Appellate Court, Prosecution Office, Ideology Division 1940b: 54). He seems to have been from a fallen Yangban House, and his attitude of identifying the outcome of the war with the resurrection of a medieval social order shows that he was counting on China's victory in the ongoing war based upon a traditional Sino-centric philosophy.

As we can see, the older generation's perception of the war and sense of national heritage were in most cases based upon traditional and also medieval thinking patterns and even upon a certain fondness for past ways of life. For another example, Jeong Sae Yeong (鄭世永, age 71, Gwaesan area) was caught hiding grain under the under-floor in the "Ondol" heating chamber on March 21st 1942. The clerk who caught him was there to encourage the subject to respond more actively to the authorities' taxation (供出) effort. But he claimed he was not a citizen of the state, and therefore he could not submit grain to the authorities because he was a citizen of Hanguk, in other words, the Daehan Empire (Economy and Police Dept. (經濟警察課 1942). Seo Byeong Seok (徐丙奭, age 56) said that when Japan is defeated Joseon would be free again, and



“we” would all be enjoying pleasant lives again (Appellate Court, Prosecution Office, Ideology Division 1939a: 34).

For a generation that witnessed the fall of the Joseon dynasty under the regime of the Lee House and Japan's annexation of the Daehan Empire, it would have only been natural for them to believe that when the situation was resolved, it would mean the entire current situation would be reversed to its previous state. It was not easy for Tenno fascism or militarist ideologies to spread into this kind of thinking pattern. It was not easy for Nationalism or Socialism to spread into it either. Only superstition or religious (either pseudo-religious or not) philosophies could do that. In a society where the Joseon people were required and forced to deliver any kind of support or cooperation to the ongoing war, the thinking patterns or sentiments of the older generation, albeit minor ones compared to other kinds of resistance, were also threatening to the Japanese authorities, so the older generation's attitude also led the Japanese authorities to oppress such thinking or actions in the name of punishing “resistance against the Holy War.”

The nature of the older generation's perception of the war and their sense of resistance could be summed up as follows. First, the number of offenders charged with breaking the Security law was much higher than the number of offenders charged with breaking the Public Safety law. Second, they often resorted to believing in pseudo-religions or superstitions, and were relatively weak in finding scientific and theoretical solutions to certain problems so they just ended up expressing resentments passively instead of indulging in active participation in a national movement. Third, even when they had some optimistic views regarding Japan's defeat and the liberation of Joseon, their perceptions were in most cases based upon traditional perceptions defined by past medieval social qualities related to traditional ways of life including international relationships and their high hopes for the role of China. Fourth, the new world they dreamed of after liberation was virtually a reincarnation of past regimes such as the Joseon dynasty and the Daehan empire. In conclusion, the older generation was in no position to suggest a completely fresh new country or nation.<sup>7</sup>

In the difficult time of war, the older generation, which indeed previously experienced Japan's annexation of Joseon firsthand, maintained their traditional

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7. Miyada Sezko said “Being a general population who would not have had a chance to hear about words like ‘republic,’ ‘democracy,’ or ‘socialism,’ they would not have had other choices but to draw some images of a liberated and independent Korea from the traditional facets of the Lee-

and medieval perceptions toward many things, and also tried to channel their own senses of nationality and resentments toward the Japanese oppression through their own dependence upon superstitious religious beliefs. But to the members of the younger generation, who were born after 1910 and did not experience the annexation in person and instead received education from the Japanese authorities, pseudo-religions were not that much of an interest. They came to have significantly different views toward the war, or the issue of liberating Joseon, or the matter of what kind of country should they be building after liberation.

## 2. The “Younger Generation,” People who were born after “Annexation”

The older generation, which negatively viewed the wars and battles caused by the Japanese, expressed their hatred and anger based on national pride, but were not provided with the liberty to free themselves from their medieval mind-set. Yet the members of the younger generation, including youth in their 10s and 20s, were distinctively different from them in many aspects. They came to be aware of the fact that Joseon was an independent country by reading history books, or through other opportunities such as seeing the Taegeuk-gi flag, or world maps showing the Korean peninsula in a “different fashion” from what they were generally used to seeing it. They also started to realize the true problems and wrong-doings of the society, problems presented by the Japanese authorities’ colonial policies. They did not harbor any abstract fondness for the past, and viewed the prospect of Japanese defeat and the liberation of the Korean people as historical events that would change the most malevolently distorted status of the present. In other words, they were prepared to analyze a certain series of events, which included concepts such as the end of the war, the Japanese retreat, the liberation of Korea, social revolution and the construction of a new country, in a consistent set of logic. They also urged themselves to get acquainted with more concrete and detailed ideologies in order to allow themselves to successfully view the ongoing situation with a more developed sense of national pride. Needless to say, they were bound to express interest in popular ideologies such as Nationalism or Socialism.

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House Joseon dynasty” (宮田節子 1998: 425). But there is no guarantee that this kind of assessment was true for the entire population.

While the members of the younger generation were fairly fast in adapting themselves to the Japanese authorities' propaganda arguing that Japan and Korea were one, they also refused most fiercely and responded most effectively to their fascist colonial policies<sup>8</sup> and their inherent unfounded-ness and self-serving concoctions of supposed and made-up facts. The youths of this era voluntarily formed small-scale secret meetings for a more systematic response,<sup>9</sup> and many youths were arrested for breaching the law of public security in terms of secret associations and philosophies. During the time period between June 1938 and June 1940, a total of 1,362 persons in 122 cases were reported for breaching the Public safety law, and 895 of those persons (roughly 66% of the entire cases) were in their 10s or 20s. Persons in their thirties numbered 277 (Appellate Court, Prosecution Office, Ideology Division 1940c: 31).

The students were the most interesting portion inside the general youth population. They were the ones who were still receiving education devised and prepared by the Japanese imperial authorities. They were young, and were relatively in a better position to enhance their level of cultural and political awareness compared to other (elder) classes or population groups of the society. As a result, they had the tendency of understanding the nature of social problems or national issues more quickly and acted on them more swiftly. They developed their own sense of national pride while dealing with the Japanese authorities' educational policies based on national discrimination, such as the unbalance between education and job opportunities etc. All these hardships trained them to better prepare themselves for breaking free from the distorted situation of a colonized land and urged them to have interest in detailed methods and ideological bases which would prove necessary for the eventual liberation of the Korean people. Their philosophies, ideologies, and inner logic might have been crude or even unrefined considering all those different and versatile philosophies being showered upon them at the time, but their influences upon the general population of the society were surely enormous nonetheless.

The Japanese authorities also viewed the activities of the youth population in terms of philosophical and ideological awareness as an indicator of the general public's level of understanding of their present condition and current issues.

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8. As Dimitrov said, Fascism had a certain enticing quality, so a younger generation with no hope for the future could have been lured entirely by such ideology.

9. During the time period of 1937 and 1945 there were at least over 200 small-scale secret alliances organized in Joseon and Japan (See Byun 2001).

Thus they proceeded with caution in dealing with them. Youth in middle schools, high schools and colleges only occupied mere 1% of the entire population, but in reality they were occupying almost half of the entire number of offenders of the public safety law (Appellate Court, Prosecution Office 1942: 222). They also accused the youth to be lacking the identity of a true national citizen under the rule of the Tenno Emperor because of their petty sense of Joseon independence based on liberalism and individualism (Dept. of Alert Office Police 1944a: 68; Dept. of Alert Office Police 1944b: 204). Though they were only part of the entire population, their activities were certainly bothering the Japanese authorities because of their social power.

The youth also had their own characteristics as members of the “younger generation.” They were not patient with injustice. They were progressive. The virtues of being the young ones proved particularly crucial in the colonial situation as they were eager to find ways to break free from the stale status which was forced upon them by their oppressors and imperial rulers who did not permit them to achieve any more self-development toward a more advanced society beyond the end of colonization or the achievement of liberation. They had had enough of the so-called colonized-Capitalist society which was bearing undeniable characteristics of medieval qualities. So they pursued prospects for other types of Capitalist societies or Communized societies which were developed in more “natural” or “independent” ways. The wartime-fascist policies of the Japanese were based upon distorted versions of Capitalism and modernization, so the youth viewed the ongoing war and the predicted defeat of the Japanese army as a perfect opportunity for Joseon’s liberation and social revolution. In many cases, they called for armed resistance based on proper preparation (Byeon 1995).

Because of this, the Socialists’ “Revolutionary movements” toward the general public after the mid 1930s put more emphasis upon the youth population’s development of political awareness and effective organization as part of the tactics utilizing public fronts. As an example, persons like Choe Gyeong Ok (崔慶玉), Kim Hee Jin (金憲鎭), and Ko Jong Gyu (高宗圭), who were engaged in the “Succession movement” of the so-called “Gyeon Yeong Tae (權榮台) group” in the Seoul area, stated that the Joseon youth had an inherent national sense and the characteristic of being natural warriors pursuing revolution (Gyeongseong Area Branch Court 1938: 9). In other examples, the Revolutionary public movements in the northern regions of the peninsula such as Seongjin, Gilju, Myeongcheon, Cheongjin, Gyeongseong, and Nanam tried to involve and

recruit comrades and associates from the villages' youth population, either men or women, after 1939. Analyzing this ongoing trend, the Japanese authorities surmised that after the Sino-Japanese War the authorities' propaganda regarding the social view that the public receive was not reaching the youth population that well, thereby allowing the Socialists to conduct a more concentrated approach to the Youth population (Appellate Court, Prosecution Office 1941: 76-87). Responding to this problem, the Japanese authorities also started to emphasize more of the importance of the youth's role in society, and channeled their efforts in breeding a more "system-supportive" youth who would serve and support prolonged colonial rule and also the ongoing war.

The social meaning that the youth population came to represent during the wartime situation was enlarged in many aspects, both to the Japanese authorities who were engaged in a war, and to the Koreans (the Joseon population) who were striving for liberation either through opposing the Japanese-induced wars or armed resistance against their Japanese oppressors. The youth themselves also realized their role of leading the Korean people in the long journey of upgrading the relatively underdeveloped culture, economy, and consciousness level in order to make them better prepared for the liberation and the birth of a new country. The youth population was the most vibrant part of the society under colonial, wartime, and overall fascist rule under the Japanese. They remained well aware of the war continuation and kept fighting for independence.

Yet the younger generation was still in the development phase of its own values and thinking patterns and philosophies, and as a result, was still immature. They were flooded with various kinds of philosophies and ideologies, so in some cases they fought for or simply delivered conflicting theories and arguments. The Joseon youth, when they should have been raised in a normal, modernized state with proper values in their journey to become an adult armed with certain adequate views of the world, with basic morals to perceive what would be right or wrong for the society and the country, and also other healthy ways to think, rationalize and embrace versatile opinions, were instead raised in a militarist, fascist colony and were forced to build up their characters, values, and thinking patterns inside such an environment. They were born after the annexation so they did not actually have any kind of inherent regret or guilt about their situation, but still experienced and lived with fascism and wartime-Capitalism continuously. That environment provided them with numerous concepts such as individualism, competition, pragmatism, rationality, and also the illogic nature of

fascism, militarism, state-nationalism, racism at the same time. The youth were also strongly against such illogic and irrational practices that were apparent in the process of the general public being mobilized under the name of wartime fascism, or under the Japanese Tenno imperialist fascism being forced upon the traditional beliefs of the Korean people.

This kind of confusion and complexity reflected in the development phase of youth philosophy suggests that their probable future path was still undecided. They were destined either to adapt to the existing layout of the society in a very pragmatic but also conservative position, or to reject the existing format and drive to be a better person in a better society. The lives they have lived after the liberation on August 15, 1945 supports this assumption. In that regard, it might have been more idealistic if they had been trained with a more rational and scientific, systematic education to develop their views toward the war or also towards the subject of nationalism. But as we all know, the situation at the time did not allow such luxury.

Flooded with so many types of ideology, they were used to such a flooding of ideas, and either conscious or unconscious of that fact, they were forming their own ways of rationalization. They also came to realize that the actual environment surrounding them was so different from what was stated in theories or books. They came to feel repulsion and national pride at the same time, and started to fight back their oppressors in any fashion they could. The youth were not in a position to be thoroughly engulfed in a particular ideology enough to be labeled as an "...ist." They were only to choose a particular type of ideology or philosophy when they became older. What they chose, at the time of choice, is what ultimately counts. But it should be noted that they were in a constant flux in terms of choosing their own philosophy and shaping their character upon it. After the liberation, the people who were in action at the time, whether they were from the left-wing or right-wing parties, were part of the younger generation during the Japanese occupation period.

## Concluding Remarks

During World War II, the Joseon population lived in a society where forcible fascist rule spread throughout the most delicate parts of the public's everyday life. In legal terms, the Korean people were labeled as second-rate citizens, mere half-citizens of Japan, which was engaged in a global war. But in terms of

nationality and sentimentality, they were still the Joseon people, and members of the Joseon country. Some of them deliberately cooperated with the Japanese authorities, and the large majority of them passively lived along, or stayed quiet, but some of them managed to express their resentment and discontent, albeit in passive fashion, regarding the situation of ongoing war and certain related policies. Those sentiments were expressed and delivered both by the older and younger generations, although in a different manner.

The members of the older generation who were born prior to the annexation did not experience the “new” Japanese education and “enlightenment” procedures in the administrative sense and were still in a way harboring “medieval minds” and were not ready or compatible to be transformed into the so-called “modernized” personalities that the Japanese imperial authorities favored. The older generation’s view of the ongoing war and their sentiment of resistance against the Japanese were usually expressed through their belief in pseudo-religious thinking or superstitions and not through scientific or theoretic devices. That was what hindered them from being fully engaged in active national movements. And even though they were quite optimistic about the eventual defeat of the Japanese, their point of view did not go beyond their liberation. Their perspective regarding the post-liberation era was limited to the extent of hoping for the return to the old-fashioned medieval way of life, and an international relationship based upon that lifestyle, such as the traditional relations held between Korea and China. Their belief or dependence upon religions or superstitions led them to be offenders more of the Security law than of the Public Safety law. Yet, in a colonized land in which the Tenno imperialist fascism was the only philosophy publicly authorized, their albeit limited sense of resentment against the ongoing war and the wartime rule itself demonstrated plenty of qualities that can be interpreted as “resistance” based upon national pride and heritage.

On the other hand, the younger generation included people that were born after the annexation and received administrative education from the Japanese. In their mind, trained in a world of Colony capitalism, concepts such as individualism, ability-oriented philosophy, and rationalism started to become embedded. Also, under the influence of Japanese imperial policies, some of them came to gather a fairly distorted point of view in terms of modernization or politics, while some of them resorted to strongly believing or advocating state-superiority or chauvinism. But the younger generation’s awareness of the upcoming defeat of Japan, linked to the vision of Joseon’s liberation and establishing a whole new country, led them to be actively involved in their struggles for independence, and

also motivated them to participate in the very process of constructing a nation after 1945, inside the turmoil of clashes between persons from the left-wing and right-wing parties.

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