

**“THE OLD PEOPLE AND THE NEW GOVERNMENT”**  
By Komatsu Midori

**Introduction**

Through a series of events that included the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese Wars (both largely fought in and around the Korean peninsula), Japan gradually emerged as the dominant foreign power on the scene. Despite Korean resistance, Korea was made a protectorate of Japan in 1905 and annexed in 1910, whereupon the Chosŏn dynasty, which had ruled since 1392, came to an end.

In order to understand Japanese colonial rule in Korea, and the reactions of Koreans, it is useful to see the ways in which Japanese officials sought to justify the takeover to Koreans, to themselves, and to the rest of the world. The article excerpted here is a transcript of a talk given by an official of the Japanese foreign ministry, Komatsu Midori, to resident foreign members (mostly British and American) of Seoul’s Royal Asiatic Society shortly after annexation. Both history and civilization are called into service.

**Document Excerpts with Questions** (Longer selection follows this section)

From Komatsu Midori, “The Old People and the New Government,” in *Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 6(1), 1912: 3-4, 7-8, 8-9.

**“The Old People and the New Government”**  
By Komatsu Midori

Judging from the facts so far pointed out in general outline it is not unreasonable to conclude that the Japanese and Korean peoples formed for a long time one and the same nation.

...

In developing the industry of an infantile nation, it is advisable to begin the work by undertaking the improvement of the agricultural industry, and this has been diligently carried on since Japan assumed the protectorate of the Korean Empire.

**Questions:**

1. Based on historical evidence and supposition about the ancient past (largely rejected by Korean historians then and since), Komatsu claims that “the Japanese and Korean peoples formed for a long time one and the same nation.” What is the significance of this claim, and what sort of political developments might it have justified?
2. Can you compare examples of situations in which the past has been used to legitimate politics in the present?

**Longer Selection**

From Komatsu Midori, “The Old People and the New Government,” in *Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 6(1), 1912: 3-4, 7-8, 8-9.

**“The Old People and the New Government”  
By Komatsu Midori**

It is stated in two famous Chinese histories, the Wei Chi (History of Wei) and the Hou Han Shu (Book of Later Han) that Korea is bounded on the east and west by sea and borders Japan on the south. If Japanese territory had not extended to the Korean peninsula over the sea in those days, such record would never have been written; but the sea would have been represented as circumscribing Korea not only on the east and west but also on the south. It is thus reasonable to infer that Japanese dominion extended to the Korean peninsula beyond the sea. In the reign of Emperor Ojin, son of Empress Jingo, as well as in the reign of Emperor Yuiyaku, who ascended the throne about two hundred years later, envoys were sent by the Japanese Court to China then under the Wu dynasty. These facts are recorded in a contemporary Chinese book, in which it is mentioned that one of the credentials presented by the Japanese envoys bore the signature of “King of Wa (Japan) and Great General giving peace to the seven countries of Wa (Japan), Packche, Silla, Mimana, Kala, Chin-Han and Ma-Han.” The latter six are the names of the states in Korea at that time. Further it is mentioned in the same book that Japan subjugated northern countries beyond the sea to the number of ninety-five. The number given is evidently an exaggeration, but the reference seems to confirm the belief that prior to and after the Korean expedition of Empress Jingo, the southern part at least of the peninsula was in Japanese hands.

Judging from the facts so far pointed out in general outline it is not unreasonable to conclude that the Japanese and Korean peoples formed for a long time one and the same nation. The recent annexation of Korea by Japan is therefore not the incorporation of two different countries inhabited by different races, but, it may rather be said to be the reunion of two sections of the one and same nation after a long period of separation. Indeed it is nothing more nor less than the old state of things restored. ...

In developing the industry of an infantile nation, it is advisable to begin the work by undertaking the improvement of the agricultural industry, and this has been diligently carried on since Japan assumed the protectorate of the Korean Empire. This may be a task easy to accomplish in other countries. In Chosen, however, the improvement of agriculture must be accompanied by the afforestation as a preventive against floods as well for facilitating irrigation. But afforestation is not a work which can be accomplished within a short time. Moreover, in order that it may be successfully carried out it is not enough for a government to undertake it of itself, but the general public must be trained to appreciate its benefits and importance. The Governor General issued for that purpose an instruction to name the anniversary of Emperor Jimmu, April 3, as Arbor-day for Chosen. On that day, all students of schools are to plant young trees. The district magistrates were also enjoined to induce members of public organizations as well as individuals to cooperate in the plantation. Seedling nurseries

will be established for the cultivation of young trees; but for the time being young trees or seedlings are to be distributed by the Provincial administration. ...

The wonderful new machinery, the command of new powers of steam and electricity, have produced a new era in Japan, bringing about a remarkable change not only in political and material conditions but also in the moral and intellectual spheres. In a territory like Chosen, of great distances, of great natural difficulties, high mountain chains, wide spreading forests and waste lands, and therefore of great obstacles to personal travel and the transportation of commodities; an industrial development of the same kind would be followed by the same results. Now, in Chosen, farmers living in distant places are obliged to resort either to pack horses or human carriers for sending their surplus products to distant markets. This entails much time and expense, and the proceeds raised often do not cover the expense so incurred. Under these circumstances farmers cannot be blamed for their reluctance to raise abundant crops by adopting imposed agricultural methods. Such a state of things however is not confined to agricultural products alone. The same or rather more difficulty would be experienced in the trade of not a few manufactured articles as well as of heavy minerals such as coal, copper, iron and graphite. This accounts for the inactivity of not only agriculture but also of industry and commerce, except in places along the existing railways and the sea coast.

**Questions:**

1. Based on historical evidence and supposition about the ancient past (largely rejected by Korean historians then and since), Komatsu claims that “the Japanese and Korean peoples formed for a long time one and the same nation.” What is the significance of this claim, and what sort of political developments might it have justified?
2. Can you compare examples of situations in which the past has been used to legitimate politics in the present?
3. Komatsu also discusses Japan’s intentions to improve Korean agriculture and transportation. How does he implicitly understand Korea?
4. How might this have been used to justify Japanese colonization? How does this compare to the justifications offered for imperial expansion by European powers, by the U.S. in the Philippines?
5. How does Komatsu’s position compare with the understandings of past and future Korean development offered by *The Independent* in the 1890s, or by Park Chung Hee in South Korea in the 1960s-70s?