Lecture 8 Korea in the 20th century

summary points

Colonial Period

- Suffering was not universal: there had already been terrible suffering in the late Joseon period.
  - Perhaps the only thing that suffered more than usual was the idea of Korea as a nation-state, as well as the end of the royal house and the Neo-Confucian ideals of the yangban literati.
  - However, there was certainly a 'premodern' sense of Korean identity during the Joseon period.
- First period of genuine modernization and early consumer culture, for a few at least (Hwashin Department Store).
- Divide-and-rule tactics employed.
- Has led to the accusations and denunciations of "pro-Japanese collaborators" which continues still even today.
- Not a black-and-white situation: 40–50% of the National Police Force were Korean and Koreans were used in the police force in Manchukuo also.
- No one knew that Japan would lose the war in 1945: the international order had demonstrated no interest in Korea's independence and broadly supported Japan.

Second World War

- Comfort women - 100,000 to 200,000 Korean women mobilized into sexual slavery.
- Offered opportunity for Koreans to serve in the Japanese army some attaining officer rank.
- Koreans never have a chance to "defeat" Japan: Japan simply leaves adding to Korea han!

Postwar Division

- At the end of WWII there were more Communists in the South and more Christians in the North.
- Both North and South were initially set up by Russia and US as puppet states, but both quickly asserted their own will and proved almost impossible to control.
- America had prepared for a military occupation of Japan which turned out to be largely unnecessary; nobody was trained in Korean affairs (nor were Russians).
- America decided to maintain much of the Japanese infrastructure including the hated police force.

"Most Koreans, especially the majority in the villages, never saw Americans, but only the local elite of koreans (in many cases the same elite as during colonial rule)." (Cumings 2005)

- Bloody anti-guerilla campaign of autumn 1949–spring 1950 was considered by Americans the litmus test for Rhee's regime.
- South Korea began to be "Americanized."
• South Korea was largely in a state of civil war already.
• North and South were already fighting with large numbers of troops involved.
• The fact that the division echoed the ancient existence of Goguryeo being a separate country in the north was pure coincidence (influenced by geography).

The Korean War

• Bruce Cumings argues that if the North hadn't started it, the South would have, and had particularly wanted to in autumn 1949.
  o You can't "invade" your own country.
  o It's unclear who started shooting first on 25 June, but North Korea continued with an all out attack, the South on that day, wasn't planning to "invade" the North.
• It's now known, however, that Kim Il Sung had received permission from Stalin to invade the South.
• American tactical error of "rollback" (crossing the 38th parallel into North Korea) allowed/forced China to enter the war leading to enormous further loss of life.
• War as the "great equalizer."
• Tragic irony is that the DMZ line ended up very close to the original 38th parallel: both states still exist with the same leaders: the war achieved nothing at an incredibly cost of human life.

Reading extract “The Question of Nationalism” from Eckert (2016:87–94)

Please note the follow abbreviations

CTS = Central Training School (a lower level Japanese military school in Manchuria).
GGK = Government-General of Korea
IJS = Imperial Japanese Army
JMA = Japanese Military Academy – for officer training.
MMA = Manchurian Military Academy – for officer training.
Mankei (滿系) = Manchukuo citizens (mainly ethnic Chinese)
Nikkei (日系) = Ethnic Japanese