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CHRISTIAN GIRLS' SCHOOLS IN KOREA UNDER COLONIAL RULE

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ABSTRACT: Colonial regimes have historically utilized various strategies to consolidate their authority over occupied territories. Japan's presence on the Korean Peninsula from 1905 marked a pivotal period characterized by significant educational reforms. Central to Japan's colonial policy was the restructuring of education, aimed at instilling moral compliance among the Korean populace. This paper examines the impact of these colonial educational policies on Korean women's missionary schools operating on the peninsula during this era. Through the analysis of periodicals, official documents, and historical records, this study investigates how these policies influenced the activities and objectives of missionary schools, particularly in their roles as educational and cultural agents amidst colonial dominance.

KEYWORDS: Missionary schools, Ehwa haktang, Ito Hirobumi, Shiritsu gakko rei, Tonga ilbo.

INTRODUCTION

The agreement on the establishment of a protectorate regime signed between Korea and Japan in November 1905 culminated in the annexation of the peninsula to the Japanese Empire in 1910. The 1905 treaty dismantled the border between the countries, establishing Japanese control over the Choson kingdom's foreign relations and internal finances. The esteemed Ito Hirobumi, a central figure in Meiji Japan's political circles since 1860, arrived in Korea in 1906 as the first Resident General. Ito Hirobumi pursued a policy of administrative consolidation, relying on the support of Japanese immigrants to the peninsula. Consequently, the Treaty of Annexation in 1910 merely formalized Japanese control, which had been practically achieved by 1907 [1].

MAIN BODY

The Japanese colonial system, akin to other contemporary colonial regimes, aimed to establish a robust presence in the territories it "annexed" or directly conquered. A critical component of this strategy was education, which was deemed an effective means to influence the mindset of the colonized populace. The Imperial Government dispatched inspectors to the governorate to evaluate the state of the education system on the peninsula. One such investigator, Hara Shoichiro, documented his findings in his memoir "Travels to Korea" (1914), highlighting his visit to Kyongsong Girls' High School. He concluded that any planned economic or social reforms in Korea would be challenging unless they included women. According to Shoichiro, Korean women are "... much easier to be influenced [by new ideas]" [2] than men. Additionally, due to the strong

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position and influence of women within the household, they could potentially play a pivotal role in "influencing men." [3]

In executing educational reform in Korea, the Japanese colonial administration prioritized two critical objectives to achieve the goal of Japanizing the Korean populace: 1) establishing Japanese schools, and 2) exerting full control over or terminating Christian schools that were established prior to 1910.

The Governor-General viewed missionary schools as impediments to the effective implementation of Japanese colonial policy. The dependency of Christian schools on Western culture and ideology – through their curricula, religious teachings, and direct foreign instructors – was perceived as a significant barrier to colonial objectives. The colonial administration believed that assimilating the Korean people with the Japanese would be more straightforward if the peninsula were entirely isolated from external influences.

The assault on missionary schools commenced as early as 1908 with the enactment of the Shiritsu Gakko Rei (Private School Ordinance) [4], which mandated all private schools, whether religious or secular, to conform to new government standards. Each school principal was required to submit an annual report on the state of their school to the Bureau of Education. Moreover, adapting textbooks, equipment, buildings, and grounds to meet the new demands represented a substantial financial burden for many missionary schools [5].

Government inspections revealed that nearly two thousand private schools on the peninsula were deemed unfit to be called educational institutions due to inadequate reserves, staffing, or teaching equipment. Additionally, accusations were made that "instead of engaging in sound educational activities, some of them [i.e., private schools] are engaged in anti-government agitation activities and use textbooks in the spirit of rebellion." [6] By 1912, the new Bureau of Education regulations required all private schools to conform to government requirements, aiming to reduce the hours dedicated to Bible teaching and to secularize the lessons. By the end of 1911, the number of private schools had decreased to 1,700 (of which 700 were missionary schools), and only 39 were recognized by the government. Consequently, 461 schools were forced to close due to lack of funds, while some schools chose to shut down in response to restrictions on religious classes, preferring closure over compliance with the current regime [6, ibid].

Since the education of Korean women was primarily conducted by Christian missionaries, the closure of schools due to the new procedures adopted by the Japanese government had a detrimental effect on their educational opportunities. Additionally, in 1922, the Missionary Council conference set a goal to achieve government recognition for schools established through missionary activities [7]. This objective required taking necessary measures, particularly addressing financial issues to improve the material and technical support of these schools. Although some schools managed to cover certain costs by receiving aid from foreign donors, the majority of private schools had to introduce additional fees and tuition to cover expenses [8].

Ehwa Haktang was among the schools that had to implement these additional expenses, which were beyond the financial capacity of many parents of female students. According to a report in

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the Tonga Ilbo newspaper in 1934, girls studying at Ehwa Haktang had to pay 380 won to cover all their tuition expenses. Additionally, those who wished to study at a more prestigious higher education institution in Japan needed to pay another 100 won [9]. Another writer noted that fees were introduced for textbooks, notebooks, and pens, which were previously provided to students for free, resulting in monthly charges to cover these expenses [10]. These additional fees significantly limited the accessibility of missionary schools, which had previously been the only system of education available to all and within their means.

On one hand, missionary schools had no choice but to adopt such policies to sustain their operations; on the other hand, the costs were prohibitive for parents who were not yet fully "democratized" in terms of prioritizing their daughters' education. This highlights the complex challenges faced by missionary schools and their students during this period.

Due to the lack of educational institutions, the gap between the education of girls and boys, which had begun to decrease, started to widen again. For instance, in 1919, 84,306, or 3.7 percent of Korean children, attended public elementary schools [11]. Although the number of missionary schools decreased from 1,317 in 1912 to 690 in 1919, the government neglected to establish new institutions to replace them. There was also a stark difference between the number of high schools for girls and boys: in 1919, Korean boys had access to five public and seven private high schools, while Korean girls only had access to two public and four private high schools [11, ibid]. As a result, the closure of missionary schools, coupled with the government's neglect, significantly reduced educational opportunities for Korean girls.

Since the 1930s, the Japanese Empire concentrated all its efforts on war preparations. Education reform and other cultural and social issues were deprioritized, with all resources directed toward ensuring that Korea would serve as a strategic base for Japan during the upcoming World War II. During this period, the first generation of Korean working women emerged, continuing the efforts of the socialist women's movement discussed in the third paragraph of the second chapter. Despite the Japanese colonial government's policy of constant repression against them, this movement did not disappear. On the contrary, even a few socialist women were part of the government of the North Korea (or Democratic People's Republic of Korea) established in 1947, indicating the enduring impact of these early efforts [12].

CONCLUSION

Despite numerous negative aspects, a notable positive outcome of this period was the involvement of Korean girls in education, regardless of their class and social status. Although their numbers did not increase as significantly as those of Japanese girls, this development signaled radical changes in Korean society [13]. Additionally, primary schools implemented a coeducational system, teaching girls and boys together, which differed from the previous patriarchal system and helped to gradually reduce gender inequality in society. This trend, initiated during the Japanese colonial period, has led to a percentage of women in Korean higher education that now approaches 50%. However, the substantial involvement of women in education also resulted in significant sacrifices during the Second World War.

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