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Anti-Colonialism and the Contested Politics of Comparison:

Rabindranath Tagore, Rash Behari Bose and Japanese colonialism in Korea in the inter-war period

Satoshi Mizutani

Doshisha University

Abstract

This paper examines the implications of Indian nationalism during the inter-war period for both Japanese rule in Korea and the anti-colonial struggle against it. It discusses how two Bengalis, famous for their Anglophobia—the poet Rabindranath Tagore and the revolutionary Rash Behari Bose—saw Japanese colonialism in Korea and how their contrasting views differentially influenced thoughts about colonialism in the Japanese empire, among both Japanese and Koreans. The paper shows how the views and influence of these two Indians can usefully be examined in terms of what Ann Laura Stoler has called the “politics of comparison.”

Anti-colonialism and the Politics of Comparison

In the period between the First and Second World Wars, the hitherto friendly relationship between Britain and Japan—two colonial empires allied with each other since 1902—gradually deteriorated, not least because their imperial interests in Asia clashed. As the two empires increasingly regarded one another as potential enemies, the struggle of Indian nationalists to overthrow British rule became a question that no longer concerned the British Empire alone. On one side, British imperial intelligence feared that the anti-colonialism of Indian revolutionaries would find resonance with the sort of “anti-British” views that had been expressed by certain Japanese pan-Asianist ideologues.¹ On the other side, the Japanese Empire had a growing interest in what was happening in the largest colony of the British Empire, particularly in affairs concerning the independence movement, which had accelerated during this period with the arrival of Gandhian nationalism. In such a context of inter-imperial tensions, some Indian opponents of British rule forged ties with influential people in the Japanese Empire. Indian anti-colonial ideas and activities flowed across borders, and in so doing, inevitably triggered comparisons between Britain and Japan, both in Japan and in its colonial territories overseas. Japan, just like Britain, practiced a colonialism of its own, and had to cope just as urgently with the threat of anti-colonialism.

The British and Japanese empires both faced legitimacy crises in the post-Versailles age of Wilsonian nationalism, and in the year 1919 both British India and Korea under Japanese rule experienced the savage suppression of anti-colonial demonstrations.² From this time onwards, anti-colonial activities in India and in Korea, as well as colonial counter-insurgent efforts to suppress them (such as colonial censorship) often intersected in “political imaginations” that transcended imperial borders.³ British, Japanese, Indian and Korean actors alike pondered comparisons between British and Japanese rule, albeit in highly heterogeneous and polemical directions that reflected the existence of a broad political spectrum both between and within these four national groups. In those parts of East Asia that fell under Japanese colonial rule, the question of Indian anti-colonialism meant different things for different political standpoints, provoking divergent and conflicting ways of comparison. This paper traces the trajectories of such comparisons by focusing on two Indians equally famous for their Anglophobia—Rabindranath Tagore and Rash Behari Bose⁴—by examining their respective relationships to the question of anti-colonialism in Korea. Tagore and R.B. Bose were both from Bengal, the long-standing heart of anti-British activities. In the period under study, both of these Bengalis became familiar figures within the Japanese Empire, but in ways that were surprisingly different and often contrasting. It is precisely these differences and contrasts that this paper explores.

When the British imperial authorities accused the Japanese Empire of “barbarous” suppression of the anti-colonial demonstrations by Korean civilians in 1919 known as the “March First Movement,” the Japanese colonial press in Korea fired back by citing Tagore’s letter of protest against the British massacre of Indians in Amritsar that took place on 13 April the same year.⁵ Ironically, however, the same Tagore turned out to be an unbending critic of Japanese rule in Korea, and his increasing influence over Korean anti-colonial sentiments would emerge as a cause for imperial anxiety, much to the chagrin of Japanese colonial intelligence. In contrast, R.B. Bose greatly served Japanese imperial interests as a mouthpiece for Japanocentric pan-Asianism. Naturally, the kind of pan-Asianist campaigns he helped to organize, such as the Conference of Asian Peoples in Nagasaki in 1926, fell foul of the Korean anti-colonialist movement.⁶ His influence was confined to a small circle of “pro-Japanese” Koreans and to the connections he had with high-ranking Japanese officials in colonial Korea in the early 1930s. In 1914, Bose had left India for Japan as a result of his attempted assassination of the British governor general in 1912.⁷ In some senses, the Bengali revolutionary might plausibly be compared to An Jung-Geun, the Korean patriot who assassinated the Japanese resident-general of Korea in 1909. Paradoxically, however, R.B. Bose proved to be so useful for Japanese colonial propaganda that in 1934 he was invited to meet with officials of the Governor-General’s Office in Korea, and his words would be taken as encouragement by those Japanese and Koreans who wished to justify their collaboration with Japanese rule.

In this paper I suggest that such paradoxes and contrasts concerning the cross-imperial influence of Tagore and R.B. Bose are

best grasped by examining the extent to which they were manifestations of what Ann Laura Stoler has called the “politics of comparison.” In a series of essays, Stoler has urged scholars to study different colonial empires in terms of their use of comparison as a tool. She argues that all modern empires, without exception, were practitioners of colonial comparison. Broadly speaking, there were two kinds of comparison. Some empires used comparison to share knowledge about how colonized societies could be governed as efficiently and soundly as possible. Among other things, this kind of comparison allowed policy makers to foresee and militate against risks by providing information on the colonial policies of other empires that were perceived to have gone wrong. For example, knowledge of how “English education” in Bengal had allegedly given rise to a class of Indian men who were “disloyal” to the British Empire was widely shared among French and Japanese imperialists around the turn of the century. Empires circulated among themselves knowhow about how different forms of colonialism had been practiced in various contexts across imperial divides. Relations among these empires were not always amicable, however, particularly under war situations that made some of them declared imperial rivals as well as complicit partners. In such a context of imperial rivalry, empires also used comparison to criticize other empires’ colonialism. For example, as described below, Japanese imperialists from the interwar period onwards often used their knowledge about colonial India to expose the wrongdoings of Britain, a nation which Japan increasingly viewed as a rival rather than a “senior” imperialist partner.

Whether used for information-sharing or to criticize, these comparisons and the “knowledge” underlying them were rarely objective, with their production and dissemination firmly grounded in politics. For instance, the cross-imperial discourse of educated Bengalis as a political threat to Britain was intrinsically bound up with efforts by French and Japanese imperialists to warn their own empires against the supposedly calamitous consequences of educating the colonized in the image of the colonizer.⁸ Likewise, the Japanese critique of British imperialism as mentioned above was fashioned as rhetoric to justify the political position of Japan as a colonizer in Asia. In colonial Korea, comparison was used to promote the idea that Japanese colonialism in Korea was not just different from the kind of “White” rule seen in India, but was a historical necessity that would prevent Korea from falling prey to such rule. In fact, Japan increasingly proclaimed itself to be an “anti-colonial” force, however paradoxical and implausible that may sound today. Defining “colonialism” as a form of foreign rule by a White nation over a non-White nation, Japanese ideologues and rulers managed to find ways to represent their own colonialism as an anti-colonial struggle on behalf of other Asian nations that were under the yoke of Western colonial powers. In the 1910s and 1920s, such a view did not have a popular support base, nor did it have much influence on Japan’s foreign policy. This changed, however, in the early 1930s, when Japan’s attitude toward the international community became more confrontational. As the examples mentioned above show, those who used comparisons with other empires did so ultimately to “improve” or justify colonialism of their own. Naturally, such knowledge tended to be partial and uneven in focus and range. As Stoler argues, to engage with it critically, we have to go beyond the surface and get at the politics behind its production and circulation.⁹

This paper extends Stoler’s concept of the “politics of comparison” by widening its scope to include comparisons used by the colonized, not just by the colonizer. What we may thus call the “anti-colonial politics of comparison” was practiced by opponents of Japanese colonialism.¹⁰ For such opponents, British-Indian affairs, particularly those concerning the anti-colonialism of Indians, seemed to have significant comparative implications. These people worked to circulate information on India among their fellow anti-colonialists in ways that articulated and justified their own anti-colonial causes. In Korea during the inter-war period, these two strands of comparative thinking—colonial and anti-colonial—coexisted, making comparison itself a contested field where different actors fought over the meaning of India’s struggle against British rule. This paper illuminates the historical relevance of these politics of comparison by bringing to light the roles played by Rabindranath Tagore and Rash Behari Bose, focusing particularly on how their own comparative thoughts influenced, and were influenced by, different individuals and groups in the Japanese Empire, both Japanese and Korean. In a nutshell, I argue that whereas Tagore saw similarities and continuities between British and Japanese colonialism, Bose emphasized their differences. The same can be said of their views on Indian and Korean anti-colonialism. Further, and more importantly, the paper shows how Tagore’s politics of comparison informed those who opposed Japanese rule in Korea, whereas Bose’s, in contrast, was used by those who sought to justify Japanese rule.

Tagore’s Criticism of Japanese Rule in Korea

Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), a polymath intellectual and artist, was awarded a Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913 for his poem *Gitanjali*. His critical views of British colonialism were well known: he was deeply involved in early anti-British political campaigning in Bengal, including the *swadeshi* movement that followed the partition of Bengal in 1905. From around 1908, he distanced himself from nationalist politics, criticizing the violent means adopted by revolutionaries like Aurobindo Ghosh and his followers. Tagore morally supported the Gandhian independence movement, but was himself an advocate of education and social reform, particularly in the countryside, as a means to achieve true independence.¹¹

An admirer of Japanese art, Tagore visited the country five times between 1916 and 1929. He never visited Korea—Japan’s protectorate from 1905 and its colony after 1910—but his relationship with Korea and its people developed nevertheless during his visits to Japan.¹² In July 1916, during his first stay in Japan, he received a visit from Korean students and, responding to their request, presented them with a poem titled “The Song of the Defeated.” The poem was subsequently published the following year in a Korean literary journal called *Chǒng Chun* [*Youth*], together with an introduction to his major works.¹³ Again in 1929, during his final visit to Japan, he presented another poem, titled “The Lamp of the East,” which was published the same year in a Korean newspaper called *Tong-a Ilbo* [*The East Asia Daily*]. The poem read:

Korea was one of its lamp-bearers.
And that lamp is waiting to be lighted once again.
For the illumination in the East.¹⁴

“The Lamp of the East,” which portrayed Korea as a nation waiting for its rightful independence, was read enthusiastically by those Koreans who aspired to liberation from Japanese rule. Tagore showed great sympathy for the Koreans as a colonized people, and criticized Japan as being responsible for their suffering. In 1924, during his third visit to Japan, he said in a speech to

his Japanese audience, "More than once I have had opportunities to talk to the Koreans who brought their problems to me." He then warned of the advent of Korean anti-colonialism as the inevitable outcome of oppressive Japanese rule: "You must know that the day comes when the defeated have their chance for revenge; times of trouble are sure to come to all nations when the weak can bring fatal disaster to the stronger."¹⁵

In our discussion of the politics of comparison, Tagore's critique of colonialism may be called "universalist" in the sense that he did not distinguish between the two forms of colonialism in question, British and Japanese. Though he was an advocate of Asian cultural unity, giving Japan an important role to play, Tagore never embraced pan-Asianism as a political ideology. In his eyes, blind forms of anti-Westernism were potentially as dangerous as Eurocentrism: either could easily lead to unstoppable quests for power and dubious justifications for oppressing others.¹⁶ Japanese pan-Asianists capitalized on the fear of British imperialism in East Asia, but Tagore never toyed with the idea that Japan's imperial expansion was a legitimate act of self-defense on Asia's behalf. Instead he saw Japan as an imperialist aggressor in its own right. In his own words, Japan was now in a position to "be gloriously mean with impunity" in its relationship to "the weak." Japan's rise as a modern nation was accompanied by "gloat[ing] upon the feebleness of its neighbours."¹⁷ Tagore recognized in Japan similarities to England, a nation whose colonialism he had long fought against. Japan was merely "imitating the West" as it inculcated in its people "an abnormal vanity of its own superiority," whilst at the same time thriving on "the humiliation of defeated nations."¹⁸

Tagore was not interested in comparing different forms of colonialism; he did not ask which was superior to or more legitimate than others. He condemned all forms of colonialism equally, and this universalist approach meant that he could see the divergent experiences of different colonized nations as having common historical significance. Tagore used the adjective "defeated" to refer to colonized nations as a whole. As Tagore used it, this was not a term of abuse. Rather, it came as a response to criticism that had been directed at him. As he wrote, "the [Japanese] newspapers praised my utterances for their poetical qualities, while adding with a leer that it was the poetry of a defeated people. I felt they were right."¹⁹ Tagore deliberately adopted the word "defeated" whilst overturning its value. His message was that, in the age of imperialism, it was the "defeated" peoples of the world—not the victorious ones—who were closer to true humanity. It is significant that one of the two poems Tagore offered to Korea was titled "The Song of the Defeated."²⁰ It was in Korea, not in Japan, that Tagore recognized a historical condition comparable to India's. Tagore never set foot on the peninsula, but in his political imagination, Indian and Korean anti-colonialism had much in common; they targeted two forms of colonialism which were seemingly different, but in fact were equally exploitative and unjust.

Tagore's Influence on Korean Anti-colonial Sentiments

By the beginning of the 1930s, Tagore had become influential among Koreans who harbored anti-Japanese sentiments. Even before the popularization of his poetry through the publication of "The Lamp of the East" in 1929, radical literati had found much inspiration in the Indian poet's art and politics. After the first introduction of Tagore to Korean readers in 1917, a series of translations of his canonical works appeared, including *The Gardener*, *Gitanjali* and *The Crescent Moon*. These poems greatly influenced Han Yong-un (1879–1944), a Buddhist social reformer and poet. After encountering Tagore's poetry in 1917, Han Yong-un developed a literary style heavily influenced by Tagore, with his *Nim ūi ch'immuk* [*Silence of My Beloved*] (1925) often cited as a classic of modern Korean literature.²¹ Han Yong-un was famously one of the architects of the March First Movement of 1919, being responsible for the collective drafting and signing of the "Korean Declaration of Independence." Despite his three-year imprisonment following the movement, he remained a staunch opponent of Japanese rule, lamenting the defection of some of his fellow comrades-in-arms.²² Compared to the post-*swadeshi* Tagore, Han Yong-un was more active politically, frustrated by a perceived lack of politics in Tagore's literature.²³ However, there is little doubt that Tagore's influence on Han Yong-un had to do with the imagined commonality of India and Korea as colonized nations.

A member of the most prominent Brahmo family in Bengal, Tagore himself was neither a Buddhist nor a Christian. But the universal religiosity characteristic of his art and thought seems to have had a particular appeal for religious activists committed to the anti-colonial cause of Korea. Tagore influenced not only Buddhist radicals like Han Yong-un, but also certain Christians. One of these was Ham Sok-hon (1901–89), who, together with the Presbyterian social reformer Cho Man-sik, came to be known as a "Gandhi of Korea." While in Japan as a student, Ham learned through books about Tagore as well as Gandhi.²⁴ By then, he was a Christian, influenced and guided by Kanzō Uchimura, a Japanese Christian dissident whose "non-church" movement had a passionate following among anti-colonial Korean Christians like himself.²⁵ The fact that Tagore was not Christian did not bother Ham at all. As he remarked in retrospect, "With the reading of *Gitanjali* as a start, I read some books by Tagore in a row. I came to like him, thinking that the pantheism of his work would not in the least stand in the way of my religious life."²⁶

The Japanese Colonial Reaction to Tagore's Influence

Ham Sok-hon read Tagore's poetry as an enlightening voice of shared colonial victimhood, duly applicable to the Korean situation, as did many other Koreans, particularly after the publication of "The Lamp of the East." In the political imagination of Koreans who resented Japanese rule, the colonial situation in British India resembled their own. This imagination was at once cross-colonial, linking India and Korea, and cross-imperial, running across the British and Japanese empires. It was based on a specific anti-colonial politics of comparison. From the perspective of the Japanese colonial authorities—particularly those dealing with so-called "thought crimes" by Koreans—such a politics was alarming.

The censors in the colonial police were quick to notice the influence that "The Lamp of the East" was having on the anti-colonial sentiments of discontented Koreans. For example, the Censorship Division of the Police Department²⁷ banned a Korean article which was due to appear in the journal *Chosŏn Munye* [*Literature Korea*] whose author, according to the *Monthly Report* (a confidential internal document published by the Censorship Division) "leapt for joy to read 'The Lamp of the East.'" In the banned article the writer lamented the current state that Korea found itself in, and stated that there still existed a flicker of hope because, as Tagore might have put it, "the lamp that has been put off may be lighted again." The article's author, calling himself "a poor

Korean youth," had written a poem that he hoped Tagore would show his fellow Indians. The poem, whose style was reminiscent of Tagore's, read:

Is not an unbloomed flower still a flower? A flower, even if unbloomed now, may someday come into blossom. Is not a fallen flower still a flower? The remnants of a fallen flower may grow into a fruit. Oh, in the East, a flower is coming into blossom, coming into blossom.²⁸

In May of the same year, 1929, the Korean journal *Samch'ŏnri* [*Three Thousand Miles*] found one of its articles banned on the grounds that it praised Tagore for having, ten years earlier, supported Gandhi's Rowlatt *Satyagraha* (a civil disobedience movement opposing the repressive 1919 Rowlatt Act) and for having relinquished his knighthood in protest in the wake of the Amritsar Massacre. According to the censorship records, the article also mentioned Tagore's presenting to the Korean people "The Song of the Defeated" and "The Lamp of the East."²⁹

These cases of censorship exemplify how cross-border flows of anti-colonial inspiration were intercepted and responded to by the authorities. Another example was the banning in July 1934 of an article by the aforementioned Christian, Ham Sok-hon, written for *Songso Choson* [*Bible and Korea*]. The Censorship Division's *Monthly Report* reproduced the entire passage in which Ham sought—through a lengthy citation from Tagore's *Gitanjali*—to represent Korea as a "queen of suffering."³⁰ It may be said that, by quoting Tagore, Ham Sok-hon identified himself with the latter's universalist approach to the question of anti-colonial resistance, where India's suffering was in essence regarded as the same as Korea's. In Ham's own words:

Whenever we contemplate our fate, a passage in Tagore's *Gitanjali* comes to mind. Ideally, we would have a song of our own to sing, but our suffering has been so suffocating that it has prevented us from having a good one. Let us then borrow someone else's.³¹

R.B. Bose's Visit to Korea and the Pan-Asianist Politics of Comparison

Around the time that Ham Sok-hon's article quoting Tagore was banned in 1934, another Indian critic of British colonialism made his influence felt in colonial Korea, albeit in a much less obvious and very different way than Tagore. As a militant revolutionary from Bengal, Rash Behari Bose (1886–1945) had been engaged in anti-British propaganda activities in Japan for two decades.³² He had married a Japanese woman, becoming a naturalized Japanese citizen in 1923.³³ Throughout these years, Bose was supported by a range of Japanese pan-Asianists.³⁴ In early May of 1934, he visited Seoul (then called Keijo), the capital city of Korea under Japanese colonial rule. It was his long-time Japanese friend Masahiro Yasuoka (1898–1983), an extremely influential right-wing ideologue, who masterminded Bose's visit, himself joining Bose in Seoul a few days after the latter's arrival.

Bose had known Yasuoka for about twelve years, probably meeting him for the first time in 1922, when Yasuoka was still in his early twenties and Bose in his late thirties. One of the elements that nurtured these two men's friendship was undoubtedly pan-Asianism. In May 1922, Yasuoka published an essay titled "The Bright Future of Colonial Policy in the East," in which he argued that the various movements across the globe against Western colonialism and racism—whether the Indian movement for independence, the nationalist movement in Egypt or the Black republican movement in the United States—shared a profound philosophical foundation.³⁵ In the early years of their acquaintance, Bose was a member of "The Society for Asian Culture" (*Ajiabunkakyōkai*), of which the young Yasuoka was academic chief. This organization had a pan-Asianist orientation. While the positions of its "councilors" were occupied by influential Japanese, including some prominent Home Ministry bureaucrats like Kiyoshi Ikeda, most of the "managing directors" were Asians of non-Japanese origin then living in Japan, including Filipinos and Indians. R.B. Bose was one of these "managing directors."³⁶ From 1927, Bose taught Indian affairs as a regular lecturer at Yasuoka's private educational institution, the "Golden Pheasant Academy," whose aim was to inculcate in current and future leaders of Japanese society his conservative ethos based on classical Chinese teachings.³⁷

By the time of his visit to Seoul in 1934, Yasuoka had managed to establish his influence inside the governor-general's office in Korea, as some of his most faithful followers had been stationed there as high-level administrators. The most important of these men under Yasuoka's influence was Kiyoshi Ikeda, who had become chief of the Police Department in Korea, and it was Ikeda who invited Yasuoka and his Indian friend to Seoul.³⁸ During their one-week stay, this odd couple—a Japanese imperialist and an Indian anti-British militant—would follow a busy schedule, attending numerous welcome events hosted in their honor by influential officials of the Japanese colonial government, including the governor-general himself.³⁹

The fact that R.B. Bose was such a welcome figure, as described above, had to do with a form of politics of comparison that was gradually coming into vogue among Japanese imperialists during the inter-war period. Among the rulers of the Japanese colonial empire were men who no longer saw the British Empire as an example to emulate. By the time of Bose's Korean visit in 1934, the Anglo-Japanese relationship had deteriorated considerably. Particularly after the Manchurian Incident (1931) and the subsequent withdrawal of Japan from the League of Nations (1933), Anglophobia quickly grew from a sentiment expressed by a few eccentrics to an ideology that was a crucial ingredient of Japan's official imperial policies.⁴⁰ In this historical context, the pan-Asianist perspective on British colonialism helped Japanese rulers to justify their own colonialism—a perspective that emphasized the supposed *difference* between British and Japanese colonialism. Kazushige Ugaki, the governor-general of Korea at the time of Bose's visit, was himself in the grip of the pan-Asianist frame of comparison.⁴¹ He appreciated Bose's Anglophobia as providing good evidence for comparison, stating in a speech several months after Bose left Seoul:

An Indian patriot who came to Korea early this summer [i.e. R.B. Bose] said that, though Britain has ruled India for more than one hundred years by now, the literacy rate today amounts to no more than 10.8 percent, and that, in comparison, Korea is extremely fortunate in terms of education.⁴²

In the context of a pan-Asianist defense of Japanese colonialism, nothing was more effective than pointing out the harm that British colonialism inflicted upon Asia. And such a comparative argument possessed particularly strong ideological force when it came from an "Indian patriot" like R.B. Bose. For rulers like Ugaki with pan-Asianist inclinations, Bose's stance on the question of imperialism—at once both pro-Japanese and anti-British—provided fertile ideological ground for legitimating Japan's

colonization of Asian countries.

Bose's Impact on "Pro-Japanese" Koreans

For Japanese practitioners of the politics of comparison, the usefulness of R.B. Bose for justifying their own imperialism in Korea was unquestionable. Even more useful for them was Bose's potential impact upon the people of Korea. Nothing would ensure imperial stability more than for the colonized peoples of the Japanese Empire to voluntarily support Japanese rule in the name of "Asian" unity against British colonialism. In fact, this seems to be exactly what Masahiro Yasuoka had in mind when he decided to bring Bose to Korea. By the time of their visit to Seoul, Yasuoka had been trying for three years to win the trust of several members of the Korean elite who had shown pro-Japanese tendencies. Since October 1931, many of these Koreans had been reached through Kiyoshi Ikeda, who created a selective social circle called the "Saturday Club" to foster friendship and communication between Korean elites and top Japanese officials of the colonial state, including the chiefs of the Home Affairs Department, the General Staff of the Army of Korea and Ikeda himself, who was the chief of police.⁴³

After June 1932, the ties between Yasuoka's circle and these "pro-Japanese" Koreans became even stronger when Yasuoka's social campaign, the "National Mainstay Movement" (*kokukai undō*), reached Korea. In fact, this organization's Seoul branch turned out to be its liveliest.⁴⁴ Yasuoka himself visited Seoul for the inauguration of the branch on 24 June 1932, meeting these supportive Koreans in person. The latter included prominent businessmen such as Han Sang-yong and Park Young-chol, journalists such as Park Sok-kyun and Cho'e Nam-son and intellectuals such as Yun Chi-Ho and Cho'e Rin.⁴⁵ Most were members of the Saturday Club. The National Mainstay Movement, which would last for two years, was a reactionary movement whose proclaimed aim was to reform Japanese society, which in Yasuoka's eyes had, since the Great War, been corrupted by moral decadence, political nihilism and left-wing extremism. The campaign was a spin-off of Yasuoka's endeavors through the Golden Pheasant Academy, in which R.B. Bose had been involved since its founding. It was within the framework of this campaign that Bose's visit to Korea and his meetings with "pro-Japanese" Koreans took place in May 1934.

Among the Koreans Yasuoka sought to win over, the two intellectuals—Yun Chi-Ho and Cho'e Rin—were regarded as especially important. Yun Chi-ho (1865–1945) was an influential Christian intellectual who had been educated in Japan and the United States. Yun took a Social Darwinist perspective on the question of historical progress, and argued that Korea's brightest future lay in becoming a faithful element of the empire of its more modernized neighbour, Japan.⁴⁶ Cho'e Rin (1878–1958) was one of the leaders of the March First Movement but had long since defected to the Japanese side, offering his political and ideological support to the colonizing Japanese. Yasuoka's strategy was to form close ties with these reactionary elites and, through their influence in Korean society, to propagate his pan-Asianist ideology. There is no doubt that his visit in 1934 had a great deal to do with this ideological work. In his diary, Yun Chi-ho noted how seriously pan-Asianism was discussed at one of the welcome parties he attended:

[The] Pan-Asian movement is more than an ideal or dream. It is a policy [in] which all leaders in Japan are seriously engaged of persuading the various races and nations of Eastern Asia to unite in a grand racial block under the hegemony of Japan.⁴⁷

In Masahiro Yasuoka's thinking, such a Japanocentric vision of intra-racial unity among Asians would be better received by Koreans if it were voiced by an Indian, rather than by a Japanese ideologue like himself.⁴⁸ Bose seems to have understood Yasuoka's intentions well enough, and during and after his stay in Seoul, he met with some Koreans who were under Yasuoka's influence, including Yun Chi-ho and Cho'e Rin. Bose met Yun Chi-ho on several occasions in Seoul. One day, he was visited by Yun at his hotel, where he told Yun that Koreans should accept Japanese rule as a historical given and try to make the best of things under that situation.⁴⁹ For Korean elites like Yun, who were scornful of Korean efforts to attain independence and were looking for ways to win concessions through collaboration with the colonial government, Bose's advice must have come as encouragement.

Bose's influence on Yun Chi-ho can also be seen in several of the latter's diary entries in late June of the same year. There we find Yun recording his impressions of the book *Shikkoku no Indo*, which was a Japanese version of *India in Bondage: Her right to freedom* (1929) by Jabez T. Sunderland. Bose was one of the translators of the book, though Yun seems to have mistaken him for its actual author. In any case, Yun copied several passages from the book describing the exploitative and discriminatory nature of British rule in India, believing that they had been penned by Bose.⁵⁰ Given Bose's support for Japanese pan-Asianists like Yasuoka, Yun's endorsement of Bose may be taken as indicating his readiness to adopt the Japanocentric pan-Asianist frame of comparison. This was exactly the kind of effect that Yasuoka hoped would result from Bose's visit to Seoul.

Bose's advice to Cho'e Rin was even more explicit in encouraging Koreans to join forces with Japan's anti-British movement. After his visit to Korea in May, Bose met Cho'e Rin in Japan, probably sometime during the latter's visit to Yasuoka in June and July of the same year. According to Bose's Japanese father-in-law, Aizō Sōma, during their meeting Bose remarked to Cho'e Rin:

It is fundamentally wrong to see the two independence movements, one in India and the other in Korea, as standing on common ground. India has suffered White exploitation and oppression. It must throw out the White race in order to become independent. But the Korean situation is different. Japan has governed and protected Korea in order to prevent the White race from exploiting it.⁵¹

Here, Bose presented a classic example of how one colonialism could be justified as legitimate based on a comparison with another. Such a justification acquired a sharper edge when it came from the mouth of Bose, an Indian in exile whose very existence as a victim of British colonialism spoke volumes about the threat posed by British colonialism to Asians as a whole.

It is not easy to gauge the extent to which Bose managed to directly influence the future actions of Korean collaborators, but it is interesting to see that Yun Chi-ho, for instance, became a representative of the "Anti-British Association" and was deeply involved in a series of anti-British demonstrations that took place in Korea in 1939 at the initiative and guidance of the colonial

government-controlled Japanese press.⁵² Many of the Koreans Bose met in 1934—almost all of whom are generally regarded today as having been “pro-Japanese”—were to become deeply involved in Japanese imperialist efforts to mobilize colonized Koreans to support what the Japanese called the “Great East Asia War,” a war against Euro-American empires, including Britain.⁵³ Anglophobia was central to the pan-Asianist justification for Japan entering the war, which went on to claim millions of Asian lives in China and elsewhere.

R.B. Bose himself continued, with increasing vigor, to speak for Japan’s wartime imperialism. This political commitment alienated him not only from the mainstream of Indian nationalism represented by Gandhi and Nehru but also from his fellow Indians in exile in Japan, particularly Ananda Mohan Sahay and Raja Mahendra Pratap, who turned against Japan’s imperialism once they came to understand its aggressive nature.⁵⁴ For Tagore, Bose’s stance was just too different from his own. In 1937, Tagore rejected Bose’s request that he give his approval to the latter’s efforts to coordinate Japan’s imperialism with India’s struggle against Britain. In a letter to Bose, Tagore described Bose’s project in Japan as something he found impossible to endorse, saying, “I wish you had asked for my cooperation in a cause against which my spirit did not protest.” Tagore conceded that he himself had once looked to Japan as a spring of hope “in safeguarding the culture of the East against alien interests.” However, he continued, “Japan has not taken long to betray that rising hope,” becoming “itself a worse menace to the defenceless peoples of the East.”⁵⁵

Conclusion

In acknowledging and discussing the differences between Rabindranath Tagore and Rash Behari Bose in terms of their impact in Japan and Korea, we should not forget the fundamental fact that both men were from Bengal, and that because of this they shared a particular intellectual and political tradition originating in that part of colonial India. As Mark Frost has shown, Bengal in the time of Tagore and Bose was not only a centre for anti-British activities, it was also a key transnational hub of pan-Asianist ideas, wherein the international rise of Japan held a special place. Despite their differences, both Tagore and Bose were deeply involved with Japan *and* with pan-Asianism simultaneously. At the beginning of the century, Japan attracted much attention from Bengali literati, not least because of the concept of “Asia is One,” advocated by Kakuzō Okakura, a Japanese curator and art historian. Tagore had met Okakura in Calcutta in 1902 and had been deeply impressed by what can be regarded as an early Japanese expression of pan-Asianism. Thus it was not as though Tagore was critical of Japan or its pan-Asianism from the beginning. Tagore was also among those Bengali nationalists who celebrated Japan’s victory over Russia in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, missing the fact that that war had been nothing but a colonial war fought over Korea. In this period, Tagore was active in nationalist protests against the “White” domination of other nations by Britain, and his view of Japan—a rising “non-White” power—lacked the complexities that characterized his later thinking. It was plagued by an indifference to Japan’s increasingly aggressive imperialism in East Asia—an imperialism which, ironically, had been backed by Britain.⁵⁶ At this time, Tagore’s stance toward the Japanese Empire was probably not very different from that of R.B. Bose in later years. It was over the course of the inter-war years that the differences between the two Bengalis became increasingly pronounced. As we have seen above, while Tagore became critical of Japanese colonialism, Bose defended it. And while Tagore sympathized with colonized Koreans, Bose deepened his collaboration with Japanese rulers in Korea.

It is interesting to observe that Tagore, who increasingly moved away from nationalism as a means of anti-colonial protest in India, grew sympathetic towards the nationalist cause of Koreans, whereas R.B. Bose came to dismiss the Korean nationalist cause despite his background as an Indian nationalist. This essay has suggested that one way to untangle this seeming paradox is to examine how these men’s ideas and politics were developed from, and influenced by, acts of comparison. In Korea under Japanese rule, knowledge about the Indian struggle against British colonialism was inevitably both comparative and contested. Japanese and Koreans of divergent political persuasions found themselves competing to explain what India’s struggle meant for their own causes.

As shown above, both Tagore and Bose had a role to play in the proliferation of such comparative knowledge. Those who supported Japanese rule over Korea—mostly Japanese, but also Korean elites who chose to collaborate with Japan—belittled the Korean struggle as nothing more than a misguided agitation, and increasingly distanced themselves from the kind of universal anti-colonialism advocated by Tagore. Tagore’s comparative thinking was inconveniently different from theirs, which postulated a radical difference between Japanese colonialism and its British counterpart. For these people, it was the sort of Anglophobia embodied by Bose that informed their own comparative imagination. In tune with Bose, they argued that Koreans should not fight against Japan, but fight *with Japan* against Britain, which they should view as the common enemy of Asian peoples. In contrast, those who criticized Japanese rule applied a different comparison. Following Tagore, they made no distinction between Japanese and British colonialism, or between Indian and Korean anti-colonialism. For these people, India’s sufferings were those of Korea, and both nations shared independence as their common hope for the future.

Finally, a few closing comments are in order in regard to Ann Laura Stoler’s idea of the “politics of comparison,” which has served as a key concept throughout this essay. First, by foregrounding Japanese rule in Korea and its political use of Anglophobia, I have shown how one empire used its knowledge about another empire’s colonialism in order to justify and gain support for its own colonialism. If we follow Stoler and claim that all empires practiced comparison in one way or another, Japan in Korea in the early 1930s was certainly a case in point. Japanese rulers not only disseminated negative information about British rule in India, but tried to make it sound more convincing by having it voiced by an Indian nationalist. Second, I have applied Stoler’s concept to a field of historical experience she has rarely taken up herself: the ideas and politics of those who *opposed* colonialism. This paper has described how a well-known Indian critic of British colonialism emerged as a transnational icon of anti-imperialism among anti-Japanese circles in colonial Korea. In so doing, it has provided an example of how one colonized people circulated knowledge about the anti-colonial struggles of another in ways that articulated and justified their own anti-colonial cause. It seems clear that such *anti-colonial* “politics of comparison” were far more difficult to practice than their *colonial* counterpart; one thing that the case of Korea demonstrates is how inter-imperial flows of anti-colonial ideologies could be made a target of suppression by such means as colonial censorship. But this does not mean that historians should hesitate to

undertake further study of anti-colonial comparison. On the contrary, the very risks faced by those who employ this brand of comparative knowledge make it a worthwhile research topic. However limited its power to influence events may have been, investigation of the use of comparison by anti-colonial intellectuals and activists adds richness and complexity to our understanding of the politics behind the production and circulation of comparative knowledge on colonialism.

For correspondence: smizutan@mail.doshisha.ac.jp.

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Notes

1. Antony Best, *British Intelligence and the Japanese Challenge in Asia, 1914-1941* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 17-8.
2. Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-determination and the international origins of anticolonial nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
3. I borrow the concept of “political imagination” from Frederick Cooper. See Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, knowledge, history* (Berkeley, CA and London: University of California Press, 2005).
4. Rash Behari Bose should not be confused with his more famous namesake, Subhas Chandra Bose. To avoid confusion, he will be referred to as “R.B. Bose” throughout this essay.
5. “British and Japanese Colonial Administration,” *The Seoul Press*, 18 July 1919. For a general discussion of the British Foreign Office’s reaction to the Japanese massacre of Korean civilians during the movement, see Ku Dae-yeol, *Korea under Colonialism: The March First Movement and Anglo-Japanese relations* (Seoul: Seoul Computer Press, 1985), 133-68.
6. Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of world order in pan-Islamic and pan-Asian thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 156-59.
7. Uma Mukherjee, *Two Great Indian Revolutionaries: Rash Behari Bose and Jyotindra Nath Mukherjee, with a supplementary essay on Surya Sen and Indian Republican Army’s Chittagong Revolution, 1930-1941* (Kolkata: Dey’s Publishing, 2004 [1966]), 119-23.
8. Satoshi Mizutani, “Singminji indoūi yōngō kyōyuk’ kwa <pigyo chongch’i>” (“English Education in Colonial India and the ‘Politics of Comparison’”), trans. Ri Myōng-Hak, (eds.) Ryūta Itagaki and Chōng Byōng uk, *Singminjiranūn Murūm* (Seoul: Somyōng ch’ulp’an, 2014), 393-453.
9. Ann Laura Stoler, “Tense and Tender Ties: The politics of comparison in North American history and (post) colonial studies,” in *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of intimacy in North American history*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), 23-67; Carole McGranahan and Ann Laura Stoler, “Refiguring Imperial Terrains” in *Imperial Formations*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler, Carol McGranahan and Peter C. Perdue (Santa Fe, N.M.: School of American Research Press, 2007), 3-47.
10. For such anti-colonial politics of comparison in contexts other than East Asia, see for instance Elleke Boehmer, *Empire, the National, and the Postcolonial, 1890-1920: Resistance in interaction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Michael G. Malouf, *Translating Solidarities: Irish nationalism and Caribbean poetics* (Charlottesville, Va.: University of Virginia Press, 2009); and Michael Silvestri, *Ireland and India: Nationalism, empire, and memory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
11. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, *Rabindranath Tagore: An interpretation* (New Delhi: Penguin [Viking], 2011), 90-94.
12. For a brief discussion of Tagore’s exchanges with Koreans in Japan during these years, see Hideaki Takagi, “Tagore to chōsen,” *Kikan sanzenri* 7 (1976): 178-82. On the relationship between Tagore and Korea more generally, see Narendra M. Pankaj, “Tagore and Korea,” *Asia Prashant* 2 (1995): 26-39, 90-98.
13. Chin Han-mun, “Indoūi segyechōk taesin,” *Chōng Chun* 11 (1917): 99.
14. *Tong-a Ilbo*, 2 April 1929. The English original is available in Ramesh Sharma, “New Trends in Modern Literature of East Asian Countries with Special Reference to Modern Korean Poetry,” *East Asian Literatures: An interface with India*, ed. P.A. George (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 2006), 96-97.
15. Rabindranath Tagore, “On Oriental Culture and Japan’s Mission,” R. Tagore, *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: Lectures, addresses*, vol. 7 (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 2007), 830.
16. Rabindranath Tagore, “Nationalism in Japan,” in R. Tagore, *Nationalism* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2009 [1917]), 1-32, esp. 27-8.
17. Rabindranath Tagore, “Nationalism in the West,” in Tagore, *Nationalism*, 33-63, quote at 58.
18. Tagore, “Nationalism in Japan,” 22-3.
19. Tagore, “Nationalism in the West,” 58; on Japanese critics of Tagore, see Stephen Hay, *Asian Ideas of East and West: Tagore and his critics in Japan, China and India* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1970), 82-123.
20. It is likely that Tagore based this poem on a passage in the English version of *Gitanjali*.
21. Tagore’s influence on Han Yong-un has been discussed by many scholars. See, for example, Pankaj, “Tagore and Korea,” 34-38; Yu Beongcheon, *Han Yong-un and Yi Kwang-su: Two pioneers of modern Korean literature* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1992), 54-59.
22. Among these nationalist Koreans who later shifted their political allegiance was the famous poet, historian, and journalist, Cho’e Nam-son. Ironically, Cho’e was the very person who had asked Tagore in 1916, via Chin Han-mun, to write a poem for his journal. Chin Han-mun, a student who met Tagore in Japan and wrote an introductory article for Tagore’s poem published in 1917, also later converted and became a “pro-Japanese” journalist. As Chin moved away from Tagore’s critical stance towards Japanese colonialism, he became a close friend of R.B. Bose. For Chin’s friendship with Bose, see Takeshi Nakajima, *Bose of Nakamura: An Indian revolutionary in Japan*, trans. Prem Motwani (New Delhi: Promilla and Co., 2009), 203-4.
23. Beongcheon, *Han Yong-un and Yi Kwang-su*, 57.
24. During the inter-war period, Gandhi and the independence movement he led in India became widely known among Koreans. For example, during

1923-24, the Korean press published a number of articles on Gandhi's *swadeshi* as a possible model for the Korean independence movement. Michael Robinson, *Korea's Twentieth-Century Odyssey* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 63-64.

25. John F. Howes, *Japan's Modern Prophet: Uchimura Kanzo, 1861-1930* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2005), 322-24; for Uchimura's influence over the non-church movement in Korea, see Chung Jun Ki, *Social Criticism of Uchimura Kanzo and Kim Kyo-Shin* (Seoul: UBF Press, 1988).

26. Ham Sok-hon, *Shinumade konoayumi de*, trans. Katsuji Kosugi (Tokyo: Shinkyōshuppansha, 1974), 205.

27. For the institutional structure of Japanese colonial censorship in Korea, see Michael Robinson, "Colonial Publication Policy and the Korean Nationalist Movement," in *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1885-1945*, ed. R. H. Myers and M. R. Peattie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 312-43.

28. *Chōsen shuppan keisatsu geppo* [abbreviated hereafter as CSKG] 8 (1929): 33.

29. CSKG 9 (1929): 20

30. CSKG 71 (1934): 15-16. The passage quoted by Ham Sok-hon is found in *Gitanjali: A collection of prose translations made by the author from the original Bengali* (New York: Scribner Poetry, 1997 [1913]), 57. This censored passage was restored in the book Ham published following Korea's independence and is now available in English in its abridged translation. See Ham Sok-hon, *Queen of Suffering: A spiritual history of Korea*, trans. E. Sang Yu (London: Friends World Committee for Consultation, 1985), 28-29.

31. This part is omitted in the abridged English translation of Ham's book (see the endnote immediately above this one). To reproduce it, I used the Japanese translation. Ham Sok-hon, *Kunan no kankokuminshūshi: imi kara mita kankokurekishi*, trans. Kim Hak-hyon (Tokyo: Shinkyōshuppansha, 1980), 82-83.

32. For his days before leaving for Japan, see Mukherjee, *Two Great Indian Revolutionaries*, 111-50.

33. It was Fumio Goto who, as the head of the Police Department, helped Rash Behari Bose become naturalized—a measure that would prove important, shielding Bose from the threat of British intelligence and allowing him to openly continue his anti-British activities in Japan. R.B. Bose, *Indo no sakebi* (Tokyo: Sankyōshoin, 1938), 335. Along with Kiyoshi Ikeda, Goto was one of the most important supporters of Masahiro Yasuoka (see below on Yasuoka).

34. For a brief summary of Bose's relationship with Japanese pan-Asianist ideology, see Eri Hotta, "Rash Behari Bose: The Indian independence movement in Japan," in *Pan-Asianism: A documentary history, volume 1: 1850-1920*, ed. S. Saaler and C.W. A. Szpilman (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2011), 231-40; Eri Hotta, *Pan-Asianism and Japan's War 1931-1945* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 59-62.

35. Masahiro Yasuoka, "Tōyoshokuminseisaku no kōmyō," *Tōyō* (May 1922): 43.

36. Toshiro Kamei, *Kinkeigakuin no kōkei* (Tokyo: Meitokushuppansha, 2003), 71-72.

37. Kamei, *Kinkeigakuin no kōkei*, 60-61. For an account of Yasuoka as a private scholar-advisor to officials and business leaders, see Roger H. Brown, "Shepherds of the People: Yasuoka Masahiro and the New Bureaucrats in early Showa Japan," *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 35 (2009): 285-319.

38. It is likely that Ikeda knew R.B. Bose from quite early on because, along with Fumio Goto, he had been a member of the Society for Asian Culture.

39. These events frequently appear in Yun Chi-ho's diary entries between 8 and 15 May 1934. See Yun Chi-ho, *Yun Chi-ho's Diary*, vol. 10. Yun's diary can be read online on the homepage of the National Institute of Korean History (<http://www.history.go.kr/> [accessed 12 January 2014]).

40. Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia*, 161-89.

41. Masataka Matsuura, *Dai Tōa Sensō wa naze okita no ka: han Ajia shugi no seiji keizaishi* (Nagoya-shi: Nagoya Daigaku Shuppankai, 2010), 201-11.

42. Kazunari Ugaki, *Chōsen no shorai: Ugaki sōtoku no enjutsu* (Chōsenōtokufu, 1934).

43. The Saturday Club was established on 3 October 1931, when Ikeda invited to dinner a group of Koreans along with some of the highest ranking Japanese officials of the Japanese colonial state. It met once a month on a Saturday. Yun Chi-ho, *Yun Chi-ho's Diary*, vol. 9, 3 October 1931.

44. For an account of the historical unfolding of the National Mainstay movement both in Japan and Korea, see Makoto Kawashima, "Kokuikairon: kokuikai to shinkanryō," *Nihonshikenkyū* 360 (1992): 1-32.

45. Masaatsu Yasuoka, "Chōsen yori kaerite," *Kokuī* 3 (1932): 9; Gyūnosuke Kisanuki, "Chōsenkokuikantsūshin," *Kokuī* 3 (1932): 15. The second gathering of the Korean branch of the National Mainstay Society was held in May 1933, one year before Bose's visit. See Gyūnosuke Kisanuki, "Chōsendayori," *Kokuī* 13 (1933): 14-15; see also Jyōjiro Sunahara, "Mansenshisatsushokan," *Kokuī* 14 (1933): 11-12.

46. For the thought and politics of Yun, see Yan Hyonhe, *Yun chiho to kimu kyoshin: sono shinnichi to kōnichi no ronri* (Tokyo: Shinkyō shuppansha, 1996).

47. *Yun Chi-ho's Diary*, vol.10, 10 May 1934.

48. For a concise account of Yasuoka as a pan-Asianist ideologue, see Roger H. Brown, "Yasuoka Masahiro: 'Education for Japanese Capable of Being leaders of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere,' 1942," in *Pan-Asianism: A Documentary History, Volume 2: 1920-Present*, ed. S. Saaler & C.W. A. Szpilman (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2011), 263-70.

49. *Yun Chi-ho's Diary*, vol. 10, 14 May 1934.

50. *Yun Chi-ho's Diary*, vol. 10, June 1934.

51. Quoted in Aizō Sōma and Kokko Sōma, *Ajia no mezame: indoshishi Behari Bose to nihon* (Tokyo: Tozaibunmeisha, 1953), 54-55. The quote was translated from Japanese by the author.

52. Matsuura, *Dai Tōa Sensō wa naze okita no ka*, 750.

53. In a book which portrays R.B. Bose as a tragic hero who agonized between Japan's anti-West stance and its imperialism, Takeshi Nakajima argues that, because Bose himself was originally from a colonized nation, it was natural for him to be critical of the Japanese government for its colonization of Korea, and that, for the same reason, he made himself popular among Koreans during his visit. See Nakajima, *Bose of Nakamura*, 201. As this essay argues, however, a careful look at relevant archives shows that such a speculation does not match historical evidence. The problem for Nakajima is that he makes his claims without asking exactly what kind of Koreans Bose met with and what sort of relationship these Koreans had with the Japanese government. Unlike Tagore, Bose was not in the least influential among anti-imperialist Koreans, and what few Korean acquaintances he had were those who were already under the influence of the colonial state, which used Korean collaborators for imperial ends.

54. Hotta, *Pan-Asianism and Japan's War*, 61-62.

55. R. Tagore, "In Response to Rasbehari Bose's Appeal," in *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Vol. 8: Miscellaneous writings*, R. Tagore (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors Private Limited, 2007), 1121-22.

56. For the relationship between the Bengal intellectual tradition represented by Tagore and pan-Asianism in the early twentieth century, see Mark R. Frost, "That Great Ocean of Idealism: The Tagore circle and the idea of Asia, 1900-1920," in *Indian Ocean Studies: Cultural, social and political perspectives*, ed. Ashraf Jamal and Shanty Moorthy (New York: Routledge, 2009), 251-79.

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