The Opening of Korea until 1876

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My contribution deals from the standpoint of international relations about the opening of Korea, which was ended by the Treaty of Kanghwa from February 1876, although Korea even since then extremely hesitated to adjust itself to the principles of modern diplomatic relations and of modern times. The most important actor was Japan, so I am focused primarily on his policy.

For many centuries, the Far Eastern countries had only limited contacts with the outside world. Korea, since 1636 a vassal state of the Manchus, was secluded even more than China or Japan, hence the nickname “the Hermit Kingdom”. Its only diplomatic relations with foreign countries represented regular tributary deputations to Beijing⁴ and similar deputations from the Japanese principality of Tsushima to Pusan.² The Koreans admired Chinese culture and considered themselves to be custodians of classical Chinese traditions, which were in China proper overrun by the “barbarian” Manchus. In contrary, they distrusted Japan, for Japanese pirates, called wakō, had for centuries harassed Korean ports³ and Hideyoshi’s invasion of 1592–1598 almost had succeeded in destroying Korea’s independence. The Japanese were considered to be a semi-barbarous nation. Pusan was the only port in Korea opened to merchants from Tsushima, and there existed a Japanese colony, strictly supervised by Korean officials. No other people

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¹ Mutual relations were conducted through Boards of Rites at both courts. See Martina DEUCHLER, Confucian Gentlemen and Barbarian Envoys. The Opening of Korea, 1875–1885, Seattle, Washington 1983, pp. 2–3.
² The House of Sō from the domain of Tsushima was of course subjugated to the Shōgun and at the same time was a vassal of Korea. Tsushima even received a “pension” in the form of foodstuffs, and followed instructions form Korea. The vassalage of Tsushima was not known in Japan until the Meiji Restoration. See Hilary CONROY, The Japanese Seizure of Korea: 1868–1910. A Study of Realism and Idealism in International Relations, Philadelphia 1960, p. 25.
³ The term wakō means “Japanese pirate”, but among them were also Chinese and Korean adventurers.
than Chinese and Japanese subjects were allowed to enter Korea; and all other nations were considered to be “barbarians” worth of contempt. 4

Since the end of the XVIIIth century, the Western powers were trying to break the isolation of the Far Eastern countries, which were unwilling to understand the changing circumstances. The Qing Empire suffered serious defeats in the Opium Wars, the Japanese were forced to open the country in 1854. In 1860, the Russian Empire annexed Chinese territory on the right bank of the Amur, thus established a common border with Korea, and the following year, Russian troops landed on the island of Tsushima, still a Korean vassal principality. 5 The Korean seclusion policy, however, remained unchanged. 6 Even the French attack on the Chinese vassal state of Annam, which took place in 1858, did not compel the Korean rulers to change their attitude. The then Korean King, Kojong, was still a child, and during his infancy ruled his father, Táwongun (this title means “Prince-Regent”, his personal name was Yi Ha-ung). 7 Táwongun was an ardent xenophobe, inimical to opening the country to any foreign influence. Another important group was the Min family, from which came Kojong’s wife, Queen Min. 8 Táwongun’s and Min factions were constantly clashing, the court was thus unstable and the country lacked firm leadership.

Similar conditions could be found in Japan. In 1853–1854, Commodore Matthew G. Perry opened the country and soon many Western powers followed his example. Japan was divided among more than 250 daimyos of unequal strength, which were subjugated to the Tokugawa Shoguns. The Emperor, residing in Kyoto, ruled only formally. However, in consequence of the opening of Japan, the authority of the Shogun, hence based on his capability to protect Japan from foreign influences, began to diminish. After the failure to expel the foreigners by strength, the dissatisfied principalities

4 Korea strictly limited foreign trade with both China and Japan. On the land border between China and Korea, there existed some trade (and smuggling). Trade with Japan via Pusan was even more restricted and only ships owning permission of the house of Sô could conduct it.


6 In 1856, the French contemplated joint occupying of Korea together with the United States in order to put pressure on China. Nevertheless, this plan did not materialize. See ibid., p. 418.

7 King Ch’oljong died without a son in 1863, but Kojong assumed his duties only eleven years later. His father did not become a new King, because he came from the same generation as Ch’oljong and, accordingly to Confucian traditions, a new ruler must be from the next generation. Moreover, the new King was chosen from the entire ruling House of Yi.

from the Southwest of Japan, inimical to the Tokugawa regime, allied with the Imperial Court, and their modernized armies in early 1868 defeated the Shogun. The Meiji Restoration was the most brilliant achievement of the Japanese, and soon bore its fruit.

Korean contacts with Western countries were rare, but tense. The Russians, who after the Sino-Japanese war replaced China as the main challenger of Japanese ambitions, limited in 1860's their actions on surveying Korean littoral waters. The Korean court was much more afraid of Christian subversion, represented by illegal preaching of Catholic missionaries, who crossed the border with China.\(^9\) France protected the catholic missions in China, and Täwongun for some time hoped to seek French assistance in case of a Russian attack. But in March 1866, when it became evident, that Russian aggression was unlikely, he changed his stance and massacred nine missionaries and their converts (three other priests fled the country).\(^10\) Thus he gave to the French a pretext to a punitive expedition. In June, 1866, the American schooner *Surprise* wrecked on the Korean coast. The castaways were *treated with civility and courtesy*, and sent to China via land trade routes.\(^11\) In contrary, one month later, the American ship *General Sherman* was, after some provocations, attacked and destroyed by the Koreans while sailing up the river Tädong to Pyongyang.\(^12\) The different fate of both ships indicates, that the Koreans were not inimical to all foreigners, they just wished to live peacefully in isolation.

Täwongun was confident about the strength of the Korean army. The French Chargé d'Affaires in Beijing, Bellonet, had a different opinion. In response on the massacres of Christians, he, without instructions from

\(^{9}\) Christianity was prohibited and persecuted also in Japan, and this ban has been cancelled only after the Meiji Restoration, and even then at first only non-officially. In Annam, which was a vassal country of the Manchu Dynasty, persecutions of Christians provoked in 1858 a French intervention, which resulted in cessation of Cochinchina to France, and it is unlikely, that Täwongun didn’t know about this.


\(^{12}\) Scholars differ in their description of the affair. Yur-Bok LEE, Wayne PATTERSON, (eds.), *One Hundred Years of Korean-American Relations, 1882–1982*, The University of Alabama Press. place not given, 1986, p. 49f claim, that a British preacher and interpreter was present, at that the ship-owner W. B. Preston was willing to conclude a treaty with Korean government. The ship landed, the preacher preached, and the crew took captive a local official. Subsequently local villagers attacked and destroyed the ship. In contrary, MORSE, p. 3 states, that the Americans took part on local riots, and that only 8 were killed, the rest imprisoned. DENNETT, note on p. 417 claims, that the ship entered the mouth of Tädong during a freshet, and then the ship got stuck, when water fell.
Paris, informed the Zongli Yamen,\(^\text{13}\) that "the French were a people who loved war," and threatened, that France was able to turn Korea in a protectorate under Christian rule, or even to annex the country.\(^\text{14}\) Prince Kong, the head of the Zongli Yamen, tried to evade the responsibility for murders of Christians, and questioned Chinese suzerainty over Korea. Moreover, Bellonet sent Rear Admiral Roze to punish Korea. Roze departed from Chinese Qifu, took on boards of his seven ships part of the French garrison in Yokohama, and with together 600 soldiers he in October 1866 landed on the island of Kanghwa, one of the cornerstones of Korean defence. The island guarded the mouth of the river Han, on which lays Seoul. French troops conquered the island, inflicted heavy casualties on the Koreans, and blocked the water-route to Seoul. Nevertheless, Tawongun did not react to the French attempts to negotiate, and when in November Roze departed, the Koreans considered it a great victory of their country.

Roze heard about the General Sherman and informed the American government. It was generally believed, that the French would return the next year with more formidable forces, the British wanted to join, and the American Envoy in China asked his government to send naval forces, which could protect Korea from the exaggerated French demands. However, France, shaken by the Mexican fiasco, changed his stance, cancelled further actions against Korea, and announced a "great victory", too. Bellonet was recalled to Stockholm.\(^\text{15}\) The Americans alone sent to Korea in January 1867 the corvette Wachusett and in March 1868 the frigate Shenandoah to investigate the fate of the General Sherman and save survivors – if there were any –, but their mission did not succeed and the fate of the ship remained uncertain.

The most curious attempt to open Korea occurred in spring 1868. An American named Jenkins, the Prussian subject Oppert and the French priest Ferron hired in Shanghai the steamer China, secretly sailed to Korea and tried to open the ancient tombs of the Korean kings at Kanghwa. They hoped to force the Korean rulers to open the country by seizing remnants and jewels of their ancestors. Their bizarre attempt failed, and after their return to Shanghai, their leader Jenkins was tried at a consular court, but for lack of evidences, liberated.\(^\text{16}\)

\(^{13}\) The Zongli Yamen was de facto Chinese Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

\(^{14}\) DENNETT, p. 417f.

\(^{15}\) MORSE, pp. 2–3; DENNETT, pp. 417–419.

\(^{16}\) MORSE, p. 3.
The first Western attempts to open Korea were unsuccessful, due to Täwongun's obscurantism. We cannot overestimate his temporal willingness to seek French assistance against Russia. For millenniums, it was a customary habit of the Far Eastern countries to use one "barbarian" against the others. The slaughtering of Christians in 1866 marked rather inflexibility than foolishness. For centuries, the Far Eastern countries were quite successfully in suppressing Christianity, moreover, Korea in 1832 without any unfavourable consequences persecuted local Christians. Only the last decades had shown, that even China was too weak to resist demands of the foreigners. Even then, many Chinese, who had much more experiences with foreign might, were convinced, that the Chinese might was sufficient and that the Chinese did not need to alter their customs. Occasional punitive expeditions of relatively small foreign detachments persuaded Täwongun, that the Korean defence was sufficient.

In contrary to the Western powers, Japan was much more interested in the fate of Korea. The Hermit Kingdom was her nearest neighbour, his gate to Asian mainland, and, in the opposite direction, "a dagger pointing at the heart of Japan". The Japanese needed Korea also as a source of foodstuffs and raw materials, and as a market for the Japanese industry. Even before the Meiji Restoration, some Japanese groups contemplated attacking Korea. Shōin Yoshida, a Chōshū clansman, advocated compensating of Japanese losses from unequal treaties by conquest of Korean and Manchurian territories.17 Nevertheless, similar plans were extremely unrealistic. Even after the opening of Korea, Japanese mainstream policy was for a long time prepared to help the Korean reformers; unfortunately, in Korea, there were scarcely any reformers.

Notwithstanding to their "victory" over Rear Admiral Roze, the Koreans were in 1867 nervous about Western designs, as well as about the alleged moves of Western ships near Korean waters or the building of Japanese navy. Through the traditional mediator, Lord Sō, they asked the Shogun, whether or not Korea was endangered. The Shogun sent to Korea a reply, in which he denied all rumours. Lord Sō, instead of sending the reply to Korea, evaluated the balance of power in Japan on the eve of the Meiji Restoration, and on November 20, 1867 he transmitted the correspondence between Korean authorities and the Shogun to Tomomi Iwakura, an important offi-

cial of the Imperial Court, who was one of the most important actors of the Meiji Restoration.\textsuperscript{18}

On the August 10, 1868, Lord Sō was ordered to inform Korea about the Meiji Restoration and about intention of the new government to change the ancient forms of intercourse between both countries. Tsushima sent at the end of 1868 to Pusan a messenger, who informed the Korean government about the arrival of a Japanese governmental delegation, and transmitted documents issued by the Imperial government.\textsuperscript{19} An Tong-jun, a Korean official conducting the negotiations with Japan, refused to accept these documents. A seal given to Lord Sō by the Korean King hitherto sealed the letters from Tsushima, and Japanese Emperor was referred to as taikun. The term taikun designated also the Shogun and was roughly equivalent to the title of the Korean King. These rules were previously accepted also by the Shogunate. In contrary, the Japanese Imperial government used its own seal, and gave to the Meiji Emperor the title kō, in Chinese translated as hoangdi, and by the Koreans ascribed only to the Chinese Emperor. The Koreans insisted on its omission, because its use implied the submission of Korea to Japan.\textsuperscript{20}

The Japanese government at first didn't consider the Korean refusal to be a part of a long-term policy. The Japanese infuriated Korea by granting their good services to Prussia, which at the end of 1860’s tried to strengthen its position in the Far East. The Prussian representative in Japan, von Brandt, had tried to negotiate with Korea, and had been accompanied to Pusan by Japanese officials, but the Koreans had expelled them from the country. Tawongun himself denounced the development of Japan by these words: “Not only have you broken the treaty as we have described, but you have also broken another very chief point of the treaty, in adopting the manners and customs of the Western barbarians [...] You think the Western barbarians are great people. We, Koreans, are a very small country, but yet we have the courage to put into writing to you that Western barbarians are beasts. The above is intended as a direct insult to you and your allies – the barbarians.”\textsuperscript{21}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[18]{CONROY, p. 23.}
\footnotetext[19]{Japanese government was in fact at this time represented by so-called State Council. This body (in Japanese called Daigōkan) led the new Japan since the Meiji restoration and in 1885 has been replaced by a usual government.}
\footnotetext[21]{Quoted in DENNETT, p. 435.}
\end{footnotes}
Some Japanese started contemplating a "subduing Korea". A group of Satsuma clansmen led by Taneomi Soejima, conspired in 1869 to occupy the island of Ullung. Kōin Kido, a samurai from Chōshū and a Junior Councillor, advocated an assault on Korea; his primarily motivation was to enhance the national self-consciousness in Japan, hitherto divided into hundreds of feudal domains. Other officials desired an alliance between Japan and Korea, some of them wanted to achieve this by military means. "The purpose of 'subduing Korea' was not the conquest but the reordering of formal relations." Thus, it seems, that although the proposed means were different, the motives of the Japanese decision-makers at this time were basically the same.

In late 1869, the new government in Tokyo decided to send an emissary to Pusan. Hakubo Sada, well-known as a propagator of attacking Korea, had been chosen for this post. Without success, he negotiated until spring 1870, but he fulfilled his main task, investigating the situation in Korea. The Japanese for the first time found out the truth about Tsushima's subjugation to Korea, and were disappointed by the conditions, in which the Japanese lived in Tongnae. Sada even recommended a three-fold assault of thirty battalions on Korea. Similar attitude towards Korea shared also his collaborator Shigeru Moriyama.

In January 1870, while Sada was still dealing with the Koreans in Pusan, Kōin Kido, another hawk, had been appointed Minister to Korea, but he failed even to depart to the country, because he didn't trust in his mission's success. The first Foreign Minister of Japan, Nobuyoshi Sawa, sent his subordinate Kōki Yoshioka to Korea, too. Yoshioka had to ask for an interpreter at Tsushima. Prior to Yoshioka's arrival, Lord Sō sent the interpreter Urase to Korea in a desperate attempt to proceed in negotiations, but Urase failed. The disgraced Lord gave up his duties as a co-mediator between Japan and Korea. After the abolition of the feudal domains, which occurred in August, 1871, this duplicity was extremely untenable, and on September 8, 1871, the Imperial Government officially relinquished him from his duties. Nevertheless, the Koreans didn't recognize this change. Immediately after his return, in January 1871 Urase was sent with Yoshioka to Pusan again – and again, this mission, although staying in Korea for

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22 DUUS, pp. 32–34.
23 Ibidem, p. 34f.
25 DEUCHLER, p. 6.
more than a year, achieved nothing.\textsuperscript{26} The refusal of the stubborn Korean officials to come to a decision was in accordance with Tawongun's policy.\textsuperscript{27}

Also the United States tried to open Korea. The American Minister to China F. F. Low, together with five ships of Rear Admiral John Rogers, sailed on May 30, 1871 to Kanghwa, on the following day, American sailors were attacked, and the Americans on June 10, 1871 retaliated by attacking Korean forts and killing 250–350 soldiers. Neither this "brilliant artillery practice", nor a blockade of the water-routes to Seoul did persuade Tawongun to negotiate with the Americans, who on July 3 decided to return, thus reinforced the false Korean belief in the invincibility of Korea. The Koreans asked China to prohibit negotiations between Korea and foreign countries.\textsuperscript{28}

The Koreans were informed about the opening of Japan and its results only through intermediaries. Yet, the Japanese experiences could not have persuaded them about the reasonability of a similar step. Several Japanese ports were opened to foreign intercourse, proud foreigners exacted the right of extraterritoriality from Japan and resided in the treaty ports, where even foreign troops were stationed. Moreover, the Japanese economy was damaged by the fixation of customs tariffs. The situation in China was even much worse.

The Koreans did not want to severe diplomatic relations with Japan at all. They, as an extremely traditionalist country, were simply opposed to any change.\textsuperscript{29} They despised everything Western, and the Japanese, who wore Western clothes and hats, embarked on steamers, and even changed their calendar, were considered to be barbarized traitors of common Far Eastern heritage. In contrary to Japan, which needed Korean raw materials and grain, the undeveloped and backward Korea was still a self-sufficient country. The Koreans were afraid, that an exportation of grain might resolve in famines in Korea proper. Moreover, the Koreans still remembered Hideyoshi’s invasion and distrusted the Japanese. From all this reasons, they foolishly wasted their chance to open and modernize their country.

The Japanese were more successful in China, with which they in summer 1871 concluded a treaty.\textsuperscript{30} An envoy was sent to Beijing, but he was

\textsuperscript{26} CONROY, pp. 26–28.
\textsuperscript{27} DEUCHLER, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{28} MORSE, p. 6f.; DENNETT, p. 453.
\textsuperscript{29} Japanese and Korean negotiators at Pusan, Hakubo Sada and An Tong-jun, were talking about the Korean diplomatic protocol. "Your code of ceremonies must be very old", said Sada. "Is it based on the T'ang and Ming examples?" "Not so new", replied An. "It is based on the precedents of Chou." Quoted in: DUUS, note 5 on p. 31.
\textsuperscript{30} MORSE, p. 8 and DEUCHLER, p. 7 state, that the treaty has been concluded on September 13, 1871, whereas DENNETT gives the date July 29, 1871.
stopped in Tianjin, where he concluded a treaty with Li Hongzhang, the most important Chinese statesman of the late XIX. century. The first article contained a non-aggression clause, but Li Hongzhang omitted specifying territories belonging to both Empires, using the vague formula “nations and territories belonging to either of the contracting parties”. The Chinese missed the chance to designate Korea as a part of their Empire in a broader sense. The Chinese position towards their vassal country Korea was already ambiguous. The Chinese constantly claimed, that “though Korea is a dependent country of China, it is not a territorial possession; hence in its domestic and foreign affairs it is independent (self-governing)”. The Koreans undoubtedly knew about the conclusion of this treaty, but their policy of seclusion remained unaltered. Their representatives at Pusan were often replaced, the new ones started negotiations from the very beginning, asked the Korean court for instructions frequently, and answers had to be received “in six or seven or ten year”. In September 1872, Yoshimoto Hanabusa, who changed the Japanese facility in Pusan into a Japanese legation, replaced Yoshioki. This move strengthened the Korean enmity.

In early 1870's, Japan found itself in a difficult situation. The Japanese claims on the Ryukyus brought it into tense relations with China. The Russian attempts to seize Sakhalin and the Kuriles threatened the Japanese position in the North. The Koreans were still unwilling to establish diplomatic relations with Japan on the base of modern international law. The Korean contemptuous behaviour aroused the question of punishing Korea. Japanese statesmen, who in some cases only several years before had also tried to preserve the isolation of Japan, and modernized the country in contrary to the wishes of important part of their own nation, probably felt personally humiliated. On the other hand, the hypothetical attack on Korea, as well as the Formosan expedition of 1874, was probably erroneously explained as means of softening the samurai resistance to abolishing their class. The Japanese soldiery could not have been satisfied with fighting in a remote, uncivilized area inhabited by snakes, mosquitoes, and skull-hunters. In the case of a victorious Korean expedition, the self-confidence of the samurais,

31 DEUCHLER, p. 7.
32 CONROY, p. 66. Compare with LEE, PATTERSON, (eds.), p. 16: “Though Korea was independent in her relations with treaty powers, in her relations with China she was still a dependency.”
33 Japanese settlement in Pusan was located in a place called Tongnæ, in a “Japanese House” (Waegwan). For centuries there resided Japanese subjects in conditions, which were similar to foreign settlement in Nagasaki during Tokugawa reign. See DEUCHLER, p. 4; DUUS, p. 30.
34 For example, Hirobumi Itō and Kaoru Inoue, later important leaders of the Chōshū clan, took part on a burning of British Consulate in Edo in 1862. See SEIICHI, (ed.), p. 361.
as well as their resistance to the new military system, would be undoubtedly strengthened. On the other hand, a successful Korean expedition might have deepened Japanese national pride and consciousness.\textsuperscript{35}

The effectiveness of the Japanese government was affected by the absence of the most of experienced and ablest statesmen, who since 1871 took part in an inspection tour led by Tomomi Iwakura. Kōbō Kidō, Toshimichi Ōkubo and Hirobumi Itō, assisted him; Takamori Saigō also wanted to join the mission, but he had been refused. Iwakura, who in June 1871 replaced Sawa as the Foreign Minister, had been at this function succeeded by Taneomi Soejima. Nevertheless, those statesmen, who remained in Japan, promised, that they wouldn’t come to decisions on important matters. The members of the Iwakura’s mission returned to Japan only in 1873.\textsuperscript{36}

Even without the most important statesmen, Japanese foreign policy was active. The annexation of Ryūkyū showed the growing Japanese might. In March 1873, Taneomi Soejima arrived in China. Not only he exchanged the ratifications of the treaty of 1871, but also negotiated about Ryūkyū, Formosa, and Korea. The Chinese didn’t recognize the annexation of Ryūkyū, but they had shown rather indifference to the fate of Formosan natives, and so Soejima erroneously assumed, that the Chinese were not much interested in the fate of Korea.\textsuperscript{37}

The belligerent Japanese leaders led by Takamori Saigō wanted to punish Korea. But the Japanese governmental circles even after the departure of Iwakura and his companions were not unanimous. A samurai of Satsuma and a brother of Arinori Mori, the later Japanese Minister to Washington, committed in 1871 suicide to show their refusal of a war with Korea. Takamori Saigō, another Satsuma clansman, contemplated suicide-like behaviour in favour of an invasion of Korea. Crucial was the development in Korea. The new negotiator, Shigeru Moriyama, was no more successful than his predecessors. When in June 1873 a Korean prefect of the Japanese settlement in Pusan, Chōng Hyón-dŏk declared, that “Japan is a land of no law”,\textsuperscript{38} he further infuriated the Japanese. Subsequently, the great “debate about subduing Korea” (Sei-Kan Ron) began.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{35} This argument, weak national consciousness in Japan, was, however, paradoxically one of arguments of opponents of war, too.
\textsuperscript{36} Ian Hill NISH, Japan’s Foreign Policy, 1869–1942. Kasumigaseki to Miyakezaka, London, Henley, Boston 1977, p. 20.
\textsuperscript{37} NISH, p. 22; DENNETT, p. 440f.
\textsuperscript{38} DEUCHLER, p. 6f.; DUUS, p. 37f. claims that posters with the same meaning were to be found in Tongnae already in May. Did Korean authorities issue them secretly?
\textsuperscript{39} For a detailed account, see CONROY, pp. 29–50; DUUS, pp. 38–43.
The Japanese subjects in Tongnae were harassed by the Koreans, and already on June 12, 1873, Taisuke Itagaki suggested an action to protect them. Takamori Saigō was much more innovatory. He offered to travel to Korea and seek death from the hands of the Koreans; thus, Japan should get a pretext to declare war on Korea.⁴⁰ The scholar Peter Duus didn’t believe in Saigō’s sincerity, but Saigō himself wrote: “I do not pretend to be able to achieve such a diplomatic feat as Mr. Soejima would do, but I am confident that I can accomplish such a thing as getting assassinated.”⁴¹ Shōjirō Gotō,⁴² Taneomi Soejima, and Shimpei Etō,⁴³ as well as the American adventurer C. W. LeGendre, who became an advisor to the Foreign Ministry, and even the American Minister to Japan DeLong,⁴⁴ supported the invasion of Korea, and perhaps the most belligerent was Itagaki. Sanetomi Sanjō, the then Prime Minister, and another Ōkuma Shigenobu hesitated to support any policy, whereas Ōkubo Toshimichi and Kōin Kido, who returned in May and July, respectively, strongly opposed any military action, because Japan could not afford it.⁴⁵

On August 17, 1873, the State Council appointed Saigō emissary to Korea. Nevertheless, after the termination of the session, Sanjō privately dealt with the Meiji Emperor, and the next day, he informed about the Imperial will to postpone the final resolution until Iwakura’s return. Iwakura returned on September 13, and supported the “peace party”, which had been further strengthened by the appointment of Ōkubo a Councillor.

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⁴⁰ CONROY, p. 31. DENNETT, p. 442 undoubtedly has in mind Saigō, when he writes: “[...] (one war-seeking daimyo) had been so eager for war with Korea that he had offered to go to the peninsula and expose himself to further insults and even death to provide the Japanese with a sufficient excuse for a declaration of war.”

⁴¹ Quoted in CONROY, p. 42f. DUUS, note 20 on p. 40 claims that Saigō wrote this in letters to Itagaki, who was not close to him, only from fear, that Soejima would have been sent to Korea instead. Duus states, that Saigō was often trying to settle conflicts by negotiation, and supports his statement by an arrangement to surrender the Edo castle in 1868, where the last Shogun had been captured. Duus does not remind, that Saigō originally wanted to execute the Shogun.


⁴³ A samurai from Hizen, Minister of Justice, and a Councillor of State. For his career, see Ibidem, p. 326f. Etō, however, supported invasion of Korea mainly because of the task of revision of unequal treaties. He felt, that this task would be facilitated by a successful display of Japanese might. See Marius B. JANSEN, (ed.), The Cambridge History of Japan. Volume 5: The Nineteenth Century, Cambridge 1989, p. 389.

⁴⁴ DENNETT, p. 439f.

⁴⁵ Ōkubo’s attitude is summed in his memorandum from October 1873, quoted in CONROY, pp. 47-49.
of State on October 10, 1873. In contrary to expectations of some, Ōkubo completely opposed the views of his Satsuma clansman Saigō. In this, he was not isolated. Aritomo Yamagata (later Field Marshall), The Minister of Navy Kaishū Katsu, and even Takamori’s own brother Tsugumichi Saigō, strongly favoured peace.

Another session of the State Council was started on October 14, 1873. Sanjō supported the sending of Saigō to Korea, because the action had been already approved. Negotiations continued and were extremely tense. On October 17, Iwakura, Kido and Ōkubo sent to Sanjō their resignations and did not attend to the session of the State Council. On the following day, Sanjō collapsed, and Iwakura, who replaced him, burnt the letters of resignation. Iwakura was firmly decided to halt the war moves even at the cost of his life. On October 22, supporters of the war with Korea had visited him, but he was adamant. The last meeting of the State Council took place the next day, and Iwakura decided to submit to the Emperor not only Sanjō’s recommendation to send Saigō to Korea, but also his own opinion, i.e., to do nothing. On October 24, it was officially decided to postpone the expedition to Korea indefinitely. Subsequently, Saigō, Etō, Gotō, Itagaki and Soejima resigned and returned to their homes. Their example followed many of their fellow-clansmen, including large parts of the Imperial Guard, and predominantly people from Satsuma.

DUUS, p. 41 claims, that Saigō in a memorial from mid-October refused the idea that his mission to Korea should automatically lead to a war. Nevertheless, the author doesn’t take into account the possibility, that Saigō was not sincere.

The first “victim” of the debate was American Minister DeLong, recalled for his attitude towards invasion of Korea on October 7, 1873. Saigō Takamori, Shimpei Etō, Shōjirō Gotō, Taisuke Itagaki and Taneomi Soejima left Japanese government. Many members of their clans left governmental services, too. Etō, Gotō, Itagaki and Soejima presented in January, 1874, to the Throne a memorandum, which demanded establishment of a representative body. Itagaki and Gotō became founders and leaders of the Liberal Party (Jiyūdō), and later returned to the government. Etō returned to the Prefecture of Saga, formerly belonging to Hizen, where he took part on an uprising, speedily crushed by Imperial troops. After this failure, he was executed. Saigō retired to Satsuma, but in 1877 he started a great rebellion, which also failed. Finally he committed a suicide. Both Saigō and Etō were in 1889 in occasion of the “granting of the Meiji Constitution to the people” posthumously cleared. Saigō’s brother Tsugumichi remained loyal to the government; he did not avenge his brother, nor has he been persecuted. Instead, he took very important posts, including the Minister of Navy, Home or War Minister. The opponents of invasion of Korea had to fear revenge of supporters of war with Korea. Iwakura has been in 1874 attacked, but survived, and Ōkubo, who was extremely unpopular among Saigō’s followers, has been assassinated in 1878. See SEIICHI (ed.), p. 326ff. (Shimpei Etō), 334f. (Gotō Shōjirō), 359f. (Taisuke Itagaki), 364–366 (Tomomi Iwakura), 385–388 (Kōin Kido), 435–441 (Ōkubo Toshimichi), 441–443 (Ōkuma Shigenobu), 449–452 (Takamori Saigō), 452f. (Tsugumichi Saigō) and 474f. (Taneomi Soejima).
The decision of October 1873 was the only one possible. Japan avoided a long clash with Korea, very probably China and perhaps even the Western powers. The country acquired time to strengthen its industry and armoured forces and finally grew to such a position, which enabled the complete humiliation of Korea. The Sei-Kan Ron and its results had a significant influence on the Japanese domestic policy of 1870’s. Moreover it marked the end of the first phase of the Japanese foreign policy in the Meiji period. Japan concentrated building the material base of its strength and for many decades followed cautious policy and abstained from adventurous interventions, which were unnecessarily threatening the Japanese international position.

Nevertheless, the Japanese showed a profound understanding of principles of imperialism. They were aware, that a successful operation against less developed countries would enhance their prestige. From this reason, they launched in May 1874 an expedition against the Formosan natives in order to avenge massacred castaways from Ryukyu.\(^{48}\) Although the Chinese government didn’t care much about the Japanese invasion of Formosa, it feared that France and the United States, countries, which still didn’t properly avenge the former Korean misdeeds, could support the eventual Japanese assault on Korea. The Chinese suggested a conclusion of the trade treaties with these countries in order to prevent their attack, but Korea refused. Nevertheless, things in Korea were moderately changing. On January 1, 1874, King Kojong assumed his duties. He purged the officials in Pusan. Chŏng Hyŏn-dŏk was banished to the remote city of Munch’ön in North-Eastern Korea, the governor of the province of Kyŏngsang, where Pusan lays, was dismissed, and the negotiator An Tong-jun was executed on April 9, 1875.\(^{49}\)

The Japanese position was further strengthened by a settlement of the border disputes with Russia. In 1874, the former commander of the Shogun’s navy, Takeaki Enomoto, had been appointed Minister to Russia. On May 7, 1875, Vice Admiral Enomoto concluded a treaty, which stipulated, that Japan retained the entire Kuriles and gave up its claims on Sakhalin.\(^{50}\)

\(^{48}\) Since 1609, Ryukyu has been a vassal state of both China and the domain of Satsuma. Commodore Perry deliberated its annexation. In November 1871, a group of Ryukyu subjects from Miyakojima wrecked on the coast of Formosa and most of them were massacred by native head-hunters. The Satsuma clan, which still considered Ryukyu to be its sphere of interest, complained to the Imperial Court, and the Meiji Emperor formally annexed Ryukyu. See DENNETT, p. 438f.

\(^{49}\) DEUCHLER, p. 16.

The disputes with China over Formosa and Ryukyu being at least temporally settled as well, the Japanese were now ready to proceed in the Korean question, too.

The negotiations in Pusan were still unsuccessful. Moriyama achieved only limited success, when he forced his Korean counterparts to admit, that "it is now necessary to make revision". When he was recalled in 1874, the government contemplated his replacement by Lord Sō, but then sent Moriyama back to Pusan instead. Moriyama returned to Pusan in January 1875. He did everything to estrange the Koreans: he wore Western clothes, sailed on a steamer, used the term "Great" Japan and called his noble ruler the "Emperor". At this time, he already submitted to his government a proposition to send to Korean waters a surveying ship, which would be undoubtedly shot upon. Navy Minister Terashima sent in May and in July, again, to Korean littoral waters several warships. Sailors from one of them, the Unyo, were attacked on September 20 near Kanghwa, when they wanted to acquire drinking water. The next day the Unyo repeated fire, killed 35 Korean soldiers, and its crew landed on the island and burnt several houses.

The Japanese considered themselves attacked. In the matter of reaction, the Japanese government was divided. A military intervention was opposed predominantly by Toshimichi Ōkubo, as well as by Kido, Iwakura and Sanjō. Only in November, 1875, it was decided to send to Korea Lieutenant-General Kiyotaka Kuroda as an Envoy and Kaoru Inoue as a Vice-Envoy, together with a substantial number of troops. The attitude of the powers was substantially favourable to the opening of Korea by Japan. Crucial was still the attitude of China. Arinori Mori was sent to China in order to inform the Chinese, explore their relations with Korea, and to gain their support. On January 4, 1876, he arrived to Beijing and began nego-

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51 When the Chinese concluded an agreement concerning evacuation of Formosa by the Japanese, they accepted a formulation, "The raw barbarians of Formosa once unlawfully inflicted injury on people belonging to Japan". Thus they indirectly accepted Japanese claims on Ryukyu. Subsequently, they understood their error, and even tried to use good services of the Americans to settle the matter, but without success. After the Sino-French war, the matter was forgotten, because the Chinese had another problems. See DENNETT, pp. 442-446.
52 CONROY, p. 60.
53 Ibidem, p. 61.
54 DUUS, p. 43 states that the Japanese landed on Kanghwa, whereas DEUCHLER, p. 23 claims, that they landed on a small island of Yŏngjong.
55 DUUS, p. 46.
56 DEUCHLER, p. 24f.
tiating with the Zongli Yamen and Li Hongzhang. The Chinese repeated their confused stance about the Korean (in)dependence. Nevertheless, they recommended the Korean government to start negotiations with Japanese envoys.57

In February 1876, Japanese negotiators with altogether 1200 soldiers landed on the island of Kanghwa. The Japanese government was prepared to send another one or two divisions, if necessary. In fact, they were not willing to fight Korea, and both negotiators received instructions to avoid hostilities. The Korean King Kojong understood gravity of situation and appointed an old, but a very competent General Sin Hon and a scholar Yun Cha-song Korean as negotiators. The negotiations started on February 10, 1876, and after two weeks, they were accomplished by the conclusion of the so-called Treaty of Kanghwa.58 This fact aroused great discontent among the Korean people, but the Korean government suppressed all opposition.59

The treaty was written in English and Chinese (the Chinese language was still used by Korean nobility and literates, who still used Chinese characters and despised the Korean scripture). The first paragraph of the English version called Korea “an independent country”, its Chinese translation “self-governing”; in both cases followed a statement, that Korea enjoyed “the same sovereign rights as Japan”. The Japanese as a proof of the Korean independence on China later used this statement. Moreover, the Japanese insisted on using a seal calling Japan “Great”. King Kojong, after some hesitation, agreed, but sent a seal with the inscription “the seal of the King of Great Korea”.60 Even this could have been explained as a proof of equality among Japan, Korea, and China. Among the stipulations of the treaty was the opening of Pusan and two other, unspecified, ports to Japanese trade until October 1877. The traditional right of extraterritoriality, under which the house of Sō settled Japanese misdeeds, was preserved. Japanese ships were allowed to survey Korean waters. Both countries agreed to inaugurate diplomatic relations. A protocol dealing with trade regulations had to be signed within six months.61 Although the Koreans later hesitated to fulfil their treaty obligations, they finally entered the modern world.

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57 CONROY, p. 65f.
58 DEUCHLER, p. 47 states, that the treaty had been dated February 26, but signed February 27. CONROY, p. 65, and MORSE, p. 9 give the date February 26, too, whereas WAGNER, p. 148 dates the treaty February 22, and Edwin O. REISCHAUER, Albert M. CRAIG, Dějiny Japonska, Praha 2000, p. 145 give the date February 27.
59 DEUCHLER, pp. 38–44.
60 Ibidem, p. 46.
The Treaty of Kanghwa finally, after ten years of occasional Western attempts and systematic Japanese effort, ended the Korean seclusion, and other nations were eager to follow the Japanese example. Japan succeeded because of its proximity to Korea, and its incomparable need to start diplomatic, as well as commercial relations with the country. The Japanese concluded for the first time a treaty, which gave them superior rights anywhere. The Koreans still had the chance to modernize, but the fate of Korea was different.