

Creating Legitimacy through Media Discourse: German Press Reporting on the Japanese Colonisation of Korea, 1905–1910

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The annexation treaties between Korea and Japan remain controversial, as does the question of their legality. In contrast to the Koreans, who indicated the treaties were concluded under duress, the Japanese focused on seeking international approval. By analysing the German news reports on the Japanese annexation of Korea published between 1905 and 1945, this article examines whether Germans believed the Japanese colonisation of Korea conformed to international law and custom. This article demonstrates two main findings. First, the Japanese government attempted to produce international approval by directly intervening in the production of news articles. The Japanese government made particular newspapers and journalists act as their agents and almost completely suppressed reports on events such as the signing of the annexation treaty of 1910. Despite these efforts, the flourishing world of German journalism was too diverse to accept Japanese intervention passively. This article also shows that the international community did not perceive the annexation treaties as of legal. The annexation treaties were interpreted simply as the continued process of colonisation and only pro-Japanese newspapers showed interest in the legality of the annexation treaties. Considering these realities of the German media landscape, we should be careful in discussing the international approval of the annexation treaties as a fact.

Keywords: Korea-Japan Annexation Treaty, legitimacy, German news report, Japanese colonisation of Korea

It is no longer controversial to speak of the colonial origins of international law. According to the accepted perceptions of the international law of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, entry into the community of international law was allowed only to so-called civilized countries; international law could not be applied to non-civilized territory. There was no sovereign equality of states. Rather, sovereignty was a purely European notion. Only by presenting itself as a civilized nation to the Western imperial powers could Japan make the colonization of Korea legitimate in the realm of international politics.¹ Given this situation, it seems quite natural that the Japanese government was eager to help produce or even create Western media coverage favourable to their colonial interests. Did this effort turn out to be successful?

Researchers have paid scant attention to the reaction of Western news media to the Japanese annexation of Korea. Andre Schmid (2002) examined international media reaction in his chapter “The Japanese Colonialism on the International Stage” but he only briefly addressed the views American journalists expressed immediately after the announcement of the annexation treaty in 1910 (15–17). Alexis Dudden (2006) outlined “the total similarity of newspaper articles throughout the so-called civilized world” regarding Japanese colonisation (15), but she focused mainly on the reports concerning the Hague Peace Treaty. Tomoko Akami (2012) examined how the Japanese state, which “recognised the power of news in foreign policy,” developed “key institutions and systematic schemes to utilise this resource”(1), but she did not focus on the situation on the Korean peninsula. Furthermore, all these authors mainly examine newspaper articles from English-speaking countries. There is little research on the news coverage of Korea and the Japanese colonization from the non-English-speaking world.² As a first step to reconstruct how the Japanese annexation of Korea had been reported in the Western media as a whole, this article examines German newspaper articles that reported on the Japanese colonisation of Korea between 1905 and 1910.

Although Germany was neither the only nor the most important European country to show interest in the Korea, the attitude of German civil society towards the colonisation of Korea deserves our attention because Germany did not have a direct geopolitical stake in this issue. In actuality, the German government represented a slightly different stance from other European countries concerning the Japanese annexation of Korea.³ Ultimately, the

¹ According to Martti Koskenniemi (2001), the distinction between the civilized and the uncivilized structured colonial international law at the end of the 19th century. The natives enjoyed no sovereignty, so they could not transfer it (98–178). Matthew Craven (2012) states that “European international law not only provided a means of legitimizing imperialism, but was also profoundly shaped by that encounter, encoding within its disciplinary structures (especially sovereignty) the discriminatory features of cultural difference” (863).

² Yoon Chongp’il (2016) analyzed early twentieth-century British newspapers and concluded that there was “a conceptual dichotomy between Korea and Japan that was subsumed under a wider frame of the binary opposition between East and West” and at least in the relationship with Korea, Japan played the role of the West (31–57). Furthermore, Yoon (2017) also analyzed the French literature and came to the same conclusion (1132–52). Both articles describe the images of Japan and Korea in the English newspapers and French literature, but did not focus on the annexation treaty as such.

³ Out of the UK, Russia, the USA, Germany and France—all of which had diplomatic relations with Korea—only Germany was considered a friend by Kojong, the second-to-last Korean emperor; Kojong had even

official response of the German Foreign Ministry to the Korea-Japan Treaty of 1905 was, similar to the reactions of many other Western states, to withdraw its embassy. The German government did not officially oppose or criticise the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910. Korean scholar Chŏng Sangsu, however, stated that Conrad von Saldern, the German ambassador to Korea, submitted a detailed report on the problem of the Korea-Japan Treaty of 1905 and Wilhelm II wrote a memo in 1910 declaring that he hoped to disrupt Japanese expansion into Asia with the cooperation of the United States in (Chŏng 2010, 138).⁴ In short, there was no particular German strategic interest in the Japanese occupation of Korea but the German government did not actively support it. Therefore, the German newspapers were not bound necessarily by predetermined national interests and can inform the more theoretical debate on the legality and legitimacy of the Korea-Japan annexation treaty of 1910.

The first section will introduce the debate over the legality and legitimacy of the Korea-Japan Annexation Treaty (韓日併合條約) of 1910. To set the historical setting for later analysis, the second section describes the context of the text: the production of the news reports. This section outlines which newspapers showed a particular interest in the Korea situation, whether the Japanese or German government attempted to intervene in the news production and, if so, how the intervention proceeded and the extent to which it succeeded. This article then analyses the newspaper articles as such and discusses and describes how the German journalists reported on the colonisation process in general and the annexation treaty in particular.

The Question of Legality and Legitimacy of the Korea-Japan Annexation Treaty of 1910

Although the Japanese colonisation of Korea still produces news almost every day in both countries, the academic dialogue between these two countries has rarely followed suit. In this sense, the debates in the Japanese *Sekai* journal in 1998 and in the *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies* in 2005 were exceptional. The focus of these discussions was how to evaluate the Korean-Japanese Convention of 1905 that deprived Korea of its diplomatic rights and the Korea-Japan Annexation Treaty of 1910 that ended the Korean state.⁵

deposited his personal assets into a German bank (Chŏng 2010, 123).

⁴ Chŏng's notion of the "second triple intervention with the United States and France" is worthy of our attention, although further research seems to be needed to confirm his statement.

⁵ Yi T'aejin (2001, 2005, 2016), a major protagonist who actually ignited this debate, insisted that these annexation treaties were "null and void from the beginning" due to procedural defects and a lack of mutual consent and that therefore the Japanese colonisation of Korea was an "illegal occupation" that required proper reparations. The Supreme Court of Korea accepted this stance in its judgement of May 24, 2012 (2009 Da 22549). According to article 4 of this judgment, Japanese colonial rule was an "illegal occupation." Despite the continued diplomatic struggles at the governmental level, dialogue at the academic level contributed to bridging the gap among scholars and eventually culminated in the "Joint Declaration of Korean and Japanese

This debate itself is still ongoing, and the list of controversial issues has grown accordingly. Controversial issues in this debate include whether the Korean and Japanese plenipotentiaries had full power to address such a significant topic,⁶ whether the treaties were signed under duress,⁷ and whether official ratification was an indispensable procedure.⁸

One of the most powerful arguments to invalidate the treaties was the issue of duress.⁹ Conversely, the most convincing point to support the validity of the annexation treaties was the “international law of the day.”¹⁰ For example, Sakamoto (2005) based his arguments on the concept of international law that included not “current international law” but “international law contemporaneous with the colonisation” (49–50). The underlying position is that the Korea-Japan treaties were recognised by the international community no matter how defective the process may have been. Indeed, Sakamoto emphasised that “the Japanese government had already secured, before 1905, *international approval* of its hold on Korea, as seen in the Taft and Katsura Memorandum, the Second Anglo-Japanese Alliance, and the Portsmouth Treaty” (43–59).

Strictly speaking, international law and international approval are two different concepts. International law relates to legality while international approval relates to legitimacy. International law as a holistic system is in the process of fragmentation, and it is instead necessary to concentrate on the consideration of the power relations within the specific context in which a particular question or issue has emerged. Accordingly, legitimacy is gaining increased significance in the realm of international law. The notion of legitimacy is quite controversial. There are distinctions to be drawn between normative and sociological

Intellectuals on the Centennial of the Japanese Annexation of Korea” in 2010 (Kim 2013, 33–40).

⁶ Yi argued that the Korean Foreign Minister Pak Chesun did not have full powers, whereas Samuel Guex (2015) insisted that the Japanese Minister Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Hayashi Gonsuke was entrusted with full power but not by the “head of the state” (165).

⁷ Sasagawa (2005) and Sakamoto (2005) argued that force and intimidation were permitted means of obtaining redress for wrongs and, according to experts on international law, were not illegal. They distinguished the use of duress to a state representative from the use of duress to a state.

⁸ Sakamoto (2005) argued that “the parties involved can freely select the form of treaties. The contents of the treaties may influence but not determine the form” (54).

⁹ Therefore, it may not be coincidental that the title of Yi T’aejin’s latest book is *Ilbon ūi Han’guk pyŏnghap kangje yŏn’gu: Choyak kangje wa chōhang ūi yōksa*. The participants on both sides of the debate published in the *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies* accepted that “duress” can be an issue to invalidate the treaties but the question is to what extent? Sakamoto (2005), on the basis of “the customary international law of the time,” came to the conclusion that the military threat that accompanied the treaties was not sufficiently fatal to deny their validity (47). He also stated that “the only duress clearly forbidden then was coercion of a state representative into signing a treaty by threatening to reveal his past wrongdoings or by putting a pistol to his head” (Sakamoto 2005, 49). By contrast, Kim Yŏngho (2013) described the argument of Sakamoto as “perverse” (33–40). Ha Chiyŏn (2010) stated that “the two sides tend to strengthen their arguments rather than find the middle ground” (6). This judgement does not stand up to scrutiny. The Joint Declaration clearly shows that nationalism was not the decisive factor in understanding Japanese colonial rule.

¹⁰ In his book titled *Han’guk pyŏnghapsa yŏn’gu*, Unno (2008) stated that “it is widely accepted among the Japanese experts on international law and diplomatic history that the annexation treaties were valid at that time” (77). Sakamoto (2005) has based his arguments on international law, which should be construed not as current international law but as “international law contemporaneous with the colonization” (49–50).

legitimacy (Buchanan and Koehane 2008, 25) and between normative and descriptive legitimacy (Beetham 1991, 3–7). Beetham makes more sophisticated differentiations between legal validity (legitimacy for lawyers), moral justifiability (legitimacy for philosophers) and belief in legitimacy (legitimacy for social scientists) (Beetham 1991, 3–7). Similarly, Thomas distinguishes between legal, moral and social legitimacy.¹¹ Social legitimacy means “the beliefs which justify the acceptance of rule” and, therefore, “a social motivation for obedience” (Thomas 2014, 741) and “legitimacy-in-context rather than absolutely, ideally or abstractly” (Beetham 1991, 14).

Samuel Guex (2015) applied the debate on legitimacy in international law to the debate on the Korea-Japan Annexation Treaties. In contrast to legal and moral legitimacies, which are complex,¹² Guex addressed social legitimacy simply. Guex stated that social legitimacy was given to the Korean-Japanese Convention of 1905 and the Korea-Japan Annexation Treaties of 1910 because Western powers “did recognise the Japanese seizure of Korea” (168). That means Western powers did not officially demonstrate against the Japanese annexation of Korea.

Guex’s claims regarding social legitimacy and Sakamoto’s notion of “international approval,” however, are far from transparent and merit reconsideration on two points. First, they conflate Western powers with the international community. Because Guex referred to the “international community, namely, the Western powers,” he clearly demonstrates the Euro-centrism that is still very powerful even in postcolonial studies.

Secondly, Guex and Sakamoto only acknowledge the reaction of Western powers at the governmental level and thus overlook discussions within civil society. The Japanese government knew well that gaining legality for the colonisation of Korea depended heavily on making it legitimate, or to be more accurate, making it seem to be legitimate. The Japanese thus made every effort to legitimise the colonisation of Korea in Western civil society through the international news media.

¹¹ Although the definitions of Beetham and Thomas appear similar, they are substantially different in the sense that the moral legitimacy of Beetham relates to moral justifiability, while the moral legitimacy of Thomas is closely aligned with questions of political authority. In Thomas’s definition, moral justifiability relates to both legal legitimacy and moral legitimacy. First, Thomas considers the naturalist approach to legal legitimacy. According to the classic natural law tradition, moral justifiability is regarded as an essential element of legal validity, whereas the positivist view of legal validity is premised on the separability between the ideas of legal validity and moral justifiability. Second, Thomas’s notion of moral legitimacy does not exclusively relate to the notion of morality. In his sense, moral legitimacy does not need to be moralistic. Rather, moral legitimacy is “a meta concept” that allows the “different conceptions of legitimacy as regards authority, order, stability, obligation, obedience and power” (Thomas 2014, 739).

¹² Again, legal legitimacy can be judged according to two different approaches, namely, the positivist approach, which sets aside the question of moral justifiability, and the naturalist approach, which considers morality as an important element of legal validity. In this debate, we observe the interdependence of moral and legal standards, which can lead back to a logical impasse.

German Newspaper Articles on Korea: The Press Archive of the *Reichslandbund*(Imperial Agricultural League)

“Korea 1905–1945 R 8034 II/ 2716” is the file on Korea that is stored in the German Bundesarchiv (National Archive). This single volume is unique; not even the Foreign Ministry’s archive holds a comparable collection.¹³ This one volume comprises 160 articles, including most newspaper articles published during the Japanese colonial period. *Vorwärts*, the central organ and weekly newspaper of the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD, Social Democratic party), is not included but the collection does include left-leaning newspapers such as *Vossische Zeitung* and the conservative newspapers of government organs such as *Deutsche Reichsanzeiger*, as well as nation-wide newspapers such as *Frankfurter Zeitung* and local newspapers such as *Rheinische-Westfälische Zeitung*. It is thus no exaggeration to say that this collection reflects the general perception of German civil society regarding Korea.

The one hundred sixty German newspaper articles that reported on the situation in Korea between 1905 and 1945 show clear tendencies. First, only certain newspapers continued to show interest in the Korea-Japan relationship, as the following table shows.

Newspaper	Target Group and/ or Region/Characteristics	Political Stance	Number of Articles About Korea
<i>Vossische Zeitung</i>	Wealthy merchants and civil servants	Liberal	34
<i>Deutsche Tageszeitung</i>	Agricultural elite	Nationalist/Christian/ Pro-empire	18
<i>Berliner Lokal Anzeigerr</i>	No particular Target Group	Neutral/ Nationalist	12
<i>Hamburger Nachrichten</i>		Liberal	10
<i>Frankfurter Zeitung</i>		Left-liberal	9
<i>Berliner Tageblatt und Handelszeitung</i>	Berlin and surrounding areas	Neutral	7
<i>Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung</i>		Conservative	6
<i>Berliner Zeitung am Mittag</i>			6
<i>Kölnische Volkszeitung und Handelsblatt</i>	Western Germany	Centre Party	5
<i>Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung für Landwirtschafts</i>	Media organ of <i>Bund der Landwirte</i>		5

Table 1. The German newspapers that published numerous articles on Korea

¹³ During the early period of Nazi control, these comprehensive materials, which contained coverage that related to 72 countries, were entrusted to the *Reichsnährstand* (Reich Food Estate), then to the *Dokumentarchiv* (Document Archive) after 1937, and eventually to the *Bundesarchiv* (Federal Archive) in Berlin.

It is impossible to explain and prove why certain newspapers were particularly interested in the situation in Korea. Simply put, the newspapers were too diverse to show any discernible common tendencies. First, the political positions of these newspapers were varied. *Vossische Zeitung*, which published thirty-four Korea-related articles from 1906-12, is noteworthy not only for the quantity of its coverage but also for its content and attitude. Along with *Vossische Zeitung*, *Hamburger Nachrichten* and *Frankfurter Zeitung* were left-wing liberal newspapers. By contrast, *Deutsche Tageszeitung* and *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung für Landwirtschaft* were conservative newspapers. Additionally, *Vossische Zeitung* and *Frankfurter Zeitung* were high-quality media that were politically neutral, or at least independent, whereas *Berliner Lokal Anzeiger* was a commercial newspaper. This diversity demonstrates that a broad political spectrum of the German public was interested in this issue.

The number of German newspaper articles clearly shows that the interest of German newspapers in the situation in Korea dramatically waned after annexation. Out of 160 articles, 131 articles appeared between 1905 and 1910 and only 29 articles were written after the annexation, which clearly shows that the Japanese annexation treaty of 1910 was the focus in German media reporting. We observe a sharp decline in the number of articles following its annexation. Only eight additional articles appear between 1910 and the March First Movement of 1919, and only seven articles appeared thereafter, with the exception for fourteen articles about the March First Movement, all of which concerned the economic situation in Korea. An explanation for this phenomenon can be found in *Rhein-Westfälische Zeitung* from March 1920.¹⁴ The article, titled “Japan’s Ireland,” stated that “virtually nothing is known to the external world” about Korea because “all news is completely suppressed.” Nym Wales echoed this perspective in her 1942 article “Rebel Korea” in the renowned journal *Pacific Affairs*. She mentioned that “little has been known of Korea since 1931” because Korea had become “a complete police state” and there was “no single foreign correspondent” in Korea (Wales 1942, 26).¹⁵

It is well-known that there was no unanimous support for the German colonial policy in Germany: the Catholic Centre Party was ambivalent toward colonization and left-liberal parties factions and the SPD were opposed to colonial expansion, the former, due to their free-trade convictions and the latter due to their concern about the exploitation of the colonized (Conrad 2012, 27–28). This difference was reproduced in the news reports on colonialism because there were a number of newspapers which were closely related to or directly influenced by particular political parties (Dussel 2011, 89). That means there was a significant number of German newspapers being critical of colonialism in general.

¹⁴ “Ein japanische Ireland,” *Rhein-Westfälische Zeitung*, March, 1920. Unfortunately, the date is not discernible because it was hand-written.

¹⁵ That does not mean that there was no open information at all. Indeed, the Government-general published hundreds of pages annually on Korea in English. Furthermore, there were a wide variety of German publications on Korea even after the annexation. What matters in this article is that German news media did not show interest in the situation of colonized Korea beyond economic issues. In that sense, the statement of Nym Wales seems to be trustworthy. As for the German publications on Korea during the Japanese Imperial rule, see Mun 2014: 241–267. This article mainly deals with the journal articles, travel literature, dissertations and books rather than newspaper articles.

Of course, this diversity was reflected in news reports on Korea. Contrary to the aforementioned scholars Alexis Dudden and Yun, I argue that there was no such thing like “the total similarity of newspaper articles throughout the so-called civilized world” (Dudden 2006, fn.3) or consistent orientalism (Yun 2011, fn.5).¹⁶ As the analysis of the next part will show, we can find considerable diversity in German news reports on the Korean peninsula.

Japanese Efforts to Create International Approval: “Gagging Korea: Japan Doesn’t Want the World to Know Much about Korea and Her Bitter Fate”¹⁷

Unlike domestic news articles that could not avoid internal political struggle and government surveillance, foreign news reports were relatively independent from political censorship. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Japanese government not the German government which did not have clear strategic interests in Korea, showed more interest in the German news reports on Korea. The careful analysis of the 160 newspaper articles from the Bundesarchiv clearly shows the interaction between the Japanese colonial regime and the German newspapers.

The extent of Japan’s interest in the German news media is evident from an article that was published in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. Erwin Bälz was a former professor at the Medical College of Tokyo Imperial University and a personal physician-in-waiting to the Meiji Emperor. He enjoyed close personal relationships with many high-ranking members of Japanese society and wrote in an article from October 2, 1910 that “If any obscure German local paper were to bring an unkind word about Japan, then you can be sure that Reuters would telegraph it Japan and the alleged antipathy of the Germans would be widely reported in all the Japanese press and, of course, much more so in case of the statements of the more influential newspapers” (Bälz, 1910).¹⁸

It was only natural that the Japanese government did not passively wait for positive reports concerning Japan but instead made every effort to produce them. According to Akami (2012), this effort can be traced back to the mid-1870s (53). Indeed, according to the research of Andre Schmid (2002), Japanese newspapers including *Asahi* regularly reported on the response of the foreign media to the Japanese Korea policy (160).

First, the Japanese government provided information on which the Western media could report to make the Japanese annexation of Korea understandable and acceptable. A case in point is the “Annual Report on Reforms and Progress in Korea” that was published between 1908 and 1945. These efforts turned out to be fairly successful. German newspapers often used data from the “Annual Report,” as shown in the article entitled, “Die Wirtschaftliche

¹⁶ See footnote 5.

¹⁷ This is a quote from A.Wirth, “Die Knebelung Koreas,” *Tag*, November 13, 1908.

¹⁸ All the German-English translations are done by the author, unless otherwise indicated.

Entwicklung” of April 2, 1909.¹⁹ This article adopted not only the statistics from the report but also the political stance of the report. In 1910, *Kölnische Zeitung* stated that these Japanese reports provided “valuable statistical material and the needed explanation.”²⁰ Even *Vossische Zeitung*, which continued to be critical of Japanese colonisation, published an article entitled “Reform in Korea”²¹ and summarised the annual reports of 1907 in detail, emphasising that the Japanese government would maintain an open-door policy towards other foreign powers. *Berliner Börsen Zeitung* adopted another summary of the annual reports of 1907 in an article.²²

To ensure favourable stories about Japan, the Japanese government not only published documents that were supportive of Japanese colonisation but also made direct ties with certain newspapers. The case of *Berliner Lokalanzeiger* shows the collusion between the Japanese government and particular German newspapers. *Berliner Lokalanzeiger* clearly showed its support for Japanese policies in Korea by producing articles that were consistent with Japanese interests. Let us focus on the series of articles from 1907 when this newspaper intensively reported on the situation in Korea. These articles began with the report on the proclamation of a new treaty between Japan and Korea on July 25;²³ an article published on July 26 examined the content of this treaty,²⁴ its interpretation by Hayashi and Ito Hirobumi appeared on July 26, and Ito’s thoughts regarding the treaty’s significance were presented on July 29.²⁵ Absent from this series of articles is any comment concerning the views of Koreans.

Indeed, the *Berliner Lokalanzeiger* had a particular association with Ito; he sent a telegram directly to the newspaper insisting that the Japanese colonisation of Korea would “ensure the co-prosperity of both countries and that Koreans no longer resisted it.” This statement was posted in an article of the *Berliner Lokalanzeiger* on July 29, 1907 (Ibid.), along with a list of Japanese achievements in Korea based on a report that Ito himself published.²⁶ On July 27, the positions of both Ito and Hayashi were printed as direct quotes.²⁷

The Japanese were at work to intervene in the news production process even at the level of individual reporters and visitors. Western visitors to Korea were often hosted and guided by Japanese officials. They were thereby induced to view the Japanese colonisation of Korea mediated through the priorities of Japanese administrative circles. Some individuals were even invited to Korea with the express purpose of having them write about colonial policies. *Vossische Zeitung* published an article that was critical of such manipulation and criticised the attitude of American professor George Trumbull Ladd, who described colonisation as

¹⁹ “Die Wirtschaftliche Entwicklung,” *Frankfurter Zeitung*, April 2, 1909.

²⁰ “Asien: Die Einverleibung Koreas,” *Kölnische Zeitung*, August 24, 1910.

²¹ “Reformen in Korea,” *Vossische Zeitung*, August 17, 1909.

²² “Reformen in Korea,” *Berliner Börsen Zeitung*, August 28, 1909.

²³ “Der neue Vertrag zwischen Japan und Korea,” *Berliner Lokal Anzeiger*, July 25, 1907.

²⁴ “Der Text der japanisch-koreanischen Konvention,” *Berliner Lokal Anzeiger*, July 26, 1907.

²⁵ “Marquis Ito über die neue Situation in Korea,” *Berliner Lokal Anzeiger*, July 29, 1907.

²⁶ “Der neue Vertrag zwischen Japan und Korea,” *Berliner Lokal Anzeiger*, July 25, 1907.

²⁷ Untitled, *Berliner Lokal Anzeiger*, July 27, 1907.

the “benevolent assimilation of Korea into the Japanese empire”(Schmid 2002, 164). After G. T. Ladd’s visit to Korea, which was completely financed by the Japanese government, *Vossische Zeitung* sarcastically stated that an “honest press doesn’t work on command [of a government].”²⁸

By contrast, the journalists who refused to acquiesce to Japanese policies in Korea experienced severe oppression. For example, Ernest Bethel, a reporter in Japan for the London *Daily Mail* and founder of the newspapers *Taehan maeil sinbo* and *The Korean Daily News*, was arrested twice in 1907 and 1908 and passed away shortly after.²⁹ This type of repression was commonly wielded against opponents of Japan and its annexation of Korea. Considering this environment, the comment of one Western observer that “few nations have striven so manfully to create a pleasant impression upon foreigners as have the Japanese” is hardly an exaggeration (Schmid 2002, 160).

Were these strategies ultimately successful? If so, to what extent? The answer to these questions can be found most clearly through an analysis of the final product, that is, the actual newspaper articles themselves. The coverage of the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910 shows the extent to which Japanese censorship succeeded. Although “a large number of Japanese and foreign correspondents rushed into Seoul” as reported by *Münchener Allgemeine Zeitung* on September 21, 1910, Chief of Police General Motojiro Akashi, who supervised the surveillance and censorship of the press in Korea, ran such a “*Schreckensregiment* (horrible regime)” that “even the slightest infraction could culminate in the repression of domestic newspapers and the confiscation of news reports in the case of foreign newspapers.”³⁰ Another newspaper noted this strict surveillance was also noted by other newspapers; according to a report in the *Deutsche Tageszeitung* that was published on July 8, 1910, “the Japanese government imposed the strictest censorship on all information by mail and the Japanese press was prohibited from even reporting on the most minor incidents happening in Korea.”³¹

In the end, Reuters was responsible for the only article that was reported from Seoul despite the alleged presence of many foreign correspondents. The article, however, simply presented, without comment or editorial intervention, the edict of the Korean emperor that urged his people to accept the annexation. This Reuters report was reproduced in the *Vossische Zeitung* on August 29, 1910³² and in the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* on August

²⁸ “Ito und Korea,” *Vossische Zeitung*, August 23, 1908. Schmid wrote an interesting article about G. T. Ladd, in which he drew a comparison between Ladd and Homer Hulbert, an ardent supporter of Korean independence. Andre Schmid, “Two Americans in Seoul,” *Korean Histories*, accessed May 18, 2018, https://koreanhistorieswebsite.files.wordpress.com/2017/04/kh2_2_schmid_two_americans.pdf.

²⁹ Chŏng Chinsŏk, 2008. *Kŭkpi: Chosŏn ch'ongdokpu ūi ŭllon kŏmyŏl kwa t'anap* (Sŏul: K'ŏmyunik'eisyŏn Puksŭ, 2008), 30–32; Hong Sunil, Chŏng Chinsŏk, and Pak Ch'angsŏk, 2003. *Han'guk yŏngŏ sinmun sa*. Sŏul: K'ŏmyunik'eisyŏn Puksŭ, 30, 60–86.

³⁰ “Die Annexion Koreas durch Japan,” *Münchener Allgemeine Zeitung*, September 21, 1910.

³¹ “Von der Einverleibung Koreas,” *Deutsche Tageszeitung*, July 8, 1910.

³² “Die Annexion Koreas,” *Vossische Zeitung*, August 30, 1910.

30, 1910.³³ We can conclude that any kind of objective journalism in Korea at this time was virtually impossible.

Frankfurter Zeitung, for its part, commissioned Erwin Bälz in 1910 to comment on the Korea-Japan annexation. In its choice of the author, the paper's obvious support for this step was clear; he had been a professor at the Medical college of Tokyo Imperial University between 1876 and 1902 and became a personal physician-in-waiting to the Meiji Emperor and the imperial household between 1902 and 1905. Furthermore, many influential Japanese politicians, including Ito Hirobumi, had been his patients. Indeed, Bälz reminded readers of the extent to which the Triple Intervention at Port Arthur had unleashed implacable hatred among the Japanese, who referred to it as evidence of the "immature diplomacy of Germany." Based on this, Bälz argued that "it is wise that Germany simply observed the process of annexation." Furthermore, he requested that the German media "strive for more restraint" because Germany had "really nothing to do with Korea."³⁴ A. Wirth succinctly summarised the situation in his article, "Gagging Korea," in *Tag* from November 13, 1908, in which he stated that "Korea is about to be raped" and "Japan does not want the world to know even the least facts or information about the tragic destiny of Korea and the Koreans."³⁵

German Press Coverage of the Korea-Japan Annexation Treaty: "Nothing New"³⁶

Reports concerning Japan's planned annexation of Korea began to circulate early in 1910, and according to *Berliner Lokal Anzeiger*, the annexation was officially made public to the representatives of various Western countries in Tokyo on August 24, 1910.³⁷

Clearly, the annexation treaty was viewed as an international issue. *Reichsbote*, *Rhein-Westfälische Zeitung*, and *Leipziger N. Nachrichten*, which had not previously reported on Japan's colonisation of Korea, began to publish articles on the situation. The articles show a similar pattern; they described the annexation process as already taking place after 1905 and stated that Korea was becoming more modernised with the establishment of schools, roads, and hospitals, all thanks to Japan. The articles also claimed that the world powers would not object to the annexation as long as Japan allowed Korea to trade with countries in the international community.

Understandably, the newspapers that were on record as supporting Japanese colonialism took a positive view of the annexation. Bälz published an article on the annexation in *Frankfurter Zeitung*, which had consistently supported Japanese colonialism. The fact that Bälz was very close to both Aoki Shuzo and Ito proves that the *Frankfurter Zeitung's* choice of Bälz

³³ "Die Annexion Koreas," *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, August 31, 1910.

³⁴ Erwin Bälz, "Korea von seinen Anfängen bis zu seinem Ende," *Frankfurter Zeitung*, October 2, 1910.

³⁵ A. Wirth, "Die Knebelung Koreas," *Tag*, November 13, 1908.

³⁶ "Die Annexion Korea," *Vossische Zeitung*, August 23, 1910.

³⁷ "Koreas Annexion durch Japan Vollzogen," *Berliner Lokal Anzeiger*, August 25, 1910.

to write this article was not a coincidence. Bälz portrayed his imperialist perspective with the claim that the annexation was a strategic inevitability; Japan had to defend itself against China and Russia. He also stated that “all European countries would have done the same if they were in Japan’s shoes” (Kim 2013, 180).

Even the newspapers critical of Japanese colonialism claimed that nothing could have been done to stop the annexation and failed to question the meaning of annexation itself. *Vossische Zeitung* continued to be critical of the annexation, providing detailed accounts of the Korean resistance movement and pointing out the Japanese censorship but it echoed the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in concluding that the annexation had been inevitable. *Vossische Zeitung* presented the conflict between Russia and Japan over regional hegemony, comparing the Korean situation to a choice between dying of hunger and freezing to death while caught between Japan as conqueror and Russia as exploiter.³⁸

How did contemporary German journalists address the legality of the annexation treaties? First, it is apparent that there was no consensus even on how to refer to this historical incident. *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Reichsbote*, *Berliner Tageblatt*, *Leipziger N. Nachrichten*, *Vossische Zeitung*, and *Hamburger Nachrichten* used the word “annexion,” while the *Rhein-Westfaelische Zeitung* used the word “einverleibung” to refer to “annexation.” These two words do not have different connotations, as illustrated by fact that the *Deutsche Tageszeitung* used the word “Einverleibung” in an article published on July 8, 1910 and then used the word “Annexion” in an article published on August 19, 1910, without any particular explanations. *Vossische Zeitung* even stated that there was a need to invent a new word to replace “annexion” in this case because the Japanese government had made a strong statement to the international community that it would not annex Korea.³⁹ *Hamburger Nachrichten* also reported that the Japanese government would find it difficult to use the word “annexion” after having promised to respect Korean independence in 1904 and citing the guarantee of Korean sovereignty as a motivation in declaring war against Russia.⁴⁰ German journalists did not accept the annexation uncritically.

The concept of agreement was highly important in justifying colonialism from the perspective of international law; indeed, it provided the legal and moral basis for maintaining the principles of the international community as they developed in Europe.⁴¹ The Japanese government, being quite familiar with international law, was highly sensitive to the importance of agreement and thus knew the strategic value in emphasising it. It was not a coincidence that *Berliner Lokal Anzeiger*, the newspaper most closely associated with Ito, was the only publication to emphasise the consent of the Korean government to the annexation,⁴² a point that other German newspapers virtually ignored. *Berliner Lokal Anzeiger* reported on August

³⁸ “Die Annexion Korea,” *Vossische Zeitung*, August 23, 1910.

³⁹ “Die Annexion Korea,” *Vossische Zeitung*, August 23, 1910.

⁴⁰ “Die Annexion Koreas,” *Hamburger Nachrichten*, August 24, 1910.

⁴¹ Koskenniemi stated that “native consent” seemed to constitute an “irreproachable moral-legal basis for European title” (Koskenniemi 2001, 138).

⁴² “Der neue Vertrag zwischen Japan und Korea,” *Berliner Lokal Anzeiger*, July 25, 1907.

24 that “the Korean government has agreed with Japan on the form of annexation.”⁴³ On the following day, the word ‘signed’ was underscored stylistically with a wider character interval.⁴⁴

Critical newspapers such as the *Deutsche Tageszeitung* did not make this Japanese effort to emphasise the agreement unnoticed. An article that was published on July 8, 1910 in the *Deutsche Tageszeitung*, which had consistently criticised Japanese colonialism, said that “the Japanese government is making efforts to make it seem as if Japan is only carrying out the will of the Korean emperor, whom Japan claims to have agreed to Japan’s annexation of Korea on his own accord.”⁴⁵ Interestingly, no attention was given to whether the emperor had signed the treaty or what the stance of the Korean government was at the time. The Korean government had already become a shadow to the newspapers. The articles only portrayed the annexation as the product of improved Russo-Japanese relations rather than any action of what remained of the Korean government.

Indeed, it was the prevailing view at the time that Japan’s annexation of Korea was a *fait accompli*, given that Korea had already effectively been under Japanese rule since the treaty of 1905. As explained in the article “Gelbe Freundschaft (Friendship of the Yellow Race),” published in the *Reichsbote* on July 5, 1910, “Japan executed its plan for annexation which it had prepared a long time ago.” Therefore, the outcome of 1910 was “not surprising.”⁴⁶ Similarly, an article in the August 24, 1910 issue of *Deutsche Tageszeitung* stated that Korea had already lost its independence after signing the 1905 treaty.⁴⁷ *Kölnische Zeitung* also referred to the annexation as “not surprising” because “Korea was no more than a province of Japan.”⁴⁸ The German media did not perceive the annexation treaty as a diplomatic treaty based on an agreement and thus did not see it as a dramatic geopolitical shift or a decisive turning point in history so much as a continuation of an ongoing colonising process.

If not the principle of agreement, what made the annexation treaty so broadly acceptable to the German media? If an agreement was important, it would not have been Korea but other imperial powers that could have agreed. An article in the *Hamburger Nachrichten* compared the Japanese annexation of Korea to the Austrian annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and concluded that Japan had been in the stronger position based on the rights of Japan as a conqueror and Korean incompetence.⁴⁹

This reference to the rights of a conqueror clearly illustrates why the German press did not question the annexation on the basis of international law. *Berliner Lokal Anzeiger* stated that the annexation had been “due to the right of conquest and the silence of the international community.”⁵⁰ Similarly, an article published on August 24, 1910 in the *Kölnische*

⁴³ “Russlands Zustimmung zur Annexion Koreas,” *Berliner Lokal Anzeiger*, August 24, 1910.

⁴⁴ “Koreas Annexion durch Japan vollzogen,” *Berliner Lokal Anzeiger*, August 25, 1910.

⁴⁵ “Vor der Einverleibung Koreas,” *Deutsche Tageszeitung*, July 8, 1910.

⁴⁶ “Gelbe Freundschaft,” *Reichsbote*, July 5, 1910.

⁴⁷ “Das Ende Koreas,” *Deutsche Tageszeitung*, August 24, 1910.

⁴⁸ “Asien: Die Einverleibung Koreas,” *Kölnische Zeitung*, August 24, 1910.

⁴⁹ “Die Annexion Koreas,” *Hamburger Nachrichten*, August 24, 1910.

⁵⁰ “Koreas Annexion durch Japan vollzogen,” *Berliner Lokal Anzeiger*, August 25, 1910.

Zeitung stated that “it was not very difficult for Japan to receive international approval”⁵¹ for its actions because the international community so broadly recognized the right of conquest. As a result, the *Leipziger Nachrichten* reported that other countries’ approval of the annexation was a “mere formality.”⁵²

The critical appraisals of the annexation treaty were not concerned with the annexation itself but rather with its inconsistency with earlier promises the Japanese government had made. *Tag* declared that “Japan’s numerous promises to respect Korea’s independence carry no value and are locked in the diplomat’s drawer.”⁵³ *Hamburger Nachrichten* suggested that Japan would find it difficult to use the word “annexation” because Korean independence had been one of the justifications for war against Russia.⁵⁴ This critique, however, never raised basic questions of the legality of the treaty.

In sum, we can say that unlike other contemporary discussions on the annexation treaty, German newspapers did not consider the legality of the treaty itself and instead regarded the annexation as the culmination of a process that began with the Russo-Japanese War six years earlier. What mattered were the rights of the conqueror, not the idea of agreement. Legality, or the maintenance of the formal legality, mattered only to the Japanese colonial regime. Therefore, we can say that it is senseless to try to separate the legality of the text from its historical context: the process of colonisation. In the end, there was no international legality in the Japanese annexation of Korea. It is a clear case of imperial expansion.

Conclusion

The question concerning the Japanese annexation of Korea was not a matter of legality but rather of whether Japan could be regarded as a member of the European community; the answer, as evidenced by the coverage of the German media, was yes. Indeed, German journalists did not distinguish the Korea-Japan Annexation Treaty of 1910 from the broader phenomenon of Western colonisation.

Actually, distinction between legitimacy and legality did not matter to the international society of the era. The issues that concern present-day historians in both Japan and Korea, such as whether the Korean and Japanese plenipotentiaries were given full power to address the annexation or whether the treaties were signed under duress with or without the consent of Korean representatives, for example, did not bother German journalists at all. The Korea-Japan Annexation Treaty of 1910 was accepted by even the most critical German newspapers, including the *Vossische Zeitung*, not because of abstract legal principles “of the day” but rather because of contemporary colonial power structures: the annexation treaty was viewed as just another episode in the continuation of colonisation rather than a legal contract based

⁵¹ “Asien: Die Einverleibung Koreas,” *Kölnische Zeitung*, August 24, 1910.

⁵² “Korea durch Japan annektiert,” *Leipziger N. Nachrichten*, August 23, 1910.

⁵³ “Zur Annexion Koreas,” *Tag*, August 31, 1910.

⁵⁴ “Die Annexion Koreas,” *Hamburger Nachrichten*, August 24, 1910.

on mutual agreement. The Japanese government wanted to present itself as a diplomat rather than a conqueror, as the *Frankfurter Zeitung* observed in an article from July 26, 1907 (Frankfurter Zeitung 1907). Both labels, however, were inseparable and mutually dependent; Japanese diplomacy gained the tacit recognition because Western powers recognized the Japan as a conqueror comparable to European powers. In this sense, legality and legitimacy were inseparably intermingled and constituted two sides of the same coin, namely, colonialism. Therefore, the approach of present-day scholars in both Japan and Korea to separate legality from legitimacy and focus mainly on the legality of the annexation treaty is premised on a retrospectively applied set of priorities that do not fully engage with the perspectives of the era.

These perspectives do not mean, however, that social legitimacy or international approval was simply granted to the annexation treaty. The Japanese government actively intervened in the German news coverage on Korea, sometimes by directly producing articles and sometimes by repressing reports that were hostile to the Japanese colonial agenda. These efforts were often successful. Some major newspapers, such as the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and *Berliner Lokal Anzeiger*, accurately reproduced arguments that were provided by the Japanese government. Nevertheless, the German newspaper market, which was experiencing dramatic growth not only in quantity but also in quality, could not be entirely brought under the influence of Japan. Considering the diverse articles that were published in various German newspapers, the picture that surrounded the Korea-Japan Annexation Treaty of 1910 was far more complex than simply a matter of giving or recognising its social legitimacy. The better question is to what extent was this legitimacy granted and in what context rather than whether or not it was granted at all.

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