

[Research Notes]

## Ahn Jung-geun and the Cultural Public Sphere

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### Abstract

"Patriot Ahn Jung-geun Memorial Hall" preserves the historical materials of Ahn's activities for visitors. Among them noteworthy is a collection of Ahn's calligraphies. Ahn was executed in Japanese occupied Lushun military prison on March 26, 1910, leaving many calligraphic works for his family, friends, and notably for the Japanese prison officers.

Ahn Jung-geon's calligraphic works might be supposed to belong to the public sphere in the world of letters. The point is that Ahn's cultural war had an overwhelmingly strong effect on the mind of the Japanese authorities in the prison. He might have been the first person that embodied the concept of world citizenship in East Asia.

### 1. Calligraphy: Cultural Weapons

Namsan (South Hill) is located in the capital city of Korea, occupying 3 million sq. meters of a wide variety of natural resources, trees, plants and small animals. Imperial Japan established the Chosen Jingu Imperial Shrine right here at the center of Namsan park. Japanese colonial authority had been ordering Korean people to pray for the Gods of Shinto shrine, who are the mythological ancestors of the Emperor's family. The Chosen Jingu was destroyed right after the collapse of Imperial Japan. "Patriot Ahn Jung-geun Memorial Hall" was open in 1970 at the right place of the former Chosen Jingu.<sup>1</sup>

On October 26, 1909, Ahn Jung-geun as an anti-imperialist Korean Justice Army general staff officer shot Hirobumi Itoh at the Russian controlled Harbin station, who was the very big name of Meiji Restoration as the leading creator of the Imperial Japan Constitution, the first Japanese prime minister and the first Japanese resident general of Korea. Itoh had prepared the Eulsa Treaty or the Japan-Korea Protectorate Treaty, which made Korea a protectorate of Japan. Three of the six bullets fatally hit the heart of Itoh Hirobumi, and finally thirty minutes later he was dead.

While Harbin was under the control of Russian Empire, Ahn was handed over to the Japanese authorities. It is notably interesting that Ahn is the most influential name ever, whom does the Japanese people, even the military personnel inside the prison, admire though he was a "felonious criminal" or "assassin of the biggest name of the modern Japan." Just for five months from the arrest to the execution Ahn's good manners and his pious Christianity on an everyday basis had been deeply moving the lawyers, the guards, and even the prosecutors of the Imperial Japan.

Ahn was writing the historical articles on the topics of Hirobumi Itoh, the Imperial Japan's colonial rule of Korea, and the creation of peace in East Asia. Ahn had been always requested to write calligra-

phy for the prison officer even on the last day of the execution. Presumably most of the calligraphy has been left to Japanese people who were working in the prison.

"Patriot Ahn Jung-geun Memorial Hall" preserves the historical materials of Ahn's activities for visitors. Among them noteworthy is a collection of Ahn's calligraphies. Ahn was executed in Japanese occupied Lushun military prison on March 26, 1910, leaving many calligraphic works for his family, friends, and notably for the Japanese prison officers.

Entering the gate of the memorial hall, we can find the calligraphic collection on the right side of the exhibition room. The first outstanding work is "Even millions of gold can not deserve to teach one child" ("黃金百萬兩不如一教子" in Chinese characters). At the early stage of his activity Ahn had a plan to establish a school to teach children to accomplish Korean independence. His intention was to start from the very bottom of the society or people themselves. Therefore this calligraphy means his unchangeable will to win liberation and independence. His handwriting style is full of vigor and dignity, which suggests that Ahn Jung-geun was the top-class person of culture in the age.

Another example is "Seriously worrying and thinking about the safety and crisis of the country" ("國家安危勞心焦思" in Chinese characters). Ahn wrote this calligraphy for the prosecutor Seishiro Yasuoka, which was presented to the memorial hall by Yasuoka's daughter. We can read "To the prosecutor Yasuoka" on the upper right of the calligraphy, and "Sincerely, Ahn Jung-geon, the citizen of the Great Korea" on the lower left of it. Ahn thought about the prosecutor's position and chose the sentence of the calligraphy. When he wrote calligraphy, he carefully and respectively decided the theme concerning who requested Ahn's writing.

The most noteworthy work is "The devotion to the country is the serviceman's duty" ("為國獻身軍人本分"). This calligraphy was written for the prison guard, the military police Toshichi Chiba right before the execution on the last morning of Ahn's life. Chiba had been eagerly requesting Ahn's work, but the chance did not come. He was waiting and waiting, and finally that was done on the last day. Chiba is one of the most affected people under Ahn's humanity. Chiba was deeply overwhelmed of shame on the execution day, seeing Ahn off. In this context "The devotion to the country is the serviceman's duty" was Ahn's deep concern about suffering Chiba.

Chiba had been the prison guard in charge of Ahn since he was arrested and sent to the prison. At the early stage of his duty Chiba was fiercely angry with Ahn because he was the killer of the elder statesman in the days of the Meiji Restoration. But in the passing of time he became affected by Ahn's behavior and thought.

Finally Chiba inclined to doubt the very meaning of Itoh Hirobumi's governing policy over Korea. Chiba resigned the military duty after Ahn's death, came home, and was praying everyday for the left calligraphy on the Buddhist altar. He was holding a memorial service for Ahn's soul all his life. After Chiba's death his widow was doing a memorial service instead of her spouse. She died, and Ahn's work was handed over to the hand of Chiba's niece, who donated it to International Korean Research Institute in Tokyo. Ahn's work came to Memorial Hall after a long journey.

On the cover of Japanese version of Memorial Hall's brochure a photo shows the memorial service in front of the stone monument of Ahn's calligraphy "The devotion to the country is the serviceman's duty" at the Dairinji Temple in Miyagi Prefecture, Japan. Delegates from the Korean Organization of

Praying for Patriot Ahn Jung-geon and the Japanese Research Institute on Ahn Jung-geon are holding a memorial service together. Among them Yasuhiko Saito, the Buddhist monk of the Dairinji Temple, is praying, who is the author of “Ahn Jung-geon in my mind: Toshichi Chiba, his lifelong “gassyo”(joining his palms together).” Flowers are offered to the monument from Yasuhiko Saito together with those from the president of Korean Organization.

If there had not been the calligraphy left for us, there would not be such reconciliation between Korean and Japanese people. Chiba’s lifelong “gassyo” is based on the medium of the left calligraphy.

On the other hand the calligraphy was one of the “cultural weapons” lastly left for Ahn Jung-geon inside the prison to struggle against Imperial Japan. The cultural weapon is not a physical weapon, but a conceptual weapon. There were only limited measures for Ahn to continue his struggle. One measure is thinking and writing. He was writing an essay “On Peace in East Asia,” which was not completed before the execution. Another measure is handwriting the calligraphy. It is Ahn’s calligraphic works that affected the mind of Japanese people since his imprisonment in Lushun military prison.

The brochure says, “many calligraphic works of Ahn Jung-geon in Korea were donated by Japanese people who had been preserving them as precious treasures even under the violent watching of the authorities generation by generation. They are good examples for us. We feel we have to learn from them.”

## 2. Ahn as a cultural icon: Keene’s understanding

Ironically Ahn hated Itoh, but he admired Emperor Meiji. A noted Japanology researcher and writer Donald Keene, the wartime drafted interpreter for Japanese prisoners, analyzes the Ahn Jung-geon case. He calls Ahn as “An Chun-gun.”

An was not anti-Japanese. The man he most admired was undoubtedly Emperor Meiji, and one of his most vehement accusations against Ito Hirobumi was that he had intentionally deceived the emperor, who desired not the subjugation of Korea but peace in East Asia and Korea independence. An’s knowledge of the emperor’s wishes was derived from the statement to Japanese objectives in starting a war with Russia in 1904. An was delighted to read about Japanese victories over the Russians and claimed that his compatriots shared his joy over the defeats suffered by one of the agents of White Peril. He regretted only that Japan had broken off the war before Russia was reduced to total submission.<sup>ii</sup>

Ahn misunderstood the reality of Japanese government. Japan ran out of military funds at the final stage of the Russo-Japan war. Japanese people were not informed of the truth of the war and the balance of the nation’s purse.

Ahn was a nationalist, but not a narrow-minded nationalist. He was seriously thinking about the peace in East Asia. Ahn insisted that he killed Ito as a “lieutenant general of the righteous army.” Ito disturbed the peace in East Asia, disaffecting Japan and Korea. Keene writes:

An still hoped that relations between the two countries would become closer, providing a model for the whole world to imitate. An urged a sympathetic Japanese prosecutor not to worry about whether or not he would be condemned to death; all he asked was that if the emperor of Japan realized how mistaken Ito's policies had been, he would understand An's action and rejoice. An expected that if in the future, following the wishes of the emperor of Japan, administrative policy with respect to Korea was improved, peace between Japan and Korea could be maintained for 10,000 ages.<sup>iii</sup>

Ahn's rhetoric above was supposed to have been an effective cultural weapon on the Japanese authorities inside the prison. But we do not think his rhetoric just as a tactics under the limited severe condition. His rational view on the relations between Korea and Japan should be redefined in the new light of the age.

Why did Japanese captors, the prison officers and the legal authorities, show sympathy to Ahn Jung-geon? The prosecutor Takao Mizobuchi even said, "You are a righteous man."

His treatment improved markedly after the Russians turned him over to the Japanese. Mizobuchi Takao, the public prosecutor, offered him gold-tipped cigarettes after finishing his interrogations and, in their chats afterward, showed his sympathy. An recorded in his autobiography that when he had revealed Ito Hirobumi's fifteen crimes, Mizobuchi exclaimed, "From what you have just told me, it so clear that you are a righteous man of East Asia. I can't believe a sentence of death will be imposed on a righteous man. There's nothing to worry about."

The other Japanese officials at the prison also were deeply impressed by An, whose attitudes and actions, much in the mold of a Japanese hero, seems to have struck a responsive chord in them. At New Year, An and the two Koreans who had been arrested as his accomplices were treated to traditional Japanese New Year's delicacies. His bold calligraphy was so much in demand by his captors that he wrote more than fifty scrolls for them, all signed "An Chung-gun, a Korean in the Port Arthur Prison."<sup>iv</sup>

In spite of Mizobuchi's reassurances, Ahn was sentenced to death. Ahn had hoped that he was not an assassin but a righteous soldier fighting a righteous war. But his hope was ignored. His last request was a postponement of two weeks in the execution in order to complete his study "On Peace in East Asia." Keene writes,

He asked the help of the prison warden, Kurihara Sakakichi, but Kurihara, though he deeply sympathetic was powerless to change the date. As a last favor, Ahn asked for white silk Korean clothes in which to die, and Kurihara obliged. Not long afterward, depressed over his failure to save Ahn, Kurihara resigned as warden and returned to Japan. Tokyo decided everything. The date for the execution was set for March 26, 1910.

### 3. Cultural weapons: “Soldiers in Civilian Clothes”

A man thought that culture might be more effective weapon than a physical one. A Japanese statesman Shinpei Goto. He was in charge of the head of the civilian affairs under the Governor-General of Taiwan Gentaro Kodama after the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895). Goto was the first director of the Southern Manchuria Railway Corporation.

In Taipei, Taiwan, the colonial age headquarters of the Governor-General office is now used as the President of Taiwan office. In 1982 the Cultural Heritage Preservation Law was promulgated to preserve Japan’s architectural legacy like this. In this context Goto’s cultural policy is reexamined in Taiwan. The following is from Jin Yang’s article of Taiwan Review, which is a monthly magazine published by the Government Information Office of the Republic of China (Taiwan).

Goto phased in Japanese systems and culture, but not without first embarking on an extensive investigation of Taiwanese customs. In light of his findings, laws were revised and new ones enacted, the cumulative effect being best described as a mixture of stick and carrot. The strategy worked. By 1905, during the rule of the fourth governor, Gentaro Kodama, Taiwan had become financially independent and could start contributing to Japanese government coffers.

At the same time, the Japanese started to erect large, modern buildings all over Taiwan. Goto Shinpei saw them as “soldiers in civilian clothes”: designed to aid the military mechanisms of colonial rule by overawing potential dissidents with an array of might combined with refined civilization. The Office of the Governor, built in the center of Taipei, was the best example of this approach—a magnificent palace that would establish the authority of the colonial rulers once for all, while cowing any Taiwanese who set eyes on it.<sup>v</sup>

“Soldiers in civilian clothes” indicates that cultural weapons might be mightier than physical ones in the colonial rule. Modern buildings are the cultural weapons that persuade the colonial people to understand the power of the ruling authority and the quality of life under their rule.

A century later “soft power theory”<sup>vi</sup> is a descendent of Shinpei Goto’s cultural policy. “Soft power” is the cultural or ideological means to accomplish the political rule. Joseph S. Nye, who coins “soft power,” says as follows:

Soft power rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others to want what you want. At the personal level, we all know the power of attraction and seduction. Power in a relationship or a marriage does not necessarily reside with the larger partner. Smart executives know that leadership is not just a matter of issuing commands, but also involves leading by example and attracting others to do what you want them to do. It is difficult to run a large organization by commands alone unless you can get others to buy in to your values.<sup>vii</sup>

Cultural context play an important role in Nye’s soft power theory. He discusses the cultural context.

Culture is the recurrent pattern of behavior by which groups transmit knowledge and values. Almost human groups develop cultures, and they exist at multiple levels. Some aspects of human culture are universal; other dimensions are particular to a group.<sup>viii</sup>

Nye's soft power uses the cultural context for the successful leaders in business and politics.

#### 4. Public Sphere as a Cultural Arena:

Culture is a public event. Culture is supposed to be played on the public stage. Jürgen Habermus studied the public sphere in the civil (bourgeois) society. Habermus focuses on the public sphere in the world of letters in relation to the public sphere in the political realm. He writes,

The process in which the state-governed public sphere was appropriated by the public of private people making use of their reason and was established as a sphere of criticism of public authority was one of functionally converting the public sphere in the world of letters already equipped with institutions of the public and with forums for discussion. With their help, the experimental complex of audience-oriented privacy made its way into the political realm's public sphere.<sup>ix</sup>

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Kant discusses the publicity as the bridging principle between politics and morality. Habermus summarizes this point as follows,

Even before "public opinion" became established as standard phrase in the German-speaking areas, the idea of the bourgeois public sphere attained its theoretically fully developed form with Kant's elaboration of the principle of publicity in his philosophy of right and philosophy of history.

The critical process that private people engaged in rational-critical public debate brought to bear on absolute rule, interpreted itself as unpolitical: public opinion aimed at rationalizing politics in the name of morality. In the eighteenth century the Aristotelian tradition of a philosophy of politics was reduced in a telling manner of moral philosophy, whereby the "moral" (in any event thought as one with "nature" and "reason") also encompassed the emerging sphere of the "social," its connotations overlapping with those of the word "social" given such peculiar emphasis at the time. It was no coincidence that the author of the *Wealth of Nations* held a Chair of Moral Philosophy. The following statement had its place in this context: "Thus, true politics can never take a step without rendering homage to morality. Though politics by itself is a difficult art, its union with morality is no art at all, for this union cuts the knots which politics could not unite when they were in conflict."<sup>x</sup>

"German" might be rewritten as "Japan" in the early twentieth century context. Ahn Jung-geon's peace construction in East Asia might have been based on the morality mentioned above. Habermus's discussion goes on.

The “world” in which the public was constituted designated the realm of the public sphere. Kant spoke of knowledge of the world (Weltkenntnis); he referred to the man of the world (Mann von Welt). This sense of cosmopolitanism (Weltläufigkeit) was articulated, in the concept of world citizenship and ultimately in the concept of world progress (Weltbeste), as the idea of a world emerging perhaps most clearly in the “cosmical concept” (Welbegriff) of science—for in all its purity world was constituted in the communication of rational beings.<sup>xi</sup>

While we can say this view is too much optimistic, “Weltkenntnis” or knowledge of the world has become more and more important now in the globalizing world. Ahn Jung-geon might have been the first person that embodied the concept of world citizenship in East Asia.

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- i Hiura Satoko, *The Chosen Jingu Imperial Shrine and Schools in Colonial Korea*, Japan Society for the Historical Studies of Education, Vol. 49(20061001) pp. 110-122
- ii Donald Keene, *Emperor of Japan MELJI AND HIS WORLD, 1852-1912*, Columbia University Press, 2002. p. 664.
- iii Ibid. p. 664.
- iv Ibid. p. 665.
- v Jin Yang, *Colonial Constructs*, Taiwan Review, 1/1/2001.
- vi Joseph S. Nye, *The Power to Lead*, Oxford University Press, 2008.
- vii Joseph S. Nye Jr., *The Powers to lead*, Oxford University Press, 2008. p. 29.
- viii Ibid. p. 91.
- ix Jürgen Habermus translated by Thomas Burger of with the assistance of Frederic Lawrence, *The structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, The MIT Press, 1991. p. 51.  
The original work in German: *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, Herman Luchthand Verlag, 1962.
- x *ibid.* pp. 102-103.
- xi *ibid.* p. 106.