

The Intensification of Russophobia in Korea from Late Chosŏn to the Colonial Period: Focusing on the Role of Japan*

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According to existing research, Koreans had complex views of Russia from the late nineteenth to first half of the twentieth century. In fact, many Koreans seem to have viewed Russia with both fear and hope during this period. However, it is also true that negative images of Russia were continually and intentionally produced and spread in Korea throughout this period, contrasting with those of other nations such as the United States. This study analyzes the main agents, contents, and characteristics of the intensification of Russophobia in Korea from late Chosŏn to the Japanese colonial period. From the mid-seventeenth to early nineteenth century, Russians featured in Chosŏn records were described as weird barbarians of the Chinese border area. They were considered not as members of a totally different cultural region, the “Western World,” but low-class barbarians who needed to be reformed within the Chinese world order. However, in the late nineteenth century, as Japanese imperialists began to exaggerate the plundering involved in the Russian conquest of Siberia, Russophobia started to spread gradually within Korea. In particular, Japan actively justified its pillaging of Korea based on the logic that it was maintaining peace in East Asia by opposing the Russians, whom they portrayed as “predatory white people.” After succeeding in colonizing Korea, Japan strengthened its anti-communist and anti-Soviet propaganda following the Russian Revolution in 1917. While Japan consistently described Russia as an aggressive, impoverished, and horrible country, pro-Japanese Korean collaborators such as Yun Ch’iho, Ch’oe Namsŏn, and Yi Kwangsu reinforced such negative images through lectures and writings during the Japanese colonial period.

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