

German Discourse on Korea during the Era of Japanese Imperialism*

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This study examines how Germany, as a leading country in the international community, perceived and narrated the Japanese colonization of Korea from 1905 to 1945. The first part of this article explores the continuities and changes in German stereotypes towards Korea and their impact on Japanese colonial rule. It analyzes whether and how German-Japanese diplomatic relations influenced German attitudes toward Korea. It can be ascertained that there were virtually no changes in the German stereotypes of Korea since the last days of the Chosŏn Dynasty, because Korean people were merely “objects” in the formation and maintenance of German stereotypes. Such deeply entrenched stereotypes legitimized Japanese colonization of Korea and persisted despite changes in the diplomatic relationship between Germany and Japan. The second part of this article examines the weakness of the German colonial discourse from two approaches. First, German stereotypes of Korea were not buttressed by a self-contained structure, as demonstrated in the representative areas of Japanese modernization such as railroads, agricultural development, education and opening to world trade. Second, German colonial discourse focused only on the material aspects of modernity and completely overlooked the ideological aspect of modernity which the Koreans themselves highly evaluated.

Keywords: German stereotypes, Japanese colonization, Korea, colonial discourse, colonialism

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