Sin Ch'ae-ho's *Toksa Sinron* and Anti-Flunkeyism as the Heart of Korean Nationalist Historiography

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Abstract

This article will analyze three main features of Sin Ch'ae-ho's *Toksa Sinron* (*A New Interpretation of History)*, first focusing on his interpretation of Pu-yo and Tan-kun's lineage in the formation of Korean identity. Next, it will explore how Sin Ch'ae-ho highlighted ancient figures like General Ŭlchi Muntok and Yŏn Kaesomun, challenging the Sino-centric view of Korea's past. The discussion will then turn to the Silla Outpost Theory, delineating Sin Ch'ae-ho's criticisms and presenting his arguments for its rejection. The article will conclude that these three essential features of *Toksa Sinron* form the core of emphasizing the Korean essence of ancient Korean history and that the displacement of China and Japanese colonial historiography in this process was the principal mission of Sin Ch'ae-ho, which *Toksa Sinron* successfully accomplished. These qualities explain why Sin Ch'ae-ho occupies the exclusive position in Korean historiography as the father of modern Korean nationalist historiography.

Keywords: Sin Ch'ae-ho, *Toksa Sinron*, Silla Outpost Theory, Tan-kun

Introduction

"A nation's history is a record of a people's disappearance, growth, triumph and fall. Abandon the concept of 'people' and one abandons all notions of 'history,' abandon 'history,' and one can never expect a people's perception of a state to be in any sense meaningful. Such is the weight and gravity of the historian's labor and toil."[1] With these words, the nationalist and temporarily Marxist Korean historian Shin Chae-ho (1880-1936) began his synoptic assessment of ancient Korean history. He unequivocally argued that the historian's primary task is important because the past of a nation reflects the achievements, failures, and unfulfilled tasks of a people which can serve as a crucial guide to constructing a better future. It was due to this very function of history that the absence of history would directly translate into an absence of a clear

direction for the nation, which could essentially spell the end of the nation itself.

The resulting work, originally serialized in the *Maeil Sinpo* and then later titled *Toksa Sinron*, or *A New Interpretation of History* in 1908, had three major objectives. First, it rejected the long-standing belief among Korean scholars who worked prior to Sin's time that Tan-kun, the founder of Kochosŏn, the first nation in Korean history, is a myth. Rather, Sin tried to show that the foundations of ancient Korean history, inclusive of Silla's unification of Korea in 668 CE can be traced back to Tan-kun and the Puyŏ tribe, which essentially meant that Sin believed 2333 BCE to be a genuine starting point for the Korean nation rather than a random number designated for a year. Second, as a foremost work of Korean historical nationalism, *Toksa Sinron* is notable for introducing forgotten heroes in Korean history such as General Ŭlchi Muntŏk and Yŏn Kaesomun, who served as a *Taemakrichi* (Prime Minister) and the most powerful political figure in Kokuryŏ, both of whom were instrumental in defeating the Sui Dynasty's invasions of Korea in the early 7th century. Finally, Sin criticized colonial Japanese historiography on Korea for falsely propagating the Silla Outpost Theory, which argued that Japan had conquered and ruled over Silla from the 4th to 6th centuries, and he demonstrated that the theory had absolutely no supporting evidence and believable logic. In essence, the main purpose of this article is to highlight the significance of *Toksa Sinron* by emphasizing the three unique features of the work and highlight that anti-imperialism and anti-flunkeyism lay at the heart of Korean nationalist historiography, which is a core reason why Sin Ch'ae-ho is deemed to be the father of modern Korean nationalist historiography.

While there is an extensive body of literature on Sin Ch'ae-ho and his work available in Korean, the scholarship in English remains comparatively sparse. Although scholars such as Michael Robinson, Andre Schmid, Chizuko Allen, Henry Em, Seung-yop Shin, and Jae-yon Lee have published articles and book chapters examining the nationalist current in modern Korean historiography and mention Sin's works, a careful analysis of *Toksa Sinron* that would clarify why Sin Ch'ae-ho should be classified as a nationalist historian and define the essence of his nationalism has yet to be undertaken.[2] More specifically, the English-language scholarship on Sin does not explain how Sin's distaste for China's grandiose and exaggerated style of recording ancient history and Japan's attempts at distorting ancient Korean history combine together to

inform the core of his anti-flunkeyism and anti-imperialism, which lie at the heart of his conception of nationalist historiography. Given that *Toksa Sinron* is the first treatise on Korean national historiography, comprehending Sin's vision of nationalism, as manifested in his historical writings, is crucial. Such understanding is necessary to fully appreciate how the work shifts focus away from Chinese centrality and counters Japanese colonial historiography, thereby underscoring Korean nationalism.

This article will analyze *Toksa Sinron* with the aim of filling in the lacuna found in the English-language scholarship. It will first examine Sin Ch'ae-ho's emphasis on Pu-yo and Tan-kun's heritage on the founding of the Korean nation and examine how this emphasis, along with his rediscovery of Korea's national heroes such as General Ŭlchi Muntŏk and Yŏn Kaesomun served to remove a Chinese lens in the traditional interpretation of ancient Korea. I will then proceed to discuss the essential features of the Silla Outpost Theory and discuss Sin Ch'ae-ho's rejection of this theory. The article will conclude that these three essential features of *Toksa Sinron* form the core of emphasizing the Korean essence of ancient Korean history and that the redefining the roles of China and Japanese colonial historiography in this process was the principal mission of Sin Ch'ae-ho, which *Toksa Sinron* successfully delivered. These qualities precisely explain why Sin Ch'ae-ho occupies the exclusive position in Korean historiography as the father of modern Korean nationalist historiography.

Removing the Chinese Lens in Korean Historiography

*Toksa Sinron'*s primary objective is to remove the Chinese lens in Korean historiography, or more specifically, to place a Korean narrative about Korea's origins at the center while relying as little as possible on Chinese sources. Conceptually, the philosophy of Sin's approach can be approximately described as the antithesis of historian Matthew Connelly's objective behind "taking off the Cold War lens" from a Western centered historical account to allow for a more inclusive discussion of the Global South. Unlike Connelly's approach which tries to expand outside the framework of the "West" to internationalize the conception of the "non-West" to tell a more global narrative, Sin's method aims at a "nationalization" of Korean history. It distances itself from the traditional and international yet, in Sin's view, servile perspective of privileging Chinese historiography which tended to marginalize and ignore Korea's

diplomatic and military victories against China.[3] Simultaneously, Sin aims to project as many unique Korean cultural and political elements in interpreting the long span of Korean history as possible by pointing out omissions in Chinese history textbooks concerning facts related to Korea's military victories over China and by emphasizing the central figures who guided Korea to achieve success in defending itself from numerous Chinese invasions. In short, Sin's primary conceptual framework in understanding Sino-Korean relations is through the tracing of Korea's tempestuous history of trying to maintain a balance or an equilibrium of power against China by presenting a military response to a military challenge against Korean national sovereignty.[4]

The central means with which Sin strives to achieve such "nationalization" is through an emphasis on proving the veracity of Tan-kun as the actual founder of the Korean state. In the very first chapter of *Toksa Sinron*, Sin makes it perfectly clear that he harbors a distaste for a Sino-centered Korean historiography, which, in Sin's view, relied excessively on Chinese sources to the extent of denigrating the authenticity of Korean accounts on Korea's ancient origins. Sin proposes that relocating the origins of the Korean state to the rise of the Pu-yŏ tribe, of which Tan-kun was a member, is appropriate, for the Three Kingdoms Period began precisely due the division of the clan into Kokuryŏ, Silla, and Paek-che. Therefore, to truly understand the origins of the Korean nation, it follows that understanding what was in existence prior to the division is essential and it is this very task which informs the gist of Sin's approach to reinterpreting ancient Korean history.

Sin argued that in an age which believes that "superior peoples survive while inferior peoples perish," history is the sole "thread of hope for a clear certainty that Korea is still functioning as a country." He emphasized that history must "perform this very task" of ensuring national survival, and without it, "it is better to declare that there is no such thing as history at all."[5] In short, Sin perceived history as a spiritual panacea for a world which seemed to be obsessed with Social Darwinism—the confused combination of Darwin's theory of natural selection and survival and Malthus's emphasis on a struggle for existence in human society.[6] For history to indeed be a spiritual panacea and guide a nation out of the confused verbiage of Social Darwinism and its application to international society, it must concentrate on clearly showing a distinctive origin of a nation to tell the world that even though the form of the nation may have died due to colonization, the nation's spirit still lives on.

To fulfill this particular function of history, a historian must always "reveal the master race, and after establishing this as the central topic of inquiry, proceed to discuss how the politics of a nation thrived and doomed, how the nation's industry flourished and fell, how military accomplishments were achieved and lost, how lifestyles and customs changed over the years, how a nation accepted outsiders and negotiated with foreign nations." Such an integrated narrative forms the core of what can properly be referred to as "the business of writing history."[7] In other words, Sin was arguing that every nation has a people who had the original power to found a state, and insofar as this particular group of people can be identified, the historian must portray history as a collection of deeds, thoughts, and the culture of this distinctive group. It is in accurately recording all occurrences stemming from the decisions and activities of a singular leading group of people which history acquires its natural importance and function of transmitting a unitary and singular narrative which allows future posterity to identify themselves as belonging to a particular nation.

In accordance with his philosophy, Sin proceeds to argue that the history of the Pu-yo tribe "is the history of ancient Korea," for although there were various tribes such as the Japanese, Mongolians, the Xianbei, when these tribes "rose in rebellion, they were quickly put down," and individuals who assimilated into Korean society such as Kim Ch'ung-sŏn, a former Japanese soldier who surrendered during the Imjin War and was instrumental for introducing the arquebus to the Korean army, are but "rarest among rare cases" and because there is no "clear evidence proving the Silla Outpost Theory to be right," it can safely be concluded that only the history of the Pu-yo tribe is "the history of the rise and fall of the Korean people."[8] Anyone who dares to deny the veracity of this thesis "can truly be declared to be uttering nothing but gibberish."[9]

In other words, unlike scholars such as Kim Pu-sik, whose *History of the Three Kingdoms* (*Samkuk Saki*) is filled with references to Silla receiving the grace of the Tang Dynasty and renders the Korean people into an inferior people compared to the Chinese by mentioning tributary missions very frequently, Sin assumes the opposite position. He is arguing that the Korean nation had a distinctive and an exclusive Korean origin which can singularly be pointed to the Pu-yŏ tribe because despite the fact that there were frequent foreign invasions and foreign presence in Korea, which in rare cases, meant the naturalization of former enemies such as Japanese soldiers during the Imjin War into Korean citizens, these rare

cases were temporal and ephemeral at best compared with the continuous existence of the Pu-yo. Therefore, Sin confidently puts forth his central thesis that ancient Korea existed as a separate entity from China because its history is essentially identical to that of the Pu-yŏ and none other. His confidence is such that he goes so far to argue that omitting the history of the Pu-yŏ tribe immediately disqualifies any individual from declaring oneself to be a genuine historian.

Having established a clear origin for the Korean people, Sin is eager to maintain the consistency of his logic. Hence, Sin argues that the Three Kingdoms Period must not be understood to be a rupture from the Ko-Chosŏn Period because Kokuryŏ was a state whose citizens were "direct descendants from North Pu-yŏ, while South Pu-yŏ quickly capitulated to North Pu-yŏ and became assimilated."[10] Sin challenged the traditional view held by his contemporaries who often saw Tan-kun as a mythical figure who established the seat of government by divine right near Mount Myohyang. He argues instead that Tan-kun blended violence with diplomacy, forging a unique form of *realpolitik*, "subjugating countries east of the Yalu River through diplomacy, and defeating vicious tribes to the north by constructing P'yŏngyang Castle."[11] Sin demystifies Tan-kun, countering the widespread but, in his view, erroneous belief in Tan-kun's divinity. He suggests that accepting Tan-kun as a mythical figure would imply that Koreans are a people without a definitive lineage or a tangible progenitor. This mistaken belief is unacceptable to Sin because it directly counters Sin's assertion that any people without a consciousness about their historical origins lacks a sense of belonging to a nation and the clear fact that Koreans do inhabit a nation called Korea.

Furthermore, Sin argues that the trajectory of Tan-kun's conquests originates from Shenyang where he established Chol-pon Pu-yŏ, whereupon he expanded into the Liaodong Peninsula, and finally arrived in Korea proper.[12] In other words, Sin is arguing that Tan-kun was a strategic leader who laid the foundations of Ko-Chosŏn through a display of superior force and tact, which suggests that like other mortal and wise kings in history, Tan-kun unified Korea through a mixture of negotiations and an adherence to what would later become the Clausewitzian dictum of war as politics by other means. Sin also thereby demystifies the origins of the Korean people by showing that the founding of Korea was a "normal" process of statecraft, and that Korea was not naturally destined or ordained to be located where it currently is today. The fact that one can find traces of Pu-yŏ's heritage in China and Korea also lends further credence to Sin's

assertion that imperial conquests laid the foundations of the Korean state rather than some dubious and nebulous notions of divinity and providence.

The demystification of Tan-kun also implicitly suggests that Sin is especially critical of scholars such as Kim Pu-sik, whose most egregious feature, as Sin argued in a chapter discussing Silla's relations with the Tang Dynasty in *Toksa Sinron*, was an "uncritical acceptance of anything mentioned in Chinese history books while barely acknowledging the value of Korean historical accounts." Sin characterized Kim's method as "slavish" and "worthless" because Kim did not "possess the acumen of a trained historian and simply did not understand a thing he was discussing."[13]

In other words, Sin found little to consider worthwhile in even the oldest historical account of ancient Korea because its excessive praise and adulation of all things Chinese strangely left nothing authentically Korean about that history except for the fact that a Korean compiled and recorded it. Such a history was unworthy in Sin's view because it failed to preserve the Korean spirit as a distinct entity from a Chinese spirit, and therefore, instead of fostering a sense of pride and belonging to the Korean people, it encouraged a misguided inferiority complex among Koreans toward China. Moreover, because Kim's *Samkuk Saki* primarily does consist of numerous instances in which Silla received the grace of the Chinese emperor rather than the converse, Sin's criticism about Kim's excessive Sino-centrism seems justified. Considering the derogatory portrayal of historians who traditionally relied on Chinese historical accounts to recount Korean history, Sin's emphasis on Pu-yŏ as the origin of the Korean nation must not simply be understood as an exercise in enhancing the accuracy of the geographical basis of the Korean people's historical origins, but as an effort to de-center Chinese history in the interpretation of Korean history and to assert Korea's independence from China as an ancient and venerable idea rooted in distinctively Korean foundations of the Korean people.

The other central means through which Sin confidently tries to remove the Chinese lens in interpreting Korean history is through his introduction or rediscovery of Korean heroes who fought against Chinese invasions. Sin argues in *Toksa Sinron* that Ŭlchi Muntŏk and Yŏn Kaesomun ought to be considered as the foremost nationalist leaders that ancient Korean history had ever produced, for these individuals were instrumental in defending Korea from China's aspirations to enlarge its territorial possessions. Ŭlchi Muntŏk had "turned soldiers under General Yu

Wenshu into fish bait," while Yŏn Kaesomun "traveled to China and observed Li Shimin's (who later became Taizhong of the Tang Dynasty) personality and learned about China's customs and culture, as well as its climate," suppressed the nobility's authority and conquered territories to the East and West, which qualified Yŏn as Korea's "Peter the Great or Napoleon."[14] Sin did not hide his scorn for Korean historians such as Kim Pu-sik who "blindly relied on Chinese sources which vilified Yŏn and depicted Yŏn as such."[15] In other words, Sin was arguing that the Chinese were guilty of concealing facts which portrayed them in a negative light and of trying to deliberately avoid recording defeats in wars out of a fear that revealing them would only bring national shame. It was equally disappointing for Korean historians to parrot whatever Chinese historians wrote without being wary of omissions, for if they had recognized them, they would have realized how progressive and patriotic figures such as Yŏn Kaesomun really were. An uncritical adulation of Chinese historians simply by virtue of them being Chinese had a seriously detrimental effect of clouding Korean historians' objectivity and discernment between fact and fiction.

It was not only such dishonesty in recording history which irked Sin, but also the fact that Korean historians had formed a bad habit of uncritically accepting anything written in Chinese history textbooks simply because they were written by Chinese historians. Sin criticized such uncritical adulation and adoption of Chinese sources because it resulted from a blatant misinterpretation of even Chinese sources written by scholars such as Wang Anshi and Liu Gongquan, who recorded Yŏn to "have slaughtered many in Changan. If Yŏn does not invade this year, he will most certainly prepare soldiers by August of next year," which suggests that the Chinese truly feared Korean nationalists such as Yŏn and tried to conceal facts of this nature because they would cast Chinese emperors in a negative light.[16] Collectively, what Sin wanted to depict and portray through such a rediscovery of Korean heroes was to admonish the slavish mentality of traditional Sino-centric historians for having an uncritical attitude towards interpreting and analyzing Chinese sources and to criticize the flunkeyism of such historians because they could not wisely discern between what the Chinese regarded as "facts"—records of events which ended advantageously or favorably for China—and "hidden facts"—facts which directly confirmed Korea's heroic efforts to defend their country from Chinese invasions but were deliberately omitted or concealed by Chinese historians because they were deemed humiliating.

In other words, Sin was critical of the fact that a deeply Sino-centric mindset had robbed traditional Korean historians of every inch of pride in their own history and of the need to maintain a critical distance from foreign sources with an eye towards maintaining objectivity. In Sin's view, the decision to accept any historical judgment as valid simply because they came from Chinese scholars was clear evidence that the tributary system not only dictated Korea's economic and cultural relations with China but was egregious to the extent of creating a "psychological colonization" of Korea. Korean historians were not nationalistic enough to understand that pride could cloud Chinese historians' judgments about what constituted objectivity, and Sin considered it his mission to salvage as many "hidden facts" from oblivion as possible to highlight the pride and virtue in being a nationalistic historian.

Considering what has been discussed thus far, Sin's search for such hidden facts can be categorized into two different types—a search for purely Korean origins of a distinctively Korean state which involves humanizing the Tan-kun myth and a search for forgotten heroes of ancient Korea who had fought against Chinese attempts to besiege and conquer Korea. Sin's nationalism was focused on recovering a Korean sense of uniqueness and pride over the establishment of an independent Korean state. The former centered on proving Tan-kun as an actual historical figure, which can be understood as Sin's attempt to demystify the origins of the Korean state. The latter was a process of reciprocity for it involved transforming every unmentioned and hidden "shame" in ancient Chinese history as sources of great pride in Korean heroes who heightened Koreans' sense of nationalism. The two were interlinked in the sense that only with a clear sense of nationhood for which Tan-kun served as its prime evidence, could Koreans muster the courage and will to constantly fight against large Chinese armies for the sake of protecting their own soil. While he certainly did not consider his search for hidden facts among exaggerated Chinese accounts to be definitive, he unabashedly made it clear that his search could potentially serve as the first big step towards recovering a Korean historical consciousness of ancient Korean history and restoring a sense of deep pride about the ancient roots of Korea's independence, which he felt was spiritually essential and necessary to remain courageous, hopeful, and positive even amidst the illegal Japanese occupation of Korea.

Sin Ch'ae-ho's Rejection of Japanese Colonial Historiography

Sin was not merely content with searching for "lost facts" amidst foreign aggrandizements of their countries' histories. He believed that the surest way to preserve Korea's spiritual independence was to directly counter, refute, and revise erroneous accounts masquerading as truths due to Japan's attempts to belittle, distort, and fabricate ancient Korean history as a part of an effort to portray Korea as a stagnant and lackluster country which could not be energized without Japan's introduction of modern civilization and advanced technology. History, in other words, was not merely a vehicle through which a historian issued correctives, but was also a bulwark and simultaneously, a weapon against an excessive politicization that encouraged the production of unabashed and unfounded lies based on weak or even, in the most extreme cases, no evidence.

Therefore, another central purpose behind Sin's composition of *Toksa Sinron* is to counter and reject Japanese colonial historiography on ancient Korea, especially its promotion of *Imna Ponpusŏl* or "Silla Outpost Theory." According to the theory, Japan controlled Kaya and surrounding regions and later expanded into much of what is today the southern portions of the Korean Peninsula.[17] However, Sin vehemently condemns the theory for seriously lacking in evidence, arguing that while Paekche and Japan may have enjoyed a close relationship in which the latter often provided military support for the former, Japan was always "in a hostile relationship with Silla."[18] Considering that Silla occupied much of the southern portion of the peninsula which corresponds with the region emphasized by the "Silla Outpost Theory," Sin argues that the theory's supposition is untenable because it would require Silla to have ceased stationing soldiers along Korea's southern coast, but "the contrary is true," for when Silla's Taejong went on an expedition against Paekche, he made sure to subjugate Osaka first before proceeding to his intended destination, which suggests that Silla always kept Japan's power in check to prevent Japan from aiding Paekche in its potential struggles against Silla.[19] Hence, the Silla Outpost Theory is an impossible supposition because it would require proof of Silla relaxing its security against Japan, which is not proven with any reliable evidence.

Moreover, Sin argues that given how close Paekche and Japan were during the period in question, and considering the fact that a "majority of cultural features found in Japan were either borrowed or derived from Paekche," if Japan had really occupied southern Korea as the theory claims, then it would have been impossible for Paekche to not notice, since

Paekche's security would directly be under threat.[20] Furthermore, because Kokuryŏ was the most powerful kingdom during that period, and because Kokuryŏ had sufficient experience with defending Korea from Japanese invasions, Kokuryŏ would not have "stood by idly to let a foreign power freely occupy the south of the Han River," on which much of Kokuryŏ's economic livelihood was concentrated.[21] Moreover, although Silla experienced one invasion from Japan annually, Sin argued that this phenomenon was mainly due to the fact that Silla was a smaller country than its neighbor Paekche. The continuation of Japan's invasions toward Silla even after the latter became powerful was due to the fact that Paekche and Japan enjoyed stable relations. The essence of the stability in Paekche-Japan relations, Sin argued, was primarily due to significant cultural exchanges which ranged from the adaptation of the Japanese script from that of Paekche to Japan's import of Paekche art and culture.[22] In other words, Sin was arguing that Japan was only able to invade Silla but not the entire southern coast of Korea because Paekche's military prowess was far superior and because as historian William Farris accurately argues, ancient Japan's Korean connection was truly extensive such that it not only laid the foundations of Japanese cultural life, but also enabled Korea to introduce iron weaponry and other essentials for daily life.[23] Ancient Korea served as a fountain for the fundamentals of Japan's development as a state, and because Paekche played the most instrumental role in that regard, Japan could not invade Paekche, for such an act would be a sign of betrayal and distrust which could harm amicable relations between the two states.

Finally, because some of Japan's inhabitants were of Paekche origin, there were "no subtle differences between the two countries in terms of ethnicity" which is why "marriages between Paekche and Japanese were frequent."[24] It was such cultural affinity and proximity between the two countries which enabled "numerous scholars to be deployed to Japan and later made some Paekche immigrants to Japan to identify themselves as Japanese." Such cultural affinity also translated into a potential threat to political stability such that when Silla's Taejong the Great planned an invasion against Paekche, he did not land soldiers on Paekche first but instead invaded Japan. In other words, Sin was arguing that Japan had no chance to invade or conquer southern Korea because of its good relations with Paekche which led to extensive cultural exchanges between the two countries and because Silla, fearing such cultural affinity to be a potential

security threat, was eager to police Japan first before attacking its chief rival in the Korean Peninsula.

The more important point emerging from Sin's discussion of Japan was to debunk the Silla Outpost Theory. The gist of the theory was, as it was briefly mentioned in the introduction, that Japan had conquered and ruled over Korea's southern coasts from the 4th to 6th century. However, Sin vehemently denounces this theory because it "is not grounded on any hard evidence." He specifically refutes the misinterpretation surrounding Prince Mi Sa-hŭn's exile to Japan, which was a consequence of hostilities between Paekche and Silla. Contrary to Japanese scholars who claimed the exile was a sign of Japan's conquest of Korea, Sin clarified that Mi Sa-hŭn's exile was a diplomatic strategy by a less powerful Silla to placate the stronger Paekche, which had Japan's military backing. Japanese historians have erroneously viewed this event as evidence of Japan's superiority, stripping the act of its diplomatic nuance and misrepresenting it as a historical conquest.[25]

Finally, even though "there is not a speck of evidence suggesting that Japan occupied Korea during ancient times, Japanese scholars promoted erroneous theories claiming that Japan conquered Kaya and created an outpost near Silla as if such phenomena were customary in Korea-Japan relations."[26] In other words, Sin argued that the Silla Outpost Theory was bankrupt because it was not supported by any evidence, it distorted the order and causality between facts, and conflated political outcomes resulting from Korean circumstances with those from Japan such that even opportune interventions which had almost no impact on Korea were exaggerated as significant military conquests, even though there was no convincing evidence proving that they ever took place.

Sin also questioned the validity of the Silla Outpost Theory by pointing out the fact that the Japanese claim about conquering southern Korea was never confirmed by any Korean scholar who had visited Japan during the 4th to 6th century. Sin pointed out that the scholar Kang Hang "never recorded anything about Empress Jingu but only recorded the fact that Silla's Taejong the Great had conquered Osaka" and yet, Japanese history textbooks published before Sin wrote *Toksa Sinron* had made erroneous claims such as "Japan had conquered Koryo."[27] Given the geographical proximity with Japan, it would not have been difficult for Korean scholars to observe Japan's historical records and political situation directly, and because Kang actually did so, Sin was arguing that if Japan's claim about Empress Jingu conquering Silla was actually true,

then any Korean scholar who was a contemporary witness to such an incident must have seen records or heard about it. The fact that there are no corresponding records from Korea served as definitive evidence for Sin to believe that the Silla Outpost Theory was nothing but a fabrication. Such blatant errors, Sin argued, were ploys designed to "deceive the Japanese public into thinking that Korea was Japan's property from time immemorial," which is akin to an effort to "render 4,000 years of Korean history into nothing more than a cog in the wheel of Japanese history."[28]

In other words, Sin was arguing that not only was there no reliable evidence which could verify the Silla Outpost Theory, but also that the Silla Outpost was a malevolent theory haphazardly conceived to justify the colonialist logic that Japan used to explain Japanese colonialism in Korea as a natural law of history because such a practice had ancient roots. The inaccuracy inherent in the theory was made more explicit by Japan's attempts to publicize the grossly incorrect claim that Japan maintained control over Korea from the 10th to 14th centuries. A search for a colonialist logic had clouded Japan's commitment to historical objectivity such that Sin was annoyed with the fact that some Japanese historians were prone to concocting fabrications and lies into truths regardless of whether there were objective bodies of evidence. The virtue of historical objectivity had been murdered by the sin of imperial aggrandizement.

Sin pointed out that each of the three kingdoms had their own alliances, and in the case of Paekche and Japan, the relationship was akin to that of Kokuryo and the Mohe—an ancient name for the Jurchens—in which the former was a suzerain over the latter. Sin challenged the veracity of the Silla Outpost Theory by raising logical inconsistencies. He noted that, despite Paekche never formally conquering Japan, the Japanese historically regarded Paekche as culturally superior. If the Silla Outpost Theory was true, Sin argued, it would not make sense for Paekche to have requested Japanese assistance in its military campaigns against Silla. Furthermore, he pointed out that Kwanggaet'o the Great reported seeing Japanese soldiers in battle, fighting alongside Paekche troops against Silla—another observation that contradicts the theory's claim of Japanese domination over Korean territories. Finally, regarding the notion that Mi Sa-hŭn was sent as a hostage to Japan, Sin cautioned that one should not read too much into it, for "sending a hostage" was a customary diplomatic gesture aimed at asking for military support and nothing more. Once Paekche achieved its desired goal, Mi Sa-hun returned to Paekche, which suggests that Japanese historians were guilty of imposing the colonial

situation into reading ancient Korean history, which is the ultimate inspiration to distort facts in favor of Japan.[29]

Considering Sin's strong urge to correct erroneous facts that Japanese colonial historiography promoted with the aim of denigrating the uniqueness of ancient Korean history, a primary purpose of *Toksa Sinron* was to debunk and refute the Silla Outpost Theory, thereby dismantling Japan's attempt to portray its colonization of Korea in the early 20th century as a sign of "manifest destiny" with an old heritage. Sin's rejection concentrated not only on the apparent dearth of reliable evidence, but also on the close connection between Paekche and Japan such that ethnic and cultural proximity seemed to be the key pieces of evidence contradicting the claim that Empress Jingu established colonies along Korea's southern coast. In a comparative sense, if Sin's critique of Korea's traditional reliance on Chinese historical records to tell its own history centered around discovering hidden facts among thick thickets of Sino-centered dramatizations of historical events, Sin's critique of Japanese colonial historiography sought to directly challenge and refute Japan's contemptuous and ill-informed view of Korean history as a permanently stagnant and decadent one ever needing guidance and direction from Japan since time immemorial.

The most important message which emerges from *Toksa Sinron* is that a search for a national past is not a selfish or vain endeavor, but a necessary and corrective measure aimed at correcting exaggerations and distortions which only serve to belittle a nation's past at the expense of aggrandizing another nation's history out of proportion. As it can be seen through this article's discussion of the two nationalistic approaches Sin took towards Chinese and Japanese historiography, it is evident that Sin believed that independence must not only be a political goal pursued through killing Japanese soldiers or assassinating high-ranking officials, but also an intellectual and spiritual goal of rectifying Korean history so that it can have firm Korean roots unhampered and unperturbed by foreign distortions and denigrations. In other words, Sin conceived his mission as a historian to salvage Korea's history from oblivion despite Korea's dismal status as a colony because, as the introduction to *Toksa Sinron* had unequivocally claimed, a nation whose past remains forgotten or lost will inspire no sense of pride in a people to motivate them to protect their fatherland, and because the death of a nation's spirit through the loss of history translates to a loss of meaning for a national territory. *Toksa Sinron* fully reflected Sin's view that Korea's independence can most certainly be

ensured if the historian firmly believes that the pen is mightier than the sword because once correct facts are recorded with the aim of banishing incorrect ones, a nation's past and a people's will to defend it with pride would both be resurrected.

Conclusion

Toksa Sinron established the foundation for modern Korean nationalist historiography by distinguishing itself in three aspects. First, unlike traditional histories such as *Samguk Sagi*,, which placed Korea at the periphery and placed China at the center, *Toksa Sinron* reversed this order and sought to tell Korea's ancient origins from a Korean perspective. In doing so, Sin not only debunked the long-standing belief that Tan-kun is a mythical figure by arguing that the entire historical trajectory of Korea's origins and development as a nation must be traced back to Tan-kun and to a continuous lineage of statehood starting with the rise of the Pu-yŏ tribe. He also argued that Chinese historical accounts of China's interactions with Korea tended to hide the latter's diplomatic achievements against the former out of an inferiority complex. He was critical of traditional historians such as Kim Pu-sik, who reiterated exaggerated Chinese accounts without critically recognizing their propensity to embellish. These historians often overlooked significant omissions, such as the lack of mention of Korean heroes who resisted Chinese invasions. To compensate for the blatant lacuna in Chinese historiography regarding Korea, Sin urged that Koreans ought to get rid of flunkeyism toward Chinese historiography on Korea. Instead, they must take pride and interest in their national origins as a unitary people and in national heroes such as General Ŭlchi Muntŏk and Yŏn Kaesomun to understand and appreciate the will of Koreans to defend their nation against foreign invasions and maintain Korea's independence.

Finally, in conjunction with the theme of protecting Korea against foreign encroachment, Sin believed that Japan was nothing but a foreign occupier who intended to denigrate the entirety of Korea's ancient heritage. Sin particularly criticized the popularity of the Silla Outpost Theory among Japanese historians and pro-Japanese collaborators and vigorously argued that Japan lacked absolute proof to support the theory as a concrete fact and that because Paekche requested Japan's aid whenever it wished and because Kokuryŏ constantly kept a close eye over any sign of turmoil near the Han River, it was essentially impossible for Japan to develop a colony along the southern coast of the Korean peninsula.

Collectively, the most important significance of *Toksa Sinron* lies in its rigorous attempt to throw off the Chinese lens in interpreting ancient Korean history by restoring a Korean heroic and nationalistic narrative centered around defending the country against Chinese invasions and its attempt to debunk Japanese colonial historiography's erroneous and dubious claim that occupying Korea was already something of a tradition long before Japan's annexation of Korea. Anti-flunkeyism and anti-imperialism were at the heart of Sin's vision for a nationalistic historical consciousness, and T*oksa Sinron's* concise and enduring portrayal of this consciousness rightly explains its exceptional standing as the founding work of modern Korean nationalist historiography.

Notes:

[1] Ch'ae-ho Sin. *Toksa Sinron* (Seoul, Korea: Bookk, 2018), 7

[2] Michael Robinson, "Nationalism and the Korean Tradition, 1886-1920: Iconoclasm, Reform, and National Identity," *Korean Studies*, Vol. 10 (2001), 135-153; Andre Schmid, "Rediscovering Manchuria: Sin Ch'ae-ho and the Politics of Territorial History in Korea," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (February 1997), 26-46; Chizuko T. Allen, "Northeast Asia Centered Around Korea: Ch'oe Namson's View of History," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (November 1990), 787-806; Jae-yon Lee, "Reading National Heroes from Fantasy: Shin Chae-ho's 'The Dream Heaven,'" *The Review of Korean Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2004), 165-186; Henry Em, *The Great Enterprise: Sovereignty and Historiography in Modern Korea* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013). See also Kwang-rin Lee, "The Rise of Nationalism in Korea," *Korean Studies*, Vol. 10 (1986), 1-12; Koen De Ceuster, "The Nation Exorcised: The Historiography of Collaboration in South Korea," *Korean Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (2001), 207-242; Vladimir Tikhonov, *Social Darwinism and Nationalism in Korea: The Beginnings (1880s-1910s): "Survival" as an Ideology of Korean Modernity* (Boston, MA and Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2010); and Kenneth M. Wells, "The Nation, the World, and the Dissolution of the Shin'ganhoe: Nationalist Historiography in South Korea," *Korean Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (2001), 179-206.

[3] Matthew Connelly, "Taking Off the Cold War Lens: Visions of North-South Conflict during the Algerian War for Independence," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 105, No. 3 (June 2000), 739-769.

[4] Andrew M. Scott, "Challenge and Response: A Tool for the Analysis of International Affairs," *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (April 1956), 208.

[5] Sin, *Toksa Sinron*, 9.

[6] James Allen Rogers, "Darwinism and Social Darwinism," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (April-June 1972), 280; see also R. J. Halliday, "Social Darwinism: A Definition," *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (June 1971), 389-405.

[7] Sin, *Toksa Sinron*, 9-10.

[8] Sin, *Toksa Sinron*, 14-15.
[9] Sin, *Toksa Sinron*, 15-16.
[10] Sin, *Toksa Sinron*, 23.
[11] Sin, *Toksa Sinron*, 26.
[12] Sin, *Toksa Sinron*, 27.
[13] Sin, *Toksa Sinron*, 99.
[14] Sin, *Toksa Sinron*, 76.
[15] Sin, *Toksa Sinron*, 79.
[16] Sin, *Toksa Sinron*, 78.
[17] For a general discussion of the theory's history and debates surrounding its interpretation, see Takashi Hatada, "An Interpretation of the King Kwanggaet'o Inscription," *Korean Studies*, Vol. 3 (1979), 1-17.
[18] Sin, *Toksa Sinron*, 58.
[19] Sin, *Toksa Sinron*, 59-60.
[20] Sin, *Toksa Sinron*, 58-59.
[21] Sin, *Toksa Sinron*, 65.
[22] Sin, *Toksa Sinron*, 59.
[23] William W. Farris, "Ancient Japan's Korean Connection," *Korean Studies*, Vol. 20 (1996), 1-22.
[24] Sin, *Toksa Sinron*, 59.
[25] Sin, *Toksa Sinron*, 60-61.
[26] Sin. *Toksa Sinron*, 61.
[27] Sin, *Toksa Sinron*, 63.
[28] Sin, *Toksa Sinron*, 63.
[29] Sin, *Toksa Sinron*, 60-61.