

Epilogue

The central purpose of this book has been to follow developments in the police organization in Korea under Japanese administration, analyzing changes in the system as they related to Japan's policy of colonial rule, and to describe aspects of what life was like for ordinary Koreans living under the ubiquitous thumb of the police. The time frame is roughly 1904 to 1919, covering the Russo-Japanese War period, when ideas for a police organization began to emerge; the establishment of the kempei police system just before the annexation of Korea and its implementation in the first decade of colonial rule; and the abolition of the kempei police system and the formation of a new civil police organization in 1919. From the study of the police in this period, several issues of historical significance become clear. They are included in the brief recapitulation that follows.

Around the time of the Russo-Japanese War, the ideas being discussed for Japan's rule of Korea had a pronounced military cast. They were premised on a central role for the Korea Garrison Army and a police force essentially run by the Japanese kempeitai in Korea. In the thinking of Itō Hirobumi, who became the first resident general in March 1906, a military-type government in Korea would only invite censure from the Western powers, and partly for that reason Itō shifted responsibility for Korea's order and security from the garrison army to the Korea police organization. At the same time, by employing Japanese advisers in the police organization, he placed Korea's police effectively under Japanese control. At that point the police advisers, who were at the heart of Korea's security system, began a process of transferring police, judicial, and tax powers out of the hands of regional officials of the Korean monarchy and putting them under Japanese control.

In the wake of the Third Japan-Korea Convention in 1907, insurrections by Korea's Righteous Armies reached a new peak in scale and violence. Itō's Korea security policy and the gradualist approach to annexation on which it was based became increasingly less viable, and, inevitably, the policy was changed in significant ways. The decision to bring in a large number of additional kempei to deal with the anti-Japanese uprisings inarguably was linked to the influential voice of the kempeitai in Korea. Initially Itō and kempeitai chief Akashi Motojirō were in basic agreement on a policy of decentralized deployment of kempei as a measure to deal with the uprisings, but ensuing developments eventually went way beyond anything Itō had planned. As soon as effective pacification of the Righteous Armies was on the horizon, Akashi began thinking about expanding the kempei presence to smaller stations in regional areas and having kempei personnel assume a wider range of duties beyond just keeping order and maintaining security. This concept of subduing the countryside and establishing control in local areas using

imported military forces deviated utterly from Itō's original strategy, which had been to leave the Korean monarchy officials nominally in place while divesting them of any real power. It is possible that Itō's increasingly dispirited outlook on the Korea situation from about the middle of 1908 was due to those developments and his inability to change them.

Sone Arasuke, who succeeded Itō as resident general, also acknowledged his support of the gradualist approach to annexation, and when the matter of the Iljinhoe petition to incorporate Korea into Japan came up in December 1909 and had to be dealt with, it brought to the surface the fractious contention between Sone on the one hand and War Minister Terauchi Masatake and elder statesman Yamagata Aritomo on the other. After Sone was recalled to Japan in January 1910, the divergent positions on annexation were effectively rendered moot, and Terauchi and his cohorts began actively to make arrangements for a police organization that would be ready to function once Korea was formally annexed. That year in June, the kempei police system was formed by absorbing the civil police into the kempeitai. The establishment of the new police system was accompanied by an increase in numbers of kempei, a turnover of top-level police administrative personnel, and changes in the deployment of kempei police officers and Korea Garrison Army units. Those tasks accomplished, the stage was set for annexation.

Just at this time when Japan's Korea policy was shifting rapidly and the Korea civil police were being eased into the background by the kempeitai, now stronger in both numbers and power, Chief of Police Matsui Shigeru and several others undertook a study of the police system in British-occupied Egypt. The report on the Egypt Study, compiled by Matsui in the form of an opinion paper, presented material to argue that in Britain's experience, putting the police under military command and completely separating the police and police functions from local government agencies had been a serious policy failure for British rule in Egypt. Against the background of the political rivalry over gradual or early annexation that had been going on since the end of 1909, Matsui's position was given strong support by a minority faction of gradualists, including Sone and others under him, in the Residency General. The Sone line was rejected, and ultimately Matsui's argument against a military police system suffered the same fate.

The newly-formed kempei police quickly secured predominance over the civil police by putting high-ranking kempei officers into the top police positions and making the Higher Police the executive core. During 1910 on into 1911, furthermore, the great majority of kempei positions were redefined to include civil police duties, an arrangement that enabled kempei police to extend wide control and liberal surveillance over virtually all the affairs of Korean daily life. Meanwhile, events surrounding the Case of the 105 that occurred in 1911, after the annexation, alerted the Government General to bases being established outside Korea by activists in the Korean independence movement and to underground organizations of Christians and others within Korea dedicated to wresting back national sovereignty. Even after domestic secret societies were exposed,

the Government General remained wary of new, ‘disturbing’ currents of thought. After World War I started in 1914, the Government General could see that the war was having a beneficial impact on economic conditions for Koreans, but at the same time it perceived, with growing unease, a restlessness in society caused by new kinds of radical ideas. By the end of the war it sensed great danger in new ideologies shaped by the Russian Revolution and new ideas of national self-determination sweeping the colonial world.

The character of the kempei police was strongly affected by the decisive power of the Higher Police at its nucleus and by the institutionalized channels that allowed it to interfere in all levels of practical daily life. Its presence and power were evident in a comprehensive range of activities. The Higher Police concentrated on surveillance of Christian and other religious groups, and made certain that private schools, village schools, and other educational facilities for Koreans were watched and given warnings, and it supervised lectures and so forth that constituted “proper guidance.” Undoubtedly the violence that often accompanied these activities was taken together with measures that had certain policy objectives. Kempei were involved in administrative duties such as supervising and planning road construction, public health and sanitation, and forestry preservation. In performing these duties, lower-ranking kempei in local areas played an instrumental role in introducing modern management practices to those fields that had remained beyond the reach of the Korean monarchy in premodern times. At the same time, they stretched their discretionary authority extensively where laws and regulations usually were at odds with the reality on the ground.

Koreans themselves had complex feelings about such minute control over their lives by the kempei police. In a Japanese survey of Korean sentiments made in Ch’ungch’ōngnamdo province, called *Shumaku dansō* or “Tavern Talks,” many comments by Koreans, whether critical or sympathetic, used “civilizing” and “cultural rule” to describe Japanese rule. Thus, while the responses in *Shumaku dansō* indicate awareness of a deep discontinuity between the Japanese style of governing and the ruling system of the Korean monarchy, they also express the discovery of a “civilizing” factor in that discontinuity. The flip side was the bitter resentment Koreans felt toward the coercive measures used by the police and their seemingly interminable interference in their lives. Their outrage at forced road labor, the high price of rice, rising taxes, and the intrusion of sanitation projects and other management systems into their daily routines seems to have been more a spontaneous, defensive groan by people just trying to live their lives than it was a conscious anti-Japanese reaction. This very mentality of people trying to live ordinary lives, with the added constant discontent provoked by Japan’s repressive colonial policies, marked off an area of the psyche where colonial modernity could not penetrate.

The kempei police system remained in force for almost the entire first decade of the colonial period, but during that time there were calls for change, responses, and

discussion about abolition or reform of the system. Chief among those voices were the core army leaders who, wanting above all to cut costs, indicated that they would not oppose restructure; the director general of political affairs and a faction within the Government General bureaucracy who were disaffected with the kempei police; and the Seiyūkai and Hara Takashi who, motivated by the “extension of the homeland” idea, were pushing for greater party influence in colonial government. In March 1919 when the Samil (March 1st) Movement broke out, these several groups finally joined forces in order to act on reform of the kempei police system.

Venting pent-up fury at the unremittingly intrusive and repressive behavior of the kempei police during the “military rule” period after Korea was annexed, local Koreans attacked and destroyed kempei police facilities in many areas during the Samil insurrections. The police and the Korea Garrison Army formed the main counterforce, and as the crackdown progressed, they worked increasingly closely together. Eventually, however, cooperation between the army and the police proved not to be smooth. In some cases local police substations had to be evacuated and closed. As a result, additional numbers of police were brought in to complete the suppression of the uprising. These added police personnel were temporary; they were not considered to provide a long-term solution to Korea’s security needs. But around that time there was the sharp realization that the police organization had to be reformed in order to strengthen the capability of lower-level police across Korea.

Beginning in June 1919 delegates from the Government General and the Japanese government embarked on discussions that resulted in a series of reforms issued in the middle of August. The process of negotiating those changes shows that both sides grasped the critical importance not only of building up Korea’s security capacity, but also of taking action to impart a positive impression of the reforms among Koreans. The prime movers in this project were Usami Katsuo and Kunitomo Naokane, both of them Government General bureaucrats. In other words, the ones who incorporated the working reality of the colonial situation into policy were none other than colonial bureaucrats. There ensued a massive buildup of the police force, accomplished at a pace unprecedented in the history of the colony, by Mizuno Rentarō, newly appointed in 1919 as Government General chief of administration, and a cadre of loyal, high-performing bureaucrats he recruited from Japan’s Ministry of Home Affairs to take over the top Government General posts.

The civil police system established by the reforms of 1919 remained in place until the final days of Japan’s colonial rule in Korea. Once additional police had been brought in after the Samil Movement, their numbers remained roughly level until the outbreak of war with China in 1937. Thus the police force as formed in 1919 was regarded as the standard for maintaining order and security in Korea. With the above considerations in mind, we can say that the 1919 reforms in the police system constituted a watershed in the history of the colonial period.