

# The Education Movement of the royal family of the Empire of Great Han and Myeongshin Girls' School\*

Suhwa Yuk  
*Seoul National University, South Korea*

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine various aspects of the civilization policy and education movement of King Gojong, who tried to protect independence through the modernization of the Empire of Great Han (1897~1910) and to trace the establishment process and spirit of Myeongshin girls' school, which was established and supported by the royal family. This study will give readers an opportunity to reconsider their perspective of King Gojong, which has been distorted by Japan, and to grasp a better idea of how the royal family supported the national salvation movement through education.

King Gojong demonstrated his will for enlightenment by often signing protective trading treaties with powers of the West despite violent opposition by the conservatives in the cabinet against his opening policy after 1880, and by emphasizing that education is the basis for the preservation of state through his "national salvation movement through education." Gojong sought to establish a modern educational system, thus positively promoting the project of educational modernization and the educational project through missionaries.

Myeongshin girls' school was a royal women's school established by Wunheon Hwang-gwibi, the wife of the king, in order to educate and train elite persons to restore the sovereignty of the state. Even though it was established based on the Japanese noble women's school as a model, the school actively and continuously participated in the protest movement against Japan with an outstanding sense of sovereignty and patriotism against the colonization of Korea. This school was different in its characteristics compared to the Japanese noble women's school in that it was established with the objective of training and nurturing wise mothers

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and good wives who could learn and accept the modern education of the West. Myeongshin girls' school was in fact a private school established by the sponsoring and support of Soonheon Hwang-gwibi, the wife of King Gojong. More specifically, it was the monarchy's best education agency for training elite women operating with the financial support of the royal court.

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**Key words**

The Empire of Great Han, King Gojong, Soonheon Hwang-gwibi (Empress Um's), the National Salvation Movement through Education, Myeongshin Girls' School

## **Introduction**

As every student of Korean history knows, after the Ganghwa Treaty was signed in 1876, Joseon became an arena of struggle among the world powers, thus precipitating an internal crisis. However, on the other hand, during the late Joseon Dynasty period, new ways to overcome the overall crisis were found, and as a result, education movements for inspiring people with enlightened thought were strengthened. These movements were transformed into the national salvation movement through education for the sake of sovereignty restoration as the Korean government lost its diplomatic sovereignty due to the Eulsa Treaty (1905) establishing Korea as a Japanese Protectorate and the Tonggambu (Residency-general) was established. The education of women also changed its focus from enlightenment to national salvation through education. Women's associations actively promoted the national salvation movement through education through charity, scholarship, and the establishment of schools.

Looking into the results of existing studies on modern Korean public and women's education, we can conclude that the modern education movement led by missionaries and the enlightenment and the national salvation movement through education led by intelligent precursors were responsible for large portions of this education. King Gojong, who made every effort to revive the sinking Empire of Great Han through the civilization and education policy, has not been given his due recognition. King Gojong is rather imprinted on Korean people's minds

as the one who ruined the nation, and this is because the image of King Gojong has been considerably distorted by Japan.

In this regard, the purpose of this study is to examine various aspects of the enlightenment policy and education movement of King Gojong, who tried to protect independence through the modernization of the Empire of Great Han (1897~1910), and to trace the establishment process and spirit of Myeongshin girls' school, which was established and supported by the royal family. If these points are examined more in detail, the efforts of King Gojong will be reevaluated, and new facts about the national salvation movement through education led by the royal family also will be brought to light. This examination will provide an opportunity to overcome Japanese distortions of modern Korean history.

### **The Enlightenment Policy and the National Salvation Movement through Education**

#### *The Enlightenment policy of King Gojong and the Enlightenment Party*

On July 9, 1879 (16<sup>th</sup> year of King Gojong), Lee Hong-jang, the Beiyang Minister of Qing dynasty sent a letter to a high official of the Joseon government urging it to establish trade treaties with England, Germany, France, and America in order to restrain Japan and Russia (“*Gojong sillok*,”<sup>1</sup> 1879)<sup>2</sup>. The request by Lee Hong-jang was based on accurate insight into the historical trend of that time. Of course, Joseon’s establishment of trade treaties with several countries of the West to restrain Japan and Russia was in line with its own interests, since continuing the pursuit of a seclusion policy would go against historical trends. Nonetheless, Joseon did not accept the recommendation by Lee Hong-jang.

It was a completely wrong decision, showing the minds of the conservatives of that time which failed to understand the historical trend. This clearly shows that any wrong judgment of politicians, failing to

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<sup>1</sup> *Gojong sillok* 高宗實錄 [*Annals of Gojong*] is the annals records of King Gojong of the Joseon Dynasty of Korea.

<sup>2</sup> *Gojong sillok*. (1879, July 9). Volume 16.

grasp the historical trend, can also bring adverse effects to the people. After the Ganghwa Treaty, which was a signal of Japanese encroachment on Joseon, Now Japan began to encroach on Joseon religiously, economically and politically.

However, in August 1880 (the 17<sup>th</sup> year of King Gojong), Kim Hong-jib, who had visited Japan as a special envoy, submitted “Joseon Chaengnyak (Chosun Stratagem)” by Hwang Jun-hun. This came to have a decisive effect on the enlightenment policy of King Gojong thereafter. The key point of this book was that Joseon should have a strategy to resist Russia, which was coming south, and to become friendly with China, to combine with Japan, and to link with America so as to make itself strong. There was violent opposition from the royal court and conservatives against this open door policy. Despite such opposition, King Gojong dispatched the Courtiers’ Observation Mission and Yeongseonsa (Korea envoy to Tientsin) to Japan and China respectively, thereby displaying his strong commitment to enlightenment.

The purpose of the Courtiers’ Observation Mission was to grasp the political situation of Japan, furthermore to get insight into the trends of the world, and thus to seek opening up and enlightenment because Japan was positively adopting the culture and customs of the West and making reforms on a full scale after the Meiji Restoration.

In 1881, Yu Gil-jun, who had visited Japan as a member of the Courtiers’ Observation Mission, decided to study at Keio-Gijuku University, which was operated by Fukuzawa Yukichi, who was taking the lead in the enlightenment of modern Japan through various writings which introduced the civilization and thoughts of the West. Moreover, Fukuzawa organized Meirokusha, which was a society of intellectuals and the first organization of a modern academy in Japan together with Nishi Amane and Mori Arinori. He was leading the world of thought in Japan with Kato Hiroyuki and Nakamura Masao.

Kato Hiroyuki made social revolution a part of Japan. He supported women’s education in recognition that women’s education can be a driving force of national development. Of course, his ideas of education were limited, as the goal of women’s education was to produce good wives and wise mothers, but he allowed girls to be admitted into Dojinsha, which he established in 1874. (Wu, 2011) When considering that Japan was a thoroughly fraternal man-centered society at that time,

and that women were not permitted to apply for admission even to Tokyo University, which was established in 1877, his women's education movement was a big turning point, and his theory of "Wise Mother and Good Wife" became the goal of women's education in modern Japan.

Yun Chi-ho went to Japan as part of the entourage of Euh Yun-jung together with Yu Gil-jun and stayed in Japan until 1883. Inoue Kaoru, a political companion of Ito Hirobumi, who was suspected as being behind the slaying of Empress Myeongseong later, arranged for him to enter Dojinsha, where he came into contact with new disciplines, and made friends with Fukuzawa Yukichi and Nakamura Masao as well as with the enlightenment school of Kim Ok-gyun, Seo Kwang-bum, and Park Yeong-hyo.

In this way, the enlightenment party of Korea in the beginning of the modern period had a close relationship with the members of Meirokusha of Japan and also formed a friendly relationship with politicians and government officials of Japan. This means that Japan was already sowing a seed of Japanization as it supported elites of Korea in those days.

King Gojong dispatched Yeongseonsa to the Qing dynasty with the purpose of learning how to manufacture weapons so as to realize the policy of self-strengthening, but put greater importance on establishing preliminary negotiations with Lee Hong-jang concerning the establishment of a relationship with America. As a result, the king established the Treaty of Peace, Amity, Commerce, and Navigation between the United States and Joseon, the Treaty of friendship and commerce between Great Britain and Korea, and the Treaty of Friendship and Commerce between Germany and Korea successively in 1882.

Afterwards, King Gojong sought to facilitate trade with other countries ("*Gojong sillok*," 1882)<sup>3</sup>, and he ordered Cheokyangbi monuments to be removed across the nation ("*Gojong sillok*," 1882)<sup>4</sup>, thus pursuing his opening and enlightenment policy actively. As for receiving new culture and products by Bobingsa (1883), which was dispatched as a friendship delegation to America, a post office division was founded. It

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<sup>3</sup> *Gojong sillok*. (1882, July 25). Volume 19.

<sup>4</sup> *Gojong sillok*. (1882, August 5). Volume 19.

provided an opportunity for agricultural and livestock industries to develop, but also provided an occasion to trigger the establishment of Royal English School and the establishment of modern education institutions by missionaries.

King Gojong actively encouraged the project of education modernization by naming the education institutions which were established by missionaries. Therefore, missionaries could lead the education modernization as part of their mission with the support and sponsorship of King Gojong, which should not be overlooked.

*Education Modernization and National Salvation Movement through Education of King Gojong*

In December 1882, King Gojong permitted people of the Yangban class to engage in commercial business so that they could improve the quality of their life and also permitted children of farmers, technicians and merchants to get education at school, thus providing an opportunity for the door of education to be opened widely to the public. In 1883, he permitted the publication of the newspaper Hanseong Sunbo, leading the people's enlightenment. Hanseong Sunbo emphasized that the pragmatic learning techniques of the West and the establishment of schools were fundamental to the reformation of people and the wealth and strength of the state and that schools should be established to provide new types of knowledge. Of course, this newspaper came to be published at the Bangmunguk (The Office of Culture and Information) by the appeal of Park Yeong-hyo, who visited Japan as a special envoy in 1882 for the enlightenment of people, and of the leaders of the Gapsin coup, such as Park Yeong-hyo, Kim Ok-gyun and Seo Yeong-beom.

However, it was King Gojong who permitted the publication of the newspaper which introduced the cultures of the West for the sake of of people's enlightenment, which means that King Gojong was in sympathy with such consciousness. Even though Hanseong Sunbo was closed due to the failure of the Gapsin coup and its history was short, there is no doubt that the newspaper had a great effect on the people's enlightenment and on the national salvation movement through education, influencing by its example various newspapers and school news letters thereafter.

When the First Sino-Japanese War broke out, King Gojong clearly understood that independence was impossible without Korea's becoming a state of wealth with a strong military power and published "Yuneum" (a royal message) containing an admonition requesting people to be loyal to the king, to study the literature of other countries, and to accept technologies from other countries, thereby laying the foundation of independence ("Gojong *sillok*," 1894)<sup>5</sup>. In the following year he re-emphasized that education is the fundamental basis for the preservation of the kingdom through "the royal doctrine for the establishment of a state on the basis of the education" ("Gojong *sillok*," 1895)<sup>6</sup>, and promoted the modernization of education by establishing a modern school system.

The victory of Japan in the first Sino-Japanese War meant a re-shuffling of the governance order in East Asia, and set off the patriotic enlightenment movement and national salvation movement through education based on the theory of social evolution. This victory stirred a great reaction. Newspapers and magazines considered that the development factor of Japan was due to the implementation of modern education and promoted the people's enlightenment and national salvation movements through education to make Joseon a state of wealth and a strong military, which Seo Jae-pil and Yun Chi-ho spearheaded through "Tongnip Shinmun [The Independent]" (1896) and "Tongnip Hyeophoe [Independence Club]" (1896). Tongnip Shinmun emphasized from the beginning of its publication that it was urgent for the government to build schools to educate the people so as to overcome the current situation, and urged the government to support the provision of the new education to make Joseon a state of wealth with a strong military ("Tongnip Shinmun", 1896)<sup>7</sup>.

Since the Empire of Great Han, established afterwards, was built by the joint effort of the Independence Club and some conservatives, King Gojong's modernization of education and the national salvation movement through education were greatly influenced by the Independence Club. However, King Gojong sadly forced the Independence Club to

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<sup>5</sup> *Gojong sillok*. (1894, December 13). Volume 32.

<sup>6</sup> *Gojong sillok*. (1895, February 2). Volume 33.

<sup>7</sup> *Tongnip Shinmun*. (1896, April 30).

disband based on the influence of conservatives who were puppets of Japan. As the government of conservatives led by Jo Byeong-sik was established, King Gojong came to suffer from the dependent situation. The separation between King Gojong and the Independence Club became an important occasion to influence the stream of history of the Empire of Great Han in the future. The conservatives could prevail over the Independence Club in competition because Japan was pulling the strings behind the conservatives. Since the government of conservatives had a strong tendency toward Russia, the government of the Empire of Great Han declared its neutrality in foreign affairs, but Japan, which was preparing a war with Russia, ignored it and started the Russo-Japanese war, occupying Seoul and threatening the Empire of Great Han to establish the Korea-Japan Protocol. Later, the Korean government lost its diplomatic right due to the Eulsa Treaty and the Tonggambu (Residency-general) was established. New media and academic associations developed the national salvation movement through education on the basis of the theory of social evolution, and the women's education movement was also in that line.

In March 1906, King Gojong issued a decree urging new education through the establishment of schools, stating that “the urgent matter is establishing schools and educating people to produce talented persons” (“*Gojong sillok*,” 1906)<sup>8</sup>. He immediately urged the School Ministry in charge of education affairs to seek ways to extend opportunity of education to the people through establishment of schools in Bu districts and Gun areas. He stated that if parents with children did not educate their children, they would be punished, and if children did not learn and follow the educational instructions, they would be punished, thus considering the national salvation movement through education as a matter of life and death. Because it was not easy to build schools rapidly due to various circumstances, King Gojong issued a decree to repair the buildings of towns to transform them to schools in March 1907. (“*Gojong sillok*,” 1907)<sup>9</sup>

In line with his education policy of the national salvation movement

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<sup>8</sup> *Gojong sillok*. (1906, March 26). Volume 47.

<sup>9</sup> *Gojong sillok*. (1907, March 29). Volume 48.



through education, King Gojong established Suhakwon (1906) for modern education of children of the royal family and noble families. It should be viewed that Soonheon Hwang-gwibi supported the establishment of Yangjeong Euisuk (1905), Jinmyeong girls' school (1906), and Myeongshin girls' school (1906) as an effort of King Gojong's national salvation movement through educational movement. All this shows the real picture of the zealous national salvation movement through the educational movement of King Gojong. It was because of the continued pursuit of the anti-Japanese movement ignited by King Gojong's national salvation movement through the educational movement that Japan forcibly dethroned King Gojong through the "Hague Secret Emissary Affair."

King Gojong put his utmost effort into the national salvation movement through education, but failed because Japan was already controlling the Education Ministry and had established Jesiljedo Jeongryguk (帝室制度整理局) to control the budget of the royal court so as to curb the policy and operation of the royal court.

Ito Hirobumi, who came to Joseon as the first Tongam (Resident-general) in 1906, dispatched a Japanese official to the Education Ministry to promote the compilation of school textbooks and reformation of the school system. Ito Hirobumi, who was the actual controller of the Education Ministry, legislated school-related laws and regulations and others and developed a policy of colonial education. Thus, Ito Hirobumi was deeply involved in the colonization policy of Korean education. Ito Hirobumi was also the person who took the lead in the modernization of Japanese education based on nationalistic education. Ito Hirobumi had already grasped that the control of education is the shortcut to the acceleration of colonization.

### **The Women's Education Movement of the Empire of Great Han**

#### *Organization and Patriotic Enlightenment Movement of Women Associations of the Empire of Great Han*

It was newspapers, academic associations and private schools that enlightened the people's spirit and promoted the national salvation movement through education and emphasized the education of women.

Tongnip Shinmun and Independence Club were at the front of the movement, followed by Hwangseong Shinmun (the first daily newspaper published in Korea) and Daehan Ilbo (The Korea Daily News).

The academic associations ostensibly stressed only a simple education promotion movement, but in fact were doing the activity of education for a righteous army to seek the recovery of sovereignty through the nurturing of talented people and people's enlightenment. In particular, as the activity of the association spread across the nation after the Eulsa Treaty, the sovereignty recovery movement became activated through the establishment of schools the publication of the association's news letters and lectures, all of which contributed to the people's enlightenment. To encounter these activities, Tonggambu (The Japanese Residency General) stipulated an "Association Decree" in 1908, requiring the association to apply for a new approval after fulfilling the legal requirements, thus fundamentally blocking the publication of the association's newsletters and re-arranging educational organizations and thereby suppressing the activity of the association.

The establishment of private schools was originally aimed at providing new knowledge, but its purpose transformed to a national movement for the recovery of sovereignty after the Eulsa Treaty, and about 3,000 private schools were established for a short time from 1907 to April 1909 ("*Hwangseong Shinmun*," 1909)<sup>10</sup>. Schools were the basis for maintaining the life of the state and a bulwark for the recovery of sovereignty. The "Private School Decree" issued by Tonggambu in 1908 was to regulate the establishment of private schools and to allow the Japanese to grasp a real picture of the situation. To obtain an approval of a private school, the following were required: the name and purpose of establishment of the school, the location, school regulations, school magazine, the plane drawing of the school, the annual budget of incomes and expenditures and statements thereof, the method of maintaining the budget, the founder of school (including the resumes of the president and teachers), the date of opening, tuitions, etc. These requirements were to prune the private schools across the nation, and they constituted a Japanese scheme to grasp the real situation of the schools

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<sup>10</sup> *Hwangseong Shinmun*. (1909, May 8).

and control them.

As mentioned above, *Tongnip Shinmun* repeatedly stated from its beginning that education was urgently needed to overcome the current problems, a position with which all intellectuals of that time sympathized. Nonetheless, the education of women was done mostly at home because of the widespread belief that “men and women should be distinguished.” Hence, *Tongnip Sinmun* also emphasized the education of women, claiming that women should be given their right and men and women should be educated equally. In addition, many intellectuals began to recognize the importance of educating women due to the positive effects of such education and participated in the women’s education movement. Hence, various women’s organizations were formed and the movement began to be organized gradually (Park, 1971; G. S. Jeong, 1989).

The activity of the women’s associations of that time can be divided into three types: charity, scholarship, and the establishment of schools (S. H. Jeong, 1972). This essay looks into the activities of women’s associations mainly centered around the school establishment movement such as the Women’s Education Association or the Korea-Japan Women’s Association.

The first women’s school established by women was Jeongseon girls’ school, which was established in Seoul by Kim of Yang Hyeon Dang in September 1897 (Y. S. Jeong, 1971). Yang Hyeon Dang, the president of the school, herself recruited girls and provided modern education to them and received 10 thousand Ryang (unit of currency) from the royal family as operational support when the school was undergoing financial difficulty (The Academy of Korean Studies, 1991). In September 12, 1898, Chanyanghoe, the first woman movement organization of Korea, was organized by about 400 wives of noble families (Yangban) in Bukchon, which was also called Yangseonghoe or Sunseonghoe.

Chanyanghoe established and operated Sunseong girls’ school and provided both traditional and modern education to the students. In addition to its members, Chanyanghoe had a number of supporters consisting of male advocates and foreign women, and Yun Chi-ho was elected the president of the men’s support organization (Park, 1971). Yun Chi-ho at that time was inaugurated as the president of the Independence Club (Seo Jae-pil had been exiled to America) and be-

came the head writer of *Tongnip Shinmun* [The Independent], actually leading the Independence Club. The fact that Yun Chi-ho was elected the president of the support organization shows that the Independence Club was in fact involved deeply in the women's enlightenment movement and the organization of women's associations at that time, resulting in the establishment of Chanyanghoe. The posting of the article on *Tongnip Sinmun* entitled "Educate Men and Women Equally" ("*Tongnip Shinmun*," 1898)<sup>11</sup> can be said to be a major stepping stone to organizing Chanyanghoe.

When Chanyanghoe underwent financial difficulty later, it sought to make Sunseong girls' school be government-operated. King Gojong assigned expenditure in the government budget in 1899 and the Education Ministry also prepared a plan for operating women's schools and put this on the cabinet agenda ("*Tongnip Shinmun*," 1899)<sup>12</sup>. However, the operation of women's schools could not be nationalized. The expressed reason was a lack of budget, but this was not the case. Shin Gi-seon, who was the Minister of the Education Ministry and was one of the moderate enlightenment party, had a negative perception of the new education, but he had been removed from the Ministry of Law after being impeached twice by the Independence Club and was appointed Minister of Education. Hence, he could not go against the affairs promoted by the Independence Club, and moreover, because he had a political tint by participating in the Freedom and People's Rights Movement by the People's Joint Association (which was promoted by the Independence Club from behind the scenes), he seemed to have dismissed the proposal that Sunseong girls' school be governmentally operated. Hence, the establishment of government-operated girls' schools gave place to Hanseong girls' high school, which was established together with the announcement of the "Girls' High School Decree" in 1908.

The organization of women associations and the establishment of girls' schools after the Eulsa Treaty were more actively promoted together with the national salvation movement through education. The

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<sup>11</sup> *Tongnip Shinmun*. (1898, January 4).

<sup>12</sup> *Tongnip Shinmun*. (1899, May 26).

Women's Education Association (1906), the Korea-Japan Women's Association (1906), the Women's Academic Association (1906), the Jinmyeong Women's Association (1907), the Women Bohakwon Yujihoe (1908), the Daehan Women Heunghakhoe (1908), and the Yangjeong Women's Education Association (1910) were all organized to support the women's enlightenment movement and the establishment of women schools. At that time, the organization of women's associations and the establishment of women's schools were actively promoted in each local area across the nation.

The Women's Education Association, which was formed to support the establishment of Yanggyueuisuk, claimed "equal rights" of women in its statement of purpose (Hwangseon Shinmun, November 1, 1906)<sup>13</sup>. Looking at the directors from its beginning, The Women's Education Association had ordinary people as the president, vice president, general affairs manager, and vice general affairs manager (G. S. Jeong, 1989). Therefore, there was a limitation on the operation and maintaining of the association. Hence Yanggyueuisuk came to experience financial difficulties, and even faced the crisis of being closed in November 1906. The Jinmyeong Women's Association was established to support Yanggyueuisuk financially, and Choi Hwa-sa of Sinsodang, president of the Jinmyeong Women's Association, recommended Soonheon Hwang-gwibi as the president. The Jinmyeong Women's Association was different in that women became the subject of the management for the first time and had only women as its members.

At that time, apart from Yanggyueuisuk, The Women's Education Association existed continually, and Lee Oak-gyeong, wife of Lee Ji-yong, became the president when the association was re-organized around 1907. Lee Ji-yong, who was the Minister of Domestic Affairs, was one of the five Eulsa traitors who approved the signing of Eulsa Treaty in 1905. In May 1907, he was appointed as advisor to Jungchuwon, and received the title of count from the government of Japan in 1910. At that time, The Women's Education Association invited Lee Oak-gyeong as its president for the sake of financial support and smooth operation.

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<sup>13</sup> *Hwangseon Shinmun*. (1906, November 1).

From that time, The Women's Education Association seemed to have changed to a pro-Japanese public agency. At that time Lee Oak-gyeong was leading the Korea-Japan assimilation of the women association as a regular member of the Korean branch of The Patriotic Women's Association in Japan. Lee Oak-gyeong established the women's primary school in 1907 ("*Jeguk Shinmun*," 1907)<sup>14</sup> and even the royal family pushed for the establishment by donating a building for the school and its annexed structures. Nonetheless, due to the loose management of The Women's Education Association, the existence of the women's primary school was endangered. Hence, to operate the women's primary school independently from The Women's Education Association, Women Bohakwon Yujihoe was formed at the home of Yun Chi-ho on May 19, 1908 (Park, 1971).

In the beginning of December 1906, The Women's Academic Association (1907), which was organized in Seoul, was not an organization for the enlightenment movement of women, but was organized with the intention of re-strengthening and maintaining the traditional fraternal right. The Yangjeong Women's Education Association, which was established on May 1, 1910, was organized to enhance the status of concubines through education in a painful regret of the social mistreatment of such women.

The Korea-Japan Women's Association, among other women's organizations, was organized to support the establishment of Myeongshin girls' school, mainly by Soonheon Hwang-gwibi, who was president of the association, and the Daehan Women Heung Academic Association was formed to support the nationalization of Hanseong women's high school after the inauguration of Sunjong. Since the Korea-Japan Women's Association and Daehan Women's Heung Academic Association were supported by the participation of wives of high officials, including Hwang-gwibi and the Empress (who were at the top of authority at that time) and were also supported by Japanese high officials, these two women's associations were classified as pro-Japanese organizations. However, looking at The Korea-Japan Women's Association, the intention of establishment was different from others as

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<sup>14</sup> *Jeguk Shinmun*. (1907, June 27).

it was to support the establishment of Myeongshin girls' school as part of the effort for national salvation movement through education supported by the royal family. However, it could not be totally independent from the pro-Japanese scheme of women organizations promoted by Japan.

*Foundation of Patriotic Women's Association by Japan and Pro-Japanese Scheme of Women Organizations*

In 1906, Japan founded a branch of its Patriotic Women's Association in Korea and systematically utilized women in the course of colonization. They systematically developed the support and relief activities for the sake of oppressing anti-Japanese protests and actively developed its activity in accelerating the pro-Japanese scheme and colonization of women's organizations by letting Korean women participate in its activities.

Originally, the Patriotic Women's Association was founded by Okumura Ioko (奥村五百子) in Tokyo in 1901. At that time, its members included high class women such as women of the emperor's family and noble families. They mainly engaged in social work in peaceful times, but were involved in official service during war times. Their major work was assisting military services or assisting living activities, visiting soldiers' families and bereaved family members, and delivered relief goods and relief funds when preparing for war. The Patriotic Women's Association did not exist in Japan only. In April 1904, a branch was founded in Taiwan and in February 1906, a branch was founded in Korea, too.

It seems that the Dokji Nurse Women's Association (篤志看護婦人会), jointly established by the emperor's family and noble families in 1889, had a great influence on the formation of the Patriotic Women's Association in Japan. The Dokji Nurse Women's Association was organized to support nursing services when war breaks out. The foundation of The Dokji Nurse Women's Association owed a great deal to the efforts of Yamakawa Stemats (山川捨松), who was the first Japanese woman student, sent together with the Iwakura delegation. Yamakawa obtained a bachelor degree for the first time as a Japanese woman at Vassar College in 1882 and studied nursing science at a nurse training

school just before leaving for Japan.

Yamakawa won outstanding credits in the first Sino-Japanese War (1894~1895) and Russo-Japanese War (1904~1905), rising to the position of duchess by marrying Ooyama Iwao (大山巖). When the Russo-Japanese war broke out, she persuaded the Japanese Red Cross to provide nursing services for war-wounded soldiers through the Dokji Nurse Women's Association and promoted charity activities wherein the nurses supported their husbands. Also she posted articles in American newspapers about the condition of Japanese suffering from the first Sino-Japanese War and Russo-Japanese War and about the financial difficulty of Japan thereafter, and Americans accepted her because she was a student studying in America. She influenced American public opinion to become friendly towards Japan. Japan was able to win consecutively in large scale power wars which erupted in East Asia partly because of the active development of the activities of women's associations mainly supported by the royal family and noble families.

The Korean branch of the Patriotic Women's Association was not founded rapidly. It was founded due to the activities of the Busan-Japan Women's Association (1893) and the Gyeonseong Women's Association (1897) under the direction and instruction of the headquarters of the Patriotic Women's Association. The Busan-Japan Women's Association was founded because Busan was the center for gathering of soldiers. Their activities in Korea were more stimulated as Okumura Ioko, who founded the Patriotic Women's Association, visited Busan in 1901.

Okumura Ioko was a younger brother of Okumura Ensin (奥村圓心) who came over as a preacher when Daegokpa Bonwonsa (大谷派 本願寺) opened its preaching center in Busan Korea in 1877. On this way back to Japan after visiting Qing with its Comfort delegation at the time of the Boxer Rebellion in 1900 and prior to the foundation of the Patriotic Women's Association, he gave a lecture promoting women's military nursing services at the annexed hall of Daegokpa Bonwonsa through an introduction of the wife of the consul in Busan. Later, the Busan-Japan Women's Association was reborn as a military supporting organization.

Okumura Ioko's charitable work in connection with the Boxer Rebellion became the direct opportunity for the foundation of the Japanese Patriotic Women's Association. Prior to the foundation of the



headquarters, the Busan Women's Association was already doing military support services and became a branch of the Patriotic Women's Association in Busan based on the recommendation of Okumura Ioko in 1905.

The membership of the Gyeongseong Women's Association, which was organized in 1897, included wives of high officials and wealthy women such as wives of envoys and consuls. They received support from Ito Hirobumi, and they organized an invitation banquet for Ito Hirobumi at the Japanese Consulate in 1898. They were very active by donating funds to the foundation of the Patriotic Women's Association in 1901. At that time, the president of the Japanese Patriotic Women's Association was a Japanese noblewoman named Hanwon (閑院宮妃). Since the Patriotic Women's Association had a close relationship with the Royal Court of Japan, it received ample assistance from the royal court of the Empire of Great Han, for instance receiving 3,000 Yen from the crown princess and 2,000 Yen from Soonheon Hwang-gwibi. At that time, it seems that the royal court of Korea didn't fully understand the objective of the Patriotic Women's Association.

In 1905, the opening ceremony of the Gyeongseong Committee of the Patriotic Women's Association took place, and on October 30 of that year, the Patriotic Women's Association permitted Korean women to become regular members of the association. It was a scheme to persuade wives of Korean high officials to be pro-Japanese. Lee Oak-gyeong, wife of Lee Ji-yong, the Minister of Internal Affairs and wife of Park Eui-byeong, head of Hangseongbu, became members of the Patriotic Women's Association. They established the Korean branch of the Patriotic Women's Association together with wives of high officials of the Empire of Great Han, indirectly contributing to its establishment. The Korean branch of the Patriotic Women's Association was founded on January 19, 1906, the foundation ceremony of which about 600 wives of high officials attended. At that time, Ito Hirobumi claimed that the Korean branch of the Patriotic Women's Association should become a Korea-Japan Women's Union. Lee Oak-gyeong and the wife of Park Eui-byeong accompanied their husbands, who were dispatched as Korean envoys to Japan on December 6, 1906. They received a 1<sup>st</sup> grade appreciation letter and a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade appreciation letter respectively from the Patriotic Womens Association in Japan (Hirose, 2010).

The Korean branch of the Patriotic Women's Association was re-named the Korean Commission Headquarters of the Patriotic Women's Association on January 15, 1907, and on February 3, 1911, it became known as the Joseon Headquarters of the Patriotic Women's Association. On July 19, 1907, King Gojong was forcibly dethroned due to the Hague Secret Emissary Affair, and the Korean military was dismissed on August 1, resulting in a military movement that occurred violently across the nation. At that time, the members of the Joseon Headquarters of the Patriotic Women's Association conducted consolation services for the wounded Japanese soldiers and set up a rest area in the complex of Bonwonsa where they provided refreshments or consoled the bereaved families.

Since the Patriotic Women's Association supported Japanese soldiers mentally and materially, it was inevitable for the association to absorb women of high class and wives of high officials. In this way, the Japanese started a scheme to make Korean women's organizations pro-Japanese. Considering this, Lee Oak-gyeong made the women education association pro-Japanese while holding the presidency of the Women's Education Association. In addition, the possibility that funds of woman primary schools were supplied to the Patriotic Women's Association cannot be excluded.

### **Establishment of the Myeongshin girls' school by Soonheon Hwang-gwibi**

#### *Organization of the Korea-Japan Women's Association*

Go Hee-jun, who had visited Japan as part of Ambassador Bobing's entourage in March 1906, reported to King Gojong his opinion about the size and system of Gakushuin, an education institute of the royal family and noble families and of the noble family girls' school, and recommended that schools for the education of noble families be established ("*Hwangseong Shinmun*," 1906)<sup>15</sup>. As a result of Go's recommendation, King Gojong established Myeongshin girls' school for noble

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<sup>15</sup> *Hwangseong Shinmun*. (1906, March 9).

women and Suhakwon for noble men as part of the royal court's national salvation movement through education. The reason why King Gojong established Suhakwon can be identified in his chronicles, where he remarks, "to educate the royal family to become an example for various schools" ("*Sunjong sillok*," 1909)<sup>16</sup>, revealing his purpose for establishing these two schools.

However, the schools did not satisfactorily fulfill the purpose of their establishment. ("*Sunjong sillok*," 1909)<sup>17</sup>. Even though the kingdom was in a perilous situation, the students were only taking advantage of the situation, unlike King Gojong, who risked his last stake. Suhakwon disappeared from history on October 4, 1910, and the remaining students were incorporated into Hanseong High School ("*Maeil Shinbo*," 1910)<sup>18</sup>.

Myeongshin girls' school, a school for noble families, was established via the opening ceremony of the Korea-Japan Women's Association on April 22, 1906 ("*Maeil Shinbo*," 1911)<sup>19</sup>, and with the funds and building donated from Soonheon Hwang-gwibi on May 22, the school received 9.9km<sup>2</sup> of farming land as operation funds from King Yeongchin, son of Soonheon Hwang-gwibi. Soonheon Hwang-gwibi was pursuing education modernization projects, as evidenced by her support of the establishment of Yangjeonguisuk (May 1905) and Jinmyeong girls' school (April 1906) before the establishment of Myeongshin girls' school. It can be said that Soonheon Hwang-gwibi did so in support of the national salvation movement through education with King Gojong as her political partner.

The purpose of establishment indicated in the application for approval which was submitted to the Ministry of Education by the Korea-Japan Women's Association says that the basis of the development of the state depends on the education of the people and that the wealth and strength of powers of the West apparently resulted from the whole effort input into the education of the people. Hence, the school purported to recruit women of high class and "to produce talented persons

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<sup>16</sup> *Sunjong sillok*. (1909, March 16). Volume 3.

<sup>17</sup> *Sunjong sillok*. (1909, March 16). Volume 3.

<sup>18</sup> *Maeil Shinbo*. (1910, October 6).

<sup>19</sup> *Maeil Shinbo*. (1911, April 4).

through education” (“*Hwangseong Shinmun*,” 1906)<sup>20</sup>. The application for approval reflected the theory of women’s education according to the theory of social evolution which was prevalent at that time.

Of course, on January 19, 1906, the Korean branch of the Patriotic Women’s Association was founded, and since Tonggambu (Japanese Residency-General) was established on February 1, the operation of the Korea-Japan Women’s Association or the curriculum of Myeongshin girls’ school could not be fully self-regulatory. Moreover, it was natural for Japan to pave the way for Japanization in the education of Myeongshin girls’ school, targeting women of high class. Nonetheless, Myeongshin girls’ school was not established as an educational organization for Japanization, but an educational institute privately established by Soonheon Hwang-gwibi in an effort to support the national salvation movement through education as requested by King Gojong. Moreover, the funds for the establishment and operation of the school were not supplied by the Korea-Japan Women’s Association or Tonggambu, but by the royal court. This fact should not be overlooked. The expenses for the operation of Myeongshin girls’ school were paid by the funds of the royal court, even after the Japanese Annexation of Korea.

The organizational manager of the Korea-Japan Women’s Association was Fuchizawa Noe (淵澤能恵), who was the supervisor of Myeongshin girls’ school. In 1905 she came to Korea for the first time at the age of 55. Fuchizawa had been in America to study. On her way back home, she met Okabe Nagamoto (岡部長職) and his wife. They came to Korea together. Okabe Nagamoto was the Minister of Law while Derauch Masatake (寺内正毅) was ruling as the governor-in-general. The objective of the Okabe couple’s visiting Korea was to establish the Korean branch of the Patriotic Women’s Association and to further the education of Korean women. At that time, the Japanese education for Korean women was largely classified into two kinds. One was to secure the cheap labor of ordinary women by teaching them silkworm-breeding skills to financially support Japanese war efforts, and the other was to provide pro-Japanese education to women of high class (Maurkami Syukuko, 2009).

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<sup>20</sup> *Hwangseong Shinmun*. (1906, May 26).

The officers of the Korea-Japan Women's Association at that time were Soonheon Hwang-gwibi, the president of the association, Leeganggongbi, the vice president of the association, Lee Jeong-suk, the chairperson of the association, Lee Oak-gyeong, the vice chairperson of the association, and Fuchiziwa Noe, the general manager of the association. The purpose of the establishment of the Korea-Japan Women's Association was language study, fine arts, craft, silkworm-breeding study, education assistant training, charity, and nursing study ("*Daehan Ilbo*," 1905)<sup>21</sup>.

*Establishment and Education of Myeongshin girls' school*

Soonheon Hwang-gwibi supported the establishment and operation of Jinmyeong girls' school and Myeongshin girls' school. However, the education styles of these two schools were different from each other. Jinmyeong girls' school followed western style education, but Myeongshin girls' school followed Japanese style. Hence, the classes of Jinmyeong girls' school were conducted by western teachers, but those of Myeongshin girls' school were taught by Japanese teachers (Sookmyung 50 Years History Compilation Committee, 1956, pp. 46-47).

On May 8, 1906, Hwangseong Shinmun carried an advertisement aimed at recruiting girl students, giving notice that the school would be opened on May 20 and that women of noble birth from ages of 11 to 25 could enroll in the school ("*Hwangseong Shinmun*," 1906)<sup>22</sup>. The admission was limited to only women of noble birth, married or unmarried, which was different from other schools. As mentioned above, the purpose of the establishment of Myeongshin girls' school was to educate women of noble birth to become exemplars in society.

According to the May 4, 1906 edition of *Hwangseong Shinmun*, Soonheon Hwang-gwibi invited wives of high officials to the Kyungsun Palace for a feast prior to the recruiting advertisement, and also invited about 30 prospective women students and observed their conduct and behavior ("*Hwangseong Shinmun*," 1906)<sup>23</sup>. This means that Soonheon

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<sup>21</sup> *Daehan Ilbo*. (1905, July 19).

<sup>22</sup> *Hwangseong Shinmun*. (1906, May 18).

Hwang-gwibi was involved to some extent in the selection of students in advance.

At the time of the school's opening, Myeongshin girls' school had 5 students, but it had 33 at the end of the year, and in the following year, the number of the students increased to 50. In March 1910, the number of students increased to 137 ("*Maeil Shinbo*," 1911)<sup>24</sup>. At the first graduation ceremony on April 5, 1910, 4 students graduated. At the time of opening, the school paid the expenses of dormitory, textbooks, supplies, and so on, but in 1907 the number of students increased to 60. As a result, all the students couldn't be roomed in the dormitory, and the expenses for the operation of the school increased due to the increase in the numbers of students and teachers. From 1909 the school abolished the free textbooks and supplies and provided only writing tools as a gift of admission (Sookmyung 100 Years History Compilation Committee, 2006, pp. 60-61). After 1911, when the Japanese occupation began, the school recruited students even from common people and began to charge monthly tuition ("*Donga Ilbo*," 1935)<sup>25</sup>.

Myeongshin girls' school was called Bosin girl's school at the time of its establishment, but renamed Myeongshin girls' school in 1907. The word "Myeongshin", meaning "bright virtue," is taken from "Myeong" of "Myeong Deok" (明明德) and "sin" of "Sin Min" (新民) from the Three Doctrines (三綱領) of Great Learning (大學, Da Xue): "The way of great learning consists in manifesting one's bright virtue, consists in loving the people, consists in stopping in perfect goodness (大學之道 在明明德 在新民 在至於至善)" (Sookmyung 100 Years History Compilation Committee, 2006, pp. 26-27). It was on December 28, 1908 when it was re-approved that the name of Myeongshin girls' school was changed to Myeongshin Girl's High School according to the Girls High School Decree of 1908. Afterwards, it was again renamed Sookmyung girl's high school in 1909 to honor King Yeongchin because his penname was "Myeongshin jae" (明新齋) (Sookmyung 100 Years History Compilation Committee, 2006, pp. 47-48). Afterwards, it was renamed Sookmyung

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<sup>23</sup> *Hwangseong Shinmun*. (1906, May 4).

<sup>24</sup> *Maeil Shinbo*. (1911, April 8).

<sup>25</sup> *Donga Ilbo*. (1935, May 16).

Girls Primary School (1911), Sookmyung Girls Middle and High School (1912), Sookmyung Girls Professional School (1939), and finally Sookmyung Women University in 1948.

Myeongshin girls school had accepted women of noble birth as its students since its establishment, following the model of Japanese noble women's schools in membership, curriculum, and operation style, so it was called a "school of noble women" or a "school of high class women." Because it was located in Bakdong, it was called "Bakdong School." When this school was established, it encountered various difficulties in recruiting students because Korean society did not recognize the importance of women's education. However, because the social recognition of women's education began to change and because it received governmental support applicable to a national school, its position gradually became stronger. The girl students at the time of its establishment used to go to school riding in a carriage on Monday and to go home riding in a carriage on Saturday (Murakami, 2009).

The school was operated with the building and land which were donated by Soonheon Hwang-gwibi and King Yeongchin. Soonheon Hwang-gwibi donated a piece of land of 1,586m<sup>2</sup> located in Jongro-gu, Seoul in April 1906 and one house and annexed structures in the complex. King Yeongchin, son of Soonheon Hwang-gwibi, donated farm lands of about 9.9 km<sup>2</sup> located in Hwanghae-do, Gyeonggi-do, and Jeolla-do in May 1907 (Sookmyung 100 Years History Compilation Committee, 2006, pp. 60-61).

As mentioned above, Yangjeonguisuk, Jinmyeong girls school and Myeongshin girls school, established and supported by Soonheon Hwang-gwibi, were both private schools, but their operating funds were provided by the royal court. Hence, during the Japanese oppression, the expenses incurred by those schools were managed and controlled by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. All the income from these schools was deposited in the bank accounts of Hanho Agriculture and Industry Bank Co., Ltd., and managed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, to which the schools could request funds for necessary expenditures each month. This was ostensibly done for the sake of stable management of the school, but in fact the Japanese government-general was thoroughly controlling the schools by assigning the right for supervising the properties of these schools to the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Education

Affairs, the Japanese government-general of Joseon, 1912).

These schools were established to recruit women of noble birth and educate them to produce talented persons as indicated in the application for approval submitted to the Ministry of Education. After the issuance of the Private School Decree, the application for establishment of private Myeongshin girls high school was submitted to the Ministry of Education with the indicated purpose: “To provide high and common education necessary for women and teach skills and etiquette.” However, previous studies and records have stated that the purpose of the establishment of Myeongshin girls school was to educate and produce “wise mothers and good wives.” This claim is based on a single unverified quotation from an April 9, 1911, article of *Maeil Shinbo*, which claimed that the purpose of the establishment of Sookmyung girls high school was only to educate and produce “wise mothers and good wives.”

*Maeil Shinbo* (Daily News) was a Korean-language daily newspaper which was published as the official magazine of the Japanese government-general of Joseon. It was rendered suitable for this purpose by deleting two words from the paper’s title on August 30, 1910 – “Dae Han” from the *DaeHan Maeil Shinbo*. The *DaeHan Maeil Shinbo* (which was Korea’s representative national newspaper, had been founded by Ernest Bethell, an Englishman, in 1904, immediately after Japan attacked the sovereignty of Korea. After the Japanese take-over, the newspaper mainly carried logical articles which supported Japanese rule over Korea. Therefore, despite the fact that Myeongshin girl’s school (which was the former name of Sookmyung girls’ high school) had been established to further the national salvation movement through education, the newspaper falsely claimed that the purpose of the school’s establishment was only to educate and produce “wise mothers and good wives,” thus diluting the founding spirit of the school (“*Maeil Shinbo*,” April 9, 1911)<sup>26</sup>. This statement undoubtedly intended to equate the educational goal of Sookmyung girls’ high school with the educational goal of the schools for noble women in contemporary Japan. The educational goal of the noble girl’s schools in Japan was limited to western liberal education to

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<sup>26</sup> *Maeil Shinbo*. (1911, April 9).



maintain noble quality with the goal of producing “wise mothers and good wives” (Women Gakushuin, 1935). Women’s education in contemporary Japan gave lip service to equality between men and women but maintained the ideology of “wise mother and good wife,” thus fundamentally restricting women’s advancement in the society and reinforcing the patriarchal order (Yuk, 2013).

The national treatment accorded the students of Myeongshin girls’ school was outstanding and special. The congratulation feast on the opening of Myeongshin girls’ school was held in Gyeongbok Palace in July 1906, with students, school staff, and dignitaries from domestic and abroad attending (“*Daehan Maeil Shinbo*,” 1906)<sup>27</sup>. More than that, Myeongshin students participated in various court events, and they were invited to the birthday celebration of the Prince (“*Hwangseong Shinmun*,” 1907)<sup>28</sup> and to Mansuseongjeol (萬壽聖節), a celebration of the birth of King Gojong (“*Hwangseong Shinmun*,” 1908)<sup>29</sup>. In addition, school sporting events were held in Changdeok Palace or Deoksu Palace. This shows the fame and position of Myeongshin girls’ school.

Not only women of noble birth, but also some palace ladies (Sanggung, palace attendant of the 5A rank) attended Myeongshin girls’ school. The palace ladies were permitted to attend the school according to an order of King Gojong which said, “Let seven palace ladies of Gyeongbuk Palace go and study.” Following the the order of King Gojong, Eom-gwibi (Soonheon Hwang-gwibi) let seven palace ladies study at Myeongshin girls’ school. Not all the palace ladies graduated from the school. They returned to their former court positions after graduation (Sookmyung 100 Years History Compilation Committee, 2006, pp. 64-65). There were seven ladies of the position who were assigned as speaking companions of the queen. Most of them were graduates of Sookmyung girls’ high school, and others were also ladies who had received new education (Gondo, 2007).

As mentioned above, the establishment of private schools in the beginning of the enlightenment period was to provide new knowledge, but

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<sup>27</sup> *Daehan Maeil Shinbo*. (1906, July 21).

<sup>28</sup> *Hwangseong Shinmun*. (1907, March 23).

<sup>29</sup> *Hwangseong Shinmun*. (1908, September 10).

the purpose changed to promote the national salvation movement through education for the sake of sovereignty restoration after the Eulsa Treaty. The goal of women's education was also to educate and produce talented persons through the cultivation of the national spirit for the sake of the wealth and strength of the state, unlike that of mission schools, which were established by missionaries to promote Christianity and its values.

The sense of independence and patriotism of Myeongshin girls' school, which was established on this nationalist ideology, was outstandingly different from other schools. After the Japanese annexation of Korea, students of the school refused to attend the Cheonjangjeol (天長節), which celebrates the birthday of the King of Japan and strongly resisted the event by throwing cakes prepared for the celebration into toilets. Because of this, all the students were punished with indefinite suspension from school. More than that, students actively participated in the Samil Movement (3.1 Movement) in 1919 and in the Manse Movement on the third anniversary of the death of King Gojong in 1921. In 1927 about 400 students joined together in refusing to attend school in protest against the Japanese rule over Korea, thus actively participating in the opposition to Japanese colonization (Murakami, 2009).

Unlike Myeongshin girls' school, the mission schools were established by missionaries for the sake of the mission itself. Hence, mission schools had no interest in sovereignty restoration from the beginning. Knowing what Catholics had to suffer as a result of their mission activities in Korea, they chose gradual mission developments through education and medical services. Women's education for the equality of men and women, breaking away from old customs, and improvement of living were their secondary goals.

## Conclusion

This essay has looked into the enlightenment policy and education movement of King Gojong, who tried to protect Korean independence through the modernization of the Empire of Great Han. The essay also traced the women's education movement of the Empire of Great Han by centering on Myeongshin girls' school, which was established as a result of the modernization movements.

King Gojong dispatched the Courtiers' Observation Mission and Yeongseonsa to Japan and China respectively after 1880 despite strong oppositions of conservatives across the nation against the opening policy, and stated his strong will towards opening and enlightenment. He also emphasized through his "Royal Doctrine for the Establishment of a State on the Basis of the Education" that education is the basis of preserving the state, and he positively promoted the project of education modernization by establishing the modern school system. In addition, he encouraged the educational project of missionaries even though the schools were established for missionary purposes.

The goal for the establishment of private schools, promoted in an effort to provide new knowledge and enlightenment at the beginning of the enlightenment period, changed its characteristic to the national salvation movement through education for the sake of sovereignty restoration after the Eulsa Treaty. Unlike the missionary schools, the schools of women's education, established by intelligent precursors, positively participated in the national salvation movement through education with the goal of educating and producing talented persons for the sake of building the national spirit and making the state strong and wealthy. Later, Japan established Japanese Women's Associations across the nation, and in 1906, established the Korean branch of the Patriotic Women's Association and utilized it in the acceleration of its scheme to make people pro-Japanese through the Japanization of women's organizations and to solidify the colonization of Korea.

Myeongshin girls' school was a school for women of noble birth which was established by Soonheon Hwang-gwibi for the purpose of educating and producing talented persons for the sake of sovereignty restoration. Even though this school followed the model of Japanese noble women's school, the sense of independence and patriotism of Myeongshin girls' school students was outstandingly different. After the Japanese annexation of Korea, students of the school strongly resisted the Japanese rule over Korea and all the students were punished with indefinite suspension from school. More than that, students of the school continually participated in the anti-Japan movement in protest against the Japanese colonization such as the 3.1 Movement. This shows that the school was different in its characteristic from the Japanese noble women's schools, which only emphasized educating and producing

“wise mothers and good wives” through the modern education of the West.

Soonheon Hwang-gwibi supported King Gojong as his political companion. The establishment of Myeongshin girls’ school can be said to be the fruit of such efforts. Before the establishment of Myeongshin girls’ school, she supported King Gojong by participating in the establishment of Yangjeonguisuk and Jinmyeong women’s schools.

In the past, there were many claims that Myeongshin girls’ school was a pro-Japanese school since it had a relationship with the Korea-Japan Women’s Association and was said to provide a Japanese education. However, Myeongshin girls’ school was a private school supported by Soonheon Hwang-gwibi. More specifically, the operational funds of the school after establishment were continually provided by King Yeongchin. Even during the Japanese oppression over Korea, the expenses of the school were provided by the budget of the royal court. Therefore, Myeongshin girls’ school (Sookmyung girls’ school) was not a simple private school, but a school of the best elite woman education operating under the auspices of the royal court.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Author’s Note: Primary historical sources are in the footnotes.

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*Biographical Note:* The author **Suhwa Yuk** obtained a Ph.D. on the Education of the Royal Family of the Latter Korean Empire Period at the Academy of Korean Studies, and was honored to be a research professor at the Post Doc of Seoul National University and at the Academy of Korean Studies, and is now working as a visiting researcher at Seoul National University. His publications include “The Education of Royal Family of the Korean Empire” and “Education Space in History – A Philosophical Overview of It” E-mail: royaled@snu.ac.kr