

Re-contextualisation of the Italian Risorgimento in Korea in the Early Twentieth Century. The Example of Chae-Ho Shin's *Three Great Founders of Italy*

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Abstract: In 1907, Korean independence activist and nationalist historian Chae-Ho Shin translated the Chinese edition of *The Makers of Modern Italy* into a Korean-Chinese script and published it under the title *Three Great Founders of Italy*. This article aims to investigate Chae-Ho Shin's intentions and purposes, as shown in his *Three Great Founders of Italy*, to reveal how he re-contextualised the history of the Italian Risorgimento. Chae-Ho Shin's re-contextualisation was inextricably bound up with the historical setting of the political crisis that Korea faced after the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1905.

Keywords: Chae-Ho Shin, Qichao Liang, Risorgimento, Social Darwinism, Japan-Korea Treaty

Introduction

Italy was one of the earliest European countries to establish diplomatic relations with Korea. Nonetheless, it is hard to say that commercial and cultural exchanges between the two countries have been vigorous compared to those between Korea and other European countries, such as the United Kingdom, Germany and France.¹ Korea and Italy have not prioritised each other politically or economically. Given this situation, it is somewhat exceptional that the achievements of the protagonists of the Italian Risorgimento are widely known in Korea. Korean people's knowledge of the Italian Risorgimento is undoubtedly due to *Three Great Founders of Italy* (*Italykōnkuksamkōlchōn*),² published by Korean independence activist and nationalist historian Chae-Ho Shin in 1907. This was a Korean-Chinese mixed edition of *The Makers of Modern Italy*, written by John A. R. Marriott and published in London in 1889.

¹ For the historical relationship between Korea and Italy, see Lim (2019) and Park (1987).

² All quotations of Chae-Ho Shin's work are from Shin (2001). All Korean words, other than proper nouns for which conventional Romanisation already exists, are converted to the Roman alphabet, according to the McCune-Reischauer Romanisation system.

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After the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1905 made Korea a protectorate of imperialist Japan, the main proponents of the Korean enlightenment, including Chae-Ho Shin himself, were dedicated to self-strengthening through Westernisation and mass education. Translation was a very effective tool for accepting Western science, technology, institutions and culture and for educating the public about Western civilisation. Owing to language difficulties, Korean intellectuals tended to translate from the Chinese or Japanese versions of Western works rather than from the original texts written in English, German, French and Italian. In many cases, translators modified texts according to their own intents and purposes. Chae-Ho Shin's *Three Great Founders of Italy* was no exception. This article will investigate Chae-Ho Shin's intentions and purposes, as shown in his *Three Great Founders of Italy*, to reveal how he re-contextualised the history of the Italian Risorgimento. As with other East Asian translators, Chae-Ho Shin's re-contextualisation was inextricably bound up with the historical setting of the political crisis that Korea faced after the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1905.

The Origin of *Three Great Founders of Italy*

Before we begin, it is necessary to examine the original script and the process by which it was translated into a Korean-Chinese mixed style by Chae-Ho Shin. This process represents how modern knowledge from the Western world was transferred to Korea in the early twentieth century.³ The original script was *The Makers of Modern Italy*, published in 1889. It dealt with the achievements of Mazzini, Garibaldi and Cavour and was written by British historian and Conservative politician John A. R. Marriott. In his work, Marriott used the history of Italian unification to infuse national pride into the hearts of British people in the context of the competition among national states ignited in late-nineteenth-century Europe. Marriott's intention is already exposed in the first chapter, where he compares Italy and England. In the nineteenth century, Italy was still struggling for national unification, whereas England had formed its national identity as early as the thirteenth century (Marriott 1889, 2).

Marriott's *The Makers of Modern Italy* was translated into Japanese in 1892 by Japanese journalist Hisashi Hirata, whose intention for translation was similar to Marriott's writing intention. Hirata thought the Italian Risorgimento was a type of modern revolution and identified it with the Meiji Restoration of 1868 in Japan (also known as the Meiji Revolution or Meiji Reform). In doing so, he intended to place Japan among the ranks of Western powers, including Italy.

Among East Asian countries, Japan was the first to adopt Western sciences and culture, and Chinese intellectuals could gain knowledge about Western civilisation through Japan. Hirata's Japanese edition of *The Makers of Modern Italy* was translated into Chinese in 1902 by Chinese social and political activist

³ On the process of translation of Marriott's work into East Asian languages, see Jeong (2015, 257-86).

and journalist Qichao Liang, who participated in a failed 103-day national, cultural and educational reform movement called the Hundred Days' Reform (also known as the Wuxu Reform) and then went into exile in Japan in 1898. During his exile, he translated many literary works on Western science and culture that were published in Japanese into Chinese, including the Japanese edition of *The Makers of Modern Italy*. In contrast to Marriott and Hirata, who intended to inspire national pride for their own countries, Liang perceived China as in a state of «ignorance» and «incapacity». In his translation, he identified China's sufferings, caused by the invasion of foreign powers, with Italy's situation before national unification and presented the protagonists of the Italian Risorgimento as examples that Chinese people should follow.

Chae-Ho Shin translated Liang's Chinese edition of *The Makers of Modern Italy* into a Korean-Chinese mixed style and published it under the title *Three Great Founders of Italy* in 1907. Before the publication of Chae-Ho Shin's *Three Great Founders of Italy*, several excerpts of Liang's Chinese edition had been published serially in modern Korean newspapers, such as *The Korea Daily News* (Daehan Maeil Sinbo) and the *Imperial Capital Gazette* (Hwangseong Sinmun), whose editor in chief was Chae-Ho Shin himself.

Compared to Liang's Chinese edition, several modifications are found in Chae-Ho Shin's *Three Great Founders of Italy*. Primarily, Chae-Ho Shin completely omitted Liang's preface and conclusion and replaced them with his own preface and conclusion. Chae-Ho Shin's intention, revealed in his preface, was the same as Liang's. Chae-Ho Shin urged Korean people to emulate the protagonists of the Italian Risorgimento to restore national sovereignty, identifying Korea under the invasion of foreign powers with Italy before national unification. Chae-Ho Shin also deleted some passages and inserted new ones into the body of the book. The most remarkable changes concern the roles of Mazzini and Cavour. Among the protagonists of the Italian Risorgimento, the achievements of Cavour were emphasised by both the original author and the East Asian translators Hirata and Liang. Liang, in particular, was a moderate reformer who had opposed the Chinese revolution of 1911 (also known as the Xinhai Revolution), which marked the collapse of the Chinese monarchy and the beginning of China's early republican era. He was a supporter of constitutional monarchy and Cavour was a figure who was most likely in agreement with Liang's political inclinations. Liang admired Cavour's achievements, comparing him with great leaders such as Otto von Bismarck, the prime minister of Prussia and founder of the German Empire, and Abraham Lincoln, the sixteenth president of the United States, who bolstered the federal government (Son 2007, 95).

However, Chae-Ho Shin, a Korean independence activist against Japan, thought that Korea needed revolutionary activists to fight for Korean independence, rather than conservative statesmen like Cavour. In contrast to Liang, moreover, Chae-Ho Shin pursued a republic as an ideal form of government for modern states, at least before he became an anarchist in the 1920s. Chae-Ho Shin believed a republic was a form of government in which «the public could

participate»⁴ and asserted that public participation was important for overcoming national crises like the one Korea faced. Accordingly, in his *Three Great Founders of Italy*, Chae-Ho Shin deleted, or at least minimised, celebrations of Cavour's larger-than-life character, endorsements of constitutional monarchy and negative references to republics, whereas he touted Mazzini's role in Italian national unification. According to Chae-Ho Shin, «Mazzini ploughed a field and Cavour just harvested».⁵

Translation as a Means of National Salvation

Translation was a very effective tool for these three countries in East Asia for learning modern knowledge from the West. Japan began to translate literary works on modern Western civilisation and knowledge, with the aim of being incorporated into an international order in which Western powers took the lead. Then, Chinese intellectuals adopted modern knowledge through Japanese translations, since they were much more familiar with Japanese than with European languages. For example, Qichao Liang retranslated many Japanese editions of Western literary works into Chinese during his political exile in Japan after the failure of the Hundred Days' Reform. His intention was to introduce modern knowledge to Chinese society and educate Chinese people about Western civilisation through translation. Liang's attempt inspired many enlightened contemporary Korean intellectuals, including Chae-Ho Shin.

It was in the 1880s that the need for translation was recognised in Korea. As early as 1882, the royal court announced in the *Hanseong Ten Daily* (Hanseong Sunbo), the first Korean modern newspaper, its extensive plan to publish translated foreign books in the *Pangmun'guk*, the Korean government printing office. In 1896, an editorial in *The Independent* (Tongnipshinmun) argued that foreign textbooks should be urgently translated to help young people acquire modern knowledge without learning foreign languages (Kim 2014, 2-3). However, it was after the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1905 that translation began in earnest. Enlightened Korean intellectuals thought that the crisis of national sovereignty in Korea could be overcome by accepting modern Western knowledge through translation.

The most frequently translated works between 1905 and 1910 were biographical novels of great historical figures, probably because this genre was very useful for encouraging national pride in Korean people's hearts. Protagonists in biographical novels published in this period can be divided into three categories. The first category consists of European political leaders who successfully enhanced

⁴ Korean intellectuals could get information about various political regimes other than monarchies through some modern newspapers published in the late nineteenth century. *Hanseong Ten Daily* (Hanseong Sunbo), whose first issue was published in 1883, introduced various political regimes. Here a republic was defined as a form of government in which «the president was elected by popular vote and political affairs were decided by the discussion of the public». Chae-Ho Shin absolutely echoed this definition.

⁵ Quoted from Yang (2011, 318). English translation is mine.

national prosperity by any means necessary, in an age of political chaos, such as Bismarck, Peter the Great and Napoleon. The second category includes national heroes or heroines who showed no fear of death, such as Joan of Arc. The third category consists of folk heroes who struggled against tyranny, such as William Tell. These biographical novels not only played a substantial role in instilling national consciousness and infusing a fighting spirit into Korean people against imperialist Japan, but also made a decisive contribution to disseminating modern Western knowledge. From these biographical novels, many Koreans could learn about key notions of modern Western political thought, including liberty, equality, unification and republicanism.

Chae-Ho Shin's literary activities aligned with this cultural current. He studied traditional neo-Confucianism in his youth, but he also had the opportunity to learn about Western political thought and modern knowledge from *Ice-Drinker's Studio* (Yinbin shi heji), written by Qichao Liang. Chae-Ho Shin was seriously influenced by Liang, who advocated for adopting and educating people about Western civilisation. After the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1905, Chae-Ho Shin devoted himself to the campaign for Korean independence and the liberation of oppressed Korean people from imperialist Japan and published several biographical novels on Korean national heroes, including Sun-sin Yi, a Korean admiral famed for his victories against the Japanese navy during the Imjin war (1592); Mundeok Eulji, a military leader who successfully defended Korea against Sui China in the seventh century; and Young Choi, a general well-known for his meritorious service in several wars and rebellions in the fourteenth century.

Like many of his East Asian contemporaries, Chae-Ho Shin was a follower of the «great man» theory, the nineteenth-century belief that history could be largely explained by the impact of great men or heroes. In this period, many East Asian intellectuals frequently utilised narratives based on the great man theory, «with the educational purpose of inspiring a sense of patriotism and encouraging social participation attitude to the public» (Lee 2004, 165. English translation is mine). They not only published biographies of their own countries' heroes but also tried to unearth and introduce biographies of Western national heroes. Chae-Ho Shin did the same. The protagonists of Italian unification, described in Chae-Ho Shin's *Three Great Founders of Italy*, were aligned with Korean national heroes such as Sun-sin Yi, Mundeok Eulji and Young Choi, who had appeared in previously published biographical novels.

Italy, a Modern State that Embodied Social Darwinism

The diffusion of biographical novels about Western national heroes who succeeded in enhancing national prosperity in early-twentieth-century Korea was the product of a fusion between the great man theory and social Darwinism. Social Darwinism applied principles of biological evolution and natural selection to human societies. It was widely utilised to assert the superiority of a particular society, nation, state or culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For example, in the first chapter of *The Makers of Modern Italy*, John A.

R. Marriott ranked England, France, Spain, Germany and Italy in hierarchical order based on social Darwinism:

In the attainment of national unity some states were, I need not say, very much ahead of others. England, for example, compassed the realisation of her national identity as early as the thirteenth century; France and Spain not until the sixteenth; while other states, like Germany and Italy, have reached the same goal only within the last few years (Marriot 1889, 2).

Social Darwinism was first introduced to Korea via Japan in the mid-1870s and was spread widely in the 1880s among enlightened Korean intellectuals, who saw Korea's incompetence and defencelessness against foreign invaders. Regarding the diffusion of social Darwinism in Korea in the 1880s, it is sufficient to quote a passage from *On Competition* (Kyōngjaengnon), written by Kil-Chun Yu, a Korean independence activist, in 1883:

Everything takes a step forward by competition. Not only political affairs, but also private affairs, progress by competition. We can reach neither intelligence nor happiness without competition in our lives, and a nation can neither enhance prosperity nor gain honour without international competition.⁶

Kil-Chun Yu's view of competition was similar to that of the English biologist and anthropologist Herbert Spencer, remembered for his doctrine of social Darwinism, who believed that competition was the «law of life». The thesis of self-strengthening through Westernisation, shared by many Korean intellectuals between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, was based on this idea.

Italy, along with other western European countries, was a paradigm for Korea to copy. In several articles published in modern Korean newspapers, Italy was described as a modern state, recently established, that had overcome both internal feuds and the oppression of foreign powers such as France and Austria. According to an article published in the *Hanseong Ten Daily* (Hanseong Sunbo), «Italy was not united, being divided in various factions twenty-five years ago». However, the «Italian government enlightened people and made them comply with the ruler's orders. As a result, Italy became a modern state that got abreast of other Western powers».⁷ Additionally, in many other articles published in the same newspaper, Italy was represented as a military power that dispatched a squadron to Tripoli, a diplomatic power that formed a military alliance with other European powers such as Germany and Austria, and a trade giant that signed a commercial treaty with the United States of America. In short, in the eyes of Korean journalists, Italy was a modern state that embodied social Darwinism and was a model for Korea (Yang 2011, 310). This image of Italy was repeated

⁶ Quoted from Yu (1995, *passim*). This is my rather loose translation.

⁷ *Hanseong Sunbo* (27 March 1884). English translation is mine. All historical Korean newspaper articles are found on the Internet Archive of Big Kinds (www.bigkinds.or.kr/v2/news/oldNews.do, last accessed 08/01/2023).

in another modern Korean newspaper, *Hanseong Ten-day Reports* (Hanseong Chubo), where Italy was described as a military power that was successful in reforming its military system and that tried to found a colony in Africa.⁸

In the early twentieth century, Korean intellectuals' interest in Italy as a model for Korea of the modern state was combined with the great man theory, which was diffused among Korean intellectuals in the early twentieth century. This was converted into interest in the protagonists of the construction of modern Italy. Chae-Ho Shin's *Three Great Founders of Italy*, which includes biographies of the protagonists of the Italian Risorgimento, was a milestone for this conversion.

The Identification of Italy in the Past with Korea in the Present

A noteworthy phenomenon, appearing in many articles about Italy published in Korea in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, was an identification of the two countries. This rhetoric also appeared in Chae-Ho Shin's *Three Great Founders of Italy*. This text includes an introduction written by Ji-Yeon Jang, a Korean nationalist journalist and one of the most important independence activists. He listed similarities between Italy and Korea: geography, population and political situation. Furthermore, he held out the hope that Korea would become the «Italy of the Orient». Chae-Ho Shin shared this idea. In the first part of *Three Great Founders of Italy*, which contains a general description of Italy, he inserted the following two phrases, which did not exist in Liang's Chinese edition: «Italy, originating from ancient Rome, was a peninsular state in Southern Europe», and «Italy declined after the invasion of barbarians from the North» (Shin 2001, 7-8). It is clear that these phrases are intended to highlight geographical and political similarities between the two countries.

Regarding political similarity, Chae-Ho Shin rigidly divided the political situation of Italy between before and after the three great founders. According to Chae-Ho Shin, the history of Italy before the three great founders was characterised by the glory of ancient times and the decline of the modern age. In ancient times, Italy «took the lead of civilisations in the world, establishing a great empire that annexed three continents, Europe, Asia and Africa»; but in the modern age, it degenerated into «a country invaded one day by Spain and France and the next by Germany, as if it was surrounded by tigers and wolves». At last, «in the early nineteenth century, Italy became nothing more than a ruination» (Shin 2001, 7-8). Conversely, after the three great founders, Italy was characterised by reconstruction. According to Chae-Ho Shin, Italy succeeded in reconstructing its past glory, and today it «has 500,000 soldiers and a population of 29 million». It would not be useful to examine the historical veracity of Chae-Ho Shin's description of Italy. Here I focus on examining the intention behind his dichotomous rhetoric of decline and reconstruction.

⁸ *Hanseong Chubo* (22 February 1886, 24 May 1886, 31 May 1886, 23 August 1886, 7 February 1887, 11 July 1887, 18 July 1887, 25 July 1887, 1 August 1887, 6 February 1888).

Chae-Ho Shin's perception of the situation in Korea was not so different from Qichao Liang's. He identified the national crisis that Korea went through in his lifetime with the great hardship Italy experienced in the past, caused by foreign invaders and internal disunity. In his *Three Great Founders of Italy*, Chae-Ho Shin inserted a new description of Austria as an «enemy of liberty and independence», which did not exist in Liang's Chinese edition. Here he identified Austria, which had suppressed Italy, with Japan, which had violated Korea's national sovereignty. Such descriptions were repeated in a newspaper article, «Italy of the Orient», written by Chae-Ho Shin himself and published in *The Korea Daily News* (Daehan Maeil Sinbo) in 1909.

Chae-Ho Shin hoped that Korea would restore national sovereignty, just as Italy had achieved independence by going through hell and high water. He believed that, for this to happen, Korean national heroes would have to play a vital role, just like the protagonists of the Italian Risorgimento. In the preface of *Three Great Founders of Italy*, Chae-Ho Shin identified the purpose of his translation, which was none other than urging Korean people to be patriots:

Why do I translate *Three Great Founders of Italy*? It is because the three great founders are patriots. Why do I admire patriots? It is because patriotism was the pillar of the state, the bread of life and the root of knowledge [...]. If we learn political science, jurisprudence, engineering, commerce, art, technology and many other sciences without patriotism, we are just like a machine or slave. Is this right?

The term «patriots» is repeated twenty-seven times in the *Preface*, whereas it does not appear even once in the *Conclusions*, where instead the term «three great founders» is repeated twenty-eight times (Son 2007, 98). This shows that the term «patriots» was a synonym for national heroes and that, for Chae-Ho Shin, Mazzini, Garibaldi and Cavour were symbols of the ideal national hero. Remarkably, unlike other contemporary Korean intellectuals, Chae-Ho Shin did not limit the concept of heroes to only a few prominent figures. He expanded it to the nation as a whole. This is shown clearly in the *Conclusions*, where Chae-Ho Shin urged all Korean people to become national heroes like the three great founders of Italy:

Oh, my patriotic compatriots! You should hope to become like the Three Great Founders of Italy [...] So, you can save this country. This is what I wish from the readers.

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