

# **Egyptianizing Korea**

## **The Role of the Egypt Analogy in Meiji Japanese Political Thought**

**By**

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Shingetsu Electronic Journal of Japanese-Islamic Relations

Volume 6

September 2009

**Abstract**

During the Meiji era, analogies involving Egypt appeared repeatedly in elite political discussions in Japan. The precise content of these Egypt analogies changed dramatically as Japan's own circumstances transformed. In the early days, Japan was compared to Egypt as an Eastern nation attempting to Westernize itself in the face of threatening European pressures. In later years, the Egypt analogy was directed at the Korean Peninsula, and Japanese leaders began to see themselves as playing the role of Great Britain in East Asia. All along, Japanese political discourse was deeply influenced and even shaped by British commentators. This paper traces the evolution of the Egypt analogy over the period of a half century and discovers that the Japanese elite of that period looked to Egypt, not to see a foreign nation, but to see themselves.

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## **Introduction**

The analogy of Egypt, in one form or another, haunted political discussions about Japanese policy for the entire duration of the Meiji era (1868-1912). Egypt was a distant and unfamiliar country for almost all Japanese, and yet it somehow intruded repeatedly upon the thought and commentary of the age. It is fair to say that Japanese leaders in fact knew very little about Egypt, and in only a few cases could Japanese sources profitably be used to understand the Egypt of that age. On the other hand, the Japan-based discussions about Egypt are a rich resource for understanding how Japan itself was perceived by British commentators, and how some Japanese perceived themselves.

During the Meiji period, the British Empire's influence was deeply felt in both Egypt and Japan. In the case of Egypt, the independence of the territory was extinguished by Britain in this period, with the Urabi Revolt and the British occupation of 1882 serving as the watershed event. In the early Meiji era, many Japanese leaders also feared that their national independence would be snuffed out by either Britain or another European power, but they were in fact able to Westernize and modernize the country rapidly enough to avoid any serious debacle. With the signing of the Anglo-Japanese Commercial Treaty of 1894, and thereafter the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902, the serious near-term threat to Japanese national independence came to an end. For their part, the Egyptians had to await the Egyptian Revolution of 1952 to secure the status of full legal sovereignty.

## **The Analogy of Unequal Treaties**

It was in the early 1870s that the Egypt analogy first began to appear. The notion that Egypt in some way carried lessons of importance for Japan seems to have originally been proposed, not surprisingly, by British diplomatic circles. From these British suggestions, certain Japanese political leaders developed a keen interest in European-Egyptian relations.

The context of these first references to Egypt related to Japanese displeasure with the terms of the "unequal treaties" signed by the Shogun's government with European powers in the late 1850s; in particular they objected to the use of European consular courts for all cases in Japan involving the subjects of European governments. An alternative to these consular courts that would have been acceptable to the British government were "mixed courts" which would install a majority of Europeans on Japanese judicial benches. A system of this

nature was being operated in Egypt, and some British statesmen felt that it might be wise for Japan to operate this kind of court system as well. In August 1872, Harry Parkes, the famous British minister to Japan, wrote to the Foreign Office the following request: "I beg to suggest that two copies of the five Draft Codes forwarded in Lord Lyons Dispatch No. ----- of 1870 on the subject of Consular Jurisdiction in Egypt should be procured from Paris, as those papers could be needed for reference in case a similar question should be raised by the Japanese Embassy."<sup>1</sup>

The "Japanese Embassy" that Parkes referred to was the famous Iwakura Mission that was visiting Europe and was soon to begin negotiations with the British government about treaty issues. The wording of his request suggests that the Japanese had never in fact raised the issue of the Egyptian mixed court system, but that he anticipated that they might.

When Ambassador Iwakura met with British Foreign Minister Granville in London on October 27, 1872, it was in fact the British side that raised the issue of Egypt, as revealed by the records of the Japanese government:

*Ambassador Iwakura:* Since our policy is to treat all people equally whether our own or foreign residents and try them by due laws, we would like to treat the British nationals in our country by our own laws and jurisdiction as we do other foreigners. Could you agree with us on this?

*Foreign Minister Lord Granville:* We think it impossible for us to transfer all of our rights to you immediately. In the first place you should follow the Egyptian example. Then we shall see if your trials go on well in practice, and if and when we are certain that they are fair, we shall transfer the right of trial on civil matters into your hands as a beginning, and then we may proceed to criminal law matters if things go well.<sup>2</sup>

This proposal, coming as it did directly from the mouth of the British foreign minister, was guaranteed to raise Japanese interest in the Egyptian system.

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<sup>1</sup> Parkes to Foreign Office, August 7, 1872: F.O. 46: 155 pp. 25-26.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Saneki Nakaoka, "Japanese Research on the Mixed Courts of Egypt in the Earlier Part of the Meiji Period in Connection with the Revision of the 1858 Treaties," *The Journal of Sophia Asian Studies*, No. 6, 1988, p. 22.

Harry Parkes was also present at that meeting, and he probably helped to sustain Japanese interest in Egypt after his return to Japan. For example, when considering the issues of establishing a passport system for inland travel, British participation in coastal trade, and British investments in Japanese property, mines, or other industries, Parkes again felt that Egypt and its neighbors provided a possible model for Japanese policy: "As it might be of advantage that I should be able to demonstrate to the Japanese Government the practice which obtains of these matters in Turkey, Egypt and Persia, your Lordship may perhaps approve of my being furnished with copies of printed papers bearing upon those subjects in those countries."<sup>3</sup>

For their part, the Japanese very quickly began to act upon Lord Granville's suggestion to consider the Egyptian mixed court system for possible adoption in Japan. Early in 1873, the young translator Genichiro Fukuchi (later to become the well-known editor of the pro-government newspaper, *Nichi Nichi Shinbun*) was sent to Istanbul and Egypt to study the mixed court system. By his own account:

On February 9, the 6th Year of Meiji, in the French capital of Paris, I was ordered by the Ambassador [Iwakura] and the Vice-Ambassadors Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, to conduct spot investigations of the judicial system concerning criminal cases involving foreigners and locals, and so on, in Greece, Turkey, and Egypt, and to submit a report thereafter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs upon my return to Japan... We conferred among ourselves and decided that it might be necessary for us to follow the examples of Egypt and Turkey, and adopt the system of mixed courts. In such a case, it would be essential for us to have a suitable idea concerning the actual situation in those countries, and this naturally involved the need to go out there and investigate the situation...I was consequently ordered to proceed to Turkey and Egypt after the mission left Paris, and to conduct the necessary investigations in those countries.<sup>4</sup>

Fukuchi, together with his companion Mokurai Shimaji, carried out this mission, traveling to Greece, Istanbul, Palestine, and Egypt. In the case of the former three locations, they are thought to have been the first Japanese ever to visit.

Fukuchi attempted to investigate the mixed court system as best as he could, but in some

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<sup>3</sup> Parkes to Lord Granville, December 24, 1872: F.O. 46:156 pp. 299-300.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Nakaoka, "Japanese Research," pp. 12-13.

respects the local governments were not entirely forthcoming with useful information. Fukuchi was fortunate, however, to be able to meet the Egyptian minister Nubar Pasha in Istanbul, and was able to discuss the mixed court system of Egypt with one of the real authorities on the topic. Fukuchi felt that it was inevitable that Japan should submit to Lord Granville's suggestion, and wrote as much in his final report. Nevertheless, in the end, the Japanese leaders rejected Fukuchi's conclusions, and decided that it would be better, for the time being, to avoid traveling the same path as Turkey and Egypt.<sup>5</sup>

Still, Japanese interest in the Egyptian mixed court system continued to thrive, and Harry Parkes continued to cater to this interest, as is apparent from this March 1875 dispatch to Lord Derby, the new Foreign Minister:

I have the honor to request that your Lordship will allow this legation to be furnished with a copy of the Documents Diplomatiques...relative to Judicial Reform in Egypt, and of any papers published for the use of the Foreign Office on the same subject, that your Lordship may approve of being supplied. I beg to apply for these papers as the subject of which they treat attracts considerable attention in Japan, and was mentioned by Earl Granville to the Japanese Ambassadors when in England in 1872.<sup>6</sup>

The "considerable attention" mentioned by Parkes was soon to be manifested in the material form of several Japanese books and reports that appeared in following years. The most significant of these were Rinsho Mitsukuri's *Documents Concerning the Amendment of the Court System of Egypt* (1875) and *The Egyptian Laws* (1878), as well as a pair of reports compiled for Hirobumi Ito by his advisor John Richard Davidson in 1877.<sup>7</sup>

### **Japan Rises in the Scale of Nations**

As we have seen, Ambassador Iwakura's appeal to human equality had been rejected during his meeting with Lord Granville with the strong implication that the Japanese could not be trusted in handling legal cases involving Europeans. At this point, the British government had no immediate intention of releasing Japan from the "unequal treaties" it had

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<sup>5</sup> A detailed discussion is available in Nakaoka, "Japanese Research," pp. 11-33.

<sup>6</sup> Parkes to Lord Derby, March 29, 1875: F.O. 46: 191 pp. 101-102.

<sup>7</sup> Later studies of the Egyptian mixed courts were also made by Takashi Hasegawa in 1887 and Takashi Hara (the future prime minister) in 1889.

signed before the Meiji Restoration. The Japanese leaders were fast learners, however, and soon began to put their studies of European law to a use that the British had neither intended nor foreseen—Japan signed its own “unequal treaty” with neighboring Korea.

Using the pretext of skirmish between the Japanese gunboat *Unyo* and Korean soldiers at Kanghwa Island near Seoul, Japan sent an armed mission to threaten the Korean court in early 1876. Led by Kiyotaka Kuroda and Kaoru Inoue, this mission was quite successful in carrying out its purposes. Cowed by threats of a Japanese invasion, the Korean court agreed to sign the Treaty of Kanghwa, which gave Japanese subjects in Korea the same kinds of privileges that Europeans enjoyed in Japan. The Japanese quickly perceived that if they wanted to be treated as equals by Europeans, then they had to act as Europeans and demonstrate their proficiency with European behavior. Among the forms of behavior they quickly mastered was that of free-trade imperialism, and the Kanghwa Treaty was their first major success in that direction.

By this point, the Egypt analogy was appearing not only in internal government councils, but in the newspaper press as well. The 1870s was the decade when Japanese newspapers began to develop rapidly, and new newspaper companies were formed one after another. Once again it seems to be British sources that first introduced the Egypt analogy. For example, in early 1875, the *Pall Mall Gazette* published an article for British readers entitled “Justice in Egypt and the East” which contended that the process of judicial reform in Egypt contained important ramifications for British relations with East Asian states. In both Egypt and the Far East, the article stated, the same problem was faced of providing “the necessary security to the foreigner” after the abolition of the Capitulations (unequal treaties) had been accomplished. In their own words: “All who are interested, therefore, in the extension of our commerce and the improvement of our relations with those countries, must watch the progress of judicial reform in Egypt with eagerness, as affording the best hope of success in the far East, where a similar difficulty stops the way.” This article was picked up and republished in Yokohama by the *Japan Weekly Mail*, so it could hardly have failed to have been noticed by elite Japanese audiences as well.<sup>8</sup>

A year later, the *Japan Weekly Mail* itself took interest in Egyptian developments when they ran two long articles on the report of British Commissioner Stephen Cave about Egyptian finances. The editor felt strongly that Japanese officials should pay close attention to the Cave Report as he perceived that it contained useful lessons for the Japanese as they

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<sup>8</sup> *Japan Weekly Mail*, May 1, 1875, pp. 386-387.

developed their own financial policies. At one point in the article, the analogous positions of Japan and Egypt were directly asserted:

Now, no one who has watched the recent history of Japan can fail to see that it presents many points of resemblance to that of Egypt. Both countries have sought, with greater or less success, to engraft upon their own civilization one of a purely European character. Both have made great and undisputed progress. Both have raised themselves considerably in the scale of nations, have elevated the condition of their people, have constructed important public works of a character and for purposes unimagined in their remoter history, have improved their systems of public education, and have sought to introduce new methods of increasing their wealth, whether by external trade or the development of their own internal resources.<sup>9</sup>

A decade later, it would become unthinkable to suggest that Japan and Egypt were roughly comparable in the “scale of nations.” By that time Egypt would be under British military occupation while Japan would be inaugurating a European-style cabinet system and straining to become accepted as a European equal. However, at this particular point in time, the editor felt that Japan compared unfavorably with Egypt in certain respects; that is, in regard to general economic prosperity and the over-centralization of government powers in Tokyo. At the end of the first article, the editor explained his purposes in having brought up the issue of the Egypt and the Cave Report: “Our sole object has been to point out some of the dangers attendant on a rapid transition from one phase of civilization to another. Egypt has fallen into serious trouble by having ignored them. We trust Japan will have wisdom enough to profit by the lesson they teach, and thus avoid them.”<sup>10</sup>

As the political situation in Egypt began to sour in the early 1880s, the notion that Egypt provided lessons on what to *avoid* were to appear in the press once again. In 1872, as we have seen, Lord Granville and then Genichiro Fukuchi had recommended that Japan adopt the Egyptian mixed court system. Less than a decade later, however, the attraction of the Egyptian example was rapidly fading as the shortcomings of the mixed court system were becoming more apparent:

The result at present is...that, since the International Courts have jurisdiction only

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<sup>9</sup> *Japan Weekly Mail*, May 27, 1876, p. 463.

<sup>10</sup> *Japan Weekly Mail*, May 27, 1876, p. 464.

in cases in which one of the parties is a foreigner, the natives, in litigation among themselves, have not the same security for justice enjoyed by strangers to the soil... Japan, we trust and believe, will begin at the right end...by the preparation of a general code of laws. Certainly the course of the jurisdiction question in Egypt affords a warning of what to shun rather than an example to be followed.<sup>11</sup>

After the Urabi Revolt and the British occupation, the direct comparison between Japan and Egypt became harder to make. This did not mean, however, that the “lessons of Egypt” now vanished from political discussions in Japan, but rather that the form these analogies took transformed in terms of their content.

The *Japan Weekly Mail* again played a prominent role in these debates when they published an article entitled “Japan’s Dilemma Illustrated in Egypt” in February 1883. The subject of the article was a very provocative one for foreign residents in Yokohama. Essentially, it was pointed out that the treaty rights of foreigners in Japan, as in Egypt, had created an *imperium in imperio* which made it very difficult for the Japanese government to fully exercise its powers and actually govern and dispense justice. The article finished with the startling suggestion that the “unequal treaties” should be abolished. Naturally, less liberal segments of the foreign community were horrified by this proposal, and several hot-tempered pieces were written in other newspapers about this issue. For its part, the *Japan Weekly Mail* wrote a passionate rejoinder that included the following passage defending the Japanese and condemning the behavior of the foreign community in Japan:

Daily, nay hourly, we [Europeans] assail the ears of the Japanese with charges of duplicity and guile; daily and hourly depraved and scurrilous journalists are hounded on to tell this nation that its rulers are not more worthy of trust than those of Turkey and Egypt, where the salient features of the administration are “rapacity and rascality”; daily and hourly we declare that we are resolved to accord Japan the treatment of a country vanquished in war until she can offer convincing guarantees of her ability to express faculties which, in the meanwhile, we peremptorily prevent her from learning to exercise; daily and hourly we preach to her the necessity of conforming her conduct to the principles of right, adapting our own, all the while, to the guidance of might; and then, in the end, we coolly assure her, that nothing but her “overweening vanity” impels her to complain, and that only if she would refrain from trying to obtain redress, the world would remain alike

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<sup>11</sup> *Japan Weekly Mail*, October 29, 1881, p. 1, 249.

indifferent to, and ignorant of, her evil plight.<sup>12</sup>

In this remarkable passage we can detect a subtle change in the Egypt analogy. It is clear that, by this point, the *Japan Weekly Mail* was no longer arguing that Japan was on a similar level to Egypt in the “scale of nations.” The Japanese government is now “more worthy of trust” than the governments of Turkey and Egypt, and to suggest otherwise was an insult. On a certain level, however, Japan’s “dilemma” could still be “illustrated” in the Egyptian case, but the main point of similarity was simply that both Egypt and Japan were being abused by excessive political interference from their European residents.

After the passing of the Egyptian political crisis in the early 1880s, a quieter phase began. Matters regarding Egypt faded from the newspaper headlines and were largely replaced by the rush of other events and issues. The British occupation of Egypt became an accepted fact. At the same time, Japan’s continued progress toward modernization and Egypt’s evident stagnation removed the tendency to make comparisons between the two countries. For about a decade the Egypt analogy lay dormant.

### **The Britain of the East**

It was the Sino-Japanese War and its political consequences that suddenly revived the Egypt analogy in the mid-1890s. At this time, Japanese leaders were beginning to fear that Korea, which they regarded as being too weak and corrupt to defend itself, was in danger of falling under the influence of a European power. If this were to happen, they felt that the security of Japan itself would be imperiled. As one of Japan’s German military advisors put it, the Korean Peninsula was “a dagger pointed at the heart of Japan.”<sup>13</sup> In particular, the idea that Russia, then in the process of building the Trans-Siberian Railway, might wield that dagger was a particularly unnerving prospect for Tokyo.

As a result, when the Tonghak Rebellion broke out in southern Korea, many Japanese leaders feared that the collapse of the central Korean political authority was imminent and the time to act had arrived. Ironically, however, it was China, not Russia or another European power, which barred the way of a Japanese advance in Korea. Thus began the Sino-Japanese War in July 1894, in which Japan decisively defeated the Chinese forces in

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<sup>12</sup> *Japan Weekly Mail*, March 17, 1883, p. 168.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Duus, Peter, *The Abacus and the Sword: The Japanese Penetration of Korea, 1895-1910*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1995, p. 49.

Korea and Northeastern China.

As early as September 1894, the Egypt analogy had reappeared. At this point Soho Tokutomi's *Kokumin Shinbun* passionately editorialized that Westerners should not be criticizing Japan in its fight against China and for its emerging control of Korea: "They [Europeans] ask us coldly, in what manner is this a righteous war? By what right does Japan engage to reform Korea and to strike at China? Our reply is simple. It is by the right of Civilization... In other words, it is the right of Civilization to conquer barbaric nations. By this right, England made Egypt into a protectorate...and by this same right, we have undertaken to reform Korea."<sup>14</sup>

In the ten years that had passed since the Egypt analogy had last been suggested, it is clear that much had changed. No longer was Japan being compared to Egypt; rather, Japan was being compared to Britain, Egypt's imperial master, and now it was Korea that fell to the position of the Egyptians.

Moreover, Japan was now consciously adopting the language and patterns of justification that attended British imperialism. Japan had formerly been focusing its efforts on attaining "Civilization and Enlightenment" by rapidly grafting elements of European material culture onto their own country. By the mid-1890s, Japan was clearly beginning to feel confident that this effort had been a great success, and that the Japanese people were now among the beacons of "Civilization" in the world. Having achieved Civilization" themselves, they now possessed the "right...to conquer barbaric nations," which in this case applied to both Korea and China, two countries that had fallen behind in efforts to reorganize their societies along European lines. Japan, therefore, was now boldly staking its claim as the carrier of the refracted light of European civilization, and even the "Britain of the East."

The notion that Japan might be the "Britain of the East" was a hardly a new idea, even in the mid-1890s. As early as 1875 some Japanese were already discussing the idea. However, there was as yet little to justify the Japanese being put on the same level in the "scale of nations" as the English, and so the analogy would have to wait several more decades before it gained general approval. In its earliest manifestation, the idea was dismissed even by many Japanese commentators, as is apparent from this excerpt from the *Akebono Shinbun*:

Some few of our politicians have assumed a joke of foreigners that Japan is the

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<sup>14</sup> "By What Right?," *Kokumin Shinbun*, September 9, 1894, p. 1.

England of the East to be true, and are extremely vain of it. To our own mind there is nothing either in the way of administration, customs or works of art analogous in the condition of the two countries. The only point of resemblance is in their shape and insular position. This being the case, we see nothing for us to be vain of. But the resemblances between ourselves and the Turks are not few. The absoluteness of the administration, the low form of religion, the deficiency of education, the methods of transacting business, the state of the arts and customs, all present analogies with Turkey. Japan, therefore, is not the England but the Turkey of the East.<sup>15</sup>

Within two decades of writing this self-flagellating editorial on the state of Japanese culture and society, the wheel had turned completely. In the heady atmosphere of Japan's rapid victories over China in late 1894, the general impression was that Japan had indeed risen to become the "Britain of the East," and was itself a fit vehicle for continuing the spread of civilization among the less-fortunate peoples of Asia.

As the Japanese military victories piled up by January 1895, the *Kokumin Shinbun* ventured even further when they asserted that "China is Turkey, Korea is Egypt, and Japan is Great Britain without England's element of decrepitude."<sup>16</sup> In very short order, some commentators now envisioned Japan as having surpassed Britain itself!

In the event, the Triple Intervention of Russia, Germany, and France on April 23, 1895, fatally punctured the more sweeping visions of Japan's flight to imperial glory. These three powers viewed with alarm the rapid rise in influence that Japan had attained in Korea and in East Asia generally, and set themselves to depriving the Japanese of some of their recent gains. Japan was forced to revise the terms of its peace treaty with China, and the incipient myth of Japanese invulnerability in the Far East was crushed almost as soon as it appeared.

Nevertheless, having seized upon the powerful analogy of Egypt, Japanese commentators were not about to immediately let it go. The *Chuo Shinbun*, for example, wanted to demonstrate why the civilized world needed Japan in Korea as much as it needed Britain in Egypt. It tried to make the case that both Korea and Egypt were in need of the strong-handed guidance of civilized outsiders. In comparing Korea and Egypt, they proclaimed: "Their rulers and people are equally impotent and ignorant as well as destitute

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<sup>15</sup> Quoted in *Japan Weekly Mail*, July 3, 1875, p. 574.

<sup>16</sup> "Asia Reflected in a European Mirror," *Kokumin Shinbun*, January 10, 1895, p. 2.

of patriotism; their national finances are equally deranged; their armies are not sufficient even for the purpose of maintaining order and peace at home; they are equally incapable of standing erect without the support of some strong hand; and to complete the picture, they claim kindred in the prevalence of faction intrigues and personal feuds.”<sup>17</sup>

Another Japanese perspective appeared in the semi-official *Tokyo Nichi Nichi Shinbun* about a month and a half later. Japan’s hopes of taking direct control of Korea seemed to be fading by this point, and there was the suggestion that Korea ought to be neutralized in a manner similar to Switzerland. By this means, the Japanese hoped to achieve their main goal of keeping Korea out of the hands of a European power, in particular Russia. Discussing this possibility, they wrote as follows:

Should Korea ever prove herself capable of independence, it would then be Japan’s duty to invite the other Powers to join in guaranteeing her neutrality. Such is the brightest future to which the Koreans can aspire. Should, however, our prediction unfortunately prove true, and Korea be found to be incapable of existing independently, it would be well to reduce her to a state resembling that of Egypt. What England is to Egypt, or France to Annam, or Russia to Bokhara, that certainly must be the attitude toward Korea of the country possessing the largest interest in her fate. We think it necessary that Japan should keep this fact in view.<sup>18</sup>

One other use of the Egypt analogy appeared in the newspaper press at this time which hinted at the main reason why it was found to be so effective. There can be little doubt that the comparison of Egypt with Korea was meant to invite the sympathy of European observers, and in particular the British. If the Japanese could be successful in luring British observers into accepting the Korea-Egypt analogy, then this would necessarily create a new bond of kinship between Japan and Great Britain, and even a certain ideological community of interest. Part of the way this might function was suggested by the British editor of the *Japan Weekly Mail* when he noted that “the situation between Japan and Russia with regard to Korea closely resembles that of England and France with regard to Egypt.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, the British might sympathize with Japan’s Russia problem in Korea because they faced their own French problem in Egypt. From a Japanese perspective, this was a welcome analogy, since it implied both an equality of status and a common interest with

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<sup>17</sup> Quoted in *Japan Weekly Mail*, May 25, 1895, p. 574.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in *Japan Weekly Mail*, July 13, 1895, p. 33.

<sup>19</sup> *Japan Weekly Mail*, June 1, 1895, p. 614.

Britain.

When it eventually became clear that Japan's road to domination in Korea was likely to be a long and rough one, it was, appropriately enough, Yukichi Fukuzawa's *Jiji Shinpo* that confidently added the master touch to the evolving analogy:

Like a skilful nurseryman who knows how to wait for the growth of his trees with patience and perseverance, Japan should never be in a hurry about the responsible task she has assumed in Korea. Japanese statesmen should look at what England is doing in Egypt. Notwithstanding the constant provoking opposition of her neighbor across the Channel, England goes on performing her work in Egypt steadily and patiently, paying no attention to what the French are saying and doing about the matter. Whatever pressure France may bring to bear upon her, England never declares to any other Power her willingness to share the duty of guiding Egypt. Such should be the policy of the Japanese government in Korea. Having taken Korea out of the hands of her former guardian [China], Japan is bound by all the principles of justice and humanity to assume the guidance and education of her ward. The task may involve expense and trouble, but in any event, Japan, for the sake of her dignity, if nothing else, ought never abandon Korea to her fate.<sup>20</sup>

Here we can see the fully-developed and refined analogy. Taking its cue from the earlier *Japan Weekly Mail* comment, the editor of the *Jiji Shinpo* masterfully evokes British annoyance with French obstruction to invite British sympathy with the ostensibly parallel situation that Japan faced in Korea. Beyond that, the language of imperial "responsibility" has now emerged in full bloom. Like the British in Egypt, Japanese policy toward Korea is not simply a case of a great power crassly seeking its own self-interest at the expense of a weaker country. Rather, Japan is selflessly taking on the burden of acting as a guardian for a weak and needy country. In their hearts, the Japanese are acting from the pure motives of "justice and humanity," in spite of the fact that in taking on this "responsible task" Japan is bound to excite the jealousy and cruel, undeserved criticism of less-enlightened rivals and commentators.

The editor of the *Jiji Shinpo* invited "Japanese statesmen" to look to the Egyptian model when forming their policies toward Korea. Well-connected with the political establishment, he probably knew that Japanese political leaders had already long since been discussing

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<sup>20</sup> Quoted in *Japan Weekly Mail*, December 14, 1895, p. 634.

the case of Egypt among themselves. Indeed, we have evidence that the Korea-Egypt analogy had been discussed not only in the newspaper press, but also at the highest levels of the Japanese government during Kaoru Inoue's mission to Seoul some months earlier. However, this discussion had little to do with the public notions of the *Jiji Shinpo* regarding "justice and humanity," but rather reflected a straight dose of *realpolitik*. Inoue, in a report back to Tokyo, wrote:

What was England's pretext for intervening in Egypt? Was it not in the fact that England had obtained a position of real interest there by supplying Egypt with capital? I firmly believe that if we wish to solidify our position in Korea and establish a pretext for intervention in its internal affairs, we must obtain real interests there, whether through railroads or through loans, and by financial means create pretexts for extending our intervention to other kinds of relationships.<sup>21</sup>

Here we see a much more hard-headed analysis than that which appeared in the newspaper press. Talk of "civilization" and "responsibility" is cast aside, and what remains is the issue of how to "create pretexts" for intervention in Korean internal affairs. Not only does this tell us what Japanese policy was really aiming at, but it also clues us in to how Japanese leaders privately viewed Britain's role in Egypt. These Japanese leaders fully understood what the *Japan Weekly Mail* had been referring to when they pointed out that Europeans spoke the language of the "principles of right" while all along acting according to the "guidance of might."

After Japan's flurry of activity in Korea temporarily ended in 1895, its attention was absorbed by the gathering threat perceived in Russian expansion in the Far East. The Korean Peninsula was one of the main venues for this rivalry, and so Japan's position of dominance weakened considerably in comparison to what had been momentarily achieved during the Sino-Japanese War. The Korea-Egypt analogy thus went into hibernation for another decade.

### **A Member of the Club**

When the Russo-Japanese War broke out in early 1904, the Japanese army lost little time in pushing the Russians out of the peninsula. Contained in the baggage the Japanese army

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<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Duus, *The Abacus and the Sword*, p. 92.

brought in tow was the now-familiar analogy that had peppered Japanese discussions about Korea for many years. There was little left to add to the analogy as it had been developed in 1895, but what had changed was Japanese ability to give concrete form to the visions that had appeared in those earlier times.

One interesting aspect of the revival of the Korea-Egypt analogy at this time is the degree of acceptance it received from sympathetic British observers, even when, as in the following passage from the *Japan Weekly Mail*, they seemed to be rejecting the analogy:

We do not for one moment intend to compare Japan's situation in Korea to England's situation in Egypt. On the contrary, it is precisely against any such comparison that we desire to protest. Apart from French intrigue and French obstruction—both natural enough in their way—England had a perfectly free hand on the banks of the Nile, whereas in Korea Japan is expected to perform the feat of reforming without interfering. Japan in Korea resembles the proverbial Irish policeman who is abused by the mob because he leaves a drunken woman lying on the pavement, and assaulted by them for laying hands on a female if he attempts to carry her off. By and bye the position will enter the phase which alone is logical and practical, but in the interval the “chorus of irresponsible reviewers” must have their innings.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the fact that this editorial writer asserts his rejection of the analogy, it is clear that he has internalized most of the ideological premises upon which it had been based. The idea that Japan and Britain were approximate equals is present. The notion that criticism of Japan in Korea had some kind of relationship with French complaints about Egypt is also present. Implicitly, too, the idea that Japan's motives were related merely to a selfless desire to “reform” Korea is apparent. Indeed, the ground upon which this writer “rejects” the Korea-Egypt analogy is because Japan's task was *more difficult* than that of Britain. In the final sentence, there even seems to be an oblique suggestion that Japan would be best served by taking an even heavier hand in Korean affairs—perhaps through annexation. Japanese readers would have been pleased.

Japanese listeners would also have appreciated what was being said by British Ambassador Sir Claude MacDonald at a meeting of the Oriental Society in Tokyo on April 27, 1906. Among other attendees at this event was Count Shigenobu Okuma, the once and future

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<sup>22</sup> *Japan Weekly Mail*, August 5, 1905, p. 129.

prime minister of Japan. The British ambassador reminisced about his younger days and offered some advice to his Japanese hosts:

It is known doubtless to few of you, that in the early part of my career I had the supreme advantage of serving in Egypt directly under my revered chief Sir Evelyn Baring, now Lord Cromer, whose administration of that country has been one of the most brilliant achievements of this or any other century. In a speech made by him...he said that the foundation stone of his administration had been justice, justice, justice. Now, gentlemen, Japan has taken under her guidance and protection a small and neighboring nation. This charge in the eyes of the world is a sacred one, so that I hope with all my heart, and I believe that it will be so, that in her dealings with the people of this nation, Japan's guiding star and principle will be justice, justice and again justice.<sup>23</sup>

For the British ambassador, then, there was little doubt that Japan was full-fledged and honored member of the imperial club by this point. In 1875, even Japanese commentators snickered at the idea that Japan was the "Britain of the East." Thirty years later this same notion would be routinely accepted by the accredited representatives of the British Empire.

Ambassador MacDonald's suggestion of looking to Lord Cromer as the model for how to govern Korea was not lost on his Japanese audience. Just a month previous to MacDonald's comments, Hirobumi Ito had arrived to take charge in Korea as the first resident-general. There seems to be a strong likelihood that this new office had been created with Lord Cromer's precedent firmly in mind. Whether or not that is in fact the case, comparisons between Cromer and Ito were forthcoming. In early 1907, when Lord Cromer was forced to resign in the wake of the Dinshaway Incident, the Japanese press lavished praise upon this British official. The *Japan Weekly Mail* perceptively noted the source of this praise:

The leading Japanese journals speak in enthusiastic terms of Lord Cromer and the great work he has done in Egypt. They recall the immense difficulties he had to encounter at the outset of his administration and the extraordinary perseverance and patience shown by him in never flinching or allowing himself to be discouraged by the attacks directed against him and his administration at the outset. It is easy to see that these papers have Marquis Ito in their thoughts when they write thus. They

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<sup>23</sup> *Japan Weekly Mail*, May 5, 1906, p. 457.

appreciate that his task in Korea closely resembles that which fell to Lord Cromer in Egypt.<sup>24</sup>

In the event, of course, Ito's reign in Korea proved to be far shorter than that of Lord Cromer in Egypt. Besieged on many sides as rightwing Japanese criticism and Korean armed resistance mounted, Ito resigned his position as resident-general in June 1909. Furthermore, he was assassinated by a Korean in October. With the more moderate Ito out of the way, Japanese military hardliners gained political ascendancy over Korean policy, and the country was formally annexed by Japan on August 22, 1910. At this point, Minister of War Masatake Terauchi was given the new office of governor-general of Korea while continuing to hold his cabinet portfolio in Tokyo. The *Jiji Shinpo* was uncomfortable with this situation, editorializing that the new post of governor-general ought to be bestowed on "a man prepared to devote his whole attention and, if need be, his whole life to that special work. He ought to emulate the example of Lord Cromer in Egypt, instead of treating his vice-regal duties as secondary to those of his original appointment at the War Office."<sup>25</sup> By now it had become routine to measure Japanese chief administrators in Korea against the apparently formidable standard of the British Lord Cromer.

One final point to note about the revival of the Korea-Egypt analogy in the period after the Russo-Japanese War is that, by this time, Japanese academics had entered this crowded field of commentary by adding more extensive studies on the British administration of Egypt and its Korean applications. At least four books were published in this period that had a direct bearing on the subject. The first, published in 1905, was Fusazo Kato's *Egypt as a Model for the Administration of a Protectorate*. The following year, 1906, saw two relevant studies produced. One was Masaji Inoue's *British Rule in Egypt* and the other was Nagao Ariga's *Discourse on Protectorates*. Finally, Lord Cromer's own *Modern Egypt* was translated into Japanese and published in 1911 with a preface by Shigenobu Okuma. It seems likely that this project had been inspired by Ambassador MacDonald's comments at the Oriental Society five years earlier. Combined, these works demonstrated a growing degree of sophistication in the Japanese understanding of how to build a modern empire. This knowledge would be put to effective use in the years after the Meiji era had come to a close.

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<sup>24</sup> *Japan Weekly Mail*, April 20, 1907, p. 423.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in *Japan Weekly Mail*, September 3, 1910, p. 295.

## **Conclusion**

Japan's view of the "lessons of Egypt" underwent remarkable transformation in the forty years surveyed here. Again and again, Egypt appeared as a topic of discussion, but at each stage the terms of that discussion altered. At no point were Meiji Japanese actually very knowledgeable about Egypt itself, and thus their image of that land was an empty vessel that could be filled in many ways. The content with which that vessel was in fact filled at any given time depended entirely on what the commentator wanted to say. Egypt could be either a model of remarkable material progress or a warning of irredeemable political decay as the circumstances shifted. In the early Meiji period, Japan was the potential Egypt, whatever good or bad qualities that might entail. In the late Meiji period, it was decisively Korea that became the potential Egypt, and Japan had been transformed into the "Britain of the East." The Egyptians themselves, though never their British masters, had now become a conflux of negative images that no sane Japanese would ever wish to emulate. Lord Cromer, then, finally became the paragon of political virtue to which Japanese colonial administrators were meant to embody.

The whole, convoluted journey that the analogy of Egypt took in Japanese consciousness in the Meiji era in fact says little about the reality of Egypt as it existed for the Egyptians themselves. It does, however, serve admirably to gauge how the Japanese saw themselves, and in turn were seen by Europeans, in this particular period of history. Most of all, it throws light upon that elusive question that long tormented Japanese minds—just how did Japan really measure up on the "scale of nations"?