I. Introduction

The discourse of modernity swept away late nineteenth and early twentieth century Korea while modernization attracted East Asia. Western imperialism expanded to the Orient and prompted globalization and modernization, increasing western hegemony. International relations and the regional socio-cultural structures rapidly changed. China, “The Middle Kingdom,” became decentralized and lost its hegemonic power over neighboring countries. The East Asian countries looked for a new system, in which they would reorganize their societies according to the new world order led by Westerners.1) Modernization looked like a necessary process for survival in the world in order to strengthen the nations and maintain independence from foreign rule.

Distinguishing the other from the self, Westerners invented the ideology of the “Orient” and defined the “Oriental” as uncivilized. Edward W. Said argued that Orientalism represented a Eurocentric bias against the Orient and reproduced cultural imperialism.2) They imposed their civilization and culture on the peoples of different cultures while calling for both civilization of the heathen and modernization of the archaic, despotic societies: modernization was to civilize the inferior races of the Orient by means of superior Western culture. In this regard, the discourse on modernization could not avoid being entwined with racism, colonialism, and cultural imperialism. From the post-colonialist view, Homi K. Bhabha argues that the discourse on modernity “opposes cultural pluralism—different cultures in the same time—or cultural relativism—different cultural temporalities in

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the same ‘universal’ space” but “justifies cultural hierarchy.”³ In other words, modernization fueled globalization of Western culture, consolidated racial, cultural hierarchy, and subordinated the Orient to the West.

The ideologies of modernization in Korea before 1945 were complicated. Rival forces sought different goals in terms of modernization. Korean nationalists endeavored to modernize Korea by adopting a Western civilization that would help reform traditional society and build up a strong modern nation. American missionaries identified modernity with Christian civilization and maintained that Korea would be civilized through Christianity. Japanese imperialists justified colonialism with modernization and argued that Korea could not be civilized without the help of a more powerful and a highly civilized nation like Japan.

These rivals interacted and competed. For modernization, Koreans depended on Western civilization, Protestantism in particular, and Japan absorbed Korea into colonial modernity. Missionaries cooperated in the earlier period but later conflicted with Japanese colonialism. For cooperation, Americans recognized Japan as one of the Western countries representing modern civilization, and Japan endeavored to portray its image as an “outpost of Western civilization in East Asia.”⁴) However, as Japanese imperialism clashed with the Western powers, particularly the U.S. hegemony, the Japanese separated them from Western imperialism. They instigated the Asian races to antagonize the White races, promoting Pan-Asianism. Resisting the Japanese repression to Protestantism in Korea, missionaries opposed Japanese colonialism, especially the anti-Christian policies. The conflict between American missionaries and Japanese imperialists came from religion. However, it also represented racial struggle.

I will examine the ideologies of the modernization of Korea from 1882 to 1945, focusing on racial, cultural relations among American missionaries, Japanese imperialists, and Koreans.⁵) I will investigate how the ideologies

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⁵) The Chosun dynasty made a diplomatic agreement with the United States in 1882 and opened its door to the Western world. From that time on, the discourse on modernity began to spread among Korean elite intellectuals and ruling politicians. That is why this paper starts from the particular year of 1882. When Japan was defeated by the United States in 1945, Japanese colonialism ended. Because my research deals with the discourse on modernity before and during the colonial period, this paper will not go beyond 1945.