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Western Images of Asia: Popular Accounts of Korea, 1882-1914

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Introduction

Korea remained isolated from the outside world longer than any other major country in East Asia. It was not until the last quarter of the 19th century that Korea was finally forced to emerge from its isolation and become a member of the community of nations, albeit grudgingly. Until that time Westerners had had little or no contact with and knew almost nothing about this mysterious land sandwiched between China and Japan. What scant knowledge that was available basically came from two sources: the accounts of ship captains or crew members from various countries[1] and the letters from a small group of French Catholic priests who had secretly entered Korea in the 1830s and 1840s.[2] However, since foreigners could not freely and safely travel in the country, there were definite limits to the amount and to the quality of information that could be gathered. Then in 1876 Korea signed a treaty with Japan which in effect opened up the country to the Japanese. The Western powers were not far behind, for this was the era of rampant expansionism. Six years later, in the spring of 1882, Korea and the US concluded a treaty grandly named, "The Treaty of Peace, Amity, Commerce, and Navigation." This made the US the first Western country to establish an official relationship with Korea. Before long, all the other major powers followed suit and made their own treaties. Although certain restrictions still applied, for the most part it became possible for foreigners to come

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1. The most famous were Hendrick Hamel and Basil Hall. Hamel was on a Dutch ship that went down in a storm near the coast of Korea. He and a few other crew members made it to the shore of Quelpart Island (Cheju-do). After spending thirteen years in Korea as a prisoner, he escaped to Nagasaki and then made his way back to Europe. He published a journal of his experiences in Korea which first came out in Dutch in 1668. It was later translated into other European languages. It is considered to be the first Western account of Korea. Hall captained a British ship that traveled along the west coast of Korea in 1816. He described his trip, which included a few days on shore, in a book published two years later. The book became popular and was widely translated.
2. Charles Dallet used the letters to write a two-volume work on the history of the Catholic church in Korea which was published in 1874. The long introduction provided a general survey of Korea and the Korean people. Although Dallet himself never set foot in the country, he did a good job of arranging and summarizing the contents of the priests' letters. Many of the early European views of Korea derived from Dallet's book.

for work, adventure, or proselytizing, and come they did. Korea would never be the same again.

With the opening of Korea more and more people wrote books and articles about the country. As one would expect, this led to a growing interest among Western readers in this small but exotic place on the other side of the world. Some of the writers spent short periods there, while others stayed for many years; there were even a few who wrote about Korea without ever visiting the country. Naturally, the quality varies from excellent to abysmal. But taken as a whole, these works offer a revealing glimpse into Korea just as she was emerging from centuries of self-imposed isolation. In large part, these works helped mold early Western images of Korea. What I intend to do in this paper is survey a fair number of the more important printed materials published in the West, mainly in the US and Britain, dealing entirely or partly with Korea, in order to show how Korean life, society, and people were described in them. I have chosen to focus on the period from 1882 to 1914. I start with 1882 because that year marked the beginning of Korean-Western relations, and I end with 1914 because that year saw the publication of the first Western guide book to Korea and the first use of Korean materials in a work of fiction by an established Western writer. As an aid to organization, I have divided the authors into four categories: Scholars, Travelers, Missionaries, and Assorted Others. While this scheme is somewhat arbitrary, it does, I think, show the various responses to Korea that were prevalent in the West in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Scholars

> To understand a people we must know their thoughts, as well as their physical environment.[3]

In 1882 William E. Griffis (1843-1928) published *Corea, The Hermit Nation,* arguably the first book written in English to have a profound effect on the way Westerners looked at Korea.[4] It turned out not only to be influential but also quite popular. The author of eighteen books on a variety of subjects, Griffis was perhaps best known for his *The Mikado's Empire*, an encyclopedic study of Japan which came out six years earlier in 1876. During his lifetime, he was well known as an authority on Asia. Although he lived and taught in Japan for three years (1871-1874), he never visited Korea nor studied the language before writing about the country; he relied solely on Japanese and European sources for all his information.[5] Looking

3. William E. Griffis, *Corea, The Hermit Nation* (hereafter abbreviated as *Corea*), p. 308.
4. I should mention that the romanization and spelling of Korean names, places, and terms was very irregular in the early publications. Unless it is a direct quotation, I will usually give the accepted modern version. Some authors used "Corea," while others used "Korea." The former dates from 1613, and the latter from 1738. In general, "Korea" was the more accepted spelling from the 19th century on.
5. In romanizing Korean place names, Griffis often simply gave the Japanese pronunciation of the

through his six-page bibliography, one gets the impression that he consulted all the relevant printed materials that were available to him at the time.[6] The result was a hefty, 456-page outline of Korean history and society, the general tone of which is anti-Catholic, pro-Christian, and pro-Japanese. This, of course, was merely a reflection of his background and the times in which he lived, and, as we shall see, this stance was by no means an unusual one, especially among authors of books on Korea. What images did readers get from Griffis' book? The first and foremost was that Korea was a "Hermit Nation." It seems that Griffis was the first person to label the country as such. Without a doubt his book helped spread this idea in the West. And for many decades to come, the phrase became an epithet that was automatically applied to Korea. However, Griffis strongly believed that Korea could not afford to remain a hermit much longer. It would have to open itself up to the outside world, whereupon Western commerce and religion (i.e. Christianity) could freely enter and elevate the life of the people. A closed Korea was like a closed Japan. What Korea needed was someone like Perry to wake the country up. If that happened, the future of Korea looked bright, just like the future of Japan.[7] Throughout the book Korea was compared to Japan, and the comparisons were unfavorable in most cases. For example, Japan succeeded in 1868 in rooting out feudalism and the caste system, but Korea faced a much more difficult, if not hopeless, task. Like Japan, it was plagued by feudalism; in addition, it suffered from countless court intrigues, Confucian bigotry, and ages of seclusion and superstition.[8] To escape from this morass was a daunting prospect, indeed. Griffis also stressed that Korea was a very old country—in fact, one of the oldest in the world. This accounted for the arrogance and contempt that Koreans felt for Westerners and Western civilization; moreover, they particularly looked down on a country like the US, which had a history of only a few hundred years.[9]

It was in the middle section of the book, "Political and Social Korea," that the author provided the most vivid information about the Korean people and their lives—the kind of information that would leave lasting impressions on readers. Griffis believed: "The great virtue of the Coreans is their innate respect for and daily practice of the laws of human brotherhood."[10] Whereas some foreigners labeled them crude, rough, and inhospitable, he disagreed, claiming that generous hospitality was viewed as a sacred duty of all people, regardless of class. Assisting others was commonplace

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Chinese characters used in the names.

6. Most of the book was written during the period 1877-1880, in other words, a few years before official relations were established between Korea and Western countries.

7. Griffis, *Corea*, p. 10.

8. Griffis, *Corea*, p. 228.

9. Griffis, *Corea*, p. 13.

10. Griffis, *Corea*, p. 288.

throughout the country. There were few inns along the major roads, mainly because there was no need for them: it was an accepted practice that travelers were assured of receiving room and board for the night from a family in the area. However, a system of such generosity could only lead to abuses. It bred beggars and louts who sponged off kind families; some travelers stayed for extended periods; there were even groups of people who would travel to distant villages in order to live off the local population. At times it got so bad that the government had to crack down on the lazy ones who were taking advantage of this tradition.[11] Griffis also noted that the people in Seoul had the reputation of being light-hearted, fickle, and obsessed with luxury and pleasure and that the officials in the capital were models for officials throughout the country in their rapacity and love of ostentatious lifestyles.[12]

While the men of Korea received only brief mention, the women were discussed in much detail. According to Griffis, Korean women lived unenviable lives. They had no moral existence and were only seen as instruments of pleasure or labor. Women of the middle class and below worked very hard, often carrying heavier loads than men. Needless to say, they were never considered the equal of men; in fact, they did not even have names.[13] The reader was told that society required females to be completely segregated, ostensibly in order to protect them. Women were confined to their apartments, except for the hours from 8 pm to 1 am, when they were allowed to walk freely outdoors but men were not. And there were severe legal and social penalties for anyone who broke the rules. Under no circumstances should women be seen or (heaven forbid!) touched by strangers. Here was an example of how unforgiving society could be: "So strict is this rule that fathers have on occasions killed daughters, husbands their wives, and wives have committed suicide when strangers have touched them even with their fingers."[14] On the other hand, Griffis admitted that women were respected to a certain extent. That is to say, they were addressed in honorific language and the sanctity of their apartments was guaranteed to the extent that no one, including the police, could violate that sanctity without being punished.[15] Also women did not have to endure the gruesome tradition of footbinding that was so prevalent in China, for Korean men never considered small feet beautiful or erotic.

Before marriage Koreans were treated like children and were never held accountable for their actions, no matter how foolish they might be. Marriage

11. Griffis, *Corea*, p. 289.
12. Griffis, *Corea*, p. 192.
13. Griffis, *Corea*, p. 244. Actually, they had names, but they were generally known by their titles within the family.
14. Griffis, *Corea*, p. 245. Griffis mistakenly gave the impression that such a high standard of behaviour applied to all women, when in fact it was limited to those of the upper class.
15. Griffis, *Corea*, pp. 245-246.

equaled a kind of emancipation, in that married people, regardless of age, were considered adults and were expected to accept the responsibilities and privileges of being married (which were obviously more onerous for women than for men). There were distinct hairstyles and clothes to distinguish those who were married from those who were not.[16] After getting married, the husband and the wife lived by a different set of rules, especially concerning conjugal fidelity. Women had to be faithful, whereas for men it was purely optional. A man could easily get a divorce and still keep his concubines, but a woman who was divorced had to remain single for the rest of her life.[17] The main purpose of marriage was to bear children who would look after the parents in old age and carry on the family line. As a result of this way of thinking, which was (and still is to a large extent) common throughout Asia, sons were much more highly valued than daughters. Nevertheless, Koreans were fond of children of both sexes, and they rarely, if ever, mistreated them.[18] Within the family, the father, who held absolute power, commanded the highest respect from wife and children alike.

Griffis treated certain aspects of everyday life in Korea, often in a rather humorous fashion. We are told of the Korean love of alcohol: "In more senses than one, the spirit that presides over too many Corean households is the alcohol spirit."[19] After realizing that the Koreans enjoyed all kinds of strong drinks, Westerners almost always came to the same conclusion, which was that the Koreans were greatly addicted to the worship of Bacchus. When it came to food, they were equally voracious. This was true of all classes of people: everyone seemed to believe that to eat enormous amounts was an honor. The quality of a feast was judged as much by quantity as by quality. And eating contests were often held, for people could eat anytime and anywhere. However, Koreans were neither fastidious in eating nor painstaking in cooking.[20] The author emphasized that the Koreans resembled the Japanese in their appetite for raw fish. They also ate all kinds of uncooked food, including intestines, which were thought to be delicacies. Apparently not wishing to waste anything edible, they even consumed the bones of fish and fowl.[21] What was surprising was that Griffis never mentioned, even once, Korea's national dish—kimchi.

Like most other Westerners, Griffis could not help poking fun at the hats worn by Korean men. He compared them to "roofs" or "umbrellas," because of their huge size. They were big enough to serve as a parachute or as a shelter for an official's wife and family. "In shape, the gentleman's hat resembles a flower-pot set on a round

16. Griffis, *Corea*, p. 246.
17. Griffis, *Corea*, pp. 251-252.
18. Griffis, *Corea*, p. 259.
19. Griffis, *Corea*, pp. 266-267.
20. Griffis, *Corea*, p. 269.
21. Griffis, *Corea*, p. 270.

table."[22] A man's hat was not a mere decoration; on the contrary, it was a vital part of a man's identity, for it denoted position and marital status. To go with the strangely shaped hat, Korean men preferred white clothes with plenty of starch, an outfit that from afar looked quite nice but up close had the opposite effect. Here was how the author put it: "Less agreeable is the nearness which dispels illusion. The costume, which seemed snowy at a distance, is seen to be dingy and dirty, owing to an entire ignorance of soap."[23] It was easy to surmise from a quote like this that Griffis was extremely critical of Korean hygiene. He put part of the blame on the lack of bathing facilities in Korea.[24] But the problem also resulted, he said, from a "neglect of a more intimate acquaintance with water." Soap and water were necessary, because "people who dress in white clothing have special need of personal cleanliness."[25] We will find a similar attitude expressed in most other works written during the period under discussion.

Another prominent image was that of the Korean tiger. Although few foreigners ever actually saw a live tiger, most were amazed and excited by the thought of such fierce animals living so far north. It was said that the largest tigers in Korea grew up to ten feet in length and were responsible for the death of many people, mainly in the northern provinces. Actually, by the end of the 19th century, there were probably few tigers still alive in the country, but the mystique surrounding this exotic animal remained compelling for decades. For the Korean people, tigers symbolized power, strength, and fierceness. The animals became paragons of courage, which human beings should try to emulate. In ancient times, the people worshipped them, for tigers were thought to possess supernatural powers.[26] And many popular superstitions grew up around them: people imagined that tigers could fly, could spit fire; and could even hurl lightening.[27]

Griffis made it clear to readers that he thought the Koreans were overly susceptible to superstitions, not only about tigers but also about human events. When anti-reformist and anti-foreign rebels attacked and killed a number of government ministers and Japanese in July 1882, the common people had a ready explanation for the disorder. They believed that the assault was necessary in order to sooth the spirits which had been angered by the arrival in Korea of increasing numbers of Westerners and Japanese. In their anger, the spirits withheld rain and thus forced the country to endure a long drought. It was only after the Japanese

22. Griffis, *Corea*, pp. 271-272.
23. Griffis, *Corea*, p. 274.
24. It was said that the Japanese even brought their own bathtubs with them when they traveled to Korea for the signing of the 1876 treaty.
25. Griffis, *Corea*, p. 270.
26. In many ways, the tiger was to Korea what the white fox was to Japan.
27. Griffis, *Corea*, pp. 300-301.

withdrew from Seoul in the aftermath of the attack that the spirits relented and allowed rain to fall again. Griffis had this to say about such folk beliefs: "Science and Christianity are the remedies for this *delirium tremens* of paganism."[28] He also noted that Koreans still worshipped spirits of heaven and earth, mountains and rivers, and the morning star, among many others. He was, or course, referring to the shamanism which was (and is) an essential part of the faith of Koreans.

Corea, The Hermit Nation painted the country in stark images as a place of strange and unusual customs and beliefs—a place desperately in need of outside help. And in the author's mind it was obvious that the West offered the best example of how to develop into a modern nation. Once Koreans recognized this fact, they would soon be enjoying the fruits of the marvelous social and spiritual revolution that was expected to ensue. Griffis expressed it in blunt language: "In intellect, government, science, social customs, manual skills, refinement, and possession of arts and comforts of life, the foreigner will soon be discovered to be superior. At the same time the intelligent native will behold with how little wisdom, and how much needless cruelty, Chosen is governed."[29] His final comments reflected his personal beliefs as well as the mood of the era: "...let us hope that paganism, bigotry, and superstition in Corea, and in all Asia, will disappear; and that in their places, the religion of Jesus, science, education, and human brotherhood may find an abiding dwelling place."[30]

The second scholar I wish to discuss was an American named Homer B. Hulbert (1863-1949). Here was a man who differed from Griffis in two important respects: first, he lived in Korea a long time, twenty-one years in all; and second, he learned the Korean language well enough to use it in his research. When he first went to Korea in 1886, he was employed as an English teacher, and for five years he taught English to the young nobles at court in the Royal English School. It was during this period that he became fascinated with Korean history and language. Later he served four years as a Methodist missionary in Seoul. During the period 1897-1905 he worked as an independent writer and as the editor of *The Korea Review*, an English journal of Korean affairs founded by him. After a few more years in the country, he moved back to the US, where he continued to support and fight for a Korea independent of Japanese rule. He returned to Korea forty-two years later in 1949 for one last visit. Syngman Rhee, the new president of the country invited him to Seoul, where he received a hero's welcome. He was honored for his efforts in publicising the plight of Korea under colonial rule. During his brief stay he died and was buried in a Seoul cemetery. On his tombstone was engraved an epitaph well known among Koreans: "I would rather be buried in Korea than in Westminster Abbey."

28. Griffis, *Corea*, p. 306.
29. Griffis, *Corea*, p. 236.
30. Griffis, *Corea*, p. 442.

Without a doubt Hulbert was one of the first serious students of Korean culture in the West. In his studies of the language, he concentrated on mastering hangul, the native script, for which he had nothing but the highest praise. On the other hand, he disliked Chinese characters and almost completely ignored learning them. In reading earlier materials, he either had to rely on hangul translations of things written in Chinese or he had to employ the services of Korean scholars well versed in the classical language. Nevertheless, he was able to research and write *History of Korea*, a massive work in two volumes dealing with political and social events from ancient times down to 1904. First published in 1905, it was a comprehensive history, but it contained too much detailed information for the general reader. However, Hulbert wrote a more popular book the following year entitled *The Passing of Korea*, which turned out to be influential in molding people's views of Korea.[31] It included ten chapters chronicling the history of the country and twenty-five chapters dealing with a variety of topical subjects—a good, solid introduction to Korea.

The author's goal in writing *The Passing of Korea* was quite clear: to show the worth of Korean history, culture, and people. In the Preface, he wrote: "This book is a labour of love, undertaken in the days of Korea's distress, with the purpose of interesting the reading public in a country and a people that have been frequently maligned and seldom appreciated. They are overshadowed by China on the one hand in respect of numbers, and by Japan on the other in respect of wit. They are neither good merchants like the one nor good fighters like the other, and yet they are far more like Anglo-Saxons in temperament than either, and they are by far the pleasantest people in the Far East to live amongst."[32]

The book presented a fair and understanding picture of the people of Korea. According to Hulbert, here were the things that Koreans considered most important: beautiful scenery; pine trees, which appeared in almost every scene in legend and folklore; bamboo, which was extremely useful in everyday life; rice and condiments, especially kimchi; flowers; and the ponies and tigers indigenous to Korea.[33] While acknowledging that human nature was the same all over the world, he still strongly believed that Koreans were more gregarious than either Chinese or Japanese. He felt it was not at all difficult to get close to Koreans and to understand their viewpoints. All one had to do was to gain fluency in the language in order to get behind the mask that hid what people were thinking. Koreans were moderate in their feelings—a happy combination of rationality and emotionalism; they also possessed an admirable mix of idealism and utilitarianism.[34] Although conservative, they would quickly

31. Yonsei University Press in Seoul considered this book valuable enough to reprint it in 1969.
32. Homer H. Hulbert, *The Passing of Korea* (hereafter abbreviated as *Passing*), p. viii.
33. Hulbert, *Passing*, pp. 10-26.
34. Hulbert, *Passing*, pp. 30-31.

discard their conservatism if it were in their best interest. They were generous to a fault, and they would be as lavish with other people's money as they were with their own. No one could deny the hospitality shown by Koreans. To be called stingy in this regard was considered a shameful insult. People valued personal pride, which resulted in their trying to keep up appearances, no matter what the circumstances. There were, however, a few weak links in their characters. Take lying, for example. It was correct to say that their truthfulness was up to the best standards of the Orient, but unfortunately those standards were not very high. In particular, Koreans were in the habit of constantly lying. To them, lying presented no great moral problem, simply because it was accepted that lying was necessary in times of trouble. Hulbert also found it distressing that the "depraved class," in other words the upper class, showed laxness in their morality. Also noted was the fact that Koreans were callous to the suffering of animals, as were all Orientals.[35] In a striking metaphor, he compared the Korean people to the bullocks so ubiquitous throughout the country. By nature, both were docile, slow-plodding, long-suffering, and uncomplaining.[36]

Most of the above were in reference to men, for women, as Griffis pointed out, were usually secluded and not easily approachable. Unlike most other commentators, Hulbert did not see this as an entirely bad thing: "... under existing conditions the seclusion of women in the Far East is a blessing, and not a curse, and its immediate abolishment would result in a moral chaos rather than, as some suppose, in the elevation of society."[37] From his experiences living in the country, the author was able to provide a detailed explanation of Korean women and their place in society. First, we learn that in cities there were three classes of women: the honorable (wives of *yangban*), the respectable (wives of merchants), and the disreputable (entertainers, slaves, prostitutes, and nuns). Women of the "honorable" class had freedom of movement until the age of ten, but from ten until the age of marriage they could only be seen by members of their immediate family. After that, they could visit female friends whenever they wished, but there were strict rules about any contact with men. And, contrary to what was often thought, they could go outside, the only restriction being that they had to cover their faces. The idea that they were not allowed to walk in the streets was not at all true. Although closely monitored, women of the "respectable" class were given a bit more leeway in the people they could meet; however, they too always had to hide their faces when venturing outside the house. It was the women of the "disreputable" class who were not secluded. They could go and do as they pleased with their faces in plain sight; in

35. Hulbert, *Passing*, pp. 35-44.
36. Hulbert, *Passing*, p. 256.
37. Hulbert, *Passing*, p. 350.

fact, there was a regulation that they could not cover up.[38] Most women, except those of the lowest class, were literate enough to read newspapers printed in the mixed script of hangul and Chinese characters. This was quite amazing when we realize that the vast majority of girls had no access to any kind of formal education; the only schools open to them were a few institutions financed and run by Western missionaries. In Hulbert's opinion, the long years of seclusion had not impaired the mental capacity of Korean women.[39]

The author found little to praise when commenting on the art and architecture of Korea. He felt there was a definite lack of imaginative power and genius, particularly in the area of aesthetic combinations. What bothered him was the way in which Koreans tended to show their art, that is to say, little by little, one piece at a time. Artists failed to see things in their proper relations. But his criticism was not limited to Korea, and he boldly asserted that it was true of the Far East in general, the only exception being Japanese landscape gardening.[40] Korea got low marks for its crafts. While it had produced beautiful ceramics in the past, it no longer did so; only inferior pieces were now being turned out. Works made from metal were also of crude construction, and the ancient skill of forging beautiful bells had long disappeared.[41] Hulbert went so far as to say that in the visual arts there was also nothing really to brag about: paintings and murals were not of high quality. Lacquer ware and embroidery lacked originality and did not measure up to that found in China and Japan. Nor was Korean architecture seen as anything special: ornamentation was wholly superficial, and there were only a few decorations on the royal palaces that were worthy of praise.[42] A bleak assessment, indeed!

When it came to Korean language and literature, Hulbert held some rather eccentric views. Since he was an avid proponent of the hangul alphabet, he favored its use and the exclusion of Chinese characters. So highly did he value the scientific nature of hangul that he even suggested it could be successfully utilized to represent the sounds of the Chinese language. Thus the Chinese could do away with all those complicated ideographs simply by adopting hangul—an almost ideal system of great simplicity and wide phonetic possibility.[43] Hulbert also claimed that Korean was superior to Japanese and English as a medium for public speaking. This was because Korean was a vocal, sonorous language with a periodic sentence structure. One readily sensed that he possessed an unbounded enthusiasm for the language. However, the same cannot be said about how he viewed Korean literature. The

38. Hulbert, *Passing*, pp. 350-352.
39. Hulbert, *Passing*, pp. 361-363.
40. Hulbert, *Passing*, pp. 330-332.
41. Hulbert, *Passing*, p. 273.
42. Hulbert, *Passing*, pp. 333-334.
43. Hulbert, *Passing*, p. 35.

works written entirely in Chinese or in a mixture of Korean and Chinese had several major shortcomings. First of all, they were for the most part limited to the genres of history and belles lettres, neither of which was forward looking. Second, there was no originality in the literature, and the reason was simple: imitation—not creativity—was the ideal in the traditional Sino-centric way of thinking.[44] Third, the fact that the works contained so many Chinese characters prevented them from ever becoming a truly popular literature. Here the author seemed to be criticizing the Koreans for their slavish imitation of things Chinese. And yet it is clear that he did not think much more highly of the fiction written in pure hangul. In general, fiction was held in low esteem, again due to the power of Chinese canons of taste. This fiction, which was usually anonymous, was widely read, especially among women. In Hulbert's opinion, the biggest problem with this type of literature was that Korea had not yet produced a great novelist.[45] It still had a long way to go to catch up with the West.

Korea's situation was a tragic one, for the country had descended into a state of moral and intellectual stagnation.. Since early times, it had been the slave of Chinese thought, which of course had affected every part of society, including literature, language, education, government, religion, and perhaps most significantly the way of thinking. This eventually led to a loss of native spontaneity and originality.[46] In the first decade of the 20th century, Korea was in the grip of a different, more ominous power, Japan. During the previous twenty to thirty years, Japan had increased its presence in Korea to the point that it was in control of much of the country. Would Japan rescue Korea from its stagnation? That did not seem likely. In its present condition, Korea needed to learn the real spirit and meaning of what the West could offer, in short, the essential tools for uplifting and modernizing the country. But this was something Japan was not providing; it was prepared to offer just a few tantalizing tidbits of Western culture.[47] What Korea needed was independence and better education. Only those things would suffice to hold Korea together in such troubling times.[48]

Travelers

> ... on acquaintance no country seems as odd as imagination, fed on a few startling facts, has pictured it to be, and yet, for all that, the facts may be perfectly true.[49]

44. Hulbert, *Passing*, pp. 307-309.
45. Hulbert, *Passing*, pp. 310-313.
46. Hulbert, *Passing*, p. 33.
47. Hulbert, *Passing*, p. 8.
48. Hulbert, *Passing*, pp. 465-466.
49. Percival Lowell, *Choson, The Land of the Morning Calm: A Sketch of Korea* (hereafter abbreviated as *Choson*), p. 287.

> ... the only obstacle to a lively conversation lay in the fact that I did not understand them.[50]
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> There is much to be learnt from this contact with a human nature differing so radically from the prescribed types and patterns of the Western standard. There is something new in every phase of the experience.[51]

Of the many Westerner visitors to Korea in the immediate years after it was first opened to the outside world, one of the most influential was Percival Lowell (1855-1916). Born to a noted Boston family, he graduated from Harvard and became an astronomer and businessman of some fame.[52] After developing an interest in Eastern culture, he went to Japan in 1883, where he lived and studied for ten years. He wrote several books about the country, the most famous of which was *The Soul of the Far East*, a work that was highly praised by Lafcadio Hearn. In late 1883, a few months after arriving in Tokyo, he made a trip to Korea and spent the winter there, returning to Japan in the spring of the following year. In 1886 he published *Choson, The Land of the Morning Calm*, a detailed account (with attractive illustrations) of his travels in and observations of Korea.[53] Though only staying a short period, he was able to collect much information; and his book did provide an early personal view of Korea and contributed to the development of Western images of the country.[54]

Why did Lowell find the East of interest? One superficial reason was that people in that part of the world did things completely differently from people in the West: they wrote and talked backwards;[55] they sat on their feet rather than on chairs; and they took off their shoes rather than their hats. A more compelling reason was that the East held up a mirror to the author's own civilization, and that was its great attraction.[56] He wrote that Korea was worth studying "because by her very oddities, as they strike us at first, we learn truly to criticise, examine, and realize our own way of doing things..."[57] In addition, Korea was "a land of which next to nothing was known, next to nothing could be represented; and we shall hardly be glad to learn that almost all of what we shall read will be incorrect."[58] His hope was that his book

50. W. R. Carles, *Life in Corea*, p. 70
51. Angus Hamilton, *Korea*, p.269.
52. His brother served as president of Harvard University and his sister was the poet Amy Lowell.
53. Lowell was the first person to use the English phrase "Land of the Morning Calm" to refer to Korea. It has since become the most common nickname for the country.
54. Apparently there were only about nine foreigners, not including Japanese, living in Seoul when Lowell visited the city in the winter of 1883.
55. "Talking backwards" probably meant that the Korean language (and Japanese as well) had a totally different sentence structure from English and other Western languages.
56. Lowell, *Choson*, p. 107.
57. Lowell, *Choson*, p. 107.
58. Lowell, *Choson*, p. 12.

would in some way help improve the situation. In striving for mutual understanding, he stressed that there were significant differences between East and West, but that Orientals were also human beings, superior in certain things and inferior in others—a fairly modern attitude for someone writing in the 1880s.[59]

When Lowell first laid eyes on the coast of Korea, he felt "the spirit of desolation made visible." During the twenty-six mile trip from the port of Chemulpo to Seoul, he judged the scenery "wanting," for there was a shortage of pleasing details, of trees on the mountains, of anything that could be called picturesque. It was a landscape so strikingly different from Japan, where color was everywhere.[60] And yet the sunrises (but never the sunsets) were strikingly beautiful, hence the name "The Land of the Morning Calm." The roads, which were really only tracks, were so poor that he concluded that it was a Korean custom never to repair anything. What made the trip worse was the fact that he was riding in a palanquin, a means of transportation with no redeeming features for a Westerner. Lowell put it this way: "European legs have been used for so many generations to walk with, not to sit upon, that where they are not considered as entitled to consideration, comfort is out of the question."[61] And to compound the problem for travelers, inns were unknown in Korea. If required to move about, officials stayed in government buildings, while the lower classes found accommodation with neighbors, friends, or relatives. Foreigners had to make do with whatever was available. Once he reached Seoul, Lowell's spirits picked up. Although it was a very sombre city with everyone he passed looking far from cheerful, he could appreciate the beautiful clear skies of winter. He also praised Seoul as being the safest great city in the world, since few people were allowed out at night and all houses were guarded.[62] However, one sight did horrify him: the display of thirty headless bodies outside the South Gate and the thirty missing heads a short distance away. As a deterrent to further crime, the government left the decapitated bodies of criminals in pubic places for three days.[63]

What kind of country was Korea? For ages it had been without a doubt a mystery, a land where time had stopped. Thanks to a strict policy of seclusion, it was a place covered by a veil; in fact, it was so unusual in numerous respects that it seemed like another planet.[64] Of all peoples, the Koreans (and the Japanese, as well) were the most removed from the European races, mainly as a result of the great distances separating the two civilizations. Another vivid metaphor the author employed was to say that Korea resembled "a living fossilization," since so much of

59. Lowell, *Choson*, pp. 108-109.
60. Lowell, *Choson*, pp. 50-51.
61. Lowell, *Choson*, pp. 49-50.
62. Lowell, *Choson*, p. 231.
63. Lowell, *Choson*, pp. 300-301.
64. Lowell, *Choson*, p. 11.

the past had been preserved with little or no change.[65] Like the vast majority of Western observers, Lowell was quick to point out that Korea had long depended on China for the essential elements of culture. He even claimed that Korea, especially during the Yi Dynasty (1392-1910), had become a slave of China in intellectual matters. There was very little that was not borrowed or adopted from its neighbor to the west. The assumption among Koreans was that China was peerless in the world, and things Chinese were automatically thought to be superior.[66] This habit of bowing down to China would prove to have far-reaching effects when Korea was finally forced to act like an independent country in the late 19th century. Simply put, at that time Korea lacked the preparation necessary to resist foreign encroachments. In spite of such overwhelming imitation, there were some features, however, that did distinguish Korea from China: for example, food, clothing, hats, pipes, and certain customs, among others. In the end, the author reiterated what he considered an obvious but frequently misunderstood fact, and that was that Korea was not the same as China or Japan.[67]

Lowell expended a good deal of space attempting to explain to Westerners how Koreans (and Orientals in general) acted and how they thought. Based on his experiences in the country, Koreans appeared to do everything at a slower pace than Europeans and a much slower pace than energetic Americans. This was because time was a necessity in the West, while there was a general disregard for time in the East. It was almost as if Orientals were beyond time: they had no need for punctuality, for they had no engagements.[68] In Eastern thought, bustle was not important, but study was; speed was not required, but contemplation was; and hurrying was not essential, but behaving with a dignified demeanor was.[69] Lowell characterized Easterners as gentle and urban and Westerners as rude and brutal. When comparing the concept of ego, he sensed that it was less pressing to have a strong ego in the East than it was in the West. Personality, which was the central fact of consciousness for Westerners, was of little use in Asia. This absence of a clear-cut and definable personality turned out to be a huge barrier between the peoples of two such dissimilar cultures.[70] And this "impersonality," which is the word Lowell used in his book, had not changed much since ancient times, for it was more a question of blood than of education. While the West liked to emphasize what made

65. Lowell, *Choson*, p. 7.

66. Lowell, *Choson*, pp. 86-87. In an aside, Lowell claimed that Japan also looked up to China but not to the same extent.

67. Lowell, *Choson*, p. 110. This statement seems to contradict the views presented in the next paragraph, where all Orientals were seen as acting and thinking for the most part in the same way. This type of overgeneralization was common in most of the books of the period.

68. Lowell, *Choson*, p. 377.

69. Lowell, *Choson*, p. 330.

70. Lowell, *Choson*, p. 120.

each individual different, the East preferred to stress what individuals had in common. From early on in his visit, the author was struck by the inquisitiveness shown by Koreans. It goes without saying that they were curious about this man, a stranger of a different race, but their curiosity was of a dignified sort; that is to say, it was less obtrusive than that found either in Japan or China. In this respect, Koreans were no more curious or rude than Americans.[71] Of course, Lowell was often stared at, but he liked the Korean way of showing curiosity because it was very open and clear and was not hidden behind indirect glances. He linked this to the fact that privacy was not a requisite part of Korean manners; therefore, intrusion was not considered impolite.[72]

The patriarchal system was another principal characteristic of Eastern countries. In Korea it had survived from the earliest days, but was strengthened by influence from Chinese culture and thought, especially Confucianism. This ancient system of family and personal relationships demonstrated an additional feature of the Korean people—a tendency to stand still, looking backward rather than forward.[73] Filial piety and subjection became a virtue. That it was an intense and powerful concept was obvious to any observer. Lowell saw it as the one great moral concept of societies in the East, for the virtues traditionally valued in the West—truthfulness, honesty, and chastity—were largely unknown or ignored among Koreans and others.[74] In this system the father occupied the pinnacle of family life, and this, in turn, contributed to the importance of ancestor worship as a defining part of Korean society. Other things that were affected by the patriarchal system were people's names, property distribution, and adoption customs.[75] Here one could again see a significant difference between Westerners and Easterners: the former received kindness from parents and then passed it on to the next generation, but the latter gave kindness to parents and received it from the next generation.[76]

It was clear to Lowell that Korean society relegated women to an inferior position. One of the first things he noticed was that women were almost completely invisible; and the few who were visible were either poor or low-class. What really surprised him was the outfit worn by many of the women walking outdoors: it had an extremely odd cut which brought the waistline level with the armpits but left the breasts exposed and in plain view of every passing person. He felt such a shameful costume was a disaster, for it showed no respect for a woman's anatomical structure.[77] In spite of his

71. Lowell, *Choson*, p. 76. Most other foreigners held exactly the opposite view, and they considered Koreans to be curious to an irritating degree.
72. Lowell, *Choson*, p. 223.
73. Lowell, *Choson*, pp. 131-132.
74. Lowell, *Choson*, p. 134.
75. Lowell, *Choson*, pp. 140-142.
76. Lowell, *Choson*, p. 134.
77. Lowell, *Choson*, p. 322. All the early visitors to Korea reacted with surprise and shame at the sight of the partially exposed women. As one would expect, the missionaries were most disgusted by the outfit

limited contact with women, most of whom came from the middle and lower classes, Lowell had no compunctions about making generalizations: Korean women (as well as those in other Eastern countries) were gentle, petite, and delicate with a strong consciousness of what it meant to be a woman.[78] Though they were praised in this way, especially by Western men, women did not in fact count for much in Korean society at that time. Their place in society was not much different from that of a slave. Chivalry obviously never played any part in the history of the East. And when it came time for marriage, women had no say in choosing a partner; that was a decision always made by the family. Women got married in order to bear children, preferably sons, who could then carry on the family name. Their husbands had absolute power over them.[79] Love was never an essential factor in the relationship. Lowell concluded that in Korea love was "hardly worthy of the name," because the people were ignorant of the moral aspects of love. To be sure, there was affection—impersonal and filial, but that was not love in the Western sense of the word.[80]

Neither Korean art nor Korean religion left a very favorable impression on the author. He judged the art to be too "Far-Eastern" for Western aesthetic sensibilities, which made it difficult, if not impossible, to appreciate. By "Far-Eastern" he meant that artists there found nature more suggestive than man; moreover, they disregarded the human body, believing that it was without beauty and was thus not a proper subject for art. This, he contended, resulted from the greater impersonality of the race and the lower status of women in the Orient.[81] When viewing Korean gardens, Lowell constantly compared them to those in Japan and concluded that, although they possessed the same spirit they had not achieved the same level of artistic perfection. The ones in Korea lacked the humanizing touch of Japanese gardens; and, thanks to their dilapidated condition, they gave off an air of decaying grandeur. Decoration of any kind was in short supply in Korean art. His general evaluation was frank: "The wonderful taste of Japan is quite wanting in Korea."[82] Also wanting was a true, national religion. The upper classes had Confucianism, and the lower classes had various superstitions, but, in Lowell's opinion, those were not religions. He had harsh words for the Korean belief in evil spirits, which he interpreted as akin to demon-worship. Not only did that belief preclude any lofty ideals, but it also degenerated into "the worship of bacteria—bacteria of the mind, body, and estate."[83]

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and saw it as a sure sign that Korea was not yet civilized.

78. Lowell, *Choson*, p. 247. His image of Asian women was the one held by successive generations of Western men, and it still persists to this day.

79. Lowell, *Choson*, p. 148.

80. Lowell, *Choson*, p. 130

81. Lowell, *Choson*, pp. 280-281. One only has to mention Japanese ukiyoe to refute his contention that this neglect of the human form applied equally to the art of all Eastern countries.

82. Lowell, *Choson*, pp. 293-294. As we shall see below, this kind of unfavorable comparison appeared frequently in books and articles of the period.

83. Lowell, *Choson*, p. 196.

Korea's lack of religion led to two other consequences: the absence of any impressive religious buildings and the absence of a theatrical tradition, both of which figured prominently in Japanese culture. Here, again, was Korea being judged in terms of Japan, often unfairly and often based on inadequate information. That, it seemed, was Korea's unfortunate fate.

In contrast to Lowell, who only traveled in and around Seoul, A. E. J. Cavendish, a Scotsman, endured numerous hardships and trekked around the northern part of the country in the fall of 1891, visiting places rarely visited by Westerners. His journey took two and a half months and covered many hundreds of miles. After returning home he wrote a book which was published in 1894 under the title *Korea and the Sacred White Mountain*. Cavendish's account was typical of a certain type of Victorian traveler—one who wanted to go to the most inaccessible places around the globe but wanted to do so in fairly comfortable and familiar conditions. No one can doubt that making a trip through the rural areas of Korea in 1891 must have been an extremely trying task. Hoping to alleviate some of the hardships, Cavendish packed thirty-three boxes of "necessary" goods, including three cases of whiskey. All of this stuff he deemed necessary in order to provide the essential material comforts for his ten-week adventure. With no knowledge of the language and very little information about the country, he found himself facing many difficult situations which he could not fully understand. This led to frustration and endless complaints about almost everything connected with the country.

Cavendish formed an unflattering impression of the Korean people. While admitting that they were good humored and well disposed towards foreigners, he judged them to be conservative, backward, and addicted to alcohol and debauchery.[84] Their personal habits annoyed him in the extreme: the constant expectorating and throat clearing, the refusal to use handkerchiefs, and the aversion to bathing. He was irritated by the fact that Koreans did not bath very frequently, and yet they insisted on their clothes being bleached sparkling white. Another serious fault was their lack of concern for decency or modesty, especially in the matter of bodily functions. Immorality was so rampant that the general condition of the people was syphilitic.[85] Cavendish also complained about how lazy the men were, estimating that 20% of the population was idle at any one moment. At first he could not understand why the men seemed to have so much time to kill. Then he realized that women and children did most of the hard work, both indoors and outdoors, while men sat around gossiping and smoking.[86]

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84. A. E. J. Cavendish, *Korea and the Sacred White Mountain*, pp. 46-47.
85. Cavendish, *Korea and the Sacred White Mountain*, p. 27. The author also noted that the country suffered from smallpox and high infant mortality.
86. Cavendish, *Korea and the Sacred White Mountain*, p. 84.

It was his daily contact with his interpreter and servants that provided the basis for most of his opinions. At the beginning of this trip, the Koreans he hired to accompany him were loose about time and schedules. "Later on," he explained, "we rectified this waste of time to a great extent, but it was impossible to obviate it entirely, as a Korean is absolutely ignorant of, or indifferent to, the value of time."[87] And there were occasions when Cavendish suspected his men of being devious, because they took longer routes and more difficult roads in the hope of being paid more. The only person he could talk to on a daily basis was the interpreter, with whom he came to have a testy relationship. That experience led him to believe that he was being lied to or misled a great deal of the time, and there was no way for him to find out the truth on this own since he could not speak Korean. He concluded: "As in China, lying is in Korea a fine art and a cardinal virtue."[88]

In addition to carping about the people, he also expressed dissatisfaction with the places and the food. Seoul, for example, had a dark side that was distinctly unpleasant: it was crowded with no sanitation; streets and gutters were filled with sewage and refuse; soap and water were non-existent; disease and vice were rampant, as were dishonesty, corruption, and oppression; and cruel punishments and even torture were commonly employed.[89] On the road it was difficult to find a decent inn to spend the night in, for the simple fact that there were none. In most cases, he ended up staying in rooms that were dirty and smelly with fleas and bugs in abundance; and to make matters worse, he had no privacy and could not thus escape from the prying eyes of curious onlookers. The result was that he was unable to get much sleep.[90] Cavendish made it a rule never to eat Korean food. Since he had brought all his own provisions with him, it seems that he traveled around the country without ever trying the food. Some of the things his servants ate along the way were revolting to him because of the nauseous smells they emitted. He had no idea what they were eating or any real interest in finding out. In his words, such foods were "not to be inquired into too closely."[91]

Cavendish went to Korea to see the country and the countryside. His goal was to climb Mt. Paektu (the Sacred White Mountain of the title), which is located along Korea's border with China, but he failed to make it that far. The way he described the people and the culture produced images that were uniformly negative. What he did appreciate and praise were the natural beauty and wildlife of Korea—the mountains, hills, and forests, along with the various kinds of animals living therein. On the whole, however, Korea did not emerge from his description looking at all like a

87. Cavendish, *Korea and the Sacred White Mountain*, p. 57.
88. Cavendish, *Korea and the Sacred White Mountain*, pp. 114-115.
89. Cavendish, *Korea and the Sacred White Mountain*, pp. 22-28.
90. Cavendish, *Korea and the Sacred White Mountain*, p. 137.
91. Cavendish, *Korea and the Sacred White Mountain*, p, 52.

very attractive place.

Of all the early visitors to Korea perhaps the most remarkable was Isabella Bird (1831-1904), an eccentric Englishwoman who after turning forty began to travel to faraway places and write books about her adventures. She liked to visit places off the beaten track because of her distaste for the constraints of Victorian society.[92] In all, she published nineteen travel books, many of which became very popular with the reading public in both England and America. It was in 1894, when she was sixty-three years old and in poor health, that she made her first trip to Korea; and over the following three years she returned three more times and spent a total of almost a year traveling around the country. She was an intrepid woman, to put it mildly. In 1898 she published a two-volume detailed account of her trip entitled *Korea and Her Neighbors*. The book, which was well written and comprehensive, got uniformly favorable reviews; it was praised for its detailed observations, correct inferences, and political relevance.[93] It sold well and went through many editions.[94] It is fair to say that it made a sizeable contribution to how Westerners at that time saw Korea. Thanks to this book, as well as her two other works on Japan and China, the author was recognized as an authority on the Far East during the final few years of her life.[95]

Realizing that in the 1890s few people in the West—even educated people—knew much about Korea or even where it was located, Bird wanted to help educate them about this unfamiliar and strange country. In doing research for her book, she did not rely just on her own personal observations; she also made friends with the "Korea Hands" living in Seoul and tapped their store of first-hand knowledge.[96] Wherever she went, she had to struggle with the language barrier, for she could not speak Korean. As often as possible she arranged for interpreters to accompany her on her journeys outside the cities, but they were not always available nor were they always proficient. This led to considerable frustration on her part: "... the interpretation was feeble, and we bowed and smiled, and smiled and bowed, with tedious iteration, without coming to much mutual understanding."[97] Of course, this was the fate suffered by all foreigners who lacked the ability to communicate, even at a basic level, in the native language.

Bird's first impressions of Korea were so unfavorable that she declared it the most uninteresting country she had ever traveled in.[98] Her initial distaste resulted from the fact that she had landed at Chemulpo, a dreary port town of mud hovels,

92. Pat Barr, *A Curious Life for a Lady, The Story of Isabella Bird*, pp. 14-15.
93. Anna M. Stoddart, *The Life of Isabella Bird (Mrs. Bishop)*, p. 344. Bishop was Bird's married name.
94. It was reprinted in 1986 by Charles E. Tuttle Co.; moreover, it is still in print today, one of the very few books of that era which is currently available in new bookstores.
95. The two books were *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (1883) and *The Yangtze River and Beyond* (1899).
96. Stoddart, *The Life of Isabella Bird*, p. 343.
97. Isabella Bird, *Korea and Her Neighbors*, vol. 2, p. 114.
98. Bird, *Korea and Her Neighbors*, vol. 1, p. xiii.

filthy alleys, dirty children, and countless idle men.[99] And on the trip from Chemulpo to Seoul, she found no beauty of form and no dignity of landscape; it all looked so barren to her. Once in Seoul, she had mixed feelings about what she saw there. The city of Seoul was, she acknowledged, one of the great capitals of the world. It was the center of commerce and the seat of government and all official employment for the entire country; in short, Seoul was Korea. What she particularly liked about the city was its safe streets. In fact, she thought there was no major city in the world as safe as Seoul. Women, foreign and Korean, could walk alone wherever they wanted without fear.[100] What disappointed her was that there no objects of art, no public gardens, no theaters, no ruins, and no temples—in other words, no obvious points of interest. And this, she discovered, was the case with all Korean cities. Any splendor that might have existed in days past had long since faded. Seoul, especially during her first visit, struck her as place of "unspeakable meanness," with its slums, open sewage ditches, foul smells, and crowded and narrow roads. Everywhere she looked there were half-naked children, mangy dogs, and crowds of purposeless men.[101] However, things changed for the better after that. When she returned to Seoul a year later, she was impressed by how much had improved. Apparently a group of capable officials had cleaned the city up mainly by enforcing sanitary regulations. Gone were the unbearable sights and smells of "old" Seoul. In Bird's eyes, it was a new city.[102]

Although the cities often presented unpleasant sights, the countryside was a place beyond compare. She took a five-week trip south of South along the Han River, where she came upon scenes more beautiful that those in China. The picturesqueness of Korea could only be found in the hard-to-get-to areas, preferably during spring or autumn. But for pure beauty, nothing surpassed what she called "the unrivaled atmosphere of the Korean winter." While walking along a remote river path north of Pyongyang, she penned this description of the sight that lay before her eyes: "Diamond-flashing in the fine breeze, below noble cliffs and cobalt mountains, across which cloud shadows were sailing in indigo, under a vault of cloud-flecked blue, that view was one of those dreams of beauty which become a possession for ever."[103] She was equally impressed by the natural beauty of the Mt. Kamgang area on the east coast, the home of a number of important Buddhist monasteries.

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99. Bird, *Korea and Her Neighbors*, vol. 1, pp. 28-29.

100. Bird, *Korea and Her Neighbors*, vol. 1, p. 36. She found this to be true of Korean cities in general. "It says something for the security of Korea that a foreign lady [Bird] could safely live in a dwelling, up a lonely alley in the heart of a big city, with no attendant but a Korean soldier knowing not a word of English, who, had he been so minded, might have cut my throat and decamped with my money, of which he knew the whereabouts, neither my door nor the compound having any fastening!" (vol. 2, p. 94)

101. Bird, *Korea and Her Neighbors*, vol. 1, pp. 33-34.

102. Bird, *Korea and Her Neighbors*, vol. 2, p. 266.

103. Bird, *Korea and Her Neighbors*, vol. 2, p. 129.

Bird formed clear-cut opinions about the Koreans she met during her several visits. She unequivocally stated that the Koreans had a unique look, which resembled neither the Chinese nor the Japanese. They were a handsome race but a race that wore the ugliest clothes on earth.[104] From a woman's oddly shaped dress to a man's stovepipe hat, she found the general effect to be nothing short of grotesque. It was her experience that Koreans were intelligent and that they were good language learners, better in fact than Chinese or Japanese. Though the common people were curious about her, they treated her in a friendly way. The same could not be said of the yangban class of officials and scholars, who for the most part were rude, arrogant, and aggressive. As far as she could tell, the yangban were a parasitic class, always living off others and refusing to engage in any kind of manual labor whatsoever. Korean society at this time was such that the yangban lorded over everyone else; they took what they wanted without payment or explanation. The common people, Bird noted, may have appeared lazy, but actually that was not their true nature. The problem was that if they seemed to be making money they would be forced to hand it over to the yangban—a traditional form of squeeze.[105] Another trait she disliked was the tendency of Koreans to exaggerate and even lie; moreover, they liked to gossip and spread rumors about anything they heard. She came to the conclusion that Koreans did not know the meaning of the word "reserve."[106] There were other shortcomings for which she criticized the Koreans, along with other Asians: "They [Koreans] have the Oriental vices of suspicion, cunning, and untruthfulness, and trust between man and man is unknown."[107] Hers was a harsh character portrait.

Being such a fiercely independent woman, Bird commented, as one would expect, in strongly unfavorable terms on the inferior social status of Korean women. Much of the problem was caused by the policy of seclusion. It seemed to her that the seclusion of women served only to restrict their freedom and, in a sense, to deny their existence.[108] Of course, in Korea keeping women separate was a valued tradition that was justified on the grounds that it helped protect them. Because it was such a firmly established custom, Bird wondered whether Korean women really wished for the kind of freedoms enjoyed by their European counterparts; perhaps they were resigned to such a restricted existence. To improve the situation meant changing the education and legal systems, popular superstitions, and the way people (particularly men) thought. All of these barriers "combined to give women as low a status in civilized Korea as in any of the barbarous countries in the world."[109] If the

104. Bird, *Korea and Her Neighbors*, vol. 1, p. 3.
105. Bird, *Korea and Her Neighbors*, vol. 1, pp. 85-86.
106. Bird, *Korea and Her Neighbors*, vol. 2, p. 168. One wonders how she could have learned all these things without ever being able to speak the language.
107. Bird, *Korea and Her Neighbors*, vol. 1, p.4.
108. As noted above, the policy of absolute seclusion applied only to women of the upper class.
109. Bird, *Korea and Her Neighbors*, vol. 2, pp. 152-153.

condition of upper-class women was bad, that of lower-class and peasant women was many times worse. They were mere drudges who looked fifty by the time they turned thirty. Not only did they have to work hard, but they also had to bear many children without the hope of any compensating pleasures. Some of the author's most bitter words were directed towards the institution of marriage as practiced in Korea. A woman had no choice but to accept an arranged marriage. She then moved into her husband's house, which became her prison. The wife was expected to be faithful, but the husband was not; she had many duties to carry out, but he had few. For a woman, marriage was her "manifest destiny"—a relationship offering little affection but requiring much endurance.[110]

When Isabella Bird was traipsing around Korea by herself, the Koreans who came into contact with her were greatly startled, for most had never seen a Western man before, not to mention a stout, elderly Western woman. The people in rural areas were unable to take their eyes off this strange sight. The bolder they became in satisfying their curiosity, the quicker she became at showing her irritation. Here was how she described one such experience in a country inn outside Seoul:

> My room had three paper doors. The unwalled space at once filled up with a crowd of men, women, and children. All the paper was torn off the doors, and a crowd of dirty Mongolian faces took its place. I hung my cambric curtains, but long sticks were produced and my curtains were poked into the middle of the room. The crowd broke in the doors, and filled the small space not occupied by myself and my gear. The women and children sat on my bed in heaps, examined my clothing, took out my hairpins and pulled down my hair, took off my slippers, drew my sleeves up to the elbow and pinched my arms to see if they were of the same flesh and blood as their own....The pushing and crushing, the odious familiarity, the babel of voices, and the odours of dirty clothing in a temperature of 80°, were intolerable.[111]

It was hard for her always to be amiable under such circumstances. Undoubtedly this was one of the drawbacks of being a female traveler in Korea, but it did have its advantages. For example, Bird was invited to the Palace on several occasions to meet the King and Queen, both of whom impressed her with their friendliness. While the King seemed gentle but weak, the Queen possessed a character which was both strong and shrewd. These two members of the royal

110. Bird, *Korea and Her Neighbors*, vol. 1, pp. 128-136.
111. Bird, *Korea and Her Neighbors*, vol. 1, p. 144.

family struck her as intelligent people whom foreigners could easily get along with.[112]

With its splendid climate, abundant rainfall, and freedom from civil war, Korea should have been a happy and prosperous nation, according to Bird. The major problem eating away at the country was corruption. It was so pervasive that it had divided the people into two classes: the robbers and the robbed, or in other words the officials and the peasants. The former were like vampires who sucked "the life-blood of the people."[113] Seoul suffered the most acute case of corruption, although every provincial government was also afflicted. The Japanese, who wielded considerable influence in Korea in the mid-1890s, tried to root out this evil. But it was hard for them to achieve much success, because honor and honesty had become forgotten virtues over the centuries. To make matters worse, there were no standards for officials.[114] Korea had to enact more effective laws to eradicate corruption; however, Bird did not think the country capable of reforming itself. What was needed was outside help. Then and only then could Korea be revitalized. Without reforms in a number of vital areas, Korea could not maintain its sovereignty and would inevitably come under the tutelage of either Japan or Russia.[115] And of course that is exactly what happened.

As we have seen, Bird was a hash critic of the conditions she witnessed in Korea. It is only natural that her moral, social, and political ideas were typical of the Victorian Age. Yet, for all her complaints about the country and the people, she seemed to enjoy traveling and living in Korea and other regions of Asia. When she was about to go home, she wrote a letter to her publisher in which she said: "Indeed I am returning to England with a very bad grace. I am far more at home in Tokyo and Seoul than in any place in Britain except Tobermory, and I very much prefer life in the East to life at home..."[116]

Two other visitors, Angus Hamilton and George T. Ladd, deserve to be mentioned, for their books proved somewhat influential in the formation of Western images of Korea. Hamilton was a British journalist who went to Korea in 1903 to report on the international crisis brewing between Russia and Japan. During his stay in Korea, he traveled to Seoul and to several cities on the east coast, making personal observations and interviewing people. In 1904 his book, simply entitled *Korea*, was published in English, as well as in French and German. It enjoyed considerable popularity at a time when Korea was just beginning to figure prominently in the news. What helped contribute to that success was the book's richness of detail and fluent prose style. Though Hamilton displayed an obvious colonial attitude and pro-British

112. Bird, *Korea and Her Neighbors*, vol. 2, pp. 43-45.
113. Bird, *Korea and Her Neighbors*, vol. 2, p. 103.
114. Bird, *Korea and Her Neighbors*, vol. 2, p. 52.
115. Bird, *Korea and Her Neighbors*, vol. 2, p. 292.
116. Barr, *A Curious Life for a Lady, The Story of Isabella Bird*, p. 333.

bias, he was still able to produce a work that was fairly objective, considering the period in which it was written.

For Hamilton, Korea was a land of exceptional beauty and friendliness. Wherever he traveled in the countryside, he observed, in addition to the stunning scenery, the peace, repose, and contentment of ordinary Koreans. Those people, usually farmers, who lived in such picturesque surroundings proved to be hospitable to strangers.[117] They were patient and had a capacity for hard work—a characteristic not often praised by earlier writers. Nevertheless, they meekly submitted to oppression from above out of a fear that nothing was worse than social disorder. Although they were superstitious and ignorant, these simple farmers still retained an admirable appreciation of nature.[118] Members of the official class, however, projected an entirely different image.[119] Dressed in their white outfits, they looked charming and dignified, to be sure, as they walked about at a leisurely pace, passing the time in almost complete idleness. This led the author to suggest that inaction, not vigorous action, suited the Korean temperament. He further commented: "The inhabitants of the Hermit Kingdom are peculiarly proficient in the art of doing nothing gracefully."[120] But this did not apply to women. While men lived the easy life, women became "beasts of burden," who labored hard to keep their home life running smoothly. As a result, they constituted a powerful force in the economy. Hamilton described them as being admirable and possessing a high degree of integrity.[121] If he was curious about them, they were even more curious about him. But unlike most other foreigners, the author was not unduly bothered by the curiosity shown by Koreans towards him or any person of a different race; and before long he came to see it as nothing more than a minor irritation. Here was how he put it: "As publicity was unavoidable, and it was useless to object, it was easier to accept the situation than to struggle with the curiosity of the spectators."[122]

By the time Hamilton visited Seoul, the city had changed a great deal for the better. Most of the filth and foulness of "old" Seoul had disappeared; one seldom encountered the appalling conditions that had distressed foreigners just a few short years before. The streets were now spacious and clean, admirably constructed, and well drained. Since the city was safe, sightseers could enjoy the many changes of scenery inside and outside the gates without fear of molestation. The author claimed that Seoul, blessed with a "pleasant, cool, and comfortable seclusion," was more

117. Angus Hamilton, *Korea*, p. 209.
118. Hamilton, *Korea*, pp. 113-115.
119. Here the author was referring to men, for he would have had few, if any, chances to met women of that class. The women still led very secluded lives.
120. Hamilton, *Korea*, p. 41.
121. Hamilton, *Korea*, p. 44.
122. Hamilton, *Korea*, p. 277.

charmingly situated than Peking. In addition to an improved sewage system, the city could boast of trains and trams and electric lights; it was becoming modernized but not overly Europeanized.[123] Without hesitation Hamilton showed his enthusiasm for this new city: "Seoul is within measurable distance of becoming the highest, most interesting, and cleanest city in the East."[124] This was the result, he claimed, of Korea's decision to open itself up to the outside world and enter into a mutually beneficial relationship with foreign countries.

No one could deny that Korea was undergoing momentous changes across a broad range of areas. One result of this was the disappearance of many picturesque customs that had once added color to the native culture. Korea was in the process of assimilating modern civilization, just as Japan had a generation earlier. There was progress, but it was often slow because the reform movement had, by this time, lost much of its momentum. And yet during the previous decade, Korea had made greater strides than China, becoming a more progressive and active society. Some liberal tendencies had even taken root, thanks mainly to the helping hand of Japan and the Western powers.[125] While a return to the conservatism of the past was out of the question, it was not clear what the future held or in which direction the country was headed. What was clear to Hamilton was that foreigners, serving as advisors or officials, had the right and the responsibility to help Korea build and maintain an honest government.[126] On the other hand, he was concerned for the future of Korea after realizing how much interest Russia and Japan were showing in the country. He expressed his concern this way: "Korea is the helpless, hapless sport of Japanese caprice and Russian lust."[127] Korean weakness and Japanese arrogance were combing to produce a volatile situation. Korea, he feared, was sure to be absorbed, annexed, or divided, and his fear proved justified.

One of the most controversial people to write about his travels in Korea was George T. Ladd (1842-1921). A noted psychology professor at Yale University, Ladd had visited and lectured in Japan in the 1880s.[128] Apparently this experience turned him into an ardent admirer of Japan. In 1907, a year after retiring, he was invited by Ito Hirobumi, the Japanese Resident-General of Korea, to tour the country and see with his own eyes what the Japanese were doing there. Ladd spent slightly over two

123. Hamilton, *Korea*, pp. 23-26.
124. Hamilton, *Korea*, p. 33.
125. Hamilton, *Korea*, pp. 11-12. Many, if not most, commentators of the period saw the Japanese-Korean relationship for the most part as an entirely beneficial one.
126. The author had his doubts about the chances of success. "It remains to be seen, therefore, if the united services of those distinguished people [foreign advisors] can prolong in any degree the era of honest government in Korea." Hamilton, *Korea*, p. 111.
127. Hamilton, *Korea*, p. xli.
128. Ladd, who taught for twenty-five years at Yale, contributed significantly to the founding of the psychology profession in the US. For a highly critical view of Ladd and his book, see Choe Yong-shik, "Sinister Brain Trust," *KOREA Now* 28 July 2001: pp. 46-47.

months in the spring of that same year traveling around Korea as a guest of the Japanese. Once it was known that Japan had sponsored his visit, Ladd had difficulty attracting Koreans to his talks, for he was seen merely as a puppet of the enemy. What information he gathered came mainly from his conversations with Japanese and Westerner residents of Seoul and other cities. After returning to the United States, he published, in 1908, an account of his trip entitled *In Korea with Marquis Ito*. It was a long, 463-page book in two parts: personal observations and historical inquiry. That it was an apology for Japanese policies was surely obvious to the majority of readers. The author even admitted as much in the Preface: "I have no wish to deny the apologetic character of this book."[129] He also insisted that the purpose of his visit was to help the Koreans, and at the same time he hoped to convince foreigners of Japan's sincerity in dealing justly with the Koreans.[130] We must realize, however, that in the context of the times his viewpoint was not necessarily abhorrent to people outside of Korea, most of whom had no interest in or concern for the country.

Ladd got his first real glimpse of Korea looking out the window of a train traveling from Pusan to Seoul. He saw how backward the countryside was, with its poor roads and primitive forms of native agriculture. This convinced him that Korea needed help from the outside world. When he toured Seoul, he found himself attracted to the architecture of the city wall and the eight gates. At the same time that he praised the Marble Pagoda, saying it was the most notable Buddhist monument in Korea, he emphasized that it was not something made in Korea but was brought there by the Mongols in the 14th century—in other words, it was not a true Korean work of art. Another major tourist sight he visited was Kyong-buk Palace, which turned out to be less than magnificent, for it was suffering from neglect, decay, and ruin.[131] But the Seoul of the palaces was not the Seoul of the people. Although improvements had been made during the previous ten years, the Seoul of the people remained "disgustingly filthy and abjectly squalid." Unsanitary conditions and indecent habits prevailed throughout the city. In spite of such strong remarks, Ladd was quick to admit that everything depended on what was being compared. For example, Seoul was no dirtier than Peking or any other Chinese city; however, it was infinitely worse than Old or New England or Japan. Ladd had no doubt that the proper thing to do was to rely on Japanese guidance.[132]

What did Ladd think about the Korean people? In the very few meetings he had with them, he found them to be quite, polite, and attentive; during his speeches, they did not interrupt or yawn, both of which would have been common distractions in the

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129. Ladd, *In Korea with Marquis Ito*, p. viii.
130. Ladd, *In Korea with Marquis Ito*, p. 14.
131. Ladd, *In Korea with Marquis Ito*, pp. 28-32.
132. Ladd, *In Korea with Marquis Ito*, pp. 21 and 34.

not so distant past.[133] He added, however, that the Japanese audiences in Korea were superior because they showed more interest in the subjects he discussed. That was understandable, considering that he was trumpeting the positive effects of Japanese rule. Those Japanese living in Korea were surely happy to hear a prominent Westerner espousing such a view. Ladd criticized the Korean emperor and his court for their countless intrigues and lack of dignity. The corruption that was endemic to the entire system made the situation hopeless.[134] The yangban possessed these same shortcomings, in addition to being addicted to laziness. Herein lay the dilemma facing Korea: How could the country develop a firm mental and moral character if it was being led by such people? What Korea needed were large doses of sincerity, courage, veracity, justice, and truth—qualities that Ladd claimed were missing in that era. Part of the blame for this could be placed at the feet of the missionaries, who tended to foster anti-Japanese prejudices rather than concentrating on developing higher moral standards among the people. The author became highly suspicious and critical of the missionary movement.[135]

During Ladd's short stay, the country was in a state of disorder: there were attempted assassinations, plots and counterplots, attacks on police, highway robbery, and tax revolts. This led him to the conclusion that Korea needed Japan's assistance. Under present circumstances the two countries were fated to be teacher and protege. He went so far as to frame the relationship in religious terms: "God has so bound together Japan and Korea, both physically and politically, that their interests cannot be separated, whether for weal or for woe."[136] Ladd's book turned out to be one long defense of the Japanese protectorate. And yet, at the time of it publication, it caused little uproar, except among Koreans. However, the book and his reputation fared less well in later decades, when Japan's colonization of Korea was seen as cruel and self-serving. Then the author became known as the scholar who "sold fame to glorify Japan's rule over Korea."[137]

Missionaries

> The great problem that confronts all work in the Far East is the Oriental mind.[138]

Foreign missionaries played a prominent role in introducing Korea to the West. Many of them stayed a long time, studied the country, mastered the language, and then wrote books about what they had achieved and what they had learned. Some of

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133. The author attributed these improvements to the influence of the Christian missionaries.
134. Ladd, *In Korea with Marquis Ito*, pp. 152-154.
135. Ladd, *In Korea with Marquis Ito*, pp. 60-61.
136. Ladd, *In Korea with Marquis Ito*, pp. 139-140.
137. This phrase is part of the subtitle of the article by Choe Yong-shik mentioned in footnote 128.
138. James S. Gale, *Korean Sketches*, p. 174.

those books provided valuable information that was unavailable anywhere else—information that came from long years of experience working and living with Koreans. In this section I will examine the works of three of the more famous missionaries of the period covered in this paper. The first was a Presbyterian minister from Canada named James S. Gale (1863-1937), who lived in Korea from 1884 to 1927. During those years, he made at least twelve trips up and down the country, which was more than that of any other European or American. Without a doubt he knew a lot about Korea. In his day he was considered one of the foremost interpreters of Korean culture and society, writing books and articles on a variety of subjects. Of his many publications, two seem particularly interesting and relevant: *Korean Sketches*, a thorough account of the country's first encounter with the West; and *Korea in Transition*, a concise guide written mainly for future missionaries. Both books were filled with acute observations, which for the most part provided accurate and fair images of Korea and the Korean people.

First published in 1898, *Korean Sketches* did something that no other book had done before: it presented Korea in a very favorable light. Perhaps it was because of Gale's long residence in and affinity for the country. In his enthusiasm for Korea, he boasted that it was the "most attractive country in the world." It had not only a good climate and great natural beauty, but also an interesting language and fascinating customs; in addition, the people were dignified and kind-hearted.[139] During his initial visit to Seoul, he found it mysterious and picturesque. Although he admitted that certain things about the city made a person shudder, he did not dwell on them; on the contrary, he stressed the positive—a stance that was almost unknown among foreigners of that era. Koreans may have disliked foreigners during certain periods, but not one person had suffered bodily harm or death at the hands of the native population since the country had been opened to the West. The fact of the matter was that Europeans and Americans, including missionaries, had been well treated.[140] That did not mean, of course, that foreigners were not objects of intense curiosity. Simply because they appeared different they quickly became the center of attention, wherever they went. Though it was harmless, the constant staring often resulted in unbearable loneliness and depression on the part of foreigners. It was, however, something they had to endure. What Gale discovered after living with Koreans for a while was that the differences separating them were not as great as he had imagined. Yes, they did wear startling clothes, and they did believe the earth was flat and the sun revolved around Korea, and they did eat dog meat in the summer. Nevertheless, in human terms, they had much in common with people from other countries.[141]

139. Gale, *Korean Sketches*, p. 136.
140. Gale, *Korean Sketches*, pp. 12-13.
141. Gale, *Korean Sketches*, p. 33.

Gale clearly liked the Korean people. Since they had long been cut off from the rest of the world, they were ignorant of everything that was taking place in other countries; there was no denying they were extremely backward. Yet he praised them for possessing the highest of human virtues: "sympathy and love for fellow mortals."[142] What particularly impressed him was the fact that Koreans were very trustworthy, more so, he claimed, than Americans. As we have seen, these words of praise were rarely uttered by other Westerners. In Gale's view, Koreans were an orderly people with a keen sense of fairness in business.[143] He partly attributed their honesty to their style of life, which was simple and patriarchal—much different from the complicated system in the West. One thing he had trouble getting used to was the Korean custom of respect for the elderly and for men of high rank. Being a foreign missionary of some stature, he was always treated as a "great man." As a result, when traveling, he had to put up with the extreme deference shown him by common people and officials alike.[144] For Koreans, appearances were always highly valued in both personal and business relationships. How something looked was more important than how authentic it really was. This trait was connected with the Korean propensity for separating heart and expression, inner and outer, private and public. Since Westerners tended to do the opposite and conflated the two, a natural barrier developed which prevented one side from understanding the other.[145] Gale forcefully made the point that East and West were hopelessly reversed in a number of essential areas: for example, the ideal of love, the integrity of a man's word, the concept of punctual time, the absolute nature of truth, and the desirability of independence. For Westerners these were essential for man's happiness and personal well-being, whereas for Koreans they seemed like imported luxuries out of step with traditional customs and mores.[146] There was a big gap, but it was not unbridgeable: "So we remain at the antipodes of thought. It will take much mental explanation and engineering to bring us within hailing distance of each other; but we trust that the day is coming when our hearts may be united and our minds may, in a measure at least, be agreed."[147]

In describing Korean gentlemen, or yangban, Gale was less censorious than other writers had been. Gentlemen did, it was true, present an unusual sight: they were dressed in an immaculate white outfit, smoking a three-foot pipe, and holding a large fan. Also required was a pair of dark crystal glasses, not so much to enhance

142. Gale, *Korean Sketches*, p. 42.
143. Gale, *Korean Sketches*, p. 240.
144. Gale, *Korean Sketches*, pp. 18-19.
145. Gale, *Korean Sketches*, p. 178. This dichotomy was basically the same as the well-known Japanese concept of *honne and tatemae*.
146. Gale, *Korean Sketches*, pp. 171-181. Chapter IX, which was entitled "The Korean Mind," offered a good summary of the differences between Korean behavior and Western behavior.
147. Gale, *Korean Sketches*, p. 181.

vision as to enhance style. Steeped in Confucianism, yangban always strove to act calm and composed, for proper form mattered above all else. What that meant in practice was that members of that class refused to do any kind of manual labor—it was simply improper. Labor had no dignity in Korea, as it did in the West. As a result, they avoided any kind of trade or business, instead serving as officials and living off the peasants and others. Even those yangban who were not well off somehow managed to scrape by without ever having to engage in any real work. Towards women they showed contempt. They believed that women had only one role in life and that was to bear sons.[148] Gale agreed that Korean gentlemen were intelligent and interesting and that their houses exuded an aura of respectability, but he found it paradoxical that, in spite of their good qualities, so many of them were content being part of such an unpolished and undeveloped civilization. Could it be due, he wondered, to the influence of the Confucian belief in the beauty of poverty?[149]

The author had nothing but praise for Korean coolies or servants. Since they were not bound by Confucianism, they turned out to be the most appealing type of person he had come to know in Korea.[150] What made them so appealing? They were peaceful and gentle boys or men who rarely if ever got excited. No matter how bad the situation became, they remained good-natured. They always accepted life as it was, eating anything and sleeping anywhere. For them, harmony and friendship were more valuable than money; money was a convenience but not a necessity. On the debit side, they lacked, it was true, an enthusiasm for hard work,[151] and they showed an unhealthy fear of devils and superstitions. However, in a sense, they served as the "managing directors" of the nation and were entrusted with roles essential to the functioning of cities. In addition, they were a veritable storehouse of Korean beliefs and traditions.[152]

Korean Sketches included other comments on life and society. One custom Gale objected to was the display of corpses. After a person died, his or her body was tied to a mat and left to bake and fester in the sun. It could not be buried until a propitious site was decided on, using the complicated rules of geomancy. But in the meantime, diseases such as smallpox and cholera ran rampant.[153] Another disturbing example of "the constant presence of the dead" was the decapitated bodies that were left outside the city gates as means to prevent future crimes—a practice neither healthy nor civilized. The author could not but fault the Koreans for their

148. Gale, *Korean Sketches*, pp. 182-183 and 186-187.
149. Gale, *Korean Sketches*, p. 24.
150. The author claimed that Korean characteristics had been pushed aside by Confucianism in the behavior of the upper classes, who, as a result, had lost their natural traits.
151. According to Gale, laziness was the curse of Korea, a kind of illness causing the entire country to waste away. *Korean Sketches*, p. 37.
152. Gale, *Korean Sketches*, pp. 53-55, 65, and 68-69.
153. Gale, *Korean Sketches*, p. 16.

heathenism and paganism, but he did so in rather mild tones, considering that he was a minister and a missionary. Whenever he stopped at Korean inns or huts, he faced a test of stamina: Could he or could he not last the entire night? In those Spartan accommodations, six to eight people slept in one room with no ventilation. With the ondul going full blast, the floor heated up like a frying pan, baking him brown within a short time. All he could do was pray for the quick return of morning. And yet, after a year or so, he not only got used to the ondul system, but he actually came to appreciate it.[154] This was one custom that most foreigners never got used to. In Gale's opinion, education in Korea left much to be desired. First of all, it was limited to the upper classes, and second it relied too heavily on the rote memorization of the Chinese classics. Whereas in the West education trained and developed a person in a practical way, in Korea it forced a person to live in the past and to experience little or no growth.[155] The missionaries hoped to offer Koreans of all classes a more useful education that would benefit the nation as it struggled to adapt to the modern world.

More than a decade later, in 1909, Gale published a second book entitled *Korea in Transition*. Attractively bound in blue silk, it offered a short but reliable introduction for young readers, many of whom were preparing to go to Korea to do missionary work. The book contained much of the basic information needed in order to understand a country with such a completely different history and culture. In this volume, he made many revealing observations, one of the most important being that Korean society was unmovable. That is to say, over the centuries, it had developed a series of principles for guiding society that were mainly based on Chinese thought. First of all, there were the Five Laws governing human beings: the father/son relationship, which required friendship; the king/courtier relationship, which required righteousness; the husband/wife relationship, which required deference; the old/young relationship, which required degree; and the friend/friend relationship, which required faith. These constituted the pillars on which society rested. Related to the Five Laws were the Five Virtues: love, righteousness, ceremony, knowledge, and faith. The existence or absence of these virtues determined whether a country was civilized or not. The final group was made up of the Five Elements: metal, wood, water, fire, and earth. They explained everything there was to know about the earth. These fifteen beliefs, taken together, had controlled the Korean world of thought since time immemorial.[156] With such rigid rules in place, people had little, or no, room to manuveor in, and society found itself in a fixed state. "As it was, is now, and ever shall be" became the country's motto. Everything was static and explained by custom. And, as a result, independent thought never had a chance to develop.[157]

154. Gale, *Korean Sketches*, p. 134.
155. Gale, *Korean Sketches*, pp. 176-177.
156. James S. Gale, *Korea in Transition*, pp. 95-96.
157. Gale, *Korea in Transition*, pp. 99-100.

Although the country was changing little by little, these beliefs remained influential. Until recent years, Korea had hoped, more than anything else, to be left alone. The ideal of old Korea was the *unsa* or hermit, and this ideal symbolized the preferred condition of the country—separated from others. The outside world, which was seen as a threat, was viewed with deep suspicion. As late as 1880, there were signposts along the roads which said: "If you meet a foreigner, kill him; he who has friendly relations with him is a traitor to his country."[158]

For the benefit of prospective missionaries, Gale explained the religious attitude of Koreans. On the surface Korea seemed devoid of religion, for in the capital there were no outward signs like great temples or priests and nuns. But it was wrong, he warned, to conclude that the people were not religious, especially if religion was defined as "the reaching out of the spiritual in man to other spirits over and above him."[159] What Koreans believed in was a strange mixture of numerous elements: ancestor worship, Buddhism, Taoism, spirit cults, divination, magic, geomancy, astrology, fetishism, and such diverse figures as dragons, devils, and elves. Of these, ancestor worship enjoyed the support of the largest number of people. It was without a doubt the heart and soul of Korea. According to Gale, this custom had its positive side in that it taught children to respect their parents. A father's authority was absolute, which helped maintain discipline and order in the family as well as in society. To rebel against a father was the ultimate blasphemy. But ancestor worship also had harmful effects. For example, it was a voracious land-grabber, monopolizing hills and other areas that might be of significant economic value; it forced young people into early marriages (often when they were in their low teens) so that they could offer sacrifices to the previous generation; it forbid people from traveling or leaving home for any length of time; it encouraged unsanitary conditions and the spread of disease by keeping the remains of the deceased at home; and it solidified the low position of women since they could not perform the sacrifices or carry on the family line.[160]

Gale used his long experience in Korea to provide information on a number of other topics. Speaking of the Korean character, he mentioned that the people were spendthrifts, not misers. When Koreans desired money, they usually wanted it in order to entertain friends. While they budgeted as little money as possible for necessities, they did not mind squandering large amounts on luxuries.[161] Compared with western countries, Korea was quiet; in fact, it was poetically nicknamed the "land of the reposeful silence." Korea was so quiet that it lured people, including

158. Gale, *Korea in Transition*, pp. 127-128.
159. Gale, *Korea in Transition*, p. 67.
160. Gale, *Korea in Transition*, pp. 75-77.
161. Gale, *Korea in Transition*, pp. 109-110.

foreigners, into a restful mood. The noise that was to be heard came mainly from the ironing sticks wielded by women, but even that tended to be soporific. The middle of Seoul remained reasonably quiet because there were no noisy pavements in the city.[162] Westerners quickly realized that education was the supreme object of Korean ambition. The course of study, which was based on a set of Chinese texts, was long and arduous. If a man was lucky, after twenty or so years he passed the official examination and became a recognized scholar. But what kind of person had he turned into? "From long contact with imperious and opinionated teachers, he had grown perfect in the matter of respect to seniors, his downsittings and uprisings are all in accordance with eternal law, his manner of deportment would delight a czar or imperial Mogul, his powers of concentration and attention are remarkable, his refinement of bearing most distinguished, and in forms of expression and dignity he could teach a prince. Within certain fixed limits he is a poet, a prose writer, a dreamer, a dream. It seems like sacrilege to break into this old and interesting world, but ... there is no hope for it."[163] This kind of education was merely another aspect of the old that was gradually giving way to the new. Gale also listed what he considered the seven hardships missionaries would have to face in Korea: sitting on the heated floor, sleeping on the heated floor, hot and spicy foods, crowds of men, vermin, sickness and death, and language.[164] If a person could overcome these difficulties, he or she was on the path to success.

When Lillias Horton (1851-1921) arrived in Korea in 1888, she probably never imagined that she would stay for fifteen years and play a role of some significance in the history of modern Korea. Horton came to Seoul from America to work both as a doctor and as a missionary—which was an ambitious undertaking for a woman in light of the hardships and primitive conditions prevalent in Korea at the time. In the following year, 1889, she married the Reverend H. G. Underwood, a missionary who was born in England but educated in the United States. On their honeymoon, which was more work than pleasure, they traveled many hundreds of miles in the rugged northern part of the country, treating the sick and converting the willing along the way. Since Mrs. Underwood was the first Western woman ever to visit many of the areas north of Seoul, she was assured of a friendly but curious reception wherever she went. Once back in Seoul, she and her husband settled down together in the capital and led very active lives for the next thirteen years. Mr. Underwood became so ill in 1903 that they decided to return to the US for rest and medical treatment. A year later, in 1904, Mrs. Underwood published a book entitled *Fifteen Years Among the Top-*

162. Gale, *Korea in Transition*, p. 17.
163. Gale, *Korea in Transition*, pp. 141-142. Of course, the traditional education was limited to upper class males.
164. Gale, *Korea in Transition*, pp. 166-171.

Knots or Life in Korea. This book, which is still in print, is considered a valuable contribution to the historical literature of late 19th century Korea.[165] In 1910 Mrs. Underwood and her husband returned to Korea, where they lived out the rest of their lives. The Underwood family left an important legacy in the fields of missionary work, medicine, and education.[166]

In true missionary spirit, Mrs. Underwood appreciated the opportunity given her to work in a country like Korea. In her book she said: "[We] thanked God for casting our lives in a land of so much beauty and among a people so kindly and teachable."[167] Upon entering Seoul for the first time, she, being a medical doctor, was particularly dismayed by the unsanitary conditions she encountered: the open sewers, filth, and vermin—all of which contributed to the spread of disease. And conditions went from bad to worse in the scorching heat of summer when the sights and odors were "unspeakable and undreamed of in civilized lands."[168] Nevertheless, it was not all bad; compared with the poor in New York or London, few people in Seoul, no matter how destitute they were, went hungry or cold. By the time she left Korea fifteen years later, the government had cleaned up Seoul and turned it into a reasonably pleasant place. While the capital, with its crowded and busy streets, taxed the limits of her endurance at times, the surrounding areas brought her much pleasure. There she discovered the beauty of the distant mountains and sleeping villages. Although she enjoyed the sights of the countryside, she did not enjoy staying in country inns, most of which were devoid of any basic comforts. Being of strong will and hearty constitution, she overcame the numerous inconveniences and traveled widely; moreover, she never allowed the unfavorable aspects of life in Korea to influence her overall impression of the country or the people.

As stated in the above quote, Mrs. Underwood praised the Koreans for their kindness. They were a people who did not bear malice; and, unless severely provoked, they were neither revengeful nor cruel. However, because foreigners looked and dressed different, they often became literally the target of curious crowds. This posed a problem for missionaries, whose job was to talk to the people about religion. When the missionary was a Western woman like Mrs. Underwood, the difficulties became even greater. In carrying out her duties, she was "thronged, besieged, invested" by all kinds of Koreans who had never before laid eyes on such an unusual creature. But she did not let such behavior, however irritating, dampen her enthusiasm. From experience, she learned it was best to show courage and

165. It was reprinted in 1987 by the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.

166. The Underwoods and their descendants were closely involved in the founding and building up of Yonsei University in Seoul.

167. L. H. Underwood, *Fifteen Years Among the Top-knots or Life in Korea* (hereafter abbreviated as *Fifteen Years*), pp. 32-33.

168. Underwood, *Fifteen Years*, p. 98.

unconcern; to act fearless proved to be the safest course. There was one character trait of Koreans that she was critical of. That was their noticeable lack of industry and thrift. When compared with the Japanese, for whom these were almost sacred virtues, the Koreans appeared lazy and prone to extravagance. Whereas a Japanese would spend one tenth of his earnings on food, a Korean would, on the contrary, spend ten times his earnings on food.[169] Looking at the women of Korea, Mrs. Underwood could not but feel sorry for their plight. They were not as a rule beautiful, she felt, because of the hardships they had to face in their everyday lives. Their world was a world of sorrow, hopelessness, hard labor, sickness, lovelessness, ignorance, and shame. As a result, by the time they reached the age of twenty-five, they were already old and worn.[170] In spite of the backwardness of much of Korean society, it was clear to the author that the people there did not "view with open-mouthed admiration everything European or American." Westerners often liked to deceive themselves into believing that Koreans worshipped the West, but that was not the case at all.[171]

One custom that elicited considerable comment from Mrs. Underwood was the male topknot. According to this centuries-old custom, all men had their hair combed into a topknot upon engagement or marriage. Later, with higher rank came a horsehair hat to put over the topknot. A man without a topknot had to endure various social slights, some minor and some not so minor. First, he was not considered a real man; furthermore, he was not addressed in the proper language, nor was he treated with due respect; finally, he was not recognized as a true family member who was qualified to pray and make offerings at ancestral shrines. The topknot was a badge of respectability; it was also an essential culture feature that distinguished Koreans from Japanese and Chinese. If a man lacked one, he felt naked and as low as a priest.[172] When the Japanese gained control in Korea, they required all men to cut their topknots, ostensibly in order to unite the two countries by merging the identities of the people. What it did in fact was to provoke indignation and hatred towards the Japanese, for Korean men resented such a blatant attempt to blot out one obvious sign of Korean national identity.

Mrs. Underwood had a close personal relationship with the Queen of Korea. Being a female and a doctor, she was from time to time summoned to the Palace to check on the Queen's health. Of course, this was a job that no male doctor was permitted to do because of the almost total seclusion of the sexes in society. During

169. Underwood, *Fifteen Years*, p. 96. Almost all foreign visitors to Korea criticized the people for their gluttonous eating habits (and prodigious capacity for strong drink.).
170. Underwood, *Fifteen Years*, p. 11.
171. Underwood, *Fifteen Years*, p. 118.
172. Underwood, *Fifteen Years*, pp. 167-169. Buddhist priests, who shaved their heads, were despised and barred from passing through the city gates.

her visits, the author saw in the Queen a woman of great strength and dignity. Here was a Korean woman who was both charming and intelligent, in spite of her Chinese-style education. Mrs. Underwood was always treated with warm-hearted hospitality by the Queen, who was in her opinion the perfect lady, regardless of the occasion.[173] As one might expect, Mrs. Underwood was deeply impressed, and exclaimed: "So simple, so perfectly refined were all her tastes in dress, it is difficult to think of her as belonging to a nation called half-civilized."[174] It was also obvious to the author that the Queen was motivated by strong patriotic feelings to serve the people. When the Queen was murdered in 1895 by agents of the Japanese, Mrs. Underwood was shocked and felt a deep personal loss, for she considered the Queen a genuine friend. In the aftermath of the incident, the Underwood family helped shield and nurture several of the remaining members of the royal family.

Both the King and the Queen enjoyed considerable popularity among the foreign missionaries in Korea. They treated them well and often granted audiences in order to learn what important events were taking place in other areas of the world. Although the government generally allowed the missionaries free rein in their proselytizing, it did enact regulations on several occasions to limit their activities. These regulations, however, were not strictly enforced and thus presented no major problems to Mrs. Underwood and others. For missionaries, the general atmosphere was conducive to what they were trying to accomplish, thanks to the benign policies of the Korean government. There were difficulties, to be sure, mostly resulting from cultural differences. The churches built and operated by the Westerners had to conform to Korean social practices. For example, the men and the women attending church had to sit on separate sides of a curtain which divided the room into two sections. This arrangement merely reflected the custom, so widespread in society, of keeping the sexes apart. The custom was symbolic of Korea, and the missionaries could ignore it only at their own peril.[175] Spreading religion among the upper classes posed unique difficulties which the missionaries had to contend with. The doctrines of the Western churches clearly prohibited polygamy, but many Korean gentlemen kept several wives and families. Then there was the ubiquitous Korean custom of performing ancestor worship and sacrifices—practices that at first grated against the basic beliefs of the missionaries.[176] Gradually, both sides made compromises, and the churches grew and prospered, due in large part to the sacrifices and efforts of missionaries like Mrs. Underwood who discovered their life's work in Korea.

The third and final missionary I wish to introduce was an American doctor named

173. Underwood, *Fifteen Years*, p. 24.
174. Underwood, *Fifteen Years*, p. 90.
175. Underwood, *Fifteen Years*, p. 236.
176. Underwood, *Fifteen Years*, p. 200.

Horace N. Allen (1852-1932). During his eighteen years in Korea, he served in a variety of positions: he was the first Protestant missionary in Seoul (1884); he was the founder of the first royal hospital (1885);[177] he was an advisor to the Korean court (1887); and he was Secretary and then Minister of the American Delegation in Seoul (1890-1905).[178] He contributed significantly to the modernization of the country: for example, he helped plan Korea's first railroad, first waterworks, first city-lighting system, first streetcar, and first modern mine.[179] In spite of his long years there, he was never really known in the West as an acute observer of Korean affairs. What knowledge he had about the country was limited primarily to the fields of politics and diplomacy; he lacked interest in other fields, such as art, literature, or history. And it was said that he possessed only a fair proficiency in the spoken language.[180] For all his shortcomings, however, he was a major figure among Westerners in Korea during this period. He wrote several articles and books, but the only one which attracted many readers was *Things Korean*, a collection of sketches concerning different facets of the country.[181] The book was first published in 1908 and is still available today in a reprinted version.

In describing Korea to Westerner readers, Allen made a lot of simple but basically accurate points. First, he stressed that the country represented an ancient civilization, even though it was seen by most Westerners at the turn of the century as merely a small and insignificant land. Long a hermit nation, Korea wanted only one thing: to avoid any unnecessary contact with the outside world. This attitude bred an exaggerated sense of self-importance, especially among the ruling class.[182] And yet, for the most part, he had a good opinion of the Korean people. As did many other foreigners, Allen found them to be polite. Since ancient times, politeness had been a compulsory trait; in fact, even into the 1880s the government had included a cabinet officer for Etiquette and Ceremony. The people in Korea treated the missionaries with great kindness, which was so different from the harsh reception they received in China. The missionaries were showered with special privileges and were even

177. Allen served for a time as physician to the royal court. It was easy enough for him to examine the King, but monitoring the Queen's health was more difficult, since women were secluded. In order to have her pulse checked, the Queen had to carefully wrap her hand and pass it through a screen; in order to have her tongue checked, she had to thrust it through a hole in a screen. Of course, a complete physical was out of the question. Horace N. Allen, *Things Korean*, p. 192.

178. It is interesting to note that Allen, during his long tenure as a US representative in Korea, served under four American presidents: Harrison, Cleveland, McKinley, and Roosevelt.

179. Fred H. Harrington, *God Mammon and the Japanese: Dr. Horace N. Allen and Korean-American Relations, 1884-1905* (hereafter abbreviated as *God Mammon and the Japanese*), p. 9.

180. Harrington, *God Mammon and the Japanese*, pp. 59-60.

181. Allen seems to have modeled his book on two others with similar titles: *Things Japanese* (1890) by Basil Hall Chamberlain and *Things Chinese* (1892) by J. Dyer Ball. Unfortunately, Allen's book did not measure up to the earlier two in either style or content.

182. Allen, *Things Korean*, pp. 52-53.

accorded the same respect as the yangban class.[183] That the Koreans were curious about Westerners was noticed and commented on by almost every foreigner traveling to the country. Allen explained that their curiosity was the result of excessive idleness. With lots of leisure time and few amusements, the Koreans were attracted by anything that was new and different; and unusual-looking people from faraway places certainly qualified as new and different.[184] That raised the question why they were so idle. The answer was that Koreans had few wants, which meant that they had little need to work hard. It was believed that the more you had the more you had to lose. Simple people had simple desires: warmth, food, tobacco, a little wine, and sons. Allen also saw them as a people who were overly hospitable and sanguine and were quick to confide in others; in addition they seemed childlike and unsophisticated in their schemes. Being honest to a fault, they were often cheated by unscrupulous foreigners. Their weak points included the love of gossip and procrastination.[185]

Allen supplied a revealing portrait of marriage and mourning in Korea. As we have seen, the Western idea of love did not figure into discussions of marriage. The custom in Korea was that marriages were arranged—an effective method of traditional matchmaking that resulted in few spinsters or bachelors. When a man got married, he was able to wear his hear in a topknot, which symbolized that he had reached manhood. From that time on, he was treated with respect. On the other hand, men who, for some reason or other, could not get married had to wear their hair in a braid, a clear sign that they were still boys. Consequently, they were spoken to in low forms of speech, even by children, and they passed their days lonely and friendless. For women, marriage offered fewer attractions, for they had to lead secluded lives, often filled with much suffering; one source of their grief and anger was the system that allowed husbands to keep concubines.[186] Koreans, no matter what class they belonged to, considered mourning a serious matter. When a parent died, the children had to mourn and perform the appropriate ceremonies for three years. This imposed such a heavy economic burden on families that it occasionally forced them into bankruptcy. Upon the death of a member of the royal family, the entire country observed three years of mourning. During that time, no one could play music and no one could get married; everyone had to lead simple lives. It was obvious to Allen that filial piety occupied a significant place in Korean society. Half in jest, he wrote: "...it is a land where the dead seem to receive more careful consideration than the living..."[187]

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183. Allen, *Things Korean*, pp. 116-117.
184. Allen, *Things Korean*, pp. 84-85.
185. Allen, *Things Korean*, pp. 28 and 131.
186. Allen, *Things Korean*, pp. 98 and 138-139. According to the author, mixed marriages between Koreans and Westerners received a surprisingly liberal reception, and in many cases turned out to be quite successful.
187. Allen, *Things Korean*, pp. 156-158.

What was Seoul like for foreigners in the 1890s? As one would expect, there was good and bad. To start with, Allen praised it for being so peaceful and safe that Westerners could go wherever they wanted without fear of unpleasant encounters. This was the opposite of what he and his wife had experienced during their stay in China. It was true that public roads in the city were filthy and reeked of indescribable smells; however, he insisted that the situation was no worse than that of the Chicago River. Everything, he seemed to be saying, was relevant. Sanitation in Seoul was, in Allen's words, "largely characterized by its absence." Such problems did not bother Koreans, who actually thrived living in the midst of them. They had become inured to everyday conditions that foreigners found intolerable and complained about in the strongest terms; furthermore, the Koreans, as a people, were a good example of the survival of the fittest.[188] Another factor at work here was a difference in perception: for Koreans, streets did not warrant any special attention, for they were nothing more than a way to get from place to place; for Westerners, however, streets made up an integral part of the landscape, and thus required a certain amount of upkeep and cleaning. According to Allen, Korean housing was not ideal by any means, but it was far better than that found in either Japan or China; the ondul system provided a primitive kind of central heating that was not available in the other two countries. As for food, most foreigners found the standard Korean diet far from satisfying. Rice might be healthy, but it was neither stimulating nor filling for Westerners. There was popular saying at the time that claimed: "Rice will not stick to the white man's ribs."[189] Kimchi, the national dish of Korea, also presented difficulties, primarily because of its smell. In all the early books I consulted, Allen was the only person who wrote in any detail about his reaction to it. Here was what he said:

> The odour of genuine kimchi in all its strength is something remarkable. I can best describe it by giving an account of my introduction to it. This happened in the early days, when I was conducting a hospital where neglected cases were plenty and bad odours were very common. Entering my home office one day I was met with a most penetrating smell such as I was not apparently acquainted with. Calling the servants I remonstrated with them for allowing patients to come there when they were under instructions to send them to the hospital. They declared no sick people had been admitted and when we entered, after opening the windows, to make an

188. Allen, *Things Korean*, pp. 108-109.
189. Allen, *Things Korean*, pp. 200-201.

> investigation, we found the odour coming from an unsuspicious looking jar left there by a grateful patient. It was a jar of the ripest and rankest of kimchi, which was at once ordered to be thrown out. From the perfumed breaths of the coolies, thereafter, it was evident they appreciated it even if I could not. Later I was induced to taste some of this compound made without garlic and it won me at once, leaving a memory that haunts me pleasantly still.[190]

Allen was a rarity among the first visitors to Korea—a person who actually liked kimchi.

The yangban also fascinated him, both in appearance and manner. They wore eyeglasses to show their scholarly achievement, jade ornaments on headbands to indicate their official rank, and unusual gowns that were split up the back. Pipes were an essential accessory, and the pipes were so long that someone else had to light them. All yangban exuded an attitude of pride and power, which they naturally assumed were the privileges of their class; they even had a special way of walking. There were several levels of yangban, and the lower had to defer to the higher: for instance, a yangban on foot was inferior to one riding a donkey, and both were inferior to one being carried in a palanquin. It was expected that yangban of all ranks would be condescending to people of the lower classes, from whom they required strict subservience. In most respects, they were content with life, thanks to the unequal social system which ranked them at the top. But the days of the traditional yangban were coming to an end, quickly in the cities and more gradually in the countryside.[191] This was something Allen applauded, realizing that Korea needed to institute major social as well as political changes in order to survive the troubling and dangerous times.

Assorted Others

> Land of the Morning Calm,—and evening rest
> And afternoon repose,—thy life's lot seems
> A dolce far niente undistressed
> By labor's pain or keen ambition's schemes.
> Keep thou thine ancient state; since countless years
> Have thrown no wave of progress on thy shores,
> Best now to stand aside, nor share the fears
> Of those who surge and clamor at they doors.
> Still let thy sons, like shadows of the past,

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190. Allen, *Things Korean*, pp. 120-121.
191. Allen, *Things Korean*, pp. 57-58 and pp. 80-83.

White-clad and silent, watch the distant strife
Nor seek to know, nor long the die to cast
Which shall with knowledge mar thy simple life.[192]

I doubt whether to most persons at home Korea is known
except as a land of white clothes and black hats.[193]

In this section, I shall look at a miscellaneous assortment of materials that provided readers of the period with images of Korea. First, let's glance at two articles from a major American magazine.[194] *National Geographic* published "Korea and the Koreans" by J. B. Bernadou in 1890. What was noteworthy was that the magazine, which had been founded only one year before, chose a piece on Korea to be its first article on an Asian country; writings on China and Japan would come to be included only later. The author was in the US Navy and had lived in Korea for over a year, where he devoted himself to learning the language. In keeping with the early format of the magazine, Bernadou described the geography, climate, mountains, rivers, mineral resources, and language of Korea. He merely presented the facts and avoided making subjective comments. On one point he differed from other visitors: he claimed that the roads in Korea were well maintained and in general were in good condition most of the year.[195] Regrettably, his article excluded any discussion about the Korean people themselves. It did contain, however, a simple but accurate explanation of the native language system, which was made up of the simple system of hangul and the complex characters from Chinese. Exactly ten years later, in 1900, *National Geographic* carried its second article on Korea. It was entitled "The Hermit Nation" and was written by Harrie Webster, a commander in the US Navy who had visited Korea (although it is not clear how long he stayed). Unlike Bernadou, Webster did more than just collect basic geographical facts; in his piece, he added some opinionated comments about the culture and the people. Koreans, he insisted, did not look like either Chinese or Japanese. For one thing, aquiline noses were common among Koreans. And not only was their skin color different, but also their eyes were less slanted than those of people in the other two countries.[196] Korea suffered from a high infant mortality rate because of the horrible sanitary conditions; those who survived were certainly the fittest of the race. What impressed the author

192. John D. Ford, *An American Cruiser in the East*, p. 278. The author wrote this poem about the Korea that existed before foreigners forced it to open its doors.
193. George, N. Curzon, *Problems of the Far East: Japan-Korea-China* (hereafter abbreviated as *Problems of the Far East*), p. xiii.
194. There were several magazines and scholarly journals in Korea, Japan, and China that included articles on Korea. But since they were not readily available in the West, their impact was minimal, and thus will not be discussed in this paper.
195. J. B. Bernadou, "Korea and the Koreans," *National Geographic* 1890 p. 237.
196. Harrie Webster, "The Hermit Nation," *National Geographic* 1900 p. 148. One wonders exactly how he arrived at this conclusion concerning the degree of slant.

was the South Gate in Seoul. With its skillful construction and beautiful decorations, it offered proof of the artistic ability of Korean craftsmen. Of the other arts, he saw little that interested him, except the bronze work, which he judged to be of high quality.[197] Webster also remarked on the Korean obsession with ancestor worship. It was so obsessive, in fact, that casting a stone at the grave of another person's father could lead to bloodshed. While filial piety was ubiquitous, religion was not. He wrote: "In religion the Korean must be marked with a minus sign. To all appearances, he has none."[198] In spite of his title "The Hermit Nation," Webster admitted that Korea had made noticeable progress since the early 1880s when the country first opened its doors to the representatives of Western civilization.

We now turn to those books that were not exclusively concerned with Korea, but included one or so chapters on the country. The authors usually visited Korea in the course of a longer journey. Although they might have spent only a brief time there, they often left stimulating and valuable accounts of Korea. Perhaps the most famous of this group was George N. Curzon, a scholar-statesman who visited the country twice, once in 1887 and again in 1892. Two years after the second trip, in 1894, he published *Problems of the Far East*, which became a popular guide to political and social conditions in Korea and seven other Asian countries. Curzon devoted four chapters, the largest part of the book, to Korea because he felt that except for Tibet it was the least known part of Asia.[199] To his mind, there were few countries that quenched the traveler's thirst for novelty—but Korea was one such place. What made it so novel? To start with, it was extremely exclusive, but at the same time it did not show any real hostility to foreigners. It had in the distant past given science, religion, art, and Chinese characters to Japan, but it now possessed few of those itself. The country was rich in natural resources but short of money. And the Koreans were a people of physical vigor but moral inertness.[200] Seclusion and subservience had contributed to the country's poverty and had made the people inert, listless, and apathetic. There was no incentive to work. While the upper classes were polite, cultivated, well mannered, and friendly to foreigners, the lower classes were good-tempered, excitable, cheerful, and talkative. In spite of their good qualities, all classes were prone to inaction.[201] Curzon saw the Korean government as an example of the "unredeemed Oriental type." That is to say, the king was a figurehead in a mysterious palace; around the king were rings of eunuchs, ministers, and officials; the

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197. Webster, "The Hermit Nation," pp. 151-153.
198. Webster, "The Hermit Nation," p. 152.
199. The author felt that most books on Korea were second-hand accounts, usually ephemeral and of little lasting value. For example, he criticized Griffis' *The Hermit Nation* for its "obsolete descriptions" and Lowell's *Choson* for its "rhapsodical" contents.
200. Curzon, *Problems of the Far East*, pp. 85-86.
201. Curzon, *Problems of the Far East*, pp. 98-99.

army was feeble and the treasury was empty; and the people lived in dire poverty.[202] As for Korea's future, the only hope of preserving its national existence was to maintain a close relationship with China, for independence was a mere phantom, especially in the face of a strong and aggressive Japan.[203]

Henry Norman's *The Peoples and Politics of the Far East* came out in 1895. According to the subtitle, it was an account of "Travels and Studies in the British, French, Spanish and Portuguese Colonies, Siberia, China, Japan, Korea, Siam and Malaysia." The author spent four years in the Far East. Although he only stayed a short time in each place, it was, in his estimation, long enough to learn what was distinctive about each society. In the book he allotted three chapters, or a total of about fifty pages, to Korea. Some of his comments differed considerably from those of other observers. When traveling by pony from Won-san to Seoul, he quickly became the center of attention everywhere he went; however, that did not phase him in the least: "...the look of overwhelming surprise that passed over each face as I came into sight was wonderfully flattering."[204] There were two lessons he learned from his trip across Korea. First, one had to accept and adapt to local standards of hygiene, for the instinctive dislike of being dirty was simply a matter of convention and not a universal absolute. Second, one had to abandon one's squeamishness about certain animals and insects, for such a feeling was more often than not based on foolish fears.[205] One point the author dwelled on was the decline of the country. Although Korea had taught the art of porcelain to Japan hundreds of years earlier, decent examples of the art were now nowhere to be found in Seoul. Although Japanese generals had led 130,000 soldiers in an unsuccessful attempt to conquer Korea at the end of the 16th century, a small company of US marines could throw Seoul into a panic at the present time. And although Korea had enjoyed peace for much of its history, the Chinese and the Japanese were now fighting over the country and making it into a battlefield. In short, Korea had lost much of its traditional glory.[206] It was clear that society was in an advanced state of decay; there was rottenness, inertness, and stagnation everywhere. And the main culprit was the class system, which had stifled ambition and had caused people to lose interest in personal or commercial success. The Korean people had excellent possibilities but were not taking full advantage of them. In Norman's opinion, what was needed was the help of Japan; that was the only solution under present circumstances.[207] He went on to say: "If it had not been for the Japanese, Korea would still be the Hermit Kingdom, without a trace of trade or

202. Curzon, *Problems of the Far East*, p. 165.
203. Curzon, *Problems of the Far East*, p. 217.
204. Henry Norman, *The Peoples and Politics of the Far East*, p. 334.
205. Norman, *The Peoples and Politics of the Far East*, p. 335.
206. Norman, *The Peoples and Politics of the Far East*, p. 341.
207. Norman, *The Peoples and Politics of the Far East*, p. 346.

the possibility of improvement."[208] This was not an unusual stance by any means; most observers of Korean affairs at the time subscribed to such pro-Japanese sentiments.

A number of other books contained chapters that treated Korea in an even more limited manner. While the books themselves were often voluminous and looked authoritative, in actuality they offered little of value; however, they deserve comment, however brief it might be, because they were read and did achieve a certain degree of popularity. A. H. Keane wrote a two-volume tome entitled *Asia*, the first volume of which covered Northern and Eastern Asia. Published in 1896, it was perhaps, in its time, the major compendium of geography and travel for that area of the world. Keane put the twenty-page Korea section in the chapter on China, due to the fact that Korea had until recent years always been a vassal state of China. His account, which relied heavily on the books of earlier travelers such as Basil Hall and A. E. J. Cavendish, was a concise geography of the country and little else. Readers learned that Korea had an absolute monarchy modelled on the Chinese example and a hereditary aristocracy indigenous to the country—a combination that resulted in continuous fights over succession. There were two social classes, the privileged and the inferior, which Keane compared to the Hindu caste system. Since the privileged class often abused their rights, the inferior class suffered injustice and cruelty and the country suffered disorders and revolts; patriotism was weak, if it existed at all. The situation got so out of hand that the Japanese had to intervene in 1895 to lessen the oppression, which had grown intolerable.[209]

In 1898 John D. Ford published his *An American Cruiser in the East*, an account of his extensive travels in Asian waters as a naval officer. Over a period of a month or two he visited most of the major cities in Korea, coming away with favorable impressions of the people and less favorable impressions of the places. According to Ford, Koreans were a brave people who made excellent friends but dangerous foes. Although they resembled the Japanese in manners, they were more frank than either the Japanese or the Chinese.[210] They seemed both innocent and inquisitive in a childlike way. Naturally good-natured, they were a people generous in their hospitality. They were also characterized by their deep appreciation for the beauties of nature. If they had a fault, it would have to be their love of gossip.[211] The men were stalwart, with well-formed heads, handsome features, and a free and easy carriage. The women, or at least those in the upper classes, were famous for their grace, wit, and beauty; in addition, they led satisfied lives and enjoyed considerable

208. Norman, *The Peoples and Politics of the Far East*, p. 350.
209. A. H. Keane, *Asia Vol. 1: Northern and Eastern Asia*, pp. 334-337.
210. Ford, *An American Cruiser in the East*, p. 281.
211. Ford, *An American Cruiser in the East*, pp. 269-270.

rights.[212] When Ford landed in Chemulpo, he could not believe his eyes, for it was the filthiest place he had ever come upon. He wondered how human beings could live in such conditions. It was his hope that the Japanese would teach the Koreans about clean habits. If they did, they would have "done a noble work for humanity."[213] Seoul was dirty, but at the same time it was picturesque and novel. The author felt that no city in the world equaled it for quaintness. And it had sights worth seeing, for example, the gates and the marble pagoda.[214] The food, however, he could do without: he stopped at one shop that served the "vilest messes that ever ruined the stomach of a human being."[215]

Frederic W. Unger was a war correspondent who wrote *Russia and Japan* in 1904. The book, which was a history of the conflict between the two countries, included a chapter on Korea. What he noticed during his stay in the country was that the people there loved their pleasures and were not inclined to wage war. On the contrary, they were good, in fact very good, at the art of graceful inactivity. Korea, due to its long history of contact with China, had made much progress in the arts. This was clear from the skill Koreans exhibited in their weaving, pottery, jewelry, and shipbuilding. The continental element in Korean culture predominated, reflecting China's strong influence on politics and religion. In spite of this, Korea had remained secluded from all other outside forces, and it had long resisted building any close relationships with foreign countries. The author believed that this policy could only harm Korea.[216] Although he saw a few faint glimmers of hope, he insisted that radical change was necessary. Without it, the regeneration of Korea was impossible; and without it, Korea would need to be controlled by another country—Japan, China, or Russia. At present Korea was in an almost hopeless position, for it lacked the power and resources to prevent encroachment by surrounding countries.[217] Perhaps it was only natural, he concluded, that Japan would end up colonizing Korea because of its proximity and the similar character of its people.

Another book published in the same year, 1904, was *Manchuria and Korea*, which was written by H. J. Whigham. The author, who visited Korea in the summer of 1901, planned the book as an analysis of current political conditions. While not producing a work of great depth, Whigham did bring a few slightly different nuances to the growing debate on what to do about Korea. First, he admitted that one could only like and feel sorry for the Korean people, for they were so patient and long-

212. Ford, *An American Cruiser in the East*, pp. 262-264. Ford's views about the rights of women differed a great deal from those of other visitors to Korea.
213. Ford, *An American Cruiser in the East*, p. 241.
214. Ford, *An American Cruiser in the East*, p. 256.
215. Ford, *An American Cruiser in the East*, p. 243.
216. Frederic W. Unger, *Russia and Japan*, pp. 272-275.
217. Unger, *Russia and Japan*, pp. 282-283.

suffering. They were certainly not aggressive, nor were they anti-foreign. Unlike the Chinese, they did not have a conceited view of themselves; far from it, they were an extremely pleasant people.[218] But Korea had become "the happy hunting-ground of concessionists," and in this sense it was a microcosm of the East. The author even claimed that "one progressive power could take her [Korea] and govern her, and make a country of her in a few years." That this had not yet happened was simply due to the jealously and continued bickering of the great powers.[219] To protect themselves and their country, Koreans would have to change their bad habits, but this was difficult, if not impossible, for them to do. The source of the problem was an inflexible society with unusually strong social restrictions. Because of this, Whigham believed that changing Koreans would be one hundred times harder than changing Chinese. His final statement revealed his disappointment in the people: "The Korean has absolutely nothing to recommend him save his good nature."[220]

Thomas F. Millard published *The New Far East* in 1906. Here was a book promoting a viewpoint that was quite different from most of those discussed so far. In short, the author was strongly anti-Japanese, for he did not approve of their attitude towards Koreans.[221] Not only did the Japanese look down upon the Koreans, but they also mistreated them. There were thousands of petty incidents in which the Koreans were treated like the inhabitants of an occupied country. And to make matters worse, those who were abused had no effective redress.[222] Furthermore, Millard did not trust the Japanese to carry out their promises in Korea. He wrote: "There is not the slightest indication of any intention on the part of Japan to abide by her frequently expressed intention to maintain the independence of the Kingdom [of Korea]."[223] To claim, as the Japanese did, that Korea was independent was nothing but a fiction, for Korea had become a protectorate of Japan. While it was true that average Koreans had experienced some changes for the better, it was also true that they had come to hate Japan and everything Japanese.[224]

The Encyclopaedia Britannica was probably the most highly respected and authoritative reference work of the period written in English. Although the Ninth Edition (1875-1889) did not treat Korea at all, the Tenth Edition (1902-1903)

218. H. J.Whigham, *Manchuria and Korea*, p. 184.
219. Whigham, *Manchuria and Korea*, pp. 184 and 186.
220. Whigham, *Manchuria and Korea*, p. 185.
221. The most famous anti-Japanese book on Korea around this time was probably *The Tragedy of Korea* by a Canadian reporter named F. A. McKenzie. The book, which first came out in 1908, was based on the author's two visits to Korea in 1904 and 1906; and, for the most part, it described Korea and Koreans in a very favorable light. For McKenzie, however, the tragedy of Korea was that it "slept on" in the face of great danger and lost its independence (to Japan) as a result. The Japanese authorities banned the book because it was so fiercely critical of the way Japan was treating Korea.
222. Thomas F. Millard, *The New Far East*, pp. 111-114.
223. Millard, *The New Far East*, p. 105.
224. Millard, *The New Far East*, pp. 109-110.

included a four-page article written by Hugh Webster, a librarian at the University of Edinburgh.[225] It appears that in writing the article the author relied primarily on M. Dallet's *Histoire de l'eglise de la Coree*, an important source, for sure, but one published more than a quarter of a century earlier. Basic geographical and political information took up more than half of the four pages; however, there was some mention of the workings of Korean society. For example, readers were told that education was based for the most part on the examination system developed in China. One difference was that after a person successfully passed all the tests, he had to endure a "burlesque initiation," during which his face was stained with ink and covered with flour and he was subjected to other whimsical insults. But by the late 19th century the system was malfunctioning and was in an advanced state of decay, mainly because there was so much corruption in the awarding of degrees. In the section on religion, the author stressed that Buddhism, which had once been the official religion of the country, had given place to Confucianism and ancestor worship. As a result, Buddhism had lost its popularity; there were few remaining pagodas and a dwindling number of monks, most of whom lacked both learning and influence. Not unrelated to this was the fact that astrologers and fortune-tellers did a thriving business in every part of the land. The article made it clear that women held a very low position in Korean society. Basically, they had no legal rights and no political or social power. This meant that they lived "in a state of lifelong pupilage." However, except for upper class women, they did enjoy a large amount of freedom and were not secluded. Marriage was nothing more than "an affair of etiquette," for the families settled everything in advance without any input from the bride and bridegroom. While women were ignored, children were universally adored—one of the better characteristics of the Koreans. And to be filial was the one ironclad rule that governed all relationships in society.[226]

The Eleventh Edition (1910-1911), famed for its unparalleled literary style and authoritative articles, many by world-renown scholars, allotted fifteen pages to Korea and treated the country in much greater detail than did the previous edition.[227] The coverage was more reliable, thanks to the rapidly increasing number of primary and secondary sources dealing with Korea that were available by this time in Western languages. For the most part, the two authors, Isabella Bird and Osbert J. R. Howarth, described the country in a straightforward manner; however, they did include some opinionated comments that probably left a distinct impression on readers. For example, in the section on race, they wrote: "The Koreans are distinct

225. The names Hugh Webster and Harrie Webster look similar, but they were two different people.

226. "Corea," *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 10th Edition, p. 393.

227. In the 11th Edition, China got 65 pages while Japan received a generous total of 119 pages. The difference in coverage mirrored the relative importance of the three countries in world affairs at that time.

from both Chinese and Japanese in physiognomy, though dark straight hair, dark oblique eyes, and a tinge of bronze in the skin are always present. The cheek-bones are high; the nose inclined to flatness; the mouth thin-lipped and refined among patricians, and wide and full-lipped among plebeians; the ears are small, and the brow fairly developed. The expression indicates quick intelligence rather than force and mental calibre."[228] Concerning industries, the authors explained that because of the poor population there were few manufactured items of high quality, the only exception being paper products; furthermore, they flatly dismissed the arts as being nil.[229] In the section on law, readers were told that up until 1895 the Korean criminal code was "scarcely equalled for barbarity." From that year on, the Japanese, who had already begun to take control over various governmental functions, instituted changes and reforms that improved the overall situation. In this and other places in the article, Japanese policies in Korea received a favorable evaluation from the authors.[230] As for religion, Buddhist monks were said to be "ignorant, immoral and despised." While Confucianism was the official cult, Shamanism was the popular cult. The latter had such a strong hold on the minds of the people that "the belief in demons, mostly malignant, keeps the Koreans in constant terror, and much of their substance is spent on propitiations."[231] As one would expect, the encyclopedia extracted the essentials from the accumulated knowledge known about Korea at the time and, with only a few exceptions, presented the summary in a fairly accurate manner.

Finally, two other books deserve mention in this survey. In 1914 T. Philip Terry published *Terry's Japanese Empire*, which included a seventy-page section on Korea. This was the first detailed guidebook in English for travelers to Korea. Terry, an Englishman who had resided in Japan for twelve years, visited Seoul and several other cities to carry out research for the book. His sentiments were unmistakably pro-Japanese. Almost everything he saw in Korea he described in negative terms; moreover, he judged the country overall to be inferior to Japan. First, however, let us point out the few things he liked. Terry thought that the climate was of "unsurpassed excellence," which meant that foreigners did not have to worry about climatic maladies. He even admitted it was preferable to that of Japan—the only such favorable comparison in the book. That Korea was known as the Land of the Morning Calm made perfect sense, for the early mornings were beautiful beyond

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228. "Korea," *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th Edition, p. 909.
229. "Korea," *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th Edition, p. 910. Mrs. Bird probably wrote this section since she said almost exactly the same thing on p. 9 of *Korea and Her Neighbors*. In fact, much of the article seems to have been taken directly from her book.
230. "Korea," *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th Edition, p. 910. In describing annexation, the article matter-of-factly stated in the very last sentence (p. 912): "This was effected peacefully in August 1910, the emperor of Korea by formal treaty surrendering his country and crown."
231. "Korea," *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th Edition, p. 911.

description.[232] The Korean people, Terry said, were in many respects unique in the world, a statement not meant to be complimentary. For example, they were economical in the use of water and the truth, but extravagant in their intake of alcohol. They had a tendency to steal, which was easy enough to do when wearing their native costume with its massive folds of material. Although conceited about their own country, Koreans disliked everything foreign and were suspicious of the outside world. They were afflicted with the Oriental vices of "duplicity, cunning, and general untrustworthiness." Lazy in the extreme, they were born dawdlers, gamblers, and brawlers. Having no ambition resulted in their having no extra money, so they ended up freeloading off relatives and friends. What they liked to do was gossip, a useless activity on which they wasted lots of time. They were inveterate smokers and voracious eaters. When it came to food, quantity was more important that quality, and gluttony preferable to moderation. In their personal habits, hygiene counted for little; they seemed content with dirt and discomfort. They were a cruel people, especially in their treatment of animals. When disputes arose, they often settled them with stone fights, a dangerous and sometimes deadly competition peculiar to Korea.[233] He believed their civilization was one of a low order.[234] As for women, they occupied an inferior position in society and suffered deplorable conditions; in addition, they were "ill-bred and unmannerly, far removed from the gracefulness and charm of the same class in Japan."[235] Terry also made some scathing remarks about the Korean language. He said: "The tongue is a difficult one for foreigners to acquire; unlike Japanese, it is full of ungallant epithets which the proletariat use with scandalous inelegancy. Scalding invective is their strong point, and sensitive persons who have to overhear them are fortunate in not knowing the language."[236] According to the author, Korea was making progress in a number of areas, thanks to the aid and guidance provided by Japan. Japan helped make Koreans healthier by improving their water system; Japan helped the city of Pusan abandon its decadence and insularity by contributing to its economic revival; Japan helped the agricultural sector move into the 20th century by introducing modern techniques; and, most significantly, Japan reformed the country's corrupt and inefficient government by turning Korea into a protectorate. All in all, Japan had

232. T. Philip Terry, *Terry's Japanese Empire*, p. 705.

233. In Korea stone fights had a history dating back hundreds of years. On numerous occasions and for a variety of reasons, the boys and men of different villages engaged in these dangerous battles, throwing stones at each other until one side retreated. Later these fights became a kind of spectator sport, with the King even attending from time to time. The Japanese colonial government abolished them in 1910. Keith Pratt and Richard Rutt, *Korea: A Historical and Cultural Dictionary*, p. 447.

234. Terry, *Terry's Japanese Empire*, pp. 719-720.

235. Terry, *Terry's Japanese Empire*, pp. 722-723.

236. Terry, *Terry's Japanese Empire*, pp. 725-726. This was an interesting comment coming from a person who apparently did not even speak the language.

effected more changes in a few short years than Korea had even dreamed of during the previous 2000 years.[237] The first guidebook to Korea was symbolic of the times: it showed little objectivity and almost no sympathy.

In the same year, 1914, the well-known American left-wing writer Jack London (1879-1916) published a long novel entitled *The Star Rover*, in which Korea and Korean history were woven into the story line.[238] This marked the first time in the West that a reputable author had used material about Korea in a work of fiction.[239] London had developed an interest in the country after spending some time there in 1904 reporting on the Russo-Japanese War. The novel had a bizarre plot, to be sure. An American professor named Darrell Standing killed a man and was sent to prison. Later, he was sentenced to hang for participating in a prison riot. While in solitary confinement, he dreamed of six earlier reincarnations, one of which dealt with Korea. This story, which comprised only three of the twenty-two chapters, was loosely based on the experiences of two adventurers who visited Korea, Hendrik Hamel in 1665 and Ernest Oppert in 1867. In London's version, an Englishman named Adam Strong was washed up on the shores of Korea after being shipwrecked several times on different islands. In the Land of the Morning Calm, he took the name Yi Yong-ik (which meant the Mighty One) and made friends with the powerful official Yunsan. Later, upon marrying Lady Om of the princely house of Min, he was appointed governor of seven provinces. The good times soon turned into the bad, and he and Lady Om were forced to become beggars. The two lived as man and wife for forty years, although along the way they experienced their share of suffering and pleasure, shame and glory. While the story itself was not particularly powerful, the images of Korea and Asia were clear and strong. One was that Koreans were cruel, for they tortured the Western prisoners by beating or starving them to death. Then we are told that the same was true of all Asiatics. "The Asiatic is a cruel beast, and delights in spectacles of human suffering."[240] Another was that of the inevitable relationship between the Asian woman and the Western man. The beautiful Lady Om could not resist the charms, physical and otherwise, of the Englishman. "Not even in my sleep," she said, "have I ever dreamed there was such a man as you on his two legs upstanding in the world."[241] And another was that of the plotting Asiatic. "It takes the cold patience of the Asiatic to conceive and execute huge and complicated

237. Terry, *Terry's Japanese Empire*, pp. 699 and 716.

238. Most reference books mistakenly give 1915 as the year of publication. That was the year London copyrighted the book under his own name. Actually, the first edition of the novel was published the previous year, with the copyright being held by The Star Co.

239. James S. Gale wrote a missionary novel about Korea entitled *The Vanguard*. It was published in 1904, but never achieved much success. Gale was not a novelist, by any stretch of the imagination.

240. Jack London, *The Star Rover*, p. 176.

241. Jack London, *The Star Rover*, p. 188.

conspiracies."[242] London did not cast Korea in an attractive light. Perhaps this should not surprise us, since the author held anti-Oriental prejudices and expressed fear of the "Yellow Peril." His socialist internationalism extended only to the white man. He clearly expressed that belief when he said: "I am first of all a white man and only then a Socialist."[243] In spite of the author's emphasis on the exotic, this first attempt at employing Korean-related material in fiction failed to excite much interest among readers. The book did not sell well when it first came out; in fact, it sold the fewest number of copies of any of London's books.[244]

Conclusion

Until the 1870s and 1880s, when Korea officially opened its doors to the outside world, Westerners knew next to nothing about this strange land, so isolated in time and space. What was known came from a very limited number of books and letters written, for the most part, by French missionaries and shipwrecked sailors. The overall impression they gave was that Korea was an unfriendly and dangerous land in dire need of Western guidance—both in spiritual and worldly matters.[245] After the bilateral treaties were signed, foreigners could legally enter the country, travel around, and see for themselves what the "Hermit Nation" really looked like. Some stayed only briefly, while others spent years or decades living and working among the Korean people. These early guests, whose numbers included travelers, journalists, scholars, and missionaries, should be counted among the pioneers of Korea-watching. It was only natural that they wrote books about their experiences in this unknown land. There were various types of people who left various types of accounts: some critical and some sympathetic; some accurate and some unreliable. These accounts made an important contribution to the way Westerners perceived Korea in that period and later.

As we have seen, most of the foreign observers noticed the same things during their days or months or years in the country. Among the multitude of impressions they recorded, a small group stood out as particularly significant and powerful. The first image was that the vast majority of Koreans lived in poverty; moreover, it was a poverty filled with dirt, filth, and decay. Coming, as they did, from relatively modernized countries like Britain and America, the foreigners compared what they had left in the West with what they found in Korea. And, due to its long years of self-imposed isolation, Korea lagged far behind Japan and the West, especially in the material aspect. The second image was that Korean society remained primitive in its

242. Jack London, *The Star Rover*, p. 196.
243. This quotation appeared in Richard O'Connor, *Jack London: A Biography*, pp. 219-220.
244. Recently, the book was reprinted in a new series of literary classics and introduced in glowing terms by Leslie Fiedler. Jack London, *The Star Rover*, Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1999.
245. Craig S. Coleman, *American Images of Korea*, pp. 28-29.

treatment of women and in its obsession with ancestor worship. Westerners always emphasized the fact that women held a grossly inferior position in Korea, their arduous lives often resembling those of slaves. To the foreigners, most of whom were either Christian believers or missionaries, the Korean practice of ancestor worship was at best a troublesome set of overly strict rules and was at worst a dangerous custom closely akin to paganism. The third image was that the yangban did not serve any valuable function, for they had become a parasitic class that lived off others and flaunted their superiority over those lower in rank and family background.

The fourth image was that the people of Korea as well as the country itself were basically static. For the overwhelming majority, a life of inactivity seemed preferable to a life of vigorous action. The Koreans did not exert themselves to the fullest for cultural and economic reasons. To show ambition was never considered a virtue in a society so deeply indoctrinated with Confucian ideology; in addition, the fear of being squeezed by the upper classes effectively dampened any desire people might have had to produce more than was necessary. In order for Korea to shed its static nature and begin to develop into a modern state, the government had to overhaul a large number of backward or outdated institutions within the country. Of course, such a major undertaking required time, money, and expertise, all of which were in short supply at this time. The fifth image was that Korea had no choice but to rely on Japan for help in its attempt to modernize. To most observers of the time, Japan, for geographical, historical, and cultural reasons, was the country best qualified to provide the necessary guidance that Korea so desperately needed. But this was by no means a unanimous opinion; some Westerners fervently believed that complete independence offered the best course of action. And the sixth image was a very positive one: the Korean countryside was beautiful and the Korean people were friendly, kind, and hospitable.

Korea fascinated the early visitors from the West. The people mentioned in this paper provided basic information about Korea and thus stimulated a growing interest in the country among Westerners. For decades to come, through their writings and activities, they set the terms for discussions of Korea. The country had finally become a part of the Western imagination.

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