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## The background and development of the 1871 Korean-American incident: a case study in cultural conflict

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF Robert Ray Swartout, Jr. for the Master of Arts in History presented May 17, 1974.

Title: The Background and Development of the 1871 Korean-American

Incident: A Case Study in Cultural Conflict

APPROVED BY MEMBERS OF THE THESIS COMMITTEE:

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This study is an attempt to combine the disciplines of Asian history and United States diplomatic history in analyzing the 1871 Korean-American Incident. The Incident revolves around the Low-Rodgers expedition to Korea, and the subsequent breakdown of peaceful negotiations into a military clash of arms.

To describe the Incident as merely another example of American "imperialism," or as a result of narrow-minded Korean isolationism, is to oversimplify its causes and miss the larger implications that can be learned from it. A basic premise of this paper is that the 1871 Incident is an example of East-West cultural conflict. As such, the forces that helped to determine the attitudes

and behavior of both the Americans and Koreans were of a broad nature reflecting their respective cultural differences. At times, these differences were so basic and general that the specialist in history can easily overlook them.

To better understand this conflict of cultures, Chapters II and III discuss elements of Korean and American diplomacy before the 1860's, and how their unique experiences led to widely different attitudes toward foreign relations. Chapter II concentrates on traditional Chinese-Korean relations, and their effect upon Korea's approach to diplomacy; Chapter III emphasizes the nature of America's first contacts with East Asia, and the important influence of the activities of the United States in the Mediterranean region.

Chapters IV and V deal with domestic politics in Korea and the United States, and how these internal conditions affected each nation's attitude toward the other. Chapter VI is a detailed description of the immediate events that culminated in the 1871 Incident. Chapters I and VII are the introduction and conclusion.

In researching this paper, government documents, memoirs, diaries, personal accounts, contemporary newspapers, books, and articles were all used. When writing the chapters that deal primarily with Korea, Korean sources have been used as much as possible.

The Korean and American officials, though communicating in the same language (Chinese characters), were negotiating from completely different cultural norms. Both sides felt that their positions and actions were morally justified. In studying the official documents concerning the Incident, the reader is

indeed impressed by the sincerity and honesty of all parties involved. In this sense, it is difficult to label one group "guilty" and the other group "innocent." It must be remembered, however, that the Americans were carrying out naval activities in Korean waters, and not the Koreans in American waters.

The student of history is reminded that American-East Asian relations, unlike most American-European relations, must constantly confront and overcome wide cultural differences. To ignore these differences, or to impose one's own cultural views on another society, is to invite misunderstanding, raise suspicions, and increase the possibility of conflict.

THE BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENT  
OF THE 1871 KOREAN-AMERICAN INCIDENT:  
A CASE STUDY IN CULTURAL CONFLICT

by

ROBERT RAY SWARTOUT, JR.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS  
in  
HISTORY

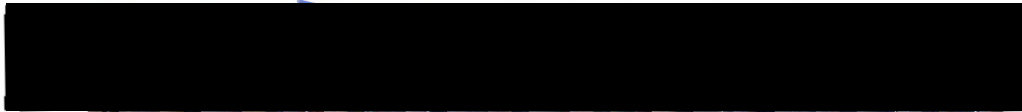
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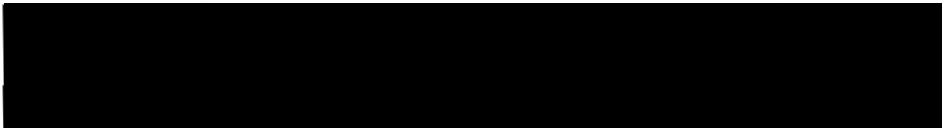
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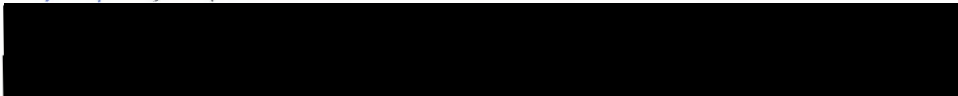
  
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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Studies to date involving the 1871 Korean-American Incident have contained two major drawbacks. Firstly, those that have dealt specifically with the Incident, though doing an excellent service of chronicling the immediate events, have for the most part not delved into the larger national and international factors that ultimately led to the 1871 events.<sup>1</sup> The general lack of interpretive themes is one of the results of this narrow concentration.

Secondly, studies that have dealt with a larger scope of history have too often represented a particular national point of view. Though these may be basically objective works, their national or regional focus has limited their usefulness. Books about American diplomatic history have described in detail the American involvement in East Asia, and in pre-treaty Korea, but they lack any deep analysis of Asian motives and reactions.<sup>2</sup> Books about Korean history

<sup>1</sup>For example, E. M. Cable, "United States-Korean Relations, 1866-1871," Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, XXVIII (1938), 1-230; Albert Castel and Andrew C. Nahm, "'Our Little War with the Heathen'," American Heritage, XIX, No. 3 (April, 1968), 19-23, 72-75; Choi Soo-bock, "Korea's Response to America and France in the Decade of the Taewon'gun, 1864-1873," in Korea's Response to the West, ed. by Jo Yung-hwan (Kalamazoo, Mich.: The Korea Research and Publications, Inc., 1971), pp. 109-140.

<sup>2</sup>For example, John W. Foster, American Diplomacy in the Orient

likewise have commented on the coming of the Western nations and its affect upon Korea, but have paid little attention to Western motivations, other than making some broad generalizations.<sup>3</sup> Too frequently the Westerners seem to appear out of nowhere, play their role in Korea, and then once again disappear from the scene. Criticism of these works is not intended; a book about Korean history cannot possibly present a detailed background discussion of American history. Such limitations are inherent in any national historical work.

This study then is an attempt to bridge the gap between American-oriented and Korean-oriented studies. At the same time, the 1871 Incident will be viewed, not as an isolated case, but as a representative study contrasting the basic differences between American and Korean diplomatic positions and methods in the early and mid nineteenth century.

Works that concentrate solely on the immediate events of a particular incident often overlook some of the larger historical implications. This has been especially true in the study of American-East Asian relations. Many of the case studies in this area have ignored perhaps the most essential element of all: East-West cultural conflict. That there was (and still is) a conflict of cultures has long been evident. Possibly its obviousness has led people to overlook

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(Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1903); Tyler Dennett, Americans in East Asia (3rd printing; New York: Barnes and Noble, 1963); Thomas A. Bailey, A Diplomatic History of the American People (8th edition; New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1969).

<sup>3</sup>For example, Sin Sōk-ho, et al., ed., Han'guk Hyōndae Sa (The History of Modern Korea) 8 vols. (Seoul: Sin-gu Publishing Co., 1969); Han Woo Keun, The History of Korea (Seoul: The Eul-Yoo Publishing Co., 1970); Sohn

the conflict's pervasive importance. At any rate, Western historians have tended to analyze American-East Asian relations in terms of Western methods and models. Using such techniques, the international relationships in Asia are often described simply in traditional political-economic terms.

Contrary to this approach, Edward D. Graham declares that the notion of a confrontation between radically dissimilar cultures in which the incidents may differ in time but in which the fundamental configurations of assumption and attitude remain much the same may in the end be the most fruitful way of understanding the whole course of American-East Asian relations.<sup>4</sup>

John K. Fairbank, in his article "'American China Policy' to 1898: A Misconception," states essentially the same idea.<sup>5</sup>

Beginning with the early nineteenth century, the Europeans and Americans saw the Asian cultures as different from and inferior to their own. Since Western culture and systems were superior, it was the hope of most that the East Asian nations would eventually adopt them as their new way of life. In 1842 President John Tyler told the United States Senate and House of Repre-

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Pow-key, Kim Chol-choon, and Hong Yi-sup, The History of Korea (Seoul: Korean National Commission for UNESCO, 1970); Choe Ching Young, The Rule of the Taewŏn-gun, 1864-1873 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972); M. Fredrick Nelson, Korea and the Old Order in East Asia (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1945).

<sup>4</sup> Edward D. Graham, "Early American-East Asian Relations," in American-East Asian Relations: A Survey, ed. by Ernest R. May and James C. Thomson, Jr. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> John K. Fairbank, "'American China Policy' to 1898: A Misconception," Pacific Historical Review, XXXIX, No. 4 (November, 1970), 409-420.

sentatives that "events appear likely...to bring China ere long into the relations which usually subsist between civilized states."<sup>6</sup> And in 1853, while attempting to open Japan, Matthew C. Perry echoed these same ideals when he stated that his aim was "to bring a singular and isolated people into the family of civilized nations...."<sup>7</sup>

G. J. Wolseley, a British military officer in the 1860 Anglo-French expedition against China, maintained that "before the Asiatic world can be led to believe in the justice of our polity, or before it will be applicable to Eastern nations, it will be necessary first to raise them up to our standard of knowledge, and enable them to reason in the same logical manner with ourselves."<sup>8</sup>

The early misunderstanding of Asian cultures was demonstrated in President Tyler's letter to the Emperor, carried to China by Caleb Cushing, and written by Daniel Webster. Parallels with the language used in the Indian treaties of the times are striking.

The Chinese love to trade with our people, and to send them tea and silk, for which our people pay silver, and sometimes other

<sup>6</sup> James D. Richardson, ed., A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897, 20 vols. (New York: Bureau of National Literature, 1897), V, 2066-67.

<sup>7</sup> Samuel Eliot Morison, "Old Bruin": Commodore Matthew C. Perry, 1794-1858 (Boston: Little Brown, 1968), p. 324.

<sup>8</sup> Franz Schurmann and Orville Schell, eds., Imperial China: The Decline of the Last Dynasty and the Origins of Modern China (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), p. 158.

articles. But if the Chinese and Americans will trade, there should be rules, so that they shall not break your laws or our laws. Our minister, Caleb Cushing, is authorized to make a treaty to regulate trade. Let it be just.... We shall not take the part of evil doers.... Let the treaty be signed by your imperial hand. It shall be signed by mine by the authority of our great council, the Senate....

Your good friend,

John Tyler<sup>9</sup>

The Americans, and the Westerners in general, had characteristics and attitudes just as unique as the Asian notions of hierarchy, humility, filial piety, and social obligation. The American emphasis on aggressiveness and confrontations to solve problems was reflected in George F. Seward's remarks: "I confess that I should think less of Western civilization and of Western manhood if it were not pushing and aggressive in China."<sup>10</sup> Seward, the nephew of Secretary of State William H. Seward, was the same person who strongly recommended sending an American expedition to Korea as early as 1868, when he was Consul-General at Shanghai. As will be shown later, George Seward's original call for action was based upon faulty information. However, such demands for an aggressive policy before all the facts were known often characterized American politics of the period.

The nationalism that swept much of Europe and America after the French and American revolutions was reflected in a very strong sense of nation-

<sup>9</sup> Daniel Webster, Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster, 18 vols. (National edition; Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1903), XII, 150-151.

<sup>10</sup> Kwang-Ching Liu, "America and China: The Late Nineteenth Century," in May and Thomson, American-East Asian Relations, pp. 84-85.

al honor, especially among naval officers. This meant that minor incidents were often interpreted as insults to the flag, and had to be avenged or the nation's honor would be disgraced.

In a letter to Congressman Aaron Ward written December 27, 1842, Matthew Perry declared that "no man is fit for the Navy if he is not ready at all times to interpose his life in the preservation of the integrity of the American flag..."<sup>11</sup> Such an attitude is naturally necessary to build patriotism and discipline aboard a ship, but when applied to delicate diplomatic negotiations, the results can often be less than satisfactory, and sometimes even disastrous.

Before opening negotiations with the Japanese, Perry had already decided upon a definite course of action. His plan was

to demand as a right and not to solicit as a favor those acts of courtesy which are due from one civilized nation to another; to allow none of those petty annoyances which have unsparingly visited upon those who preceded me; and to disregard the acts as well as the threats of the authorities if they in the least conflicted with my own sense of what was due to the dignity of the American flag.<sup>12</sup>

For a number of reasons, which will be discussed in Chapter III, Perry's position did not prevent him from successfully concluding the negotiations. But generally speaking, Perry succeeded in spite of the dangers his position created, not because of it.

<sup>11</sup>Morison, "Old Bruin": Commodore Matthew C. Perry, p. 159.

<sup>12</sup>Roger Pineau, ed., The Japan Expedition, 1852-1854: The Personal Journal of Commodore Matthew C. Perry (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1968), p. 92. Emphasis added.



The same emphasis upon the honor of the flag succeeded only in bringing about the final disruption of the attempted American-Korean negotiations of 1871. Although material presented later in this study will show that the Koreans probably would not have signed a formal treaty under any circumstances, an American position based more on cultural understanding and less on national honor would have prevented hundreds of needless deaths.

This conflict of cultures then is the essence of the Korean-American Incident of 1871. In order to better comprehend these cultural differences, this study opens with two chapters concerning the development of Korea's attitude toward foreign relations and the corresponding American attitude with respect to East Asia. These chapters are followed by two others organized around the theme of domestic politics, Korean and American respectively, and the influence it had on the course of foreign affairs that ultimately led to the 1871 Incident.

This study owes a deep debt to E. M. Cable's "United States-Korean Relations, 1866-1871." I first became interested in Korean-United States relations in general, and the 1871 Incident in particular, while reading Cable's study two years ago in Korea. It is by far the most thorough work to be published on this affair, and is due much more credit and recognition than it usually receives by specialists in the area.

Although the organization of material in Cable's study may at first be confusing to the reader, the appendices still offer the best collection of original source material available in one volume. I am especially grateful for chapters

from the Yi Dynasty Annals (李 朝 實 錄),<sup>13</sup> which would otherwise have been unavailable to me.

It was also the absence in Cable of any detailed description of the national and international scenes that raised certain questions in my mind and led to the present study. For the reader who is interested in a day-to-day chronicle of the 1871 Incident, Cable's work is highly recommended.

<sup>13</sup> For a somewhat dated, but still interesting description of the contents and value of the Yi Dynasty Annals, see George M. McCune, "The Yi Dynasty Annals of Korea," Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, XXIX (1939), 57-82.

## CHAPTER II

### TRADITIONAL CHINESE-KOREAN RELATIONS

#### AND THEIR EFFECT UPON KOREA

A western journalist residing in the Far East about the turn of the last century once reported:

Late in the seventies, when Peking was still the city of mystery, one annual event never failed to arrest the attention of Europeans there. During the winter months a large party of strangers would arrive, men of odd dress and unfamiliar speech. Their long, thickly padded robes were tied with short strings, not buttoned like the Chinese, and their outer garment was parted in the middle, instead of the Chinese style, on the right hand. . . . They wore extraordinary hats, often of gigantic size, made of horse-hair or of bamboo, and their hair was tied in a knot on the top of their heads. . . .

The visitors, who never exceeded two hundred in number, were the ambassadors, tribute-bearers, and traders from Chosen, the Hermit Kingdom. . . . [They] entered into the very heart of the Forbidden City, paid their dues to the Emperor, kow-towed, and were entertained at the official dinner. The traders sold their ginseng . . . , brassware, and their rolls of oiled paper. Europeans often tried to hold intercourse with them, but without much success. At the end of the forty days, the embassy and its followers returned, back over the great Peking road. . . and through the dreaded bandit belt of the Yalu. Then they were swallowed up again in the darkness and mystery of their own land.<sup>1</sup>

This mysterious and often romantic impression of a vassal nation come to pay formal homage to its superior touches only the surface of a very real and historic cultural and political relationship between China and Korea. Contrary

<sup>1</sup>F. A. McKenzie, The Tragedy of Korea (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1908), pp. 1-2.

to the beliefs of some of the first Europeans in the Far East, Korea had traditionally been a country independent of China, with its own domestic and foreign policies. This was in part a reflection of the very distinctive Korean culture. Not only clothes, but also food, architecture, language and even the personality of the Korean people differ greatly from that of the Chinese.<sup>2</sup>

But at the same time, China's immense size, wealth, and political power could not be ignored. China had its greatest influence on Korea in the area of cultural and social attitudes. This certainly would not have taken place if China had been a small, weak nation on Korea's periphery. Needless to say, China's cultural influence is a corollary therefore of her national power.

This power relationship was reflected in the titles commonly used for the two nations. China was referred to as Tae-guk (大 國) the Great Country, or Chung-guk (中 國) the Middle Country or Middle Kingdom lying half-way between heaven and earth. Contrastingly, Korea, although possessing a specific proper name noting the respective dynasty, was usually referred to as Tong-guk (東 國) the Eastern Country, since it lay to the east of Chung-guk.<sup>3</sup>

However, none of these titles were used until after both nations had be-

<sup>2</sup>George A. McGrane, Korea's Tragic Hours: The Closing Years of the Yi Dynasty, ed. by Harold F. Cook and Alan M. MacDougall (Seoul: Taewon Publishing Co., 1973), pp. 21-23; Edwin O. Reischauer and John K. Fairbank, East Asia: The Great Tradition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1965), pp. 396-398; Richard Rutt, "The Chinese Learning and Pleasures of a Country Scholar," Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, XXXVI (April, 1960), 3.

<sup>3</sup>James S. Gale, "China's Influence Upon Korea," Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, I (1900), 1.

come securely established. Nevertheless, there were widespread and extremely important contacts between the area of the Korean peninsula and the Chinese region dating back to pre-national times.

## I. THE KOREAN TRIBAL LEAGUE PERIOD

Up to roughly 200 A. D., the Korean peninsula contained not a nation, or nations, but rather loose tribal societies. In the fourth century B. C., some of these tribes unified into various leagues, the forerunners of the earliest Korean states. One of the largest and most significant of these tribal leagues was Ko Chosŏn, (古朝鮮) or Ancient Chosŏn. It was centered around the Taedong River valley in northwestern Korea and at its greatest height spread all the way to the Liao River basin located in present-day Manchuria. Thus it became a rival to many of the "Warring States" in north and northeastern China. (At this time I am using the terms "Korea" and "China" to describe geographic areas rather than political units.)

Ko Chosŏn held its own for some time, but finally during the period of King Chao of Yen (312-279 B. C.), the Liao River area fell to the invading Yen armies.<sup>4</sup> This brought a marked decline in the influence of Ko Chosŏn, although it maintained control of most of the area lying east of the Liao.<sup>5</sup>

With this action a pattern was set for later Chinese-Korean relations. When China would enter a period of instability and chaos, which often succeeded

<sup>4</sup>Han Woo Keun, The History of Korea, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup>Sohn Pow-key, The History of Korea, p. 15.

the fall of an old dynasty, Korea's territory, power, influence and independence often expanded. Then when the Chinese nation or states again became unified and strong, Korea was forced to play a much more subservient role, although still independent, and not unusually lost some territory in the process.

As the Han state began to unify China at the end of the third century B. C., many rebellions occurred in the northern states of Yen, Ch'i, and Chao. These were successfully put down by the Han, and as a result many of the rebels chose to flee eastward. In this way many of them entered Ko Chosŏn.<sup>6</sup> One of these rebels was Wiman (衛滿), a subordinate of the Yen leader, Lu Kuan.<sup>7</sup> As Professor Han Woo Keun states, "He was evidently a person of some importance, and is said to have brought about a thousand followers with him."<sup>8</sup>

Chun (準), the king of Ko Chosŏn, decided to use Wiman, and so appointed him military commander of the western frontier along the Yalu River. Wiman then turned the tables in 190 B. C. Using his new military base to attack the capital of P'yŏngyang, he drove out Chun, who was forced to flee to the southern part of the peninsula. Wiman solidified his control of Ko Chosŏn and even expanded its territory by bringing surrounding tribes into the existing organization.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, the Han dynasty's efforts to unify all of China precluded any interference in Ko Chosŏn matters. In fact, the Han government

<sup>6</sup> Han, The History of Korea, p. 15.

<sup>7</sup> Sohn, The History of Korea, p. 25.

<sup>8</sup> Han, The History of Korea, p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> Sohn, The History of Korea, pp. 25-26.

was grateful for any help it could receive from Ko Chosŏn in controlling the Hsiung-nu nomads along the northern frontier.<sup>10</sup>

Ko Chosŏn experienced peace and prosperity for the next eighty years. But then events in Chinese affairs again came into play. The Han dynasty was now securely established, with all internal rebellions suppressed. It was now time to deal with the Hsiung-nu barbarians threatening the north. Wu Ti, the emperor of China, decided that the most successful tactic would be to out flank the Hsiung-nu on the east. This called for control of Ko Chosŏn's territory. To bring this about, Chinese forces invaded the area twice, first in 109 B. C., and again in 108 B. C. In the first year an army of sixty thousand and a navy of seven thousand were repelled by the Koreans at Wanggŏmsŏng (王儉城). But the following year the Chinese were not to be denied.<sup>11</sup>

With the defeat of Ko Chosŏn, Han China divided the area into four provinces; Lolang, Chenfan, Lintun, and Hsuant'u. (Nangnang, Chinbon, Imdun, and Hyŏnt'o in Korean.) Although the exact location of these provinces is not today known, they were probably situated in the northwest corner of Korea, the Liao-tung peninsula, and the Liao River valley. Except for Lolang, which lasted until 313 A. D., none of the other provinces were successful. They were constantly harassed and attacked by the surrounding native population and had soon

<sup>10</sup> Han, The History of Korea, p. 16

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 17-18.

to be given up by China.<sup>12</sup>

Another major tribal league that came into contact with the Chinese was Koguryō (高句麗), located near the watershed of the Yalu River and as such lying north of Ko Chosŏn. The Koguryō league was often at war with China, but unlike Ko Chosŏn, it was never subdued. These people soon gained a reputation for being "skilled horsemen and courageous fighters." It was largely their constant attacks that forced the Chinese to abandon the province of Hsuant'u in 75 B. C.<sup>13</sup>

Thus even before the founding of a Korean nation, the people of the peninsula had had major contact with the Chinese. But despite such contact there seems to have been little influence on the culture and social institutions of the Korean society. Such impact was to come later. However, the metal-working techniques of the Chinese did have a major effect. As these techniques spread through the peninsula, they generally strengthened the tribal communities. This was especially true in the north. As their technical skills increased, some of these tribal groups gradually began to develop into integrated political units.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Sohn, The History of Korea, p. 26.

<sup>13</sup>Han, The History of Korea, pp. 26-27.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 22. Although I have presented the traditional interpretation of this period, a recent study supports the thesis that Ko Choson and some of the other "leagues" were already political states, rather than still tribal societies. See Kim Jung-bae, "Hanguk Kotae Kukga Kiwon-ron (On the Origins of Ancient States in Korea)," The Paek San Hakpo, XIV (June, 1973), 65-67.



## II. CHINA AND THE THREE KINGDOMS PERIOD

As previously mentioned, the tribal league called Koguryō played a major role in the fall of the Chinese province Hsuant'u in 75 B. C. From this time on, Koguryō grew increasingly stronger, so that by the end of the second century a true nation was firmly established.

In China the Han dynasty, followed by the three kingdoms of Shu, Wu, and Wei, had collapsed. Beginning in 311 and lasting until 349, the "Sixteen States" of the "Five Barbarian Tribes" struggled for control in north China.<sup>15</sup> Capitalizing on this, Koguryō attacked Lolang and in 314 captured the last of the Chinese provinces near northeastern Korea. During the later part of the century, the new Korean kingdom was able to extend its control as far west as the Liao River, including all of the Liaotung Peninsula. At the same time, its other borders expanded up to northern Manchuria.<sup>16</sup> From this point until the sixth century, Koguryō remained a dominant power in northeast Asia, rivaling many of the small kingdoms within China. Above all, Koguryō was certainly not a "vassal" state of any other nation.

Despite the fact that China's political role was negligible during this time, her cultural influence in the peninsula was definitely growing. In 372, during the reign of King Sosurim (小獸林), Buddhism was first introduced

<sup>15</sup>Sohn, The History of Korea, p. 39

<sup>16</sup>Han, The History of Korea, pp. 45-47

from Ch'ien Ch'in China, and with the support of the government rapidly grew and spread.<sup>17</sup> It became one of the main vehicles for the transportation of Chinese ideas and culture. In the same year King Sosurim established a school called T'aehak (太學, Great Learning) to teach the Chinese language and Confucian classics. Its purpose was to train future government officials. Private schools called Kyōngdang (黌堂) were also set up where the youth of the aristocracy were taught Chinese and archery.

Another important Chinese practice adopted by Koguryō was the writing and collection of historical records.<sup>18</sup> This, above all else, helps to demonstrate that these northern Koreans had created a nation of their own. The history they wrote, though based on the Chinese model, described the unique foundation and development of the Koguryō state.

Koguryō was not the only nation to arise at this time on the peninsula. Just a few years after its establishment, the kingdom of Paekje (百濟) gradually developed. An exact date for its beginning is unknown, but it was most likely a nation by the reign of King Koi (古爾), 234-285.<sup>19</sup> Paekje covered the southwestern part of present-day Korea, and during its early period extended up to the Han River. For much of its existence Paekje was the rival of Koguryō, and the two powers were often at war. It was during one of these

<sup>17</sup> Richard Rutt, James Scarth Gale and His History of the Korean People (Seoul: Royal Asiatic Society, Korea Branch, 1972), pp. 139-140.

<sup>18</sup> Han, The History of Korea, pp. 63-64.

<sup>19</sup> Sohn, The History of Korea, pp. 39-40.

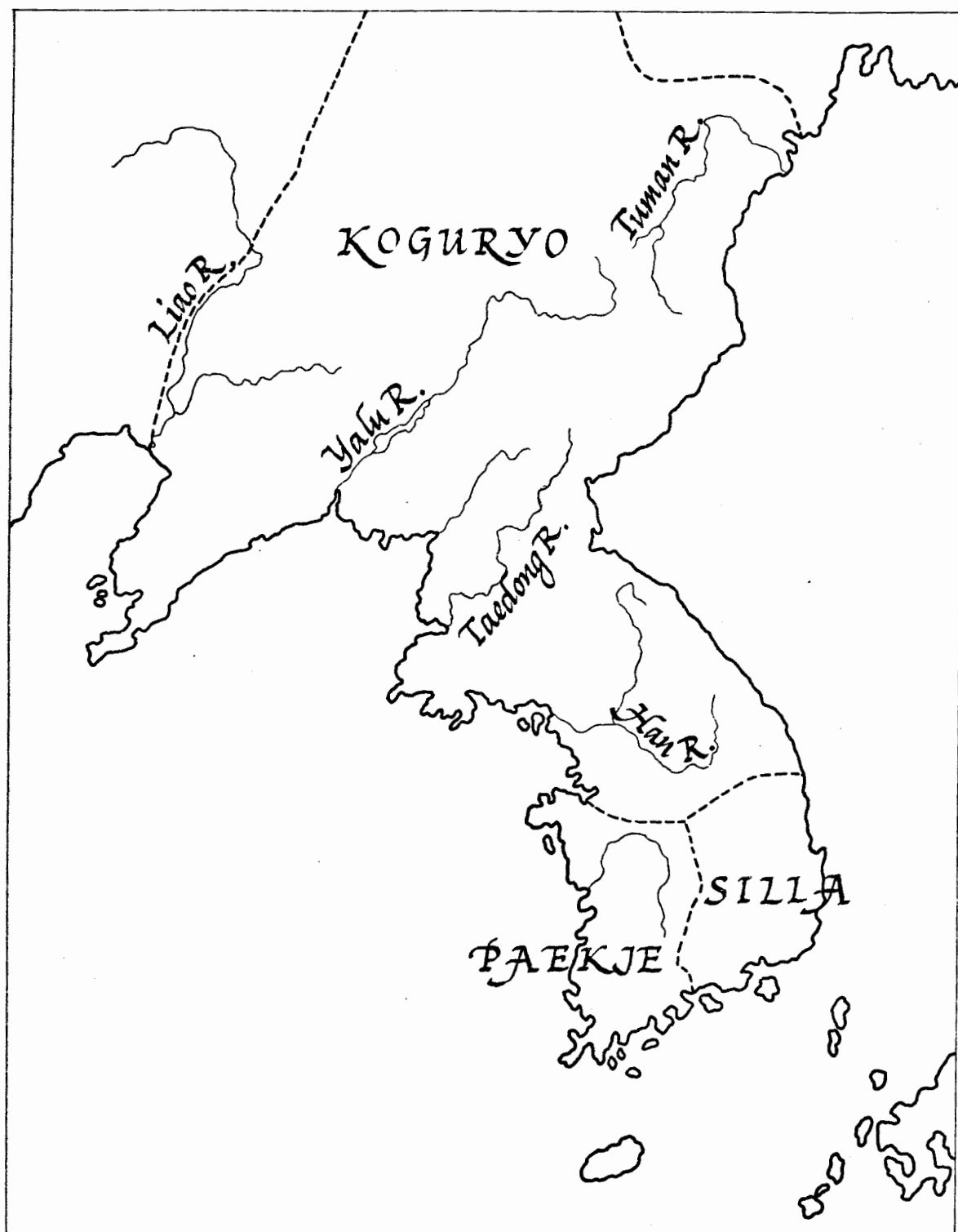


Figure 1. The Early Three Kingdoms, fifth century. After Han Woo-keun, The History of Korea (Seoul: The Eul-Yoo Publishing Company, 1970), p. 46.

earlier wars that Koguryō gained control of the south bank of the Han. Paekje was never again able to reconquer that area.

Paekje's strength and vitality as a nation are attested to by the fact that her army at times controlled parts of southwestern Manchuria. And there is some historical evidence that she even controlled territory lying along the present North China coast.<sup>20</sup> This Korean expansion was again largely due to the fact that China was in a period of constant turmoil. Paekje generally was not taking territory away from an established Chinese kingdom. In fact, she was usually on very good terms with the various Chinese states. This was in sharp contrast to Koguryō, which seemed to be involved in never-ending warfare along her western border with the Chinese.<sup>21</sup> As a result, friendly Chinese contact with Paekje was much greater than that with Koguryō. Paekje had especially close relations with the Chinese states of Sung, Ch'i, Liang and Chin.

As in Koguryō, Buddhism imported from China became very important in Paekje, arriving in 384. With it came many other elements of Chinese culture, including the Chinese language, Chinese history, art, the Confucian classics, and even the philosophical theory of "yin" ( 陰 ) and "yang" ( 陽 ).<sup>22</sup> The people of Paekje not only knew of these things, but also became well versed in them.

<sup>20</sup>Pang Sun-jōo, "Paekje Kun ūi Hwabuk Chinchul gwa Ku Paekyōng (The Advance of the Paekje Army to the Coast of North China)," The Paek-San Hakpo, XI (December, 1971), 4.

<sup>21</sup>Sohn, The History of Korea, p. 40.

<sup>22</sup>Han, The History of Korea, pp. 66-67.

Of the three kingdoms existing in Korea at this time, Paekje had by far the greatest contact with and influence on Japan. It was largely through Paekje that the Japanese received their introduction to Chinese Buddhism and the Chinese culture in general. Many Paekje craftsmen were sent to Japan to teach, while several Japanese monks came to Paekje to study.<sup>23</sup>

Silla (新羅) was the last of the three kingdoms to be established. Originally located in the further most southeast corner of the peninsula, the technological and cultural influences from China were slow to arrive. The area finally formed into a nation, although it maintained strong tribal overtones, in the latter half of the fourth century. But once Silla was established, she grew quickly. In the last half of the 500's, the Yellow Sea was reached by conquering the area north and south of the Han River between Koguryŏ and Paekje. This not only increased the political power of Silla, it also brought her into direct contact with China by way of the Han and the Yellow Sea.<sup>24</sup> From this time on, her power expanded until finally in the 660's she defeated first Paekje and then Koguryŏ with the help of T'ang China to become the sole master of the peninsula.

The sixth century brought dramatic changes in Silla. In addition to her new power, internal political and cultural changes were taking place. It was during this century that the name Saro, a purely Korean word, was replaced by Silla, a name taken from Chinese characters. Also at this time the title "Maripkan" (麻立干), meaning "great chieftain" and thus an expression of

<sup>23</sup> Sohn, p. 58 and Han, p. 48.

<sup>24</sup> Han, The History of Korea, pp. 49-50.

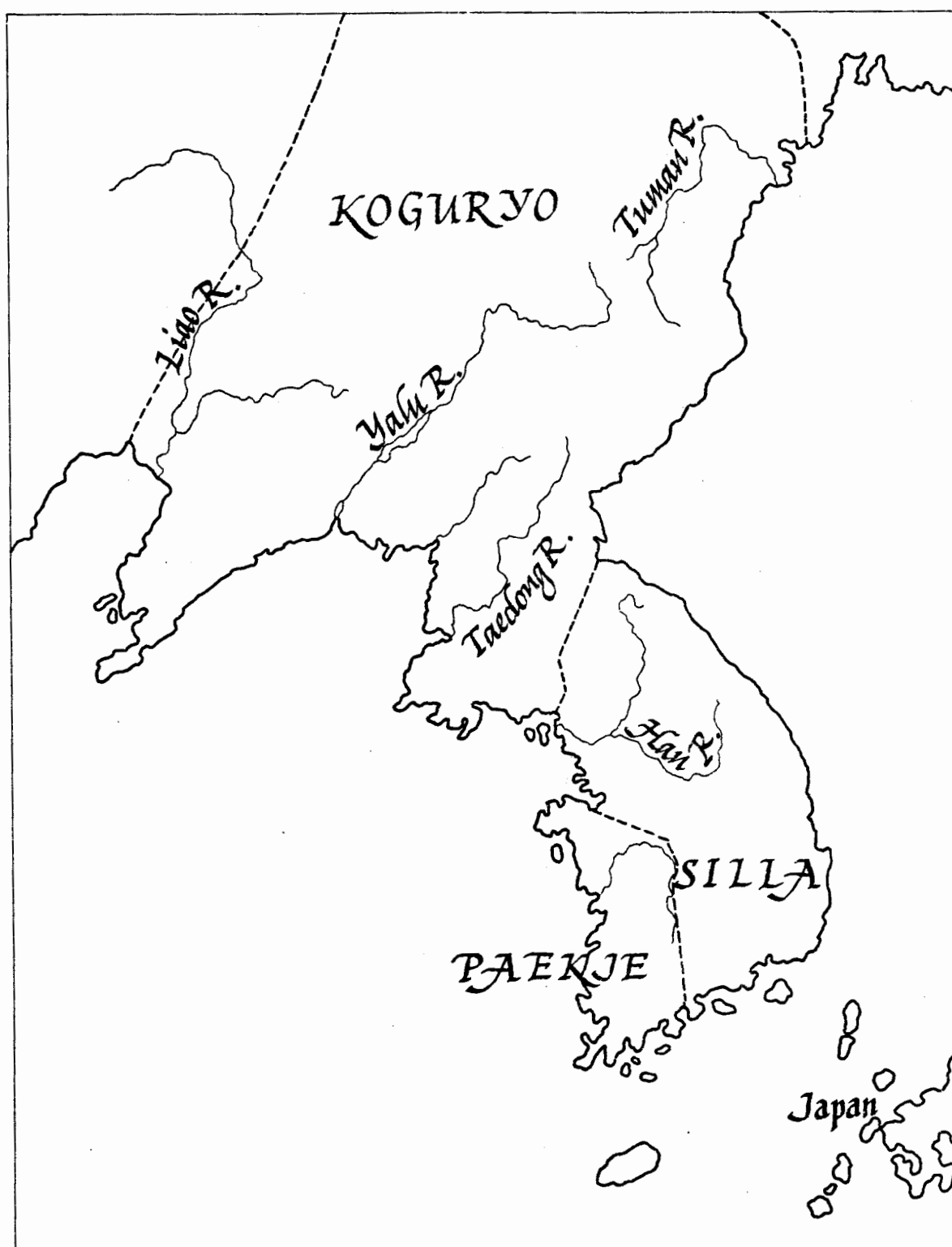


Figure 2. The Later Three Kingdoms, seventh century. After Han Woo-keun, The History of Korea, p. 79.

the tribal league period, was replaced by "Wang" ( 王 ), the Chinese for "King." Pobhŭng ( 法興 ), 514-539, was the first Silla king to use this title.<sup>25</sup>

Buddhism became the "official" religion of Silla much later than in the other two kingdoms, about 528. This was in part due to the conservatism of the area. They were not quick to accept new ideas.<sup>26</sup> But once Buddhism was accepted, it became highly influential. Some of the most beautiful Buddhist temples existing in Korea today are those that were built during the Silla period.

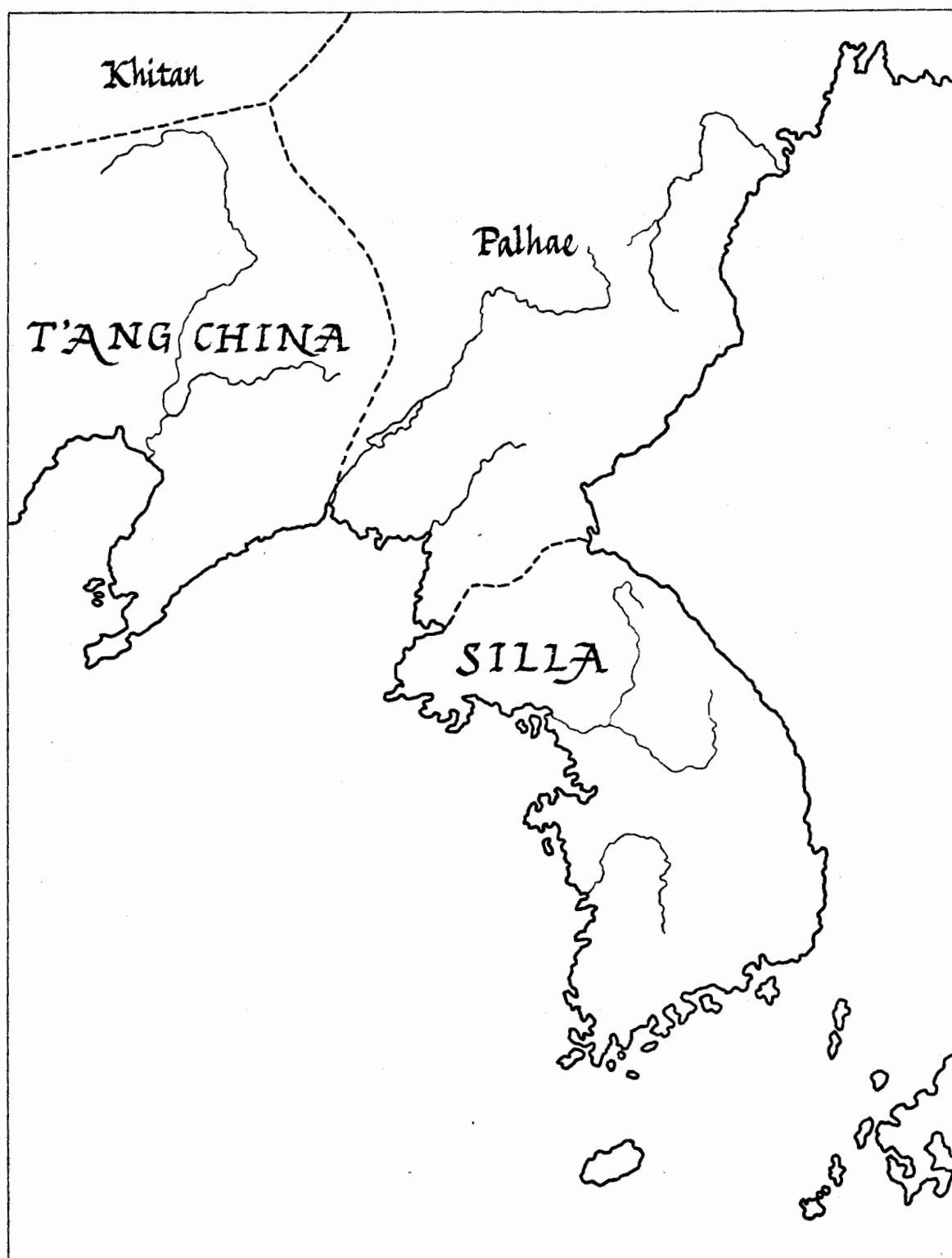
### III. T'ANG CHINA AND THE KINGDOM OF SILLA

T'ang ( 唐 ) China played an essential role in the unification of the peninsula under Silla control. As already noted, Korean states were completely independent, as well as expansionistic, during periods of Chinese division and weakness. However they were much more confined during periods of Chinese strength. The last such period had ended in 220 A. D. with the fall of the Han dynasty. But in 589, China was again unified by the Sui ( 隋 ) dynasty. Although it only lasted for about thirty years, it was immediately replaced by the T'ang, which was to last for almost three hundred years.

Things were changing in Korea at the same time. Just as the power of Koguryŏ and Paekje were declining, the power of Silla was rising. Thus the ancient alliance between Silla and Paekje to keep Koguryŏ in check was outdated. A new alliance between Koguryŏ and Paekje against Silla was formed.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 69.



**Figure 3.** The United Silla Period, eighth century. After Han Woo-keun, The History of Korea, p. 87.



Silla decided to ally with T'ang China in an effort to defeat and eliminate Koguryō. Since T'ang was involved in securing her northern border, and probably desired the return of the "Chinese" Liaotung peninsula, she agreed. Finding a direct assault on Koguryō's western borders too difficult, the Chinese and Silla forces decided to secure a southern front by first defeating Paekje and taking over her territory. Paekje was no match for the two powers, and was completely defeated in 660. Except for a few rebellions later on, this was the end of the state of Paekje.

The two powerful belligerents then turned their attention to Koguryō. They began the last assault in 661, and though the Koguryō soldiers fought expertly and bravely, the northern Korean state was finally defeated in 668. Like the fate of Paekje, this was the historical end of Koguryō.

Once the alliance of convenience with Silla served its purpose, the T'ang leaders had hopes of assimilating all the Korean peninsula into their empire. However, the long distance from China proper and the power of Silla made this impossible. After a few clashes between the two countries, the occupation armies of China were forced to retreat north of the Taedong River. They finally recognized Silla sovereignty to all land south of this point in 735. Silla thus controlled all of the peninsula. For a time China ruled most of the northern territory formally occupied by Koguryō, but they eventually were driven out by "barbarian" rebels about 700 A. D.<sup>27</sup>

Once Silla had unified the peninsula, there "entered a great period of

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., pp. 75-89.

peace, prosperity, and cultural development."<sup>28</sup> The next three hundred years of Silla rule paralleled that of T'ang China. This was the period when relations between Korea and China became truly regularized. There began a frequent exchange of embassies between the two nations. Foreign trade, though small, became important. Common commodities were gold, silver, silk, Silla ginseng and Chinese tea.<sup>29</sup>

This era is popularly referred to as the time of greatest Chinese influence.<sup>30</sup> The greatness of the T'ang dynasty left its mark upon the Koreans. Even as late as 1900, T'ang represented the highest level of Chinese culture. At that time the Korean word for a Chinese person was T'ang-in (唐人); for Chinese cotton, T'ang-mok (唐木); for Chinese medicine, T'ang-jae (唐材); and for Chinese paper, T'ang-ji (唐紙). The substitution of "T'ang" for "China" to such a degree is striking. Census taking throughout the Koryo and Yi dynasties that were to follow was based primarily on the T'ang model. The histories Korean students studied at the close of the Yi dynasty were of course Chinese, and these always ended with the T'ang dynasty.<sup>31</sup>

The T'ang dynasty strongly effected the political structure of Silla. Many government offices were redesigned to match those of China. But much of

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>30</sup> Gale, "The Influence of China," p. 5 and Han, The History of Korea, p. 99.

<sup>31</sup> Gale, "The Influence of China," p. 12; Lee Kwang-rin, "Census Taking under the Yi Dynasty," Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal

this was for appearances only. The power of the aristocracy dating back to tribal times remained largely untouched. So, while the government bureaucracy maintained the appearance of a Chinese system, the rationality and efficiency that lay at the root of the Chinese model were usually lacking. The Chinese model was designed to help centralize a giant government ruling a sprawling nation. Such a system was needed to control the local aristocracies and maintain the power of the emperor's government. But when that type of model was superimposed on a country as small as Korea, where power already rested with the aristocracy, it could easily lead to overcentralization and increased power in the hands of the land-owning elite. Korea's problem was often just the opposite of China's; that is, she needed more de-centralization.<sup>32</sup>

Buddhism naturally had an important role in this cultural development. The golden era of Korean Buddhism began in this period, extending into the following Koryŏ dynasty. Numerous Korean monks traveled to China for study, and some even ventured as far as India in tracing the sources of Buddhism.<sup>33</sup> The following memorial written in 784 for the great monk Sodang is an example of this intellectual and religious development.

The religion of the buddha goes not, comes not, loves not, hates not. Like a shadow it follows in silence. Its influence lies in the mind only. How great its power! Such was the master Sodang: a

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Asiatic Society, XXXV (1959), 67.

<sup>32</sup> For a most thorough and scholarly discussion of this problem up to the present period, see Gregory Henderson, Korea: Politics of the Vortex (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968).

<sup>33</sup> Han, The History of Korea, p. 99.

man who cast the world aside that he might give his whole soul to the onward march of the buddha.<sup>34</sup>

But it was not the cultural aspects of religion alone that came to Silla. The development of the natural sciences was also a result of Chinese influence. And Geomancy, which has remained in use up to present times, was introduced by the monk Doson. The Korean name for Geomancy was "Pungsujiri-sŏl" (風水地理說), the theory of water, wind, and earth.<sup>35</sup>

Perhaps the Chinese influence was nowhere as great as in education. As stated earlier, Koguryŏ had recognized the importance of the Chinese language and established a few schools to teach it. But Silla expanded and formalized the system far beyond that. A special government school was established in 682 called "Kukhak" (國學 national school) to train future government officials. The students had to study the various Confucian classics just as their Chinese counterparts did. The course generally lasted for nine years and ended, as in China, with examinations that determined the candidates' eligibility for office.

But at this point the Korean social system took effect just as it did in the political sphere. In China the education and examination were theoretically open to all youths. But in Korea it was limited to just the aristocracy, and even within the aristocracy there were limitations between ranks. The social elite were determined to preserve their special interests. Thus the Chinese system

<sup>34</sup> Rutt, Gale and His History of the Korean People, p. 166.

<sup>35</sup> Han, The History of Korea, p. 106.

was corrupted, or shall we say modified, to fit the society. As such the purpose of the examination system, to staff the government exclusively on the basis of merit, was defeated.<sup>36</sup>

#### IV. KORYŎ AND THE TURMOIL IN EAST ASIA

In 936 Silla was overthrown and replaced by a new kingdom, Koryŏ (高麗). This was not an outside invasion as were many of the Chinese dynastic changes. It was an internal rebellion led by Wang Kŏn (王建), who later became the first king of Koryŏ. The reasons for the rebellion are complex, but to simplify matters, there were two basic points. First, the aristocracy of the north and central regions were dissatisfied with Silla rule and decided to take matters into their own hands. Secondly, the corruption and heavy taxation that marked the last days of Silla had driven many farmers to poverty, loss of land, and even slavery. When the rebellion broke out, they were more than willing to serve its cause, hoping that a change in government would better their own prospects.

The new dynasty was not too dissimilar from the previous one. The most basic change was the restructuring of land holdings. Many of Wang Kŏn's relatives, close friends, advisors, and supporters were given large tracts of land at the expense of the old Silla aristocracy. And, in the beginning at least, taxes were reduced in order to create more content and prosperous farmers.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pp. 102-105.

<sup>37</sup> Sohn, The History of Korea, pp. 102-105.

But the government system, national culture, and relations with foreign countries remained generally the same. To give the new government legitimacy, its leaders claimed historic ties with Koguryō. Even the name of the dynasty reflects this, Koryō being a contraction of Koguryō.

Although Buddhism had been strong in the Silla period, it reached its apex of power with the coming of Koryō. Various temples became some of the largest landholding institutions in the realm. Many monks held tremendous political as well as religious power. An example of this was Uich'ōn (義天), the son of King Munjong (文宗 1046-1083) and the brother of King Sōnjong (成宗 1083-1094). Over the years the workings of the government and the Buddhist hierarchy became inseparable, so much so that when the former fell, the latter was irreversibly effected.<sup>38</sup>

Just as Buddhism was a carry-over from the Silla period, so was the educational system. The school system was expanded to include the "Kukchahak" (國子學), "T'aehak" (太學), and "Samunhak" (四文學). These dealt strictly with the Confucian classics and Chinese literature. Unlike the effect in Silla, where this type of education reached only the top aristocracy, during Koryō times it gradually permeated the entire society. From the eleventh century on, numerous private institutions were founded to educate aspiring youths of the country. These private schools became so important that many of them eventually grew more prestigious than even the government schools.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Sohn, pp. 99-100 and Han, p. 147.

<sup>39</sup> Sohn, pp. 98-99 and Rutt, pp. 181-182.

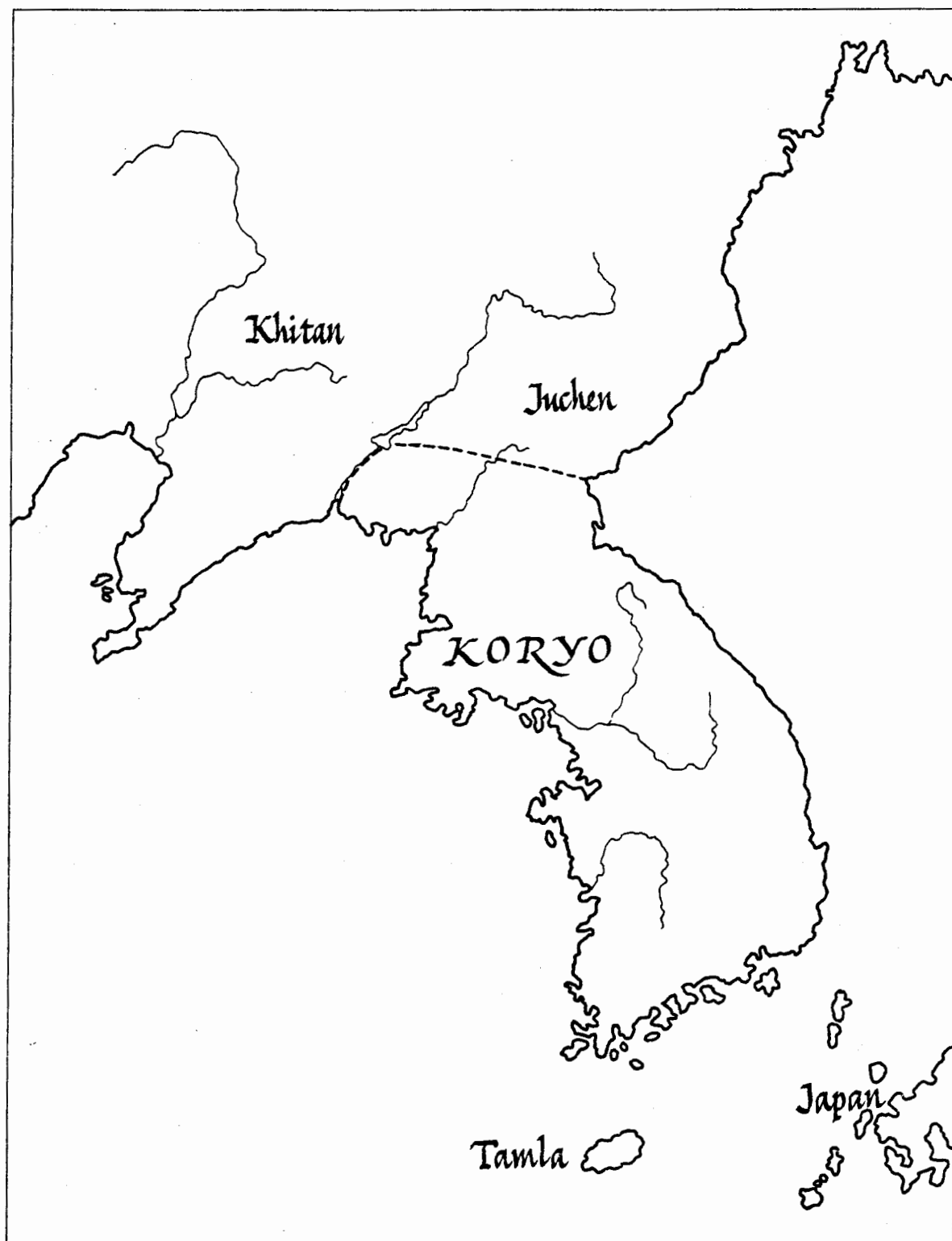
We can recall that the theoretical equality that lay behind the Chinese examination system was largely negated by Silla adaptations. Such was also the case with Koryŏ. As early as 958, the Chinese examination system was officially adopted. But then special considerations were made. In order to maintain the aristocracy's privileged position, sons of the highest ranking bureaucrats were exempted from having to take the examinations. This guaranteed the aristocratic families' continued role in the government, which was by far the most important activity in society. Furthermore, entrance into the government schools was based partly upon aristocratic rank. Thus once again a governmental system supposedly reflecting an institution of China was strongly Koreanized in its operational aspects. Likewise, the military units of Koryŏ were originally based upon the T'ang system, but in reality they had little in common with their Chinese counterparts.<sup>40</sup>

Foreign trade continued to be an important factor during the Koryŏ period. And as in the past, an overwhelming percentage of it was with China. Major Korean exports were gold, silver, copper, ginseng, pine nuts, hides, silk cloth, hemp cloth, paper, metalwares, knives, and stationery. The most important imports were silk textiles, porcelain, books, drugs and musical instruments.<sup>41</sup>

In the diplomatic sphere, relations during this period were quite active.

<sup>40</sup> Han, The History of Korea, pp. 132-133; William B. Henthorn, "Some Notes on Koryŏ Military Units," Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, XXXV (1959), 67.

<sup>41</sup> Sohn, pp. 97-98 and Han 144-145.



**Figure 4.** The Koryŏ Period, eleven-fourteenth century. After Han Woo-keun, The History of Korea, p. 184.



After another period of turmoil following the fall of T'ang China, the Sung ( 宋 ) dynasty gradually emerged. By the late 900's, it had unified most of southern China and was pressing the Khitans in the north. In 985, the Sung court requested military aid from Koryŏ to help in their campaign against the Khitans. Not wanting to get involved in such a war (the Khitan and Korean forces were almost equal, with neither side having an advantage), the Koreans turned down the Chinese request. As in other instances, the foreign policy of Korea seems to have been almost totally independent. Although she was an "ally" of China, there was no requirement in their relationship that she must obey Chinese demands. In fact, it is important to notice that the Chinese sent a "request" to Koryŏ, rather than a demand.

The Khitans remained strong in southern Manchuria and northern China for more than a century. But by 1115, they were being replaced by the Juchens, or so-called Chin dynasty, originating out of eastern Manchuria. This new force became so powerful that by 1126 they were able to drive the Sung armies, whom they had earlier allied with against the Khitans, completely out of northern China. Sung was able to retain only the area within and south of the Yangtze valley. While this campaign was going on, the Sung rulers once again asked for Koryŏ aid, and again it was refused. The Koreans reasoned that they were under no obligation to risk the very possible destruction of their country, Chin power being what it was.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>42</sup>Han, pp. 137-138, 153-154 and Sohn, pp. 103-104.

The next major development in foreign affairs came with the Mongol attack and domination of Koryŏ during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. But this can hardly be termed diplomatic relations, as the Mongols were primarily concerned with Koryŏ subjugation, and would use force to achieve their goals where diplomacy failed.<sup>43</sup> The Koreans themselves, aside from a small number of government officials, were definitely not interested in attempting to appease the Mongols.

When a new group of barbarians, the Mongols, apparently less civilized than either the Kitans or the Nuchen, became masters of China, they too were rejected. An area which centuries before had been termed the "gentleman's country" could not admit voluntarily the superior position of a people obviously uncouth. The Mongols, on the other hand, failed to comprehend the mutually acceptable relations which former [Chinese] dynasties had maintained with the Korean peninsula. Thus, with ill will on both sides, Koryŏ was to suffer constant invasion, control, exploitation, and virtual annexation by the Mongol dynasty.<sup>44</sup>

China was the direct cause in ending Mongol domination of Koryŏ. The Mongol empire in East Asia had been weakening rapidly in the 1300's. In the middle of that century a massive Chinese rebellion broke out south of the Yangtze. By the late 1360's the rebel forces had driven the Mongols completely out of China proper. In 1368 the victorious Chinese established the Ming ( 明 ) dynasty, which was to rule for almost three hundred years. With no base positions in China, the Mongol "outposts" in the Korean peninsula were no longer

<sup>43</sup>See Koh Pyong-ik, "Mongol-Koryŏ ūi Hyŏngje Mengyak ūi Sŏnggyŏk (On the Nature of the Brotherly Alliance Between the Mongols and Koryo in 1219)" The Paek-San Hakpo, VI (June, 1969), 73-74; Rutt, Gale and His History of the Korean People, pp. 200-202.

<sup>44</sup>M. Fredrick Nelson, Korea and the Old Order in East Asia, pp. 56-57.

tenable. The Ming armies spreading into Manchuria could easily cut them off from the main Mongol strongholds in Central Asia. With this in mind, the Mongols quickly left the ravaged country. But the destruction and killing they left behind were important factors in the creation of a suspicious, isolationist Korean foreign policy that would develop over the next 450 years.

## V. THE YI DYNASTY PERIOD

Although the general population of Koryŏ was fervently anti-Mongol, a small but important minority of the ruling class had served the Mongols in order to increase their own power and property. When the Ming dynasty was first established, there were still many Mongols in northern Manchuria and related areas. Some of the Koryŏ officials just mentioned attempted to play these Mongols and the Ming rulers against each other, hoping to achieve benefits from both. To the Ming group, such "un-brotherly" action seemed both an insult and a threat to their tenuous northern border. They thus sent a military expedition to Koryŏ's northeast boundry on the Yalu, believing that this would help their traditional allies to see the light.

These events brought about one of the great moments in Korean history. The foolish government leader, Ch'oe Yŏng ( 崔瑩 ), decided in 1388 to send an army under Yi Sŏng-gye ( 李成桂 ) to attack the Chinese. Upon approaching the Yalu, General Yi realized that such an attack would be disastrous, owing to the Mings' proven military power and, at this time, Koryŏ's lack of the same. Under these circumstances, the General chose the alternative to an

attack on the Chinese. Leading his troops back to the capital of Kaesŏng, he overthrew the government and created one of his own. Although it was not formally recognized until 1392, this was the actual beginning of the Yi ( 李 ) dynasty. Yi Sŏng-gye became its founder and first king, T'aejo ( 太祖 ).

These were the immediate factors leading to the establishment of the new dynasty. But the Ming action, and Ch'oe Yŏng's reaction, only helped in the culmination of a process long overdue. Just as the corruption and excessive privileges of an elite Silla aristocracy led to the foundation of Koryŏ, so Koryŏ's decadence called for its replacement by Yi. The power of the landlords had made the government helpless in times of national emergency. And since their massive landholdings were non-taxable, the government was constantly short of revenue. This in turn helped to spread corruption and demoralize the state bureaucratic officials, since they could not receive adequate salaries through proper channels. Because of all this, land reform was essential if the new dynasty was to succeed. The lines of battle were drawn between the conservative officials, powerful landowners, and many Buddhists on the one side and the military leaders and the youthful, reform-minded Confucian lower level scholar-bureaucrats on the other. It was to the benefit of the early Yi dynasty that the latter achieved victory.<sup>45</sup>

Since the troubled affair with Ming China was an important cause of Koryŏ's fall, King T'aejo realized that relations with China had to be normalized. This was done by asking the Ming emperor to "approve" the new dynasty. The

<sup>45</sup> Han, The History of Korea, pp. 185-191.

Korean report to the Chinese cited "the corruptness of the Wang [Koryŏ] dynasty, its lack of an able heir, and the refusal of Yi Sŏng-gye to advance to the border against the Ming armies." This report also stated that such a dynastic change was the will of the people.<sup>46</sup>

The Ming emperor replied:

[Korea] is a small region in the far east, and it is not under the rule of the Middle Kingdom. Let the Board of Rites inform it that so long as its rule is in conformity with the will of Heaven and in harmony with the hearts of men, and so long as it creates no strife on our borders, so will its people be allowed to go and come and the Kingdom will enjoy happiness;... we have no investigation to make in the matter [of the change of dynasty].<sup>47</sup>

The emperor was also given the right to select the dynasty's new title, a choice between "Chosŏn" (朝鮮) and "Hwanyŏng" (和寧), T'aejo's birthplace. He selected "Chosŏn," in honor of the ancient tribal state that had existed centuries before.

It is my opinion that most of this exchange was principally political maneuvering on T'aejo's part. Korea did not need China's permission or blessing to begin a new dynasty. For the past 800 years China had not interfered in a tributary state's internal affairs. But with respect to China's political and military power at this time, T'aejo was being practical in securing her friendship. And since both countries' cultures were by now based largely upon Confucian ethics, Korea's request for "approval" fitted into their theoretical "father-son" relationship.

<sup>46</sup> Nelson, Korea and the Old Order, p. 70.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Nelson, p. 71.

The idea that Korea was by and large independent is supported by other evidence about this same time. With the northward march of the Ming armies, many people from Manchuria had fled to Korea. Because the Chinese were short of manpower, they demanded that Korea repatriate these people. Rather than do this, the Koreans instead furnished the Manchurians with land in the southern part of the peninsula and further extended and fortified their northern border. Although making "conciliatory gestures" from time to time in order to stave off any direct clash with Ming China, Korea's actual position remained firm. Such behavior hardly represents an obedient, dependent vassal state. By the middle of the fifteenth century China again had her hands full in the north and had to drop any further protests to their eastern neighbor.<sup>48</sup>

I have attempted to demonstrate throughout this chapter that China's greatest influence on Korea has been in the cultural, rather than the political, sphere. A nation is generally aware of its political behavior, and sensitive to any foreign manipulation or influence, even if they are of the same "Confucian state-family." But with regard to cultural attitudes, the influence is usually more gradual and subtle. As generations are reared in a cultural atmosphere that has taken on new values, their attitudes, opinions, and even thought processes begin to reflect these new values. Most of our present-day societies demonstrate this learning function. To sum up this notion in a phrase: people are products of their environment, and as the environment changes, so must the people.

<sup>48</sup> Han, The History of Korea, pp. 221-222.

Up to 1392, the Korean peninsula had gradually been adopting Confucian values (although purely Korean values have remained very strong up to this day.) At any rate, a dramatic speed-up in this adopting process took place with the coming of the Yi dynasty. Hahm Pyong-Choon describes the essence of this change:

Confucianism...during the Yi dynasty...was established as the official ideology of the state.... It is one of the earliest instances in the world history where non-religious ideology was consciously employed as an instrument of dynastic policy. It was used to discredit Buddhism which had been the state religion of the preceding dynasty. It was used to consolidate the power base of the new ruling elite who were mostly young reform-minded Confucian scholars. It was used to secure a highly centralized authoritarian form of government and was mobilized to bring the underlying social structure and mores into line with the political philosophy of the ruling class. It is amazing how effectively it was utilized by the Yi dynasty rulers to accomplish their ends.<sup>49</sup>

This reformist, efficient, dedicated government was in sharp contrast to that of later Koryŏ. And as a result the next one hundred years were perhaps the greatest in Korean history. Progress was made "in governmental administration, science, agriculture, and military preparedness, and during the reign of Sejong (世宗 1418-1450) remarkable technological advances were made, particularly in astronomy, printing, and climatology, in some respects surpassing the contemporary achievements in Europe."<sup>50</sup>

But already by the reign of Yŏnsangun (燕山君 1490-1509),

<sup>49</sup> Hahm Pyong-Choon, The Korean Political Tradition and Law (Seoul: Royal Asiatic Society, Korea Branch, 1967), pp. 8-9.

<sup>50</sup> Lee Chong-sik, The Politics of Korean Nationalism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), p. 4.

things had begun to change. Ming China had generally adopted the Neo-Confucianism of Chu Hsi (朱熹), the most important Confucist in the last thousand years,<sup>51</sup> that developed during the Sung dynasty. "Korea followed suit with the enthusiasm of the convert. Far more, even, than in Ming China, the word of Chu Hsi in Korea was law; one could criticize Confucius if necessary, but Chu Hsi was beyond cavil or doubt."<sup>52</sup> Such a doctrinaire approach naturally conflicted with the pragmatism of the early regime. People began to lose interest in new ideas. They might possibly run counter to the words of Chu Hsi. It became easy to purge rival factions within the government; a person could always charge his enemy with the crime of revisionism.

To better understand this problem it is necessary to discuss the basics of Chu Hsi's interpretations. "Confucius... had warned against overemphasizing either study or thought. 'Study without thought,' he said, 'is a waste of time. But thought without study is dangerous.' He reported that he had tried meditation as a means of seeking the truth, but found it to be useless. Instead, he recommended broad inquiry and experience, supplemented by a rational testing and arrangement of the facts that experience yields."<sup>53</sup> But Chu Hsi was not interested in these practical aspects of Confucianism.

Since the later Han dynasty, Buddhism had grown tremendously in

<sup>51</sup> H. G. Creel, Chinese Thought: from Confucius to Mao Tse-tung (New York: The New American Library, 1953), p. 168.

<sup>52</sup> Gregory Henderson, "Chong Ta-san: A Study in Korea's Intellectual History," Journal of Asian Studies, XVI No. 3 (May, 1957), 383.

<sup>53</sup> Creel, Chinese Thought, p. 171.



China, threatening to become the center of Chinese philosophy. Chu-Hsi's interpretations were in large part a response to this challenge.

Neo-Confucianism sought to show that Confucianism could offer everything desirable that Buddhism could, and more. Specifically it undertook, first, to match the Buddhist cosmology; second, to explain the world and Confucian ethics metaphysically, and finally, while doing these things, to justify social and political activity and to vindicate men's right to final happiness in the ordinary pursuits of the normal life.<sup>54</sup>

Chu Hsi's Confucianism practically became a religion itself. Its central conception was "li" ( 理 ), roughly translated as "principle." Li, according to Chu Hsi, was the metaphysical non-substance that all things had in common. It is "without birth and indestructible, . . . part of . . . the Supreme Ultimate, . . . pure, empty, vast, without form. . . ."<sup>55</sup> When this concept was applied to politics, it was felt that li "establishes the ideal type of political conduct. This is the 'Tao,' the Way. When actual government corresponds to this ideal government, it is good; when it differs from it, it is bad."<sup>56</sup> This abstract, dogmatic interpretation of politics was a major departure from original Confucianism. Such a departure was not without its serious political effects.

Instead of discussing the practical solutions to problems, politicians and scholars argued abstract philosophical points. And political decisions came to be made on the merit of these arguments. One noted Korean political scientist has this to say about Chu Hsi-ism:

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

Its captions and self-righteousness and preoccupation with the shortcomings and foibles of others could not fail to place the ruling elite of Yi Korea under the same curse of factionalism that had plagued the literati-bureaucrats, including Chu Hsi himself, of Sung China

....

The sanguinary factional struggles that were to torment Korea... to the end of the Yi dynasty were descended from the factional politics that had come into definite shape in the time of Jen Tsung (1023-1063) of Sung. The alliance of scholarship and politics that had characterized the Sung monarchy also characterized Yi politics. Rigid orthodoxy with its relentless persecution of any deviation or opposition came to typify the Yi Confucianism. . . . No adaptation of alien ideas was possible.<sup>57</sup>

When the Ming dynasty was replaced by the Ch'ing ( 清 ) in 1664, Chu Hsi's philosophy came under strong attack. Its rigidity and mysticism fell in favor of a more practical and critical approach. Many scholars once again returned to the study of ancient original texts. But the Koreans had no dynastic break or political upheaval that would have served to discredit Neo-Confucianism. Instead, it continued, causing increased intellectual stagnation and political factionalism.<sup>58</sup>

Although factionalism had broken out by 1500, Korea was still a strong, prosperous country, thanks to her more than one hundred years of growth and stability. The stifling effect of Neo-Confucianism was a gradual process. It did not result in Korea's decline overnight. By far the greatest disaster to strike Yi Korea, before the Japanese takeover of 1905, was the Hideyoshi invasion of the 1590's.

<sup>57</sup> Hahm, Korea's Political Tradition, pp. 9-10. Also see Henderson's "Chong Ta-san" for an example of this factionalism.

<sup>58</sup> Henderson, "Chong Ta-san," p. 383.

The Koreans had already experienced limited attacks from the Japanese during the Wakō (倭寇) piratical expeditions of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.<sup>59</sup>

Hideyoshi had decided to increase and solidify his power in Japan by attacking China. And in order to do that, he planned to go through Korea. But he never got as far as China. The Koreans, with some help from the Chinese, were able to repel the invaders from their peninsula after six years of constant, terrible fighting.

Although victorious, the cost to Korea was enormous. Thousands of Korean civilians were killed or kidnapped, and their property and others' destroyed. Cultivated land after the fighting ended was only one-third of the pre-war level, and only one-sixth in the rice-producing province of Kyōng-sang. Control by the central government lay shattered; records, especially those of landholding and census, were destroyed. Tax revenue was almost non-existent. Many people who survived the fighting died of starvation. With regard to structures, "there is hardly a building left in Korea today, except those made of stone, which antedates the Hideyoshi invasion."<sup>60</sup>

Korea never completely recovered from this mass destruction. The next fifty years saw one crisis follow another. By the late 1600's, a degree of stability had returned and few people were starving, but the country remained

<sup>59</sup> For a detailed description of these events, see Benjamin H. Hazard, "The Creation of the Korean Navy during the Koryō Period," Transactions of the Korean Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, XLVIII (1973), 10-28.

<sup>60</sup> Han, The History of Korea, pp. 270-275.

remarkably poor. And here Neo-Confucianism had an adverse effect. Had a dynamic, progressive, pragmatic ruling group existed, perhaps Korea could have recovered its pre-war prosperity. But the factionalism and stagnation in government continued.

Chinese involvement in the Hideyoshi invasion had weakened the Ming dynasty, while at the same time a new power was rising in Manchuria. The Manchus, as they are called today, had united and proclaimed their own nation by 1616, and were determined to conquer and control all of China. But before doing that, they wanted to secure their southeastern flank. They evidently felt that Korea's alliance with the Ming posed too great a danger.

In 1636 the Manchus demanded that Korea recognize them as their superior and renounce allegiance to the Ming dynasty. This the Koreans refused to do. As a result, the Manchu armies swiftly overran Korea and carried out their demands by force. Officials who opposed the Manchus were imprisoned and later killed, while the Crown Prince Sohyŏn (昭顯) and his brother Pongrim (鳳林) were held by the Manchus as hostages to make certain that the Koreans did not have a change of heart.

After the Manchus conquered all of China in 1644 and established the Ch'ing dynasty in Peking, the hostages were returned and Korean-Chinese relations reverted back to the traditional pattern. But despite the formal observance of all customs and ceremonies, the Korean attitude had changed. They still greatly respected Chinese culture, but they did not forget how the Manchus

came to power.<sup>61</sup> They viewed the original Manchu relationship as little more than extortion. Such overt aggression, added to the Mongol and Hideyoshi disasters, only helped to confirm Korean suspicions of all foreigners and drive them deeper into willful isolationism.<sup>62</sup>

Although there were many problems in the latter part of the Yi dynasty, Ch'ing ascendancy in China brought peace and diplomatic stability to Korea that was to last for over two hundred years. China's size alone caused her presence to be felt. Koreans certainly would not go out of their way to offend her. But as long as Korean policy did not threaten China, the Eastern Country was free to do as she pleased. China neither advised nor interfered.<sup>63</sup>

Trade had become both important and largely unregulated during the Sung and Ming dynasties. The Ch'ing government put a stop to that, and the Korean government was more than willing to go along.<sup>64</sup> In these last two hundred years when conservative regimes were in power in both countries, it was thought that the less contact with the outside, the better. And this meant contact with the other oriental nations as well.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., pp. 275-278; Yu Bang-yeong, "Wangjo Sillok e nat'anan Yijo Chŏn-gi ūi Ya-in (The Jurchens in the Early Period of the Yi Dynasty as Recorded in the Yi Dynasty Annals)," The Paek San Hakpo, XIV (June, 1973), 156-63; Edward Harper Parker, "The Manchu Relations with Korea," Transactions of the Asian Society of Japan, XV (1887), 96-98.

<sup>62</sup> Gari Ledyard, The Dutch Come to Korea (Seoul: Royal Asiatic Society, Korea Branch, 1971), p. 101.

<sup>63</sup> Mary C. Wright, "The Adaptation of Ch'ing Diplomacy: The Case of Korea," Journal of Asian Studies, XVII No. 3 (May, 1958), 364-365.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 366.

The only legal trade was that accompanying the yearly tribute missions, and this was highly restricted as to who could sell what to whom.<sup>65</sup> These missions from Korea to China, and vice-versa, were extremely important and precise. From 1662 to 1872, there were only three years in which Korea did not send a mission; 1722, 1752, and 1865. The number of embassies per year varied from one to twenty-three, but as a rule there were twelve.<sup>66</sup>

The trade carried out during the early missions was usually in the hands of official Korean interpreters, called puyŏnyŏkgwan (赴燕譯官).<sup>67</sup> These men did not often have permanent salaries, and as a result had to depend largely upon their profits made from trading. But as the years passed, illegal trade carried out by private merchants began to grow and rival the trade of the interpreters. Unable to stand up to this competition, these "official traders" had to sell their "trading rights" to the private merchants, who controlled all Korean-Chinese trade by the mid-18th century.<sup>68</sup>

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

In a purely political sense, Korea was for the most part an independent

<sup>65</sup> Nelson, Korea and the Old Order, pp. 95-96.

<sup>66</sup> John K. Fairbank and Ssu-Yu Teng, Ch'ing Administrations: Three Studies (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), pp. 193-198.

<sup>67</sup> Liu Seung-ju, "Chosŏn Hugi Taechŏng-Muyŏk ŭi Chŏn-gae-Kwajŏng (Development of Trading with Ch'ing in the Latter Yi Dynasty Period)," The Paek San Hakpo, VIII (June, 1970), 327-328.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., pp. 400-401.

nation. She had her own king and government officials who proclaimed domestic and foreign policies without interference from others. The only times when this was not so were during periods of foreign domination by force, such as the Mongol experience.<sup>69</sup>

However, many of the first Westerners who came to East Asia had a difficult time understanding the exact relationship between Korea and China. They viewed diplomatic relationships solely from the Western point of view, in which nations were all theoretically equal, and their conduct was based upon a specific set of laws. Such a concept had largely been derived from their common Christian principles and the West's legalistic background,<sup>70</sup> dating back at least to the Greek era. And if by chance a nation was not considered the equal of others, then it was assumed that that area was under or would fall under the control of some stronger, neighboring country.

Contrastingly, both Chinese and Korean societies were based upon Confucian ethics, as we have already seen. Accordingly, all action and behavior were dominated by "li" ( 禮 ), the rules of proper conduct (and vastly different from the "li" proposed by Chu Hsi). This li was concerned primarily with the motives and will causing behavior. It was thought that by teaching man to act morally, laws would become unnecessary. Confucius is said to have made

<sup>69</sup> Even Li Hung Chang, who designed the attempted Chinese domination of Korea in the 1880's and the 1890's, admitted that Korea "has ever been independent and even resentful of our influence or interest...." William F. Man-nix, ed., Memoirs of Li Hung Chang (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1913), pp. 249-250.

<sup>70</sup> Nelson, Korea and the Old Order, pp. 97, 100.

this distinction between li and law:

If people are led by laws, and uniformity sought to be given them by punishments, they will try to avoid the punishment, but have no sense of shame. If they be led by virtue, and uniformity sought to be given them by the rules of propriety, they will have the sense of shame, and moreover will become good.<sup>71</sup>

When western nations came to East Asia and demanded treaties because "international law" required it, the oriental nations were of course at first mystified. To them, relations between nations were but an extension of their social relationships. Li not only dictated the actions of individuals, it also set the standards for family, community, and international relations. They reasoned that if a nation did not recognize li in its social relations, how could it expect to carry out international relationships? The alternative such a nation, one ignorant of the proper rules of conduct, might choose was force, as the Mongols had demonstrated.

There is no denying that Korea was strongly affected by China in both diplomatic<sup>72</sup> and social affairs. A Korean writer during the Yi dynasty declared:

Our ceremonies, our enjoyments, our laws, our usages, our literature, our goods have all followed after the morals of China. The [five] great relationships shine forth from those above and the teachings pass down to those below, making the grace of our customs like that of the Flowering Land, so that Chinese themselves praise us by

<sup>71</sup> Analects in The Chinese Classics, I, 10, as cited in Nelson, Korea and the Old Order, p. 101.

<sup>72</sup> Ko Byong-ik, "Weguk e taehan Yijo Han'gukin ūi Kwannyōm (The Korean Concept of Foreign Countries During the Yi Dynasty)," The Paek San Hakpo, VIII (June, 1970), 238-243.



saying "Korea is little China."<sup>73</sup>

Although this particular individual considerably over did it, such adulation did not come out of thin air. Under the impact of China, Korea often did not fit the western classification of either an independent nation or a dependent "vassal," or province. (Using today's phraseology, it possibly could be said that Korea was within China's "sphere of influence," and thus acted accordingly. And this is partly true. But most importantly, this label does not take into consideration the cultural phenomenon.)

This ambiguity concerning Korea's position existed largely because the Confucian ethic was based not upon equality, as in the West, but rather inequality. It was the basis of the "five relationships," and to this day is still the dominant characteristic of Korean society. China was truly the center of political power and cultural greatness, and this naturally tended to support the philosophical attitudes.

Inequality... was necessary to preserve the natural order, for equality in any relationship bred conflict and disorder and caused disharmony in the natural order of things.... Equality would violate the relation between the position of superior and the degree of virtue that varied with that status. Equality of countries would mean an equality of virtue, an assumption no one would maintain against China and her emperor. Conversely, virtue denoted superiority, and the size of one's domain varied in direct proportion to one's virtue.<sup>74</sup>

The practical aspects implied in that last sentence help to explain why the Manchus, after gaining power in 1644, were so readily accepted, at least on the

<sup>73</sup> Quoted in Nelson, Korea and the Old Order, p. 85.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., pp. 103-104.

surface, as the legitimate rulers of the Middle Kingdom.

So while Korea was China's "inferior," she was not necessarily her dependent. Such a distinction was not drawn in the West. This type of inferiority was based upon cultural ideals, while dependence would have been based upon political boundaries.

Since this chapter has been primarily concerned with the effect of the Chinese Confucian systems upon Korea, Korean-Japanese relations have for the most part been ignored. The numerous piratical and military attacks from Japan of course had a strong political and economic influence on Korea, but in a cultural sense, the Japanese role was marginal. This is even reflected in the terminology used in Korean-Japanese relations. Both the Chinese and the Koreans viewed the latter's culture as superior to that of Japan, the Koreans thus having little desire to borrow anything from the island nation.<sup>75</sup>

One last statement must be added when discussing Chinese influence on Korea. It helps to balance and put into perspective the excessive pro-Chinese quotation by the contemporary literary scholar on page 46. "Under the veneer of this adopted Chinese culture, the common people, and not infrequently even the ruling class itself, continued with their indigenous way of life. Moreover, as soon as a Chinese element left its habitat, a great deal of its content was

<sup>75</sup> George M. McCune, "The Exchange of Envoys Between Korea and Japan during the Tokugawa Period," The Far Eastern Quarterly, III (May, 1946), 308-309, 314-315. For a Japanese view of this period, see Yamagata Isoh, "Japanese-Korean Relations After the Japanese Invasion of Korea in the XVIth Century," Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, IV, Part 2 (1913), 1-11.

lost, and when it finally established itself in the Korean culture, it underwent drastic changes."<sup>76</sup> Korea, despite the coming and going of the Chinese, Mongols, Japanese, Russians, and Americans, has remained uniquely Korean.

<sup>76</sup>Hahm, The Korean Political Tradition and Law, p. 8.

## CHAPTER III

### EARLY AMERICAN RELATIONS WITH EAST ASIA:

#### THE MEDITERRANEAN INFLUENCE

#### AND THE ROLE OF GUNBOAT DIPLOMACY

We now turn to the American scene, and to the early experiences in foreign relations, especially those in the Mediterranean region, which helped to shape the attitudes and policies of the United States in East Asia. To begin this chapter, a brief resumé of the development of American commercial, diplomatic, and military involvement in the Far East will be presented.

#### I. A SUMMARY OF EARLY AMERICAN RELATIONS IN EAST ASIA

America's earliest contacts with East Asia were of a strictly commercial nature, a result of the new republic's growing interest in foreign trade. Such Chinese products as tea, silk, and porcelain made up the bulk of imports from Asia, while the United States in turn began to carry furs and sealskins from the northwest coast of North America to Canton, the only Chinese port open to foreign traders.<sup>1</sup> From 1784, when the 370-ton merchantman Empress of

<sup>1</sup> Foster, American Diplomacy in the Orient, p. 30; Tong Te-Kong, United States Diplomacy in China, 1844-1860 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964), p. 18

China became the first American vessel to arrive at Canton,<sup>2</sup> to 1800, this trade grew slowly but steadily.<sup>3</sup>

From 1800 to 1807, when President Jefferson's Embargo went into effect, the trade was considerable. From twenty-three to forty American ships called on Canton each year, while the combined value of exported and imported goods reached \$10,400,000, the exported portion amounting to five percent of America's total exports.<sup>4</sup> But the Embargo of 1807-1809, and then the War of 1812, severely retarded this growing trade. "The total commerce from 1812 to 1815 was barely half that of the years before the war."<sup>5</sup>

However, with the signing of the Treaty of Ghent, prosperity began to return. By the 1840's the East Asia trade had become one of the principal elements of American overseas commerce. The character of the goods exported to China began to shift after the War of 1812. The furs and sealskins were replaced largely by specie, with copper, cotton, rice, lead, steel, ginseng, rattans, pepper, nutmeg, tin, cochineal, corals, British manufactures, and opium (which will be discussed later) also becoming important. Tea and silk continued

<sup>2</sup>Charles O. Paullin, Diplomatic Negotiations of American Naval Officers (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1912), pp. 160-161; Kemp Tolley, Yangtze Patrol: United States Navy in China (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1971), p. 2.

<sup>3</sup>Foster, American Diplomacy, p. 36.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.; Tong, U. S. Diplomacy in China, p. 18.

<sup>5</sup>Tong, U. S. Diplomacy in China, p. 18.

to be the major exports from China.<sup>6</sup>

As already mentioned, the Empress of China became the first United States ship to visit East Asia. In 1786 the Grand Turk, out of Salem, Massachusetts, called at Canton. The same year, eight other vessels left for Asian ports.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, Japan was not being completely ignored. In 1791 the Lady Washington, under the command of John Kendrick, anchored in a Japanese harbor, the first American vessel to do so. Efforts were made to trade, but the Japanese officials forbade any such activities.<sup>8</sup>

However, the Napoleonic Wars in Europe soon afforded the Americans a chance to trade indirectly with the Japanese. Dutch ships had been swept from the seas by the British Navy, so in an effort to continue their trade at Nagasaki, the Hollanders commissioned American vessels to carry their goods under the Dutch flag, the Japanese agreeing to this procedure. Thus from 1797 to 1809, many American ships, such as the enterprising Eliza, were able to call at Nagasaki. Unfortunately for the Americans, the embargo, followed by the War of 1812, put an end to this new-found carrying trade. And with peace coming to Europe in 1815, the Dutch were once again able to furnish their own ships.

The total amount of this trade was insignificant when compared with overall American trade, but it did introduce for the first time Japanese goods to

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>7</sup> Paullin, Diplomatic Negotiations, p. 161.

<sup>8</sup> F. W. Howay, "John Kendrick and His Sons," Oregon Historical Quarterly, XXIII, No. 4 (December, 1922), 286.

American markets, and whetted the appetites of several United States merchants. Although Americans were not successful in trading with Japan again until the 1850's, that country continued to be of some interest, thanks mainly to the frequency of American whalers being shipwrecked on her shores.<sup>9</sup>

During the early stages of American trade with China, the United States government played a passive role. The first American residents of Canton had to rely on either the Chinese government or British force for protection and redress of grievances.<sup>10</sup> But as the volume of trade and number of American merchants residing in Canton increased, the likelihood of problems and conflicts also increased. This in turn forced the American government to become involved in Asian matters to a certain degree, regardless of whether or not the State Department and various Administrations favored an expansionist policy in the area.

In 1818 the naval frigate Congress was sent to Asian waters, arriving off China in November, 1819. Sent "to protect our merchantmen from the pirates that frequented the East Indies," the vessel was the first United States ship of war to appear in East Asia.<sup>11</sup> The second American naval vessel to visit China was the Vincennes, arriving in January, 1830.

<sup>9</sup> William L. Neumann, America Encounters Japan: From Perry to Mac Arthur (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1969), pp. 7-10.

<sup>10</sup> Dennett, Americans In East Asia, p. 83; Fairbank, "'American China Policy' to 1898: A Misconception," 412-413.

<sup>11</sup> Paullin, Diplomatic Negotiations, pp. 167-181; Dennett, Americans in East Asia, p. 79.

After learning that the American merchantman Friendship had been attacked in the East Indies, and had three of her crew killed, President Jackson in 1831 dispatched the frigate Potomac "with orders to require immediate satisfaction for the injury and indemnity to the sufferers."<sup>12</sup> In 1832 the Potomac succeeded in destroying the town of the offending attackers, and in killing and wounding about one hundred and fifty of the natives.<sup>13</sup>

1832 was also the year that the Edmond Roberts mission, sent by the Department of State, visited Manila, Canton, Cochin China, Siam, and Muscat; signing treaties with the latter two. Roberts was also given the authority to sign a treaty with Japan, but he was not able to visit that nation.<sup>14</sup> Concerning Japan, an American naval captain, David Porter, had proposed an expedition to that country in 1815 in order to open up commerce between the two nations, but President Madison chose to ignore the suggestion.<sup>15</sup>

With the outbreak of the Opium War between China and England in 1839, American diplomacy in China became much more active. And, as suggested earlier, commerce and the United States merchants played a major role. Relations had become so strained between China and the foreigners over the opium

<sup>12</sup> Richardson, ed., A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897, III, 1114.

<sup>13</sup> Paullin, Diplomatic Negotiations, pp. 347-348.

<sup>14</sup> Dennett, Americans in East Asia, pp. 128-132.

<sup>15</sup> Allen Cole, ed., "Captain David Porter's Proposed Expedition to the Pacific and Japan, 1815," Pacific Historical Review, IX, No. 1 (March, 1940), 63-65.



problem that on May 25, 1839, "a number of American merchants [eight, to be exact]... memorialized the Congress of the United States, setting forth their need for protection, commenting on the nature of their commerce activities, and suggesting lines of policy...."<sup>16</sup>

This petition, quickly followed by the outbreak of the war, convinced Washington that American interests and citizens in Canton needed protection. On November 2, 1840, the Constellation and the Boston, under Commodore Lawrence Kearney, were told to depart for Asia. As well as offering protection, the ships were ordered to "prevent and punish the smuggling of opium into China either by Americans or by other nations under cover of the American flag."<sup>17</sup>

There was no serious trouble between the Americans and Chinese while Kearny was in Asian waters, the latter among other things having their hands full with the British. In 1842 Kearny was able to get unofficial Chinese recognition for the United States of the most-favored-nation principle. This has sometimes been noted as a great diplomatic achievement by Kearny, but in reality the Chinese were simply acknowledging the privileges already won by Great Britain for all Western powers, the Chinese seeing no significant distinction between the foreigners.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Paul H. Clyde, United States Policy Toward China: Diplomatic and Public Documents, 1839-1939 (New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1964), pp. 3-6.

<sup>17</sup> Paullin, Diplomatic Negotiations, p. 191.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 191-204; Dennett, Americans in East Asia, pp. 108-111; Clyde, U. S. Policy Toward China, pp. 7-8; Earl Swisher, China's Management of the Western Barbarians: A study of Sino-American Relations, 1841-1861,

In late 1842 President Tyler recommended that a commissioner be sent to China to help protect American interests, and to regularize relations between the United States and China.<sup>19</sup> There was strong opposition by some members of Congress to this recommendation. People such as Senator Thomas Benton, being preoccupied with Mexico, California, and Oregon, viewed a mission to China as irrelevant to American affairs and a waste of taxpayers' money.<sup>20</sup> However, there was enough support at home, including that from John Quincy Adams, that Caleb Cushing was able to depart for China in May, 1843.<sup>21</sup> The Cushing mission resulted in the signing of the Treaty of Wanghia on July 3, 1844.<sup>22</sup> The Sino-British Treaty of Nanking, signed in 1842 following the conclusion of the Opium War, had actually paved the way for Cushing's success. The Chinese saw no need to withhold rights already granted to one set of foreigners, the same line of reasoning they had used when dealing with Kearny.

The Treaty of Wanghia and the privileges granted the United States were enlarged upon and superceded by the Treaties of Tientsin in 1858 following the Arrow War.

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with Documents (New Haven: Far Eastern Association, 1951), pp. 93-94.

<sup>19</sup> Richardson, Messages and Papers, V, 2067.

<sup>20</sup> Tong, U. S. Diplomacy in China, pp. 29-30.

<sup>21</sup> Charles Francis Adams, ed., Memoirs of John Quincy Adams (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1969), vol. XI, p. 167.

<sup>22</sup> Clyde, U. S. Policy Toward China, pp. 9-12; David Hunter Miller, ed., Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States of America, 17 vols., (Washington: United States Government Printing office, 1942), IV, 559-662.

Early American government relations with Japan, when compared with China, were far simpler, since no trade was allowed prior to 1858. In fact, only one government attempt to open negotiations with Japan preceded the Perry Expedition of 1853-54. That was in 1846. Commodore James Biddle of the U. S. S. Columbus, who had temporarily replaced the ailing first Commissioner to China Alexander Everett and exchanged the ratified Wanghia Treaty with the Chinese in 1845, was given the power to negotiate with Japan.<sup>23</sup> Arriving in Tokyo Bay in July of 1846, Biddle had no luck at all with the Japanese and was forced to return to China.<sup>24</sup> This set the stage for Perry's expedition, which will be discussed at length later.

Just as growing commercial relations, or the desire for commercial relations as in the case of Japan, led to increased government involvement and the formation of treaties, so also government action in Asia all too frequently involved diplomacy by force, or the threat of force, as a means to achieve specific ends. American, and European, "gunboat" tactics did not begin with the Yangtze River Patrol of the early 1900's, or even the Korean Incident of 1871.

Technically speaking, our treaties of 1844 and 1858  
...were not forced upon China, but they did come out of weakness

<sup>23</sup> Richardson, Messages and Papers, V, 2251-52; Swisher, China's Management, p. 185; John Bassett Moore, ed., The Works of James Buchanan (New York: Antiquarian Press, Ltd., 1960), vol. VI, pp. 139-144.

<sup>24</sup> Neumann, America Encounters Japan, p. 27.

rather than out of equality, . . . following a British or international military victory, and . . . carrying the most-favored-nation clause which gave us the fruits of victory whether we participated or not.<sup>25</sup>

In this way the United States was using "gunboat" tactics, even if the "boats" themselves were not necessarily American. The Nanking Treaty of 1842 was forced upon the Chinese, and this opened the way for the subsequent American treaties.

But although British power was the dominant factor in Asia for most of the nineteenth century, Americans did not refrain from using force at times when it was available and seemed handy. In March of 1853 the U. S. S. Plymouth under the command of Captain John Kelly, decided that the American flag had been insulted and used force against a Chinese vessel to obtain satisfaction. Fortunately no deaths were recorded, but the next month the same captain and a number of his crew, working with the British, were involved in a conflict with Chinese soldiers over the occupation of a "foreign race course," resulting in several deaths.<sup>26</sup>

During the spring of 1854, the steam frigate Susquehanna, one of the ships used by Perry to open Japan, traveled fifty miles up the Yangtze River as a show of American force. This act was soon followed by similar ones by the

<sup>25</sup>E. Mowbray Tate, "U. S. Gunboats on the Yangtze: History and Political Aspects, 1842-1922," Studies on Asia, VII (1966), 121.

<sup>26</sup>Tolley, Yangtze Patrol, pp. 12-13; Samuel Eliot Morison, "Old Bruin": Commodore Matthew C. Perry, 1796-1858 (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1968), pp. 408-409.

British and French.<sup>27</sup>

In 1867 direct force was used when the Navy Department, with Secretary of State Seward's approval, authorized the Hartford and the Wyoming, under Rear Admiral Bell, to land forces on Taiwan and punish the aborigines who had murdered the captain and crew of the American bark Rover.<sup>28</sup>

And in 1870, just a year before the Korean-American Incident, the heavily armed U. S. S. Alaska traveled all the way up the Yangtze to Hankow. Rear Admiral John Rodgers, who would command the Korean expedition, noted that the Alaska's visit "was important as showing to the Chinese that their cities are at the mercy of the foreign navies."<sup>29</sup>

Remarking on American gunboat tactics in China, and he might easily have included the expedition to Japan in 1853-54 and the one to Korea in 1871, E. Mowbray Tate maintains:

From the cruise of the Susquehanna in 1854... to the sinking of the Panay in 1937, the Navy often acted first and was questioned afterward, but... the State Department usually agreed by authorizing the protection of what Secretary of the Navy Dobbins had called in 1855 "the immense property belonging to the citizens of the United States of America." The principle that Americans legally resident by treaty [and later even those not covered by treaties] were entitled to protection has spread to other parts of the world. It may not even have begun in China....<sup>30</sup>

Tate's concluding sentence introduces us to the next section of this paper.

<sup>27</sup>Tate, "U. S. Gunboats on the Yangtze," 125.

<sup>28</sup>Dennett, Americans in East Asia, p. 411.

<sup>29</sup>Tolley, Yangtze Patrol, p. 33.

<sup>30</sup>Tate, "U. S. Gunboats on the Yangtze," 131.

## II. THE PRECEDENCE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION

The willingness of the United States Navy and government to use force to back up commercial, treaty, and "God-given" rights did not begin in East Asia, just as this nation's commercial trade and overseas missionary movement did not originate in East Asia. One of the most crucial areas for setting such precedents was in the Mediterranean area, a fact that has been widely overlooked by many American-East Asian historians.<sup>31</sup>

The Mediterranean had been one of the principal areas of expanding commerce in the American colonial period, years before any thoughts of Asia entered the American mind. When independence was achieved, British naval protection from the Barbary corsairs was lost to United States merchant vessels. This loss of British protection was the central cause for America's first attempts at signing treaties with the North African nations. When the price of these treaties became too high (tribute was demanded), the war with Tripoli and the use of force against all the Barbary states resulted.<sup>32</sup>

Up to the 1840's, commercial interests in the Mediterranean region

<sup>31</sup> John K. Fairbank, "America and China: The Mid Nineteenth Century," in American-East Asian Relations: A Survey, ed. by Ernest R. May and James C. Thomson, Jr. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 21; James A. Field, Jr., America and the Mediterranean World, 1776-1882 (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 443.

<sup>32</sup> R. W. Irwin, The Diplomatic Relations of the United States with the Barbary Powers, 1776-1816 (Chapel Hill, N. C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1931), pp. 20-21, 101; Field, The Mediterranean World, pp. 38-49, 62-67.

were of prime importance to American shippers. Cotton, worked metal, and rum were some of the most common American exports. Figs and raisins were two of the major imports from the area. But one product picked up in the Mediterranean, principally in Turkey, soon surpassed all others. This was opium.<sup>33</sup>

Opium not only played a major role in the Mediterranean trade, it was also one of the first products to really open up American commerce with China. In this way the Mediterranean region served as a valuable point of departure for the Far East. The Americans had been shut out of the India-China opium trade by the British East India Company's monopoly in that area. However, that same company inadvertently gave the United States an almost complete monopoly over the trade of Turkish opium.

Two policies of the East India Company combined to facilitate American exploitation of the opium in the Levant. In the first place, the East India Company excluded private English shipping from trade between Europe and China. In the second place, the East India Company did not permit carriage of opium on Company ships. The two general policies of the East India Company converged, in the particular question of trade in Turkish opium, to produce a situation in which private English shipping could not, and the Company's vessels could not, carry the drug to China. As a result, Americans were assured freedom from English competition....<sup>34</sup>

American ships were definitely hauling opium to China by 1805. In that year the brig Pennsylvania departed from Smyrna with, among other things, forty-nine chests of opium. In the same year the brig Entan left for Canton with

<sup>33</sup>Field, The Mediterranean World, pp. 114. 438.

<sup>34</sup>Charles C. Stelle, "American Trade in Opium to China, Prior to 1820," Pacific Historical Review, IX, No. 4 (December, 1940) 429-430.

forty-six chests and fifty-three boxes of opium.<sup>35</sup>

For the years 1805, 1806, and 1807, British records listed Turkish opium imports by American vessels at Canton as being 102, 180, and 150 piculs. (One picul equaled 133-1/2 pounds of opium, or one chest.) If the British records are accurate, such amounts would have been only about five to ten percent in value of the goods shipped into Canton by Americans, excluding the remittances of specie. However, even ten percent was quite a large amount for such a new item. The volume gradually increased until by 1818 opium accounted by value for anywhere from thirty to fifty percent of the commodities which Americans used for the purchase of Chinese goods.<sup>36</sup>

This traffic in Turkish opium continued to grow so that during the years from 1824 to 1830, the American consignment of Turkish opium averaged between 1,000 and 1,500 chests annually.<sup>37</sup> The major American commercial firms in Canton, such as Perkins and Company, and Russell and Company, became dominate carriers in the trade. As a point of interest, the merchantman Emily, which became well known in 1821 because of the "Terranova Incident" and the question of extraterritoriality,<sup>38</sup> had previously departed from Turkey

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 430.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 432-433, 442.

<sup>37</sup> Stelle, "American Trade in Opium to China, 1821-1839," Pacific Historical Review, X, No. 1 (March, 1941), 57, 68.

<sup>38</sup> Dennett, Americans in East Asia, pp. 86-88.



with a load of opium.<sup>39</sup>

By the mid-1830's, the Turkey-Canton trade in opium began slowly to die out. 'The peculiar conditions under which American traffic in Turkish opium developed: freedom from competition in carriage, freedom from competition in storage, monopoly of the market---all these were gone. The gloss was off the trade.'<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, the opium trade from the Mediterranean had played a vital role in the growth and prosperity of America's trade with China, and helped to establish commercial companies and interests that were to continue.

A subject of major concern in American-East Asian history is the role of missionaries. Although much has been written about such activities in East Asia, missionary work, like commerce, got its first start in the Mediterranean, an area that dominated the movement for years and had a strong influence on the missions in the Far East. In fact, the dominance of the missions in the Near East over their counterparts in the Far East lasted far longer than the respective commercial relationships between the two areas. As late as 1850 the budget for China missions was only one-fifth that of the Near East missions' budget. In the 1870's the combined budget of missions in Japan and China was still only one-half of that allocated to the Levant. It was not until the last thirty years of the

<sup>39</sup> Stelle, "American Trade, 1821-1839," 57-59.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 73; for a description of the psychological and social rationalizations supporting the American opium trade, see Jacques M. Downs, "Fair Game: Exploitive Role-Myths and the American Opium Trade," Pacific Historical Review, XLI, No. 2 (May, 1972), 133-150.

nineteenth century that missions in the Far East began playing the major role in missionary activities.<sup>41</sup>

Generally speaking, in the first half of the nineteenth century Mediterranean affairs overshadowed those of the Far East in the public eye. The wide public interest in the Greek revolution of the 1820's serves as an example. Nowhere can the researcher find similar enthusiasm and support for any East Asian "cause" or topic of the period.<sup>42</sup> An inspection of popular reading material of the 1840's suggests the same conclusion. For instance, "Littell's Living Age in the year 1845-46 selected newsworthy topics concerning the Near and Middle East over the Far East at a rate of four or five to one. In 1860 the preponderance is still roughly two to one."<sup>43</sup>

Just as American commerce in the Mediterranean generally preceded that in East Asia, so too this nation's first non-European treaties were with Mediterranean states. In 1787 our first treaty with Morocco was signed, followed by one with Algiers in 1795, another with Tripoli in 1796, and a fourth with Tunis in 1797.<sup>44</sup> All of these treaties contained varying demands for tribute, and when Tripoli insisted on increasing the tribute, war broke out. After five years of intermittent warfare, a new treaty was signed in 1805.

<sup>41</sup>Field, The Mediterranean World, pp. 176-77, 262-63, 436-37.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., pp. 121-133.

<sup>43</sup>Fairbank, "America and China: The Mid Nineteenth Century," in May and Thomson, American-East Asian Relations, p. 25.

<sup>44</sup>Miller, ed., Treaties and Other Acts, II, 185-227, 275-317, 349-385, 386-426.

The situation along the North African coast remained unstable until 1815, when two large American squadrons under Commodores William Bainbridge and Stephen Decatur arrived in that region. Decatur demanded that a new treaty disclaiming any tribute be signed by Algiers, the country then causing the Americans the most trouble. The Algerians, although naturally detesting the new terms (they made their living from tribute, privateering and piracy), agreed to sign when faced with such a strong naval force. Decatur, soon followed by Bainbridge, then sailed on to Tunis and Tripoli to make it clear that no more tribute would be forthcoming. Even though it took some years to get the Algerian treaty ratified, this effort ended the armed conflict with the Barbary states, as well as any further tribute.<sup>45</sup>

A treaty with Turkey was signed in 1830 and ratified in 1831 under much more amicable circumstances. Like other treaties in the Mediterranean, it was originally motivated by commercial considerations.<sup>46</sup> The principles of most-favored-nation and extraterritoriality that were to become so controversial in Western-Asian relations were first designated in this treaty.<sup>47</sup>

The commissioners that were appointed following the signing of the first treaties with East Asian nations, as well as their assigned duties, were also influenced by Mediterranean precedents. Upon receiving the Wanghia

<sup>45</sup> Irwin, The Diplomatic Relations of the U. S. with the Barbary Powers, pp. 161-186.

<sup>46</sup> Paullin, Diplomatic Negotiations, pp. 122-153.

<sup>47</sup> Kwang-Ching Liu, "America and China: The Late Nineteenth Century," in American-East Asian Relations, p. 46.

Treaty, President Tyler recommended that "a permanent minister or commissioner with diplomatic functions, as in the case of certain Mohammedan States," should be dispatched to China.<sup>48</sup> Commenting on the possibility of establishing a representative in China, John Quincy Adams on January 9, 1843 remarked: "Mr. Webster thought a salaried consul, like those maintained at the Barbary States, would require about \$3,000...."<sup>49</sup> The Mediterranean was an early measuring stick for diplomatic, as well as commercial and missionary, standards.

The use of naval force to carry out government policy actually began with the Barbary Wars.

Intended as a police force to keep the oceans clear for legitimate commerce, the Navy was projected for use against Algiers [in 1794], was employed against the French [in the Quasi War], was sent against Tripoli.... After 1814 there was projected a systematic program of naval expansion, paralleling the growth of commercial opportunity, but a police force the Navy remained until late in the century.<sup>50</sup>

The 1815 naval force sent to Algiers was a perfect example of gunboat diplomacy. Not a shot was fired, but the immediate threat of using the impressive armament available had the desired effect on the reluctant Algerians.

Whereas the American Pacific Squadron was formed in 1822 (renamed the East India Squadron in 1835, and the Asiatic Squadron in 1865), the Mediter-

<sup>48</sup> Tong, Diplomacy in China, pp. 8-9.

<sup>49</sup> Adams, Memoirs, vol. XI, p. 290.

<sup>50</sup> Field, The Mediterranean World, p. 63.

anean Squadron appeared as early as 1801.<sup>51</sup> And although the naval forces in the Western Hemisphere and the Far East began to outnumber those in the Mediterranean by the late 1850's, the "Mediterranean remained a focus of world diplomacy and the show window of the world's navies...." To command its squadron was the most prestigious assignment in the active Navy.<sup>52</sup> As a case in point, when first offered the command of the Japan Expedition in 1851, Perry refused, desiring rather to command the Mediterranean Squadron. It was only after this was refused him and he was ordered to command the Japan Expedition that Perry gave up attempts to receive the treasured assignment.<sup>53</sup>

Service in the Mediterranean Squadron trained many naval personalities who later left their mark in East Asian waters. David Porter (1780-1843), who James A. Field calls "America's first naval expansionist"<sup>54</sup> for his 1813 activities in the Marquesas Islands and his 1815 suggestion of a Japan expedition,<sup>55</sup> had earlier experiences in the Mediterranean. He became a hero in the 1803 Tripoli campaign when, as a lieutenant, he led an attack party ashore against heavy fire and was twice wounded. Later the same year he was among the crew of the Philadelphia that became prisoners of Tripoli when their vessel was cap-

<sup>51</sup> G. W. Allen, Our Navy and the Barbary Corsairs (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1965), p. 323.

<sup>52</sup> Field, The Mediterranean World, p. 238.

<sup>53</sup> Morison, 'Old Bruin,' pp. 272-274.

<sup>54</sup> Field, The Mediterranean World, p. 151.

<sup>55</sup> Dictionary of American Biography, ed. by Dumas Malone (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946), vol. IX-X, p. 84.

tured. He remained in captivity for almost two years, until a treaty was finally signed in June, 1805. After his release he remained with the Mediterranean Squadron for another year.<sup>56</sup>

James Biddle (1783-1848), who as Commander of the East India Squadron from 1845 to 1848 exchanged the ratified copy of the Wanghia Treaty with China, as well as attempting to negotiate with Japan, had served in the Mediterranean from 1802 to 1805, and again from 1826 to 1832. During the first period he served two tours as a midshipman, the second tour on the fateful Philadelphia, and like Porter thus became a prisoner for twenty-one months in Tripoli. His second major period of duty in the Mediterranean was undoubtedly more enjoyable. As commander of the Mediterranean Squadron, he held the most enviable position in the Navy. It was during this period that he was one of the three commissioners charged with negotiating and signing the 1830 treaty with Turkey.<sup>57</sup>

Lawrence Kearny (1789-1868), who as we noted earlier commanded the East India Squadron from 1841 to 1843, served in the Mediterranean from 1825 to 1829. During this time he was to aid in the suppression of piracy, and from 1827 to 1829 convoyed American ships to Smyrna and patrolled the waters around the Cyclades. It was reported that "in little over two months after his arrival, he had taken seven boats belonging to the pirates and recovered much

<sup>56</sup> Allen, Our Navy, pp. 127-128, 143, 154.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 330; Tolley, Yangtze Patrol, p. 303; Paullin, Diplomatic Negotiations, pp. 144-149.

stolen property."<sup>58</sup> It was probably largely due to his successful service in the Mediterranean that he was promoted to captain on December 27, 1832.

Robert Shufeldt (1822-1895), who made his first visit to Korea in 1867 while commanding the U. S. S. Wachusett and later climaxed his career by negotiating the first Korean treaty with a Western nation in 1882, had served in the Mediterranean region from 1845 to 1848, and again in the early 1870's.<sup>59</sup> It should also be remembered that his voyage in the Ticonderoga, which eventually resulted in the Korean treaty, had first begun in the Mediterranean-African area. After rounding Cape Verde,

... Shufeldt attempted the Liberian arbitration, gained the right to establish an American coaling station on Madagascar, and negotiated a commercial treaty with the Sultan of Johanna, in the Comoro Islands; continuing on his way, he visited Zanzibar, Muscat, the Persian Gulf and the Euphrates....<sup>60</sup>

Furthermore, in his negotiations with Korea Shufeldt was influenced by Perry, who himself was greatly influenced by his own experiences in the Mediterranean.<sup>61</sup>

This brings us to two of the most important figures in this limited study of Mediterranean influences on naval attitudes. Matthew Perry and John Rodgers the younger played two of the central roles in early American-East Asian relations. I will therefore discuss both in separate sections of this paper.

<sup>58</sup> Dictionary of American Biography, vol. IX-X, p. 270.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., vol. XVII-XVIII, pp. 139-140.

<sup>60</sup> Field, The Mediterranean World, pp. 379-380.

<sup>61</sup> Fairbank, "America and China," In May and Thomson, American-East Asian Relations, p. 23.

### III. MATTHEW GALBRAITH PERRY

Although Commodore Perry (1794-1858) is best known for his activities in Japan, a proper understanding of his role there is not possible without first studying his personal background, and especially his experiences in the Mediterranean.

In many ways Perry was a protege of Commodore John Rodgers the elder. His first significant sea duty began on the U. S. S. President in 1810, commanded by Rodgers. The Commodore "seems at once to have sensed Galbraith's outstanding qualities, since he appointed him his personal aide, with the duty of keeping the official sea journal."<sup>62</sup> This was as a midshipman. Perry later was to learn most of his seamanship and attitudes toward discipline from Rodgers, and maintained those attitudes the rest of his life. Rodgers gradually gave the then youthful Perry more and more responsibility, especially during their cruise together in the Mediterranean in the 1820's.<sup>63</sup>

Perry served three important tours of duty in the Mediterranean area. The first was in 1815, when, as a lieutenant, he participated in the Decatur-Bainbridge expedition to the Barbary coast. He was second in command of the man-o'-war brig Chippewa, under George C. Read. (Read later served in East Asia waters from 1838 to 1840.) The nineteen year old lieutenant noted the influence that both Decatur's and Bainbridge's squadrons had on the Dey of

<sup>62</sup> Morison, 'Old Bruin', p. 27.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., pp. 36, 75, 101.



Algiers, "and it proved a precedent for what the younger Perry did... in Japan in 1853-54."<sup>64</sup> Perry returned from this cruise on November 15, 1815.

His second cruise to the Mediterranean was from April, 1825, to July, 1827. By now a lieutenant commandant, he was assigned as "First Lieutenant" (or, second in command) of the U. S. S. North Carolina. The North Carolina was the pride of the American Navy, its largest ship of the line, mounting 102 guns and carrying 832 men. To be appointed First Lieutenant of such a ship was a great honor for any young naval officer. She was the flagship of the Mediterranean Squadron, and the commander of that Squadron was Perry's mentor, Commodore John Rodgers, by then the senior officer in the American Navy. The Squadron's principal duty during this period was to once again protect American commerce, this time threatened by developments in the Greek war for independence.<sup>65</sup>

By now Commodore Rodgers was getting along in years, and left many of the daily tasks up to Perry, including those of a diplomatic nature. Perry conferred with the highest officials of the Turkish Navy, "which doubtless gave [him] a few hints about dealing with Orientals."<sup>66</sup> There is possibly little similarity between Turks and Japanese, but Perry's notions of how to treat non-Western people were probably further cemented. His attitude could be summed up as: be firm in your position and demonstrate an impressive, disciplined

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., pp. 85-86, 96.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

show of force.

Perry's third cruise in the Mediterranean was from November, 1830, to November, 1832. This time, as Master Commandant, Perry was commanding his own ship, the 127 feet long sloop-of-war Concord. Perry and the Concord had just finished transporting John Randolph first to St. Petersburg and, since that city was not to the temperamental politician's liking, then to London. The ship's assignment in the Mediterranean, like the North Carolina, was to protect American commerce, which was now being threatened by pirates from the Cyclades. As well as serving convoy duty, Perry actually landed troops ashore in search of pirates. Due to the local population's unofficial support of the pirates, Perry's action had little concrete affect. But it shows that he was not opposed to the use of force in foreign waters to make his point.<sup>67</sup>

In the summer and fall of 1832 occurred an experience profoundly important in Perry's development as a diplomat and naval officer. The United States had claims against the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies for spoliations on American commerce during the Napoleonic Wars. France had agreed to pay a similar claim in 1831, but the government officials in Naples had repeatedly balked at the idea. It was decided that the Mediterranean Squadron would be used to help persuade these officials to see the error of their ways. Perry was chosen to carry out the plan of operation, a plan

which probably suggested his strategy in the Japan mission. It consisted in making a cumulative impression by sending the squadron

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., pp. 104, 114-115, 120.

into the Bay of Naples in echelons. First to arrive, on 23 July 1832, were Brandywine and Constellation. . . . Ferdinand [the King of Naples] happened to be away when the two frigates arrived, but was immediately sent for. "Great uneasiness was felt upon the occasion," wrote Minister Nelson [U. S. chargé d'affaires at Naples], "and vigorous preparations were made for the defense of the City. . . ."

Brandywine and Constellation sailed back to Port Mahon in August, and Naples drew a long breath. But Perry, after delivering Commodore Biddle to Marseilles in Concord, sailed directly to Naples, arriving 17 September. John Adams, already there, did not create much alarm, but the arrival of Concord did the trick. Prince Cassaro, minister of foreign affairs, now condescended to negotiate with Nelson, and Perry assisted the negotiation by entertaining members of the Neapolitan aristocracy on board.<sup>68</sup>

A treaty was signed on October 14, 1832, in which the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies agreed to pay 2,100,000 ducats to the United States within nine years. Perry and the Concord sailed for home the next day, carrying Nelson and the treaty with them. Thus ended Perry's third and final cruise in the Mediterranean.<sup>69</sup>

As noted earlier, Perry later in his life strongly desired the command of the Mediterranean Squadron, but he was never to receive it.

Perry acknowledged the lessons he had learned, though not naming specific cases, when he later sailed to Japan.

...I have found it profitable to bring to my aid the experience gained in former and by no means limited intercourse with the inhabitants of strange lands---civilized and barbarian---and this experience has admonished me that with people of forms it is necessary either to set all ceremony aside, or to out-Herod Herod in assumed personal consequence and ostentation.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., pp. 121-122.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>70</sup> Pineau, ed., The Japan Expedition, 1852-1854: The Personal Journal of Commodore Matthew C. Perry, p. 159.

Perry's principal biographer, Samuel Eliot Morison, feels that the Commodore was not an imperialist in the modern sense of the term, as he was a person "eschewing forcible annexation, punitive expeditions, or forcing religion and trade on people who desire neither."<sup>71</sup> However, to find absolutely no fault in Perry's behavior, as Morison does, one must ignore several activities that were a direct affront to Japanese sovereignty. Morison seems to think that since Perry's success was, in the long run, a benefit to Japan (that is, it helped her to enter international affairs and introduced the period of modernization), then all the Commodore's actions are commendable.

But whether the overall effects of the Expedition were good or bad is beside the point. Several specific incidents demonstrate that Perry was a skilled tactician in the use of gunboat diplomacy.

From the beginning Perry made it clear that he would consider using force, if not a "punitive expedition," when circumstances called for it.<sup>72</sup> When the squadron first anchored in Tokyo Bay and was met by a group of small Japanese boats, Perry used the threat of force to drive most of them off. When a few still remained, "an armed boat from the ship was sent to motion them away, at the same time showing their arms, which had the desired effect." Later when Perry insisted on meeting with a high Japanese official in order to present his government documents addressed to the Emperor, and was met with objections, he threatened to "go on shore with a sufficient force and deliver them,

<sup>71</sup> Morison, "Old Bruin", p. 429.

<sup>72</sup> Pineau, The Japan Expedition, p. 92.

whatever the consequences might be."<sup>73</sup>

Although desiring to bring Japan into the "family of nations," where she could be guided and controlled by the rules of international law, Perry was not above making his own law to achieve his goals. Throughout his visit to Japan, he sent out armed boats to survey that country's coastal waters, a questionable activity that later was to get John Rodgers into trouble. On one such occasion, Perry reported in his journal that

the governor enquired what these boats were doing, and on being told that they were surveying the harbor, he said it was against the Japanese laws to allow of such examinations [sic]. He was replied to that though the Japanese laws forbade such surveys, the American laws command them, and that we were as much bound to obey the American as he was the Japanese laws.<sup>74</sup>

Perry's rebuttal may have carried little legal weight, but backed up by the guns of the squadron, the surveys continued.<sup>75</sup>

Matthew Calbraith Perry's sharp judgment of personalities and understanding of dissimilar cultural attitudes were major reasons for his successful use of gunboat diplomacy, skills which set him apart from many other naval diplomats of the nineteenth century. This ability, along with specific internal changes then being experienced by Japan, combined to bring about the first Japanese treaty with a Western power. The effect these changes had on the negotiations, and how this contrasted with the Korean situation, will be discussed

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., pp. 93, 94; see also pp. 100-101 for a similar episode.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., pp. 94-95.

<sup>75</sup> Morison, "Old Bruin", p. 326.

further in the conclusions of the thesis.

#### IV. JOHN RODGERS

John Rodgers the younger (1812-1882) was the son of Commodore John Rodgers (1773-1838). He served two tours of duty in the Mediterranean, the first in 1828 when as a midshipman he saw his first active service on board the Constellation and Concord, and the second from 1846 to 1848. During the later period he cruised in African as well as Mediterranean waters protecting American commerce as Perry had done off and on from the 1820's to 1845.<sup>76</sup>

Rodgers was undoubtedly influenced by both his father and Perry. He was aware of his father's exploits along the Barbary coast from 1802 to 1806, where the then captain was "so much a fighter that he offered to raise the ransom money from the officers of the squadron [for the captured crew of the Philadelphia] if only the war could go on. . . ."<sup>77</sup> Rodgers the elder played one of the leading roles during the subsequent negotiations, and as we have already seen, continued his Mediterranean experiences into the 1820's.<sup>78</sup>

Matthew Perry's influence on the younger Rodgers did not stem solely from his naval experience. There had been close personal relations between Commodore Rodgers and Perry dating back to 1810, and the ties between the

<sup>76</sup> Dictionary of American Biography, vol. XV-XVI, p. 77; Morison, "Old Bruin", pp. 163-178.

<sup>77</sup> Field, The Mediterranean World, p. 54.

<sup>78</sup> Dictionary of American Biography, vol. XV-XVI, p. 76; Irwin, The Diplomatic Relations of the U. S. with the Barbary Powers, pp. 143, 161-164.

two families became even closer when Perry's daughter, Sarah, married the Commodore's son, Robert, in January of 1842. "Sarah's marriage was a delight to both parents; and young Rodgers... looked to Captain Perry for guidance, since his father... had died."<sup>79</sup> The Rodgers and Perry families became one large clan after this, and Robert's brother John was certain to have become well acquainted with Matthew Perry. In fact, it seems entirely possible that they might have discussed naval tactics and the role of the American Navy in diplomatic affairs.<sup>80</sup>

At any rate, Rodgers' activities in East Asia were certainly based upon Perry's experiences. Just six months after Perry had left the Ryukyu Islands for the last time in February, 1854, Rodgers called there and, à la Perry, threatened the use of force to gain treaty privileges.<sup>81</sup>

But the major incident which demonstrates the pervasive influence of Perry was the expedition to Korea in 1871, led by then Rear Admiral Rodgers.<sup>82</sup> The Incident of course will be reviewed thoroughly in Chapter VI. Here I merely wish to show the relationship between the attitudes and behavior of Rodgers and those of Perry.

The mission as a whole bore striking similarities to Perry's expedition,

<sup>79</sup> Morison, "Old Bruin", p. 126.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., pp. 145, 275.

<sup>81</sup> Neumann, America Encounters Japan, p. 48.

<sup>82</sup> John K. Fairbank, Edwin O. Reischauer, and Albert M. Craig, East Asia: The Modern Transformation (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1965), pp. 375-376.

except for the fact that Rodgers shared the diplomatic responsibilities with Minister to China Frederick F. Low. Once again it was decided that a show of force would have the greatest effect on a reluctant Asian kingdom. Thus five heavily armed warships were dispatched under Rodgers' command.

Upon reaching Korean waters, Rodgers decided there was a need to survey the surrounding coastline, just as Perry had done in Tokyo Bay and the immediate area in 1853-54. The activities of the surveying party, especially in such heavily armed ships, were a violation of Korean law and territorial sovereignty. The Koreans, already wary of such foreign movements following their clash with the French in 1866, were determined to protect their coastline and harbors. When the surveying party penetrated their fortified zone, the Korean shore batteries opened fire. Fortunately no Americans were killed in this exchange and only two were wounded. But the Americans, Rodgers and Low, not realizing that they had been in error, ordered an attack on the Korean forts. This much larger engagement ended any possibility of treaty negotiations between the two countries.<sup>83</sup>

Rodgers had followed in the best Perry tradition, but he unfortunately was not familiar with the domestic Korean situation. Perry had used force, and surveying parties, and had gotten away with it because the Japanese had already decided they did not want a military clash with the foreigners, and would there-

<sup>83</sup> John Rodgers, "Partial Report on the Military Expedition to Corea." appended in E. M. Cable's "United States Korean Relations 1866-1871," Transactions of the Korean Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, XXVIII (1938), 189-191.



fore sign a limited treaty.<sup>84</sup> The Koreans did not share this attitude. For numerous reasons, which will be covered later, they opposed any treaty with a foreign power, and the violation of their territorial rights by Rodgers' forces confirmed this position.

I have not meant to imply in this paper that all American activity in East Asia was preceded by events in the Mediterranean, or that all United States naval officers insisted on using force to facilitate diplomatic negotiations. The cautious and responsible behavior in Asian waters of Lawrence Kearny and James Biddle, to name only two men, deny the latter suggestion.

However, America's early activities in East Asia were not born in a vacuum. Many of the naval officers who served in East Asian waters had previously been stationed in the Mediterranean during formative periods of their careers. And as fate would have it, the years from the 1790's to the 1850's were often a time of conflict and political instability in the Mediterranean. This meant that naval squadrons in the area were called upon to use force in many instances in order to counteract conditions that seemed to threaten the United States politically and commercially. When these same officers later appeared in East Asia, these experiences may have strongly influenced their interpretation of and reaction to Asian events.

Just as important as this factor, service in the Mediterranean was often an American's first contact with non-Western people and cultures. It became an

<sup>84</sup>Neumann, America Encounters Japan, p. 41; Morison, "Old Bruin", pp. 357-358.

accepted notion that these people, being inferior to those of the West, should be treated differently. It was assumed that their word was unreliable in diplomatic negotiations, and that force was the only method they really respected. From this period on, Americans began to use two diplomatic standards; one for "civilized" Western nations, and one for "uncivilized" non-Western nations. When the United States finally began to come into serious contact with the Asian countries, these non-Western "principles" were often applied. This study is too limited to determine the exact degree of this Mediterranean influence, but that there was such an influence, and that in some individual cases it may have played a predominant role, should not be ignored by historians of American-East Asian relations.

## CHAPTER IV

### KOREAN DOMESTIC POLITICS

#### ON THE EVE OF THE 1871 INCIDENT

The period leading up to 1871 was one of domestic turmoil and social upheaval for Korea. The country had never truly recovered from the Hideyoshi invasions of the late sixteenth century. The poverty of the nation made the peasants' life hard enough, but in addition, the continued decay of the government helped to bring about the "first major popular uprisings in the entire history of the Yi dynasty."<sup>1</sup>

Although the answer to what brought on these social uprisings is an extremely complex one, for our purposes there were three immediate problems: land ownership, military service and taxes, and the grain-loan system. A larger and more general problem that was related to all of these causes was the favoritism, inefficiency, and corruption rampant in the government.

As the last three centuries of the Yi dynasty unfolded, the cultivable land fell more and more under the control of powerful government officials, relatives of the royal family, and the wealthy "yangban" (兩班), the highest level of the Korean aristocracy. The results of this process were twofold. Since most of these holdings were tax-exempt, the state's tax revenues steadily

<sup>1</sup>Choe, The Rule of the Taewŏn'gun, p. 24.

decreased. At the same time the number of peasants bought out or forced off their land conversely increased.<sup>2</sup>

The military system in theory called for universal service of all males between the ages of sixteen and sixty, but since in reality the yangban and the lowest classes were exempt, the peasants had to shoulder the entire load. By the late stages of the Yi dynasty, "men of military age were not assigned to actual military service, but to pay taxes [instead].... With this new development, the military tax, which was popularly known as yangyŏk [良役, commoners duty], became literally the 'evil of evils'."<sup>3</sup>

The peasants who paid the military tax were driven deeper into poverty; many others became slaves, servants, monks, and outlaws to escape such heavy payments. Those who were successful in evading the tax only made the position of the people left behind in the villages that much worse. Before the uprisings of the 1860's occurred, the military exemption tax was partially modified, but it still remained very much a burden to the peasants.

The grain-loan system, which in principle was designed to help relieve the plight of farmers in times of famine, became in practice a tool used to raise government revenues and line the pockets of bureaucratic officials. The interest for loans and the penalties for overdue payments became excessive, and special fees were charged for carriage, storage, and wastage. "Many farmers were ruined by these loans and deserted their land in despair, taking to banditry

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 1-6; Sohn, The History of Korea, p. 187.

<sup>3</sup> Choe, The Rule of the Taewŏn'gun, pp. 8-9.

or eking out a precarious living by farming hillsides in remote, mountainous areas. The financial structure of the Kingdom verged on collapse...."<sup>4</sup>

Social discontent, especially by the peasant and lower-level yangban excluded from government, began growing by the early nineteenth century. "Posters with anti-government slogans appeared mysteriously, and the popular custom of fortune-telling and divination was used to criticize the officials, some of these going so far as to foretell the downfall of the dynasty."<sup>5</sup> In 1812 there was a major peasant uprising in P'yŏngan Province led by Hong Kyŏng-nae (洪景來) a poor, lower-level yangban who had not received a government post. The social problems just summarized, as well as the government's discrimination against people from northern provinces like P'yŏngan, were reason enough to enable Hong to gather a large following. Although eventually suppressed by government troops, the revolt lasted for four months and warned of events to come. Minor revolts also occurred in 1813 and 1816.<sup>6</sup>

At about this time nature also began working against the peasants. The early and mid nineteenth century was a period of widespread natural disasters in Korea, including floods, fires, and epidemic diseases. Homeless people "poured into the cities or fled to the mountains" as social unrest continued to rise.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 6-8; Han, The History of Korea, pp. 340-341.

<sup>5</sup> Han, The History of Korea, p. 341.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 341-343; Sohn, The History of Korea, pp. 188-189.

<sup>7</sup> See the table in Choe, The Rule of the Taewŏn'gun, pp. 10-11.

On March 18, 1862, one of the great peasant uprisings in modern Korean history began in the Chinju (晉州) area of southwest Kyōngsang (慶尙) Province. Led by an intellectual, Yi Myōng-yun (李命允) the revolt was aimed in general at the oppressive government system. More precisely, the revolting farmers wanted to drive out the corrupt officials and wealthy landlords who were using their power and influence to bleed the peasants dry. Much of their anger was directed toward Paek Nak-sin (百樂莘), the newly appointed military commander of Kyōngsang, whose greed was even worse than the usual avaricious official. The uprising was so serious that Paek was dismissed by the central government and limited reforms were promised. But once the government forces were able to regain military control of the area, the leaders of the revolt were arrested and executed. The reforms were meaningless, after becoming bogged down in numerous government committee meetings. Nevertheless, the overall graveness of the peasants' situation was reflected in the fact that other uprisings at about this same time occurred in Chōlla (全羅), Ch'ungch'ōng (忠淸), Hamgyōng (咸鏡), and P'yōng-an Provinces, as well as on Cheju (濟州) island. The dynasty was indeed in very serious trouble.<sup>8</sup>

It is at this point that the famed Taewōn-gun (大院君) comes into the picture. King Ch'ōljong (哲宗, reign: 1849-1864) died on January 16, 1864, without leaving a male heir or named successor. In this situation it was

<sup>8</sup> Sohn, The History of Korea, pp. 188-190; Han, The History of Korea, pp. 344-345; Choe, The Rule of the Taewōn'gun, pp. 28-31.

the right of the widow of a deceased monarch to choose the new king. Although Ch'ŏljong's widow, who was a member of the Andong Kim (安東金) clan then controlling the crown, was still living, she was preceded by the earlier King Munjo's (文祖) widow, Queen Sinjong (神貞).<sup>9</sup> Queen Sinjong was from the Cho (趙) clan, which at that time was the predominant rival of the Andong Kims. She used this opportunity to replace the Kims and their allies with people who she thought would be friendly to the Cho clan. It should be noted that this continual in-fighting for control of the throne further increased the bitter factionalism and at the same time decreased the efficiency and respect of the government. To be the new king, Queen Sinjong selected

...the son of an obscure descendant of King Yonjo (英祖, reign: 1724-1776) named Yi Ha-ŭng (李昰應), who had managed to survive the various political conflicts by having no affiliation with any of the factions and by making himself appear of no account. The boy was only twelve, and so could not become a factor in politics for some time, while the father, the Cho clan felt, would easily be used as a tool for their domination of the court. They were in for a big surprise.<sup>10</sup>

The boy was Kojong (高宗), who was to reign until 1907. His father, Yi Ha-ŭng, became better known by his court title, Taewŏn-gun, which

<sup>9</sup> King Munjo had never actually reigned. Although a Crown Prince, he died before his father, King Sunjo (純祖, reign: 1800-1834), did. Sunjo was therefore succeeded by Munjo's son, Honjong (憲宗, reign: 1834-1849). However, Munjo was posthumously given the title "king", and his living wife Sinjong thus became a queen, with all the rights and privileges of that position. From Choe, The Rule of the Taewŏn-gun, p. 194.

<sup>10</sup> Han, The History of Korea, p. 361. See also Sin Sŏk-ho, et al, ed., Han-guk Hyŏndae Sa, I, 26-29; Kuksa Taesajŏn (Encyclopedia of Korean History) (Seoul: Chimun-gak Publishing Co., 1962), p. 1812.

can be translated as Prince Regent. Although there had been taewŏn-guns before, during the reigns of other minors, the title is always associated with Yi Ha-ŭng. For in reality, he ruled Korea from 1864 to 1873 ( and made several brief appearances thereafter), carrying out one of the most active domestic programs in later Yi dynasty history.

He proved to be a capable and dedicated politician, and, despite the attempts of the Cho clan and the various other factions, was soon in complete control of the court and the government. He was not interested in petty factional fights; his goal was to restore Korea to the position she had held in the early years of the Yi dynasty, and to do so along purely Confucian lines. To a large degree he was a reformer, but in the traditional sense rather than in the Western sense. He looked to the past for the remedies of Korea's problems, not to the future. The Taewŏn-gun "was aiming at a new beginning for the dynasty, a return to the time of King T'aejo (太祖) and the golden age when true harmony reigned between the sovereign and his subjects."<sup>11</sup>

His first move was to try to weed out the corrupt officials throughout the government. The campaign was carried out continuously and energetically to 1873, and while the overall successes were mixed, corruption for the first time in decades was strongly checked.<sup>12</sup>

Steps were also taken to cut down on the size of tax-exempt landholdings largely in the hands of the royal family members and powerful officials. This

<sup>11</sup> Choe, The Rule of the Taewŏn-gun, p. 32.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 33-34, 40.



spread the tax load more evenly, thus improving the lot of the peasants. The grain-loan system was also modified, so that the local areas and people began to have more control over the management, distribution, and payment of grain-loans. This helped to cut down on the amount of extortion by government officials.

The military tax system, one of the chief causes for the social disturbances of the early sixties, was effectively reformed. For the first time, Yangban as well as commoner households were forced to fulfill their military obligations, either in services or in taxes. This equalization of payments, regardless of social class or number of sons in a household, greatly relieved the burden of the farmers, and seemed to remain effective for years afterward.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, during the Taewŏn-gun's regime the government recovered from its economic decline and regained some of its financial vitality despite unprecedented spending on military and public works. Yet the Taewŏn-gun did not significantly abandon the traditional economic policies and institutions. The economy remained basically agrarian with no steps taken toward commercialization or industrialization.<sup>14</sup>

The government was reorganized along more efficient lines. Favoritism and discrimination in granting posts were curtailed and in some cases even discontinued. "Talented clerks, illegitimate sons, and slaves were given official status." A new degree of equality among the social classes, although often limited, was beginning to develop. From 1866 on, government edicts were passed to eliminate the discrimination against men from the northwest, which we can re-

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp. 35, 40.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 41.



Figure 5. Yi Ha-ŭng, the Taewŏn-gun, de facto ruler of Korea from 1864 to 1873.

(Courtesy of the Sin-gu Publishing Co.)

call was an important element in the P'yŏng-an revolt of 1812. Such edicts continued to be issued through 1872. "The Taewŏn-gun's policy of giving equal opportunity to men of all social classes (and regional areas) was indeed momentous in Yi history." Many of the men who played major roles in the late nineteenth century were first brought into the government during this decade.<sup>15</sup>

In this spirit of revitalization and equality, the Taewŏn-gun even initiated new dress codes, outlawing extravagant clothing commonly worn by wealthy aristocrats, and giving the commoners the right to wear certain articles previously reserved just for the Yangban.<sup>16</sup>

During this period of domestic reform, the Taewŏn-gun was influenced both by the necessities of the situation and by his earlier contact with the Silhakup'a (實學派), or the School of Practical Learning. This school was comprised of a group of reform-minded intellectuals, usually out of government power, who rejected the formalism and rigidity of Chu Hsi's doctrines. The movement existed in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries. Naturally, in this period of strong Neo-Confucianism, such scholars had a difficult time obtaining government offices. However, because of their social and intellectual positions, they were often in contact with many government officials.

Kim Chŏng-hŭi (金正喜, 1786-1856), a member of the Silhakup'a, taught the Taewŏn-gun calligraphy and painting; the latter also had close contact

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 42-51, 52, 61-63; Sin, Han-guk Hyŏndae Sa, I, 30-32.

<sup>16</sup> Sin, Han-guk Hyŏndae Sa, I, 48-49; George H. Jones, "The TaiWŏn-Kun," Korean Repository, V (1898), 245.

with Pak Kyu-su ( 朴 珪 壽 ) and Kim Yun-sik, students of Silhak. Yi Ik ( 李 翼 ) and An Chǒng-bok ( 安 鼎 福 ), two of the movements greatest leaders in the eighteenth century, were posthumously honored by the Taewǒn-gun in 1867. Such an exposure to the Silhak ideas probably influenced his own notions of social reform.<sup>17</sup> It should be remembered that most of these people, though reformers, were raised in, and believed in, the Confucian system.

In addition to the needs for social reform and government reorganization, one other area was a serious domestic problem for the Taewǒn-gun. This was the growth of Catholicism.

The first Christian literature had been introduced into Korea from China by Hǒ Kyun ( 許 筠 ) in 1610. This was followed by more material, including items brought by Crown Prince Sohyon in 1645. The first Korean Catholic was Yi Sung-hun ( 李 承 薰 ), who was baptized in 1783. Other Koreans were converted, and though their numbers were small, they had an important impact on society since most of them were members of the aristocracy. The first priest to enter Korea as a missionary was a Chinese, Chou Wen-mo. This was in 1794. By 1837 three French priests had arrived, having been smuggled into the country in native costume. In 1845 Kim Tae-gǒn ( 金 大 建 ) became the first Korean Catholic to be ordained. By 1863, there were twelve French missionaries and approximately 20,000 native Catholics in the nation.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Han, The History of Korea, pp. 324-333; Choe, The Rule of the Taewǒn-gun, pp. 13-23.

<sup>18</sup> L. George Paik, The History of Protestant Missions in Korea, 1832-1910, first printing: 1929 (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1970), pp. 30-39;

The spread of Catholicism posed a threat to the government in two ways: as a competing ideology and as a weapon for foreign invasion.

If the Neo-Confucianists were fearful of the Silhakp'a, they were doubly so of the Christian teachings. In 1790 the bishop in Peking, Alexandre de Govea, instructed his Korean followers "that the worship of ancestors was inconsistent with the doctrine of the church."

The result of Govea's prohibition of ancestral worship was disastrous.... Its neglect meant the abandonment of everything that a Korean held most sacred in the duty which he owed to his family, society, and state. But zealous Christian converts tore down their ancestral tablets and set them on fire.<sup>19</sup>

Thus the beginnings of an East-West cultural conflict preceded even the coming of individual Westerners. The position of the Korean Catholics was further weakened by the fact that many of them belonged to a political faction known as the Sip'a (時派), then being driven out of the government by a stronger faction, the Pyŏkp'a (僻派).<sup>20</sup>

The first major persecution of Catholics began in 1801, for reasons both of ideology and factional strife. Chou Wen-mo, the Chinese missionary, was executed, along with many prominent members of the Sip's faction. It was at this time that the fear of a foreign threat was first introduced to those in power. A government agent discovered a secret letter, written by a convert named

Joseph P. Gibbons "Catholicism," in Yi Kyu-tae's Modern Transformation of Korea (Seoul: Sejong Publishing Co., 1970), pp. 185-187; Sin, Han-guk Hyŏndae Sa, I, 63-67; Choe, The Rule of the Taewŏn-gun, pp. 91-94.

<sup>19</sup> Paik, The History of Protestant Missions in Korea, p. 33.

<sup>20</sup> Choe, The Rule of the Taewŏn-gun, pp. 92-93.

Hwang Sa-yōng (黃嗣永) and addressed to the bishop of Peking, describing the persecutions of 1801 and pleading for a European military intervention of several thousand to protect the Catholics in Korea. The letter also recommended that China annex Korea and appoint one of the emperor's sons to rule the country. Such a letter, being captured before it could be sent, only made the Catholics more suspect. If the letter had gone undetected and reached Peking, it probably would have had little affect on either the Europeans or the Chinese; but the Korean government had no way of knowing that.<sup>21</sup>

In 1839 a second major persecution broke out. It was then that the first three French missionaries were killed. But still the movement survived and prospered. Its growth was in large part due to the severely depressed economic and social conditions that the country was experiencing in the early and mid nineteenth century. As people became disillusioned with the government and the present social system, they looked for new answers. Some turned to the Tonghak (東學) movement of Ch'oe Che-u (崔濟愚), which although generally anti-Western, was also suppressed by the government; others turned to Catholicism. The movement began to spread down to the peasant level.

The government's reaction against the Tonghak movement of the 1860's sheds some light on the Taewŏn-gun's possible motives for persecuting the Catholics, a persecution that began in 1866. It was not simply the work of a "re-

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 93; Paik, The History of the Protestant Missions in Korea, pp. 35-36.

actionary" determined to resist foreign "contamination."<sup>22</sup> This notion contradicts the fact that the Taewŏn-gun's wife inclined toward Catholicism, his son's nurse was Catholic, and so were many of his acquaintances. Such is usually not the background of a confirmed, radical anti-Christian.<sup>23</sup> As a dedicated Confucian reformer, he was seriously attempting to cure the social ills that plagued the country. But as the leader of the government, it was also his duty to suppress any movement that seemed to pose a threat to that government's survival and stability. He therefore opposed both the Tonghaks and the Catholics.

The immediate cause of the persecutions of 1866 was the appearance of the Russians along the northern Korean border. To counter this new threat, two Catholics, Nam Chŏng-sam ( 南 鍾 三 ) and Hong Pong-ju ( 洪 國 周 ), proposed to the Taewŏn-gun that Korea form an alliance with France and England. The French priests then in Korea, it was thought, could be used as contacts. The Taewŏn-gun was at first interested, but the Frenchmen show little enthusiasm. Later the idea was dropped when the Russian threat seemed to diminish, and it was realized that such an alliance might make China suspicious. In the meantime, the Catholics, against the wishes of the Taewŏn-gun, made public the news of these events. It began to appear that the Catholics had unusual influence around the throne; and the existence of the foreign missionaries became known

<sup>22</sup> Castel and Nahm, "'Our Little War with the Heathen'," 20.

<sup>23</sup> Sin, Han-guk Hyŏndae Sa, I, 70; Paik, The History of the Protestant Missions in Korea, p. 40.

by those in government.<sup>24</sup>

Soon, increasing pressure was put on the Taewŏn-gun from the anti-Christian elements in the government to sanction the arrest and trial of missionaries and heretics. Thus the Taewŏn-gun had to take a very strong stand against the religion of his friends and his son's nurse, when until that time he had appeared indifferent.<sup>25</sup>

The Taewŏn-gun was forced to act or possibly lose his position of power, a position, it should be remembered, that could not rely on the absolute backing of any major factional group. The politician in him quickly understood the situation. However, contrary to common thought, no more than thirty to forty people were executed in the first wave of the persecutions. It was only with the attacks by the French and the Americans in 1866 and 1871 that the persecutions became widespread.<sup>26</sup>

By chance, Korea had her first direct contact with Western powers just as she was experiencing severe domestic trials. It has usually been true in history that when a nation is weak and in turmoil, she is least prepared to face a foreign challenge. Rather than strengthen the nation, such foreign encroachments, whether they be political, technological, or simply cultural, tend to increase the stability and confusion in the country. It was this instability that the Taewŏn-gun was trying to combat. Unfortunately, he lacked the time and

<sup>24</sup> Sin, Han-guk Hyŏndae Sa, I, 70-71; Lee Sun-keun, "Some Lesser-Known Facts About Taewŏn-gun and His Foreign Policy," Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Society, XXXIX (1962), 26-32; Choe, The Rule of the Taewŏn'gun, p. 95.

<sup>25</sup> Choe, The Rule of the Taewŏn'gun, p. 96.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.



the weapons to be successful.

## CHAPTER V

### FOREIGN POLICY UNDER SEWARD AND FISH

William H. Seward and Hamilton Fish, the United States Secretaries of State during the 1860's and early 1870's, played key roles in determining the course of America's first contacts with Korea.

#### I. WILLIAM H. SEWARD

Although the American public's desire for expansion, so common in the 1840's, had largely died out by the late 1860's, William Seward was an exception. He was an expansionist in the strongest sense of the word.<sup>1</sup> It was his hope that the United States would one day occupy all of North America, and be one of the great world leaders. Seward himself based this vision of empire and domination on

a political law--and when I say political law, I mean a higher law, a law of Providence--that empire has, for the last three thousand years... made its way constantly westward, and that it must continue to move on westward until the tides of the renewed and of the decaying civilizations of the world meet on the shores of the Pacific Ocean.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Thomas A. Bailey, A Diplomatic History of the American People (8th ed.; New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1969), p. 360; Glyndon G. Van Deusen, William H. Seward (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 549.

<sup>2</sup>Walter LaFeber, The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898 (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1963), pp. 25-26.

Those "decaying civilizations" no doubt referred to the nations of Asia. In this statement, Seward was reflecting the cultural superiority felt by most Americans and Europeans of the time toward non-Western peoples.

It is very important to distinguish between Seward's policies for North America and those worldwide. Like the proponents of Manifest Destiny twenty years before, he believed that all of North America would ultimately fall under the control of the American government and system, for as he told a Boston audience in 1867, "Nature meant this whole continent to be sooner or later, part of the American Union."<sup>3</sup> Canada and Mexico would not be colonies, but rather states, just as Texas, California, and Oregon had become. Seen in this light, the Alaska purchase was the first step in bringing about this new union. Of course, there were other factors involved in the purchase, which will be mentioned later, but Seward's vision of a North American empire had already begun to develop.

However, his attitude toward overseas territory was quite different. "He was not interested in the acquisition of colonies in distant parts of the world, since they would mean control over populations alien to the United States by language, custom, and ideas."<sup>4</sup> Seward felt that American influence and domination would come about, not by the acquisition of colonies or military conquest, but by the growth of "world-wide foreign commerce."<sup>5</sup> This would make the

<sup>3</sup> Van Deusen, William H. Seward, pp. 548-549.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 514.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., P. 512.

United States truly powerful and a world leader. And to Seward, one of the greatest, if not the greatest, potential market areas of the world was East Asia.

As early as 1853 he had declared to Americans:

Open up a highway through your country from New York to San Francisco. Put your domain under cultivation, and your ten thousand wheels of manufacture in motion. Multiply your ships, and send them forth to the East. The nation that draws most materials and provisions from the earth, and fabricates the most, and sells the most of productions and fabrics to foreign nations, must be, and will be, the great power of the earth.<sup>6</sup>

It was this quest for widely scattered foreign markets, along with the need for naval stations pointed out by the Civil War, that led Seward to obtain Midway Island, and attempt to obtain the Hawaiian Islands, the Virgin Islands, rights to a canal through Colombia, and various ports in the Caribbean and Pacific.<sup>7</sup> Although this may be labeled "economic imperialism," it was very different from the expansion Seward hoped for on the continent. Alaska was the exception, in that it added to the continental empire, and, because of its position, also served as a gateway to Asia and Asian markets. Seward's son, Frederick W. Seward, commented on this,<sup>8</sup> as did Nathaniel P. Banks, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee in 1867, who called the Aleutians the "draw-

<sup>6</sup> LaFeber, The New Empire, pp. 26-27.

<sup>7</sup> Van Deusen, William H Seward, pp. 526-534; Bailey, A Diplomatic History, pp. 360-363.

<sup>8</sup> Tyler Dennett, "Seward's Far Eastern Policy," American Historical Review, XXVIII (October, 1922), 61.

bridge between America and Asia."<sup>9</sup>

Just by coincidence, Seward had more time to deal with diplomacy and "territorial expansion" in the latter half of the 1860's. Although nominally a supporter of President Johnson, the personality clash between the two prevented a close working relationship, "Johnson was pugnacious and intolerant of opposition, while Seward could enjoy the friendly fellowship of his most active opponents. Seward was a master of compromise, but no compromise was possible in the quarrel between Johnson and his enemies in Congress." So as Seward withdrew more and more from domestic politics, his attention and energy became more strongly focused on foreign affairs.<sup>10</sup>

The desire for large markets and growing commercial contacts in East Asia led to a very active foreign policy by Seward in that part of the world. Representing the Secretary in China was the very able Anson Burlingame. One result of Seward's activity was the Burlingame Treaty signed with China in 1868.<sup>11</sup> "It could more properly be called the Seward Treaty, for... Seward, who showed more interest in the Far East than any other Secretary since Webster, seems to

<sup>9</sup> Fred Harvey Harrington, Fighting Politician; Major-General N. P. Banks (Philadelphia, 1948), pp. 182-185, as cited in LaFeber, The New Empire, p. 29.

<sup>10</sup> Henry W. Temple, "William H. Seward," The American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy, edited by Samuel Flagg Bemis (New York: Pagant Book Company, 1959), VII, 111.

<sup>11</sup> Frederick W. Seward, ed., Autobiography of William H. Seward, 3 vols. (New York: Derby and Miller, 1891), III, 379-382.

have desired it more than Burlingame."<sup>12</sup>

As was the case in China, Seward's chief concern in Japan was the "promotion of American commerce."<sup>13</sup> However, his actions toward the Japanese were influenced by his cultural, as well as economic attitudes. During Perry's expedition to Japan, Seward maintained: "Certainly no one expects the nations of Asia to be awakened by any other influence than our own from the lethargy into which they sunk nearly three thousand years ago."<sup>14</sup> Given such an attitude, it would be difficult to treat the people of such nations as equals, with equal rights and privileges. Seward seems to have been somewhat impressed by Chinese culture, or perhaps by Burlingame's explanations. At any rate, his actions toward the Chinese were for the most part friendly and courteous.<sup>15</sup> But not so with the Japanese. Seward thought that they were half-civilized, and told the United States Minister to Japan Robert H. Pruyn that "Japan was semi-barbarous, the government being relatively enlightened, but the people and the ruling classes not yet reconciled to the opening of the country."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Bailey, A Diplomatic History, pp. 307-308.

<sup>13</sup> Van Deusen, William H. Seward, p. 521.

<sup>14</sup> G. E. Baker, ed., The Works of William H. Seward, 5 vols. (Boston, 1853-1883), I, 356, as cited in Dennett, "Seward's Far Eastern Policy," 47.

<sup>15</sup> Van Deusen, William H. Seward, p. 521.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 521, 519. There is a strong element of truth in the latter part of Seward's statement. However, it was the way in which Japan was "opened" and the demands made upon her through the unequal treaties, as well as any native anti-foreignism, that aroused such anger.



Figure 6. William Henry Seward, United States Secretary of State from 1861 to 1869.

(Courtesy of the Oregon Historical Society)

When the American interpreter, Heusken, was killed in 1861, and it was feared that Japan would ignore the treaties of 1858, Seward proposed a joint naval expedition to the other Western powers against Japan. He suggested that "such hostilities be commenced and prosecuted as the naval commanders may deem most likely to bring the Japanese to a sense of their obligations."<sup>17</sup> Although nothing came of this proposal, the American participation in the "gunboat" diplomacy of 1863, 1864, and 1866 was approval completely by Seward.<sup>18</sup> Seward's desire to cooperate with the European powers in East Asia influenced these decisions, but there is no doubt that he "reacted vigorously [nationalistically] to actions that jeopardized American lives...."<sup>19</sup>

He reacted similarly when news arrived of the death in Korea of the French missionaries and the crew of the American merchant ship, General Sherman, in 1866. Seward's desire for the growth of an Asian market, coupled with this reaction, led him to propose a joint expedition with the French designed to avenge the murders and force a commercial treaty. This proposal was soon dropped, but Korea was not forgotten. In January, 1868 Seward wrote that the American wrongs in Korea were "unendurable," but that "the United States was eager to proceed with such moderation there as not to bring into question American dignity and liberality in relation to rude and unorganized Eastern communi-

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Dennett, "Seward's Far Eastern Policy," 49.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 49-50.

<sup>19</sup> Van Deusen, William H. Seward, p. 522.



ties."<sup>20</sup>

This statement so aptly reflects the misunderstanding and cultural gap that lay between the United States and the Asian nations. It is true that Seward was jumping to conclusions because he still lacked the real facts of the incident, but it was the cultural attitude and feelings of superiority that actually allowed such conclusions to be drawn.

Another "peaceful" expedition was recommended, and though not carried out until after Seward left office, it reflected the Secretary's interests and attitudes.<sup>21</sup>

## II. HAMILTON FISH

Hamilton Fish, although like Seward, a Republican, brought a much different background to the office of Secretary of State. Many people were surprised, including Fish himself, when Grant nominated him for the position. This occurred only after Grant's first two choices, Elihu B. Washburne and James F. Wilson, had resigned and refused the post respectively.

Fish did not seek or desire the office, and accepted Grant's nomination only out of loyalty to the party. He hoped to resign as soon as it was possible without causing the administration further embarrassment. In fact he did offer his resignation several times, but each time it was refused by Grant. In such a

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> For a detailed description of this entire episode, see below, pp. 125-154.

manner Fish ended up serving until the conclusion of Grant's second term in 1877.<sup>22</sup>

While Seward was a confirmed expansionist, Fish's policy was largely moulded in the long run by his inherent qualities of caution and patience--the caution and patience bred of a lifetime spent in the management of a secure estate, in association with conservative businessmen, and of a personal disinterestedness in his tenure of office. His caution led him to distrust all adventurous undertakings, even while lending himself to their pursuit; his patience enabled him to wait the proper moment for discomfiting projects with which he did not sympathize, but which he did not feel able to defeat by open opposition at the outset.<sup>23</sup>

Although he served in many political offices, Fish was in no way the professional politician that Seward was. In fact, he had not held a political office since 1857. He had "retired from the political arena and was not interested in reentering it."<sup>24</sup>

Interestingly enough, the historian Walter LaFeber sees this wealthy conservative as one of the principal figures in the growth of American economic expansion and imperialism in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>25</sup> Fish, along with Grant, "had made an important new addition to the Monroe Doctrine [the non-transfer principle], focused attention on the Caribbean, and established

<sup>22</sup> Allan Nevins, Hamilton Fish: The Inner History of the Grant Administration, 2 vols. (New York: Ungar Publishing Co., 1957), I, 107-117.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph V. Fuller, "Hamilton Fish," The American Secretaries of State, edited by Bemis, VII, 131.

<sup>24</sup> Graham H. Stuart, The Department of State, a History of Its Organization, Procedure, and Personnel (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1949), p. 141; Nevins, Hamilton Fish, pp. 64-66.

<sup>25</sup> LaFeber, The New Empire, pp. 32-39.

the first formal United States holds on Hawaii and Samoa, thus contributing "much to the eventual success of the new empire."<sup>26</sup>

Attempting to support his thesis that the United States practiced economic imperialism from 1860 on, LaFeber seems to add undue emphasis to certain facts. To begin with, Grant's statement of non-transfer was only echoing many earlier American attitudes. It was not a "new addition" to the Monroe Doctrine, since the principle had been used as early as Jefferson's administration, and was implicit in the Doctrine itself.<sup>27</sup>

In addition, the "formal holds" on Hawaii and Samoa were not necessarily major examples of expanding imperialism. In 1872, Commander Richard W. Meade signed an agreement with the native chiefs of Samoa giving the United States rights to a coaling station at Pago Pago. In return, "the United States would employ its good offices to adjust any differences that should arise between Samoa and a foreign power." This agreement became a treaty in 1878. Given growth of steamships at this time, such a treaty was not necessarily imperialistic. The Americans gained no political control over Samoa, and were not burdened with any real responsibilities. "The Senate registered the stamp of its approval" only because the arrangement was not a protectorate, and thus did not seem to pose a threat to America's traditional policy of overseas non-entangle-

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>27</sup> J. A. Logan, Jr., No Transfer (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1961), 95-96, 111-122, 166-172.

ment.<sup>28</sup>

The commercial reciprocity treaty signed with Hawaii in 1875 reflected much more than just economic imperialism. The American cultural influence in Hawaii had by this time become predominant; and the sugar growers relied so heavily on exports to the United States that the new treaty meant a boom to that troubled industry.<sup>29</sup> The Hawaiina Islands' strategic position was noted by many foreign nations. Should she fall into the hands of any of these powers, it could pose a direct threat to the security of the west coast of the United States. Or at least, that is what many people thought at that time. To Fish, some degree of security seemed desirable, if not necessary.

Because of the international situation, Fish was deeply involved in the Caribbean. But this had little to do with imperialistic aims on his part. With regard to Cuba, Fish worked endlessly for non-intervention, usually confronting Grant along the way.<sup>30</sup> Concerning the possible annexation of Santo Domingo, the Secretary of State coldly opposed the idea when it was first brought up, and later went along with Grant only because it served to divert the latter's attention from the more important and delicate negotiations involving the Alabama claims and recognition of Cuban belligerency.<sup>31</sup> In ways such as this, Fish sought to

<sup>28</sup> LaFeber, The New Empire, pp. 35-36; Bailey, A Diplomatic History, pp. 422-423.

<sup>29</sup> Bailey, A Diplomatic History, pp. 428-429.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 380-381; LaFeber, The New Empire, p. 38.

<sup>31</sup> Nevins, Hamilton Fish, pp. 128, 273-275; Fuller, "Hamilton Fish," 130.

dampen many of his President's adventurous plans and schemes, rather than aid their development.

Given this conservatism and disinterest in aggressive imperialism, why then did Fish sanction the 1871 Expedition to Korea? There seems to be two basic reasons. First of all, his general unfamiliarity with foreign affairs and the Department of State, especially in his first years in office, forced him to lean "heavily upon others more experienced than himself for advice and even for the formulation of his policies. . . ."<sup>32</sup> In this way George Seward, the principal proponent of an expedition to Korea, was invited back to Washington and had consultations with the Department of State in early 1870. Seward's remarks appear to have been well taken, for Fish soon gave orders authorizing the mission.

A second factor may have also influenced Fish's decision. Unlike Seward's attitudes, which often stemmed from a political and even at times emotional outlook, "his was a legal mind, well trained, careful in logic, and respectful of tradition. His devotion [was] to the supremacy of law. . . ."<sup>33</sup> Such an outlook would probably place a high value on the necessity for a legally binding treaty between the United States and Korea, especially when an increase of future contacts seemed inevitable. The problem of shipwrecked sailors could thus be handled in an international, legal fashion. This idea unfortunately was to clash with the Korean view of diplomatic relations.

<sup>32</sup> Stuart, The Department of State, p. 141; Fuller, "Hamilton Fish," 130.

<sup>33</sup> Marlene J. Mayo, "A Catechism of Western Diplomacy: The Japanese and Hamilton Fish, 1872," Journal of Asian Studies, XXVI, No. 3 (May, 1967), 396.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE IMMEDIATE EVENTS LEADING TO THE 1871 INCIDENT

Although Korea's first major contact directly with the West did not occur until the 1860's, there had been numerous Western visitors previous to that time. These people had little effect on Korea's impressions of the West, but they form a fascinating part of early Korean-Western relations.

#### I. EARLIEST WESTERN CONTACTS WITH KOREA

Knowledge of pre-nineteenth century Korea was not limited strictly to the Chinese and Japanese. As early as the ninth century, Arab geographers learned of the area, and referred to it in their works.<sup>1</sup> The first Westerner to visit Korea was a Jesuit priest born in Madrid, Gregorio de Cespedes. A missionary in Japan from 1577 to 1611, he was sent to Korea for a year and a half in the 1590's in order to administer services to the Japanese Catholics in Hideyoshi's army. However, though in Korea, he was so fully occupied with the Japanese troops "that no opportunity arose for evangelism among the Koreans. Moreover, his ignorance of the language and his attachment to the invading army

<sup>1</sup> Chung Kei Won and George F. Hourani, "Arab Geographers on Korea," Journal of the American Oriental Society, LVIII (1938), 658-661.

would have prevented him from coming into any effective contact with Koreans other than prisoners of war."<sup>2</sup> This explains why he is not mentioned in any of the contemporary Korean records.

The next Western visitors were Jan Janse Weltevree and two other Hollanders, who were either shipwrecked or stranded on Korean shores in 1627.<sup>3</sup> Since they were not permitted to leave Korea, they became soldiers in the Korean army. Weltevree's two companions died in the Manchu invasion of 1636, but Weltevree himself lived to be at least seventy, settling in Korea with a wife and children while gaining distinction through government service.<sup>4</sup>

He held a government position of some responsibility when the next visitors arrived from the West, the crew of the ill-fated Dutch ship Sparrow Hawk. Shipwrecked on Cheju Island in 1653, the survivors were transported to the mainland. Hendrik Hamel, the ship's secretary and one of the eight Dutchmen to escape to Japan in 1666, eventually wrote an account of their experiences. This was the first book on Korea to appear in the West.<sup>5</sup> Until that time, Wes-

<sup>2</sup> Ralph M. Cory, "Some Notes on Father Gregorio de Cespedes, Korea's First European Visitor," Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, XXVIII (1937), 10.

<sup>3</sup> Gari Ledyard, The Dutch Come to Korea (Seoul: The Royal Asiatic Society, Korea Branch, 1971), pp. 26, 36.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 26-33.

<sup>5</sup> See Hendrick Hamel, An Account of the Shipwreck of a Dutch Vessel on the Coast of the Isle of Quelpaert, Together with a Description of the Kingdom of Corea, translated by John Churchill (London, 1704). Appended in Ibid., pp. 169-226.

tern maps had shown Korea as an island.<sup>6</sup> Although Hamel's work was quite accurate and reliable, its description of a culture so foreign to the West led many people to doubt its authenticity.<sup>7</sup>

While the influence of Catholicism began to seep in across the northern border, the growth of European commerce in East Asia caused many more foreign vessels to appear off Korean coasts by the early nineteenth century. In 1797, the British ship Providence, under the command of William Robert Broughton, sailed near Tongnae ( 東 來 ) on the southeastern coast during a mission of exploration to the North Pacific.<sup>8</sup> In 1816, two more British ships, the Alcest and the Lyra, commanded by Captain Basil Hall, attempted to survey the Western coast of Korea as they traveled from the Gulf of Chilhi to Canton. Although they were able to make contact with some Korean officials, the language barrier prevented the British from learning any significant information.<sup>9</sup> The first attempt to secure actual trade relations occurred in 1832, when the British East India Company sent a ship from Canton for that purpose. But it was re-

<sup>6</sup> Martina Deuchler, "The Opening of Korea, 1875-1884," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1967), p. 151.

<sup>7</sup> Ledyard, The Dutch Come to Korea, pp. 123-124.

<sup>8</sup> Deuchler, "The Opening of Korea, 1875-1884," pp. 151-152; Sohn, The History of Korea, p. 184.

<sup>9</sup> Basil Hall, "Captain Basil Hall's Account of His Voyage to the West Coast of Corea in 1816," edited in Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, IX (1920), 1-37; L. George Paik, ed., "The Korean Record on Captain Basil Hall's Voyage of Discovery to the West Coast of Korea," Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, XXIV (1935), 15-19.



buffed by the Koreans and had to return empty-handed.<sup>10</sup>

The British were not alone in this area. Early American interest also rose from a desire to expand their trade in the Far East. When Edmond Roberts returned from his first diplomatic mission to Asia in May, 1834, he reported to Secretary of State Louis McLane that "one advantage in opening trade to Japan was the possibility that it could lead to trade with Korea."<sup>11</sup> But no concrete efforts came of his ideas.

On February 15, 1845, the first official proposal for the opening of Korea was made by Congressman Zadoc Pratt, Chairman of the Committee on Naval Affairs of the House of Representatives. He introduced a resolution calling for a mission to Japan and Korea to establish trade relations. Pratt declared: "The American people will be able to rejoice in the knowledge that the 'star spangled banner' is recognized as ample passport and protection for all who, of our enterprising countrymen, may be engaged in extending American commerce."<sup>12</sup>

However, the desire to establish trade relations was aimed mostly at Japan. Pratt explained that he was "desirous of a closer acquaintance" with Japan because she had "a population exceeding fifty millions [sic], about thrice as numerous as the whole population of the United States," while her industry could be "comparable with that of the Chinese." Likewise, her potential mar-

<sup>10</sup>Foster, American Diplomacy in the Orient, p. 308.

<sup>11</sup>Harold F. Cook, "America Comes to Korea: The Early Contacts," Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities, XXXIV (June, 1971), 53; Department of State, A Historical Summary of United States-Korean Relations (Washington, D. C., 1962), p. 3.

<sup>12</sup>Cook, "America Comes to Korea: The Early Contacts," 53.

kets for American goods could be comparable to those of China.<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, the United States could not expect "anything like equal advantages from intercourse with Korea," but it seemed to be "desirable to include that country along with Japan in the proposed mission, as negotiations with both countries may be dispatched with little additional expense by the same ambassador."<sup>14</sup> Despite Pratt's efforts, the resolution failed to pass. But it does help partially to explain why it was seventeen years after Perry opened Japan before the United States made a similar attempt in Korea. Once Japan was open, Korea by herself was not important enough to warrant a special mission. And only after the General Sherman episode produced a "cause" did the United States feel justified in dispatching an expedition.

Meanwhile, indirect pressure from the West continued to grow, especially when China, and then Japan, were officially opened. In 1845 the crew of the British vessel Samarang, while surveying along Korea's southern and western coasts, invaded a sea-side pasture on Cheju Island. At about the same time a Russian fleet was sighted off Hamgyŏng Province, while a French fleet appeared off the southwest coast. In 1847 a French ship ran aground while attempting to approach in Kogunsan (古君山) Islands of Cholla province.<sup>15</sup>

The Americans aboard the General Sherman were not the first Ameri-

<sup>13</sup> Yong Suk Jung, 'The Rise of American National Interest in Korea: 1845-1950,' (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Claremont Graduate School and University Center, 1970), pp. 8-9.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Sohn, The History of Korea, p. 184.

cans to reach Korea. In 1855 four American seamen, Melville Kelsey, Thomas McGuire, David Barnes, and Edward Brailey, of the whaler Two Brothers jumped ship off the coast of Korea. They reached the shore in a rowboat, and, as stated by McGuire, "were hospitably received" by the Koreans, who "took us to their houses and treated us well, gave us clothes and food." Barnes added that "the Koreans treated us like men."<sup>16</sup> After spending about thirty days in Korea, they were escorted to the Chinese border at the Yalu River, and from there they were taken by the Chinese first to Peking, and eventually to the United States Consulate in Shanghai. Shortly thereafter they returned to the United States and disappeared from history.<sup>17</sup>

From the 1840's on, the appearance of foreign vessels became more and more common. As the Western powers continued to expand throughout all of East Asia, it would be only a matter of time before they would come into official direct contact with Korea. As fate would have it, an American merchant schooner, the General Sherman, set into motion the events that were to lead to the 1871 United States expedition.

## II. THE CASE OF THE GENERAL SHERMAN

The personnel of the General Sherman consisted of three Americans,

<sup>16</sup> Earl Swisher, "The Adventure of Four Americans in Korea and Peking in 1855," Pacific Historical Review, XXI (Aug., 1952), 239.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 239-241; Swisher, China's Management of the American Barbarians: A Study of Sino-American Relations, 1841-1861, with Documents (New Haven: Far Eastern Association, 1951), pp. 308-309.

two Englishmen, sixteen Chinese and two Malaysians. The principal persons were the owner, Mr. W. B. Preston, the master, Mr. Page, the chief mate, Mr. Wilson, all Americans, and Rev. Robert J. Thomas, an English missionary. In many ways Thomas was the leading personality on board, and seems to have played a major role in determining the ship's fate.<sup>18</sup>

The vessel was loaded with a "cargo of foreign merchandise" at Tientsin, and after stopping in Chefoo to pick up a passenger, it proceeded on to Korea, arriving there in August, 1866.<sup>19</sup> Although the main purpose of the cruise was to carry out trade with Korea, at least in the eyes of Preston and the crew, Thomas had much more in mind.

Thomas had arrived in China in December, 1863, and soon became dissatisfied with his situation there. But his "gloomy thoughts" were soon replaced by new ideas of Korea. In China he met two Koreans, learned some of their language from them, and became curious about the country.<sup>20</sup> From September through December, 1865, he traveled along the coast of Korea. In his own words:

I have been four months away from European society, and traveled by sea and land nearly two thousand miles. I am well acquainted with the coast of the two western provinces of Corea and have made numerous vocabularies and dialogues in the colloquial of the capital, which will be useful in any future negotiations with that

<sup>18</sup> Cable, "United States-Korean Relations, 1866-1871," 8-9.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> M. W. Oh, "The Two Visits of the Rev. R. J. Thomas to Korea," Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, XXII (1933), 100-101.

people.<sup>21</sup>

This first trip to Korea convinced him that the country was a good choice for further missionary work. When he learned that the General Sherman was sailing to Korea hoping to open up trade, he jumped at the chance to return. The vessel, needing someone familiar with the language and geography, was glad to have him aboard.<sup>22</sup> By this time, the summer of 1866, news of the Catholic persecutions that had begun in Korea the previous winter had reached China. The London Mission at Peking, for whom Thomas worked,

on account of the persecution in Korea, did not approve of his decision to make the voyage at that time, and under those circumstances even his best friends tried to dissuade him from it. But he was determined to go and did not consider the risks, thinking only of the chance thus offered to get an entrance for the Gospel into Korea.<sup>23</sup>

His exact aims were to learn more about the country and "perfect his knowledge [of the language] in order to preach the Gospel and establish a Protestant Mission in [Korea]."<sup>24</sup>

As soon as the ship arrived in Korean waters, its members made it known to Korean officials that they intended to enter the Taedong River and carry out trade with the city of P'yŏngyang, located far up the river. Upon hearing this, the Korean officials notified the foreigners that "it was alright for their

<sup>21</sup> Thomas letter to Dr. Tidman, January 12, 1866, quoted in Ibid., 103-104.

<sup>22</sup> Oh, "The Two Visits," 108.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 113-114.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 107-108.

ships to anchor in the seas off the coast but that the King of Korea had forbidden any foreign vessels to enter the inland waters of the country." To this Thomas, as spokesman for the ship, was quoted as saying, "Who can prevent us from going to P'yŏngyang?.... We intend to sail as soon as a favorable west wind comes up."<sup>25</sup>

To the Koreans, it appeared that the ship was not simply a trading vessel. Why else would the foreigners want to proceed to P'yŏngyang, the capital of P'yŏng-an Province? The Koreans knew that the river was not safely navigable up to that point for such a large ship. The Koreans had already noticed that the vessel was heavily armed with guns, swords, and cannons.<sup>26</sup> It would not only be illegal for such a ship to enter inland waters, it would also pose a serious threat to the nation's security.

Nevertheless, the vessel soon got under weigh and succeeded in reaching a spot just below P'yŏngyang, thanks to the unusually heavy monsoon rains that had swollen the river that year.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Yijo Sillok (The Yi Dynasty Annals), chapter XXII, appended in Cable, "United States-Korean Relations, 1866-1871," 16; Sin, Han-guk Hyŏndae Sa, I, 86-87.

<sup>26</sup> Yijo Sillock, chapter XXII, in Cable, "United States Korean Relations, 1866-1871," 15.

<sup>27</sup> In his discussion of this episode, Yong Suk Jung incorrectly states that the General Sherman was "burned and its crew murdered at the mouth of the Taedong River." In fact, if the vessel only had proceeded to the mouth of the river, there would have most probably been no incident. It was when the ship travelled upstream, disobeying the laws and threatening the countryside, that retaliatory action was taken against it. See Jung, "The Rise of American National Interest in Korea: 1845-1950," p. 9.

When the deputy commander of the P'yŏngyang military headquarters, Yi Hyŏn-ik ( 李 玄 益 ) came out peacefully to question some of the foreigners, he was taken prisoner by them instead. Despite the pleas from other officials and even the local populace, Yi was not released. At about this time the foreigners also began to fire randomly at the shore and at the Korean boats in the river.<sup>28</sup>

The situation had now become so serious that the ministers of state, who had been receiving various local reports, were forced to convene in Seoul to discuss the problem and advise the King. They were of course in reality advising the Taewŏn-gun, since he alone controlled the government at this time. They finally decided that:

We must... deal very severely with such men. There is no other way but to go into the particulars of their case very carefully and deal with them sternly. The foundation and perpetuity of the nation is in its righteous principles. If the proper law is administered in such an emergency as this, such lawless fellows will naturally disappear. If the acts of such vicious men as these take place within our borders, how can our country be considered a civilized nation? Therefore, in this crisis we must administer the proper law.<sup>29</sup>

Meanwhile, matters had gotten worse near P'yŏngyang. The sailors

<sup>28</sup> Yijo Sillok, chapter XXII, in Cable, "United States-Korean Relations, 1866-1871," 18-20. What triggered this first firing is not clear. The Korean sources do not yet furnish an answer, and since there were ultimately no survivors from the General Sherman, their side of the story will never be known. It can be speculated that the foreigners may have thought that a show of force would convince the Koreans to open up trade, and that some spectators were accidentally hit during gun "practice." Another possibility is that the Chinese members of the crew allowed their cultural prejudices to overflow into hostile actions. Chinese pirates were common in this area, and some of them may have made up the crew.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 21.

aboard the General Sherman began to fire indiscriminately at Korean soldiers and civilians. At the same time, they decided that they should head back downstream. But by now, the river had dropped greatly and the ship was soon grounded on a sandbar. In his report to the central government, the governor of the province, Pak Kyusu, declared:

the foreign vessel... [has] plundered provisions from Korean ships, recklessly discharging its guns and killing seven and wounding five Koreans. There has never been such a thing as a foreign vessel entering the inland waters of the country and remaining for a number of days. They say they are going to threaten the Koreans with violence in order to force them to trade with them... However, since they had come from a far country we preferred to speak to them kindly, and have them depart with a sense of gratitude, rather than to force them to go by the means of applying the law so we treated them generously many times with food but they did not go and finally acted in [such] a barbarous way, ... so that nothing remained for us to but destroy the vessel.<sup>30</sup>

The order was soon given to destroy the ship, which was finally done by setting it on fire with flaming junks that were floated down the river. Seeing that the drop in the river's level had cut off their escape, some members of the vessel, including Thomas, pleaded for mercy. But the earlier acts of violence and killing, especially those committed against civilians, had so angered the local populace that every member of the ship was killed in return. The crew of the General Sherman had sealed its own fate by first disobeying the national laws, and secondly, by using force and violence against their hosts.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup>  
Ibid., 22.

<sup>31</sup>  
Ibid., 22-25.



### III. THE FRENCH INVASION

When the persecutions of the Catholics broke out in early 1866, only three of the twelve French priests managed to escape arrest. They were Fathers Felix-Clair Ridel, Stanislas Feron, and Adolphe-Nicholas Calais. It was decided that one of them had to go for help, and Ridel, a newcomer was chosen. In June, 1866, with the aid of some Korean Catholics, he was able secretly to sail from Korea to Chefoo, China.

Once in China, he pleaded with the commander of the French Asiatic Squadron, Admiral Pierre-Gustave Rose, to send ships to Korea to rescue their two fellow countrymen. Rose agreed to do so, but he had to wait until most of his squadron returned from a mission to Indochina. Meanwhile, Rose notified the French chargé d'affairs, Henri de Bellonet, of the events taking place in Korea. The fiery Bellonet, who had taken over the French Mission when Minister Berthemy had left, reacted quickly without waiting for specific instructions from Paris.<sup>32</sup>

On July 13, 1866, he sent the following note to Prince Kung, the head of the Chinese foreign office, the Tsungli Yamen.

I grieve to bring officially to the attention of Your Imperial Highness a horrible outrage committed in the small kingdom of Korea, which formerly assumed the bonds of vassalage to the Chinese empire, but [from] which this act of savage barbarity has forever

<sup>32</sup>Choe, *The Rule of the Taewŏn'gun*, pp. 96-97; Wright, "The Adaptation of Ch'ing Diplomacy: The Case of Korea," 376-377; Dennett, "Seward's Far Eastern Policy," 51-52.

separated it. . . . The same day on which the King of Corea laid his hands upon my unhappy countrymen was the last of his reign; he himself declared its end, which I, in my turn, solemnly declare today. In a few days our military forces are to march to the conquest of Corea, and the Emperor, my august sovereign, alone, has the right and the power to dispose, according to his good pleasure, of the country and of the vacant throne.<sup>33</sup>

Hoping to avoid an armed clash between the French and the Koreans,

Prince Kung replied to Bellonet on July 16:

I may here observe that since Corea is an out-of-the-way country, lying in a secluded corner, and, as it is well known, has always strictly maintained its own relations, I am quite unaware what has led them to put these missionaries and Christians to death. . . . Seeing, however, that when two countries come to war it involves the lives of their people, as it will in this case--and, therefore, I cannot but endeavor to bring about a solution of the difficulty between them--as the Coreans have killed a number of the missionaries, it seems to me that it would be best to inquire beforehand into the proofs and merits of the affair, and ascertain what were the reasons for this step, so that, if possible, a resort to arms may be avoided. I . . . suggest such a course for your excellency's consideration.<sup>34</sup>

However, this note had little effect on Bellonet and Rose, who continued with their plans. On September 18th Rose sailed to the Korean coast in his flagship, the Primauguet, accompanied by two other vessels, the Deroulede and the Tardif, to make a preliminary survey of the area. From this reconnaissance, Rose decided that, when the remainder of his fleet returned from Indochina, he would use it to capture Kanghwa Island and then blockade the mouth of the Han

<sup>33</sup>"Bellonet to Prince Kung, enclosed in Burlingame to Seward, December 12, 1866," Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1867, I, 420. Hereafter cited as FRUS.

<sup>34</sup>"Prince Kung to Bellonet, enclosed in Burlingame to Seward, December 12, 1866," FRUS, 1867, I, 421.

River, thus cutting off all shipments by sea into Seoul.<sup>35</sup>

On October 11, 1866, Admiral Rose returned with seven ships and about 600 men to carry out his plan. The French were able quickly to take Kanghwa City, the major town on the island, and proceeded to blockade the Han River. Rose felt that such a show of strength would frighten the Koreans into agreeing to come to terms. But just the opposite occurred. The blockade had little effect on Seoul, since most goods could be brought overland. The French were isolated on a single island, and the Koreans rapidly began to fortify and take up offensive positions on the mainland side of the channel facing Kanghwa Island. Within a month there were nearly 10,500 troops stationed opposite the island, preparing for an attack.<sup>36</sup>

On October 22nd, the Taewŏn-gun issued his famous Four Point declaration.

The Four Points were these: [1] Talking peace with the French is a betrayal to your motherland; [2] Establishing "intimate" relationships with the French is inviting the gradual destruction of your motherland; [3] Retreating in the face of the enemy is a cowardly act, and will encourage the French to endanger the survival of your motherland; and [4] attempting to drive the French away by means of superstitious exorcisms is playing into the hands of the enemy.<sup>37</sup>

The final blow to the French was when a Korean detachment of about 500 men ambushed and defeated a French force of 160 marines on the south end of

<sup>35</sup> Sin, Han-guk Hyŏndae Sa, I, 75-76; Choe, The Rule of the Taewŏn'-gun, pp. 98-100.

<sup>36</sup> Choe, The Rule of the Taewŏn'gun, pp. 100-107; Sin, Han-guk Hyŏndae Sa, I, 77-78.

<sup>37</sup> Yi, The Modern Transformation of Korea, p. 255.

Kanghwa Island. The French suffered nearly fifty casualties, while the Koreans had only one man killed and three wounded. Admiral Rose could now see that there was no way he could subdue, or negotiate with the Koreans. He feared that they would soon launch an attack from the mainland against his small number of troops isolated on Kanghwa.

On November 18th, the French expedition sailed from Korean waters, but not before they transferred all their "war booty" to the ships and set fire to all the government buildings in Kanghwa City.<sup>38</sup>

The Koreans rejoiced in the "defeat" of the foreigners, and were assured of the righteousness of their cause. Following the French invasion, the real persecution of Catholics began, as every Christian was considered a traitor to the nation. It has been estimated that in the next three years over eight thousand Korean converts were slain.<sup>39</sup>

This clash with the French drove the Taewŏn-gun to introduce a more extreme anti-Western policy, which meant not only persecution of Christians and rejection of relations with the outside, but also banning of all Western goods. . . . The invasion also gave rise to a sweeping reconstruction of the defense system. Finally, his victory over the French led the Taewŏn-gun to misjudge the real strength of Western powers and their true motives in coming to Korean shores. After 1866 he persistently viewed other Western nations as mere reflections of the hated French.<sup>40</sup>

These events were to effect America in two ways. First of all, Ameri-

<sup>38</sup> Sin, Han-guk Hyŏndae Sa, I, 79-83; Choe, The Rule of the Taewŏn'-gun, pp. 107-108.

<sup>39</sup> Sin, Han-guk Hyŏndae Sa, I, 73.

<sup>40</sup> Choe, The Rule of the Taewŏn'gun, p. 108.

can diplomats became involved with the French over Korea, and secondly when the United States finally sent an expedition to Korea, the latter's reactions were strongly determined by the previous encounter with the French.

#### IV. THE OPPERT AFFAIR

Along with the General Sherman matter and the French attack must be added one more incident. As mentioned earlier, three French priests had escaped the persecutions. One of them, Father Feron, finally arrived in Shanghai and contacted one Ernest Oppert, a German merchant adventurer very much interested in opening Korea to foreign trade. Oppert had made two previous trips to Korea in 1866 for that purpose, but had been rebuffed both times by the Koreans.<sup>41</sup>

Feron, along with some Korean Catholic friends, devised a plan whereby they would secretly travel to the tomb of the Taewŏn-gun's father, Prince Namyŏn ( 南 延 ), and steal some of the valued objects contained therein. At least that is what Oppert thought. Feron and the Korean Catholics who led them to the tomb were possibly contemplating taking the old gentlemen's body. Then they would hold either the valuable objects or the body for ransom until the Taewŏn-gun agreed to open up trade relations. Feron also wanted to avenge the abortive Rose expedition and the deaths of his fellow priests.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Ernest Oppert, Voyage to Corea: A Forbidden Land (New York: G. P. Putman's Sons, 1880), pp. 177-289.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 297-298; Richard Rutt, "American Tried to Rob Royal Tomb," Korea Times, September 17, 1972, 3.

Two ships were hired for the expedition, the China and the Greta, a shallow-draft vessel suitable for river navigation. The expedition's company, in addition to Oppert, Feron, and the Koreans, included an American adventurer named Frederick Jenkins, who helped to finance the trip. There were also "ten or twelve European sailors, twenty-five Miliamen, and a number of Chinese sailors...engaged to serve as escort."<sup>43</sup>

They left on their mission in May, 1868. But their guides had misjudged the distance from the seacoast to the tomb, and several extra hours were needed to reach the site. Due to a lack of time and the thickness of the tomb walls, they were unable to carry out their plan. In fact, they were just able to escape on the outgoing tide, as their ships were anchored in very shallow water that was turned into mud flats during low tide. During their march to the tomb, they had clashed with some Korean soldiers. If they had stayed overnight at the tomb site, the Koreans might have retaliated with force.<sup>44</sup>

Once aboard their vessels, they did not immediately return to China. Instead, they traveled north to the island of Yōngjong (永宗島) where they again clashed with Korean soldiers. During the fighting, two of the Filipinos were killed. While at Yōngjong, Oppert informed the Regent of what they had

<sup>43</sup>Oppert, Voyage to Corea, p. 303; 'Williams to Seward, August 1, 1868,' FRUS, 1868, I, 547-549; Foster, American Diplomacy in the Orient, pp. 317-318.

<sup>44</sup>Oppert, Voyages to Corea, pp. 304-310; Sin, Han-guk Hyōndae Sa, I, 90-91.

done and demanded that trade relations be opened.<sup>45</sup> The Taewŏn-gun naturally refused. "The court and government reacted to the savagery of Oppert's party with execration, indignation, and bitterness."<sup>46</sup> Even without the armed clashes a worse crime could probably not have been committed in a nation so dominated by ancestor worship. The reputation of all foreigners fell further still and the persecution of Catholics was resumed, while the Regent's policy of total isolationism got another boost.

All three of these incidents, the General Sherman intrusion, the French attack, and the attempted tomb-robbing affair, were important in solidifying the Korean government's distrust of foreigners. This must be remembered when reviewing the American attempt at treaty negotiations in 1871. The Korean attitude was not simply the result of ethnocentricity or inherent isolationism. There had been important, and tragic contact with foreigners previous to that attempt.

## V. AMERICAN DIPLOMACY, 1866-1870

Father Ridel, the French missionary, brought news of the General Sherman to China when he fled Korea.<sup>47</sup> The American Minister to China,

<sup>45</sup> Oppert, Voyage to Corea, pp. 310-319; Choe, The Rule of the Taewŏn'gun, pp. 113-114; Rutt, "American Tried to Rob Royal Tomb," 3.

<sup>46</sup> Choe, The Rule of the Taewŏn'gun, p. 114.

<sup>47</sup> Henry G. Appenzeller, ed., "The Opening of Korea: Admiral Shufeldt's Account of It," Korean Repository, I (1892), 57. When news of the General Sherman and a copy of Bellonet's declaration to Prince Kung reached Washington in January and February of 1867, Secretary of State Seward proposed that

Anson Burlingame, requested the Chinese government to ask the Koreans the true facts concerning the case. The Chinese "disavowed all responsibility for the Koreans and stated that the only connection between the two countries was one of ceremony."<sup>48</sup> However, they agreed to look into the matter when the Korean envoy to Peking made his annual visit. They also sent a special note to Seoul, asking the Koreans for clarification of the problem.<sup>49</sup>

In the meantime Burlingame decided to take more direct action to determine the fate of the General Sherman. He "suggested to Rear Admiral H. H. Bell, then acting commander of the United States Asiatic Squadron, that he send a warship to Korea to inquire about the lost vessel."<sup>50</sup> In January, 1867, Bell ordered the U. S. S. Wachusett, under the command of Robert W. Shufeldt, to carry out this mission. Arriving off the coast of Korea, Shufeldt "addressed a letter to the King of Korea, asking him the reasons for the destruction of the General Sherman and the murder of the crew, expressing my surprise at the

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the United States and France unite in a joint military action against Korea. Whether it was Seward's purpose to avenge the deaths of the General Sherman's crew, or to prevent the French from gaining sole control of Korea, is debatable. Possibly it was a combination of both. At any rate, when Seward learned of the French government's disavow of Bellonet's rash statement and the failure of the Rose expedition, the whole idea was dropped. For more details, see Dennett, "Seward's Far Eastern Policy," 52-58; Van Deusen, William Henry Seward, p. 522; and Jung, "The Rise of American National Interest in Korea," pp. 20-24.

<sup>48</sup>"Burlingame to Seward, December 15, 1866," FRUS, 1867, I, 426.

<sup>49</sup>Choe, The Rule of the Taewŏn'gun, p. 116.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 117.



barbarism of the act...."<sup>51</sup>

While waiting for an official answer, Shufeldt heard from the local people "that the General Sherman had willfully and under constant protest ascended to Taedong River; that finally, the crew landing and behaving in a lawless manner, were attacked and murdered by an enraged mob, which was entirely beyond

the control of the authorities."<sup>52</sup> Shufeldt mentioned that Chinese pirates had been coming to this part of Korea for centuries to rob and plunder, and since most of the crew of the General Sherman were Chinese, the conflict between them and the local populace was understandable.<sup>53</sup>

Shufeldt hoped to wait for the reply from Seoul, but lack of provisions and the possibility of being frozen in until spring forced him to return to Shanghai before receiving it.

The Koreans were confused by these requests from both the Chinese and Shufeldt concerning an American ship. They had no way of knowing that the offending vessel near P'yŏngyang had been American. Koreans did not know the meaning of a national flag and had no way of telling American, French, and English flags apart.<sup>54</sup> They assumed the ship to be either British or French; the former because the ship's apparent leader (Thomas) was known to be an Englishman,

<sup>51</sup> Appenzeller, "The Opening of Korea: Admiral Shufeldt's Account of It," 58.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Lee, "Some Lesser-Known Facts About Taewŏngun," 35.

and possibly the latter because of the recent French attack by Rose.<sup>55</sup> The destruction of the General Sherman occurred only three weeks before the appearance of the first French reconnaissance, and communications being what they were, some connection could have been drawn.

The only American ship that the Koreans positively knew of was the Surprise, a merchantman which had been wrecked on the Korean coast during a storm in June, 1866. As the Koreans stated:

According to the laws of our realm a foreign ship adrift and in distress, although not wrecked, can be supplied, and aided to proceed on its way when the storm was subsided; but when a vessel is wrecked and unable to proceed under its own power, the crew may ask the officials to assist them in any manner they like. Such a crew will be protected on land and sent on to Peking as has already been done in several instances. This indicates that our people have manifested their humane spirit toward neighbors in distress and thus kept the sanctions of the moral law.<sup>56</sup>

Such was the case concerning the crew of the Surprise. The American legation in Peking confirmed this statement, declaring that "the crew was very kindly treated by the [Korean] people and handed over to the officers in Manchuria...."<sup>57</sup> In fact, the friendliness and help offered by the Koreans was in sharp contrast to that denied them in Manchuria.

The fate of the General Sherman and all its crew was still not completely resolved. Therefore S. Well Williams, the American Consul-General in Pe-

<sup>55</sup> Pak Kyu-su, Hwanjae Chip (11 kwon, 1911). Quoted in Cable, "United States-Korean Relations, 1866-1871," 50.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>57</sup> "Williams to the Foreign Office, October 23, 1866," enclosed in Williams to Seward, October 24, 1866, FRUS, 1867, I, 416-417.

king and temporarily in charge following Burlingame's departure, requested the Asiatic Squadron commander, Commodore J. R. Goldsborough, to send another fact-finding ship to Korea. Goldsborough ordered Captain John C. Febiger, commander of the U. S. S. Shenandoah, to carry out the mission. Arriving at the mouth of the Taedong River in April, 1868, Febiger received a copy of the letter originally intended for Shufeldt. Although not definitely stating whether the ship was American or if there were any survivors, both Shufeldt and Febiger "were convinced that the attack upon the General Sherman was made by an unauthorized mob under strong provocation."<sup>58</sup>

On July 31, 1868, S. Wells Williams wrote to Secretary of State Seward that "there can be no reasonable doubt that the whole company on board the General Sherman was killed about September, 1866, and the evidence goes to uphold the presumption that they invoked their sad fate by some rash or violent acts towards the natives."<sup>59</sup>

Although Williams seems to have felt that the issue was now concluded, another question arose that also involved Korea. On April 24, 1868, while the Shenandoah was still in Korean waters, Consul-General George F. Seward at

<sup>58</sup> Appenzeller, "The Opening of Korea: Admiral Shufeldt's Account of It," 60; See also the Congressional Record, 45 Cong., 2 Sess., April 17, 1878, pp. 2600-2601.

<sup>59</sup> "Williams to Seward, July 31, 1868," FRUS, 1868, I, 544-545. From May, 1867, to January, 1868, Seward had also been in contact with American minister to Japan Robert B. Van Valkenburgh, concerning the Japanese offer of good offices to settle the General Sherman "dispute." Seward approved the Japanese offer, but nothing was developed from it since the Koreans refused to recognize the Japanese envoy. See the Seward-Van Valkenburgh correspondence in FRUS, 1867, II, 36-37, 46-47, 75-76; and FRUS, 1868, I, 634-635.

Shanghai sent Secretary of State Seward, his uncle, the following note:

Mr. Frederick Jenkins, a citizen of the United States, formerly interpreter to this office, gave me the following information:

There are now in Shanghai four Koreans and a bishop for Korea, of the Roman Church. These persons have been sent by the Korean government. The purpose is to make inquiries concerning the state of feeling existing toward Korea in regard to the alleged murder of French priests and of the crew of the American schooner, General Sherman, with a view to determine whether it will be wise for the Korean government to send an embassy to America and Europe to explain these occurrences and to make desired treaties of amity and commerce.<sup>60</sup>

The story, of course, was completely false. Jenkins, who a few months later was to take part in the Oppert expedition, evidently hoped to create a Korean-American incident that would lead to the opening of Korea by force.<sup>61</sup>

Whatever the reason, George Seward and his uncle both took this information seriously. The former recommended that he be sent to Korea with power to negotiate a treaty of "amity and commerce similar to those existing with China and Japan."<sup>62</sup> William Seward strongly supported the idea, and gave his authorization June 26, 1868.<sup>63</sup>

Not everyone favored such a move, though. Gideon Welles, the Secretary of the Navy, felt that Seward wanted to use the Korean disturbance as an excuse to sign a treaty with that country and thus expand American foreign interests.

<sup>60</sup>"George F. Seward to William H. Seward, April 24, 1868, enclosed in Fish to Low, April 20, 1870," FRUS, 1870, 336.

<sup>61</sup>Choe, The Rule of the Taewŏn'gun, p. 120.

<sup>62</sup>"George F. Seward to William H. Seward, April 24, 1868, enclosed in Fish to Low, April 20, 1870, FRUS, 1870, 336.

<sup>63</sup>Choe, The Rule of the Taewŏn'gun, p. 120.

Welles himself felt that a treaty "cannot at this time be effected. I said that we were better without a treaty than with one; that the case of the General Sherman ...called for no action by the government."<sup>64</sup> The Welles statement was soon proven true when the Shenandoah returned to China and reported that there were no survivors of the General Sherman and no Korean interest to sign a treaty.<sup>65</sup>

Furthermore, Consul-General Seward learned that Jenkins had traveled to Korea in

an attempt to take from their tombs the remains of one or more sovereigns of that country for the purpose, it would seem, of holding them for ransom. I therefore entered upon an investigation of the facts with a view to determine the nature of Mr. Jenkins connection with the expedition, and whether I ought to prosecute him. I regret to inform you that the information gathered by me has convinced me that it is my duty to do so.<sup>66</sup>

During the investigation, it became apparent that Jenkin's earlier story was a fabrication. However, this did not dissuade Seward from his ideas of negotiating with Korea. Instead, it convinced him that the only way Korea's "opening" could be achieved was with a "considerable show of force."<sup>67</sup> He sent three additional letters to his uncle requesting such an armed expedition,

<sup>64</sup> Howard K. Beale, ed., The Diary of Gideon Welles: Secretary of the Navy under Lincoln and Johnson, 3 vols. (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1960), III, 485.

<sup>65</sup> "George F. Seward to William H. Seward, May 25, 1868, enclosed in Fish to Low, April 20, 1870," FRUS, 1870, 337.

<sup>66</sup> "George F. Seward to William H. Seward, July 3, 1868, enclosed in Fish to Low, April 20, 1870," FRUS, 1870, 337.

<sup>67</sup> "George F. Seward to William H. Seward, October 14, 1868, enclosed in Fish to Low, April 20, 1870, " FRUS, 1870, 337-339.

but nothing was done.<sup>68</sup> Perhaps the Secretary of State was too busy, or perhaps being once burned by authorizing negotiations with Korea, he was more cautious.

The inauguration of the Grant administration gave George Seward another chance. After meeting with Seward in February, 1870, the State Department decided to send a large naval expedition to Korea with the power to negotiate a treaty. Along with Rear Admiral John Rodgers, the commander of the Asiatic Squadron, the American Minister to China Frederick F. Low was entrusted with the negotiations. He was to take with him Acting Secretary of the Legation E. B. Drew, Assistant Secretary of the Legation John P. Cowles, and two Chinese interpreters. Rear Admiral Rodgers was to represent the Navy.<sup>69</sup>

A stout, vigorous New England Yankee, Low was brand-new to his post and totally lacked previous diplomatic experience. But he was a man of substance: at the age of forty-two he had already been a successful banker, a United States congressman, and the Republican governor of California from 1863 to 1867,.... In his early youth he had spent five years clerking in a Boston shipping firm employed in the China trade....<sup>70</sup>

Low's principal orders were to negotiate a treaty for the protection of shipwrecked sailors, and if possible, to include some "commercial advantages in Korea." It was recommended that Low "secure; in advance, the good will and, possibly, the good offices of the Peking government." Furthermore, the mission was to be carried out "with a display of force adequate to support

<sup>68</sup> Choe, The Rule of the Taewŏn'gun, p. 122.

<sup>69</sup> Cable, "United States-Korean Relations, 1866-1871," 72.

<sup>70</sup> Castel and Nahm, "'Our Little War with the Heathen'," 20-21.



Figure 7. Standing: Frederick F. Low, special minister to Korea; sitting:  
E. B. Drew, secretary, and two Chinese interpreters.  
(Courtesy of the National Archives)

the dignity of this government."<sup>71</sup>

Once Low arrived in Peking, he attempted to secure the aid of the Chinese. But the Tsungli Yamen declared that it had neither the right nor the power to interfere in Korean affairs. After three different requests were made by Low, Peking finally agreed to forward Low's letter written to the King of Korea. The Chinese also sent a covering letter to Seoul, which "emphasized the fact that this was an extraordinary step and that the decision must, as always, remain with Korea."<sup>72</sup> These letters were not sent by the Yamen, but by the Board of Rites, since only the latter had authority to deal with a tributary state.

Low's letter to the Korean King dealt mostly with the need to protect shipwrecked persons. It also asked further clarification of the General Sherman incident, and why its outcome differed from that of the Surprise. Low stated that there was no need for the Koreans to be alarmed by the arrival of American warships, as they were coming with peaceful intentions. There was no mention made about trade or commercial privileges in the letter. Low notified the Koreans that he would be arriving in about three months. Since the Koreans did not receive this note until April 10, 1871, it was actually less than two months before he appeared.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>71</sup> "Fish to Low, April 20, 1870," FRUS, 1870, 334.

<sup>72</sup> Wright, "The Adaptation of Ch'ing Diplomacy: The Case of Korea," 371.

<sup>73</sup> Choe, The Rule of the Taewŏn'gun, pp. 124-125.



## VI. THE AMERICAN EXPEDITION

The expedition was comprised of five vessels: the flagship Colorado, the corvettes Alaska and Benicia, and the gunboats Palos and Monocacy. Together, they carried eighty-five pieces of artillery and 1,230 marines and sailors.<sup>74</sup> The force left Shanghai on May 8, stopped briefly in Nagasaki from May 12 to May 15, and appeared off the West coast of Korea on May 19. By May 21, the squadron had reached the Bay of Namyang ( 南陽灣 ) off Kyōnggi Province.<sup>75</sup>

On May 23, the fleet arrived at Ipp'a Island ( 立波 ), and while in this vicinity had its first contact with Korean officials. The magistrate of Namyang, Sin Ch'öl-gu ( 申轍求 ), "made an inquiry concerning the pre-sense of the fleet. He wanted to know when it had arrived, the object of its coming, and when it expected to leave."<sup>76</sup> This was on May 26. The next day, the Americans sent a written reply to the magistrate, formally announcing the arrival of "an envoy and an admiral from the Great United States of America for negotiations with a Korean envoy of high rank." Since such negotiations would take some time, the ships would "remain in Korean waters until the business was completed."<sup>77</sup>

<sup>74</sup>"Low to Fish, May 13, 1871," FRUS, 1871, 115; Paullin, Diplomatic Negotiations of American Naval Officers, p. 288.

<sup>75</sup>Choe, The Rule of the Taewōn'gun, p. 127.

<sup>76</sup>Cable, "United States-Korean Relations, 1866-1871," 76.

<sup>77</sup>Choe, The Rule of the Taewōn'gun, p. 127.

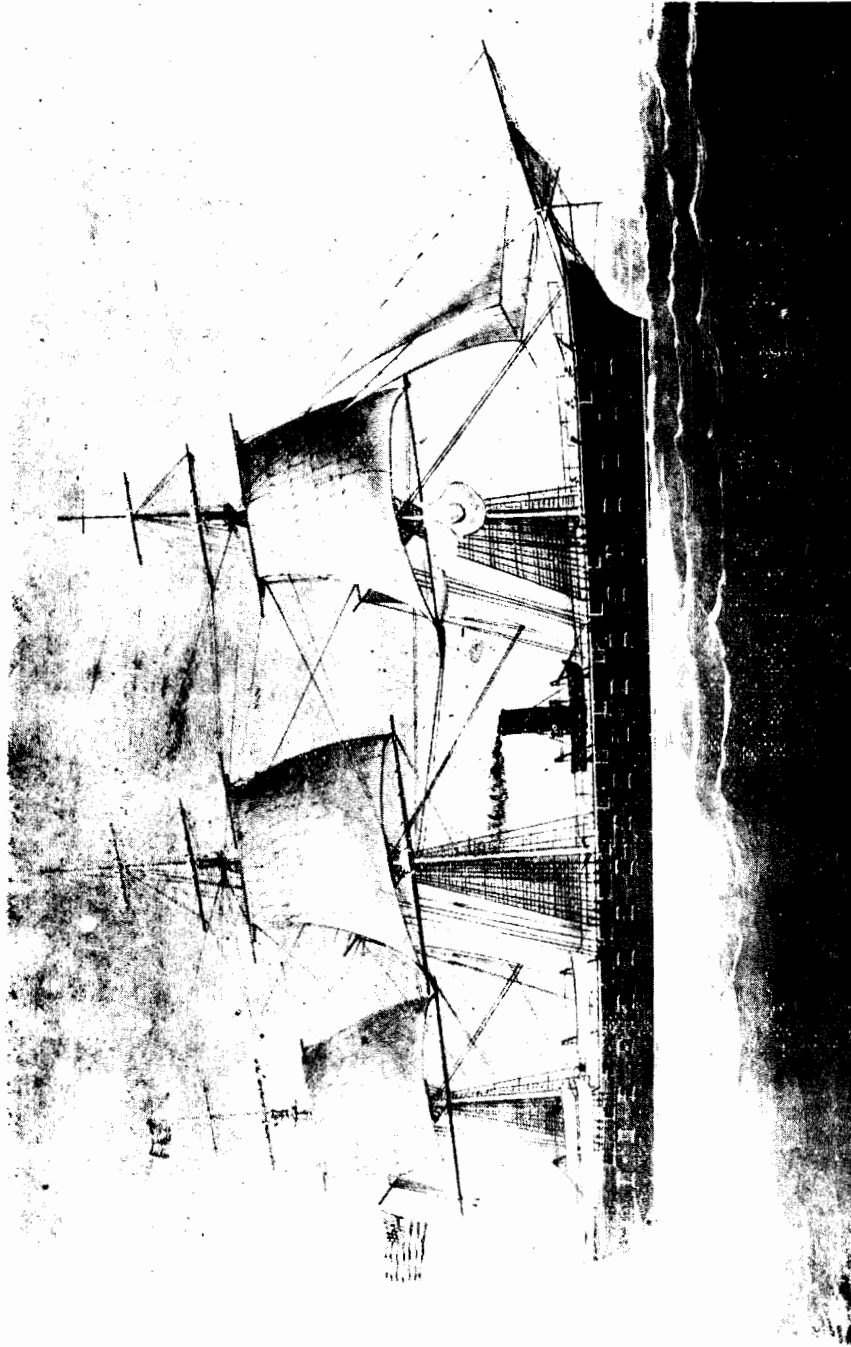


Figure 8. The frigate Colorado, flagship of the Asiatic Squadron in 1871.  
(Courtesy of the National Archives)

Beginning on May 24, Admiral Rodgers sent surveying parties out in smaller boats. Minister Low reported:

When we reached Eugenie Island [Ipp'a Island] the Palos and four steam launches were sent northward to sound the channels as far as the point. They met with no resistance, nor was any attempt made by the natives to communicate with either the launches or the vessels.<sup>78</sup>

Following this survey, the squadron sailed farther northward, and finally anchored off Chak-yak Island ( 竹葉島 ) on the 30th of May. This was southeast and just 10 miles from Kanghwa Island, site of the French invasion.<sup>79</sup>

On May 31, three minor Korean officials came to visit the Colorado. Because of their low rank, Drew and Cowles were assigned to meet them. The two Americans restated the aims of the mission that had been presented May 27. The Koreans replied that though the King of Korea wished to maintain friendly relations, he had no interest in signing any treaties. Drew nevertheless asked that his request for the appointment of a high ranking official to meet with the American minister be forwarded to the Korean King. The Koreans answered that a report of their interview would be sent to the King.<sup>80</sup>

Drew further stated that surveying vessels would be sent to the Kanghwa area the following day. When the Korean officials made no comment, the Ameri-

<sup>78</sup>

"Low to Fish, May 31, 1871," FRUS, 1871, 116.

<sup>79</sup>

Rodgers, "Partial Report on the Military Expedition to Corea," appended in Cable, "United States-Korean Relations, 1866-1871," 189; "Low to Fish, May 31, 1871," FRUS, 1871, 116.

<sup>80</sup>

"Low to Fish, May 31, 1871," FRUS, 1871, 117.

cans assumed that approval for the surveys had been granted.<sup>81</sup>

This was the first major American mistake. Just as Drew was "not authorized to discuss" possible treaty negotiations in Low's place, likewise these minor Korean officials had no power to grant survey privileges. Their mission to the Colorado was merely one of ceremony, a welcoming to the foreign ships. Any request to enter fortified areas would have had to be dealt with by much higher authorities in Seoul. Even if they had refused, Rodgers would have probably ordered the surveys anyway, just as his mentor, Perry, had done eighteen years before.

Furthermore, Drew had not been explicit in his talks. He had stated only that "surveying vessels would go up higher tomorrow."<sup>82</sup> He did not mention that the American party intended to survey Korea's heavily guarded interior passageway between Kanghwa Island and the mainland.

The next morning a force of two gunboats and four steam launches, all heavily armed, proceeded up the narrow channel separating Kanghwa from the mainland. At the northern end of this channel lay the entrance to the Han River and the heart of Korea. The force was led by Captain Homer C. Blake of the Alaska. Before departing on the survey, Low had instructed Blake that in case a hostile attack was made, either upon his men or vessels, to reply by force, and destroy, if possible, the places and the people from which the attack came. Any advantage gained should not be pursued by a landing force, but instead he

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

should quietly proceed in the further prosecution of the work in view until he reached the northern part of Kanghwa, and, if practical, should travel a few miles up the Han River, but not attempt to reach the capital.<sup>83</sup>

By 2:00 p. m., the party had traveled well up the channel. As they neared the fort of Kwangsŏng, they were fired upon by Korean artillery pieces. The Americans retaliated, soon silencing the Korean guns. But damage to the Monocacy forced the party to return to the main fleet. No casualties were reported by the Americans. On the Korean side, one gunner was killed.<sup>84</sup>

Minister Low and Admiral Rodgers interpreted this "wonton and unprovoked attack" as an insult to the American flag. On June 2, 1871, Low wrote to Secretary of State Fish:

The events of yesterday convince me that the government of Korea is determined to resist all innovations and intercourse with all the power at its command, without regard to nationality, or the nature of the demands made. . . .

The question now is, what is the safe and prudent course to pursue, in view of the temporary check, which the Koreans will undoubtedly construe into a defeat of the "barbarians," . . . . If the squadron retires now, the effect upon the minds of the Koreans, and, I fear, upon the Chinese also, will be injurious, if not disastrous to our future prospects in both countries. Korea will rest firmly in the belief that she is powerful enough to repel any of the Western states singly, or even all of them combined; and this opinion will be likely to react upon China, and strengthen the influence of those who insist that it is practicable to drive out by force all the foreign residents. In view of these considerations, I cannot advise the admiral to abandon the field without further attempts at redress for the wrongs and insults which our flag has suffered. . . .

My own view is that a sufficient force should be sent back to the place where the vessels were attacked yesterday, to take and effect-

<sup>83</sup> "Low to Fish, June 2, 1871," FRUS, 1871, 121.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.; Choe, The Rule of the Taewŏn'gun, p. 129.

ally destroy the fortifications above the place as far as the northerly end of the island of Kanghwa. This the admiral expects to do, provided, he finds his forces are able to do it without incurring too much risk.<sup>85</sup>

Although this is the plan that the Americans ultimately carried out, Low and Rodgers decided to first give the Koreans an opportunity to "send an apology for this outrage... before taking further steps."<sup>86</sup>

The Korean view of the June 1 engagement was quite different. They explained that the Americans triggered the exchange by sending armed vessels into forbidden waters. On June 6, they sent the Americans the following note.

The barriers of defense of a country are important places, within which it is not allowable for foreign vessels to make their way. This is the fixed rule of all nations. Hence it was the ascent [up the channel] to the seagate by your vessels the other day that brought on the engagement between us. Upon the arrival of your vessels the court warned the civil and military authorities along the coast to avoid most carefully anything which should cause trouble or arouse ill feeling, yet when your honorable vessels, not considering the fixed regulations of another country, penetrated its important pass, how could the officers appointed to guard the frontiers, whose duty it is to take measures of defense, calmly let it go by as of no consequence? Pray do not then be offended at what occurred.<sup>87</sup>

The Korean sensitivity over the Kanghwa approach to Seoul is understandable. Very close to the capital, it was usually the first outpost to be attacked and the most important to be defended, in case of invasion by sea. Indeed, it had "felt the full force" of the Mongol invasion in the thirteenth century, the

<sup>85</sup> "Low to Fish, June 2, 1871," FRUS, 1871, 122.

<sup>86</sup> "Drew to prefect of Fu-ping, June 5, 1871, enclosure 2 in Low to Fish, June 20, 1871," FRUS, 1871, 131.

<sup>87</sup> "Chong, guardian of the prefecture of Kanghwa, to Low, enclosure 4 in," Ibid., 132.

Manchu invasion of the seventeenth century, and recently the French invasion of 1860.<sup>88</sup> Because of this, it was one of the most heavily guarded areas in the entire country. Following the 1866 invasion, all vessels, whether private or public, were strictly forbidden to go beyond the southern extreme of the channel without a special permit from the proper authorities.<sup>89</sup>

In his study of the incident, E. M. Cable remarked that "the presence of an alien armed force in the vicinity of a fortified and prohibited zone of another country without its permission, and with which the invading force had no treaty of any kind, was in itself, a challenge to war."<sup>90</sup>

Seven years later in the United States Senate, Senator Aaron A. Sargent of California, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Naval Affairs, pointed out that "we would not allow any foreign vessel of a nation with which we even might have a treaty to come and survey our James or any other river; but here was a people particularly sensitive to these things, . . . maintaining a rugged independence, isolated from all the world by a policy which it thought necessary in order to maintain itself as a nation at all." Sargent went on to say that the Koreans guarding the river (the channel) "fired for the purpose of warning the invaders of danger. This appears in the records of the Navy Department."<sup>91</sup>

<sup>88</sup>M. N. Trollope, "Kang-Wha," Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, II (1901), 5.

<sup>89</sup>Cable, "United States-Korean Relations, 1866-1871," 86.

<sup>90</sup>Choe, The Rule of the Taewŏn'gun, pp. 128-129.

<sup>91</sup>Congressional Record, 45 Cong., 2 Sess., April 17, 1878, p. 2601.



Figure 9. Strategy meeting aboard the Colorado. Front row, far right: Rear Admiral John Rodgers; back row, second from left: Commander Lewis A. Kimberly; third from left: Commander Homer C. Blake.

(Courtesy of the National Archives)



By this time the Koreans had also become suspicious of the Americans' avowed desire to negotiate a treaty. The United States declared they needed a treaty to protect shipwrecked sailors. But to the Koreans, their policy of kindness and aid to such people, as reflected in the Two Brothers and Surprise cases, made such a treaty unnecessary. Furthermore, the details concerning the General Sherman had already been given to Commander Febiger of the Wachusett.<sup>92</sup> Low's request in April for more details seemed strange and uncalled for.

Concerning the American desire to open up trade, the Koreans replied:

It is universally known that our humble state is a small dependency in the corner of the seas, that the people are poor and the articles of commerce scanty; that the precious metals and precious stones are not found here, while grains and cloth fabrics are not abundant; that the productions of the country are insufficient to meet the domestic wants; and if they were permitted to flow abroad, thus impoverishing us at home, this insignificant land would certainly be in extreme danger, and difficult to protect from ruin; furthermore, that the habits of the people are sparing and plain; the workmanship crude and poor; and that we have not a single article worthy of commerce with foreign nations.<sup>93</sup>

With no need for a treaty to protect shipwrecked sailors, the General Sherman incident explained, and commercial relations not wanted, the American squadron's purpose for being in Korean waters appeared uncertain. The size and strength of the expedition's military forces seemed unusual for a mission of

<sup>92</sup> King of Korea's dispatch to the Chinese Board of Rites, in reference to Low's letter of April 10, 1871, enclosure 5 in Low to Fish, June 20, 1871," FRUS, 1871, 133-134.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 134. Although the last part of this declaration was intentionally exaggerated to discourage any foreign trade with isolationistic Korea, the portion about needed domestic products leaving the country was proven true in the 1880's and 1890's, when many such commodities were shipped to Japan, thus contributing to the poverty and upheaval in the countryside.

peace, and reminded the Koreans of the French invasion.

The Americans meanwhile had found the Korean explanation of June 6 to be unacceptable. On June 7, Drew, following Low's instructions, once again demanded an apology, and if none was to be forthcoming in three or four days, the "admiral and minister will then feel free to pursue such a course as they may deem proper."<sup>94</sup>

Therefore in a note to the Americans on June 9, the Koreans once again tried to explain.

Before the officials who had been sent to inquire of the fatigues of your voyage get back to the capital [those minor officials notified of the intent to survey], your honorable vessels suddenly entered our narrow pass [from the sea]. . . . As the vessels on which you came [up the river] were vessels of war, and filled with implements of war, our people and soldiers could not but be filled with alarm and suspicion. . . . Now, I apprehend that the way of concord and the rule of propriety in entering another country do not justify this. As this place has been the scene of battle [with other foreigners], it is always strictly guarded. Although I deeply regret the firing affair--indeed by the sudden sight of an unusual thing--and the alarming of your people, still, to defend a pass leading into your territory is what you would do were the case your own.

Your blaming us recently, as is shown by the [demand for an] apology is truly incomprehensible. . . .<sup>95</sup>

This explanation evidently did not satisfy Low or Rodgers any more than the one of June 6 had. The fact that the minor officials had not been given enough time to report the requests to survey was ignored. On the morning of

<sup>94</sup>"Drew to guardian of Kanghwa, June 7, 1871, enclosure 6 in Low to Fish, June 20, 1871," FRUS, 1871, 135.

<sup>95</sup>"Cheng, guardian of Kanghwa, to Low, Juen 10, 1871, enclosure 9 in Low to Fish, June 20, 1871," FRUS, 1871, 136.

June 10, Admiral Rodgers dispatched the punitive expedition to Kanghwa Island.<sup>96</sup>

It was made up of the two gunboats, the Monocacy and the Palos, four steam launches, twenty boats to transport the landing force of 651 men; the naval force manning the ships consisted of 105 sailors, making the total number of men 759. The landing force was organized into ten companies of infantry, with seven pieces of artillery. In addition to her own armament, the Monocacy was armed with two nine-inch guns from the Colorado. Homer C Blake, Commander of the Alaska, was put in charge of the expedition, while Commander Lewis A. Kimberly was ordered to command the landing force.<sup>97</sup>

The force sailed cautiously northward, until they reached the southern tip of Kanghwa Island. They were in position by mid-afternoon, and commenced to attack the fort of Ch'oji ( 草 芝 ). Under the heavy bombardment of the two gunboats, the Koreans decided to retreat to a more defensible position. Thus the forts were taken without any combat or casualties. Once in control of the fort, the Americans completely dismantled it and destroyed everything of military importance. By the time this action was completed, it had become too late to make further advances. Commander Kimberly gave orders to make camp for the night. Pickets were sent out and the artillery was positioned to protect all approaches to the fort, while the Monocacy and the Palos protected the flanks off shore. Except for some minor firing, the night passed peacefully for the

<sup>96</sup> Rear Admiral Winfield Scott Schley, "Partial Report of the Engagement of June 10-11th, 1871," appended in Cable's "United States-Korean Relations, 1866-1871," 192.

<sup>97</sup> Cable, "United States-Korean Relations, 1866-1871," 91.

Americans.<sup>98</sup>

The American troops were up early the following morning, June 11. Their next objective was the fort of Tōkchin ( 德 津 ), located a short distance north of Ch'oji. They began marching northward along the east coast of Kanghwa about 7:00 a. m. Thanks to the heavy shelling of the fort by the Mono-  
cacy and the Palos, Tōkchin was deserted by the time the troops arrived. As they had done at Ch'oji, they dismantled the fort and destroyed all military material, including all the buildings, which were burned.<sup>99</sup>

The most difficult part of their mission now lay ahead: the assault of Kwangsōng. The day had become hot, and the terrain much more rugged. This was also a more important fort than the previous two, and the Koreans had decided it was the place to make a stand. Ō Choe-yōn ( 魚 在 淵 ), deputy commander, was in charge of the fort's defenses, which was located on the crown of a hill overlooking the channel.<sup>100</sup>

At 12:40 p. m. the attack began, and though the "Coreans fought with desperation, rarely equalled and never excelled by any people," they were no match for modern American weaponry. "Nearly all the soldiers in the main fort were killed at their posts,"<sup>101</sup> including Ō Chae-yōn, his brother Ō Chae-sun ( 魚 在 淳 ), and the fort commander. Once Kwangsōng was occupied, the

<sup>98</sup> Schley, "Partial Report of the Engagement of June 10-11th, 1871," in Ibid., 192.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 193; Cable, "United States-Korean Relations," 94.

<sup>100</sup> Choe, The Rule of the Taewōn'gun, p. 132.

<sup>101</sup> "Low to Fish, June 20, 1871," FRUS, 1871, 128.

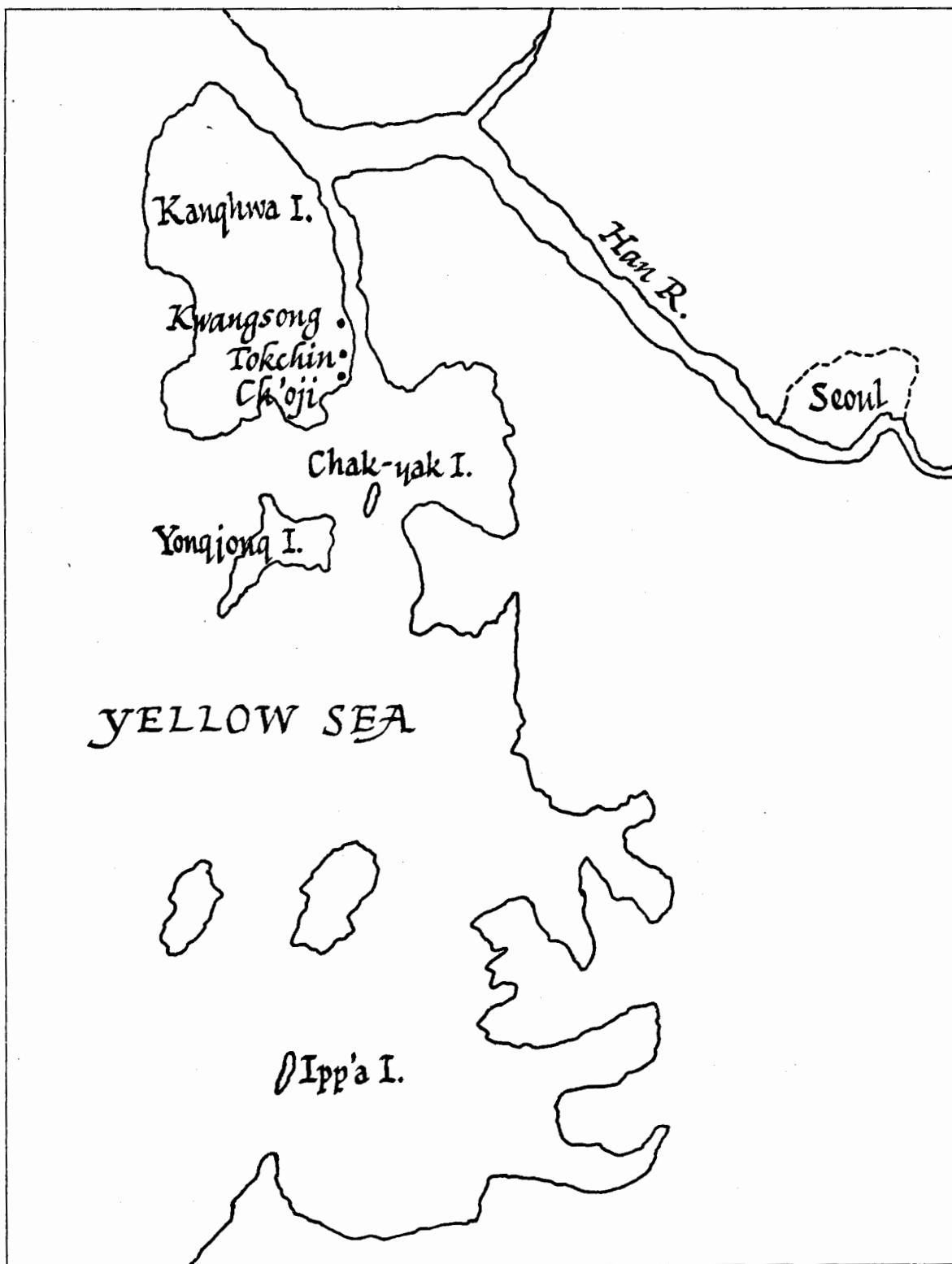


Figure 10. Kanghwa Island and west Kyōnggi Province.

two minor forts lying below it near the water's edge, were easily taken.

The Americans proceeded to burn and destroy all buildings and military equipment in the vicinity.<sup>102</sup> The Koreans suffered 243 dead, while only three Americans died and ten were wounded.<sup>103</sup> On the afternoon of June 12, the troops re-embarked, and the entire force joined the main fleet back at Chak-yak Island.

Although any chance of negotiations were now ended, the Americans still demanded that their request for a treaty be sent to the King. However, Low himself realized that such a demand was futile. On June 20, he wrote that

I have... little hope of bringing the King to any proper terms. Everything goes to prove that the government from the first determined to reject all peaceful overtures for negotiations or discussion; and that the recent demonstration, which would have produced a profound impression upon any other government, has little or no effect, favorable or otherwise, upon this.<sup>104</sup>

Low and Rodgers possibly hesitated to leave Korea because they had failed in their primary mission: to sign a treaty of protection for shipwrecked persons. Moreover, they may have lingered after the "redress" of June 10-11 because they feared that a quick departure would leave the Koreans with the wrong impression. Low wrote on July 6, 1871: "It appeared to me indispen-

<sup>102</sup> Schley, "Partial Report of the Engagement of June 10-11th, 1871," in Cable, "United States-Korean Relations," 195-196; Cable, 99.

<sup>103</sup> This figure for the Korean number of dead is from a body count taken immediately after the battle. See Cable, "United States-Korean Relations," 97. Another figure that is often listed is fifty-three dead and twenty-four wounded. See Sin, Han-guk Hyōndae Sa, I, 95, and Choe, The Rule of the Taewōn'gun, p. 132.

<sup>104</sup> "Low to Fish, June 20, 1871," FRUS, 1871, 129.

able that the fleet should not leave Korea while there remained any reasonable ground for the government to believe that we had been defeated by force of arms,"<sup>105</sup> which had been the impression after the French evacuation in 1866.

When they were totally convinced that all their communications were hopeless, they left the Korean shores on July 3, and arrived in Chefoo, China, on July 5, 1871.<sup>106</sup> Thus ended the first formal United States attempt to negotiate a treaty with the Hermit Kingdom.

## VII. REACTIONS TO THE 1871 INCIDENT

The American reaction to the "Corean Affair" back in the United States was marginal. Little was known of Korea and there was no public pressure as yet to open the country to Americans. The Morning Oregonian only commented that the Koreans "acted treacherously. . . . Their motives are represented as somewhat resembling our Indians."<sup>107</sup>

The New York Times, stated that "the Coreans had treacherously lured the surveying party [of June 1] where they expected they would easily destroy it." When the Koreans refused in "an insulting manner to make any amends," the fleet was forced to teach "the Coreans a lesson concerning our power."<sup>108</sup> In the following day's editorial, the Times proudly boasted the Americans had suc-

<sup>105</sup> "Low to Fish, July 6, 1871," FRUS, 1871, 145.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>107</sup> Morning Oregonian, July 26, 1871, 1.

<sup>108</sup> New York Times, August 22, 1871, 1.

ceeded in taking "about a hundred [Korean] lives for each of our sailors and marines either killed or wounded."<sup>109</sup> Such an attitude is not too surprising when coming from a newspaper that was then a "slavish supporter" of the Republican party and Grant Administration.<sup>110</sup> However, the editors went on to say that in dealing with the "semi-barbarous Orientals" a foreign nation should have a policy either of total non-intervention or be willing to use adequate force when the situation arises. "In Corea we have blundered between the two policies, and have retired without either glory or satisfaction."<sup>111</sup>

But Horace Greeley's New York Daily Tribune, critical of the Grant Administration and any expansionistic foreign policy, saw the Incident in a different light.<sup>112</sup> It described the setting in the following way.

The American Minister had plausibly urged upon the Coreans the policy of making a treaty; but his smooth speeches, strained through Chinese interpreters, availed naught to the suspicious people, especially as the frowning sides of the men-of-war and their black-muzzled batteries were threateningly held behind the oily utterance of the Minister's opening overture. They refused to treat, but the surveying party went to work "in the interests of civilization." For though the massacre of the crew of the General Sherman was one of the original excuses for the expedition, that grievance seems to have disappeared before the overpowering necessity of mapping the Korean coast and inviting the people to partake of the sweets of American

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., August 23, 1871, 4.

<sup>110</sup> Ernest R. May, American Imperialism: A Speculative Essay (New York: Antheneum, 1968), p. 108.

<sup>111</sup> New York Times, November 17, 1871, 4.

<sup>112</sup> Glyndon G. Van Deusen, Horace Greeley: Nineteenth Century Crusader (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1953), pp. 386-397.



civilization."<sup>113</sup>

The article concluded by declaring: "What right we have in Korean waters, what we are to gain by killing these people, how many more are to be killed, and where this fierce diplomacy is to land us--all these questions will become interesting as we find how much easier it is to go to war then to get out of it."<sup>114</sup>

The administration's official attitude was summed up in President Grant's Third Annual Message to the Congress. On December 4, 1871, the President stated: "A small surveying part...was treacherously attacked at a disadvantage. Ample opportunity was given for explanation and apology for the insult. Neither came. A force then landed.... The forts from which the outrage had been committed were reduced by a gallant assault and were destroyed. Having thus punished the criminal, and having vindicated the honor of the flag, the expedition returned, finding it impractical...to conclude the desired convention. I...leave the subject for such action as Congress may see fit to take."<sup>115</sup>

This ended American interest in Korea for the next several years; until Senator Sargent introduced his joint resolution to authorize appointment of a commission to negotiate a treaty with Korea in 1878. Although the resolution was never adopted, interest in Korea once again began to grow, culminating in the Korean-United States Treaty of 1882 signed by Robert Shufeldt.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>113</sup> New York Daily Tribune, July 17, 1871, 4.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. For more information, and a stinging attack on the New York Times position, see the New York Daily Tribune, November 18, 1871, 4.

<sup>115</sup> Richardson, Messages and Papers of the Presidents, IX, 4099-4100.

<sup>116</sup> For a description and analysis of Sargent's interest in Korea, see

Back in Korea, these events had a much more pronounced effect on that country's attitudes. Contrary to popular belief, the Koreans had previously not been unfriendly to foreigners in distress. The generally humane treatment of the crew of the shipwrecked Dutch vessel, the Sparrow Hawk, in the mid-1600's demonstrates this.<sup>117</sup> This was at the same time when most shipwrecked foreigners were being put to death in Japan. And more recently, the very kind treatment of the sailors off the Two Brothers and the Surprise also verifies this statement. The fact was, due to provisions already made in the Korean law, a treaty to secure the safety of shipwrecked persons was not actually needed.

Despite their position toward stranded sailors, the Koreans definitely had a policy of isolationism, and for very understandable reasons. "After the Japanese terror of the 1590's, and the transformation of the Ming tributary relationship into a facade for Manchu extortion following the disaster of 1636, this wish [to be left alone] became an obsession."<sup>118</sup> This suspicion and mistrust of foreigners was further enhanced by the recent acts of the General Sherman, the French attack, and the Oppert-Feron incident. Then came the Americans. In all of these affairs, whether misguided or not, the Koreans were acting in a purely defensive manner. When reviewing the Korean-American correspondence prior to the June 10-11 attack, it is interesting to note the Koreans' politeness and respectfulness.

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Jung, "The Rise of American National Interest in Korea," pp. 37-42.

<sup>117</sup> Ledyard, The Dutch Come to Korea, pp. 17-97.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 101

Following the American aggression, the United States Minister received the following Korean communication.

Looking at it now, one can know this much for certain; under outward professions of friendship you cherish false and deceitful designs. To come to your landing, and thoroughly displaying your force of committing public buildings to the flames, burning cottages, stealing property, sweeping up everything to the veriest trifle. These are the actions of thieves and spies.

Where was such unsparing and implacable savagery ever exceeded? You came with professions of friendship and amity, and wish us to treat you with politeness, and your actions, forsooth, are such as these. . . . I had not thought that such as these would have been the actions of one entrusted with his kingdom's commission to bind in friendship another kingdom.<sup>119</sup>

The end result of the American attack was twofold. First of all, Korea's distrust and fear of foreigners and all things foreign was greatly heightened, thus adding impetus for the continuation of the Taewŏn-gun's strict policy of isolationism. After the United States fleet had departed, the Regent had several stone tablets, ch'ŏkhwa-pi (斥和碑), erected across the country which bore the following inscription:

The barbarians from beyond the seas have violated our borders and invaded our land. If we do not fight we must make treaties with them. Those who favor making a treaty sell their country. Let this be a warning to ten thousand generations.<sup>120</sup>

Secondly, the withdrawal of the American forces misled the Koreans into thinking that militarily they could repel any further probes by foreign troops. The fallacy of this notion, and the trouble and confusion it would cause,

<sup>119</sup> "Li, guardian general of Fu-ping prefecture to Low, June 12, 1871, enclosure 12 in Low to Fish, June 20, 1871," FRUS, 1871, 138.

<sup>120</sup> Yi Hong-jik, Kuksa Taesajŏn, p. 1518; Jones, "The TaiWonKun," 247.

became all too apparent in the years to come.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

Although it is not the purpose of this study to assign any blame for the June, 1871 confrontation to either the Koreans or the Americans, the latter must bear a certain degree of responsibility for the immediate course of events. It was the United States that sent a large naval squadron to Korean waters, not vice-versa. It was the entry of the American survey party, a heavily-armed party, into a fortified, interior waterway that resulted in the first exchange of shots. Even if the Americans had mistakenly thought that they had received Korean permission to survey the area, their authority and judgment in pursuing such a course can be questioned. As Senator Sargent pointed out in 1878, the United States certainly would not have allowed similar activities in their own home waters.

But rather than ask who is to blame, more important questions are: why did Low and Rodgers order the survey, and why did they order the "retaliatory" attack of June 10 and 11? In a broader context, why did the Americans feel justified in asking for a treaty in the first place?

In dispatching the survey, Low and Rodgers were clearly following the pattern established by Perry. This reliance on the Japanese experience for guidelines was evident throughout the expedition. The Americans saw little dif-

ference between the various Asian nations, and felt they would react pretty much the same way in similar situations. This over-simplification of Asian politics and cultures was a serious mistake. Perry had been successful in Japan because the central government was then very weak, and a new commercial and urban class was eager to gain power. This internal instability made a unified front against the foreigners impossible.

Korea was a much different situation. The government was in the middle of a reform program, and the people, no matter how dissatisfied with the present circumstances, looked to it for leadership. There was no new commercial or urban class ready to take its place should the government fall. In the short run, this strengthened the government's hand in dealing with the Westerners. Furthermore, Korea's recent experiences with foreign nations, both Western and Asian, had created suspicions and fears that would make any concession to Western demands much more difficult to accept. Unlike the Japanese, the Koreans at this time, if pressured, would choose to fight rather than submit.

The Americans had also misunderstood the Korean character.<sup>1</sup> After approving the attack of June 10-11, Low wrote to Secretary of State Fish that it did not "seem likely that such a step [the attack] would by any possibility lessen the chances of negotiation, and it might improve them...."<sup>2</sup> Actually, the attack had just the opposite effect. In the eyes of the Koreans, the "barbarity" of the foreigners was proven beyond a doubt, and as a result, negotiations were out of

<sup>1</sup> Cable, "United States-Korean Relations, 1866-1871," 116.

<sup>2</sup> "Low to Fish, June 20, 1871," FRUS, 1871, 127.

the question. Force seemed to be the only thing the Americans understood.

The cultural differences between the two nations were sharply demonstrated by their approach to international relations.

In the Far East, especially among China, Korea, and Japan, the Western concept of sovereignty did not exist, though there were "tributary" missions. There several nations maintained sovereignty, but culturally they were closely attached to each other in an order which was described in fraternal terms: China was the elder brother; Korea, the middle brother; and Japan, the younger brother.<sup>3</sup>

Because East Asian diplomacy was based upon social relationships, the importance Westerners placed on international law had little meaning to these countries. They reasoned that if nations did not share similar cultural attitudes, there could be no basis for diplomatic relations. Moreover, law was secondary to "social behavior." Since Korea had treated all shipwrecked sailors with kindness and help, there was no need to sanction this policy in an official treaty. Likewise, when the crew of the General Sherman behaved in an anti-social manner that threatened "civilized" society, they had to be dealt with harshly. They had broken the rules of proper social conduct, and it was felt that such people should not be sheltered by "laws," regardless of their nationality.

To the Westerners, such an attitude clashed with their legalistic approach to foreign relations. They took pride in being a culture and society "ruled by laws," where nations were equal members in a corporate group, rather than unequal members of a familial system, as in Asia.

It was the Western view that all people were protected by this set of

<sup>3</sup> Sohn Pow-key, "The Opening of Korea," Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, XXXVI (1960), 103.

international laws, and at the same time that all nations had a responsibility to obey these laws. No nation could voluntarily reject or ignore them. In a dispatch written on July 6, 1871, Frederick Low summed up this notion by stating: "It... becomes the duty of all civilized and Christian Governments to carefully consider what their rights are, and their duty to their citizens and subjects when these rights are trampled upon by countries which reject and set at defiance the laws of nations as well as the laws of humanity."<sup>4</sup>

It was the universal application of these laws, coupled with the expansion of Western religion and commerce, that ultimately led to numerous clashes with Asian nations.

The Westerners had concluded that their culture and systems were superior to those of non-Western nations, and it was therefore their right to impose these "natural" laws on inferior peoples. A corollary of this attitude was that these "non-civilized" countries, not respecting or understanding these international laws and responsibilities, had to be dealt with by force. Gunboat diplomacy, which would never be considered acceptable when dealing with an enlightened Western nation, became entirely acceptable when moved to the regions of Africa or Asia.

This sense of superiority also led many Westerners to interpret Asian behavior as acts of deceit and aggression, rather than as results of a different cultural perspective. Such an interpretation caused Low to assume in 1871 that "the dignity of the United States would be seriously compromised unless repara-

<sup>4</sup> "Low to Fish, July 6, 1871," FRUS, 1871, 146. Emphasis added.



tion be sought, and enforced if necessary...."<sup>5</sup> This statement was made after the June 2 misunderstanding, and the June 10-11 attack was the result.

An emphasis upon the honor and dignity of the flag, a distinctive cultural trait, appeared repeatedly in nineteenth century American diplomacy. The emotional impact of this emphasis, and its hindrance to objective, rational negotiations, played a major role in compounding the cultural conflict.

The American insistence upon using Western standards and Western notions of international law in the 1871 Incident reflects the "multiformed Western invasion of East Asia" that began in the late eighteenth century.<sup>6</sup> John K. Fairbank points out one of the larger implications of such an analysis.

In this perspective Vietnam has been only an updated use of gunboat diplomacy, in lineal succession to the American expedition to Korea in 1871.... As in earlier incidents of gunboat diplomacy, the use of force in Vietnam was resorted to only because it seemed necessary to support, by violence, certain principles in which our society deeply believes, principles that on former occasions we have considered worth fighting for. During the nineteenth century, gunboat diplomacy and its occasional expansion into warfare were normally sanctioned by moral beliefs. Those who used force were seldom merely acquisitive. They saw themselves as trying to nurture in East Asia principles of freedom, beginning with the freedom of the individual to trade, travel, and teach, that lie at the core of Western civilization, formerly known as Christendom.<sup>7</sup>

But despite many of these "noble" intentions, most Western activities in East Asia ended in failure, for they were designed from a purely Western point of view. If lasting cooperation and true understanding were to prevail be-

<sup>5</sup> "Low to Fish, June 20, 1871," FRUS, 1871, 126-127.

<sup>6</sup> Fairbank, "'American China Policy' to 1898: A Misconception," 415.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 416.

tween the nations of East Asia and the United States, a new approach needed to be used. Cultural differences should have been recognized and respected, while national pride and egotism needed to be kept to a minimum.

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## APPENDIX A

1871 EXPEDITIONARY FORCE TO KOREA<sup>1</sup>

<u>Ship</u>	<u>Class</u>	<u>Built</u>	<u>Length</u>	<u>Displacement</u>	<u>Crew</u>	<u>Guns</u>
Colorado	frigate	1856	263	3,425	646	44
Alaska	sloop	1868	250	2,400	273	8
Benicia	sloop	1868	250	2,400	291	14
Monocacy	gunboat	1865	265	1,370	159	6
Palos	gunboat	1865	137	420 (tonnage)	?	6

<sup>1</sup>Compiled from U. S. Naval History Division, Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships (5 vols., Washington: Navy Department, 1959).

## APPENDIX B

### ASIAN TERMS AND NAMES

The Asian system of placing surnames before given names has been retained for all Korean and Chinese individuals mentioned in this study. Korean terms and names have been spelled according to their Korean pronunciation, while Chinese names, with the exception of Wiman, have been spelled according to their Chinese pronunciation. In general, the McCune-Reischauer system has been used for the transcription of all Korean words. The apostrophe representing an aspirated consonant is used, but the apostrophe that often separates two syllables has been replaced by a hyphen.