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**Picturing a Storm Center in the Far East:
Geopolitical Image and Representation of Korea in Early
American Newspaper Visuals**

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APS-650-02: Capstone Project

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May 20, 2021

Abstract

This Capstone Project explores the image and representation of Korea in early modern American newspaper visuals during the period when Korea and the U.S. first began to engage in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The American newspaper visuals, which interact with headlines, captions, and texts, are represented with specific patterns and features in close links to the newspaper's geopolitical discourse production, specifically the “Far Eastern Question,” which was produced by western powers and Japan. The visuals were intended to show Korea as a dangerous and uncivilized place, “a storm center in the Far East.” Such geopolitical visuals in early American newspapers, which presented Korea by linking politics with geography, aided in justifying the power-competition environment of imperialist countries in the Far East and neutralize Korea's independence. The geographical images and representation of Korea in American newspaper visuals served American readers to visually understand the process of Japan's protectorate of Korea. This project, which navigates the image and representation of early modern Korea, implies the origin of today’s Korean geopolitical images in U.S. media.

Keywords: American newspaper visuals, modern Korea, colonial photography, critical geopolitics, Korean image, photography’s Orientalism

1. Introduction

The band chose a remarkable setting for the performance, setting up outside Gyeongbokgung Palace in Seoul, South Korea, as a full moon hung overhead and purple and blue lights flashed against the facade of the 14th-century building.¹

Last year, an American newspaper reported on the popular band, BTS's performance at Gyeongbokgung Palace in Seoul, the capital of Korea, along with a YouTube video of NBC's The Tonight Show. This video showed the world the beauty of Korea, with the band posed in front of the main building in the Palace (Appendix A). One hundred sixteen years ago, an American newspaper carried a photograph of the same Gyeongbokgung Palace as it reported about Korea just before the Russo-Japanese War over Korea. The image of the Palace was the representation of a hotbed for the "storm center in the Far East" before the war, coordinating the headline "The Battle Ground of Eastern Asia" and text (Figure 14). The past and present visuals were taken of the same Gyeongbokgung Palace, but the Palace in the visuals was reproduced in completely different contexts.

Differences in the reproduction of these newspapers can be explained in historical contexts. In the late 19th century, when the first encounter between the U.S. and Korea took place, it was an era of Western imperialism's expansion and conflict between the East and the West. The lenses of American newspapers projected colonialism and Orientalism, presenting Korea's enduring history and cultural tradition with barbarism and non-civilization. Since then,

¹ Jon Blistein, "BTS Kick Off 'Tonight Show' Residency with 'Idol'," *Rolling Stone*, September 29, 2020, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/bts-idol-performance-tonight-show-fallon-1067887/>.

the arrival of the post-colonial era, the rise of South Korea's international position following democratization and economic development, and the Hallyu have changed Western perception of Korea. Yet the legacies of colonialism and Orientalism have not yet been resolved. The task of decolonizing Korean images still remains. Korean visuals produced in the late 19th and early 20th centuries need a deep exploration in that they formed a prototype of modern Korean images.

In this paper, I explore the geopolitical image and representation of Korea in early American newspaper visuals when Korea first had contact and relations with the U.S. from 1871 to 1905. In the late 19th century, American newspapers played an essential role in producing knowledge and images of foreign countries and spreading them to American society since there were no other media outlets. Newspaper visuals were more accessible and had a more considerable influence on the public than photo albums, collections, and travelogue publications. The visuals left a strong impression of other countries even before readers began reading the article.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Visuals of Korea in Late 19th Century American Newspapers

In the 19th century, Korean-related visuals began to be produced in the U.S. due to what it euphemistically referred to as “expeditions,” the establishment of diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Korea, westerners travel, and the presence of American missionaries. Visuals in the form of illustration from a photograph, sketches, photographs, political cartoons, and maps were produced, and then disseminated through newspapers, magazines, books, and travel lectures. Newspapers were the easiest medium for the American public to access Korean visuals. In the mid to late 19th century, when news related to Korea in newspapers began to appear, illustrations

from photographs were common; then, in the 20th century, photographs themselves began to appear.²

In Korean scholarship, there are studies of Korean-related visuals in newspapers and magazines in Western Europe. Hwa-jeong Seok reveals how Westerners visualized Korea in the newspapers and magazines' political cartoons through the lens of imperialism, colonialism, and Eurocentrism.³ Heangga Kwon examines how King Gojong's portraits photographed in Western newspapers were interpreted differently by the context of Westerners, contrary to King Gojong's own intention to use his portraits as means of propaganda.⁴

As for Korean Studies in the U.S., the research on the Korean-related visuals in early American newspapers and magazines has not been actively studied. Ji-min Kim introduces photos of many American magazines during the colonial period (1910-45); however, her research subject is not visual studies, but American perceptions of Korea.⁵ Reflecting this research, the Capstone Project explores Korean-related visuals in American newspapers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The illustrations from photographs that were one of the main forms in the newspapers at the time, was a replica of the original photograph. Therefore, this

² Thierry Gervais, *The Making of Visual News: A History of Photography in the Press*, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), 14-19.

³ Hwa-jeong Seok, *P'ungjahwa ro ponŭn rŏil chŏnjaeng 풍자화로 보는 러일전쟁 [Russo-Japanese war through political cartoons]* (Seoul: Chisik Sanŏpsa, 2007).

⁴ Heangga Kwon, *Imiji wa kwŏllyŏk: Kojong ũi ch'osang kwa imiji ũi chŏngch'ihak* 이미지와 권력: 고종의 초상과 이미지의 정치학 [Image and power: King Gojong's portraits and image politics], (Paju: Tolbaege, 2015).

⁵ Jimin Kim, "Representing the Invisible: The American Perceptions of Colonial Korea (1910-1945)" (PhD. diss., Columbia University, 2011).

study will accept the theoretical framework of modern East Asian photography studies: recent photography critiques in conjunction with post-colonial studies argue that photographs are not objective, but they collaborate with colonial projects, reinforcing colonialism and Orientalism.⁶

2.2 My Previous Work

My previous study exploring geographical images and representation of Korea in modern English language newspapers (Korea, U.K., U.S., Japan, and China) can serve as a bridge to newspaper visuals studies of Korea.⁷ The study was conducted on the basis of critical geopolitics, of which the theoretical framework is to understand geography as discourse instead of a natural phenomenon. In this context, geopolitics is the spatialization of international politics and the representation of specific places, people, and events for specific political purposes.⁸

English-language media editors in Korea, who were mainly American missionaries, had to face a wall of international stereotypes about Korea. Westerners believed that they should establish their identity in a racist sense of superiority and simply classify and separate other races into “barbaric and uncivilized” to dominate “inferior races.” They then regionalized into areas distinct

⁶ James R. Ryan, *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Eleanor M. Hight and Gary D. Sampson eds., *Colonialist Photography: Imag(in)ing Race and Place* (London: Routledge, 2004); Ali Behdad and Luke Gartlan eds., *Photography's Orientalism: New Essays on Colonial Representation* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2013).

⁷ Jihyung Kim, “Taehan Cheguk ki yǒngja ōllon ūi Han'guk insik kwa p'yosang yǒn'gu” 대한제국기 영자언론의 한국 인식과 표상 연구 [Geopolitics in the “Far East” and the re-imagining of Korea in the English-language media, 1894-1910] (PhD. diss., Korea University, 2016).

⁸ Gearóid Ó Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space* (London: Routledge, 1996), 59-60.

from Western civilizations that they belonged to, such as Africa, Orient, the Middle East, and the Far East, and imagined that all countries in the regions shared “inferior” cultural elements.⁹ Along with China and Japan, Korea was also classified as a Far East (or East Asia) region and given the name tag “uncivilized country.”

As the Great Game of Britain and Russia, the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05) over Korea, which raised the Far East's strategic value, the “Far Eastern Question” began to emerge as a regional issue of the foreign policies among the Western powers. The “Far Eastern Question” refers to the issues regarding the foreign policy, military, and commerce that emerged in the Far East region. The term “Far Eastern Question” appeared in Western newspapers, and articles related to Korea based on a regional discourse framework.

The “Far Eastern Question” assigned a certain geographical image to Korea, which was widely circulated. For example, Korea, known as the “hermit kingdom,” has been called the “storm center of the East” and “battleground of Eastern Asia” since its opening port (1876). Such geographical expressions and discourses in Western media, which presented Korea by linking politics with geography, accelerated the power-competition environment of imperialist countries in the Far East and neutralized Korea's independence. Western and Japan's geographical images and representation of Korea promoted Japan's colonization of Korea in conjunction with the “feeble state” discourse, which states Korea needs guidance and protection of so-called “civilized nations.”¹⁰

This international media environment made it a challenge for Korea to gain recognition for its values and strengths. This caused Korea to limit its actions in the Far East and acted as a major constraint on Korea's exercise of sovereignty. The editors of the English-language media

⁹ Kim, “*Taehan Cheguk ki yǒngja ǒllon ūi Han'guk insik kwa p'yoasang yǒn'gu*,” 14.

¹⁰ Kim, 4-5.

in Korea made great efforts to develop a positive image of Korea and regional discourse that could preserve its sovereignty against the internationally prevalent negative image of Korea. In addition, the English/Japanese media and the Korean media seemed to have been at odds, but in reality, the two sides shared an interpretive framework of colonialism. In the process of Western and Japanese colonial order in the Far East, the White American missionary editors in Korea eventually took on the ironic aspect of accepting the regional discourse of the “Far Eastern Question” and certain geographical identity and images assigned to Korea by the Western powers.¹¹

2.3 C-Corea and K-Korea

In this current study, I search newspaper archives for two words: “Corea” and “Korea.” Although “Korea” is now commonly used in English contexts in the phrases “Republic of Korea (South Korea),” in the 19th century, “Joseon Dynasty” (1392-1910) was spelled “Corea” more frequently than “Korea.” The use of “Korea” increased in the 1890s with the adoption of “Korea” as the official name for the Joseon dynasty by the State Department of the U.S. During this period, both terms were used, but eventually it became solidified as “Korea.”¹² A study collected and analyzed the frequency of “Corea” vs “Korea” using a Gale Database of 19th century U.S. newspapers. It was noted that “Corea” was widely used in the U. S. throughout the 19th century, and “Korea” began to increase after 1880 and was especially becoming more visible after 1891.¹³ The American newspapers covered in my Capstone project show similar

¹¹ Kim, 185-186.

¹² Min Sik Lee, “‘Han'guk’ e taehan yŏngmun p'yogi nŭn Corea in'ga? Korea in'ga?” ‘한국’에 대한 영문표기는 Corea인가? Korea인가? [A study of description to Corea and Korea], *Han'guk sasang kwa munhwa* 36 (2007): 277.

¹³ Jai-June Kim and Jong-Ki Park, “19segi miguk sinmun e nat'anan han'guk ŭi yŏngmun

findings.

There is a controversy surrounding why the national name changed from “Corea” to “Korea.” An argument suggests that during the Japanese colonial period Japan changed “Corea” to “Korea” because Japan tried to make Korea appear subordinate to Japan in alphabetical order. Generally, South Korean scholars have dismissed this argument as untrue. Through multiple examinations of Western contexts (books, diplomatic documents, newspapers, maps, etc.), many scholars have concluded that K-Korea has nothing to do with Japanese manipulation, and the use of “Korea” is proper. On the contrary, Youngho Lee reveals the name change was initiated by the Joseon dynasty itself.¹⁴ On the other hand, North Korean scholarship insists on the Japanese fabrication argument, and even attempted to change the national name to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.¹⁵

Although South Korean scholars and media are trying to let the public know the historical fact of “Korea” was not a fabrication by Japan, there is still support among the South Korean people for the use of C-Corea, which is connected to the discourse on the unification of South

kukho p'yogi: Corea & Korea” 19세기 미국 신문에 나타난 한국의 영문 국호표기: Corea & Korea [Corea vs Korea: a review of the name of Chosen in the 19th century U.S. newspapers], *Minjok munhwa nonch'ong* 40 (2008): 568-69.

¹⁴ Young-Ho Lee, “Kukho yŏngmun p'yogi, Corea esŏ gorearouï chŏnhwan'gwa ūimi” 국호영문표기, Corea에서 Korea로의 전환과 의미 [Changing the English version of the name of the country, from ‘Corea’ to ‘Korea’: nature of that transition and the meaning], *Yŏksa wa hyŏnshil* 58 (2005): 340-48.

¹⁵ Bogueun Kim, ““Koryŏ sŏ yuraehan k'orea nŭn ‘C’ ro sijak...ilje ka ‘k’ ro naljo” “고려서 유래한 코레아는 ‘C’로 시작...일제가 ‘K’로 날조” [“Corea, originated from Goryeo, starts with ‘C’...the Japanese fabricated it with ‘K’”], *Hankyoreh*, January 7, 2016, <http://m.hani.co.kr/arti/politics/defense/725194.html#cb>.

and North Korea and the removal of the vestiges of Japanese colonialism. That forms a strong consensus between South and North Koreans. Examples include the use of “Corea” by the united South and North Korean sporting team for world events such as the Olympics and Asian Games, and the South Koreans’ show of support for the unified team with rally towels printed as “Corea.” Korean newspapers have captured the scene as a touching moment in which South and North Korea are one.¹⁶

Why does the memory of “Corea” remain so intense for both South and North Koreans? I do not think such a C-Corea memory can be regarded only as a myth of Koreans. The research needs to examine the Japanese context (Japanese diplomatic documents and newspapers), which has not been the subject of a scholarly review on the memory of Corea on the Korean Peninsula. Around the Japanese colonial period, Japan made great efforts to manipulate foreign newspapers to strengthen the legitimacy of its colonial rule of Korea. The West obtained information about Korea mainly through Japan and reproduced it. Japan was both a producer and a provider of information on Korea. The research tended to overlook that in this case.

Hence, based on my previous studies, I examine Korean geopolitical image and representation in early American newspaper photography in connection with the discourse analysis of newspaper articles of Korea, starting with the following two central questions (R.Q.):

R.Q. 1: What and how do American newspaper visuals in the late 19th-century represent Korea, especially from the geopolitical aspect in the historical context on Japan's colonization of Korea? How are the visuals and articles’ discourse intertwined?

¹⁶ Chanyoung Lee, “Tanil t'im chonghap 28wi...han tal hapch'in nambuk i ködun kyölssil” 단일팀 종합 28위...한 달 합친 남북이 거둔 결실 [28th overall as a single team...the result of the two Koreas competing together for a month], *Hankyoreh*, September 3, 2018, http://m.hani.co.kr/arti/sports/sports_general/860346.html#cb.

R.Q. 2: By using photos, maps, and drawings, how does the newspaper visualize international policy issues related to Korea and create a specific understanding of Korea in the international political sphere?

3. Methodology

Newspapers communicate discourses through the interactions in various modes of texts including headlines/subheadlines, visuals such as photographs, cartoons, illustrations, maps, and drawings, and also captions that make visuals understandable. I adopt critical geopolitics and multimodal critical discourse analysis that can provide useful theoretical frameworks and methods for interpreting discourse production in newspaper media that served imperial and colonial ideologies for analysis of the early U.S. newspaper visuals of Korea.

Critical geopolitics adopted in my previous work was useful in interpreting geopolitical discourses and interpretations of Korea in newspaper media of imperial powers such as Britain, the U. S., and Japan in the late 19th century and early 20th century.¹⁷ In this study, centered on the newspaper article texts, I revealed the discourse production and competition of newspapers and its relevance between Japan's colonization of Korea in the historical context of East Asia and Europe. The framework and analysis of critical geopolitics are still valid in this Capstone project, given that newspaper visuals production is closely related to text.

Meanwhile, in revealing how the question of space and power at the global level was reproduced through newspaper visuals and served imperial/colonial ideologies, I apply

¹⁷ See 2.2 My Previous Work, 6-8.

multimodal critical discourse analysis, which is widely adopted in various disciplines. Gunther Kress and van Leeuwen, the representatives in multimodality studies, argues the way in which visual features and elements are used to convey ideas, attitudes, values, and identities beyond the linguistic level, and different semiotic resources are deployed to convey them, and how they enable and constrain different kinds of interactions. As the title of his book *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, he suggests a “grammar” for interpreting images.¹⁸

The way that the realization of discourses through different modes is one important way that they become naturalized and legitimized. It is necessary to trace how discourses are translated into other semiotic forms and into social practices asking why this is done and what this accomplishes.¹⁹ Although the two theoretical frameworks: critical geopolitics and multimodal critical discourse mainly target contemporary discourse. I apply their theoretical frameworks and methods to the discourses of the late 19th and early 20th century newspapers in the historical context of East Asia.

Using these methodological frameworks, I look at multiple modes of communication such as visuals and texts (headlines, captions, and articles) and how they interact with one another to create a specific meaning and discourse. I examine Korea-related visuals in approximately 750 articles in American newspapers. On average, one article contains multiple images (photographs, illustrations, maps, drawings). The analysis period is 35 years during the first contact period between the U.S. and Korea in 1871, when the U.S. expedition first arrived in Korea and

¹⁸ Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (New York: Routledge, 2021).

¹⁹ David Machin, “What is multimodal critical discourse studies?” *Critical Discourse Studies* 10, no. 4 (2013), 351.

throughout the Japanese protectorate in 1905. The historical context analysis provides us a deeper understanding of historical transition and its impact on newspaper photography, which is published periodically. To this end, I use the Library of Congress' Chronicling America digital archive (<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>), which provides access to America's nationwide historic newspapers from 1777-1963. By analyzing newspapers from across the entire United States, it is possible to understand the general American perception of Korea across the country.

My positionality as a Korean scholar majoring in modern and contemporary Korean history can distinguish the difference between being a colonized nation and being a colonizing nation in this Capstone Project. There are many people, who have a history of colonizing, might know about colonialism; however I wonder to what extent they empathize with the colonized people. Based on my positionality as a Korean scholar, whose nation has a history of being colonized by Japan, I will retell Korea's history to decolonize the Westerner's image. However, I acknowledge my positional narratives are immersed in the imperial/colonial vs. nationalism framework, indicating in this analysis that I can overlook important but marginalized issues such as women, children and old ages, human rights, daily life, and the natural environment of that time.

4. Findings

4.1 The Hermit Kingdom and A Storm Center in the Far East

4.1.1 Typical Far East and its People

For Europeans in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Far East was one of the least known regions on Earth. They usually refer to the countries between India and the Pacific as the

Far East. It included Japan; China; Korea; Tongking, a former state of North French Indochina (1883-1946) on the Gulf of Tonkin that forms the largest part of North Vietnam; Annam, a former kingdom and French protectorate along the east coast of French Indochina that is now part of Vietnam; Cochinchina, a former state in South French Indochina that is now part of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Siam (former name of Thailand).²⁰

The Westerners had a distorted singular perception of the Far East. We can identify it in an observation of George N. Curzon (1859-1925), a Viceroy of India and Chancellor of Oxford. He traveled to three countries in East Asia (Korea, Japan, and China) and published *The Problems of the Far East: Japan, Korea, China* (1894) where he noted Asia's unique features: "a certain homogeneousness of expression, a certain similarity of character, certain common features of political and still more of social organization, certain identical strains in the composition of man, that differentiate her structure from anything in Europe or even in America."²¹ He points out the dominant note of Asian individuality is, by contrast with Americans and Europeans: "in character a general indifference to truth and respect for successful wile, in deportment dignity, in society the rigid maintenance of the family union, in government the mute acquiescence of the governed, in administration and justice the open corruption of administration and judges, and in every-day life a statuesque and inexhaustible patience, which attaches no value to time, and wages unappeasable warfare against hurry."²²

²⁰ George N. Curzon, *Problems of the Far East: Japan-China-Korea* (London: Longmans, Green and co, 1894), vii.

²¹ Curzon, *Problems of the Far East*, 4.

²² Ibid.

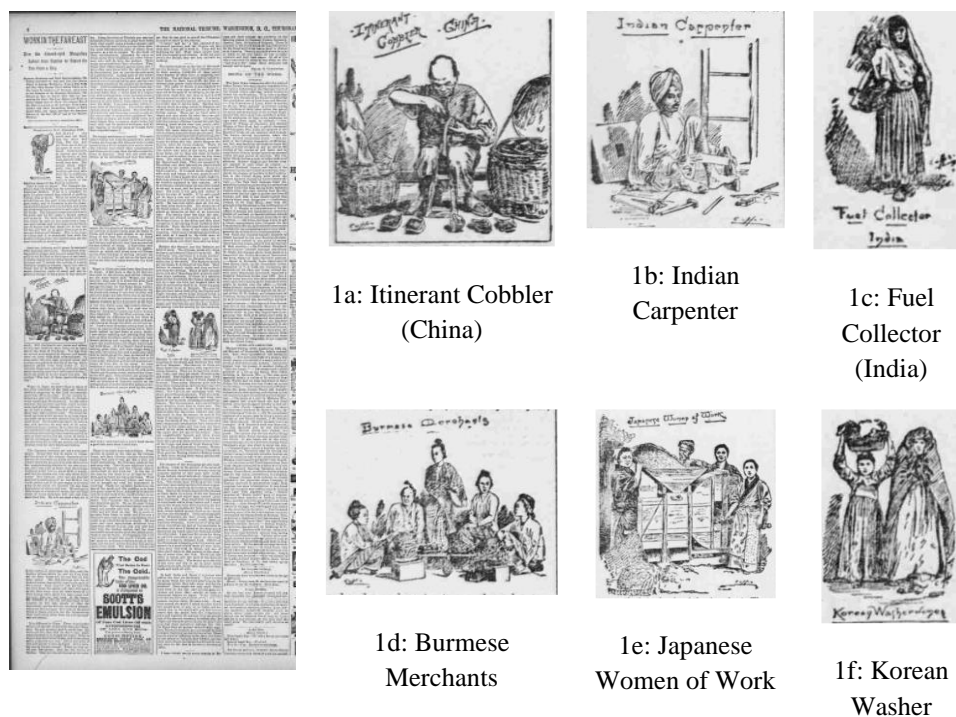


Figure 1. Frank G. Carpenter, “Work in the Far East: How the Almond-eyed Mongolian Labors from Sunrise to Sunset for Ten Cents a Day,” *National Tribune*, December 19, 1889. (1a-1f is an extract of the images in the left article "Work in the Far East.")

Western anthropologists, travelers, and geographers used photography as a means of representing the ethnological features of Asia. Such photographs of Asian types or typical scenes established Western images of Asia, which were propagated by other travelers, writers, artists and photographers, reinforcing prevalent Western views of Asia.²³ For example, the newspaper article in Figure 1 addresses the subject of primitive labor and exploitation of Asian workers. The illustrations from photographs in a single article present the different types of Asian workers from the four countries such as China, Japan, Korea, and India with ethnographic descriptions. The article’s title “How the almond-eyed Mongolian labors from sunrise to sunset for ten cents a day” shows racial and cultural similarities that all Asian workers have in being hard-working by

²³ Ryan, *Picturing Empire*, 164-65.

hand or with poor tools. These illustrations were intended ultimately to prove Far Eastern racial inferiority. Carpenter's use of illustrations of Far East people in this article was a singularly important means of demonstrating the superiority of the White Anglo-Saxon race and American supremacy.

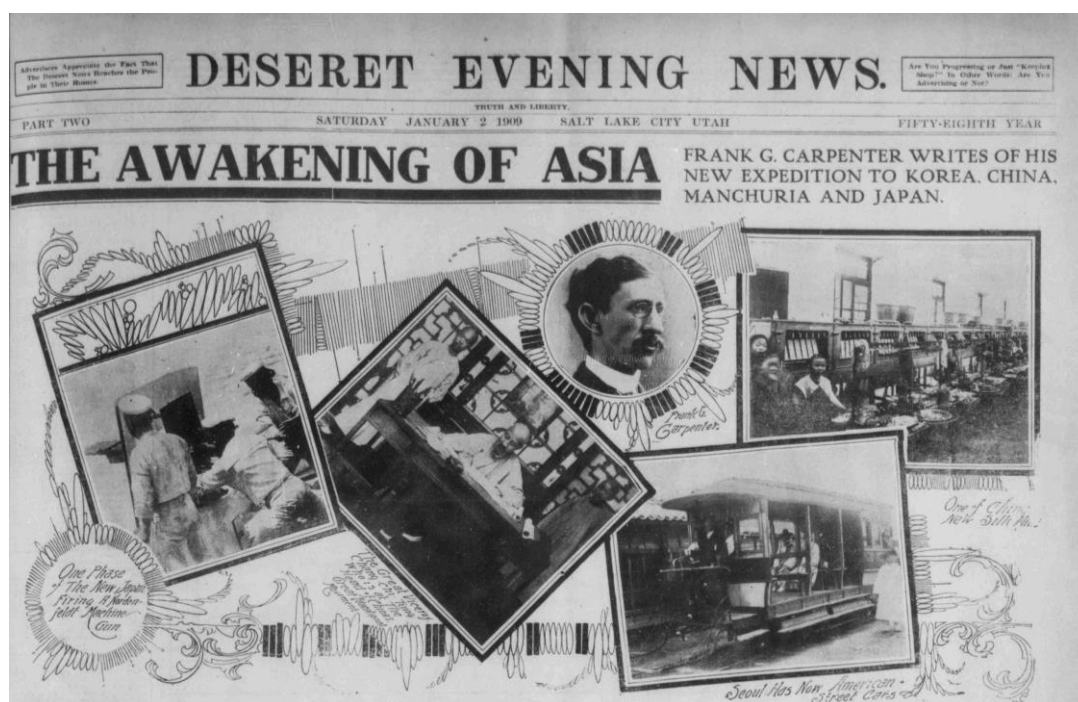


Figure 2. Frank G. Carpenter, "The Awakening of Asia," Deseret Evening News, January 2, 1909.

As with Figure 2, the photographer projected the idea that America's role in Asia was to paternalistically awaken it. Westerners considered it a "sacred mission" to give the best value to Western civilization and spread Western civilization in non-civilized areas. The Far East was also a place to check the superior value of Western civilization. By reproducing the people of the Far East as ignorant and exclusive barbarians who threaten and kill Western missionaries, the Far East was able to elicit a response from Western readers that the order of dominance and subordination should spread.

4.1.2 First Encounter in Conflict

In 1866, an American merchant ship, the *General Sherman*, which has two 12-pound cannons, sailed up the Daedong River to Pyongyang looted the village and was shot down by Koreans. Although the U.S. concluded through an investigation that the incident was caused by the provocation of the *General Sherman*, they decided to carry out an “expedition” using the incident as an excuse with the purpose of effecting a treaty with the Koreans. When the U.S. fleet arrived on the coast of Ganghwa Island, the gateway to Korea, Korea did not attack, but first dispatched officials to examine U.S. intentions. However, Admiral Rodgers unilaterally informed the Korean side that they were going to measure the water’s depth, and approached the coast, demanding that senior officials be sent. The Korean military saw it as an invasion and fired artillery.²⁴ Daewongun, the king’s father, who was in power, sent a letter to U.S. fleet containing Korea’s stance after the conflict. The following is part of the letter:

On reflection, America is a country well-known for respecting civility, It is outstanding among nations in this regard.... Why did you cross from so far away to deeply intrude into another country? It is standard practice for every nation to prohibit a foreign ship from passing strategic forts. Anyone would do the same, if they were in my place. American warships recently steamed past the strategic forts on the coast, causing us to go on alert and provoking an exchange of fire. It is most deplorable that such a serious incident happened after we had already discussed forging friendly ties with each other. Since your ship crossed to our country, I ordered both civil and military officials responsible for the management of the coastal waters to take extreme caution so as not to cause any undue hostility with your country. However, your ships ventured far past the mouth of a strategic point. How could my subjects, whose duties are to defend the nation, take no action? I hope you fully understand the incident.... All people in all nations on earth lead lives of their own on their land. As such, it is the principle of the universe that countries in the East and West mind their own business, maintain stability for their own people that they may live peacefully, and desist from attacking and plundering other

²⁴ Yeon-Soo Kim ed., *The Sujagi Flag: Coming Home after 136 Years* (Seoul: National Palace Museum of Korea, 2008), Exhibition catalog, 24-25.

nations. If any nation fails to do so, it would cause the heaven to rage, which should be the least auspicious. How could you be unaware of this principle?²⁵

In the letter, Daewongun stated that the Korean artillery attack was self-defense and that Koreans were willing to resolve the conflict in a peaceful way and politely declined diplomatic ties with the U.S., citing differences in traditional diplomatic practices between the East and the West. His letter proves the Western perception of the East, reminding of the image of barbarians attacking expeditions with primitive weapons, a kind of “imagination.” The U.S. attacked the fortress of Ganghwado Island, announcing the contents of Daewongun's letter were only a repetition of the previous one and occupied after being devastated by U.S. fleet’s gunfire.

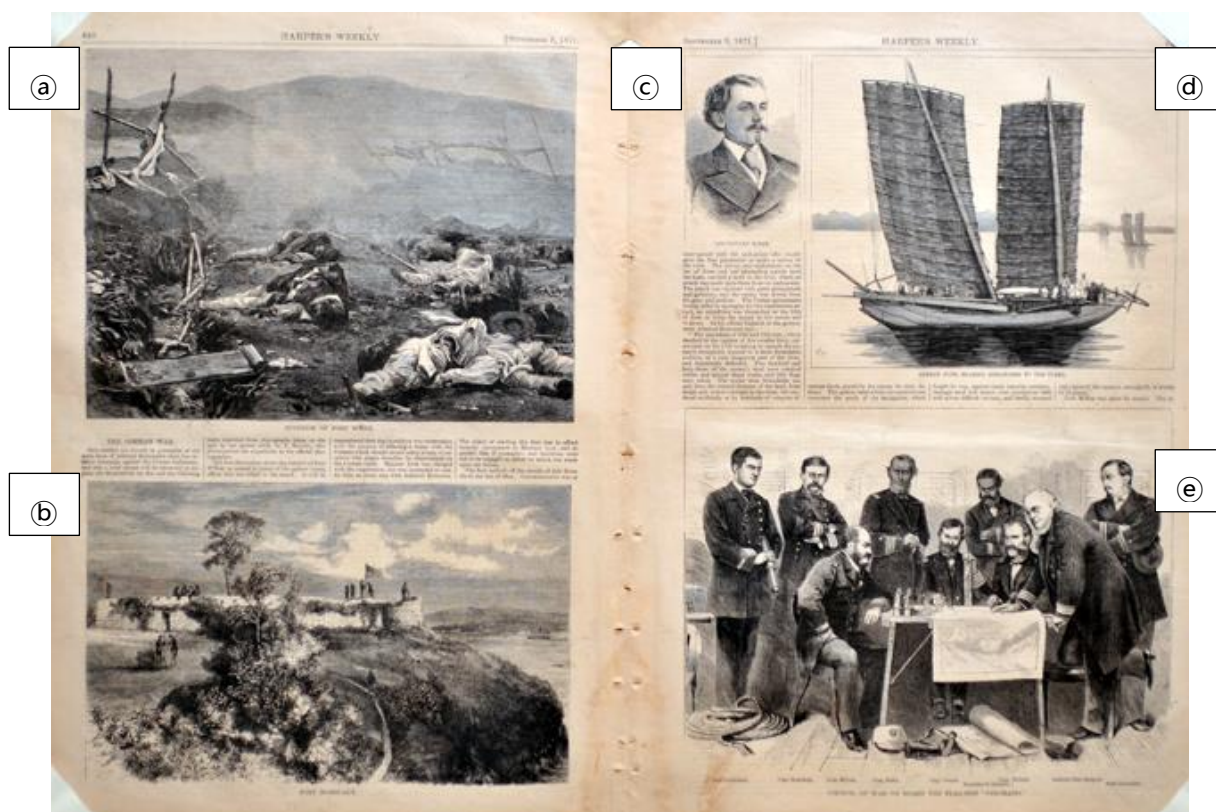


Figure 3. “The Korean War,” *Harper’s Weekly*, September 9, 1871.

²⁵ Yeon-Soo Kim, 29.

Harper's Weekly (Figure 3) reported “the expedition” with the start of a description of “Admiral Rodgers’ short but secret campaign against the Korean barbarians.” They represented the U.S. invasion as the story of “expedition” as follows:

It will be remembered that the expedition was undertaken with the purpose of effecting a treaty with the Koreans which should secure safety to any of our sailors who might hereafter be shipwrecked on the Korean coast.... The survey was undertaken.... The Korean government having failed to apologize for this treacherous attack, an expedition was dispatched on the 10th of June to bring the enemy to his senses and to terms.²⁶

The *Weekly's* first illustration (a) shows the bodies of unnamed Korean soldiers scattered in thick smoke. This illustration is contrast to the portrait of Lieutenant M'Kee on the right page (c), which was placed in honor of his tragic death. The Korean junk (d) allows the readers to gauge the level of civilization in Korea. In these illustrations, Korea is represented as a place of expedition and conquest: U.S. soldiers are putting with an American flag in their occupied fortress (b), and the council of war on board the flagship “Colorado” is having a serious operation meeting (e). The U.S. soldiers had their own way of naming other country's territory such as “Fort M'Kee” (a) and “Fort Monocacy” (b), making them look like their own land. An unfamiliar exotic space in the illustrations completes the representation of the land of conquest through captioning of American naming and Western sketching techniques.

4.1.3 Colonialist’s Metaphor, “Hermit Kingdom”

It was common for Westerners who published books and articles about Korea, to introduce Korea as the “hermit kingdom,” a place that completely isolated itself from the outside world. First of all, it was the usual order of any visit to open a map to check the location of

²⁶ “The Corean War,” *Harper’s Weekly*, September 9, 1871.

Korea. Some people guessed that the location of Korea is on the equator, the Mediterranean Sea or the Black Sea, or the Aegean. Westerners who were interested in Korea were reminded of Catholic persecution and the two Korean Wars: the French campaign against Korea in 1866 and the U.S. invasion of Korea in 1871.²⁷

The presentation “On the Korea” [*sic*] made by Captain Allen Young at the meeting of the Royal Geographical Society in Britain, which follows, shows the dominant image of Korea. As the title “On the Korea” indicates, even someone who was a presenter on Korea did not understand the national title whether it was Korea or the Korea:

The country is so completely lost to the outer world that no foreign ship ever enters its ports, nor is any European voyager allowed to remain on its shores. The country forms the eastern shore of the Yellow Sea, the great highway to the rich treaty ports of Northern China, yet its western coast, masked by innumerable and mostly inhabited islands, dangerous to navigation, has never yet been surveyed, and laid down on our charts. The history of the Korea is diversified by various attempts of the Chinese to encroach on the Northern Provinces, and particularly by two invasions of the Japanese in the 16th century.²⁸

The spatiality of the “hermit kingdom” as conceived of by Westerners was useful in justifying the necessity of opening ports and the notion that Korea should no longer remain isolated. They asserted that it was manifest that in a short time Korea must be opened to other nations. To the western world, Korea was to attract the attention of all who take an interest in geographical discovery and the progress of their commercial intercourse with the East to the fine new field for enterprise.²⁹

²⁷ Kim, “*Taehan Cheguk ki yǒngja ǒllon ũi Han'guk insik kwa p'yosang yǒn'gu*,” 17.

²⁸ “Royal Geographical Society,” *Times*, June 15, 1865.

²⁹ Kim, “*Taehan Cheguk ki yǒngja ǒllon ũi Han'guk insik kwa p'yosang yǒn'gu*,” 19-20.

Before and after the opening of the Korean ports, there were only roughly two western books summarizing Korean history and culture: French priest Charles C. Dallet's *Histoire de l'Eglise de Corée* (1874) and William E. Griffis' *Corea: The Hermit Nation* (1882). Not only had neither author ever visited Korea, but they described Korean history with only Chinese and Japanese literature. The situation of overseas media coverage of Korea was not much different. Western media, which mainly obtained Korea's news through Chinese and Japanese newspapers, produced articles on Korea reflecting the interests of China and Japan.³⁰

Since the opening of the Korean ports, publications on Korea had also increased as Westerners from various occupational groups, including missionaries, geographers, travelers, politicians, diplomats, and officers, began to enter Korea. Commonly their first impression was one of "conventional hostility," even though they developed their attitudes and understanding of Korea differently according to various factors such as length of stay, areas visited, presence of contact with Korean people, and sources of information.³¹

4.1.4 Bow? or Shake Hands?: Korea's First Diplomatic Mission to the U.S.

There was a transfer of the leading powers in the Korean government and a commercial treaty was signed between the two nations (The Treaty of Ganghwa, 1876). Korea also opened the ports of Busan, Incheon and Wonsan. Korea opened ports to Japan as a start. New civilization from the outside world was thus able to enter Korea. However, when Japan's aggressive designs became evident, Korea signed treaties of commerce with the U.S., England and Germany in 1882, with Russia in 1884, and with France in 1886 and pursued the balance of

³⁰ Kim, 17-18.

³¹ Kim, 18.

power in East Asia.³²

The Korea-U.S. treaty in 1882 meant that Korea first established official diplomatic relations with Western countries. In return for the signing of the treaty and the dispatch of U.S. ambassador, Korea sent a diplomatic mission to the United States in 1883. There was an official reception of the Korean ambassadors at the VIP room of the Fifth Avenue Hotel in New York City, where the Korean delegation delivered a sovereign's message. At that time, the diplomatic customs of the East and the West were not similar, so the ambassadors made their first greeting to the U.S. president in a Korean way.³³



Figure 4. *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, September 29, 1883.

³² “Strange Ships Approach,” *History of Korea*, History net, National Institute of Korean History, accessed May 1, 2021, http://contents.history.go.kr/front/kh/view.do?category=english&levelId=kh_001_0070_0020_0010.

³³ “The Korean Embassy,” *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, September 29, 1883.

This scene marked the first page of the newspaper (Figure 4). President Arthur, who was supposed to shake hands with the Korean delegation, is looking at them bowing dressed in Korean costumes. The people behind the president also tilt their heads and look at the strange scene. The newspaper described that “the scene was almost Oriental in its impressiveness” and provided the detailed visual description of the delegation’s costume, commenting that “the costume of these representatives of the ‘Hermit Nation’ is peculiarly fanciful.”³⁴ Unlike modern times, there was an offensive exploration of others’ appearance, a visual scanning, which was unfamiliar to Americans at the first meeting at that time. Another newspaper article revealed the sense of alienation felt toward the Korean ambassadors: “of all queer people that Washington has ever seen the Koreans who were presented to the President recently are the queerest.”³⁵

Principles such as sovereignty equality and international law among European countries did not apply to non-Europe. Until the 19th century, European people had established Christian Europe as a standard of civilization, and non-European nations regarded it as “barbarians” or “half-civilization,” which meant by only in a limited sense were considered an entity of international law. In order to become a sovereign state, in which the principle of equal sovereignty was applied, the “approval” of European countries was needed. The delegation from the “hermit kingdom” was described as a curiosity and object of observation from a “non-civilized” country rather than an equal diplomatic opponent.³⁶

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ “Washington Letter,” *Barbour Country Index*, March 21, 1888.

³⁶ Yong-Hwa Chung, “Kaehwa kaehyŏngnon esŏ kukkwŏn·min'gwŏn·kun'gwŏn ũi kwan'gye” 개화개혁론에서 국권·민권·군권의 관계 [The relationship among sovereignty, people's rights and monarchy], in *Kŭndae kukche chilssŏ wa hanbando* 근대 국제질서와 한반

4.1.5 Russia and Japan Covet the “Hermit Nation”

Beginning with the Korea-Japan treaty of 1876, the “hermit kingdom” Korea emerged as a double cross point of the Anglo-Russian-Chinese-Japanese confrontation, and the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05) broke out on the Korean Peninsula.



Figure 5. “New Map of Corea, Where Japs Have Landed,” *Worthington Advance*, February 26, 1904.



Figure 6. “Who Will Push Him Back,” *Aberdeen Democrat*, January 15, 1904.

The powers with interests in the Far East had created a new geographical representation of Korea, one depicting Korea as “a storm center in the Far East.” At that time, Western newspapers and magazines criticized the situation in the Far East through political cartoons (Figures 5 and 6): the political space in the Far East was perceived as a conflict in which imperial powers had yet to resolve control.

☞ [Modern international order and the Korean peninsula], ed. Kukche kwan'gye yŏn'guhoe (Seoul: Ŭryu munhwasa, 2003), 350-51.

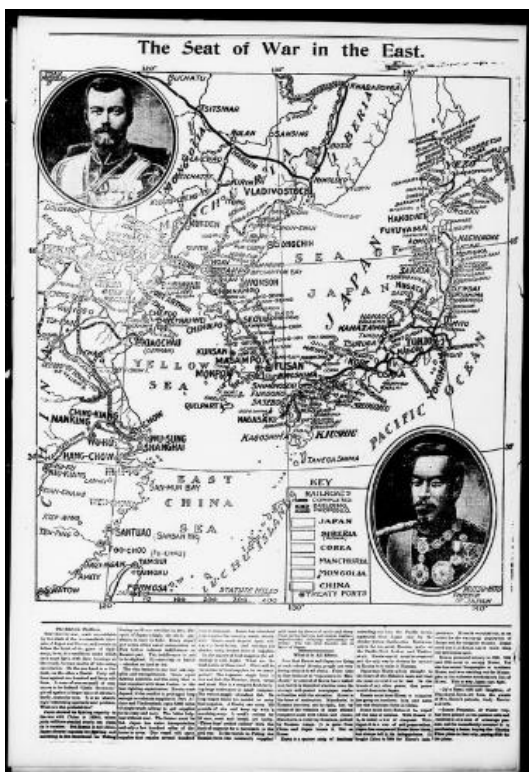


Figure 7. "The Seat of War in the East," *Holt County Sentinel*, February 19, 1904.

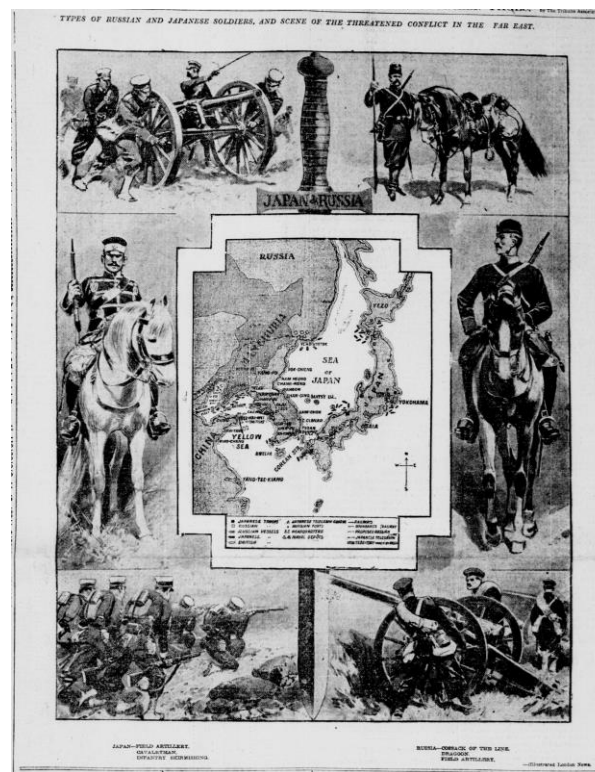


Figure 8. "Types of Russian and Japanese Soldiers, and Scene of the Threatened Conflict in the Far East," *New York Tribune*, January 12, 1904.

War, maps, and geography form a powerful triumvirate with one another. At times of war and international discord, public interest in maps and the places that they represent is greatest.³⁷ Most American newspapers attached a Korean map to the news of the Russo-Japanese War in the Far East. In Figures 7 and 8, the reader's attention is immediately drawn to the Russian emperor (or Russian army) and the Japanese emperor (or Japanese military) is placed on both sides. The Korean map placed in the middle shows that it is a battleground between the two countries. The two illustrations visually depict Korea's geopolitical status, the empires' power competition to dominate through hegemony in the Far East, and the fact that damage and loss

³⁷ Claus Dodds, *Geopolitics* (London: Oxford, 2007), 115-16.

experienced by Koreans from the war were not considered. The maps of the two figures show the scope and scale of military operations across the Korean Peninsula and the Liaodong Peninsula in China. Readers can anticipate that if one of the two empires were to take control of Korea, the Empire would acquire resources to mobilize and project naval and military forces on the Korean Peninsula.

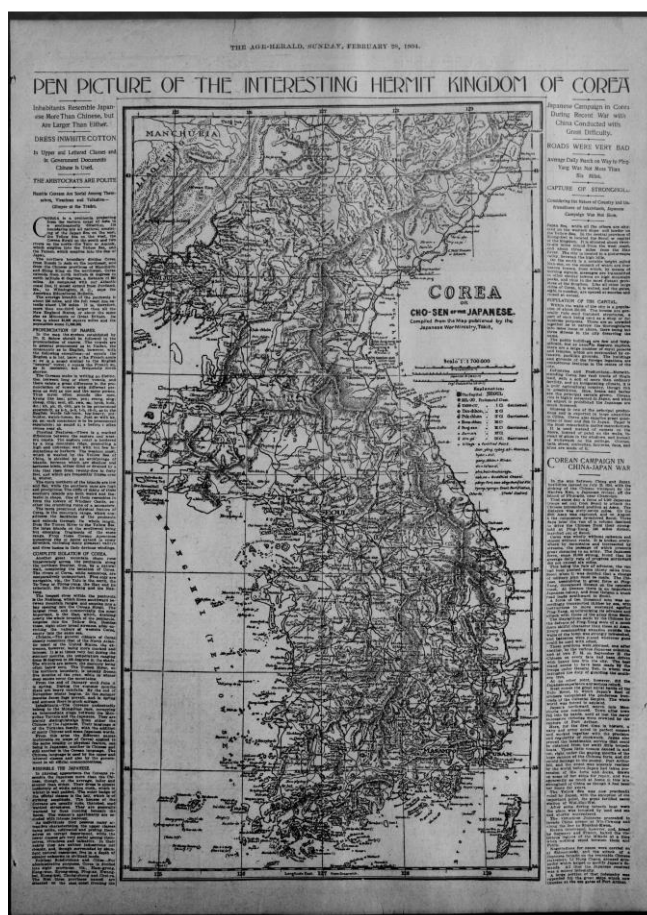


Figure 9. “Pen Picture of the Interesting Hermit Kingdom of Corea,” *Birmingham Age-Herald*, February 28, 1904.

This detailed Korean map was compiled from a map published by the Japanese War Ministry, Tokyo (Figure 9). This map provides a key clue to the Japanese invasion of the Korean Peninsula. Along with this, the news articles appearing in Western papers combined the history,

geography, and politics of Korea in order to promote a way of seeing the Korean peninsula as a battleground. The military map, which includes geographical intelligence, was understood to be an important instrument of power. The Korean map, produced by the Japanese War Ministry, attempted to persuade the Western powers that Japan has sufficient geographical information for domination of Korea and that it is qualified as an imperial state to govern colonies like other Western powers. Of course, it was used to suppress Korean resistance to Japanese aggression.

Maps as images of political space were never neutral or transparent representations of reality, rather the maps reflected the leitmotif of imperialism that the “hermit kingdom” had been the cause of much fighting. Korean maps of every kind and their description in the newspapers were used as visual materials to describe the political structure of the Far East and the geopolitical status of Korea between the colonial powers.

4.2. Inside the Storm Center

4.2.1 Korean King and His Palace

King Gojong (1852-1919) was the 26th king of the Joseon Dynasty and the first emperor of the Korean Empire to promote the establishment of a modern state through gradual reform centered on imperial rights. Through the establishment of a new national friendship with Western countries, he made many efforts to introduce modern culture and systems and to enhance the national prosperity and defense. The Korean landscape began to contain modern elements and Western-style buildings began to be built in his palaces. King Gojong had a friendly policy toward Christian missionaries in Korea. He had close ties with the missionaries such as the Underwood couple and Homer B. Hulbert. However, Korea was at a very disadvantageous point for him to solve the challenges of the regime's internal contradictions and

the invasion of imperialist powers at the end of the Joseon Dynasty. He tried to protect Korea's sovereignty against Japan, but Japan forced the abdication.

When Korean news was covered by U.S. newspapers, portraits of King Gojong wearing a Korean royal robe, Goryongpo made with red silk, often appeared. It was more of an illustration from a photograph than a photograph. When we observe the images, we see many are at the level of crude and humbled sketches. It is hard to find out that the Goryongpo's decorations on the chest, back, and shoulders are decorated with gold thread in his illustrations. Rather than keeping King Gojong's latest photos updated, two or three specific photos were reproduced and distributed in various illustrations. It was common for portraits of King Gojong taken 20 years before in newspaper articles. Even the wrong photo of a Korean school teacher became a portrait of King Gojong and circulated.³⁸



Figure 10. "The Ruler of Korea," *New York Tribune*, February 14, 1904.



Figure 11. Archer Butler Hulbert, "Korea, the Storm Center of the East," *Indianapolis Journal*, February 28, 1904.

³⁸ "Danger Still Exist in Seoul," *Desert Evening News*, January 21, 1904.

In U.S. newspapers, his portraits were mainly used to convey “strange” or “chaotic” news of the “hermit kingdom.” This did not require newspaper editors to take a nice picture of the Korean king. Rather, an Oriental photo of a king with small eyes in a strange costume was more suitable for their articles. The official portrait that King Gojong (Figure 10) asked of French artist De Neziere was used in a completely different context in an article titled “The Ruler of Korea: Like a Kernel of Grain Between Two Millstones.”³⁹

Three weeks after the Russo-Japanese War occurred, *The Indianapolis Journal* published a large portrait of King Gojong in an article titled “Korea, the Storm Center of the East” (Figure 11). The eyes of King Gojong, which are somewhat small and gathered, make it difficult for readers to think that he was a monarch who makes rational judgments. At the top of both sides, around him, there are drawings in which Japanese and Russian soldiers confront each other with guns pointed at one another. In conjunction with the headline “Korea, the Storm Center of the East,” the visuals present the Russo-Japanese War over Korea.

Archer Hulbert, the contributor to this article, conveys the situation inside Korea as follows:

It is doubtful if there were ever a people so afraid of devils as the Koreans; and there must be some connection between their wild superstitions and their desperate history throughout the centuries in which Korea has played the professional storm center of the East... , lastly, the bone of contention between Russia and Japan, the Koreans solemnly go about with a devil’s-goin’-to-get-you expression on their faces. They protect the country from devils, and likewise the cities and temples and houses, and beat drums to drive the devils out.⁴⁰

³⁹ “The Ruler of Corea,” *New York Tribune*, February 14, 1904.

⁴⁰ Archer Butler Hulbert, “Korea, the Storm Center of the East,” *Indianapolis Journal*, February 28, 1904.

King Gojong's facial hair in the portrait reminds readers of a devil in conjunction with the text. Korea, an "uncivilized" place run by an Eastern tyrant and pagans like "devils" was natural to be a storm center in the East in this context.

King Gojong's photographs were usually taken by Westerners who were visiting Korea, and they were usually published in Korea-related books and magazines published by Westerners. Up until that time, King Gojong's photos had largely represented the monarch as a photographic object seen through the eyes of foreigners. At the turn of the 20th century, international politics intensively influenced the visual representations of Korea. The Western powers and imperial Japan had begun to look upon Korea as an "other" rather than an equal and they used the images of King Gojong to promote this view and justify their actions. As a result, this complex image of the emperor was eventually contextualized to represent the abdicated monarch of the Joseon Dynasty, i.e., as the symbol of an impotent nation caught helplessly between foreign powers.⁴¹

4.2.2 A Comic Opera Nation

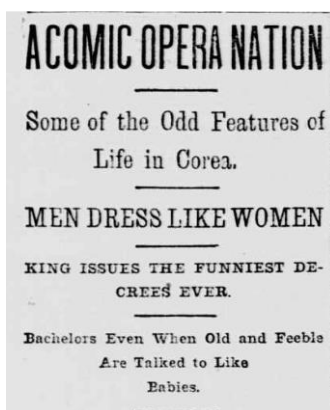


Figure 12. "A Comic Opera Nation," Evening Star, October 10, 1903.

⁴¹ Heangga Kwon, "Photographic Portraits of King/Emperor Gojong: Competing Strategies for Representing a Sovereign," in *Photographs of the Daehan Imperial Family: 1880-1989*, ed. National Museum of Contemporary Art (Seoul: National Museum of Contemporary Art, 2012), Exhibition catalog, 327-31.

American newspapers had imagined Korea as “a comic opera nation” (Figure 12). The inside of the nation was full of oddness: “Men dress like women”; “Bachelors even when old and feeble are talked to like babies.” The newspapers feminized and infantilized Koreans, which had to do with gender hierarchy and age stratification. Their ideal image of an adult man was the colonizer who was in control of these other people.



Figure 13. “Comic Opera Existence in Korea,” Illustrated Bee, January 23, 1904.

Ethnographic photographs, as a means of representing Korea's ethnological features, aided readers to visually recognize the inside of the “Comic Opera Nation” (Figure 13). The bottom picture is of the “City Gate at Seoul.” American newspapers frequently carried pictures of Asian city gates in the news of the East, which create an atmosphere where curious things

would unfold when they passed the gate. The top left picture, "Corean Wives Ironing," shows a strange scene of Korean women ironing with their bats, proving that Korean women are in poor working conditions. In the top right picture, "A Korean School," young Korean students sit around their teacher's small table and study with their heads bent over their heads with books on the floor. From the perspective of American readers, the photo raises strong doubts about whether they are receiving proper education in poor conditions without desks and chairs. These photos served to prove that Korea is a "comic opera nation."

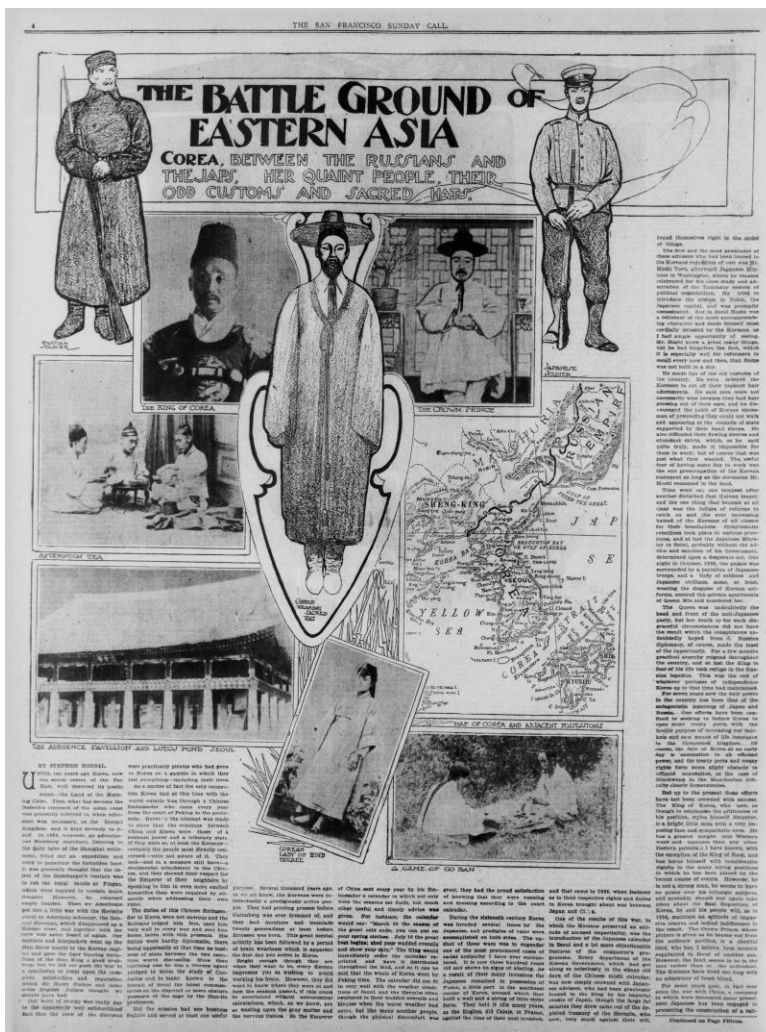


Figure 14. "The Battle Ground of Eastern Asia," San Francisco Call, January 24, 1904.

Figure 14 was published two weeks before the start of the Russo-Japanese War when tensions escalated in Korea. The editor intended to place various kinds of visuals (photographs, illustrations, and a map) on a single page to show the situation in Korea at a glance. Under the headline “The Battle Ground of Eastern Asia” and sub-headline “Corea, Between the Russians and the Japs, Her Quaint People, Their Odd Customs and Sacred Hats,” a Russian soldier (left) and a Japanese soldier (right) stand symmetrically on both sides centered on the “Corean Wearing Sacred Hat.” This triangle expresses the political situation in the Far East, where Russia and Japan are at odds over Korea. The Korean man in the center, unlike the Russian and Japanese, looks like a ghost floating in the air unarmed. The map and its caption “Map of Korea and Adjacent Positions” provide a gauge of Korea’s geopolitical position in the Far East.

The center illustration of a Korean man is surrounded by other visuals that identified the essence of Korea at that time. Portraits of Korean royalty looked very awkward. For example, the king’s face on the left appears to be crying while also, the prince’s illustration from a photograph on the right seems to be just a hastily drawn caricature. The thick and dark contours on the prince’s face made it look like he had an abnormally large head. The article describes the history of how the ‘Hermit Kingdom’ Korea became “the center of the storm in the Far East.” In this context, the palace building captioned with “The Audience Pavilion and Lotus Pond, Seoul” is reproduced as a tragic space in which the Korean queen, who had an anti-Japanese policy, was killed by the Japanese and the King feared for his life and escaped from the palace.

We can also see ordinary Koreans in the article. The editor placed a photo of the elegant “Corean Lady of High Degree” with an oblique point under the Korean man. Photos with captions “Afternoon Tea” and “A Game of Go Ban” are also shown. Korean men in the photos are sitting with their legs folded, drinking tea or playing a game. These are ethnographic

photographs that the backgrounds and poses of the subjects prove. We can see Western curtains and wall mouldings in the tea drinking space meaning that this photo was taken in a studio, directed by a Western photographer. Also, it is awkward for Koreans to be playing games in bushes; it creates a primitive atmosphere. If Koreans at that time were to play games outside, they would have used a mat or sat on a low wooden bench, elevated above the ground.

Why did the editor put pictures of Koreans drinking tea and playing games when war might be imminent? And why did the Korean royalty seem so strange or foolish? The intentional placement of these visuals made readers interpret that the cause of the war was Korean uncivilization. At that time, Koreans did not want a war to break out in their land. King Gojong made diplomatic efforts to prevent the war. He expressed his position through personal letter diplomacy that he had nothing to do with the unstable situation in the East and that he would preserve neutrality between Russia and Japan, but the war broke out and his neutral diplomacy failed. The Japanese military drove out Russian forces on the Korean Peninsula and occupied Korea.

A Korean newspaper, the *Hwangsŏng sinmun* (*Capital Gazette*, 1898–1910) criticized the Russian-Japanese negotiations on Korean affairs as an insult to the independent state. Koreans were aware of the situation in the Far East through newspapers and rumors, and they accepted the prospect offered by foreign media that Korea would become a colony of the country no matter which country won. Koreans projected maximized geopolitical anxiety into cultural prophecies and predicted the future of the Far East. In January 1904, when the sense of crisis of war was heightened a month before the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War, it happened that a cow seller in Yongin, Gyeonggi Province, would not sell cattle even though the customer offered a high price of 900,000 *nyang*. This anecdote was published in *The Korea Review* (1901-1906), an English-language magazine in Korea published by Homer Hulbert, who was a representative of the few journalists of English language media in Korea at that time. This short news item was

not intended to introduce the absurd anecdote of the cow seller's foolish judgment. Koreans at that time believed that when the price of a castrated calf reached 1 million *nyang*, it was close to a ruined country. *The Korea Review* said Koreans wanted to leave themselves alone in the contention between Russia and Japan.⁴² But for American newspaper editors, the opinions of Koreans did not matter and were irrelevant. This is because they imagined that they already knew that Koreans were indifferent in everything, even the war.⁴³

This article, coordinated with the visuals, headlines, and captions, is filled with images that show Korea as a dangerous, uncivilized place (battleground) that needs a colonial power's intervention. These particular types of Korean images had collaborated with the competition between Japan and Russia, which was a representation of the colonizer's intention that only war and conquest could solve Korea's problem (non-civilization).

5. Conclusion

The lens of American newspapers captured images of non-civilization and barbarism instead of Korean cultural traditions and development. The reproduction and deliberate deployment of these visuals was the product of a geopolitical discourse called the "Far Eastern Question" produced by Western powers and Japan seeking to push imperialism/colonialism through the Far East. Through these visuals, American readers visually understood that the "Far

⁴² Kim, "Taehan Cheguk ki yǒngja ōllon ūi Han'guk insik kwa p'yosang yǒn'gu," 117-19.

⁴³ "Peaceful Koreans Are Now in Abject Terror," *Indianapolis Journal*, February 12, 1904.

Eastern Question” could only be solved if Korea, a troublemaker of the Far East, was placed under the rule of the civilized country.

Korean visuals appearing in American newspapers around the Japanese protectorate of Korea (1905) show a new aspect. Previously, visuals reflecting the Korean position were difficult to find in the newspapers, but after the protectorate of Korea, the discourse competition between Korean nationalism and Japanese colonialism affected the visual production of American newspapers. This can be a research subject to identify the characteristics of what visuals the two opposing discourse produces and represents in American newspapers during the Korean colonial period.

The study of the past Korean visuals is significant in that it is a prototype of today's image of the Korean Peninsula. The U.S., which is deeply involved in Asia Pacific politics, tends to solve geopolitical situations, such as trade friction with China, North Korea's nuclear program, and Hong Kong/Taiwan issues through identity politics. Geographical visuals and images produced by the U.S. media serve to justify U.S. policy toward the Asia Pacific region. In that respect, my research, which reveals Korea's image and representation in early U.S. newspaper visuals in historical context, can contribute not only to understanding the current relevance of Korea's image in the U.S. but also make progress in Korean Studies in America, a field that tends to be somewhat relatively understudied, even though Korea has a significant role in the Asia Pacific region historically and geopolitically.

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Appendix A

BTS Kick Off 'Tonight Show' Residency With 'Idol'

K-pop outfit delivered the hit song outside Gyeongbokgung Palace in Seoul

By JON BLISTEIN



BTS kicked off a week-long residency on *The Tonight Show* with a performance of their hit song "Idol" on Monday, September 28th.

Jon Blistein, "BTS Kick Off 'Tonight Show' Residency with 'Idol'," *Rolling Stone*, September 29, 2020: image taken from website.