

Article

Western Travelers in Colonial Korea: Foreign Perceptions on Legitimacy of the Japanese Rule and the Two Nations

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Introduction

The present essay analyzes the discourse contained in the accounts of Westerners travelling in Korea during the colonial period. Most of the publications regarding these historical primary sources have been compilations organized by topics or in chronological order. This would be the case of works such as: *Times Past in Korea: An Illustrated Collection of Encounters, Events, Customs and Daily Life Recorded by Foreign Visitors* (Routledge, 2003); *Letters from Joseon. 19th Century Korea through the Eyes of an American Ambassador's Wife* (Seoul Selection, 2012); *Brief encounters. Early Reports of Korea by Westerners* (Seoul Selection, 2016); or *Korea through Western eyes* (Seoul National University Press, 2009) to cite a few recent examples. Other works including *Living Dangerously in Korea: The Western Experience 1900-1950* (Eastbridge, 2003) have focused more on the accounts of long-term foreign residents in Korea, mainly missionaries. However, through this study my intention has been to look for the common points contained in travel literature in order to provide a better understanding on issues such as to what extent were Western travelers influenced in their views of Korea by the Japanese propaganda efforts.

To that purpose I have limited the analyzed accounts to those written by what I define as “short term travelers.” The reason behind this is that it is possible to find much more detailed accounts written by authors who lived for years or even decades in Korea. Those people were fully aware of the circumstances surrounding the colonial rule in Korea and thus were less inclined to fall in the Japanese attempts of rationalizing their control over the peninsula. On the contrary, it is important to note that most of the “short term travelers” during this period arrived Korea through Japan and that in many cases they had visited Japan first and during their trip in Korea they had little to non-contact with the natives staying at Japanese managed institutions like the Chosun Hotel. Thereby there was a tendency to perceive Koreans as part of the landscape and their images on them often contained a bias promoted by the Japanese propaganda machinery.

Moreover, the scarce information available in English about the country was published by the Japanese. Due to the language it is possible to infer that such materials were targeted at a global audience. Through this introduction I would like to put two examples of such materials. One can be found in *The Guide to Keijo* (currently Seoul) published in 1917 by the Japan Tourist Bureau

Chosen Branch which starts as follows:

A tourist who has visited Japan proper only is not justified in saying that he has already completed sightseeing in Japan until he has visited Chosen, now a part of Japanese Empire by peaceful annexation. After having enjoyed his tour in the charming “Land of the Rising Sun,” he should come to the “Land of the Morning Calm” and make acquaintance with the old attire, peculiar customs, and distinctive architecture of this “Hermit Kingdom” which is no longer shut off from the rest of the world, but is now passing through a great and rapid change under the progressive policy of the Japanese administration. (Japan Tourist Bureau Chosen Branch 1917, 1-2)¹

Besides the alleged peaceful character of the annexation, it is interesting that the rhetoric of analogues was used to describe both countries through their traditional names. The dynamic Japan was presented as the land of the rising sun in contrast to “the stagnated Korea,” the land of the Morning Calm (Joseon in Korean) once hermetic and now enjoying a process of modernization at hands of the benevolent Japanese administration.

A complete outline of Korea was published in 1929 under the name *Chosen of Today Illustrated*. An extensive section analyzes the progress of the industries from the previous years up to 1929, and several pictures of modern colonial buildings and infrastructures can be found throughout the book. On its history section it criticizes Daewongun’s rule in Korea and its dependency on China. It describes the Japanese establishment of the Korean protectorate as follows:

Korea was still too weak however to stand on her own feet. The evil results of chronic misgovernment and corruption in politics could not so easily be overcome. To strengthen this weak point in the maintenance of peace in the Orient, it was necessary that Korea should be brought under the protection of Japan, and this was effected in 1906. Prince Ito, the greatest liberal statesman Japan ever produced, was appointed Resident-General of Chosen and devoted himself heart and soul to her betterment, only to meet a tragic end in Harbin in 1909 at the hands of a Korean assassin. Out of the ensuing turmoil, voices were heard calling for Japan and Korea to be united

1. All the translations of the citations are the author’s own unless otherwise noted.

in one. The strongest advocate of this move was the Ilchinhoe, the leading political party in the country and composed of the intellectual classes. The end of it was that on the 22th of August, 1910, the treaty of annexation between Japan and Korea was signed and duly recognized by the world at large. (Kiryama 1929, 8)

The claim that the Ilchinhoe was the leading party is a propagandistic exaggeration and an attempt to justify the legitimacy of the Governor-General of Korea (GGK) by using a pro-Japanese group and presenting it as the mainstream Korean public opinion. This can be demonstrated by paying attention to Ilchinhoe's number of affiliates which was not large enough to be considered mainstream (Moon 2013, 17-18).

The Way to the Annexation of Korea

The number of available Western accounts in Korea, while numerous in the previous period, reduces drastically after the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910. External factors such as the development of the world wars may have prompted this fact. After the establishment of a Japanese protectorate over Korea in 1905, the general perception was that a complete annexation would be just a matter of time. In fact, given the control that the Japanese already exerted over Korea, the announcement would simply give official recognition to an already *de facto* situation (Brown 1919, 204). When the British adventurer Emily Georgiana Kemps (1911, 105) travelled to Korea under Japanese protectorate as part of a broader trip, she noted:

It seems absurd to the traveler to hear the Japanese pretending that they have not annexed Korea, for they have, practically speaking, taken possession of everything in the most high-handed manner. (Railway, post, telegraph, currency taxation and customs are in their hands. The bitterness of the bondage is aggravated by the fact that so few Japanese trouble to learn the language, so misunderstandings constantly arose.) (ibid.)

In this paragraph concerning one of her first impressions of Korea, it is possible to find a trend that will be common in many other accounts. It is the fact that while Westerners acknowledge the developments carried by the Japanese in

Korea in terms of modernization, they criticized their forms when dealing with their colonial subjects. This can be more clearly seen as she continues: “The courtesy which is such a universal characteristic of the Japanese at home, he has left behind” (ibid. 106).

In that sense, she lamented the impact that the Japanese dominance was having in the landscape of Seoul. The old city walls were being used as material for new Japanese houses. For the first time, the Japanese had opened all the palaces to the public, and she noted that inside Gyeongbok Palace the Japanese were erecting a school for boys:

This is a hard blow to Korean pride, but unfortunately our Japanese allies are apparently reckless of such details, and instead of trying to make their protectorate as conciliatory as possible, they often do the reverse, indeed it is only in rare instances that they seem to do otherwise. (Kemp 1911, 95)

She also affirms that one of the saddest losses Koreans had suffered before her arrival was the death of Ito who is depicted as “their best friend among their rulers.” Ito Hirobumi who initially refused the idea of annexation represented a moderate stance about Korea and he was a respected figure not only in Japan but also in the West. Thereby, it is often said that his death may have contributed to accelerate the process of annexation since the public opinion in Japan increasingly demanded it after Ito’s death (Hotta Lister 1999, 80). In fact, he was replaced by the army general Terauchi Masatake who later established a tight control on all the spheres of Korean society after the annexation in 1910. Ito was murdered by An Chung-gun who shot him in the station of Harbin in 1909 and would later become an icon of Korean patriotism and nationalism. His fifteen reasons were published in the press in many Western countries. He alleged to have done it for the peace in East Asia and declared to be disappointed by Ito’s break of his promise of Korean independence by proclaiming a protectorate over Korea (Moon 2013, 46).

Legitimacy of Japanese Domination in Korea

This section focuses on the Western perception of the Japanese rule in Korea. The following table contains relevant information on this topic:

Table 1. The Character of Koreans and Japanese in Western Perception

No	Author	Date	Title of Sources	Contents
1	Drake, H. B.	1930	<i>Korea of the Japanese</i>	Inefficient Koreans versus efficient Japanese; Feeling versus rationality; Japanese rule in Korea (pp. 11; 25-36)
2	Ibáñez, V. B.	1924	<i>La vuelta al mundo de un novelista</i>	Foreign powers in Korea; Japanese hypocrisy; Characteristics of Koreans (p. 194)
3	Goldschmidt, R. B.	1927	<i>Neu-Japan. Reisebilder aus Formosa den Ryukyuinseln, Bonininseln Korea und dem südmandschurischen Pachtgebiet</i>	Passive Koreans; Feelings versus rationality (pp. 237-38)
4	Powell, A. E.	1922	<i>Asia at the Crossroads. Japan, Korea, China, Philippine Islands</i>	Occupation as inevitable; Japanese as modernizers of Korea (pp. 128; 106)

While examining how Japanese presence was perceived in Korea through different Western sources it is possible to find a heterogeneous spectrum that ranges from open pro-Japanese writers (especially from the Anglo-Saxon countries) to less favorable opinions. A common point is the frequent acknowledgement of Japanese progress in the process of modernizing Korea. However, many Westerners disapproved the oppressive methods employed by the Japanese and except for a few cases it is possible to assert that they did not fall into the propagandistic arguments of a benevolent Japan helping its neighbor and they analyzed the situation from a more critical point of view.

H. B. Drake's (1930, 25-36) opinion about Japanese domination can be basically summarized saying that based on the pre-colonial political system he believed that Koreans could not govern themselves efficiently, but at the same time, as someone who saw them firsthand, he disliked the Japanese methods and ways of rule over the country. This is well expressed in the following paragraph:

One pities the Koreans, but knows them for incorrigible ineffectives; one admits the Japanese efficiency, but dislikes its methods and applications. With the best will in the world no one can help the Koreans; and with the best will in the world he Japanese will never learn how to help. Their arrogance, their officiousness, their bursts of injustice, their subtlety, are so much more conspicuous than their superhuman and heart-breaking

endeavors to uplift a people incapable of uplift. The Koreans clamour for freedom as children clamour for a world without grown-ups. But who's to cook the dinner, and light the fires, and clean the rooms? (ibid.11)

While not every travelogue author would fall in the dualism between stagnant/lazy/ineffective Koreans as opposed to progressive/dynamic/effective Japanese, it is safe to say that the other dualism of feeling versus rationality expressed in this paragraph was the mainstream way to see the Korean problem from a Western perspective. For example, Katz (1935, 170-71) shares this same view on the character of both nations Japanese being depicted as dynamic and Koreans associated with the morning clam. As citizens of independent nation states every traveler would feel pity for the Koreans who lost their independence. However, from a rational point of view the old Korean regime could not survive in the new emerging world and “something” had to happen. Whether that implied necessarily the Japanese occupation is not clear in most accounts, it is often seen as a natural outcome that finally a foreign country took power over Korea and the fable of the lamb and the wolf is often quoted in relation to it. This was also a common point of view portrayed in the Western press during the time of the annexation. For example, Blasco Ibáñez (1924, 194) wrote the following about the annexation:

Under the excuse of freeing Koreans from the “chinese tyranny” the Japanese did a war against the Middle Kingdom in 1894 forcing them to recognize Korean independence. Later, as the Russian intended to influence the politics of the country, they also did a war against them in 1902 and defeated them, this always to defend the independence of the poor Korea. In 1910 so that nobody else could attack Korean independence they simply annexed Korea declaring it a Japanese colony. Very few times in history has be seen so much apparent generosity hiding such cynical hypocrisy.

Thus, he did not believe in the alleged benevolence of the Japanese regime. However, at the same time when comparing Japanese and Koreans he felt into the previously mentioned dualism:

Their advantaged height seems to be bigger when they walk next to their Japanese dominators. These pygmies disciplined, active and energetic dressed in grey color do not have the majesty of the arrogant Koreans with

their long white robes. Such is their solemn appearance of decadent and lazy characters that the observer finally gets used to their small clown hat and even finds some beauty to their long faces... (Blasco 1924, 194)

This depiction of Koreans is further reinforced by the relation the author establishes with the Korean pipe which he describes as: “it is to a Korean like the antenna of an insect or the blade of a swordfish.” He argues that the fact that Koreans smoke during the construction of buildings gives their working style “a sleepy and slow path” (Blasco 1924, 194).

The same idea can be found in the book of the German Benedict Richard Goldschmidt published in 1927 under the title “New Japan.” In his travelogue the author narrates his experiences through Japan and its colonies. From his point of view, the superiority of the “discrete island folk” is an impression that persists through his trip in Korea. He says that one may wonder how an ancient culture folk like Korea with wonderful natural frontiers felt so effortlessly and passively in hands of a foreign nation (Goldschmidt 1927, 237-38). However, he also claims that:

There is no purpose to be sentimental here. Obviously, the natural feeling is to be on the side of the oppressed and show sympathy for a folk who has lost its national existence in the hands of a stronger folk. However, the knowledge of history and geopolitical facts show that it was a necessary development. (ibid. 238)

Then he states that while the feeling is normal, one has to be rational in understanding the Japanese annexation, which is exactly the same point made by the previous authors in their accounts. However, whether this was exclusively an influence of Japanese propaganda or it was due to their Western mindsets is not clear. In fact, the dualism between stagnant Korean and progressive Japanese was a concept already in vogue in the years after the opening of Korea and before the Japanese dominance over the peninsula became evident. Many Western authors were eager to recognize the disgrace that supposed the loss of freedom for Koreans, but they considered that the Japanese occupation was a matter of realpolitik. An American traveler named Powell (1922, 128) wrote the following about the establishment of the Japanese protectorate: “[...] though the methods which Japan employed in effecting this step may be open to criticism, that the step was imperative and inevitable cannot be seriously

questioned.” Even though he criticized the methods employed by the Japanese in Korea to some extent, he was convinced of the Japanese ability to modernize the country: “Korea under the Japanese tutelage will be one of the most prosperous agricultural countries in the world someday” (ibid. 106).

Other visitors like Goldschmidt were less concerned with the new political status of the Korean peninsula. One of the first stops of this German was the city of Keishu (Gyeongju) which he describes as the capital of the powerful Kingdom of Silla that lasted for more than one thousand years and as one of the peaks of Korean culture. In his opinion this city is the most interesting spot to visit for people interested in Korean archaeology. He points out that Keishu is an interesting example of a typical Korean city with traditional housing because it has less influence from the Japanese than other cities. In contrast to other travelogues where the chapters on Korea are largely filled with references to the Japanese and their effects on the peninsula, here the author is committed to describe all things Korean from the houses and furniture to the clothing and other customs.

Korean Customs as Related to the Japanese Annexation

Western travelers often quoted Korean customs and the character of Koreans as related to the loss of sovereignty of the country. This kind of arguments were also used by Japanese authors, some examples of this have been compiled in this section. The following table references the sources from which I have extracted quotes:

Table 2. Korean Customs as Related to the Loss of Independency

No	Author	Date	Title of Sources	Contents
1	Goldschmidt, R. B.	1927	<i>Neu-Japan. Reisebilder aus Formosa den Ryukyuinseln, Bonininseln Korea und dem südmandschurischen Pachtgebiet</i>	<i>Ondol</i> virtues as compared to the lack of heating in Japanese houses (p.245); Korean hats as related to the loss of independency (p. 250)
2	Price, W.	1937	<i>Korea from a Nunnery Window</i>	Korean heating system as related to the loss of independency (p. 510)
3	Ibáñez, V. B.	1924	<i>La vuelta al mundo de un novelista</i>	<i>Ondol</i> as the opium of Koreans (p. 196)

Through his observations Goldschmidt looked for the reason of Korea's fall into a colonial status. This can be seen when he points out the importance of Korean hats:

I want to argue (of course it shouldn't be taken too literally) that these hats are guilty of the loss of Korean independency. A folk that wears their cylinders with such tranquility and dignity for a walk did not possess the elasticity and speed of business in order to oppose successfully to the moving Japanese. (Goldschmidt 1927, 250)

The statement together with the image offered a few pages before portraying a group of Korean *yangban* under the title "Dolce far niente in Korea" (See fig. 1) make possible to affirm that the author of this account also fell in the same argument, probably preconceived.

The interrelation between a specific Korean custom and the spirit of Koreans was not an uncommon narrative in the travelogues as we have previously seen in Blasco Ibañez with the case of Korean smoking pipes. However, while this author points to the traditional hats most of the people blamed the *ondol* or traditional heating system following a trend established by the Japanese historian Sekino Tadachi (Kikuchi 2004, 126). It is possible to infer



Dolce far niente in Soeul. Der dritte Mann trägt den Trauerhut.

Figure 1. "Sweet Do-nothing in Seoul. The Third Man Wears the Mourning Hat"
(Goldschmidt 1927, 245)

that the Japanese promoted this kind view in the following quote from Blasco Ibáñez (1924, 196)²: “The Japanese, undermining these yellow people who live under their domination say that the fire was for Koreans like the opium for the Chinese. The pleasure of heat put them to sleep while their country was decaying.”

When depicting the floor in the Korean houses Goldschmidt (1927, 245) simply noted: “Its main virtue is that in winter is heated, a blessing that can be appreciated only by someone who has stayed in a Japanese house during winter.”

William Price’s article published in *Harper’s Magazine* as late as in 1937 gives an insight on the living conditions of the population. Its particularity lies in the fact that he had the opportunity to visit the countryside guided by a Buddhist abbess. In the first part of the article he summarizes the Japanese benefits on Korea’s modernization, all of them correspond to the kind of achievements present in the urban areas that every visitor could easily confirm (infrastructures such as for example telegraph, telephone, electric lines, and transportation among others). It is also acknowledged that life had been made safer and epidemics or smallpox were rare, which led to a growth of the Korean population. Witches and magicians were being replaced by licensed doctors, new Korean educated doctors being the ones who were carrying the work in rural areas where missionaries or Japanese doctors would refuse to go (Price 1937, 503-12). Modern curriculum was introduced in the schools although there were still not enough of them. After a conversation with the abbess the author reflects about the costs of this progress. When he is invited the next day to visit a village in the countryside, he realizes the misery of the farmers who according to his data constituted more than 80% of the population at that time.

In the first house a woman is found trying to feed his baby with tree barks. When they talk to the husband, he confesses that long time ago he had received a loan of 10 *yen* but he could not return the interests in time and the debt grew every year to the point that he was forced to sell his two daughters and even with that he was still not able to repay it. If the corruption of *yangban* hindered farmer’s progress in the past, the new exploitation mechanism under Japanese rule were loans, many farmers

2. For another reference to the relation between *ondol* and the character of Koreans, see Price 1937.

were in debt and in many cases expropriated from their lands since they did not have an education and were unaware of laws. Besides that, the tax over the farmers was higher than before, the same had happened in Japan as well if one compares the situation of farmers in Meiji and Tokugawa eras. In Japan the capital used to form the first state owned Zaibatsu came to a great extent from the exploitation of the farmers and the assassination of politicians related to the sector. Through this brief experience in the countryside the author reflects about the alleged Korean laziness. Similar to what happened in the past when corrupt officials took over all the possessions of a peasant, now farmers in debt knew that any attempt to work hard would only serve to feed their lenders and consequently were discouraged to do it. (ibid. 503-12)

A relation between Korean customs and this characteristic is again established. Not only *ondol* is mentioned, but also the white clothes of the Koreans. This is basically because Korean women spent a large amount of time washing those clothes that got dirty very easily when working on the fields because of their color. This had been noted by the Japanese colonizers who tried to change the color of the clothes to black in order to increase the productivity allowing women to cultivate the land together with men.

Throughout the two previous sections we have analyzed the racial perceptions Westerners had about Koreans and Japanese. At this point it is important to note that besides the Japanese influence on them, Westerners were also influenced by preconceived racial stereotypes about Koreans and Japanese contained in Western encyclopedias at that time.³ At the same time their field reports would have an impact in the new materials that would be published in the West regarding this topic. Thereby this has to be seen as a bi-directional influence.

To put an example on how the predominant dichotomy of stagnant Koreans versus progressive Japanese made it into the mainstream imaginary of the Westerners I would like to introduce two cards that were used by a tobacco company in Great Britain.

These two cards belong to a collection of descriptions of “Racial Types” that were given by the Scottish Cooperative Wholesale Society Ltd. in 1925

3. For further information on this see Lehner 2015, 77-101.

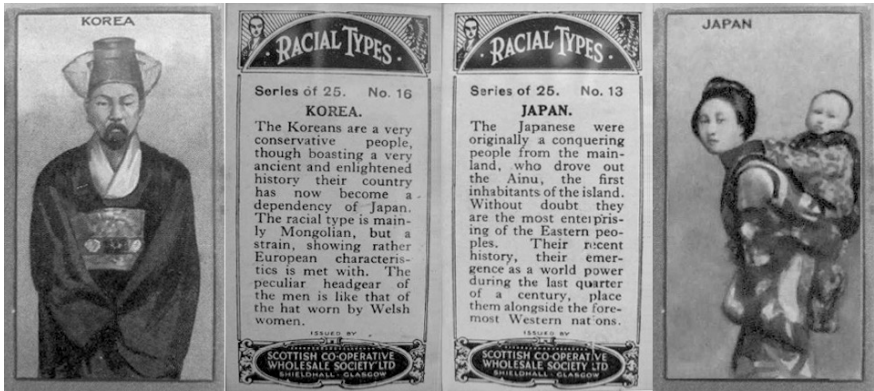


Figure 2. Cigarette Cards from the “Racial Types” Collection (Wade 2009, 223)

with their cigarettes (*ibid.*). They present Koreans as “very conservative” versus the Japanese as “the most enterprising of the Eastern peoples.” It is true that the card depicting Koreans also acknowledges their ancient culture and enlightened history. However, the recognition of a rich ancient culture was well integrated in the Japanese discourse.

Western Perception of the Japanese Urban Planning in Seoul, from Hanyang to Keijo

During the occupation of Korea, the Japanese erected numerous modern buildings designed to be their centers of power in the peninsula. The transformation that Seoul underwent during that time from being the capital of the Korean emperor to the capital of the Japanese colony was perceived by external travelers and their remarks of this process are essential to better understand how the Japanese rule in Korea was perceived by outsiders. The following table contains different quotations used in this section to illustrate how Westerners perceived the Governor-General in Korea (GGK) building which was the Japanese center of power in the peninsula.

Table 3. Governor General Building and Urban Changes in Seoul

No	Author	Date	Title of Sources	Contents
1	-	1897	<i>The Independent</i> (February 23)	Seoul's changing skyline as a symbol of modernization
2	Drake, H. B.	1930	<i>Korea of the Japanese</i>	Perception of GGK building (p.79)
3	Ibáñez, V. B.	1924	<i>La vuelta al mundo de un novelista</i>	Perception of GGK building (p.199)
4	Angoulvant, L. G.	1930	<i>Etapas asiáticas: Indochine, Chine, Mandchourie, Corée, Transsibérien.</i>	GGK building and other monuments in the city (p. 267)
5	Bodley, R. V. C	1933	<i>A Japanese Omelette. A British Writer's Impressions on the Japanese Empire</i>	Perception of the GGK building; Reasons to be pro-Japanese (pp. 2-6;109-10)

During the brief existence of the Korean Empire (1897-1910), King Gojong and his officials had plans to transform Seoul into an imperial capital. These plans included the following actions: destruction of temporary commercial stalls that jutted in some of the main streets of the city, creation of new roads centered around the Daehan Gate of Deoksu Palace (where the king was residing since the assassination of the queen by the Japanese), and also the construction of buildings of political importance, such as the Independence Gate, Pagoda Park and a memorial monument. The Wongudan Altar (later demolished by the Japanese) was built so that Emperor Gojong could perform ceremonies to the heaven, a privilege reserved to the Chinese Emperor in the past (Lee 2009, 336). The very fact that the new center of the imperial capital was located in the quarter where the foreign embassies were established was a sign of the political weakness of Korea and in fact a secret passage between the Russian legation and the Deoksu Palace was later discovered (Tangherlini 2008, 19-21). Other projects emerged as products of the semi-colonial concessions such as the mentioned electric trams. In 1897 an article in *The Independent* described in a positive way the variety of foreign buildings such as the Myeondong Cathedral and the foreign legations that were being constructed in the last years improving the image of the city and implying that a modern city required modern (and Western style) buildings.⁴ The fact that there was an intention of re-creating the city as a symbol of the new regime through new roads and public spaces is related to the urban planning reforms that the

4. See *The Independent*, February 23, 1897.

Japanese started in Seoul after the annexation in 1910. Through these reforms the Japanese pursued the desacralization of the Korean dynasty (Todd 2014, 29) stripping national symbols from their political meaning. The modernization of the city was another goal, and in that sense the neighborhoods where Japanese settlers lived were favored with a series of reforms.

If Mrs Kemps already found a blow to Korean pride the fact that the Japanese established a school inside one of the palaces, that was nothing in comparison with what was about to come with the end of the protectorate and the annexation of Korea to the Japanese Empire. As it is known today the palaces were open to the public and many of their dependences were destroyed in their transformation process from symbols of the Korean dynasty to public spaces.

The case of the Governor General Building did always cause an impression to the Westerners who had the opportunity to see it. A process of reconstruction had taken place in Gyeongbok Palace between 1865 and 1867 at the orders of the Daewongun who pursued to strengthen the monarchy (Amstrong 2014, 222). Thus, even if during the years of the Korean Empire King Gojong resided in Deoksu Palace, it remained as a symbolic place for Koreans. Among a group of modern Western style buildings designed to legitimate Japanese exercise of authority starting with such buildings as the Bank of Joseon in 1909, the extant Gyeongseong post office in 1910 or the Gyeongseong Station in 1925 (currently Seoul Station), the GGK building was designed to be the center of Japanese power in Korea and consequently had to be located at the heart of the city inside Gyeongbok Palace grounds.

In his book *Korea of the Japanese*, H. B. Drake (1930, 79) describes the GGK building as “another example of the unpardonable illtaste of the dominant nation.” The author of this book lived in Korea for almost two years as a foreign teacher. The Spanish writer Vicente Blasco Ibáñez spent only a few days in colonial Korea as a part of his trip around the world, and at that time he visited the Korean palaces when the GGK had been already built. He describes it as:

A barbaric act of unworthy vanity to any traveler with a sense of taste. The Japanese government of Korea had numerous terrains available in the capital in order to build a palace that could accommodate the governor and his main offices. However, the victorious insisted to locate this building over a yard of the ancient residence of the kings and imitating awkwardly the North American architecture they have erected a bad copy of Washington's capitol made of concrete that crashed with its stupid mass the delicate

pavilions of the ancient Korean monarchical palace and hide them from the eyes of the visitor avoiding the appreciation of the whole. (Blasco 1924, 199)

This was a common perception of visitors when they saw the GGK building. The lack of taste of the Japanese or the arrogance of the victorious perceived in the establishment of their center of power in the Korean peninsula can be also found in many other small anecdotes about their behavior narrated by travelers. Regarding to the GGK building even the Japanese art critic Yanagi Muneyoshi became involved in a controversy in 1922. When the colonial government planned to destroy the Joseon dynasty city gate to make way for a modern office building for the administration, Yanagi published an article under the title “For the Sake of One Piece of Korean Architecture about to be Lost (Kleman 2003, 82). In the article he praised the gate as pure oriental art and condemned the planned structure as “Western style, lacking creativity or aesthetic merit” (ibid.). He pleaded to the Japanese government to “love pure Eastern beauty for the sake of your own honor”(ibid.).

The French traveler Angoulvant was more ambiguous in his descriptions and did not write an opinion about the GGK building. Actually, he quotes it as the main monument to visit in Keijo and evaluates that the Shinto shrine erected in Namsan did not have any interest besides its position dominating the city and that the ancient imperial palace was a “modest assembly of wooden boxes” with a magnificent ceiling supported by two columns in red lacquered technique which view was spoiled by the unmatching European furniture (Angoulvant 1930, 267).

While it is possible to affirm that the GGK building was highly criticized by most Western travelers, it also found its admirers among the “pro-Japanese” ones. An example of this can be found in the account of R. V. C. Bodley (1933, 109-10) who praises the GGK building as splendid and of good taste resting any importance to its location. If we take in consideration that his book was published by a Japanese editorial and that the first chapter of six pages was entitled as “My Reasons for Being pro Japanese,” (ibid. 2-6), a strong bias in the account is to be expected. Already in the preface the author informs the reader that the publication of the book was product of a conversation with an intelligent Japanese diplomat and journalist who encouraged him to offer his “first impressions” of the Japanese Empire. He only dedicates ten pages to Korea. At his arrival in Korea he was received in the GGK building by General

Ugaki and at some other point he remembers the time he served under a Japanese officer in the army which also give hints about his relations with the insular country.

One example of the Japanese influence and how Keijo's new symbols of political power exercised an influence on the Western perception is to be found in the short movie produced by Fitzpatrick in 1930 under the title "Siam to Korea" (Fitzpatrick 1931). Virtually all the locations where the 4-5 minutes footage of this video was recorded correspond to Japanese symbols of power in Korea. First appears the GGK building followed by Honmachi or the Japanese district in Seoul. In the next scenes we can identify the place where he attends a Korean dance exhibition as the former Wongudan Altar (by that time already part of the Chosun Hotel's garden). At last, three Korean men in traditional clothes who are there in representation of the native people bow to the camera at the stairs of the Japanese Shinto shrine built in Namsan. The following figures are captures of the documentary:



Figure 3. GGK Building



Figure 4. Honmachi, the Japanese Settlement in Seoul



Figure 5. Traditional Performance in Wongudan Altar, at That Time Located in the Grounds of a Japanese Hotel



Figure 6. Koreans Wearing Traditional Clothes (Namsan Shinto Shrine is Seen in the Background)

Comparison of Korea to Ireland and Other Colonies

In order to better understand the Korean case, many Western authors compared it to cases more familiar to them depending on their country of origin. Through this section I present some of this information which I believe is one of the characteristics of the Western view of the Korean situation.

The fact that Westerners often used this comparison mechanism to explain the Korean situation further reinforces the idea that Westerners analyzed the situation primarily by using their own background which was in many cases Eurocentric. However, as we have seen, to some extent Japanese propaganda (and especially during the colonial rule) made its influence as it was in many cases the main source of information for travelers who arrived in Korea:

Table 4. Comparisons between the Korean Case and Other Colonies

No	Author	Date	Title of Sources	Contents
1	Powell, A. E.	1922	<i>Asia at the Crossroads. Japan, Korea, China, Philippine Islands.</i>	Korea as the Ireland of the East (pp. 101-02)
2	Katz, Richard	1935	<i>Funkelnder Ferner Osten. Erlebtes in China, Korea, Japan</i>	Comparison of the geopolitics of Korea and Poland; perception on the assimilation ambitions (pp. 184-87)
3	Chauvelot, R.	1928	<i>Visions d'Extrême-Orient. Corée. Chine. Indochine. Siam. Birmanie</i>	Comparison of Korea to Morocco (p. 6)
4	Ibáñez, V. B.	1924	<i>La vuelta al mundo de un novelista</i>	Interview with a Korean independence fighter
5	Brown, A. J.	1919	<i>The Mastery of the Far East: The Story of Korea's Transformation and Japan's Rise to Supremacy</i>	Western travelers in Asia (p. 533)
6	Angoulvant, L. G.	1930	<i>Etapas asiatiques: Indochine, Chine, Mandchourie, Corée, Transsibérien.</i>	Access to information about Korea; Comparison of Korea to Ireland (pp. 269; 272)
7	Bodley, R. V. C.	1933	<i>A Japanese Omelette. A British Writer's Impressions on the Japanese Empire</i>	Activities of Western travelers in Korea
8	H. J. Mullet Merrick	1921	<i>La Corée Contemporaine</i>	Stagnant Korea versus progressive Japan (p. 6)

Comparisons between the Korean case and Ireland (or other cases) were frequent although not every author agreed in such ideas. It is logical to think that Westerners turned to more familiar cases in order to explain the relations between Korea and Japan. In that sense a representative comparison of Korea

and Ireland can be found in the account of E. Alexander Powell, who was an American correspondent during World War I and later became a travel writer publishing several books of this genre. In his book *Asia at the Crossroads* he begins his chapter on Korea asserting that: “Korea is the Ireland of the East. The More I consider the comparison the better I like it” (Powell 1922, 101). In the following pages the reasons to compare both cases are presented. Indeed, both British and Japanese were convinced that independent Ireland and Korea would be a threat to the safety of their empires. Both countries were separated of their colonies by a narrow landlocked sea, and due to their troubled past relations (the author mentions Hideyoshi’s military invasions in the case of Korea and Cromwell’s invasion of Ireland in 1649 in the case of Ireland) it seemed reasonable to say that both Koreans and the Irish felt a similar distrust and detestation towards their colonizers (ibid. 102). More significant is the fact that the author considered Korea and Ireland incapable of self-government.

Richard Katz (1935, 184) from Germany compared Korea with Poland in his account. He argued a geopolitical similarity between both:

Just like Poland was jammed between the sleeping giant Russia and the tightly organized central powers, so lies Korea between the sleeping China and the energetic Japan and just the same way Poland’s independence was pulverized by those powers, Korean could not enjoy a true independence between its neighbors. For the most part of its four and a half thousand years of history it maintained tributary vassal relations with China. Now Poland has been divided with almost no hopes of regaining independence unless a simultaneous defeat of all its neighbors takes place.

More interesting is however his view on Japan’s plans for the assimilation of Korea which he finds a “risky experiment” with a high probability of fail. For that he argues that Koreans had been a different entity during their thousands of years of history. Then he continues saying that since the Japanese found a barrier in language they forced Korean schools to teach Japanese instead of Korean, since religions were different they forced Koreans to adopt Shintoism, and since the Korean royal house remained as a symbol of the past independence they had married the crown prince with a Japanese princess (Katz 1935, 186). Even though he praises some of what he regards as Japanese achievements in Korea he remains skeptical about what he sees as an attempt of race mixing with no precedents.

A French traveler, Robert Chauvelot (1928, 6) compared the situation in Korea with the French protectorate over Morocco and his perception of the Japanese rule was positive:

For fifteen years Japan has had Korea as part of its territory. It is only after having found the inability and observed the flaws of its leaders that the Mikado intervened to restore the order under the form of a pacific military occupation, destined mostly to defend the interests of the Japanese nationals. Then the friendly aid transformed itself into an effective protectorate –like ours in Morocco—that led to the abdication of the dynasty and the annexation of August of 1910. Indeed, this annexation continued to be like the protectorate before 1910, enlightened, liberal and not oppressive from which prince Ito had been the soul.

This author further asserts that Japanese occupation was only beneficial for Koreans. From his text we can infer an influence of both his own background as citizen of a country that has colonies (in the reference to Morocco) and the Japanese propaganda in his descriptions of the peaceful character of the military occupation and the not oppressive rule of the Japanese (Japan Tourist Bureau Chosen Branch 1917, 1-2) which are indeed very similar to the ones made by the Japanese in such documents translated into English as the travel guides or the annual reports on the state of affairs in Joseon. Under Japanese rule any Western traveler had much more contact with Japanese than Koreans and consequently it is logical to think that to some extent they influenced in the Western depictions of the country. This is easily testable by the fact that usually Koreans are depicted as part of a landscape in most of the accounts and it is rather uncommon to find conversations between the visitors and Koreans. One interesting case was that of Vicente Blasco Ibáñez (1924) who had the opportunity to meet “Doctor Li” whom he depicted as a Korean politician and writer who was looking for support in order to restore the independence in his country. Apparently, doctor Li thought that Korea would be independent again in the course of 10 years because a politician from the United States named Lloyd George had affirmed that. Then Blasco Ibáñez replied that he believed in Lloyd’s words not to disappoint Doctor Li, but he affirms in his text that actually the other powers should be happy if Japan was satisfied with just keeping Korea without looking for other colonies.

The scarce opportunities for short-time travelers to know the Korean

version of the situation led to the bias that we find in some accounts. This is criticized by the English war correspondent F. A. Mackenzie, famous for his book *Korea's Fight for Freedom*, who declared: "Some travelers are accustomed to sneer at missionary converts. Usually these are people who have never travelled further than treaty ports, and who consider that a few days stay at a semi-Europeanized town like Shanghai or Yokohama enables them to speak as authorities on heathen lands forever after (Brown 1919, 533).

Also, a French traveler visiting Korea found difficult to summarize his view on Japanese actions in Korea due to lack of information: "It is difficult to find the information in situ besides the annual report of the Government general which is complete but partial and the official publications of the information office" (Angoulvant 1930, 269).

In fact, his narrative seems to be full of the kind of statistical data contained in the handbooks published by the GGK. He also compares the relation between Korea and Japan with the one between Ireland and England arguing that despite the benefits of colonial rule Koreans cannot and would not give up on their freedom as the attempts to recover it demonstrated (Angoulvant 1930, 272). Lack of information was however not a problem to most of the travelers who wrote on Korea. In some cases, like those of the declared pro-Japanese writers, their perception of the colony seemed to be forged even before putting a foot in Korea. This is the case of Bodley R. V. C. Most of the short chapter he dedicates to Korea is used to describe the possibilities of taking part in hunting games in the peninsula. In author's words his "best insight in what Japan has done in Korea" was a visit to a mine that was under the supervision of a Scotchman. During that trip he had the opportunity to see Korean farmers who wore "those absurd little tall hats" and "appeared to be well fed." In ten pages this together with a comparison between the "less feminine" Korean *gisaeng* as opposed to the Japanese *geishas* are virtually the only references to Korean people (Bodley 1933).

Another pro-Japanese author named H. J. Mullet Merrick discouraged people from such comparisons between Korea and Ireland by stressing his view of the difference between both cases. By doing so, he reproduces the Japanese argument of stagnation asserting that in Korea generation after generation oppression and tyranny were the means of the ruling class and that the country had fallen to "the last degree of degeneration" and he continues saying: "now (Koreans) fiercely attack the neighbor nation who has come into recue with

as much generosity as success” (Mullet 1921, 6). He summarizes the dualism between stagnant Korea and progressive Japan in two points: firstly, by asserting that regardless of the antiquity of the Japanese civilization, in what it concerns to Western civilization, Japan has achieved more in the previous fifty years than ourselves (the French) in the past five hundred years; secondly, Korea, despite older than Japan has not done anything but falling down while Japan rose remaining closed as Japan also once did to the rest of the world. And Koreans did not know anything about the Western ways of government outside what they have learnt from Japan.

As we have seen in the cases of other Westerners, the fact that the Japanese adopted the Western civilization is for the author the key of its success. Although he asserts that Korea has been in constant decline in contrast to a rising Japan there is no explanation of this point in the rest of his work which is full of praise to the Japanese achievements in the Korean peninsula even coming to affirm that no nation would have the altruism of Japan in assisting Korea.

Conclusions

While every traveler had a different experience influenced by the people with whom they were able to establish contact, it is possible to state that in most of the case, travelers who stayed for brief periods in Korea did not have much contact with the local population and sometimes tended to describe Koreans as part of the landscape rather than as individuals. A problem to analyze the different sources derives from this fact. For example, while some Westerners stayed with missionaries who usually had a more complex and clear perception of what was happening in Korea, some others stayed in the Japanese-managed Chosen Hotel and very few had direct contact with Koreans. These different experiences affected without any doubt the accounts that they published later about the country. In any case, it is safe to say that during this time most of the travelers felt in the dichotomy (also promoted by Japanese) between stagnant Koreans and progressive Japanese.

Here it is important to take in consideration that travel accounts and their authors were consulted in the West as sources for other works such as encyclopedias and had thereby an influence on materials portraying Koreans and Japanese back in the West. Since travelogues became a widely popular genre the

experiences of their authors constituted a source for the readers who were eager to gain knowledge concerning the foreign and the exotic (Seok 2013, 261).

The common acceptance of the dichotomy of conservative Koreans versus progressive Japanese did not necessarily mean that all the Western authors were pro-Japanese. While Westerners were eager to acknowledge the material benefits of the Japanese rule in Korea that were shown in the modern shape of the cities, they often despised their methods and found the Japanese arrogant and disrespectful towards Koreans.

In that sense the case of the GGK building is representative because many Western travelers found its location as a lack of taste and an abuse of power. The establishment of a zoological and botanical garden in palace's ground was also criticized. As representative of this trend I may quote the case of H. B. Drake who was an English teacher in Korea for a period of two years. He had the opportunity to enter in contact with Korean students who desired freedom for their country. While he was skeptical of the Korean ability to control the country, he also disliked and sometimes satirized the practices of the Japanese in Korea (as for example the cult to the portrait of the emperor conducted in the classrooms).

When looking for the reasons of the “stagnation of Korea” many Westerners related this fact to Korean customs. While the Japanese related it to history and the fall of the Joseon dynasty, it is to note that casual travelers in Korea did not often have a deep knowledge of Korean history being very frequent the mistakes whenever they tried to attach a historical background to their travel accounts.

This kind of perception can be defined as the mainstream in the materials that I have analyzed. In contrast, there are a few accounts that show clearly pro-Japanese views as for example, the previously mentioned Trumbull Ladd's in *Korea with Marquis Ito*. However, in such cases the authors usually maintained a long relation with Japanese before travelling to Korea having often worked for the Japanese government. The pro-Japanese accounts are mostly written by British who maintained an alliance with Japan and by Americans. It is important not to underestimate the influence of this alliance that gave the Japanese opportunities to promote their views of Korea, for example, in events such as the British-Japanese exhibition of 1910 in London. It could be argued that out of the Anglo-Saxon travelogues authors were influenced by the Japanese to a lesser extent allowing more room for critical remarks.

It is also possible to argue that some authors regarded as beneficial the Japanese rule over Korea influenced by their own imperialist backgrounds. In that sense, it is important to emphasize that the Korean case was different because at the eyes of Westerners Japan was the first non-Western colonial power. Even though Japan consolidated his position in the geopolitical order defeating a Western power in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904 some Western authors would not consider them at the same level of other colonial powers due to their own racial bias.

Nonetheless, they would compare the Korean annexation with other cases where European powers dominated over their colonies. Thus, when reading these materials, it is important to keep in mind the Social Darwinist background of the Westerners who also shared a common philosophical heritage that favored the view of a supposedly superior character of Europeans in comparison to Asians. For example, Herder classified history in four stages: Oriental, Greek, Roman, and the Christian-Germanic world. (Hsia 1998, 131) Chinese culture belonged to the Oriental category which he defined as “the childhood of history.” Even though there were some Western thinkers such as Voltaire or Leibniz who defended positive views of Chinese civilization, the tendency would become the opposite later with the works of Montesquieu, Rosseau, or Herder. In his distinction between “schönen und hässlichen Volker” (good and bad nations) Herder believed that the best countries were in the region of the Tigris and Euphrates which he considered the root of European civilization. Another important concept in his philosophy is the *Volksg Geist* or spirit of a nation which is unique and defined as the creative forces that act in an unconscious way and manifest in the creations of every folk (literature, law, history, etc.). Herder glorified the *Volksg Geist* of the Germans. For him the Mongolians were primitive and ugly predators of men. Moreover, he emphasized that Chinese had their origin in these “vultures” who were ashamed of the shape of their bodies, especially ears and feet. This deformation would influence their spirit and consequently their governments were despotic and their wisdom primitive. In his opinion the Chinese and the Japanese had no chance to become noble. In these ideas and other concepts such as the yellow peril (*gelbe Gefahr*) coined by Kaiser Wilhelm II it is possible to find the roots of Western’s perception of the Orient during the nineteenth century. These stereotyped views were politically useful for the European imperialists and have been perpetuated even to our times, though it is not possible to quantify their

potential influence in Western traveler's preconceptions about Asia.

Another recurrent dichotomy shared by both, travelogues and Western press, was the one opposing feeling to rationality. While many Western travelers would feel sorry for the fate of the Korean nation, they would argue that rationality had to impose over feelings and that Japanese colonial rule, if not necessary, would have been substituted by the dominance of another nation such as China or Russia. In that sense, they confirmed as true the Japanese argument that Korea would fall in the hands of others sooner or later if Japanese would not have taken control. Strategically it was believed that this could have posed an enormous threat to Japan and it constituted one of the Japanese arguments for the occupation.

To sum up, as pointed by Wade (2009) in the case of British travelers, most Westerners of that time had no complaint about their Japanese hosts. Although they often criticized the politics and control methods of the Japanese in the peninsula most of them also perceived their rule as beneficial for Koreans in terms of modernization.

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the information contained in a variety of travelogues written prior to and after the Japanese annexation of Korea to provide a better understanding on how Westerners perceived the colonial rule. In order to do so quotes on specific topics such as the socio-political situation of Korea or the traveler's perception on both Korean and Japanese people have been extracted and juxtaposed in an effort of identifying and defining predominant trends. These primary sources need to be approached taking in consideration the *Zeitgeist* during the period in the West. Their authors depart from a sociopolitical context during which Social Darwinism was in vogue. Besides that, while taking travelogues as a source of historical information has its limitations it also constitutes an excellent way to discuss to what extent the Japanese propaganda effort in the colony was efficient or not. It is also important to note that most of the travelers arrived into Korea via Japan, stayed at the Japanese-managed Chosun Hotel and they often had very limited interactions with Koreans. Thereby they were exposed to the Japanese discourse. This can be perceived in their comparisons between Korean and Japanese customs. However, I would like to argue how their perception on the latter was still influenced by the orientalist discourse as well.

Keywords: Korean history, colonial period, travel literature, Westerners in Korea, Japanese rule