

# The Perception of the West in *Yeonhaeng gasa* in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century<sup>1</sup>

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There was no mention of the West in 18<sup>th</sup> century *yeonhaeng gasa*. It was not until the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the West appeared as part of the exotic phenomena of Qing in *yeonhaeng gasa*; by that time Korean literati began to consider Qing not as a barbarous country but a civilized one. They did not discover and recognize the West's advancement toward the East but conceived it to be an alien and strange part of Qing. In *yeonhaeng gasa*, strangers with grotesque appearances as well as curious and exotic things represented the West. As a result, the image of the West in *yeonhaeng gasa* was distortedly fragmental and far from lifelike.

The writers of *yeonhaeng gasa* closely adhered to the traditional worldview that divided people into two groups: the barbarous and the civilized. According to this worldview, the West in general belonged to the barbarous. For this reason, they ignored Western sciences and technology and the West represented to them merely Catholicism which was the very opposite of orthodox Confucianism. They were confident that they were far superior to their Western counterparts in learning and knowledge.

Obviously, the image and idea of the West expressed in *yeonhaeng gasa* was very limited and prejudiced. Korean literati, in general, adhered to Confucianism and the Western sciences and technology were religious 'heresy' that did not disturb their established outlook on life. They maintained an obstinate view that the royal government solidly founded upon Neo-Confucianism would ensure the prosperity of a nation.

Keywords: *yeonhaeng gasa*, ideas of the West, traditional worldview, Confucianism, exotic phenomena

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## Introduction

*Yeonhaeng gasa*<sup>2</sup> is Korean poetry and a major genre of travel literature beginning in the 18<sup>th</sup> century along with Chinese literature. The genre of *gasa* is characterized by the openness of indefinite enlargement in its form. Such a formal characteristic matched the interest in describing what was seen and heard during travels and popularized *yeonhaeng gasa* in the late Joseon dynasty. Foreign countries became the topic in travel records because of envoy's experiences visiting a foreign country or drifting.

Though the records of travel both in Hangeul (Korean alphabet) and in Chinese characters were actively written during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the number of *yeonhaeng gasa* was scarce. Only two pieces of *yeonhaeng gasa* to Qing in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century have been left and no *yeonhaeng gasa* in the 18<sup>th</sup> century has been reported except for a piece of *yeonhaeng gasa* to China by drifting. At that time, contact with the West was through the Catholic churches in Beijing during a visit to Qing.

It was not until the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the *gasa* based on travels to Qing appeared. Based upon the long contemporary *gasa Ildongjangyuga* (Grand Trip to Japan) that dealt with an envoy's visit to Japan and sang what was seen and heard there precisely, it is obvious that the literary use of *gasa* was already in existence. Nevertheless, it is worth reviewing why *yeonhaeng gasa* to Qing hadn't been used.

The answer is closely related to the *yeonhaeng gasa* writers' perceptions toward the West. Why didn't the West arouse interest during the 18<sup>th</sup> century but appeared in works in the 19<sup>th</sup> century? It suggests that the then perception toward the West was diversified according to hierarchical and collective tendency and raises the need to review the diverse perceptions of the West.

*Yeonhaeng gasa* is different from records of travel written in Chinese in the class of writers and the class of readers. The records of travel to Qing in Hangeul had a complementary relation to those written in Chinese characters and, in nine out of ten cases, the same writer wrote the travel records to Qing both in Hangeul and in Chinese characters. In spite of the differences of literal and political systems, it is very probable that the then records of travel to Qing in Hangeul

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2. *Yeonhaeng gasa* means a kind of Korean narrative poem in which the speaker describes what he has seen or heard during his travels.

showed a remarkable likeness to those in Chinese characters (Jo Gyu-ik 2004).

On the contrary, writers of *yeonhaeng gasa* had a different perception than the advanced intellectuals including scholars of the Northern Learning Group. These writers of *yeonhaeng gasa* were marginal figures that didn't belong to the core group of learning and culture. While both the *yeonhaeng gasa* and records of travel to Qing were written for readers of Hangeul, the *yeonhaeng gasa* was more popular with the people. Accordingly, the *yeonhaeng gasa* was a barometer of people's perception of the West and showed that the general public had a different perception than the writers of records of travel to Qing.

This paper won't be limited to *yeonhaeng gasa* from the 18<sup>th</sup> century but will also look at works from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It can be estimated how the characteristic aspects of *yeonhaeng gasa* to Qing changed from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. *Pyohaega* (1797), a *yeonhaeng gasa* from the 18<sup>th</sup> century written by Lee Bang-ik, *Seohaengnok* (1828) written by Kim Ji-su, *Yeonhaengga* (1866) written by Hong Sun-hak and *Bukhaengga* (1866) written by Yu In-mok from the 19<sup>th</sup> century are the four *yeonhaeng gasa* studied in this paper. The total number of *yeonhaeng gasa* is scarce, but a few of them attracted attention with multiple alternative versions.

### ***Yeonhaeng gasa* during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and the West**

*Pyohaega* (漂海歌) (1797) by Lee Bang-ik deals with his experiences after drifting because of a storm. *Gasa* based upon 'unexpected drifting' is different from *gasa* dealing with an official diplomatic mission, or travels by an envoy. However, *Pyohaega* emphasizes the Lee Bang-ik's travel experiences in a foreign country after being rescued rather than his extraordinary and difficult experiences while drifting.

Lee Bang-ik, from a family of military attaches, encountered a storm while sailing to Jeju Island to meet his parents and drifted about. In the form of *gasa*, he described his journey of reaching an island in the southern province of the Yangtze River and returning home via Beijing. Lee Bang-ik writes about his experiences in a foreign country rather than his motive for returning home and describes what he saw, the amazing grandeur under heaven. He concentrates on what he saw and heard in the southern provinces of the Yangtze River and omits what he saw and heard in Beijing during his journey.

First of all, the journey in the southern provinces of the Yangtze River

assumes a proud and grand journey. While describing a strange landscape and a queer funeral ceremony, the journey in the southern provinces assumes a spiritual meaning as a whole and looks marvelously back on the spiritual inheritance of ancient sages. The journey centers on the remains connected with historical events quoted in poetry and assumes a historical and geographical character from the viewpoint of looking back on the inheritance of ancient sages. At the ancient capital and remains of the Chu(楚) dynasty, Lee Bang-ik looked back on the appearance of Emperor Guangwu of the Han(漢) dynasty with the retired scholar Yanziling(嚴子陵), the ancient events about the two queens E Huang (娥皇) and Nu Ying(女英) at Mount Cang wu, and the traces of Du Fu and Li Bai. In the process, Lee Bang-ik was deeply moved by seeing China like a dream. We can feel his exultant air of visiting the famous remains connected with ancient events and the scenic beauty of Yue Yang Lou frequently shown in literature (Lee Sang-bo 1991: 518-9).

In his book, the southern provinces of the Yangtze River appear to be very ideal and strange. Such an embodiment of the southern provinces of the Yangtze River was made in comparison with Beijing which he described as “a province of indignant classical scholars and survivals of propriety and music stemming from the Han dynasty.” In the Shandong province far from the southern provinces, his tone changed rapidly into a critical expression, calling the Shandong province barbarous. “Dried grass for fuel is scarce, people’s clothes are worn-out sheepskin and their appearances are ghostlike.” He wrote about his hostile views about their burial customs in contrast to those of the southern provinces of the Yangtze River by saying “It is a custom of barbarians unbearable to see.”

Part of what was seen and heard in Beijing was intentionally omitted. He describes Beijing as inferior to the southern provinces of the Yangtze River by saying “Beijing as the capital of emperors is grotesque but is inferior to the southern provinces of the Yangtze River in people’s extravagance and beauty of mountains and rivers,” and “The etiquette of serving food is very cordial but is ten times less cordial in contrast to that of the southern provinces of the Yangtze River.” He wasn’t interested in what Qing looked like and how it worked. Describing the whole of Beijing as barbarous, his book did not mention the existence of the West as symbolized by the Catholic churches. This is contrary to the intellectuals of Chinese learning including the scholars of Northern Learning Group who were keenly interested in Western science and technology since the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century.

In reality, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century only advanced intellectuals of high birth felt the existence and identity of the West. In this book, Lee Bang-ik who was from military nobility maintains the Joseon traditional worldview of Chinese-Barbarian Thought. He doesn't recognize the culture of Qing and its perception toward the West. It proves that it wasn't until much later that the West attracted general attention in Korean society.

## ***Yeonhaeng gasa* of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and the West**

### 1. Change of Perception and Interest in the Qing Civilization

It was not until the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the West appeared as a literary object in *yeonhaeng gasa*. These *gasa* were longer in length because there was an increased desire to write *gasa* because there was a different perception of the Qing civilization and the values of what was seen and heard in Qing came to be recognized. This is quite a contrast to *yeonhaeng gasa* from the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries which omitted what was seen and heard in Qing and were short.

*Seohaengnok* (1828) written by Kim Ji-su was a direct influence on Hong Sun-hak's *Yeonhaengga* (1866). The two works share the composition of content and frame and have many overlapping parts. Kim Ji-su may be a pseudonym rather than his real name and his status isn't identified (Lim Gi-jung 1978). Based upon the contents of his work, he may be from a learned family in Seoul but also a poor scholar that hasn't entered into an official career. He is an attendant without an official title of a visiting envoy and may be a marginal man of central bureaucrats.

In *Seohaengnok*, while it is still meaningful to visit historical places of ancient events as a spiritual inheritance of the gentry and follow the traces of saints, less weight is given to these experiences. As Kim Ji-su approached Beijing, he stopped yearning for the old days of viewing the remains of ancient sages and being indulged in the past and concentrated on the new sights and sounds of everything around him and the changing landscapes. Such a change of attitude was caused by the prosperity of the Qing civilization. Overwhelmed visually by the grandeur of prosperity, he was forced to compare it with that of Joseon and was surprised at the enormity.

In Beijing, Kim Ji-su describes exotic and interesting social conditions and Chinese things such as the palaces of the Emperor, markets, living conditions of

the common people and civilian customs. He precisely describes such attractions as a Mongolian monk, the appearance of a Westerner, tightrope dancing, strange animals, the appearance of the Emperor, landscapes of neighboring scenic places and gigantic Buddhist temples.

The grandeur of the palaces of the Emperor, a typical symbol of Beijing, is described in precise detail and so is the majesty of the Emperor leaving the palace. “There are ten times more officials than ours even at a weekday meeting, not a grand morning meeting. ... many soldiers are so quiet that the place looks like no soldier stands” is an aspect of a big country that can be confirmed through the grandeur of its system and strictness of discipline.

Kim Ji-su’s expansive descriptions of markets show his special interest in the Qing civilization. He is interested in its prosperity, saying “The outer city with many stores is larger and more prosperous than the inner one.” The marketplace embodies such daily aspects as manure and water sellers and beggars. The markets’ visual aspects and all of its sounds are nothing more than a “middle-class custom,” making the vigor of the city felt.

Enumerating the trifling, unusual, and high-quality goods of Qing daily life, the landscape of a prosperous marketplace is described. In the case of the market Longfusi and the store Liulichang, every kind of commodity is enumerated. Then, the way to show social conditions and Chinese things is the way of “maximization of the scenes.” This maximization of the scenes is originally an idea characterized in the construction of *pansori* (traditional Korean narrative songs) (Kim Dae-haeng 1976: 207). A passage describing an object of interest and especially interesting things one sees is abnormally expanded and projected in contrast to the context.

As a result, when seeing interesting attractions among natural features of the season, part of the scene is expanded and it is pleasant to see various commodities. Various displayed goods including stationery like a brush and a brush stand and daily goods like a candle-stand, an alarm clock and a folding screen are a landscape of prosperity. As they are enumerated item by item, it is pleasant to see them. *Yeonhaengga* is almost the same as *Seohaengnok* in the vigor about markets and the enumeration of commodities but is more expanded than *Seohaengnok*. Based upon the description of Liulichang as a place selling every commodity, the gorgeous and prosperous atmosphere can be assumed.

In *Seohaengnok* Kim Ji-su describes civilian customs, the busyness of markets, the gorgeousness of commodities, the management of houses, and food culture. These descriptions prove the quality of Qing urban lifestyle and his

yearning for a refined lifestyle can be seen through his description of moderately light, fragrant and clean-shaped food while associating with foreign scholars.

*Yeonhaengga* by Hong Sun-hak also contains descriptions of exotic things. He describes exotic social conditions and things, current attractions including civilian customs and the appearance of palaces. In particular, civilian customs including Guandimiao, the shrine of the civilian religion Guandiu, the Buddhist temple Dongyuemiao and the temple of Taoism Baiyunguan were described in detail. In Yu In-mok's *Bukhaengga* from 1866, there are comparatively more descriptions of amusements than what was seen and heard in Beijing. It also describes attractions from the Taoist temple Baiyunguan to the palaces of the Emperor.

What was seen and heard in Beijing from the appearance of the Emperor and the palaces to civilian customs can be abridged as 'materialistic prosperity centering on the royal rule.' In *Bukhaengga*, Yu In-mok recognizes the greatness of Qing while confirming the palaces and dignity of the Emperor, the strictness of discipline and scholastic prosperity on the one hand and realizing materialistic prosperity mingled with the stability of civilian life on the other hand.

## 2. The West as a Strange Attraction

The recognition of Qing prosperity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the motive for the appearance of experiences with the West. Early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the West was considered part of the exotic phenomena of the Qing civilization and Beijing. The image of the West appeared as exotic animals like a camel and an elephant.

By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Catholicism had already become a social issue in Joseon and there was an underlying perception that the West was the same as Catholicism. Catholicism was seen in contrast to Confucianism. The viewpoint of the West as a provider of exotic things exceeded the viewpoint as an academic and cultural subject. This viewpoint was clearly shown in the way of understanding Russia.

The Russian Embassy is recognized as a concrete symbol of the West in *Seohaengnok*. In Kim Ji-su's consciousness, Russia is mixed with the West and so his perception toward the West represented by Russia is not a realistic view of another country but a queer stranger with exotic things. What they encounter are strange-looking people.

The ancient Korean Embassy became the Russian Embassy.

Staying twenty thousand *ri* (0.4 km) away, they take turns every ten years.

They're giants of nine *cheok* (30.3 cm) tall with white jackets and yellow hair  
With deep eyes, sharp noses and yellow hats on.  
Tens of individuals look the same.  
They write letters like ants horizontally.  
Half of the books are Chinese ones.  
They have different characters from the Chinese.  
Their learning resembles Catholicism.  
So, Chinese laws make them stay by turns  
And learn the Classics and biography of the saints for enlightenment.  
Like Koreans, they translate Chinese characters  
And write them beside their own language.  
Their language is considered heresy.  
They provide us with apples.  
They look admiringly at us.  
They decline cigarettes and *cheongsimhwan* (medicinal pills).  
While talking by means of writing, they're unskillful in writing  
And old Gang Bo Rok has a comfortable temperament.  
Sometimes, there is a study on astronomy.

The above is a scene from Kim Ji-su's visit to the Russian Embassy and his meeting some Russians. He thinks Russia is mixed with the West and has no knowledge of geography. Very interesting are the strange features of the Westerners characterized as "giants" with "deep eyes and sharp noses" that are represented with a realistic description. He feels something noble for them contrary to his preoccupation because they have noble temperaments and don't accept presents thoughtlessly. Despite his ideological opposition toward Western learning, he has a friendly feeling while communicating with them.

He looks at them optimistically and from the viewpoint of morality, saying "They are admiring us." He compares the relation between Catholicism and Confucianism from Chinese-Barbarian Thought and thinks they are staying in China for enlightenment because their learning is heresy.

An alarm clock is an extraordinary thing and looks like a bookcase  
With a hole covered with glass on its top  
At the appointed time a pigeon comes out of the hall  
And goes back into the hall after crying four or five times according to the time.  
A gramophone also looks like a bookcase



When opening the door and winding it  
 Its five sounds and six pitches are marvelous.  
 The looks and the techniques of the Russians are queer and delicate.

What is amazing to Kim Ji-su is that the Russians have delicate items such as alarm clocks in contrast to their strange looks and incomprehensible learning. Kim Ji-su is deeply interested in these unique items and that is probably the reason for his visit to the Russian Embassy. The discrepancy between the Westerner's looks and their strange items doesn't arouse academic curiosity in Kim Ji-su but only brings about a detailed description of the thing that most interests him, Westerners.

The Russian Embassy is also recorded in *Buyeon ilgi*. The author of this *yeonhaeng gasa* is unknown but he writes about the same travel to Qing as in *Seohaengnok*. The writer of *Buyeon ilgi* is a medical officer and military attaché of the senior envoy and his status during the visit seems to be similar to that of Kim Ji-su. The writer's intercourse with scholars in Beijing and the radius of action is congruous to that of Kim Ji-su and Kim Ji-su's real name is often mentioned in the text.

In *Buyeon ilgi* Russia is recognized as a dark place in the remote western region and part of the West. The writer wrongly refutes Kang Bo Rok's saying that "My country borders on China, Japan, the West and Mongolia on all sides" and corrects it by saying "You are wrong. Your country lies in the western corner of the world outside the desert" (Anonymous 1977: 321). Also, his personal criticism about Kang Bo Rok and his viewpoint about the Russian Embassy are identical with those from Kim Ji-su's *Seohaengnok*. "In their customs, there is no learning except Catholicism, heresy. Chinese laws have them stay here, learn the teachings of saints and transmit them to their own country after their homecoming" (Anonymous 1977: 319). There is also a precise description of a statue of Jesus Christ that isn't contained in *Seohaengnok*. The anonymous writer expresses disapproval, saying "strange and miserable" and a vague feeling that the learning is very strange.<sup>3</sup>

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3. "What the ordinary people of the age admire is strange and evil and how can Chinese learning enlighten their custom? As the learning is very strange, we cannot accept it. The Catholic church is very strange and miserable to see. I've made up my mind to advise the people visiting Beijing not to enter the church when they come to our own country again" (Anonymous 1977: 321-2).

What both men encounter at the Russian Embassy are only queer and delicate things and aren't perceived as learning and science since the Catholic church doesn't admire orthodox learning but only Catholicism. "The Catholic Church has been constructed strangely and there are many queer things to see" (Anonymous 1977: 322). Thus, the rumors of queer things become a direct motive to visit this place.

The West isn't understood in relation to us so much as it is related to China on the basis of the Chinese-Barbarian Thought. Through the Chinese-Barbarian Thought, the superiority of Confucian philosophy is confirmed. Only seeing in relation with China, there is no hint of a realistic encounter with Joseon.

Like in *Yeonhaengga* (1866) written by Hong Sun-hak and *Bukhaengga* (1866) written by Yu In-mok, the power of the West is realistically felt after Joseon's direct encounter with the West according to the change of mechanism, the West's advancement toward the East. A feeling of crisis and antagonism is shown only superficially. In *Yeonhaengga*, there is a feeling of crisis that there are many Western halls and Catholic churches in Beijing and Western learning is prevalent. It is only interested in exotic appearances, saying 'they are not humans' and relegates them as barbarians from the standpoint of the Chinese-Barbarian Thought. In *Bukhaengga*, it calls the West the Western enemy and cries not to violate morality. Thus, the West is perceived as a powerful force causing conflicts. In spite of the strong antagonism, there is also an underlying embarrassment derived from unexpected circumstances owing to the misunderstanding of the counterpart.

## **The Meaning of Embodying the West in the *yeonhaeng gasa* during the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> Century**

### **1. Weakening of the Consciousness of Administration and Acceptance of Popular Interest**

Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, intellectuals including Northern Learning Group scholars traveled to Qing to ascertain solutions to realistic problems of the Joseon. The administrative interests of Confucian scholars sought out the learning, culture and political situation of Qing and the dynamic relations with other countries and Western civilization.

*Seohaengnok* and *Yeonhaengga* maintain the fundamental consciousness of

an envoy traveling to China and the viewpoint of looking back on the spiritual origin. In these works, the concerns of intellectuals are often expressed. Looking around the National Confucian Academy, they exchange their views on the civil service examination and associate with Chinese literary men who are called true classical scholars.

The self-consciousness of intellectuals decreases to a considerable degree and they pay attention to interesting attractions in *yeonhaeng gasa* of the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century compared with that of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, such macro interests as official diplomatic procedures, the relations between two countries and the inquiry into the political situation of Qing don't appear but the contents of private sightseeing are expanded. As Kim Ji-su, the writer of *Seohaengnok* joined in the travel to Qing as an unofficial attendant, there is a great deal of content about sightseeing in his work. Although Hong Sun-hak's official position was temporary recording clerk during his travels to Qing, his only official duty expressed in *Yeonhaengga* was the presentation ceremony of *Pyojamun* to the Office of Protocol. Most of his book's content is about private sightseeing and such an attitude is maximized in *Bukhaengga*. Free from the burdens and responsibilities of being an envoy sent to a foreign country, the writer proudly describes his sightseeing and entertainment experiences. Consequently, in this work the writer puts more emphasis on his merrymaking experiences with female entertainers than what is seen and heard in a foreign country.

Thus, in *yeonhaeng gasa* during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the contents of the Qing civilization and what is seen and heard in a foreign country are described in overwhelming detail. It largely describes social conditions and Chinese things, or matters of concern shared with the common people who read Hangeul. Intelligent questions by intellectuals lessen and they don't approach the civilization of Qing and the West from the practical or systematic point of view. Queer things are accurately described in their shapes and names. The writers of *yeonhaeng gasa* are interested in things concerned with urban life and culture such as commodities and the management of houses. They are eager to investigate instruments and ornaments used in ceremony rather than survey the theory of propriety when describing burial and matrimonial customs.

There are many cases of acting like a reporter describing the scenes as they were rather than the reflective voices of the speaker. The way the author describes the scenes is connected with the author's consciousness to effectively report the prosperity of what was seen and heard. In particular, the precise description of civilian religions including Dongyuemiao, various temples, mar-

kets and merchants could have been omitted from a practical point of view, but by describing these things in detail, the feeling of liveliness remains true to its nature. As a result, the appearance of a big country represented as Qing urban vigor can be vividly transmitted.

The tendency to see the Qing civilization and exotic things was very popular when traveling to Beijing as an envoy, but some scholars criticized such behavior. Kim Jo-sun, a bureaucratic scholar, criticizes the social conditions which make traveling to Beijing as an envoy an object of interest. Seong Hae-eung also indicates that there is a considerable amount of merrymaking that includes sight-seeing to mountains and streams and enjoying paintings and calligraphic works while previous travelers to Beijing performed academic activities like discussing the Classics and sentences with Chinese scholars. Kim Gyeong-sun also indicates in *Yeonwonjigji* that practical commodities should be mainly imported (Roh Dae-hwan 2004: 99). On the contrary, the reporting used in *yeonhaeng gasa* entails descriptions of attractions including gorgeous and queer goods.

Thus, the focus of travel writings changed from an administrative or diplomatic consciousness to one about interesting affairs and is partly connected with taking readers into consideration. Kim Gyeong-sun says to his father in the epilogue, "Father, enjoy reading this article to kill time." Hong Sun-hak also says to his father in his epilogue, "Father, read this article and it will be my comfort." Such creativity becomes the motive for reporting mainly the interesting affairs of the common people rather than a heavy topic and eventually brings about enlarging a class of readers.

It can be assumed that there was a prevalent interest in Qing among a class of Hangeul readers around Seoul in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This is proven by the fact that more alternative versions were published in a diachronic stream of *yeonhaeng gasa* during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and more interesting parts were enlarged in later works. In the case of Hong Sun-hak's *Yeonhaengga*, ten or more alternative versions were transmitted up to now. *yeonhaeng gasa* was very popular at that time (Lim Gi-jung 2001: 25). *yeonhaeng gasa* came to be read more broadly and the audience began to include the general public of Seoul.<sup>4</sup>

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4. *Yeonhaengga* was contained as the title of *Bugwonnok* in *Yadam* (Historical-Story Book) in 1940. This historical novel contained such interesting works as classical poetry, popular historical novels, and *pansori*. *Yeonhaenggasas* very popular (*Yadam* Vol. 6 Nos. 10-12. 1940. Yadam Publishing Co.).

In this respect, writers of *yeonhaeng gasa* have a different intention from both the gentry and scholars of the Northern Learning Group who were very conscious of administration when traveling to Beijing as an envoy. The different writing style of *yeonhaeng gasa* coincides with the interest of readers.

## 2. Traditional Worldview and the West as “Strangers”

Among *yeonhaeng gasa* about China, there are two *yeonhaeng gasa* written in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. These *yeonhaeng gasa* mainly deal with the reminiscences of survivals of the Ming dynasty and are short because the experiences in Beijing are simple. The appearance of China in *Pyohaega* from the 18<sup>th</sup> century is almost the same and the knowledge and experiences of traveling in Beijing are short.

It was not until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century that the West appeared in *yeonhaeng gasa*. At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, *yeonhaeng gasa* depicting the Qing dynasty became a long story and produced various alternative versions. Due to the change of perception toward Qing, the *yeonhaeng gasa* during the 19<sup>th</sup> century reflected the desire of imitating the West including Qing and became a long story.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Western learning became positively accepted, transmitted and dispersed among intellectuals. While the West was symbolized as a scientific civilization, intellectuals who were aware of its superiority had a problem harmonizing the superiority of scientific civilization with a justifiable cause. The gentry who recognized Western civilization tried to establish a theory to accept Western learning by means of the division between Confucian philosophy and technology and a theory that technology had already derived from China (Roh Dae-hwan 2003; Park Seong-sun 2005).

In the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Roman Catholic books were transmitted and there was a tendency to consider the West as Catholic. With Catholicism causing social problems, Catholicism was regarded in the same light with Western technology. The negative perception toward the West and Catholicism was enlarged to the whole Western civilization by degrees (Roh Dae-hwan 2005: 125).

At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, central bureaucrats showed less interest in the West and paid no attention to Western trends because of a precaution and opposition to Catholicism. In the records of travel to Beijing in Chinese characters at that time, the interest in the West decreased and some of the advanced scholars who were not in office had an interest in the scientific civilization of the West

(Roh Dae-hwan 2005: 134). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the contact with the Catholic churches in Beijing became restrictive and so did the communication with the West. Accordingly, the records of travel to Beijing at that time only described unofficial visits to Catholic churches.

In the *yeonhaeng gasa* of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Qing itself was not a matter of concern and the West that was considered part of exotic phenomena of the Qing civilization was not an object of interest. Early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the West became an object of interest and interest in the Qing civilization spread throughout society. At this time the West was viewed with curiosity as a queer stranger. The intellectuals who had already known Western learning tried to approach its reality through travels to Beijing in many cases. On the other hand, it seems that the writers of *yeonhaeng gasa* had less knowledge of geography or history of the West and, consequently, the experiences of actual contacting with Russians are mixed with their knowledge of the West.<sup>5</sup>

Contact with the West was considered meeting “a stranger in China” and the West was not considered a diplomatic counterpart in the world or an intellectual impetus but an unknown place with queer things to see. These queer things were considered insignificant technique expressed as crafts or skillfulness.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the writers of *yeonhaeng gasa* stuck to the traditional worldview of Chinese-Barbarian Thought. The consciousness of Little China represented as propriety and music and “dress and hat” was often shown in *yeonhaeng gasa*. *Seohaengnok* exhibited the traditional thought of *yeonhaeng gasa* writers by saying that the West represented as Russia was staying in China and was receiving favors from China that would enlighten the barbarians. On the contrary, Lee Deok-mu and Yu Deuk-gong who were intellectuals of the Northern Learning Group thought that there was another intention when Western countries paid tribute to China (Roh Dae-hwan 1996a: 113-5). Accordingly, in the ideological mechanism of Confucian philosophy, *yeonhaeng gasa* distinguished Western learning from crafts.

The traditional worldview held by writers of *yeonhaeng gasa* about the Qing

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5. While Min Yeong-hwan and his company were traveling to Russia in 1896, they regarded the West in the same light with Russia and considered Russia a symbol of Western civilization (Kim Jin-yeong 2005: 329-39).

6. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was emphasized at the Royal Court that the West was a place with delicate crafts. It was also reported in China that Western learning was discarded but its crafts were taken (Roh Dae-hwan 1996b: 43).

civilization is different from that of the scholars. The records of travel to Beijing by scholars of the Northern Learning Group who associated with scholars and literary men of Qing is characterized by a change of perception about the West (Kim Hyeon-mi 2003: 47). On the contrary, the writers of *yeonhaeng gasa* proudly associate not with scholars of Qing but “noble-minded patriots and descendants of the Han dynasty.” Although they felt the prosperity of learning in Qing, they didn’t approach the concrete reality of learning prevalent at that time.

Even though they adhered to the traditional worldview, the reason they put an emphasis on the West and their experiences in Qing was that they enjoyed the urban atmosphere and had an interest in a new civilization. All of the writers except Yu In-mok were part of the Seoul gentry and marginal men of central bureaucrats. Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, they accepted that the Qing civilization influenced the development of Seoul and were accustomed to the situation of urban development. Accordingly, in *yeonhaeng gasa* like *Seohaengnok* and *Yeonhaengga*, they looked interestingly at urban vigor with its various and brilliant things. The motive for visiting the Russian Embassy was regarded in the same light with the West and came from the curiosity about queer goods.

Qing was recognized as a great country because of its prosperity of civilization and learning. The writers of *yeonhaeng gasa*, gentry who were loyal to Neo-Confucianism, strongly believed in the academic and spiritual superiority of Confucianism. The optimistic and moral viewpoint toward Russia that was regarded in the same light with the West came from this confidence in academic superiority. They understood that the prosperity of the Qing civilization that they had seen and felt in Beijing stemmed from the prosperity of learning. Visiting the school palace of the Emperor beside the National Confucian Academy and seeing that sacred books including the Nine Classics, the Book of the Doctrine of the Mean and Great Learning were engraved, they were struck with wonder, saying “the administration of Emperor Geonyung emphasizing the importance of learning is great” (Lim Gi-jung 2001: 241). They thought that the administration emphasizing the importance of learning was the foundation of a big country. This perception was based on the fact that the philologico-bibliographical study of the Qing dynasty was prevalent.

Thus, the appearance of Qing as a big country in the writers’ mind is closely connected with the still existing old systems of Xia, Yin and Zhou and the prosperity of Confucian philosophy. The writers say, “Commodities are prosperous; discipline is strict; their customs are strange from urban areas to middle-class homes; it is evident that the remains of the dynasties of Xia, Yin, Zhou, Song

and Ming are transmitted to date” (Lim Gi-jung 2001: 284). Accordingly, what they confirmed in Qing was materialistic prosperity on the basis of the prosperity of Confucian philosophy. Therefore, their consciousness doesn’t conflict with the materialistic prosperity they see and hear.

While they are interested in the Qing civilization and the strange commodities of the West, they still cling to the traditional Chinese-Barbarian Thought. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Western learning was already accepted among advanced intellectuals to a considerable degree and the interest in the advanced practical system continued among some intellectuals who didn’t hold office. On the contrary, the appearance of the West in *yeonhaeng gasa* is less significant and is embodied in fragmentary images of “strangers” and “queer commodities.”

The restricted perception toward the West in the traditional worldview was shared with the consciousness of central bureaucrats to a considerable degree until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. It seems that these writers of *yeonhaeng gasa* were central bureaucrats and their marginal figures that aimed at entering into the existing power circle and were under the influence of the central government maintaining the fundamentals of controlling the West. Lee Bang-ik (1757-?), the writer of *Pyohaega*, was a military attache in an important post and Kim Ji-su, the writer of *Seohaengnok*, Hong Sun-hak and Yu In-mok were central bureaucrats and marginal figures. Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century knowledge about the West was gained around family learning and schools of the Seoul gentry, but these writers of *yeonhaeng gasa* didn’t belong to any school or group of family learning. Kim Ji-su wasn’t identified but he was evidently a poor scholar living in Seoul. Yi In-mok was a provincial literary man, a Namin from Yeongnam province who joined the travel to Beijing as an attendant of his uncle who was temporarily appointed as an envoy due to the policy of appointing Namin by Daewongun. Hong Sun-hak was from Noron and was in government service after passing the civil service examination, but his family seems to have been poor and lowly (Lim Gi-jung 2001: 298).

Due to such a social status, the perception toward the West was restricted and this was shared with the class of Hangeul readers. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the West still appeared as barbarians obscure as their strange looks but as the powerful reality called “Western enemies.” Looking at the Catholic churches in Qing, Joseon did not feel the crisis of the West’s advancement toward the East but, afterward, it came to experience an unexpected crisis and embarrassment because of the Western enemies.



## Conclusion

Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the records of travel to Beijing contained some discussion about Western learning. The phenomenon became conspicuous after the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century when many records of travel to Beijing by the scholars of the Northern Learning Group appeared. However, it was not until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century that the perception toward Qing changed in *yeonhaeng gasa*. Travels to Beijing by an envoy were considered a visit not to a barbarous country but to a big one. The *yeonhaeng gasa* proudly reported these experiences. It can be assumed that the change of the perception toward Qing was generalized at this time. Accordingly, the travel experiences in Qing were accepted in the form of *gasa* and the West appeared as “exotic things”.

Thus, the close relationship between the change of the perception toward Qing and the perception toward the West was due to the fact that the West was considered an exotic thing that could be seen and heard in Qing. The West didn't have any significance of its own but was regarded as part of the urban vigor and various exotic things prevalent in Qing. The interest in the West is related to the curiosity caused by rumors of strange things. As a result, the West is symbolized as fragmentary images such as “strangers of queer looks” and “delicate things.” The Westerners met in restricted communication through Qing and their Western things are recognized not as academic results but as skillful crafts.

The perception of the West was strongly influenced by the writers who maintained a traditional worldview. The writers of *yeonhaeng gasa* who didn't have any knowledge of the West beforehand define the West as Catholicism and express their precautions against it and confidence about academic superiority. Thus, the West is understood from the viewpoint of the Chinese-Barbarian Thought and the relation between China and the West is understood not from the reciprocal dynamic relations but from the viewpoint of ‘enlightenment’ and “favors” by China.

According to the records of travel to Beijing by the scholars of the Northern Learning Group, since the 18<sup>th</sup> century the acceptance and spread of Western learning was gained through common academic areas that were composed by academic relations and family records. In the midst of the division between the capital and districts, particularly among the central Seoul gentry and among part of families and academic sects, the acceptance of Western learning was intensively gained. Since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the acceptance of Western learning moved to the share of intellectuals out of office with Catholicism causing social

problems.

Thus, it seems that the perception toward the West shown in the *yeonhaeng gasa* partly reflects the consciousness of central bureaucrats during the early and mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. As they have a firm belief in Neo-Confucianism, their consciousness doesn't shake under the influence of Western civilization symbolized as "skillful crafts" or "heretic learning." What they confirm through China is such prospect for "material prosperity by the royal rule on the basis of prosperous Confucian philosophy."

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