

Korea as Represented in Eighteenth-Century French Travel Literature¹

Jeong Eun-Jin

The most informative texts about the Far East in 18th century France were reports sent home by Jesuit missionaries. Their correspondence was published in a periodical entitled *Edifying and Curious Letters*. These reports were an excellent source regarding the Far East because the Jesuits, who were genuinely curious about native customs, held relatively cooperative and open attitudes toward the natives. This approach allowed them to have unprecedented access to the lives of the natives in the region as well as those of the Chinese royalty.

This paper focuses on two sources that mention Korea: Jean-Baptiste Du Halde's *Descriptions of the Chinese Empire and Chinese Tartary* (1735) and Abbé Prévost's *The General History of Voyages* (1748). The references to Korea in both texts are based on the written records of Jean-Baptiste Régis, a Jesuit priest who lived in China.

Although Régis, as indicated in Du Halde's text, thought of Korea as a Chinese colony, he was interested in the history, geography, and customs of the country, and he actually met some Koreans and made references to their innocent nature. Prévost's work is a translation of *A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels* compiled by the Englishman John Green. Its section on Korea consists of a summary of the 17th century *Hamel Voyage* as well as Régis' testimony that was also chronicled in Du Halde's work. The two texts show that the Europeans' first impressions of Korea were relatively accurate from their scientific standpoint, but largely imaginary in their humanistic descriptions.

1. This work was supported by the Korea Research Foundation Grant funded by the Korean Government (MOEHRD) (KRF-2005-042-A00075).

In addition to the descriptions of the culture and people of Korea, this paper explores the historical, political, and social context of the period in France in which these texts were published. It also examines the influences of philosophers of the day, such as Voltaire, on French society's recognition of "the other." Characterized by Enlightenment, 18th century France started to view its own culture objectively based on its observations of foreign cultures. However, the cultural superiority of the West had not yet formed nor had "Orientalism" emerged. While it was a period of exploration not too far removed from the geopolitical ambitions of colonialism, there were even some attempts made to change parts of French society using China as a model.

Keywords: Du Halde, Prévost, Régis, Hamel, Jesuits, 18th century, travel literature

Introduction

There are two French texts that contain records on Joseon in the 18th century, and they are Jean-Baptiste Du Halde's (1674-1743) *Description de l'empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie chinoise* (Descriptions of the Chinese Empire and Chinese Tartary) in 1735 and l'Abbé Prévost's (1697-1763) *Histoire générale des voyages* (The General History of Voyages) in 1748.

Du Halde's book consists of four volumes and the records about Joseon are on pages 423 to 439 of the fourth volume. L'Abbé Prévost's writings about Joseon are found on pages 500 to 546 of the sixth volume.

To fully comprehend these texts, it is necessary to understand the circumstances of 18th century France, how these texts were published and how the records on Joseon were included.

Socio-Political Background of 18th Century France

Eighteenth-century Europe, especially France, can be defined as an era of so-called "philosophy of illuminism (Philosophie des Lumières)." The philosophy was born in an anti-religious atmosphere, not denying the existence of God itself but rejecting and protesting against the exclusive attitudes of the Church, after the abolition of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. It refused the metaphysical

approach to the past and focused on understanding the world based on individual experiences and concerns. It acknowledged the need for secular happiness and praised nature, and in this context the myth of the good savage emerged.

At the same time, more and more people began to believe that scientific progress would lead that of human beings. *Encyclopédie* (Encyclopedia, 1751-65) published by Diderot and d'Alembert in the 18th century, the golden age of dictionaries, was not only a simple collection of knowledge. It tried to show that human beings have the power to change the world when they can overcome their prejudices by controlling religion, politics, and ethics reasonably. Also some philosophers including Voltaire believed “tolerance (tolérance)” is the best virtue. This attitude must have some relations with one’s interest in other cultures or ambition of encyclopedic knowledge.

Interests in Other Cultures and the Activities of the Jesuits

The Jesuits, or the Society of Jesus (la Compagnie de Jésus), was established around 1540. Francisco Javier, a Spanish priest passed away in 1552 after living in China for about two years. Some Jesuits set foot on the territory of Macao around 1560. Matteo Ricci, an Italian priest who belonged to a Portugal Mission, lived in China from 1582 to 1610.

It was not until the late 17th century that French Jesuits settled in Beijing. Their original motive for this move was not religious. At the time France was experiencing major innovations and changes in geography at the behest of Louis XIV. Scholars from the National Academy of Sciences were dispatched to different countries and regions for field investigation. The Jesuits seemed to be the best people to be envoys to China and India, which were not well known in France yet, because they had crossed into these countries many times in the past for missionary work. In fact, the Jesuits were playing a very important role in the political and social world of France through their various activities such as running educational facilities and raising young elites.

The royal family and Prime Minister Jean-Baptiste Colbert also wanted to open up new trade markets while Portugal, the early colonists, was on the decline. Therefore, the dispatch of Jesuit missionaries was made for a variety of reasons and motives. “Catholic missionaries along with merchants could be seen to use vessels of merchants from the 16th century. They were helping each other as they shared the same interests while their motives were very different. The

collaboration between commercial business and religion was one of the main characteristics of European penetration of China” (Détrie 1992: 81).²

The priests didn’t scorn Chinese culture in the name of missionary work, but rather they showed a sincere curiosity and interest in Chinese culture. Some of them even adapted themselves to native life in China by learning the Chinese language. The reign of Emperor Kangxi (r. 1662-1722) was the glory days of Jesuit missionaries’ activities in Beijing as he praised their knowledge and experiences in various fields such as astronomy. The basic line of Jesuit missionaries could be summarized in the expression “aristocracy, profound learning, assimilation” (Vissière 2001: 7)³ and it had already been defined by Matteo Ricci’s time in the 16th century.

However, the very fact that the Jesuits were too generous and liberal to local customs displeased the Vatican as they sometimes even violated Church rules. Finally in 1773 the Vatican disbanded the Jesuits. Of course there were other factors for the dissolution of the Jesuits besides their behavior in China. It is a paradox that illuminist philosophers greatly influenced the fall of the Jesuits while their search for encyclopedic knowledge about China was gratified by the work performed by the Jesuit missionaries. Though the Jesuits cried for tolerance of other cultures such as China, they were at the head of exclusive attitudes in France when Protestants were suppressed after abolition of the Edict of Nantes. Philosophers like Voltaire criticized the dual attitude of the Jesuits. In addition, conflicts between the Jesuits and Jansénistes also attributed to the demise of the Jesuits.

Jean-Baptiste Du Halde and *Descriptions of the Chinese Empire and Chinese Tartary*

Jean-Baptiste Du Halde was born in Paris in 1674. He was a Jesuit and also the secretary of Michel Le Tellier, the Royal Confessor of Louis XIV. He could not have written a book on the Far East without information from Jesuit missionar-

2. “... avec les marchands et profitant de leurs navires, on retrouva aussi dès le début du XVII^e siècle les missionnaires chrétiens. Les uns avaient besoin des autres car, si leurs objectifs n’étaient pas communs, leurs intérêts, eux l’étaient. Aussi la collusion du commerce et de la religion allait-elle être un des traits marquants de la pénétration européenne en Chine.”

3. “... une politique aristocratique, un haut niveau scientifique, une adaptation aux mœurs locales.”

ies. For about a century, there were mixed reports on China from those who had enough knowledge and learning and didn't seek unconditional propaganda but tried to approach as close as possible to local people.

From 1709 to 1743, Du Halde was the editor of the periodical *Edifying and Curious Letters* (*Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*). He was said to have the privilege of receiving vivid testimonies on the Far East faster than anyone else in Europe. "For about one century, these letters captivated intellectual readers by providing numerous images and ideas as well as exotic details. Europeans found out they are not the center of the world. Europeans newly identified themselves by establishing new standards and comparing points. Just like most travel literature, these letters contributed to the destruction of past structures. Through these letters, the notion of relativity could take root in Western consciousness in a crisis" (Vissière 2001: 18).⁴

At his desk in Paris Du Halde compiled the most important and interesting encyclopedia on China in 18th century Europe. Information on China's history, geographical features, and culture integrated by Du Halde greatly influenced the illuminists. He also issued forty-three unpublished maps of China including a separate map of the Korean Peninsula. Voltaire praised his work saying "He has never been to China and doesn't speak Chinese, but he made the most enormous, excellent and unprecedented description of China" (Voltaire 1957: 1160).⁵ As his book was translated into English the following year, its influence was even greater. Since the first translation, many books on China copied the Du Halde's work.

Du Halde aimed to show how liberal and open the Jesuits were to Chinese culture and to deliver accurate images of China to his readers. The author admired the culture and harmonized social mechanism of China based on natural philosophy. At the same time European interest in silks, chinaware and other things increased. The third volume, mostly about religion, family system, and

4. "Ces lettres ont captivé pendant un siècle le public privé, en lui offrant non seulement des détails exotiques, mais une profusion d'images et d'idées. L'Europe avait découvert qu'elle n'était pas le centre du monde. Elle cherchait à se définir en établissant des repères, des points de comparaison: comme toutes les relations de voyages, les *Lettres* ont largement contribué à l'éclatement des structures anciennes. Elles développaient dans la conscience occidentale en crise le sens de la relativité."

5. " ... quoiqu'il ne soit point sorti de Paris, et qu'il n'ait point su le chinois, a donné sur les mémoires de ses confrères, la plus ample et la meilleure description de l'empire de la Chine qu'on ait dans le monde."

customs, describes Chinese science and medicine and it contains a few translations of Chinese books. The most significant part about Korea is the fourth volume that contains about thirty pages of statements on Joseon including maps that the Frenchman Jean-Baptiste d'Anville drew based on maps by the Jesuits.

In the Preface, Du Halde pointed out that Europeans had been interested in China for a long time, but lack of information and unreliable rumors about this unknown world were widespread. He also wrote that some truths could finally be verified thanks to the work by the Jesuit missionaries who often travel to China, but even some of their statements were inaccurate due to insufficient knowledge. Therefore, he published the book after rewriting some parts by himself and checking the authenticity by letting his friend who was a priest and knew China very well read it.

Du Halde had never been to Joseon and most of his knowledge is based on the reports of Jean-Baptiste Régis (Jesuit missionary, born in Istres, Provence, France in 1663 or 1664 and died in China in 1738). Father Régis went to China in 1698 and committed himself to research and missionary work in China for about 40 years. He was in charge of cartography for the Chinese Empire. There were some attempts to create accurate geographical maps of China in Europe before him, but until the late 16th century even the best geographers were almost completely ignorant about China. Régis collected information from geographical books about China and tried to create a more accurate map by adopting the means and observations that astronomers at a Paris observatory used with more advanced equipment. With the support of Emperor Kangxi who put confidence in his work, Father Régis succeeded in producing in-depth maps.

Father Régis and his colleagues explored even Far Eastern areas in order to complete a whole map of the Chinese Empire. However, they couldn't cross the border into "the hermit kingdom" of Joseon. Still the fact that they investigated the entire northern border of Joseon without setting foot in the territory of Joseon can be regarded as a great merit to break Western misconceptions of Joseon. Until then, Westerners believed Joseon was an island. Father Régis gained information on Joseon from Chinese books and a Tartarian lord who was sent to the Joseon king by Emperor Kangxi.

There are two chapters about Joseon in Du Halde's book and the first chapter's title is "Observations géographiques sur le royaume de Corée, tirées des mémoires du père Régis" (Geographical observations on the kingdom of Joseon from Father Régis' memoir). For reference, it was 1720, the last year of King Sukjong's reign when Father Régis made the records on Joseon. Du Halde stated

clearly that Joseon was called “kao li” in China. He repeatedly recalls Father Régis’ statement and notes that descriptions on Joseon are only based on what they heard and not what they actually saw or experienced. “As mentioned before, we can’t say with confidence because we couldn’t set foot in Joseon territory. But from what we observed at the border, the land was cultivated very well as the way of southern China. According to a Tartarian lord who had visited Joseon with a low-level official in charge of mathematics in obedience to the Chinese Emperor, Joseon is a beautiful country and produces all the necessary things for life such as rice, wheat, and millet abundantly” (Du Halde 1735: 424).⁶

The author explains that the northern Joseon border was measured based on information they heard and makes an additional remark that “as we didn’t actually observe inside of Joseon or its seashores, we can’t say this map is a complete one. But this map can be said to be the best one among existing maps on Joseon because no one else was able to research cities or rivers of Joseon more in detail until now” (Du Halde 1735: 424).⁷ After describing the Joseon landscape, he honestly discloses the source saying “we heard that the houses are one-storied buildings and somewhat shabby from Tartarians” (Du Halde 1735: 425).

They recognized Joseon only as a tributary state of China. “Joseon people have been subject to the Chinese people” (Du Halde 1735: 432).⁸ “A diplomatic mission of Joseon can’t be well treated as they only represent a vassal king who pays tribute to China. They are not welcomed by high-level officials and even sometimes by low-level officials. At least until the first ceremony they are almost forced to stay only inside the lodgings. Even after they are allowed to go out, some people follow them wherever they go not in order to escort them but in order to watch them” (Du Halde 1735: 425).⁹

6. “Nous ne sommes point entrés dans le Royaume, comme j’ai dit ailleurs, pour pouvoir parler avec une entière certitude de la nature des terres: mais ce que nous en avons vû sur les Frontières, est très bien cultivé à la manière des Chinois du midi. / Un Seigneur Tartare que l’Empereur y a envoyé, suivi d’un petit Mandarin du Tribunal des Mathématiques, nous a rapporté que le pays est bon, & qu’il produit abondamment ce qui est nécessaire à la vie, du ris, du bled, du millet, & d’autres grains.”

7. “Comme nous n’avons point vû nous-mêmes le dedans du Royaume, ni la côte de la mer, nous n’avons garde de donner cette Carte comme un Ouvrage fini, mais seulement comme le meilleur qui ait paru, personne n’ayant eu la facilité, ni le moyen de s’informer en détail de la situation des Villes, & du cours des Rivières.”

8. “Les Peuples de la Corée furent soumis aux Chinois depuis *Yao*”

9. “Pour ce qui est des Ambassadeurs de Corée, comme ils représentent un Roi feudataire & tributaire, ils ne sont traités qu’avec une médiocre distinction: ils n’ont point le pas devant les

Also he takes Chinese culture as a standard of describing Joseon. “They follow Chinese dress” (Du Halde 1735: 425).¹⁰ “To punish a criminal, instead of putting a gag as the way of China...” (Du Halde 1735: 426).¹¹

For missionary work, their main aim was China and Joseon was regarded as extra. “In the past, a few Joseon people were baptized in Beijing, but no one propagandized directly in Joseon. In order to propagandize in Joseon safely, the Chinese Emperor’s permission is required. But it’s very difficult to get permission... However if God has mercy on us to have a miracle of Chinese evangelization, conversion of Joseon and Tartar people is merely a matter of time. These states rely upon China and are devoted to Chinese people to this extent” (Du Halde 1735: 426).¹²

It seems that Father Régis and his company actually met some Joseon people in China. “Chinese letters are in common use in the kingdom (of Joseon). A few years ago, an envoy came to meet us and he expressed his intention in written letters. He also explained that Confucianism is highly respected in his country while Buddhist monks are treated with contempt and Buddhist temples can be built only at the outskirts of a city” (Du Halde 1735: 426).¹³

In addition to collecting information from various sources, the book referred to Chinese books. “Old books and chronicles of China show that Joseon is a historic country” (Du Halde 1735: 426).¹⁴ Actually the second chapter, “Histoire

Grands, ni même devant les Mandarins du second rand. Ils sont comme enfermez dans la maison où on les loge, au moins jusqu’aux premières cérémonies. / Lorsqu’ensuite ils ont la liberté de sortir, on leur donne un nombre de personnes qui les accompagnent, bien moins pour leur faire honneur, que pour veiller à leur conduire.”

10. “Les Coréens sont vêtus à la manière Chinoise”

11. “Quand il s’agit de punir un Criminel, on ne lui met pas un baillon à la bouche, selon ce qui se pratique à la Chine”

12. “On a jamais prêché la Religion Chrétienne dans la Corée, quoique quelques Coréens ayent été baptizez en différents tems à Péking. Pour le faire d’une manière stable, il faudroit en avoir la permission de l’Empereur de la Chine, chose plus difficile à obtenir que jamais / Mais il paroît certain que si par un miracle de la miséricorde de Dieu sur cette Nation, la Chine se faisoit Chrétienne, la conversion de la Corée & de la Tartarie ne seroit qu’une affaire de peu d’années. Telle est la dépendance où ces pays sont de la Chine, & l’estime que les Nations voisines font des Chinois.”

13. “Les Lettres Chinoises sont ... en usage dans tout le Royaume: le dernier Envoyé qui vint nous voir il y a peu d’années, le servit du pinceau pour nous faire entendre en Chinois ce qu’il vouloit. Il nous dit que la doctrine de Confucius étoit parmi eux dans une grande estime, & qu’on tenoit fort bas les Bonzez, à qui il n’étoit permis de bâtir des Pagodes que hors des Villes.”

14. “La Corée est un Royaume très ancien, comme il est aisé de le montrer par les annales, & les plus anciens Livres de la Chine.”

abrégée de la Corée” (An outline of Joseon history) is an integration of three Chinese books. It is written that “the whole texts of important parts are translated and a reliable chronicle is added” (Du Halde 1735: 431).¹⁵

While this book is a dry report on geographical features and history, it also takes on a strong travel literary character so it shows the author’s personal feelings on other cultures. For example, when he explains the Jumong story, the birth myth of Goguryeo, he describes it the following way: “The people of Goguryeo are Buyeojok (Buyeojok is a tribe of Dongijok). Their origin, according to their own explanation, is fabulous. The following story shows how naive these people and their historians are. It is true that this absurd story sounds plausible for them as taken up too much with idolatry” (Du Halde 1735: 433).¹⁶

L’Abbé Prévost and *The General History of Voyages*

Antoine François Prévost is better known as l’Abbé Prévost, the author of the novel *Manon Lescault*. He was a novelist and a historian, and more importantly he was a translator. He was an ardent “cosmopolitan” and he even added the word “exil” meaning exile to his name; thus he became Prévost d’Exiles. He was born in Hesdin, France in 1697 and studied with the Jesuits when he was young. After serving some years in the army, he joined the Benedictine Order and was ordained in 1726. At the same time, he accumulated knowledge in various fields such as philosophy. When he was in discord with the Benedictine Order and faced threats, he ran away to England. He later became a great translator thanks to his linguistic abilities that he accumulated in exile. In spite of several scandals, when *Manon Lescault* was first published in 1731, it created a scandal but also acquired great popularity in 1733. In 1734 he was pardoned by the Pope and actively worked as a priest and writer until he died in 1763

In the case of *The General History of Voyages*, the circumstances of its publication are more complicated than that of Du Halde’s book. The subject of the

15. “Dans les points essentiels, on s’est contenté de traduire simplement, & on y a ajouté la Chronologie qu’on croit être sure.”

16. “Les *Kao kiuli* étoient de la Race des *Fou yu* ...: (Ces *Fou yu* doivent être un Peuple de la Tartarie Orientale.) Leur origine, ainsi qu’ils la racontent, est toute fabuleuse: ce que j’en vais rapporter fera voir jusqu’où va la crédulité de ces Peuples & de leurs Historiens. / Il est vrai que l’idolâtrie donne quelque air de vraisemblance à ces sortes d’extravagances”

book was not only China but the whole world. The subtitle of the book on the cover is “Nouvelle collection de toutes les relations de voyages par mer et par terre, qui ont été publiées jusqu’à présent dans les différentes langues de toutes les nations connues” (A new complete collection of every travel record by sea and by land published in different languages in every country whose name is known until today). Because it is a compilation of travel reports from the past, many of the original authors’ names are not clearly stated. The first seven volumes are l’Abbé Prévost’s translation of John Green’s *A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels* (London, 1745-47).

Green’s book was considered a tool to celebrate English superiority in voyage and to prove the commercial utility of expedition. It is also a colonial history report. This book was translated not only into French but also into Dutch, Italian, Swedish, and Russian. In each case, it was adapted to meet different political/commercial tastes and the interests of its readers.

In the section of “avertissement” following the Preface, the translator who did not disclose his name and introduced himself only as a “translator” announces that he has begun to translate according to the order of publication in England and had already finished translating the first three volumes when he wrote “avertissement.” The French version was first published in 1746. The translator wrote that the authors of the original texts allot the best position to their mother country and he makes an excuse saying, “I feel sorry for the reality that I have to simply follow each steps of foreign editors’ work in their schedule. I don’t mean that their plan is not good, but it is true that there is no room for adapting the order or priority in accordance with my country’s interests because I have to rely upon what they announced in advance in the preface and outline and translate as soon as each volume is published” (Prévost 1748: xiv).¹⁷ Therefore, l’Abbé Prévost translated the English version into French as soon as he received it.

In the book, he points out that the first volume is not as good as the other volumes because English travelers focused on useful information rather than interesting stories in this first volume. It means that Prévost himself puts special

17. “C’est ici ... que je ne suis pas libre de cacher mes regrets sur la nécessité où je me trouve de suivre pas à pas des Compileurs Etrangers, & de m’assujettir servilement à leur plan. Non que je le condamne: mais n’en connoissant que ce qu’ils ont annoncé dans leur Préface & dans leur Introduction, je suis forcé d’attendre la publication de chaque ... volume pour juger de l’exécution, sans pouvoir espérer de faire jamais à l’ordre général aucun changement qui convienne aux idées de ma Patrie.”

stress on “interesting stories.” The authors of the first volume were mostly merchants who were interested in opening up new markets or seamen who attached importance to the art of navigation. Even English editors stated that they put these reports in the first volume not because they were very interesting but as a matter of courtesy.

Prévost explained that he couldn't be satisfied with just translating the work of Green and that's why he added other texts from different sources. He also produced a map with Jacques-Nicolas Bellin and put it in his book. It looks as though Prévost didn't do a straight translation of Green's descriptions on Joseon but adapted them a bit. Green discloses in advance that his descriptions of Joseon were the quoted reports of Father Régis and parts of Du Halde's book which contained parts of Father Régis' reports since few Westerners had set foot on Joseon territory.

Valuation on Joseon people is very similar with that of Du Halde's especially in the aspect that it is ideally positive. “The Joseon people are generally majestic and are very tenderhearted by nature. They have great interest in science and enjoy dance and music. Especially males from the Northern region are passionate and there have been excellent warriors. *Ki-tse*, I will explain more about him later, made a law so well that there is neither immorality nor theft. They don't lock their doors at night. Because of the government revolution they lost their innocence a little, but still they can serve as a model for other countries. On the other hand, there are many fast women and practices of youth are somewhat too liberal” (Prévost 1748: 503).¹⁸ Boulesteix pointed out this kind of description fit the image of “good barbarians” in illuminism.

The editor carefully calls the reader's attention to the fact that the history of Joseon is from the Chinese viewpoint in a footnote. “The history (of Joseon) is extracted from Chinese history so it doesn't record whole lines of kings or events of Joseon but deals with those which are related to China. However, the importance of the text can't be neglected as it is the only text on Joseon”

18. “Les Coréens sont généralement bien-faits & d'un naturel fort doux. Ils ont du goût pour les sciences. Ils sont passionnés pour la danse & la musique. Leurs Provinces du Nord produisent les hommes les plus vigoureux du Royaume & les meilleurs soldats. *Ki-tse*, dont nous parlerons bien-tôt, avoit établi parmi eux de si bonnes loix, que l'adultère & le vol y étoient inconnus. Les portes de leurs maisons ne se ferment jamais pendant la nuit. Quoique les révolutions de leur Gouvernement leur ayent fait perdre quelque chose de cette ancienne innocence, on peut encore les proposer pour modèle aux autres Nations. Mais leur Pays est rempli de femmes de débauche, & les jeunes gens des deux sexes y sont trop libres.”

(Prévost 1748: 506).¹⁹

In addition to this, Prévost's book introduces *Hamel's Journal and Description of the Kingdom of Korea 1653-1666 (Hamel Voyage)* that might be the only text on Joseon from the 17th century. He also mentions that the same part was introduced in the English version. "The English translator stated that (descriptions on Joseon in *Hamel Voyage*) are almost matched to that of other history books on Palafox or Tartarian invasion. Although his analysis is correct, there is room for reconsideration in regard to geographical description in the report of the Dutch. Names of cities that he passed in the journey to travel from the sea to the capital are not matched to a complete map of Joseon and even the name of the capital city is different. It is very absurd especially because the map of Joseon is a copy of that hanging on the wall of the king's palace and the names of cities are written on the map. I can suggest only one explanation that missionaries might have written names using Chinese pronunciation not using the Joseon language pronunciation. In practice the two countries use the same letters though they have different languages" (Prévost 1748: 517-8).²⁰ It is very confusing that in general these descriptions are far from the truth while the records of Hamel who had close and direct relations with the Joseon people are more similar to pronunciation of Korean language than Father Régis' though they were more recent documents.

Hamel Voyage contains seventeen pages about the thirteen years that the Dutch spent in Joseon (Chapter Two: "Voyage de quelques Hollandois dans la Corée, avec une Relation du Pays & de leur Naufrage dans l'Isle de Quelpaert" [Several Dutchmen's travel reports to Joseon, descriptions on shipwreck on Jeju

19. "Cette Histoire, qui est tirée des Annales de la Chine, n'est pas une Relation bien suivie des Affaires & des Rois de la Corée. Elle ne touche que ce qui a rapport à l'Empire Chinois, mais comme c'est l'unique monument de la Corée qui soit connu, son importance oblige de ne la pas négliger."

20. "Le Traducteur Anglois ... observe ... qu'il ne sy trouve rien qui ne s'accorde avec ce qu'on lit dans Palafox & dans d'autres Historiens de l'invasion Tartare. Cependant quelqu'apparence de vérité qu'ait cette réflexion, à l'égard des usages de la Corée & de la forme de son gouvernement, qui paroissent les mêmes qu'à la Chine, il y a quelqu'objection à faire contre la géographie de l'Auteur Hollandais. Elle ne s'accorde point avec la Carte de Corée pour les noms des Villes ..., dans la route que les Hollandois suivirent depuis la mer jusqu'à la Capitale du Royaume, ni pour celui de la Capitale même ; ce qui est d'autant plus embarrassant, que cette Carte est une copie de celle qui est suspendue dans le Palais du Roi, & que les noms qu'elle contient sont les noms indiqués. On ne peut répondre à cette difficulté qu'en supposant que les Missionnaires ayent écrit ces noms en Chinois au lieu de les écrire en Coréen ; car les deux Nations emploient les mêmes caractères quoique leur langue soit différente."

Island and Joseon)] (Prévost 1748: 517-34). In addition to this, the book quotes their descriptions of Joseon customs. “Hamel’s statements are much more enormous and detailed as he lived in Joseon for thirteen years. Most of all, I prefer them as they sound sincere while the missionaries’ style of writing is dry” (Prévost 1748: 518).²¹

Since the author used different sources than Father Régis, there are some discrepancies in the descriptions about Joseon. It is not difficult to assume that the Dutch did not have many good feelings toward the Joseon people while they had been shipwrecked. They couldn’t communicate even though it is said that there was a translator, they were almost forced to stay for years, and they had to go through all the ups and downs under continuously changing rulers. Hamel primarily described what he had an interest in such as marriage, funeral, the position of women, children’s education, and language. In his reports, he often describes the nature of the Joseon people as negative and customs as barbarian in practice. “No one can ever trust the Joseon people because they have a propensity for stealing and have a good deal of swindler in them. They even brag of cheating others as they don’t think cheating is bad. But in the law, compensation for victims of fraud is prescribed. Besides the Joseon people are simple and naive. They, especially the Buddhist monks, like foreigners and believe whatever the Dutch tell them even if it is very absurd. The Joseon people are cowardly and also soft and spiritless. The Dutch reached this conclusion after they heard testimonies from reliable people who witnessed what happened when the Japanese killed a Joseon king, slaughtered people and when Orankae (barbarians) invaded Joseon across a frozen river. According to Weltevree who witnessed these revolutions with his own eyes, there were many more Joseon people who were killed in the forest than in the enemy line. The Joseon people felt sympathy for those who had to fight against the terrible conditions far from being ashamed of acting cowardly. When a few Europeans were wrecked in a terrible storm to the Joseon shores, they could easily check the Joseon people’s plundering. The Joseon people are afraid of blood so they run away when they face blood on the road.” (Prévost 1748: 535-6)²²

21. “Comme le séjour de l’Auteur dans le Royaume de Corée fut d’environ treize ans, il semble que sa Relation devoit être plus ample & plus détaillée. Mais on doit être content si l’on y trouve les caractères de la vérité, sur-tout lorsque celle des Missionnaires est beaucoup plus sèche.”

22. “Les Corésiens ont tant de penchant pour le larcin & tant que disposition naturelle à tromper,

“The Joseon’s perception of the world is significantly imperfect. Scholars of Joseon insist there must be 84,000 countries in the world. However, common people don’t give credit to the assumption. They ask in return ‘Is it possible that the sun sheds light on that many countries in a day? Unless a small island or a negligible reef is counted as a state.’ When the Dutch named a few kingdoms, they laughed saying that they must be names of cities or towns. In practice their knowledge of seashores doesn’t go beyond the Siam kingdom that they trade with. They believe there are 12 kingdoms or regions in the world and all of them were tributary states to China in the past and became independent after Orankae’s conquest” (Prévost 1748: 540).²³

The description about the honorable treatment toward Chinese envoys has a slightly different shade of meaning from that of Father Régis who only mentioned supervision. “The kingdom of Joseon pays tribute to East Tartar that conquered Joseon before China. Three times a year, an envoy from Tartar visits Joseon to receive tribute. Then the king himself accompanied by his subject

qu’on ne peut prendre la moindre confiance à leur caractère. Ils regardent si peu la fraude comme une infamie, qu’ils se font une gloire d’avoir dupé quelqu’un. Cependant la Loi ordoenne des réparations pour ceux qui ont été trompés dans un marché. Ils sont d’ailleurs simples & crédules. Les Hollandois auroient pû leur faire croire toutes sortes de fables, parce qu’ils ont beaucoup d’affection pour les Etrangers, sur-tout leurs Prêtres & leurs Moines. Ils sont d’un naturel efféminé, sans aucun marque de courage. Du moins les Hollandois en prirent cette idée sur le récit de plusieurs personnes dignes de foi, qui avoient été témoins du carnage que les Japonois firent dans la Corée lorsqu’ils en tuèrent le Roi, & de la manière dont les Corésiens se laissèrent traiter par les Tartares, qui avoient passé sur la glace pour s’emparer de leur Pays. Wettevri, qui avoit vû toutes ces révolutions, assuroit qu’il en étoit mort beaucoup plus dans les bois que par les armes de l’Ennemi. Loin d’avoir honte de leur lâcheté, ils déplorent la condition de ceux qui sont obligés de combattre. On les a vûs souvent repoussés par une poignée d’Européens, lorsqu’ils vouloient piller un Vaisseau que la tempête avoit jetté sur leur Côte. Ils abhorrent le sang, jusqu’à prendre la fuite lorsqu’ils en apperçoivent dans leur chemin.”

23. “La connaissance qu’ils ont du Monde est fort imparfaite. Leurs Auteurs assurent que la Terre est composée de quatre-vingt-quatre mille Pays. Mais ces suppositions trouvent peu de crédit parmi les Habitants. ‘Il faudroit donc, disent-ils, compter pour un Pays la moindre Isle & le plus méprisable Ecueil, car peut-on s’imaginer autrement que le Soleil suffise pour éclairer tant de régions en un seul jour ?’ Lorsque les Hollandois leur nommoient quelques Royaumes, ils se mettoient à rire, en leur disant que c’étoit sans doute des Villes ou des Villages, parce que la connaissance qu’ils ont des Côtes ne s’étend point au-delà de Siam, où leur Commerce se borne. Ils sont persuadés en effet qu’il n’y a dans le Monde que douze Royaume, ou douze contrées, qui étoient autrefois soumises à la Chine & qui lui payoient un tribut ; mais qui ont secoué le joug depuis la conquête des Tartares, parce que ces nouveaux Maîtres n’ont pas été capables de les contenir dans la soumission.”

leaves the capital to welcome him and guides him to his abode. The envoy enjoys even better treatment than the king. Wherever he goes, musicians, dancers and acrobats wait in advance and add to the amusement. During his stay at the royal court, soldiers are stationed every 10 to 12 steps on the way from his place to the palace. There are some servants with the special duty of taking a message from the envoy and delivering it to the king so that the king can perceive what the envoy does or wants every time. The king tries very hard to please the envoy so it can reported to the Chinese Imperial Household about Joseon friendliness” (Prévost 1748: 543).²⁴

Prévost’s text was written with the purpose of accumulating universal knowledge in the spirit of illuminism based on as many travel reports as possible regardless of time or space. When Prévost translated the original texts, his romantic and imaginary disposition affected the style of the book, and it gives the feeling of reading a very interesting adventure story. In that context, Hamel’s experiences may have fit his romantic taste better than the dry descriptions of Father Régis. While Du Halde’s work was faithful to the original texts of Father Régis, Green and Prévost frequently quoted Hamel’s adventure stories after describing the history and geographical features of Joseon based on Father Régis’ writings. In the section about Joseon customs, they primarily referred to the Dutch testimonies and put in a lot of anecdotes.

Meanwhile, the quite unserious attitude of l’Abbé Prévost as a translator is related to the perception and practice of translation at that time. L’Abbé Prévost does not remain faithful to the original text but expresses the text as he deems useful. In the 18th century, in many cases “translation” was rather “adaptation.” “Belles infidèles” (unfaithful beauty), the famous expression of Georges Mounin, best represents this concept. In other words, it is “the translation beauti-

24. “Ce Royaume est tributaire des Tartares orientaux, qui en firent la conquête avant celle de la Chine. Ils y envoient trois fois chaque année un Ambassadeur, pour recevoir le tribut. A l’arrivée de ce Ministre, le Roi sort de sa Capitale avec toutes sa cour pour le recevoir, & le conduit jusqu’à son logement. Les honneurs qu’on lui rend de toutes parts paroissent l’emporter sur ceux qu’on rend au Roi même. Il est précédé par des musiciens, des danseurs & des voltigeurs, qui s’efforcent de l’amuser. Pendant tout le tems qu’il passe à la Cour, toutes les rues, depuis son logement jusqu’au Palais, sont bordées de soldats, à dix ou douze pieds de distance. On nomme deux ou trois personnes dont l’unique emploi est de recevoir des notes écrites qu’on leur jette par la fenêtre de l’Ambassadeur, & de les porter au Roi, qui veut sçavoir à chaque moment de quoi ce Ministre est occupé. Il étudie tous les moyens de lui plaire, pour l’engager à faire des récits favorables au grand Khan de la Chine.”

ful but not faithful to the original text.” “Most of the translators in the 18th century had to satisfy the tastes of intellectual readers. So translating work should follow the rules of grammar, style and rhetoric of the day. Sometimes it had to distort the content of Greek and Roman classics. It was the time that translating work was not considered as a very dignified activity (socially or artistically) which was different from the previous century” (Oseki-Dépré 1999: 34-5).²⁵

But it doesn't look like Prévost largely exaggerated or distorted the testimony of Hamel though there are some different terms or words used. The statements that are far from the truth such as that in the river so many crocodiles live and eat up children were inserted by a Dutch editor who published *Hamel Voyage* (Frédéric Max 1992: 17). Hamel's testimony on the unknown country of Joseon created a sensation in the readers of the day so it was reprinted many times and translated into French, Germany and English. Until the middle of the 19th century, it was perceived as the one and only direct statement on Joseon.

Conclusion

This paper examined the political/social context in France where Du Halde's and Prévost's books were published. Eighteenth-century France, characterized by Enlightenment, began to view its own culture objectively through exploration of the unknown world. But the cultural superiority of the West and Orientalism were not yet formed or fixed. It was a period of exploration not too removed from the geopolitical ambitions of colonialism, but at the same time there were some attempts to model parts of French society after China.

The text of Du Halde is an integration of the Jesuit missionaries' reports and maps that they produced for the Chinese Emperor Kangxi, and the translated book by l'Abbé Prévost is a summary of various diaries of explorers from different times. Since Jesuits could get close to local residents in the East Asia region including the Imperial Family of China with a relatively amicable and open attitude toward local customs based on a great store of knowledge and curiosity,

25. "... les traducteurs du XVIIIe siècle ont, entre autres choses, à satisfaire au goût du public lettré, devant non seulement se plier aux règles grammaticales, stylistiques, rhétoriques en vigueur dans leur siècle, mais aussi bien travestir le contenu des textes traduits, à savoir, les textes de l'Antiquité gréco-romaine. Il s'agit d'un siècle où la traduction n'est plus l'activité prestigieuse (socialement et artistiquement) qu'elle a pu être durant les siècles antérieurs."

their reports were the best source of information on the Far East region in Europe. Meanwhile it is worthwhile to study the texts of Du Halde and l'Abbé Prévost that contain indirect experiences as they show ways and trends of French society's interests in others of the day.

These two texts also deliver descriptions on geographical features and the innocent nature of the Joseon people that Father Régis collected from those who visited Joseon or met Joseon people in China, though Father Régis himself didn't experience or see them with his own eyes. L'Abbé Prévost's book even insists the educational and administrative system of Joseon could be a model for other countries. To this point, they were very important documents until the late 19th century when writings by explorers who finally set foot on territory of Joseon were introduced. La Pérouse found Joseon on his voyage in 1787, but he didn't set foot in the territory because he was afraid of having the same experiences as Hamel did one century prior.

They recognized Joseon as the people of "nature," contrary to the concept "culture," but at the same time the state was so simple and an effective social operation system that advanced countries in the West might admire it. In other words, their recognition of Joseon was not very different from the Jesuits' recognition of China that was criticized for its extreme idealization.

However it is very interesting that Joseon was ultimately not a "practical" state but a "potential" state for Du Halde, Prévost and even for Régis. None of these three authors actually visited Joseon, but they spoke of it only based on the information that they read or heard. In actuality, it was a period that combined the nonsensical descriptions of an imaginary world that was very popular with realistic travel reports. There is no information about the reflection of readers on *Hamel Voyage* in Prévost's translated version, but the possibility can't be discounted that 18th century French readers considered Hamel's story an interesting story like Gulliver's travels and not as information of an actual country even though Hamel's description is much more accurate than any other writings from the time.

References

- Albertan-Coppola, Sylvaine. 1999. "L'Abbé Prévost romancier et éditeur de voyages" (A paper on romantic writing of l'Abbé Prévost in *The General History of Voyages*). *Romans et récits de voyage. Ecriture de fiction, écriture*

- du voyage. Amiens, France, December.
- Boothroyd, Ninette, and Muriel Détrie, comp. 1992. *Le Voyage en Chine: Anthologie des voyageurs occidentaux du Moyen Age à la chute de l'empire chinois* (A compilation of travel reports on China). Paris: Robert Laffont, coll. Bouquins.
- Boulesteix, Frédéric. 2001. "La Corée, un Orient autrement extrême" (A comparative literature paper on images of Joseon by the Western). Pp. 93-112 in *Revue de littérature comparée* 297 (January).
- Chaunu, Pierre. 1982. *La Civilisation de l'Europe des Lumières* (Books on Europe at the era of illuminism). the first edition: B. Arthaud, 1971. Paris: Flammarion
- Du Halde, Jean-Baptiste. 1735. *Description géographique, historique, chronologique, politique et physique de l'empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie chinoise* (Descriptions of the Chinese Empire and Chinese Tartary). Paris: Mercier.
- Hamel, Hendrik. 1668. *Relation du naufrage d'un vaisseau hollandais sur la côte de l'île de Quelpaert et description du royaume de Corée* (Hamel's journal and a description of the kingdom of Korea 1653-1666), reprinted in 1992 with preface and footnotes by Frédéric Max. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Hazard, Paul. 1963. *La Pensée européenne au XVIIIe siècle* (Books on European thinking in 18th century). Paris: Fayard, coll. Pluriel.
- La Perouse, Jean-François de. 2005. *Voyage autour du monde sur l'Astrolabe et la Boussole (1785-1788)* (The voyage of La Perouse around the world) Paris: La Découverte.
- Madec, Loïc, and Charles-Edouard Saint-Ghulem, comp. 2006. *Corée, voyageurs au pays du matin calme: récits de voyage 1788-1938* (A compilation of travel reports on Korea). Paris: Omnibus.
- Moerman, Ellen . 2001. " Le Pirate dans l'Histoire générale des voyages: fonction commerciale, politique et littéraire " (A paper on pirates described in *The General History of Voyages*), paper presented at 13e Colloque du Centre de recherche sur la littérature des voyages, Paris-IV-Sorbonne. *L'Aventure maritime--pirates, corsaires et flibustiers*. Paris: Sorbonne.
- Mounin, Georges. 1955-1959. *Les Belles Infidèles* (Books on translation). Paris: Cahiers du Sud.
- Oseki-Dépré, Inês. 1999. *Théories et pratiques de la traduction littéraire* (Books on the theory and practice of literature translation). Paris: Armand Colin.
- Prévost, l'Abbé et al. 1748. *Histoire générale des voyages, ou Nouvelle collec-*

tion de toutes les relations de voyages par mer et par terre qui ont été publiées jusqu'à présent dans les différentes langues de toutes les Nations connues (The General History of Voyages). Paris: Didot.

Vissière, Isabelle, and Jean-Louis, comp. 2001. *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses des Jésuites de Chine: 1702-1776* (A compilation of the Jesuit missionaries' reports). Paris: Desjonquères.

Voltaire. 1957. *Œuvre historique de Voltaire* (Historical discourse of Voltaire). Paris: Gallimard, La Pléiade.

Jeong Eun-Jin graduated from Sogang University in 1992 with a degree in French literature, received her first doctorate in French literature from Université Paris X in 1998 and a second doctorate in Korean studies from Institut National des Langues et civilisations orientales à Paris in 2001. She currently teaches Korean studies at Université Paris XII. She is interested in Korean modern literature, literature translation, and Korean movies. She also translates Korean literature into French.

к с і