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Transitional Images of the West in Chosŏn Literature

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My research over the past few years has examined different genres of travel literature from the 18th to early 20th centuries, focusing on changing Korean perceptions of the West. Transitional images of ‘Western civilization’ are especially well presented in works produced towards the end of the Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910). To this end, the main focus of my investigation has involved literature from the Korean Enlightenment period (1894-1910).

Until the first half of the 19th century, Chosŏn’s contact with the West primarily took place in the Catholic (Jesuit) mission in Beijing. In other words, the Koreans’ understanding of Western culture and civilization in the 18th and early 19th century period was ultimately based on mediated encounters and secondhand sources. However, the situation changed from the second half of the 19th century onwards. Due to the expansion of imperialist powers, Chosŏn Korea opened her ports and became part of the world capitalist system in 1876. Chosŏn’s very existence came under threat as neighboring countries surrounding the Korean peninsula – Qing (China), Japan, and Russia – competed for power. Consequently, as a last resort for survival, the Chosŏn government called for a diplomatic strategy of mutual containment between the imperial nations to maintain national sovereignty, and dispatched diplomatic delegations to Western states. It was under these circumstances that Chosŏn began to have direct contact with the West.

From 1880 to 1910, the majority of literature on Korean travels to the West were written by diplomatic delegates (intellectual bureaucrats)¹ and were in the form of diverse genres including travel accounts (essays), *kasa* (lyrical songs in Korean), *hansi* (poetry in classical Chinese), and diaries. These works commonly convey a sense of awe, admiration, surprise at and envy of Western technology and industry, but upon closer examination, great and subtle differences in the writers’ views and perceptions of Western culture and civilization can be detected. This highlights the private, subjective nature of travel literature which contains selective expressions of the observer’s proclivities and perceived views alongside objective observations. Among these works, by and large three categories of Korean perceptions of the West can be identified as follows.

1) Experiences of Western civilization are internalized, naturalized, and subsequently the West is perceived from a ‘Westernized’ perspective. In this case, the developed nature of

¹ One exception was a work of *kasa* composed by a local gentry from the Kyŏngsang province that conveys his observations and experiences in the United States while working there as a laborer at the beginning of the 20th century.

Western culture and systematized institutions are unilaterally praised and regarded as corresponding to Chosŏn's prospective future. Hence, though they recognized the underlying policy of colonial rule that supported the military enterprise, Korean travellers of this category did not express criticism when they visited sites of military industry because it was understood as a source for imperialistic power that was based on Western principles of modernity (which in turn derived from Western rationalism). It corresponded to the imperialist principle of competition, which would have been internalized, then perceived from an 'imperialist' standpoint by this group. In the process, their own country (Chosŏn) increasingly become the 'barbaric other', and at times they even conveyed racist attitudes towards their own people. Works that fall under this category include *Yun Ch'ih'o ilgi* (Yun Ch'ih'o's Diary) and *Haechŏn ch'ubŏm* (Journey to the Wider World).²

2) This category is characterized by reflective perceptions of the West. Though the Korean observers in this category acknowledge the pre-eminence of modern Western civilization, they do not consider it as a substitute for Chosŏn's traditional culture. These observers take an objective stance and grasp both positive and negative aspects of political and social institutions of the West. Western culture, values, and institutions can be regarded in relative terms, and only when it is in equilibrium with those of Chosŏn can they be deemed significant. Works that fall in this category include *Sŏyu kyŏnmun* (Observations on a Journey to the West) which considers the synthesis of the positive aspects of Western constitutional government and Confucian statecraft to establish a constitutional monarchy, and *Sagu sokch'o* (Diplomatic Journey to Europe) which conveys an ethnographic interest in the customs and systems of various different cultures of the world.³

3) This category is marked by ethno-centric perceptions, namely analyzing and perceiving Western culture from a position that prioritizes East Asian civilization. Travellers of this category assign Confucian values as the standard for appraising the West, based on erudite knowledge of East Asian classical texts. The concept of 'Western civilization' is understood as a collective, abstract entity that includes wide-ranging aspects, from urban culture to nature, and aesthetic considerations are prominent in this category of works. Moreover, Western customs that conflict with Confucian values and ethics become subjects of vehement criticism. Works that fall in this category include *Sŏsarok* (Record of Travels to the West by Ship) and *Hwan'gu ūmch'o* (Poems on the World).⁴

I will summarize my research to date, then offer suggestions for further discussion and questions to consider.

² The example given later in this paper focuses on *Haech'ŏn ch'ubŏm*. For a discussion on *Yun Ch'ih'o ilgi*, see my article, "Korean Embassy Trips Around the World and an Understanding of Global Civilization During the Enlightenment Period (1894-1910): *Haechŏn chubŏm*, *Sagu sokcho* and *Seosarok*", *The Review of Korean Studies* Volume 11 Number 1 (March 2008): 29-46.

³ This paper will discuss *Sagu sokch'o*.

⁴ This paper will discuss *Sŏsarok*.

1) “Hong Dae-yong’s [Hong Taeyong] Beijing Travels and His Changing Perception of the West – Focusing on *Eulbyeong yeonhaengnok* [Ŭlbyŏng yŏnhaengnok] and *Uisan mundap* [Ŭisan mundap].”

The Review of Korean Studies Volume 9 Number 4 (December 2006): 45-62.

This paper brings to light some examples that allude to changing Korean perceptions of the West in the eighteenth century as reflected in Hong Taeyong’s (洪大容, 1731-83) *Ŭlbyŏng yŏnhaengnok* (乙丙燕行錄, Journal of Travels to Beijing in 1765-1766) and “*Ŭisan mundap*” (鑿山問答, Dialogue on Mount Ŭisan). The former is Hong’s accounts of his trip to Beijing in 1765-1766, and the latter is a philosophical discourse on scientific principles, in the form of exchanges between two fictional characters, Sirong (實翁) and Hŏja (虛子). *Ŭlbyŏng yŏnhaengnok* only records a few months of Hong’s time in Beijing, and entries related to Western culture are limited to a small portion of the book. Hence, it is difficult to ascertain his perceptions of the West only from his travel accounts. Accordingly, this study also examines Hong’s later work “*Ŭisan mundap*”, which is found in his collection of writings *Tamhŏnsŏ* (湛軒書), and which presents Hong’s reflective insight that responds to his earlier experiences and views.⁵ Given the passage of time between the two works, a comparative examination of them presents us with an example of shifting perceptions of the West.

It is noted that what is perceived as ‘fact’ in individual travel accounts is often limited to the scope of the writer’s own personal experiences, thus it would be unreasonable to consider them as representing a holistic view and understanding of the cultures encountered. Recent studies have shown that *Ŭlbyŏng yŏnhaengnok* contains inconsistencies between Hong’s perceptions and actual facts, as well as self-contradictory remarks within the work. Hence, this paper presents Hong Taeyong’s encounter with Western culture in topical categories (i.e., his view on Catholicism, Western paintings, and Western science and astronomy), and varying opinions are identified and examined. At the same time, Hong’s system of perception that is commonly inherent in his varying views is investigated and analyzed.

Hong Taeyong was a *sirhak* (實學, ‘Practical Learning’)⁶ scholar who went to Beijing as a military attaché to his stepfather Hong Ŏk (洪穉) for a few months in 1765-1766. Korean knowledge of the West during the 18th century was mainly based on the Chosŏn envoys’ visits to the Catholic mission in Beijing. There were four Catholic churches (South,⁷ East, North, and West church), which were the main site of cultural exchange for the Chosŏn literati officials who travelled as royal envoys to Qing China (*Yŏnhaengsa* 燕行使). Hong had been informed

⁵ It is worth mentioning here that the names of the two fictional characters in the work, ‘Sirong’ [實=practical, 翁=old man] and ‘Hŏja’ [虛=empty, 子= young man], are significant in that they represent Hong Taeyong in his later years and Hong in his earlier years respectively.

⁶ *Sirhak* or ‘Practical Learning’ refers to a school of thought that advocated a practical or ‘scientific’ approach to statecraft with emphasis on reform, and criticized ritual-oriented Neo-Confucian formalism. See Michael C. Kalton and Oaksook C. Kim, *The Four-Seven Debate: An Annotated Translation of the Most Famous Controversy in Korean Neo-Confucian Thought* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1984).

⁷ The Chosŏn envoys primarily visited the South Catholic Church, which was built on the southwest of the Forbidden City by Matteo Ricci in 1605, and extended later by Adam Schall. See Wŏn Chaeyŏn, “Chosŏn sidae hakchadŭl ūi Sŏyang insik” (Chosŏn Literati Scholars’ Perceptions of the West), *Taegu sahak* 73 (2003).

about the excellence of Western science, and had high expectations for visiting the Catholic churches.⁸

Around the time of his travel to Beijing, Hong Taeyong's perception of the West and Western Learning (*Sōhak* 西學)⁹ seems to have been marked by a considerable degree of dualism. He reacted negatively to Western religion, but positively to Western systems of maths, science, and technology, namely astronomy and the calendar system; while he appreciated the style and techniques of Western painting, he disliked their content, namely those with religious themes; and though he praised the technology of Western musical instruments (pipe organ), he regarded the principles behind the technology to be an extension of traditional East Asian (Chinese) concepts.¹⁰

With regards to Catholicism, based on an exchange with one of the missionaries, Augustin Hallerstein (劉松齡), Hong came to understand the figure of Jesus (天主, 'Lord of Heaven') as corresponding to the Confucian notion of 'Supreme Being' (上帝).¹¹ Not long after this exchange with Hallerstein, he entered into another conversation about Western religion, this time with two Chinese literati from Hangzhou named Pan Ting-jun and Yan Cheng when he was

⁸ While his predecessors had frequently visited the churches and been warmly received during the first half of the 18th century, in Hong's time visits by Chosŏn envoys were not welcomed by the missionaries [see Shin Ik-Cheol, "The Experiences of Visiting Catholic Churches in Beijing and the Recognition of Western Learning Reflected in the Journals of Travel to Beijing", *The Review of Korean Studies* Volume 9 Number 4 (December 2006): 11-31]. Nevertheless, Hong managed to visit the South church twice and the East church once.

⁹ 'Western Learning' or *Sōhak* refers to the study of Western culture, including Western thought, religion, ethics, science, and technology, which was introduced into Korea from the Chinese Ming and Qing dynasties in the 17th and 18th centuries. In a narrow sense, *Sōhak* sometimes refers only to the study of Western religion and ethics during this period. The term is also used to refer to Roman Catholicism, or Ch'ŏnhak (天學, 'Heavenly Learning'). In this paper, 'Western Learning' is generally used to signify both the religion and scientific technology of the West.

¹⁰ Prior to his visit to the Catholic mission, Hong had preconceived notions about Western culture and civilization based on various sources. In a letter to the missionaries in Beijing requesting visitation to the Catholic mission, he wrote the following to inform them of his knowledge about the West. "The Catholic church is where people from the Western kingdom reside. The Western kingdom is situated in the middle of the Western seas, tens of thousands of *li* (里) away from China. It had no contact with China until the time of Emperor Wanli (萬曆, r. 1572-1620) of Ming (明, 1368-1644), when a person by the name of Li Madou (利瑪竇 – the Chinese name for the Italian Jesuit priest, Matteo Ricci, 1552-1610) came to China. Li Madou was indeed a strange person. He declared, 'When I was in my twenties, I wished to explore the world so I left my country and travelled all over. I came to China by way of the south of the continent.' His statement was hard to believe, but he knew everything about astronomy, maths, and the calendar system, and he was able to explain their fundamental laws in detail with evidence, whereby nothing was speculative. His talent in this matter was most extraordinary. He also introduced and preached his learning (Catholic doctrine) in China, the main principles of which were to revere Heaven in the same manner as one would revere and serve the Buddha in Buddhism; advise people to offer worship services morning and evening; and attain good fortune through good deeds. As the principles generally differ from the ways of the Chinese sages and are marked by heresy, his learning (Catholicism) is not worthy of further deliberation. However, with respect to his ability to clarify and discuss the fundamental laws of celestial movement (maths) and the almanac system which accurately correspond to the twenty-four divisions of the year (lunar calendar system), no one from the past could surpass it." (*Ŭlbyōng yōnhaengnok*, entry on the 7th day of the first month in 1766)

¹¹ "I said, 'I once heard that Catholicism is being practised alongside the three religions (Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism) in China. Being from the Eastern kingdom (Chosŏn), we are unfamiliar with the religion, and so I wish to hear about its general principles.' Hallerstein replied, "The teachings of Catholicism are extremely commendable and profound (extensive). Which particular aspects would you like to know?' I said, 'Confucianism values benevolence and righteousness, Taoism esteems purity, and Buddhism emphasizes deeds (accomplishments). I wish to know what Catholicism reveres.' Hallerstein explained, "Catholicism aims to teach people to love the Lord of Heaven, and to love others as we would love ourselves.' I asked, "Does the 'Lord of Heaven' refer to the (Confucian notion of) Supreme Being? Or is there a particular person to whom the term refers?" Hallerstein answered, 'It correlates with what Confucius said, "The propriety of Jiaosi (郊社) rites is to serve the Supreme Being," but it does not signify the Jade Emperor (玉皇上帝, Taoist ruler of Heaven and all realms of existence) of Taoism.' He also added, 'In the annotations of *The Book of Odes* (詩傳), does it not state, "the Supreme Being is the ruler of heaven"?' (*Ŭlbyōng yōnhaengnok*, entry on the 19th day of the first month of 1766)

in Qianjingtong. Pan Ting-jun's knowledge of the Catholic doctrine was rather accurate, but he regarded its teachings as being 'truly infatuated' or perplexing. Hong agreed, and further criticized Catholicism for being a Western religion that had in his view appropriated sacred concepts of East Asian religions (Confucianism and Buddhism). In other words, he believed that the origin of Catholic principles essentially derived from China. Accordingly, it seemed strange to Hong that in spite of this 'treacherous' and heretical nature of the Catholic doctrine, some Chinese people were still willing to accept and follow its teachings.¹²

With regards to Western art, in both fields of painting and music Hong distinguished between technique and content, which he responded to in different ways. He was captivated by the technique or technology, but critical towards theme or principle. Observing the frescoes in the South church, Hong was very much taken by the realist technique that paid attention to perspective and detail, which gave off a life-like effect,¹³ but he was less than impressed by the content or themes of the crucifixion and death of Jesus, regarding which he remarked, "the mere sight of it made me sick." A gifted musician of traditional Korean instruments, Hong had occasion to hear the sounds of the pipe organ in the South church. In his record he stated that the sound was splendid and clear, and the different sounds of the different keys 'imitated' those of the 12-note system (chromatic pitches) of traditional East Asian music theory.¹⁴ He thereby assumed that the constitution of the Western instrument was essentially based on an extension of traditional Chinese musical principles, which strongly suggests his Sino-centric perspectives. But similar to his reaction to Western paintings, he marvelled at the craftsmanship of the organ itself.

It is clear that Hong was most impressed by objects of Western science and technology, as demonstrated by his wonderment and positive remarks about the telescope, armillary sphere, as well as smaller items such as clocks, pocket watches, spectacles (glasses), compasses, and pens. With respect to the gap in quality between Eastern and Western technology, Hong had established his own theory to explain the reason behind this phenomenon. In one of his writings, *Yup'o mundap* (劉鮑問答), he remarks based on an entry in the *Shujing* (書經, Book of Documents): "As Yu (虞) and Xia (夏, ca. 2100-1600 B.C.E.) deteriorated, the official post of Xi and Huo (羲和) disappeared, whereby knowledge of astronomy was not handed down to

¹² "When I asked, 'Are there people who esteem Catholicism in the southern regions as well?' Pan Ting-jun replied, "Catholicism has come to be practised in China only recently, but because of its approximation to savagery (barbarism) none of the literati believe in it. Its teachings began to be practised with the arrival of Li Madou (Matteo Ricci) from the Western kingdom to China during the time of Emperor Wanli of Ming. There are numerous books on Catholicism. Among them, one states, 'The Lord of Heaven was incarnated into the world and tried to teach the people, but was reproachfully accused of crime and died a cruel death as punishment. There is something called the Cross, so have people offer services everyday; everyone should think of the Lord of Heaven, shed tears on His behalf, and never forget His grace.' These are truly infatuated words." I said, "The ways in which Western Learning explains celestial movement and the calendar system are most sophisticated and beyond the abilities of the Chinese people. But upon discussing their principles (of Catholicism), (Westerners seem to have) appropriated the Confucian term, "Supreme Being", and embellished upon the Buddhist concept of transmigration (of the soul), which is truly treacherous. Even so, there are some Chinese people who offer services now and again, so how could this not be strange?" Thereupon Yan Cheng stated that there was an edict that prohibits the teachings of Catholicism in the country." (*Ŭlbyŏng yŏnhaengnok*, entry on the 24th day of the first month 1766)

¹³ *Ŭlbyŏng yŏnhaengnok*, entries on the 9th and 24th day of the first month of 1766.

¹⁴ *Ŭlbyŏng yŏnhaengnok*, entry on the 9th day of the first month of 1766.

posterity.”¹⁵ Hong wished to suggest that with the collapse of a golden age and passage of time, the Chinese astronomical calendar system could only but gradually deteriorate and be eventually surpassed by the West.

It becomes clear that Hong Taeyong’s attitude and dualistic perception of the West (negative about their religion and principles, but positive about their science and technology) was based on the system of perception known as ‘*Tongdo Sŏgi ron*’ (東道西器論, ‘Eastern principles and Western instruments’ theory) otherwise known as *togiron* (道器論), which acknowledged the pre-eminence of Western devices and technology, but regarded Eastern thought and principles as superior. Hong’s perception was not based on objective facts or empirical evidence, but on theoretical conjectures that insisted on the superiority of one group against another. In this respect, Hong Taeyong’s perception of the West as reflected in *Ŭlbyŏng yŏnhaengnok* remained in the realm of subjective idealism.

However, his later work, “*Ŭisan mundap*” conveys a shift in his worldview, from that based on subjective idealism to that based on objective pragmatism. Inspired by new scientific knowledge, namely the concept of a spherical Earth, Hong came to challenge his former perception of the world that was marked by Sino-centrism, whereby he began to perceive the East and West in more objective and relative terms. Based on the idea of a spherical Earth, Hong began to argue that any place could be the ‘center’, and thereby a distinction between the ‘central’ and ‘peripheral’ did not exist.¹⁶ By this logic, the West could be perceived in equal terms as the East, and a synthesis of Western and Eastern learning and elements could ultimately secure the prospect for an advanced civilization. Such a stance marked by relativism vastly differs from his earlier attitudes characterized by Sino-centric idealism and criticism. This shift in his perception of the West did not remain simply in the abstract or speculative realm, but manifested itself in application. A good example is when he discusses the system and principles of music theory and instruments, and concludes that the basic pitch of *hwangjong* (黃鐘, first pitch in traditional Korean music theory) could be best determined by using the Western lute, based on a scientific assessment of the material of relevant Korean instruments and its capacity to produce certain sounds and pitches.

¹⁵ The *Shujing* states that Emperor Yao (堯) established an observatory with the post of Xi and Huo, while Emperor Shun (舜) devised a model resembling an armillary sphere and maintained a calendar system.

¹⁶ “Since heaven yields life and the earth nurtures it, anyone and everyone with the force of life (血氣) are effectively the same. Those who stand out as exceptional and end up ruling their kind are all equally kings or emperors. Those that construct fortress gates and dig deep moats and protect their capital cities are all equally kingdoms. Whether it be a top hat from Yin (殷) or a top hat from Zhou (周), whether it be tattoos on the body or tattoos on the forehead, they are all equally products of propriety and customs. (Life) viewed from heaven above, would there be a distinction between inner (central) and outer (peripheral)? Thus, whether it be feeling intimate and partial towards one’s own kind, looking up to one’s own king or emperor, protecting one’s own kingdom, and regarding one’s own propriety and customs to be convenient, it is all the same for Chinese or barbarians alike.” (“*Ŭisan mundap*”)

2) “Perceptions of Western Civilization and Literary Modes of Expression in Newspapers during the Korean Enlightenment Period: With a special focus on the editorials and poems published in the *Tongnip sinmun* and *Taehan maeil sinbo*”

Papers of the British Association for Korean Studies 12 (2007).

This study analyzes the perceptions of Western civilization found in modern newspapers – *Tongnip sinmun* (獨立新聞, The Independent) and *Taehan maeil sinbo* (大韓每日申報, Korean Daily News) – during the period 1880-1910, while also tracing contemporary trends of relevant literary modes of expression.

As Chosŏn Korea, which had maintained an isolationist policy, was virtually forced to open her ports in 1876 to participate in the capitalist world order, she soon found herself being waged by the imperial powers, mainly Western countries and Japan who was perceived to have been ‘Westernized’ to a large extent. Hence, Western civilization came to be perceived as an immensely powerful entity, with various measures that were oriented towards ‘modernization’. At the risk of oversimplifying matters, the main positions adopted in the 1880s by Korean advocates of modernization could be divided into two categories. The first can be identified as a ‘*Tongdo Sŏgi*’ (‘Eastern principles, Western instruments’ theory described earlier) approach to development, which was promoted by the pro-Chinese conservative faction of the Chosŏn government. The other advocated the importation of Western technology and science as well as Western ideas and institutions into Korea, and was maintained by a group of modern reformists.¹⁷

During this time, there were different newspapers that became the mouthpiece of the two groups. The ideas of the first group were expressed through the *Hansŏng sunbo* (漢城旬報) and the *Hansŏng chubo* (漢城周報, Hansŏng Weekly) [October 1883-July 1888], and those of the second group through the *Tongnip sinmun*. The publication of the *Hansŏng sunbo* and *Hansŏng chubo* was carried out by a public agency called Pakmun’guk (博文局, Office of Culture and Information) and printed in classical Chinese. They sometimes reprinted articles and editorials from Chinese and Japanese newspapers which discussed the origins of Western developments, and claimed that Western prosperity was rooted in the notion of *Sirhak*, or the combination of practical learning and scientific technology, which generated new inventions of communication (telegraph wires), transport (steamship), and military technology among others. While conservative Confucian literati regarded the study of Western Learning as being a disgraceful act, these newspapers adhered to a stance which emphasized the importance of science and technology combined with Sino-centric theories, thereby suggesting affinities between Western Learning and Chinese Learning.¹⁸ As such, the *Hansŏng sunbo* and *Hansŏng chubo* presented views that advocated accepting material aspects of Western civilization while upholding

¹⁷ See Chu Chino, “19 segi huban munmyŏng kaehwaron ūi hyŏngsŏng kwa chŏn’gae” (The formation and establishment of civilization and modernization theories during the late 19th century) and Kim Tohyŏng, “Taehan cheguk ch’ogi munmyŏng kaehwaronŭi paljŏn” (The development of civilization and modernization theories during the early period of the Taehan Empire), both in Institute of Korean Studies, Yonsei University, ed., *Sŏgu munhwa ūi suyong kwa kŭndae kaehyŏk* (The Acceptance of Western Culture and the Drive for Modernization), Seoul: T’aehaksa, 2004.

¹⁸ “私議: 廣學校”, *Hansŏng chubo*, 1889. 10. 11.

traditional East Asian principles.

On the other hand, the *Tongnip sinmun* [April 1896- December 1899] conveyed the assumption that Western notions of civilization were a universal concept, and advocated the need to abandon absolute notions of Confucianism. To this end, it encouraged not only the acceptance of Western religion (Christianity) which was regarded as an important source of Western civilization, but also the importation of the West's modern political systems and customs in addition to technology. The *Tongnip sinmun* was among the first privately-managed modern daily newspapers in Korea, was printed in two different language editions – Korean (*Han'gŭl*) and English – and run by modern intellectuals. For those affiliated with the paper, a systematic and comprehensive assimilation of Western institutions and systems was perceived as the most urgent task in establishing Korea as a modern nation-state. Accordingly, the motto of the *Tongnip sinmun* was 'civilization, military strength, and the independence of Chosŏn', and the United States was regarded as the ideal model for achieving these aims. These beliefs were to a great extent inspired by the intellectuals' firsthand experiences in the West (Sŏ Chaep'il [Philip Jaisohn] and Yun Ch'ihŏ), and contributors often used ideological rhetoric to depict Western models in a positive light.¹⁹

Having established Western nations as the model of civility, the *Tongnip sinmun* went to great lengths to stress the urgent need to accept and import aspects of these countries into Korea, including political, educational, public health, and security systems as well as religion and customs. These were emphasized not only through informative and operative text types, but also through expressive genres such as poetry. The works of poetry published in the *Tongnip sinmun* are generally marked by bright, optimistic tones, and often express visions of a future world in which Korea would be one of the most 'civilized' independent nations.²⁰ These poems undoubtedly embody a strong sense of Korean patriotism, but they also at times resonate with Orientalist undertones in their tendency to dismiss the historical past and traditions of Korea as mere fallacies or illusions ("wake up wake up from this 4,000 year-old dream"²¹) or even 'barbaric'.

Hence, both conservative literati and progressive intellectuals agreed that Western technology was more advanced and that Korea could benefit from it; where they disagreed was in relation

¹⁹ The *Tongnip sinmun* classified nations into four categories: civilized countries (Britain, the United States, Germany, France, and Austria), modernized countries (Japan, Italy, Russia, Denmark, and Netherlands), semi-modernized countries (Chosŏn, Qing, Thailand, Persia, Myanmar, Turkey, and Egypt), and uncivilized ('barbarian') states. The countries classified as being 'civilized' were described as possessing a state system under which democratic management of the state and human rights were guaranteed: "a civilized country establishes laws and regulations, governs the state in a transparent and fair manner, provides freedom to its people, and maintains a level of stability and prosperity that is comparable to the Yao-Shun (堯舜) Era of China." ("Country Rankings", *Tongnip sinmun*, 1899. 2. 23)

²⁰ "If you raise the national flag in the air,

It will shine the world over and even overwhelm China.

Of all the independent countries, our independence is the best.

America's customs and England's strong laws –

Take lessons from these countries,

Make efforts to establish the best country in the world.

Independence for all ages, generations, and for eternity."

(Pak Kiryŏm's "Aegukka", *Tongnip sinmun*, 1896. 8. 1)

²¹ Yi Chungwŏn, "Tongsimga", *Tongnip sinmun*, 1896. 5. 26.

to the underlying values and ideology that should accompany Korea's modernization efforts. In other words, their views converged or overlapped with regard to material elements of development, but diverged or split with respect to ideological principles between Sino-centrism and Euro-centrism.

However, both groups soon found themselves in rapidly changing political circumstances whereby existing theories began to be critically reassessed and reformulated to reveal a new approach at the turn of the century. This involved re-interpreting notions of Western civilization in light of East Asian traditions, and in turn, re-evaluating East Asian traditions in light of notions of Western civilization.²² The most important factors in the new process were enlightenment and education designed to awaken latent national spirit, whereby the emphasis shifted from outer action (implementing Western modernized systems) to inner motivation (the driving spirit behind advocating modernization), with continued emphasis on the realization of an independent Korean nation-state as the collective aim. To this end, what the West had to offer was examples of the kind of education needed in order to inspire patriotic spirit;²³ but the spirit of cultivation should remain grounded in a sober understanding of Korea's current vulnerable state but with the confidence that Korea's time would come in the imminent future.²⁴

Together with *Hwangsŏng sinmun* (皇城新聞, Capital Gazette) [September 1898- September 1910], the *Taehan maeil sinbo* [July 1904 - August 1910] conveyed the changing strategies characterized by critical and balanced scrutiny and adopted by reformed Confucian scholars. The *Taehan maeil sinbo* was founded at a time when Japanese encroachment on the Korean peninsula was imminent, and the Patriotic Enlightenment Movement, whose objective it was to restore national sovereignty, was at its peak. Under these circumstances, the *Taehan maeil sinbo* focused more on drawing attention to the internal force and dynamics involved in the process of modernization than on its external features. In line with the new grounded perception of Chosŏn's reality amid the rise of imperialist powers around her, the *Taehan maeil sinbo* also published a number of poems that made use of satire to demystify inflated notions of the West by comparing imperialist nations to kites, wolves, and coyotes.

²² Kil Chinsuk, "Munmyŏng ūi chaegusŏng kŭrigo Tongyang chŏnt'ong tamnon ūi chaehaesŏk: Hwangsŏng sinmun ūl chungsimŭro" (The reorganization of civilization and the reinterpretation of oriental tradition: With a special focus on the *Hwangsŏng sinmun*), in Korea Cultural Research Institute, Ewha Woman's University, ed., *Kŭndae kyemonggi chisik ūi palgyŏn kwa sayu chip'yŏng ūi hwakdae* (The Discovery of Knowledge and Expansion of Thought Horizons during the Enlightenment Period), Seoul: Somyŏng Publishing, 2006, p. 46.

²³ The examples cited include Bismarck's implementation of an elementary school educational system that contributed to the cultivation of the German spirit; Mazzini's focus on youth education which had inspired the Italian spirit; and Washington's independent nature which had inspired the U.S. spirit of independence.

²⁴ This claim was supported by Mun Ilp'yŏng's 'Theory of Civilization' which was published in instalments in the *Taehan maeil sinbo* on November 9-12, 1907. According to Mun, the vital force or energy of different cultures and civilizations rotates like the sun, and this energy had originally emanated in the Orient before moving westwards to create what is now Western civilization. Therefore, as Chosŏn's rites and music were well developed and had at some point been more advanced than those of China, and its people strictly abided by the five moral imperatives (*oryun*), Korea would soon have the chance to establish its own civilized world. See also the Editorial, 'The Spirit of Korea', of the *Taehan maeil sinbo*, 1907. 9. 27-29.

3) “Korean Embassy Trips Around the World and an Understanding of Global Civilization During the Enlightenment Period (1894-1910): *Haecheon chubeom* [*Haech’ŏn ch’ubŏm*], *Sagu sokcho* [*Sagu sokch’o*] and *Seosarok* [*Sösarok*].”

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This study surveys Korean experiences of and attitudes towards Western civilization through a critical analysis of mainly three travel records by Chosŏn diplomatic delegates who were dispatched to Western Europe from 1896 to 1902.

Amid the expansion of Western imperialist powers, Chosŏn maintained a strong isolationist policy which resulted in antagonistic confrontations with the West in the 1860s and 1870s (e.g, conflict with French ships in 1866 and American ships in 1871). When Chosŏn found herself in a vulnerable position after being forced to open her ports through an inequitable treaty with Japan in 1876, the government dispatched congratulatory embassies to Russia and Great Britain, with the aim to protect her national rights through reciprocal check among imperialist nations. Their strategy was essentially to ‘control a barbarian with the help of another barbarian’ by utilizing Western military power to stop an imminent invasion by Japan or Russia. Concerned about Russia’s southward advance, Great Britain and the United States supported Japanese advancement and control of the East Asian region, and so the Chosŏn embassy’s mission to persuade them to do otherwise was a considerable task.

Travel accounts of these early ‘round-the-world’ journeys primarily served as documented records of important diplomatic missions. As such, the narrative content of most of these works was limited to dispassionate descriptions of facts, analytical observations, and reflective deliberations. They convey mixed feelings of shock, admiration, and a desire to catch up as the Korean delegates visited and experienced firsthand the sites of imperialist centers that were building a global system through colonial expansion based upon scientific and technological revolutions. Since the records were written from the standpoint of officials of a diplomatic embassy, they tend to resonate with efforts to restrain one’s personal feelings and maintain an objective description whenever possible. Also, as the embassy’s main mission was to stop a Japanese invasion through secret treaties with Western powers, certain details were omitted or obscured for security measures. Nevertheless, some differences in attitude and perception can be detected through the different narrative styles, focus of deliberation, and varying approaches in understanding and perceiving the West.

Min Yŏnghwan’s (閔泳煥, 1861-1905) *Haech’ŏn ch’ubŏm* (海天秋帆, ‘Journey to the Wider World’, 1896) is widely known as the first Korean ‘round-the-world’ travel account. Min and his group were sent to Russia to attend the coronation of Tsar Nikolai in 1896. The embassy left Seoul on April 1, traveled via Yokohama, Japan, sailed the Pacific Ocean, took a train across North America from Vancouver to New York, sailed the Atlantic Ocean, went to Germany via Great Britain, arrived in Petersburg for the ceremony, and then returned to Seoul via Siberia on October 21 of the same year. *Haech’ŏn chu’bŏm* is a travelogue which documented everyday experiences during this round-the-world journey in the form of a diary. Throughout this work, the author unreservedly expresses his admiration and praise of Western urban and scientific

civilization. In some ways, it could be said that this work embodies a tone of ‘Occidentalism’ in that the author’s preconceived notions about the West prior to his journey resonates in his narrative strategy, which presents Western civilization as a model that Chosŏn Korea must strive to emulate. It becomes apparent that *Haech’ŏn ch’ubŏm* falls under the category of works where the author’s experiences of the West is internalized and naturalized to present perceptions from a ‘Westernized’ perspective. Hence, Min does not criticise the West’s military exploitation, because while the enterprise is a force of imperialistic power it is understood as being based upon Western principles of modernity supported by ‘rationalism’. It also seems that he was inclined to believe that Korea’s destiny could be settled with the help of the Western imperial powers, and her independence would be secured only if Chosŏn were to catch up with them. Hence, *Haech’ŏn ch’ubŏm* abounds with uncompromised and undue praise for Western civilization.²⁵

While *Haech’ŏn chu’bŏm* reflects by and large a blind admiration of the West, *Sagu sokch’o* (使歐續草, 1897) by the same author published in the following year conveys more diverse perspectives. This travel journal recounts Min Yŏnghwan’s second round-the-world journey, when he and his group were dispatched to Great Britain to attend Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee celebrations in 1897. The travel route this time was westward, opposite in direction from the route Min took in the previous year. On March 24, the embassy departed from the port of Inch’ŏn, passed through Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Singapore, sailed the Indian Ocean then through the Suez Canal, arrived in Odessa, went to Petersburg by train, and finally reached Great Britain. *Sagu sokch’o*’s descriptions are more dynamic than those in *Haech’ŏn ch’ubŏm* because it focuses on human events and situations rather than objects or fixed settings. Min conveys more interest in the cultural climate, natural environment, lifestyle and political situation of various tribes and countries beyond the Western regions in this work than in his first

²⁵ Some examples that demonstrate his praise and positive attitude toward to the West, even Japan emulating the West, are as follows (emphasis added to highlight the key statements):

[Japan]: “When staying in Yokohama the day before yesterday, the mountains and the streams were beautiful and exquisite, the piers solid, the pavilions and houses tall and large, the roads in good condition, and the electricity lights and gaslights brightened the field of vision in no time. Meanwhile, in Tokyo, *all establishments and systems were faultless, extremely meticulous, and very modern. This resulted from the diligence and enlightenment of the Japanese people studying Western methods for their own benefit.*” (1896. 4. 17)

[Canada]: “The vast fields we passed over the past few days were four to five thousand *li* [1 *li* equals 0.4 kilometers] in width and length, and all belong to Great Britain. *The British are industriously cultivating the rough and barren land, which will profit the country and people.* The rate of progress is swift beyond prediction. On the way, our train stopped in Winnipeg. It is a big town with magnificent pavilions, houses, and surroundings, and it is apparently under the jurisdiction and rule of British officials.” (1896. 5. 3)

[London]: “The population of this city is five million. The streets, shops, houses, automobiles, and horses are similar to those found in New York, but even grander and more magnificent. The land area is not large but there are so many people, so they have excavated multi-storeyed subways (underground passages) under the streets. There are also residences, stores, and railways, with automobiles and horses coming and going, and *the degree of prosperity of this city is the highest among all in the world.* Moreover, the passers-by on the street are gentle and composed, and there is no one disorderly or raucous.” (1896. 5. 16)

[Germany]: “*Since the war with France, the country has continued to strengthen and prosper, and no other country can easily be compared with them.* The schools are attentive to detail and exquisite, the army is strong and unsurpassed, and even their art of medicine and music are beyond compare. Scholars from different countries who may already have completed their studies in their own country must still come and receive further training here before they could go forth into the world properly. All the facilities here do not fall behind those of London in terms of quality, though they are a bit simple and somewhat old-fashioned.” (1896. 5. 17)

travel journal. As such, *Sagu sokch'o* falls under the category of works that are characterized by reflective perceptions of the West, and considers both positive and negative aspects of political and social institutions of Western cultures in relative and comparative terms.

The fact that the trip was Min's second round-the-world journey could have accounted for more diverse subjects and composed tone in *Sagu sokch'o*. However, while the narrative presents itself as relatively more balanced compared to his first travelogue, there still exists an established dichotomy between 'civilization' and 'barbarism', and at times, perhaps in spite of the author, the narrative resembles that of an imperialist. For example, when describing the disposition and customs of the British, the author seems to emphasize what he believes to be their 'inherent superiority' as a people,²⁶ which is in stark contrast to how he describes non-Western people he encounters en route to Britain (usually natives of colonized lands).²⁷ Nevertheless, on the whole, the work seems to balance positive and negative aspects of both Western and non-Western cultures alike, and base its accounts on direct observations and facts, making note of peculiarities and variations.²⁸

In comparison to Min's works, Yi Chongŭng's (李鍾應, 1853-1920) *Sōsarok* (西槎錄, 'Records of Travels to the West by Ship' 1902) represents a very different approach in perceiving the West. It falls under the category of works that describes and appraises Western culture with reference to traditional East Asian concepts and values as a standard paradigm. Upon the death of Queen Victoria in 1901 and the announcement of Edward VII's coronation set for June 26, 1902, the Chosŏn government appointed a special ambassador and dispatched an embassy to Great Britain. Yi Chongŭng joined this embassy as an attendant, and *Sōsarok* is his record of this trip. The group departed Korea on April 5, 1902, and took the same eastward route

²⁶ "Based on my observations, British people are big in build, white and bright in complexion, and their hair and eyes are dark, golden, or reddish. They are accurate and meticulous in mind, laborious and diligent with work, and their spirit and disposition are among the strongest in Europe. It is their custom for brothers and sisters to share equally the inheritance from their parents. Also, men cannot keep concubines – anyone who does so can be found guilty of crime and imprisoned for seven years. When a host meets his guests, both parties express their respect for another by removing their hats and offering their right hands to shake. In an audience with the monarch, there is no custom of kowtowing. The noble and the humble sit together and there is no discrimination between them." (1897. 7. 1)

²⁷ His description of Aden (present-day Yemen) and the native people is one example: "At noon, we arrived at the port of Aden. Because there is no pier, the ship dropped anchor in the sea. A wooden plank was laid out so that we could disembark onto the shore. [...] On the streets, peddlers raucously try to sell ostrich feathers, perhaps because they are popularly used to adorn millineries (hats) by Western women. The island is several hundred *li* in circumference, and is administered by a British governor-general and a British commander-in-chief. The land was originally one of the Arabian islands. The mountains and land are barren with no vegetation. There was a period when it did not rain for thirteen years, and sometimes it only rains once a year. Recently, the British have been making use of a distillation process to change seawater into fresh water. They also constructed ponds in the mountains and deposit rain water in them whenever it rains, and makes sure the water does not seep out. [...] The number of native people is about four thousand, among whom half are originally from tribes of neighboring islands. The natives are ugly and fierce in temperament, so they loot on a daily basis and feed fish to the cows and sheep. They live in houses made of stone with wooden beds put together by plant weaves, which are all shabby and squalid. Some people pitch tents, which resemble the practices of the Mongolians. The number of British people is two thousand, all of whom are soldiers. The island's fauna and natural products are limited in number and include camels, oxen, horses, ostrich feathers, ostrich eggs, and coffee." (1897. 5. 4)

²⁸ For instance, while the author maintains in positive terms that Germany became a powerful military state with the implementation of a universal conscription system, he also points some negative features including their penchant for extravagance and the number of people affected by less favourable conditions: "Since this country appointed Otto von Bismarck as the prime minister, they esteem military training and preparation so that even the sons and brothers of the nobility between the ages of 15 to 25 are subject to and carry out military service for a full three years. In other words, they have a system of universal conscription so that they are able to dispatch three million or even as many as five million troops in a state of emergency. However, they have a penchant for extravagance, and among the people many are poor." (1897. 6. 3)

that Min Yŏnghwan's group had taken in 1897 – they travelled from Inch'ŏn to Nagasaki and Yokohama (Japan), crossed the Pacific Ocean by ship, passed through Canada from Vancouver to Quebec by train, then sailed the Atlantic Ocean to arrive in Great Britain.

Yi's work is marked by lyrical expression and aesthetic recognition of 'exotic' landscapes and cultures. In his descriptions of different places, the author takes into account the overall or holistic landscape, including the natural features as well as man-made devices and practices – an approach seemingly inspired by traditional East Asian epistemology. For example, when describing his train journey between the port of Vancouver and Mount Baker in Canada, Yi describes in great detail the natural landscape and features of the region in highly lyrical and expressive terms.²⁹ The description combines the poetic style of traditional folk songs (as we see in his *Yusan'ga*) and unguarded expression of uncontrollable emotions and reactions. Many travelogues from this time period usually included detailed comments on the technological apparatus found in the West, including the train and railway technology which was an object of constant praise by Korean travellers. The train passing through rugged mountains and valleys, unhindered by natural topography, was a characteristic symbol of Western material culture and scientific technology, which levelled height in spatial terms and minimized the barriers of distance and time. However, the main focus of Yi Chongŭng's entry is not the train or railway, but rather the overall landscape and natural scenery of which the railroad is merely one feature. This is common throughout the *Sŏsarok*.³⁰

Furthermore, Yi Chongŭng based many of his observations and deliberations of Western cultural features in reference to classical East Asian traditions. He associates the prosperity of the British capital city to that of Linzi (臨淄), the ancient capital of Qi [齊, 1046-221 B.C.E.] of the Warring States Period, which was known to have been one of the most prosperous cities in East Asia during its time;³¹ upon seeing certain animals in the zoo and park, he conjures up references from classical Chinese traditions and myths,³² and he expresses his wonderment at

²⁹ "At two in the afternoon, we arrived at Mount Baker on the way to Quebec by train. As the mountain ridge is very high, the railway between the port of Vancouver to Mount Baker extends itself in bends and curves according to the topography of the terrain. It goes round the mountain, embraces the valley, crosses a bridge along a river, goes over an elevated bridge and an embankment then through a tunnel, over thousands of miles. Such harmonious union of human skill and material power! It compels us to say that as the mountains and rivers were created by Heaven, the railways have been built by mankind. Seen from the base of Mount Baker, numerous peaks pierced the sky in all directions, and white clouds enveloped around mountainsides. Radiant colors emanated from beautiful, rare trees and vegetation, and filled our eyes. Up above are green slopes and emerald streams, and down below are cold streams and waters as white as snow. What an extraordinary landscape! Waterfalls cascade out from precipices, and water from different vales here and there gather and spill over cliffs and rocks in immeasurable abundance. Mesmerized by the rapturous natural scenery, I found myself shouting out in applause and wonderment throughout the day. The beauty is truly beyond description." (1902. 5. 15)

³⁰ Another example is when he describes the Niagara Falls in his entry of 1902. 5. 21.

³¹ [During an excursion in London] "At three o'clock in the afternoon, the four of us together with the Korean consul-general to Great Britain, Min Yŏndong, took a tour (of London) by carriage. Tall buildings of several storeys tower over the main roads, so it feels as though one has left a lesser world behind. They look like lengths and lengths of stone cliffs laid out evenly next to one another in neat rows. The size of the rooms in guesthouses is as large as those of a royal palace, and the roads are paved with stone. People's shoulders touch one another's as do the wheels of carriages [symbolizing bustling activity and liveliness of the city]. *Even Linzi (臨淄) of ancient times would not have measured up to this place.*" (1902. 6. 9) [Emphasis added.]

³² [At the London Zoo] "There are a wide variety of animals including valiant tigers and leopards, ferocious lions and bears, truculent rhinoceros and elephants, robust camels, agile monkeys, elephant seals, dolphins, deer, roe, foxes, wolves, cats, rats, frogs, and toads. There was an animal with a single horn, the tip of which was a pulp of flesh. Its tail resembles that of an ox, and its hoofs are similar to horse's hoofs. It was as big as an ox. This animal is called a giraffe (麒麟), and the one we saw is

the sight of the British royal palace with a phrase from the *Book of Mencius*.³³ However, it is worth mentioning that while his perception of the West was registered through classical East Asian references, Yi's view was not Sino-centric to the extent where he believed that Western culture and civilization originally derived from those of China. Rather, he uses his knowledge of classical Chinese sources to analyze cultural phenomena from a comparative perspective. When new cultural encounters take place, it is almost natural for an individual to take in, understand, and evaluate the foreign culture based on certain standards with which s/he is already familiar. In the case of Yi, it was his knowledge of classical Chinese texts that served as a relative paradigm. As such, his accounts reflect a perception of the West that is more referential than critical.

apparently from India. *Does this signify the existence of sages (聖人) in the West?!*" (1902. 6. 9) [Emphasis added.] Traditionally in East Asia, the giraffe or *qilin* (麒麟) in Chinese, was a mythical creature that appeared in conjunction with the arrival of sages, which is why Yi makes such a reference here.

[In a park in London] "In an artificial pond carved out from a crag, there were four very big water creatures. We were told that they are kept and reared separately from the others water creatures because of their fierce and aggressive nature. Upon closer inspection, they had four feet and their eyes were blue and red. When I inquired about this, our guide told us that they were called crocodiles. *The crocodiles reminded me of Han Yu's* (韓愈) "Address to the Crocodiles of Chaozhou" (祭鱷魚文). It became clear that these creatures are difficult to tame." (1902. 6. 9) [Emphasis added.]

Han Yu's (韓愈, 768-824) work is a well known allegorical account that involves an incident with crocodiles during his trip to Chaozhou as an envoy.

³³ [At the royal palace] "The British royal palace is colossal in size and magnificent. In ancient times, upon seeing the royal residence of the Emperor of Qi [齊, 1046-221 B.C.E.], Mencius (孟子) remarked in wonderment, 'How colossal the Emperor's residence is!' Today's Great Britain must be the kingdom of Qi of times past. [...] At four o'clock in the afternoon, the four of us dressed in our official clothing and entered the royal palace. It was a two-storeyed building with eighty-two doors / gates, each with satin drapes. Following the instructions of an officer with a pointy cap and a silver staff, we entered the room of the British monarch's throne. The four walls were decorated with embroidered silk, and the ridges and eaves were decorated with golden threads. The tables in the room were magnificent, the lighting radiant and resplendent, and the sounds of music roared out like thunder. Truly, 'How colossal the Emperor's residence is!'" (1902. 6. 13) [Emphasis added.]

Suggestions for Further Discussion

1) My research on the changing Korean perceptions of the West has focused on early mediated encounters in the 18th century and first instances of direct contact with Western civilizations in the late 19th early 20th century. The authors of travel literature from this timeframe were primarily literati or intellectual bureaucrats, and thus their accounts represent images of the West as perceived by a particular social group. Therefore, if the scope of research were to be expanded to cover the early period of the Japanese annexation of Korea (up to the 1920s and 1930s), then materials by the increasing number of Korean students studying abroad (in Japan and the US) during this time could also be examined, which would provide us with a substantially broader spectrum of views as well as shifts in perceptions.

2) From the beginning of the 20th century, especially 1920 onwards, there began to appear domestic travel accounts by Koreans in great abundance. It would be interesting to compare these accounts with those dealing with foreign travel (to the West), in particular the proclivities, value systems, and worldviews that are embedded within these works. If traveling is a process of looking at oneself and perceiving one's own sense of identity through the mirror of 'another', then it is possible to discern different perceptions according to different subjects or 'others'.

3) Up until now, my colleagues and I have examined different travel accounts from 1700 to 1910, each with our own range of texts and findings with regards to how Korea perceived and represented the West, and how the West perceived and represented Korea. Now it is essential to gather and synthesize our research to arrive at critical conclusions regarding mutual perceptions and transitional images of Korea and the West in travel literature, and how they developed according to changes in time and space in collective terms. What we need to consider for this is the critical methodology in negotiating 'difference' and establishing conceptions of the 'other'.