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TRANSITIONAL IMAGES OF CHOSŎN KOREA –
ACCOUNTS BY CONTIGUITY VERSUS
FIRSTHAND ACCOUNTS

Grace Koh

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Transitional Images of Chosŏn Korea – Accounts by Contiguity versus Firsthand Accounts

Grace Koh

School of Oriental and African Studies, London

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For our collaborative project, my research has focused on examining British travel literature and records from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to investigate Western (British) perceptions of Chosŏn Korea during this time. Unlike the case of her neighbors – China and Japan – Korea was rarely a subject for British accounts prior to the late eighteenth / early nineteenth century, whereafter a gradually increasing number of written materials on Korea began to be produced.

The early nineteenth century was marked by the Napoleonic Wars and a measured but growing ecological and demographic crisis in northwestern Europe. Foreign trade was considered one of the ways to resolve these problems, and a means to procure economic stability and power. Based on a postulate that trade was a mutually beneficial enterprise for all parties concerned,¹ efforts to initiate treaties of exchange and commerce with countries abroad dominated eighteenth and nineteenth century British politics and society. In the process, new territories were explored, and navigators mapped unfamiliar regions, and recorded as much detail pertaining to the land, people, and their customs for the benefit of both the state and private audience who relished these works for their presentation of ‘exotic’ worlds. By the late nineteenth century, the effects of the industrial revolution in Britain were significant in socio-economic terms, and the British Empire expanded on a global scale. Increasingly more embassies were established abroad, and more diplomat officials as well as missionaries, merchants, and travelers began to sojourn in countries around the world. As a result, travel accounts increasingly came in great demand, and they served as archive, entertaining narrative, and inspiring literature that promoted pride in the extensive and ever expanding economic empire of Great Britain.²

In the nineteenth century, countries such as China and Japan were regarded favorably for their technological and economic achievements as noted by European merchants and missionaries

¹ This view was articulated by Josiah Child, the director of the East India Company in the seventeenth century, when he wrote “Foreign Trade produceth Riches, Riches Power, Power preserves our Trade and Religion; they mutually work one upon and for the preservation of each other” (*A Treatise Wherein is Demonstrated* [London, 1681], 29). See Robert Markley, *The Far East and the English Imagination, 1600-1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 4-5.

² For studies on the literary tropes and features of travel literature, see Percy Adams’s *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1983).

who had visited the region prior to the nineteenth century.³ During their voyages to East Asia around this time, British navigators also made attempts to explore Korea. Chosŏn Korea during the first half of the nineteenth century was greatly affected by factional strife and corrupt officials, which led to great internal discord and strong isolationist policies that prohibited contact with foreign powers, namely the West.⁴ However, between the expansion of imperial powers wishing to establish relations with Korea and the Chosŏn government's persecution of Catholics which included Western missionaries, Korea experienced hostile confrontations with Western ships that approached the Korean shores (e.g., French ships in 1866 and American ships in 1871), and was eventually forced to open her ports through a treaty with Japan in 1876. Thereafter Korea found herself in an increasingly vulnerable position of losing her national sovereignty with increasing competition for power in the region among neighboring countries (China, Japan, and Russia).

The varying nature of British accounts on Korea reflects the changing political and historical context. Earlier British records about Korea (eighteenth and early nineteenth century) constitute for the most part chapters within larger bodies of work on East Asia and the surrounding regions – for example, John Green's *A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels* (1745-47), and the October 1797 entries in William Robert Broughton's *A Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean...* printed in 1804. Not long after, there appeared lengthier accounts, but they were somewhat limited in scope and detail such as Basil Hall's *Account of a Voyage of Discovery to the West Coast of Corea...* (1818) and John McLeod's *Narrative of a Voyage in His Majesty's Late Ship Alceste...* (1817). By the late nineteenth century, an increasing number of accounts dealing with Korea exclusively and in depth began to be published, with descriptions of the geography, history, state of affairs, people, manners and customs, and language. Some accounts also convey the socio-political and cultural vicissitudes in light of historical developments in the region during that time period. While some are shorter, more localized narratives,⁵ others are colorful volumes extensive in scope, information, and insight, including A. H. Savage-Landor's *Corea or Cho-sen* and Isabella Bird Bishop's *Korea and Her Neighbours*.

In addition to firsthand travel accounts, an increasing number of studies on Korea's history, language, literature, and other subjects began to be published in the nineteenth century, many of them in periodic journals managed by Anglo-American societies based in East Asia. Moreover,

³ Markley, 12-13. For studies related to the socio-economic situation of Europe in relation to East Asia during this time, see Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). See also Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986) and Jack Goldstone, *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991).

⁴ See Shin, Ik-Cheol's "The Western Learning Shown in the Records of Envoys Traveling to Beijing in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century Focusing on Visits to the Russian Diplomatic Office", *The Review of Korean Studies* Volume 11 Number 1 (March 2008): 11-27.

⁵ For example, Charles W. Campbell's *Report by Mr. C. W. Campbell of a Journey in North Corea* (1891) and A. E. J. Cavendish's *Korea and the Sacred White Mountain* (1894). For a study on Campbell and Cavendish's accounts, see Jo, Yoong-Hee's "Joseon [Chosŏn] and Her People Shown in the Travel Report of Campbell in the Late 19th Century" (*The Review of Korean Studies* Volume 11 Number 1 [March 2008]: 47-66), and "The Adventures of Two British Nationals in Chosŏn during the Late 19th Century: With a special focus on Cavendish's account of his voyage to Mt. Paektu" (*Papers of the British Association for Korean Studies* 12 [2007]).

some of these journals also contain the minutes of societal meetings which record members' discussions about Korea's state and affairs in relation to the papers presented at the meetings and published through the journals.

As such, eighteenth and nineteenth century British accounts of Chosŏn Korea largely fall into two broad categories: accounts by contiguity and firsthand accounts. The first category includes hearsay, reported, and secondhand material procured while residing in neighboring countries (Japan and China), while the second obviously refers to accounts based on personal experience in Korea. The ramifications of contiguity in this case are diverse as they refer not only to physical geographical contiguity but also to the fact that the thought that seemingly focuses singly on an aspect of Korean culture still comes with comparative frames from which it becomes difficult to extricate and determine the specificity of thought. However, the persuasive nature of comparative frames, which are closely linked with one's worldview, is that which affects both categories of works. Hence, one becomes obliged to consider the power of discursive modalities, and the extent to which they affect contemporary and subsequent narratives and perceptions of foreign culture, even those that are seemingly objective, firsthand observations. This in turn raises questions related to the critical agency at work when presenting perceived notions of 'the other' in light of personal and/or collective interest and intention, different value systems and socio-historical contexts. These are the questions I wish to raise for further discussion.

First, I will provide brief summaries of my research to date for context.

1) "British perceptions of Joseon [Chosŏn] Korea as reflected in travel literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century."

The Review of Korean Studies Volume 9 Number 4 (December 2006): 103-133.

This study proposes to bring to light British perceptions of Chosŏn Korea in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century by examining travel literature by four British authors: John Green (d. 1757), William Robert Broughton (1762-1821), Basil Hall (1788-1844), and John M'Leod (1777?-1820). It pursues an analytical approach to the primary sources, focusing on the implications of their content and rhetorical operations in connection with British attitudes toward Chosŏn Korea prior to the emergence and rise of the 'Great British Empire.'

Some of the earliest extant Western works on Korea include records by the Dutch navigator Hendrik Hamel (fl. 1653-1669) and French Jesuit priests based in China, including Jean-Baptiste Regis (1663?-1738) and Jean-Baptiste du Halde (1674-1743).⁶ The earliest British accounts on Korea, however, were not produced until the eighteenth and early nineteenth

⁶ For studies on Hamel, see Vibeke Roeper and Boudewijn Walraven eds. *Hamel's World: A Dutch-Korean Encounter in the Seventeenth Century* (Amsterdam: SUN, 2003b), Boudewijn Walraven, "Reluctant Travellers: Shifting Interpretation of the Observations of Hendrik Hamel and his Companions", *Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies* Vol.7, No.1 (2007): 19-32, and Gari Ledyard, *The Dutch Come to Korea: An account of the life of the first Westerners in Korea (1653-1666)* (Seoul: Royal Asiatic Society, Korea Branch. 1971). For a recent study on du Halde's work, see Jeong, Eun-Jin, "Korea as Represented in Eighteenth-Century French Travel Literature", *The Review of Korean Studies* Volume 9 Number 4 (December 2006): 83-101.

centuries. Even before her first expedition to China and Korea in the late eighteenth century, Britain's interest in the region was documented in the form of an extensive compilation of surviving travel records, *A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels* (1745-47). Compiled by John Green (d. 1757) and published fifty years prior to the first British mission to China, the collection includes diverse accounts related to numerous countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America. The sections on Korea are found in Chapters One and Two of Book Two in Volume Four and are English translations of earlier writings by Regis and Hamel. Through the preface and relevant introductions, Green as compiler and editor includes his own notes which convey by and large three matters related to Korea: he corroborates that the only surviving European travel accounts on Korea to date were those written by Hamel and the French missionaries; for the compiler as well as editors and authors of the original accounts, China served as a leading model to understand and weigh up other countries in the region including Korea;⁷ and while Korea was recognized as a tributary state to China, her historical and cultural identity was regarded as being separate and distinct.⁸ The first point effectively confirms that even by the mid-eighteenth century British navigators had not had direct contact with Korea.⁹ The last two points indicate a perception of Korea that is at once affected and obscured by discerned images of her more powerful neighbor, but which also credits her as a unique cultural entity that has yet to be discovered first hand.

Around fifty years after the publication of Green's compilation, the first British expedition to China took place, known as the Macartney Mission of 1792-1794. This mission, however, failed in its aim to open the Chinese Empire and form trade relations.¹⁰ Although the Britons had no explicit intention of making contact with Chosŏn during this visit, subsequent expeditions to China after Macartney's unsuccessful venture raised possibilities for encounter, and heightened British interest in surveying the Korean coast. This interest gave way to the first British

⁷ For instance, his statement, "From this Country so much resembling *China*, as well in its Improvements as the Manners and Customs of the Natives, we pass into its Reverse in those Respects, Great Tartary" (John Green, *A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels Vol.4* [London: printed for Thomas Astley, 1745-47], v), implies China as a pinnacle paradigm of its region on which to compare and evaluate other surrounding nations. If a culture shares similarities with China, then it is 'improved' or developed in its manners and customs (Korea); and if it does not, it is 'reversed' or backwards (Siberian Tartary). In addition, in his Introduction to Regis's account, Green makes clear the different status between Korea and Tartary in relation to China; with Korea as "only a Kingdom tributary to *China*" while Tartary being "immediately subject to the *Chinese* Empire." (Green, 319)

⁸ In reference to Regis's statement, "The *Koreans* were subject to the *Chinese* from the Time of *Yau*," Green comments, "This History, taken from the *Chinese* Annals, is not a connected Relation of the Affairs and Kings of *Korea*, but only so far as they concern the Empire of *China*: Yet, being the only Piece of the Kind extant, we judged it too important to be omitted." (Green, 322, note e) By drawing attention to this fact, Green's note not only suggests that the information provided by Regis may be misguided, but it also honors and differentiates Korean identity as one that is separate from the Chinese. Moreover, while maintaining that the people's customs and governing system of Korea are congruent to those of China, Green also acknowledges cultural distinctions, namely language, between the two countries, highlighting the Korean language as being emphatically different from Chinese: "For though both Nations use the same Characters, their Languages are different." (Green, 330)

⁹ Adding to this, Green also speculates that Europeans had yet to experience traveling around Korea first hand: "The Jesuit was not in *Korea* himself, he only traversed the Northern Borders, extending from Sea to Sea; the other three Sides being surrounded by Water. By this Survey the Notion, which long obtained, that *Korea* was an Island, is found to be an Error. The Author of the Memoirs had his Informations for the Inland Parts from a *Tartar* Lord, who was sent as Envoy from *Kang-hi*, to the King of *Korea*, but was too much confined to make many considerable Remarks." (Green, 319)

¹⁰ See J. L. Cranmer-Byng's *An Embassy to China* (London: Longman, 1962) and "Lord Macartney's embassy to Peking in 1793 from official Chinese documents" (*Journal of Oriental Studies* 4 [1957/1958]: 117-87), and Alain Peyrefitte's *The Collision of Two Civilisations* (London: Harvill, 1993, 1989c).

navigators to arrive on Korean territory in 1797 followed by a second tour in 1816.¹¹ The first British ship to reach Korea in 1797 was the HMS *Providence* under the command of Captain William Robert Broughton (1762-1821) who documented his journey and experiences, which was published in 1804 as *A Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean*.¹² Broughton and his fellow naval officers were entrusted with the task of, among other things, exploring and charting the coasts of Northeast Asia and the North Pacific. An initial attempt at surveying the Korean coast after their departure from China was unsuccessful, which is documented in a short, uneventful account in Chapter Two of Book Two. But after their journey around the Japanese islands they began their second attempt to navigate the east coast of the Korean peninsula from 6 October. On the 14th they docked near the harbour of “Tchosan” or “Chosan,”¹³ to remain there for one week before heading south toward Macau. Broughton and his crew were unable to spend much time around the Korean coast and had little contact with the local people owing to the Koreans’ expressed desire and anxiousness for their speedy departure. They remained long enough to obtain basic provisions and to venture briefly around the surrounding villages.¹⁴ While one of the main tasks of Broughton’s crew was to chart the Korean coastline, the captain’s observations of resources and articles spotted on the land,¹⁵ and the Korean people’s reactions to his men’s attire and presence¹⁶ clearly indicate the underlying mission and objective of their journey: to investigate possibilities of British trade with Chosŏn.¹⁷ While Broughton was among the first British crew to have landed on Korean shores and had some (albeit limited) contact with Koreans, his travel account did not prove to be as popular or influential as the works by subsequent explorers.¹⁸

¹¹ Based on G. N. Curzon’s *Problems of the Far East* (London, 1896), A. H. Hamilton also suggests that the earliest British interest in Korea was expressed in the seventeenth century, accompanying the first East India Company factory in Japan. See Hamilton’s “Origins of British Interest in Korea in the Nineteenth Century” (*Korea Journal* Vol. 14, No. 5 [May 1974]: 5-33), 26.

¹² For further information on Broughton and his four-year voyage aboard the HMS *Providence*, see James E. Hoare’s “Captain Broughton, HMS *Providence* (and her Tender) and His Voyage to the Pacific 1794-1798” (*Asian Affairs* Vol. 31, No.3 [2000]: 303-312).

¹³ Hoare suggests that Broughton “confused the name of the country, Choson, with that of the harbour” (Hoare, 309). Both he and James H. Grayson render the location to be the Pusan area. See Hoare, 309 and Grayson’s “Basil Hall’s *Account of a Voyage of Discovery*” (Unpublished paper presented at the International Symposium on Anglo-Korea Cultural Relations held in Sŏch’ŏn County on 5 September 2005), 2.

¹⁴ Broughton and his crew’s experiences and brief sojourn in October 1797 on the southern shores of Chosŏn are recorded in Chapter Seven of Book Two.

¹⁵ “We saw horses, hogs, poultry, and black cattle, of which articles much as we were in want we could not procure. Money, at least of European coins, they had no idea of; but they perfectly understood the value of gold and silver, their knives, &c. being ornamented in the workmanship with those metals” (William Broughton, *A Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean* [London: printed for T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1804], 343).

¹⁶ “They were well acquainted with guns and firearms, but we saw no appearance of offensive weapons amongst them, nor did they seem any way apprehensive of the small force we possessed. All their attention was paid to expedite our departure; and yet many articles of European manufacture excited their curiosity, particularly our woollen clothing” (Broughton, 343).

¹⁷ This is made all the more explicit in Broughton’s final introspective remarks based on his experience on the Korean shores before continuing with his journey: “As a commercial nation, of course they [Chosŏn] were well acquainted and conversant in trade; but with us they did not seem desirous of making any exchanges whatever, which may be owing, probably, to the articles we possessed being of no value in their estimation. Indeed we had nothing to excite their attention, or satisfy their curiosity, except our wearing apparel.” (Broughton, 343-4) It should be noted that there is also a Korean account of Broughton’s visit in the *Chosŏn wangjo sillok* [Annals of the Chosŏn Dynasty]. The entry is found under the twentieth year of King Chŏngjo (47:41).

¹⁸ Grayson conjectures, “This lack of influence may be attributed to the time when the book was published, in the middle of the Napoleonic war years when British attention would have been focussed on military and political events in continental Europe and not on commercial and hydrological interests in distant parts of the world” (Grayson, “Basil Hall’s *Account of a Voyage of*

With the Napoleonic Wars and the War of 1812, the pressure for overseas trade expansion became even greater for Britain in the early nineteenth century, competing with her European neighbors as well as the United States. Although Britain's interest in commercial relations with East Asia was due in part to a desire to block the expansion of Tsarist Russia, it was also the desire to open trade with China and Japan, who were some of the most coveted trade partners.¹⁹ Basil Hall (1788-1844) sailed to East Asia as a lieutenant of the Royal Navy on board the *Lyra*, as part of the Amherst Mission to China, after which he was promoted to the rank of captain. His work, *Account of a Voyage*, recounts the journey of two British ships, the *Alceste* and the *Lyra*, along the west coast of Chosŏn Korea in 1816. Hall's work was well received by his compatriots upon its publication in 1818 in London, and his work was translated into Dutch, German, and Italian in subsequent years.²⁰ Along with Basil Hall's account, John M'Leod (1777?-1820), a surgeon on board the *Alceste*, also wrote a travelogue of the journey. His *Narrative of a Voyage* complements Basil Hall's, and a third edition of the book was published in 1819 entitled, *Voyage of His Majesty's Ship Alceste to China, Corea, and the Islands of Lewchew, with an Account of her Shipwreck*.²¹

During the first two British expeditions to the Korean coasts, consistent motifs which Broughton, Hall and M'Leod encountered during their journeys were the Korean people's averse reaction to the unexpected sight of foreigners on their land, and their constant plea for their visitors' departure. In spite of this, the British navigators succeeded at spending some time on Korean shores and achieving some interaction with the locals, albeit limited in time and extent, which enabled them to record and put out the first and rather interesting firsthand British observations about Korea and Koreans for the benefit of future explorers and general readers. In the case of Hall's work, his perception of the Korean people gradually changes – from impertinent natives,²² to nimble 'savages',²³ to embodying 'propriety of manners' (as exemplified by the Korean 'Chief' he encounters during one of his brief stopovers on Korean

Discovery", paper presented at the International Symposium on Anglo-Korea Cultural Relations held in Sŏch'ŏn County on 5 September 2005, 2-3). While this may have been the case, it should also be considered that the lack of details and information pertaining to the manners, customs as well as the political situation and intentions of the Korean people at the time could not have served to form British opinion and views regarding Chosŏn Korea in any significant way. Thus, the sparsity of information would not have yielded the work to have any major impact on Anglo-Korean relations. However, one could assume that the event of Broughton's journey and record did serve as an incentive for future navigators to attempt a journey to Korea and, the local people permitting, to further explore the country and document their experiences in as much detail as possible. This is alluded to in Basil Hall's acknowledgement of Broughton's work in the Preface to *Account of a Voyage of Discovery*.

¹⁹ For further details on circumstances and events surrounding the voyage of the *Alceste* and *Lyra*, see Shannon McCune's "Introduction" to the Tuttle edition of *The Voyage of the Alceste* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1963, xi-xxviii).

²⁰ Moreover, it is believed that an unauthorized edition published in Philadelphia the same year of its publication in Britain was the "first book published in the United States which referred directly to Korea." (Library of Congress, *Korea: An Annotated Bibliography of Publications in Western Languages*, 1950). Reference found in Shannon McCune's "Introduction" to the Royal Asiatic Society, Korea Branch's edition of *Account of a Voyage of Discovery* (Seoul: Kyung-In Publishing, 1975, 1-19), 6.

²¹ Details related to Hall and his life can be found in McCune, *Account*, 2-6 and in Grayson. For further biographical information on M'Leod, see McCune, *Voyage* and Grayson, 4-5.

²² "These people have a proud sort of carriage, with an air of composure and indifference about them, and an absence of curiosity which struck us as being very remarkable. Sometimes when we succeeded, by dint of signs and drawings, in expressing the nature of a question, they treated it with derision and insolence." (Basil Hall, *Account of a Voyage of Discovery to the West Coast of Corea, and the Great Loo-Choo Island*.... [London: John Murray, 1818], 6)

²³ "their beards and whiskers which, apparently, had never been cut, and their fans and long tobacco-pipes, and their strange language and manners, gave a grotesque air to the whole group, which it is impossible to describe." (Hall, 11)

shores)²⁴ – and he also comments on their knowledge of letters,²⁵ provides speculations on the Chosŏn government's policies,²⁶ and provides advice for future (British) travelers.²⁷

From Broughton, Hall and M'Leod's narratives, it can be said that British perceptions of Chosŏn Korea at this time were characterized by a people who, while displaying marks of discipline and the capacity to be polite, sociable, and generally of good behavior, were firm in their wish not to interact or deal with foreigners outside of select or known regions; and a government who had strict control over their people who dared not defy orders from above. With regards to the level of propriety and civility on a cultural or national level, the British travel accounts on Chosŏn Korea do not, on the whole, convey the kingdom to be what the British may deem as 'uncivilized' in spite of the Korean people's unwelcome reception of the

²⁴ "The politeness and ease with which he accommodated himself to the habits of people so different from himself, were truly admirable; and when it is considered, that hitherto, in all probability, he was ignorant even of our existence, his propriety of manners should seem to point, not only to high rank in society, but to imply also a degree of civilization in that society, not confirmed by other circumstances. Be this as it may, the incident is curious, as shewing, that however different the state of society may be in different countries, the forms of politeness are much alike in all. This polished character was very well sustained by the old Chief; as he was pleased with our attempts to oblige him, and whatever we seemed to care about, he immediately took an interest in. He was very inquisitive, and was always highly gratified when he discovered the use of any thing which had puzzled him at first. But there was no idle surprise, no extravagant bursts of admiration, and he certainly would be considered a man of good breeding, and keen observation, in any part of the world." (Hall, 34)

²⁵ "The knowledge of writing is supposed to be very generally diffused over the countries using what is called the Chinese character, and, as probably none but the lowest vulgar are ignorant of it, the surprise of these people on discovering our inability to read their papers is very natural. The case, we may imagine, had never occurred to them before, and it was highly interesting to watch the effect which so novel an incident produced. At first they appeared to doubt the fact of our ignorance, and shewed some symptoms of impatience; but this opinion did not last long, and they remained completely puzzled, looking at each other with an odd expression of surprise." (Hall, 18)

²⁶ "It seems very probable that some general instructions were in force along the whole of this coast by which the treatment of strangers is regulated. The promptitude with which we were met at this place, where, perhaps, no ship ever was before, and the pertinacity with which our landing was opposed, seem to imply an extraordinary degree of vigilance and jealousy on the part of the government." (Hall, 38)

While much else of M'Leod's travel accounts overlaps in their details with those of Hall's work, what is particularly noteworthy is his personal reflections which follow the main narrative toward the end of the section on Korea, when he proceeds to speculate on Chosŏn Korea's political situation in relation to China and based on the consistent signs of anguish displayed by the Korean people at the British crew's uninvited presence on their land:

"China has very little communication with *the barbarians of the west*, and that is chiefly confined to a particular spot, the port of Canton; Japan still less, and Corea none at all. A connexion, however, is kept up with China by two or three annual junks from the eastern coast. [...]

"Corea (or Kaoli) is tributary to the emperor of China, and sends him triennial Embassadors expressive of its homage. We saw enough, however, to convince us that the sovereign of this country governs with most absolute sway; and that, occasionally, he makes very free with the heads of his subjects. The allusion to this danger could not have been so constant and uniform, in places so remote from each other, without some strong reason.

"The law against intercourse with foreigners appears to be enforced with the utmost rigour. ... On almost all occasions they positively refused every thing offered to them. His Corean majesty may well be styled "king of ten thousand isles," but his *supposed* continental dominions have been very much circumscribed by our visit to his shores. Except in the late and present embassy, no ships had ever penetrated into the Yellow Sea; the *Lion* had kept the coast of China aboard only, and had neither touched at the Tartar nor Corean side." (John M'Leod, *Narrative of a Voyage in His Majesty's Late Ship Alceste, to the Yellow Sea, Along the Coast of Corea...* [London: John Murray, 1817], 51-2)

M'Leod's reflections, as well as Hall's accounts, convey and bear out the fact that Britain was not yet well-acquainted with Korea in the early nineteenth century, with China acting as a major point of reference for all matters, from government, politics, and culture, to the people, customs and manners.

²⁷ "The shortness of our stay on this coast, and the difficulty we experienced in communicating with the inhabitants, will account for the scanty and disjointed nature of the information obtained. A future voyage would do well to be accompanied by a person who can write the Chinese character, and should have full leisure to overcome, by patient management, the distrust of strangers evinced by the unsociable people." (Hall, 56-7)

British explorers. Rather, in line with Green's notion of civility as implied in his writings which postulate cultures similar to China as 'improved' or developed, it appears that Chosŏn Korea was considered as one of the more 'civilized' nations. As for her resources and capacity for commercial trade, there was much potential but Korea did not appear to be ready in spirit as of yet to consider direct trade relations with unknown strangers beyond familiar territory. Existing knowledge and records were scanty and insufficient, so there was still much effort and more visits to be made to gather further concrete information about the country. In other words, these accounts suggest that Korea was regarded as one of the more 'civilized' nations by British estimation at the time, and even a potential trading partner which would imply British interest in Korea as one primarily inspired by trade prospects.

2) "Beyond Metonymic Contiguities: 'Chosŏn Korea' in British Travel Literature of the Late Nineteenth Century."

As Robert Markley notes, international trade for Britain increasingly began to be perceived as a means to transcend and displace contemporary anxieties about declining proceeds, increasing prices, and environmental degradation, whereby trade was to be promoted as the source of adjudicating the value of nation states.²⁸ In relation to this, travel literature as a discursive practice established standards of cultural value in the context of dealing with foreign cultures or external differences. At the same time, as Lisa Lowe suggests, the trope of travel became a discursive means for a culture to cope with internal as well as external differences and changes.²⁹ And, while purporting to be a discursive mode that portrayed Europe and Britain as cultivated and influential in contrast to other 'uncivilized' worlds, Lowe suggests that British travel literature also inadvertently challenged ideological constructions that were essentially Euro- or Anglo-centric.³⁰ Based on the texts, it can be concluded that this holds true to some extent for earlier British accounts on Korea. In spite of the Korean people's reticence which disallowed the wanting British explorers to become better acquainted with the local customs and people, the British writers' rhetoric does not necessarily fall into one of patronizing condescension or disparagement with notions of British values being a superior model; as a result, Korean values are presented as one of many instructive models for the British readership. As Britain had yet to start making active attempts to open Korea to trade, British travel literature from these earlier times would have performed a practical role of educating and assisting future British voyagers and merchants in the future establishment and promotion of mercantile relations with Korea.

At any event, though these works were valued by readers, Western perceptions of Chosŏn remained limited to Korea as a somewhat 'imaginary' realm given the limited knowledge and

²⁸ Markley, 270.

²⁹ Lisa Lowe, *Critical Terrains* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 31. In Britain, internal trials were related to the economic and social expansion, which increasingly gave rise to religious dissent, parliamentary control, burgeoning industry, and a growing working class. Lowe also states, "the utopian geographic expansion implied by travel literature addressed national anxieties about maintaining hegemony in an age of rapidly changing boundaries and territories. Yet it also regulated the social quarrels besetting the old regimes of the period by transfiguring internal challenges to the social order into fantasies of external otherness."

³⁰ For related studies on travel narratives in the context of 'Orientalism', see Lowe, in particular chapter two, pp. 30-74.

sparse information presented in these earlier accounts. In the latter half of the century, however, as Chosŏn opened her ports and more British visitors had occasion to explore and experience Korea for themselves, Korea transformed into a ‘real’, physical place with natural resources, manpower, and material culture that could be nurtured for development, trade, and profit. This transitional image of Korea manifested itself through the increasing number of narratives that described in great detail and length the country’s topographical features, urban and rural landscapes, people and their daily lives, their manners and customs, and the political systems and institutions. If earlier writings served as a reference guide of sorts about this East Asian kingdom that remained unfamiliar to the British public, then the travel literature that began to be published towards the end of the nineteenth century allowed readers at home to experience Korea by proxy through the vivid descriptions and reflections of creative yet meticulous writers.

Among works well known are Arnold Henry Savage-Landor’s (1865-1924) *Corea or Chosen: The Land of the Morning Calm* (1895) and Isabella Bird Bishop’s (1831-1904) *Korea and Her Neighbours* (1898). Though neither of them were civil servants or official emissaries obliged to observe such matters, both Savage-Landor and Bishop confirm or re-iterate to some extent their predecessors’ views about Korea in relation to Chosŏn’s trade prospects and political system. Their descriptions of the Korean people also echo those of earlier accounts, which were much more limited in context. Especially in the case of Bishop, who had a personal interest in the socio-political circumstances of Chosŏn during the time of her four visits between January 1894 and March 1897, her work includes chapters on the Chosŏn government system, education and foreign trade, with factual data and figures based on official sources.³¹ The similar points which the different British writers convey are: Chosŏn Korea has potential for trade, but she is lacking in developed material civilization, for which the corrupt government and its system are to blame; given their limited yet useful amount of natural resources and the able-ness of the Korean people, there is a latent ability for progress, especially if the people of the lower classes were to be involved, and the government and upper classes reformed; in spite of certain noticeable drawbacks, the Koreans are generally a congenial, intelligent, and able people.³² While the nature of these different writers’ works vary in length and scope, the ways in which they arrive at these views are presented through similar narrative strategies which deploy the power of observation (meticulous description of the topography, vegetation, fauna, facilities, and people – from their physiognomy, physique, and physical movement to their airs and mannerisms; and in some cases, especially in the later accounts, cultural practices, customs, and institutions as they are observed) and evidence of verifying information with relevant sources (history, official reports and data).

Savage-Landor and Bishop’s works also present a discursive mode in which richly detailed depictions of physical aspects (i.e., physical descriptions of ‘things’) are offered with

³¹ See Chapters 32 and 33 of Isabella Bird Bishop, *Korean and Her Neighbours: A Narrative of Travel, with an Account of the Recent Vicissitudes and Present Position of the Country* (With a Pref. by W.C. Hillier) (London: John Murray, 1898).

³² For an overview, see Chapter 37 of Bishop. These views were also explicitly express by the British diplomat, diplomat Charles William Campbell (1861-1927) through his *Report by Mr. C. W. Campbell of a Journey in North Corea in September and October 1889* (London: Printed for Her Majesty’s Stationery Office by Harrison and Sons, 1891). See also Jo, Yoong-Hee’s article mentioned earlier.

intermittent reflections on metaphysical elements (i.e., why things are as they are). In their narrative strategies, one suspects the writer's impulse to remain 'objective' through a system of presenting 'facts' for the most part, then including personal deliberations on issues that arise which warrant explanation or trigger curiosity due to their 'foreign' nature. And if a deliberation should include negative criticism, there is then a tendency to present either a counter-argument or positive comment to offer balanced views.³³

3) 'Accounts by Contiguity'

If we examine, then, records of observations and discussions based on reported material procured abroad (i.e., 'accounts by contiguity') for comparison, what we find are similar narrative strategies as those found in accounts based on firsthand experiences of Korea. The subject of my research for this category of works has included mainly articles and minutes of meetings published in the *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan* around the same time period. The Asiatic Society of Japan (Nihon Ajia Kyokai, 日本アジア協会) was founded in 1872 in Yokohama by British and American residents. The *Transactions* volumes published towards the end of the nineteenth century contain a number of articles related to Korea, including W. G. Aston's "Hideyoshi's Invasion of Korea",³⁴ Ernest Satow's "The Korean Potters in Satsuma",³⁵ J. C. Hall, "A Visit to West Coast and Capital of Korea",³⁶ and H. A. C. Bonar, "Notes on the Capital of Korea".³⁷ The first two deal with early relations between Japan and Korea, and the other two are the authors' recent records of travel to Korea. In addition to the articles themselves, the minutes of the meetings of the Society at which the papers were delivered provide interesting discussions on Korea based on the content of the articles. Hence, they also serve as texts that present or allude to Western perceptions of Chosŏn Korea.

Though the length and scope of the minuted discussions can vary, there are a few that are detailed narratives in their own right. For instance, comments in response to Satow's study and Bonar's travel account include many remarks that are effectively reflections or deliberations on Korea's predicament at the time. If we were to consider these documented discussions as texts or narratives, we can identify a discursive mode that presents itself with elements congruous to

³³ The following deliberation on Korean women by Savage-Landor could be cited as one among many examples: "Her face brightens, and the soft, affectionate, distant look in her eyes is enough to melt the strongest of mankind. She is simple and natural, and in this chiefly lies her charm. She would not compare in beauty with a European woman, for she is neither so tall nor so well developed, but among women of far-Eastern nationality she, to my mind, takes the cake for actual beauty and refinement. The Japanese women of whom one hears so much, though more artistically clad, are not a patch on the Venuses of Cho-sen, and both in respect of lightness of complexion and the other above-named qualities they seemed to me to approach nearest to the standard of European feminine beauty." (In Chapter V of A. Henry Savage-Landor, *Corea or Cho-sen: The Land of the Morning Calm*, [London: William Heinemann, 1895]).

³⁴ Aston's historical account of the Hideyoshi invasions of Chosŏn in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is based on a number of Japanese and Korean sources, including *Seikan iryaku* (征韓偉略 – Japanese compilation of numerous sources, ca. 1831) and *Chingbirok* (懲志錄, 'The Book of Corrections' by Chosŏn literati official, Yu Sŏngnyong [柳成龍, 1542-1607] during the Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea). His research was published in installments in the following volumes: *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan* 6 (1878): 227-245; 9 (1881): 87-93, 213-222; 11 (1883): 117-125.

³⁵ *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan* Vol. VI (Oct. 1877-June 1878): 193-203.

³⁶ *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan* Vol. XI (1883): 148-161.

³⁷ *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan* Vol. XI (1883): 243-59.

those of what we find in firsthand travel records. The one element that is obviously different between the two genres is the immediate object of ‘physical’ description – for travel accounts, it is all the physical ‘things’ encountered and observed directly by the author, and for the recorded minutes it is the content of the articles as read and registered by the audience. Notwithstanding this difference, the powers of observation conveyed in, for instance, the narratives in response to both Satow and Bonar’s papers are equally compelling as those found in Bishop or Savage-Landor’s travelogues. Moreover, descriptions are offered alongside thought-provoking reflections. And in the case of what these documented discussions have to offer is that they also confirm, echo, or engage with the aforementioned views related to Korea, which raise questions related to the power of discursive modalities, which I hope we can discuss further. Finally, as in the narrative strategies of travel literature, one strongly detects an impulse for objectivity within these discursive records in the way that negative comments are accompanied by either reasonable substantiation or positive assessments to present balanced views.³⁸

³⁸ An example can be taken from the minutes of the meeting on 1 June, 1883, in reference to Bonar’s paper: “In inviting discussion on the paper, the President observed that Mr. Bonar’s description of the Capital of Korea was by no means an attractive one and clearly revealed an impoverished condition of society. It should be remembered that this description was not a singular one. It was confirmed by the account given by Mr. Hall in a paper lately contributed to this Society, and also by another one furnished last year to a local journal by a foreign visitor to Söul [Seoul]. It might certainly be inferred that the state of the Capital was at least as good, if not superior, to that of the other cities or towns of the Kingdom, and therefore that the low state of agriculture in the neighbourhood of Söul, the absence of industry within its walls, the want of roads and vehicles, the inferior characteristics of the houses and the squalor of the streets, denote general characteristics and not those of a single locality. [...] What should be expected, he would ask, from a population of eight or possibly ten millions who have been long secluded from the world, who have had no incentives to industry and no means of developing it, and who have therefore been content to produce only the necessities of life, and the few luxuries required in the present inert condition of the upper classes of society. The Japanese trade with Korea might be accepted as some indication of the commercial capacity of the country. [...] at the same time it should be observed to the credit of the Koreans that, notwithstanding the marked absence of cleanliness in their streets and residences, they are a remarkably well-clad race, and, according to the testimony of one of the writers above mentioned, the condition of the masses in this respect is decidedly in advance of the people of China and Japan.” (*Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan* Vol. XI (1883): xiv-xv)

Questions for Further Discussion

However much the narrative strategies may seemingly convey an 'objective' perception of a foreign culture, readers may question the extent to which the author is persuaded by his or her own worldviews, or inclined to allow his or her comparative frames to dictate the process of negotiating 'difference'.

This raises the following questions in relation to cultural encounters:

- The power of discursive modalities in relation to personal and/or collective interests and intentions;
- Critical agency in negotiating 'difference' and determining conceptions of the 'other', with consideration to different temporal / spatial settings and established ethno-centric perspectives;
- Different notions of civility (vs. 'barbaric') and markers for 'civilization', and how they are established in different historical and cultural contexts;

e.g.) In the early modern period when different civilizations encountered one another for the first time, the way in which one culture judged another was ultimately based on systems determined and designated as normative by their own traditions. However, how do these systems or comparative frames become established in the first place, and how do they evolve over time?