Representing Korea as the "Other": Ernst J. Oppert's *A Forbidden Land: Voyages to the Corea*

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This paper endeavors to analyze *A Forbidden Land: Voyages to the Corea* (1880), a text written by a Jewish-Prussian by the name of Ernst J. Oppert. I focus on Oppert's representation of Korea mirrored by China and Japan because his discovery of Korea was mediated by that of the other two empires.

In the first place, I argue that the biography of Oppert, merely known as a "traveler" or "ethnographer" (or merchant), should be taken into re-consideration as an author and must be more complexly reevaluated in light of the nineteenth century European colonial projects in Asian countries that he actively participated in during his stay in Shanghai. The text, in this sense, must be positioned as one of the early Westerners' writings on Korea in which discourses on the "forbidden land" were being constructed in comparison with China and Japan whose doors were already open. While the text, according to the author, was intended to attract the Western public's attention and subsequently to commence with trade and commerce, it in fact reflected Oppert's "colonial" desire to open a "sealed book" (Oppert 1880:3).

The text can be divided into two parts. The first contains chapters one to six that introduce almost all aspects of Korea but rely on European research achievements and their translations of Chinese and Japanese historical sources. The second part, chapters seven to nine, cover Oppert's three voyages allegedly designed to arrange trade partnerships with the Joseon government, yet which I posit into "encounters" between the two heterogeneous worlds. In this part, different worldviews between Oppert and the native officials were dramatically expressed in relation to the then priority of the "pening of the ports." By perceiving the "hermit kingdom" mainly in the dialogues with and references to China and Japan who opened their doors earlier, Korea was represented as "in-between" and "uncivilized."

Keywords: Korea, China, Japan, discovery, encounter, in-between, uncivilized, forbidden, representation, post(-)colonialism.

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Introduction

As a "de-colonizing" project, postcolonial studies has fulfilled its objectives mainly in two respects. One is that it has provided critical insights into disclosing a covert relationship between knowledge and power in the historical and cultural context of Western imperialism/colonialism. And at the same time, the second point is that such studies has endeavoured to give voice to the historically excluded and marginalized under Western hegemony. Therefore, while the term post(-)colonialism implies an "aftermath" in a temporal sense (Loomba 1998: 7), as a practice it offers a challenging critique of West-centered worldviews. This transformation in "thinking the West" poses a significant task of invoking, problematizing, and interrogating the Western construction of the "Otherness" as well as its discoveries of the "Other."

For that purpose, based on the theoretical perspective mentioned above, this paper endeavours to analyze a Westerner's text of late nineteenth-century Korea. Written by a Jewish-Prussian, Ernst J. Oppert (1832-1903), the text is entitled *Ein Verschlossenes Land: Reisen nach Corea*, published in 1880 by F. A. Brockhaus in Leipzig. Its English editions were simultaneously published both in London and New York, entitled *A Forbidden Land: Voyages to the Corea*, with the first name of the author as "Ernest" and translator(s) unidentified.[1] In general, not only his short term of stay but the thinness of observation also causes this text to be no more than the travelling account of an audacious merchant who, having little identification with the country, coveted only for lucrative trade, even attempting to unearth the tomb of a Joseon royal family member with commercial intent.[2] Yet the text is of great importance in that it is the first sort of monograph on Korea in German in a full volume (Kim Yeong-ja 1997: 101). It was also one of the early major introductions available on Joseon,[3] as it

1. Due to the limitations of language and material availability, I use as a text an English version published in New York. Those published in New York and London are almost the same in body part. Yet, while a London version has an "Appendix" of Korean vocabulary corresponding to the English counterpart as well as the Korean alphabet and single syllables, the New York version that I had access to does not.
2. For Oppert's perceptions, see Kim Baek-yeong (1998), Jeong Yeon-tae (1999), and Kim Wang-bae (1999). These papers are also useful for reviewing variations in the status of foreigners and the way of treating diverse writings more systematically.
3. Oppert (1880: 4-5) makes references to Western materials as follows: H. Hamel, *Journal van de ongelukige voyagie van't Jacht de Sperwer, gedestinert na Tayawan in't Jaar 1653* (1668); W. R. Broughton, *A Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean* (1804); B. Hall, *Account*

came to be "known" as the "Hermit Kingdom," ironically a "hermit" in a temporal and spatial sense in the Western mode of thought. Thus, an inquiry into the author and the text, particularly if the latter is the reflection of a Western representation of the Oriental Other, needs to be made with the following questions: In order to make the unfamiliar familiar, what narrative techniques does the author mobilize, and how does he display and justify his own knowledge of the object? And, in what way does the narrator represent the tacitly narrated within the unequal field of representation? These basic questions are vital in the case that the object spoken of is historically and textually unfamiliar and less powerful. As the epochal event of opening the ports was deemed the most important criterion for his *Weltanschauung*, Oppert perceived in the mirrors of China and Japan a forbidden Korea. His discovery of the kingdom was, in some sense, predetermined by that of the two neighbouring empires. The main channel for leading to understanding Joseon was therefore via his "dialogues" with the two.

Author and Text

Oppert came to Joseon three times between 1866 and 1868 before the country was forced by Japan to open its ports. Amidst a domestically oppressive atmosphere due to persecutions against Catholic priests and Joseon converts by the Daeweongun (1821-1898), along with the notorious seclusion policy, he

of a Voyage of Discovery to the West Coast of Corea (1818); Jean Baptiste du Halde, *Description de la China et de la grande Tartarie* (1741, 4 vols.); K. Ritter, *Description of the Globe; N.* Witsen, *Nord en Oost Tartarye* (1674, 2 vols.); M. Maxwell, *Voyages in China, or Journal of the last Embassy to the Court of Pekin* (1818); J. Macleod, *Voyage of the English Frigate "Aleeste" along the Coast of Corea to the Island of Loo-choo (1818); F. J. Klaproth, Apercu general des trios Royaumes, traduit de l'original Japonais-Chinois* (1832); C. von Siebold, *Nippon* (1832). Considered that these are early writings on Korea prior to 1876, the question of Oppert's status among those above comes to be crucial. Of them, in the first place, it is supposed that while the texts of Hamel, Broughton, Hall, Maxwell and MacLeod belong to exploration diaries, including brief introductions to things Korean and impressions of encounters with the indigenous people, those of Du Halde, Klaproth, and Siebolt deal with Korean history, language and so on additionally, but more specifically, their writings focus on China and Japan. This kind of sequence and accumulation of knowledge came to be full-fledged in Oppert (1880), which has been greatly expanded in terms of coverage and volume. Equally important is an inquiry into "cross-references" and interrelationship between the texts, to trace a route to construction and (re)production of Western discourses on the "Other," which remains to be done in my future research.

explored Asanman and Ganghwado in the year of 1866 (Gojong 3), seeking in vain to arrange a trade partnership with the native government. On a further third voyage in 1868 (Gojong 5)[4] he unsuccessfully embarked on an expedition to unearth the burial place of the Namyeongun (the father of the Daeweongun). While some expositions were given for the intentions behind the incident,[5] Oppert himself asserts that the objective of the digging was to get Korea to open its doors to the rest of the world (Oppert 1880: 303).

As one of chief translators of several Korean editions, Shin Bok-ryong (2000: 6-9)[6] introduces Oppert's biography and evaluates his position in Korean history. Although he speaks reproachingly of the Prussian merchant's "body-snatching expedition" (Griffis 1911: 396) and cover-up of identity in the third voyage, he tries to do justice to Oppert's profound knowledge of Oriental countries and his status in the scene of Korea's opening of the ports as well. Still, as it seems rather perplexing for me to contextualize Oppert as an author; I would like to consider other biographic elements based on the survey by Shin. A part that remains to be discussed among others, and thereby directs my attention, is that Oppert is recorded as being a "traveler" and "ethnographer (*Ethnologe*)" in *Jüdisches Bibliographisches Archive* and *Gesamtverzeichnis des deutschsprachigen Schrifttums (GV), 1700-1910* (Shin and Jang 2000: 6).

Given the period of the nineteenth century when European colonizers expanded their colonial projects into Asia, Africa, and South America and set-

4. W. E. Griffis, renowned for *Corea, The Hermit Nation* (1911[1882]), devotes one chapter to Oppert's excavation incident (396-402). According to Griffis, in 1867, Oppert was on trial at the Consular Court in Shanghai due to the infamous expedition. But considering that his last voyage was in the year of 1868, Griffis, or the sources the author used, seemed to be mistaken. However, it must be pointed out that there are hardly any specific dates for the voyages in the text that Oppert himself spelled out, except "The weather being still cool (March)..." (Oppert 1880: 185) on the first voyage and reference to "Peing-in [Byeongin], the 17th of the 7th month" (275) on the second. Thus one can only assume approximate months and years for his visits through a review of the historical events in the text in relation to the Joseon royal chronicles.
5. Firstly, Oppert coveted royal family treasures buried in the tomb; secondly, he thought that if he could succeed in taking the treasures out of the tomb, he could also succeed in arranging a trade partnership because the Taeweongun would be expected to negotiate commerce in exchange for the treasures; lastly, Oppert sought to revenge against the Taeweongun's persecutions of Catholic priests and believers. (Remember that the operation was undertaken in collaboration with Mons. Féron, the late *provicar* of the Korean mission, and Joseon laymen.) (Lee Junguk 1983: 287-8)
6. I refer to Shin and Jang (2000) for Korean translation, the most recent version. The other two pioneering translations are *Hanguk Gihaeng* (trans., Han Woo-geun, 1959) and *Joseon Gihaeng* (trans., Han Woo-geun, 1974).

tled their colonies, it appears that a "traveler" did not simply mean a person whose taste was literally to "travel" foreign territories for leisure. Especially, "traveling accounts" (as seen in the word "*Reisen*", i.e. "travels" in the original), as a written product of the journey, had a more "positive" connotation at that time, in which Western travelers met their desire, sometimes elevated to a sacred obligation, to inscribe into their reports their own impressions and alleged facts of the Orient. Moreover, in those times of exploration and discovery, "voyage" (as given to the title of the English translation) is an evident term invoking the actors' masculine enterprise overseas and reflecting their expansive concern for yet unknown areas. And the frequent appearance of such associated words as expedition, discovery, journey, and so on in publications of those kinds[7] in turn bears witness to domestic readers' interest in peoples beyond the European Continent.

Also reflecting Eurocentric conceptions, the term, "ethnographer" implies something more than an exotic taste to non-Europeans. Two propositions may be drawn here. One is that, if Oppert were satisfied with the vocational title of ethnographer, the term would mean to him that he had a wide range of knowledge of the origin of other people(s) and their domestic affairs in general. The other is in relation to the fact that in spite of his short stay in Joseon, he had been staying in China nearly for 20 years after coming to Shanghai via Hong Kong in 1851, and also visited other East Asian countries, including Japan, shortly after opening its ports. He even ran his own shop there, and was involved in British colonial enterprises in China, or to say mildly, benefited from the assistance of a managing partner of the largest British firm in China (Oppert 1880: 179).[8] This means that he was more interested in "local (hyeonji)" trade than that at home, and that he did do "field" investigations on his own terms, whether they were for purposes in an academic sense, or not. It is by his ethnographic interest that *A Forbidden Land*, including *Ostasiatische Wanderungen, Skizzen und Erinnerungen* (1898) and *Erinnerungen eines Japaners* (1898), came into exis-

7. See Oppert's references in footnote 3 of this paper, and confirm it in Griffis's bibliography (1911: xv-xxi).
8. It was after the late 1870s that Germany, with its unity of decentralized powers in 1870, transformed into a colonial empire and began to organize a colonial association on a national scale and acquire overseas colonies (Kim Hak-i 1996). Moreover, considering the state of things in the text, it seems that Oppert aligned himself more with the British or European enterprises. Indeed, there is hardly the slightest clue in his text, except for the language of Chapter 5, that identifies him as a Prussian.

tence.[9]

The text consists of nine chapters and covers a wide range of topics as follows:

Ch 1. Introduction, ethnology and geography: geographical position; racial origin; islands and rivers; provinces; capital; population
Ch 2. Constitution and government: relationship between China and Korea; governmental institutions; military organization
Ch 3. History of Corea: from ancient times to the nineteenth century (the present)
Ch 4. Manners and customs, castes, religion: class system similar to yet different from caste of India; slavery; religion; costume; housing; currency; music and dance; food; women
Ch 5. Language: grammar and dialect
Ch 6. Produce, natural history, commerce: climate; plants; natural resources; trade; handicrafts
Ch 7. First voyage: arrival of Heimi (Haemi); encounters with native officials and villagers
Ch 8. Second voyage: landing at Ganghwado; negotiations with native officials
Ch 9. Third voyage: attempt at excavating the burial place of the Namyeongun

As seen above, it can be divided into two large parts. One is the chapters from one to six, which describes "facts" about Korea. The other is from seven to nine that concentrates on his three expeditions. Of these chapters, the author devotes many pages to geography, history, and customs and attitudes. One of the most scanty chapters is chapter five that introduces Korean language. He mentions that there have been few Europeans who studied Korean, and that the linguistic findings of Catholic priests were destroyed by fire due to the religious persecutions of the Daeweongun (Oppert 1880: 155-7).

As important as the contents above, however, are narrative characteristics that enable both text and author to carry effectiveness and authority of representation. One characteristic may be termed "textual tonality," concerning the usage

9. In addition, Oppert's first two expeditions were later introduced in Georg Adolf Narciß ed., *Im Fernen Osten: Forscher und Entdecker in Tibet, China, Japan u. Korea: 1689-1911* (1978).

of grammatical persons. According to the author, in chapter seven, eight, and nine of voyage accounts, he used the first person for a more vivid description, much more than he had "intended" (viii-ix).[10]

> ...he [Oppert] has been painfully careful to avoid the flight of fiction and imagination so often met with in works of travel, or to write and describe nothing but what he has personally seen and experienced, or knows from undoubted authority to be positively true (viii).

While these three chapters bear witness to a more personal account, he hardly used the first person in the other six chapters. Even in the preface, he refers to himself with the third person like "author" or "he/him" instead of using the first person such as "I" or "me". By doing so, he tries to attribute "objective" and "neutral" tonality to the text, that is to say, he intends his accounts not to be a common subjective travelling guide but a more objective introductory book to Korea. While the narratives developed by the third person mask the crucial question of whether what Oppert came to know of Korea was "reliable" or not, it seems that they have the effectiveness that readers uninformed on Korea would take them granted as "established" facts.

The other characteristic is related with what I may call "narrative strategies." As mentioned above, Korea was represented throughout the text in comparison with China and Japan. This is because it would be efficient for the author to refer to these two countries since they were earlier "opened" and consequently more well-known in Europe. His comparison of Korea with both countries ranges from geographical aspects like "Corea, placed between two large empires like China and Japan, has hitherto been considered of so little importance, ..." (2), to such a "petty" thing as "the natives are not so fond of tea as their neighbours, and no pains are taken to cultivate this plant, ..." (166). However, it in turn implies the way that Oppert perceives and represents Korea, in which the hermit kingdom always exists to him as an "imaginative geography" (Said 1978: 54) or the "Other" between the empires. It is the imaginative geography that he makes "familiar" by his writing, and he does so by bringing in more familiar and "imaginable" objects.

10. For quotations from Oppert (1880), I will give only page numbers hereafter.

Open and Closed: Encounters between Two Heterogeneous Worlds

In the first part of the preface, the objectives of the writing are explicitly stated that:

> ...the author [Oppert himself] wishes it to be distinctly understood that all he claims for this work is that it may be considered what it is intended to be—a missing, though as yet incomplete link in the research of one of the most interesting countries of the great Asiatic Continent. With this object he combines the hope to be able to direct the attention of the public at large to the anomalous state in which this country has so long and so successfully maintained itself, and to contribute his share in having those obstacles removed at last which hitherto have prevented foreigners from entering its gates (vii).

The motivation of the writing resulted not only from the author's unsuccessful voyages, but also, consequently, from his desire to open a "sealed book" (3). The chapters seven, eight, and nine are a good reference to grasp the procedures of the adventures and the direct intention of the writing; if read following each expedition's objectives, approaching routes to Korea and the attempts at contact with the native authorities, that way of reading would not be against the author's will.

However, I argue that the experiences of voyages should be posited into "encounters" between the two heterogeneous worlds of the West and East, the worlds of "open" and "closed," and "civilized" and "uncivilized," being defined entirely by the former. In those encounters, while such physical, yet extraneous, objects were given and received, such as empty bottles, tobacco, liquor etc., impressions and opinions of people with different worldviews emerged and came to clash. In addition, as much as the encounters were made at the peak of the isolation policy and the excessive "xenophobia," they were usually accompanied by appeasement, persuasion and coercion. The following are vivid examples that characterize and even define the relationship of discordance between the two, concerning the priority of the "opening of ports." The negotiation below went on by Oppert and Ni-Eung-ini (李寅夔, Lee In-gi), an envoy of the Joseon government who was once attached to an embassy to Peking.

> We have come here, in a friendly and amicable spirit, to endeavour to open an intercourse, for commercial and other purposes, between your country and other nations. ... I have for a long time past taken a deep interest in all that concerns your people and your country, and I know, that my feelings and wishes are shared by all foreigners abroad. I also feel confident, that if my endeavours to induce the Corean Government to consent to throw open this country are crowned with success, foreign Governments will lose no time in confirming them by special treaties...
>
> The request, which is now submitted through me to you, is neither unreasonable nor unjust; no country is at present justified in keeping itself isolated and shut up from the whole civilized world; nor has it the power to keep in this state for any [l]ength of time... I am bound to say, that if the friendly advances now made are rejected, they will be renewed, sooner or later, in a different shape, and in the form of demands, which the Government will then be compelled to agree to and to accept, without having the chance or the power to refuse them.
>
> Ni-Eung-ini listened attentively to this long address, ... he said,—I am fully sensible of the justice of your remarks, and I may state, that my Government is also conscious of the importance of the subject, and will give it the most serious consideration; nor is *it at all disinclined to agree to such proposals as are submitted* by you. But it shirks the responsibility to decide alone a question of so much moment, and for this reason the Government is desirous of obtaining the consent of the Emperor of China, previous to taking any decisive steps in this matter. (276-8)

Oppert was arguing that the opening was the legitimate course that no countries in the world could swerve from, while the Korean official still had the view of a Chinese-oriented world order even after the empire fell into the hands of Western imperial powers. As further negotiations with other native officials did not produce any favourable results, Oppert assertively and even aggressively makes a concluding statement on Western imperial projects and the forbidden kingdom's future course as follows:

> ...I am naturally angry with your Government, which will not listen to the voice of reason and peace; the time will come sooner or later, when it will have to listen to the sound of cannon instead. Neither in size nor in power can your country compare to China or Japan, and both these countries

> have been compelled to admit foreigners; how much less will you be able to resist our demand for opening Corea, when the western powers are determined to enforce the same? The times have long since gone by, in which any country had the right or power to close its gates to the whole world, and you will make no exception to this rule. The appearance of this small steamer, which has succeeded to penetrate nearly up to the walls of your capital, is a proof of what I say; and if we have been able to carry out what you have always believed to be next to impossible, how much easier will this be for the well armed men-of-war of the great European powers, when they are sent here to finish the work now commenced!... (288)

The quotation may be one of his final notifications to Korea. It was sure to Oppert that the commencement of intercourse meant the exploitation of a new overseas market and the securing of a profitable business. Yet, the frontier spirit was deeply involved in, and even in complicity with the colonial spirit, in which both were parasitic on each other. Thus, like a messenger who carried the messages of the European world, he was extremely confident that Korea could not run counter to the world "rule" initiated by Western modern military power and hegemony.

Representing a Forbidden Land: Korea Mirrored into China and Japan

l. Korea as "In-between"

I would first like to term Oppert's representation of Korea as "in-between" in a geo-political sense. It was not only personal chance that he came to know of Korea, but his general recognition in history, politics, and geography of the country also bear witness to the efficacy of the term. In the first place, let me quote the following statement.

> On my return to China, after a visit to Japan immediately after the opening of its ports, my attention was called by several of my native friends to another country of scarcely less importance, which, notwithstanding its close proximity to China and Japan, still remained completely closed and

> inaccessible to the outer world, viz. the kingdom of Corea. (178)

It was exactly next to China and Japan that Korea directed Oppert's attention. To him, the country was never the one detachable from the two empires. The personal opportunity to become intimate with Korea dovetails with the general geo-political constellation of the country.

> It is a strange and almost unaccountable fact, in the face of an intercourse with eastern Asia ... that Corea, placed between two large empires like China and Japan, has hitherto been considered of so little importance, that hardly anything positive is known of it, ... no doubt that many new sources would by its opening be developed, which would prove as valuable to trade as to the scientific world. ... it must appear yet more remarkable [than Chinese and Japanese isolation policy] that this same system of exclusiveness has for centuries past successfully been kept up against those powerful and neighbouring nations. (2)

He wonders that "it is a strange and almost unaccountable fact" for Korea is unknown to the outside world even though it is placed between China and Japan. The feeling "unaccountable" signifies that Europe should have discovered it as it already had China and Japan. The discovery of the kingdom was in this way through that of the two countries, which means that a reference point of representation was set down by situating the kingdom as "in-betweener," and thereby there was no other way than to refer to the two.

The author delves into the history of Korea by expanding the perception of the country's geo-political position. Indeed, the history from ancient times to the seventeenth century was embroidered with the scene of wars among China, Japan and Korea. The repeated wars of conquest and the establishment of alliances and reconciliation between neighbouring powers and Korea--to Oppert these are virtually recurring themes throughout Korean history. Moreover, in chronicling and interpreting history, he drew on European, especially missionaries and scholars' research, and their translations of Chinese (not given) and Japanese historical materials. In particular, Japanese sources like *Nipponki* (日本書記, 720 A.D., 30 vols.), *Nippon-wŏdai itsi-van* (日本皇代一覽, 1795, 7 vols.), and *Tsjo-sen Monogatari* (朝鮮物語, 1750, 5 vols.) offered useful and valuable accounts on Korean historical events in ancient times (Oppert 1880: 49-50). It is suggested that within the text, representing Korea being between the empires

was embodied by the in-between Korea within the empires' historical materials.

In the first part of "History of Corea" (Ch. 3), he points to the lack of historical materials written by native scholars, identifying the documentation of history as indicating a degree of civilization. The lack of written history is then cynically reduced by Oppert to the satisfaction of Korean native scholars with substitute writing by neighbouring counterparts, i.e., written history is absent in Korea, and native scholars are merely satisfied with Korean histories written by Chinese and Japanese scholars.

> Among the nations of the universe who claim to have attained a certain degree of culture, and profess to live in a state of civilization, there is none whose literature shows a greater incompleteness and deficiency respecting its own origin and history than that of the Coreans. It appears almost as if not one of all pretended native scholars had been willing or able to write a record of the history of the country, or that the accounts left by Japanese and Chinese historians were considered sufficiently complete to supply the want. (48-9)

Yet, he indicates the erroneous view of the contemporary political relationship with China, stating that Korea is not subjugated to China according to the relation of liege and vassal (82). For all, with regard to the politico-historical relationship in general, the country as "in-betweener" has been "the scene of the thirst of conquest of her nearest neighbours, who settled there either their own disputes between each other, or tried to possess themselves of the supremacy over the country itself" (49). After the turmoil between the empires, "this hard-tried country has enjoyed a longer repose" (49).

Mentioning that the first reliable Chinese account of Korea starts from twelfth century, the author traces back ancient history to Kitse (箕子, Gija) Joseon. Korea was founded by Kitse who was kin of the Chinese royal family.[11] Moreover, Chinese descendants like Kiao-tong (箕準, Gijun) and Weiman (衛滿, Wiman) had repeated power struggles to conquer and rule Joseon. But as Kaoli (Goguryeo), Petsi (Baekje) and Sinra (Shilla) were founded, the relationship

11. "... where he founded a new kingdom, selecting the town of Pieng'an [Pyeongyang] as capital. This new state he named Tschao-sien [Joseon] made allegiance to Vouyang [武王, Muwang] in 1119 B.C., and acknowledged the latter as liege lord, giving his kingdom a constitution formed after the Chinese" (52).

between the Three Kingdoms and China was at times, favorable and at others, hostile. It was also in the period of the Three Kingdoms that Oppert first recognized the relationship with Japan. Similar to the connection with China, his attention is directed toward Japanese invasions, in which about A. D. 200, the Japanese invaded Shilla for the first time, and did so with the alliance of Baekje (52).[12]

Likewise, in the period of Goryeo, the author focuses on the political relationship with the two countries, especially with China.

> ...Octai [太宗, Taejong] ... tried to force Mongolian officers upon the Coreans, against whom the people soon rose and slayed every one of them. ... Octai despatched a formidable army, under the command of the Tartar chief Tsalita [撒禮塔, Salletap] against Corea, who succeeded in subduing a large portion of the country. (65)

As the relationship with the Mongols grew friendly later, it was figuratively expressed as that of king and subject, as "grateful for all proofs of favor and benevolence, Corea heartily joined Kublai-khan in the execution of his Japan enterprise, and fully shared all the mishaps and disasters which attended the undertaking" (67).

Entering into the Ni [李, Yi] dynasty, the country has temporarily seen and enjoyed the "blessings of peace and the fruits of a growing prosperity" (69). This, according to him, was because the dynasty made a tributary treaty with China and formed an alliance of peace and amity with Japan. Still, due to the following wars like the "Japanese wars (壬辰倭亂, Yimjin waeran)" and the ones with the Ting (淸, Cheong) (丙子胡亂, Byeongja horan), Korean rulers decided to close its frontiers and adopt a policy of isolation (79).[13]

The policy, however, did not fully close the country, since the isolation, to Oppert, meant that Korea no longer oscillated between the two empires as before. Rather, it was thrown beyond East Asia into an arena of struggles by forces in triplicate, in which the Daeweongun and his followers, the West includ-

12. For *imna ilbonbu seol* (任那日本俯說), Shin and Jang (2000: 66) have pointed out Oppert's uncritical reference to Japanese historical sources.
13. "The remembrance of the many lasting and sanguinary struggles with their neighbours, of the enormous sacrifices they had entailed both in lives and common property, may have been the first reason to induce the Corean kings to adopt their subsequent line of policy by a complete isolation of the country from the outer world" (79).

ing Oppert himself and the Catholics, and the already opened China and Japan were more dramatically involved. For all, "standing at the threshold" of Korea's opening and being thwarted successively, his historiography ends with the following long statement of the then turbulent scene, by affirming the country's images as stubbornly "tacit" and "motionless" and by re-affirming the title of the text. It seems that by this textual inscription did he essentialize Korea as ever forbidden to the rest of the world.

> From remote and dark ages, over a period extending for more than four thousand years, we have followed the history of this remarkable country... But to us it remains as much as ever a "forbidden land," a land which no foreigner dares to enter without running the risk of paying for his hardihood with his life. Expeditions after expeditions are sent out to discover the North Pole, dauntless travellers have penetrated into the dark and unknown regions of Central Africa, and still explore this continent to open it up to commerce and science, and here, within a day's steam from the nearest Chinese coast, we stand on the threshold of a country with a history of four thousand years, into which country we do not venture to demand admission because a semi-barbarous Government against the wishes of its own people, chooses to write "no entrance" over its doors, and bids defiance to the whole civilized world (104).

2. Korea as "Uncivilized"

As seen in the statement quoted above, Oppert's portrayal of Korea as "forbidden" is closely related with his conception of "civilized" and "uncivilized." This distinction, which prevailed historically nineteenth century Europe, was above all a key naturalized word to distinguish the "Us" and the "Other." In order to justify and fulfill the "civilizing" mission (i.e. to make it open), however, it is required first to "define" and label the Other "uncivilized."

In fact, Oppert reveals the distinction by frequently using the term "civilization." To take a few examples, "... who ... profess to live in a state of civilization, there is none whose literature shows a greater incompleteness ... than that of the Coreans" (48), "because a semi-barbarous Government, against the wishes of its own people, ... bids defiance to the whole civilized world" (104), or "fearful of seeing its despotic sway endangered by the introduction of a higher state of civilization [Catholicism], it resists, by all means in its power, any attempt tending in

that direction" (120). Thus, it is supposed that "civilization" means to Oppert some state achieved in history, religion, and science.

Contrary in nuance to "civilization," words like "barbarous," "savage" and "primitive" are also often used. To take the instances, "a semi-barbarous [Joseon] Government" (104), "in post of utter disregard for their own religious ceremonies and customs the Coreans rise hardly above the level of savages" (112), or "[Korean officials] who, as soon as they set aside their official character, appear what they are—the wild barbarians without any disguise" (130). Thus by using such words as barbarous, savage, and primitive, Oppert implies that to some degree in religion, manner, and arts that Korea does not reach the level of Europe, or even that of China and Japan.

Conjecturing the origin of the Korean race with illustrations,[14] he assumes that the people originated from one (later subdivided) tribe in Mongolia, although there were some who resembled the Caucasian race from western Asia (10). Since the Korean people themselves were unable to account for their origin, different and ambiguous perceptions of their ancestry between the classes are repeatedly depreciated by the author as follows:

> I have already mentioned that most of the Coreans claim to be in complete darkness and ignorance of their own origin; some declare quite seriously that their ancestors have sprung from a black cow on the shores of the Japan Sea, while others again, and notably the larger and more important families, ascribe their origin to a somewhat mysterious and supernatural cause. ...with the lower classes, however, they find no belief, and are explained and commented upon by the people in a manner irreverent as well as prosaic (11-2; italics added).

For him, lack of knowledge of one's own origins is related to the characteristics of the primitive and uncivilized. While the upper class Koreans find their ancestry in unaccountable mysterious origins, the lower class mocks it uninterestingly. The depreciation of the people's genealogy expands into the aforementioned other aspects like religious piety, manners, and arts.

14. In "ethnology," chapter 1, he offers the illustrations of men's appearances with titles, "Caucasian race—merchant" (page not given), "Mongolian race—lower class Corean" (4), "Caucasian race—ship-owner" (7), "Mongolian race—Korean youth" (10), "Caucasian race—Corean upper class. Winter dress" (13), and "Mongolian race—middle class Corean" (16).

> In point of utter disregard for their own religious ceremonies and customs the Coreans rise hardly above the level of savages; assuredly they do not occupy such a place in this respect that a people, not totally devoid of culture and civilization ought to take, and far below the Chinese and Japanese. ...from our point of view, they [the Chinese and Japanese] ... harbour at all events some feeling of piety and consideration for the keeping up of their old and long established religious usages, a feeling of which the Corean is utterly destitute. (112-113)

He attributes the Korean's deficiency in religious piety to a total degeneration of the Buddhist priests, and thereby degrades the priests to the lowest among all classes. Still, Korean Catholic converts are characterized highly, compared to their Chinese counterparts, who are thought sly and calculating and consider conversion almost always as a business transaction (118). By this, he means that while the Korean laymen harbor religious piety and ethics, the Buddhist priesthood has caused the corruption of religious customs at large. This is guaranteed by the sincere belief of the indigenous converts to Western religion, through which they could finally improve their piety.

Furthermore, in comparing the physical body and demeanor among the peoples of the three countries, he states that,

> Firm, sure, and quick in his walk, the Corean possesses greater ease and a freer motion than the Japanese, to whom, as to the Chinese, they are superior in tallness and bodily strength. Their bearing denotes also greater fortitude and energy, and a more developed warlike spirit. On the other hand it cannot be denied, that with all their bodily and mental advantages, they rank considerably below these in cultivation and good manners, and without *savoir-vivre*, they are wanting in that little polish which is not even missed amidst the low class population of China and Japan. (130)

He positively evaluates the stature and physical strength of Koreans compared to those of the other two peoples, but the judgment changes negatively when it comes to manners. Although the constitution and other bodily conditions may be recognized "objectively" to some extent, such "civilized" indicators as "manners" or "etiquette" tend to be judged from his own point of view. The so-called "civilized gaze" is further directed toward other aspects like housing architecture (138), medicine (135-6), hygiene (136), music (143), drama (144-

5), and so on, without reservation. Although the selections and judgments were drawn from his own criteria, it is supposed that his images of Korea as "uncivilized" resulted above all from the state of being "open" or "closed." Different to China and Japan, which were laboriously chasing 'civilization' in the aftermath of commencing intercourse with the West, Korea, keeping itself ever impenetrable was seen as no more than living in darkness and primitiveness.

Conclusion

This paper was motivated by a question of why Westerners' writings have caused renewed attention in Korean academia. The inquiry into what Said (1978) called Orientalism lays bare a trajectory of the (re)production of knowledge, by which the Other and Otherness of the West have been formed, documented, and represented. Indeed, it was a productive system of coding and recoding them into an unequal field of representation. A text, then, would hardly be free from the world, and the world, in turn, would not produce a separate text and author.

While Western perceptions and representations of Korea have historically been rooted in the images set down by Chinese and Japanese historical material, they were later (re)appropriated by those who tended to look into Korea in the mirrors of the two neighbouring empires. *A Forbidden Land: Voyages to the Corea*, in this sense, is a very important text for tracing back the route(s) of Western discourse on Korea. It not only offered grounds for the initial construction of Western perceptions, but also represented the "hermit kingdom" through a sequence of dialogues with and references to China and Japan. After dauntless voyages to the country prior to the opening of ports, Oppert represented Korea as the "Other"—as "in-between," situated historically between the two empires, and "uncivilized," not getting out of its remote darkness and consequently at a level of existence far below the opened neighbouring countries.

Still, a critical question further remains. Oppert's representation of Korea was virtually a reflection of complex elements: colonial desire shared by nineteenth century imperial Europe, the exploitation of overseas markets and the accumulation of wealth by making inroads into them, the needs for knowing the Others to rule them, the collection and translation of knowledge into Western terms, and above all the cross-references between texts. Therefore, in order to date back to the "origin" of discourse, not only European but also Chinese and

Japanese sources, by which Oppert's text was produced, and which I could not research more systematically in this paper, must be interrogated.

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