**HOW WESTERN CORRESPONDENTS COVERED THE JAPANESE SEIZURE OF KOREA DURING THE RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR**

I dedicate this book to our three beautiful and bright granddaughters: Madeleine Métraux, Mila Egan and Ella Marie Métraux

None of this would be possible without the devotion  
and care of my beautiful and loving wife of fifty years,  
Judy Métraux.

**CONTENTS**

**Foreword by Wilton S. Dillon, PhD** i

**Preface** v

**Acknowledgements** xxiii

**Chapter I – Life in Korea Prior to the Russo-Japanese  
 War** 1

Two Very Different Neighbors 1

Early Western Views of Korea: The Writing  
 of Isabella Bird Bishop 5

Corruption a Chief Cause of Poverty 11

Japan’s Gradual Absorption of Korea 18

The Russo-Japanese War 27

Why Did Korea Fall to Japan? 35

**Chapter II – American Attitudes Towards Japan and  
 Korea at the Time of the Russo-Japanese  
 War** 37

Western Attitudes Towards Imperialism at the  
 Time of the Russo-Japanese War 42

Japan’s Propaganda Campaign During the  
 Russo-Japanese War 47

Baron Kentarō Kaneko’s Close Relationship  
 With Theodore Roosevelt 49

Theodore Roosevelt’s Support for Japan’s  
 Takeover of Korea 51

The Second International Conference on  
 Peace at The Hague 55

American Policy Toward Korea: A Divergence  
 of Opinion 58

**Chapter III – George Kennan’s Depiction of Korea as  
 a “Degenerate State” and Japan as its Gracious  
 Savior** 59

George Kennan: A Career War Correspondent 60

George Kennan and Korea in 1905: How Japan  
 Could Save a Degenerate State 65

Kennan’s View of the Korean Government and  
 its Officials 74

Kennan’s Praise for Japan’s Promise to  
 Guide Korea Into the Modern World 78

Kennan’s Criticisms of Japanese Actions in  
 Korea 81

**Chapter IV – Frederick Palmer: Visionary Who  
Predicted the Russo-Japanese War Years  
Before its Onset** 87

First Encounter with Japanese Troops 90

Palmer Journeys to Japan in 1904 94

Palmer’s Exclusive Interview with Field  
Marshal Yamagata 95

Palmer Encounters Korea 95

Palmer and the Japanese Advance into  
Manchuria 103

Sampling of Palmer’s Writing Fully  
Demonstrates His Bias 105

Was Palmer an Objective Reporter? 107

**Chapter V - Jack London: Koreans as People of  
the Abyss** 111

London Arrives in Japan 113

Did Racism Cloud London’s Reporting  
in East Asia? 114

The Yellow Peril Threatens the West? 118

Japanese Aggression, Chinese Pride 119

China’s Rise Provokes the White Peril’s Gems 121

London the Internationalist Still Speaks to Us 125

Interlude: London’s Essay on the Future of  
Asia 125

London’s Long March Through Korea and  
Manchuria 128

London’s Experiences as a Journalist in Korea  
and Manchuria 130

London’s Koreans as “People of the Abyss” 131

How London Portrays Koreans as People of the  
Abyss 136

**Chapter VI - Frederick McKenzie: The Malevolent  
Japanese Seizure of Korea** 145

The Russo-Japanese War 149

A Journey to the Righteous Army 155

The Lack of Foreign Interest in Korea 155

Japan’s Goal was the Annihilation of Korean  
Identity 159

The March First Movement 160

Afterword 165

**Chapter VII - William Jennings Bryan: The Great  
Commoner Tours War-Torn Korea** 167

Bryan’s World Tour 1905-06: Japan and  
Korea 168

Bryan Arrives in Korea 173

**Chapter VIII - William E. Griffis: The Studious  
Compiler** 183

**Chapter IX - Thomas Millard: Anti-Imperialist  
Critic of Japan** 197

Millard’s Critical View of Japanese  
Imperialism 203

**Chapter X – Epilogue** 211

The Case of Korea 214

The Rashōmon Effect 219

**Bibliography** 223

**Index** 229

**FOREWORD**

For several decades I served as director of the Smithsonian Institution’s interdisciplinary symposia series and resided atop the Smithsonian “Castle.” Directly below me was the then-headquarters of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars which housed the Kennan Institute. The Kennan Institute is named for George Kennan (1845-1924), a famous war correspondent, explorer of Russia and Siberia, and a founder of the National Geographic Society. I am told that whenever he was in Washington, Kennan would come up to what later became my office to admire the magnificent views of the mall and capitol.

I have always admired Kennan, not only for his work as a journalist but also for his pioneering ethnological studies of tribal peoples in Siberia and elsewhere. So I was quite intrigued when my younger colleague Daniel A. Métraux asked me to read drafts of several chapters of a book he is writing on how North American journalists including Kennan covered the Japanese occupation and later colonization of Korea at the time of the Russo-Japanese War. His chapter on Kennan’s reporting raises real questions about his objectivity and his honesty as a journalist.

Daniel Métraux structures his work around the framework of Akira Kurosawa’s 1950 film, Rashōmon where viewers must explore an inexplicable crime scene, the fictional murder of a samurai and the rape of his wife. There is no doubt that a crime did take place, but the viewer is presented with eyewitness stories that are clearly mutually contradictory. The film is an exploration of multiple realities that asks the poignant question, “What is Truth? What is reality?”

Métraux asks the same questions concerning Western reporting of Japan’s initial military occupation of Korea during the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905). He examines the writing of seven correspondents: George Kennan, Frederick Palmer, Jack London, Frederick McKenzie, William Jennings Bryan, William Elliott Griffis and Thomas Millard. They all agree that Japan was a successful modern nation, that Korea was an impoverished corrupt backwater, and that something had to be done to bring the Koreans into the modern world. Where they so greatly differ is on Japan’s motives for seizing Korea and Japan’s ability to modernize the “Hermit Kingdom.” Kennan and Palmer portray Japan as a most benevolent big brother who will unselfishly give a helping hand to its stricken neighbor while Millard condemns Japan as a merciless imperialist and McKenzie accuses Japan of employing brutal tactics in its unwarranted theft of Korean nationhood. London does not trust Japan’s motives in Korea while Griffis and Bryan are supportive of Japan, but have severe reservations over the way in which Japan entered Korea.

Today cultural anthropologists face very similar questions when studying other cultures. Too often ethnologists can apply their own values when documenting the customs of an alien culture. Even Margaret Mead’s controversial presentation of the sexual mores of young Balinese women has been challenged by other anthropologists. The worthy journalist or anthropologist will make an honest effort to be as objective as possible, but it is almost impossible to keep out some biases in their presentations.

Kurosawa asks us “What is Truth” and responds that “Truth is relative.” Daniel Métraux makes inquiries over the truths over Japan’s initial incursion into Korea in 1904. He asks, “What were Japan’s true motives when its army occupied Korea in early 1904? Was it there to save the Koreans or to enhance its own power?” The seven correspondents covered here provide wildly different answers.

Daniel Métraux wants the reader to beware when reading supposedly factual news. What is Truth? That’s the hardest question of all.

Wilton S. Dillon

Senior Scholar Emeritus

Smithsonian Institution

[Editor’s Note: Wilton S. Dillion (1923-2015) died six months after composing this Foreword.]

**PREFACE**

**UNBALANCED REPORTING ON THE JAPANESE SEIZURE OF KOREA DURING THE RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR**

We live in societies that champion freedom of the press. A vibrant press is a key ingredient of a successful democracy, but it is essential that writers and publications separate hard news from news analysis and editorial opinion. When it comes to reporting the news, accuracy and balance as well as an effort to see all sides of a story are critical components. Unbalanced reporting or deliberate misrepresentation of the facts represents the antithesis of responsible journalism.

Modern war journalism is especially susceptible to biased reporting. Wars place nations against nations, governments against governments, and people against people. There is strong pressure by each belligerent to manage the news. Even the most balanced war correspondent can have difficulty seeing the big picture. Correspondents too often interpret facts differently and allow their subjectivity to diminish their accuracy. The result is that too often war journalism is unbalanced and incomplete. These factors reveal themselves in the coverage of any conflict, but few examples have been as egregious as reporting on the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905). The war attracted great interest worldwide because it involved the first modern conflict between a major Western power and a rising Asian nation.

The goal of this work is to demonstrate and analyze the “Rashōmon effect,” a phenomenon where there are so many different interpretations of what is going on that it becomes difficult to know the whole truth. The Western coverage of the Russo-Japanese War provides a clear example of this phenomenon. The structure of this research follows the thematic nature of the classic Japanese film *Rashōmon*, a psychological thriller that challenges the audience to determine the truth of what it has seen. The focus of this work is on the 1904-1905 Japanese occupation and eventual seizure of Korea which served as the base for Japan’s invasion of Manchuria where Russian forces awaited them and the basis for Japan’s absorption of Korea into its empire in 1910. Western journalists covering the Japanese move into Korea provided readers in the West with highly contradictory stories. Some reporters portrayed Korea as a “degenerate” nation incapable of saving itself. They lauded Japan for its stated willingness to intervene in Korean affairs as a benevolent “brother” who would make the necessary sacrifices to usher Korea into the modern world. Others also saw Korea’s weakness, but questioned Japan’s motives for forcing the Koreans to accept them as overlords. A few saw a very different phenomenon occurring. They characterized Japan as an imperialist monster intent on devouring a helpless Korean state.

The emphasis in my study is on seven Western writers, six American and one Canadian, who reported the war from behind Japanese lines. There were other Western correspondents who covered the war from behind Russian lines and there were several journals such as *Collier’s* that covered both sides with different reporters. A few writers like the *New York Herald*’s Thomas Millard managed at different times to gain access to both sides, but such cases were quite rare. Since the focus of this work is on the coverage of Japanese efforts to control Korea, I will consider only the work of Japan-based writers.

The Russo-Japanese War attracted some of the great correspondents and writers of the early 20th century including Richard Harding Davis, George Kennan, Frederick Palmer, Jack London, Frederick Arthur McKenzie, William Elliot Griffis, William Jennings Bryan and Thomas Millard. Each of these men presented his audience at home with widely diverse views of the war, and it is possible that at least some of them may have influenced policymakers such as President Theodore Roosevelt on how they reacted to the Japanese entry into Korea. We know that Roosevelt paid close attention to the press and actively read material written by Kennan, Palmer and London and regarded Kennan and Palmer as his unofficial advisers.

A contributing factor to poor reporting of the war was the Japanese effort to manage the flow of information and to censor news reports—all to the utter dismay of the Western journalists who traveled to Tokyo in 1904 hoping to cover the conflict. The Japanese initially forbade Western reporters to embed themselves with Japanese forces marching north in Korea from Seoul to confront Russian troops awaiting them in southern Manchuria or sailing to attack the Russian naval base at Port Arthur. The Japanese endeavored to confine these reporters to the environs of the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo where they received daily press briefings from Japanese military authorities. Later small groups of reporters, many of whom demonstrated a more pro-Japanese balance in their reporting, were allowed to join the Japanese military in Manchuria and Port Arthur under the close supervision of Japanese authorities.

The Japanese justified their restrictions on grounds of national security. They wanted to manage and restrict the flow of information to prevent the Russians from learning about their battle plans and troop movements. There is the anecdotal story that the Japanese felt that the Russians were giving far too much military information to the press. It is said that officials in Japanese embassies in Europe were carefully studying press reports emanating from Russia and wiring government offices in Tokyo with what they perceived as Russian military intentions.

**New Technology and the Growth of Modern Journalism**

The late nineteenth century witnessed the dawn of modern journalism. Daily newspapers in North America and Western Europe competed ferociously to gain an upper hand, and newspaper chains like the Hearst papers gained prominence. This evolution in journalism came into being with the emergence of the telegraph in the 1840s and 1850s and the astounding progress in the mechanics of journalism which allowed major newspapers to publish tens of thousands of papers each day. This era also saw the birth of many widely circulated news magazines such as *Collier’s* and *The Outlook* which came out on a weekly or monthly basis.

The advent of modern journalism led to the evolution of career correspondents who often became as famous as the newspapers and journals that employed them. Certainly the most famous and most flamboyant journalist of the era was Richard Harding Davis (1864-1916). Other noted journalists of this early modern era include George Kennan and Frederick Palmer. To attract more readers newspapers and magazines such as *Collier’s, The Outlook* and the Hearst newspaper chain invited the services of celebrity writers such as Jack London to attract more readers. Other writers such as the famous politician William Jennings Bryan created their own journals to circulate their ideas.

Foreign conflicts in the late Victorian era drew substantial attention from these publications and wars in Asia were no exception. The first Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), the Philippine-American War (1899-1901), the 1900 Boxer Rebellion in China and the Russo-Japanese War which began in early February 1904 all attracted their fair share of Western correspondents from Europe and North America.

**The *Rashōmon* Effect of Western Reporting of the Russo-Japanese War**

*Rashōmon,*[[1]](#footnote-1)a 1950 Japanese film directed by Akira Kurosawa (1910-1988), is often cited as one of the finest films that investigates the philosophy of justice. It is on the surface a crime thriller, but the narrative goes much deeper. The viewer is asked to confront multiple personal perceptions of reality in a vain attempt to get at the final truth. Kurosawa asks us whether it is ever possible to look at certain circumstances and to arrive at a definite conclusion. Can we as humans ever really agree with absolute certainty about anything? Are we able to be absolutely objective about anything, or are we forced away because our subjectivity gets in the way?

The story seems perfectly straightforward. Centuries ago in Japan a fictional samurai and his wife making their way on a lonely path through a thick forest near Kyoto are apprehended by the notorious bandit Tajimaru. We soon learn that Tajimaru raped a woman and that her husband is dead. Tajimaru is soon captured and is under investigation at a police station in Kyoto. However, the testimony that he gives concerning the husband’s death is remarkably different from that of the wife. A physic is brought in to allow the murdered samurai to give his own testimony which to everybody’s surprise reflects yet another interpretation of what happened. However, a woodsman appears who says he witnessed the whole crime, but rather than corroborate any of the other testimonies, he offers yet another version of the alleged crime.

The viewer is left in a quandary. The samurai is dead, but how did he die? Did the bandit kill him in a fight to the death? Did he kill himself out of shame for his inability to save his wife? Did his wife in any way bring on his death? The actors during the filming of the movie begged Kurosawa to provide them with a definitive answer, but he refused. So we are left with the question, who is telling the truth? Are the witnesses lying and if so, what or whose agenda are they trying to promote? An even broader question might be, what is truth?

We confront this *Rashōmon* problem every time we open a history book, read a newspaper, or watch the news on TV. When I teach Asian history courses at Mary Baldwin University in Virginia, I always tell my students that there is no one way to look at any one historical event. When asked why a certain event occurred, each student must come up with her own rational explanation. For example, when I lecture on Pearl Harbor, I give my students both American and Japanese points of view as to why the attack occurred. I then ask them to write an essay on the question, “Who was responsible for Pearl Harbor?” Twenty students will submit twenty very different explanations of what happened. They all agree that the Japanese attacked Hawaii and that Americans were taken by surprise, but some will argue that the Japanese acted in self-defense because President Roosevelt had cut off their access to oil. They argue that American actions provoked the attack. Others take a very different point of view.

Journalists are supposed to be utterly objective in their reporting, but during the coverage of the 2016 presidential campaign in the United States, readers encountered wide discrepancies in reporting. MSNBC and FOX were clearly unbalanced in their reporting, but even more objective sources like the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* were at times less balanced in their reporting. Fox spent a lot of time focusing on Mrs. Clinton’s email debacle while blithely ignoring Mr. Trump’s alleged sexual escapades while the *Times* and *Post* virtually ignored the emails and gave a lot of attention to Mr. Trump’s problems.

There are times when reporting on certain events can greatly influence public opinion and influence government actions. Coverage of the civil rights marches in places like Selma Alabama in the early 1960s certainly led the way to the Civil Rights laws of 1964 and to the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Television coverage of the Vietnam War without doubt led to the vigorous anti-war movement and at times over-zealous coverage of the antiwar candidacy of Senator Eugene McCarthy probably contributed to President Lyndon Johnson’s decision to leave the race in March 1968 before it really began.

Some of the most egregious examples of biased reporting occurred during the Russo-Japanese War. It is also possible that some of this biased reporting influenced American policies toward Japan and Korea at the time of the war. The war was the first major conflict of the 20th century pitting Russia, a huge but lumbering European power, against Japan, an upstart modernizing Asian nation that until the late 1860s lacked most of the elements that one might call modern. The war seemed like a perfect David versus Goliath scenario, an epic struggle between East and West.

**War Objectives**

The object of the war was dominance in northeast Asia with a focus on the Korean Peninsula and southern Manchuria. Russia was in the process of attempting to become a Pacific power. The Russians had seized the maritime region in eastern Siberia from China and by the 1860s were in the process of building what is now the major port city of Vladivostok. Russia coveted control over Korea for its warm water ports and improved access to the Pacific Ocean. Japan saw Russian—or any other nation’s—control pf Korea as a severe threat to its national security. Because of Korea’s strategic position (its place between three major powers, Japan, China and Russia made it vulnerable to outside attack), Japan was very willing to go to war to ensure control of Korea.

Well over one hundred American, Canadian, British and other Western reporters rushed to Japan to cover the war. Many of them never got beyond Tokyo where they were wined and dined by the Japanese government which fed them daily news items extolling the virtues of the Japanese army and navy. The Japanese practiced strict censorship throughout the war. Very few reporters were allowed anywhere near the front and their transmissions underwent strict censorship by the Japanese military before they were sent to their home newspapers and journals.

Part of Japan’s apparent strategy was to encourage the writing of Western journalists who would support Japan’s effort to create a protectorate over Korea. The notion was that since political leaders in the West had very little knowledge of the history and culture of Korea, Western journalists who would support Japan’s point of view could effectively mold opinion in the West. It is evident that at least some Western journalists like Kennan and Palmer who demonstrated strong sympathies with Japanese views and aims and who had a broad readership in the West received gala treatment from Japanese authorities. They got lavish accommodations and traveled with Japanese officials across Korea where they could witness the terrible living conditions of the people and the good work being done by the Japanese to modernize and reform Korean society.

**The Nature of this Work**

This study examines the reporting of seven foreign war correspondents that covered the war and its aftermath: George Kennan (1844-1923), Frederick Palmer (1873-1958), Jack London (1876-1916), Frederick Arthur McKenzie (1869-1931), William E. Griffis (1843-1928), Thomas Millard (1868-1942) and William Jennings Bryan (1860-1925). Each of these correspondents portrayed the Russo-Japanese War from different perspectives.

George Kennan was best known for his extensive journalism in and exploration of Russia in the late 1800s. He traveled throughout Russia and became openly critical of the repression of the tsarist regime and of its prison camps in Siberia. The Associated Press hired Kennan as a roving wire service journalist who covered political affairs in the United States[[2]](#footnote-2) and who gained prominence as a war correspondent who for the rest of his life traveled to many conflict areas around the world. As a free-lance journalist in the late 1880s and 1890s, Kennan contributed numerous articles on world affairs to many of the leading journals of his day including *The Century Magazine* and *National Geographic.* He covered unrest in Europe and Russia, the American invasion of Cuba in 1898, the Russo-Japanese War, World War I and late in life, the Russian Revolution. Kennan was also a part of the group that founded the National Geographic Society. Overall Kennan became famous not only in the United States, but also throughout Europe not only as a war and political correspond-dent, but also as an outspoken critic of autocratic government in Europe.

Kennan became a strong critic of the autocratic policies of the tsarist government of Russia. Through his many books articles, and speaking tours, the elder Kennan did more to shape the popular “image of Siberia—and to a considerable extent—of tsarist Russia itself—as a prison of peoples.” It is estimated that Kennan delivered more than eight hundred lectures to an aggregate of one million or more listeners between 1889 and 1898 on the tsarist government’s persecution of Jews and dissidents.[[3]](#footnote-3) His activities led to his ultimate banishment from Russia in 1891.

The Russo-Japanese War gave Kennan an opportunity to explore new parts of the world, to report back to a mass audience back in the United States, and to influence American policy concerning Russia. An influential New York weekly news magazine, *The Outlook,* hired him to cover the war and President Theodore Roosevelt turned to him as one of his chief Russian advisors.[[4]](#footnote-4) Kennan traveled to Japan and had the unique privilege of accompanying the Japanese fleet that lay siege to the Russian naval base at Port Arthur. With the cooperation of the Japanese he visited Korea at least twice, early in 1904 at the start of the war and again in the Fall of 1905 after the war had ended. He spent the first part of 1906 reporting on events in China. Overall he wrote about 25 dispatches between 1904 and early 1906, each of which averaged 2000 to 3000 words.

Kennan and Frederick Palmer, informal but valued advisors to President Theodore Roosevelt, provided a distorted image of Japan and Korea that very likely played an important role in the shaping of American foreign policy and public opinion in favor of Japan’s takeover of Korea during the Russo-Japanese War. What their influence was is hard to determine, but Palmer certainly[[5]](#footnote-5) and probably Kennan met with the President in Washington. Roosevelt’s opinions on Japan, Russia and Korea largely reflected the writing of these two correspondents.

Until the start of World War II, very few Americans had any knowledge of Korea and the United States had no vital interests there and was by and large indifferent to its fate.[[6]](#footnote-6) Realizing this the Japanese government did everything in its power to affect the flow of news coming out of Tokyo in a favorable light. Japanese military officials fed Palmer and Kennan an endless stream of propaganda which they agreeably reported in their articles[[7]](#footnote-7) Kennan and Palmer, both of whom commanded a large readership in the U.S, and who were on close terms with Roosevelt, caught the attention of the Japanese. It seems that the Japanese military invited Kennan and Palmer to accompany Japanese leaders on “fact-finding” missions in Korea and Manchuria with the implicit understanding that they would write a stream of articles showing the utter depravity of Korea and the magnanimity of Japan’s desire to modernize a free and independent Korea.

Kennan and Palmer did their job beautifully. They were lavish in their praise of the Japanese. They lauded the ability of Japan to modernize itself so quickly, on the honesty and efficiency of its government and military, and for the general cleanliness of Japan. They reported just the opposite about Korea which they saw as backward and hopelessly corrupt without a functioning government and military. They frequently commented on the filth and deprivation of the cities and the degenerate nature of the Korean people. Both men sent a stream of articles back to the U.S. and Palmer, who made a brief trip back to Washington in late 1904, briefed President Roosevelt on the nature of Japan’s occupation of Korea.

The result of this reporting may have influenced the implementation of American foreign policy that strongly backed the Japanese takeover of Korea and public opinion that supported this approach. The following Kennan quote is quite typical:

The first thing that strikes a traveler in going from Japan to Korea is the extraordinary contrast between the cleanliness, good order, industry, and general prosperity of one country, and the filthiness, demoralization, laziness, and general rack and ruin of the other… The Japanese are clean, enterprising, intelligent, brave, well-educated and strenuously industrious, while the Koreans strike a newcomer as dirty in person and habits, apathetic, slow-witted, lacking in spirit, densely ignorant, and constitutionally lazy. Korea is an organism that has become so diseased as to lose its power of growth; and it can be restored to a normal condition only by a long course of remedial treatment.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Jack London was a far more balanced correspondent than either Kennan or Palmer. Already a famous novelist and short-story writer in the United States, the twenty-eight year-old London readily accepted an offer from the Hearst newspapers to cover the war. He had a glorified view of the role of the foreign correspondent—basically he wanted to see blood and action at the front, but the Japanese military absolutely refused to let any Western reporters embed themselves in the Japanese army as it marched north from Seoul to the Yalu River in the late winter of 1904. Japanese censorship was very strict.

When London arrived in Tokyo in late January 1904, he very quickly realized that the Japanese were going to force virtually every Western reporter to stay at lavish hotels in Tokyo where they would be courted by the Japanese government and fed a constant stream of government propaganda. London would have none of this. On his own initiative he took passage on a small ship making its way to Korea. After a rather arduous trip, London—to the shock of the Japanese military—suddenly appeared in Seoul. Not knowing what to do with him, the Japanese allowed London and two other reporters including McKenzie to travel north behind the Japanese army.

The correspondents’ freedom of movement was very restricted, but London very dutifully took close to fifteen hundred photographs and wrote twenty-two long feature articles which made their way back to the Hearst chain. These articles focused on the strength and bravery of the common Japanese soldier, the desperate poverty of Koreans, and the corruption that so permeated Korean society. London often confronted Japanese military officials who eventually grew so exasperated that they wanted to get rid of him in any way possible. When London got into a tussle with a Japanese soldier whom London felt was mistreating his horse, the Japanese high command arrested London and threatened to court-marshal him. It took a timely telegram from President Roosevelt to get London safely and quickly expelled from East Asia in June, 1904.

Canadian-born but British-based Frederick Arthur McKenzie initially came to Korea as a great admirer of the Japanese. When he witnessed the arrival of their military in February 1904 in Seoul, he wrote that they must take upon themselves the modernization and betterment of the lives of Koreans. But as time went by, McKenzie came to like and respect the Koreans he met and soon became aware of the fact that while the Japanese did indeed plan to modernize and clean up Korea, they were going to do it for their own benefit and at the expense of Korean freedom and independence. In late 1904 and early 1905, McKenzie witnessed the Japanese usurping the Korean government and their gradual takeover of Korean society.

McKenzie saw the Japanese move as grossly inhumane. Koreans were neglected and often beaten. Whenever a Korean singularly or in a group protested he (and often she) were quickly arrested and confined in prison without trial. When some Korean women continued their protests, the Japanese stripped them naked and forced them to march throughout their towns. This humiliation of Korea and the brutality of the Japanese infuriated McKenzie. Later after the war McKenzie heard that some younger Koreans had fled to the mountains to launch an insurgency campaign against the Japanese occupiers, McKenzie was the only Western reporter to go visit the rebels, many of whom lost their lives in their futile campaign. The Japanese wanted to expel McKenzie, but because he was a British subject and because they valued the 1902 Japanese-British mutual security treaty, they did not wish to create an incident that would upset their allies.

William Jennings Bryan was one of the best known American politicians of the late 1800s and early 1900s. He was a two-term Nebraska Congressman who became the unsuccessful Democratic candidate for President in 1896, 1900 and 1908. He was a progressive candidate for President who claimed to stand for the “common man” as opposed to the wealthy oligarchy that he claimed had taken control of American politics. Early in his career Bryan founded the weekly news magazine *The Commoner* which had a large circulation and often published his articles. When Bryan went on a worldwide tour in 1905-1906 he stopped in Japan and Korea for several weeks and got a good look at both nations immediately after the end of the war. He wrote numerous articles about the Japan takeover of Korea, for which he gave his approval on the condition that the Koreans gave the Japanese their approval for their proposed reforms in Korea.

William Elliot Griffis was America’s first bona fide Japan scholar. After graduating from what is now Rutgers University in New Jersey in 1869, Griffis spent four years (1870-1874) teaching science in several Japanese schools including an institution which later became Tokyo University. Griffis only returned to Japan in 1926 when he received a special award from the Japanese government and got a guided tour of Japanese-controlled Manchuria and Korea. He became an ordained minister after his 1874 return to the U.S. and held several positions in a number of churches. He was also a very prolific writer on East Asian affairs including *The Mikado’s Empire* (1877 and many future editions) and a history of Korea (1882). He wrote a total of 18 books and hundreds of magazine and newspaper articles as well as giving numerous lectures. When the Russo-Japanese War started, the New York-based news magazine *The Outlook* induced him to write an article on Korean life.

Thomas Millard, who became a famous China-based reporter in the 1920s and 1930s, experienced his first major conflict covering it from both the Russian and Japanese perspectives. Millard was a vigorous opponent of imperialism and thus took a very dim view of the Japanese seizure of Korea. His 1905 book *The New Asia* provides perhaps the best analytical coverage of the war.

Therefore, with their varying preconceptions and interpretations of the Russo-Japanese War and the Japanese entry into Korea, these American correspondents present a *Rashōmon effect* in their coverage of the war. Kennan and Palmer became unwitting propagandists for the Japanese while McKenzie and Millard condemned Japanese imperialism and their brutality in Korea. London gave the most balanced coverage of the war but made few comments on the Japanese seizure of Korea. Griffis and Bryan both admired the Japanese and felt that Japan could potentially help modernize Korea, but also worried that the Koreans would oppose Japanese entry into their realm.

We thus see here a very *Rashōmon effect* in the coverage of the war—from Kenan and Palmer who seemingly sold their souls to the Japanese to London who tried his best to be an objective reporter and McKenzie who covered the very dark side of the Japanese seizure of Korea and on to Griffis, Bryan and Millard who had very different takes on the war. Determination of which writer gave the most accurate as well as the most inaccurate view of the Japanese seizure of Korea is left to the discretion of each reader. Kurosawa asks his viewers to decide the truth through their own thought processes and these seven correspondents ask us to do the same. Thus, we can see the Rashōmon effect around us in everyday life.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This project came to life in October 2007 when my daughter Katie Métraux took me to visit the Jack London State Historical Park near Sonoma, California. Katie, at that time a historic preservationist and curator with the California State Park Service, had played a key role in restoring Jack London’s House (“The Beauty Ranch”). While walking through the exhibits I encountered a photograph where Jack London was having an earnest conversation with a small group of Japanese military officers in Manchuria in the spring of 1904 at the outset of the Russo-Japanese War. “What was London doing there?” I wondered.

As a specialist in modern Japanese history, I was especially interested in what a novelist with his stature was doing in a war zone. Further research informed me that London had a great interest in East Asia and that he had written many newspaper articles, magazine pieces, and short stories with an East Asian focus. I read all of London’s material on East Asia and in 2009 Edwin Mellen Press published my book, *The Asian Writings of Jack London.* I am forever grateful to Katie Métraux for introducing me to Jack London and to Dr. Jeanne Reesman and Professor Kenneth Brandt, leaders of the Jack London Society, for encouraging my work on London and allowing me an opportunity to participate in Jack London symposia and conference panels.

Further research on press coverage of the Russo-Japanese War led to my discovery of the writing of George Kennan, Frederick McKenzie, W. E. Griffis, William Jennings Bryan and Thomas Millard. Professor William Walker kindly introduced me to the work of correspondent Frederick Palmer.

Several knowledgeable scholars took many hours to read the first draft of my manuscript. They include William Walker, Dr. Robert Grotjohn, Dean Hye Ok Park, Harris Dillon, Anne-Louise Lasley and USN Retired Captain Michael Radoui. Their many suggestions played a key role in the improvement of the text and their hard work is much appreciated.

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I sent a very early draft of this work to another distinguished scholar, Dr. Wilton Dillon (1923-2015), in early 2015 requesting that he write a foreword for the book. He agreed and completed the foreword shortly before his death in August 2015. Luckily I had an opportunity to thank Dr. Dillon before his passing.

**CHAPTER I**

**LIFE IN KOREA PRIOR TO THE RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR**

Japan and Korea had very different responses in the manner in which they approached modernity and Western cultures. Japan had become a powerful industrial and military power because of its decision to open itself to Western learning and technology. Korea, on the other hand, had rebuffed the West and remained a poor, isolated and corrupt society with no apparent means to defend itself. Western writers who visited both countries often praised Japan’s successful efforts at modernization and criticized Korea for the backward nature of its society.

**Two Very Different Neighbors**

The rapid modernization of Japan that began in earnest in the early 1870s stunned the Western world. Only fifty years had elapsed since an American naval flotilla commanded by Commodore Matthew Perry had obliged Japan’s Tokugawa shogunate (1600-1867) in 1854 to abandon its policy of seclusion until Japan challenged one of Europe’s formidable military powers, Russia, over which nation would control both Korea and Chinese Manchuria. The weakness of the Shogunate in its relationship with the West encouraged groups of highly nationalistic *samurai* to overthrow the Tokugawa regime and to create a wholly new government in 1868 based in Tokyo which was determined to preserve Japan’s independence. Rather than imitating China’s xenophobic attempts to isolate itself from the West, Japan’s Meiji leaders threw open its doors with the expressed purpose of learning as much about Western technology and ways as they could. Hundreds of Japanese students went to the United States and Europe to study while several thousand Western teachers and technical experts came to Japan to instruct their eager Japanese pupils.

Japan worked hard to modernize its society during the Meiji era (1868-1912). Educational reforms led to the creation of a new school system modeled after those in the West. All children, male and female, attended primary schools together. Social classes were abolished and any male now had the opportunity to advance to positions of leadership and responsibility through his own endeavor.[[9]](#footnote-9) The government supervised the gradual industrialization of the country with the textile industries leading the way. The Japanese developed modern shipyards, modernized their mining industry, and built a national network of railroads. By 1904 Japan had become a very modern and energetic industrial power by existing world standards. The Japanese also built a modern army and navy through universal male conscription. The military was put to its first test in the 1894-1895 Sino-Japanese War to determine which nation would hold sway in Korea. Japan’s fast and overwhelming victory led to foreign recognition that Japan was the first modern Asian power.

Korea’s history differed greatly from that of Japan. The Korean Peninsula had been inhabited since Paleolithic times, and today Korean historians trace the ethnic roots of the Korean people at least as far back as the pottery-using cultures of the fourth and third centuries BCE. Early tribal groups formed numerous federations and over the centuries these combined into larger nation-like entities. Chinese troops during the Han dynasties (206 BCE-220 CE) invaded Korea and held much of the region for the duration of the dynasties. At that time the Chinese introduced Koreans to many aspects of their advanced civilization including Buddhism, Confucianism and the Chinese writing system.

After the collapse of Chinese rule in Korea at the end of the Han era, three separate states came to dominate Korea: Koguryo in the north, Paekche in the southwest and Silla to the southeast. Korean political, cultural and linguistic unity dates from the unification of these three kingdoms under Silla in the seventh century CE, making Korea, despite its current division into two nations, one of the older unified nations in the world. Over the years Korea developed its own social and cultural patterns. Korea adopted the Chinese model of monarchy and successive dynasties, rather than developing an imperial line from its early tribal federations. At the same time Korea retained its native preference for a strongly aristocratic social order based on hereditary lineages. While always an independent kingdom, Korea maintained very close ties with China which it recognized as its protector, close ally, and “mother country.” Korea sent frequent “tributary missions” to China which in effect served as a means of trade.

Geographically poised among China, Japan and Russia, Korea has long been the focal point for regional conflict. Recovering from two Japanese invasions in the 1590s and Chinese Manchu incursions in the early 1600s, Korea’s last traditional dynasty—the kingdom of Choson (1392-1910) withdrew into self-protective isolation, strictly regulating travel and commerce with Japan while maintaining its tributary status with China. By the mid to late nineteenth century, however, a revived Japan and several Western states including the United States sought to open all of East Asia, including what they termed the Korean “Hermit Kingdom” to Western-style trade and diplomatic relations. Japan was the first foreign state to open the Korean door, imposing a Western-style “unequal treaty” on Korea in 1876. The United States and other Western states established diplomatic relations with Korea in 1882, and by the late 1880s many Western tourists and missionary-teachers began entering Korea.

At the turn of the last century, Korea became the object of two wars as both Japan and China in turn fought to maintain footholds on the peninsula and to exclude a Russia that was keenly interested in Korea’s warm-water ports. After Japan’s victory over Russia in the Russo-Japanese War, Korea became a Japanese colony from 1910 until 1945, when American and Russian forces threw out the Japanese and created the current division of Korea.

It is important to note that part of the reason that Korea seemed to be so impoverished in the eyes of Western writers who visited the “Hermit Kingdom” was that Korea had suffered severe destruction during the 1894-1895 Sino-Japanese War. Much of the fighting actually occurred in Korea, and Koreans were just starting to recover from that conflict when the Russo-Japanese War started and a large Japanese army was stationed in Korea.

**Early Western Views of Korea: The Writing of Isabella Bird Bishop**

Although many Westerners had visited China and Japan by the early 1880s, very few had visited smaller and less consequential countries like Korea or the Philippines. There were very few books or articles written about these minor states and only several people in the West had any idea where they were or understood their cultures.[[10]](#footnote-10) Even President McKinley, when forced to decide whether the United States should colonize the Philippines or not, had to admit that he had no idea where the Philippines was located.

Foreign tourists began entering Korea in the 1880s and 1890s, and a few missionaries and educators settled in Korea starting in the mid-1880s. The tourists often stayed at Mme Sontag’s hotel in Seoul where for the modest sum of three yen per day (about $1.50) they could enjoy some of the comforts of home while exploring the ancient capital.[[11]](#footnote-11) American missionary educators like James Scarth Gale (1863-1937), a Canadian Presbyterian missionary who arrived in Korea in 1888, and Horace Newton Allen (1858-1932), a Protestant medical missionary who built the first Western hospital in Korea, settled in the country and wrote extensive books and articles that brought Korea to the attention of the West.

Perhaps the most widely read of the early Western writers was the intrepid British adventurer, Mrs. Isabella Bird Bishop(1831-1904), who visited many then exotic parts of the world and wrote at least eighteen books about her travels. As a young woman she traveled to Canada and Scotland and later to Australia, Hawaii and the Rocky Mountains in the United States. Later in the 1880s and 1890s she explored parts of Japan, China, Korea, Vietnam, Singapore and Malaysia. She first visited Korea in 1894 and returned there on three more occasions through 1897. Her 1897 book *Korea and Her Neighbors*[[12]](#footnote-12)is an important volume because it presents a comprehensive look at Korea just after the Sino-Japanese War, but well before Japan’s full penetration of the country. Later writers who came to Korea like Jack London often read Bishop’s book to get some understanding of the country that they were about to visit.

Mrs. Bishop, like many other contemporary tourists who visited Korea in the late 1800s and early 1900s, initially had a very negative view of Korea. These visitors remarked on the pervasive poverty that they saw everywhere: the filth in the streets, the poor condition of the housing, the superstitious nature of the people, and rampant corruption at every level of government. Travelers like Mrs. Bishop who actually stayed for a while in the country, however, eventually got over their initial dismay and came to appreciate the beauty of Korea’s mountains and rugged coastline and the warmth of the people.[[13]](#footnote-13) By the end of Mrs. Bishop’s fourth visit to Korea in 1897, she was expressing her great appreciation of the natural scenery of the country that she had explored on horseback and deep regret at leaving behind so many close friends.

Despite Mrs. Bishop’s growing love for Korea, the poverty of the people and the filth on the streets and in houses dismayed her. When she visited Korea for the first time she had already traveled to Japan and China. She saw rapid modernization, cleanliness, and other signs of progress in Japan and much of the ancient glory of China. Korea when compared to Japan and China in 1894 was poor, dirty, and certainly inconsequential, a small nation helplessly caught in the struggle for Asian domination among Russia, China and Japan.

Mrs. Bishop’s commentaries on Korea and Japan are important because she was one of the earliest visitors to Korea and because her works sold very well in Great Britain and North America. We know that Jack London and William Jennings Bryan read her work on Japan and Korea and that George Kennan probably did so as well.

Mrs. Bishop starts her narrative by looking at China’s heady influence in shaping Korea’s traditional culture:

Chinese influence in government, law, education, etiquette, social relations and morals is predominant. In all of these respects, Korea is but a feeble reflection of her powerful neighbor; and though since the [1894-1895 Sino-Japanese] war the Koreans have ceased to look to China for assistance, their sympathies are with her, and they turn to her for noble ideals, cherished traditions, and moral teachings. Their literature, superstitions, system of education, ancestral worship, culture and modes of thinking are Chinese. Society is organized on Confucian models, and the rights of parents over children and of elder over younger brothers, are as fully recognized as in China.

It is into this archaic condition of things, this irredeemable, unreformed Orientalism this parody of China without the robustness of race which will help to hold China together, that the ferment of Western leaven has fallen, [on] this feeblest of independent kingdoms, rudely shaken out of her sleep of centuries, half frightened and wholly dazed, finds herself confronted with an array of powerful, ambitious, aggressive, and not over scrupulous powers, bent, it may be, on overreaching her and each other, forcing her into new paths … clamoring for concessions, and bewildering her with reforms, suggestions and panaceas, of which she sees neither the meaning or necessity.[[14]](#footnote-14)

These early views are superficial at best. At first glance it is possible to see the profound effect that Chinese culture and Confucianism has had in Korea, but a closer look reveals the fact that while traditional Chinese culture has influenced Korea, there is a distinct Korean culture that is in no way a direct carbon copy of old China.

Mrs. Bishop took to the streets of Korea’s cities and took long sojourns across rural parts of both southern and northern Korea. Her early impressions were hardly favorable:

I sat amongst the dirt, squalor, rubbish and odd-endism of the inn yard before starting, surrounded by an apathetic, dirty, vacant-looking, open-mouthed crowd steeped in poverty. I felt Korea to be hopeless, helpless, pitiable, piteous, a mere shuttlecock of certain great powers, and that there is no hope for her population of twelve or fourteen millions.[[15]](#footnote-15)

When Mrs. Bishop first arrived in Korea, she arrived in the southern port city of Pusan (Busan). By the 1890s there was a large Japanese settlement in Pusan as well as the homes of many Westerners, but the Korean sections of the city shocked Bird because of their dilapidation:

A miserable place I thought it and later experience showed that it was neither more nor less miserable than the general run of Korean towns. Its narrow, dirty streets consist of low hovels built of mud-smeared wattle without windows, straw roofs, and deep eves, a black smoke hole, in every wall 2 feet from the ground, and outside most are irregular ditches containing solid and liquid refuse. Mangy dogs and blear-eyed children, half or wholly naked, and scaly with dirt, roll in the deep dust or slime, or pan and blink in the sun….[[16]](#footnote-16)

Seoul wasn’t much better. Seoul was then the capital of an ancient Asian nation, older than Japan and the Chinese settlement of Beijing. But it could not compare to Tokyo or Beijing:

I shrink from describing intramural Seoul. I thought it the foulest city on earth till I saw Peking, and the smells the most odious, till I encountered Shao-shing. For a great city and a capital its meanness is indescribable. Etiquette forbids the construction of two-storied houses, consequently an estimated quarter million people are living on ‘the ground,” chiefly in labyrinthine alleys, many of them not wide enough for two loaded bulls to pass, indeed barely wide enough for one man to pass a loaded bull and further narrowed by a series of vile holes or green slimy ditches which receives the solid or liquid effuse of the houses, their foul or fetid margins being the favorite resort of half-naked children, begrimed with dirt …[[17]](#footnote-17)

**Corruption a Chief Cause of Poverty**

Mrs. Bishop finds many causes for the backward, poverty-stricken state of Korean society. There was the closed nature of the nation and its longtime refusal to allow any contact with any foreign nation but China. This exclusion kept Korea away from experiencing any of the technological progress of the late 19th century. But a far deeper problem lay with the very corrupt nature of Korean society. In spite of some reforms brought in by the Japanese since the 1870s, there were essentially two classes in Korean society, the “Robbers” and the “Robbed.” The Robbers were the ruling *yangban* class, the “licensed vampires of the country.” They made up roughly ten percent of the population. The *sang-in* or common people who made up the rest of the population were the victims of the “vampire” and their “reason-d’etre was to supply the blood for the vampires to suck.”[[18]](#footnote-18)

One problem arose from the forced financial extractions of the *yangban.* When any member of the common class made a noticeable amount of money, the *yangban* official would readily find some excuse to rob the underling of his gains either by increased taxation or forced “loans” that were never paid back. Mrs. Bishop writes:

Every man in Korea knows that poverty is his best security, and that anything he possesses beyond that which provides himself and his family with food and clothing is certain to be taken from him by voracious and corrupt officials. It is only when the exactions of officials become absolutely intolerable and encroach upon his means of providing the necessaries of life that he resorts to the only method of redress in his power, which has a sort of counterpart in China. This consists in driving out, and occasionally in killing, the obnoxious and intolerable magistrate, or, as in a case which lately gained much notoriety, roasting his favourite secretary on a wood pile. The popular outburst, though under unusual provocation it may culminate in deeds of regrettable violence, is usually founded on right, and is an effective protest.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Mrs. Bishop found that the key to corruption was the eternal greed of Korea’s aristocracy, the *yangban.* The *yangban* were a wealthy aristocratic class. Most of its members had a classical Chinese education, but only a few worked and contributed to the economy:

Among the modes of squeezing are forced labour, doubling or trebling the amount of a legitimate tax, exacting bribes in cases of litigation, forced loans, etc. If a man is reported to have saved a little money, an official asks for the loan of it. If it is granted, the lender frequently never sees principal or interest; if it is refused, he is arrested, thrown into prison on some charge invented for his destruction, and beaten until either he or his relations for him produce the sum demanded….[[20]](#footnote-20)

Mrs. Bishop, however, had some optimism concerning Korea’s potential. She traveled through many sections of the country visiting areas that few if any Europeans had visited before. She saw areas where mines provided valuable resources and good soil that could be better utilized. She also felt that Korea’s misguided social system was hurting the economic potential of the land:

Korea is not *necessarily* a poor country. Her resources are undeveloped, not exhausted ….On the other hand, the energies of her people lie dormant. The upper classes, paralyzed by the most absurd of social obligations, spend their lives in inactivity. To the middle class no careers are open; there are no skilled occupations to which they can turn their energies. The lower classes work no harder than is necessary to keep the wolf from the door, for very sufficient reasons … Class privileges, class and official exactions, a total absence of justice, the insecurity of all earnings, a Government which has carried out the worst traditions on which all unreformed Oriental Governments are based, a class of official robbers steeped in intrigue, a monarch enfeebled by the seclusion of the palace and the pettinesses of the Seraglio, a close alliance with one of the most corrupt of empires, the mutual jealousies of interested foreigners, and an all-pervading and terrorizing superstition have done their best to reduce Korea to that condition of resourcelessness and dreary squalor in which I formed my first impression of her. Nevertheless the resources are there, in her seas, her soil, and her hardy population.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Another reason, according to Mrs. Bishop, for Korea’s poverty was the parasitic attitude of thousands of men who took advantage of the tradition that they were obliged to support other family members who were less well off than them.

A great and universal curse in Korea is the habit in which thousands of able-bodied men indulge of hanging, or “sorning,” on relations or friends who are better off than themselves … A man who has a certain income, however small, has to support many of his own kindred, his wife’s relations, many of his own friends, and the friends of his relatives. This partly explains the rush for Government offices, and their position as marketable commodities. To a man burdened with a horde of hangers-on, the one avenue of escape is official life, which whether high or low, enables him to provide for them out of the public purse. This accounts for the continual creation of offices, with no other real object than the pensioning of the relatives and friends of the men who rule the country. Above all, this explains the frequency of conspiracies and small revolutions in Korea. Principle is rarely at stake, and no Korean revolutionist intends to risk his life in support of any conviction.[[22]](#footnote-22)

Mrs. Bishop like other Western visitors placed the blame for Korea’s poverty and the obvious insecurity of the people on their allegedly corrupt and menacing aristocratic *yangban* class. Mrs. Bishop noted that the *yangban* ruthlessly exploited the people, cheating them out of any wealth they might acquire. They also persecuted the common people, said Mrs. Bishop, depriving them of any rights and taking away any pleasures they might have in life. On the other hand, when Bird crossed the border from northern Korea into eastern Siberia, she encountered Korean refugee communities that lacked any *yangban* presence. Here she said the peasant Koreans thrived in relative freedom. They lived in clean prosperous villages and had an air of confidence that she had found totally lacking in Korea proper: “Travelers are much impressed with the laziness of the Koreans, but after seeing their energy and industry in Russian Manchuria, their thrift, and the abundant and comfortable furnishings of their houses, I greatly doubt whether it is to be regarded as a matter of temperament.” The blame, therefore, for Korea’s backwardness must be the *yangban* class and their culture.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Mrs. Bishop also commented on the weakness of the Korean emperor who must she thinks shoulder some of the blame for the misery of the Korean people:

The dynasty is worn out, and the King, with all his amiability and kindness of heart, is weak in character and is at the mercy of designing men, as has appeared increasingly since the strong sway of the Queen was withdrawn. I believe him to be at heart, according to his lights, a patriotic sovereign. Far from standing in the way of reform, he has accepted most of the suggestions offered to him. But unfortunately for a man whose edicts become the law of the land, and more unfortunately for the land, he is persuadable by the last person who gets his ear, he lacks backbone and tenacity of purpose, and many of the best projects of reform become abortive through his weakness of will. To substitute constitutional restraints for absolutism would greatly mend matters, but *cela va sans dire* this could only be successful under foreign initiative.

1 have dwelt so long on the King’s personality because he is de facto the Korean Government, and not a mere figure-head, as there is no constitution, written or unwritten, no representative assembly, and it may be said no law except his published Edicts. He is extremely industrious as a ruler, acquaints himself with all the work of departments, receives and attends to an infinity of reports and memorials, and concerns himself with all that is done in the name of Government. It is often said that in close attention to detail he undertakes more than any one man could perform. At the same time he has not the capacity for getting a general grip of affairs. He has so much goodness of heart and so much sympathy with progressive ideas, that if he had more force of character and intellect, and were less easily swayed by unworthy men, he might make a good sovereign, but his weakness of character is fatal.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Mrs. Bishop spent a great deal of time in Korea and in time began to befriend some Koreans and to grasp a basic understanding of their culture. She came to see great merit in the character of the Korean people and the beauty of their land:

It is with great regret that I take leave of Korea [in 1897], with Russia and Japan facing each other across her destinies. The distaste that I felt for the country at first passed into an interest which is almost affection, and on no previous journey have I made dearer or kinder friends, or those from whom I parted more regretfully. I saw the last of Seoul in the blue and violet atmosphere of one of the loveliest of her winter mornings.[[25]](#footnote-25)

A second opinion came in the diaries and publications of James Scarth Gale (1863-1937), a Presbyterian missionary and educator who spent much of his adult life in Korea. Bruce Cumings describes Gale’s views on Korea:

James Scarth Gale walked from one end of Korea to the other in the early 1890s. Filling his diaries with pungent descriptions of old Korea seen through the eyes of a frosty Calvinist. On the road from Seoul to Haeju he witnessed corpses lying alongside the road, some of them with their heads cut off. Pusan, by then one of three Korean treaty ports, was “a heap of ruins, nothing more than a hamlet composed of mud-huts and mat-sheds. Pyongyang was filthy, the northwest border town of Uiju was “a poor Asiatic Antwerp,” with “a wilderness of demons, rags dogs, unburied dead, vermin, squalor, filth and what not.”[[26]](#footnote-26)

The opinions of the visitors to Korea before the Russo-Japanese War varied greatly. Those visitors who only stayed a short time were carried away by the apparent filth and poverty that they witnessed, but those who stayed for a longer time like Mrs. Bishop or James Gale grew to appreciate the warmth of the people and the beauty of the land.

**Japan’s Gradual Absorption of Korea**

Several years ago during my course on Korean history, a young Korean student rose and stammered: “The date August 22nd is one of the saddest in our nation’s history.” She went on to explain, “That is the date in 1910 when the imperialistic Japanese forced our king to sign the Annexation Treaty that made Korea a key part of the Japanese Empire. We no longer existed as a nation and a few years later my family was forced to take a Japanese name. Our education was in Japanese. In our hearts we were still Korean, but we could not exist as Koreans!”

August 22 is indeed one of the darkest days in the often tragic history of modern Korea. August 22, 1910 is the date when representatives of the Japanese and Korean governments formally signed the Annexation Treaty that allowed Japan to formally absorb Korea into its Empire, but in reality it was a formal act that had been in the works since the 1870s. It was then that Japan initiated a series of steps that led to the slow but very real demise of Korea as an independent state. During that time Korea was forced out of its centuries-long isolation and pushed into the rough-and-tumble world of Western and Japanese imperialism.

Shortly after the modernizing Meiji government took over Japan in 1868, some of its leaders turned a nervous eye towards Korea. They quickly realized Korea was a weak, isolated nation susceptible to seizure by any one of the Western powers, notably Russia. Some of them urged measures that would establish Japanese interests on the Korean Peninsula in order to counterbalance the influence of other nations. The idea of fully absorbing Korea into the Japanese Empire would only come years later.

Korea was a fully independent nation throughout the late nineteenth century, but Koreans looked to China as their mentor, protector, and closest ally. At the same time several Western states including Russia, France, Great Britain and even the United States were developing an interest in Korea and sought to establish a presence there. But during much of the 1860s and 1870s, the Korean government successfully resisted attempts by foreign ships to create a foothold in Korea, but at the same time the nation made little if any effort to strengthen and modernize itself to counter these threats.

As early as 1873, several Meiji leaders suggested a military expedition to Korea as an outlet for Japanese samurai who were losing many of their traditional privileges due to Meiji reforms designed to create a more egalitarian society. After lengthy deliberations the government discarded the idea. But this decision did not eliminate Japanese interests in Korea. Imperialism was the spirit of the age. European powers such as France, Britain and, belatedly, Germany were building colonial empires in Africa and Asia, and Russia was establishing a presence in the Pacific regions of Siberia and had its gaze fixed on Chinese Manchuria. Meiji leaders saw a presence in foreign lands as a very necessary and important aspect of becoming a modern nation. Korea, by far Japan’s closest neighbor, very naturally became the prime target for Japanese expansionism. A Japanese presence in Korea, they believed, would strengthen their national security interests at home while providing a potential springboard for further expansion on the Asian mainland.[[27]](#footnote-27)

It did not take Japan very long to find a pretext for intervention into Korea. A Japanese warship entered Korean coastal waters in September 1875 and soon came under fire by Korean coastal batteries. The ship escaped unharmed, but the Japanese felt confident enough to intervene into Korean affairs and decided to break the barrier between them and Korea. They launched an expedition to Korea in early 1876 that consisted of several ships and about 800 soldiers. Japanese negotiators bluffed, stating that Japan was prepared to launch a full-scale military invasion of Korea that would include the seizure of the Korean capital of Seoul. Korean officials, fearing the worst and realizing their total lack of preparedness, caved in and quickly signed the Ganghwa Treaty of 1876. There was some resemblance between this agreement and those imposed on Japan earlier by the major Western powers. The Koreans agreed to allow foreigners to live in certain sections of the country where they could become engaged in various trade and business activities. The treaty included the provision of extraterritoriality where foreigners were exempted from the jurisdiction of Korean laws and justice. Initially these rights were extended to Japanese only, but by 1882 the Koreans had signed very similar reciprocal agreements with the United States and other foreign powers as well. Korea thus hoped to blunt the power of Japan by developing strong relationships with a number of major Western powers including Great Britain, France and the United States.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Korean reaction to foreigners was mixed. Conservative traditionalists [[29]](#footnote-29)wanted to keep Korea free of all contacts with the outside world and on several occasions sought Chinese aid and protection. Other Koreans opposed their nation’s policy of self-isolation believing that strict adherence to isolation and old customs would only lead to national disaster. They hoped that Korea would use the access to foreign knowledge in order to strengthen and modernize their nation as quickly as possible. Some saw Japanese penetration of their country as a possible way to obtain this knowhow, and they trusted Japan to enter their realm as a benign instructor and not as an imperialistic aggressor. They believed that Japan, the only “modern” country in Asia, would help other Asians escape the clutch of the Western colonial powers. They turned out to be tragically incorrect, but it was hard to tell in the 1870s and early 1880s.[[30]](#footnote-30)

Japanese poured into Korea after the Ganghwa treaty. They developed commercial interests in such areas as Pusan and brought in the first telegraph and railroad construction. International politics intervened in the mid-1890s as both Japan and China jockeyed for power in Korea. The result was the first Sino-Japanese War in 1894-1895 which resulted in a resounding Japanese victory and the departure of China from the Korean sphere of influence. Japanese influence at the Korean court increased especially after their involvement in the assassination of Empress Myeonseong (Queen Min) in October, 1895.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Later in the 1890s the Russians began to regard both Korea and Chinese Manchuria as being a crucial sphere of influence in their desire to become a major Pacific power. The Korean Emperor and his government briefly looked to the Russians to help them escape the overbearing threat of the Japanese. For a while the Emperor fled from his palace to the Russian Embassy where, free from the Japanese, he sought to establish his independence. His success was short lived. Since both Russia and Japan sought to establish spheres of influence in the same proximity and neither side was at all willing to give way, the inevitable war between Russia and Japan broke out in February, 1904.

Japan’s moves to eliminate Korean independence came less than three weeks after the Japanese attack on the Russian naval base at Port Arthur. At the end of February, 1904, the Japanese ambassador in Washington DC handed the State Department a protocol reached the day before between the governments of Japan and Korea. The agreement on the one hand stated that Japan would absolutely protect Korea’s independence as a nation. On the other hand, several clauses in the protocol severely compromised Korea’s sovereignty. The Korean government would henceforth accept without reservation the “advice” of the Japanese government regarding improvements in administration and Japanese occupation of sections of Korea by Japan’s military. Also, Korea would seek Japan’s consent whenever Korea might seek arrangements with other powers which might be considered inimical to Tokyo’s interests.[[32]](#footnote-32) Japanese “advisors” would effectively run each major Korean governmental bureau. A year later Japan presented Korea with a proposed treaty that in effect made it a protectorate of Japan.

The basic premise of this and other agreements that the Japanese imposed on Korea between 1904-1905 was the same as the one that had guided the Japanese since the 1880s. Peter Duus describes Japan’s actions after it forced Korea to accept a protocol on 23 February 1904 that gave Japan the right to station troops in Korea and to supervise Korean governmental affairs:

The fate of Korea so directly affected the security of the Japanese empire that no other country could be allowed to swallow it up. The document began by asserting that Japan at that moment was exerting its entire strength and wagering its national destiny to preserve the independence and integrity of Korea. After observing rather obtusely that the trust of the Korean nation, high and low, toward Japan was growing, the document went on to argue that the instability of Korean politics and the deterioration of popular sentiment meant that it would not be able to maintain its independence by itself for very long. Therefore, it was necessary that Japan gradually build its position in Korea politically, militarily and economically to forestall the outbreak of future disturbances and accomplish the self-defense of the Japanese empire.[[33]](#footnote-33)

Koreans soon began to realize that Japanese imperialists were little different from their Western teachers. *T*he Japanese posed as benevolent modernizers who would protect Korean independence and bring them into the modern world. But with Russia effectively neutralized by 1905, Japan felt that it could take action in Korea with impunity. The Japanese were ruthless when Koreans assembled to protest the loss of their freedom and independence. Demonstrations were often violently crushed, and the Korean Emperor and his ministers vigorously protested what they considered to be the loss of Korean sovereignty.[[34]](#footnote-34)

According to the 1905 Treaty, Korea lost its status as an independent country. All diplomatic or foreign policy matters had to be handled through Japanese representatives either in Seoul or Tokyo. The United States closed its embassy in Seoul as did the other Western powers. An appointed Japanese official with the title of Resident General was to supervise all political activity in Korea. No important political decisions in Korea could be made without his and his government’s assent. Former Korean ministers and the Emperor himself were reduced to being little more than figureheads in the Japanese administration of their country.

The Korean Emperor Gojong made one last feeble attempt to regain effective sovereignty in 1907. That year the major international powers met at The Hague in Holland at the Second Peace Conference[[35]](#footnote-35) where all participants were supposed to discuss how they could keep the peace and make wars less likely. Emperor Gojong quietly and secretly dispatched three Korean diplomats to protest Japanese actions in their country and to gain international recognition for Korea’s independence. Unfortunately, when they made their appeal at The Hague, nobody at the conference raised a finger to help Korea. This was not a surprising development – the major powers themselves had their own colonies to worry about and nobody wanted to alienate Japan, now the first non-white world power.

When the Japanese realized what Gojong had done, they were furious. They forced the aging Emperor to abdicate and put his young very pliable crown prince Sunjong on the throne. Emperor Sunjong was the last of the Korean emperors and was no more than a Japanese puppet. A new treaty that Japan foisted on Korea in 1907 removed the last vestiges of Korean sovereignty.[[36]](#footnote-36)

The Japanese in 1910 formally annexed Korea into the Japanese empire. An independent Korea simply ceased to exist. Koreans were now officially Japanese citizens, but they were not granted the full rights of Japanese citizens. The Japanese openly discriminated against the Koreans. Virtually all positions of power in Korea were held by Japanese, and Japanese seized land from Korean farmers and treated Korean workers as virtual slaves. Most Korean language publications ceased, Koreans had to adopt Japanese names, and teaching in Korean was strongly and forcefully discouraged. It took 35 years for the Koreans to regain their independence.

**The Russo-Japanese War**

The Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 was the first major conflict of the twentieth century and involved an intense and very bloody struggle between Japan and Russia over which nation would control strategically-located Korea and mineral rich southern Manchuria, then and now Chinese territory. Its importance in world history is magnified because it was the first time in modern history that an Asian or non-white nation had defeated a leading Western power in a major conflict. Japan’s overwhelming victory surprised the West even more than its crushing defeat of China ten years earlier in the first Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895). Japan emerged from the war as a widely recognized world power with strong ties both with Great Britain and the United States. Russia’s defeat led to major demonstrations in St. Petersburg that lay the foundation for the Russian Revolution a decade ahead.[[37]](#footnote-37)

The war originated over the conflicting imperialist ambitions of the Russian and Japanese empires over Korea and southern Manchuria. Korea had been an independent kingdom for many centuries, but had very close ties with China and was very much a part of China’s sphere of influence. The major theatre of operations centered on southern Manchuria, particularly the area around the Liaodong Peninsula and Mukden and the seas around Japan, Korea as well as the Yellow Sea. Much of the early fighting in the spring of 1904 occurred along the Korean-Manchurian border at or near the Yalu River.

Japan and Russia, both ancient empires in their own right, were newly emerging powers in northeast Asia at the dawn of the twentieth century who regarded Korea and parts of Manchuria as being vital to their national security. The Japanese had been working hard since the start of the Meiji era to modernize their nation and to become a part of the major nation power order. They coveted Korea for primarily security reasons, fearing that if another power like Russia gained control over the “Hermit Kingdom,” it could become a major threat to the sovereignty of Japan.

The Russians, long a European power, began expanding their influence eastward towards Asia in the seventeenth century. Their strength in Asia grew rapidly in the late nineteenth century with the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway, which linked Moscow directly with their new port city in Siberia, Vladivostok.[[38]](#footnote-38) Vladivostok, then only fully operational in the summer months, was not fully satisfactory as a major port for the Russians. Moscow was in hot pursuit of a fully serviceable port farther south in East Asia for its navy and maritime trade.

Japan had demanded that China surrender the Liaodong Peninsula to it at the conclusion of the first Sino-Japanese War, but by 1897 Russia backed by France and Germany demanded an end to Japanese control. Japan objected strenuously, but was not willing to take up arms against France, Germany and Russia. Later that year the Russians forced the Chinese government to lease past of the peninsula to them. This lease included an important naval base, Port Arthur, located in the town of Tailienwan and surrounding waters. The Russians wasted no time occupying Port Arthur and in building a new railway from Harbin to Port Arthur. The Russians hoped that this addition to their empire would make them into a formidable Pacific power.

Japan by the early 1900s had also emerged as a rising world power. During most of the Meiji Era, Japan found itself subjected to a series of “unequal treaties” which it had been obliged to sign with various Western powers. These treaties limited Japanese sovereignty and put Japan at a disadvantage in terms of tariffs. A cherished Japanese goal was recognition of Japan as an equal with the Western powers. A major change that signaled Western acceptance of Japan was the 1902 Anglo-Japanese Alliance (1902-1923) that bound Great Britain and Japan to assist one another in safeguarding their respective interests in China and Korea.  On the eve of the Russo-Japanese War Japan’s cherished goal of recognition as an equal with the Western powers was finally being realized.

Japan recognized the critical importance of Korea to the defense of Japan. Japanese leaders throughout the Meiji Era correctly identified Korea as a “sword facing the heart of Japan,” noting that any foreign power taking over Korea could play havoc with Japanese maritime trade and naval power. Japan’s top military official and prime minister Yamagata Aritomo (1838-1922) clearly outlined Japanese policy towards Korea during a 1904 interview with American reporter Frederick Palmer that focused on the Russo-Japanese War:

If you look at the geographical position of Korea you will see that it is like a poniard pointing at the heart of Japan,” said the Marquis. “If Korea is occupied by a foreign power, the Japan Sea ceases to be Japanese, and the Korean Straits are no longer in our control. Our public men are of many parties, not only two, as are yours in America. Our Cabinets are the products of coalitions, which, for the time being, seem to His Majesty and the legislative power best to serve the interests of the country. Foreign policy is a thing entirely apart. In the consideration of Korea and Manchuria, all men of all parties needed only patriotism to realize the singleness of our interests. Whatever Cabinet was in power continued the policy of its predecessor, and the policy of all on a question which put the very life of our nation at stake. So our unchanging attitude from the outset of our disagreement with Russia has been natural and inevitable. In its negotiations the Government has patiently kept the hope of peace in view. No agitation prejudicial to calm deliberation has been permitted … Our demands were clear. We had to deal with an enemy whose methods were those of evasion and hypocrisy.[[39]](#footnote-39)

Although it had lost Port Arthur in 1896, the Japanese made every effort to consolidate their power in Korea. There had been limited Japanese investment in Korea since 1876, but the search for economic opportunities grew after the war with China. These investments included the construction of railways, modern postal facilities, some new industry, banks and the like. The Korean government realized the growing threat from Japan and tried to interest investment by other countries to counterbalance the Japanese. The Russians responded. They were fully entrenched in Manchuria and at Port Arthur and actively meddled in Korean politics. For a time the Korean emperor fled his palace for the Russian embassy in Seoul in an attempt to escape Japanese domination.

By the early 1900s the Japanese were willing to negotiate with the Russians over who would be dominant in what areas in northeastern Asia. They proposed allowing the Russians to dominate Chinese Manchuria in exchange for Russian recognition of Japanese dominance over the whole of Korea. Simultaneously the Japanese signed the 1902 Anglo-Japanese alliance. This development meant that Russia could not count on the help of Germany and France that it had received after the 1895 Sino-Japanese War.

Russia was loathe to surrender any chance it had of retaining or even expanding its influence and presence in Korea. The Korean peninsula offered warm water ports not found in Asian reaches of Russia as well as control of a strategic position along the Pacific. The Japanese felt that they had a limited amount of time in which to act. By 1904 the Russians were on the verge of finishing the vital construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway. They were also transporting several thousand troops to the Far East every month. The Japanese had a large numerical advantage over the Russians in early 1904, but they realized that their superiority would decrease with every passing month. When in January, 1904 Japan repeated its offer for a Russian Manchuria in exchange for a wholly Japanese Korea, Russia blithely ignored Japan’s entreaty. Japan reacted quickly, declaring war on Russia on February 8th, 1904, and opened an attack on Port Arthur. The minimal goal of the war was for Japan to get full control over Korea and to destroy any Russian effort to move into the Korean peninsula.

Japan first attacked Port Arthur in February 1904 with the goal of destroying Russia’s Pacific fleet. While the Japanese navy attacked Port Arthur from the ocean, one of Japan’s armies laid siege to the base. Other Japanese soldiers were sent to Seoul where they organized a large force that began a long march through frigid Korea towards the Yalu River where a smaller Russian force lay in wait. Jack London had made his way to Korea by the middle of February and joined two other reporters who had arrived earlier. Together they made the trek through the bitter cold towards Manchuria

By the time the two hundred thousand Japanese troops reached the Yalu in April, they found that they greatly outnumbered the eighty thousand Russians waiting across the Yalu. The first major land battle of the war occurred at the end of April 1904 at the Yalu. The Japanese quickly gained an advantage through Trojan-horse battle trickery. They starting building a bridge at one point in full sight of the Russians who concentrated their forces there to fight off the Japanese invasion. What the Russians did not realize was that the Japanese were also secretly building a bridge several miles upstream that when completed, allowed thousands of Japanese to cross the river and begin a assault against the Russians.

The Japanese siege of Port Arthur ended with a full Russian surrender in January 1905. The victory allowed Japanese troops stationed there to reinforce their comrades in Manchuria and to start a major offensive towards the Russians based at the walled Manchurian city of Mukden. The fiercest fighting of the war continued for over a month along a fifty mile front near Mukden until March 10, 1905 when the Russians began a broad retreat. The Japanese had won a major victory though both sides had suffered major casualties, but the Russians still had a potent land force that was being supplied with fresh recruits sent there on the Trans-Siberian Railway.

The final phase of the war involved a decisive naval battle between Russia’s Second Pacific Squadron which had voyaged an unprecedented 18,000 miles from its base in the Baltic to relieve Port Arthur. When the fleet got the news of the fall of Port Arthur while en route, the Russians decided to continue their voyage by going to Vladivostok instead. They encountered the Japanese combined fleet as they passed through the Tsushima Straits and experienced a shocking defeat.

This bitter defeat brought the war to a quick end. There is evidence that the Russians could have kept on fighting despite their horrific losses and that the Japanese, while mainly victorious despite huge losses, were reaching the end of their strength. It has been said that the Japanese in early 1905 made a special appeal to President Theodore Roosevelt, who was known to be sympathetic to the Japanese, to propose a conference that would bring the war to an end.

The bitter defeats of the Russian army and navy shattered its government’s confidence and served as a catalyst for the 1905 revolution in Russia, itself a stern precursor to the traumatic revolutions of 1917. Meanwhile, Russian diplomats led by Count Sergius Witte met a Japanese delegation led by Baron Komura at Portsmouth New Hampshire late in the summer of 1905. President Roosevelt hosted the peace conference and later won the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts. At the conference the Russians ceded Port Arthur and the southern half of Sakhalin Island to Japan which was now firmly entrenched in Korea. .

Japan’s victory represented the first major defeat of a Western power at the hands of an Asian nation in modern times. Tokyo’s prestige soared as it finally gained recognition as a modern Great Power. The Japanese were also firmly entrenched on the Asian mainland and within a decade after the start of World War I began to focus on taking advantage of Chinese weakness to gain a firm military and economic foothold not only in Manchuria, but in northern China as well. By the 1930s the Japanese had begun a full-scale invasion of China which continued through Japan’s total defeat in World War II.

**Why Did Korea Fall to Japan?**

Korea fell to Japan for many reasons. The key factors were Korean weakness, the strength of Japan, and general disinterest of the United States and other Western powers. Korea was a weak link in East Asia eagerly sought by Japan, China and Russia. Her weak but central geographical position made Korea an almost irresistible field of contention for these three powers. Long years of political corruption, exploitation by the aristocracy, and the weakness of the imperial government together with the absence of a young group of reformers like those that spurred the Meiji modernization in Japan made Korea weak. Korea at various times sought protection from China and Russia, but Japan routed them both, and the United States showed little inclination to fight Japan’s influence in Korea. Japan’s early interests in Korea were primarily commercial, but after 1894 her interests became mainly political. The gradual absorption of Korea had begun.

**CHAPTER II**

**AMERICAN ATTITUDES TOWARD JAPAN AND KOREA AT THE RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR**

In the very early twentieth century seven American correspondents were instrumental in forming the impressions of their fellow citizens about the nations of northeastern Asia. But they themselves had been influenced by several earlier generations of intrepid Western visitors to the region whose writing had been the prime source of information about the area.

American attitudes toward Japan underwent a dramatic change in the latter part of the 19th century. When American teachers and missionaries began arriving in Japan in the late 1860s and early 1870s, some held very low opinions of Japanese culture and preached the “benefits” of the obviously “superior” Western civilization and culture. By the time of the Russo-Japanese War, however, these feelings had undergone dramatic change. Japan’s rapid modernization had won it great respect and admiration in the United States and Europe, and a number of Western writers quite seriously suggested that Japan was the key to the spread of “Anglo-Saxon civilization” to the rest of Asia.

The multitude of essays and books of three American missionary teachers, W. E. Griffis (1843-1928), E. Warren Clark (1849-1907) and Sydney Gulick (1860-1945),[[40]](#footnote-40) reflect this change from adverse feelings about Japan to great admiration. Their work, which included a flood of books, articles, and hundreds of public lectures, also played a great role in changing public attitudes toward Japan during this period. When E. Warren Clark first arrived in Japan in 1871 as a young teacher hired to teach in a school opened in Shizuoka by the family of the last deposed shogun, his view of Japan was one of haughty superiority:

You can scarcely imagine the impressions of one fresh from a Christian land at the first view of the heathenism of which we had heard, but never seen. There is no more Sabbath here than if the Ten Commandments were never written. The sounds of labor are heard in every direction and sin and corruption abound in their worst forms. Instead of church bells, I hear ever and anon the deep prolonged sound of the great bell of the heathen temple as it strikes to announce that another soul has entered to bow down to the idol. Instead of sacred music, I hear fire crackers in the adjacent burying round where worship is going on to the spirits of the dead….True progress depends more upon the development of sound principles within the heart of the nation, than it does upon costly importation of material appliances from without.[[41]](#footnote-41)

W. E. Griffis, who first came to Japan in 1869 as a teacher and who like Clark was a science teacher and lay Protestant missionary, wondered whether Japan could become modern if it refused to adopt Christianity. He wrote that without Christianity, and without “the enlightened ideas of government and law” as well as the “rights of the individual,” Japan will gain little more than a “glittering veneer of material civilization” which in the presence of the aggressive powers of the West will cause Japan to “fall like the doomed races of America.”[[42]](#footnote-42)

Japan’s rapid and successful transition into a major world power, however, forced teachers, missionaries and other observers like Clark and Griffis to come to grips with the Japanese phenomenon, a successful embrace by a non-Western people of modern Western civilization. Religiously-inclined writers like Clark and Griffis soon developed a healthy respect for the politeness, cleanliness, intelligence, devotion to work, and high ethical standards of the Japanese. They reconciled the apparent contradiction between Japan’s achievements and its refusal to adopt by saying that Japan had the ***latent tendencies*** of an Anglo-Saxon Christian country. These so-called “latent tendencies” of the Japanese included their honesty, thrift, hard work and strong patriotism.

The Russo-Japanese War represents the highpoint of favorable American attitudes toward Japan before Pearl Harbor. American writers then portrayed Japan as a most progressive and modern nation which alone amongst the nations of Asia had the potential to adopt the Anglo-Saxon traditions of the West. The fact that Christianity had found few converts was not terribly disturbing in itself to writers like Clark and Griffis because Japan had been found to possess the “Anglo-Saxon” qualities of honesty, self-sacrifice, patience, hard work and grace. Already possessing these qualities together with the science and technology of the West made the eventual conversion of Japan to Christianity itself a virtual certainty.

This enthusiastic image of Japan is best portrayed in the writing of Sydney Gulick, a Japan-based missionary, teacher and historian during the latter years of the Meiji period (1868-1912). Gulick’s 1904 book, *The White Peril in the Far East*[[43]](#footnote-43)which was written at the height of the Russo-Japanese War, is a blanket indictment of the Russians as an enemy of progressive Western civilization. One finds these ideas as well in the writings of both Griffis and Clark, who were both scientists and theologians. They both shared a strong belief in what they regarded as the inevitable benefits of science which together with Christianity were the foundations of a modern nation and that the mantle of civilization had been passed from the West to Japan. But Japan’s advances came with a price because it was now Tokyo’s obligation to spread this version of modern civilization to its Asian brothers in China and Korea. Gulick’s ideas were strongly echoed in the writing and sentiments of other writers like Clark and Griffis and in the thinking of politicians like Theodore Roosevelt.

Gulick urged Americans to support the “progressive” Japanese as they fought for their survival against the “regressive” Russian empire. Gulick comments that although few Japanese had converted to Christianity while the Russians were at least nominally Christian, the Japanese boasted many of the qualities one would expect in a Western democracy. Gulick literally saw the Russo-Japanese War as a conflict between the forces of good and evil, progress and reaction. Japan was the West’s best hope for the successful implantation of Western civilization in Asia, and American support for Japan was critical for the success of this endeavor.

These positive feelings for Japan, however, quickly dissipated after the Russo-Japanese War. Japan’s hard fought victory over Russia made it a world power and a presumed threat to other imperialist powers in Asia. American leaders began to ponder the weakness of their position in the Philippines and Hawaii and Japanese became increasingly agitated over the hostility of white Californians to growing Japanese immigration. The favorable image of Japan spawned by American writers like Gulick, Griffis and Clark swiftly vanished in the midst of the growing antagonism and mistrust that led eventually to Pearl Harbor and the Pacific War of 1941-1945.

These feelings are amplified elsewhere. Trumbell White opens his 1904 book, *War between Japan and Russia: The Complete Story of the Desperate Struggle between Two Great Nations with Dominion over the Orient as the Tremendous Prize*[[44]](#footnote-44)by asking whether “it be Russia or Japan that is fighting on the side of occidental civilization.” White is firm in his view while Japan may not be in the technical sense a Christian nation, “the spirit of the Island Empire” is stirred to freedom, justice, enlightenment, advancement.” Japan is thus seen as the torch bearer for Western-style political liberalism and Enlightenment against the great uncivilized, though technically Christian, bear of Russia.

When war correspondents like George Kennan and Frederick Palmer traveled to Japan in early 1904 to cover the Russo-Japanese War, for some, their strong feelings for Japan and their presumption that Japan had a duty to rescue Korea from the abyss was very much in the mainstream of American thinking about Japan and Korea. Indeed, American political leaders like President Roosevelt shared these sentiments, as did many of the newspapers of that era.

**Western Attitudes Toward Imperialism at the Time of the Russo-Japanese War**

Nineteenth century imperialism reached its height by the start of the twentieth century. The great powers of the West controlled virtually every part of Asia and Africa. By the end of the Russo-Japanese War, the only fully independent states in Asia were Japan and Thailand. The justification for imperialism was based on an idea sometimes referred to as “benevolent occupation.” Western powers could justify their seizure of lands in Asia or Africa by explaining that it was the duty of advanced civilizations to care for and advance the lives of people in disadvantaged societies. Since these lesser peoples might well resist their takeover by these advanced countries, the more advanced nation could justifiably employ force in order to help bring these people into the modern world. As we will see, this is the rationale that Japan used for its takeover of Korea and that Western leaders in the United States and Britain cited to justify their support for Japan’s moves in Korea.

These ideas are discussed by legal scholar Alexis Dudden in her monograph, *Japan’s Colonization of Korea: Discourse and Power.*[[45]](#footnote-45)Dudden writes that the practice of an advanced nation creating a protectorate over a less advanced culture was quite common and at the time was called “enlightened exploitation.” The idea of a protectorate represented a particular piece of territory “governed in part by an alien regime.” Dudden continues:

[R]ace-driven theories of civilization more generally shaped a Euro-American political climate that ordered a taxonomy of the peoples of the world. So-called civilized governments predicated their claims to legitimacy on conquering and ruling so-called barbaric ones; such governments also infused their claims with political and social theories derived in part from nascent evolutionary sciences. A regime was civilized only if it could claim the ability to transform an uncivilized people. The logic of the politics of enlightened exploitation can be described as the practice of legalizing the claim to protect a place inhabited by people who were defined as incapable of becoming civilized on their own. It was understood, of course, that the protecting regime had access to the material and human resources of the place it protected.[[46]](#footnote-46)

Ultimately, the ability to control colonial space defined a nation as “sovereign” and “independent.” Regimes that sought to dominate others legitimated their actions in terms consistent with this intellectual order. Declaring a territory a protectorate did not merely apply a euphemism to the action of taking over; it established a legal precedent for defining certain people unfit to govern themselves.[[47]](#footnote-47) The major nations of the period divided the world into two categories: states that were civilized and those that were not. “A regime was ‘civilized’ if it could claim the ability to transform an uncivilized people.”[[48]](#footnote-48) A related concept was that of a “protectorate,” a piece of territory governed by an alien regime where the foreign element ruled for the good of the native people whether they wanted this rule or not.[[49]](#footnote-49)

The late Victorian period saw a massive effort by several European nations and later the United States to seize control of foreign lands in both Africa and Asia based on the idea of “enlightened exploitation.” Alexis Dudden writes that “The logic of the politics of enlightened exploitation can be described as the practice of legalizing the claim to protect a place inhabited by people who were defined as incapable of becoming civilized on their own.”[[50]](#footnote-50) It was understood that the “protecting regime” had access to the material and human resources of the place that it sought to protect.

Theodore Roosevelt certainly subscribed to this notion that a civilized nation had a duty to advance less advanced societies. He used the American occupation of the Philippines as an example:

Now in the Philippines the questions we have to decide are not in the least theoretical. They are entirely practical, as can only be decided if there is knowledge of the facts. The Filipinos are not fit to govern themselves. They are better off in every way now [under American rule] than they have ever been before. They are being given a larger measure of self-government than they ever had before, or than any other Asiatic people except Japan now enjoys. They have unmeasurably more individual freedom than they ever enjoyed under Spain, or than they ever could have under Aguinaldo or any other despot. I suppose no one seriously believes that if the Filipinos were free at present their government would represent anything except a vibration between despotism and anarchy … They certainly will not be fit for independence in the next half dozen or dozen years, probably not in the next score or two score years.[[51]](#footnote-51)

Along these same lines Roosevelt felt that because it had been so successful in its modernization process, Japan was well positioned to move both China and Korea forward. Just as the United States was promoting the economic and cultural development of less developed countries in the Caribbean, Japan should do so with its neighbors in East Asia.[[52]](#footnote-52)

Roosevelt agreed that “civilized governments” legitimatized their grabbing of foreign land by stating that their goal was to transform barbaric people into a more civilized citizenry. Following this logic, the Japanese government studied these concepts with great care and used them to legitimatize their taking of Korea. They declared that Korea had a corrupt government that exploited its people. A high degree of corruption kept the people poor and uneducated. In short, the Korean people were incapable of governing themselves and their nation would fail or be seized by an outside power if left to its own devices. Japan’s supposedly benevolent goal was to enlighten the Korean people, to make Korea able to stand on its own in the international arena. Therefore, Japan claimed the right, even the humane obligation, to take over Korea for its own good.

When Japan’s special envoy to Korea, Ito Hirobumi, talked to Korean cabinet members on the eve of Japan’s establishing a protectorate over Korea, he described Japan as both a friend and protector of Korean independence. Before the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895, China had sought to dominate Korea as a weak tributary state. The 1894-1895 war freed Korea from the tentacles of China, but despite its defeat, China has “continued to harbor intentions of restoring Korea as its tributary state in name and in reality.” Labeling this war as the “Korean War of Independence,” Ito then suggested that when Korea had become truly independent in 1895, Russia saw Korea’s inherent weakness and made its own moves to seize control of Korea:[[53]](#footnote-53)

Russia grew more aggressive … and made a grab for Korea besieging by land and sea. Watching Russia try to annex the peninsula, [which country] … became alarmed for the sake of your country? For the fate of the Orient [tōyō], it was Japan. Japan took up arms and sacrificed life and property.[[54]](#footnote-54)

**Japan’s Propaganda Campaign During the Russo-Japanese War**

Until the Japanese seizure of Korea, virtually all protectorates had been established by such Western powers such as Britain, France and Belgium. Japan opened a well-orchestrated campaign during the Russo-Japanese War led by politician and Harvard University graduate Kaneko Kentarô to gain international support for its military efforts. Following the end of the war in 1905, Japan continued its efforts to win international recognition for its new protectorate in Korea. Prime Minister Katsura Tarō promoted the idea of the desirability of Japan’s plans for Korea in a 30 July 1905 interview with the *New York Times:*

The introduction of all the blessings of modern civilization into East Asiatic countries—that is our Far Eastern policy and behind it there is no more selfish motive than a simple desire for our own commercial and educational betterment. China and Korea are atrociously misgoverned. They are in the hands of a lot of corrupt officials whose ignorance and narrow-mindedness are a constant menace to political tranquility in the Far East. These conditions we will endeavor to correct at the earliest possible date—by persuasion and education if possible; by force, if necessary, and in this, as in all things, we expect to act in exact occurrence, with the desires of England and the United States.[[55]](#footnote-55)

Part of Japan’s strategy was to encourage the writing of Western journalists who would support Japan’s effort to create a protectorate over Korea. The notion was that since political leaders in the West had very little knowledge of the history and culture of Korea, Western journalists who would support Japan’s point of view could mold opinion in the West. Western journalists who demonstrated strong sympathies with Japanese views and aims and who had a broad readership in the West received gala treatment from Japanese authorities. They got lavish accommodations and traveled with Japanese officials across Korea where they could witness the terrible living conditions of the people and the good work being done by the Japanese to modernize and reform Korean society. Both George Kennan and Frederick Palmer took full advantage of this opportunity to travel to “the front.”

**Baron Kentarō Kaneko’s Close Relationship with Theodore Roosevelt**

At the start of the war the Japanese government recruited a highly skilled propagandist, Baron Kentarō Kaneko (1853-1942),[[56]](#footnote-56) to lead a campaign to gain American support for Japan and to get Americans to buy Japanese bonds to help fund the war. Kaneko was one of the first young Japanese to study at Harvard University, starting in 1870 and graduating from the Harvard Law School in 1878. He had a successful career in Japanese politics serving in the House of Peers and as Minister of Justice. He studied at Harvard at the same time that Theodore Roosevelt went there, but they did not become good friends until introduced a decade later by mutual friend William Sturgis Bigelow.

Officially the United States remained neutral during the Russo-Japanese War. President Roosevelt issued a policy statement on 10 March 1904 which offered American neutrality, but privately he admired and strongly supported Japan as did many of his subordinates. He gave Baron Kaneko and other Japanese his personal support and advice and he offered to host a peace conference in 1905 at a time when Japan, though winning, had reached its military limits.

Kaneko traveled through the United States throughout the war giving hundreds of speeches and interviews and writing many newspaper articles selling the virtues of the Japanese and urging Americans to support the Japanese in the war. Speaking to the Japan Club of Harvard University in April 1904, Japan’s diplomat said that Japan was fighting to maintain the peace of Asia and to conserve the influence of Anglo-American civilization in the Far East. He concluded his speech saying:

This war is neither racial nor religious in character. It is a battle for Japan’s national existence, a struggle for the advancement of Anglo-American civilization in the East, and undertaken to insure the peace of Asia. To call Russia “Christian” and Japan “pagan” in this crisis is reversing the story of the Good Samaritan.[[57]](#footnote-57)

The Baron renewed his ties with Roosevelt and was a frequent guest at the White House throughout the war. When the President requested that Kaneko give him a book that would best explain Japanese culture and history, he gave Roosevelt a copy of Inazo Nitobe’s 1900 book *Bushido: The Soul of Japan.* It is clear that Roosevelt greatly enjoyed his time with Kaneko and that the President often expressed very pro-Japanese sentiments to his learned friend. Explaining why he issued the neutrality proclamation, Roosevelt said:

In fact when Japan declared war and the war began between Russia and Japan, the young officers of the U.S. army and navy wanted to help Japan win, and several people said we should support Japan and provide reinforcements for the Japanese army….This concerned the Russian ambassador [Cassini] ….As I was earnestly entreated by Cassini to control the situation, I had no choice but to make that proclamation. Nevertheless, in Roosevelt’s [my] mind, I have wholehearted sympathy for Japan….I believe my love and respect for Japan is second to none. My private mind is quite different. I have been waiting for an opportunity to tell you [Kaneko] the real state of my mind. In the first place the reason I hold Japan in high esteem is from meeting Japanese people, and hearing what people such as Fenollosa and Bigelow[[58]](#footnote-58) who have traveled to your country have to say….[I]n the aforesaid war situation, I became firmly convinced that your country will ultimately gain victory[[59]](#footnote-59)

**Theodore Roosevelt’s Support for Japan’s Takeover of Korea**

Influenced by Roosevelt’s faith in Japan, the United States regarded Korea as an impossibly backward nation and strongly advocated a Japanese takeover of the state. Roosevelt’s views on Korea were formulated by 1900, even before he became President. He had determined in his own mind that Korea was in no way capable of governing itself, that Japan was best suited to govern Korea, and that the United States should in no way become involved in Korean affairs. Efforts by Korean embassy personnel and American sympathizers to convince Roosevelt to oppose Japan on Korea fell on deaf ears. Roosevelt envisioned a power balance on the mainland of Asia with Japan controlling Korea and parts of Manchuria and Anglo-American interests dominating the Yangtze Valley to offset expanding Russian influence in the region on two fronts. In January 1905 President Roosevelt told the Japanese minister in Washington that the United States would not object if the Japanese were to provide Korea with “protection, supervision, and guidance.”[[60]](#footnote-60) The Taft-Katsura “Agreement” of 30 July 1905 formalized approval of the President’s wishes.[[61]](#footnote-61)

Horace Allen, an American missionary and teacher in Japan who served as the American minister to Korea from 1897 to 1905, reflected Roosevelt’s policy of accepting Japanese rule over Korea when he told the American secretary of state on the eve of the Russo-Japanese War:

We will make a real mistake if we allow sentimental reasons to induce us to attempt to bolster up this “Empire” in its independence. These people cannot govern themselves. They must have an overlord as they have had for all time….Let Japan have Korea outright if she can get it….I am no pro-Japanese enthusiast, as you know, but neither am I opposed to any civilized race taking over the management of these kindly Asiatics for the good of the people and the suppression of oppressive officials, the establishment of order and the development of commerce.[[62]](#footnote-62)

President Roosevelt and his administration exhibited a very pro-Japanese stance during the Russo-Japanese War. In 1905 he wrote, “What wonderful people the Japanese are! They are quite as remarkable industrially as in warfare … I believe that Japan will take its place as a great civilized power of a formidable type …”[[63]](#footnote-63) Roosevelt knew, however, that a victorious Japan in the war with Russia might spell trouble for the U.S. in the future, but he hoped that would not be the case.[[64]](#footnote-64)

Roosevelt believed that strong modern states had a right and an obligation to take over and modernize backward nations for their own good. Four years before the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War, the inimitable TR had written a friend, “I should like to see Japan have Korea. She will be a check on Russia and deserves it for what she has done.”[[65]](#footnote-65) Roosevelt sent a cable to Tokyo in July 1905 where he stated his approval for the Japanese annexation of Korea, thus negating the 1882 treaty where the United States, together with Great Britain and Germany, established diplomatic recognition of an independent Korea. The 1882 accords were classic unequal treaties where the Western nations got extraterritorial rights for their citizens, fixed tariffs and the like. Korea also got the standard “use of good offices” clause which the Korean government mistakenly assumed would obligate the United States to protect it from attempts by Japan to annex their nation.[[66]](#footnote-66)

Roosevelt in the cable also agreed to an “understanding or alliance” among Japan, the United States and Britain “as if the United States were under treaty obligations.” This “as if” clause is critical because Congress was much less interested in the affairs of Northeast Asia than the President. Roosevelt thus made an unofficial and unwritten but in his mind perhaps binding treaty with Japan.[[67]](#footnote-67) Diplomatic notes exchanged between the United States and Japan (the Taft-Katsura Agreement) in 1907 acknowledged a trade-off between both nations where the United States would not oppose the Japanese absorption of Korea and in exchange for Japan’s recognition of the American takeover of both the Philippines and Hawaii.[[68]](#footnote-68) Roosevelt followed up by cutting off relations with Korea, closing the American legation in Seoul, and seeing to it that the State Department’s Record of Foreign Relations no longer had a separate heading for Korea. Instead, Korea was placed under the new heading of “Japan.”[[69]](#footnote-69)

**The Second International Conference on Peace at The Hague**

When diplomats from the “great powers” including Japan and Russia convened at The Hague in May 1907 to discuss arms reduction, they were surprised by the arrival of three young Korean representatives of the Korean Emperor Gojong to protest Japan’s 1905 protectorate agreement over Korea. They carried a letter from the Emperor detailing the invalidity of the protectorate and insisting that the international community should condemn Japan for its aggressive actions towards the Korean state.[[70]](#footnote-70)

Unfortunately for the Koreans, they encountered an international community which strongly supported Japan’s actions. The Portsmouth Treaty of 1905, which had been largely orchestrated by President Theodore Roosevelt, gave Japan the privilege to “protect its interests in Korea.” The Second Japan-Korea Agreement in 1905 allowed Japan to establish a protectorate over Korea and gave Tokyo the legal right to control Korea’s foreign affairs. As a result Korea could not conduct its own foreign relations and ceased to exist as an identifiable independent entity.[[71]](#footnote-71) At that time international law affirmed the right of major powers to seize control of countries or peoples who were not regarded as fit to govern themselves. As a result the Korean representatives were not allowed to present their case to the Hague conference.

Japan had done a very good job in convincing international leaders such as Roosevelt and many journalists by 1907 that Korea was totally unfit to govern itself and that it was a place that Japan should control. Alexis Dudden provides us with a series of reactions to Korea’s futile 1907 bid for independence from the world’s press:

In newspapers in London, Paris, Frankfurt and Shanghai, the discourse of enlightened exploitation colored descriptions of the Korean ruler, the Korean people, and how Koreans contrasted with Japanese. Emperor Kojong was, for example, “an Oriental despot of the weaker type.” Korea was “amongst the most antiquated of Oriental States, a by-word for immovable and unreasonable conservatism.” In London, the Korean emperor was seen as a “backward Sovereign,” “foolish,” and “fatuous.” In Paris, he was a “sovereign out of an operetta … incapable of initiative, energy, or will.” after the Japanese secured Kojong’s abdication, the *New York Times* condescended, “Upon the whole, the poor man is in a less pitiable state now.” A report from Frankfurt declared that the new Emperor had “a character as tractable as India rubber.” A Frenchman confirmed this view: [Sunjong] used to follow his father about like a dog, never showed the slightest energy or initiative.” In the racial typology underpinning the category of “Oriental Despot,” reporters defined the Korean people as one with their sovereign. An editorial in Paris’ *Le Temps* declared that the “passivity of the Korean people” rendered them “incapable of all sustained exertion, of all methodical activity.” Even in an article somewhat sympathetic to the plight of the Koreans, their primary defect—according to world opinion—surfaced: “There is, to be sure, much evidence to show that the Koreans, at least the ruling caste, are incapable of carrying on a civilized government.” The vocabulary used in the *New York Tribune* was clearest of all: “The law of survival of the fittest prevails among states as well as among plants and animals. Korea has been conspicuously unfit.”[[72]](#footnote-72)

The 1907 Hague conference solidified Japan’s hold on Korea. None of the nations represented at The Hague supported or even recognized Korea’s claims of independence and as we can see from the above, journalists and newspapers and magazines followed the Japanese propaganda line. This is somewhat different from 1905 where there was a great deal of skepticism as well as some dissent among journalists concerning Japan’s intentions in Korea. However, one can perhaps make the argument that much of the journalistic coverage during and right after the Russo-Japanese War helped to create a more favorable attitude towards Japan among world leaders like Roosevelt and the public at large.

**American Policy Towards Korea: A Divergence of Opinions**

While official American policy supported the Japanese seizure of Korea based on the assumption that Japan would hold true to its promise to uplift and modernize Korea while protecting its independence, not all American journalists shared this view. Some correspondents did agree with Japan’s intentions, others had reservations and a few were horrified at what they saw in Korea.

**CHAPTER III**

**GEORGE KENNAN’S DEPICTION OF KOREA AS A “DEGENERATE STATE” AND JAPAN AS ITS GRACIOUS SAVIOR**

The writings of veteran American journalist, political activist and explorer George Kennan (1845-1924) provide a very clear case study of the mainstream reporting on conditions in Korea at the start of the twentieth century. His condemnations of Korea reflect those of Mrs. Bishop, but he goes further in celebrating Japan’s takeover as Korea’s only chance for salvation. Kennan, one of the leading investigative reporters of his day and an unofficial but very real advisor to President Theodore Roosevelt, depicted Korea as a “degenerate state” and praised Japan’s “unselfish desire” to both modernize and “civilize” Korea.[[73]](#footnote-73) Such reporting by leading writers like Kennan presented American and British readers with a wholly negative view of Korea and may well have helped to shape American and British foreign policy in support of Tokyo’s moves in Korea and away from their former recognition of Korea as an independent state.

**George Kennan: A Career War Correspondent**

George Kennan was a man of many talents and dimensions. He was a well-known writer, explorer, and lecturer who spent many years in Russia and became the most prominent American expert on that country in the nineteenth century. Indeed, it is fair to say that Kennan became the first American-born specialist on Russian affairs. Born and raised in Norwalk, Ohio, he was a distant cousin of George F. Kennan (1904-2005), the prominent twentieth-century scholar and diplomat who became one of the foremost authorities on the Soviet Union throughout the Cold War. The elder Kennan made his first trip abroad in 1865 at the age of twenty when he accompanied the Russian-American Telegraph Expedition to Siberia in a herculean effort to link Europe and North America via Alaska and the Bering Strait. This effort failed when the Atlantic cable began operating in 1866. But despite this early failure, Kennan became fascinated with Russia and made many trips there in the last three decades of the nineteenth century.

Kennan explored many regions of Russia including Siberia and Dagestan, in the northern Caucasus region in the late 1860s. His 1870 book, *Tent Life in Siberia: Adventures Among the Koraks and Other Tribes in Kamchatka and North Asia* provides excellent ethnographies, histories and descriptions of various cultural groups that he encountered in his travels and remains an important ethnographic reference book for the region today[[74]](#footnote-74) Kennan’s second and most influential book, *Siberia and the Exile System* (1891)*,* described in great detail the harsh realities of Russian prison life and the tyrannical treatment of the Russian people by their autocratic government.[[75]](#footnote-75)

The newly formed Associated Press hired Kennan as a roving wire service journalist who covered political affairs in the United States[[76]](#footnote-76) and who gained prominence as a war correspondent who for the rest of his life traveled to many conflict areas around the world. As a free-lance journalist in the late 1880s and 1890s, Kennan contributed numerous articles on world affairs to many of the leading journals of his day including *The Century Magazine* and *National Geographic.* He covered unrest in Europe and Russia, the American invasion of Cuba in 1898, the Russo-Japanese War, World War I and late in life, the Russian Revolution. Kennan was also a part of the group that founded the National Geographic Society in 1888.[[77]](#footnote-77)

Although Kennan stayed active as a roving reporter throughout the Russo-Japanese war, he also engaged in a very active anti-tsarist movement with another anti-tsarist activist, Nikolai Konstantinovich Sudzilovskii (more commonly known by his pseudonym Dr. Nicholas Russel). They realized that the Russian military might provide fertile ground for a revolutionary movement against Russia’s autocratic government. Kennan and Russell conducted an extensive propaganda campaign among Russian prisoners of war in Japan whose numbers reached some 70,000 by the end of the decisive battle of Mukden in March, 1905. The campaign was multifaceted: it consisted of many informal discussions, the organization of anti-tsarist revolutionary circles, the widespread distribution of Peter Struve’s liberal pamphlet *Osvobozhdenie* (Liberation) and other liberal literature advocating democracy, and, ultimately, a small newspaper published by Russel entitled *Iaponiia I Rossiia* (Japan and Russia). Kennan and Russel heartily believed that even liberal literature would be anti-tsarist enough to convince many of the prisoners of war, including a number of young officers, to become not only liberal in sympathy, but also, especially after news reached them of the start of the Revolution of 1905, disposed to support the very concept of revolution as a practical way to achieve significant change. According to some of the ranking officers among the prisoners, the campaign was a resounding success.[[78]](#footnote-78)

Kennan enjoyed the role of being a political activist and publicist for causes dear to his heart. What he had witnessed in Siberia affected him so profoundly that he made every attempt to adopt the role of revolutionary partisan. As a strong supporter of change, especially revolutionary change in Russia, he undertook a strong personal crusade against Russian autocracy. He publicized the need for a democratic revolution through a myriad of articles and public lectures on behalf of Russian dissidents. He also personally helped Russian political emigres with gifts of money, shelter and badly needed moral support.[[79]](#footnote-79)

We can see that through these activities Kennan saw himself more as a political activist than as an objective reporter. Once he had adopted a cause, he wrote fervently to support that stance. He did this in his multi-year campaign to promote a revolutionary cause in Russia and during the Russo-Japanese War to promote Japan in its seizure of Korea and campaign against Russia. What is not entirely clear is whether his support for Japan came because he genuinely admired Japan, was pro-Japanese because Japan was fighting autocratic Russia, or some combination of both.

Kennan became a strong critic of the autocratic policies of the tsarist government of Russia. Through his many books articles, and speaking tours, the elder Kennan did more to shape the popular “image of Siberia—and to a considerable extent—of tsarist Russia itself—as a prison of peoples.”[[80]](#footnote-80) It is estimated that Kennan delivered more than eight hundred lectures to an aggregate of one million or more listeners between 1889 and 1898 on the tsarist government’s persecution of Jews and dissidents. His activities led to his ultimate banishment from Russia in 1891.[[81]](#footnote-81)

The Russo-Japanese War brought Kennan an opportunity to explore new parts of the world, to report back to a mass audience in the United States, and to influence American policy concerning Russia. An influential New York weekly news magazine, *The Outlook*,[[82]](#footnote-82)hired him to cover the war and President Theodore Roosevelt turned to him as one of his chief Russian advisors.[[83]](#footnote-83) Kennan traveled to Japan together on the same boat with Jack London, Frederick Palmer and many other Western reporters in January 1904. Later in the war he had the unique privilege of accompanying the Japanese fleet that lay siege to the Russian naval base at Port Arthur. Together with delegations of Japanese officials, he visited Korea at least twice, early in 1904 at the start of the war and again in the fall of 1905 after the war had ended. He spent the first part of 1906 reporting on events in China. Overall Kennan wrote about 25 dispatches concerning the war and postwar East Asia between 1904 and early 1906, each of which averaged 2000 to 3000 words. Unfortunately, Kennan never published a book on the Russo-Japanese War. His much younger cousin, George F. Kennan, found many parallels in the lives of the two Kennans well beyond sharing the same name and being born on the same date:

Both of us devoted large portions of our adult life to Russia and her problems. We were both expelled from Russia by the Russian governments of our day, at comparable periods in our careers. Both of us founded organizations to assist refugees from Russian despotism. Both wrote and lectured profusely. Both played the guitar. Both owned and loved particular sailboats of similar construction. Both eventually became members of the National institute of Arts and Letters. Both had on occasion to plead at one time or another for greater understanding in America for Japan and her geopolitical problems vis-à-vis the Asian mainland.[[84]](#footnote-84)

**George Kennan and Korea in 1905: How Japan Could Save a Degenerate State**

George Kennan demonstrated a strong admiration for Japan in its conflict with tsarist Russia. His writing probably helped to fortify the American government’s strong support for Japan and its incursion into Korea in 1904. He shared Theodore Roosevelt’s belief that Japan had a strong obligation to help the Korean people modernize their nation and that a Japanese takeover of Korea was fully justified to achieve this goal. He lauded Japan for its successful modernization during the Meiji Era (1868-1912) and castigated Korea for its apparent poverty, filth, decay and apparent corruption. He wrote:

The first thing that strikes a traveler in going from Japan to Korea is the extraordinary contrast between the cleanliness, good order, industry, and general prosperity of one country, and the filthiness, demoralization, laziness, and general rack and ruin of the other … The Japanese are clean, enterprising, intelligent, brave, well-educated and strenuously industrious, whilst the Koreans strike a newcomer as dirty in person and habits, apathetic, slow-witted, lacking in spirit, densely ignorant, and constitutionally lazy… Korea is an organism that has become so diseased as to lose its power of growth; and it can be restored to a normal condition only by a long course of remedial treatment.[[85]](#footnote-85)

President Roosevelt was one of the first public officials to respond to this article. In a letter to Kennan eight days after the publication of this piece, the President wrote, “I like very much your first article on Korea in the Outlook.”[[86]](#footnote-86)

Kennan heard from many Western tourists in Asia that China’s Canton was the dirtiest and smelliest city in Asia, but he had even more negative feelings about Seoul:

Tourists who visit China speak of the smells in certain parts of Canton as the worst in the East; but Canton is clean and sweet in comparison with Chemulpo,[[87]](#footnote-87) Seoul, Chinampo, or Pingyang.[[88]](#footnote-88) In a walk of twenty minutes through one of the principal streets of Chemulpo, I saw more filth and breathed more sickening odors of rotting garbage, excrement, and decaying animal matter than in a ride of twenty miles in a sedan chair through the narrow, crowded streets of Canton.[[89]](#footnote-89)

George Kennan was very vociferous in his attacks on Korea, noting that his and other newcomers’ first views of Korea were bound to be unfavorable. The Koreans were caught in some kind of time warp. While the rest of the world was modernizing around them, Koreans remained trapped in their self-imposed hell where a lazy parasitic ruling class (*yangban****)*** preyed upon an impoverished and filthy group of peasants who labored in a nether world where any hope of advancement in life was impossible and where their betters drained and punished them for even the most minor of achievements. Kennan argues that it will take some benevolent outside force, namely the Japanese, to help rescue the Koreans from themselves.

Kennan writes in 1905 that he cannot decipher any positive aspects of the Korean people and culture:

Generally speaking, the whole Korean population seems to be lacking in dignity, intelligence and force … They are not only unattractive and unsympathetic to a Westerner who feels no spiritual or religious interest in them, but they appear more and more to be lazy, dirty, unscrupulous, dishonest, incredibly ignorant, and wholly lacking in the self-respect that comes from a consciousness of individual power and worth. They are not undeveloped savages; they are the rotten product of a decayed Oriental civilization.[[90]](#footnote-90)

Kennan goes into considerable detail to highlight evidence that in a historical sense Korea was once a highly civilized nation, that one can “find them in possession at least of good natural ability, and of some of the ripened fruits of discovery and invention.” They had used money as a medium of exchange more than a thousand years before and in 1401 devised the world’s first system of movable metal type, well ahead of even Guttenberg in the West. They had a phonetic alphabet by the early fifteenth century and had become acquainted with the mariner’s compass in 1525. Korean military officials had created a highly explosive mortar which hurled shells against the invading Japanese in the 1590s. He adds that many cultural matters which one commonly associates with Japan were in fact borrowed or taken from Korea including landscape gardening, flower arrangement, printing, paintings, weapons, banners, Satsuma ware and much more. Some of these items were in turn borrowed from the Chinese, “but the essential point is that they had them, many centuries ago, and must, therefore, have been far more civilized and refined then than they are now.”[[91]](#footnote-91)

Kennan feels that it is hard to fathom the key reasons for the very obvious deterioration of Korea from the clearly imperfect but highly promising civilization that they had several centuries before:

The crushing of the feudal system before it had a chance to develop probably had something to do with the decay of the more manly virtues; the system of education which they adopted from China may have exercised a cramping and benumbing influence upon national character; and the selfish and corrupt bureaucratic government under which they lived doubtless repressed originality and initiative, discouraged individual enterprise, and crushed personal liberty; but even after due allowance has been made for all of these adverse conditions and crippling misfortunes, the decline of Korea, in comparison to the simultaneous rise of Japan, seems to be a mysterious and inexplicable phenomenon.[[92]](#footnote-92)

Although Korea had several distinct classes of people, Kennan divided society into two groups, the gentry or “yangbans”—people who “originate nothing and produce nothing”— and the “coolies or peasants” who “produce all, but who own nothing and enjoy nothing. Both classes have the same vices, but one is in the saddle while the other is under foot.”

Kennan begins his description of the *yangban* by noting their peculiar dress: “Regarding the Korean, in his loose white robes and ridiculous horse-hair hat, with its broad flat brim and ribbons under the chin, and taking into consideration the bovine stare and hanging jaw with its sparse tuft, you would best describe him as a mixture between a Quaker and an amiable goat. Or, from another point of view, he resembles the pale ghost of what a Chinaman was a thousand years ago. He is more set in his ancestor-worship than the Chinese; more Confucianist than Confucius….”[[93]](#footnote-93)

Kennan stresses that the very conservatism of this ruling class makes it impossible for them to adapt to the modern world—that they are so very set in their ways that they are completely incapable of even contemplating any reform of society where they might lose some of their privileges. But conservatism is not their worst failing—his worst vices are such things as selfishness, laziness, a propensity to lie, full-blown treachery and greed.

If he [a *yangban*]occupies an official position, he uses it as a means of ‘squeezing’ the unfortunate peasants whose interests he ought to promote; and if he happens to be out of office, he will lie, bribe, or bear false witness in order to secure the dismissal of those who are in and get a chance to do a little robbing on his own account … He cares nothing for the welfare of his country; he seems incapable of loyalty or fidelity. Of everything worth knowing he is as ignorant as an Eskimo; and he is lazy to the marrow of his bones.”[[94]](#footnote-94)

The *yangban,* said Kennan, considered themselves as gentlemen of leisure. Manual labor was seen as something unworthy of a gentleman—work to be done by the many “coolies” who are there to serve every *yangban*. He is contemptuous or indifferent to women and usually keeps a concubine along with his wife. Many *yangban* had some education, but their education has nothing to do with practical current matters. Education is instead focused on Chinese calligraphy and classics which he notes are as useless and out of date as catapults and battering rams would be in nineteenth century warfare! To make matters worse, the *yangban* surrounded themselves with large numbers of useless sorcerers, soothsayers and spirit mediums who promote religious ideas that include the existence of goblins and malicious spirits of all sorts.[[95]](#footnote-95)

Kennan, however, feels that over-reliance on the study of Confucianism and Chinese classics, while it may not prepare the young Korean gentry for service in a modern state, cannot account for the moral degeneration of society. “Confucius did not teach selfishness, untruthfulness, dishonesty, treachery and greed, and yet the Korean upper class has acquired in some way all of these vices while it has learned none of the Confucian virtues.” Modern education is what is needed to transform the nation, but the *yangban* are so entrenched, so conservative and so anxious to hold on to their privileges that there is no hope for any modern education in Korea.

There are a few members of the gentry that Kennan finds who were well educated and ready to make the necessary reforms to save Korea from itself, but their numbers were too scanty to make any difference.

It is like a human body in which disease has gone beyond Nature’s methods of self-cure. The few Koreans who would accept advice and friendly help in the work of reform are not strong enough to combat the evil influences which center in the palace, and the many, who have the power, are wholly destitute of civic virtue, and want no advice that would interfere with their privileges or lessen their hold upon the people whom they oppress and rob. Their ignorance, selfishness, superstition, and greed are at present invincible.[[96]](#footnote-96)

Kennan has even less use for Korea’s “coolies” or peasants. He acknowledges their physical prowess—they are certainly stronger, taller and perhaps even more physically fit than their Japanese counterparts. But the Korean, says Kennan, lacks the Japanese peasant’s enterprise and industry and only gets done in a month what a Japanese can do in a week or less. The Korean lacks initiative—one of his primary tasks is to be a beast of burden, but if there are no jobs coming his way, he will loaf about, take a nap, or do nothing. The Japanese, on the other hand, is far more enterprising. If no work comes one way, he will devise something else that will bring him new income and/or opportunities to advance.

Wherever Kennan went in Korea, he saw peasants hard at work in the fields, but their work is often for naught because anything they produce above a subsistence level will be taken away by greedy government or yangban officials. It is a national case of the rich robbing the powerless poor of the fruits of their labor. The fact that they can never make any gains or improvements in their status implies that “[t]here is no incentive to work strenuously when there is no security for surplus or savings.”[[97]](#footnote-97)

Kennan found both the environment and personal habits of the Korean peasantry to be disgusting. He claims that they rarely if ever cleaned their clothes or even bathed more than a few times every year:

They are indifferent or insensible to smells, and loaf or smoke in perfect contentment on the edges of drains filled with excrement or garbage. Every now and then they are swept away by thousands in a great epidemic of cholera due almost wholly by the filthiness of their habits and environment; but instead of looking to their water supply and cleaning up their premises, they attribute the disease to rats, which produce cramps by crawling up inside their legs and bodies; and they try to frighten away these rats by rubbing the parts affected with cat-skins and by tacking paper silhouettes of cats on the doors of their houses.[[98]](#footnote-98)

Kennan had a very low opinion of the moral character of the common Korean. Lying was universal, stealing was frightfully common, and gambling, though illegal, was rampant everywhere. The fault for this immorality lies with the *yangban*—they set the tone for the rest of the society. But when looking at the vices of the Korean people, their laziness, untruthfulness, dishonesty and immorality, Kennan found an even deeper problem—“the incredible ignorance and savagery” of the natives of this benighted land.

Overall, Kennan felt that Korea’s greatest failure lay in the downward spiral of its once-proud people. Classical Korea had reached its height between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but since that time it had shut itself off from the world and had created its own prison from which there was no escape. Only Japan could save Korea from itself.

**Kennan’s View of the Korean Government and Its Officials**

In another article, “Korea: A Degenerate State,” Kennan looked at his sick patient, Korea, and found three political actors who also contributed to malaise: The Emperor, The Government, and The People.

Kennan, guided by his Japanese hosts, had a unique opportunity to meet with the Korean Emperor on several occasions. The Emperor, he noted, was a gentle little man with the personality of a child—stubborn, ignorant and superstitious, so much so that he devoted much of his time to conferring with sorceresses and witches who inhabited the palace and advised him on state affairs. “He is indeed a spoiled child, who regards his country as something created for his special delectation, and all the people as flocks and herds for his slaughter.” He is “absolutely incapable of forming a correct judgment with regard to men and events, and in consequence of this mental disability, he is deceived by his courtiers and robbed and cheated by all who have business dealings with him.”[[99]](#footnote-99)

If the Emperor was bad, the rest of the government was in even worse shape. “Thieves, extortioners, counterfeiters, torturers and assassins have again and again held positions in the Emperor’s Cabinet.” Grossly corrupt provincial governors paid out a lot of money for their positions, but they got a far greater profit because of their illegal schemes to rob the common people of Korea. These schemes included excessive taxation, bribery, and illegal seizure of private property on a mere whim. There was nobody to stop these selfish practices. Every position in government was for sale and there was corruption everywhere. Corruption was so endemic to the system that only a strong outside force could improve the situation.

The ultimate victims of this corruption were the Korean people. As already noted, he elucidated that no matter how hard they worked, whatever profits they made were seized by the thieves who were their governors, policemen and local guardians. The result was that the people were impoverished and depressed, with no hope for advancement in life, no education or prospects and no one to look after them in times of adversity. They lacked the incentive to work hard because their labor would get them nowhere. Sadly, they starved in the streets and lacked the energy or desire to seek a productive and prosperous life. Street scene photographs from the period show many gaunt Koreans sitting idly around with little or nothing to occupy them. Their faces lack any smiles or other signs of joy. Their homes are of simple design and their personal possessions are few.[[100]](#footnote-100) The common Korean man was thoroughly used to the robbery of his hard-earned gains by government officials. Commoners in Korea would only protest if the demands made on them were excessive:

It must be remembered, moreover, that the Korean people have been accustomed to “squeezes” and illegal extractions for centuries, and that they protest or resist only when robbery passes the extreme limit of endurance. If a governor or prefect “squeezes” moderately and with discretion, he may do so with impunity—the people will not “kick”—but if he resorts to general violence, or attempts to “squeeze” for his own use ten or twenty times as much as he collects in legal taxes, there is apt to be trouble. You may rob some of the Koreans all of the time; but if you rob all of them all of the time and without limit, you are finally dragged out of your house and beaten or kicked to death in the streets.[[101]](#footnote-101)

Kennan provides statistics that he says demonstrate government graft and misuse of funds. There is a huge emphasis on spending for the Emperor and his court, but absolutely little or no provision for the safety, education and welfare of the Korean people. While the Emperor and other high officials lived in evident luxury, the ten to twelve million ordinary Koreans paid dearly to support their rulers, but received nothing in return. Kennan in 1905 provides the following figures from a recent budget to emphasize his point. Figures are in “Korean dollars.”

Monies spent for the benefit of the government:[[102]](#footnote-102)

Imperial Privy Purse $1,103,359

Imperial “Sacrifices” 186,041

Palace Construction 300,000

Palace Guard 170,256

Special Palace Guard 81,978

Total: $1,751,634

Monies spent for the benefit of the Korean people:

All public schools[[103]](#footnote-103) $27,718

Public Works 424

Suppressing Robbers 500

Total $28,642

Kennan reports that by far the largest appropriation was $5,180,614 spent on the army, which because of its shoddy and weak condition he considered a waste. Desertion was rampant and men and equipment in sorry shape. There was little order in the ranks and a great deal of money was siphoned off. If the army was bad, the navy as even worse. It had a budget of $450,000, but all it had to show for itself was an old and very dilapidated gun boat.[[104]](#footnote-104)

Kennan concludes his article on the “degenerate” and corrupt” condition of Korea:

The activities and operations of the existing Korean Government may briefly be summed up as follows: It takes from the people, directly and indirectly, everything that they earn over and above a bare subsistence, and gives them in return practically nothing. It affords no adequate protection to life or property; it provides no educational facilities that deserve notice; it builds no roads; it does not improve its harbors; it does not light its coasts; it pays no attention to street-cleaning or sanitation; it takes no measures to prevent or check epidemics; it does not attempt to foster national trade or industry; it encourages the lowest forms of primitive superstition; and it corrupts and demoralizes its subjects by setting them examples of untruthfulness, dishonesty, treachery, cruelty, and a cynical brutality in dealing with human rights that is almost without parallel in modern times.[[105]](#footnote-105)

**Kennan’s Praise for Japan’s Promise to Guide Korea into the Modern World**

While historical hindsight tells us that Japan’s rule in Korea (1905-1945) was brutal and designed to serve Japanese interests at the expense of the Koreans, many in the West, including Kennan and Theodore Roosevelt, accepted Japan’s announced goal of entering Korea to improve the welfare of the Koreans and their nation. George Kennan, like Roosevelt, in 1905 strongly applauded the Japanese for their seemingly unselfish pledge to modernize Korea, noting that Korea was too savage, too far gone to be able to save itself:

With a demoralizing inheritance of savage superstitions from a remote Asiatic ancestry, with a corrupt and brutal government to repress every attempt at reform, and with an antiquated system of Chinese training to cramp and fetter all minds that had natural capacity for improvement and growth, the degeneration of the Korean people was almost inevitable. It has now progressed so far as to be beyond the possibility of self cure, but it may yet be arrested by foreign interference. Japan has finally undertaken to stop the process of decay; remedy the evils of bad government; encourage honesty, industry, and public spirit; and substitute modern enlightenment for the gloomy darkness of semi-barbarism. It is a gigantic experiment, and it may or may not succeed; but we, who are trying a similar experiment in the Philippines, regard it with the deep interest and sympathy.[[106]](#footnote-106)

Kennan is very much influenced by the spirit of William Griffis and E. Warren Clark, discussed earlier, who anointed the Japanese as “latent Christians” now charged with spreading “Anglo-Saxon” civilization to the rest of East Asia. The Japanese had readily invited the West to teach them the ways of the modern world, but for the West, Japan was unique—an ambitious pupil eager to learn. The Japanese had thrown themselves open to the civilized world, but one would be far pressed to find such accommodation in countries like Korea and China. Japan, on the other hand, is an Asian country with a long relationship with both Korea and China. Koreans and Chinese might distrust alien Westerners, but they surely would be more open to relations with Japan. Thus it was up to Japan to spread “Anglo-Saxon civilization” to the rest of Asia:

For the first time in the annals of the East, one Asiatic nation is making a serious and determined effort to transform and civilize another. Asiatic peoples, in centuries past, have exchanged ideas, arts, or products, and the higher has sometimes handed down its knowledge and such civilization as it had to the lower; but no Oriental nationality ever made a conscious and intelligent attempt to uplift and regenerate a neighbor until Japan, a few months ago in 1904, took hold of Korea.

The interest and importance of this experiment are not wholly due to its unique and unprecedented character. An experiment may be new and yet have little or no bearing on human progress and welfare. The Korean experiment, however, is not of this kind, inasmuch as its results are likely to affect vitally the interests and happiness of millions of people, and may completely transform the social and political conditions not only in Korea, but throughout the vast empire of China. The present war has made Japan the predominant Power in eastern Asia, and there can be little doubt, I think, that she is about to assume the leadership of the so-called Yellow Race.

In the Korean experiment we may see what capacity for leadership she has, and what are likely to be the results of the exercise of her newly acquired influence and strength in the wide field thrown open to her by her recent victories. She has successfully transformed and regenerated herself, but has she the disposition and the ability to uplift and civilize the degenerate nation on the other side of the Tsushima Strait, or to guide wisely and unselfishly the greater and more promising people on the other side of the Yellow Sea?[[107]](#footnote-107)

**Kennan’s Criticisms of Japanese Actions in Korea**

While Kennan always supported Japanese assertion control of Korea, he strongly criticized the manner in which they attempted to impose their will. When the Japanese forced the Koreans to accept the placement of their troops on the peninsula in preparation for their planned invasion to counter the Russians, they asserted that Korea was and would always continue to be an independent country. The Japanese were to play an advisory role with the Korean government and the Koreans, having no real choice in the matter, reluctantly agreed to accept Japanese advisors and advice.

The reality, however, was that from the very start in mid-1904, the Japanese began to assert control over branches of the Korean government starting with its postal service. However, many ranking Koreans, infuriated that the Japanese were in fact gradually asserting their sovereignty over more and more of the Korean government, protested that the Japanese were going against their pledge to respect Korean independence. A number of ranking Koreans including the Emperor reacted strongly against these intrusions on Korean sovereignty and sought outside on their behalf from the United States and other nations.[[108]](#footnote-108) American support, of course, was not forthcoming because the U.S. was firmly on the side of Japan.

Even Japanese officials at this time expressed what they considered to be the real reasons Japan was in Korea in 1905 and offered a very low opinion of Korea and its people. When Baron Kaneko Kentarō, Japan’s chief propagandist in the United States during the Russo-Japanese War, was asked if the Japanese would support intermarriage between Japanese and Koreans in Japan, he emphatically replied: “Not at all! On the contrary we will oppose it very vigorously. We shall consider the Koreans as a lower race; we will give them all possible liberty, but we shall in every possible way endeavor to maintain the Japanese spirit among the colonists that go among them. We believe in the superiority of the races, not amalgamation.”[[109]](#footnote-109)

Kennan suggested a direct approach: “The Japanese government may have thought it necessary, or expedient at the time, to treat Korea as a sovereign and independent State which needed only benevolent advice; but it would have saved itself much trouble if it had made its advisors directors, and had guaranteed only the ultimate independence of a reformed and regenerated Empire.”[[110]](#footnote-110) The direct approach might have distressed Koreans, but it would have clarified Japanese aims and allowed for better Korean understanding of what was at stake.

Kennan also felt that the Japanese erred with regard to the programs that they initiated in 1904-1905. The Japanese worked to restore financial order in the country by restructuring Korea’s currency and postal system. Kennan suggests that the greatest concern of all Koreans was the “cruelty and corruption of Korean [government] administration … The people everywhere were being oppressed, robbed and impoverished by dishonest Korean officials, and they wanted, first of all, adequate protection for their personal and property rights.”[[111]](#footnote-111)

Kennan’s approval of Japan’s seizure of Korea was conditional. Japan’s mandate was to reform and restructure Korean government and society for the expressed benefit of the Korean people. Japan had proven its claim to be a fully modern civilized nation and the leading country of East Asia, but this maturity came with responsibilities to assist its less-fortunate neighbors. Failure to unselfishly act on behalf of the Koreans in Kennan’s opinion might well terminate Japan’s mandate to occupy Korea.

Sadly for the futures of both Korea and Japan, Japan’s motives were highly mercenary with promises as dishonorable as British and French pledges made during World War I to help Arabs build their own independent nations after the war. Tokyo had no intention of furthering Korean modernization and industrialization for the benefit of Koreans, but Kennan failed to surmise this fact. Rather, they in time became determined to hold Korea as their stepping stone leading to a sphere of influence in northeast Asia extending into Manchuria. Instead of lending a helping hand even at the start of their occupation of the Korean peninsula in 1904-1905, they used force to coerce the Korean emperor and his cabinet members to accept Japanese “reforms” and to suppress Korean protests.

While Kennan was a keen observer and a quick learner, his travels in Korea and China were under the auspices of the Japanese, a restriction that restricted his ability to be an impartial observer. He began his work in 1904 in Japan, traveled on Japanese ships, and always had Japanese-sponsored guides with him and his party. He made use of his many opportunities to walk through the streets of Seoul and Chemulpo [Incheon] and to interview Korean officials, and he certainly read many of the books that Westerners familiar with Korea had written by that time, but he was always under the watchful eye of the Japanese administration. He listened acutely to Japanese propaganda much of which he seemed to accept at face value.

Another journalist, Frederick Arthur McKenzie, who covered the Russo-Japanese War in Korea and with the Japanese army together with his friend Jack London, worked independently of the Japanese, but was writing for a British, not an American audience. McKenzie wrote that the Japanese from the outset of the war fully intended to exert their authority over Korea. Japan, according to McKenzie, was to become the "leader of a revived Asia. She is advancing to-day along three lines—territorial expansion, increased fighting power, and an aggressive commercial campaign.” Korea was to be the heart, the nerve center of its growing empire in northeast Asia. The Japanese occupation was anything but the benevolent modernization of Korea.[[112]](#footnote-112)

Kennan came to Korea with extreme prejudices—in the perfectibility of the Japanese and the savagery of the Koreans. Good modern journalism must be based on some degree of objectivity and other writers included in this work like Jack London and Frederick McKenzie made honest efforts to free themselves from Japanese propagandists. George Kennan, however, allowed himself to become a prolific propaganda organ for the Japanese. Indeed, supporting Japan became a “just cause” as had his efforts to rid Russia of its tsarist autocracy. As a result the Japanese took Kennan on “fact-finding tours” of Korea, Manchuria, China and the region around Port Arthur. While on these tours Kennan was generously fed and comfortably housed and encouraged to look at the material progress that Japan was sponsoring in Korea.

A major goal of the Japanese was to create a favorable impression on both the United States and Great Britain. They had a well-tuned propaganda machine that included both George Kennan and Frederick Palmer. The sad part of Kennan and Palmer’s efforts is that their writing was widely read in the United States and Great Britain, and thus they had a captive audience of many readers who knew nothing about Korea and who thus would be susceptible to the very unbalanced writing of correspondents like Kennan. It is sad that their ideas in their writing became the establishment view in the United States. The truth is that even though they both spent a lot of time in Japan with the Japanese, they really did not understand Japanese history and culture, and the same can be said when it came to Korea and even Manchuria and China.

**Chapter IV**

**FREDERICK PALMER: VISIONARY WHO PREDICTED THE RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR YEARS BEFORE ITS ONSET**

Frederick Palmer (1873-1958) was already a celebrated war correspondent and, like George Kennan, a friend and informal adviser to President Theodore Roosevelt when the Russo-Japanese War broke out in the first week of February, 1904. He had gained considerable fame for his coverage of a conflict between Greece and Turkey in the mid-1890s, his in-depth reporting on the American-Filipino War in 1899 and 1900, his many articles on the 1900 Boxer Rebellion in China as well as his well-chronicled experiences covering the Klondike Gold Rush of 1899. He was a master chronicler of war and his meticulous coverage of battles and military campaigns provided readers in the United States with a very clear picture of each of these conflicts and historians today with precious material for their research.

Despite his skill as a war correspondent, Palmer’s work suffered from a lack of true balance. He was clearly mesmerized by the Japanese—they could do no wrong and were wonderfully clean and modern people. They represented the cusp of Western Anglo-Saxon civilization in Asia and were using their highly modern military to benefit the corrupt and backward Koreans. Palmer believed that the Koreans were a pathetic, poor, almost uncivilized people who could only be saved by a bold Japanese occupation that would by sheer force bring them into the modern world.

During nearly a half century, Palmer covered more wars in more places than most other correspondents in American history.[[113]](#footnote-113) Later in life he covered World War I in Europe as an aide to General Pershing and lived long enough to report on World War II as an aide to General MacArthur. Palmer contributed more than one hundred lengthy magazine articles, many hundreds of front-page news stories, and at least thirty-one books, both fiction and non-fiction, which gave readers back home their best opportunity to learn about each of these conflicts. Palmer was the first American war correspondent to win the Distinguished Service Medal during World War I. He so impressed President Theodore Roosevelt that he called Palmer “our best war correspondent” and eagerly sought his advice concerning the conflict between Japan and Russia.

Biographer Nathan A. Haverstock praises Palmer, saying that to dive into his war correspondence from the front lines is to know war close up:

It is to stand with Japanese infantry so densely packed in the darkness before a night attack that one can feel the heartbeats of the men on either side, hear the bursts of air escaping from lungs punctured by dull bayonets and wish they were sharper, and see the bleached bones of young men hung up in the rusted strands of barbed wire along the Western Front, in poignant testimony to costly offenses …[[114]](#footnote-114)

Today we can get news from “the front” through television and the internet, but in Palmer’s day the writings of a correspondent was the best a reader could ask for. The rapid technological progress of the late nineteenth century such as the advent of national and international telegraph communications as well as new high-tech presses that printed thousands of newspapers an hour led the way to the growth of modern war correspondents. Writers like George Kennan, Richard Harding Davis, Jack London and Frederick Palmer gained considerable national and international fame for the high quality news coverage and analysis that they delivered.

Frederick Palmer grew up in western New York, the child of an impoverished tenant farmer. He was fascinated by newspapers and as a boy persuaded his hometown newspaper to publish a few of his stories. He had the wherewithal to attend Alleghany College in Pennsylvania for two years after which he took his savings and traveled to New York City seeking a job with a major newspaper. He landed a position as the London correspondent for the newly founded *New York Press* in 1895 at age 22. Two years later the *New York World* and *Collier’s Weekly* sent him to cover the short-lived Greco-Turkish War. He then covered the Klondike gold rush in 1898 where he first met his longtime friend Jack London.

A year later *Collier’s Weekly* sent him to cover the brutal Filipino-American War (1899-1902). His many dispatches from Manila in *Collier’s Weekly* won him many faithful readers back home, but his work there was suddenly cut short in early 1900 when *Collier’s* sent him to northern China to cover the Boxer Rebellion. He arrived in time to accompany troops of the Western powers and Japan who marched north in 1900 from Tientsin to Peking to relieve the zone that housed the foreign legations and which were under attack by Chinese forces.

**First Encounter with Japanese Troops**

When Palmer arrived in China in 1900, he heard Europeans and Americans often belittling the ability of Japanese troops to accomplish anything. They accused the Japanese of being dishonest, mere puppets masquerading as soldiers in foreign clothes. Hearing these comments every day led Palmer to believe that the Japanese were little more than “toy soldiers,” but when he began to watch the Japanese in action against the Chinese Boxers, he quickly changed his mind. He soon began to admire their organizational skills and their cool courage under fire. His articles in *Collier’s* became more and more complimentary to the Japanese as they approached Peking. At the same time Palmer developed a great dislike for the Russian troops whose conduct he felt was deplorable. When it came to the full-scale looting which occurred after the allied troops seized Peking,

[T]he Russians were the most ruthless and abandoned offenders … They wrought destruction for the sheer fun of it…. [At a mandarin’s house] In wanton glee they had slit rare old kakemonos and the richly embroidered hangings of the favorite wife’s bed. With the butts of their rifles they had smashed the household jars, flailed jade and crystal into powder, and among the debris I noted the beautiful white and blue of the fragments of precious old Ming porcelains.”[[115]](#footnote-115)

Palmer learned a great deal about the affairs of East Asia from this visit to China. The West and Japan had worked together in a coordinated effort to thwart the Chinese attempts to seize European and American embassies. However, when this had been accomplished, new rivalries would soon create difficult crises that could lead to further conflict. The two rising powers in East Asia were the Japanese and the Russians. The Japanese had begun to assert themselves in Korea after their overwhelming victory in the first Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), and the Russians were establishing themselves in eastern Siberia and Manchuria. Both wanted control of Manchuria and Korea. The likeliest scenario, Palmer wrote in *Collier’s* after his return to the United States late in 1901, was a mighty clash between Russia and Japan. Japan had staked out its destiny in Korea and had its eyes on Manchuria with all of its resources, but Russian influence in the region was growing rapidly.

The key to Russian settlement of the region, Palmer noticed, was the Trans-Siberian railway which was bringing more and more Russian troops to East Asia every month. Palmer noted that the initiative for the rapid expansion of the railroad was military and strategic:

Its object was strategic; the uniformed intelligence of Russia, which will sit placidly on an undeveloped gold mine while it applies its finesse to acquiring more land, and increasing an army which it could not support in action, dreamed of accession of potency to the Russian fist in the Far East once its sinews were of steel.[[116]](#footnote-116)

Palmer returned to the United States in 1901 by taking the Russian railway back through Europe. En route he noticed how the Russians were working furiously to finish the railway, to build their settlements in the Far East, and to build their military might in the region. It was a herculean task that could not be accomplished just overnight. Indeed, it would take a decade or more to establish Russia as a worthy military power in East Asia. Palmer agreed with a fellow traveler, a Russian officer, who said, “The railway has sent us too far and too fast” with respect to its military objective. “We are in Manchuria, ten, yes, fifteen, years too soon. We have too much to defend.”[[117]](#footnote-117)

Palmer quickly saw the logic of this thinking. Although many in the West discounted Japan’s ability to take on a major power like Russia that in so many ways was so much bigger than Japan, the Japanese at least had a distinct advantage. It had far more forces available for a northeastern Asian war with Russia, and Russia was simply not prepared to fight at that time. Palmer insisted that while the might of Russia was greater than that of Japan, if the Japanese struck before the “Russian bear” was firmly settled in his new Asian lair, he could very well be soundly beaten. If the Japanese waited too long, however, they might become powerless against a Russian onslaught. Clearly the Japanese were thinking the same thing. Palmer wrote in 1901:

My own experience leads me to think that Japan [can] drive the Russian back in a campaign which will be as great a revelation in its time as that of the Germans in 1870.[[118]](#footnote-118) Two guarantees are necessary before Japan proceeds: the neutrality of the powers and that China shall make common cause with her. In other words, the plan is for China to demand the evacuation of Manchuria, while Japan stands ready to assist in its accomplishment. At the present time in Manchuria and Eastern Siberia Russia has not over 125,000 men…. Then where is her force for meeting Japan’s army, which will be rapidly landed as soon as her navy has cleared the seas? Provided that not a single stick of dynamite is placed under a culvert or a bridge support, the most optimistic Russian expert does not hold that Russia can dispatch 500,000 men to the [Liaotung] Peninsula in less than eight months. No one realizes better than the few thinking Russians themselves Russia’s problem of fighting one army in the Peninsula with her line of communications running through the country of another nation.[[119]](#footnote-119)

Palmer’s predictions soon came true. The 1902 Anglo-Japanese alliance gave Japan the European support it needed. France was an ally of both Britain and Russia, but it chose not to intervene in a Russo-Japanese conflict. The United States remained a defacto ally of Japan throughout the whole war.

**Palmer Journeys to Japan in 1904**

A seasoned and famous war correspondent at age 32, Frederick Palmer boarded the steamship *Siberia* that departed San Francisco on 7 January 1904, destination Yokohama Japan. *Collier’s* magazine had hired Palmer to be one of its ten-to-twelve member journalistic team of correspondents and photographers including veteran Richard Harding Davis that was to cover the war behind both Japanese and Russian lines. There was a group of other journalists on board to keep Palmer company including the most famous writer in the United States at that time, Jack London.

When the *Siberia* reached Yokohama on 24 January, the correspondents on board found a Japan feverishly preparing for war. Trains leaving Tokyo to various port cities were packed with soldiers who boarded troop ships that sent them to Korea to join a large expeditionary force being organized in Seoul. The foreign reporters all wished to join the Japanese military in Seoul to cover their march north to confront the Russian army that awaited them at the Yalu River that marked the border between China and Korea. The Japanese refused to allow Palmer and his colleagues to accompany the troops and instead consigned them to the Imperial Hotel in downtown Tokyo where they sat at the bar while they grumbled among themselves about their boring plight. Only Jack London, who was able to get to Korea at his own initiative, managed to confound Japanese authorities by suddenly appearing in Seoul.

**Palmer’s Exclusive Interview with Field Marshal Yamagata**

Soon after his arrival in Tokyo Palmer arranged an exclusive interview with Marquis Yamagata Aritomo (1838-1922), the leading military figure in Japan and a former Prime Minister. The Japanese clearly respected Palmer and took advantage of his admiration for Japan by permitting him access to their major political figures like Prime Minister Ito Hirobumi and Field Marshal Yamagata. During his interview with Yamagata, the former Prime Minister explained to him that the purpose of the war was to secure Korea as a bulwark of Japan’s national security and to remove Russia as a threat to Korea. This was Japan’s chance to build a strong sphere of influence on the Asian mainland.[[120]](#footnote-120)

**Palmer Encounters Korea**

*Collier’s* magazine, perhaps more than any other Western publication, made a major effort to cover the war. They very quickly published an expensive book, *The Russo-Japanese War: A Photographic and Descriptive Review of*

*the Great Conflict in the Far East*[[121]](#footnote-121)in 1905 as the war was still being fought. The many photographic images in the book document a Japanese military machine functioning in perfect order, moving men and supplies and constructing bridges in excellent order. Davis narrates that the Japanese army’s march through Korea “has been as smooth and orderly as that of a British column in India, the organization as efficient in every way.” Korean and Chinese peasants, however, are depicted by Davis as non-modern and “apathetic” bystanders offering yet again a sharp contrast between a modern Japan and its more primitive neighbors.[[122]](#footnote-122)

Palmer’s 1904 dispatches in *Collier’s* provide very clear evidence of his admiration for all aspects of Japanese society. He had by this time made lengthy visits to several Asian countries including China, the Philippines, Japan and, now, Korea. He was amazed by the progress that Japan had made since the start of the Meiji period and was always ready to compare Japan with China and other Asian states that he had visited or heard about. It is clear that Palmer subscribed to the popular notion of the time that Japan had become the standard-bearer of Anglo-Saxon civilization in East Asia. Japan had copiously absorbed much of Western civilization and was now going to spread these ideas to other Asian countries. Korea, strategically located and backward, would be the first Asian state to benefit from the intervention of the benign Japanese. Palmer, following his Japanese hosts on a specially guided tour meant to emphasize the good that Japan was doing in Korea, is very clearly unbalanced in favor of the Japanese and thinks that whether they like it or not, the Koreans would strongly benefit from a Japanese takeover of their country.

Palmer remained in Tokyo until mid-April 1904 when he heard that he was to be included to be part of a group of sixteen correspondents that would join the Japanese First Army in Korea as it approached the Yalu River. When they finally caught up with the First Army it had arrived at the Yalu and was defeating a Russian army that had entrenched itself on the Manchurian side of the Yalu River. Palmer and the other correspondents including Jack London were allowed to witness the battle three miles away atop a high mountain.

Surveying the situation in Korea upon his arrival in Korea in April 1904, Palmer writes that the start of the Japanese occupation of Korea and the march of 200,000 troops to the north had gone off peacefully without a hitch:

After two months of inaction in Tokio, I am at last in the field, following the main Japanese army that is marching to Wiju and the Manchurian border. Along this highway, leading from Chenampo to Salinkan, signs of the war and the passage of many thousands troops are scarcely more visible than were military preparations in Japan. All signs are peaceful. The only indication that the army is somewhere ahead is the long lines of coolies, Japanese and Korean, bearing rice from the depots and transport to feed the troops on the road. Thousands of these coolies and small carts maintain the line of communications unbroken, with the military discipline and system that extends to every detail of the field organization … Everything observed along this route … goes to show the clean-cut preparedness of the Japanese army for great feats.[[123]](#footnote-123)

Korean village headmen told Palmer that the conduct of each and every Japanese soldier had been exemplary. Foreign critics of Japan had predicted to Palmer that while Japanese troops had behaved themselves very well in the company of soldiers of Western nations, “away from foreign scrutiny they would wage brutal and uncivilized warfare.” Palmer notes that the fine behavior of the Japanese proved the critics wrong.[[124]](#footnote-124)

Palmer sees the coming of the Japanese to Korea as an act of benevolence. The Koreans, he feels, are a sick and helpless people drowning in their own corruption, filth and poverty. What they need most is the helping hand of an obliging big brother who will rescue them from their own oppression: “We are passing through a Korea that has been keenly and subtly made Japanese in two months—a country conquered by kindness, fair treatment, and a nice skill in handling public and private opinion.”[[125]](#footnote-125) He noted that “The agent of change is the Japanese army itself. Through the sodden, hermit Korea runs a new river of life, to be fruitful with consequences that open all the vistas of conjecture and problematic discussion.”[[126]](#footnote-126) Long ago, Palmer reflects, civilization came to Korea from China down the old Peking Road that linked the two countries. Now the Japanese army is marching across Korea spreading modern civilization like a crashing wave, ironically moving in the opposite direction of the former wave from China. “For the first time since the Romans, the armed mission of a higher human organization has gone northward. In its wake, with its bulk in mass to strike the enemy, the army leaves stations of its order and cleanliness; as significant as the clean hospital attendants in the ward of sickness. The new may not be ideal, but it is so much better than the old as to silence all comparisons.”[[127]](#footnote-127)

The differences between modern Japan and traditional Korea were plainly obvious the minute that Palmer arrived with his Japanese hosts at Chenampo:

In an hour in Chenampo you get an impression of the coming and passing race, clearer perhaps than you will have weeks hence. Here the little men [the Japanese] are of the future and the big men [Koreans] of the past. The two races are as distinct in type as Germans and Moors. Whenever you see a blue figure on the landscape it is Japanese, wherever there is a white figure, it is Korean. The Korean never washes his body and only washes his clothes occasionally. You are in a land of coolies and corrupt officials. All spend most of the time in the street. The race itself is characterless, listless, without color… Men and women, dressing much alike, in their mud-colored white clothes, with feminine faces unfeminine and masculine faces unmasculine, the Koreans are a sexless people, begetting wonder that the race has not long ago ceased reproduction.[[128]](#footnote-128)

The Koreans, says Palmer, have no idea what to do with the incoming Japanese. They stand silently on the streets looking at the invaders “with a kind of stupid, preoccupied curiosity.”[[129]](#footnote-129) The smaller Japanese soldier neatly dressed in his clean uniform could almost walk under the arm of the taller erect Korean male who saunters up and down the street or sitting out in front of his house with pipe in hand, but who does nothing. Indeed, notes Palmer, the Koreans seem to be as noncommittal about the coming of the Japanese as the average American might be “about the tribal differences of the Fijians.”[[130]](#footnote-130)

Palmer sees Korea as a country that once long ago had enjoyed the early fruits of Chinese civilization, but which for centuries had “rotted through generations of decadency.” It is a place where “no man understands a horse and men take the places of horses.” It is a land where “filthy corrupt officials” have for so long collected surplus profits of peasants as taxes that peasants are always careful to avoid amassing any surpluses.[[131]](#footnote-131) It is also a land lacking any sign of intelligent leaders who could possibly lead them out of their current morass. “The Hermit Land—might well be called the land of the Burden Bearers … Your native can carry more and lift or pull less than an average man of any other country. Nourishment for his brain, the force for the natural aggressive characteristic of the male sex, all go into his back. He is as mild and as helpless as a milch cow with a load of five hundred weight.”[[132]](#footnote-132)

Palmer goes as far as to sternly show disgust over the personal hygiene of the Koreans when comparing them with the conditions afforded American missionaries in Ping Yang (today Pyongyang):

The [foreign] missionaries of Ping Yang are practicing in truth the precepts of the devotion which called the ambition of their theological school days. What a town they dwell in! A town where the human being lives as filthy as only one other animal, the swine, will, where the leather merchant lays his fresh pelt on the uneven stones of the main street and from his doorway watches, through the dirty slits of his unwashed eyelids, the tanning by the tread of passing feet …[[133]](#footnote-133)

Yes, before the romance of this ancient city appeals to me, it must have a sewage system and its inhabitants must submit to immersion in lye in order to give soap a purchase. You may search in vain among the people of the earth for a satire like that which clothes this race in white—a white that is hardly ever washed. Long ago, an Imperial Edict bade them put on white whenever royalty died, and royalty died so often that the rabbit folk saved expense most loyally by grieving for royalty all the time.[[134]](#footnote-134)

Palmer is very optimistic about the future of Korea under Japanese tutelage. In the previous few months, the Japanese army had made its dominance in the country felt through a sense of compassion and good behavior. The Koreans, Palmer notes, have been won over and are cooperating to such an extent that their outpouring of support for the Japanese is “spontaneous.” There had been no examples of bad behavior by the troops—“they have left no stories of loose discipline in their wake.”[[135]](#footnote-135) Now that it was spring, Korean farmers were out in their fields planting vast amounts of food that will be used later in the summer to feed the quarter-million Japanese troops occupying their country. The Korean farmers carry on with their work oblivious to the fact that a large foreign army is marching through their towns and villages.[[136]](#footnote-136) In short, the very humanity of the Japanese was winning over the Koreans and the two peoples, he was sure, would cooperate together in that bold experiment of a big brother selflessly helping a less able younger brother. “The Korean, giving way to the masterful race, not making even the feint of resistance, still retains that stupidly impassive dignity.”[[137]](#footnote-137)

**Palmer and the Japanese Advance into Manchuria**

Palmer and the other correspondents followed the Japanese army into Manchuria. While another group of correspondents joined the Japanese Second Army as it tightened its death grip siege around Port Arthur, Palmer and the Japanese First Army marched further north into Manchuria to meet the Russians to the north. There was little action and even less stirring to report until late August when the Japanese engaged the Russians in the Battle of Liaoyang. Unlike the Battle of the Yalu where a huge Japanese force had completely overwhelmed a smaller Russian army, the August strife saw two evenly matched armies fight from 23 August to 3 September 1904, ending only with the Japanese capture of Liaoyang. Unlike the battle of the Yalu, Palmer enjoyed considerable freedom of movement and was able to give a very detailed analysis of what he saw in his articles for *Collier’s.* Now that he was entirely out of Korea, he changed the focus of his articles to other topics and never really mentioned Korea again.

After the battle of Liaoyang Japanese officers speculated to Palmer that there probably would not be another offensive against the Russians until spring 1905. The principal military goal of the Japanese was a victorious ending to their siege at Port Arthur. Furthermore, Japanese supply lines in Manchuria were sorely stretched and it had become necessary to refurbish their forces before renewing their attacks on the Russians. Sensing this break in the action, Palmer decided to return to the United States for the winter.

While on his way home by steamer—the trip routinely took about three weeks—Palmer worked hard on his book on the first year of the war entitled *With Kuroki in Manchuria,* basing his title on the name of the general leading Japanese forces in Manchuria. Much of the book consists of updated articles published earlier in *Collier’s*, but there are added insights including interviews with Japanese officers. The purpose of the book was to provide a detailed chronicle of the war. Soon after his arrival Scribner’s published *With Kuroki in Manchuria,* one of the first if not the first book providing a close up view of the conflict. The book was quickly bought up by both military and civilian leaders in both Europe and the United States who were anxious to learn something about the Japanese military. The book is rather shallow on actual military details, but it does a very good job describing Japanese military goals as well as the mentality of Japanese military leaders. It also presented in vivid form Palmer’s very negative view of Korea and his support for Japan’s takeover and remake of the country.[[138]](#footnote-138)

One of the first readers was probably President Roosevelt himself. Roosevelt had a very keen interest in Asian affairs and the outcome of the war. We do know that Roosevelt was very aware of Palmer’s reporting and after his return to the United States in late 1904, Roosevelt summoned him to the White House and bombarded him with questions. Palmer later wrote, “So random did his questions seem at times, running back and forth from Japanese history, social life, and mode of thought, that I might have concluded he had a scattered mind.” After several visits with the President, Palmer began to comprehend the purpose of all this grilling. When Roosevelt strangely interjected, “I know what I am going to do when the time comes,” Palmer replied, “You’re going to make peace?” Roosevelt replied, “Yes, but don’t you tell anybody.”[[139]](#footnote-139) It was a secret that Palmer did indeed keep.

Palmer returned to Manchuria in February 1905, as the Japanese were gearing up for their spring offensive which resulted in the great battle of Mukden. The battle did not prove decisive for either side, but by now both the Japanese and Russians were exhausted. In hindsight it is clear that the Russians had unlimited resources and manpower and that if they decided to pursue the war any further, they perhaps could have reversed the tide and eventually enjoyed greater success. Unfortunately for Tsar Nicholas II and his army staff, the Japanese navy had destroyed the Russian Baltic fleet at the sea Battle of Tsushima and there was growing unrest against the war at home which led to the Bloody Sunday Massacre in front of the Winter Palace at St. Petersburg on 22 January 1905. The Japanese had thrown every available resource against the Russians with great success, but now their army was exhausted and the resources and money necessary to keep the war going were running low. Thus, when President Roosevelt offered to mediate a peace settlement, he received a very receptive audience on both sides.

**Sampling of Palmer’s Writing Fully Demonstrating His Biases**

The following is a sampling of Palmer’s reporting in Korea. Here we encounter both his attention to detail as well as his clear admiration of the Japanese and his lower opinion of the Koreans that he encountered. This dispatch was probably sent in late April or early May, 1904:

Along this highway, from Chenampo to Sa-linkin, signs of war and of the passage of many thousand troops are scarcely more visible than were military preparations in Japan. All signs are peaceful. The only indication that the army is somewhere ahead is the long lines of coolies, Japanese and Korean, bearing rice from the depots and transport to feed the troops on the road. Thousands of these coolies and small carts maintain the line of communication unbroken, with the military discipline and system that extends to every detail of the field organization. The roads are in the throes of the spring thaw, but their difficulties have been exaggerated so far as blocking the advance is concerned. Japan has policed the country with small posts widely scattered. I have traveled twenty miles without passing one of these few outposts guarding the line of communication. Security for supply trains, peace, and confidence among the populace have been attained by other means. In the path of this great army, moving by forced marches in winter weather, there are no burned villages, no plundered houses, no fugitive peasantry.

There has been no license or disorder among the troops. They have left no stories of loose discipline in their wake. The headmen of the Korean villages tell me that the conduct of the individual private soldier has been exemplary. All supplies taken en route are paid for at native market rates. Their advance has been as smooth and orderly as that of a British column in India, the organization as efficient in every way.

The natives are on their little farms making the fields ready for spring cultivation, already sowing crops of oats. They are unconcerned about war or passing armies which have not yet troubled them. In the summer months the farming regions of northern Korea will furnish great quantities of food supplies for the Japanese bases. We are passing through a Korea that has been keenly and subtly made Japanese in two months a country conquered by kindness, fair treatment, and a nice skill in handling public and private opinion.[[140]](#footnote-140)

**Was Frederick Palmer an Objective Reporter?**

One of the keys to being a good news reporter is the ability to have and develop confidential news sources. It is impossible to get behind the superficial content of news without reliable portals that permit an in-depth background understanding of what is going on. At the same time the good correspondent will report the news as fairly and as balanced as possible. Pure objectivity is humanly impossible, but an effort must be to look at all sides of an issue, to let people on all sides to speak and to be as fair as possible.

Palmer’s coverage of the Russo-Japanese War was truly excellent. Even today his book *With Kuroki in Manchuria* is possibly one of the best studies of the opening phase of the war and must be required reading for any student or scholar trying to get a better understanding of the conflict. He had the gift of making the war come alive for the reader and to gain access to key leaders to ascertain what they were thinking. His relationship with President Roosevelt is a case in point. He learned about the President’s role in designing the peace talks long before any other public person. Palmer was also very perceptive to predict the war years before its outbreak and to realize the critical weakness of the Russian position in northeast Asia.

This reporter’s writing is marvelous in its clarity. The philosopher Henry David Thoreau noted that the key to good writing is to “simplify, simplify.” Palmer has a graceful and incisive style that is easy to follow and his depictions of battles, marches and other military maneuvers give one the feeling of being there with him. Even today reading his articles in *Collier’s* and again in his book takes one back to the front. His interview with General Yamagata is a vivid portrayal of Japan’s greatest pre-World War II military hero.

What is not to be congratulated is Palmer’s obvious infatuation with the Japanese. He shows a lack of balance in his reporting—the Japanese are wonderful, they are modern, they can be the saviors of Asia. His relationships with several Japanese military officials are too deep. He likes them and they like and trust him and see him as a useful tool in their propaganda machine. There would be no problem with these relationships if it did not affect his writing, but it does. Perhaps without realizing it, Palmer like Kennan had become an indirect propaganda machine for the Japanese.

Palmer’s anti-Korean feelings may well have been justified. Other writers of the period from Mrs. Bishop to Kennan had said much the same. Korea was poor, its government was weak and there was corruption at every level of Korean society. But Palmer like Kennan and unlike Mrs. Bishop made no attempt to talk to Koreans, to find out the source of their misery and how they felt about the Japanese coming into their land and taking control of their government. Throughout world history one can find instances where people are for whatever reason miserable and find themselves taken over by an outside army. They are not going to support this and they are going to want the alien army to leave. The United States certainly experienced this phenomenon in Iraq after March, 2003. Koreans had to accept the Japanese, but they were certainly not happy about it—something which Canadian-British reporter Frederick McKenzie found out when he actually talked to many Koreans.

Western reporters had much to complain about the Japanese military. One factor was the high level of Japanese censorship. Jack London, who had to deal with the Japanese far longer in Korea than did Palmer, was very upset with the high degree of censorship and the failure of the military to allow him or any other reporters near the front. The Japanese were so exasperated with London’s attempts to get the “real story” that they finally expelled him. But by the same token the Japanese gave significant access to Palmer and Kennan because they were in effect, as noted, a part of the vast propaganda machines that extolled all the virtues of the Japanese, that they were on a humanitarian mission to save the Korean people. It didn’t hurt that Kennan and Palmer wrote for newspapers and magazines whose readership included powerful men in Washington DC, including none other than the President of the United States.

Scholars and students must be careful when they read the works of Kennan and Palmer. If they only rely on their writing even a century later, they too can develop the feeling that the Japanese were the “good guys” bent on a mission to bring the lowly Koreans into the modern world which as it turned out was certainly not the case at all. They should balance them with the writing of Jack London and Frederick McKenzie and with a realization that in hindsight the Japanese administration of Korea was not at all benevolent.

**CHAPTER V**

**JACK LONDON: KOREANS AS PEOPLE OF THE ABYSS**

Today Jack London (1876-1916) is particularly remembered as a novelist and short story artist who wrote about his adventures in the Yukon and on sailing ships on the Pacific. But London was also a first-class war correspondent, feature writer, political essayist and photographer. London was one of the first people to realize at the turn of the last century that the time of Western superiority was over and that the 20th century would witness the rise of East Asia. His breakthrough as a journalist came in early 1904 when the American-based Hearst newspaper chain hired London to cover the Russo-Japanese War. His many feature articles and photographs from Korea provide as good a view of the poverty of Korea as did his classic 1903 book about the East End of London, *The People of the Abyss.* Jack London had little experience as a journalist prior to the Russo-Japanese War. At that time it was not uncommon for major newspapers and magazines to hire leading fiction writers to cover major conflicts. Stephen Crane, author of *The Red Badge of Courage,* had covered both the Greco-Turkish War of 1897 and the Spanish-American War in Cuba prior to his death in 1900. The Hearst news syndicate planned to send London to South Africa to cover the Boer War in 1902, but the conflict had ended by the time he had reached England en route to Africa. Stuck in Britain with little to do, he moved into the notorious East End of London for several weeks doing research for *The People of the Abyss.*

Born into a poor family where his step-father was a ne’er-do-well vegetable farmer and his mother was a part-time music teacher and soothsayer, Jack worked various hard labor jobs as a youth. As a teenager he pirated oysters on San Francisco Bay and later served on a fish patrol to capture other such pirates, sailed the Pacific to East Asia on a sealing ship, and joined Kelly’s army of unemployed working men in 1893. London was a voracious reader, and through his books and his practical experience working hard labor jobs, he became acquainted with socialism. He ran twice on the socialist ticket for mayor of Oakland but lost badly. He early on decided to become a writer to escape the awful prospect of working as a low-wage factory worker. He spent the winter of 1897 as part of the Yukon gold rush. He found no gold, but collected a wealth of material for future stories. He studied the works of many other writers, and by 1899 and 1900 was submitting stories to various literary magazines. His early novels including *The Call of the Wild* (1903) and *The Sea Wolf* (1904) won him lasting fame. From then until his untimely death in 1916 at the age of forty, London would produce over fifty volumes of stories, novels, and political essays.

London during his prime was one of the most famous and most read writers in America. He traveled widely and was acquainted with famous folk like President Theodore Roosevelt. He often used his writings and his many public lectures to promote his ideas on socialism, women’s suffrage, and even prohibition. His book, *The People of the Abyss,* in which he depicts the misery of the tens of thousands of impoverished inhabitants of East London, remains one of the classics of urban sociology. London was also a brilliant photographer whose pictures strongly supported his essays.

London as a journalist was at his best as a features writer. His long, well-developed essays reflected his points of view, but unlike war correspondents George Kennan and Frederick Palmer, London’s more balanced writing does not seek to promote the agenda of one nation over another. In the era of “yellow journalism,” when few reporters wrote objectively or sought true balance in their coverage, London kept a fully independent voice even when a more pro-Japanese stance may have won him more favor with the Japanese. His own obstinacy made him a pain in the side of the Japanese but permitted him to offer American readers fine coverage of the early stages of the war. But by the time that Kennan and Palmer arrived on the mainland in the spring of 1904, London’s time there was almost over.

**London Arrives in Japan**

When Jack London arrived in Tokyo in late January 1904 to cover the Russo-Japanese War, he had a major advantage over many of the other Western reporters there in that he had visited Japan a decade earlier. In 1893 he had joined the crew of the *Sophie Sutherland,* a three-masted sealing schooner bound for the cold waters off the northern coast of Japan and the Bering Sea. They docked at the Japanese-administered Bonin Islands on the way out and then made port in Yokohama for three or more weeks on their way home to sell the seal pelts they had accumulated. London spent much of his time roaming the Tokyo-Yokohama region immersing himself as deeply as possible in Japanese society. It is clear that he talked with many ordinary Japanese including several rickshaw drivers. He launched his writing career upon his return to California by composing three excellent short-stories set in Japan that demonstrated a fundamental understanding of the dynamics of Japanese society.[[141]](#footnote-141)

A decade later, when London had already achieved fame as a novelist and short-story writer, he became one of the premier American correspondents covering the war. His services as war correspondent and photographer for the forthcoming conflict between Japan and Russia had been sought by *Collier’s Weekly,* the *New York* *Herald, Harper’s Magazine* and the Hearst newspaper syndicate. The latter had made the best offer, and going off to war had definite advantages for him, besides financial gain. He would be well-paid, have a splendid adventure, and would be able to develop considerable material for future novels and stories. He would also escape a failed marriage.

London actually spent most of his time in Asia traveling through Korea. When he arrived in Tokyo in late January 1904 aboard the *S. S. Siberia* after a difficult passage across the Pacific, he discovered to his chagrin that the Japanese had no intention of issuing permits enabling foreign correspondents to travel up to the Japanese front lines. There was a waiting game at the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo where the Japanese wined and dined the foreign reporters while denying them the chance to do their jobs. William Straight, a Reuter’s correspondent, observed:

The situation was unique in the annals of journalism … A government holding the rapid pressmen at a distance, censoring their simplest stories, yet patting them on the back, dining them, giving them picnics and luncheons and theatrical performances and trying in every way not only to soften their bonds and make their stay a pleasant one, but siren-like, to deaden their sense of duty and their desire to get into the field.[[142]](#footnote-142)

Very strict censorship rules were in force as the Japanese feared that reporters at the front might give the enemy information as to Japanese troop movements. However, London was not going to let a few Japanese censors get in his way. While other foreign correspondents hung out in Tokyo-area bars and at the Imperial Hotel and begged Japanese officials to let them join Japanese forces marching north in Korea to meet the Russian army at the Yalu River, London caught two rattle-trap steamers in early February that took him to the Korean southern port city of Busan and then along the Korean coast to Chemulpo (Incheon) from which he quickly made his way to Seoul where the Japanese were busily mobilizing for their march north.

The Japanese military was surprised and perplexed when London suddenly showed up in Seoul. They really did not know what to do with him and two other Western reporters who had arrived without proper permits.[[143]](#footnote-143) The Japanese were preoccupied with the movement of their over two-hundred thousand troops northward to become too involved with the three obstinate Western reporters. They tended to generally ignore London and his companions as long as they kept a low profile, moved to the rear of the army, and did not interfere with Japanese military operations.

London wrote twenty-two feature length articles averaging 1500-2000 words while in Korea and Manchuria between his arrival in Korea in the midst of February, 1904 and his forced return to the United States from Manchuria in June of the same year. He employed a Japanese civilian translator and a young Korean assistant, Manyoungi,[[144]](#footnote-144) as they moved north at the rear of the Japanese army. London’s photographing skills flourished with pictures of Japanese soldiers, poverty-stricken Koreans, pathetic Russian prisoners, and hard-working Chinese farmers capture the poignancy of the war.[[145]](#footnote-145)

**Did Racism Cloud London’s Reporting on Life in East Asia?**

Jack London was writing in an era when many of his fellow Californians had developed a strong sense of racial prejudice against Asians, especially those Japanese and Chinese immigrants who had settled in the San Francisco area, the central valley, and the numerous gold mining towns across northern California. London on occasion reflected some of these same prejudices in his novels and essays, but he more often showed genuine sympathy and respect for Asians that he encountered. In that sense, most of London’s writing differs somewhat from the anti-Asian diatribes found in many newspaper articles and books of the period.

A famous photograph of London showed the reporter standing among the Japanese soldiers wearing a weather-beaten visored cap over his short, dark hair and a roughhewn jacket covering his broad soldiers, a cigarette dangling away from his square jaw and a camera dangling from his gloved hand. As they studied documents, the Japanese troops contrasted with Jack London in their box hats and high collared uniforms. A photographer present immortalized London looking like the adventurer and writer that he was, one drawn to the battle like a missionary to his calling, who skillfully recorded the machinations of great powers while sympathizing with the underdogs who struggled to survive.

London is remembered for many of his novels and short stories, but his visits to Japan, Korea and Manchuria, his factual, hard-hitting coverage of the early stages of the Russo-Japanese War; his astute essays and short stories about Sino-Japanese competition; his prophetic feature articles predicting the rise of nations on the Pacific Rim, and his call for respect and constructive interaction between Americans and Asians over “yellow peril” hysteria are undeservedly ignored or downplayed by his biographers to this day. These salient aspects of London's life deserve to be remembered and respected. They evidence his keen intelligence, painfully accurate vision of the future and the progressive and humane values that are still needed to bridge the East and West.

**The Yellow Peril Threatens the West?**

Today the term “Yellow Peril”—but not necessarily the fears and fantasies that it engenders—has gone out of fashion. But in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Westerners’ dreams about the “superiority” of their civilization competed with their nightmares of Oriental hordes swarming from the East to engulf the advanced West. This was a popular theme in the day’s literature and journalism, which London knew well. The term “Yellow Peril” supposedly derives from German Kaiser Wilhelm II’s warning following Japan’s defeat of China in 1895 in the first Sino-Japanese War. The expression initially referred to Tokyo’s sudden rise as a military and industrial power in the late nineteenth century. Soon, however, its more sinister meaning was broadly applied to all of Asia. “The Yellow Peril” highlighted diverse Western fears including the supposed threat of a military invasion from Asia, competition to the white labor force from Asian workers, the alleged moral degeneracy of Asian people and the specter of the genetic mixing of Anglo-Saxons with Asians.[[146]](#footnote-146)

John R. Eperjesi, a careful London scholar, writes that “More than any other writer, London fixed the idea of a yellow peril in the minds of the turn-of-the-century Ameri-cans.” Many biographers quote London, just after his return from covering the first months of the Russo-Japanese War for the Hearst newspapers in 1904, as telling a coterie of fellow socialists of his profound dislike for the “yellow man.” Eperjesi quotes Robert Dunn, London’s fellow journalist in Korea, as saying that Jack’s dislike of the Japanese “outdid mine. Though a professed socialist, he really believed in the Kaiser’s ‘yellow peril.’”[[147]](#footnote-147)

Are these charges correct? If so, they would cast London as a bigot and alarmist. In fact, a close examination of London’s writing shows much the opposite: he was ahead of his time intellectually and morally. His Russo-Japanese war dispatches about Korea and Manchuria in early 1904 offer balanced reporting, evincing concern for the welfare of both the average Japanese soldier and Russian soldier and the Korean peasant, and respect for the ordinary Chinese whom he met. As a widely-read journalist covering that war, London emerges as one of the era's few writers who sensed that the tide of white “superiority” and Western expansionism and imperialism was receding.[[148]](#footnote-148)

His positive views of Asians can be traced back a decade earlier to his first published stories and later writing such as his essays “The Yellow Peril” and “If Japan Awakens China” and his short story, “The Unparalleled Invasion.” As many Americans held racist beliefs about Asians, London expressed more liberal views.

**Japanese Aggression, Chinese Pride**

In addition, as an analyst, London's deep understanding of how the industrial, politico-strategic and social worlds were profoundly changing surpassed that of his peers. His fiction and essays explored the appearance of new industrial powers in the East, as well as Western counter-moves and inter-Asian tensions, too. London shrewdly predicted elements of the coming age of revolution, total war, genocide and even terrorism. This renders his writing painfully relevant. As biographer Jonah Raskin has observed, “In a short, volatile life of four decades, Jack London explored and mapped the territory of war and revolution in fiction and non-fiction alike.  More accurately than any other writer of his day, he also predicted the shape of political power—from dictatorship to terrorism—that would emerge in the twentieth century, and his work is as timely today as when it was first written.”[[149]](#footnote-149)

For instance, during and after his time in Korea and Manchuria, London developed a complicated thesis in his 1904 essay, “The Yellow Peril,” envisaging the rise first of Japan and then China in opposition as major twentieth century economic and industrial powers.

London’s starting point was his suspicion that Japan's imperial appetite exceeded its swallowing of Korea in the Russo-Japanese War. He anticipated that Tokyo would eventually take over Manchuria and then attempt to seize control of China in the attempt to use China’s vast land, resources and labor for its own benefit.

London knew that Japan’s strength at the turn of the twentieth century lay in its ability to use Western technology and its national unity. London and some other contemporary writers, as well as many politically attuned Asians recognized that Japan’s defeat of Russia was a turning point in a history of Asian subjugation to white imperial powers. Japan’s victory called into question as no previous event the innate superiority of the white race.

However, London believed that there were severe limits on Japan’s ability to become a leading world power. However impressive its initial gains, Tokyo would falter from lack of “staying power.” One reason was that Japan was too small and its population of 50-60 million was dwarfed by China. Although it had humbled Russian forces, London believed that Japan was not sufficiently powerful to create a massive Asian empire, still less to militarily or economically threaten the West. Seizing “poor, empty Korea for a breeding colony and Manchuria for a granary” would greatly enhance Japan’s population and strength—but that was not enough to challenge the great powers.[[150]](#footnote-150)

Simultaneously, London saw that Asians themselves would be antagonists. He clearly distinguished between the Chinese and Japanese, at times—ironically—referring to the Chinese as the “Yellow Peril” and the Japanese as the “Brown Peril.” Japan would launch its crusade promising “Asia for the Asiatics” as its clarion call, but its aggression would catalyze Chinese resistance.[[151]](#footnote-151)

**China's Rise Provokes the White Peril's Germs**

London’s conclusion to the “Yellow Peril” left the reader hanging. Although aroused by the Japanese invasion, China's vast potential is hindered. Its leaders hew tenaciously to the past. Clinging to power and tradition, they refuse to modernize and so China's fate is uncertain. London does not tell the reader who will prevail. However, in his 1906 short story, “The Unparalleled Invasion,” London develops the theme of China's rise. The Japanese are expelled from China and are crushed when they try to reassert themselves there. A socialist revolution in China overthrows China’s parasitic conservative ruling class allowing the Chinese masses to exert their energy to such an extent that China becomes a world economic power by the 1970s.[[152]](#footnote-152)

Writing over a century ago, London warned that the imperial West, blissfully ignorant of what awaited it, was living in a bubble. The shift of power to East Asia was the prick that would burst it. The transition would be peaceful because Asia’s rise was primarily economic, but eventually war between East and West was inevitable because China would begin to challenge the economic might of the West. Although critics have read different messages into the story, the clear irony is that the West is the paranoid aggressor. It is a “White Peril” and China is the innocent victim. But “contrary to expectation, China did not prove warlike [so] after a time of disquietude, the idea was accepted that China was not to be feared in war, but in commerce.” The West would come to understand that the “real danger” from China “lay in the fecundity of her loins.” China would emerge as a major manufacturing power and its citizens would spread across the world. As the 20th century advances, the story depicts Chinese immigrants swarming into French Indochina and later into Southwest Asia and Russia, seizing territory.[[153]](#footnote-153)

Western attempts to slow or stem the Chinese tide all fail. By 1975 it appears that this onslaught will overwhelm the world. With despair mounting, an American scientist, Jacobus Laningdale, visits the White House to propose eradicating the entire Chinese population. He aims to drop deadly plagues from Allied airships over China. In May, 1976, the air ships appear over China and release a torrent of glass tubes.[[154]](#footnote-154)  At first nothing happens, then, an inferno of plagues gradually wipe out the entire Chinese population. Allied armies surround China and all Chinese die. Even the seas are closed because 5,000 Allied naval vessels blockade China’s coast. “Modern war machinery held back the disorganized mass of China, while the plagues did the work.”[[155]](#footnote-155)

London’s piece is a stern warning about bio-warfare. He wrote when strategists were investigating the new concept of germ weapons. London sounds an alarm over such hazards that world powers ignored as they rushed into the gas clouds and carnage of World War I. Decades later, Japan would unleash bio-warfare against China’s cities in the China-Japan War of 1937-45, and China and North Korea would charge the US with allegedly waging germ warfare during the Korean War.

More broadly it is worth reflecting on London’s vision in light of the changes of the last few decades in East Asia. Above all, this phenomenon has been a story of the rise of East Asia. First Japan’s, and later Taiwan’s, South Korea’s and China's wealth and power have grown spectacularly. East Asia’s resurgence has challenged the status quo of American and European dominance. Now the exponents of the “China Threat” school insist that this could auger a military challenge that transforms the balance of power in Asia and the Pacific.

Before Samuel Huntington, London anticipated a clash of civilizations. His readers see how the vast cultural differences that divide the West from China spark hatred and malice in the former. The focus in London’s work is not the Chinese danger to the West, but it’s reverse.  As Jean Campbell Reesman points out, “London’s story is a strident warning against race hatred and its paranoia, and an alarm sounded against an international policy that would permit and encourage germ warfare. It is also an indictment of imperialist governments per se.”[[156]](#footnote-156) He anticipates that the wars of the twentieth century will exact an unprecedented death toll among armies and civilians. Indeed, the world can regret London's prescience. To avoid this fate, London urges the West to understand the new Asia and to live with non-white peoples in a spirit of brotherhood.

**London the Internationalist Still Speaks to Us**

London’s views of Asians and the Pacific's other non-white people became more refined in the last seven years of his life during and after his 1907-1909 trip to the South Pacific aboard his decrepit schooner, the Snark. London’s increasingly pan-national world view led to his 1915 recommendation of a “Pan-Pacific Club” where Easterners and Westerners could meet congenially in a “forum” to exchange views and share ideas as equals. Far from being the thoughts of a racist, they are the vision of an internationalist. In particular, London wanted Americans and Japanese to associate to promote mutual respect and understanding.

Jack London traveled extensively during his short but active life. He encountered diverse cultures that he tried to understand. He empathized with the downtrodden in the United States, Europe, East Asia and the South Pacific. His “Pan-Pacific Club” essay[[157]](#footnote-157) is his final appeal for the West to overcome stereotypical view of Asians as inferior peoples who needed Western domination for their betterment. Although London died in 1916, the words of this realistic and humane writer still speak to a world on the verge of conflict.

**Interlude: London’s Essay on the Future of Asia**

London wrote the following essay, “If Japan Awakens China,”[[158]](#footnote-158) in 1909, five years after his return from Manchuria. He predicts the rise of Japan and its endeavor to transform itself into a major world power by harnessing the labor of four hundred million Chinese. The Chinese, he suggested, would in turn eventually overthrow their conservative leaders, drive out the Japanese and develop a prosperous modern economy. This short essay expresses London’s view of the future of Asia and of the need for the West to come to terms with a rising dynamic East Asia:

The point that I have striven to make is that much of the reasoning of the white race about the Japanese is erroneous, because is it based on fancied knowledge of the stuff and fiber of the Japanese mind. An American lady of my acquaintance, after residing for months in Japan, in response to a query as to how she liked the Japanese, said: “They have no souls.” In this she was wrong. The Japanese are just as much possessed of a soul as she and the rest of her race. And far be it from me to infer that the Japanese soul is in the smallest way inferior to the Western soul. It may even be superior. You see, we do not know the Japanese soul, and what its value may be in the scheme of things. And yet that American lady’s remark but emphasizes the point. So different was the Japanese soul from hers, so unutterably alien, so absolutely without any kinship or means of communication, that to her there was no slightest sign of its existence.

Japan, in her remarkable evolution, has repeatedly surprised the world. Now the element of surprise can be present only when one is unfamiliar with the data that go to constitute the surprise. Had we really known the Japanese, we should not have been surprised … Japan is a unique Asiatic race, in that alone among the races of Asia, she has been able to borrow from us and equip herself with all our material achievement. Our machinery of warfare, of commerce, and of industry she has made hers. And so well has she done it that we have been surprised. We did not think she had it in her. Next consider China. We of the West have tried, and tried vainly, to awaken her. We have failed to express our material achievements in terms comprehensible to the Chinese mind. We do not know the Chinese mind. But Japan does. She and China spring from the same primitive stock—their languages are rooted in the same primitive tongue; and their mental processes are the same. The Chinese mind may baffle us, but it cannot baffle the Japanese. And what if Japan wakens China—not to our dream, if you please, but to her dream, to Japan’s dream? Japan, having taken from us all our material achievement, is alone able to transmute that material achievement … to the Chinese mind.

The Chinese and Japanese are thrifty and industrious. China possesses great natural resources of coal and iron—When four hundred and fifty million of the best workers in the world go into manufacturing, a new competitor, and a most ominous and formidable one, will enter the arena where the races struggle for the world-market. Here is the race-adventure—the first clashing of the Asiatic dream with ours. It is true, it is only an economic clash, but economic clashes always precede clashes at arms. And what then? Oh, only that will-o’-wisp, the Yellow peril. But to the Russian, Japan was only a will-o’-wisp until one day, with fire and steel, she smashed the great adventure of the Russian and punctured the bubble-dream he was dreaming. Of this be sure: if ever the day comes that our dreams clash with that of the Yellow and the Brown, and our particular bubble-dream is punctured, there will be one country at least unsurprised, and that country will be Russia. She was awakened from her dream. We are still dreaming.

This is Jack London’s clearest statement concerning the future of East Asia. The West could ignore Japan and China at its own risk. Japan had already risen to great power status, but it was too small to sustain itself. China with its huge hard working population might well become the great economic power of the future.

**Jack London’s Long March Through Korea and Manchuria**

By the autumn of 1903 it was obvious to public officials and journalists in the West that war between Russia and Japan was imminent. Expecting a quick Russian victory, newspaper and magazine editors frantically sought big-name correspondents to report on the war before it ended. William Randolph Hearst, founder of the new school of “yellow journalism,” wanted the most famous name he could get for his syndicate of newspapers. Since the services of the best known correspondent, Richard Harding Davis had been bought by *Collier’s*, Hearst outbid several other editors to hire Jack London, by then one of the most famous writers in the U.S.[[159]](#footnote-159)

London boarded the *SS Siberia* together with a team of other Western journalists on January 8 and arrived at the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo on January 24, 1904. He was now ready to encounter armed warfare for really the first time. London was dazzled by the attention afforded him and his colleagues by the Japanese, but he was always a man of action and he had not traveled over rough seas for seven thousand miles just to sit and drink at a bar. He wrote: “I soon found out that there were two ways of playing the game … either to sit down in Tokio as [they] wanted me to and eat many dinners, or to go out on my own resources.”[[160]](#footnote-160) He had ample resources including enough money, so three days after his arrival in Japan, he left Tokyo and began an extensive search for a steamer heading for the Korean port of Chemulpo (Incheon).

London finally made it to Chemulpo on February 16th with great difficulty[[161]](#footnote-161) where he met two other Western correspondents, Robert L. Dunn, a photographer for *Collier’s*, and Canadian Frederick A. McKenzie, a reporter for the London *Daily Mail.* London and his companions gradually made their way north behind the advancing Japanese army. By March 4th they had reached the north Korean city of Ping Yang (Pyongyang). They continued north and after the Japanese had overwhelmed Russian forces at the border crossing into Manchuria at the Yalu River in April, 1904, they entered Manchuria. London remained in Manchuria until mid-May when a minor altercation with a Japanese soldier got him expelled. But by this time London was frustrated with his entire experience and quickly accepted orders to return to the United States.

**London’s Experiences as a Journalist in Korea and Manchuria**

Jack London came to the Russo-Japanese War in 1904 looking for excitement. He longed to be in the thick of battle, dodging bullets and risking mortality. He wished to hear the sounds of rifles and guns, the bursting of shell and shrapnel, and to hear the voices of competing soldiers as they fought to the death. He later wrote:

Personally, I entered upon this campaign with the most gorgeous conceptions of what a war correspondent’s work in the world must be. I knew that the mortality of war correspondents was said to be greater, in proportion to numbers, than the mortality of soldiers. I remembered, during the siege of Khartoum and the attempted relief by Wolsely the death in battle of a number of correspondents. I had read “The Light that Failed.” I remembered Stephan Crane’s descriptions of being under fire in Cuba. I had heard—God what was there aught I had not heard of all sorts of and conditions of correspondents in all sorts of battles and skirmishes, right in the thick of it, where life was keen and immortal moments were being lived. In brief, I came to war expecting to get thrills.[[162]](#footnote-162)

**Jack London’s Koreans as “People of the Abyss”**

Jack London was a brilliant essayist and feature-writing journalist as well as a crusading socialist, an impassioned and articulate spokesman for the underclasses. In his essays as well as in much of his fiction London was determined to demonstrate the squalid living conditions of the working class. His most poignant work is his 1903 book, *The People of the Abyss,*[[163]](#footnote-163)which brilliantly portrays the economic and societal misery of the poor residing in London’s great East End slum. London’s thesis is not a condemnation of the wealthy capitalist class per se, but rather the irony that tens of thousands of British subjects were still living and working in conditions of abject degradation in what was then supposedly the wealthiest city in the world

London explored the presence of the same conditions when he later traveled to Japan and Korea during the winter and spring of 1904 to report on the Russo-Japanese War for the Hearst newspaper chain. His twenty-two feature articles and accompanying photographs portray the squalor and degradation of the Korean people. As was the case in his book on Great Britain, London’s goal is not to condemn Korea’s ruling class, but to showcase the misery of Korea’s mammoth lower classes. Many critics in Korea and elsewhere have criticized London for his allegedly dismal portrayal of the Korean commoner as a weak, even pathetic individual. London endeavored to present a very honest and objective portrait of the misery of the common man as he had in the East End and in so many of his stories.

While London’s work in England has received international acclaim as a societal critique, his feature articles written for American newspapers while covering the early stages of the Russo-Japanese War in Korea are largely forgotten, perhaps because they were published as newspaper articles and were never compiled as a book. Denied access to the front lines and restricted in any reporting on military activities by Japanese censors, London instead turned much of his attention to a long series of feature articles and photographs that depict the poverty and corruption prevalent in Korean society. London approaches Korean society in much the same way as he did in the East End.[[164]](#footnote-164) When read as a whole with his accompanying photographs, London’s Korean work is almost as damning a societal critique as the *Abyss.*

***The People of the Abyss***

The British Empire was still riding high in 1902, and for many the city of London was the financial center of the world. London, posing as an American sailor who found himself stranded without means in London’s East End, wandered the streets for seven weeks talking to as many people as he could. He slept in doss houses together with destitute, starving individuals. He befriended folks wherever he could and let them tell him their pitiable stories of sadness and remorse. London could well relate to these people because he had had his own experiences with poverty, having worked for minute wages in a California jute mill and having been jailed for vagrancy in upper New York state while still a teenager.

London’s *The People of the Abyss* is one in what is a long line of evolutionary socialist critiques of the brutality exploited workers face due to the cruelty and selfishness of imperial, industrial capitalism. He constantly exploits the notion that within earshot of the wealthiest and “vast and malodorous sea,” there exists a “noisome and rotten tide of humanity,” that is “doomed to a moral degeneracy which puts them lower than the savage in cleanliness and decency.”[[165]](#footnote-165)

London’s writing here is a mixture of pity and disdain. Although these elements may seem self-contradictory, we often see London engaging with the suffering around him and then sometimes in the very same paragraph almost repudiating the same person by describing his filth, pathetic face or whatever. On the one hand, he shows tremendous empathy for his subjects. Through his writing we see their hunger, their despair, lack of hope. He engages the audience, inviting them to share the horrific scene that he has just witnessed. On the other hand, London is almost cruel in depicting their licentiousness, ugly features, bad smell and the like, as the following paragraph demonstrates:

From the slimy sidewalk, they were picking up bits of orange peel, apple skin, and grape stems, and they were eating them. The pits of green gage plums they cracked between their teeth for the kernels inside. They picked up stray crumbs of bread the size of peas, apple cores so black and dirty one would not take them to be apple cores, and these things these two men took into their mouths, and chewed them, and swallowed them; and this, between six and seven o’clock in the evening of August 20, year of our lord 1902, in the heart of the greatest, wealthiest, and most powerful empire the world has ever seen.[[166]](#footnote-166)

London tells us that city life in this quarter of London is so unnatural that the average workman or workwoman cannot long endure it. “Mind and body are sapped by the undermining influences ceaselessly at work. Moral and physical stamina are broken, and the good workman, fresh from the soil, becomes in the first city generation a poor workman; and by the second city generation, devoid of push and go and initiative” on his way down into the abyss.[[167]](#footnote-167)

After attending the public coronation of King Edward VII in 1902 and celebrating with noisy crowds in Trafalgar Square in London, he entered the slums of the city’s East end. He quickly found himself immersed in a “human hell hole,” a “vast shambles,” “utterly unnatural,” “a huge killing machine.” Cramped and unhygienic lodging where they existed, hopeless drunkenness everywhere, all this London observed in horror: “It is incontrovertible that the children grow up into rotten adults, without virility or stamina, a weak-kneed, narrow-chested, listless breed, that crumples up and goes down in the brute struggle for life with the invading hordes from the country….So one is forced to conclude that the Abyss is literally a huge dungeon …”[[168]](#footnote-168)

London the journalist is amazed, indignant, and angry at what he has found. Although he had himself grown up in conditions that were both impoverished and very difficult, he asks us to ponder why such misery and poverty is to be found at the very heart of the British Empire with all of its wealth and world power. Why must a family with seven or more children sleep on the floor of a flea-infested room? Why are the homeless forced to sleep in the street and to move away from park benches at night because their presence there might offend the eyes of wealthy neighbors?

Jack London continued asking these questions in many of his short stories, essays and novels until his untimely death at age 40 in late 1916. The capital of the British Empire may have provided London with his most extreme example of the wild contrasts between rich and poor, but it was not just in London where such degradation had occurred. Similar conditions were to be found in all of the major cities not only of Britain, but also in the United States and elsewhere. Jack London concludes *The Abyss* by noting, “This must be understood and understood clearly: *Whatever is true of London in the way of poverty and degradation, is true of all England.* While Paris is not by any means France, the city of London is England. The frightful conditions which mark London an inferno likewise mark the United Kingdom an inferno.” London was soon to find parallel conditions in Korea, which, while not remotely as wealthy as Great Britain, had a huge impoverished underclass.[[169]](#footnote-169)

**How London Portrays Koreans as People of the Abyss**

As was the case in the *Abyss*, London’s Korean writing and photography is also a mixture of pity and disdain. While London demonstrated deep sympathy for the common Korean whom he suggests had been deeply exploited by their nation’s *yangban* aristocracy, he also criticized what he deemed to be “weak” and “cowardly” aspects of Korean personality. Many writers, including prominent Korean scholars, have criticized London for his alleged racial bias, his apparent contempt for Korea and Koreans—and today London is largely shunned in Korea. But a much closer look at London’s writing and photography shows the same combination of sympathy and disdain that are found in the *Abyss.*

Korean scholar Young-Hee Chang of Sogang University writing recently in *The Call* provides a good example of these attacks on London:

London seemed to harbor a deep contempt for Asians, especially for Koreans. He made numerous disrespectful—to say the least—comments about Koreans … His assessments of Korean characteristics is more pejorative and derogatory, compared to that of the Japanese and the Chinese … London, who was usually quite sensitive to the plight of underdogs, didn’t exhibit any pity or sympathetic feelings towards the Korean people victimized by the war—a war between two strong nations they were involved in against their own will.”[[170]](#footnote-170)

London’s comments, especially when taken out of context, give credence to Professor Chang’s anger:

The Korean is the perfect type of inefficiency—of utter worthlessness ... A Stalwart race are the Koreans, well-muscled and towering above their masters, the [Japanese] ‘dwarfs’ who conquered them of old time and who look upon them today with the eyes of possession. But the Korean is spiritless … The Korean has fine features, but the vital lack in his face is strength. He is soft and effeminate when compared with the strong breeds, and whatever strength has been his in the past has been worked out by centuries of corrupt government. He is certainly the most inefficient of human creatures, lacking all initiative and achievement, and the only thing in which he shines is the carrying of burdens on his back. As a draught animal and packhorse he is a success.[[171]](#footnote-171)

When London reached southern Manchuria with Japanese forces in June 1904, he added:

War today is the final arbiter in the affairs of men, and it is as yet the final test of the worthwhileness of peoples. Tested thus, the Korean fails. He lacks the nerve to remain when a strange army crosses his land. The few goods and chattels he may have managed to accumulate he puts on his back, along with his doors and windows, and away he headed for his mountain fastness. Later he may return sans goods … impelled by insatiable curiosity for a ‘look-see.’ But it is curiosity merely—a timid, deer-like curiosity. He is prepared to bound away on his long legs at the first hint of danger or trouble … [Koreans] have splendid vigor and fine bodies, but they are accustomed to being beaten and robbed without protest by every foreigner who enters their country.[[172]](#footnote-172)

Despite these negative views, London’s writing and photography show empathy and concern for the plight of the common Korean. London wrote extensively about Koreans’ material poverty. He hated the *yangban*, whom he labeled a perfect example of a parasite ruling class living off the wounded body of the commoner class. He gave a good example of this treatment when he observed Japanese army units coming to a village and requesting some basic food stuffs for their men and horses. The well-behaved Japanese paid for the food and supplies acquired from the villagers. The local *yangban,* Pak-Chon-song, collected the money from the Japanese on behalf of the villagers, but he only gave them a quarter of the take, pocketing the rest for himself. London heard about this incident from his Korean man-servant, Manyoungi who approached London saying, “Master … You speak Number One Man catch very poor people’s money. Him keep allee time no give. Very poor people, very much poor.” London replied that he would get in contact with Pak:[[173]](#footnote-173)

Two hours later I walked up to the Yamen of Pak-Choon-Song. It was beautifully located on rising ground overlooking Sunan, but was in bad state of repair. Everything had gone to rack and ruin, including the erstwhile rudeness of the snow and exalted flagstones of a courtyard as like as two peas to the one described by Mrs. Bishop. The torn paper was fluttering from the lattice windows and the lacquer and paint were scaling off.[[174]](#footnote-174)

London states that he was led into an inner room where he found Pak sitting erect on the floor. London walked in and deliberately sat on the cushion next to him:

The attendants were aghast. Pak-Choon-Song, for all his studied indifference, could not forbear stealing an apprehensive look at me out of the corner of his oblique eyes. He did not speak. Manyoungi was standing and being shouldered by the crowd, more of which seemed jammed in. In his head was the ferment of a new idea, the Western idea of the rights of man. In his head were mutiny and revolt. In his head, though dimly perhaps, were the ideas of Revolutionary France. In his head were hatred for the yang-ban class and defiance. But in the soul of him was the humility of generations, a thing not to be downed in a day by any idea of the head.

London demanded that everybody except Pak, Manyoungi, and himself leave the room and all three sat in obvious discomfort, exchanging forced pleasantries until Manyoungi insisted that London state his business:

“Master,” he suggested. “You speak Number One Man him catch very poor people’s money. Him keep allee time no give. Very poor people, very much poor. I explained that….Pak-Choon-Son had furnished the Japanese soldiers with fuel and rice and forage for their horses, and he had been paid for the same. Where had he obtained the fuel, rice and forage? From the people. Then why did he not pay the people the money which belonged to them? Manyoungi was like a wrathful angel as he translated the question. His voice, no longer subdued, rang like a trumpet in the tiny room. He sat up erect, and his sunburned face grew dark.

Pak-Choon-Song glowered at me in speechless anger. Of course it must be understood that directness is as repulsive to the Oriental mind as the violation of every one of the Ten Commandments is to the Occidental. Besides, I had begun by being so beautifully indirect, and then to spring this most brutal, point-blank directness upon him! He would have looked reproachful at me, had he not been so angry. He glanced about him and made as though to call his attendants… Who or what I was, or what were my powers, Pak-Choon-Song did not know. He only knew that I was a visitant in the chaos of war, that his authority was not what it once was, and that I was a mystery to be feared. His anger faded away to helplessness. The lines which years of authority had put into his face likewise faded. He began to talk to Manyoungi, in soft insinuating tones. He talked and talked. The insinuating tones sank into seductive crooning. Waiting, I nearly dozed off to sleep. The upshot of it all was that he pleaded not guilty, and that I was mistaken, that I did not understand. “What do you think?” I asked Manyoungi. “I think him lie” was the reply.[[175]](#footnote-175)

London’s empathy for the common Korean parallels his mourning the plight of people in Britain’s East End. The enemy is Korea’s upper class; the Japanese here are an invasive force whose presence, while necessarily disruptive, are not the key players in the problems facing Korean society. They pay for their food, but give the funds to the local patriarch with the understanding that he in turn will pay the common farmers whose supplies the Japanese bought. Looking at Manyoungi London sees the potential for revolution among the Korean masses against their *yangban* oppressors. The *yangban* as personified by Pak are losing their power which might well provide an opening for Manyoungi and his commoner cohorts to assert themselves.

London’s empathy for the poverty and misery of the common Korean is best found in his photography. As Jeanne Campbell Reesman and Sara S. Hodson demonstrate in their recent book, *Jack London: Photographer,*[[176]](#footnote-176) London was as skilled with his camera as he was with his pen. London took over 1500 pictures in Korea, some of the landscape, but mostly of ordinary Koreans. His photography captures both the poverty of the people, but also of their feelings of fright and sense of hopelessness caught in a land where two invading armies are fighting each other but where the Korean people are the true losers.

Some of London’s most compelling articles and photographs from the war are of Korean refugees, dressed in white, showing the devastating effects of the war on Korean civilians. One is impressed by a very poignant photograph of a young girl, perhaps only six or seven, carrying her younger sister on her back, and terribly worried expression on her face. London’s photographs, many of which were published in American newspapers along with his articles, are especially moving. London scholar Jeanne Campbell Reesman notes:

London’s photographs from Korea signal his developing photographic goals and his compassionate view of humanity. His socialist views on labor and class are illustrated in his many images of people at work, and the images of war orphans [in Korea] echo the suffering of the children he observed in London’s East End. His photographs [of Koreans] preserve the dignity of even the most destitute of subjects, such as refugees.”[[177]](#footnote-177)

London’s comments on Koreans may sound unkind, but they are an accurate reflection of what he saw and experienced. It is the same with his photography. London readily caught the poverty of the land and the misery of its people. There is little difference between his depiction of Korea and Koreans and of that of Mrs. Bishop and several other Western or even Japanese writers who traveled through Korea at this time. Life there then was indeed wretched for all but the wealthiest Koreans. It is ironic that London is often praised for his exposure of the miserable state of life in the East End, but is condemned as a racist by critics for saying much the same a year later about Korea.

London was very sensitive to Koreans’ plight. Having read Bishop’s book before going to Korea, he knew what to expect. Yet he reaches her same conclusions as to the cause of their misery, their exploitation by the dominant large aristocratic class which itself did nothing to advance their nation. The common man in Korea led a miserable and exploited life; Seoul and other cities and towns throughout Korea were filthy and impoverished; the commoner in Korea had a deep ingrained sense of insecurity that caused him or her to flee any potential trouble. His descriptions of Korea are as honest and forthright as those of the downtrodden folks of the East End.

Jack London a decade after the Russo-Japanese War updates us on his views of Koreans in one of his last novels, *The Star Rover.* Several critics, noting London’s more positive views of Korea and Koreans in this novel, feel that London had reversed his earlier views on Korea. But while London does indeed demonstrate a more positive view of Korean history and culture, especially in the virtuous character of the heroine, Lady Om, we also get much the same kind of scathing view of Korea’s aristocracy as we got in 1904.

Many critics have depicted London as a racist, but while he may have harbored some racist views prevalent in the West at the turn of the last century, he also held a great deal of respect for all the people of East Asia. He very accurately depicted their hardships and misery, but was not necessarily trying to single them out for criticism.

**CHAPTER VI**

**FREDERICK McKENZIE: THE MALEVOLENT JAPANESE SEIZURE OF KOREA**

The brutality of Japanese rule in Korea from 1910 to 1945 is well known. Japanese killed a great many protesting Koreans during the March First Independence Movement of 1919, and during the 1930s the Japanese forced masses of Koreans to work in Japanese factories and to serve in the Japanese army. Over two hundred thousand young Korean women worked as “Comfort Women”—sexual slaves for Japanese soldiers. Even today the legacy of Japanese barbarism affects relationships between the two nations.[[178]](#footnote-178)

What is less well known is that the violence and brutality of Japanese against Koreans began much earlier than 1910. The forceful Japanese move against Korea began as early as the 1870s. The Japanese first entered Korea posing as potential saviors who would bring modern civilization and true independence to what they considered to be a most backward and isolated people, but the talk of providing for the Korean people was little more than a ruse that allowed for the rapid seizure of Korea and the literal rape of its land and people. The Koreans were well aware of what was happening to their land and fought valiantly for their freedom, but they lacked both a strong military and the necessary weaponry to combat the systematic brutality of the Japanese.

It is a common assumption that while Japanese troops behaved badly in World War II, killing and raping as their armies moved first across China and then into Southeast Asia, their behavior in the Russo-Japanese War was exemplary. It is often said that Japanese troops were kind to the Koreans as they marched north through their country in 1904 and 1905 to fight their Russian enemy in Manchuria. They hired the Koreans as “coolies” to carry their wares and to perform other chores at high wages, paid Korean farmers for the food and other supplies that they got from them, and were not engaged in immoral conduct with the Korean public, especially Korean women. According to Frederick McKenzie, the reality of 1905, however, was much different. Even as the fighting against the Russians in Manchuria continued, the Japanese army and police instigated a campaign of brutal terror to take control of many millions of Koreans.

While Americans at home as well as many Europeans turned a blind eye to Japan’s brutal acts in Korea in the years immediately after the Russo-Japanese War, a few brave Western journalists and missionary educators like Professor Homer Hulbert (1863-1949) wrote articles and books detailing what was happening in Korea. The most graphic and prolific writer was Canadian-born British journalist Frederick Arthur McKenzie (1869-1931) who came to Korea to cover the Russo-Japanese War and then stayed to the great annoyance of the Japanese to cover their brutal assault on Korea after the war.

In his many books, articles, and public lectures later in Britain[[179]](#footnote-179) McKenzie was a brutally honest reporter who demonstrated growing anger against the Japanese for what he regarded as their brutal takeover of Korea. But just as reporters Kennan and Palmer were unbalanced in their writing in favor of the Japanese, McKenzie’s writing is a vendetta against the Japanese for their repression of Koreans. His lack of objectivity is just as real as Kennan and Palmer, but just in the opposite direction. The Japanese were very upset with McKenzie’s articles and books, but since they had recently signed a critically important treaty with the British, they did not want to create an incident and let him stay in Korea.

McKenzie paints a very convincing story to counter the view of reporters like Kennan and Palmer that the Japanese occupation was benign. He argues convincingly that the Japanese probably intended from the start of their modernization in the 1870s to exert their authority over Korea. Japan’s goal by the 1890s, according to McKenzie, was to become the “leader of a revived Asia. She is advancing to-day along three lines—territorial expansion, increased fighting power, and an aggressive commercial campaign.”[[180]](#footnote-180) Korea was to be the heart, the nerve center of its growing empire in northeast Asia. The Japanese told the world that their goal was the benevolent modernization of Korea—that Japan would invest in its people and resources in the creation of a strong independent state and that Korea would be a showplace of Japan’s modernization program. The reality, according to McKenzie, was very different. Japan was prepared to use crude aggressive force to seize full control over Korea and to employ whatever brutality was necessary to subdue the Koreans. In short, the Japanese military and police sought to bulldoze Korea into total submission by means of “sheer terrorism” which included beating and killing innocent civilians, torturing many others, and physically harming, violating and humiliating women. In other words, McKenzie feels, the Japanese had descended to the lower depths of barbarism to get their way. He wonders why the British entered into an alliance with such people, an alliance which he determined the Japanese would inevitably break.[[181]](#footnote-181)

McKenzie writes that Japan’s victory over China placed it in a very strong position in Korea. Korea’s long isolation, refusal open itself to modern technology, and the rampant corruption that found its way into every corner of Korean society had rendered the country pathetically weak just as Japan was becoming a major world power. There was no effective Korean military and the Korean monarchy was powerless against the Japanese juggernaut. The Korean government had signed treaties with various Western states such as the United States and Great Britain in the early 1880s in an effort to counter Japanese influence, but in fact if not in theory, the West really had no interest in Korea. The only Western state with a genuine interest in Korea was Russia, which hoped to gain power in Korea so as to get access to Korea’s warm water ports.

Japan’s first goal after its victory in China was to seize control over the Korean government which in effect meant making the Korean emperor a virtual puppet of the Japanese. Empress Myeongseong (1851-1895), a powerful figure in her own right, did everything she could to counter Japanese influence. The Japanese response was to launch a military raid into the palace that led to the assassination of the Empress in late 1895. The Emperor in 1897 sneaked into the heavily guarded Russian Embassy in an effort to escape Japanese control. He was successful for a while, but by 1904 the Japanese had reasserted their control over the Emperor and Korea. Japan declared war on Russia in 1904 when the Russians refused to consent to Japan’s goal of becoming the predominant power in Korea.

**The Russo-Japanese War**

McKenzie notes that many Koreans had also feared the Russians and that they had initially welcomed the entrance of the main Japanese army into their country as a way to get rid of the Russians. The Japanese entrance into Korea, says McKenzie, was something akin to a Trojan Horse. Japanese officials clearly stated that their goal was indeed to help Korea stand tall as a modern independent state. The Japanese government signed a protocol with the Korean government affirming its friendship and promising real economic development for the Korean people. Japanese troops in fact behaved very well in early 1904 as they moved north to counter the Russians who were waiting for them by the Yalu River that divided China from northern Korea.

By 1905, however, following Russia’s defeat, the face of the Japanese occupation changed drastically. The Japanese military seized control of the Korean Emperor and forced him to sign a document that gave the Japanese administrative control over the Korean government. Japanese then began seizing large chunks of valuable land from Korean farmers and landowners. Koreans who resisted or protested in any way were brutally killed or tortured and thrown in prison. The seizure and rape of Korea had begun.

McKenzie in his first book *From Tokyo to Tiflis,* written during the last phases of the war and published in 1905 at the end of the conflict, aptly shows his initial enthusiasm in 1904 for the Japanese takeover of Korea. He comments favorably on the initial positive reaction of many Koreans to the coming of the Japanese who they hoped would keep their promise to modernize their nation and to keep out the Russians who showed every sign of wanting Korea for themselves. But he then documents how the Korean government, especially the Emperor and faithful members of his cabinet, was reluctant to sign the Japanese-imposed treaty of 1904 which effectively gave them advisory control over the Korean government.

McKenzie’s feelings are mixed in this early book. He finds the behavior of Japanese troops in Korea to be exemplary. There are no signs of looting or physically assaulting Korean men or women and when Japanese requisition food and supplies from a village, they pay a fair price. McKenzie acknowledges that Korea is indeed a backward country and that Japan had the potential as well as the obligation to follow through with its promises of modernizing Korea.

McKenzie, however, notes that Japan had promised to both honor and further Korean independence, but its forcing Korea to sign a document surrendering independence was by no means a step in the right direction. He published reports showing that the Japanese employed terror tactics and brute force in obtaining Korean agreement to the establishment of the Japanese Residency-General in Korea. He charged that Japanese officials such as Ito Hirobumi, the Japanese Minister Hayashi, and General Hasegawa kept Korean ministers in session far into the night and that Hasegawa at one point pulled his sword and threatened the Korean Prime Minister Han Kyu-sul, when he refused to sign the document which in effect gave Japan administrative control over Korea.[[182]](#footnote-182)

McKenzie very ably summarizes the changes that occurred in Korea between 1904 and 1906 in his next (1907) book, *The Unveiled East.* He recounts how in February, 1904 at the very start of the war he stood at the docks at the Korean port city of Chemulpo and watched as Japanese troops disembarked from their ships in perfect marching order. McKenzie greeted them with a sigh of relief. Here at last was a force that was going to modernize and reform Korean society for the better. Many of McKenzie’s Western acquaintances ranging from diplomats and missionary teachers in Korea agreed with that sentiment in 1904, but by mid-1905 their positive feelings for the Japanese had evaporated:

They were almost unanimously critical, unsympathetic, and full of denunciation. The change had come because of what they had seen of the methods of Japanese administration. Everywhere, from men of the most varied type, I heard the same story, a tale of oppression, exaction, and wholesale robbery.

When the Japanese first came to Korea, they were received by the common people with sympathy and hope. Today the common people hate them with the most intense bitterness. The first cause for this hatred is national. The Koreans say that the Japanese wormed their way among them under the guise of friendship, with fair words and solemn promises to maintain their independence. Then, having planted their troops all over the land and broken the Korean power, they violated their promises and deprived the nation of its freedom. The more intelligent Koreans admit, as they cannot but admit that the loss was largely their own fault. Their country relied upon treaty promises in place of national efficiency. It had degenerated and did not deserve to live. And yet the degeneration affected the officials rather than the mass of the common people. “If we had only a chance,” the men of the north have said to me more than once, “we could show that we are fit to hold our own.”

The national aspect is not the only or the most important one. Had the Japanese done justly, and had they behaved fairly to the masses, the wounded national sentiment would have been but a minor danger. The Korean coolie, farmer and tradesman were tired of being corruptly and cruelly governed [by their own people], and they would have welcomed any administration, under whatever name, which gave them safety and equitable dealing. But they complain that, cruel and abominable as were the old administrators, the Japanese are worse….

Koreans, according to McKenzie, were a very proud people who treasured their heritage and sense of independence:

One complaint of the Korean people is that the Japanese have taken over the entire machinery of the Government of the country and are using it mainly for the financial profit of the Japanese people. They are, officially and unofficially, pushing forward schemes of extortion, robbery, and cruelty which in three years have inflicted more actual damage than the worst Government of the old style could have done in 30 years.[[183]](#footnote-183)

Japanese soldiers and civilians seized Korean property, especially land, from Koreans of all classes. They attacked not only Koreans, but Americans and other foreigners, including missionaries, at will. Korean Christians were especially vulnerable to beatings and death at the hands of Japanese soldiers and police, and many of their churches were burnt to the ground. Thousands of Koreans were arrested and imprisoned without charge. McKenzie found conditions in the prison to be barbarous. In one cell in what is now the city of Pyongyang, he found 18 men and one woman confined in one small cell. Some of the men were fastened to the ground by wooden stocks. All had been terribly beaten by Japanese police.

McKenzie found that Japanese showed utter disdain for the “white man” in Korea:

Everything that is possible has been done to rob the white man of whatever prestige is yet left to him. The most influential white men in Korea are the missionaries, and they have a large and enthusiastic following. Careful and deliberate attempts have been engineered to induce their converts to turn from the lead of the English and American teachers and to throw in their lot with the Japanese. The native press, under Japanese editorship, systematically preaches anti-white doctrines…. I have heard stories from friends of my own, residents in the country, quiet and inoffensive people, that have made my blood boil. It is difficult to restrain one’s indignation when a missionary lady tells you how she was walking along the street when a Japanese soldier hustled up against her and deliberately struck her in the breast. The Roman Catholic bishop was openly insulted and struck by Japanese soldiers in his own cathedral and nothing was done….[[184]](#footnote-184)

**A Journey to the “Righteous Army”**

By the summer of 1906 the people of Seoul had given up their protests against the violence and depravity of the occupying Japanese. McKenzie heard rumors that a large number of young Korean men, mainly from the Seoul area, had retreated deep in the mountains of eastern Korea to form the “Righteous Army” to fight against the Japanese. He learned that detachments of Japanese had been annihilated and others driven back, but that the Japanese stuck back with “bitter vengeance” destroying whole towns and killing everybody in sight. McKenzie, the dutiful journalist, decided to head towards the mountains where it was said that the “Righteous Army” was hiding.

After a difficult sojourn to the fighting zone, McKenzie was able to slip out of view and enter a village held by the Korean fighters. He surmised quickly that they were badly armed and lacked ammunition, that they lacked adequate training in warfare and were poorly organized against a well-organized huge Japanese military machine. The Japanese adapted a two-pronged strategy—to hunt the rebels in the countryside and to burn and destroy as many Korean villages as they could find in the region of the fighting.

McKenzie was horrified with the amount of destruction he saw in the villages:

I rode out of the villages heavy-hearted. What struck me most about this form of punishment, however, was not the suffering of the villagers so much as the futility of the proceedings….In place of pacifying a people, they were turning hundreds of poor families into rebels. During the next few days I was to see at least one town and many scores of villages treated as this one. To what end? The villagers were certainly not fighting the Japanese. All they wanted to do was to look quietly after their own affairs. Japan professed a desire to conciliate Korea and to win the affection and support of her people. In one province at least the policy of house-burning had reduced a prosperous community into ruin, increased the rebel forces, and sown a crop of bitter hatred which it would take generations to root out.[[185]](#footnote-185)

Later when McKenzie actually met a group of the rebels, he was not terribly impressed:

In another moment half a dozen of them entered the garden, formed a line in front of me and saluted. They were all lads, from 18 to 26. One, a bright-faced handsome youth, still wore the old uniform of the regular Korean Army. Another had a pair of military trousers. Two of them were in slight, ragged Korean dress. Around their waists were home-made cotton cartridge belts, half full … I looked at the guns they were carrying. The six men had five different patterns of weapons, and none was any good. One proudly carried an old Korean sporting gun of the oldest type of muzzle-loaders known to man. Around his arm was the long piece of thin rope which he kept smoldering as touch-powder, and hanging in front of him were the powder-horn and bullet bag for loading. The sporting gun was, I afterwards found, a common weapon. The ramrod, for pressing down the charge, was home-made and cut from a tree. The barrel was rust-eaten.

The second man had an old Korean army rifle, antiquated, and a very bad specimen of its time. The third had the same. One had a tiny sporting gun, the kind of weapon, warranted harmless, that fathers gave to their fond sons at age ten....[All the guns] were eaten up with ancient rust …

A pitiful group they seemed—men already doomed to certain death, fighting in an absolutely hopeless cause. But as I looked the sparkling eyes and smiles of the sergeant seemed to rebuke me. Pity! Maybe my pity was misplaced. At least they were showing their countrymen an example of patriotism, however mistaken their method of displaying it might be.[[186]](#footnote-186)

McKenzie had every reason to be skeptical of the chances of the Korean freedom fighters. The very large Japanese army, well-trained and well-armed, were determined at all costs to crush the Koreans, and in this they were ultimately successful. The Japanese killed indiscriminately in a successful effort to create terror. But the fighting continued until 1915 when the last Korean freedom fighter was murdered.

**The Lack of Foreign Interest in of Korea**

Despite articles and books by writers like McKenzie, people in the West remained ignorant or disinterested about what the Japanese were doing in Korea. Japanese moves immediately after the end of the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) to take over Korea met with a warm reception in the West. When missionary professor Homer Hulbert went to Washington in late 1905 as a representative of the Korean Emperor to request American assistance in repelling Japanese encroachments, he found the Roosevelt administration in full support of Japanese claims that their enforced modernization of Korea was for the good of its people.

Professor Hulbert met a very cold reception in Washington at a time that Japanese prestige in the United States was at its highest following its great victory over Russia.[[187]](#footnote-187) This refusal to help came as a shock to Korean leaders who had put their faith in an 1882 treaty of amity between the United States where it was stated that if other powers dealt unjustly or oppressively with Korea, America would exert her good offices to bring about an amicable settlement. But when Hulbert approached several senators for help, they replied, “What do you expect us to do?” and “Do you really believe that America ought to go to war with Japan over Korea?”

**Japan’s Goal was the Annihilation of Korean Identity**

McKenzie believed that Japan’s goal from the very start in 1904 if not even earlier was the entire absorption of the country and the assimilation of Koreans into Japanese society. One of the most influential Japanese leaders in Korea who talked to McKenzie as an anonymous source in 1905 was very frank about Japan’s intentions:

You must understand that I am not expressing official views, but if you ask me as an individual what is to be the outcome of our policy, I can see only one end. This will take several generations, but it must come. The Korean people will be absorbed in the Japanese. They will talk our language, live our life, and be an integral part of us. There are only two ways of colonial administration. One is to rule over the people as aliens. This you English have done in India, and, therefore your Indian empire cannot endure. India must pass out of your rule. The second way is to absorb the people. That is what we will do. We will teach them our language, establish our institutions, and make them one with us.”

But this policy of assimilation had its limits. When Baron Kaneko Kentaro (1853-1942), Japan’s chief propagandist in the United States during the Russo-Japanese War, was asked if his country might encourage intermarriage between Koreans and Japanese in Korea. His reply was emphatic: “Not at all! On the contrary we will oppose it very vigorously. We shall consider the Koreans as a lower race; we will give them all possible liberty, but we shall in every possible way endeavor to maintain the Japanese spirit among the colonists that go among them. We believe in the superiority of the races, and not in amalgamation.”[[188]](#footnote-188)

**The March First Movement**

McKenzie goes to great lengths in his 1920 book *Korea’s Fight for Freedom* to describe the brutality of the Japanese suppression of the March First Movement. Koreans successfully organized peaceful demonstrations throughout their country to demand independence and an end to Japanese rule. Shouting “*Mansei,”* (“ten thousand years” implying “Long Live Korea”), they marched hoping to further ignite a spirit of nationalism and national pride and to draw international attention to their plight. The March First demonstrations marked the highpoint in Korea’s struggle for independence from Japan’s colonial government. Although the demonstrations failed to achieve the desired goal of independence, they unified the Korean people in spirit as they persevered through another twenty-seven years in a Japanese colonial state.

The Japanese response was horrific. Demonstrators were shot dead in the streets, many more were taken to prisons where they were tortured and very often killed. It was a violent suppression that led to the deaths of an estimated 7500 Koreans and the severe wounding of another 16,000. A few examples will provide a graphic picture of the pain that the Japanese inflicted on ordinary Koreans whether or not they had participated in the demonstrations. McKenzie quotes an American missionary who observed the torture going on in a rural village:

A few hundred yards from where I am writing, the beating goes on, day after day. The victims are tied down on a frame and beaten on the naked body with rods till they become unconscious. Then cold water is poured on them until they revive, when the process is repeated. It is sometimes repeated many times. Men, women and children are shot and or bayoneted….A few miles from here a band of soldiers entered a village and ordered the men to leave, the women to remain behind. But the men were afraid to leave their women, and sent the women away first. For this the men were beaten….A short distance from this village, this band is reported to have met a Korean woman riding in a rickshaw. She was violated by four of the soldiers and left unconscious. A Korean reported the doings of this band of soldiers to the military commander of the district in which it occurred and the commander ordered him to be beaten for reporting it. Word comes from another province of a woman who was stripped and strung up by the thumbs in an effort to get her to tell the whereabouts of her husband….Here in this land it is probably safe to say that two thousand men, women and children, empty handed and helpless, have been put to death in seven weeks.[[189]](#footnote-189)

The Japanese vented special fury against Christians and Christian churches. When Japanese came to any village, they would separate the Christians from the non-Christians and then kill or torture only the Christians. McKenzie cites the example of a small village that was suddenly attacked by a squad of well-armed Japanese soldiers. The Japanese ordered all the male Christians to gather in the church. “When they had so gathered, to a number estimated to be thirty by our informers, the soldiers opened fire on them with rifles and then proceeded into the church and finished them off with sword and bayonets.” The soldiers then burnt the church and all the other houses in the village.[[190]](#footnote-190)

McKenzie quotes an American reporter, William R. Giles of the Chicago *Daily News*, who investigated Japanese raids on villages in southern Korea:

After nearly three months of traveling in Korea, in which time I journeyed from the north to the extreme south, I find that the charges of misgovernment, torture and useless slaughter by the Japanese to be substantially correct … In a valley about fifty miles from Fusan [Busan], the Japanese soldiery closed up a horseshoe-shaped valley surrounded by high hills, and then shot down the villagers who attempted to escape by climbing the steep slopes. I was informed that more than 100 persons were killed in this way.[[191]](#footnote-191)

The same reporter visited a prison where he found a cell, ten feet by six, occupied by more than thirty prisoners who had to stand tight in a crowd for days, depositing their feces on the ground and finding no relief from the stench and filth of the cell.

McKenzie reports that one of the extraordinary aspects of the March First demonstrations was the participation of women. The Japanese arrested and severely tortured many of these women, especially younger women. They were forced to undress and parade around prisons and on streets in front of both Japanese and Korean men. Many were raped repeatedly by Japanese soldiers. And they were harshly tortured. One form of torture inflicted on women was to make them hold a heavy board or chair at arm’s length and to hold it out for an hour, beating anyone who faltered in any way. The Japanese guards would also twist their legs and spit in their faces.

One case stood out in McKenzie’s mind. A young widow was taken to a police office where a policeman stripped her down to her underwear. “Then the police began to take off her underclothes. She protested, whereupon they struck her in the face till she was black and blue. She still clung to her clothes, so they put a wooden paddle between her legs and tore her clothes away. Then they beat her. The beating took a long time. When it was finished the police stopped to drink tea and eat Japanese cakes, they and their companions amusing themselves by making fun of her as she sat there naked among them….” Later a large crowd gathered outside the police station demanding to know why only younger women and not older women were being beaten after being stripped and why women and not men were stripped. The crowd was shocked to see the horribly damaged women prisoners when they were finally released. They thought about charging into the police office and stripping and beating the Japanese police chief, but a Christian elder said that such an act would only bring on more violence and persuaded them to go home.[[192]](#footnote-192)

The savage massacres and tortures of Koreans involved in the March 1st Movement by Japanese continued unabated for over a year, finally coming to an end in late 1920. Looking back in 1920 on Japan’s years of occupation of Korea, McKenzie offered up this critical assessment of Japanese rule:

Between the annexation in 1910 and the uprising of the people in 1919, much material progress was made….And yet this period of the Japanese administration in Korea ranks among the greatest failures of history, a failure greater than that of Russia in Finland or PolandorAustria-Hungary in Bosnia….Good administration is impossible without the part of sympathy on the part of the administrators; with a blind or foolish contempt, it is impossible. They started out to assimilate the Koreans, to destroy their national ideals, to root out their ancient ways, to make them over again as Japanese, but Japanese of an inferior brand, subject to disabilities from which their overlords were free.[[193]](#footnote-193)

McKenzie should have added that no foreign occupation of a nation can be successful if the people of the occupied state feel like slaves in their own country and have no wish to have occupiers ruling their land.

**Afterword**

A Korean student at Mary Baldwin College once remarked that while she liked individual Japanese students, she hated the Japanese government and nation: “I can never forgive what they did to my country….I hate their arrogance and their refusal to even admit and apologize for what they did.” The legacy of 1905 lingers to this day.

McKenzie gives the most direct criticism of the Japanese takeover and modern historians give credence to his analysis. Hilary Conroy notes that McKenzie “gives eyewitness testimony to the burning of scores of Korean villages by Japanese soldiers in their search for ‘rebels’ and the desperate heroism of the tattered ‘Righteous Army’ who thought it better ‘to die a free man than to live as a slave of Japan.”’[[194]](#footnote-194)

Many Koreans realized very early what the Japanese were doing and that they were in danger of losing their country. Any visitor to Seodaemun Independence Park in Seoul can see with his own eyes the passion of the Koreans who in 1919 stood up against the Japanese demanding their country back. Sadly, there were so very few international voices like McKenzie’s who tried to alert the world to the travesty of the Japanese “rape” of Korea. Too many people like George Kennan and Frederick Palmer were so taken in by Japanese hospitality that they did not take the time to meet and discuss matters with any Koreans. They portrayed Koreans through the eyes of Japanese propaganda and their writing went a long way to influence official American policy towards the Japanese takeover of Korea.

**CHAPTER VII**

**WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN: THE GREAT COMMONER TOURS WAR TORN KOREA**

William Jennings Bryan (1860-1925) was certainly not a journalist like George Kennan and not a novelist and essayist like Jack London, but along with Theodore Roosevelt, he was in 1905 the best known political figure in the United States. He was three times the Democratic Party’s candidate for President[[195]](#footnote-195) and was also considered one of the leading orators and journal columnists of his time. Bryan participated in the Chautauqua circuit for many years and founded a well-read magazine, *The Commoner,* which had a circulation of over 145,000 andwhich included a lot of his own writing, at least one article most every week. His writing on Japan and Korea reached a large audience in the United States in the weeks and months right after the termination of the Russo-Japanese War, giving his own impressions of developments in both countries.

Bryan was a populist politician who with his many followers transformed the more conservative and traditional Democratic Party into a far more progressive movement and paved the way for the progressive presidencies of Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt. Bryan, a native of Illinois, moved to Nebraska as a young lawyer and quickly became involved in local politics. He entered and won a multi-party race for Congress in 1890. He narrowly won re-election in 1892, but his 1894 race for the U.S. Senate ended in failure. He gained a national reputation as a progressive campaigning for “Free Silver” and other measures designed to help farmers and working men in the face of the great depression of the mid-1890s. When progressives took control of the Democratic Party at the 1896 national convention, they nominated Bryan as their standard-bearer despite his youth—he was only 36 at the time. Bryan later served as Woodrow Wilson’s Secretary of State from 1913-1915.

**Bryan’s World Tour 1905-06: Japan and Korea**

Bryan embarked on a world tour starting in September 1905 and ending eleven months later in August 1906, accompanied by his wife and their two youngest children, William, Jr. and Grace. The purpose of the trip was to learn as much as possible about world affairs and to gather materials for articles and eventually a book about what he and his family saw and learned on the trip. He was planning another run for the presidency and traveling and writing was one way of keeping himself in the public eye. While traveling Bryan wrote close to sixty letters discussing conditions he observed in virtually every country he visited. These letters were published as front page articles in *The Commoner* in late 1905 and early 1906 and later in a book, *The Old World and Its Ways*[[196]](#footnote-196)in 1907.

Bryan and his family sailed from San Francisco on September 27th, 1905, arriving in Japan in mid-October after a brief stopover in Hawaii just a few weeks after the formal ending of the Russo-Japanese War. They spent roughly a month traveling through Japan before a relaxed visit to Korea on their way to China. Bryan wrote six articles about his observations of Japan and Korea, each about two thousand words, which began appearing on a weekly basis in *The Commoner* starting in February 1906.[[197]](#footnote-197) These articles appeared together with many photographs taken by Bryan and family members when they appeared in his 1907 book. Bryan’s articles on Japan and Korea are well-informed.[[198]](#footnote-198)

The Japanese realized Bryan’s notoriety in the United States and that he could potentially become President. Therefore, he was received as no mere tourist. He was given opportunities to meet leading political leaders and cultural icons, visited the key cultural sites of Japan including such places as Nikko and Nara, and was even granted an audience with the Meiji Emperor. His discussions with Japanese leaders were quite frank and covered a wide range of topics including Japan’s plans for Korea.

Bryan in his first article on Japan states his great admiration for the Japanese, but cautions that with their modernization came a whole host of new problems which he would elaborate in his later articles: “The eyes of the world are on Japan. No other nation has ever made such progress in the same length of time, and at no time in her history has Japan enjoyed greater prestige than she enjoys just now; and, it may be added, at no time has she had to face greater problems than those which now confront her.”[[199]](#footnote-199)

Part of Bryan’s positive feelings for Japan were very personal. He received a letter in 1896 from a young Japanese man, Yashichiro Yamashita, asking for the opportunity to study with Bryan. His letter was largely forgotten when two years later Yamashita suddenly arrived at the Bryan home in Lincoln, Nebraska. Bryan’s family welcomed him in and he stayed for five years, eventually graduating from the nearby state university. He became a vital part of the family and later served as Bryan’s guide and host when he visited Japan. Bryan’s affection for his adopted Japanese “son” translated into strong affection for all things Japanese.[[200]](#footnote-200)

Bryan admired the Japanese ability to coordinate a brilliant plan of modernization. The modern bustling nation appeared to be an excellent blend of modern Western society and traditional culture. He especially admired the energetic manner in which the Japanese had transformed their isolated traditional culture in order to become a major world power. Bryan was impressed by the strong sense of nationalism of the Japanese as well as the efficiency and productivity of their traditional and modern industries. He complimented them on their writing a modern constitution, creating a parliament, and allowing the functioning of competing political parties. He found a political soulmate in the recently deceased educator and Westernizer, Yukichi Fukuzawa (1835-1901). Like many other American leaders and journalist of the time, Bryan cheered Japan’s victory over the Russians in the recent war.[[201]](#footnote-201)

Despite Japan’s gains, Bryan noted that Japan still faced many challenges. Educational facilities needed to be expanded and more people needed to be given the right to vote. He commended the Japanese for their great emphasis on education and for the fact that they developed a comprehensive system of universal education as their first step in their modernization process. But, he asks, would the creation of a highly educated citizenry incline people to stay away from jobs requiring hard manual labor that were essential for the industrialization of the nation?

It is probable that the education of the masses will show itself to some extent in improved methods and in the more extensive use of animals and machinery, but there must remain a large amount of work which requires daily contact with the soil. With further education would young Japanese be willing to go back to the factory and rice field? Japan faces the educational problem that confronts the civilized world, viz., how to put behind a trained mind an ideal which will make the educated citizen anxious to do service rather than to be waited upon.”[[202]](#footnote-202)

As a politician and student of politics, Bryan was deeply impressed with Japan’s new Meiji constitution and its recently organized Diet (parliament). He praised the Japanese for removing the rigid social class system of the Edo era (1600-1868). He felt that a more open and less class-based society based on a principle of universal education created opportunities for all males to rise through the ranks of society. He also spoke highly of education for women, but complained that too many impoverished rural families were selling their daughters into prostitution.

Bryan was very impressed by many aspects of Japan’s modern infrastructure. He found their trains to be a marvel, riding Japanese trains all over Japan and Japanese-built train systems in Korea. He found Japanese telegraphy to be very up to date, but he was very disappointed in Japan’s telephone network which he found quite sporadic in its usage and availability and quite difficult to use.

Speaking as a progressive Democrat, Bryan felt that further steps needed to be taken to expand democracy in Japan. He noted, for example, that the 1889 Meiji constitution specified that the members of the nation’s cabinet were to be chosen by and were directly responsible to the Emperor. He specified that the members of the cabinet should be responsible to the people of Japan and chosen by members of the Diet. Bryan also urged the Japanese to expand the electorate to give the people a greater voice. Japan, in short, was still too authoritarian and did not yet have the necessary institutions to respond to the critical will of the people.[[203]](#footnote-203)

Bryan was a deeply religious Christian and saw Japan through this prism. To continue to advance, he suggested Japan should adopt Christianity because she had already outgrown Buddhism. He stated that Christianity and Buddhism are diametrically opposed—“the former looks forward while the latter backward.” Christianity “regards life as a blessing to be enjoyed and an opportunity to be improved, the other sees in it only evil from which escape should be sought; one crowns this life with immortality, the other adds to a gloomy existence the darker night of annihilation.”[[204]](#footnote-204)

**Bryan Arrives in Korea**

Bryan and his party arrived in November 1905 in what is now Busan, the closest Korean port city to Japan with one of the largest concentrations of immigrant Japanese. With scant delay Bryan traveled by rail north to Seoul and after stopping there, slowly made his way through northern Korea to China. There was plenty of time to observe the major sites in Seoul and elsewhere and to talk with many Koreans and Japanese.

Bryan remarked that during the day he observed few women on the streets and that the condition of Korean women was quite low. The hardest working men were lower class “coolies” who carried large packs on their backs or led ponies or oxen laden with hay, wood, or other materials. On the other hand, he saw large numbers of middle and upper class men who seemed to have nothing to do. The noticeably unsettled Bryan noted that “there seems to be a deep-rooted contempt for labor, even among the middle classes.”[[205]](#footnote-205)

Bryan was also taken aback by the dirty streets, poverty and the backward nature of the capital:

Seoul … is surrounded by a substantial wall and entered by gates which until recently were shut at night, even though the city long ago outgrew the walls. The gates remind one of the gates described in the Bible, and they are not lacking in the beggar who finds the gate a convenient place to make his plea to the passerby. Aside from two or three broad thorough-fares, the streets are narrow, crooked and filthy. The open sewers on each side are filled with refuse matter and reek with foul odors.[[206]](#footnote-206)

Bryan comments at length on the absence of a concrete educational system for the country as a whole, but remarks that the situation was not hopeless. Missionary schools were opening all over the country and a few young Korean men had gone to study in China, the United States and Japan. Education was the reserve of the upper classes who were educated in the conservative classics of the past. Another negative aspect of Korea was the non-existence of modern medicine and that the nation’s first modern hospital had just been built in Seoul by Americans using American money.[[207]](#footnote-207)

Bryan was greatly disturbed by the corrupt and chaotic makeup of the Korean government. He decried the authoritarian nature of the nation’s absolute monarchy and the weak decision-making process. But worst of all was the obvious corruption. The “government” is as corrupt an organization as can be found on earth. Just who is responsible is not clearly known, but that offices are sold and all sorts of extortion practiced there can scarcely be doubt. There is no spirit of patriotism such as to be found in Japan, and why should there be when the government gives so little in return for the burdens which it imposes.” There was also great instability in the upper ranks of government with frequent cabinet personnel changes.

Bryan acknowledged that there had been a recent power shift in Korea. For centuries Chinese influence had been paramount in Korea, but that all ended with Japan’s victory in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895. The Russians had a brief time of primacy in Korea when the Korean emperor sought refuge in the Russian legation in Seoul, but Japan’s victory had transformed Korea into a Japanese protectorate. Now it was Japan’s turn to clean up Korea.

Bryan noted that Japan had both the power and responsibility to make Korea into anything it wanted. It had already built a railway up the central spine of the country, brought in a modern banking system, and was now creating a new currency to replace the old Korean coinage. Korean coins had little value and it required large boxes of generally worthless coins for even the simplest transactions. Families had to keep huge boxes of coins in their homes. A further problem was that the coins were so badly minted that they were very often counterfeited—with the counterfeits in many cases better made than the originals.[[208]](#footnote-208)

Even though he was there quite briefly, Bryan was able to sense that there was trouble in the air. Wherever he looked, he saw great numbers of Japanese soldiers and no sign of any Korean military. It was very clear who was in charge. Bryan observed that most Koreans he saw “regarded the new Japanese invasion with silent distrust and are in doubt whether the purpose of Japan is simply to protect herself from future danger at the hands of China or Russia, or whether she is expecting to colonize Korea with her own people.”[[209]](#footnote-209) Bryan asserts that the Koreans had every right to be suspicious of Japanese motives because the people of both countries had a long history of enmity and animosity.

Japan, Bryan notes, had created new problems for itself as a result of its victories over China and Russia:

The most serious national problem with which Japan has to deal is that imposed upon her by the attempt to extend the sphere of her political influence to Formosa on the southwest and Korea on the northwest. The people of Formosa do not welcome Japanese and an army of some six or seven thousand is kept on that island to support Japanese authority.

But Korea presents a still more delicate and perplexing situation. For more than a thousand years a feud has existed between Japan and Korea and two attempts have been made by the former to invade the latter, the last about three hundred years ago. At that time a number of captives were carried back to Kagoshima where they….[i]ntroduced the art of making what has since been known as Satsuma ware. The fact that the descendants of these captives lived in a colony by themselves for three centuries without intermarrying with the Japanese is sufficient evidence of the feeling entertained toward them by their captors.

To aggravate the matter Japan has been engaged in two wars, first with China and then with Russia, over Korea, and it was also the cause of one civil war in Japan.[[210]](#footnote-210) Having driven China from Korea ten years ago and now having driven Russia out, she is undertaking to exercise a protectorate over the country. When it is remembered that Korea is separated from both Manchuria and Siberia by an imaginary line and that the Koreans themselves regard the Japanese as intruders, some estimate can be formed of Japan’s task….Will Japan be able to accomplish what other nations have failed to do, viz., exercise a colonial power without abusing it and without impoverishing herself?[[211]](#footnote-211)

Bryan fills out a prescription of what Japan had to do if it was to fulfill its promise to modernize Korea. Japan had to “purify” the Korean government and “make it honest.” It would have to work especially hard to establish schools nationwide and “raise the intellectual standard of the people.” Japan would have to revive older industries and introduce new tones to assist in the modernization process. This would require exercising its power for the benefit of the Korean people. And by so doing, the Japanese might overcome the deep prejudice that the Koreans had felt for them after many centuries of mutual hostility.

Bryan is pessimistic that the Japanese would fulfill their bargain. He was a strong anti-imperialist who denounced the American seizure of the Philippines in 1900. That year he had campaigned hard against McKinley’s and Theodore Roosevelt’s support for American expansion abroad. He felt that no colonial power in modern times had brought so much benefit to any of its colonies. Imperialism is all about exploitation of a colony’s resources for the benefit of the mother country. “If Japan purifies the government and makes it honest; if she establishes schools and raises the intellectual standard of the people; if she revives the industries now fallen into decay and introduce new ones; if, in other words, she exercises her power for the up building of Korea and for the advancement of the Korean people, she may in time overcome the prejudice that centuries of hostility have created.” But if the Japanese did do good for Korea, would it not develop an educated class of Koreans who would one day challenge Japanese authority? If, on the other hand “she keeps the Koreans in ignorance and poverty, they will be sullen subjects; if she leads them to higher levels they will the more quickly demand their independence and be the better prepared to secure it. Which course will she pursue?”[[212]](#footnote-212)

Bryan and his companions soon left Korea to explore China, but the questions he posed concerning Japanese rule in Korea were very relevant. Japan’s stated goal was to bring Korea into the modern world, to create a modern sister nation. Bryan admired Japan’s goals, but was most skeptical that Japan would be successful. Bryan recognized that the Koreans were not happy with the Japanese occupation, but he hoped that the Japanese would do what they said they would because of the very backward state of Korea. Its lack of education, modern forms of transportation, corrupt government, and fraudulent currency doomed the Korea to an awkward state of backwardness unless the Japanese interceded on their behalf.

Modern portrayals of William Jennings Bryan are often based on the movie and play “Inherit the Wind” where actor Frederic March plays a bumbling and perhaps rather senile religious fanatic who joins the prosecution team in the celebrated 1925 Scopes Monkey Trial. The real Bryan was a shrewd and well-read politician who had a deep understanding of world affairs. A full reading of his book *The Old World* demonstrates that its author is a realist who had a full grasp of the major world problems including the real danger of a war in Europe and the potential for major bloody conflicts in the future. Bryan was truly a pacifist at heart and he sets the framework for a less aggressive American approach to world affairs, an approach he developed almost a decade later when he briefly became Woodrow Wilson’s Secretary of State (1913-1915).

Bryan appreciates Japan as a modern and innovative nation and Korea as a country desperately in need of help, but at the same time he is a skeptical of Japan’s feigned altruism. He sees a very fine line between Japan’s potential as a “do-gooder” and as an invader. Koreans, he correctly notes, are a very proud old culture, even older than Japan. Their isolation had kept them behind and they had gotten trapped in a cycle of their own misery where a greedy ruling class had robbed the people of any incentive or opportunity to advance themselves. But they still had great pride in their culture and history, and an abiding hatred for Japan.

Bryan correctly notes that Korea’s antipathy for Japan stemmed back to the 1590s when Japan’s leading military figure of the time, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, launched two very destructive invasions of Korea. Hideyoshi’s goal was some kind of invasion of China, but his forces were held in check in Korea, but at the great cost of life and destruction of the country. Even though three centuries separated Hideyoshi and the coming of the Japanese in 1904, there was little love lost between the two countries. Bryan was well aware of this antipathy and worried out loud that no matter how well the Japanese played the role of a beneficent big brother, most Koreans would find cause to oppose them. In the long run Bryan holds out very little hope for a meaningful and successful Japanese incursion into Korea, but he still feels that it would be worth the effort because of Korea’s backward state and the negative effect than the *yangban* had on Korean society.

**CHAPTER VIII**

**WILLIAM E. GRIFFIS: THE STUDIOUS COMPILER**

Although largely forgotten today, William Elliot Griffis (1843-1928) a century ago was arguably the best known and most respected scholar of Japanese and East Asian history and culture in the United States. We met him briefly in Chapter II in the section pertaining to American views of Meiji Japan. He and other contemporary Japanologists had arrived in Japan early in the 1870s as teachers and lay missionaries. They were greatly disappointed that many Japanese had failed to convert to Christianity, but they were greatly encouraged that Japanese had many “latent” Christian qualities as high ethical morals and a dedication to such ideals as honesty, hard work and thrift. Japan, they declared, was rapidly adopting many of the high ideals and qualities of Anglo-Saxon civilization and it was they, the Japanese, who would spread this bastion of Western civilization to the rest of East Asia. This thinking led Griffis to believe that Japan had a moral duty to enter, reform, and modernize Korea.

Griffis had a long career as an educator, clergyman, and author of many books and articles on Meiji Japan. Born in Philadelphia, one of his strongest childhood memories as a ten-year-old boy was observing the departure of Commodore Perry’s fleet of “Black Ships” to Japan and China in 1853. Griffis’ association with Japan began when he was a student at what is now Rutgers University in New Jersey from 1865-1869, when he graduated. Griffis tutored several Japanese students who were among the first to study in the United States.

Griffis’ connection with these Japanese and their families led to an 1870 invitation to teach science to high school and college-age Japanese students in a school in the provincial capital of Fukui Prefecture (then Echizen) in western Japan. Griffis hastily accepted the invitation and made his way to Fukui where he taught for a year. By 1871, however, he had moved to Tokyo to teach science at one of the schools that would eventually become the renowned Tokyo University. Some of his Tokyo students later became Japan’s leading politicians, diplomats, writers and scholars, thus providing Griffis with a wide and influential network of people who would keep him closely informed about affairs in Japan even though he would not return to Japan for decades after his 1874 return to the U.S.

Certainly Griffis’ greatest contribution was his voluminous writing on Japan and East Asia. He wrote about 18 books and several hundred articles and gave hundreds of public lectures on Japanese and East Asian topics. When Griffis left Japan in 1874, he spent the next two years writing his masterpiece, *The Mikado’s Empire,* first published in 1876. By 1912 this book had gone through 12 editions and was one of if not the most read book on Japan in the West through the 1920s. Throughout his life, though based in the United States, he was able to keep close tabs on what was going on in Asia. In 1926, two years before his death in 1928, Griffis accepted a Japanese invitation to travel not only to Japan to receive “The Order of the Rising Sun” award but also to travel through Korea and Japanese-held parts of Manchuria.[[213]](#footnote-213)

While Griffis did not return to Japan between 1874 and 1926 and never went to Korea until 1926, he developed a huge private library on Asia and studied conditions there from afar. He read widely on Korea and his 1882 (new edition in 1888) book *Corea: The Hermit Nation*[[214]](#footnote-214)got excellent reviews. He later published an anthology of Korean Literature in 1911, *The Unmannerly Tiger and other Korean Folk Tales.* It was his reputation as a serious scholar of Asian Studies that led *The Outlook Magazine* to solicit an article in early 1904, “Kim the Korean,” at the outset of the Russo-Japanese War.[[215]](#footnote-215)

Griffis, of course, was not alone in thinking that Korea was a backward degenerate country. There was the strong belief, shared even by some missionaries in Korea itself, that Korean society was indeed backward and that Japan was the state best equipped to bring modern civilization to the Korean peninsula. Griffis urged such a task for Japan, noting that the “fires of civilization” were beginning to “smoke out the hermit,” and that the “worn out dogmas of Chinese statecraft must pass away … and Corea be allowed to work out her career as a sovereign state, in the line pointed out by progressive Japan and democratic America.”[[216]](#footnote-216)

Although he confined himself to the United States after 1874, he collected a great deal of material about Japan and Korea and interviewed or corresponded with many Japanese, Koreans and Chinese, all of which he felt provided him with ample information to write his scholarly tomes about Japan and Korea. Griffis defended his approach—writing about a country that he had never actually entered—by arguing that the best history of any nation is best done by a “compiler” who collects and studies the material of other writers rather than a traveler who can only write about that small part of a country which he himself has seen:

In one respect, the presentation of such a subject by a compiler, while shorn of the fascinating element of personal experience, has an advantage even over the narrator who describes a country through which he has travelled. With the various reports of many witnesses, in many times and places, before him, he views the whole subject and reduces the many impressions of detail to unity, correcting one by the other. Travelers usually see but a portion of the country at one time. The compiler, if able even in part to control his authorities, and if a anything more than a tyro in the art of literary appraisement, may be able to furnish a handbook of information more valuable to the general reader.[[217]](#footnote-217)

Because of his high reputation as a scholar and as an expert of East Asian affairs, the New York-based weekly news magazine, *The Outlook,* requested an article from Griffis in early 1904 on the impending war between Russia and Japan and the role that Korea would play in the conflict. The result was a short piece, “Kim the Korean” where Griffis comments on the squalid life of the average Korean as the fate of his country hangs in limbo between the angry claws of two of its powerful neighbors, Japan and Russia.[[218]](#footnote-218)

Griffis begins his piece with a very negative view of Korea in 1904. Both the individual Korean and his nation are “degenerate.” Virtually all Koreans, rich and poor, live in shabby homes with thatch roofs. They subsist on pale dishes of millet and turnips at most meals with occasional doses of beef and dog meat. And they are forced to pay outrageous taxes and forced loans to the lazy, good-for-nothing parasite *yangban* class. “There is no incentive for industry, no motive for getting rich, in this hermit land. The tax collector is ever hungry, and omnivorous, the nobleman is jealous and able to make inquisition, superstition is rampant, the sorcerer rules the land and the palace, and beast worship and degraded paganism dominate all.”[[219]](#footnote-219)

Griffis mourns the fact that proud Korea would lose its independence. Korea, he notes, is a small country that has the misfortune of being located in the center of an angry vortex of three ambitious powers, China, Japan and Russia. Traditionally the fight for dominance in East Asia had been between China and Japan—a fight that had led to two vigorous wars between the two powers, in the 1590s with Hideyoshi’s invasion of the Peninsula and just a decade before in the 1894-1895 Sino-Japanese War. The danger this time in 1904, he warns, is from Russia whose territorial ambitions in northeast Asia are well known.

Griffis grieves that Korea in 1904 had become a pathetic civilization and a degenerate nation. Theoretically, this should not be the case. Korea is not a small nation—it’s more than twice the size of the large state of Pennsylvania and had a population of well over ten million. It has a civilization that is far older than Japan and rivals China in its antiquity. It is the fount or source of advanced Japanese civilization:

Yes, as learned from books, Korea had a proud civilization … while herself the beginner of Japan’s. In a sense, she looks down on both her conquerors. Furthermore, Korean men invented not only printing by means of movable type, centuries before the Europeans, Gutenberg or Coster, and a true alphabet, that is acknowledged to be one of the most perfect in the world.[[220]](#footnote-220)

The “Golden Age” of Korean civilization, Griffis asserts, came before the start of the Yi or Choson Dynasty (1392-1910):

After the race migrations and struggles of ages, three States, in the north, northeast and south, arose, of which Shinra (Silla) became pre-eminent. From her ports from the fifth to twelfth century came holy men from India, Arabs for trade, Chinese ships sailing by the magnetic compass, and Japanese as pupils, and envoys, while Korean youths went to China for study and her ministers had influence at Nanking. From the fourth to the fourteenth century is the golden age of Korean splendor. Since A.D. 1392, when the present dynasty—Confucian to the core—was founded, there has been an age of decline. All Korea’s mighty monuments and heaps of ruins are of this earlier era.

Griffis then pauses to consider what it was that made ancient Korean civilization so great, that stimulated the arts, magnificent architecture, great literature, and brought untold wealth to the Korean peninsula. His answer, of course, is Buddhism:

What gave the peninsula, from the Ever White Mountains to Quelpart Island[[221]](#footnote-221) and, its temples, pagodas, schools, art, literature, and blessings unnumbered for the common people? There is but one answer. Under that one word “Buddhism” may be told the long story of the Hinduization, or the Aryanization, of the mind of all eastern Asia. In Korea the missionary bearing the Sakya’s gentle creed came to be a true civilizer, teacher, nurse of art, opener of paths to dwell in, maker of communications, and educator of the low and humbler of the proud. In the glow of first faith, the mountainside was chiseled, and these colossal human figures, single or in pairs, called *mir-yek*, were cut. They stand today, after a thousand years of individuality and five hundred years of neglect, often forgotten amid forests and on deserted sites where cities and monasteries once were. On the site of Seoul, when no city was there, rose the superb marble pagoda, tier upon tier, its facades and stories illustrating Buddha’s life. Until the awful Japanese invasion of 1592-1597, which literally scooped the land of its art, art works, and skilled artisans, it had three more stories. Once the land of art, as all Japanese history shows, Korea stands today, as to wealth and art, only the specter of her past. Japan, art besotted, spared little that could enrich her. China, ever ready to extort silver, “fined” regularly this Issachar of nations.[[222]](#footnote-222)

The fault, Griffis writes, lies in “four corners.” There are the savage Japanese invasions of the 1590s, the various rampages of China, the growing corruption of the Buddhist hierarchy and, worst of all, the evolution of the “scholarly” *yangban* class and the practice of Confucianism. This group of “noblemen” became a totally nonproductive parasitic class that thrived on and sucked the energy and whatever wealth the huge group of common people achieved. Above all, the useless *yangban*, who produced nothing and whose gross corruption strangled the nation, were responsible for Korea’s precipitous decline:

In a word, it was religion’s old story. The freshness of faith and vigor over, difficulties surmounted, and now in royal favor, Buddhism enters upon the era of power and luxury, and is active in palace intrigue. The monk wears armor and dictates policies. Briefly, religion, when most impressive in outward form, clogged inwardly with all the diseases of worldliness, is dying with heart disease. Then came the inevitable struggle with Confucianism, as an ethical system, as a creed, and as a political force. Worsted in the conflict, Buddhism was disestablished, her priests were forbidden to enter walled cities or to build therein any new temple, while Confucianism was declared the official religion, its temples maintained at public expense, the Chinese classics made the basis of education. In place of the priest or monk, nun and abbess, the Yang-ban, this is, the office seeking class, who with their hangers-on number myriads, take their seats permanently at the public crib. The only business of Kim, the common man, is to pay his taxes, hold his tongue, and in every time of danger to submit to blackmail for “pro-tection.”[[223]](#footnote-223)

Griffis asserts that the key to Japan’s successful modernization during the Meiji period stems from the government’s decision to terminate the legal class system that had dominated Japanese society throughout the Edo period (1600-1867): Samurai, Peasant Farmers, Artisans, and Merchants. The elimination of class restrictions and the decision to provide a basic education for children of all classes permitted people from all classes to advance according to their abilities rather than by their class. Fukuzawa Yukichi, one of Japan’s leading educators of the Meiji period, adopted the motto “Heaven helps those who help themselves” in his seminal work *Gakumon no Susume* (An Encouragement of Learning, 1872).[[224]](#footnote-224)

Griffis states that if Korea had any hope of strengthening and modernizing itself, the first step must be the removal of the *yangban* class, but since the Korean nobility would certainly not demote itself, the task must be carried out by an outside power. Korea, he stresses, is completely incapable of saving itself. The *yangban* have a stranglehold on power and money, and the peasantry has neither the education nor the resources to mount a challenge to authority.

The key to Korea’s salvation is Japan’s seizing authority, eliminating the *yangban,* and building a modern state founded on the principle of self-rule. Japan as an agent of change must launch a revolution in Korea with a focus on educating the masses. The Japanese had proven their ability to undergo a positive metamorphosis and had expressed an unselfish desire to bring progressive modernism to Korea. The Koreans might struggle against this inoculation, but Japan, with its newly acquired Anglo-Saxon heritage has both the obligation and the tools necessary to bring Korea struggling and kicking into the modern world.

But Japanese intervention was not the only road to the salvation of Korea. Griffis always believed that Christianity was a key component of a nation’s modernization and that there must be concerted effort to bring the religion to the Hermit Kingdom. “There is nothing the matter with Korea but the diseases in her own vitals. Let the lazy nobles work; let labor and industry have some incentive under good government, and all will be well. Above all, let the Korean know something of the one God, Father of all, and the Saviour of mankind.”[[225]](#footnote-225)

Griffis, like so many other Asian affairs writers of his time, was stunned to hear about what he considered to be the superstitious folk religions of Korea. What alarmed him the most was talk of the many sorcerers and so-called wizards who lived at the imperial court in Seoul. Buddhism, notes Griffis, had been a key to Korean civilization, but it had been discredited throughout the Yi Dynasty and had become worn out and largely discarded. Confucianism had created on paper an ethical and moral system, but the reality was a corrupt and parasitic ruling class that encouraged corruption and depravity throughout the land. The introduction of Christianity, and one would assume here that Griffis had Protestant Christianity in mind, would infuse Korea with a new moral system and the energy for Koreans to build new lives for themselves.

Griffis the compiler was a famous writer and public lecturer who commanded a large audience that read his books, articles and listened to his lectures. He thus had the power to influence the general public in its attitudes toward both Japan and Korea. Unfortunately, like correspondents Palmer and Kennan, Griffis had a bad case of tunnel-vision when it came to his perceptions of Asia. He had spent a great deal of time in Japan, but that had been twenty years earlier and Japan had undergone immense change during those two crucial decades. He was totally possessed by the idea that Japan was a truly altruistic nation willing to make the necessary sacrifices to help other states modernize as well. It never really occurred to Griffis that Japan might pursue its own interests which would include the total submission of Korea.

The problem with Griffis’ critique of Korea is that he really could not know the depths of the Korean psyche. I have discovered in my 40 years of college teaching that one cannot really teach others about another people and culture unless one spends some real time there. William E. Griffis, as far as I can tell, never visited Korea until very late in life and thus had no direct experience with the people. He had to rely on the words and reactions of others and his views were already out of date when he espoused them in this article. Being a compiler is simply not enough.

Griffis was also too married to the idea that Japan was going to act as the purveyor of Anglo-Saxon civilization to the rest of Asia. Oscar Wilde noted sarcastically in 1889 that “… Japan is a pure invention. There is no such country, there are no such people.”[[226]](#footnote-226) What Wilde meant was that many people in the West were so infatuated with Japan at that time that they created an illusory country in their own minds. They had developed such an extreme enthusiasm for traditional Japanese arts and imagery known as *japonisme* that several American writers concluded that Japan was becoming this veritable “Anglo-Saxon” and “latently Christian” nation through its rapid adoption of Western technology and institutions.

Some Americans like Griffis presented a complex and on occasion contradictory portrait of Japan that divulges more about the values, mores and norms of their own society than about the distant land they glossed over. The “quaintness” of Japanese culture contrasted greatly with its explosive modernization. While other Asian nations such as China and even Korea appeared lost in a quagmire of tradition, Japan had begun erecting factories, conscripting an army, preparing a parliament. There were universities, offices, department stores, and modern banks. Japan’s sudden emergence as a modern power drew accolades from all quarters and encouraged writers like Griffis to mold not only Japan, but also Korea in their own image. The difficulty, however, as Wilde so perceptively noted, was that these Western images almost totally ignored the *real Japan*.

Griffis had the misfortune to get himself caught up in the uncritical fascination with Japan in the late 1800s. Clearly, if a writer approaches a subject with a strong preconceived image, their work will show a highly blemished view of reality. But if said work is widely read and discussed, an unsuspecting public might accept the author’s views as gospel truth. These views in turn can influence foreign policy decisions and views that policymakers have of that culture. Pearl Buck and her celebrated but badly flawed novel, *The Good Earth,* certainly helped to frame a false image of China during the 1930s. But just as Buck’s work helped to frame American images of the 1930s, Americans like Griffis played a key role in formulating American images of Korea and Japan at the turn of the last century.

**CHAPTER IX**

**THOMAS MILLARD: ANTI-IMPERIALIST CRITIC OF JAPAN**

Thomas F. Millard (1868-1942), a top correspondent for the *New York Herald,* covered a number of conflicts before the Russo-Japanese War including the Spanish-American War (1898), the Boer War (1898-1900), the American-Philippine War (1900) and the Boxer Uprising in China (1900). He covered both sides in the Russo-Japanese War. A true Sinophile, Millard was a strong opponent of imperialism, especially British and later Japanese imperialism.He later served for many years as the chief correspondent for the *New York Times* in China and as a longtime advisor to Chiang Kai-shek and the government of the Republic of China. Many journalists credit him as being the “founding father” of American journalism in China. He wrote several books and dozens of articles about Asian affairs during the early decades of the twentieth century.

Millard in his book, *The New Far East,*[[227]](#footnote-227)written in 1905 and 1906 and published at the start of 1907, was a strong critic of imperialism who understood as early as 1904 that Japan’s seizure of Korea was a blatant case of imperialism even as the Japanese government swore up and down that its goal was to protect Korea’s independence. His book is a very pragmatic and objective view of Japan’s growing influence in East Asian affairs at the end of the Russo-Japanese War. Millard respected Japanese modernization, but was appalled at the fact that Japan had opted to become an imperialist in Asia akin to its British and American “allies” in East and Southeast Asia.

Millard begins his book with a critical analysis of British and American coverage of the Russo-Japanese War, claiming that the highly favorable press that Japan received was unwarranted. While acknowledging that Japan had many admirers in both the United States and Great Britain at the time of the conflict, he proposed the idea that British manipulation of the news and a highly effective Japanese and British propaganda machine produced a flow of very pro-Japanese and anti-Russian reporting on the conflict. Japan and Britain had agreed to the Anglo-Japanese military alliance in 1902 which guaranteed Japanese protection of British interests in East Asia and British support for Japan’s efforts to gain control of Korea and to establish a foothold in Manchuria. Millard also asserts that the treaty signing fully guaranteed that Japan would soon go to war with Russia to get Korea and enter Manchuria.

Millard reminds his readers that many of the journalists covering the war were British and that these correspondents would adhere to British demands that they write from a very pro-Japanese point of view. Furthermore, since most news reports from East Asia during the war were sent by cable from Japan or China by cable via London and from there to the United States, the British could effectively filter the news so that press reports in the U.S. would reflect a pro-Japanese slant. The smaller group of American reporters, anxious to join the British in gaining access to sources, would also follow the British line and in effect become unwitting supports for the Japanese propaganda machine.

Millard suggests that just before and during the war Americans were fed an unrealistically glowing picture of Japan while Russia was showcased with correspondingly negative images. As a result, Americans gained the following false image of Japan:

If, then, the average person in America and England now finds himself imbued with an impression that Japan is a miracle among the nations; that her national purposes and ambitions point straight along the path of universal altruism; that she genuinely sacrificed the blood and substance of her people in the cause of right and the broad interests of humanity and civilization, in a war unjustly and unexpectedly forced upon her; that the Japanese people are the most patriotic, the most agreeable, and the “cutest” ever known; that the Japanese soldier and sailor are the bravest the world has ever seen, and their standard of excellence maintainable by Westerners; if he has somehow gathered all this, and much more of the same sort, it is not at all surprising.[[228]](#footnote-228)

Millard suggests that this rosy image of Japan and evil view of Russia must be eradicated before any real discussion of the causes of the conflict can be advanced. British manipulation of the news and the combined force of Japanese and pro-Japanese British propaganda unfairly tilted American support in favor of Japan. Millard repeatedly reminds us that good journalism must be based on highly objective reporting by the press and good journalists should not allow themselves to become propaganda machines for Japan:

This is the rubbish pile that must be cleared away before any intelligent grasp of the immediate issues of the Far Eastern question may be had. It is more or less a mass of rubbish though much of the fundamental structure consists of incongruous and unrelated facts, with no real bearing upon the larger propositions involved. In fact, there is probably no parallel (although I am familiar with the methods and success of the British government in its manipulation of the news from South Africa prior to and during the Boer War) in the absence of direct use of money or application of special or pressing interest, to the manner by which the press of America (I assume that a majority of the British press was complaisant) had been worked by the Japanese government in regard to the late war and its issues.

How much I wonder of geisha girls, of cherry blossoms, of politeness of servants and rickshaw coolies anxious for a tip or desirous of smoothly covering a pecuniary exaction, of lotus blossoms, of old palaces and temples, of crude surprise and astonishment of commonplace facts and circumstances of Oriental life, at the beauty of the scenically delightful land, is included in the present Western conception of Japan….Too much, entirely too much, I think.[[229]](#footnote-229)

During the war Japanese and British propaganda stated that Japan was fighting for its survival against Russian aggression. Russia supposedly had designs on both Korea and Manchuria and was thereby encroaching on Japan’s entitled sphere of influence. An added point was that Japan was coming into Korea to protect its independence. Korea was so weak and so corrupt that it could not survive on its own in the face of Russian or other foreign aggression. Japan was fighting the war to protect Korea from the autocratic Russian Bear and to then build a strong and modern independent Korea.

Millard, always the anti-imperialist, reminds his readers that neither Russia nor Japan had any proprietary rights in either Korea or Manchuria. Korea was already an independent kingdom of long standing, and Manchuria had been in integral part of China for several centuries. The great truth was that both Japan and Russia were fighting to dominate land that belonged to neither:

Much has been written about the causes of this late war; so much so that there is now danger that the real causes will be entirely lost sight of in a chaos of comment and advocacy. We heard much of the rights of Japan one hand, and the rights of Russia on the other. As a matter of fact, neither belligerent had any rights involved. Both had interests, but no rights. This constitutes a difference as well as a distinction. The chief bones of contention were Korea and Manchuria, and neither Japan nor Russia had any more rights in these countries than the United States, France or Germany. Manchuria is a part of China and Korea is, or was when the war began, an independent kingdom. Any rights foreign nations have are under treaties which may be modified or reinstated at any time. This distinction should be kept clear, for it is vital in any intelligent discussion of the issues of the war and their settlement.[[230]](#footnote-230)

Millard was an objective news reporter who saw the responsibility of the press to provide an accurate portrait and assessment of what they were reporting. His voice was a stern warning to the pro-imperialist policies of the Roosevelt administration that it was neglecting the rights of people in smaller nations. There was a strong anti-imperialist movement in the U.S. at that time which strongly opposed, among other things, the American seizure of Hawaii and the Philippines. Millard gives voice to that movement in opposition to the Japanese subjugation of the Korean state and for the strong support that the U.S. and Britain gave to Japanese imperialism. He was deeply offended by the British and Japanese successful attempts to manipulate the news so skillfully that many British and American reporters in effect became well publicized propaganda tools for the Japanese and against the Russians.

**Millard’s Critical View of Japanese Imperialism**

Millard respected the Japanese for all they had accomplished during the Meiji period, but as an anti-imperialist, he strongly opposed the expansion of the Japanese empire. He was a keen observer of the way the Japanese treated Koreans starting in 1904. He warned his many readers that the very positive, even rosy picture of Japan and the Japanese found in much of the American press was very misleading—the product of propaganda from the Japanese press bureau. In his book *Our Eastern Question* (1916), he wrote: “From what I know of Japan, inside and outside, I am convinced that Western knowledge of darkest Russia is as the noonday sun to the moon compared to general Western understanding of internal forces which sway the policy of [Nippon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Names_of_Japan).”

Millard makes it very clear that Japan saw Korea as its linchpin of national security. Korea under the control of a third power would be an intolerable threat to their security. Korea as a truly independent nation could stand as a buffer between Russia and Japan, but Korea in Japan’s eyes was too corrupt, old fashioned and industrially too weak to endure on its own. If Japan failed to intervene militarily in Korea, another Western power, most likely Russia, would step in to take over Seoul. At this deeply imperialistic period in history, weak nations like Korea and the Philippines were “sitting ducks” just waiting for an outside power to move in. Millard implies that Japan’s decision to go to war with Russia was a cover for its true goal – the complete seizure of the Korean empire.

When Japan declared war on Russia in early February, 1904 and immediately used Korea as a staging area for its military goal of an attack on Russian troops stationed in southern Manchuria, it announced that another mission was the preservation of Korean “independence.” The Japanese asserted that Russia aimed to absorb Korea into its Pacific empire for the express purpose of constructing a number of warm water ports there which in time would establish Russia as the preeminent power in the East Asia / Pacific region. Japan’s military occupation of Korea which began right after its declaration of war was therefore a necessity to protect Seoul from the Russian menace.

Therefore, at the very commencement of hostilities with Russia, Japan staged a coup by taking defacto power in Korea. The Korean government was in theory still intact, but Japan’s power grab was made very evident by the fact that its troops immediately seized control of all Korea’s communication links including its postal services, its telephone and its telegraph. The flow of all information in Korea was in Japanese hands, and it was impossible for anybody in Korea, including foreign correspondents, to communicate with anybody without the acquiescence of the Japanese.

Millard correctly surmised that even though the Japanese were still professing the desire to create a viable and independent Korea, all Koreans knew the bitter truth. “There exists in the heart of every Korean a deep and bitter hatred of Japan and everything Japanese. On the surface everything looked normal. Japanese soldiers were everywhere, but outwardly the Korean government still functioned. But deep down every Korean knew that their country was doomed.”[[231]](#footnote-231)

Millard notes that Japan’s true intentions became a lot clearer a few weeks after its intervention when they brought forward a protocol agreement which the Korean government had no choice but to sign. The Korean government may have been reluctant to sign the agreement, but the Japanese had by then effective military control over the whole country.

The protocol itself on the surface guaranteed Japan’s role as the protector of Korean independence. But Article One stated that the “Imperial Government of Korea shall place full confidence in the Imperial Government of Japan and adopt the advice of the latter regarding improvements in administration.” The protocol gave the Japanese military the right to occupy strategic areas of Korea, already by then an accomplished fact, and the right to further intervene in Korea should it experience an attack from a third party.

Millard saw this early protocol as a direct violation of Japan’s promise to protect Korean independence: “It is somewhat difficult to see how a country can remain truly independent and at the same time be compelled to adopt the advice of another government about its own administrative affairs. The articles relating to the right of Japan to intervene in certain matters clearly leave Korea entirely without discretion to approve or reject.”[[232]](#footnote-232)

Millard insists that the deeper meaning of this early protocol was that the Korean government had been forced without recourse to surrender a significant amount of its sovereignty. The Japanese pretense that they were acting on behalf of the Korean people was in Millard’s eyes an act of true hypocrisy. Koreans were fast becoming second-class citizens in their own land and were in fact losing their independence without having any chance whatsoever to keep it.

Japan’s pretense of being a good and generous neighbor to Korea enraged Millard. As one who despised imperialism, he vented venom on the Japanese for not telling Korea that its goal was in fact the complete elimination of Korean sovereignty. Millard sees no way for the Koreans to protect themselves, and he is upset that nations like the United States and leaders like Theodore Roosevelt were doing nothing to stop Japan. Millard concludes this section of the protocol discussion by writing: “Thus did Japan, by a domestic coup d’état, seize the reins of power in Korea.”[[233]](#footnote-233)

Millard devotes a lot of attention to the second protocol which the Japanese forced on the Koreans in August of 1904. This time the terms were more severe. Korean government officials were now obliged to accept the presence of Japanese “advisors” in every office of the Korean Finance ministry and the office of Foreign Affairs. They were not allowed to arrive at any major decision without the full consent of the advisor and the Japanese government. The Koreans thus lost control of government finances and were not allowed to make any treaties with any foreign nations without the expressed consent of Japan.

Millard commented that these two protocols “constituted a complete abdication by the Korean government of every vestige of its authority in favor of the Japanese government and left Korea without any genuine authority” over its own people.[[234]](#footnote-234)

The Japanese offered a third protocol in February 1905 that did away with even the pretense of Korean sovereignty. The Japanese ordered the Koreans to close all of their foreign legations throughout the world, to terminate all treaties that they had signed with foreign powers other than Japan, and ordered all foreign nations to permanently shut down all of their embassies in Korea. From now on Japan would represent Korea in all of its dealings with the outside world. The Korean government did what it could to renounce this protocol, but the Japanese, it is said, forced Korean cabinet members to sign away their sovereignty and forged the Korean Emperor’s name on to the document. 1910 is the official date of the Japanese annexation of Korea, but by 1905 the deed had already been done. When Koreans openly protested these protocols in 1904 and 1905, Japanese troops with machine guns in place would occupy key arteries in the cities and protesters who dared to come out were either killed or arrested and tortured. Koreans were indeed prisoners in their own land.

Millard speculates that in some respects Koreans might do better under Japanese rule. Koreans suffered greatly under the autocratic rule of their own government and the selfishness of the corrupt yangban class. The Japanese stabilized the currency and created a more effective system of taxation which was collected in a fairer and more reasonable manner. But at the same time the Japanese were seizing Korean property and land without just payment and were preventing Koreans from controlling their own destinies.

Millard focuses on another key aspect of the Japanese takeover of Korea: Immigration. The Japanese government opened Korea’s doors to virtually unlimited numbers of Japanese who had entered Korea by late 1905. By the time Millard had finished his book in late 1905, Korea, a country of ten to twelve million Koreans, had suffered an invasion of one hundred thousand Japanese. Since many of the Japanese wanted to settle in Korean cities like Seoul, Japanese authorities were expropriating Korean property in cities and forcing the Korean owners to flee without any compensation. Millard comments that many of these immigrants “are not, as a rule, of a very good class.”[[235]](#footnote-235)

Millard is especially annoyed at the way that Japanese civilians were treating Koreans. He witnessed several cases in Seoul and elsewhere where gangs of Japanese would assault perfectly innocent Koreans. In each case there were Japanese police nearby who witnessed the assaults but did nothing to help the Koreans. Koreans themselves were afraid to offer any resistance to these attacks for fear of further retribution, and they would never go to the Japanese police for help for fear of a further assault. Millard also noticed that he and other Western reporters were occasionally struck or attacked by Koreans, but the Westerners’ response was also not to go to the Japanese police.

Thomas Millard probably had a better understanding of both Korea and Japan than any of the other writers portrayed in this work with the possible exception of Frederick McKenzie. As former Japanese Prime Minister Yamagata told Frederick Palmer in Tokyo at the outset of the Russo-Japanese War, Japan was fixated on Korea and was determined to hold Korea as the key to its national security. Japanese propaganda promised to preserve Korea’s independence, but Millard saw it as the canard that it was. While Kennan, Palmer and many other reporters accepted Japanese propaganda at face value, Millard understood Japan’s imperialistic goals exactly.

**CHAPTER X**

**EPILOGUE**

We are all familiar with the Latin phrase, *caveat emptor,* “let the buyer beware.” An even more important phrase should be, *caveat lector,* “let the reader beware.” This admonition is especially true in the area of news reporting, whether print or electronic journalism. When covering a specific event there can be a wide discrepancy even among supposedly objective publications. Coverage of any election campaign is a case in point. If a reader relied solely on the *New York Times* for coverage of the 2016 presidential election, one could easily get the impression that Republican nominee Donald Trump was little more than a corrupt businessman who cheated on his taxes and who attempted to defraud the public through such schemes as Trump University. A reader of the *Boston Herald,* on the other hand, could read lurid stories about Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s careless handling of the Benghazi affair or her supposedly unprotected emails.

The actual coverage of each of these events may have been accurate, but unbalanced reporting may well give the impression of bias on the part of the writer or the publication itself. Trump University clearly did not deliver on its promises to improve the business acumen of its students and Secretary Clinton did peruse potentially sensitive emails while at home. The danger of unbalanced reporting often comes with the actual placement of the story or in composing the headline, which is not done by the reporter. Placing a lead article on Mr. Trump and his university could easily cast doubt for the reader on the viability of his leadership while a lead piece on the security lapse Mrs. Clinton may have caused might cause a reader to question her best judgment. Where one places a story or how much emphasis one places on it can cause just as many problems as actual unbalanced discourse in the article.

Writers of history must tread carefully when describing past events. The Philippine resistance to the American takeover of the islands between 1899-1901 is a clear case in point. When I was in college and graduate school, I took several courses which covered the Spanish-American War of 1898 and the implementation of American colonial rule over the Philippines. When reading American texts I was told about a minor Filipino insurrection that was quickly put down. This episode rarely received much attention and is a little known piece of American history. Whenever I asked my college students in my Asian Studies classes if they had ever heard or studied this conflict, only an occasional hand went up.

I got a wholly different picture whenever I visited the Philippines. Instead of labeling it the “Philippine Insurrection,” Filipino historians made reference to “The Philippine-American War” or the “Philippine War of Independence.” Independence leader Emilio Aguinaldo (1869-1964) wrote a book in 1899, *The True Version of the Philippine Revolution* depicting the long struggle of his people for real independence, I have read in more recent Philippine histories that a major portion of the American army, 125,000 men, spent two full years crushing an incipient resistance movement led by Aguinaldo. The Americans killed a quarter million Filipinos while losing 7,000 of their own, making it one of the more destructive conflicts in American history in terms of casualties.

I learned further that American troops tortured and maimed numerous Filipinos, including many innocent civilians. Waterboarding and other forms of torture were very common. But the most famous atrocity was committed by American soldiers led by General “Howling” Jake Smith on 28 September 1901 in retaliation for a deadly Filipino attack on a remote American military outpost. In retaliation, General Smith vowed to turn the province into a “howling wilderness,” telling his troops, “I want no prisoners. I wish you to kill and burn; the more you kill and burn, the more you will please me.” Jacob “Howling Jake” Smith infamously ordered his soldiers to “kill everyone over the age of ten” while conducting a scorched-earth policy that involved burning villages and crops. Smith was court-martialed for violating military discipline, but never formally punished.

It is puzzling that the Philippine-American War receives so little attention in American historical literature. The loss and taking of so many lives is no small undertaking. We can read about the very brief and supposedly glorious Spanish-American War of 1898 where Admiral Dewey destroyed the Spanish fleet at Manila without a single casualty and where Teddy Roosevelt and his “Rough Riders” ascended San Juan Hill and took Cuba with only 300 or so casualties. This war gets a lot of coverage, but the brutal 1899-1901 conflict does not? Why?

One answer may lie in the response to my presentation by my students. They are usually horrified by the carnage inflicted on the Philippines by the American military. These students especially revile the words and actions of Jake Smith. As one student once noted, “America is supposed to represent freedom and democracy, but when Filipinos demanded their freedom, their independence, we imposed our will on them and killed them by the thousands using terrible torture.” Maybe the very brutality of the conflict is too much of a blemish on our historical record. We wipe it from our collective memory because it was just so very brutal and shameful that it’s easier for us to forget.

**The Case of Korea**

Historical coverage of the American taking of the Philippines is a classic example of the Rashōmon effect of historical writing. Modern historiography on Korea also depicts Japan’s two-generation hold on Korea as a time of barbarous subjugation and enormous cruelty on the part of the Japanese occupiers. The forced sexual enslavement of over two hundred thousand young Korean women is often presented as the personification of the ruthlessness of Japan’s suppression of the Korean nation. Korean historians today give full play to the alleged barbarism of the Japanese while Japanese texts downplay or even completely ignore the negative aspects of their occupation of Korea. Many texts attest to the sheer brutality and subjugation of the Koreans by the Japanese.

Western writers at the time of the Russo-Japanese War had no idea of what Japan would do in Korea in the years to come. All of the writers covered in this text admired the manner in which the Japanese had so rapidly and successfully modernized their own country. There was general agreement that Japan, having so successfully absorbed certain aspects of Western civilization, was well equipped to bring Korea into the modern world. They also agreed that compared to Japan and other modern world standards, Korea was a very “backward” nation. Writers like George Kennan were so contemptuous of the Koreans that he called them “degenerate” and he called Korea a “degenerate nation.” These writers also agreed that the reason for the backwardness of Korea was its corrupt government which did little if anything to develop the nation, and the parasitic ruling *yangban* aristocracy which ravenously fed on the resources of the common people.

These writers, however, differed greatly on what the Japanese should do in and with Korea as well as what were Japan’s intentions in the “Hermit Kingdom.” George Kennan and Frederick Palmer advocated the immediate Japanese takeover of Japan. They believed Japanese propaganda that Tokyo would fully respect Korean independence and that it would occupy Korea as a benevolent gesture. They said that as an Asian nation, Korea would be far more ready and willing to accept Japanese intervention on their behalf than intervention by any more alien Western nation. Kennan and Palmer lauded Japan’s supposed intentions and clearly had the support of President Theodore Roosevelt, for whom they worked as informal advisors, and thus the support of the U.S. government.

The problem with Kennan and Palmer was that they believed Japanese propaganda that Japan had benevolent reasons for going into Korea and that it planned to fully respect Korean independence. They ignored what Japanese officials like former Prime Minister and Army Field Marshall Yamagata were saying—that Japan was committed to the seizure of Korea for reasons of national security. Japan feared that some other nation, namely Russia, would take Korea if Japan did not act promptly and that a Russian navy base there would threaten Japan’s vital sea lanes.

Kennan, however, chided the Japanese for not making their intentions clear. He felt that rather than proclaiming its commitment to Korean independence, it should state that its goal was to create a protectorate in Korea for the good of the Koreans. Saying that Japan was truly committed to the independence of Korea only caused confusion for all parties and led to unnecessary bloodshed.

W. E. Griffis was like Kennan a Japanophile. He had lived in Japan for three or more years in the early 1870s when Japan’s rapid modernization process was just beginning. After he left Japan he maintained friendships with many Japanese, wrote the first scholarly text in English on Japanese history, and filled his life with lectures and writings about Japan. He never visited Korea until near the end of his life in the late 1920s. Most of his information for his book on Korea (1882) surely came from Japanese sources. His 1904 article on Korea discussed the poverty and corrupt nature of the land. Griffis belonged to the school of thought that believed that Japan had done a good job absorbing “Anglo-Saxon civilization” and that the Japanese were by far the best vehicle to convey this civilization to other East Asian nations, namely to the Chinese and Koreans. Thus it was only natural for the Japanese to enter Korea and to start a carefully orchestrated modernization there.

William Jennings Bryan was both a leading American politician and journalist. When he traveled through Japan and Korea, he developed a great fondness for both countries. He was keenly aware of the success of Japan’s modernization process and of Korea’s poverty and high degree of corruption. He was convinced that it would take a strong outside force to bring effective change to Korea and that Japan was up to the job. On the other hand, he was keenly aware of Korea’s antipathy to Japan and he worried that if Japan forced its way into Korea and actually threatened Korean sovereignty—thus ignoring its pledge to honor Korean independence fully—that the Koreans would quite rightly protest Japanese encroachments on their nation. Thus, Bryan had grave misgivings about the future of Japan’s presence in Korea and openly feared that Japan’s mission to Korea would fail—and deep down he feared that Japan’s goal was not the preservation of Korea’s independence, but, rather, its subjugation.

Frederick McKenzie and Thomas Millard had strongly disagreed with Palmer and Kennan, but for slightly different reasons. Millard had a very low opinion of imperialism and a low regard for governments and nations that committed acts of imperialism. Very early in his coverage of the Russo-Japanese War he saw through Japan’s promise that it was going to respect Korean independence and sovereignty. He outlined very carefully Japan’s step-by-step encroachment on Korean freedom with its series of protocols starting in February 1904 and continuing through 1905 and 1907.

Frederick McKenzie initially supported Japan’s military entrance into Korea in February 1904. He fully respected Japan’s modernization and was well aware of Korea’s backward state. He speculated that Japan’s presence in Korea might present some positive benefits to the Korean people, but when he began to witness the true nature of the Japanese occupation, he very quickly began to have second thoughts. He realized that each successive protocol that the Japanese forced the Korean government to sign took away another layer of sovereignty and that the Korean people, while initially welcoming to the Japanese, were becoming more and more hostile to the loss of their control over their own affairs. McKenzie was even more horrified with the brutality of the Japanese occupation even as early as 1904. He noticed that whenever Koreans openly protested against the Japanese or when the Korean Emperor or his cabinet members refused to sign any protocol, the Japanese employed brutal force to get their way. McKenzie very early became a vocal opponent of Japanese imperialism. Fortunately, his status as a British citizen allowed him to remain in Korea, because Japan’s recent naval alliance with Great Britain had forged a bond that Japan was loathe to break.

Jack London was alone among these writers in that he never really discussed the possibility of the Japanese seizure of Korea. He admired many aspects of Japanese civilization and modernization, but had had significant run-ins with Japan’s military authorities who arrested him twice. He published his misgivings over trusting the Japanese in his famous essay, “Beware the Monkey Cage.” His coverage of conditions in Korea was both critical and sympathetic, but his photographs, which numbered over a thousand, pictured a country that was poor, where the faces of the people were worried and glum, and where the land was barren.

London does not condemn the Japanese, but he is sympathetic to the Koreans. He has a real interest in Korean culture and is the only one of these writers, except perhaps for McKenzie, who shows any empathy to the plight of individual Koreans. It is his writing, but more importantly, his photography, which gives Korea a truly human face in the eyes of Western readers. He cannot trust the Japanese in their pledges to respect Korean independence, but does not openly confront this question in his writing. We see no items calling for a Japanese takeover of Korea. Koreans and Korean problems are problems facing the Koreans and it is up to them to resolve their own problems, not an outside force like the Japanese who are in any case following their own interests and not to be trusted when it comes to the welfare of others, especially weaker people like Koreans.

**The Rashōmon Effect**

This work examines the writing of seven correspondents covering the same topic—the Japanese seizure of Korea during the Russo-Japanese War. The role of Korea remained somewhat covert during the hostilities. The Japanese said that they fought to preserve Korean independence, but it is clear that they went to war to seize the Hermit Kingdom for themselves. All of the writers argued both the merits and demerits of the Japanese takeover bid. They all realized that in one way or another there would be lasting Japanese influence in Korea long after the war was over.

There are however significant differences in the unbalanced writing of these journalists. They all presented themselves as open-minded reporters focusing, as goes the old adage, “the facts, Ma’am, just the facts.” There is commonality and accuracy in their reporting of the facts. Japan had become an advanced and militarily strong modern nation while Korea was clearly an impoverished and backward society. The divergence in opinion came over what Japan should do in Korea and what it was fighting for. Kennan and Palmer saw Japan as a benevolent nation that was making very generous efforts to uplift a sister nation. Griffis saw it as Japan’s duty to advance “Anglo-Saxon civilization” to the Koreans. London was noncommittal about the Japanese, though he mistrusted their motives, and felt that the Koreans had to resolve their own problems. Millard focused his writing on the imperialist and hypocritical acts of the Japanese in Korea—they posed as benevolent liberators who would do their utmost to protect and advance Korean independence when in fact their intentions were just the opposite. Millard shows how with each protocol the Japanese forced the Koreans to sign, they were taking another huge bite into that very independence, so much so that by November, 1905, Korea had become a complete dependency of Japan. McKenzie saw the Japanese encroachments on Korea as a brutal and savage attack on Korean nationhood that was meant to advance Japan’s strength and power at the expense of the Korean people and their weak and corrupt government. Bryan realized that Japan could help the Koreans, but mistrusted Japanese motives and believed that the Koreans would balk at the loss of their sovereignty.

So we come back to the main thesis of this work featuring the Rashōmon effect: *Caveat Lector! Let the Reader Beware!* When we read history we must carefully examine not only what the writer is saying, but also his or her perspectives and biases. History does not provide absolute answers. We know for a fact that Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in December 1941 and that Japan initiated a war with Russia with a surprise attack on Port Arthur, but we as historians must decide for ourselves WHY a certain event occurred. *Let the reader derive his or her own perspectives on history!*

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1. The film *Rashōmon* is based on Japanese writer Ryūnosuke Akutagawa’s (1892-1927) 1922 short story “In a Grove” and, to a lesser extent, his short story *Rashōmon* (1915). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Kennan was the chief wire service correspondent at the White House on the evening that President Garfield was shot in 1881, and twenty years later he was on hand for the McKinley assassination. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. John Lewis Gaddis, *George F. Kennan: An American Life* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Palmer met with Roosevelt and briefed him on the war situation when visiting Washington during a brief lull in the war in early 1905. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. James I. Matray, “The Korean War 101: Causes, Course, and Conclusion of the Conflict” in *Education About Asia* (17.3) Winter 2012, 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. A handful of reporters led by novelist and journalist Jack London managed to sneak into Korea and to accompany the Japanese military through northern Korea to Manchuria where the Japanese met the Russian army. Despite this proximity, Japanese censorship made it very difficult for London and his few colleagues to get close to the action. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. George Kennan, “Korea: A Degenerate State,” in *The Outlook,* 7 October 1905, 307. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Perhaps the spirit of the day is found in a quote by Japanese educator and writer Yukichi Fukuzawa (1835-1901) who wrote “Heaven helps those who help themselves.” [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. I wonder if things have improved much even today. A few years ago on the first day of my Japanese history class at the college where I teach, I handed the students a blank map of the Pacific world and asked them to point out in writing where Japan was. At least a third of the students promptly and deliberately declared that New Zealand was Japan. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Bruce Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1997), 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Isabella Bird Bishop, *Korea and Her Neighbors* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1897). Among her many books are *Australia Felix: Impressions of Melbourne and Victoria* (1879); *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (1880); *Among the Tibetans* (1884) and *The Yangtze Valley and Beyond* (1899). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. My first reactions to Korea were very much like those of Mrs. Bishop. When I began visiting Korea on a regular basis in the mid-1980s, the country was just beginning to prosper. A few slum districts, now long gone, like those described by Mrs. Bishop still could be fund in Seoul, but after a Fulbright summer there in 1988 I came to appreciate the beauty of the land and people. Koreans are by nature lively, intelligent and very friendly people and Seoul is now my favorite place to visit in Asia. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Bishop, Korea, 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Bishop, Korea, 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Bishop, Korea, 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Bishop, Korea, 304-305. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Bishop, Korea, 304-306. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Bishop, 335. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Bishop, 336. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Bishop, 336. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Bishop, 336. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Bishop, 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Bishop, 255-257. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Quoted in Cumings, 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Cumings, 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Peter Duus, *The Rise of Modern Japan* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1976), 121-122. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Ibid., 122. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. The main culprit of this is the Daewongun (1820-1898), King Gojong’s father, who maintained an iron-fisted control to keep foreign influence out of Korea, causing Korea to become more isolated. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Michael Seth, *A Concise History of Korea From the Neolithic Period Through the Nineteenth Century* (Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.), 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Marius B. Jansen, “Japanese Imperialism: Late Meiji Perspectives” in Raymon H. Myers and Mark R. Peattie, Eds., *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895-1945) Princeton* NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984, 61-79. See also Saya Makito, *The Sino-Japanese War and the Birth of Japanese Nationalism* (Tokyo: International House of Japan, 2011). The Empress was a strong opponent of Japanese expansion into Korean affairs and the Japanese together with a few Korean supporters successfully plotted her assassination in October 1895. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. John Edward Wilz, “Did the United States Betray Korea in 1905?” in *The Pacific Historical Review,* 54.3 (August 1985), 246 (243-270). [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Peter Duus, *The Abacus and the Sword: The Japanese Penetration of Korea, 1895-1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 184. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Duus, *The Rise of Modern Japan, 190-192.* [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. The Hague conventions of 1899 and 1907 attended by many of the “Great Powers” resulted in a series of international treaties and declarations against war. The Hague conventions were among the first formal statements regarding the laws of war and war crimes in the body of secular international law. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Cumings, 145. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. For an excellent synopsis of this conflict, see Duus, *The Rise of Modern Japan,* 126-135. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Russia acquired the entire Maritime Province of East Siberia and the island of Sakhalin from China by the Treaty of Beijing in 1860. Construction of the port city of Vladivostok began soon thereafter. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Frederick Palmer, *With Kuroki in Manchuria* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1904), 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Griffis’ book, *The Mikado’s Empire* (1877) was the first quality book on Japanese history and went through many revisions well into the early 1900s. He is today regarded as the West’s first significant Japanologist. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Quoted in Joseph M. Henning, *Outposts of Civilization: Race, Religion and the Formative Years of Japanese-American Relations* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Thom Burns, “America’s ‘Japan’: 1853-1952” in the *Kyoto Journal* (40) 1999, 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Sidney L. Gulick, *The White Peril in the Far East* (New York, 1905). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Trumbell White and Richard Lithicum, *War between Japan and Russia: The Complete Story of the Desperate Struggle between Two Great Nations with Dominion over the Orient as the Tremendous Prize* (New York, 1904). Reproduced by the Ulan Press, 2012. Page 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Alexis Dudden, Japan’s *Colonization of Korea.* Honolulu: University of Hawai’I Press, 2005, 8-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Dudden, 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Dudden, 9-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Dudden, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Dudden, 11-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Quoted in Dudden, 9-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Letter from Theodore Roosevelt to Charles William Eliot, 4 April 1904, published in Louis Auchincloss, Ed., *Theodore Roosevelt: Letters and Speeches* (New York: The Library of America, 2004), 326-329. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Letter from Theodore Roosevelt to Cecil Spring-Rice, 13 June1904, in Auchincloss, *op. cit.,* 334-335. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Quoted in Dudden, 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Quoted in Dudden, 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Quoted in James Bradley, *The China Mirage: The Hidden History of American Disaster in Asia.* New York: Little Brown and Company, 2015, 76. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. The family name is Kaneko. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. *Yale Daily News, 9 March 1905, 1.* [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Ernest Fenolossa (1853-1908) and William Sturgis Bigelow (1850-1926) were major collectors of Japanese art and Buddhist artifacts—now housed in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Quoted in Matsumura, Masayoshi. *Nichi-Ro senso to Kaneko Kentaro: Koho gaiko no kenkyu*. Shinyudo. Translated by Ian Ruxton as *Baron Kaneko and the Russo-Japanese War: A Study in the Public Diplomacy of Japan* (Morrisville NC: Lulu Press, 2009), 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Peter Duus, *The Abacus and the Sword: The Japanese Penetration of Korea, 1895-1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 188. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. David Brudnoy, “Japan’s Experiment in Korea,” in *Monumenta Nipponica* 25, (1970), 158 (155-95).

    Brudnoy writes: “Japan saw her position as analogous to, but more compelling than, that of the United States in Panama, or as resembling that of Britain in Egypt since I887, ‘to reform a Government rotten with corruption to its very core; and to elevate a people reduced by ages of oppression and spoliation to the lowest abyss of unrelieved misery and hopeless poverty.’ Accordingly, on 18 November I905, Marquis Ito Hirobumi negotiated an agreement with the Korean emperor, establishing a full protectorate. On 20 December, the tokan-fu (Supervisory Office, i.e. Residency-General) was set up. Korea's army was disbanded (leading resentful Koreans to form the ‘Righteous Army’-a rebel force hiding in the hills); overseas envoys were recalled, and Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs was abolished, as Japan assumed responsibility for Korea's diplomatic relations. The agreement gave the Resident-General wide supervisory powers and control of all government functions previously under Japanese ‘advisory’ control. Preservation of Korea's Imperial House was guaranteed, as was again her ‘independence.’ Ito, appointed Resident-General in December, came to Seoul in February and took up his duties. Japan gained control of the organs of state power through agreements signed between I905 and I909, culminating in the I2 July I909 memorandum giving her the administration of justice in Korea.” (159). [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Quoted in Duus, 189. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Letter to Cecil Spring-Rice, 16 June 1905, in Auchincloss, *op.cit,* 391. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Letter to Cecil Spring-Rice, 13 June 1904, in Auchincloss, *op. cit.,* 336. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Roosevelt to Hermann Speck von Sternberg, 8 August 1900. *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt,* E.E. Morison, Ed., II, *The Years of Preparation, 1898-1900* (Cambridge, MA, 1951), 1394. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Bruce Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1997), 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. James Bradley, “Diplomacy that will Live in Infamy,” *New York Times,* 5 December 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Cumings, 142. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Bradley, op. cit. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Bradley, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Bradley, 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Ibid., 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. John Lewis Gaddis, *George F. Kennan: An American Life* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Kennan wrote at least four other books: *Siberia and the Exile System* (1891), *Campaigning in Cuba* (1899), *A Russian Comedy of Errors, with Other Stories and Sketches of Russian Life* (1915), and *E. H. Harriman’s Far Eastern Plans* (1917). [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Taylor Stults, “George Kennan: Russian Specialist of the 1890s” in the *Russian Review,* 29.2 (July 1970), 275-285. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Kennan was the chief wire service correspondent at the White House on the evening that President Garfield was shot in 1881 and twenty years later he was on hand for the McKinley assassination. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Kathy Hunter, “George Kennan: An Investigative reporter who help to Found the National Geographic Society.” 21 September 2012. <http://voices.nationalgeographic.com/2012/09/21/george-kennan-an-investigative-reporter-who-helped-found-the-national-geographic-society/> Accessed 25 January 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Frederick F. Travis, “The Kennan-Russel Anti-Tsarist Propaganda Campaign among Russian Prisoners of War in Japan, 1904-1905” in *The Russian Review,* Vol. 40, No. 3 (July 1981), 263-277. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. John Lewis Gaddis, *George F. Kennan: An American Life* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), 11 [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. *The Outlook* was a weekly magazine published in New York focusing on news and opinion. Together with *The Nation* and *The Independent, i*t ranked among the most widely read and influential American magazines at the time. Its distinguished writers and editors included Theodore Roosevelt and Booker T. Washington. Founded in 1870, it ran until 1935. All of Kennan’s East Asia articles are available on line. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Gaddis, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Quoted in Gaddis, 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. George Kennan, “Korea: A Degenerate State,” in *The Outlook,* 7 October 1905, 307. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Wilz, 256. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Today the port city of Inchon. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Today the North Korean cities of Chinnampo and Pyongyang. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Kennan, “The Land of the Morning Calm,” *The Outlook,* 8 October 1904, 367. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. George Kennan, “The Korean People: The Product of a Decayed Civilization” in *The Outlook,* 21 October 1905, 409-410. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Ibid., 410. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Ibid., 410. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Ibid., 410. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Ibid., 411. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Ibid., 411-412. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Ibid., 413. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Ibid. Cholera is caused by a number of types of *Vibrio cholerae*, with some types producing more severe disease than others. It is spread mostly by water and food that has been contaminated with human feces containing the bacteria. Insufficiently cooked seafood is a common source. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Ibid, 308-310. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. For excellent photographs of Koreans taken by writer Jack London in Korea in 1904, see Jeanne Reesman et al., *Jack London, Photographer* (Athens GA: U Georgia Press, 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Kennan, “Degenerate State,” 311. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Ibid., 318. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. “All public schools outside of the capital—schools for the education of ten to twelve millions of people.” [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Ibid., 314-315. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Kennan, “The Korean People,” 416. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Kennan, “The Korean People, op. cit., 410. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. When Seoul-based missionary professor Homer Hulbert went to Washington in late 1905 as a representative of the Korean Emperor to request American assistance in repelling Japanese encroachments, he found the Roosevelt administration to be in full support of Japanese claims that their enforced modernization of Korea was for the good of its people.

     Professor Hulbert met a very cold reception in Washington at a time that Japanese prestige in the United States was at its highest following its great victory over Russia. This refusal to help came as a shock to Korean leaders who had put their faith in an 1882 treaty of amity between the United States where it was stated that if other powers dealt unjustly or oppressively with Korea, America would exert her good offices to bring about an amicable settlement. But when Hulbert approached several senators for help, they replied, “What do you expect us to do?” and “Do you really believe that America ought to go to war with Japan over Korea?”

     Source: Frederick Arthur McKenzie, *The Tragedy of Korea* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1908), 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Frederick Arthur McKenzie *The Unveiled East* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1907), 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. George Kennan, “The Japanese in Korea” in *The Outlook*, 11 November 1905, 609. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Frederick Arthur McKenzie, *The Unveiled East*, 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Much of the material concerning Palmer’s early career is derived from Nathan A. Haverstock, *Fifty Years at the Front: The Life of War Correspondent Frederick Palmer* (Washington and London: Brassey’s, 1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Ibid, xiv. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Haverstock, 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Quoted in Haverstock, 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Palmer is referring to the Franco-Prussian War when the newly formed German armies overwhelmed an over-confident France. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Quoted in Haverstock, 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Frederick Palmer, *With Kuroki,* 15-16 [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Richard Harding Davis et al., *The Russo-Japanese War: A Photographic and Descriptive Review of the Great Conflict in the Far East (*New York: Collier’s, 1905). [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Ibid., 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Frederick Palmer “All Ready for Action in Northern Korea” in *Collier’s,* 30 April 1904, 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Frederick Palmer, “All Ready for Acton in Northern Korea” in *Collier’s,* 30 April 1904. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. *With Kuroki,* 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. *With Kuroki*, 34-35. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Frederick Palmer, “The Occupation of Chenampo by the Japanese” in *Collier’s,* 4 June 1904, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Ibid., 7 [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. *With Kuroki,* 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. *With Kuroki,* 88-89*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. *With Kuroki,* 35-36. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. With Kuroki, 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Frederick Palmer, “All Ready for Action in Northern Korea” in *Collier’s,* 30 April 1904, 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Palmer, “Occupation of Chenampo.” [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Haverstock, 132 [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Ibid. It is important to note that at the behest of the Japanese, Roosevelt later proposed a peace conference which later led to the Portsmouth Peace Treaty. The President’s work won him the Nobel Peace Prize and made the United States an important power broker in Asia. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Quoted in Richard Harding Davis et al., *A Photographic and Descriptive Review of the Great Conflict in the Far East* (New York: P F Collier & Son, 1905), 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. These stories are: “Sakaicho, Hona Asi and Hakadaki,” “O Haru” and “A Night’s Swim in Yedo Bay.” All of these stories are available on line. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. Quoted in Labor, 189. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. The other correspondents were Frederick McKenzie and Richard Dunn. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Manyoungi stayed with Jack London after he returned to the United States and for several years thereafter. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. See: Hodson, Sara S. and Jeanne Campbell Reesman, *Jack London: Photographer.* Athens GA and London: Georgia University Press, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. See William F. Wu, *The Yellow Peril: Chinese-Americans in American Fiction, 1850-1940* (Hamden CT: Archon Books, 1982). [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. John R. Eperjesi, *The Imperialist Imaginary: Visions of Asia and the Pacific in American Culture* (Hanover: Dartmouth University Press, 2005, 108). [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. Richard O’Connor, *Jack London: A Biography* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1964), 214. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. Jonah Raskin, *The Radical Jack London: Writing on War and Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. See Jack London’s essay, “The Yellow Peril” in Metraux, *The Asian Writings of Jack London: Essays, Letters, Newspaper Dispatches and Short Fiction by Jack London* (Lewiston NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), 294-305. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. John R. Eperjesi, *The Imperialist Imaginary*, 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. Jack London, “The Unparalleled Invasion” in Dale L Walker, Ed., *Curious Fragments* (Port Jefferson NY: Kenkat Press, 1976), 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. “The menace to the Western world lies not in the little brown man, but in the four hundred millions of yellow men should the little brown man undertake their management.” *Jack London Reports*, 346 [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. See [Tsuneishi Keiichi](http://japanfocus.org-tsuneishi-keiichi/2194), “Unit 731 and the Japanese Imperial Army’s Biological Warfare Program. See also Stephen Endicott, *The United States and Biological Warfare: Secrets from the Early Cold War and Korea*.  Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998.  Critics have strongly challenged Endicott’s key points concerning the alleged use of germ warfare in the Korean War. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. Jeanne Campbell Reesman, *Jack London: A Study of the Short Fiction* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1999), 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. See Metraux, 310-315. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. *Sunset Magazine,* December 1909. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. Earl Labor, *Jack London: An American Life* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2013), 188. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. For detailed comments on London’s convoluted travel to Korea and his time there, see Daniel Metraux, *The Asian Writings of Jack London* (Lewiston NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. Quoted in Métraux, 289. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. Jack London, *People of the Abyss* (New York: Lawrence Hill Books, 1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. For the full text of London’s Russo-Japanese War, see Daniel A. Metraux, Ed., *The Asian Writings of Jack London: Essays, Letters, Newspaper Dispatches and Short Fiction* (Lewiston NY: Edward Mellen Press, 2009), 153-294. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. Micaela di Leonardo, Foreword to *People of the Abyss* (New York: Lawrence Hill Books, 1995), ix. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. London, *Abyss,* 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. Ibid., 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. Ibid., 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. Young-Hee Chang “Korean Sources and References in Jack London’s *Star Rover”* in *The Call: The Magazine of the Jack London Society,* 21.2 (2010), 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. Quoted in Métraux, 297, 199. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. Ibid., 294-95. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. Quoted in Métraux, 248-251. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. Ibid., 248-249. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. Quoted in Métraux, 248-251. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. Reesman and Hodson, *op. cit.* [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. Jeanne Campbell Reesman and Sara S. Hodson, *Jack London: Photographer* (Athens GA and London: The U of Georgia Press, 2010), 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. One issue greatly aggravating Japanese-South Korean relations today is Japan’s continual refusal to apologize for such matters as the Comfort Women episode. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. Frederick Arthur McKenzie was a newspaper correspondent who wrote a number of books and articles on geopolitical developments in East Asia during the early decades of the twentieth century. He was born in Quebec in 1869 and often described himself as a Scots-Canadian. Despite his Canadian heritage, McKenzie worked as a British journalist employed by British publications. He worked briefly for the *Pall Mall Gazette* and later as a roving East Asian correspondent for the *Daily Mail.*  His many books on conflicts in East Asia from *Tokyo to Tiflis: Uncensored Letters from the War* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1905); The *Unveiled East* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1907); *The Tragedy of Korea*  (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1908); and Korea’s *Fight for Freedom* (London: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1920). McKenzie had already made his way to Korea before Jack London’s arrival and the two of them traveled with one or more other reporters with the Japanese army as it marched north to Manchuria. He died in 1931. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. McKenzie, T*he Unveiled East,* 19*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. Ibid., 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. Hilary Conroy, *The Japanese Seizure of Korea: A Study of Realism and Idealism in International Relations* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960), 345. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. Ibid., 62-65. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. *Tragedy of Korea,* 150-151. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. McKenzie, *Korea’s Fight for Freedom,* 78-79*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. Ibid., 84-85. [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. Frederick Arthur McKenzie, *The Tragedy of Korea* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1908), 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. McKenzie, *Unveiled East,* 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. Quoted in McKenzie, *Korea’s Fight for Freedom,* 142-143. [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
190. Ibid., 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. Ibid. 146. [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. Ibid., 162-164. [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. Quoted in Dudden, 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. Hilary Conroy, *The Japanese Seizure of Korea: 1868-1910.* Philadelphia: U Penn Press, 1974, 347. [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. He ran for President in 1896 and 1900 against McKinley and in 1908 against Taft. [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. William Jennings Bryan, *The Old World and Its Ways* (St. Louis: The Thompson Publishing Company, 1907). [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. These articles by Bryan appeared on the cover page of *The Commoner* in February and March 1906: “Japanese Customs and Hospitality” (2 February); “Japan—Her History and Progress” (9 February); “Japan: Her Industries, Arts and Commerce” (16 February); “Japan: Her Educational System and Her Religions” (23 February); “Japan—Her Government, Politics and Problems” (2 March); “Korea—The Hermit Nation” (9 March). [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. It is clear that he had read widely on both countries and that he was most familiar with the work of Lafcadio Hearn who had died a year before Bryan’s visit to Japan. [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. Bryan, *The Old World,* 25. Since all of the articles in *The Commoner* were later published as is in his book, *The Old World,* all references hereafter for Bryan are from this 1907 book. [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. Michael Kazan, *A Godly Hero: The Life of William Jennings Bryan* (New York: Anchor, 2007), 127-128. [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. Kazan, 128-129. [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. Bryan, 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. Bryan, 86. Bryan adds:” With a broader educational foundation Japan will find it necessary to extend the suffrage. At present the right to vote is determined by a strict property qualification, but there is already an urgent demand for the reduction of the tax qualification, and it will not be long before a large addition will be made to the voting population (88).” [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. Bryan, 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
205. Bryan, 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
206. Bryan, 96. [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
207. Bryan, 96-97. [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
208. Bryan, 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
209. Bryan, 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
210. Here Bryan is referring to the Satsuma Rebellion of 1877. [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
211. Bryan, 88-89. [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
212. Bryan, 99-100. [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
213. Edward R. Beauchamp, *An American Teacher in Early Meiji Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1976). [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
214. William E. Griffis, *Korea: The Hermit Nation* (New York: Scribner’s, 1882 and 1888). [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
215. William Elliot Griffis, “Kim the Korean” in *The Outlook*, 5 March 1904, 543-549. [↑](#footnote-ref-215)
216. William Elliot Griffis, *Corea: The Hermit Nation* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1889) quoted in Bruce Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 130. [↑](#footnote-ref-216)
217. Griffis, Kim, 454. [↑](#footnote-ref-217)
218. Ibid. 543-544. [↑](#footnote-ref-218)
219. Ibid., 543-544. [↑](#footnote-ref-219)
220. Ibid., 544. [↑](#footnote-ref-220)
221. Today known as Jeju Island. [↑](#footnote-ref-221)
222. Griffis, Kim, 545. [↑](#footnote-ref-222)
223. Ibid., 547. [↑](#footnote-ref-223)
224. Fukuzawa wrote: “There are no innate status distinctions between the noble and the base, the rich and the poor. It is only the person who has studied diligently, so that he has a mastery over things and events who becomes noble and rich, while his opposite becomes base and poor.” Quoted in Kenneth Herschel, *A History of Japan: From Stone Age to Super Power* (New York: Palgrave, 2012), 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-224)
225. Griffis, Kim, 548. [↑](#footnote-ref-225)
226. Quoted in Thom Burns, “America’s ‘Japan:’ 1853-1952” in *Kyoto Journal* (40) 1999, 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-226)
227. Thomas Franklin Millard, *The New Far East: An Examination into the New Position of Japan and Her Influence upon the Solution of the Far East Question (*New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1907). [↑](#footnote-ref-227)
228. Millard, 15-16. [↑](#footnote-ref-228)
229. Millard, 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-229)
230. Millard, 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-230)
231. Millard, 110. Koreans have long memories. Much of their fear and hatred of Japan stemmed from the Japanese invasions of the 1590s which brought so much carnage and destruction to Korea. Those anti-Japanese feelings persist to the present. Over the past few years my college has had an exchange relationship with a Seoul-based women’s college which has brought us over fifty Korean female students. When I interviewed them about their feelings about Japan, the almost unanimous response was while they liked and got on well with young Japanese females as individuals, they harbored very negative feelings about Japan the country and the Japanese government. [↑](#footnote-ref-231)
232. Ibid., 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-232)
233. Ibid., 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-233)
234. Ibid., 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-234)
235. Millard, 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-235)