

BOOK REVIEWS

In the Service of His Korean Majesty: William Nelson Lovatt, the Pusan Customs, and Sino-Korean Relations, 1876–1888. By Wayne Patterson. Berkeley: Center for Korean Studies, 2012. 193 pp. (ISBN: 978-1-55729-100-4)

A great regret of mine is having only recently found the time to read this wonderful book. Wayne Patterson's study of William Nelson Lovatt (1838–1904), first Commissioner of Customs at Pusan (1883–1886), tells a good, gripping story and complements a few other, similar works we have. It is a well-wrought biography of an insider to the Korean Customs Service. Patterson's background and knowledge are exactly what are needed to bring us the full significance of the tale. Patterson had one of those rare moments, envied by all historians, when someone he happened to meet asked him if he would be interested in a cache of personal letters and documents by "a man who had worked in East Asia in the late nineteenth century." The resultant book is history at its most authentic, and I can report that the book is refreshingly devoid of mindless distractions about whatever fashionable theory currently clamours for attention.

Lovatt served the Korean throne at a critical juncture when Chinese policy was moving away from the benevolence of the *sadae* arrangement and towards outright intervention, even reaching towards annexation. First in the employ of the Chinese Imperial Maritime Customs Service and then the first Commissioner of Customs at Pusan, Lovatt was often separated from his wife and family. He wrote copiously to his loved ones about his professional career in the service of the Korean king and about his personal life. Close to my own interests, Lovatt's letters offer an excellent view from the ground and from outside Seoul of how the Customs Service operated in the febrile atmosphere created by Li Hung-chang, Sir Robert Hart, Paul Georg von Möllendorff, and Henry F. Merrill. But, there is much more to be enjoyed in the extensive texture of life Patterson weaves for us as Lovatt and his family lived as the first western family in the predominately

Japanese city of 1880's Pusan. One can hear the sea in the distance and smell the salt air. The book is divided into four parts that provide background on the establishment of the Customs Service, on Lovatt's time in Pusan, and on the denouement following his retirement to Minnesota and later return to the Chinese Customs Service.

Lovatt was an Englishman who had served in India just after the Sepoy Mutiny, had seen action in the Second Opium War, had marched on Peking in 1860, and had even served with Colonel Charles "Chinese" Gordon in the defence of Shanghai against the Taipings. By the mid-1860s he was in the employ of Robert Hart's Chinese Customs Service and rose to the rank of tidesurveyor, a middle-management post between the Commissioners and the actual inspectors who boarded ships to assess customs on cargoes and ferret out contraband. At age thirty, in 1868, he married a "mail-order bride" from Minnesota. That is, he discovered her picture in an American missionary's high-school annual and struck up a correspondence that led to matrimony with Jennie Shaw. He tried his hand at farming in Minnesota but was back in China by 1870 and becoming friends with Paul Georg von Möllendorff. Lovatt was a close confidant to Möllendorff in professional and personal matters, even to the point of witnessing Möllendorff's undiplomatic nature (what is our current phrase, "he has issues with authority"?) and becoming involved with his less than gallant dealings with women. Möllendorff had an acrimonious departure from the German diplomatic corps and took up service with Li Hung-chang. In 1878, the Korean government reproduced the structure of the Chinese Customs Service and established customs houses in Pusan, Inch'ön (Chemulp'o), and Wönsan. By 1882, Li Hung-chang had recommended Möllendorff to Kojong to create a Korean Customs Service and to serve as foreign advisor. Möllendorff turned to his friend, Lovatt, and hired him to be Commissioner of Customs in Pusan. Lovatt rightly worried about his career prospects: should he resign from the Chinese Service and take up a "hardship post, characterized by poverty, isolation, poor hygienic conditions, poor communication and transportation, little prospect for trade, a weak and faction-riven government, and an official bias against foreigners and Christianity" (30)? He took the five-year contract, with a higher salary, and invited his wife to join him, arriving in Seoul in September 1883. By early October, he was in Pusan, and by early November, he formally opened the Customs House. Jennie left three children in Minnesota and arrived in Pusan in late 1883 with their youngest daughter Mabel. Together, they became the first Western family to reside in Pusan.

Patterson well describes Pusan in the early 1880s (although a map would have helped), and we are given extensive information on what life was like for the Lovatts. They lived in a Japanese house on the beach and close to the Customs

House, ate beef from Nagasaki, game from Lovatt's hunting trips, and fresh fish from Korean fishermen. Pusan was generally free of cholera and other diseases during their stay and otherwise pleasant, except for the "boredom, monotony, isolation, and loneliness" (56). Reading, sewing, and teaching English to Japanese helped Jennie cope. The *lingua franca* was Japanese, and the five-year old Mabel acquired a good fluency through her Japanese playmates, as well as some use of Chinese and Korean through the Lovatt's servants. Lovatt was fluent in Chinese and had studied French and Greek and even attempted to learn a bit of Korean. They hiked and picnicked and Lovatt hunted on Chölyöng-do, but mostly they awaited the occasional steamer from Inch'ön, Wönsan, Nagasaki, Vladivostok, or Shanghai bearing mail and Western sea captains, various European and American diplomats, businessmen, missionaries, and the occasional Western woman. Their social world was largely Japanese, with "very tricky" (72) businessmen, "nearly naked" wrestlers (72) at celebrations, *sashimi* and other dishes that Jennie found difficult to eat, and dinners "as obligations to be endured rather than parties to be enjoyed" (74). Although Lovatt had little contact with Koreans, he was suspicious of Korean officialdom as corrupt, and because of the extreme "squeeze" they put on the populace, ordinary Koreans had no incentive for hard work and were "a very lazy lot of people" (81). The result was that poverty was common, and poverty, combined with the insecurities presented by the Sino-French War (1884–1885) and the Kapsin Coup (December 1884) meant that there was not much trade. Lovatt often feared for his job.

Although general peace returned by the spring of 1885, the low levels of trade were chronic and Lovatt found himself with high payroll costs and little income. He balanced his books and Pusan was relatively prosperous, but the Inch'ön operation was not as prosperous and apparently mismanaged. To make matters worse, Möllendorff was embroiling himself in politics with the Russians. His "prickly personality" (91) did not help, and he began to pressure Lovatt to transfer to Inch'ön. Jennie became pregnant and left Pusan in September 1885, taking Mabel with her and leaving Lovatt to his own devices. As Möllendorff revealed himself to be a "complete fraud" (100) and the Japanese maids and the Chinese houseboy became uncontrollable, Lovatt found himself isolated and lonely.

Möllendorff's intrigues with the Russians became public knowledge and Li Hung-chang pressured the Korean government to relieve Möllendorff of his duties as foreign advisor in the summer of 1885 and finally as head of the Customs Service in October 1885. Li dispatched Henry Merrill to take over the Customs, Owen Denny to serve as foreign advisor, and Yüan Shih-k'ai to become the Chinese "Resident." Their arrival marked the beginning of the "Chinese

decade” (115) and the high-tide mark of the new Chinese imperialism. Robert Hart and Li Hung-chang agreed on a more interventionist Chinese policy, and Hart even wanted to absorb the Korean Customs into the Chinese Customs. To make this work, Merrill, as his agent in Seoul, set about replacing the staff hired by Möllendorff and eventually came to Lovatt. By that time, though, Lovatt had learned that Hart and Li were interested in something of a Chinese takeover, and he effectively employed “blackmail” (131) against Hart to extract a generous severance package. The problem for Hart and Li was that, if it became known that Merrill was firing people on Hart’s command, then the Chinese influence would become too public, and that would result in Western diplomatic protestations to the Korean Foreign Office, which would, in turn, inflame the domestic anti-Chinese faction and set back Li and Hart’s plans considerably. Lovatt finally obtained an acceptable severance package and departed Pusan in early June 1886, after the arrival of his replacement, A. Theophile Piry, a French national. Arriving in Minnesota in July 1886, Lovatt again discovered that he had no interest in farming and cared little for the climate. Because of deteriorating finances, he swallowed his pride, asked Hart for a job in China, and found himself back in the employ of the Chinese Service from July 1888, but now he was demoted and drew a salary of only one-third his previous salary as Commissioner in Pusan and only one-half his previous salary when he worked for the Chinese Service years earlier. Although demoted, he had blackmailed his former employer to obtain a handsome severance package, and it is surprising that Hart took him back. He was eventually promoted back to his previous rank of tidesurveyor by the summer of 1890.

Something strange seemed to happen to the Chinese appointees to Korea—they apparently went native. Möllendorff betrayed Li in courting the Russians, and O.N. Denny betrayed Li in openly criticising Yüan. Merrill began standing up to Yüan as well, and his improved management of the service led him to conclude that the Korean Customs need not be taken over by the Chinese Customs to operate effectively. But Li and Hart were not vindictive. Hart gave Lovatt a job and eventually employed Möllendorff after he had been taken back by Li as a secretary. Möllendorff died in 1901 as Commissioner of Customs in Ningpo, and Lovatt also died in China at Hankow in 1904, age sixty-six, and still only a tidesurveyor. Jennie had joined him in China and remained after his death until 1908, returning to St. Paul, where she died in 1911.

Lovatt’s tenure in Pusan overlapped with the most critical years of Chinese influence, and the vicissitudes of the Korean Customs Service mirrored the larger political drama. Despite the efforts by Hart to annex the Korea Service, the Chinese Service never drained money from the Korean Service and actually

subsidised it by paying some of the salaries of the foreign officials. The Chinese were apparently of two minds as to what to do with Korea: exercise direct control (Yüan, Hart, and the Ch'ingliutang) versus indirect control (Li) through advisors. Patterson's story reveals a great deal of the actual state of affairs in the world of the expats in East Asia, and we are given an insider's view of the machinations of the great and the good. My only real quibble is that I would have liked to have read something about the views of the Korean officials in Tongnae regarding the changes in Pusan. In fact, we were hardly introduced to any Korean officials with whom Lovatt must have had contact. Is this another story or was Lovatt simply left alone?

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Intimate Empire: Collaboration and Colonial Modernity in Korea and Japan. By Nayoung Aimee Kwon. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015, 296 pages. (ISBN 978-0-8223-5925-8)

Nayoung Aimee Kwon's *Intimate Empire: Collaboration and Colonial Modernity in Korea and Japan* is a welcome addition to the thriving scholarship on Japanese colonialism in the English-speaking world. It sheds light on the late colonial writers and their works that have been labelled as "*ch'inil*" [intimate with Japan] in South Korea since the liberation. The term "*ch'inil*" has long been associated with these writers' "treasonous" activity—that is, writing in the language of the colonizer—in the nationalistic discourse of colonial literature in South Korea. The term comes under close scrutiny by Kwon, who calls for reframing the term away from "the imperial and nationalist binary rhetoric" (p. 8) so prevalent in the post-colonial writings about colonial writers as a way to interpret the intricacy of modernity that the writers experienced. Kwon's use of the phrase "conundrum of representation" thus is emblematic of this intricacy; it highlights the ambivalent representations of the colony and the empire embedded in cultural productions in the late colonial era. Kwon "translates" the conundrum of representation by investigating the complex dimension of the collaborations between the colonizers and the colonized whose imperial encounters of modernity are embodied in the selected materials. By reading archives written mainly in the Japanese language fastidiously and with admirable dexterity, Kwon illuminates throughout the book "the shared but disavowed" (p. 9) modernity that the colonial writers experienced.

Chapter 1, “Colonial Modernity and the Conundrum of Representation,” serves as an introduction to the book. It problematizes “the ambivalent and unstable play of recognition and denial” (p. 6) of colonial modernity represented in the Japanese-language literature penned by colonized writers. Kwon describes this as the “conundrum of representation,” a key concept upon which she analyzes selected texts, notably literature, theatre, debates, epistolary exchanges, and round-table discussions.

Chapter 2, “Translating Korean Literature,” outlines “linguistic, spatial, and political barriers” (p. 19) that have delayed the study of the Japanese-language literature authored by colonized writers in Korea, followed by a description of a renewed interest in the scholarship since the late 1990s. It highlights the new scholarship that challenged the binary reading of the Japanese-language literature of the past by using “more nuanced and open dialogue,” interrupting the “messy scholarly and political terrains” of colonial history (p. 21). The rest of the chapter is devoted to an examination of the debates over Korean literature that reveals the “urgency, complexity, and contradictions of defining and constructing a timeless tradition of Korean literature in the colony” in the late colonial era (p. 37).

Chapter 3, “A Minor Writer,” examines the convergence of Korean and Japanese literature by focusing on Kim Saryang, who negotiated the coercive demands of the Japanese empire’s assimilation from the colonized. As Kwon describes, Kim’s case illustrates “a painful conundrum” (p. 46) felt by a minor writer who failed to represent the truth or authenticity of the culture of the colonized in the way that was desired by the colonizers. Kwon probes into the conflicting demands through examining Japanese literary critics’ commentaries on Kim’s work, “Into the Light,” which was nominated for one of the most prestigious literary awards in Japan, the Akutagawa Prize.

Chapter 4, “Into the Light,” is a close reading of Kim Saryang’s “Into the Light,” which embodies Kim’s “deep anxieties about the colonial encounter” (p. 59). Kwon argues that the text “goes against the conventions of the ‘I-novel’” (p. 61); instead she reads the narrating subjectivity as multiple and schizoid. She demonstrates how the narrating I’s subjectivity splits/breaks down multiple times at the impasse the colonized subject was put under, and yet, in this most vulnerable position, the I does recognize others whose selves are also fragmented and abjected.

Chapter 5, “Colonial Abject,” further interrogates the abject position of Kim Saryang, who faced contradictory demands to be different and exotic from the literary fields in the metropole. Kwon shows how Kim’s “double-directed and double-voiced nature” inherent in his story “Pegasus” “performs a multilayered metadiscourse on the challenges of bilingual colonial writers and their texts” (p.

98) through crossing multiple boundaries imposed on him. The “self-reflexive parody,” (p. 89), “Pegasus,” delineates Kim’s conflicted position, and at the same time it shows his continuing exploration of the self and Other.

Chapter 6, “Performing Colonial Kitsch,” examines another bilingual writer, Chang Hyökchu—who is categorically seen as a collaborator in postcolonial Korea—and his involvement in the theatre production of *Ch’unbyangjön* (*The Tale of Ch’unbyang*) in the metropole. The popularity of the play, Kwon observes, was thanks to its spectacle: it staged the “timeless art” of colonial Korea. Kwon views the commodification of the Korean folk tale in the metropole as “colonial kitsch” that embodies the colonizers’ nostalgic gaze on the culture of the colonized, which manifests in the mass consumption of the exotic and timeless culture of the colonized. Kwon compares the reception of the play in the metropole and Korean critics’ review of the play in which the “conflicting nostalgic desires came to a head within the uneven context of empire” (p. 130).

Chapter 7, “Overhearing Transcolonial Roundtables,” discusses the failure to enhance harmonious collaboration between the colonized and the colonizer by examining a roundtable that was published in two different venues, more specifically, *Keijō nippō*, the Japanese-language newspaper in colonial Korea, and *Bungakukai*, one of the most influential literary magazines in Japan. By comparing the two versions of the roundtable, Kwon identifies the “impossibility of communication” (p. 152) between the colonized and the colonizer, revealing the breakdown of the imperial propaganda of transcolonial collaboration.

Chapter 8, “Turning Local,” revisits the Korea Boom by examining the promotion and consumption of literature written by the colonized writers in the metropole. Kwon rightly argues that the Japanese media presented Korean literature as a site of “a united and harmonious community throughout the empire” (p. 171): a violent act of appropriation of Korean literature that erased the very violence of the imperial agenda of assimilation.

Chapter 9, “Forgetting Manchurian Memories,” examines the complex ethnic geography of Manchuria by focusing on Kang Kyöngae’s works. The complexity of the “Manchurian experience” embedded in Kang’s works, Kwon argues, must be approached away from a nation-centered reading of Kang’s works in the postcolonial era. Chapter 10, “Paradox of Postcoloniality,” positions Kwon’s own book in relation to prior postcolonial discourses of colonial culture, which she problematizes for their Eurocentric knowledge production.

Intimate Empire is a major contribution to the study of colonial Korea. It examines key bilingual writers in the late colonial era whose works, despite their historical and aesthetic significance, have been relegated to the margin of the history of Korean literature. It contextualizes the ways in which the postcolonial

binary was imposed on these works and delves into a meticulous reading of archives as a way to decode the “conundrum of representation.” I especially appreciate her close reading of texts such as Kim Saryang’s “Into the Light,” the theater version of *Cb’unbyangjŏn*, and Kang Kyŏngae’s works, all of which successfully support Kwon’s succinct argument about the failure of the imperial ideology of harmonious existence between the colonized and the colonizer. Besides many compelling analyses and arguments made in *Intimate Empire*, plentiful visual materials provide us a fascinating glimpse into the cultural fields in the empire. Last, but not least, the comparison between two different versions of a roundtable is ingenuous for its articulation of the ambivalent notion of “Koreanness” in the empire.

While most chapters are organized solidly, some parts in *Intimate Empire* could be strengthened in terms of its comparative perspective. Kwon rightly argues why a writer such as Chang was marginalized in the literary fields in Japan after the liberation despite the fact that he remained in Japan and continued to produce works. But an additional discussion of Chang’s literary works would have allowed her readers to see how his “collaborative” attitude can be contrasted with other bilingual writers such as Kim Saryang, who is given much attention in the book. In Chapter 5, Kwon mentions that Tanaka Hidemitsu rewrote “Pegasus,” originally penned by Kim Saryang. This section might have been developed further than simply stating that it was written “from the perspective of the Japanese writer” (94). These points are minor concerns that do not decrease the value of *Intimate Empire*: it is a great contribution to the scholarship on colonial culture and imperialism for its exemplary handling of archives and its succinct arguments made based on comparative readings of texts. It is an essential text for researchers of colonial literature, transcultural colonial exchange, cultural fields in wartime Japan, and translation.

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