

A Historical Overview of Korean Perception of the United States: Five Major Stereotypes

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Abstract

This article examines five major stereotypes concerning America held by Koreans from the earliest contacts about 150 years ago until the present day. The first stereotype held during the late Joseon period was a result of the prevailing Sinocentric worldview in the region. According to this view, Americans were uncultured barbarians. As knowledge of the West increased among Joseon intellectuals, however, a second stereotype arose; namely, that America was the wealthiest nation in the world with vast territory and no territorial ambitions. This view was given impetus by Huang Zunxian's *Zhaoxian celyue* (Korean Stratagem), which recommended that Joseon make an alliance with America. With the emergence of the United States as a major regional power in the wake of the Spanish-American War (1898), a third stereotype of America as an imperialist aggressor emerged. This view was particularly strong among Korean communists during the Japanese colonial period and became more firmly entrenched after 1945. A fourth stereotype also emerged during Japanese rule, which viewed America as a white nation pitted against the yellow nations of East Asia. This racist view is particularly apparent in the writings of Yun Chi-ho and arose from his experience of racial discrimination in America as well as from the influence of Japanese propaganda. A fifth stereotype has emerged in recent times and views America as a nation in terminal decline. This view has its origins in the work of Oswald Spengler and the School of Decline. In his conclusion, the author argues that despite the existence of negative stereotypes, the positive stereotype of America as a benevolent nation has prevailed in the Republic of Korea. In conclusion, the author argues that Korean-American relations must be based not on stereotypes but on mutual understanding based on rational and objective research.

Keywords: Joseon-American relations, Korean-American relations, the Enlightenment Party, Yun Chi-ho, Huang Zunxian, Korean communism, anti-Americanism, Donghak, Western Learning, Japanese colonialism, School of Decline

Introduction:

The United States of America is undoubtedly the most important foreign power among all the nations with which Korea has concluded diplomatic relations. The history of the relationship between the Korean and American people stretches back to the 1850s. Nevertheless, it is only since the end of World War II in 1945 that America has emerged as a nation of such importance to Korea. Today the United States is exerting just as immense an influence on Korean politics, economy, military affairs, and culture as Imperial China once did on the politico-cultural development of the Korean people in the past. It is likely that this trend will continue to increase in the future.

Korea—or more precisely the Republic of Korea—has had close ties with the United States for more than half a century, yet the views and feelings held by Koreans toward that country are far from being straightforward and, in fact, may be described as an ambivalent mixture of love and hate.¹ On the one hand, Koreans look upon the United States as the leading superpower in the world, with which Korea has forged a serious alliance in blood, but on the other hand, they are wary of it, regarding it as an imperialistic, hegemonic state that has hindered the independent historical development of the Korean people.² Although after Liberation (1945)—and especially after the Korean War (1950–1953)—an extremely friendly perception of America became universal in South Korea, a critical attitude toward American culture began to emerge after the student uprising of April 19 (1960). It eventually reached such an extent that violent anti-American protests broke out among student, worker, and farmer organizations after the Gwangju Democratization Movement in 1980.³

The contradictory love-hate perception that Koreans have toward the United States today makes an interesting historical contrast with the perception and attitude of the Korean people toward their two traditional neighboring states—namely, China and Japan. That is to say, Koreans' attitude toward China under the rule of the Han Chinese was a respectful one, as expressed by the phrases “revering China” (*mohwa*) or “serving the

¹ The following research works on the history of Koreans' perception of the United States are of interest: Kim Yong-deok (1972, 19–30); Kim Hyung-chan (1972, 12–19); Hahm (1983, 27–68; 1984, pp. 23–52); Park Kwon-sang (1983, 133–154).

² See for example the results of a questionnaire given to twenty-nine Korean intellectuals in 1978 under the title, “The United States and its People through the Eyes of Koreans” in *Ppuri gipeun namu*. Hahm (1978, 72–81).

³ For the influence of the April 19 student uprising on perceptions of the United States, see Ko Yeong-bok's statement in Seoul Shinmun (1971, 47). Concerning the sudden spread of anti-Americanism among Koreans after 1980, see Kim Jinwung (1992, 57, 65–66, 102–103, 242–243). Macdonald (1992, 224–225). See also the most recent works on the anti-American movement in Korea, Kim Jinwung (1989) and Clark (1991).

great” (*sadae*), while their attitude toward Japan, which was regarded as a “nation of island barbarians” (*doiguk*), was one of contempt.⁴ Whereas Koreans developed a distinctive attitude of respect for China and scorn for Japan, the formation of their perception of the United States has been fluid and unclear. What is the reason for this? Koreans’ perception of America has remained in an indefinite state largely due to the fact that American history is extremely short. Furthermore, during America’s existence it has been repeatedly transforming itself, so that it has not been easy to grasp the totality of its particular characteristics. At the same time the international position of Korea has recently been changing rapidly and, as a consequence, its own situation and point of view in relation to America is also in a state of flux. An additional reason is that because the history of contact and exchanges between Koreans and Americans has been so brief, almost no systematic study on the United States has been made, further contributing to Koreans’ unclear perception of that country.

The fact that Koreans’ perceptions of America are in flux, however, does not mean that Koreans were without any views or feelings toward America during the Joseon era (1392–1910). From a historical point of view, it appears that for the last one hundred and forty years from the mid-nineteenth century, Koreans have been influenced by the dominant worldviews and prevalent ideologies of each period and have formed their own perception of the United States within those contexts. For example, during the late Joseon period Koreans viewed and understood America through the prism of the dominant East Asian worldview, which divided the world into two distinct parts—namely, China and “barbarian” states. In the latter part of the nineteenth century Koreans’ assessment of the United States came to conform to the worldview associated with the prevalent theory of Social Darwinism. After the 1920s, with the spread of Marxist-Leninism among Korean intellectuals, there was a steady increase in the number of people whose perception of America conformed to a worldview based on historical materialism. From the 1930s onward, some Koreans under the influence of racialist propaganda put out by the Japanese Empire, which was at war with the Anglo-Saxon nations around that time, acquired a view of a white America in contrast with the yellow race. Another group of Koreans under the influence of the so-called School of Decline, which viewed Western civilization as being in a state of decay, also criticized American civilization. When we closely examine the development and formation of Koreans’ perceptions of the United States, we can conclude that they conform to a series of stereotypes associated with particular worldviews. From this point, therefore, we will now examine the way in which Koreans have formed their perceptions of the United States through history and by this means ascertain when and

⁴ See Ko Byeong-ik (1970, 231–249).

how the five stereotypes mentioned above were introduced and spread inside Korea.

America as a Country of Uncultured Savages and Robbers

The first stereotype formed by Koreans concerning the United States was based on traditional East Asian worldviews which divided “all under heaven” (*cheonha*) into the two spheres of China and surrounding non-Chinese “barbarian territories,” based on the “theory that heaven is circular and the earth is square” (*cheonwon jibangseol*). According to these views, because America was located outside the Chinese cultural sphere, it was perceived as a nation of beasts, savages, or barbarians. Influenced by the views contained in ancient Chinese texts such as *Shanhaijing* (The Mountain and River Classic), Zou Yanshi’s *Tianxiatu* (Map of the World), and so on—namely, the view which saw China as the only civilized zone in the world and all nations beyond its borders as barbarians—Koreans also came to accept this Sinocentric view. Even though Koreans themselves belonged racially to the Eastern Barbarians (*Dongi*), culturally they considered themselves to be a “small China” (*so junghwa*) on the basis of the fact that they had once been referred to by the Chinese as the “courteous nation of the East” (*dongfang liyizhi guo*). Koreans consequently developed a racially and culturally scornful attitude toward other peoples who existed outside the Sinic zone, namely, outside the realm of those nations which paid tribute to China.⁵ The first world map to be produced in Korea, the *Honil gangni yeokdae gukdo jido* (Map of Integrated Lands and Regions of Historical Countries and Capitals), and various versions of the Sinocentric world maps (*cheonhado*), which were circulated from early Joseon times, symbolically demonstrated this worldview that divided the world into China and barbarian territories.⁶

The first time that Koreans heard about the geographical existence of the West was early in 1521. Then in 1582, a man referred to as Mari-i, of unknown nationality, became the first Westerner to set foot on Korean soil.⁷ Koreans obtained systematic knowledge about the West from around 1600, when various Koreans gained access to books on world geography and terrestrial globes made by Jesuit Catholic missionaries in China in the seventeenth century, which were first brought back to Korea by its tribute envoys to Beijing. Koreans’ direct contact with the shipwrecked Dutchmen Jan J.

⁵ See Jeon Hae-jong (1979, 41–42); Yu Geun-ho (1977, 87–90).

⁶ Concerning “Chinese-style world maps” from among Korea’s old world maps, see Kim Yang-seon (1972b, 215–226); Jeon Sang-un (1983b, 306–311); Yi Chan (1976, 47–66; 1991, 11–44, 320–324); No Jeong-sik (1971, 204–209); McCune (1977, 1–8). Concerning the history of the development of world maps (*cheonhado*) in Korea, see Mok Yeong-man (1965, 126, 221).

⁷ Yi Neung-hwa (1928, 12); Yi Won-sun (1986, 467); Ledyard (1973, 16); Kim Yeong-ho (1968, 300).

Weltevrée and two others in 1626, followed by Hendrik Hamel (1630–1692) and thirty-five others in 1653, as well as with fifteen French Roman Catholic missionaries who entered the country secretly from 1836 onwards to carry out missionary work, must have made a definite contribution to changing their worldview. Nevertheless, such tendencies among late Joseon Koreans toward acquiring a modern view of the world were no more than a part of the forward looking intelligentsia's reception of enlightenment and did not make any significant contribution until the flow of history changed in the late Joseon era.⁸

The first Americans set foot on Korean soil in the Busan area in early 1853. From that moment until the burning of an American merchant vessel, the *General Sherman*, on the Daedonggang river in 1866, sailors from shipwrecked American whaling and merchant ships were washed up on Korea's shores on six occasions.⁹ During that period the local Korean officials who encountered the seamen who arrived in "strangely shaped ships" (*iyangseon*) from "America" (Myeorigye) or the "Country of the Flower-studded Flag" (Hwagiguk), reported to the government that the physical appearance of Americans was "antiquated and strange" and that their actions were like those of "goblins." Lurking within these negative descriptions that disparaged Americans both racially and culturally, we can see the prejudiced attitudes of the Sinocentric worldview. Nevertheless, the Joseon administration, after treating these "barbarian" sailors with the courtesy due to visitors from far away, spared no efforts to return them to their own country via China.

This perception of Americans as "barbarians" changed to one of extreme xenophobia as a result of a rapid succession of incidents such as the Byeongin Yangyo (French Punitive Expedition of 1866), the attempted excavation of the tomb of the Daewongun's father, Namyongun (Prince of Namyeon), by a German merchant-adventurer Ernst Oppert (1832–1903) in 1868, as well as the unfortunate incidents directly concerning Joseon and the United States, such as the *General Sherman* incident of 1866 and the Sinmi Yangyo (Low-Rodgers Expedition of 1871). All these incidents occurred during the rule of the Daewongun (1864–1873), who strictly enforced a closed-door policy. Especially after the serious clash of arms with American naval forces on Ganghwado island, namely, the 1871 Low-Rodgers Expedition, administrators in the Joseon government referred to Americans as "dogs and sheep," "pirates," and "robbers," and adopted a resolute policy toward America of stubbornly rejecting any friendly relations with that country.¹⁰

This perception of the United States, based on a Sinocentric worldview, was

⁸ See Yi Won-sun (1992, 151; 1986, 367–368, 497–498).

⁹ Chay (1990, 17–18).

¹⁰ Concerning the view of America of one local official charged with negotiating with the Americans at the time of the Low-Rodgers expedition of 1871, see Chay (1990, 31)

characterized by the outright rejection of all Westerners and their culture, without making any distinction between the various Western nations. This kind of “exclusionist” ideology¹¹ was expressed through the movement to “uphold orthodoxy and reject heterodoxy” (*wijeong cheoksa*), which was developed at the time of the conclusion of the Korean-American Treaty of 1882 through the joint action of the conservative Confucianists of Gyeongsang-do province and the disciples of Yi Hang-ro (1792–1868), who advocated doctrines urging the Korean people to “revere right learning and reject heresy” (*sun gyeonghak byeok idan*) and to “respect China and drive out the barbarians” (*jon junghwa yang ijeok*). There is no doubt that the anti-Western attitudes of the Confucianists were also widely spread among the general populace who followed the Donghak (Eastern Learning) at that time. For example, the following “Gwonhakga” (Song Exhorting Learning), which is included in the anthology, *Yongdam yusa* (Posthumous Poems from the Dragon Pond) by the Donghak founder Choe Je-u (1824–1864), clearly reveals the animosity felt by the Korean people toward the “Western enemy” (*seoyangjeok*) in the 1860s:

At the beginning of the year *gyeongsin* (1860) we received word that
 The fickle Western thieves had invaded China
 And raised up the church of the Lord of Heaven, spreading that false teaching
 All around the world. Doesn't it make one laugh and stop singing.¹²

Also, Sin Jae-hyo (1812–1884), who compiled *pansori* libretti in the latter half of the nineteenth century, provides the following account of the confrontation with the French troops during the punitive expedition of 1866 in his short poem, entitled “Disgraceful Western Wretches”:

Disgraceful Western wretches, you should be spreading
 The teachings of the Lord of Heaven, which recognizes neither king nor father,
 In your own country. Our eastern country of Dangun and Gija
 Upholds filial piety and loyalty. How dare you raise troops and cross the sea?
 We have set fire to your floating fortresses and shot you dead
 At Jeongjok mountain fortress. Quickly, quickly
 Run away while you are still alive.¹³

¹¹ Kim Key-Hiuk has termed this kind of extreme anti-foreign nationalism in Joseon “exclusionism.” Kim Key-Hiuk (1980, 25–38)

¹² Yun Seok-san (1967, 99)

¹³ Kang Han-yeong (1966, 1-2); Jo Dong-il (1979, 82).

Similar anti-Western attitudes were also reflected in the anti-foreign placards that were put up around Protestant churches in Seoul by Donghak activists and Confucianists in 1893.¹⁴

After the onset of the twentieth century, this type of negative view of Westerners, including Americans, began to appear once again in various different forms in a retrogressive way in the writings of Korean intellectuals. In the early 1940s when the Japanese Empire precipitated the Pacific War, Koreans were indoctrinated by their Japanese colonial rulers with a view that the “Americans and British are devils and beasts” (*beiei kichiku; miyeong gwichuk* in Korean)—a view that was undoubtedly connected with anti-Western and anti-American attitudes.¹⁵ Furthermore, some South Koreans have internalized an image of Americans as being savages, wild beasts, and robbers in more recent years under the influence of carefully scripted anti-American propaganda from North Korea, while nursing a lingering indignation against the immoral behavior of American troops during the Korean War. If we examine this extremely negative perception of America carefully, however, we will find that it is, in fact, connected with the traditional views that have been outlined above.¹⁶

America as a Civilized, Wealthy and Powerful Nation

Koreans' second stereotypical view of the United States is that it has a vast territory and is the wealthiest nation in the world. Furthermore, because it pursues a policy of holding strong nations in check and assisting the weak in accordance with Christian altruism, it is considered a civilized, wealthy, and powerful nation that may be depended upon. This perception of America originated from knowledge about the West contained in Western world maps, globes, and books on human geography received from Jesuit missionaries, who were encountered from the beginning of the seventeenth century by Korean scholars and officials during their visits to Beijing in China.

Out of the urgent necessity to understand the West more clearly after the defeat of the Qing Empire in the Opium War (1839–1842), a number of China's leading thinkers

¹⁴ See Weems (1964, 28)

¹⁵ Concerning the view of the Americans and British as being devils and beasts propagandized by the Japanese Empire, see Kim Byeong-geol and Kim Gyu-dong (1986, 143–151)

¹⁶ As part of Stalin's worldwide anti-American struggle, after the liberation of Korea in 1945 Kim Il Sung began to fiercely vilify and attack the U.S. military government in Korea from the time of the first meeting of the U.S.-Soviet Joint Commission on 20 March 1946. The first time that Kim Il Sung denounced the United States as an imperialist aggressor that intended to colonize Korea was in a speech concerning the drafting of the “democratic” labor law on 20 June 1946. See Yang Homin (1991, 107–127)

and officials wrote books on the human geography of the West. Particularly well-known among these published works were *Haiguo tuzhi* (Illustrated Gazetteer of Countries Overseas; first published in 1844; enlarged edition, 1852) by Wei Yuan (1794–1856) and *Yinghuan zhilue* (Brief Survey of the Maritime Circuit, 1848) by Xu Jiyu (1795–1873). In 1845, one year after its first publication in China, the *Illustrated Gazetteer of Countries Overseas* had already been introduced to Korea and was avidly read among a section of Korea’s government officials and its educated class, while *Brief Survey of the Maritime Circuit* was also circulated and read by the same group of people from 1850 onwards.¹⁷ It goes without saying that these books contributed greatly to raising the level and increasing the clarity of the perception of the United States and the West among the informed people of late Joseon. Furthermore, after the conclusion of the Korean-Japanese Treaty of Ganghwa (1876), the intellectuals in Joseon’s reform movement came in contact with books about the West written in Japanese, either indirectly through the Buddhist monk Yi Dong-in (?–1881) or directly through visiting Japan. Among the books that they read were undoubtedly *Seiyō jijō* (Conditions of the West, 1866) and *Bummei ron no gairyaku* (Outline of Civilization, 1875) by Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835–1901), both of which contained favorable descriptions of the United States.¹⁸

World maps, globes, and geographical books which were transmitted to Korea by Jesuit missionaries included such maps as *Kunyu wanguo quantu* (Complete Terrestrial Map of All Countries; produced in 1602) and *Liangyi xuanlantu* (Map of the Heavens and Earth as Seen from Obscurity, 1603) made by Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), *Zhifang waiji* (On World Geography) (including the *Complete Terrestrial Map of All Countries* [Wanguo quantu, 1623]) written by Giulio Aleni (1613–1649), *Kunyu tushuo* (Explanation of the Map of the Earth) (1672) and *Kunyu quantu* (A Complete Map of the Earth, 1674) made by Ferdinandus Verbiest (1623–1688)—as well as the first globe to be introduced to Korea.¹⁹ Through such materials as these, which introduced the geography of the West, a section of Joseon’s educated class became aware of the “largeness of the world,” the “multiplicity of nations,” and the worldview of the “equality of nations,” while for the first time being awakened to the geographical existence of Europe and, of course, the American continent (Amugnigaju) and the country of Americans (Mirigyeonguk).²⁰

Once this kind of modern geographical knowledge had been received by Joseon’s

¹⁷ Yi Gwang-rin (1980, 5–6).

¹⁸ In the early 1880s a group of intellectuals in the Enlightenment Party met to read all kinds of books on Western civilization that they had received from Yi Dong-in, who had visited Japan in 1879. They appear to have received their information about the United States from such books. See Kim Do-tae (1948, 62–65).

¹⁹ Kim Yang-seon (1972a, 169–193).

²⁰ Yi Won-sun (1992, 53–56).

forward looking Silhak (Practical Learning) scholars beginning with Yi Ik (1681–1763) and then by scholars of the Bukhak (Northern Learning School) such as Hong Dae-yong (1731–1783), Bak Ji-won (1737–1805), Bak Je-ga (1759–1805), and Yi Deok-mu (1741–1793), it resulted in the undermining of their Sinocentric worldview.²¹ This kind of perception, however, did not have sufficient time to spread among the ordinary people, and its diffusion was interrupted altogether as a result of the crisis of the Catholic Persecution of 1801.

With the frequent appearance of “strangely shaped ships” along Joseon’s coasts at the beginning of the 1830s, the need arose for more detailed information about the West, and so in 1834 *Jigu jeonhudo* (A Map of the Front and Back Hemispheres of the Globe) was produced by Kim Jeong-ho (?–1864), and in 1840 Verbiest’s *A Complete Map of the Earth* was reprinted.²² Subsequently, in the 1840s various works on the West were introduced to Korea by members of the regular embassies to the Qing capital and, as a consequence, there arose from among the educated class in Joseon some people who, having acquired a basic understanding of the West, now attempted to compile their own works on its geography and culture. Among these works, the writings of a *yangban* scholar in Seoul, Choe Han-gi (1803–1877), are particularly striking. In 1857 he compiled a work on the human geography of the world, entitled *Jigu jeonyo* (Concise Description of the Earth), which was based on the *Illustrated Gazetteer of Countries Overseas* and *Brief Survey of the Maritime Circuit* together with his own philosophy of “transformation of matter” (*gihwa*). In this unpublished manuscript Choe Han-gi not only presented a detailed map of America but also information about the United States of America founded in 1776, dealing with various aspects of that nation such as its physical geography, including territorial boundaries, natural features, customs, people, and products; its economic geography, including clothing, food, drink, trade, construction, employment, and wealth; its political system, including government, leadership, bureaucracy, scholarship, etiquette, punishments, law, military, and customs; and the history of the development of governmental departments.

The most striking points that emerge from Choe Han-gi’s description of America include the following: first, geographically America was a country with a vast territory; second, it was a country with an abundance of products, a well developed transportation system, a prosperous foreign trade, and a rapidly developing industrial technology; third, in America, which was ruled by British people, black slaves and Native Americans received discriminatory treatment; fourth, American citizens were generally Protestants,

²¹ See Choe So-ja (1970, 414–422); Yu Geun-ho (1978, 73–84).

²² Jeon Sang-un (1977b, 230; 1983, 222).

and the relationships between siblings, parents and children, friends, and so on were more or less the same as in China; and finally, America did not have a king, but instead, the people chose a president (*chongnyeong*), senators, and representatives by means of “elections.”²³

Unfortunately, Choe Han-gi’s manuscript of “Concise Description of the Earth,” which contained this kind of favorable view of America, was probably never typeset after its completion because of the closed-country and obscurantist policies prevalent in Joseon during the 1850s and 1860s. This work, therefore, could not exert as great an influence on the Joseon intelligentsia as we might expect. Nevertheless, we can assume that the manuscript of this book with its profound and detailed knowledge of America was circulated and read carefully by the Silhak scholars and officials of the School of Northern Learning as well as by the intellectuals of the Gaehwadang (Enlightenment Party) that came after them.

Among Joseon’s Silhak scholars and officials, Bak Gyu-su (1807–1876) was the one who contributed most to disseminating among the intellectuals of the Enlightenment Party the favorable view of America contained in such works as *Illustrated Gazetteer of Countries Overseas*, *Brief Survey of the Maritime Circuit*, and “Concise Description of the Earth.” Bak visited northern China in 1861 to convey Joseon’s condolences to the Qing emperor, Xianfeng (r. 1851–1861), who had fled to Jehol after the occupation of Beijing by British and French allied troops. Then in 1872 he visited Beijing as a tribute envoy and during his stay there not only became familiar with human geographies of the West, but also received a considerable quantity of up-to-date information about the activities of the powerful Western nations by associating extensively with Qing intellectuals and officials who dealt with Western affairs. In this way he also acquired a good deal of information about America. According to Kim Yun-sik (1841–1920), before his death in 1876, Bak expressed the following favorable view of America and urged Joseon to take the initiative in establishing diplomatic ties with that nation:

From what I have heard, America is considered to be the most impartial of all the nations of the world and is good at settling disputes and putting an end to disturbances. It is also the wealthiest of the six continents and is said to have no desire to expand its territory. Even if no word comes from their side, we should in any case take the lead in establishing diplomatic relations and making a firm alliance, thus avoiding the anxiety of being isolated.²⁴

²³ Kwon O-yeong (1990, 183–185; 1991, 119–150).

²⁴ Kim Yun-sik, *Unyang jip* (Collected Works of Kim Yun-sik). Also see, Kang Jae-eon (1981,

That is to say, Bak perceived America as a wealthy country that was fair, respected etiquette, and was good at settling conflicts, and urged Joseon to put an end to its closed-door policy and to take the initiative in approaching America to establish diplomatic relations with that country.²⁵

This favorable perception of America, which first appeared in the works of Wei Yuan and Xu Jiyu, was accepted by and received the approval of Joseon's Silhak scholars and officials such as Choe Han-gi and Bak Gyu-su and was argued for in detail by a counselor in the Chinese legation in Tokyo, Huang Zunxian (1845–1905), in his short work, *Zhaoxian celue* (Korean Stratagem). A Korean envoy to Japan, Kim Hong-jip (1842–1896), received a copy of this work from Huang in 1880 after visiting Tokyo as an envoy. In this well-known diplomatic treatise, Huang Zunxian attempted to open the eyes of Joseon's conservative intellectuals, who were steeped in a Sinocentric viewpoint, to the penetration of Asia by the Western European powers, particularly “land-hungry” Russia, and proposes that the administrators of Joseon swiftly implement a policy of “intimacy with China (*chin jungguk*),” “association with Japan (*gyeol Ilbon*),” and “alliance with America (*yeon miguk*).” Huang, in short, was advocating an “alliance with America” in order to effectively deal with the threat to Joseon posed by an aggressive Russia. In the course of developing his argument for an alliance with the United States, Huang introduced the United States in the following favorable way:

Why do I say Joseon should ally itself with America? When you cross the Eastern Sea from Joseon, you eventually reach the American continent, where the United States of America is situated. That country once belonged to England, but about a hundred years ago there was a man named Washington, who was unwilling to endure the harsh rule of Europeans and was endowed with such energy and heroism that he was able to gain independence for his country. Since that time, following the teachings of their founding ancestor, Americans have founded their nation on courtesy and justice. They covet neither territory nor populations which do not belong to them, nor do they interfere in the domestic affairs of other states. During the period of between ten and twenty years that they have had a treaty with China, there has never been the slightest disagreement between our two countries, while, as regards their relations with Japan, they have not only induced her to enter into commercial relations, but have persuaded her to organize her army, and

178–179).

²⁵ Concerning the process whereby Bak Gyu-su formed his view of America, see Son Hyeong-bu (1986, 84–85).

have also taught her the arts of administration. These are facts well known to the whole world. The constitution of the United States is democratic and republican, and therefore the Americans do not covet the property of others; while on the other hand, as it was the indignation excited by the harsh and oppressive acts of the English government that was the cause of their country being founded, they are always disposed to be friendly toward Asia while entertaining feelings of dislike for Europe. At the same time, they are of the same race as the Europeans, while the power of their country is so great that they have no difficulty in holding their own with the Great Powers of Europe in any part of the globe. This enables them to help the weak, and, by upholding just principles, to prevent Europeans from giving a loose reign to their overbearing disposition. The United States are situated close to the east of Asia, and it is there that the greater part of their commerce is carried on. They are desirous, moreover, that the nations of East Asia should each and all maintain their independence, and continue in the enjoyment of peace and tranquility. Even if their envoy has never visited you, it would be worth Joseon's while to send all the way to America and to enter into relations with the United States. But seeing that they have repeatedly dispatched envoys to you, and manifested their desire to enter into relations with Joseon, it becomes still more clearly in your interest to invite them to become your allies, so that you may obtain help in time of need and security against calamity. Therefore I say, "Let Joseon ally herself with America."²⁶

Joseon's King Gojong (r. 1864–1907) read Huang Zunxian's work and approved of its main gist. After having his chief ministers study its contents thoroughly, he had copies of it distributed throughout the land to be read by the Confucian scholars. Although the view of America put forward in *Korean Stratagem* was substantially the same as that of Choe Han-gi and Bak Gyu-su, unlike Choe Han-gi's "Concise Description of the Earth," which never saw the light of day, or Bak Gyu-su's arguments for establishing diplomatic ties with America, which were only circulated among an extremely small circle of progressives, Huang's work was widely studied by Joseon's intellectuals and became a "historical work" that stirred up a fresh wind among Joseon's intelligentsia in the early 1880s. In short, *Korean Stratagem* can be viewed as a work of epoch-making significance in implanting a positive image of America in the minds of Joseon's educated elite.

The conservative Confucian scholars, who rejected the arguments put forward by

²⁶ Huang Zunxian (1977, 13–14). See also a contemporary English translation (on which this translation has been based) in [Park Il-keun](#) (1982, 106–107).

Korean Stratagem and particularly found fault with those portions of it dealing with Protestantism, initiated the so-called “movement to uphold orthodoxy and reject heterodoxy.” Nevertheless, as the government officials were already prepared for a treaty with America in accordance with Huang Zunxian’s “alliance-with-America” doctrine, the Korean-American Treaty could finally be concluded in May 1882. Not long after this the Imo Gullan (Soldiers’ Riot of 1882), led by a group of potentially anti-American conservative soldiers, erupted in Seoul but was suppressed within a month. With the failure of the Soldiers’ Riot and the consequent undermining of the conservatives’ power in the Seoul political scene, the anti-American mood inside the capital grew weaker. From that time until the end of 1905, when America unilaterally annulled the Korean-American Treaty, the officials in the Joseon court steadily pushed forward a policy of reliance on the United States in accordance with its policy of friendship toward America.

After the ratification of the Korean-American Treaty, the Joseon government dispatched its first ever diplomatic and cultural delegation in 1883, styled the Reciprocity Mission (*bobingsa*), across the Pacific Ocean to the United States of America. On returning to Seoul in the spring of 1884 after touring the United States as the chief envoy of the mission, Min Yeong-ik (1860–1914) spoke frankly of his impressions of the United States to his American assistant, Lieutenant George C. Foulke, saying, “I was born in the dark. I went out into the light and now I have returned into the dark again: I cannot see my way clearly but I hope to soon.”²⁷ He also made the following answers to the king during his official report on the mission:

Gojong: Even from looking at the American envoy stationed here [namely, Lucius H. Foote], we can guess that that country has a magnanimous character. Did you find it to be true from your observations that America is the wealthiest and most powerful nation in the world?

Min: That country produces all the grains of the earth, its people all work hard, and its trade is so prosperous that there is no other nation that can be compared with it.

Gojong: Good. . . . Is it also militarily well prepared?

Min: The powerful and wealthy nations of the West are all oriented around trade, so if a war is on the verge of breaking out, they each protect themselves by closing their ports, and even though the United States is not militaristic, it is, of course, extremely powerful.

Gojong: Is the president (*daetongnyeong*) changed [regularly]?

²⁷ McCune and Harrison (1951, 7, 106).

Min: Although I did not hear about this before I went, after three years [four years] the president's term of office is complete, but if he is popular then there are instances of his being reappointed. Also, when there are elections all the members of the lower house are elected . . .²⁸

If we examine the contents of this dialogue closely, we can see that by around 1884 Min Yeong-ik and King Gojong too, of course, had a relatively detailed knowledge of the most important aspects of the political system of the United States and that they were also inclined toward a favorable view of America.

Thereafter, the knowledge of Korean officials concerning America's cultural institutions was supplemented with more detailed and favorable information coming from such works as *Seoyu gyeonmun* (Observations on a Journey to the West, 1895) by Yu Gil-jun (1856–1914), a member of the 1883 mission to the United States, who had stayed on as a student at Governor Dummer Academy in Northfield, Massachusetts before returning to Korea in 1885, and the unpublished official report, *Misok seubyu* (Miscellany of American Customs), presented by Bak Jeong-yang (1841–1905) on his return from Washington, where he had established the Korean legation as Joseon's envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary.²⁹

The greatest contribution to the implanting and dissemination of a favorable perception of America among the ordinary people of the "Hermit Nation," however, was made by means of the printed medium, namely, Korea's first "modern" newspaper (in classical Chinese) the *Hanseong sunbo* (Seoul Three-Monthly), published from 1883 to 1884 by the Government Printing Office (Bangmunguk) and *Dongnip sinmun* (The Independent), published (in *hangeul*) from 1896 to 1898 by the leaders of the Independence Club, including Seo Jae-pil (Philip Jaisohn, 1863–1951) and Yun Chi-ho (1864–1945), who had both had experience of studying in the United States.

By means of these modern newspapers the ordinary people of Korea came to have a relatively high level of knowledge not only of American geography but also of its history, institutions, and so on. At the same time a favorable perception of the United States was planted in their minds.

This favorable perception of America that was formed in the 1880s and 1890s was spread not just among Joseon's ruling class but also among the general populace, so that it became the most widely accepted stereotype in the late Joseon period. Even after the Japanese Empire's overthrow of the Joseon dynasty in 1910, following the Taft-

²⁸ Mun Il-pyeong (1945, 113–116).

²⁹ See Han Cheol-ho (1992, 89–91).

Katsura Agreement (1905), this stereotype continued to be adhered to by some Korean intellectuals and independence activists. On the occasion of a visit by a delegation of American congressmen to Seoul in the autumn of 1919, the year of the March First Movement, Jang Deok-su (1896–1947), a leading journalist in Seoul, wrote a eulogistic editorial for the *Dong-a Ilbo*, entitled “We Welcome the American Representatives,” which lavished praise on the United States as follows:

From the bottom of our hearts our twenty million Joseon citizens welcome our beloved brothers from the great nation of America. Although that nation is separated from us by the vast expanse of the Pacific Ocean so that we are unable to see it directly, in our hearts we long for America. It is a nation of people of liberty and righteousness, a nation with the natural grandeur of the Rocky Mountains and the Hudson River, the brilliant faith of the popular Puritan Christianity of Washington and Lincoln, which forms the foundation of its society, and a nation with God’s special grace, ensuring the prosperity of the land, making it the light of the world and the protector of humanity. . . .

In the past we missed our chance to develop because of the restraints of despotism and a rigid class system. Our twenty million citizens, who were sunk deeply in the mire, now see the light of truth, have found the way, and are manifesting the values of eternal life so that there is now hope in Joseon. Truly, therefore, we wish to convey our gratitude through Christ to you representatives of the American people. Not only did you break down the closed-door policy of Japan and awaken that nation and convey modern civilization to it, but you also transmitted the civilization of life to Joseon. . . .³⁰

In connection with the kind of tradition shown above, this favorable perception of America hardened into a kind of “official view” of the United States in South Korea during the First Republic (1948–1960) when the American-educated president, Dr. Syngman Rhee, was in power. During the Korean War (1950–1953) it developed further to the extent that the United States came to be looked upon as a “savior” nation.³¹ Kim Dong-ri’s poem below, “Flag of Youthful America: a Letter of Appreciation to General Van Fleet,” may be taken as being representative of this kind of perception during the war:

At this moment the names of so many great benefactors

³⁰ Editorial dated 24 August 1919 in the *Donga Ilbo*. Quoted in Kim Dong-hwan (1932, 83, 84–85).

³¹ Kang Hyeon-Dew (1976, 31–33).

Who have helped Korea will be forever remembered in my heart,
Among them, MacArthur, Ridgway, Truman, and Eisenhower.
But there is none who makes my heart beat within my chest
And makes me choke with tears so much as you.
Friends hate the enemies of their friends.
Brothers take vengeance on their brothers' foes.
What other righteous man has cared for, loved,
And protected my capital city like you?
Your son and many other soldiers entered some Korean port
On a foreign ship and shed their youthful blood in this place.
We have not seen more precious blood being shed
Even in the Bible and on the Cross.³²

America as an Imperialist Aggressor

Koreans' third stereotypical view of America is that it is a capitalist, imperialist aggressor. According to this estimation, Korea absolutely cannot trust or support America. Rather, it is a nation that should be guarded against and driven out of the country. This negative perception of America first appeared among Korean intellectuals with America's occupation and colonization of the Philippines in 1898 as a consequence of the Spanish-American War. Subsequently, America emerged on the heels of Great Britain as an imperialist power in East Asia with its demands for an open-door policy in China. Furthermore, along with the conclusion of the secret Taft-Katsura Agreement in 1905, it was the first of the Western powers to close its legation in Korea. As a consequence, one of the few intellectuals who understood the political workings of the United States—namely, Yun Chi-ho, who will be discussed below—became disillusioned with its policy toward Korea.³³ Nevertheless, it was not until after the March First Movement and the Washington Naval Disarmament Conference of 1921–1922 that this perception of America as an imperialist aggressor state became generalized among Korean intellectuals. This was because it was from this moment that the United States overtook Great Britain and emerged as the leading hegemonic power in the Pacific region.

The conspicuous emergence of this critical perception of the United States as an imperialist power after the March First Movement may be traced back to the spread of

³² Quoted in Kim Hak-dong et al. (1979, 43).

³³ See Yu Yeong-yeol (1985, 266, fn. 93).

revolutionary Marxist-Leninism among the intellectuals of small and weak states following the successful Communist revolution in Russia in November 1917. Consequently, from around that time a Marxist-Leninist perspective on America as a capitalist, imperialist nation began to appear among Korean independence activists abroad. Their critical perception of America originated from the indignation aroused by the Paris Peace Conference that concluded World War I, at which the American representative, President Woodrow Wilson, turned a blind eye to the nationwide demands for independence by the Korean people during the March First Movement. It grew further in the wake of the Washington Naval Disarmament Conference, which once again passed over Korean appeals for independence in complete silence and resulted in the “Quadruple Agreement” among America, Great Britain, France, and Japan. Disillusioned and outraged by the indifference of the United States to the independence of Korea on the international stage, fifty-two Korean independence activists, including Kim Gyu-sik (1877–1952), attended the First Congress of the Toilers of the Far East held in Moscow under the auspices of the Comintern in January 1922 and denounced the “four powers,” beginning with America.

After the end of the conference, Kim Gyu-sik, a graduate of Roanoke College in Virginia, wrote an article under the title “The Asiatic Revolutionary Movement and Imperialism” and published it in the *Communist Review*. In the introduction to this piece, he placed America on a par with the other “bloodsucker nations” in the Quadruple Agreement and denounced it as follows:

We often speak of the necessity of a “united front” and “cooperative action” in connection with the revolutionary undertakings of the Far East. Recently we have come to realize this more than ever, since we have seen how the capitalistic powers of Western Europe and America have combined themselves to jointly exploit the whole of Eastern Asia. Even the great republic of America, which has made so much ado about its “altruistic” pretenses and its worldwide “democratic principles,” threw off its mask at the Washington Conference when it formed the hideous Quadruple Agreement with the three notorious bloodsucker nations—England, France, and Japan.³⁴

In this way, the view of America as an imperialist nation that oppressed and exploited small and weak countries became widely accepted among Korean Communist activists during the 1920s and gradually became further developed. A good example of this is the

³⁴ Suh Dae-sook (1970, 91).

case of the first chairman of the Korean Communist Youth Association, Bak Heon-yeong (1900–1955). In an article, entitled “Yeoksasang-euro bon gidokgyo-ui naemyeon” (The Inside of Christianity from a Historical View), published in the journal *Gaebyeok* in November 1925, Bak depicted the history of the founding of America in the following cynical way and in so doing subverted the favorable image of America that had been widely accepted by Koreans until that time:

If we take a look at the history of the founding of America, we find it filled with praise for the heroic deeds and sacrificial spirit of the Puritans. But if this is not just a shallow observation, it is a plain lie which conceals the hidden facts. The first page in the history of America opens with the slaughter of its indigenous people.

The Europeans who first moved to America drove out the indigenous people who lived in the forests and the plains, slaughtered them, and seized their dwellings, claiming that this was a “divine task” given to them by God. From the outset the indigenous people did not positively and actively impede the influx of Europeans. The Dutch, French, British, and Spanish, however, espousing Christians’ love of mankind, freely encroached on the dwellings of the natives destroying them and massacring the inhabitants, while gradually propagating the gospel of love to them.

Those Puritans, who are considered to have loved God and had compassion for people, seized the native people’s lands, set fire to their homes, killed them, or even if they did not kill them seized their land to enrich themselves. . . .

The whole world knows that Washington, as the great man responsible for the independence and founding of the nation of America, was the personification of a saintly ruler, embodying the virtues of care, discretion, temperance, self-denial, fortitude, courage, endurance, and honor. They say, however, that this same Washington, who was also one of those Puritans guided by God, while governing territory on behalf of the British government, stole thirty thousand acres of land and made himself the owner. When the ownership of this land came under threat from a new law, he sent Benjamin Franklin to the British capital London in order to confirm his right of ownership.³⁵

In this article Bak Heon-yeong exposed the other side of the conquest and pioneering of the American continent by white people and denounced the contradictory hypocrisy of

³⁵ Kim Nam-sik and Sim Ji-yeon (1986, 171–122).

Christianity, the spiritual pillar of American civilization. Also, by exposing the moral weakness of George Washington, the widely respected founding hero of the United States, Bak implanted in the minds of his readers the impression that from the very beginning of its establishment as a nation, America had been based on an immoral foundation of exploitation and deception. This critical depiction of American history must have had an immense effect in making Korean intellectuals in the 1920s view the United States as an aggressive, imperialistic nation.

With the onset of the Stalin era in the 1930s, however, Bak Heon-yeong's type of view of an imperialistic America was no longer discussed or expressed among Korean Communist activists. This was almost certainly because in the 1930s and 1940s the leading Communist state, the Soviet Union, was faced with the strategic necessity of confronting the Fascist states, and so Communists all over the world were instructed—through the Comintern—to temporarily refrain from criticizing America.

Anti-American consciousness, however, which had been voluntarily restrained in this way among Korean Communists, found expression once again after Liberation in 1945 under the American military government in South Korea. It goes without saying that the various anti-American slogans that began to appear at this time grew louder after mid-1946 in line with the northern Korean view of the United States as “the inveterate enemy of the Korean people.”³⁶ At that time the first person to denounce America as an imperialist nation that had to be driven out of the Korean peninsula was Bak Heon-yeong, who emerged as the leader of the Korean Communist Party after Liberation. In several manifestos and reports published after April 1948, Bak bitterly criticized American policy toward Korea. He asserted that from the very outset American policy was not directed toward helping the freedom and independence of Korea but was aggressive—that is to say, it was directed toward occupation and the establishment of a reactionary regime. He declared that “America had never supported the independence of Korea” and, in support of this view, asserted that although America had promised Korean independence in the Cairo Declaration during World War II, this promise had not been made in order to liberate Korea, but rather to remove Japan so that America could take its place. Furthermore, he denounced America for having already decided on establishing a separate government in the south from the moment it placed the issue of Korea before the United Nations. In conclusion, Bak perceived of the United States as “an imperialist opponent of Korean independence and democracy.”³⁷

Bak Heon-yeong's type of anti-American tone was expressed in various violent

³⁶ See Kim Nam-sik and Sim Ji-yeon (1986, fn. 15).

³⁷ See Kim Nam-sik and Sim Ji-yeon (1986, 80–81).

popular movements of the left which opposed the American military government after May 1946 when it suppressed the South Korean Workers' Party—a new name given to the Korean Communist Party in southern Korea. Anti-Americanism made a particularly prominent appearance in the wake of the October Uprising of 1946³⁸ and the Jeju Rebellion of April 1948. The following is a manifesto distributed at the time of the Jeju Rebellion:

Dear citizens, parents, brothers and sisters! Today, on 3 April, your sons and brothers have stood up with arms in hand. We oppose the country-selling separate elections to the death, and have risen up in order to liberate the people, unify the fatherland, and achieve independence. We have stood up with arms to get rid of the American cannibals and their running dogs, to destroy them, and to stop them from killing people. We have stood up to avenge your grievances for you! You should also rise up to help us fight for final victory!³⁹

Due to the enforcement of the National Security Law and Anti-Communism Law as well as the strengthening of an anti-Communist and pro-American line at every level in the educational system, this kind of anti-American view in South Korea could no longer spread.

With the relaxation of control over the media after the eruption of the Gwangju Democratization Movement (1980), however, anti-American ideology reappeared in South Korea. The anti-American ideology that emerged in the 1980s was based on an interpretation of American imperialism influenced by new worldviews, including neo-imperialist theory, dependency theory, and liberation theology, which had mainly been developed in the United States, Europe, and South America.⁴⁰

America as a Racist Nation

In Korea under Japanese colonial rule during the 1930s, a critical view of America as an aggressive nation belonging to the white race, which was based on the ideas of the supremacy of the yellow race and pan-Asianism, was spreading in certain sectors of

³⁸ Bruce Cumings (1979, 194–195); Jeong Hae-gu (1988, 194–195).

³⁹ Kim Bong-hyeon and Kim Min-ju (1963); Arari Yeonguweon (1988, 85); John Merrill (1989, 67).

⁴⁰ Concerning the anti-American movement in South Korea after 1985, see Auh Taik Sup (1986, 110–111).

society. Although this was a view of America that was created to justify the Japanese Empire's own wars of aggression in Manchuria and China at that time, even among Koreans there were some who formed this view of America for themselves and aligned themselves with the Japanese Empire. A typical example was Yun Chi-ho (1864–1945), a graduate of Emory College in Georgia, who was active in religious and educational circles in Seoul at that time. After examining how Yun first came to form his racist view of America, we will introduce and explain the fourth stereotypical view of America formed by some Koreans during the 1930s and 1940s.

Yun Chi-ho, who had studied abroad in Japan, China, and America during his youth, gradually created and developed a “defensive racialism” for the weaker yellow race—namely, the theory of cooperation among the three nations of East Asia: Japan, Korea, and China—as a result of his outrage over the “aggressive racism” of white people toward the yellow race.⁴¹ This racist consciousness of Yun Chi-ho—as shown in the examples below—first began to appear after he witnessed the contempt and disrespect of the British for the Chinese in Shanghai. Later, when he went to America and landed at San Francisco, he wrote admiringly, “The immenseness of the roads and houses and the opulence of the goods on display were things I had never witnessed before even in my dreams.”⁴² In other words, he formed a favorable view of American civilization. Soon afterwards, however, he changed his view after he was mistaken for a Chinese person by a white American in Georgia and was treated in an extremely insulting and discriminatory way.⁴³ Subsequently, after observing the contempt and disdain with which white Americans treated the Chinese, African-Americans, and Native-Americans, he began to feel a sense of disillusionment concerning America and its people. As shown in the following passage from his diary, he felt so frustrated that he “even wanted to die” because of the racial prejudice and discrimination of the white people toward him:

The Americans showed that their equality was merely superficial. That is to say, if you wish to enjoy human rights in this “land of the free,” this is only possible if you are white. . . .

Life is a joyful thing. But when I think of the national shame and humiliation I am experiencing now and will have to undergo in the future . . . life feels loathsome. . . . If death were to come to me naturally right now, I would not be sad to leave this world which treats those who are not strong with such

⁴¹ See Yu Yeong-yeol (1985, 265–267).

⁴² Yun Chi-ho (1973, vol. 1, 347) (22 October 1888).

⁴³ See Yun Chi-ho (1973, vol. 1, 348) (29 October 1888).

indifference.⁴⁴

Around the time when Yun Chi-ho returned to Korea after completing his studies in Christian theology and political science, however, he reverted to an earlier view and rated America highly as a “Christian nation,” as may be seen from the following entry in his diary:

Yet no one will deny that the democracy of America is after all the best form of government in spite of its defects. So in a higher sense after all the allowances made to the excellency of other creeds it remains still true that Christianity beats them all.⁴⁵

After his return to Korea in 1895 Yun actively participated in reform movements based on this view as a member of the Independence Club—a group of pro-American officials and intellectuals.

After the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), however, a critical perception of the United States reappeared in Yun’s diary. That is to say, there appeared a sense of outrage and resentment toward America and Britain, as these two nations, rather than standing in the forefront to prevent the Japanese annexation of Korea, were the first to recognize Japan’s protectorate rights despite the fact that they had obtained the most concessions from Korea.⁴⁶ At the same time Yun also began praising Japan’s victory in the Russo-Japanese War from a racist perspective in the following way:

I am glad Japan has beaten Russia. The islanders have gloriously vindicated the honors of the Yellow race. . . . I love and honor Japan as a member of the Yellow race; but hate her as a Korean from whom she is taking everything [including] independence itself.⁴⁷

In this way Yun gave expression to his latent racist views concerning the supremacy of the yellow race over the white race from the time of the Russo-Japanese War onward. Precisely the same kind of racist argument functioned as a way of rationalizing his submission to and collaboration with Japanese colonial rule after he served a three-year

⁴⁴ Yun Chi-ho (1974, vol. 2, 18) (14 February 1890); (14 June 1893). See also Yu Yeong-yeol (1985, 263).

⁴⁵ Yun Chi-ho (1974, vol. 3, 174) (24 September 1893).

⁴⁶ Yun Chi-ho (1975, vol. 4, 3–9) (15 January 1903); see also Yu Yeong-yeol (1985, 266, fn 92).

⁴⁷ Yun Chi-ho (1976, vol. 6, 143) (7 September 1905); also, see Yu Yeong-yeol (1985, 27).

prison term as a consequence of being implicated in the so-called Case of the One Hundred and Five in 1912.

Yun's opposition to the nations of the white race such as Britain and the United States became even plainer after the Manchurian Incident of 1931. From this time onward, he bitterly criticized the self-conceited "arrogance" of the imperialist Anglo-Saxon race of Britain and America, while frequently vindicating Japan's invasion of Manchuria and the Chinese mainland in his diary. The following are representative examples of this kind of view from his diary. First, when the American government criticized Japan's invasion of Manchuria in the wake of the Manchurian Incident, he criticized America and vindicated Japan in this way:

. . . America which under [Theodore] Roosevelt who personified brutalism so generously and lightheartedly consented to the annexation of Korea by Japan what face has she—America—to object to the Japanese occupation of Manchuria? Every argument which Japan advanced to justify her annexation of Korea and which Roosevelt and his crowd accepted as the Gospel truth is applicable to Manchuria word for word . . .⁴⁸

In 1934 he justified Japan's invasion of the Chinese mainland by linking it to the immigration restrictions placed on the colored races by the white nations of Britain and America as follows:

England and America are howling for open door and equal opportunity in Manchuria. These great nations seem to never have heard [of] such a thing as the exclusion bills of America and Canada against Far-Eastern peoples. The people of Arizona have lately been amusing themselves by brutal attacks with bombs and dynamites [*sic*] on peaceful Japanese farmers. Not a Korean student can stay in the U.S. a day longer after he finishes his school. All this in a land which brags about its Declaration of Independence. Japan has as much right to monopolize the natural resources and opportunities of and in Manchuria as the Americans are monopolizing those of North America and the English, those of Austronesia and of Canada. In fact Japan can't commit one single international or interracial sin that Christian nations of the West haven't set an example and a precedent.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Yun Chi-ho (1988, vol. 9, 398) (25 September 1931).

⁴⁹ Yun Chi-ho (1988, vol. 10, 348–349) (10 September 1934).

Subsequently, with the outbreak of the (Second) Sino-Japanese War in 1937, Yun praised the victory of the Japanese army in several battles on the Chinese mainland from the standpoint of the supremacy of the yellow race. Especially, as may be seen in the following example, he thought the victory of the Japanese army a “sweet revenge” for the racial discrimination that the yellow race had received at the hands of the white race in East Asia and exulted over it:

Papers say that yesterday from 6 a.m. the Japanese authorities, military and Consular, began blockading the English and French settlements in Tientsin quivering and searching every man and woman going into the settlements. Just think of every arrogant English men and English women submitting meekly to the indignities of being forced to undress to be searched like so many spies or smugglers. In the eyes of the Chinese the prestige of the domineering Anglo-Saxon has been degraded to the dust. While I think the Japanese are going a little too far to subject the English to such personal humiliations, I can't help feeling that the English are paid in kind some of their intolerable arrogance against the Chinese and the Oriental races. I still remember with deep indignation how sad I felt when years ago I saw the placard which the English had hung at the gate leading to the public garden in Shanghai with these words in big Chinese and English letters: “No dogs and Chinese admitted.”⁵⁰

When Yun, who harbored this kind of deep resentment against the white race, first heard the news of the outbreak of the Pacific War on 8 December 1941, he characterized this war as “a real war of races—the Yellow against the White” and prayed for the victory of Japan as follows:

Oh, I pray that Japan may succeed in not only puncturing the balloon of Anglo-Saxon racial prejudices and injustice and arrogance but in tearing that balloon to shreds and tell them “Go to hell” with your boasted science discoveries and inventions with which you have kept the colored races in subjection and shame for so many centuries.⁵¹

Although in early 1943 Yun Chi-ho's view of the white race had undergone a slight qualitative change, it had basically remained unchanged, as may be seen in the following

⁵⁰ Yun Chi-ho (1989, vol. 11, 192–193) (15 June 1939).

⁵¹ Yun Chi-ho (1989, vol. 11, 407, 409) (8 and 11 December 1941); also, see Yu Yeong-yeol (1985, 271).

excerpt from his diary:

The series of brilliant victories that have crowned the Japanese Army and Navy during the last 12 months have brought down the pride-balloon of Anglo-Saxon prestige and arrogance to the earth. The sunflag of Japan is proudly wavering over the citadels and Government buildings on the islands which John Bull and the Dutchman held in their own iron grip for 3 centuries. The Japanese have proved themselves a miracle among the nations of the world.⁵²

Through the example of Yun Chi-ho, a representative pro-Japanese Korean intellectual during the period of Japanese colonial rule, we have examined the stereotype of America that was based on the supremacy of the yellow race and pan-Asianism, which permeated a section of Korean society from the 1930s onwards. The distinctive feature of this stereotype was the criticism of the “arrogant” aggression of Britain and America, as white Anglo-Saxon nations. It is not known how widespread this kind of racist perception of America was among the general populace during the Japanese colonial period. At all events, however, this type of racist perception had an emotional appeal that transcended the times and was connected in some way to the racial prejudice inherent in Sino-centrism. Therefore, it must be recognized that even today this racially oriented view of the United States holds a great influence on the minds of race-conscious Koreans.

America as a Modern-Day Equivalent of the Roman Empire in Decline

The fifth stereotype that Koreans have of the United States is one that takes a pessimistic view of Western civilization in its entirety, compares the decline of contemporary American civilization with that of the Roman Empire, and sees the United States as a nation that is spiritually and morally bankrupt. The origin of this view, which was first put forward as a comprehensive view of the history of civilization by the so-called School of Decline after World War I, may be found in Oswald Spengler’s (1880–1936) work *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (Decline of the West), which was published in Vienna in 1918.⁵³

Western intellectuals belonging to the School of Decline warn that American

⁵² Yun Chi-ho (1989, vol. 11, 412–413) (1 January 1943).

⁵³ Paul Kennedy’s *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, which was published in 1988 in the United States, also clearly has an affinity with Spengler’s book.

civilization, which may be considered the zenith of modern scientific civilization, although externally displaying immense power is internally fraught with serious moral, social, and economic problems, and, therefore, is faced with imminent and inevitable collapse. They criticize the present situation of American society with its unending racial tensions, the decline of the Protestant work ethic, the tendency for extravagant and wasteful consumption, high rates of violence and crime, the overwhelming tide of drugs, alcohol and free sex, the spread of AIDS, the increasing divorce rate and number of children born to single mothers, the administration's chronic financial deficit, the fall in workers' productivity, the decline in students' scholastic ability, the rampant hypocrisy of public officials, and so on, warning that these are all symptoms of the decline and fall of American civilization.⁵⁴

In the case of Korea, however, this kind of perception of the United States came to the fore in the 1930s—at the same time as the rise of the yellow supremacist view of America which has been outlined above. The first person in Korean intellectual circles to depict American civilization from this kind of critical viewpoint was Ju Yo-seop (1902–1972). In a series of articles in the *Dong-a Ilbo* in 1930 entitled, “A Sidelong View of American Civilization,” Ju Yo-seop, who had majored in English literature at Stanford University in California, first set out the premise that “Whoever has experienced the true taste of American civilization strongly deplores its bitterness, envy, suspicion, and scorn.” He then went on to sharply analyze and expose various negative aspects of American civilization, including the dehumanization of the scientific civilization of which Americans were so proud, the growing superstition of Christianity, the transformation of democracy into capitalist dictatorship, the ruin of the electoral system, political corruption, the failure of the “aristocratic millionaire-style labor movement” to solve the problem of the gap between the rich and the poor, and the nationwide tendency toward lawlessness. Ju's critiques of “the religion of money worship” and “hedonism,” presented below, are selected from among his criticisms of American civilization:

Money worship: If there is one really powerful religion in America, it is the religion of money worship. Therefore, the daily life of Americans has become completely devoted to the worship of money. Scholars worship money, religious figures worship money, public officials worship money, and artists worship money. It is truly difficult to find anyone who is not crazy about money. As a consequence, their philosophy smells of money, and their literature smells of money. This ideology of money worship is fanning an extreme capitalist ideology. . . .

⁵⁴ Han Nam-gyu (1988).

Hedonism: If there is an abundance of material goods, it is only natural that there will also be a similar level of indulgence in pleasure. . . . This mania for pleasure is ultimately ruining the American family system completely. Out of every one hundred married persons sixty divorce and the reason for this high percentage . . . begins with conflicts arising from an excessive desire for enjoyment. . . . Legally they have a monogamous system, but in reality it can be called a polygamous and polyandrous system. The favorite item of pleasure for Americans these days is alcohol. . . . As the sale of alcohol is against the law, it takes place secretly just like the other secrets of American-style prostitution and Chinese-style gambling dens. . . .⁵⁵

Ju Yo-seop's view of America, together with the other critical stereotypes based on Marxist-Leninism and yellow supremacism, disseminated a negative perception of America among members of the Korean intelligentsia from the 1930s onwards and presumably exerted a considerable influence on them. Furthermore, this type of intentional stereotype was linked with propaganda predicting the "inevitable downfall of the allied nations," which we can presume was also widely accepted by ordinary Korean people because it was indoctrinated into them by the Japanese Empire when it launched the Pacific War in the early 1940s.

This type of critique of American civilization has also been raised more recently in Korean intellectual circles. A good example is the article "What is America to Us?" written by a prominent contemporary journalist-historian, Song Geon-ho (1927–2001), on the 200th anniversary of the founding of the United States. In this piece he carefully laid out the "decline theory" of American civilization as shown below:

This coming July 4 is the 200th anniversary of the founding of the United States of America. They say that America is in an uproar as it prepares to celebrate this day. Nevertheless, this 200-year-old America, rather than giving the impression of having a youthful and energetic spirit, seems instead to have entered some kind of final phase of civilization. This should make us reflect on the fact that even though the wealth and strength of the ancient Roman Empire were well known all over the world, at the very zenith of its development as a civilization, it was unable to conceal the signs of its own decline.

Inside America there are racial tensions, rising crime, the emergence of

⁵⁵ Quoted from Ju Yo-seop's opinion column on page 3 of the 11 and 14 February 1930 editions of the *Dong-a Ilbo*.

the hippies, the anti-war movement, economic uncertainty, endless difficult problems that are piling up with no clue to their solution, while externally after the defeat in the Vietnam War, American prestige has come crashing to the ground, and all around the world there is the unceasing uproar of anti-Americanism. The agonized appearance of America, which also appears to have almost sole responsibility for dealing with the turmoil that is engulfing the Third World, is just like that of a sick lion gasping for breath as it is driven into a corner by an army of red ants.

Nevertheless, even though this lion seems to be panting for breath, it is after all a lion. The underlying strength of the United States still far exceeds that of any other nation.⁵⁶

Conclusion

The history of Korean-American relations extends over a period of more than one and a half centuries. During that time, while making various efforts to understand its true character, the Korean people have called America by various names, for example, Myeorigye, Hwagiguk, Mirigyeonguk, Amiriga, Mi Hapjungguk, Miguk (美國), Miguk (米國), and Miguk (尾國). The perception that Koreans have formed concerning America through this kind of process may be classified into five different stereotypes. Although the second of the five stereotypes is a favorable one, all the others are critical. Consequently, among the different perceptions of Koreans of the United States there are more stereotypes which present a negative view of that country. This does not mean that Koreans have tended to have a negative perception of America. If we make a historical survey, we can conclude that from the 1880s onward the overwhelming majority of Koreans have preferred and adhered to the second favorable perception of America from among the five different stereotypes. Although the remaining stereotypes have admittedly held some appeal, they are deemed to have been the views of the minority that are not connected to mainstream opinion.⁵⁷

While each of the five different stereotypes of America examined above has its own persuasive power and attraction, we can also say that they were ways of perceiving America that were developed and formed in accordance with their times. Nevertheless, they remain mere stereotypes with inherent limitations and logical strengths and

⁵⁶ Song Geon-ho (1977, 286).

⁵⁷ According to a popular survey carried out in 1984 by the *JoongAng Ilbo*, America was still the country that was most preferred by the majority of people of South Korea. See Auh Taik Sup (1986, 106).

weaknesses. America has been continually changing, and Korea has also been changing through countless phases of development within the international arena. Bearing in mind the fluid nature of both the subject and the object in the mutual perceptions of America and Korea, in future Koreans should make an effort not to be carried away by ideological systems or unscientific prejudices and try to understand this “foreign power” America with a more level-headed and open-minded attitude. In order to obtain a more scientific way of perceiving the United States, Koreans should deal with America in the context of the other foreign powers that have historically exerted an important influence on Korea—namely, China, Japan, Russia, and so on.

After his return to Korea in 1885, Yu Gil-jun, the first Korean to study abroad in America and observe its culture in detail, wrote in his essay, “On Neutrality”:

America is far away on the other side of the ocean and so does not have a particularly deep relationship with our nation. Furthermore, in accordance with the “Monroe Doctrine” America has decided not to interfere in the affairs of Europe or Asia. So if our country should face a critical situation, it will only be able to help us with words but will not be able to mobilize an army to rescue us. There is an old saying that a thousand words are of less value than a single bullet. Therefore, we can only have close ties with America in terms of trade but cannot rely on it as a close ally that would rescue us from a crisis.⁵⁸

This kind of “objective” attitude in approaching America demonstrated by a representative figure from among the “America experts” during the enlightenment period should be taken as a methodological paradigm for our own future research on the United States.⁵⁹

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⁵⁸ Yu Gil-jun *Jeonseo Pyeonchan Wiwonhoe* (1971, IV, 323).

⁵⁹ See, Mun Dong-hwan and Im Jae-gyeong (1986, 12–17).

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