

АЛТАН АРГАМЖ

VOL.3

1/2000

THE OPENING OF KOREA: THE CASE OF KOREAN – GERMAN RELATIONS

SFS/NUM

D. Uliambayar

1. Introduction

"His Majesty the German Emperor, King of Prussia, in the name of the German Empire, and His Majesty the King of Corea, being sincerely desirous of establishing permanent relations of friendship and commerce between their respective dominions, have resolved to conclude a Treaty for that purpose...". Those are the words marking the official begin of relations Korea and Germany on November 26th, 1883.

These Korean-German relations never were of such decisive interests for German politics as were, for instance, German-Chinese or German-Japanese relations. Nevertheless, Korea at the end of the 19th century was a natural object of special strategic and economic interest for the German Empire, which was seeking to extend its influence in the Far East.

What was the political situation like in the time the treaty was signed in 1883? This report will discuss due to religious issues following the expedition to Korea of the first German expeditions in 1867, and the conclusion of the German-Korean Treaty of Friendship and Commerce, that developed between the two countries.

The Opening of Korea up to 1882

area in the first place was an interest of Japan. It was not new markets in the Far East, as they were more than all other national industrial in the the humanita

region. But in spite of that, the first contacts between Korea and Western powers a rose from incidents caused by Russian, French and American ships. In 1866, for example, a French fleet was sent to Korea in revenge for the murder of some French Roman Catholic missionaries, and in 1868 an American merchant ship, the "General Sherman", sailed up the Taedong River into the interior of the country. But neither of the expeditions had any success in establishing trade or diplomatic contacts between Korea and other powers. The first treaty to be signed by Korea itself was a Japanese – Korean treaty of friendship and commerce dating from Feb. 26th, 1876, the so-called Treaty of Kanghwa. The most important clause in it stated that Korea, being an independent state, enjoyed the same sovereign rights as Japan. That clause was mainly addressed to the Chinese interests in Korea, which were in fact countering the Japanese attempts to come into contact with Korea, as China was not willing to give up suzerainty over Korea without gain. Since that treaty Korea has been an object of contest between China and Japan, and all following Korean struggles, internal as well as external, can be reduced to that decision of political interests.

The Chinese interest now was to open Korea to powers other than Japan, especially Western nations, to avoid a misbalance of foreign influence with a Japan a Japanese's preponderance. The first result of those efforts was the treaty of Tientsin between Korea and the United States, signed in 1882 with the Chinese viceroy as an intermediary. But that treaty also held fast to the clause of Korea's total independence of China. Following that pattern treaties between Korea on one side and England, Italy, Russia, France and Germany on the other hand were signed between 1882 and 1886.

3. The Expeditions of Ernst Oppert in 1867

This is good point to interrupt the account of political relations between Korea and Germany and to report on expedition which took place under the guidance of the German Jewish marchant. Ernst Oppert, in the year 1867. The expedition started in April 1867 from Shanghai with the German ships "China" and "Greta", which were

manned with mostly Chinese and some European sailors. They reached Korea at the former Prince-Jerome Gulf at the West coast south of Incheon. One of the ships, the Greta, then sailed from the gulf about thirty miles inland. There the Europeans disembarked from their ship, and guided by some Koreans, marched to the grave, situated in a great memorial. Their tools, inadequate and they did not succeed in opening the prince's grave.

The expedition thus failed, but it, nevertheless, had visible results. The Korean authorities-some officials at Kanghwa had been informed by Oppert himself of his plan were strengthened in their anti-foreign attitude, especially against the Europeans. The end of the expedition was a judgement in Shanghai by which Oppert was imprisoned.

But even if Oppert's activities obviously have caused more prejudices to the Western countries than advantages there is one interesting point of his journey which has not yet been discussed. In his talks with the officials at Kanghwa. Oppert proposed to sign a preliminary treaty, an outline of which had brought along to Korea. The treaty was designed to be ratified later by the Western nations including the U.S. and was to be supplemented by special bilateral treaties. Since this treaty has not yet been talked about in detail, some remarks shall be made on its contents.

The treaty was to be treaty of place, friendship and commerce(article 1). It contained provisions for the opening of the harbours and cities of Wonsan, Tongnae, Songdo(today is Kaesong) and Kangwa(article 2). There were among others, also some proposals concerning regulations of commerce(article 4 and 5), liberty of religion for Christians(article 6), and initiation of consular relations(article 8).

Thus project was destined to fail, although it certainly would have been of great interest to all Non-Chinese powers, had they initiated it, even the failure of the Korea visit of the German Minister von Brandt, in 1870 can be traced back to Oppert's

Paul von Moellendorff – a German diplomat in Korea Service

on Korean politics reached one of its

culmination's in the activities of Paul George von Moellendorff (1847-1901). Moellendorff had been on duty in Shanghai since 1869, had entered into the German foreign service as an interpreter in 1874, and had served German consulates in China. Since July 1882, after his dismissal from German service, he had been a secretary of the Chinese viceroy in Tientsin. In December 1882 he was sent to Korea and, since January 1883, he was ranked as a second class Korean civil servant. It was one of Moellendorff's first measures to begin the organisation of a Korean mint, which began the function 1886, guided by German engineers.

The first political task in had to deal with was the building-up of a Korean foreign service. On this occasions, he fell back on certain German servants, whom he already knew a measure which was thrown back at him later on. Another decisive task was the development of Korean foreign trade. In January 1883, Moellendorff carried on successful economic negotiations with China, as a result of which Korea was granted a considerable credit for developing the country.

In the same time, Moellendorff took part in Korean negotiations with the Western nations, which were carried out during the early 80s. In this capacity he also guided the Korean deputation in the negotiations that lead to the Korean-German commercial treaty in November 1883.

As a relatively independent adviser of the Korean king he also gave distinct opinions on questions of foreign policy. After the revolt in winter 1884, he was promoted to be a member of the new government. In the middle of February 1885 he was sent to Tokyo as a Korean envoy to lead the interceding negotiations between China, Japan and Korea. After the settlement of the Li-Ito-treaty he systematically carried on the increase of the Russian rule in Korea. Even the planned reorganisation of the Korean army by Russian officers served this aim. Moellendorff, by this measure hoped to neutralize the Chinese-Japanese rivalry for Korea. In March 1885, he formulated three alternatives for a Russian engagement in Korea as a following:

1. A guarantee-treaty to be signed together with China and Japan ensuring Korea's neutrality and integrity.

2. A bilateral safeguard-treaty, based on the idea of two states having equal rights or,

3. The guarantee of Korea's integrity by a Russian protectorate over

Korea.

It was Moellendorff's discharge from Korean service that hindered these projects from being realised. By his position, which was totally independent of the parties at the court intriguing one against the other, he had made himself enemies in both parties, who now carried out his dismissal. Therefore, in 1885, Moellendorff went back to China. All his life, he tried to gain a new post in Korean service, but remained unsuccessful. Paul George von Moellendorff died in Ningpo, China in 1901.

5. The Korean-German Treaty 1883

As already stated, the first ratified treaty between the German Empire and Korea was signed in November 1883 and ratified on November 18th, 1884. However, there had been a preliminary treaty, which, although not ratified, was also characteristic of the principles of German Far East policy.

In 1882, the United States and Great Britain had signed their treaties with Korea to open the country not only for their respective commercial interests, but also because of strategic reasons. These treaties contained, among others, the remarkable clause that Korea by signing them would not violate its old ties to China, whose tributary Korea still was.

The German envoy in Peking, Max von Brandt, now tried to gain a similar treaty between Germany and Korea. Considering the special relationship between Korea and China, he at first contacted the Chinese authorities at Tientsin. There he was told that China would not oppose such a treaty in principle, if Germany would sign a treaty with clauses similarly to those contained in the treaties with the U.S. and Great Britain. The German envoy agreed to these conditions and he also agreed to the Chinese request to have a Chinese diplomat observe the negotiations.

The negotiations themselves began on June 27, 1882. The Chinese deputy was Ma Chien-chung, a secretary of the Chinese

vicerey at Tientsin. The Korean agents were Tschung Ning Yih and Kim Hung Tschü. Max von Brandt states that the negotiations were not too difficult, because there was a general consensus that the Chinese conditions should be fulfilled. The German delegation showed a special interest in a clause that said that Germany should enjoy all of the advantages guaranteed by the treaty, even if it would not ratify the treaty at once. Containing these clauses and with a French translation of the text added, the treaty was signed on June 30th, 1882. Nevertheless, it was not ratified, as the German government missed a most-favoured nations-clause in it.

That clause is the only difference between the two Korean German treaties, which were signed in 1882 and 1883 respectively. The second treaty, signed on November 26, 1883, was negotiated by the German Eduard Zappe, consul general at Yokohama. The treaty contained among others, as a following conditions:

A general promise of "perpetual peace and friendship" (article 1.1)

The opening of the following harbours and cities for trade by German merchants: Chemulpo(today is Incheon), Wonsan, Pusan, Seoul and Yangwach (article IV.1).

The general liberty of trading for German in the above mentioned harbours and cities (article V.1) and.

A most favoured-nations-clause in favour of Germany (article X).

The debate on the treaty in the German parliament took place on June 26, and 28, 1884. It became one of the most important debates on the major issues in German colonial politics.

The chancellor Otto von Bismarck defined the principles of a future German colonial policy as follows:

The colonial policy shall not be an exclusive policy aimed at displacing other Western powers out of their respective spheres of interest.

The German colonial policy does not aim at gaining provinces for the Empire. It merely shall defend the activities of German marchan overseas from other power's attempts to claim those activities for their own colonies.

The special German version of colonial policy does not claim the decisive role for the government. The official policy of the governments

is only aimed at supporting private initiatives.

As a result of this debate, the German-Korean treaty was accepted the German parliament and five months later, it was ratified. The first German vice-consul in Korea became H. Budler.

The visit of the German Emperor's younger brother, Prince Heinrich of Prussia, to Korea in July 1898 became the external expression of German interest in Korean affairs.

References:

1. China. Imperial Maritime Customs, III. Miscellaneous Series: No. 19, Treaties Regulations, etc., Between Corea and Other Powers, 1876-1889, Shanghai: 1891
2. Myung Hyun Cho, Korea and The Major Powers *An Analysis of Power Structures in East Asia*: Korean Unification Studies Series: 7, Seoul., 1987
3. C.I. Eugene Kim, Han-Kyo Kim, Korea and the Politics of Imperialism 1876-1910, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967
4. Frederic Foo Chien, The Opening of Korea, A Study of Chinese Diplomacy, The Shoe String Press, Inc, 1967
5. Woonsang Choi, The Diplomatic History of Korea, Seoul, 1987
6. Ku Dae Yeol, *A Korean Diplomat in London: Yi Haneung and Anglo-Korean Relations* Vol. XV, No. 3, Korea Observer, pp. 361-380
7. Paul H. Clyde and Burton F. Beers, *The Far East: A History of Western Impacts and Eastern Responses*, 1830-1875, Prentice Hall, 1976 (Sixth Edition).
8. M. Frederick Nelson, Korea and the Old Orders in Eastern Asia, New York, 1967, p. 133
9. Han Woo-Keun, *The History of Korea*, Seoul, 1986 (Seventeenth Edition).
10. Pyung-Do Yi, Litt. D, *The Impact of the West on 19th Century Korea, Korean Quarterly*, Summer, 1959, Vol. 1, No. 1
11. Choi Mun-Hyung. *The Onslaught of Imperialist Powers and Its Influence in Korea*, Korea Journal, March, 1984
12. Choi Chang-Kyu, *The Opening of Treaty Ports in Korea and the Open Door Policy of the Republic of Korea*, East Asia

Review, 1975, pp. 283-303

13. Won Yu-han, *A study on the Introduction of German Coinage Techniques to Korea*, Korea Journal, 1974, November, pp. 4-11
14. Werner Sasse, *The Historical Development of Korean-German Relations*, Korea Journal, November, 1983, pp. 5-9
15. Alexander Kneider, *A list of German Citizens in Korea Prior to 1910*, Korea Journal, November, 1983