

Hyojin Lee

The History of Exchange between Korea and Sweden in the Early 20th Century

Introduction

How were the cultural exchanges between Korea and the West during the colonial period? Culture in the colonial period is arguably focused on the inner situation: under Japanese rule and their cultural policy, and Korean people's reactions and struggle toward a modern society. Relationships with other countries are also researched in very limited cases. The very beginning of the exchanges between Korea and Western countries is based on travelers' records including Hendrick Hamel (1630-1692), Siegfried Genthe (1870-1904) and Isabella Bird Bishop (1831-1904). On the other hand, there are envoy records of meetings with Westerners, mostly missionaries, in Beijing (Shin 2006; Lee 2016). In the end of the Chosŏn period, Western ships were anchored, and Korea had an 'official' contact and treaties between Korea and the West before the annexation in 1910. There are also missionaries who established schools and hospitals in Korea. During the colonial period, Korea didn't talk about diplomacy anymore, and only the Korean provisional government had some contact with other countries. The shape of relationships and connections with the outside world became more individual and private. Foreign countries are portrayed in records written by individuals who visited America or Europe such as Yu Kilchun (1856-1914) and Na Hyesök (1896-1948) (Hwang 2009). There is some research about Korean intellectuals' perception of Western culture and knowledge and their personal connections (Lee 2009; Hoffmann and Schirmer 2015-). Additionally, there were some exchanges of people through the networks of Christian communities.

Due to such restricted circumstances, it seems there was a disconnection between Korea and the West during the colonial period, but after the liberation and the Korea War, Korea finally started to establish for-

mal relationships with other countries. However, losing sovereignty and the severance of diplomatic relations, which was the inevitable consequence, does not mean losing all contacts and their identity. Koreans resisted inside and outside. They tried to introduce the Korean situation abroad and to find ways of getting independence. Intellectuals and the Korean provisional government were involved in independence movements outside of Korea (Han 2016; Ko 2009). In many cases, these efforts were operated by individuals. Korean exchange students were not only individuals who sought new knowledge but also heralds of Korea.

The Korea-Sweden case is one of the examples of the history of colonial Korea's interactions. According to the Embassy of the Republic of Korea in the Kingdom of Sweden, the first relationship goes back to 1950, when the Swedish government dispatched Swedish Red Cross Field Hospital (SRCFH) including the nursing staff during the Korean War. Even after the Korean War Armistice Agreement, private medical teams were left in South Korea and offered medical assistance. In 1959, with these connections, South Korea and Sweden established their diplomatic relations. In July 1963, the Embassy of the Republic of Korea was opened in Sweden and ten years later the embassy of the Kingdom of Sweden opened in Korea (Embassy of the Republic of Korea in the Kingdom of Sweden). In 1973, Sweden also established diplomatic ties with North Korea and the embassy of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was opened in Stockholm.

We should keep in mind that this is the record of 'official diplomatic relations' of two countries. There are a few articles that examine the history between Korea and Sweden before the liberation and the Korean War. Tobias Hübinette (2013) introduced the image of Korea in Sweden before 1950 and introduced some significant examples in his article. According to this article, the first meetings between Korea and Sweden already started in 1720s, and there was a partial but continuous history between Korea and Sweden. As I mentioned above, one factor of the difficulty of knowing about the Korea-Sweden relationship is because Korea was a colony of Japan between 1910-1945. Korea was not a nation but a part of Japan. Accordingly, it is impossible to find an official relationship between Korea and Sweden, or any cases of diplomatic exchanges, such as Swedish visits to Korea and vice versa, as Korea had to get permission from the Japanese government. Images of Korea in Sweden and images of Sweden in Korea required Japan as an intermediary. However, there were rare but meaningful direct exchanges between Korea and Sweden in this period.

This article explores the direct exchanges between Korea and Sweden focusing on two representative figures: the first Korean exchange student Ch'oe Yöngsuk and the Swedish King Gustaf VI Adolf. Through these two cases, this article attempts to understand the history of Korea-Sweden relations, not as being severed but as being connected. This research can contribute not only to discovering new historical scenes between Korea and Sweden but also imply insights into the question: How colonial nations such as colonial Korea kept or tried to keep their own international connections informally with their own voices and perspectives.

The Meeting of Korea and Sweden in early 20th Century

Korea was once called a “hermit kingdom” and was finally forced to open its port to the world by signing the first international treaty in 1876 with Japan. After that, Korea had to open several ports to international commerce (Cumings, 2005, p. 86). Modern Korean history started this massive historical turmoil in the middle of imperialism. In 1910, Korea became a colony of Japan and lost its sovereignty for 35 years. In this situation, it seems there was not a significant nation to foster the relationship between Korea and Sweden before 1945. However, there are hitherto unknown cultural exchanges by individuals and associations.

The very beginning of Korea-Sweden relations can be found from the records of Chosön envoys to China in the 18th Century. In the 1720s, Lorenz Lange, a Swede in Russian service, met with Korean diplomats in Beijing and wrote a report on Korea. Johan Philip von Stralenberg produced the first Swedish map with Korea included. At the end of the 19th century, Swedish travelers went to China and Japan, and some of them also visited Korea: Amanda Gardelin stayed at the court of King Kojong in the 1880s and cured a member of the royal family for which she received a valuable tea box as a gift (Hübinette 2003: 109–110).

The first book on Korea in Swedish was a travel record written by a Swedish journalist who visited Korea in 1905. His name is William A:son Grebst (William Daniel August Grebst, 1875-1920), and he visited Korea while he was staying in Japan during 1904-1905, and it was in the middle of the Russian-Japanese War 1904-05. He attended the Korean crown princess' funeral in early January 1905 and then received an audience with the emperor at the Kyöngbok Palace (Grebst 1912; Världskulturmuseet 2010). He published his travelogue *In Korea* in Swedish in 1912.

There were two official records on Swedish persons that can be found in *the Annals of the Joseon Dynasty*. Both are related to Sven Hedin (1865-1952) who was a Swedish explorer and travel writer. He met King

Sunjong accompanied by vice Resident-General of Korea Sone Arasuke (1849-1910) in 1908. The next year King Sunjong awarded him a first-class metal badge (*Sunjong Shillok*, 1908.12.21; 1909.01.06). Korea became a protectorate of Japan in 1905, and lost control of its diplomacy. Japan already took a role as a decision-maker in Korea when Hedin visited Korea.

Swedish missionaries also stayed in Korea during the colonial period. The information is scattered in many different resources because they worked with missionaries from other countries. Swedish protestant missionaries also continuously entered Korea for their missionary works. Before the Swedish Crown Prince's visit in 1926, a Swedish Princess Elsa Victoria Bernadotte (1893-1996) visited Korea in 1924 and met Korean women students. Her visit was on behalf of the Kristliga Föreningen av unga kvinnor (K.F.U.K.) and Young Women's Christian Association of Korea welcomed her warmly (Dong-A Ilbo 1924). There is a record that the Swedish crown prince met two Swedish women missionaries in Taegu (Dong-A Ilbo 1926). The Korean crown prince and the crown princess also visited in Sweden in 1927 and met Gustaf VI Adolf. Interestingly, one Korean woman arrived in Sweden in 1926 for study purposes and stayed in Sweden for 5 years. She had a connection with Swedish royal family, and earned a bachelor's degree in economics at Social-politiska och Kommunal Institutet in Stockholm. She was the first Korean who earned a degree in economics. Between 1935-1936, the Swedish zoologist Sten Bergman (1895-1975) visited Korea, and published *I morgonstillhetens land: skildringar från en forskningsfärd till Korea* (Sten Bergman 1937).

Gustaf VI Adolf and Korean Objects in Sweden: A Symbol of Korean Culture

Gustaf VI Adolf was born in November 1882, and he became the crown prince in 1907 and became the king of Sweden in 1950. He studied history, economics, political science, and archaeology at Uppsala University from 1901. He was also well-known as an archeologist his entire life. His cultural interests included archaeology and art, and he was a great collector – most notably of Chinese art (Swedish Royal Court). Over the years, Gustaf VI Adolf devoted much of his free time to archaeology. He often visited Swedish archaeologically interesting places where he vividtook part in the excavations and the scientific results (*Gustaf VI Adolf – människan och monarken* 1972: 13–16).

As an extension of his interest in archeology, he departed for a long tour starting in America to Asia in 1926. In the beginning, Korea was not included in his plan. The original plan was to visit Japan and to go to China by ship. However, the Japanese government changed the route to go by train via Korea to Manchuria due to the turmoil in China. On 2 September, the group with the Swedish crown prince arrived at Yokohama, Japan. They stayed in Japan for a month, and toured from Tokyo to Fukuoka via Kyoto and Nara and departed from the Shimonoseki port to Pusan. On 9 December, they arrived in Pusan. The following table is the schedule of the crown prince and princess and their companies planned by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Table 1: Working Schedule for the Visit of the Swedish Crown Prince and Princess (1st September version)¹

Date	Plan
9. Oct 1926 (Saturday)	9:00 Arrival in Pusan 9:10 Departure to Taegu 11:38 Arrival in Taegu, departure to Pulguk Temple (by car) Pulguk Temple, Sökkuram, stay at Pulguksa Hotel
10. (Sunday)	Trip to Kyôngju, Stay at Pulguksa Hotel
11. (Monday)	From Pulguk Temple to Taegu 11:46 from Taegu to Keijo (Seoul), Stay at Chosôn Hotel
12. (Tuesday)	Japanese Government-General Museum, Dinner with Government-General, Stay at Chosôn Hotel
13. (Wednesday)	Yi Royal Family Museum, Stay at Chosôn Hotel
14. (Thursday)	8:05 Depart from Keijo 14:19 Arrival in P'yôngyang Nak-rang, P'yôngyang junior high school, Dinner at Takino Chasitsu, Stay at P'yôngyang Railway Hotel
15. (Friday)	Head to Kangsô (by car) 14:30 Depart from P'yôngyang 20:35 Arrival in Shinûiju 20:40 Depart to Hôten (Fengtian, now Shenyang)

The Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent this to the Japanese Government-General in Korea (JGGK) and JGGK escorted them from Pusan. His visit is well-known for his discovery of a golden crown from

¹ Based on material from the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Items related to the VIP visiting Japan-The case of the highness Swedish crown prince and crown princess's visiting Japan" (document number: 6.4.4.1-13).

Sōbongch'ong. On 10 October, the second day of his arrival, he participated in an excavation of a Silla tomb in Kyōngju. To commemorate this discovery, this tomb was named after the first syllable of "Sweden". *Sō* is a Korean pronunciation of the Chinese character 'rui' (the equivalent of "Swe") which originally means 'auspicious', *bong* means "phoenix", and *ch'ong* means "tomb".

This memorable event became a symbol of the good relation between Korea and Sweden. There is a commemorative tree next to On'gogak where the old Kyōngju Museum was. In 1971, the Korean Society of Sweden established a monument to commemorate this in Kyōngju. This event is also often used for emphasizing the relationship of the two countries.

The relationship between Sweden and Korea was friendly. In 1926, The *[sic]* King Gustav VI was warmly welcomed by Koreans who were under pressure from the Japanese to visit Korea for archaeological research with Crown Princess *[sic]* (Dong-A Ilbo 1971).

The Swedish crown prince also collected Korean ceramics and artistic objects consistently. They were donated to the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities in Sweden, and this donation is the core part of the Korean collection in Sweden, and related the opening of the Korea Gallery in 2012 supported by the Korean Foundation.

On the other hand, there are critics who claim that this excavation was orchestrated in order to give an impression of Japanese cultural rule to the Swedish crown prince (Kyunghyang Shinmun 1982). As we can read from [table 1], his visit to Korea was organized by the Japanese government and all his excavations were also accompanied with by Japanese archeologists. However, it does not change the fact that this was one of the most meaningful moments of cultural exchange between Korea and Sweden. The Swedish crown prince did not follow Japan's framing of the Korean objects but recognized their intrinsic worth. Korea was regarded as a part of Japan but its culture and history could be seen as an independent one in Sweden. Gustaf VI Adolf fully understood this adversity and showed his support of Korean culture to the Korean crown prince and princess when they visited Sweden in 1927.

Crown Prince Gustaf VI Adolf said, "There is no such fine art in the West. You can't understand the delicate and clean taste of the Koryō celadon without knowing the Orient. When it comes to the East, we all think of China and India, but I think Korea has a more special culture than any other country.

...The power of spirits which enable to create [*sic*] this culture is immortal. Creativity is something no one can destroy" (Kyōnghyang Shinmun 1984).

Ch'oe Yōngsuk, a Voice from Korea

Ch'oe Yōngsuk (1905/6-1932) is famous for being the first Korean with an economics degree and the first Korean who studied in Sweden (Kim 2015; Chosun Ilbo 1931). However, compared to her recognition as a Korean New Woman,² there are various unknown facts and stories about her life. Woo (2006) pointed out that the reasons for her being unknown are that she died young and that her personal life was publicly unknown (Woo 2006). Lee discovered her life and activities in Sweden and corrected the inaccurate information on her in the magazines in Korea (Lee 2018).

Ch'oe was born in 1905/6 in Kyōnggi province. She studied at the Kyōnggi Ewha high school in 1918-1921, which was the first women's modern educational institute, established by American missionary Mary F. Scranton in 1866. She went to China in 1922 and studied at Ming Deh school in Nanjing and the next year entered Huiwen school in Nanjing.³ She recalled the reason for choosing China: "Unusually, I hated to study in Japan, and I preferred to study in China, so I admired that land (Ch'oe 1932)". However, the critical reason was the March First Movement and the Japanese government's brutality (Stockholm Dagblad 1927). She even took a Chinese citizenship rather than a Japanese one, and entered Sweden as a Korean-Chinese.

While studying in China, she had an interest in sociology and socialism, and after her studies in China, she decided to go to Sweden for further study, and this bold decision was also influenced by a Swedish female writer: Ellen Key (1849-1926). She headed to Sweden in 1926 despite all difficulties; she was even captured by police because of possessing books about socialism, but unfortunately, Ellen Key passed away a few

² The word New woman or *Shinyōsōng* has its origin in the English 'New woman'. This word translated to Shin Fujin in 1886 September in Japan. But this word was widely used since 1910 when Tsubouchi addressed it in Osaka education association. In particular, the boost in the idea of women liberalization that began largely with the publishing of *Seito*, the first women's literary magazine in Japan created by graduates from women's colleges such as Hiratsuka Raiteu (1886-1971), who had an impact on the formation of the Japanese new women's idea of modernity (Shin 2011)

³ Ming Deh Academy, founded in 1884 by the American North Presbyterian Church. From 1912 it was called Private Ming Deh Girls' School. Hwei Wen Girls' School was founded by the Methodists in 1887 and known under its subsequent name from 1902.

months before her arrival. Ch'oe, however, decided to stay in Sweden and study sociology, and she stayed five years in Sweden but studied social economics. At the beginning she stayed in Sigtuna city which is one hour away from Stockholm. There is a Christian institute called Sigtuna-stiftelsen, and while staying there Ch'oe entered Sigtuna Folkhögskola and learnt Swedish and studied Swedish history before entering higher education. While staying in Sigtuna, Ch'oe was supported by her Christian connections with K.F.U.K. (Kristliga Föreningen av Unga Kvinnor) and the Swedish Princess Elsa Victoria Cedergren (1893-1996) who was a chief of K.F.U.K. In Korea it was reported that Ch'oe graduated from Stockholm University (at that period, Stockholms högskola) but in fact she studied at Socialpolitiska och Kommunala Institutet in Stockholm. This institute was merged with Stockholm University in 1977 and became the Institution for Social Work (Institutionen för socialt arbete). She studied under Gösta Bagge (1882-1951) and Gerhard Halfred von Koch (1872-1948) and began to build her knowledge of social economics.

In 1931, she finally finished her long journey from 1921. After her graduation, she went on a trip and visited various countries in Europe and Asia on the way back home. Especially, she spent four months in India. In India, she met Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) and Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949) and gave speeches about the situation in Korea. After her return, she participated in several interviews and meetings and was involved in the enlightenment movement for rural women. Despite her ambition and rich experience, she struggled to find a proper job in Korea and had to work at a small grocery shop. There were only few positions where women could work and Ch'oe, as a female and colonial subject, failed to enter into society. In April of 1932, she passed away because of overworking during pregnancy. It was less than half a year after returning.

In previous research, Ch'oe's activity in Sweden was not fully spotlighted. The author argues that Ch'oe was not the first female student in Scandinavian countries but a remarkable female independent activist in Europe (Lee 2018). Ch'oe should be reevaluated for her efforts to introduce the Korean situation in Swedish society. She was the only window that could deliver Korea's perspectives in Sweden. Ch'oe's independence movement can be elucidated largely in three ways: communicating, addressing, and visualizing.

She tried actively to communicate with others and planned events related to Korea, such as arranging a Korean evening, and introducing Korean culture and food to the Swedes.

In November a Korean evening was organized - unfortunately not too numerous - when the Young Sook Choi provided the entertainment (M.A. 1929).

After the meeting, Miss Young Sook Choi from Korea tells us about Korea. – Tea supper at 1:25, Styrelsen (Styrelsen 1928).

Ch'oe was also interviewed by a Swedish newspaper and published a short essay in the school magazine. She gave a speech to the public regarding the situation in Korea. Through these addresses, she brought up deep and serious topics such as the brutality of the Japanese ruling in Korea and the Koreans' strong feelings against it.

Korea is a peninsula, located in the Far East. Korea is a pretty beautiful country, many foreigners love our country's nature. ... But now, since 1910, the bloodthirsty Japanese imperialists have penetrated Korea, gained political power and all our economic resources. From that time, the young people in Korea have been fighting for the freedom of their motherland. They fight with righteousness and humanity as weapons against the enemies armed with swords and cannons (Ch'oe 1927).

When we heard that the congress in Paris expressed itself for the freedom and independence of the people, we believed that Korea too had become a free country. ... The Japanese shot down a few thousand and put a few hundred in jail. Most people still sit there, but many have died. My best friend died there a couple of years ago. ... I ran from Korea to China and became a Chinese citizen (Stockholm Dagblad 1927).

She also showed her identity by wearing Korean traditional costume, *hanbok*. Several pictures of her are found in Sweden and in many of them she wore a white *hanbok*. “White *hanbok*” is a symbol of Korean custom. Koreans liked to wear white clothes from ancient times and called themselves “the people of White Clothes (*Paegūiminjok*)” (Soh 2011). Ch'oe wore white *hanbok* when she worked for the Chinese exhibition in NK department store in 1927. She did a calligraphy performance with her white *hanbok* and attracted the visitors' attention. To her, wearing white *hanbok* was a deliberate action or performance to show her identity and introduce Korean culture visually.



Figure 1. Ch'oe Yöngsuk in Hanbok⁴

Ch'oe stayed in Sweden for five years, and she was not only accepting new knowledge but also spreading Korean culture and appealing the Korean situation to Swedish society. There were no other Koreans staying in Sweden for such a long period and matters regarding Korea were taken care of by the Japanese embassy in Sweden. It is also known that she worked for the Swedish crown prince, especially with his Korean collection. Without her, it is likely that the Korean objects would have been

⁴ Sigtunastiftelsens arkiv. "Sigtunastiftelsens Folkhögskola Picture Book" (1927-1928).

organized by Japanese scholars or curators.⁵ Under these circumstances, Ch'oe was the only figure who could communicate Korea's messages from a Korean perspective, and she knew her position deeply and devoted herself to it.

Conclusion

In the colonial period, Koreans went to Japan to learn about the West and the West learned about Korea through Japan. Japan had already established diplomatic relations with Sweden by signing the Swedish-Japanese Treaty in 1868. Compared to Japan, Korea was way behind in participating in this flow and became a colony of Japan before achieving international recognition. As a result, the situation in Korea did not allow Korea to have diplomatic relationships with other countries, and it was extremely hard to get a direct connection with the West.

As an inevitable consequence, the relationship and interactions of Korea and Sweden relied on Japan. However, there were some direct exchanges between Korea and Sweden by individuals in the 1920s. It was the start of the cultural interaction between the two countries. The Swedish crown prince visited Korea and took part in the excavation in Kyōngju. The essential part of the Korean collection in the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities is the objects donated by His Majesty King Gustaf VI Adolf. It is the most famous and substantial Korean collection among the Scandinavian countries. This historical event also influenced the later diplomatic relations between Korea and Sweden. There was a political tension between Japan and Korea regarding the hegemony of Korean objects. The Japanese attempted to use this visit as propaganda for their works in the colonial state. Regardless of the concealed intention of the Japanese government surrounding this visit, however, the Swedish crown prince comprehended the aesthetic value of the objects with his insight into the history and meaning of Korean objects.

Ch'oe Yōngsuk is one of the essential figures for understanding the life of elite women under colonial Korea, but also to know the cultural interaction between Korea and Sweden and to understand the awareness between those countries. She was the only direct window for introducing Korean things to Sweden during her residence in Sweden, and she was actively using her unique position to introduce Korea to Sweden and deliver its own voice. Her intensive life and ambitions to devote herself to being a herald of Korea let her have rich connections with the Swedish

5 Indeed, some of the catalogues were written by Japanese scholars or curators.

royal family, professors, and Swedish Christian associations. She also kept connections with Swedish society after her return (Dahlgren 1934). Her life was short, but she increased knowledge of Korea by communicating with Swedish people, addressing the Korean perspective, and making Korea visible in late 1920s Sweden.

These two direct interactions and the following awareness of the two countries during the colonial period paved the way for the relationship between the two countries until their formal diplomacy started. Many undiscovered histories between the two countries still remain, and they will tell us more about the connections and unknown fascinating stories of Korea and Sweden.

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