

A Pawn in the Great Game: Chosŏn's Rapprochement with the Russian Empire Amidst the British Seizure of Kŏmundo, 1884–1886

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Abstract

The paper examines the Chosŏn government's rapprochement with the Russian Empire performed against the backdrop of the British seizure of Kŏmundo (1885–1887). Two attempts of Russo-Chosŏn rapprochement, carried out in the summer of 1885 and summer of 1886, are analyzed separately and against the wider geopolitical situation in Northeast Asia and on the Korean peninsula of the time. To do so, the author relies on the analysis of Russian, Korean, and English primary sources to reveal the Russian and Chosŏn government's standing at that time, and the geopolitical reasons behind the failure of Russo-Chosŏn rapprochement.

Keywords: Great Game, Kŏmundo, the Russian Empire, Great Britain, Kojong, Chosŏn (Korea's) foreign policy

Introduction

In the mid to late nineteenth century, the Northeast Asian region, which throughout its history generally maintained a self-sufficient system of cross-country relations and exchanges focused on the Sinocentric diplomatic order, began to experience significant political and geopolitical changes. With the

influence of Western powers and Capital reaching this part of the globe, the old China-centered system was significantly weakened, paving the way for “modern,” open foreign exchanges. For various reasons, the so-called opening of Northeast Asia for diplomacy and trade happened not simultaneously but gradually, with China and the Japanese archipelago being included in global geopolitics earlier than other countries in this region.

Squeezed between China on the continent and a modernized Meiji Japan to the east, the small kingdom known as Chosŏn (Korea) was forced to join global diplomacy only in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Due to its geographic location and internal political situation that for many years prevented foreigners, in general, and westerners, in particular, from landing on its territory, Chosŏn was the last country in Northeast Asia to be open for international trade and included in diplomatic exchanges with Western partners.¹

Chosŏn concluded its first modern treaty in 1876,² and after that found itself unable to maintain its traditional policy of isolation. However, the active phase of Chosŏn’s foreign policy began only in the early 1880s. Therefore, by the mid-1880s, Chosŏn was still new to modern geopolitical exchange. Nonetheless, guided by a proactive diplomatic approach launched by its King,³ by the spring of 1885 Chosŏn had concluded treaties with all the major powers present in Northeast Asia,⁴ including Great Britain and the Russian Empire, and was a full participant in regional geopolitics. That is when the issue around Kōmundo unfolded.

Part 1: So close and yet so far

Russo-Chosŏn (semi-)official exchanges began in 1860 after the Russian Empire had obtained large territories in northeastern Manchuria, which became Russia’s Primorsky region.⁵ These territories bordered the northern provinces of Chosŏn by land, thus laying the foundations for an intensification of exchange between the two countries.

The poorly controlled border between Hamgyŏng province of Chosŏn and the southern territories of the Russian Primorsky region allowed a relatively easy crossing. Since the early 1860s, these circumstances led to a steady migration of Chosŏn’s citizens (mostly peasants), seeking unoccupied land further to the north in the Russian territories.⁶ Therefore, in March of 1880, an official of the Russian Ussuri region approached the Hamgyŏng provincial authorities to suggest the mutual strengthening of supervision of human traffic over the Russo-Chosŏn border, but his approach failed to achieve any result.^{7,8}

Despite the discouraging outcome of their first attempt at approaching Chosŏn, the dynamic development of overland trade,⁹ however, assured the Russian

government of the necessity to formalize relations between the two countries. Therefore, in early June of 1882, the Russian representative in China submitted a note to the Chinese government requesting its assistance in negotiating a treaty with Chosŏn.¹⁰ Referring to the recently concluded treaty between the United States and Chosŏn,¹¹ he asked for this new treaty to be of the same nature and content, but with one addition: the Russian party wanted to include a clause that would govern the overland trade between the two countries.¹² On this matter the Russian government's attempt failed again: in mid-July, the Chinese government delivered Chosŏn's reply, which stated that, since the border between the two countries is narrow and small, there is no need for a special clause about overland trade in the treaty.¹³

Although rejected again, the Russian government did not give up on the idea and, after consulting in late 1883 with the adviser to the Chosŏn government Paul Georg von Möllendorff,¹⁴ it appointed the Russian consul in Tientsin Carl Waeber (also known as Weber or Вебер)¹⁵ to carry out the treaty negotiations with Chosŏn officials. Relying on the favorable conditions of Kojong's active line in diplomacy and the example of Chosŏn's already concluded and ratified treaties with the United States, Great Britain, Germany, and Italy, on 20 June 1884, Waeber arrived in Chosŏn. The negotiations went smoothly, and on June 27, the Russo-Chosŏn treaty was signed in Seoul.

Amidst the news of the escalation of the Sino-French conflict over Vietnam,¹⁶ which alarmed Chosŏn's civilians and officials,¹⁷ the recently concluded (but not yet ratified) treaty with Russia was soon used as grounding for rapprochement between the two countries. This time, however, it was the Chosŏn party who took the initiative.

In August to September 1884, Paul Georg von Möllendorff contacted the Russian Empire's officials in China, offering them a discussion about the international status of Chosŏn. Attempting to take advantage of the geopolitical struggles of that moment, he introduced two possible options for the Russian party's consideration: a neutralization¹⁸ of Chosŏn, ensured by protective measures offered from China, Japan, and Russia or an exclusive protection of the Korean peninsula by Great Britain.¹⁹ Against the background of Anglo-Russian rivalry in the Middle East, as well as the fact that the treaty between Chosŏn and the Russian Empire, entered into against China's will,²⁰ was not yet ratified, both afore-mentioned options appeared highly provocative. It was only natural that the Russian officials did not accept either of them. Therefore, although the Chosŏn representative's offer was duly reported to Saint Petersburg, no reaction from the Russian government followed.²¹

In December of the same year, while visiting Tokyo under Kojong's order to handle the diplomatic consequences²² of the recent Kapsin coup,²³ Paul Georg von Möllendorff contacted the Russian officials again. This time he offered Russia the opportunity to establish its military protectorate over Chosŏn. For this purpose, von Möllendorff asked the Russian government to send military instructors and warships with two hundred sailors on board to Chosŏn. While not completely rejecting this offer, the government in Saint Petersburg, however, stated that the presence of its naval forces in the waters of the Korean peninsula would be undesirable.²⁴ Therefore, once again, the Chosŏn party's attempt to engage with Russia faced the latter's ambiguous attitude and a refusal to undertake responsibilities on the Korean peninsula.

Ironically, in the summer of 1885, the Russian party rushed to take up Paul Georg von Möllendorff's December 1884 offer, when, driven by the British navy's activities on Kōmundo, it initiated an open attempt to approach Chosŏn.

Part 2: Setting the scene

Since the 1870s, Great Britain had shown interest in three islands on the southwest of the Korean peninsula, called Kōmundo by the locals, but commonly known in the west as Port Hamilton. In July 1875, amidst increasing tension between Chosŏn and Japan (unfolding due to the Japanese government's continuous attempts to "open" Chosŏn for trade and modern diplomacy and the Chosŏn government's firm resistance to that "opening"), and amidst rumors that Japan had reached an agreement with Russia to attack Chosŏn, the British representative in Tokyo introduced the idea of occupying Kōmundo, arguing that the possession of these islands would ensure the British presence in the region.²⁵ This plan was, however, rejected at that time, as Her Majesty's government concluded that it did not wish to "set other nations the example of occupying places to which Great Britain has no title."²⁶

However, by the spring of 1885, amidst escalating Anglo-Russian hostilities in the Middle East, also known as the "Great Game,"²⁷ the British approach towards the inviolability of borders in Northeast Asia was revised.

After the Afghan army, which had allied with Great Britain, clashed with Russians in early March 1885,²⁸ and the government in London started its preparations for the war,²⁹ the Kōmundo issue was brought out again and treated in a markedly different light. Evidently, Great Britain, the major maritime power with a relatively small land army,³⁰ aimed to counterbalance its potential overland campaign in the Middle East. Therefore, Britain sought to strengthen its presence in the waterways of the Northwest Pacific. In mid-March of 1885, the British

fleet deployed in Nagasaki was ordered to be ready for potential actions against Russia.³¹ On April 15, a new order dictating the occupation of Kōmundo was issued. The territory was taken the day after, on April 16, with no resistance from locals.³²

These actions were rationalized by British politicians by a set of geopolitical and economic reasons, which, ironically, were very similar to arguments that were used against the plan of occupation of the islands back in 1875. The Admiralty Foreign Intelligence Committee justified the decision in the light of the British interests in the region: the need to protect Hong Kong, which Great Britain had leased from China in 1841, the need to ensure the safety of British trade in the region, and a complicated argument that the seizure of the islands would be useful for British potential future actions in Northern China, Japan, on the Korean peninsula, and even in eastern Siberia.³³ Meanwhile, the First Lord of the Admiralty highlighted British hostilities with Russia over Afghanistan, which determined the need to blockade Russia in the Pacific and to direct a naval offensive against Vladivostok.³⁴

Despite the existence of a decade-old proposal to occupy Kōmundo, the British seizure of the islands in April of 1885 was not a well-prepared act. Although, since February of 1885, the possibility (and necessity) of seizing this part of Chosŏn land once again become a subject of discussions between high British officials, the ultimate resolution to take such an action, influenced by escalating Anglo-Russian hostilities, was made only in early April.³⁵ Therefore, failing to carry out diplomatic preparations, the British government attempted to get its actions approved by the main powers in the region post-factum.

On April 17, the British representative in Beijing was officially instructed not to mention the Royal Navy's actions at Kōmundo.³⁶ The same instructions were transferred to the British ambassador in Tokyo.³⁷ Britain spared no efforts to make sure that no rumors of its activities on Kōmundo would spread before its new status was negotiated and, ultimately, approved by both China and Japan. Accordantly, the Chinese minister in London was informed of the seizure of the islands on April 16,³⁸ and a confidential telegraphic message of the same nature was delivered to the Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs on April 20.³⁹ The British government explained to both countries that this invasive action was performed "in a view of the probable occupation of these islands by another power."⁴⁰

Having long-standing territorial disputes with Russia⁴¹ and aiming to secure its prevailing status in the region, the Chinese party promptly responded, stating that "it was better that England should take ... [these islands] rather than the Russians."⁴² This favorable response encouraged the British officials to take a

further step and to attempt to conclude a written understanding with the Qing government about Kōmundo.⁴³

However, the Japanese party's reaction was rather restrained. Technically not opposing the British navy's actions, the government in Tokyo declared that fearing the Russian response, it could not issue an official approval.⁴⁴ Thus, while voicing no disapproval, the Japanese government, however, distanced itself from the issue. Apparently, the British also came to realize that the Russian Empire's close interest in the Kōmundo case was unavoidable. Therefore, it rushed to initiate negotiations with the Chosŏn government directly, aiming at preventing the Russians from getting involved.

On April 24, the British representative in Seoul William Carles⁴⁵ officially informed the Chosŏn government of the Royal Navy's activities on Kōmundo. Although he specifically stressed that the occupation was temporary,⁴⁶ it was only natural the Chosŏn government did not comply. Therefore, realizing that Chosŏn's open protests would unavoidably invoke Russia's attention, the British diplomat spared no efforts to convince the country's authorities of the good nature of British intentions. To succeed with this task, Russian actions in the Anglo-Russian hostilities in Afghanistan were to be described in a certain negative way. On 7 May 1885, while briefing Chosŏn's Foreign Minister Kim Yunsik,⁴⁷ Carles revealed that "Russia had encroached on Afghanistan, with the Ruler of which country England was in intimate relations, and that England had resented the invasion of the territory of her friendly neighbor" and "then came forward to Afghanistan's protection."⁴⁸ He assured the Chosŏn official that the British fleet had to take Kōmundo to prevent Russia from seizing it.^{49,50}

Meanwhile, Russia, perhaps unintentionally was contributing to the British narrative. First, in early May, the word spread that the Russian Minister in Beijing had informed his Chinese counterpart that if China consented to the British occupation of the islands, then the Russian government would feel the need to occupy some other island or portion of the Korean peninsula.⁵¹ Just then, the Russian vessel *Vladivostok* reached Kōmundo.⁵² Treated as an attempt to take the islands,⁵³ the *Vladivostok's* arrival added to the British accusations against Russia.

Carles, however, went even further and, on May 14, informed Kim Yunsik of the on-going speculation that the Chosŏn government offered Russia the ceding of a "group of islands" in exchange for its military protection. Two days later, the same rumor was duly delivered to the Chinese minister in Seoul.⁵⁴ No specific islands were ever named, but, given the timing and circumstances that surrounded the appearance of this speculation, it can be assumed that the Chosŏn territory in question was Kōmundo.⁵⁵

As a result, by late May of 1885, when the peak of Anglo-Russian tensions in the Middle East had passed,⁵⁶ the British party found itself securing a moral right to continue with the occupation of the Kōmundo islands, quite literally re-allocating the Great Game from the Middle East to the Northeast Asian region. Amidst that, a rapprochement between Chosŏn and the Russian Empire unfolded.

Part 3: Between a hammer and a hard place

On May 18, after obtaining an eyewitness report of the occupation of Kōmundo, the Russian representative in Beijing repeated his government's protest against the British actions to the Chinese government. On the same day, Alexey Shpeyer (also known as Alexis de Speyer or Алексей Шпейер),⁵⁷ secretary of the Russian legation in Tokyo, was authorized to make his second trip to Chosŏn.⁵⁸ Visiting Chosŏn in a semi-official capacity, Shpeyer was ordered to monitor the negotiations on the Kōmundo case and oppose the British possession of these islands. He was to stay in Chosŏn until the arrival of Carl Waeber, who was appointed as the Russian minister to serve in Seoul. Shpeyer's agenda also included negotiations with the Chosŏn government about the employment of Russian military instructors—an idea introduced by von Möllendorff in early 1885. However, to avoid a clash with China or Japan, Shpeyer was specifically commanded to proceed with the discussions about this issue only if Chosŏn stated its desire to employ Russian instructors first.⁵⁹ Therefore, no official credentials enabling Shpeyer to carry out such talks were issued for him by the Russian Foreign Ministry.

The Russian government's decision to send Speyer was taken before von Möllendorff, who reached Japan to present the Chosŏn government's official protest against the Royal Navy's actions in Korea to the Commander-in-Chief of the British China Station, had called to consult the Russian consul in Nagasaki.⁶⁰ Therefore, it would be safe to assume that Russia acted with no regard for the Chosŏn party's ongoing agenda, and that its intention to make an open diplomatic gesture towards Chosŏn was triggered by the then-current geopolitical situation that was unfolding in the region due to the Anglo-Russian tensions in the Middle East. Evidently, Russia was under the impression that the offer that von Möllendorff made back in February 1885, before the British actions on the Korean peninsula, remained active and intended to use it in its rivalry with Great Britain.

In this complicated situation, on 9 June 1885, Shpeyer reached Seoul.⁶¹ Convinced that the offer, voiced by von Möllendorff in early 1885, was sanctioned by the King and still valid, the Russian delegate straight away attempted to deal directly with the Chosŏn government. This, however, turned out to be problematic, and for some ten days, he could only meet with von Möllendorff.⁶²

Despite that, Kojong was, apparently, duly informed of the Russian delegate's agenda in Chosŏn. Therefore, the King acted accordingly. On June 14, he summoned the United States minister, George Clayton Foulk,⁶³ for yet another discussion about American military instructors, long-awaited in Chosŏn.⁶⁴ During this meeting, Foulk noticed Kojong's increased anxiety for the American instructors to be sent as soon as possible. He deduced that the King's conduct was with no doubt caused by the Anglo-Russian tensions.⁶⁵ It is evident that understanding the geopolitical meaning of the Great Game, which now was threatening the territorial integrity of his country,⁶⁶ Kojong was hesitant to approach either of these two countries and instead resolved to address the United States as the third party.

Amidst that, frustrated by a delay and in violation of his instructions, on June 18, Shpeyer took the initiative and directly addressed the Chosŏn government, demanding the employment of Russian military instructors instead of American specialists.⁶⁷ It is evident that the Russian delegate became aware of Kojong's further request to the American party and attempted to prevent the Chosŏn government from achieving it. However, rather than spoiling the Chosŏn-American negotiations, Shpeyer's open declamation instead alarmed the British Consul in Seoul. Understanding Shpeyer's statement as the Russian party's attempt to enforce its influence over Chosŏn and by it to not only squeeze the British out from Kŏmundo but also to strengthen its presence in the region, Britain began prompt countermeasures.

On June 19, the new British representative Willian Aston⁶⁸ informed Kim Yunsik that the occupation of Kŏmundo, in fact, had not been occasioned by the Russo-British tensions in the Middle East and that von Möllendorff's intrigues with the Russian legation in Tokyo in early 1885 were the real reason for the Royal Navy's invasive actions.⁶⁹ Evidently, this British strategy was proven to be effective. The next day Shpeyer finally met with Kim personally just to learn that the Chosŏn government was completely unaware of von Möllendorff's repeated appeals for the Russian military assistance.⁷⁰ Discouraged by such a turn of events, the Russian delegate made yet another attempt to convince the Chosŏn government to accept Russian military instructors, openly delivering a detailed report on von Möllendorff's diplomatic ventures of 1884 and 1885.⁷¹ These drastic actions, however, had little effect on Kim Yunsik, who simply replied that no Russian instructors could be invited because the employment of the American instructors was the King's personal request, while von Möllendorff's negotiations with the Russian party were carried out at a private level.

But the Russian diplomat refused to take "no" for an answer. To counter the Chosŏn party's ultimatum, Shpeyer resorted to bluff. He stated that if the Chosŏn government keeps insisting on engaging American drill instructors, then the

Russian government will recall its minister to Chosŏn (who had not even arrived yet), and cause a rupture in the relations of the two countries.⁷²

This threat, evidently, reached its goal. Three unidentified Chosŏn state officials, who referred to themselves as Kojong confidants, soon called on Shpeyer. They revealed that the King was willing to employ Russian military instructors, but he wished to keep this agreement in secret until the instructors arrived in Chosŏn. Therefore, the following plan of action to soothe the Russian delegate's interactions with the Chosŏn government was drafted: in the following days, Kojong should grant Shpeyer a formal audience during which the issue of Russian military instructors would not be discussed; the King would formally inform the United States of an issue with Russian military instructors and ask the government in Washington to cancel a dispatch of their drill instructors; finally, before Shpeyer left Chosŏn,⁷³ a letter from Kojong would be delivered to him. In this letter, the King would express his desire to accept Russian military instructors, undertake to enter into a written agreement with the Russian Empire upon the instructors' arrival, and reject employment of military instructors from other countries.⁷⁴

Honoring his part of the deal, on June 21, Kojong summoned the United States minister for a discussion about demands made by the Russians. During this meeting, Foulk revealed to the King that one of the Chosŏn government ministers already informed him that the American instructors were no longer needed.⁷⁵ This statement not only indicated that the government in Washington was aware of the Kojong-Shpeyer secret agreement but also quite unambiguously implied that Chosŏn's further rapprochement with Russia might harm Chosŏn's relations with the United States. This turn of events, however, did not make the King give up on the idea to meet with the Russians. The next day, he finally met with Shpeyer. As agreed, Kojong denied any knowledge of previous negotiations on the employment of Russian military advisors. He recommended the Russian delegate to address this matter to the Foreign Minister.⁷⁶

It is noticeable that Kojong made this suggestion while being aware of Kim Yunsik's firm opposition to the employment of the Russian instructors. On the evening of the same day yet another "confidant" from the King made a call on Shpeyer. He explained that Kojong wanted the Russian delegate to continue to press Chosŏn's Foreign Minister on this matter, but added that, if this approach failed, then the King would issue a written promise to employ the Russian military instructors, regardless of Kim's opposition.⁷⁷ This motivated the Russian delegate to further actions.

Suspecting that Kim Yunsik's resistance had taken its source from Chinese opposition and intending to overrule it, on June 23, Shpeyer called on the Qing resident in Seoul. Surprisingly, the Chinese diplomat explained that while the

Chosŏn government indeed informed him about the negotiations, he did not advise the Foreign Ministry in this regard. Moreover, the Chinese official clarified that, in his opinion, it was not a matter of concern for China to which government Chosŏn might turn for instructors.^{78,79}

As the assumption of Chinese meddling was proven wrong and having no other leads to explain the Chosŏn Foreign minister's resistance, on June 24, Shpeyer once again met with Kim Yunsik and rather boldly attempted to persuade him to comply with the plan. Kim was, however, adamant. He once again brought up the existence of a previous written agreement with the United States, but as this did not discourage the Russian delegate, he ultimately pointed out that, as Shpeyer approached the Chosŏn government with no credentials, the whole discussion was of a private nature,⁸⁰ and therefore, further talks were pointless. That was a card Shpeyer could not trump. He retreated, hoping, perhaps, for another opportunity to renegotiate.

At this point, Britain struck its final blow, completely frustrating Shpeyer's efforts and by de-facto annulling his agreement with the King. On June 26, obviously aiming at forcing Kojong to denounce the rapprochement with Russia, the British minister in Seoul informed the Chosŏn government of his government's intention to release Kōmundo when assured that von Möllendorff's consultations with Russian officials were not authorized by the King.⁸¹ Taking up this promise, the Chosŏn government complied, issuing on July 1 an official statement that disowned von Möllendorff's agreements with Russian officials.⁸²

After this announcement, it became clear to Shpeyer that Kojong's written compliance was the last opportunity for his mission to succeed. After all, even failing on the official level, the Russian delegate still had Kojong's semi-official promise. Indeed, up until his last moments in Seoul, Shpeyer remained assured that the issue with the Russian instructors would be resolved after his agreement with the King. On July 12, a messenger from the palace informed him that the letter in question would be delivered that night.⁸³ Shpeyer waited until morning, but no deliveries from the King came.⁸⁴ With this, Shpeyer left the country on July 13, failing to achieve the goals set for him and again violating the instruction issued for him by the Russian Foreign Ministry.

Part 4: Half a loaf is better than no bread

By autumn of 1885 and amidst China tightening its grasp over Chosŏn,⁸⁵ it became clear that in the summer Kojong had backed the wrong horse. Despite him stepping down from the rapprochement with Russia, the winter of 1885 and spring of 1886 came and passed, but the British navy had shown no signs of any

intention to leave Kōmundo. Or so it seemed. The historical irony of the situation was that just as Kojong had realized that, with the Chinese unspoken approval of the continuation of the British occupation of part of Chosŏn's land, he had no other options left but to approach the Russians again, the Chinese and the British authorities opened a discussion, seeking the appropriate way for Her Majesty's navy to finally release the islands.

In mid-March 1886, pressed by Russia, which, despite its position weakened by the failure of Shpeyer's mission on the Korean peninsula,⁸⁶ continued to make threats to "take 10 times more of Chosŏn's territory"⁸⁷ if the British navy did not retreat from Chosŏn, the Chinese party concluded that it could not get into trouble with Russia about a matter that concerned only British interests.⁸⁸ In late March, the British also realized that, amidst high maintenance costs and relatively low strategic value, further occupation of the islands was no longer desirable.⁸⁹ Thus, assuming that on a geopolitical scale the British and the Chinese interests were pursuing the same objective, and that it would be against the interest both of China and Britain if Kōmundo were to be occupied by another European Power, the government in London produced a new strategy of joint guarantees of Chosŏn's integrity. According to it, the Chinese party was to obtain Russia's written engagement not to occupy Kōmundo before the British navy's withdrawal from it.⁹⁰ However, contrary to what was expected of him, Lǐ Hóngzhāng,⁹¹ the Chinese state official in charge of Chosŏn affairs, demanded a prior obligation from the British party to evacuate the islands. Only then he would undertake the task of convincing the Russians to issue the required written engagement.^{92,93}

Evidently, Kojong knew nothing about changes in the Chinese and British agendas. Therefore, since the early summer of 1886, he was closely watching the activities of Carl Weaber, the Russian minister in Seoul, so as not to miss the right time for another attempt at rapprochement.

The opportunity soon appeared as Russia once again voiced a desire for an agreement on overland trade to be concluded between the two countries. This initiative was treated by Kojong as a sign of the government in Saint Petersburg's incessant interest in the Korean peninsula. The British and Germans, however, were alarmed by it. Both countries assumed that Russia would demand the same tariffs as those that were defined by Chosŏn's overland trade regulations with China (1882).⁹⁴ Therefore, they feared that, if concluded, such an agreement would negatively affect their trade in the region. For this reason and attempting to frustrate Waeber's venture, the British and German representatives in Seoul stated that in the case of the conclusion of such an agreement, their governments would insist on an adjustment of tariffs and duties defined in their applicable treaties.⁹⁵ Naturally, the Chinese party also viewed the Russian government's

initiative with worry and dissatisfaction. In early July, Lǐ Hóngzhāng even issued an open memorial to the King, in which he accused Russia of having an agenda to invade the Korean peninsula at the first opportunity and stated that it would be better for Chosŏn not to have any overland trade at all than to trade with its northern neighbor.⁹⁶

Lǐ's concern at a possible Russo-Chosŏn rapprochement increased with a report in a local Chosŏn newspaper that in mid-July 1886 a Russian vessel was spotted near Wŏnsan (known in the West as Port Lazareff) on the east coast. As alarming as this was, the situation got even worse when the new British minister to Chosŏn, Edward Baber,⁹⁷ by a mistranslation, was informed not of one Russian ship, but of "the presence of a fleet of four Russian vessels at Port Lazareff." Apparently, before consulting with Waeber, Baber telegraphed this urgent news to Beijing and communicated it to the Chinese representative in Seoul.⁹⁸ As the tension was increasing, rumors of a Russo-Chosŏn secret rapprochement began to spread. At the end of July 1886, the British minister at Beijing reported to London that the King had asked for the protection of Russia, and that the Russian government demanded this request to be in writing. Highlighting the Chinese side's concerns in the matter, the diplomat added that Lǐ Hóngzhāng issued an urgent order to prevent the Russo-Chosŏn rapprochement at all costs.⁹⁹

Against this background, Kojong's actual attempt to attain the protection of the Russian Empire was set in motion. On August 5, Chosŏn's high state official called on the Russian minister in Seoul, Carl Waeber. During this meeting that lasted for four hours, the Chosŏn official passionately explained to Waeber that "the King is extremely burdened by the influence that the Chinese representative has on the country," that he "is convinced that China would not be able to defend [Chosŏn]... if any serious trouble arises," and that the British seizure of Kŏmundo was a vivid proof of such Chinese disability. All this, just to convince the Russian diplomat to accept the letter that would soon be delivered to him, in which the King would seek the Russian government's "assistance for strengthening Chosŏn's independence."¹⁰⁰ No arguments that such action would only worsen the Chinese party's dissatisfaction with the Chosŏn government and harm Sino-Russian relations as well,¹⁰¹ voiced by Waeber to persuade Kojong from submitting the letter, had any effect. On August 7, the King's emissary called on the Russian minister again and reconfirmed Kojong's intentions to ask for a Russian protectorate in writing. By that time, Waeber became aware of rumors about a secret Russo-Chosŏn rapprochement that had been going around Seoul. Thus, conscious of a looming crisis, he once again suggested not to send the letter, or at least to put its dispatch on hold until the proper moment.¹⁰² The King, however, was deaf to the Russian diplomat's reasoning. Therefore, on August 9, a written request,

bearing the seals of the King and the Minister of Internal Affairs was delivered to the Russian legation. In the letter, Kojong largely repeated the above-mentioned arguments and requested Russian assistance to obtain Chosŏn's liberation from Chinese vassalage, additionally asking the government in Saint Petersburg to "send warships to temporarily ensure [his]... security ... if tensions with the other Country arise."¹⁰³ In violation of the Foreign Ministry's instruction, which forbade any negotiations regarding establishing a Russian protectorate over Chosŏn,¹⁰⁴ Waeber, sympathetic toward Kojong's efforts, accepted this letter and duly transferred it to Saint Petersburg.

Amidst the sensitive situation in the country, it was only natural that soon the Chinese minister in Seoul, Yuán Shikǎi,¹⁰⁵ would be informed of Kojong's actions. And so around August 12, Yuán, allegedly,¹⁰⁶ came into possession of a copy of the King's letter. After this, the Chinese party's prompt retaliation followed. Revealing that "he had accurate knowledge of an agreement in writing, bearing the King's seal, the effect of which was to turn Korea bodily over to Russian protection," Yuán informed Chosŏn's high officials of the Chinese intention to stop it at all costs. He threatened that 75,000 Chinese soldiers would be sent to Chosŏn under his summons¹⁰⁷ to punish the King for his independent actions.

Taking Yuán's threat seriously, once again, Kojong had to step back from his agreement with the Russians. Even more, attempting to appease the Chinese Minister and escape the retaliation promised by him, the King produced and delivered an explanatory note to Yuán, in which he claimed that it was not his idea to approach Russia and that the letter and his stamp on it were forged.¹⁰⁸

It is hard to estimate how convincing Kojong's assurances appeared to the Qing. However, it stands as a historical fact that against the uncertainty of the Chinese minister's threats,¹⁰⁹ and the uncertainty of the Chosŏn explanations, it was the Russian response to the situation that released the steam from a speedily developing crisis. Implying that the letter, which Yuán allegedly had, was forged, the Russian minister in Seoul was adamant in his denial that any correspondence from the palace requesting Russian protection had ever reached him.¹¹⁰

Evidently, not willing to harm fragile Sino-Russian relations, and intending to resolve the Kŏmundo case, the Qing authorities choose not to challenge Waeber's words. Instead, Lǐ rushed to instruct the Chinese representative in Saint Petersburg that if the letter from Kojong was ever received through Waeber, then the Russian government was to be asked to resolutely treat it as not composed or authorized by the King.¹¹¹ The Russian foreign ministry complied,¹¹² and with this, a diplomatic crisis on the Korean peninsula was avoided.

Part 5: The bitter end

This paper shows that in 1885–1886 Chosŏn had been treated as expendable, a pawn in a bigger game unfolding between the Russian Empire and Great Britain. The British seizure of Kŏmundo was an example of how geopolitical struggle between the two Western countries could affect the balance of power inside Northeast Asia. The Royal Navy's invasion of Chosŏn's land promptly transformed into a major international crisis that not only entangled the countries directly involved (Chosŏn and Great Britain) but also the Russian Empire, China, and, to some extent, Japan, placing them in rival camps.

Ironically, however, the Kŏmundo incident benefited neither Great Britain nor Russia. The only power that capitalized on the international crisis in Chosŏn was China. Amidst the absence of direct Anglo-Russian contacts regarding Kŏmundo, the Qing stepped in as a mediator. With the islands freed of the British presence owing to its involvement,¹¹³ China managed to generally overcome restrictions implied by the Convention of Tientsin,¹¹⁴ and strengthen its standing in Chosŏn and the Northeast Asian region.

As neither of the competing parties and the mediator considered Chosŏn's standing and interests, it is possible to conclude post-factum that King Kojong had no opportunity to solve the crisis looming around his country without approaches to Russia or Great Britain. He, however, still tried to remain neutral. In the summer of 1885, when Shpeyer reached Seoul intending to transform not yet formalized relations between the two countries into a strategic partnership, the King of Chosŏn immediately realized that his official statement of any nature about the Russian party's demands would automatically be treated as an expression of support to either Russia or Great Britain. If he would choose to officially support the agreement with Russia, this would invoke not only China's disapproval, but, most importantly, provide the British with a pretext and a justification for its seizure of Chosŏn's territory. If he, however completely ignored the Russians, this would spoil the relations between the two countries even before the ratification of a Russo-Chosŏn's treaty.¹¹⁵ Thus, King Kojong took a middle path of withdrawing from the official negotiations with Shpeyer but continuing semi-official discussions. It was, however, the British promise to release Kŏmundo that eventually ended the King's semi-official interactions with the Russian delegation and, ultimately, put the Russo-Chosŏn rapprochement on hold.

By the summer of 1886, Kojong had learned his lesson, realizing that Anglo-Russian rivalry, having reached Northeast Asia, left him with no chance to solve the Kŏmundo problem himself. Since the British had already tricked him once, the King of Chosŏn chose to side with Russia, rushing to reconcile with it at the

first opportunity. However, lacking knowledge about the Sino-British talks over the Kōmundo issue, instead of protecting his country, Kojong put it in a vulnerable position. It cannot be an overstatement to conclude that the events of August 1886 negatively affected the ongoing discussion over Chosŏn's territorial integrity and thereby slowed down the withdrawal of the British navy from Kōmundo.

As was mentioned above, since the spring of 1886, British officials pressed the Chinese party about obtaining guarantees of non-occupation of Chosŏn's territory by a third power. However, if before the incident *Lǐ Hóngzhāng*, aiming not to irritate the Russian party, had handled the matter cautiously, from mid-August of 1886 his approach changed. When, at the end of August, the Russo-Chinese consultations over Chosŏn, which were gradually unfolding since the spring, entered the stage of discussion of a written agreement,¹¹⁶ the Chinese party, feeling insecure amidst the rumors of the secret Russo-Chosŏn rapprochement, began to insist on a clause that would ensure Russia's admittance of China's rights to suzerainty over the Korean peninsula.¹¹⁷ As it would endanger its interests in the region (namely, the ongoing negotiations about the overland treaty with Chosŏn), such a clause was deemed unacceptable for the Russian government.¹¹⁸ This clash of opinions, naturally, unleashed time-consuming negotiations. It was only by mid-November of 1886 that both parties, ultimately unable to reach consensus on the matter, concluded a verbal, gentleman's agreement, whereby both Russia and China guaranteed Chosŏn's status quo, i.e., its sovereign and territorial integrity.¹¹⁹ Luckily, constantly updated on the Sino-Russian negotiations, the British too saw merits in the absence of a written Russo-Chinese agreement: if Britain was ever to go to war with Russia, it could easily re-occupy Kōmundo.¹²⁰ With this, the Chinese verbal assurance that no part of Chosŏn, including Port Hamilton, will be occupied by a foreign power was deemed sufficient, and "on the faith of this guarantee [and] to comply with the wishes of the Chinese government,"¹²¹ in mid-November of 1886, the British began their preparation to evacuate from the Chosŏn territory.¹²²

Notes

1. Despite numerous attempts facilitated by several western powers active in the region (including several attempts of the United States), until 1876 (the Chosŏn-Japan "Kanghwa" treaty) the country remained uninvolved in global geopolitical processes.
2. Treaty that Japan forced on Chosŏn in 1876 copied treaties that the United States and Great Britain had forced on Japan in the mid-1850s. This treaty paved the way for the development of Asian imperialism, led by Japan.
3. *Kojong Shillok* 고종실록. 19kwŏn, kojong 19 nyŏn 8 wŏl 5 il muo 5 pŏntchae kisa, Sŏul kwa chibang e seun ch'ŏkyangbi rŭl modu ppoba pŏrirago myŏng hada (19권, 고종 19년 8월 5일 무오 5번째기사, 서울과 지방에 세운 척양비를 모두 뽑아버리라고 명하다). http://sillok.history.go.kr/id/kza_11908005_005.

4. A treaty with the United States was concluded in May of 1882. It was followed by treaties with Great Britain (November of 1883), Germany (November of 1883), and Italy (June of 1884).
5. By the Treaty of Aigun (1858) and the Convention of Beijing (1860) with China.
6. By the end of 1869, around 7,000 Chosŏn peasants were residing in the South Ussuri territory of Russia. From Park, Boris Иак Борис. *Rossiya i Koreya* (Moscow: Institut Vostokovedeniya RAN, 2004), p. 86.
7. Boris Park states that reacting to the Russian authority's suggestion, the ruler of Chosŏn had forbidden any direct contact with Russian officials. For detail, see Park Boris, *Rossiya i Koreya*, p. 93.
8. Kojong's refusal to communicate with the Russian party was, apparently, influenced by the Sino-Russian crisis over the Ile river region (1871–1881) and by the existing argument, promoted by the Chinese and British parties and supported by the Japanese party, about the invasive nature of the Russian policies in Northeast Asia. In May of 1880, Great Britain began to suspect that the Russian Empire was preparing for a treaty with Chosŏn. A report of Japan's agent in Seoul, obtained by the British Legation in Tokyo, indicated such moves. It revealed that in March 1880, a Russian agent arrived on a ship of war to Seoul and delivered a letter to the government of Chosŏn, the object of which, as the Japanese official believed, was to conclude a treaty. Amidst the Anglo-Russian tensions in the Middle East region, this report focused Great Britain's attention on Chosŏn. Speculations, spread in the summer of 1880 about the Russian intention to invade Chosŏn in case of Sino-Russian military conflict, added to the British party's concerns. Therefore, by November of the same year, the British government decided on the necessity of a treaty with Chosŏn. For detail, see: Mr. Kennedy to the Marquis Salisbury, May 25, 1880, #90. *Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866–1886*, Seoul, Korea: Sin Mun Dang Pub. Co., 1982, p. 57; Mr. Kennedy to Earl Gravelle, June 29, 1880, # 113. *Ibid.*, p. 61; Mr. Kennedy to Earl Gravelle, November 21, 1880, #179. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
9. With no restrictions properly applied, by the 1880s active human traffic over the Russo-Chosŏn borderline was supplemented by a flourishing, but unregulated, trade. The annual turnover of overland trade between Chosŏn and Russia in 1881 was 450,000 rubles. By 1884 it grew to be twice that. For detail, see: Simbirtseva, Tatiana Симбирцева Татьяна. "Rossiysko-koreyskiye kontakty v Pekine v kontse XVII—seredine XIX vv." *Problemy Dal'nego Vostoka* №6 (1998), pp. 91–93; Park, *Rossiya i Koreya*, p. 91.
10. Grosvenor to Earl Granville, December 14, 1882, #155, *Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866–1886*, p. 139.
11. The treaty was signed on 22 May, 1882.
12. Park, *Rossiya i Koreya*, p. 117.
13. Park, *Rossiya i Koreya*, p. 118.
14. Paul Georg von Möllendorff (1847–1901) was a German linguist and diplomat. He is mostly known as the first foreign advisor of Kojong, serving in Chosŏn in this capacity from 1882 to 1885.
15. Carl Waeber (Карл Иванович Вебер, 1841–1910) was a Russian Imperial diplomat and Kojong's close acquaintance. From 1885 to 1897, he served as the Russian representative in Chosŏn. In this capacity, Waeber largely contributed to strengthening the Russian Empire's influence on the Korean peninsula.
16. The Sino-French conflict over Vietnam—rivalry over dominance of Vietnam, was unfolding between France and China from the late 1870s. By 1884, after several military clashes, the conflict developed into a full-scale war (the so-called Sino-French War), which ended with the Chinese party's loss in the spring of 1885.
17. Allen Horace Newton. *Korea the Fact and Fancy* (first printed in 1904) (Seoul: Hanbinmun'go, 1983), p. 167.

18. By “neutralization” von Möllendorff meant international guarantees of Chosŏn’s integrity with the Belgium case taken as example. For more details about Chosŏn’s neutralization see, for example, Jin, Sangpil. “Korean Neutralization Attempts (1882–1907): Retracing the Struggle for Survival and Imperial Intrigues.” Ph.D. dissertation, SOAS, University of London, 2016.
19. Park, *Rossiya i Koreya*, p. 144.
20. Since the early 1880s the Chinese government advised Chosŏn against engaging with Russia. This hostile attitude was influenced by the on-going Sino-Russian territorial tensions and the Qing government’s intention to secure its prevailing rights in the Korean peninsula.
21. Lee, Yur-Bok. *West goes East: Paul Georg von Möllendorff and Great Power Imperialism in late Yi Korea* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1988), p. 95.
22. *Kojong Shillok*, 21, Kojong 21/10/27 musul, second entry, “서상우를 전권 대신에, 뮐렌도르프를 부대신에 임명하여 일본에 파견하다,” http://sillok.history.go.kr/id/kza_12110027_002.
23. The Kapsin Coup was an attempted revolution led by Chosŏn’s liberal political forces of Chosŏn—the so-called Progressive Party—which aimed to come to power through a civil and military uprising. Beginning on December 4, 1884, the coup attempt lasted only four days and was suppressed by Chinese military forces.
24. The government in Saint Petersburg sought to maintain its neutrality in the case of Sino-Japanese military conflict over the Korean peninsula. For detail, see: Park, *Rossiya i Koreya*, p. 146.
25. “Memorandum by Sir E. Hertslet on the Importance of Port Hamilton, February 5, 1885”. *Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866–1886*, p. 488.
26. The Secretary to Tenterden, August 3, 1875. From Stephen Royale, *Anglo-Korean Relations and the Port Hamilton Affair, 1885–1887* (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 49.
27. The Anglo-Russian rivalry in the Middle East, the so-called Great Game, was one of the major global geopolitical struggles on the nineteenth century. Unfolding since the early 1870s, this rivalry was premised on the Russian government’s ambitions to strengthen its presence in the Middle East and the British government’s efforts to push the Russians out of the region, as their presence endangered the British hold on India.
28. Since 1882, pushed out of Afghanistan by the Afghan-British forces, the Russian army was campaigning to re-claim the region. Unavoidably, these activities were laying the foundation for another escalation of the political and diplomatic confrontation between Great Britain and the Russian Empire. These tensions peaked in March 1885 when the Russians provoked a strike by the Afghan army and used this opportunity for counter-attacking and advancing into the south of Afghanistan’s territory. For detail, see: Gerald Morgan, *Anglo-Russian Rivalry in Central Asia, 1810–1895* (London: Routledge, 1981), p. 195.
29. Morgan, *Anglo-Russian Rivalry in Central Asia, 1810–1895*, p. 195.
30. In the 1880s, the British army counted only about 48,000 soldiers, while the Russian troops consisted of more than 900,000 regular soldiers and nearly 250,000 irregulars (mostly Cossacks). Numbers are taken from open sources (Wikipedia).
31. Plunkett to Granville March 21, 1885. From Royle, *Anglo-Korean Relations and the Port Hamilton Affair, 1885–1887*, p. 58.
32. Royle, *Anglo-Korean Relations and the Port Hamilton Affair, 1885–1887*, p. 58.
33. Royle, *Anglo-Korean Relations and the Port Hamilton Affair, 1885–1887*, p. 58.
34. Royle, *Anglo-Korean Relations and the Port Hamilton Affair, 1885–1887*, p. 58.
35. Admiralty to Currie (Confidential), 4 April 1885, FO 405/35 TNA. From Suzuki, Yu. “Anglo-Russian War-Scare and British Occupation of Kōmundo, 1885–7: The Initial Phase of Globalisation of International Affairs Between Great Powers,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 47: 6 (2019), p. 1108.
36. Earl Granville to O’Conor, April 17, 1885, #79a. *Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866–1886*, p. 491.

37. Earl Granville to O'Connor, *Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866–1886*, p. 491.
38. Earl Granville to the Marquis Tseng, April 16, 1885, #7. *Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866–1886*, p. 490.
39. Plunkett to Earl Granville, April 23, 1885, #11. *Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866–1886*, p. 491.
40. Earl Granville to the Marquis Tseng April 16, 1885, #7. *Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866–1886*, pp. 490–491.
41. The late nineteenth century was marked by several Russo-Chinese territorial disputes. As well as Russia taking territories in northeastern Manchuria, in the 1880s, the Sino-Russian crisis over the Ili River region (1871–1881) was an active issue. Additionally, the issue of the border between the two countries, which the Chinese party was aiming to solve since 1874, was actively negotiated only in the spring-summer of 1886.
42. O'Connor to Earl Granville, April 21, 1885, #53. *Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866–1886*, p. 508.
43. On April 28, a draft of this agreement, prepared by the British Foreign Ministry, was delivered to the Chinese envoy in London. For detail, see: Earl Granville to the Marquis Tseng, April 28, 1885. *Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866–1886*, p. 493.
44. Mr. Plunkett to Earl Gravile, April 23, 1885, #11. *Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866–1886*, p. 491.
45. William Richard Carles (1848–1929) was a “provisionally” British Vice-Consul for Chosŏn in 1884–1885.
46. O'Connor to Carles, April 24, 1885. From Royle, *Anglo-Korean Relations and the Port Hamilton Affair, 1885–1887*, p. 59. This narrative was already used on the Chinese and Japanese and since then became a part of general rhetoric that British diplomacy utilized while dealing with consequences of its actions regarding Kōmundo. The temporary nature of its seizure was, however, not completely true. Some powerful British politicians were advocating for a permanent hold of Port Hamilton. Eventually, their suggestions were overpowered by the opinion that the permanent hold on the islands would unavoidably invoke Russia's protests and, therefore, contribute to the tensions between the two countries. Thus, the scheme of establishing a permanent British navy base at Chosŏn's Kōmundo was soon put aside. For detail, see: Memorandum by Lord Northbrook, May 20, 1885. *Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866–1886*, pp. 498–499.
47. Kim Yunsik (김윤식 / 金允植, 1835–1922) was an influential politician and diplomat of Chosŏn. In 1884, he served as the Foreign Minister of Chosŏn and signed a treaty with the Russian Empire. Despite that, Kim Yunsik was known as a pro-Chinese politician.
48. Vice-Consul Carles to Mr. O'Connor, May 7, 1885. *Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866–1886*, p. 511.
49. Carles to O'Connor, May 19, 1885. From Royle. *Anglo-Korean Relations and the Port Hamilton Affair, 1885–1887*, p. 60.
50. It is important to note that despite the existence of several rumors about Russian interests in leasing Chosŏn's territories to use it as an ice-free port for its Pacific Fleet, the majority of these rumors were pointing to Wŏnsan, while Kōmundo was out of consideration. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the British rhetoric of accusing the Russians of having plans regarding Kōmundo was a pretext for the British navy's hold on the islands and preventing Chosŏn from an open protest against it. For detail, see: Ian Nish, *Collected Writings of Ian Nish: Part 2: Japanese Political History—Japan and East Asia* (Collected Writings of Modern Western Scholars on Japan) (Pt. 2) (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 120–122.
51. Earl Granville to Mr. O'Connor, May 6, 1885, #93A. *Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866–1886*, p. 494.

52. Vice-Admiral Sir W. Dowell to the Secretary to the Admiralty, May 14, 1885, Inclosure 1 in #68. *Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866–1886*, p. 519.
53. Vice-Admiral Sir W. Dowell to the Secretary to the Admiralty, May 14, 1885. From *Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866–1886*, p. 519.
54. Acting Consul-General Carles to Mr. Plunkett, May 18, 1885, Inclosure 1 in #79. *Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866–1886*, p. 531.
55. It is difficult to trace the origins of this speculation. However, the mere fact that Carles reported it to his colleague in Tokyo as something that reached him “from Japan” lays the foundation for an assumption that this rumor was produced by Great Britain, or even by Carles himself. See: Acting Consul-General Carles to Mr. Plunkett, May 18, 1885, Inclosure 1 in #79. *Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866–1886*, p. 531.
56. Royle, *Anglo-Korean Relations and the Port Hamilton Affair, 1885–1887*, p. 129.
57. Alexey Shpeyer (Алексей Николаевич Шпейер; 1854–1916) was a Russian diplomat. In 1885, he served as secretary of the Russian Empire’s legation in Tokyo. In 1897, he was appointed as Russian consul general to the Korean Empire.
58. Shpeyer had visited Chosŏn briefly in January of 1885. He even met with Kojong, but as his appearance in Seoul was unofficial, no applied consultations, negotiations or such with the Chosŏn government took place at that time. For detail see, for example: Boris Park, *Rossiia i Koreya*, pp. 146–149.
59. Park, *Rossiia i Koreya*, p. 153.
60. Evidently, von Möllendorf reached Nagasaki on May 18, 1885. For detail, see: Kojong Shillok, 22, Kojong 22/4/6 musul, seventh entry “업세영 등이 영국 수군 제독에게 편지를 보낸다,” http://sillok.history.go.kr/id/kza_12204006_007
61. Park Bella Пак Бэлла. “Rossiyskaya Diplomiatiya i Koreya (1876–1898) (Российская Дипломатия и Корея (1876–1898))”. Ph.D. dissertation. Moscow: Institut Vostokovedeniya Rossiyskooy Akademii Nauk, 2006, p. 208.
62. Foulk to Secretary of State, July 5, 1885, #192. *Korean-American Relations. Documents Pertaining to the Far Eastern Diplomacy of the United States, volume 1, the Initial Period, 1883–1886*. Ed. by George McCune and John Harrison (Berkeley, CA: Univ. of California Press, 1963), p. 81.
63. George Clayton Foulk (1856–1893) was a United States Navy officer. From 1883 he served as Naval Attaché to Chosŏn; from 1886 to 1886 and from 1886 to 1887 he served as the United States minister in Chosŏn. Foulk maintained close relations with several influential politicians and enjoyed Kojong’s confidence.
64. An agreement that the United States government will provide Chosŏn with various specialists and instructors was achieved during the Chosŏn observation delegation to the United States (보빙사 / 報聘使) in the autumn of 1883. Since that time Kojong, personally concerned with the matter, continuously pressed the US officials to make good on this promise. However, the arrival of the American specialists was constantly delayed under various pretexts.
65. Foulk to Secretary of State, June 18, 1885, #184. *Korean-American Relations. Documents Pertaining to the Far Eastern Diplomacy of the United States, volume 1, the Initial Period, 1883–1886*, p. 58.
66. Foulk to Secretary of State, *Korean-American Relations. Documents Pertaining to the Far Eastern Diplomacy of the United States, volume 1, the Initial Period, 1883–1886*, p. 58.
67. Allen, Horace Newton. *Allenü ilgi*, Translated by Kim Wŏnmo. Seoul: Tan’guktaehak-kyoch’ulp’anbu, 1994, p. 472 (June 19, 1885).
68. William George Aston (1841–1911) was a British diplomat. He first served in Japan, but in 1884 was transferred to Chosŏn as the British representative. He was transferred back to Japan in 1885.

69. Aston to O'Connor, July 10, 1885. From Lensen, George Alexander. *Balance of Intrigue: International Rivalry in Korea & Manchuria, 1884–1899, vol. 1.* (Tallahassee, FL: University Press of Florida, 1982), p. 52.
70. Lensen, *Balance of Intrigue: International Rivalry in Korea & Manchuria, 1884–1899, vol. 1,* p. 38.
71. Lensen, *Balance of Intrigue: International Rivalry in Korea & Manchuria, 1884–1899, vol. 1,* p. 38.
72. Lensen, *Balance of Intrigue: International Rivalry in Korea & Manchuria, 1884–1899, vol. 1,* pp. 39–40.
73. Clearly, Kojong was unaware of the Russian Foreign Ministry's instruction that dictated Shpeyer to stay in Chosŏn until Waeber's arrival.
74. Park, *Rossiia i Koreya*, p. 155.
75. Allen, *Allenüi ilgi*, p. 474 (June 21, 1885).
76. Lensen, *Balance of Intrigue: International Rivalry in Korea & Manchuria, 1884–1899, vol. 1,* p. 41.
77. Park, *Rossiia i Koreya*, p. 155.
78. Spheyer to Davydov, June 15 (27), 1885. From Lensen, *Balance of Intrigue: International Rivalry in Korea & Manchuria, 1884–1899, vol. 1,* p. 41.
79. It seems reasonable to treat the Chinese minister's reply as truthful. An order from Li Hóngzhāng, dictating resident Chen to frustrate the treaty between Russia and Chosŏn and remove von Möllendorff from his post as the counselor of the king, came on July 2. The latter lays the foundation for the assumption that China, at least officially, was not involved in the ongoing Shpeyer-Kim negotiations. For detail, see: Lensen, *Balance of Intrigue: International Rivalry in Korea & Manchuria, 1884–1899, vol. 1,* p. 45.
80. Lensen, *Balance of Intrigue: International Rivalry in Korea & Manchuria, 1884–1899, vol. 1,* p. 43.
81. Foulk to Secretary of State, June 26, 1885, #187. *Korean-American Relations. Documents Pertaining to the Far Eastern Diplomacy of the United States, volume 1, the Initial Period, 1883–1886,* p. 79.
82. Lensen, *Balance of Intrigue: International Rivalry in Korea & Manchuria, 1884–1899, vol. 1,* p. 45.
83. Shpeyer to Davydov, June 24 (July 6), 1885. From Lensen, *Balance of Intrigue: International Rivalry in Korea & Manchuria, 1884–1899, vol. 1,* p. 47.
84. Haeoesaryoch'ongsŏ 12kwŏn Rŏshia kungnip haegnip sŏngmunsŏ I (1854~1894) (해외사료총서 12권 러시아국립해군성문서 I (1854~1894). 8. RGAVMF, f.26, op.1, d.6, ll.3ob.~5ob □03060835 (8. РГАВМФ, ф.26, он.1, д.6, лл.3об.~5об. □03060835), http://db.history.go.kr/item/level.do?sort=levelId&dir=ASC&start=1&limit=20&page=1&pre_page=1&setId=2&prevPage=0&prevLimit=&itemId=fs&types=&synonym=off&chinessChar=on&brokerPagingInfo=&levelId=fs_012_0080&position=-1. It is easy to guess that at the very last moment Kojong was persuaded from honoring his part of the deal with the Russians.
85. As the result of publication of Kojong's secret attempt to approach Russia, the Qing implemented punitive measures against its vassal state. Paul Georg von Möllendorff was ousted; the Chinese resident in Seoul replaced; and in early October of 1885, Kojong's father and ex-regent—the Taewŏn'gun—known for his anti-foreign policies, returned to Seoul.
86. The Russian minister who finally reached Seoul in early October of 1885 was specifically instructed to proceed with extreme caution, not to irritate the Chinese and other foreign representatives, and not to discuss matters of a Russian protectorate with Chosŏn's officials, even if the Chosŏn party initiated such discussions. This “wait-and-see” disposition of the Russian government lasted until the summer of 1886. For detail, see: Park, *Bella Пак Белла. Rossiyskiy Diplomat C.I. Waeber i yego Koreya* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Instituta Vostokovedeniya RAN, 2013), p. 51.

87. Plunkett to Earl Granville, June 23, 1885, #173. *Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866–1886*, pp. 582–583.
88. The Earl Rosebery to Mr. O'Connor, April 1, 1886, #79. *Ibid.*, p. 667.
89. O'Connor to Earl Rosebery, Match 27, #109, 1886. *Ibid.*, pp. 672–673.
90. O'Connor to Earl Rosebery, Match 27, #109, 1886. *Ibid.*, pp. 672–673.
91. Lǐ Hóngzhāng (李鴻章, 1823–1901) was an influential politician and diplomat of Qing China. Since the mid-1870s, he oversaw China's policies regarding Chosŏn. Under Li's supervision, Chosŏn signed its treaty with the United States in 1882.
92. O'Connor to Earl Rosebery, Match 27, #109. *Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866–1886*, pp. 672–673.
93. *otnosheniya v Priamur'ye (ser. XIX-nach. XX vv.)* (Blagoveshchensk: Blagoveshchenskiy gosudarstvennyy pedagogicheskiy universitet, 2003), p. 22.
94. These new regulations basically ensured Chinese trade hegemony on the Korean peninsula. For detail, see: Park, Jung Mee. "Interpreting the Maritime and Overland Trade Regulations of 1882 between Chosŏn and the Qing: How logics of appropriateness shaped Sino–Korean relations," *International Area Studies Review* 23.1 (2020).
95. Park, *Rossiya i Koreya*, p. 174.
96. Denby to Secretary of State, July 5, 1886. *Korean-American Relations. Documents Pertaining to the Far Eastern Diplomacy of the United States, volume 1, the Initial Period, 1883–1886*, pp. 145–147.
97. Edward Colborne Baber (1843–1890) was an English diplomat, who, from 1885 to 1886, acted as consul-general in Chosŏn.
98. It is easy to guess that at the very last moment Kojong was persuaded from honoring his part of the deal with the Russians. The roots of Baber's anxiety can be found in the Chosŏn government's decree of early July 1886 granting a United States schooner the right to pearl-fish near Kōmundo. For detail, see: Vice-Admiral Hamilton to the Secretary of the Admiralty, July 19, 1886, Inclosure in #47. *Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866–1886*, p. 688.
99. Sir J. Walsham to the Earl of Rosebery, July 31, 1886, #53. *Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866–1886*, p. 689.
100. Waeber to Girs, August 6, 1886. Arkhiv Vneshney Politiki Rossiyskoy Imperii, Fond №150 «Yaponskiy stol», 493, 1, K1, 1885–1887, Doneseniya poverennogo v delakh i general'nogo konsula v Seula i raznaya perepiska o polozhenii del v Koreye, ob otnosheniyaKh onoy k Kitayu i o snosheniyaKh Koreyey Rossii i drugikh derzhav, Delo №36, list 109.
101. Waeber to Girs, August 6, 1886. Arkhiv Vneshney Politiki Rossiyskoy Imperii, Fond №150 «Yaponskiy stol», 493, 1, K1, 1885–1887, Doneseniya poverennogo v delakh i general'nogo konsula v Seula i raznaya perepiska o polozhenii del v Koreye, ob otnosheniyaKh onoy k Kitayu i o snosheniyaKh Koreyey Rossii i drugikh derzhav, Delo №36, list 109.
102. Waeber to Girs, August 6, 1886, Приложение (Prilozhenie), Arkhiv Vneshney Politiki Rossiyskoy Imperii, Fond №150 «Yaponskiy stol», 493, 1, K1, 1885–1887, Doneseniya poverennogo v delakh i general'nogo konsula v Seula i raznaya perepiska o polozhenii del v Koreye, ob otnosheniyaKh onoy k Kitayu i o snosheniyaKh Koreyey Rossii i drugikh derzhav, Delo №36, list 115.
103. Waeber to Girs, August 6, 1886, Приложение (Prilozhenie), Arkhiv Vneshney Politiki Rossiyskoy Imperii, Fond №150 «Yaponskiy stol», 493, 1, K1, 1885–1887, Doneseniya poverennogo v delakh i general'nogo konsula v Seula i raznaya perepiska o polozhenii del v Koreye, ob otnosheniyaKh onoy k Kitayu i o snosheniyaKh Koreyey Rossii i drugikh derzhav, Delo №36, list 115; list 117.
104. Park, *Rossiyskiy Diplomat C.I. Waeber i yego Koreya*, p. 51.
105. Yuán Shìkǎi (袁世凱, 1859–1916) was a Qing military official and diplomat. Yuán first arrived at Chosŏn in 1882 as a military commander; in 1885 he was appointed as the Imperial Resident in Sŏul and held this post until 1895.

106. It is still not known whether or not Yuán really had a copy of the king's letter. On August 15, asked to show this letter by the foreign advisor to the king, Yuán refused to do so. For detail, see: Foulk to Secretary of State, September 8, 1886, #3. *Korean-American Relations. Documents Pertaining to the Far Eastern Diplomacy of the United States, volume 1, the Initial Period, 1883–1886*, p. 150.
107. Foulk to Secretary of State, September 8, 1886, #3. *Korean-American Relations. Documents Pertaining to the Far Eastern Diplomacy of the United States, volume 1, the Initial Period, 1883–1886*, p. 151.
108. Park, *Rossiya i Koreya*, p. 165.
109. New Foreign advisor to the king, Owen Nickerson Denny, was at that time convinced that Yuán had no letter in his possession and that the rumors of the secret Russo-Chosŏn rapprochement were untrue. For detail, see: Foulk to Secretary of State, September 8, 1886, #3, *Korean-American Relations. Documents Pertaining to the Far Eastern Diplomacy of the United States, volume 1, the Initial Period, 1883–1886*, p. 150; Denny to Detring, August 12, 1886, #16. *An American Adviser in Late Yi Korea: The Letters of Owen Nickerson Denny*. Edited, with an introduction, by Robert R. Swartout, Jr. (AL: The University of Alabama press, 1984), p. 39.
110. Kim Jong Hong. “Russko-Koreyskiye diplomaticheskiye otnosheniya v 1884–1904 gg” Ph.D. dissertation. Moscow: Moskovskiy Gosudarstvennyy Universitet imeni M.V. Lomonosova, 2000, pp. 141–145.
111. Lǐwénzhōng gōng quánjǐ, Diàn gǎo 7:32A-b, guāngxù 12 nián 7 yuè 19 rì. From Im Kyesun. Chorŏ miryakkwa kū huhuūi chorŏgwan'gye (1884–1894). In Chorŏgwan'gye 100nyŏnsa (Seoul: Han'guksayŏn'guhyŏbūihoe, 1984), p. 105.
112. Lew, Young Ick. “Yuan Shih-k'ai's Residency and the Korean Enlightenment Movement (1885–94),” *Journal of Korean Studies*, 5 (1984), p. 83.
113. Mr. Rockhill to Mr. Bayard, January 22, 1887, #50, *Index to the Executive Documents of the House of Representatives for the Second Session of the Fiftieth Congress, 1888–'90, Vol. 1, Part 1*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1888–1889, p. 255.
114. Concluded between China and Japan on April 18 of 1885 as an aftermath of the Kapsin Coup, this treaty ordered Chinese and Japanese troops to leave the peninsula and forbade both countries from providing military instructors to Chosŏn, de-facto limiting their involvement in Chosŏn state affairs.
115. The treaty was ratified in October of 1885.
116. For a detailed account and analysis of Li-Ladyzhevsky negotiations over Chosŏn see, for example: Kim, Hyunsoo. “The relationship between the British fleet's withdrawal from Port Hamilton (Kŏmundo) and British foreign policy: the Li-Ladygensky joint agreement of 1886,” *European Journal of Korean Studies*, 13 (2011), pp. 43–75.
117. Lensen, *Balance of Intrigue: International Rivalry in Korea & Manchuria, 1884–1899, vol. 1*, p. 63.
118. Park, Boris Борис Пак. *Rossiyskaya diplomatiya i Koreya* (Moscow: Institut vostokovedeniya RAN, 2004), p. 166; Mr. Brenan to Sir J. Walshaw, November 3, 1886, Inclosure in #299. *Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1866–1886*, p. 747.
119. Korph, Memorandum osobogo sobraniya, January 26, 1887. *Arkhiv Vneshney Politiki Rossiyskoy Imperii, Fond №143 «Kitayskiy stol»*, 491, 5, 1887, Vsepoddaneyshiye doklady, 168, List 10 – 10 oborot, 17 oborot – 18.
120. Royle, *Anglo-Korean Relations and the Port Hamilton Affair, 1885–1887*, p. 133.
121. Iddesleigh to Walshaw, November 19, 1886. From Royle, *Anglo-Korean Relations and the Port Hamilton Affair, 1885–1887*, p. 133.
122. Kŏmundo became free of the British navy in late February of 1887.

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