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- 17 *Ibid*, p.215.
- 18 *Ibid*, p.217.
- 19 *Ibid*, p.217.
- 20 *Ibid*, p.217.
- 21 *Ibid*, p.216.
- 22 *Ibid*, p.216.
- 23 "The Ten Most Important People in the Fifth Republic on Trial", *Shin Tonga*, February 1989, p.375.
- 24 *Ibid*, p.381.
- 25 Ed Baker, *Democracy in South Korea: A Promise Unfulfilled, A Report on Human Rights 1980-1985* (International League for Human Rights and the International Human Rights Law Group), pp.127-128
- 26 Bruce Cumings, *The Two Koreans, Foreign Policy Association Headliner Series 269*, p.62

**ROBERT HART AND CHINESE
DOMINATION OF KOREA
A STUDY OF MISGUIDED IMPERIALISM**

YUR-BOK LEE

Introduction

The place of the British administrator, Robert Hart, in modern Chinese history is well known. As the Inspector General of the Chinese Imperial Maritime Customs Service between 1863 and 1911 and as a Westerner who had "more influence on the ruling Chinese than any other foreigner" during his tenure, Hart had a great impact not only on the operation of China's Customs Service but also on matters of modernization and foreign policy. Profound as Hart's influence on Chinese leadership was, his role in the history of China has been the subject of considerable controversy among scholars. Patriotic Chinese historians are insistent that Hart was simply a collector of revenue designed to meet indemnity payments to the treaty powers and, more significantly and more revealingly, was an archetypical defender of Western colonialism in China.¹ Several

outstanding Western scholars portray him as a "modernizer," who tried to do what was best for the Chinese people within the context of Western imperialism.² As recondit as his role in China might be, all students of history, both Chinese and Western, concur that Hart left a tremendous legacy in China. Unlike his place in China, however, Hart's role in the affairs of Korea is less known even to East Asian historians. Because Korea was important to China even after it supposedly had become independent in the 1880s, Hart paid a great deal of attention to it, and especially to the Korean Customs Service and financial matters. Hart's conception of what China's policy toward Korea should be after 1882 did not differ substantially either from the course the British government advised the Chinese to adopt or from the course the Chinese in fact pursued.

The traditional Sinocentric East Asian world order was disintegrating under pressure from the West's imposition of modern treaties on China from the 1840s onwards, by Japan's conclusion of a treaty with China on the basis of sovereign equality and the annexation of the Ryukyu Islands, by Korea's negotiation of modern treaties with Japan and the Western powers, and by the French colonization of Vietnam. Nonetheless, the Chinese continued to claim that Korea was still their dependency and acted as if nothing had altered the status of traditional Sino-Korean relations. Of all the treaty powers, only Great Britain appeared to support China's assertion of suzerainty over Korea, even after the British had concluded a modern treaty with the Koreans. What the British government did was to urge the Chinese to tighten their control over Korea as a means of inhibiting Russia from penetrating the peninsula.

In general, Hart actively supported the British government's policy of encouraging China to control Korea *vis-à-vis* possible Russian expansion. Hart, who had helped

the British conclude an agreement whereby Burma would despatch a tributary mission to China, even after it had become a part of British India in 1885 and 1886,³ felt that nothing was wrong with Britain's apparently contradictory policy toward Sino-Korean relations. In order to tighten control over Korea, Hart strongly urged that China dominate Korea through sundry economic and financial measures. Hart convinced himself that, as the Inspector General of China's Imperial Maritime Customs Service, he should have not only supervisory but operational control of Korea's Customs Service.

This study is based on the broad premise that, even though imperialism is viewed pejoratively by those victimized, it is not by necessity a deleterious condition if the colonizers and the colonized mutually benefit from it economically, culturally or otherwise. If the colonized did not want this form of domination and if imperialism brought nothing but harm both to victims and to imperialists, then such a system cannot but be condemned as destructive and unavailing. The focus of this work is threefold: one is to analyze how and why Hart tried to control the Korean Customs Service and urged China to dominate Korea as if it were a new colony; the second is to see if China's new imperialism in Korea proved to be constructive, sagacious and prescient, or self-destructive and myopic; the third is to determine if Hart, as foreign adviser, should be held accountable for providing advice which turned out to be tragic and detrimental to the very fate of China.

Hart and Von Möllendorff

Despite the fact that Korea entered into treaty relations with other powers during the 1880s, when King Kojong and his independent-minded advisers strongly

desired to make their kingdom a fully sovereign state, the Peking government persistently interfered in Korean affairs. In order to give an air of historical legitimacy, China attempted to justify its interventionistic and imperialistic policy in terms of the old suzerain-dependency relations.⁴ Even though Hart, like many others, failed to comprehend the essentially new nature of Chinese interventionism in Korea, China's radical interference amounted to no less than imperialism. Recent studies show conclusively how Korea moved towards independence from the negotiation of a treaty with Japan in 1876, through international treaties with the United States and other Western powers. China's intervention had no justification, regardless of the rationalization Chinese leaders gave it.⁵ Among other measures, China tried to dominate Korea by controlling Western advisers in the service of the Korean government. Mainly to promote and expand China's interests in Korea, but partly to help the Korean government in benefiting from the services of Western advisers in the conduct of diplomatic and commercial relations with treaty powers, viceroy Li Hung-chang persuaded the Seoul government to request him to recommend a Western adviser to Korea.⁶

After formally receiving a Korean request in late 1882, Li sent Paul Georg von Möllendorff, a 35 year old German diplomat, to become the Inspector General of the Korean Customs Service and an adviser to the Korean government.⁷ Von Möllendorff had served both in the Chinese Maritime Customs Service under Robert Hart and as German Vice Consul at Tientsin. At the time of his new appointment, von Möllendorff was working on Li's staff.⁸ When Hart, who disliked the Germans, learned of von Möllendorff's assignment, he strongly opposed it.⁹ He wanted to send one of his own men to Korea, so that he could control the Korean Customs Service. But Li refused to change his mind.¹⁰ Feeling sour and ignored about the choice of the Head of the Korean Customs Service, Hart complained that Li wanted to

have in Korea "low-class men who will obey orders rather than better-class men who will give advice."¹¹ This remark proved very interesting and prophetic in view of the fact that later when Hart was allowed to select and send his men, he despatched a series of "low-class" yes men to Korea.

Despite Li's expectations, von Möllendorff established and ran the Korean Customs Service independently of Chinese control.¹² Once in Korea, von Möllendorff identified himself with the Koreans, believed Korea should become independent of China, and initiated various reform projects designed to modernize the archaic kingdom. He was promptly made a Korean noble and became an important confidant to Kojong, who was delighted with von Möllendorff's pro-Korean posture *vis-à-vis* China.¹³ Somewhat surprised by von Möllendorff's swift ascendancy, Hart remarked, "I must confess v M. has gone ahead very cleverly: perhaps he'll end by being King of Corea (with German support)!"¹⁴ Worried erroneously by possible German involvement in Korea, Hart stated that "we may find Germany intervening to protect and support 'Prince' von Möllendorff!!!"¹⁵ This kind of Germanophobic statement makes one wonder if Hart really understood the nature of German Far Eastern policy. On the Li-von Möllendorff controversy over Korean independence Hart scoldingly wrote, "I hear Li is *inwardly* wild over this, but *outwardly* says that it's what he intended!"¹⁶

Before, but especially after the *Kapshin* coup of 1884, von Möllendorff concluded that, due to Korea's weakness and geopolitical situation, it needed a strong protective ally against outside aggressors. He believed that China, the old suzerain but now a degenerate state, should leave Korea alone, that Japan was too selfish and treacherous, and that the distant United States was indifferent to the fate of Korea. To him, Germany was not yet a sufficient Far Eastern power to be deeply involved, while Great Britain was most supportive of China's policy, and only Imperial Russia,

ever-expanding and the largest power in the world, would be interested in protecting Korea's independence. Russia after 1860 shared a common border, and support would come if Korea leased Port Lazareff and hired Russian advisers to train its army.¹⁷

When von Möllendorff's pro-Russian ploy became publicly known through Korea's Sinophile Foreign Minister, Kim Yunshik, Japan and Great Britain put maximum pressure upon Li to remove von Möllendorff.¹⁸ Li liked von Möllendorff's anti-Japan stance, but his anti-China plot proved unacceptable. Besides, he felt his government should respect pressure coming from London and Tokyo for the removal of this controversial diplomat. Kojong still had confidence in von Möllendorff and strongly wanted to retain him, but the monarch had no choice but let him leave. Li advised the king to relieve him of all his official duties and positions and to take another adviser, preferably an American, as new adviser to Korea.¹⁹ In forcing von Möllendorff out, Hart was not consulted. In selecting von Möllendorff's successor, however, Li made a drastic change: he wanted to share the responsibility with Hart. Since von Möllendorff, his unilateral choice, had turned out to be the "wrong" person and since Hart's over-all posture toward Korea was identical with his own (ie, China's control of Korea), Li felt that he and Hart should together select the next Head of the Korean Customs Service.

Hart, Merrill, and King Kojong

Following the dismissal of von Möllendorff in July 1885, the king requested Li to select and send an American. Even before the king's request reached Tientsin, Li had already asked Hart to recommend a successor. Hart was more than pleased to nominate one of his most trusted aides, the American Henry F. Merrill.²⁰ After carefully

interviewing Merrill, Li became convinced that the American would remain loyal to China and would promote Chinese rather than Korean interests. Li specifically instructed Merrill to run the Korean Customs Service according to the Chinese system and to respect and promote Chinese suzerainty over Korea.²¹ In addition, the contract stipulated that Hart, as Inspector General of the Chinese Imperial Maritime Customs, had the right to recall Merrill at any time with Li's agreement. Moreover, unlike von Möllendorff, who had both customs and foreign policy responsibilities, Merrill's authority and responsibility were confined strictly to customs matters.²² Because of his unfortunate experience with von Möllendorff and his mistrust of Hart, Li decided to divide these two functions by recommending and sending another American to become a Korean foreign policy adviser.

Compared with the contract that von Möllendorff had signed,²³ it is clear that Merrill was made much more dependent on the wishes of Li. Hart's wish and design were, in fact, to annex the Korean Customs Service to that of China without consulting or even informing the Korean government of the act.²⁴ As early as 1882 he had urged the *Zongli yamen*, the Chinese foreign ministry, to incorporate the Korean Customs Service into the Chinese Maritime Customs Service. Moreover, Hart now advised the ministry to urge the Korean government to entrust him to take over the Korean affairs officially.²⁵ But Li was opposed and instead preferred a *de facto* but covert way of controlling the Korean Customs, or any other branch of the Korean government.²⁶ Furthermore, Li had no desire to make Hart's already significant position any more powerful and influential by integrating the Korean Customs Service into the Chinese Service. After all, one of the most important reasons that Li had divided von Möllendorff's functions was to reduce Hart's strong influence over Chinese foreign policy.²⁷

Kojong resented the arbitrary manner that Li employed in selecting and sending Merrill. Once again, however, the monarch did not dare to protest to Li or any other Chinese official. Besides, learning Merrill's nationality and believing that any American would become a good friend of Korea, he decided to welcome him. The king was also pleased to learn later that another American, Judge Owen N. Denny, former American consul general at Shanghai, was selected to be the foreign policy adviser to his government.²⁸

On 3 October 1885, the 33-year-old Merrill and the Taewŏn'gun, escorted by Resident Yuan Shikai, reached Inch'ŏn on the same ship.²⁹ Merrill took over the office of Chief Commissioner (*Ch'ong semusa*) of the Korean Customs Service from A. B. Stripling, who had temporarily held the position since von Möllendorff's dismissal. Unlike von Möllendorff's title, Merrill's was merely "Chief Commissioner." As Hart instructed, Merrill's most important job was to incorporate the Korean Customs Service into the Chinese Imperial Maritime Customs to demonstrate that "Korea is China's tributary." Hart also urged Merrill not to make the kind of mistakes that von Möllendorff had committed: "so do not be tempted to hook on, or drop your moorings, elsewhere."³⁰ Merrill's mission was as much political as financial, to effect the union of Korean and Chinese customs in order to make Korea more dependent on China and, in addition, to make the position of Hart more powerful. Merrill was supposed to implement Hart's design without disclosing this intention to the Koreans and without giving any impression of direct intervention in Korea's internal affairs.³¹

Hart acknowledged that Merrill might find himself sympathizing with "Korean aspirations and angry over China's interference and system of vetoing." But he advised the young American to serve the interests of China rather than those of Korea, for China would rather fight than allow

independence to Korea. Like most Chinese leaders of his time, Hart insisted that Korea should not become independent for this would "endanger Korea more than the dependent condition;" China could take better care of Korea and keep "all comers" out.³²

Hart was apparently unable to see that, since Korea had become legally independent through entering into treaty relations with various international powers, China's control would constitute not only imperialism but also an interference which Kojong felt undesirable and unwarranted. It was due to Great Britain and China, which were now trying to inhibit the evolution of an independent Korea, that the Sinocentric East Asian order had begun to dissolve after the treaties of Nanking and the Bogue in the early 1840s. Yet, when it came to Sino-Korean relations, these same powers acted as though the old system was still operative and accordingly had to be respected, the feelings of Koreans, Japanese, Americans, Russians, and others being irrelevant.

More importantly, Hart proved unable to realize China could not have it both ways; it could not exercise new colonial control while at the same time loudly proclaiming the same old dependency relationship continued. If China was to have tight control of Korea in a new manner as though it were a colony, then Korea must be a new colony. And if Korea was still the same old dependency then China must remain non-interventionist except for Korean crises of the most profound magnitude, and have other powers abrogate the treaties they had mutually concluded on the basis of sovereign equality.

Apart from any legalistic argument in favour of the recognition of Korean independence, one could also question the political and diplomatic sagacity of the British government's encouragement of China. Since China's new

imperialism in Korea led to the Sino-Japanese War of 1894 and 1895, with tragic results for China, one wonders whether the British should not have supported Peking and other treaty powers to strengthen and sustain Korea as a strong, independent buffer against foreign aggressors. The consequences of such international diplomacy could not have been worse than what the interventionist policy did do, with China's humiliating defeat at the hands of the Japanese.

Among all of China's former dependencies, only Burma had a dualistic status—the country still remained a kind of vassal or tributary to China after it had become part of British India and therefore subject to British jurisdiction. It is not only intriguing but important to understand how Hart was disinclined to perceive obvious differences between Korea and Burma *vis-à-vis* China: Korea had concluded modern treaties with several powers while Burma had undertaken no such action. Furthermore, the peculiar arrangement Hart manoeuvred to accomplish in respect to Sino-Burmese relations in the mid-1880s did not endure, and only one decennial mission was despatched.³³ The important point is that Hart's position on Chinese/Burmese relations was neither long-lasting nor well-conceived.

The old but still relevant ceremonial aspect of Korea's status also needs elaboration. Even after 1882, Korea did not become a completely sovereign and *bona fide* independent nation because it kept dispatching tributary missions to China, whether or not forced, until 1894. Then, Japan compelled Korea to cease such activity. Therefore, one should say that by the 1880s Korea was *partly* independent and *partly* dependent. That this kind of dual role made Korea a unique and peculiar nation in international terms is apparent. But, if a formerly dependent country moves to semi-independence on the way

to becoming genuinely independent, should it be considered a more independent political entity than dependent? All the treaty powers with the exception of Great Britain treated Korea more or less as a sovereign and independent nation. Perhaps just as importantly, Kojong himself, whenever and wherever possible, acted more like a sovereign and independent monarch than as a dependent king. Together, these factors seem to sustain the proposition that treating Korea as nothing but a vassal to China—worse still a new colony to China, as the British did—was grossly unfair and wrong.

As badly thought out and unfair as it might have been to the Koreans, the British government could have argued that while the consequence of their policy was a disaster to China, it was not against the longer term, strategic interests of Britain. In the case of Hart, however, his major concern should have been the interests and welfare of the Chinese people, there being no intimation here that he should have acted against the national security and interests of Great Britain. As an employee of the Chinese government, he should have been demonstrably more sensitive and solicitous about both the short and long-term interests of the Chinese than was the British government. According to Spence, British merchants and consuls in China accused Hart of "using the customs service to help the Chinese against the British interests,"³⁴ but there is no evidence corroborating this view. With regard to Korea, Hart should not merely have danced to London's tune, to prod China to dominate Korea. Rather, he should have advised the Chinese leaders to do what would be wise, innovative, and good for the Chinese, even if doing so would not invariably supplement or assist London. After all, he was hired and paid by the Chinese. The problem with Hart's role is fundamentally that he not only danced to China's (and Great Britain's) policy of controlling Korea but went way beyond what Li and other Chinese wanted to do in

colonizing the peninsula. Most of the time Hart acted as if Britain had no treaty obligations with Korea and as if the kingdom was already a new province of China. Worse still, he believed that the Koreans would be somehow better off under Chinese control. However, he failed to explain how China, utterly unable to take care of even itself, could control Korea. His self-centered disposition was the most important reason why he urged China to take over the Korean government. Placing the Korean customs under his office would expand the sources of his revenues and also constitute a significant addition to his authority and prestige. Besides, such a new arrangement would strengthen the Anglo-Chinese policy of treating Korea as a dependency.

American diplomats such as chargé George C. Foulk and Denny, who championed the independence of Korea *vis-à-vis* China, were of course displeased with Hart and Merrill and the latter's role as a westerner employed by the Korean government but serving the interests of China. When Korea became semi-independent, a number of westerners came to be involved either directly or indirectly in Korean affairs. Some were employees of their own governments, while others found work with the governments of Korea, China, Japan, or private organizations such as mission boards and trade companies.

By and large, there were two distinctively different kinds of westerners, as far as the Koreans were concerned. One group campaigned against the interests of Korea for the sake of China or Japan, whereas others promoted the welfare and independence of the Korean people. To the first belonged Hart and Durham White Stevens;³⁵ to the second belonged Paul Georg von Möllendorff, George C. Foulk, Owen N. Denny, and Horace N. Allen.³⁶ Foulk actively supported the policy of Washington with regard to Korea's status while in official service of his own government in Seoul (1883-1887). During the period of his tenure (1886-1890) Denny,

an American citizen in the service of the Korean government, determinedly fought for the cause of Korean independence against China. Thus, when Hart learned of the pro-Korean postures of these two, he wrote that "the best place for F [Foulk] would be—the quarter deck of his own ship,"³⁷ and that "D's [Denny's] presence in Korea has been a mistake from the first to last."³⁸ In Hart's view westerners, whether working for the government of Korea or for their own governments, were praiseworthy if they promoted China's interests, but dismissible if they did anything constructive for the welfare and aspirations of the Koreans. From his standpoint, those who tried to do for Korea what Hart himself had done for China should be removed. His basic idea was that any westerner hired and paid by the Koreans must work against the interests of Korea in favour of the British and Chinese governments.

The worst thing about Hart from the perspective of the Koreans was that he was avaricious and prejudiced enough to remove semi-independent status from Korea in his own personal interests, but was not benign enough to promote the well-being of the Koreans. Since Hart considered himself as the ultimate and *de facto* head of Korea's Customs Service by successfully contriving to take it over, he should have also felt an obligation to do, or at least try to do, something constructive to promote the industrialization and commercialization of the country. But there is no evidence showing that Hart even entertained such thoughts. He wanted to merely collect Korea's customs revenues and add these to the revenue sources in China. Acutely conscious of Hart's anti-Korean stance, Kojong correctly and perspicaciously regarded him as an enemy but, lacking strong will power, dared not criticize or condemn "the most powerful Westerner in China."

Contrary to his stance toward Korea, Hart was deeply involved with various modernization programs in China. An important and interesting question arises as to why

Hart condemned those who attempted to do in Korea exactly what he himself had done in China. The answer is not complicated: in spite of a strict Wesleyan background, he was a man not only of double standards but also of paradoxes with a bifurcated personality. Wright states that Hart led a spartan and solitary life, yet enjoyed expensive ceremonial display and lavish parties.³⁹ Spence writes that this Irish Methodist had three children with a Chinese mistress. "When it came time for him to wed a lady of good British family, he paid off the Chinese woman with \$3,000 and shipped their children off to England so they would not embarrass him with their presence."⁴⁰ Following separation from his legal spouse, Hart provided her with luxurious living arrangements in England. In addition, he saw to it that all his children lived well,⁴¹ a circumstance that clearly indicates he was a man of conscience and honour. At the same time one could also raise the wholly legitimate question of where he obtained the money for lavish entertainment and for maintaining his family. His regular government salary could scarcely have been the only source of his revenue, which might have included the tapping of additional outlets. Respecting Hart's appetite and eagerness for money and the accumulation of wealth, Li stated that he "is malicious at heart, yet, driven by lust for money, he is quite willing to serve us," while Chen Zhi, a Chinese contemporary, testified that Hart "looks sincere but in reality is a blackguard" whose "vast fortune may be compared with the wealth of a nation."⁴² Commenting on Hart's demonstrable kindness revealed toward others, Wright said that he "showed a keen appreciation of the value of money, but he tempered this with a warm hearted impulsive generosity."⁴³

Merrill did sympathize with the Koreans' aspirations for independence and even felt that Yuan was too high-handed in trying to control Korean affairs. But, in general he carried out Hart's instructions faithfully and efficiently.

From the beginning of his service in Korea he decided that his first and utmost loyalty should be to Hart and to Li, not to the Korean king or government. Among other things, he not only reduced the number of customs officials in Korea, mostly von Möllendorff's appointees, but replaced them with his own appointees.⁴⁴ The reason for this was mainly to make Hart's control easier but partly to make the administration appear more efficient. In addition, he tried to subordinate the Korean Customs to the Chinese Customs and allow Hart to exercise virtual control. Because of Li's opposition to outright legal seizure, even Merrill did not actively campaign for such a move.⁴⁵

Unlike von Möllendorff and his staff who had been paid entirely by the Korean government, Merrill and his staff in Korea were paid mainly by the Chinese Customs under Hart, with only a portion coming from the Korean government through a special commission. This was in spite of Merrill's contract, which stipulated that the Korean government was to pay a full salary. The Koreans would have been glad to honour this, with full salaries of 300 silver taels—\$400—monthly owed to Merrill, based on the amount von Möllendorff had received. In fact, the Koreans did insist on paying, "without reference to what I [Merrill] was receiving in China." By doing so, Kojong and his Foreign Office wanted to induce him to be more loyal to Korea, as von Möllendorff had been. Yet Hart and Merrill continued to pursue their scheme.⁴⁶ Without notifying the Korean or Chinese governments, Hart and Merrill made a private arrangement whereby the former deposited the latter's salary at a bank in Hong Kong. In addition, Merrill received a salary from the Korean government. As a means of maintaining tight control over such officials, Hart continued this dubious practice with Merrill's successors, J. F. Schoenicke, F. A. Morgan, and J. McLeavy Brown.

Without explaining the political implications, Merrill proposed that the Korean government should have the

Statistics Department of the Chinese Imperial Maritime Customs publish the statistics of import and export goods and related items of Korea in the regular *Gazette* (published in China) as a joint publication.⁴⁷ Hart instructed him to do this in order to strengthen the argument that Korea was a dependency to China. Somewhat misled by Merrill, the Koreans believed that such an arrangement would have no political implications and readily consented. Insisting that it would compromise another piece of evidence showing that Korea was China's tributary, Hart told the *Zongli yamen* that this constituted a "successful implementation of our policy to maintain the privilege of a superior country [China] without intervention in the domestic affairs of the dependent state [Korea]."⁴⁸ As for China's control or takeover of the Korean Customs Service, therefore, Li and Yuan did not have to be bothered inasmuch as Hart and Merrill had misled, fooled, and practically cheated the Korean government and Kojong.

Westerners such as Foulk who had been supporting Korean independence complained of the Hart-Merrill conspiracy. Foulk complained to Washington that, by publishing Korea's Customs Trade Reports as a section of the General Reports of the Chinese Customs, Korea "would appear to have been incorporated into the Customs of China...as though Korea was a province of China."⁴⁹ But the American government showed no intention or inclination to get involved, since it was still hesitant to become entangled with China or with any other power to sustain the integrity and independence of a small far-away kingdom, which was of no vital strategic or economic interest to it. Even after Merrill left Korea in 1889, the Korean Customs Reports continued to be printed as a part of the Chinese Customs and Trade Statistics.⁵⁰

To the extent that the king was made aware of Merrill's scheme, he was unhappy with the American and his effort. Merrill was, nonetheless, able to keep doing as instructed,

usually reporting his actions as *fait accompli* to the Korean Foreign Office for nominal approval. In 1889, at his superior's instruction, Merrill finally tried to persuade the Korean king to issue a royal decree to the effect that the Korean Customs should be superintended and administered by Hart.⁵¹ But the king rejected the idea. The British Consul General, E. Colborne Barber, a close friend of Hart, and Yuan, ever anxious to strengthen China's suzerainty over Korea, supported Merrill. But Li, as noted already, was opposed to such an outright incorporation and feared international protests. Besides, he wanted to exercise and enjoy the rights and privileges of China in Korea without at the same time assuming any responsibility. Moreover, Li did not wish to add more power and prestige to the already-too-powerful Hart, whom he considered a strong rival. Li thus favoured a *de facto* rather than *de jure* control of the Korean Customs, and of other branches of the Korean government.

Hart and Korea's Foreign Loans

In the case of Korea's loans from foreign governments and bankers, Hart not only danced to the Chinese tune but went beyond what Li did. Since his government's revenue was meagre, the king sought to borrow money from abroad to modernize the country and to satisfy indemnities owed to Japan. Fearing the negative impact that China's political loans might have on independence, the monarch was ready to borrow money from the Americans, the French, the Germans, and even the Japanese (until the mid-1890s), using China only as a last resort. But whenever the king and advisers such as Charles W. LeGendre (in Korea from 1890 to 1895)—the successor to Denny—tried to negotiate western loans, Li and Yuan thwarted their efforts. From the

Chinese perspective, a Chinese loan would be a "very effective way to protect the dependent status of Korea."⁵²

In 1889 Hart went so far as to recommend to the *Zongli yamen* that China send a memorandum to foreign powers declaring that, since Korea was a tributary to China, no foreign government should make a loan to the Korean government without Chinese approval. He argued that such formal and open declaration would strengthen Chinese suzerainty.⁵³ However, Li preferred to control Korea in a more covert and indirect manner. Moreover, he feared that such an open declaration might trigger a protest from other treaty powers and also feared that such a naked declaration might induce Korea to ask China for more financial aid or cause older creditors to sue China for repayment. Consequently, he rejected Hart's suggestion. But the *Zongli yamen*, supported by the Guangxu Emperor (1875-1908), overruled Li and took the unprecedented step of delivering such a memorandum to foreign powers:

Since the Korean government is wasteful and incapable of repaying any loan, foreign governments and merchants should never conclude a loan contract with it. Besides, the Chinese government would never approve any loan arrangement with the Korean customs as security.⁵⁴

So, here was another incident in which the traditional elder brother (China) was telling the world how incompetent and unreliable his younger brother (Korea) was. But, who was telling whom? Was the China of the 1880s and 1890s in so much better shape than Korea? There is no doubt that the Korean government was, indeed, incompetent and corrupt; but the Chinese leadership under the Empress Dowager Cixi, the *de facto* ruler, was undoubtedly even more self-destructive, corrupt, and incompetent. Apparently, not only Chinese leaders but Hart himself failed to grasp the extent of China's problems.

As was to be expected, the Japanese government reacted negatively to the memorandum, declaring that "each country has its own right to handle the matters of loans, and China has no right to intervene in the loan affairs of the Korean government."⁵⁵ Although the Japanese government was reluctant to compete with China, it was dismayed by the expansion and intensification of Chinese control. The British government supported the Chinese position, while the governments of the United States, France, Germany, Belgium and Italy were indifferent.⁵⁶

Schoenicke, Morgan, and Brown in Korea

In November 1889, after serving in Korea for four years, Merrill decided to take a two-year leave of absence from the Korean post. J. F. Schoenicke, a German national and the Commissioner of the Inch'ön Customs House since 1886, replaced Merrill as acting Chief Commissioner. He had served as Assistant Commissioner at the Customs House in Qiung Zhou, a port on Hainan island in south China, until June 1885. In April 1886 Hart sent Schoenicke to Korea to work under Merrill.⁵⁷ Even though a German, he felt he owed a great deal to Hart. While serving at Inch'ön, he became a good friend of his superior, Merrill. Then, when Merrill left, Hart became worried that Kojong might finally expel his proteges and let "Denny take the Customs," thereby creating a "crisis" for him and the Chinese.⁵⁸ Kojong dared not take advantage of this opportunity, and the Chinese government influenced him to accept Schoenicke.

Kojong was in fact pleased to have Schoenicke as acting Chief Commissioner, partly because the latter sympathized with the Koreans' desire for independence and partly because he was a German like von Möllendorff. However, Hart promptly influenced his employee to change his mind

and supporting China's policy of domination.⁵⁹ While he served in Korea for three years, Schoenicke never became a confidential adviser to Kojong, as von Möllendorff had done. Thus, whenever the king and his government, with the support of American advisers such as Denny and Charles W. LeGendre, tried to take over the Customs Service, Hart, Li, Schoenicke, and Yuan would gang up together to frustrate the Korean efforts. Hart was especially afraid that a new commissioner, if unchecked or uncontrolled, might investigate the management of the Korean customs and expose the secret and irregular financial arrangements he had made with Merrill, thus damaging his public integrity.⁶⁰

Consequently, Hart maintained a tight control over Schoenicke. This, plus his secret arrangements, does not necessarily prove he was a trickster or swindler, but it does indicate that he was not only an immoderate accumulator and spender of money but also a manipulative book-keeper. Unlike Merrill, who left a tremendous imprint on Korea by making customs a *de facto* branch of Chinese customs, Schoenicke and his successors did not change what had been done, but merely continued the same policies. LeGendre, who became the chief adviser to Kojong in 1890, succeeding Denny, ran into difficulties with Schoenicke because he tried to oust the German from Korea as a means of helping the Korean government *vis-à-vis* China. But LeGendre was unable to accomplish this because Hart and the Chinese government supported Schoenicke.⁶¹ In Hart's opinion, Schoenicke "did excellently well" in Korea.

When Merrill was due to return to the Korean post, he decided not to do so. Instead he accepted the position of Commissioner at Ningpo, China. To begin with, back in 1885, he had gone to Korea with reservations and a great deal of reluctance. He enjoyed living in China and relished his position as acting Assistant Chinese Secretary under Hart. While serving in Korea, however, he faithfully carried out Hart's and Li's instructions and policies, but often ran

into difficulties with the dictatorial Yuan.⁶² When the terms of Merrill's leave of absence were to expire, Yuan told Li not to send the American back to the peninsula. Besides, Hart decided to honour Merrill's desire to stay in China and appointed him as the new Commissioner at Ningpo.

In 1892, when Schoenicke left Korea on leave, F. A. Morgan was appointed acting Chief Commissioner.⁶³ In those days when westerners in the service of the Korean government decided to leave, they preferred to take leave of absence rather than to resign, so that they would continue to be paid by both the Korean government and by Hart's office.

Morgan, who had been Assistant Audit Secretary under Hart in Peking, was sent to Korea in April 1893 to become acting Commissioner at the Inch'ön Customs as J. C. Johnston went on leave. Hart planned to keep Morgan at Inch'ön until November, when Schoenicke was to take leave, and then have him appointed as acting Chief Commissioner of the Korean Customs.⁶⁴ Each time that the position of the head of Korean Customs was vacated, Hart became worried that the king might take the drastic action of appointing his own man, who would champion the cause of Korean independence as von Möllendorff had done.⁶⁵ But the king and his advisers, under the close and tight control of Yuan, dared not do so.

Like Schoenicke, Morgan generally subscribed to the instructions and policies handed down to him by Hart and Li. Thus, Hart praised him as a man of "common sense and amiability" well suited for such a delicate position.⁶⁶ Morgan left no significant influence on the matter of the Korean Customs however, nor on any other matters, because his tenure was too brief. Suffering from a leg problem, he had to leave in July 1893 for surgical attention.⁶⁷

In September 1893 J. Mcleavy Brown became the Chief Commissioner of the Korean Customs Service (he was to serve from 1893 to 1897, and again from 1898 to 1905). Brown, a British subject, had served as an interpreter at the British legation in Peking and had also worked at the Chinese Maritime Customs under Hart for about twenty years.⁶⁸ Hart, who was responsible for Brown's new appointment, described him as a "first-rate man," but "terribly lazy."⁶⁹ He had been Commissioner at the Maritime Customs in Shanghai before being selected and appointed as the Chief Commissioner of the Korean Customs Service, and enjoyed close associations with Hart and Li. Unlike two of his immediate predecessors but like von Möllendorff, he became closely involved in the financial and political affairs of Korea.⁷⁰ But his main concern, following Hart's instructions, was with promoting British interests, be they economical or political.⁷¹ Toward the Japanese he took a posture of conciliation and he advised the Korean government to take a similar position.

Commenting on Brown's service in Korea, Hart noted that the British servant was "head over ears in work" and was "an uncommonly able man."⁷² Just about every time Hart made a comment on Brown, he called him "lazy," yet he kept him in Korea for the obvious reason that Brown did what was expected. Even the Japanese preferred to retain Brown as Head of the Korean Customs Service. After driving the Chinese from Korea following the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95, the Japanese required British support to counterbalance Russia's growing influence and consequently encouraged the British servant to remain at his post,⁷³ which he did until 1905 despite some temporary interruptions.⁷⁴ Unlike Hart, who tended to be biased in favour of China against Japan, Brown kept a more balanced view.

After 1895, Hart lost his control over the Korean Customs Service. Brown was able, however, to remain in

charge as Chief Commissioner, and he even became an adviser to the Department of the Treasury in the government. Kojong and many of his advisers retained faith and confidence in Brown while the Japanese and the Americans found him useful in counteracting Russian influence.⁷⁵

Hart in China's Expulsion from Korea

Without question one of the gravest mistakes made by Hart during his entire tenure in China was in the final showdown between China and Japan, when he believed that the Japanese would be defeated. None of the advice given to Chinese leaders by Hart was designed to prevent an armed conflict. He also failed to comprehend the real motives of the Japanese when they demanded radical reforms of the Korean government prior to the outbreak of fighting.

Even in the 1880s and early 1890s when the Japanese maintained a low posture toward Korea politically and militarily, they deliberately sought economic penetration.⁷⁶ During the same period, China, by contrast, made Korea a virtual new colony. By 1894, Japan's leaders had decided to remove the Chinese from Korea and place the kingdom under their influence.⁷⁷ As far as they were concerned, either Korea should become genuinely independent of China or, if any country had to dominate it, this country ought to be Japan. The most tragic error Li made during his entire political career and another significant mistake on the part of Hart was that neither perceived the importance of Korean independence nor foresaw the far-reaching consequence of China's military defeat in the event of a Sino-Japanese conflict.

Using the crisis created by the *Tonghak* rebellion and the Chinese despatch of troops to Korea in 1894, the Japanese sent a large number of soldiers and demanded

that the Korean government adopt and implement radical reforms.⁷⁸ The Korean king and his government would have been unable to carry out these reforms, even if they had wanted to. There is no question that the salvation of the rotten Korean government required drastic reforms, but the Japanese proposals were too radical, too unreasonable, even absurd. After suppression of the rebels, the Chinese insisted that both Japan and China withdraw troops simultaneously.⁷⁹ But on 23 July 1894, the Japanese military broke into the palace and took the reluctant king, Queen Min, and their children as prisoners to the Japanese legation.⁸⁰ Even though Hart disapproved of their methods, he apparently took the Japanese demand for reform at face value and felt their motives were genuinely good.⁸¹ In the words of Wright, therefore, "Hart's idealism and hatred of corrupt government [of Korea] blinded his vision to Japan's real aims."⁸² Hart failed to see that the Japanese strategy was to make unreasonable demands which the Koreans would reject or delay implementing, and then use this rejection or delay as an excuse to drive the Chinese out and install a pro-Japanese clique.

Even after the outbreak of war, Hart believed that China would eventually be victorious. He grossly underestimated Japan's actual and potential military strength, and predicted that "if China would bravely go on fighting, I think victory would be hers in the end."⁸³ Even after much of China's navy and army were soundly beaten, Hart still stated that "Chinese grit, physique, and numbers will beat Japanese dash, drill and leadership: the Japs are at their best now, but we'll improve every day."⁸⁴

Hart finally came to realize how wrong he was when he learned that Chinese soldiers on all fronts were being overwhelmingly defeated. Now he wrote that "the sooner we're out of it, the better."⁸⁵ But he again erroneously predicted that the Chinese would learn a lesson from this war and "go through the revolutionary process in a healthy

way and come out right in the distant future."⁸⁶ He added, "I would still rather have China than Japan for an ally, but of course only on condition that she'd follow my advice, and accept my guidance and nursing."⁸⁷ Here again, Hart failed to admit that China's acceptance of his advice and guidance had led to a humiliating defeat.

Toward the end of the war as Li vainly searched for foreign mediation, Hart lamented that "China has given no offense—has done no wrong—does not wish to fight and is willing to make sacrifice: she is a big 'sick man,' convalescing very slowly from the sickening effects of peaceful centuries, and is being jumped when being down by this agile, healthy, well-armed Japan,—will no one pull him off?"⁸⁸ Since he had led or at least assisted China in getting into this disastrous situation, since he was "the most powerful Westerner in China," and since the government of the entire British Empire for all practical purposes stood behind him, Hart should have attempted to do something constructive for swifter peace negotiations. He did no such thing. Rather, he merely acted as though he were a pampered and spoiled child. Even after it became abundantly clear that China's imperialistic policy had led the Middle Kingdom to this humiliation, Hart refused to admit that his policy had been a tragic mistake. The Japanese were not interested in anything less than a direct Chinese appeal for peace, which Li did, in fact, give, following a further inglorious defeat at Weihaiwei.

Apparently expecting that the victorious Japanese would treat the defeated Chinese as harshly as the British had done to them at the time of negotiating the treaties of Nanking and the Bogue following the Opium War, Hart wrote "if we fail, the Customs will, of course, disappear; the Japanese will put in their own men. I am sorry, but I don't see how to prevent such a catastrophe."⁸⁹ Actually, the Japanese were not interested in taking over the Customs Service, but wanted to use it as an instrument for the

Chinese payment of war indemnities. Besides, the Tokyo government, embarrassed by the fact that Li was shot and wounded by a Japanese fanatic, proceeded to moderate its final terms. In general, Hart was not displeased with the terms of the 1895 Treaty of Shimonoseki. Even so, the final provisions proved detrimental to the honour and very survival of China. In addition to recognizing the independence of Kórea, China had to cede Taiwan and the Pescadores, to pay an indemnity of 230 million taels and to extend commercial rights. With an annual revenue of only 89 million taels the Peking government had to negotiate loans with a western consortium to meet these payments. In essence this was the result of China's new and misguided imperialism, a policy which Hart had urged the Chinese government to adopt. If China had treated Korea as an independent nation state, then in 1895 they would not have lost Taiwan and the Pescadores and would not have gone into such debt. Moreover, Japan would have had no more rights in China and Korea than China had in Japan and Korea. After the war, Li, the architect of China's Korean policy, was compelled to retire in disgrace while Hart, more of a collaborator than a rival of the viceroy in terms of policy, continued steadfastly as the Inspector General until his retirement in 1911.

Being a foreigner in the service of the Chinese government, Hart was not held accountable as Li was for the war. In fact, his prestige and influence in China, ironically, reached its peak after Chinese humiliation.

Conclusion

What the Chinese government needed most in the 1880s and early 1890s was a mobilization of every segment of its natural resources and manpower in order to strengthen its armed forces and to modernize industry,

agriculture, and political institutions, the object being to emulate Japan after the Meiji Restoration. They least needed direct hard-line policies toward Russia in the Sino-Russian border areas or Japan over Ryukyu and Korea. As dishonourable and disadvantageous as the terms of the 1881 Treaty of St. Petersburg had been to China, the Imperial Russian government would have imposed far harsher sanctions had the Chinese decided to fight over the Ili area and had lost the war, which at one time seemed possible.

Hart should have been acutely aware that China could ill afford a war with Japan over Korea. A Chinese defeat at the hands of the island nation, which had once been a tributary to the Middle Kingdom, would have made the Ch'ing Dynasty look to be in hopeless decline. More than anybody else, Hart should have advised Peking to leave Korea alone. He was, though, disinclined to extend such far-sighted, pragmatic, flexible, and sagacious advice to the Ch'ing leaders.

Instead, he advised a policy of tight and rigid control to the exclusion of all other treaty powers and quite contrary to the spirit and letter of Korea's international treaties. He urged a takeover of Korea's Customs Service, asked treaty powers not to make loans to Korea, and tried to incorporate the kingdom into a Chinese empire. The integration of customs into Hart's Peking office would have resulted in an increase in his authority and additional revenues. Li concurred with Hart's overall objective, but preferred *de facto* control rather than a *de jure* takeover lest other treaty powers would protest. Moreover, distrustful and jealous of Hart, Li wanted nothing in Korea that could add to Hart's power. Most significantly of all, the viceroy wished to secure whatever advantages China could obtain from Korea without assuming any corresponding responsibility there.

Both Hart and Li, then, wholeheartedly agreed that China should tighten its control of Korea.

China's new imperialistic policy of rigid control was best exemplified by Hart's takeover of the Korean Customs Service. Hart and his appointees carried out Chinese policy so successfully and effectively that Li and Yuan did not even bother with its continuing implementation. Apparently, Hart believed sincerely that by helping China have a tighter control over Korea he was promoting the interests not only of British policy but also of his own employer, the Chinese government.

As far as the question of the independence and the welfare of Korea was concerned, Hart subscribed staunchly to the Sinocentric view that the kingdom remained a vassal to China and cared only minimally about the aspirations of the Korean king and people. Notwithstanding his keen interest in Korea's affairs, Hart neither cared for Korean political aspirations nor advised Chinese leaders to promote the economic well-being of the peninsula. Instead, he did everything he possibly could to destroy the newly acquired semi-independent status. We may therefore conclude that Hart's total impact upon Korea, in sharp contrast with his positive legacy in China, was entirely negative from the vantage point of the Koreans. This resulted also from his personal character and standards of behaviour. As a man of paradoxes and double standards, he apparently believed there was nothing inconsistent about this double-edged approach: the Inspector General worked assiduously for the modernization of China while also campaigning against the progress of Korea. Korea had become more a sovereign and independent nation than a dependent state in the early 1880s. By way of analogy, the thesis that China's interference constituted a new imperialism can also stand on its own merits. In particular, if China's imperialism in Korea proved to be nothing but negative or detrimental to

China and Korea, then such a policy can hardly be defended. In other words, if the Chinese policy had somehow prevented the Sino-Japanese War, with its tragic results, or if China had defeated Japan, then we could say that Hart and Li had been prescient and men of discernment, at least from the standpoint of China. However, since China's imperialistic policy brought about nothing but disaster and humiliation, we have to conclude that Hart's advice was misdirected, myopic, and ultimately destructive.

To be certain, even if Hart had never left Belfast, China's policy toward Korea after 1882 would have been what it was—a new imperialism. Even if he had never served the Chinese government, the Sino-Japanese war would have erupted and the inadequately prepared and misplaced Chinese would have been defeated. Thus, the importance of Hart's influence should not be exaggerated or overstated. He merely advised and urged China's leaders to do to Korea what they would have done in any case.

By the same token, Hart could hardly be praised or excused for having failed to give the Chinese government the kind of advice that could have prevented them committing tragic errors. As a gifted administrator and "the most powerful Westerner" in China, he should have tried to provide prescient, fresh, innovative and internationally acceptable policy advice. If he had, the most probable outcome would be that we could now praise his wisdom and effort. But instead he suggested only short-term, convenient, and stop-gap measures. And for his misconceived and misdirected advice he can hardly escape censure. He should be held, ethically and intellectually, if not politically and legally, accountable.

As for Korea, China's elimination from the peninsula finally made the Korean kingdom fully sovereign and independent. However the Japanese, having achieved

Korea's independence through a bloody war, insisted they were entitled to special rights and privileges, something they might have felt less justified to do if China had treated Korea as fully independent to begin with. Confronted by the newly aggressive Japanese, Korean leaders again solicited protection from the Russians, who had been actively engaged in colonizing Manchuria and were more than agreeable to agitating the troubled waters of Korea. This led to the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5. After vanquishing Russia, Japan proceeded to annex Korea into its empire officially in 1910. Owing in part to the efforts of Li, Hart, and others, Korea missed a golden opportunity to become genuinely independent and modernize itself in a manner analogous not to Ch'ing but to Meiji supporters. After all, ever since the 1960s South Korean leaders have proved amenable to Japanese-type reforms to make their small nation into an industrial giant. One cannot help speculating whether Hart, if he were now to return from his grave and visit Peking and Seoul, would still say the Koreans would be better off under Chinese rule.

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- 63 Wright, *Hart*, pp.110, 587.
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- 65 Hart to Campbell, 10 April 1892 and 27 November 1892, *Hart Papers*.
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- 70 Nish, "Brown," pp.30-47.
- 71 Nish, "Brown," p.37.
- 72 Hart to Campbell, 6 March 1896 and 15 March 1896, *Hart Papers*.
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- 74 In 1897, when the Korean government was under Russian influence, the king replaced Brown with a Russian official, K. A. Alexeyev, but Brown refused to leave his post. With the support of British diplomats, he was soon restored to office and Alexeyev became his subordinate. See Il-Keun Park, ed., *Anglo-American and Chinese Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea, 1887-1897* (Pusan: Institute of Chinese Studies, Pusan

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- 75 In 1905, when Japan drove the Russians from Korea, they pressured Brown to retire. See Nish, "Brown," pp.46-47.
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**THREE PERSPECTIVES ON
DEVELOPMENT
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE
WELFARE SYSTEMS OF EAST ASIAN
NICs**

JIN YOUNG MOON

Introduction

It is widely accepted that the industrialisation processes of Korea and Taiwan, two East Asian "Newly Industrializing Countries (NICs),¹ are central to understanding the general situation of Third World countries, not only because they have shown impressive economic development during the past three or four decades, but also because they indicate both the possibilities and limitations of Third World development. Compared with the detailed research on the industrialisation of these two, too little attention has been devoted to their welfare systems, which have been regarded by many western scholars as "part and parcel of the industrialisation process."² This is mainly due to the historical nature of the