

2015

# An Idealist's Journey: George Clayton Foulk and U.S.-Korea Relations, 1883-1887

Joohyun Kim  
*Claremont McKenna College*

---

## Recommended Citation

Kim, Joohyun, "An Idealist's Journey: George Clayton Foulk and U.S.-Korea Relations, 1883-1887" (2015). *CMC Senior Theses*. Paper 1119.  
[http://scholarship.claremont.edu/cmc\\_theses/1119](http://scholarship.claremont.edu/cmc_theses/1119)

This Open Access Senior Thesis is brought to you by Scholarship@Claremont. It has been accepted for inclusion in this collection by an authorized administrator. For more information, please contact [scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu](mailto:scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu).

Claremont McKenna College

**An Idealist's Journey: George Clayton Foulk and  
U.S.-Korea Relations, 1883-1887**

submitted to  
Professor Arthur L. Rosenbaum  
and  
Dean Nicholas Warner

by  
Joohyun Kim

for  
Senior Thesis  
Spring 2015  
April 27, 2015



## **Abstract**

This senior thesis studies the character and influence of a young American naval officer and diplomat. George Clayton Foulk, the 1<sup>st</sup> Naval Attaché to the United States Legation and the 2<sup>nd</sup> U.S. Minister to Korea, brought his intellectual ability and passion to this East Asian country. He hoped for Korea to become an independent, modernized state. Due to the strong Chinese opposition and lack of assistance from the U.S. government, Foulk failed to realize his dream and left Korea in disgrace. However, his service instilled a positive image of America in the minds of many Koreans. By closely examining his letters and journals, this thesis brings an image of a cosmopolitan who expressed genuine understanding of and sympathy for Korea. More importantly, this thesis introduces his vision that America must become an exceptional country which spreads its values across the world through peaceful means. Even today, the clash between Foulk's idealism and the *realpolitik* of Washington policymakers raises a question on the future of American diplomacy.

## **Acknowledgements**

This thesis is dedicated to all men and women who lived through the oppression and hardships of the late-19<sup>th</sup> century. They include Korean peasants who suffered from poverty and war, American teachers and doctors who selflessly worked in an unknown country, and countless soldiers and civilians from all nations who died in battles which had nothing to do with their welfare.

Throughout the process of research and writing, I received strong support and guidance from Professor Rosenbaum. He always fueled me with his superb knowledge, ideas, and questions. Most importantly, I must thank him for always reminding me to be confident in my argument and analysis.

I am grateful for the support of the History Department, Ms. Bridgette Stokes, and Mr. Joseph Z. and Ms. Ruth N. Stasneck. Because of their generosity, I was able to go to the New York Public Library and look at the George Clayton Foulk and Horace Newton Allen Papers. Three days of wrestling with the microfilm reader taught me joys and difficulties of becoming a good historian.

Next, I must offer thanks to my friends from college. Despite being always busy with their own work, they always listened to my questions and gave healthy comments.

Finally, words can hardly describe the support from members of my family. They provided me an unconditional love and guidance throughout my life.

## Introduction

A journey to East Asia brought a strong sense of mission to America. During the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, American men and women crossed the Pacific as missionaries, diplomats, and traders, confident that they had an ability to change the lives of people in an unknown world. Many saw themselves as agents of American economic expansionism, boldly developing new business opportunities in East Asia. Those who were religious also brought a fervent commitment to convert their Asian brothers to Christianity. But more importantly, they wholeheartedly accepted and internalized the idea of American exceptionalism. They believed that America, unlike other nations, built an advanced society based on democracy, liberty, and egalitarianism. Therefore, many proud Americans saw themselves as citizens of the new world, who embodied the “highest qualities of civilization.”<sup>1</sup> But to them, East Asia represented an old world that gave birth to “humanity and civilization” but gradually fell behind the West.<sup>2</sup> Now, Americans believed that they must return the favor by teaching East Asia about their advanced technology, government system, and modern institutions. This idea instilled a sense of duty to Americans who crossed the Pacific.

When American officials, businessmen, and missionaries stepped foot in East Asia, they naïvely expected East Asia to welcome their new ideas. When their

---

<sup>1</sup> Akira Iriye, *Across the Pacific: An Inner history of American-East Asian Relations the United States* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1967), 4-5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-7.

expectations turned out to be wrong, Americans used force. In 1851, Japan opened its ports and signed Japan-U.S. Treaty of Peace and Amity only after Commodore Perry threatened the Japanese officials with four American gunboats.<sup>3</sup> In China, Fredrick Townsend Ward led the troops against the Taiping movement because these rebels had threatened the Qing Dynasty, which had agreed to trade with the Western world.<sup>4</sup> Korea encountered Americans at a much later period. A decade later, Korea also went through a bloody encounter with America. But it did not take long for Korea to associate the U.S. with hope and vision, not with violence and imperialism.

A key pioneer in U.S.-Korea relations was a young naval officer named George Clayton Foulk. After graduation from the U.S. Naval Academy, Foulk served several years in the Pacific. During this period, he developed a passion for learning the customs and languages of the outside world. In 1884, he moved to Korea as a naval attaché and later served as the 2<sup>nd</sup> U.S. Minister to Korea. Through his efforts for Korea, many liberal Korean eventually fostered a positive image of America. But before focusing on his career and achievements, it would be important to look at a brief history of U.S-Korea relations before the arrival of Foulk.

America's involvement in Korea began during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. In the 1850s and early-1860s, several shipwrecked American sailors briefly stayed in Korea. The Korean government sent these Americans to China, and they left Korea without any

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>4</sup> Alex Gouzoules, "The Use of Foreign Soldiers during the Taiping Rebellion," *Emory Endeavors in World History* Vol. 2 (2008), accessed April 7, 2015, <http://history.emory.edu/home/undergraduate/endeavors-journal/volume-2.html>.

significant events.<sup>5</sup> The first major encounter between Korea and America only happened in 1866, twelve years after Commodore Perry had forced the Japanese government to open its ports.<sup>6</sup> In a hot, humid day of August, *USS General Sherman*, which carried Westerners and commercial goods, arrived in Taedong River near Pyongyang. At first, even Korean authorities did not know the nationality of the ship.<sup>7</sup> But both onlookers and guards became angry when Americans detained a Korean military officer who had entered the boat for further inquiry.<sup>8</sup> These crowds armed themselves with “stones, sticks, and bows and arrows.” When American sailors shot cannons towards the crowd and killed a dozen of the crowd, hundreds of Korean men attacked the vessel. In the end, these angry Koreans destroyed the entire ship and beat all American sailors to death.<sup>9</sup>

After hearing reports about the murder of the crews of *USS General Sherman*, the U.S. government decided to demand reparations and open the closed doors of Korea. In 1871, Americans sent a large expeditionary force to Korea. The troops included “five ... warships carrying eighty-five cannons and 1,230 marines and sailors.”<sup>10</sup> They arrived in Kanghwa Island, where small number of Korean troops had established forts. Kanghwa Island had strategic values because if enemy vessels pass through the island, they could

---

<sup>5</sup> Young-sik Kim, “A Brief History of the U.S.-Korea Relations Prior to 1945,” paper presented at the *University of Oregon*, accessed April 7, 2015, <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/943949/posts>.

<sup>6</sup> Iriye, *Across the Pacific*, 36.

<sup>7</sup> Young-ick Lew, *Korean Perceptions of the United States: A History of Their Origins and Formation* (Seoul: The Jimoondang, 2006), 108-109.

<sup>8</sup> James Gale, *History of the Korean People* (Seoul: Royal Asiatic Society, 1983), 310.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 310-311.

<sup>10</sup> Gordon H. Chang, “Whose ‘Barbarism’? Whose ‘Treachery’? Race and Civilization in the Unknown United States-Korea War of 1871,” *Journal of American History* 89 (2003), 1338.

move to Seoul through the Han River.<sup>11</sup> When a small number of Koreans in Kanghwa attacked two U.S. vessels, American forces launched artillery attacks against the forts and sent ground troops to capture these forts. Facing a superior military power, the Korean forces lost 250 men while only killing three American soldiers.<sup>12</sup> Despite massive casualties, the Korean government refused to surrender. Frederick F. Low, American resident minister at Beijing and head of the entire military expedition, sent the Korean government an official request for negotiation.<sup>13</sup> The Koreans never responded. Tired of waiting for a response from the Koreans and restrained by the size of the fleet, which would be too small to launch further attacks towards the inlands of Korea, American vessels withdrew from Korea after a month of siege.<sup>14</sup> In consequence, hatred against America grew in Korea.

However, two major changes finally opened the closed doors of the hermit kingdom. First, in 1873, King Gojong of Korea announced direct rule and took power from his father, Daewongun. The father had ruled over Korea on behalf of his young son and supported strong anti-Western policies.<sup>15</sup> However, Daewongun lost support among many aristocrats because he took away many of their privileges and spent an excessive

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 1342-1345.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 1355.

<sup>13</sup> Lew, *Korean Perceptions of the United States*, 175.

<sup>14</sup> Bruce E. Bechtol Jr., "Avenging the General Sherman: The 1871 Battle of Kang Hwa Do" (MA diss., Marine Corps University, 2001).

<sup>15</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *Restless Empire: China and the Modern World* (New York: Basic Books, 2012), 96.

amount of the budget to rebuild the palace. Unlike his father, the King believed that Korea must eventually accept some Western ideas and technology to survive.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, non-American powers now pressured Korea to open its borders. They eventually tried to put Korea under their control. After modernizing its economy and armed forces, Japan decided to take advantage of Korea's political instability during the ouster of Daewongun. In 1875, it sent a warship named *Un'yo* near Kanghwa Island.<sup>17</sup> Japan justified the expedition as a peaceful coastal survey.<sup>18</sup> So when Korean officers attacked these boats, Japan blamed the Koreans for obstructing peace and launched a much stronger counterattack. Outmatched by forceful Japanese weaponry, several Korean soldiers and civilians lost their lives. The unstable Korean government saw their military defeat with fear. Furthermore, even though it had opposed the Japanese expansion in Korea, the Qing government did not want to see increasing tensions in East Asia. Therefore, it sent a representative to Korea, who recommended that the Korean officials conclude a treaty with Japan.<sup>19</sup> Due to domestic instabilities and increased pressure from Qing, the Korean government could not oppose Japan as it had against America four years ago. In 1876, Korea signed the first modern treaty with Japan, which promised the establishment of trade ports and modern Japanese legation in Korea.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 95-97.

<sup>17</sup> Alexis Dudden, *Japan's Colonization of Korea: Discourse and Power* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), 51.

<sup>18</sup> Hilary Conroy, *The Japanese Seizure of Korea, 1868-1910: A Study of Realism and Idealism in International Relations* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960), 61-64.

<sup>19</sup> Lew, *Korean Perceptions of the United States*, 85.

<sup>20</sup> Dudden, *Japan's Colonization of Korea: Discourse and Power*, 52-66.

Following the *Un'yo* incident, even the Chinese government decided to exert more influence over Korea. Its traditional relationship with Korea was called “suzerain-vassal relationship.”<sup>21</sup> Under this system, Korea would recognize Chinese hegemony over East and Southeast Asia and annually exchange gifts with China.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, China would respect the autonomy Korea by rarely interfering in domestic policies of the Korean government. But during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, China was introduced to the Western system of colonization. Unlike most historic Chinese empires, European powers used its military, bureaucracy, and international treaties to maintain tight control over several Asian countries and exploit their resources.<sup>23</sup> Since the mid-1870s, Li Hongzhang, a high-ranking Qing official, “overstepped ... the practice of the suzerain’s authority in traditional Sino-Korean relations.”<sup>24</sup> Although he did not desire to make Korea a full colony of China, Li changed the nature of Sino-Korean relations. He intervened in most economic and diplomatic decisions of the Korean government. By doing so, Li hoped that he could prevent Korea from falling under the hands of emerging neighbors, such as Russia and Japan.<sup>25</sup> In 1882, anti-Western and anti-Chinese Daewongun attempted to regain his power by launching a revolt against the King and Queen Min of Korea. Chinese soldiers defeated Daewongun and kidnapped him to China.<sup>26</sup> Korea-Qing

---

<sup>21</sup> Key-hiuk Kim, *The Last Phase of the East Asian World Order: Korea, Japan and the Chinese Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 330-333.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 328.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 344.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 345-346.

<sup>25</sup> Samuel C. Chu and Kwang-ching Liu, *Li Hung-chang and China's Early Modernization* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 154-156.

<sup>26</sup> Gale, *History of the Korean People*, 312-313.

Communications and Commerce Rules, an unfair treaty which granted special privileges to Chinese merchants, soon followed.<sup>27</sup>

One piece of advice from the Chinese government to Korea was to establish diplomatic relations with the U.S. Since 1860s, China worried that Japan and Russia might take over Korea.<sup>28</sup> Li believed that if Korea established relations with as many Western countries as possible, Japan and Russia would have less opportunity to intervene in Korea. Therefore, China used several channels to make Korea form a diplomatic relationship with the U.S. For example, Huang Zunxin, a young Chinese diplomat, distributed his pamphlet titled “A Strategy for Korea,” to Korean delegates visiting Beijing.<sup>29</sup> This pamphlet, which became popular among Korean officials in Seoul, warned about Russian expansion. In order to prevent Russia from taking control of Korea, Huang advised the Korean readers to build strong ties with the U.S. More importantly, he instilled an ideal image of the U.S. Huang described America as a nation with different characteristics than European powers because the country was found as part of a resistance against British tyranny.<sup>30</sup> It further stated that America, as a democratic country which is ruled upon republicanism, is only interested in trade and communication but not territorial claims.<sup>31</sup> Although it is difficult to measure the contribution of Huang Zunxin, Li succeed in bringing Koreans to the negotiation table. Two years after the

---

<sup>27</sup> Myungki Moon, “Korea-China Treaty System in the 1880s and the Opening of Seoul,” *Journal of Northeast History* 5 (2008), 89.

<sup>28</sup> Chu and Liu, *Li Hung-chang and China's Early Modernization*, 179-180.

<sup>29</sup> Lew, *Korean Perceptions of the United States*, 88.

<sup>30</sup> Zunxian Huang, *Chosun Chaengnyak-ui Wonbon-gwa Haesol-bon [The Original and Interpreted Version of a Strategy for Korea]*, accessed April 27, 2015, <http://historia.tistory.com/1789>.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

introduction of “A Strategy for Korea,” Korea and U.S. concluded the 1882 U.S.-Korea Treaty of Amity and Commerce, which is often called the Shufeldt Treaty.<sup>32</sup>

Regardless of the Chinese influence, Korean diplomats had their own reasons to develop good relations with the United States. First of all, they believed that the “geographical distance between Korea and the United States” would prevent Americans from having “evil or ulterior motives.”<sup>33</sup> England and France were also located far from Korea, but they had already established colonies in Asia by the mid-1880s. Furthermore, Korea not only hoped that the U.S. would limit potential Russian and Japanese interventions, but they also secretly hoped that America would limit far-reaching Chinese influence over Korea. Most importantly, Koreans accepted the idea of American exceptionalism from “A Strategy for Korea.” They now believed that America had a fundamentally different national character. Although the U.S. rarely hesitated to use force against seclusionistic countries, Korean officials still viewed America as a unique nation focused on commercial and cultural exchange.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, the Koreans trusted American power because they lacked proper understanding of international treaties. Article 1 of the Shufeldt Treaty included a good-offices clause. It said that “if another power deals unjustly or oppressively with either Government, the other will exert their good offices, on being informed of the case, to

---

<sup>32</sup> David Andrew Nordmann, “Idealism, immigration and imperialism: Durham Stevens and the rise and fall of United States diplomacy with Japan and Korea, 1873-1908” (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2001), 55.

<sup>33</sup> Wayne Patterson and Hilary Conroy, “Duality and Dominance: A Century of Korean-American Relations,” in *One Hundred Years of Korean-American Relations, 1882-1982*, ed. Yur-Bok Lee and Wayne Patterson (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1986), 14.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

bring about an amicable arrangement, thus showing their friendly feelings.”<sup>35</sup> U.S. and most of the states normally interpreted the good-offices clause as a “sign of friendship,” but not as a “commitment to or guarantee of physical protection.”<sup>36</sup> But the Korean government understood the good-offices clause as if U.S. had promised to defend the independence of Korea. In the end, all of these factors helped Korean officials erase the memory of their soldiers being slaughtered by the Americans eleven years ago. The Shufeldt Treaty was accepted by Korea with only nominal opposition.

After the treaty, King Gojong of Korea clearly revealed his pro-American views. For example, he appointed his foreign advisors “almost exclusively from among Americans.”<sup>37</sup> His government even accepted U.S. missionaries to Korea, hoping they could help the modernization of this small, East Asian nation.<sup>38</sup> For a Confucian country that had murdered Catholic missionaries and eight thousand native converts fifteen years ago, the acceptance of American missionaries suggested the Korean government’s desire to establish good relations with the U.S.<sup>39</sup> A year after the Shufeldt Treaty, the King sent the first official Korean delegates to the U.S. and also received the first U.S. Minister to Korea, Lucius Harwood Foote. The King greatly welcomed him and explicitly told the

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>37</sup> Young-ick Lew, *Early Korean Encounters with the United States and Japan: Six Essays on Late Nineteenth-Century Korea* (Seoul: The Royal Asiatic Society, 2008), 10.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>39</sup> Bruce Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 96.

American diplomat that he eagerly sought American support and advice. Later, Foote became the first foreigner to be admitted to the personal apartments of the King.<sup>40</sup>

While the King and many liberal-minded officials sought American guidance, the opening of an unknown, mysterious nation also attracted a few adventurous Americans. During the 1880s, American businessmen, missionaries, and doctors moved to Korea for new opportunity. But unlike in the U.S., these newcomers in Korea did not work in a strictly defined occupation. Sometimes a businessman also served as a missionary. Or a single person performed the role of a doctor, missionary, educator, and diplomat. Occupation was not a big issue, because many of them believed that they shared the same mission in Korea. Although they sometimes revealed racist, arrogant, and paternalistic attitudes, most of them believed their role was to introduce American skills and systems to Korea.

However, even among these adventurous Americans, a few men who overcame cultural difference and expressed more sympathy for Korea stood out. George Clayton Foulk was clearly one of them. A man of high ideals, he believed his key duty as an American diplomat was to help Korea become a much stronger, modernized country. But his idealistic vision for Korea was frustrated by lack of American government's support and strong Chinese opposition. The following chapter is an analysis of a highly idealistic young man who was at the center of the most turbulent period in Korean history.

---

<sup>40</sup> Lucius Foote to Secretary of State Fredrick T. Frelinghuysen, October 19, 1883, comp. George M. McCune and John A. Harrison, *Korean-American Relations: Documents Pertaining to the Far Eastern Diplomacy of the United States, Volume I ("KAR I")* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 53.

### **Foulk's Moral and Intellectual Passion**

George Clayton Foulk was born in the small town of Marietta in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, on October 30, 1856,<sup>41</sup> He had fond memories of his childhood in a small Pennsylvania town, where he spent time playing with his little brothers along the river.<sup>42</sup> Later, he often revealed his nostalgia for his childhood years and love for his family in his letters from Korea. But Foulk, an ambitious, young man, wished to explore a bigger world. In 1872, at the age of sixteen, Foulk enrolled at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland.<sup>43</sup> Although he initially struggled to adjust to a completely new environment, Foulk overcame the difficulties and graduated third in his class in 1876.<sup>44</sup>

After the graduation, Foulk started his service under the Asiatic Squadron. For six years, he joined several flagships that sailed across the Pacific, including parts of Japan, Siberia, and Korea.<sup>45</sup> During his service, he demonstrated his intelligent, hard-working, likeable character and therefore earned the favor of other naval officers and superiors.<sup>46</sup> While serving for his country, Foulk devoted his time to studying the Japanese and Chinese languages.<sup>47</sup> After his first visit to Korea in 1882, he even began studying

---

<sup>41</sup> Introduction, comp. Samuel Hawley, *America's Man in Korea: The Private Letters of George C. Foulk, 1884-1887* ("AMK") (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008), 1-2.

<sup>42</sup> Foulk to his parents and brothers, January 18, 1886, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 43-44.

<sup>43</sup> Introduction, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 1-2.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>45</sup> Yur-bok, Lee, "Diplomatic Relations between Korea and the United States, 1882-1887: A Study of Foreign Services of Minister Foote and Charge Foulk in Korea" (PhD diss., University of Georgia, 1965), 108.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>47</sup> Introduction, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 2-3.

Korean. At the end of his six-year service, Foulk returned to the U.S. to work at a library under the Navy Department in Washington D.C.<sup>48</sup> While in Washington, he met the first official Korean delegation to the U.S. in 1883.

From the career and achievements of Foulk, two important characteristics stood out. First, Foulk brought his moral and Christian passion to Korea. Unlike other Christians of his era, he never attempted to convert as many Koreans as possible. In fact, he severely criticized American missionaries who came to Korea with little knowledge of the country.<sup>49</sup> He also disliked many missionaries because they created jealousies and rivalries among different sects. But Foulk still expressed his devout faith in God and believed that his religion gave him a mission to explore, build friendship with people, and modernize a “poor pagan nation.”<sup>50</sup> In a personal letter to his parents, he expressed his Christian duty as follows.

“I shall try to be a working Christian, to be temperate, to be honest, to be as you advised me to be more than once, true to myself, which implies truth to the training I received at your hands, and the Christian surroundings of my boyhood life. I say try, for I may not know my own strength or weakness.”<sup>51</sup>

So even when he experienced financial difficulties and made many enemies during his stay in Korea, Foulk tried hard to reassure his inner self that he must not seek empty fame or prestige. He wrote,

---

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>49</sup> Foulk to his parents and brothers, September 15, 1885, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 126-127.

<sup>50</sup> Foulk to his parents, June 20, 1886, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 159.

<sup>51</sup> Foulk to his parents, July 10, 1886, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 164.

“I have jumped very high out of my ensign’s breeches. Some people might be very proud over the exaltation, but am I not still George C. Foulk with the same body, the same mind, the same liability to work, care or sickness that I had as simple ensign? Rank is a grand humbug, a damnable snare, wind. I don’t care for it. It would be different were rank commensurate with the amount of good it caused to be done.”<sup>52</sup>

“If I only worked for complimentary remarks and a name, I might regard myself as a grand success, for indeed I only hear good of myself.... But I am honest when I tell you that it is not the empty name I care for, but the real good and the means to accomplish it that I do want.”<sup>53</sup>

In few cases, Foulk revealed paternalistic attitudes or occasionally expressed his disgust at some unimagined local practices and attitudes. Still, he strongly believed that he had a genuine mission in Korea. At heart, he wanted to teach Koreans about the benefits of a new, American civilization and help them establish a more sovereign, westernized state.

“There is much reason in all you have written about the bad state of affairs here, of the poverty and wretchedness of every other kind in Korea. It is no doubt to many, to most everybody, a good country to leave, yet I do not like to give it up ... I never think about making money... Here are lots of chagrins and growls for me, yet all the time I can teach, can do good in some form or other, and feel that I am doing something towards the share of real work demanded of every man in the world.”<sup>54</sup>

Naturally, Foulk hoped that the U.S. government would share his lofty ideals. He recognized how many Korean officials have faith towards America, and therefore tried to bring a response from the U.S. government. But officials in Washington, both due to separation by geographical distance and practical concerns over its relations with China,

---

<sup>52</sup> Foulk to his father, May 4, 1885, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 103.

<sup>53</sup> Foulk to his parents and brothers, January 18, 1885, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 144.

<sup>54</sup> Foulk to his father, May 4, 1885, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 101.

“remained aloof” in determining the fate of Korea.<sup>55</sup> The gap between Foulk’s idealism and the State Department’s realpolitik eventually led to his demise in Korea.

Another quality that made Foulk a unique historic character was his wide intellectual ability and tolerance towards other cultures. Everyone who had worked with Foulk recognized this young Ensign as a superb naval officer.<sup>56</sup> But his wide arrange of interests prevented the young officer from becoming focused on establishing a successful career within the Navy. Unlike other naval officers, Foulk committed much of his time and effort towards mastering foreign languages. According to one record, he “acquainted himself with Russian, French, three dialects of Chinese, Persian, Hindustani, and Sanskrit.”<sup>57</sup> However, his interests were not solely confined to languages. For example, even during the era when many Protestant Americans expressed their stereotypes about Catholicism and Judaism, Foulk studied Buddhist culture. During his stay in Korea, he visited several Buddhist temples and talked at length with monks about their religion.<sup>58</sup> He also appreciated the designs of temples and statues of Buddha with pleasure. Soon after his arrival in Korea, his strong curiosity made him the first American to travel the inlands of Korea. For two months, with only a few companions and servants, he toured

---

<sup>55</sup> Introduction, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 22.

<sup>56</sup> Lee, “Diplomatic Relations between Korea and the United States, 1882-1887,” 108.

<sup>57</sup> Harold F. Cook, “Early American Contacts with Korea” *Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 57 (1980), 90-91.

According to Foulk, the items lost during the looting after the 1884 coup included “Russian dictionary, French dictionary... Japanese grammar book... and Hindustani phrase book.”

<sup>58</sup> Foulk’s Journal, November 22, 1884, comp. Samuel Hawley, *Inside the Hermit Kingdom: The 1884 Korea Travel Diary of George C. Foulk, 1884-1887 (“IHK”)* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008), 97-98.

Southern parts of Korea and kept a detailed diary of this trip.<sup>59</sup> This intellectual curiosity and deep knowledge of non-American culture made Foulk a natural guide for official Korean guests in Washington, D.C. Furthermore, these qualities helped Foulk earn the favor of many progressive Koreans and become the highest-ranking American official in Korea within a few months after his arrival.

---

<sup>59</sup> Introduction, comp. Hawley, *IHK*, 1-20.

### **May 1884 – January 1885: Foulk’s Empathy and Political Alliances**

The first official Korean delegation to the U.S. arrived in Washington on September 15, 1883.<sup>60</sup> King Gojong of Korea, who believed that America could provide technological support and undermine Chinese influence over Korea, selected many young, progressive Korean men as members of the trip.<sup>61</sup> During the mission, Korean officials met President Chester A. Arthur and John Davis, Acting Secretary of State.<sup>62</sup> They also visited manufacturing exhibitions, model farms, educational institutions, telegraph and postal offices, and other government institutions. Awed by the things that he had seen in America, even a pro-Chinese, semi-conservative head of the delegation named Min Yong-ik later told Foote:

“I was born in the dark; I went out into the light, and now I have returned into the dark again; I cannot as yet see my way clearly, but I hope to soon.”<sup>63</sup>

Shortly before his meeting with Korean officials, President Arthur searched for an official who could assist the Koreans throughout the trip. None of the Korean delegates could speak English, but at least two of them spoke some Japanese. Since he failed to find a suitable official from the State Department, Arthur selected Foulk and ordered him to accompany the Korean mission.<sup>64</sup> During this period, Foulk grew tired of his work in a

---

<sup>60</sup> Frelinghuysen to Foote, March 15, 1883, comp. McCune and Harrison, *KAR 1*, 32-33.

<sup>61</sup> Lee, “Diplomatic Relations between Korea and the United States, 1882-1887, 68-70.

<sup>62</sup> Frelinghuysen, March 15, 1883, comp. McCune and Harrison, *KAR 1*, 33.

<sup>63</sup> Foote to Frelinghuysen, June 17, 1884, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States 1885* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1885), 126.

<sup>64</sup> Lee, “Diplomatic Relations between Korea and the United States, 1882-1887, 70.

quiet, uneventful library.<sup>65</sup> In order to start a new overseas journey, Foulk had already requested his superiors to send him back to the Asiatic Squadron.<sup>66</sup> Perhaps out of a hope to find new opportunities in Washington, he accompanied the Koreans with great vigor and good information. From Boston to Washington D.C., he toured for two months with the delegation and introduced the Koreans to as many modern developments as possible.<sup>67</sup> Since most members of the Korean delegation were young reformers in their 20s, Foulk's youth and energy helped him leave a good impression on many Korean visitors.

Impressed by Foulk, Min Yong-Ik made a special request to the Department of State. He asked if Foulk could join their return trip and continue to work in Korea, building stronger U.S.-Korea relations.<sup>68</sup> However, even though Foulk personally wished to return to Asia, the State Department could not arbitrarily send someone who was still a part of the Navy. After consultation with the State Department, the Navy Department appointed Foulk as the Naval Attaché to the United States Legation in Seoul.<sup>69</sup> But during this period, the Korean government did not have its own navy. Therefore, every official knew that the Navy created this title solely for Foulk's mission to Korea.<sup>70</sup> Due to

---

<sup>65</sup> Gary D. Walters, "The Korean Special Mission to the United States of America in 1883," *Journal of Korean Studies* 1 (1969), 107.

<sup>66</sup> Harold J. Noble, "The Korean Mission to the United States in 1883" *Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 18 (1929), 5-7.

<sup>67</sup> Walters, "The Korean Special Mission to the United States of America in 1883," 102-106.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>69</sup> Noble, "The Korean Mission to the United States in 1883," 14-16.

<sup>70</sup> Walters, "The Korean Special Mission to the United States of America in 1883," 107.

the unprecedented nature of his position, he received a rather broad, unclear description of his role from Secretary of the State Frelinghuysen. He asked Foulk to,

“Make trips of exploration and find out the nature and resources of Korea, inform the State Department on naval subjects in Korea, and give advice on nautical and kindred and other pertinent subjects to the Korean government.”<sup>71</sup>

From the phrase, “give advice on,” Frelinghuysen probably expected Foulk to not only work for the interests of the U.S. but also help the Korean government modernize its country and raise its international status. But when Foulk gave many hearty advises to the King, he faced huge opposition from pro-Chinese Koreans and disapproval from American officials.

On November 16, 1883, Foulk and three Korean officials boarded the *USS Trenton*.<sup>72</sup> For six months, the *USS Trenton* sailed across the Atlantic, stopped in a few European cities, passed through the Suez Canal, and finally arrived in Korea in May 1884.<sup>73</sup> Even during the long trip, he taught Koreans about the importance of modernization and instilled a good image of the United States. In one episode, the Korean delegates saw Egyptian artifacts at the British museums in London. Foulk described how these items were “taken by force from other countries” and compared British imperialism

---

<sup>71</sup> Lee, “Diplomatic Relations between Korea and the United States, 1882-1887, 72.

<sup>72</sup> Walters, “The Korean Special Mission to the United States of America in 1883,” 108-109.

The rest of Korean officials took a train to San Francisco. They sailed across the Pacific and arrived in Korea several months earlier than Foulk and three other Korean officials.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 109-110.

with friendly, non-imperialistic American foreign policy.<sup>74</sup> Overall, most Korean officials returned to Korea with a “good impression of the American people and government.”<sup>75</sup>

On May 31, 1884, after a six-month journey, Foulk finally landed in a small port village of Chemulpo. His first impression of Chemulpo was that it represented the backwardness of Korea. In 1884, only about 1,200 people lived around this small port area. On the same day, he wrote his first letter to his parents and brothers, describing the things that he had seen in Korea.

“The outlook for me is not a cheering one. Things are dismal looking one every side, the boats, the boatmen, the shore, the islands. I am indeed going into a land of pagans.”<sup>76</sup>

“On going on shore with Pyon Su I found Chemulpo to be a wretchedly muddy, poverty stricken place... The Korean houses are poor straw hovels with mud for their flooring.”<sup>77</sup>

But he still left his family with a hopeful message by suggesting that he would do his best to help this hermit kingdom.

“Yet I am prepared to rough it. I mean to be in earnest in all I do, as I hope I have been so far, have no need to lie, or steal or wrangle, and do not see why I should not make friends with the people and get their help. While I am brave enough in looking at the prospect as a whole before me, doubtless my eyes will be wet when the *Trenton* sails form here, and I am left practically alone among these pagan people<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>76</sup> Foulk to his parents and brothers, May 31, 1884, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 27.

<sup>77</sup> Foulk to his parents and brothers, June 15, 1884, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 29-30.

<sup>78</sup> Foulk, May 31, 1884, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 27.

His mixed attitude towards Korea was typical of an ambitious person who would venture to a foreign land. While Foulk was eager to make great accomplishments in Korea, he simultaneously recognized that his job would be a very tough one.

Soon after the arrival of Foulk, the State Department made one significant change which indicated its lack of interest in Korea. In July 1884, it reduced the grade of the U.S. Minister to Korea from “that of Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to that of Minister Resident and Consul General.”<sup>79</sup> While announcing this message, Secretary Frelinghuysen assured Minister Foote that such a change did not mean “disparagement of Korean dignity or want of appreciation on the part of the United States.”<sup>80</sup> He also reassured Foote that his salary would not be reduced. Despite assurances made, Foote gloomily received the news. As an old man in his late-50s, he felt it would be unnecessary to stay in a foreign country while bearing the “loss of his rank” and expensive cost of living.<sup>81</sup> Two months later, he complained to the State Department about his hardships and declined his new appointment as the Minister Resident and Consul General to Korea.<sup>82</sup>

“If I have in any manner succeeded, it has been with the sole purpose of extending the influence of my country and of opening new fields for her commerce. The change of rank detracts nothing from the character of the position ... But to these (Koreans), proud that the United States should have sent to them a Minister of the first rank, it is impossible to explain the reasons for the change, without leaving the most unfortunate impressions ... the Minister ... is no longer clothed with the same importance and influence. For this reasons I must respectfully decline the

---

<sup>79</sup> Frelinghuysen to Foote, July 14, 1884, comp. McCune and Harrison, *KAR I*, 36.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>81</sup> Foote to Frelinghuysen, September 17, 1884, comp. McCune and Harrison, *KAR I*, 37-38.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-38.

appointment which His Excellency the President has so graciously tendered to me.<sup>83</sup>

Two months later, on December 4, 1884, a climatic event happened in Korea. Young, progressive Korean officials, including a few men who had traveled to the U.S. in 1883, launched a coup against conservative, pro-Chinese officials.<sup>84</sup> They expected to gain support from several hundred Japanese soldiers guarding their Embassy. However, Japan quickly withdrew support once it realized that their soldiers were outnumbered by Chinese troops. The progressives lost power in only three days, and most of them either escaped to Japan or lost their lives.<sup>85</sup> In the midst of the violence, Foote helped foreign residents in Seoul seek refuge in the American legations office. He moved back and forth between Seoul and Chemulpo, evacuating American civilians escape from Korea and negotiating a treaty between China and Japan.<sup>86</sup> Since the presence of an American official would dissuade violent gangs from attacking the palace, Foote even left his wife to stay in the dangerous palace for many days.<sup>87</sup> After the conclusion of the treaty, Foote believed that he could not tolerate more hardships in Korea. In January 1885, Foote and his wife abruptly left Korea and returned to California. Soon after the arrival, Mrs. Foote died due to illness. Some historians blamed her physical and mental hardships in Korea for causing her untimely death.<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>84</sup> Jong-suk Chay, *Diplomacy of Asymmetry: Korean-American Relations to 1910* (Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 70-71.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 70-71.

<sup>86</sup> Lee, "Diplomatic Relations between Korea and the United States, 1882-1887," 98.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 104-105.

Whereas Foote gradually lost interest in Korea during the second half of 1884, Foulk brought his energy and vigor to the U.S. mission in Korea. In some ways, he expressed his deep sympathy towards Foote. He admitted difficulties in establishing a productive relationship with Foote, because his ambiguous role as a naval attaché overlapped with Foote's responsibilities as a minister.<sup>89</sup> But Foulk still thanked Foote for his kindness. Furthermore, after the State Department announced Foote's demotion, Foulk once again expressed his sympathy towards the old man.

“Minister Foote has sent his resignation to the State Department because by act of Congress at the last session his rank and pay were reduced. I think he does very rightly and that our government has made a great error... Now the government hauls in its horns and the Koreans think America is going back on them after all its fair promises. Minister Foote is terribly humiliated and very justly thinks himself badly treated.”<sup>90</sup>

But over time, Foulk lost his feelings for Foote. He criticized Foote for his lack of ability and energy. For example, Foulk compared himself with Foote and argued that while “General Foote learned next to nothing of the actual state of affairs” he personally could “talk to many Koreans and do learn everyday of things which General Foote ought to know.”<sup>91</sup> More importantly, Foulk believed that Foote often distrusted him, rather than crediting him for his sincere advice. After the failed 1884 coup, Foote often cared too much about his personal safety. Foulk thought Foote was tarnishing the image of a proper American diplomat. He portrayed the old diplomat as a timid person who would like to

---

<sup>89</sup> Foulk to his parents and brothers, July 2, 1884, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 39-40.

<sup>90</sup> Foulk to his parents and brothers, October 26, 1884, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 67-68. According to the official documents from the State Department, the U.S. government did not reduce salary of Minister Foote. However, one could deny that he had suffered from financial problems during his service in Korea.

<sup>91</sup> Foulk, July 2, 1884, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 39-40.

skedaddle to Japan, in order to flee from the turbulent situation in Korea.<sup>92</sup> Moreover he blamed Foote for leaving the U.S. legations with large amounts of unpaid debt.<sup>93</sup>

However, it would be difficult to agree with all of Foulk's criticisms against Foote. Initially, Foote also succeeded in building good relationship with the King. Furthermore, even while worrying about his personal safety, Foote mediated a treaty between China and Japan after the coup. Foote received unfair judgment from Foulk because he only saw the last one-third of his eighteen-month service in Korea. Similar to how Foulk would suffer in the future, Foote went through financial difficulties due to the lack of support from Washington. Furthermore, unlike Foulk, he raised a family and therefore brought his wife to Korea. He worried not only about his personal safety, but also about his wife's conditions. Still, Foote doubtlessly lost his passion for Korea coincidentally with the arrival of Foulk. Also, Foulk clearly enjoyed more advantages than Foote: his language ability and his youth. So while Foote spent his last six months in Korea without great vigor, Foulk energetically built friendships and made extensive journeys to areas untouched by non-Koreans. This energetic first six months of George C. Foulk could be summarized into two major aspects: his sympathy towards Korea and his development of strong opinion about progressive and conservative factions in Korea.

Compared to other foreigners, Foulk demonstrated a high level of understanding and sympathy for Korea and its people. He clearly recognized the rampant poverty of Korean people and believed that many of their traditions were culturally backward. Despite these beliefs, Foulk showed respect to many aspects of Korean culture. Also, he

---

<sup>92</sup> Foulk to his father, January 5, 1885, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 80.

<sup>93</sup> Foulk to his parents and brothers, April 19, 1885, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 98.

accepted the good will of many Koreans with gratitude. In a May 1884 letter from Nagasaki, he described his first taste of Korean food. Surely he did not appreciate every part of the meal, as he admitted that the food “may have seemed queer” to a typical foreigner.<sup>94</sup> But he believed that the food was better than he expected and described a few dishes as being even “better adapted to European taste than Japanese food.”<sup>95</sup> Since an adjustment to local taste was one of the main difficulties awaiting him, Foulk believed his overall satisfaction with Korean food as an optimistic sign. So even during his two-month journey in rural Korea, he ate the same food with his Korean companions and local hosts without much difficulty. Furthermore, unlike other Christians, Foulk expressed deep interests in the Buddhist tradition of Korea.

“I traveled twenty-nine days, living on Korean food ... and did not see anybody during the interval except Koreans. Nearly the whole journey was unknown to foreigners and of course I was an immense curiosity... Korea is not a land of great wonders in the way of great buildings or other evidences of wealth and grandeur as we look them... Then too, old and fixed as is the way Koreans have, there are relics of things which have had their day even here. There are relics of Buddhist temples of great size, curious rock carvings, representing the ancient gods of the people, etc. All these I had the pleasure of seeing, in addition to learning some of the geography, language, customs, etc. than has probably any other person in the world<sup>96</sup>

Foulk’s interest in Korean culture gradually shifted towards his sympathy for the people. During his first month in Seoul, he recognized the giant gap between the few government bureaucrats and the rest of the people. He defined the relationship as,

---

<sup>94</sup> Foulk to his parents and brothers, May 21, 1884, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 25.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>96</sup> Foulk to his parents, December 1, 1884, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 71.

“Here there are, broadly speaking, only two kinds of people, the officers and the common people. The former are all rich and great, the latter all poor, dirty and helpless.”<sup>97</sup>

Three months later, on November 1, 1884, Foulk launched his two month journey to the Southern provinces of Korea. Ever since his arrival in Seoul, he dreamed of making an extensive journey to all parts of Korea. After the Southern trip, he planned to make two more trips to the Northern provinces of Korea.<sup>98</sup> But a tense political situation and his promotion to the Minister to Korea prevented Foulk from launching further trips. Still, he became the first American to travel outside of Seoul or several port cities of Korea.<sup>99</sup> Throughout this journey, he vividly watched the loathsome situation of the common people and judged Korean bureaucrats as cruel, incompetent men.

Whenever he came into a direct contact with the common people, he remarked on their harsh situations. Although Foulk recognized Korea as a poor country, he discovered that many Southern parts of Korea had rich rice fields. Some of the fields even looked “better, neater” than the farmlands that Foulk had seen in Japan.<sup>100</sup> But, he found out,

“Yet contrary to my expectations, though rice is produced in great abundance, I fail to see evidence of the wealth or of the prosperous condition of the country spoken of by so many Koreans of Seoul. The houses of the people and their dress are far inferior to those about Seoul.”<sup>101</sup>

---

<sup>97</sup>Foulk to his parents and brothers, July 2, 1884, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 36-37.

<sup>98</sup> Introduction, comp. Hawley, *IHK*, 3.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4.

<sup>100</sup> Foulk’s Journal, November 4, 1884, comp. Hawley, *IHK*, 30.

<sup>101</sup> Foulk’s Journal, November 9, 1884, comp. Hawley, *IHK*, 49.

He learned how local officials took away large amounts of rice and justified their practices as preparation for war, famine, and the spring season. However, when food was scarcest during the spring, the officials returned less rice than they had taken before.<sup>102</sup> Foulk therefore criticized the bureaucrats who systematically caused the farmers to remain poor. He believed that these farmers should be able to share the benefits of rich rice fields.

His sympathy for average Koreans and dislike of high-ranking officers grew when he became an official guest in several cities. Governors, military officers, and local bureaucrats joined banquets hosted for Foulk. To him, they demonstrated their lack of knowledge on diplomatic issues involving Korea. Local officials knew nothing about the ongoing war between China and France. They also did not know that China and Japan were having disputes about the status of the Ryukyu Islands.<sup>103</sup> Much worse, many of them knew little about the geography of Korea. When Foulk asked the distance from Chinju to Tongrae, two major Korean cities, no one sitting in a meeting gave a correct answer.<sup>104</sup> They also rarely traveled cities outside of their residence. These episodes reinforced the image of an incompetent Korean government.

Unfortunately, the only thing the Korean officials were good at was tormenting and stealing things from their own people. When the sightseers came to watch Foulk, they had no understanding of personal privacy. Out of curiosity, some of them even followed Foulk when he went to the toilet. But his dislike of these locals quickly turned

---

<sup>102</sup> Foulk's Journal, November 2, 1884, comp. Hawley, *IHK*, 25.

<sup>103</sup> Foulk's Journal, November 11, 1884, comp. Hawley, *IHK*, 56.

<sup>104</sup> Foulk's Journal, November 24, 1884, comp. Hawley, *IHK*, 103.

into sympathy when low-ranking officials often dispersed the crowd by hitting them with sticks.<sup>105</sup> Or when the officers needed to travel across towns, they forced peasants to furnish torches without proper payment. If local peasants refused to work, officials often beat them.<sup>106</sup> However, the worst enemies of the common people were Achons, modern-day equivalent of tax collectors. They collected exorbitant amount of rice, cotton cloth, and silk from the taxpayers.<sup>107</sup> Foulk concluded that the Korean government ruled its people by relying on terror. In consequence, most Koreans became passive, weak men who even feared achieving personal success and becoming a hero because it would lead to more jealousy and suspicion from the government.<sup>108</sup> He concluded,

“It has been the custom of this government to get rid of strong men physically and mentally among the common people, fearing the use of their power against it. Thus such men are made to live in fear and silence... The hero of Tongyong, after killing so many Japanese for his country (a man of the people), knew that this display of his power would cost him his life, and standing on top of his junk in plain sight of the Japanese fleet, shot himself with a Japanese pistol or gun, thus to avoid dying like a criminal!<sup>109</sup>

Therefore, even during the early months of his stay in Korea, Foulk found small things that he could do to help Korea. During his tour with the Korean delegates in Washington, Foulk helped them receive a large number of seeds from the Department of Agriculture.<sup>110</sup> Later, Korean officials distributed the seeds to many local areas and achieved some success. Foulk also personally brought some other kinds of seeds from

---

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>106</sup> Foulk's Journal, November 6, 1884, comp. Hawley, *IHK*, 39.

<sup>107</sup> Revenue of Korea, November 27, 1884, comp. Hawley, *IHK*, 114-115.

<sup>108</sup> Foulk's Journal, November 21, 1884, comp. Hawley, *IHK*, 93-94.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 93-94.

<sup>110</sup> Noble, "The Korean Mission to the United States in 1883," 16-17.

America and planted them in a place which he named “American Farm.”<sup>111</sup> He recognized how “nobody here ever saw or knows how to use cabbage, tomatoes, potatoes, beets, corn, and sugar cane.”<sup>112</sup> Next, Foulk used his small knowledge about dairy life to educate Korean farmers about milking technique and introduced some agricultural tools. He hoped one day the Koreans would “awake to (agriculture’s) importance” and increase the wealth of their country.<sup>113</sup> Finally, using his seven-year experience as a naval officer, Foulk taught Koreans how to use and store some weapons that they had purchased before his arrival.<sup>114</sup>

While Foulk searched for ways to help and educate Koreans, he also witnessed the violation of basic human rights. For Foulk, one of the first unforgettable scenes in Korea was public execution. He described the details of these public executions to his family. In Korea, the executor beheaded the criminals as family members of the prisoners watched the scene.<sup>115</sup> Worst of all, perhaps out of intent to create a brutal scene, the executor used a poorly designed sword. Therefore, the head of the prisoner did not fall from the body in a single cut. Out of disgust, Faulk described,

“Every now and then I hear that “Heads go off today.” About three weeks ago, sixty people – robbers, counterfeiters, etc. were beheaded... On the men are placards stating their crimes. Behind each go the wife, children, and other relatives... The executioner is always made half drunk. The sword is so dull and poorly made that from eight to fourteen cuts must be made before the head is severed. Often legs and arms are chopped off

---

<sup>111</sup> Foulk to his parents and brothers, August 12, 1884, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 51.

<sup>112</sup> Foulk to his parents and brothers, July 22, 1884, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 43.

<sup>113</sup> Foulk to his parents and brothers, August 31, 1884, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 54.

<sup>114</sup> Foulk, July 22, 1884, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 43.

<sup>115</sup> Foulk, August 12, 1884, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 51.

first. I cannot imagine anything more horrible than to see a man's head chopped off, nick by nick, as you would fell a tree.<sup>116</sup>

His concern for basic human rights multiplied when government officials hunted down people whose relatives had participated in the 1884 coup. After the failed coup, gangs led by pro-Chinese, conservative officials massacred several Japanese residents. Foulk's personal Japanese cook went missing, and he assumed that he had been killed by these gangs.<sup>117</sup> Most of the conspirators of the coup escaped to Japan. Unfortunately, a few of them failed to escape. They lost their lives in a very brutal way. In his letter to the State Department, Foulk described the horrible details of the executions.

“These persons were placed face down in the streets and decapitated by from six to ten blows of a dull instrument, while a rope secured to their queues served to open the wounds. The bodies were all dismembered and distributed about the streets for exposure for three or four days.<sup>118</sup>

In a way of retaliation, the Korean officials murdered fathers, brothers, wives, and even young children of the conspirators. Despite many risks, Foulk helped some of the relatives who had managed to hide from the authorities. He gave money to the mother of So Kwang-bom, one of the key leaders of the coup.<sup>119</sup> Before the coup, So enjoyed a promising career as a young reformist. Only twenty-five years old, he was selected as a member of the Korean mission to America by the King, who had enjoyed his reports on

---

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 50-51.

<sup>117</sup> Foulk to his parents and brothers, December 20, 1884, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 77.

<sup>118</sup> Foulk to Secretary of State Thomas F. Bayard, January 31, 1885, comp. McCune and Harrison, *KAR I*, 117.

<sup>119</sup> Foulk, January 5, 1885, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 80.

his visit to Japan and had given “unhindered access” to see him.<sup>120</sup> Furthermore, So was one of the three Koreans who had traveled across the Atlantic for six months with Foulk. But after the failure of the coup, he barely escaped to Japan and his family faced retaliation. Later, some of So’s close friends came to Foulk to ask for poison, so that his relatives could commit suicide when they could no longer escape from the authorities. Although shocked at such idea, Foulk gave them morphine and laudanum because he knew the women in So’s house would suffer more from being captured than committing suicide.<sup>121</sup> He cried,

“What must you think of me, to have been thrown in such barbarism as this? It will not be difficult for you to imagine what a mental strain such things enacted right under my very nose bring upon me.”<sup>122</sup>

Although slightly frightened by these incidents, Foulk assured his family of his safety. He once again criticized Minister Foote, who had hurriedly left Korea after being “frightened for his life.”<sup>123</sup> Unlike Foote, he declared he would stay in Korea and change many things about this underdeveloped, hermetic country. A religious man, he personally prayed to God to come to Korea and use his power.

“I believe, however, it was all for the best – the execution of the prophecies of the Bible. Good must come out of it. This land is so dark, so God-less, so full of pagan cruelty, oppression, vice and misery that it seems to me only natural the vengeance of the just God should fall on it.”<sup>124</sup>

---

<sup>120</sup> Walters, “The Korean Special Mission to the United States of America in 1883,” *Journal of Korean Studies* 1 (1969), 9.

<sup>121</sup> Foulk to his parents and brothers, February 5, 1885, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 90.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>123</sup> Foulk to his parents and brothers, March 12, 1885, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 92.

<sup>124</sup> Foulk, January 5, 1885, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 84.

But Foulk also knew he could not idly rely on his prayers alone and therefore asked himself what he could do to modernize Korea.

One more key aspect of Foulk's first six months in Korea was his own assessment of several Korean leaders. Even among the young Korean officials who had visited the U.S. and traveled with Foulk, disagreements over reform led to rivalries. Min Yong-ik, the nephew of the powerful, pro-Chinese Queen Min of Korea, used his personal connections and became a powerful official at a young age. Min, So Kwang-bum, and Pyon Su were three Koreans who traveled with Foulk for more than six months. Foulk believed that these young men, especially a powerful person like Min, would use their experience and vision to introduce American technology and ideas to Korea. But unlike the other two, Min withdrew his support for reforms soon after his return from the U.S. Later, he even purged several progressives from the Korean Army.<sup>125</sup> This angered So and Pyon.

Foulk expressed solidarity with So and Pyon and criticized Min. After arriving in Korea, he described Min as a "Chinese lover at heart" who worked "against the development of his country according to (America's) ways."<sup>126</sup> In another letter, Foulk called him a coward who feared China and pro-Chinese conservatives among his family friends. While supporting strong measures against the conservatives, he even admitted:

---

<sup>125</sup> Introduction, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 10.

<sup>126</sup> Foulk, June 15, 1884, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 29-30.

“You may be surprised to hear it, but if the heads do go off one will be that of Min Yong-ik, because he obstructs the country from becoming civilized.”<sup>127</sup>

Two months later, the progressives almost killed Min during the coup; he barely survived after receiving medical treatment from an American doctor.<sup>128</sup> When he saw a badly wounded Min, Foulk expressed pity to this young Korean. But he still criticized his political stance, calling him a poor, weak-hearted man who “allowed himself to be used as a tool to China against what he thought right.”<sup>129</sup> Still, it would be surprising to hear the suggestion of beheading a person from a man who had expressed strong disgust over the public execution scene.

Contrary to his harsh criticism of Min Yong-ik, Foulk expressed sympathy and personal support towards progressive Korean officials. Before his arrival, he built good relations with So Kwang-bom. Foulk described him as “most liberal of all the Koreans.”<sup>130</sup> He especially valued liberals like So after he realized that most of the nobles “depended on their Chinese religion” while “opposing Western ideas.”<sup>131</sup> Furthermore, in order to make accurate reports about situations in Korea, Foulk needed to build a strong friendship with the progressives. From his progressive friends, he learned about their initial plans about the coup. A month before the coup, So came to Foulk and openly told

---

<sup>127</sup> Foulk, October 26, 1884, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 67.

<sup>128</sup> Foulk, January 5, 1885, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 84.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>130</sup> Foulk to his parents and brothers, July 22, 1884, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 45.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

him that it would be impossible to bring agreements with conservatives like Min.<sup>132</sup> During the conversation, So even strongly advocated “the assassination of ten person, six of whom are very high officials.”<sup>133</sup> After the end of the conversation, Foulk recognized that a violent crisis would soon happen in Korea. He immediately reported the information to Foote and the Navy Department.<sup>134</sup> In this report, he positively labeled the progressives as the “truly loyal party in Korea” who “possessed any knowledge of the principles of Western government.”<sup>135</sup>

But even though he strongly supported the progressives, Foulk recognized the circumstances which disfavored the liberals. Although the King gave passive support for the progressives, they were still outnumbered by the Queen, her Min family, and other conservatives. Foulk also recognized that the progressives did not have enough money to build a political alliance and outnumber conservative groups backed by China. Furthermore, even during the Sino-French War of 1884, China still stationed 1,500 soldiers in Seoul. Finally, Foulk viewed the progressives as “so pure, amiable and earnest.”<sup>136</sup> In a turbulent country, men of pure, amiable, and earnest character would never survive through treacheries and betrayals. Therefore, the progressives failed to gain power in Korea.<sup>137</sup>

---

<sup>132</sup> Report of information relative to the revolutionary attempt in Seoul, Korea, December 17, 1884, comp. McCune and Harrison, *KAR I*, 111.

<sup>133</sup> Foulk, October 26, 1884, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 66.

<sup>134</sup> Report of information relative to the revolutionary attempt in Seoul, Korea, December 17, 1884, comp. McCune and Harrison, *KAR I*, 111.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 104-105.

<sup>136</sup> Foulk, July 22, 1884, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 45

<sup>137</sup> Chay, *Diplomacy of Asymmetry*, 71.

Finally, the more he sympathized with the progressives, the more Foulk disliked the Chinese officials. Ironically, it was Li Hongzhang who had recommended Korea to establish diplomatic relations with the U.S. But Foulk and several other Americans in Korea bitterly criticized the conduct of the Chinese government. Before coming to Korea, Foulk had already established strong opinion and stereotypes about the neighboring countries of Korea. While he viewed Japan as a modernized state ruled by a progressive government, he saw China as a backwards state.<sup>138</sup> He analyzed that most of the conservatives in Korea still regarded China as a model country and strongly believed in Chinese culture and religion, while often criticizing Western values as sinful or barbaric.<sup>139</sup> After spending a few months in Korea, Foulk believed that China's Korea policy was hypocritical. On paper, the Shufeldt Treaty declared Korea to be an independent state. However, in reality, the Chinese government sent troops to Korea, planted powerful allies within the Korean government, and murdered Foulk's best Korean friends.<sup>140</sup> Later, thousands of Chinese merchants arrived in Seoul without the permission of the Korean government and established monopolies in several businesses, threatening Foulk's plan to encourage "Korean trade with the Americans."<sup>141</sup> Outside of Korea, Foulk also heard news about indiscriminate killings of foreigners in Tientsin by angry Chinese people during the Sino-French War.<sup>142</sup> Therefore, he believed that if America let China to do whatever they want in Korea, the U.S. government would

---

<sup>138</sup> Foulk, May 4, 1885, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 103.

<sup>139</sup> Foulk, July 22, 1884, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 44.

<sup>140</sup> Introduction, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 15.

<sup>141</sup> Foulk, August 31, 1884, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 54.

<sup>142</sup> Foulk, October 26, 1884, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 70.

compromise the future of both the Korean people and foreigners in Korea.<sup>143</sup> With a mildly imperialistic tone, he wrote letters supporting the French victory and criticizing Chinese threats against Korea.

“I fear our government will not take firm enough steps to enable Americans to control in Korea... If the French do not continue the war with China, do not whip her, Korea and China will surely become dangerous for foreigners to reside in.”<sup>144</sup>

“It is the Chinese, of all people of the semi-civilized world, who kick against the civilization of reason, maintaining that that of custom is the right one. It is this which has made them keep troops here, which made them carry off the father of the King to China, which made them prop up against the King and people the families like that of Min who are lovers of China through fear and the privileges allowed them by her. This Chinese cloud thrown off of Korea, and I know the King and people will do all that can be expected to introduce the good of the Western world.”<sup>145</sup>

Therefore, even though the U.S. government told Foulk to treat Chinese officials with caution, his antipathy towards China often prevented him from easily accepting “Chinese suzerainty over Korea.”<sup>146</sup> Naturally, he built tense relationships with Chinese officials, especially with Yuan Shikai, the Chinese Imperial Resident of Seoul. Later, the Chinese government created a plot to remove Foulk from Korea.

During the first six months of his career in Korea, Foulk did everything he could to know more about the country and its people. He befriended the King of Korea and his officials, traveled the inlands of the country for two months, and revealed his genuine passion for Korea. Now, it was time for Foulk to use his energy and knowledge to

---

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>145</sup> Foulk, May 4, 1885, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 102.

<sup>146</sup> Noble, “The United States and Sino-Korean Relations, 1885-1887,” *Pacific Historical Review* 2 (1933), 295.

establish strong U.S.-Korea relations and help the modernization of this Asian country. Perhaps in recognition of these abilities, the State Department promoted this 28-year old young naval officer to the U.S. Minister to Korea, the highest-ranking American position in this unknown country.

Sadly, Foulk did not receive the news with full excitement. Most of his political allies and friends lost power after a failed coup. Now, he faced an insurmountable obstacle from Chinese and pro-Chinese Korean officials and a weak King who, at heart, supported reforms but remained overly cautious about pushing modernization and angering China. Therefore, Foulk celebrated the new year of 1885 with both hope and despair. Increased authority and prestige as a Minister could help Foulk work for Koreans' struggle for sovereignty and modernization. But Foulk also lost most of his trusted allies in Korea. Gradually he recognized growing Chinese opposition towards his service and lack of support from Washington.

### **January 1885 – June 1887: Foulk’s Success, Failure, and Departure**

In January 1885, George Foulk became the new U.S. Minister to Korea, while concurrently serving as the naval attaché to Korea. Besides giving occasional advice to the King and his government, he searched for things that he could accomplish in Korea. Soon, he decided to bring more American companies and missionaries to Korea. Personally, Foulk did not use his influence to “make money for himself.”<sup>147</sup> Also, although being a Christian, he respected traditional Korean religions and opposed excessive proselytizing by his fellow Christians. But Foulk believed that American businesses could strengthen ties between Korea and the U.S. and introduce modern technology to Korea. Furthermore, he hoped that the missionaries would help him by establishing schools and hospitals for the Korean population.

First, Foulk introduced American businessmen to a variety of economic opportunities in Korea. He built a close relationship with the American Trading Company of Yokohama and one of its agents, W. D. Townsend.<sup>148</sup> Foulk and Townsend worked together to expand business opportunities in Korea. For example, he introduced different

---

<sup>147</sup> Lee, “Diplomatic Relations between Korea and the United States, 1882-1887,” 157.

<sup>148</sup> Cook, “Early American Contacts with Korea,” 101.

kind of animals for government-owned farms and also brought furniture to the palace, earning more favor from the King.<sup>149</sup> Next, Townsend brought arms and ammunition for nascent Korean military. Even years after the departure of Foulk, the American Trading Company was able to use its close relationship with the Korean government. On March 22, 1897, after receiving a concession to establish Korea's first railroad, Townsend and his company opened a railway which connected Seoul and Chemulpo.<sup>150</sup>

Meanwhile, Foulk believed that the Korean government could raise revenue by signing contracts with American companies. For example, he collected samples of pearl oysters from Korea and sent letters to businesses like Tiffany and Co.<sup>151</sup> He repeatedly communicated with his American friends and asked about the prices of the pearl. Several months later, Foulk finally found someone who would be interested in finding pearls from Korea. In the summer of 1886, an American named H. A. Norrell acquired a right to excavate pearls from the Korean government.<sup>152</sup> In return, he promised to pay ten percent of the profits to Korea

In the end, Norrell failed to excavate as many pearls as he had expected in Korea.<sup>153</sup> Also according to today's standard, some of these economic concessions only promised a small share of profit to the Koreans. But cases including pearl oysters all showed how Foulk worked diligently to find opportunities for both American businesses and the Korean government.

---

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 101-102.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>151</sup> Foulk, April 19, 1885, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 100.

<sup>152</sup> Notes, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 232.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 232..

Next, Foulk helped bring many American missionaries to Korea. He “drew a clear distinction between education and medical missionary work on the one hand and evangelical or gospel preaching missionary work on the other.”<sup>154</sup> After watching an infighting among the Presbyterians and Methodists, he borrowed a quote from a Japanese minister, who had said,

“Missionary work is an institution to provide a respectable, easy livelihood, and a vocation to a number of men and women not over-gifted with brains, or knowledge of religion.”<sup>155</sup>

Nevertheless, Foulk still believed that missionaries would eventually help Korea because these devout Christians had selflessly built schools and hospitals across the world. An American who grabbed Foulk’s attention was Dr. Horace Newton Allen. A missionary and a physician from Ohio, Allen was sent by his Presbyterian church to work as a doctor in Korea. His personal goal was to “establish a mission-dominated and royally supported government hospital.”<sup>156</sup> When Foulk learned about this goal, he intervened in favor of Allen. Although the King internally had some concerns about the role of the missionaries, Foulk persuaded him that a new, modern hospital would help the Korean people.<sup>157</sup> In April 1885, after receiving subsidies from the Korean government, Allen opened the first modern hospital and institution named Jejungwon. Next year, Allen also opened Korea’s first medical school as part of Jejungwon. For more than hundred years, Jejungwon played a crucial role in Korean medical history. Both its hospital and medical

---

<sup>154</sup> Lee, “Diplomatic Relations between Korea and the United States, 1882-1887,” 160.

<sup>155</sup> Foulk, August 18, 1885, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 126-127.

<sup>156</sup> Lee, “Diplomatic Relations between Korea and the United States, 1882-1887,” 162.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

school still exist today as part of Yonsei University, which was also found by an American missionary during Foulk's tenure in Korea. And even after Foulk's departure in 1887, Allen continued to work in Korea until 1905. Between 1897 and 1905, he also served as the U.S. Minister to Korea and led an unsuccessful lobbying effort for Korea. He met Theodore Roosevelt and persuaded him to see Japan as a potential threat to America and therefore oppose its colonization of Korea. His career in Korea ended shortly before Japan effectively took control of Korea in November 1905.

Besides Allen, Foulk also established close relationships with many other American educators and missionaries. John W. Heron, Henry G. Appenzeller, Horace G. Underwood, and William B. Scranton were names of figures that are still recognized for their service for Korea. They received much advice from Foulk on how to earn the support of Korean people.<sup>158</sup> Feeling highly positive about their impacts, Foulk reported,

“The work of these missionaries cannot, to my mind, be too highly commended. They have done much to introduce a spirit of order and neatness among the Koreans... In the school attached to (Jejungwon) a dozen young gentlemen are enthusiastically studying professions, and rewards for faithful work are promised them by the Government. The spectacle presented by this little group of highly-esteemed Americans, with their good work and bright homes in the midst of this dense, far off people ..., is creditable to the people of America, and alike creditable to Korea.”<sup>159</sup>

So even though the impact of these benevolent missionaries could have looked small in the eyes of American policymakers in Washington, many Koreans saw them as visionaries who made contributions towards the modernization of Korea. Since he had

---

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>159</sup> Foulk to Bayard, June 3, 1886, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States 1887* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), 222.

helped these missionaries throughout his diplomatic career, Foulk was also highly appreciated.

Besides typical administrative work as a diplomat, Foulk was involved in many different fields of activities. But during the process, he undesirably made many enemies. Foulk did not face strong opposition when he pursued less controversial issues, such as the improvement of Korean agriculture or the establishment of modern hospitals and schools. However, when he tried to bring American military advisors to Korea, his political opponents saw Foulk with suspicion. Conservative Korean officials and Chinese diplomats in Seoul considered him their enemy. They believed that an American official who could utilize his determination and knowledge for the independence and modernization of Korea could become an important threat against Chinese suzerainty.

Unexpectedly, Foulk's first major enemy was a pro-Russian official named Paul Georg von Möllendorff. A German from a lower Prussian aristocratic family, Möllendorff first came to Korea as an advisor to the Korean Foreign Office in 1882. A linguist, he was also one of few Westerners who boasted a good knowledge of Asian culture and language.<sup>160</sup> After helping Korea conclude treaties with several Western nations, Möllendorff earned personal trust from the King of Korea.<sup>161</sup> Since he arrived in Seoul after receiving recommendation from Li Hongzhang, Möllendorff initially worked

---

<sup>160</sup> Walter Leifer, "Paul-Georg von Möllendorff -Scholar and Statesman," *Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 57 (1982), 42-45.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

in favor of the Chinese government.<sup>162</sup> But later, he broke with the Chinese and developed close relationship with the Russian diplomatic mission in Korea.<sup>163</sup>

Shortly after his arrival, a small incident led Foulk to dislike Möllendorff. The American Trading Company, which worked closely with Foulk, secured an exclusive right to develop and sell timber from Ulleung-do, an island located in the middle of the Sea of Japan (East Sea). But British and German merchants later exploited the Koreans' lack of knowledge on modern contracts and the replacement of relevant officials after the coup. They concluded a similar logging contract with the Korean government. Foulk believed that Möllendorff was behind the plot. So even though American, British, and German merchants later agreed on a compromise, Foulk began to distrust Möllendorff.

Foulk once again clashed with Möllendorff when he interfered with his yet unrealized plan to bring American military advisors to Korea. Instead of allowing American advisors, Möllendorff attempted to bring Russian drill instructors to train the Korean troops.<sup>164</sup> Foulk's anger grew when he discovered that most of Möllendorff's dealings with Russia had taken place without any consultations with Korean officials or the King.<sup>165</sup> Möllendorff's attempt to bring Korea under Russia influence disturbed all other Great Powers. His activities especially bothered Great Britain, which attempted to stop Russian expansion at all cost and therefore even fought a war against Russia in Afghanistan. In April 1885, British troops seized Port Hamilton, an island located miles away from the Southern coast of Korea. This island was crucial for Britain because it

---

<sup>162</sup> Foulk to Bayard, July 5, 1885, comp. McCune and Harrison, *KAR I*, 81.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 81

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

could now monitor vessels sailing from south to either the Yellow Sea or the Sea of Japan (East Sea).<sup>166</sup> Later, Foulk worked with the Korean government to prepare a settlement with Britain and asked the British Navy to withdraw its troops from the island. After two years, the British troops withdrew from Port Hamilton in February 1887.

When Korea once again became a hot spot for imperial powers, Foulk believed that Möllendorff must be blamed for creating a diplomatic fallout. He wrote to the State Department that Möllendorff had intended to put Korea under Russian control and once again asked Secretary of State Bayard for American advisors.

“It may be said, however, that the general effect of the negotiations was towards establishing Korea as the protectorate of Russia; ulterior objects to this can at present only be surmised... I would respectfully and earnestly beg the attention of the Department of State to those parts of the correspondence on this subject, which pertain to the employment of American assistants in Korea.”<sup>167</sup>

A month later, Foulk also accused Möllendorff of extracting valuable Korean goods to a museum in Shanghai for personal gain and blamed him for surrounding himself with “low pack of Koreans.”<sup>168</sup>

Therefore, Foulk used his extensive network in Korea and demanded “the dismissal of von Möllendorff from the Korean government for his unfitness to advise the government in its dealings with the foreign representatives.”<sup>169</sup> He boasted his good relationship with the King when the King dismissed Möllendorff from the Foreign Office

---

<sup>166</sup> Foulk to Bayard, May 19, 1885, comp. McCune and Harrison, *KAR I*, 74.

<sup>167</sup> Foulk, July 5, 1885, comp. McCune and Harrison, *KAR I*, 81-83.

<sup>168</sup> Foulk to his father, August 4, 1885, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 120.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

on July 27, 1885. After hearing the news, Foulk never expressed sympathy towards the German but simply gave a brief assessment of his career in Korea, calling the German advisor as one-time “agent of China” and later an agent of Russia.<sup>170</sup> After the British occupation of Port Hamilton, the Russian government recognized its lack of resources in the Far East and strong opposition from Britain, China, Japan, and the United States. Until the end of the Sino-Japanese War, Russia decided to limit its role in Korea.

Despite the successful removal of Möllendorff, that event never suggested the decline of Chinese power over Korea. China still remained a big brother to Korea. Also, it sent more soldiers, advisors, and officials after the failed coup of 1884. A month after Möllendorff’s dismissal, Foulk reported how the relations between Korea and China was turning into a “complete dependency,” not a sovereign state.<sup>171</sup> In an address given at the Chinese legation, the Chinese official stated:

“Korea is to China as lips to the teeth, and (being thus members of one body) each must share the joys and sorrows of the other.”<sup>172</sup>

Later, one of the Chinese commissioners in Korea even described that his position was the “equivalent of the *Resident* under England, in India.”<sup>173</sup> Furthermore, the Chinese government announced a plan to build Korea’s first telegraph line, which would

---

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 120-121.

<sup>171</sup> Foulk to Bayard, August 16, 1885, comp. McCune and Harrison, *KAR 1*, 126.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 126-127.

“Lips to the teeth” became widely known when Mao Zedong used the phrase when he sent 1.3 million soldiers of People’s Liberation Army to fight with North Korean communists during the Korean War. Recent articles and journals still use this phrase to describe China-North Korea relations.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 127.

facilitate communications between Seoul and Beijing.<sup>174</sup> Finally, Chinese officials practically incorporated the Customs of Korea into the Customs of China, disrupting Foulk from bringing American businesses and goods to Korea.<sup>175</sup>

As the highest ranking American official in Korea and unofficial advisor to the King, Foulk watched all of these developments with deep concern. More importantly, he built a negative relationship with Yuan Shikai. Yuan came to Korea in 1885 as the Chinese Imperial Resident of Seoul, the position in charge of all Chinese troops in Korea. Both Foulk and Yuan were young, energetic men in their late 20s. But Foulk did not get along with Yuan and criticized both his policies and character. On the surface, Yuan acted as if he would continue to work together with Foulk under favorable terms. But behind the scenes, Yuan tried to thwart the modernization efforts of Foulk and wished to force the young American diplomat to leave Korea. Foulk recognized the true intent of Yuan and wrote unfavorably of him.

“Mr. Yuen [Yuan Shikai], the Chinese hoodlum, seems to have observed that in spite of his brutal threats and intrigues, I have managed to put the hospital, the hospital school of chemistry, the Royal school for nobles, and a common school for the people, into Korea; have got a powder mill going, a revenue steamer flying the Korean flag successfully bringing in the King’s revenue to the capital ... These things are fixtures and now Mr. Yuen evidently wants to make people think he did it all with me! And so he has swung around and has asked me not to go away from Korea.”<sup>176</sup>

After recognizing the real goal of Yuan, Foulk became even more critical of the Chinese government. He repeatedly warned others about the evil intent of Chinese

---

<sup>174</sup> Foulk, September 25, 1885, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 132-133.

<sup>175</sup> Foulk, April 23, 1886, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 147-148.

<sup>176</sup> Foulk to his parents, December 3, 1886, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 180.

officials. Furthermore, he argued that besides a few number of conservatives, most Koreans did not want China to control their country and willingly accepted Western influence and advice.

“It seems to me that China now aims at something at least akin to incorporation of Korea into her own empire. If such a move be intended, it comes too late and must fail Koreans are more than usually united in guarding the independence they possess practically, and are greatly strengthened by the treaties with Western Powers. The country is quiet, and fresh signs of progress are visible among the people.<sup>177</sup>

Therefore Chinese and conservative Koreans recognized Foulk as their enemy. So they devised strategies that would force him to leave Korea. First, the conservatives tried to undermine his safety. Since the failed 1884 coup, Foulk repeatedly faced rumors about his personal security. His friends heard a false story that Foulk had been killed by a group of mobs during the coup.<sup>178</sup> Due to poor communication, it took more than a month for Foulk to dispel that rumor. Next year, rumor spread in the U.S. that a new violent event happened in Korea. Foulk believed that the Chinese made up this rumor “to prevent other countries from interesting themselves in Korea.”<sup>179</sup> In consequence, Foulk constantly reminded his family and friends of his status, as they had always worried about his security. He often reminded people that his main concern was the lack of the U.S. government’s involvement in Korea, not his personal safety.<sup>180</sup> But it was highly likely that there had been an attempt on Foulk’s life. In May 1887, even a Russian

---

<sup>177</sup> Foulk, April 23, 1886, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 148-149.

<sup>178</sup> Foulk to his parents and brothers, January 18, 1885, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 85.

<sup>179</sup> Foulk to his parents and brothers, January 2, 1886, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 140.

<sup>180</sup> Foulk to his parents and brothers, September 28, 1885, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 131.

representative in Seoul met American officials and warned them how “owing to the desperate character of the Chinese minister (Foulk’s) life might be in danger.”<sup>181</sup>

But even though Foulk remained largely unaffected by growing threats against his life, Chinese officials finally seized an opportunity to damage Foulk’s reputation. Throughout his stay in Korea, Foulk often sent his detailed analysis of Korean politics and leaders to the State Department. Although most of these reports should have been classified as CONFIDENTIAL, the State Department included several of his letters in its annual publication titled *Foreign Relations of the United States*.<sup>182</sup> As expected, Foulk made negative descriptions of Chinese influence in Korea and praised the progressives who had launched a coup in 1884.<sup>183</sup> More importantly, he made blasphemous comments about the royal family. He first criticized the Queen and the Min family of putting the Korean government practically under their control.<sup>184</sup>

“The Government of Korea has been for an indefinite period under the practical control of the Min family, of which the Queen of Korea is the highest representative. The blood of (Min) family is largely Chinese, and it has been always, and remains the desire and aim of this family to subject, and retain in subjection, their country to the suzerainty of China.”<sup>185</sup>

But even worse, Foulk reported secret personal stories between the Queen and the King, which included details of their sex life. He also criticized the Queen for her lavish spending. Foulk added,

---

<sup>181</sup> Foulk to his parents and brothers, May 9, 1887, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 197.

<sup>182</sup> Chay, *Diplomacy of Asymmetry*, 76.

<sup>183</sup> Noble, “The United States and Sino-Korean Relations, 1885-1887,” 300.

<sup>184</sup> Report of information relative to the revolutionary attempt in Seoul, Korea, December 17, 1884, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States 1886* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1886), 335.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 335.

“It is commonly reported that the King long refused association with the Queen, who practiced various superstitious rites to attract him, and was aided in this by the members of her family, who are notoriously regarded as the greatest patrons of geomancers, fortune tellers, &c, in Korea. When the present prince royal was about to be born the Queen sacrificed to the various gods to such an extent, most notably for forty-nine days at Kum-gang-son, that the expense attending it, which fell directly on the people, gave rise to national complaint.”<sup>186</sup>

Finally, Foulk hinted that the Crown Prince’s poor health might have been caused by consanguinity.<sup>187</sup> Considering that it was a taboo to openly talk about the details of the King or the Queen, the State Department should not have disclosed such information to the public.<sup>188</sup>

Later, parts of Foulk’s were reprinted in Chinese newspapers published in English.<sup>189</sup> They included details of the corruption of the Min family and personal stories of the Queen and the King. After the Chinese officials read the newspaper, they used the contents of the article to build negative opinions of Foulk within the Korean leadership. The King, who still maintained good relations with Foulk, personally wished him to stay in Korea.<sup>190</sup> However, he could not prevent the Chinese-controlled Korean Foreign Office from criticizing Foulk.<sup>191</sup>

---

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 335.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 335-336.

It was true that both the Queen and King’s biological mother, who would be Queen’s mother-in-law, came from the same Min family. Genealogical tree showed that they were 5<sup>th</sup> cousins. But that alone did not prove that consanguinity had led to the Crown Prince’s poor health.

<sup>188</sup> Noble, “The United States and Sino-Korean Relations, 1885-1887,” 300.

<sup>189</sup> Chay, *Diplomacy of Asymmetry*, 76.

<sup>190</sup> Noble, “The United States and Sino-Korean Relations, 1885-1887,” 30.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 301.

When news about these reports circulated in Korea during the spring of 1887, Foulk was no longer the U.S. Minister to Korea. He made fewer conversations with the State Department and only worked as a naval attaché. But pro-Chinese officials recognized his good knowledge and his intimacy with the King. Therefore, they decided to completely remove Foulk from Korea. So they used this opportunity to strongly demand the American government to dismiss Foulk from the position of naval attaché.<sup>192</sup>

Hugh A. Dinsmore, a lawyer from Arkansas, recently replaced Foulk as the new U.S. Minister to Korea. He advised Secretary Bayard that Foulk should be allowed to stay in Korea. Dinsmore believed that China was using this event as a “test case” to find out the level of American involvement in Korea.<sup>193</sup> Foulk also sent numerous messages to the State Department and expressed his good will towards the Korean people.<sup>194</sup>

But in the end, China got what it had wanted. The State Department initially tried to defend Foulk’s actions. But Chinese and pro-Chinese Korean officials relentlessly pressured Washington to dismiss Foulk. Even Yuan Shikai sent a personal letter to Dinsmore and described how Foulk had damaged good relations between China and the U.S.<sup>195</sup> In the end, Secretary Bayard changed his mind and decided to recall Foulk from Korea. He told Dinsmore:

---

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 301.

<sup>193</sup> Yong-suk Jung, “The Rise of American National Interest in Korea: 1845-1950” (PhD diss., Claremont Graduate University, 1970), 86.

<sup>194</sup> Foulk to W. W. Rockhill, January 2, 1887, comp. Spencer J. Palmer, *Korean-American Relations: Documents Pertaining to the Far Eastern Diplomacy of the United States, Volume II (“KAR II”)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 58-59.

<sup>195</sup> Yuan Shikai to Hugh A. Dinsmore, May 28, 1887, comp. Palmer, *KAR II*, 76-77.

“The motive in certain quarters to get rid of Mr. Foulk may be stronger than the facts brought forward to effect his removal. However this may be, the inexpediency of pressing Mr. Foulk further upon the Korean Government as a representative of the United States is evident.”<sup>196</sup>

In the letter, Bayard also used the term *persona non grata*, which meant that an individual was “not welcome in a particular place because of something they have said or done” against a particular state.<sup>197</sup> Even though most of the officials in Korean Foreign Service had been appointed because of their good relations with China, the State Department concluded that their request to dismiss Foulk must be respected. After consultations between Bayard and officials from the Navy, the Navy Department declared that it would “relieve Ensign Foulk as Naval Attaché, and to order him to report for duty, on board the *USS Marion*.”<sup>198</sup> Later, Bayard also sent a message to a Chinese diplomat. He said “that the action of this government has thus incidentally been in the line of satisfaction of the Imperial Government of China is naturally a cause of congratulation.”<sup>199</sup> On June 26, 1887, Foulk finally left Korea for Nagasaki.

Foulk’s eventual departure was the product of China’s effort to get rid of any person that would oppose its control over Korea. But it would be wrong to say that his demise was solely the result of an opposition from China. Throughout his years in Korea, Foulk tried to raise American awareness of Korea and deepen ties between Korea and the

---

<sup>196</sup> Bayard to Dinsmore, June 17, 1887, comp. Palmer, *KAR II*, 78.

<sup>197</sup> “Persona non grata,” *Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries*, accessed April 18, 2015, [http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american\\_english/persona-non-grata](http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american_english/persona-non-grata).

<sup>198</sup> Bayard, June 17, 1887, comp. Palmer, *KAR II*, 79.

<sup>199</sup> Bayard to Shu Cheon Pon, June 16, 1887, comp. Palmer, *KAR II*, 80.

U.S. But his efforts always received little support from pragmatic and realistic officials of the State Department.

Their apathy stemmed from the fact that they had seen no advantages of helping the Korean government. Simply put, Korea never offered large economic and political opportunity that could interest Washington. First, Korea never boasted a large population that could potentially become a large market for American businesses. Both Foulk and the Korean government knew the difficulty of attracting American businesses. Therefore, Korean officials designed economic policies that could satisfy American entrepreneurs.

Between 1882 and 1905, the Korean government granted special privileges to the U.S. businesses.<sup>200</sup> For example, an American company secured the right to excavate gold from Unsan district. This mining district turned out to be the richest gold mine area in Korea.<sup>201</sup> Other concessions, such as logging rights in Ulleung-do and the right to establish Korea's first railway, soon followed.

But even with these concessions and efforts by Foulk, Korea still remained a relatively less important diplomatic partner of the U.S. Historian Jong-suk Chay described Korea-U.S. relations of this period as "Diplomacy of Asymmetry."<sup>202</sup> This definition made sense because while Korean officials had judged the share of American influence in their country to be immense, American counterparts had believed that Korea played only a minimal role in their overall trade and other forms of interaction. For

---

<sup>200</sup> Foote to Frelinghuysen, July 19, 1883, comp. McCune and Harrison, *KAR 1*, 53.

<sup>201</sup> Spencer J. Palmer, "American Gold Mining in Korea's Unsan District," *Pacific Historical Review* 31 (1962), 381.

<sup>202</sup> Jong-suk Chay, *Diplomacy of Asymmetry*, 1-4.

example, even twenty-two years after the conclusion of the Shufeldt Treaty, total amount of U.S.-Korea trade was only \$1,014,086.<sup>203</sup> While this million-dollar trade accounted between ten and twenty percent of Korea's international trade, it accounted less than 0.05% of America's international trade.<sup>204</sup> At the same time, total volume of U.S.-China and U.S.-Japan trade, respectively, was 80 and 103 times larger than that of the U.S.-Korea trade.<sup>205</sup>

Non-economic statistics also suggested asymmetry in U.S.-Korea relations. No one could doubt that a few number of American missionaries made great contributions to the modernization of Korea. They built Korea's first modern hospitals and schools, which produced numerous Korean leaders of the early-20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>206</sup> By 1910, American missionaries headed more than one-thirds of all Korean academic institutions.<sup>207</sup> But from the perspective of American policymakers, these Americans only accounted 0.9% of all missionaries from the U.S.<sup>208</sup> Between 1898 and 1905, the number of Korean converts also hovered around one percent of the total men and women proselytized by American missionaries.<sup>209</sup>

American popular media also shared the lack of interest in Korea. Between 1896 and 1910, except during the Russo-Japanese War, the New York Times only published an

---

<sup>203</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid, 2-3.

<sup>206</sup> Lew, *Korean Perceptions of the United States*, 163-164.

<sup>207</sup> Chay, *Diplomacy of Asymmetry*, 6.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid, 5.

average number of twenty-three articles about Korea per year.<sup>210</sup> Other newspapers, which did not enjoy as expansive global network as the Times had owned, published much less number of articles about Korea. Such facts and statistics showed how Foulk had faced an uphill battle when he unsuccessfully persuaded American officials to provide more support for the Korean government and his mission.

The first major rejection for Foulk came when the American government refused to send American military advisors to Korea. Since the conclusion of the Shufeldt Treaty, the King highly demanded American military advisors who could help Korea develop a modern army. On behalf of the King, both Foote and Foulk repeatedly sent messages to the State Department and reported how the King had anxiously wanted “some Military Officer who could organize the Korean Troops.”<sup>211</sup> Their letters also warned that if the King could no longer wait for a response from Washington, Russia or other European powers could take over the advisory position.<sup>212</sup> But the State Department did not listen to their plea. Secretary Bayard replied,

“It is clearly the interest of the United States to hold aloof from all this and do nothing nor be drawn into anything which could look like taking sides with any of the contestants or entering the lists of intrigue for our own benefit... It may be especially needful for you to let it be distinctly understood that your government in no wise originated or is now disposed to press the proposal to obtain United States Military officers as instructors in Korea.”<sup>213</sup>

---

<sup>210</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>211</sup> Foote, September 17, 1884, comp. McCune and Harrison, *KAR I*, 56.

<sup>212</sup> Foulk to Bayard, May 15, 1885, comp. McCune and Harrison, *KAR I*, 58.

<sup>213</sup> Bayard to Foulk, August 19, 1885, comp. McCune and Harrison, *KAR I*, 64-65.

Bayard also pessimistically replied to Foulk that it would be very difficult to receive an approval from Congress. In the same letter, Bayard also warned Foulk that he should be careful in helping Korea or giving advices to its officials.

“It is deemed proper to instruct you to communicate without reserve, with the United States Ministers at Beijing and Tokyo ... These three countries, China, Japan, and Korea, bear to the United States a common, almost identical relation in this Korean matter, and the United States can take no action which might even in appearance, seem to favor or oppose the policy of either China or Japan.”<sup>214</sup>

Three American military instructors finally arrived in Seoul in April 1888, five years after the King’s initial request and a year after Foulk’s departure.<sup>215</sup> But even these officers proved to be incompetent instructors. Only two years after their arrival, the Korean government fired two of these advisors.<sup>216</sup> Furthermore, it also took two years for the U.S. government to send its school teachers to Korea, even though they would be less controversial figures than the military instructors. Therefore, although he finally received the news about the arrival of teachers, Foulk pessimistically said “it was questionable as to whether (Korea) could support the teachers and schools.”<sup>217</sup>

Moreover, the State Department never gave enough financial support to Foulk and his legation. When he became the U.S. Minister to Korea, he inherited a poor legation which owned no funds, but some unpaid debt. Personally, he also lost \$800 worth of

---

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>215</sup> Donald M. Bishop, “Shared Failure: American Military Advisors in Korea, 1888-1896” *Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 58 (1983), 53-76.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 53-76.

<sup>217</sup> Foulk to his parents and brother, January 17, 1886, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 117.

goods when Korean gangs vandalized his home during the aftermath of the coup.<sup>218</sup> In order to improve his financial conditions, both private and public, he searched for business activities that would help both the Korean government and his office. However, the State Department warned Foulk that “it is undesirable that a legation abroad should appear to advocate concessions or exclusive privileges of trade or business in favor of its countrymen.”<sup>219</sup>

But even though it had dissuaded Foulk from deeply engaging in business activities that could help his legation, the State Department never tried to alleviate his financial concerns. Foulk once expected that he would need an extra amount of \$10,000 each year to run the American mission in Korea.<sup>220</sup> But the State Department never promised adequate amount of money. It only asked Foulk to draw the salary of both the Naval Attaché to Korea and the U.S. Minister to Korea, which would only give him an extra “2,500 dollars a year.”<sup>221</sup> But even this was not a legally proper idea for Foulk, because he had worried “such an act (would) be unconstitutional so long as (he) holds a commission in the navy.”<sup>222</sup> His disappointment with the American government grew when even the poor, incompetent Korean government compensated him for his losses during the 1884 coup. He could not understand why a relatively rich American government would refuse to give enough financial support to his mission. In his personal journals, Foulk harshly criticized the American government.

---

<sup>218</sup> Foulk, January 5, 1885, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 82.

<sup>219</sup> Foulk, July 2, 1884, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 39.

<sup>220</sup> Foulk to his parents and brother, November 10, 1885, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 134.

<sup>221</sup> Foulk to his parents and brother, May 15, 1885, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 105.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

“I am in debt, have no outfit of any kind, clothes or other necessities, am mentally played out and with no certain future, am in a bewildering tangle, certain of but one thing, which is that our government is a corrupt, ungrateful institution almost criminally negligent of its duties, and unworthy of any man’s honest service, and the flaunting name it shoves on other and sometimes better governments.”<sup>223</sup>

Although he started out as a young soldier and an official who loved to learn a new language and interact with a new culture, Foulk slowly lost his passion as a diplomat and advisor. With more responsibilities, hardship, and humiliation but no reward, he wished to serve only as a naval attaché. On February 18, 1886, he submitted a letter of resignation, requesting “that the Department provide a relief to take charge of the legation.”<sup>224</sup> In this letter, he criticized the lack of political, financial, and moral support by the United States.

“The state of affairs in Korea has been one of excitement and gravity, such as to necessitate unceasing observation and watchfulness, and an amount of office work and embarrassing duty, in other respects, which I have only been able to execute under constant and severe strain. It is simply impossible for one person to execute for any length of time, without clerical assistance, the work called for at this legation.”<sup>225</sup>

However, Foulk’s resignation still did not end his troubles with the U.S. government. William H. Parker, Foulk’s initial replacement, arrived in Seoul on June 8, 1886.<sup>226</sup> Despite initial hopes, he turned out to be an incompetent diplomat. Parker suffered from alcohol abuse and neglected his duty. He earned great disfavor of Korean officials and failed to help American civilians and marine guards who had occasionally

---

<sup>223</sup> Foulk to his parents and brother, April 24, 1886, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 153.

<sup>224</sup> Foulk to Bayard, February 18, 1886, comp. McCune and Harrison, *KAR I*, 40.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>226</sup> Introduction, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 18.

stopped at Chemulpo.<sup>227</sup> So even though he had personally wished to disengage himself from the issues relevant to the State Department, Foulk eventually decided to report Bayard on Parker's reckless drinking habits."<sup>228</sup> Only three months later, the U.S. government dismissed Parker. Until Hugh A. Dinsmore arrived in Korea on March 31, 1887, Foulk once again served both as the Naval Attaché and interim U.S. Minister to Korea. He still assured others that he was still "fully determined to serve Korea," but he simultaneously complained about his mental and physical sufferings.<sup>229</sup>

In the end, when he learned about his dismissal, Foulk expressed mixed feelings of anger and relief. He could have still remained in Korea if he had accepted the King's offer to retire from the Navy and serve as a civilian advisor to the King. Since February 1887, the King repeatedly asked Foulk if he could join the Korean government. After being frustrated by Washington's refusal to send its military advisors, the King asked Foulk if he could rather serve as the first American man "in charge of a new battalion of troops."<sup>230</sup> Foulk expressed enormous gratitude to the King, who even sent an officer to help him escape from a secret plot by the Chinese minister. The minister had planned to attack Foulk with "some Chinese soldiers disguised as Koreans" in Seoul.<sup>231</sup> But in the end, Foulk believed that he could not continue making accomplishments for Korea when pro-Chinese officials occupied most of the positions and continuously threatened his life

---

<sup>227</sup> Foulk to Bayard, September 7, 1886, comp. McCune and Harrison, *KAR I*, 43-44.

<sup>228</sup> Foulk to his parents, July 10, 1886, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 164.

<sup>229</sup> Foulk to his parents and brother, October 3, 1886, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 171.

<sup>230</sup> Foulk to his parents and brother, March 27, 1887, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 193.

<sup>231</sup> Foulk, June 28, 1887, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 207.

with rumors and secret plots. Foulk refused the offer and bid final farewell to Korea on June 28, 1887.<sup>232</sup>

Foulk arrived in Nagasaki on June 30 and soon asked the Navy Department if he could serve as the new naval attaché to Tokyo. But even this request was rejected by the State Department because Secretary Bayard worried that his appointment might disrupt U.S.-China relations.<sup>233</sup> After hearing that his requested had been denied by the government, Foulk lost his desire to serve his country. A year later, he decided to leave the Navy and start his own career.

After being discharged from the Navy, Foulk married a Japanese woman and moved to Yokohama. He briefly worked for the American Trading Company, and later worked as a professor at the Doshisha College, an institution supported by Christian missionaries.<sup>234</sup> In 1893, Foulk unexpectedly died of a heart failure. At the time of his death, he was only 36 years old. The mental and physical struggles in Korea contributed to his premature death.<sup>235</sup> Foulk is now buried with his Japanese wife in Kyoto.<sup>236</sup>

---

<sup>232</sup> Foulk to his parents and brother, July 3, 1887, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 197-198.

<sup>233</sup> Introduction, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 21.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>235</sup> Chay, *Diplomacy of Asymmetry: Korean-American Relations to 1910*, 77.

<sup>236</sup> Introduction, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 21-22.

### **Conclusion: Idealism vs. *Realpolitik***

During the initial contact among separate, distant countries, the character of the pioneering visitor could not be ignored. He or she had the power to set up rules and practices that affect the relationship among these entities. But most importantly, his or her character became the image of the country represented. Therefore, a look at the life and career of George Clayton Foulk must be important in studying U.S.-Korea relations.

An energetic naval officer with strong opinions and pride, Foulk was not an ideal diplomat. A skillful diplomat would be expected to openly avoid making enemies. But Foulk could not prevent himself from making harsh judgments of other figures. Rather than establishing good relations with Chinese officials in Seoul, he disliked Yuan Shikai and saw him as a hoodlum. Next, he severely criticized other American officials like Foote and Parker of being incapable diplomats. In his personal letters, Foulk even criticized Dinsmore because he became impatient over the Arkansas lawyer's lax personality. Finally, Foulk could also have avoided the accusation that he had defamed the royal family. No one could entirely blame Foulk because the State Department had decided to publish the report on the royal family, but Foulk should have been more careful by giving directions on what must be published and must not be published.

This relentless and slightly impetuous manner, however, led Foulk to overstep the expected role of a diplomat. Rather than merely focusing on the safety of American residents and businesses in Korea, Foulk technically became an advisor to the Korean government. He also helped bring several likeminded American men and women who

devoted their life to the education, cure, and freedom of the Korean people. Horace Newton Allen, one of these likeminded American men in Korea, later became the U.S. Minister to Korea and continued to follow the footsteps of Foulk. Due to their efforts, many Koreans believed that their lives had been changed by the support from American-built schools and hospitals. Later, these young Koreans eventually “emerged as political luminaries in Korean reform or nationalist movements.”<sup>237</sup> They spread the positive image of the U.S. across the Korean society, even while the American government signed a secret agreement that supported the Japanese occupation of Korea. Therefore, even though Foulk never established a long-term, successful career as a diplomat, he played a significant role in improving the Koreans’ perspective of the United States.

Due to his selfless work for Korea, many Americans and Koreans saw Foulk as an idealist. The word ‘idealist’ must be understood with caution because even though Foulk was an idealist, he did not express an overly optimistic view of the future of Korea. Since he spoke Korean and learned a lot about Korea through his friendships and journeys, Foulk knew the harsh realities of Korea more than any other foreigners. Later, he also accurately predicted that despite their openness to Western technology and values, progressive Koreans would lose their power if they launched a premature coup against the conservatives. These examples show that Foulk was not oblivious to the difficulties which had haunted Korea.

But in one aspect, Foulk never gave up his idealism. He always believed that the conduct and mission of American government must be different from those of other

---

<sup>237</sup> Lew, *Early Korean Encounters with the United States and Japan*, 12.

nations. As a firm supporter of American exceptionalism, Foulk believed that the American government must spread the unique values of American government, economy, society, and technology across the world. Furthermore, he hoped that he could be part of this noble mission. This hope eventually led Foulk to spend his youth and energy to work as a messenger of American values. In some ways, Foulk even advocated a stricter version of American exceptionalism than his contemporaries. He believed that Americana must further distinguish itself from other Western countries by spreading its values through peaceful means, not through violence. So when a few U.S. government officials tried to receive reparations from the Korean government even more than a decade after the *General Sherman* incident, Foulk criticized these American officials. He wrote that “the *Sherman*’s people had no business to go to Korea, as Korea forbade foreigners from coming there, and again, all accounts agree in that the foreigners fired off guns, which made the Koreans believe they came to do harm.”<sup>238</sup> In the end, even though he quickly realized that chance of success for Korea would be slim, Foulk still believed he must fulfill the role of a dutiful American citizen by devoting himself to the welfare of Korea.

But his projection of the mission of American government was not universally shared by all Americans. Policymakers in Washington, who saw the world from a realpolitik perspective, disagreed with Foulk. They never believed that America had political and economic reasons to support Korea. Therefore, officials in the State Department frequently refused Foulk’s requests to help the Korean government and

---

<sup>238</sup> Foulk to his parents and brother, October 13, 1885, comp. Hawley, *AMK*, 131.

American mission in Seoul. Rather, they often warned Foulk to not intervene in Korea-China relations nor give too many advices to the King. Later, Foulk recognized this realpolitik decision-making and therefore tried to change the minds of the State Department officials by searching for commercial interests in Korea. But a small number of gold mines and pearl oysters never drew enough attention from Washington.

The analysis of George Clayton Foulk ended with a debate between idealism and realpolitik. Even Foulk would not disagree with the State Department that helping Korea would never bring imminent benefits for the U.S. government. But it would be wrong to simply reject Foulk's vision of American government as a naïve, costly idea. If people like Foulk, Dinsmore, and Allen had wholeheartedly followed the advices from Washington and idly watched the sufferings of the Korean people, future generations of Koreans would not have seen America as an exceptional nation. Instead, many of them could have perceived America as another imperialistic country. Under such scenario, America could have faced bigger troubles when strategic value of Korea increased during the Cold War. One cannot go back 130 years to eliminate Foulk to compare Korea with and without Foulk. Still, it would be wrong to reject the work of these idealistic Americans who believed that their selfless devotion to helping other nations follow the United States' footsteps would eventually benefit all nations, including the United States itself.

## Bibliography

- Bechtol, Bruce E. "Avenging the General Sherman: The 1871 Battle of Kang Hwa Do." MA diss., Marine Corps University. 2001.
- Bishop, Donald M. "Shared Failure: American Military Advisors in Korea, 1888-1896." *Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 58 (1983).
- Chang, Gordon. "Whose 'Barbarism'? Whose 'Treachery'? Race and Civilization in the Unknown United States-Korea War of 1871." *Journal of American History*, Vol. 89 (2003).
- Chay, Jong-suk. *Diplomacy of Asymmetry: Korean-American Relations to 1910*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990.
- Chu, Samuel C. and Liu, Kwang-ching. *Li Hung-chang and China's Early Modernization*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Conroy, Hillary. *The Japanese Seizure of Korea, 1868-1910: A Study of Realism and Idealism in International Relations*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960.
- Cook, Harold F. "Early American Contacts with Korea." *Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 57 (1980).
- Cumings, Bruce. *Korea's Place in the Sun*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005.
- Dudden, Alexis. *Japan's Colonization of Korea: Discourse and Power*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005.
- Foulk, George Clayton, *America's Man in Korea: The Private Letters of George C. Foulk, 1884-1887*. comp. Samuel Hawley. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008
- Foulk, George Clayton, *Inside the Hermit Kingdom: The 1884 Korea Travel Diary of George C. Foulk, 1884-1887*. comp. Samuel Hawley. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008
- Gale, James. *History of the Korean People*. Seoul: Royal Asiatic Society, 1983.

- Gouzoules, Alex. "The Use of Foreign Soldiers during the Taiping Rebellion." *Emory Endeavors in World History*, Vol. 2 (2008). Accessed April 27, 2015.  
<http://history.emory.edu/home/undergraduate/endeavors-journal/volume-2.html>.
- Huang, Zunxin. *Chosun Chaengnyak-ui Wonbon-gwa Haesol-bon [The Original and Interpreted Version of a Strategy for Korea]*. Accessed April 27, 2015.  
<http://historia.tistory.com/1789>.
- Iriye, Akira. *Across the Pacific: An Inner history of American-East Asian Relations the United States*. New York: Brace & World Inc., 1967.
- Jung, Yong-suk. "The Rise of American National Interest in Korea: 1845-1950." PhD diss., Claremont Graduate University. 1970.
- Kim, Key-hiuk. *The Last Phase of the East Asian World Order: Korea, Japan and the Chinese Empire*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980.
- Kim, Yong-sik. "A Brief History of the U.S.-Korea Relations Prior to 1945," Paper presented at the *University of Oregon* (2003). Accessed April 27, 2015.  
<http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/943949/posts>.
- Lee, Yur-bok. "Diplomatic Relations between Korea and the United States, 1882-1887: A Study of Foreign Services of Minister Foote and Charge Foulk in Korea." PhD diss., University of Georgia. 1965.
- Leifter, Walter. "Paul-Georg von Möllendorff -Scholar and Statesman." *Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 57 (1982).
- Lew, Young-ick. *Early Korean Encounters with the United States and Japan: Six Essays on Late Nineteenth-Century Korea*. Seoul: The Royal Asiatic Society, 2008.
- Lew, Young-ick. *Korean Perceptions of the United States: A History of Their Origins and Formation*. Seoul: The Jimoondang, 2006.
- McCune, George M. and Harrison, John A., comp., *Korean-American Relations: Documents Pertaining to the Far Eastern Diplomacy of the United States, Volume I*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951.
- Moon, Myung-ki. "Korea-China Treaty System in the 1880s and the Opening of Seoul." *Journal of Northeast History*, Vol. 5 (2008).
- Noble, Harold J. "The Korean Mission to the United States in 1883." *Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 18 (1929).

- Noble, Harold J. "The United States and Sino-Korean Relations, 1885-1887." *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 2 (1933).
- Nordmann, David A. "Idealism, immigration and imperialism: Durham Stevens and the rise and fall of United States diplomacy with Japan and Korea, 1873-1908." PhD diss., Indiana University. 2001.
- Oxford Learner's Dictionaries. "Persona Non Grata." *Oxford University Press*. Accessed April 27, 2015.  
[http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american\\_english/persona-non-grata](http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american_english/persona-non-grata).
- Palmer, Spencer J. "American Gold Mining in Korea's Unsan District." *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 31 (1962).
- Palmer, Spencer J, comp., *Korean-American Relations: Documents Pertaining to the Far Eastern Diplomacy of the United States, Volume II*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963.
- Patterson, Wayne and Conroy, Hillary. "Duality and Dominance: A Century of Korean-American Relations." In *One Hundred Years of Korean-American Relations, 1882-1982*, edited by Yur-Bok Lee and Wayne Patterson. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1986.
- United States Department of State, comp., *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States 1885*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1885.
- United States Department of State, comp., *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States 1886*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1886.
- United States Department of State, comp., *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States 1887*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1887.
- Walters, Gary D. "The Korean Special Mission to the United States of America in 1883." *Journal of Korean Studies*, Vol. 1 (1969).
- Westad, Odd Arne. *Restless Empire: China and the Modern World*. New York: Basic Books, 2012.