[page 19] **Impermanent Residents: The Seoul Foreign Community in 1937**

by Prof. Donald N. Clark

Books about Korea often begin with introductory statements to the effect that before the outbreak of the Korean War, few Westerners had ever heard of the country. This commonplace, while true enough, overlooks the fact that there was a thriving Western expatriate community in Korea before World War II, made up of missionaries, consular officials, businessmen, adventurers, and refugees. While they were concentrated in the main cities, they lived in all parts of the country. The missionaries especially were committed to work in provincial towns, and much of what they accomplished there continues under Korean management. This paper, which is based on Japanese census documents, consular archives, and missionary literature, is a snapshot of their life in the year 1937, the year the Japanese attacked North China, and the last year of “normalcy” before a concerted campaign by the Japanese to wipe out all Western interests in Korea and East Asia.

Westerners in Seoul in 1937, like the Korean people, had already been living under Japanese control for many years. The Japanese called Korea “Chosen,” (Korean: Choson) and Seoul was “Keijo” (Korean: Kyongsong). Of the city’s total population of 706,396, fully 18.5%, or 131,000,were Japanese.1 Many were small-time businessmen and workers; but the Japanese were also the power structure of the city. Governor-General Minami Jiro ruled Korea like a shogun from his office overlooking Kyongbok Palace. At the Keijo Prefectural Office Building (City Hall), Mayor Yoshikuni Kanja administered the city, and at Ryuzan (Yongsan) General Koiso Kuniaki served concurrently as Commander-in-Chief of the Chosen Army and the army’s Twentieth Division. In downtown Seoul, Japanese power was manifested in modern buildings. The tallest structures in the city were the twin broadcast towers of station JODK downtown. The biggest building, however,was the Government General building facing southward from the head of Kokamon Avenue (Sejong-no).2 Its dome commanded a view of the other citadels of Japanese rule in the down-[page 20] town area: Citizen’s Hall with its clock towar and the Keijo Prefectural Office Building (City Hall) across from it; the Mitsui Building3 on Koganemachi-iriguchi (Ulchiro-ipku); the Chosen Hotel in Hasegawa-cho (Sogong Dong); and beyond, around the fountain in what was the heart of the Japanese city of Keijo, the Bank of Chosen, the Keijo Main Post Office,the Mitsukoshi (Shinsegye) Department Store, and the Dai-ichi (Che’il) Bank. On the slope on Namsan above, as a kind of spiritual antipode to the Government-General building, was the Chosen Shrine,the Korean headquarters of the Japanese Shinto religion.

In 1937,Seoul also boasted many new non-governmental structures. A granite museum building had just been opened in Toksu Palace. The Chosen Building4 was going up across the street from Mitsui to serve as an office building and hotel. Around the corner on Nandaimon-dori (Nam- daemun-no), the Teijiya (Midop’a) Department Store was going up. Beyond this in Meiji-machi (Myong Dong), fashionable people attended concerts in the new Meiji-za Theater (the postwar National Theater). East, beyond the Catholic cathedral, were two new moviehouses, the Kogane-za (the Kukdo) and the Wakakusa Gekijo (the Scala).5

Nandaimon-dori was the main avenue of Japanese Keijo, from the Chongno Bell intersection southwest to the railroad station. Along it ran a main streetcar line and the byways on either side were lined with the office buildings of Japanese banks, stores, and businesses of every description in classic Meiji and Taisho-era Japanese buildings which far outlasted the presence of their Japanese inhabitants after the war. Not so durable were the symbols of Japanese cultural dominance around the city, however; not only the Chosen Shrine on Namsan, but also the other jingu around the city, some of which honored heroes of Japanese imperialism on the mainland,6 and the monuments which commemorated Japanese heroes such as the “Three Human Bombs,” who gave their lives trying to save their superiors from an attack by Koreans in Shanghai.7 These things all served to emphasize the reality of Japanese control and the Govern- ment-General,s intention to rule on its own terms without taking Korean sensibilities into account.

In between the Japanese and Koreans in 1937 there were 486 Western residents in Seoul. Of these, 238 were Americans, ninety-two “White” Russians, eighty-eight British (including Canadians and Australians), twenty-six French, twenty Germans, twelve ‘‘Red” Russians at the Soviet consulate-general, four Swedes, four Poles, and two Czechs. American Protestant missionaries and their families made up the biggest sub-group [page 21] of Westerners in Seoul: among them were ninety-one Methodists, fifty- six Northern Presbyterians, and thirty-one Seventh Day Adventists. Other Protestants included Anglicans, Canadian and Australian Presbyterians, and British and Swedish Salvation Army officers. The Catholic missionary community was composed primarily of French priests and nuns, though there were Irish, German, and American Catholics in other parts of the country.8

The consular and business contingents were small by comparison. Only the British, Americans, and Russians kept consulates in Seoul on a permanent basis, while France and Belgium appointed various Westerners to serve as honorary consuls. The non-missionary, non-official community was made up of American and British businessmen in oil,mining, and import companies;9 a community of Russian refugees in the clothing business concentrated in Honmachi (Ch’ungmu-ro), a handful of freelance businessmen, and a few self-employed doctors and teachers,mostly Western language teachers at Keijo Imperial University.

From any of the heights surrounding Seoul one could look out and get the impression that Seoul was really two cities in the same spot: the Korean city,which was a matrix of one-story houses, some still with thatched roofs, and a foreign-run modern city dominated by Japanese establishments and the enterprises of Westerners. This was not, strictly speaking, correct; downtown there were a number of Korean-owned businesses such as the Tong-A-Ilbo and Choson Ilbo, newspapers. The year 1937 also saw the completion of the Korean-owned Hwashin Department Store and the imposing gothic buildings of Korean-owned Posong College (Korea University). For elegance there was Ch’angdok Palace and the Chong Myo shrine of the royal ancestors; and for eccentricity there were the Meiji-Victorian mansions of the former kings’ relatives in Unni Dong and Ogin Dong,but many of the city’s most striking features were Western. Foremost was the Catholic Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. On “Legation Street” and in places around Chong Dong there was conspicuous greenery decorated by Western symbols: the Romanesque tower of the Anglican Cathedral of St. Mary and St. Nicholas, the white tower of the Russian consulate, and the Stars and Stripes atop the flagpole at the American consulate.10

In Chong Dong and elsewhere around the city were missionary com-pounds, enclosing two-story red brick Western-style homes and boarding houses, a school or two, a church, and Korean houses for the local staff. The Northern Presbyterian Mission compound in Yonji-Dong, near East [page 22] Gate, was the biggest and most obvious, having been built along a ridge which had been bought cheap because of the difficulty of raising water. The pioneer missionaries solved the water problem with drills, pumps,and tanks, and then built nine missionary homes, the Yondong Presbyterian Church, the John D. Wells School for boys, and Chongsin School for girls. Protected by a wall around the perimter, the grounds had lawns, paths, vegetable gardens, and servants’ houses. Similar compounds were constructed by the Methodists in Naengch’on Dong, Chong Dong, and Sajik Dong, by the Seventh Day Adventists in Hoegi Dong, and, the Oriental Missionary Society at Takezoe-cho 3-chome, (Ch’ungjong-no 3- ga). Missionary consortia also created Western housing clusters at key institutions such as Severance Union Medical College, which was then across from the main railroad station, and at Chosen Christian College in Sinch’on.

A few Westerners owned their own homes. Horace H. Underwood, president of Chosen Christian College, had a two-story home and garden on eight acres adjacent to the campus in what is now Yonhi-dong. The most conspicuous Western home in the downtown vicinity was the A. W. Taylors’ “Dilkusha”11 at No. 1 Haengch’on Dong, high on the slope of Inwang-san outside the city wall. Dilkusha, which was distinguished by a 400 year-old gingko tree, was located on a site once owned by Gen. Kwon Yul, a distinguished Korean military hero during the war with Japan in the 1590s. With its commanding view of the valley south to Kwanak-san, Dilkusha was Mary Linley Taylor’s social headquarters and the site of many festive events in the life of Seoul’s foreign community.

THE SOCIAL SYSTEM OF THE FOREIGN COMMUNITY

In the grand tradition of the East, Western consuls were the unofficial heads of their respective national communities in Seoul, and of these the acknowledged dean was the British Consul-General. The British con- sulate-general was housed in two standard China coast-style buildings constructed alongside Toksu Palace in the early 1890s. Over time, the British consular list turned into a Who’s Who of British diplomacy in the East: Sir Harry Parkes, W. G. Aston, Sir Claude MacDonald, Sir Walter Hillier, and J. N. Jordan, among others. The British consulate-general with its staff and imposing buildings, together with the neighboring Anglican mission with its bishop and pro-cathedral, comprised a substantial British presence in the heart of the city.2

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Each May 24th, on Queen Victoria’s birthday, the British community hosted Empire Day festivities on the consulate’s grounds, giving everyone in the foreign community at least an annual encounter with the consular aristocracy. For adults there was conversation, tea, and sandwiches. For the children there were races, games, and snacks. Empire Day presented quandaries for the ladies of the community: Would it be warm enough, or proper, to wear summer attire? How did one address the consul-general’s wife? Would the children know how to behave? And there were occasional crises for the hosts as well, such as the warehouse fire that roasted the consulate’s supply of condensed milk for Empire Day—just well enough, as it turned out,for the cooks to make the best caramel ice cream that anyone could remember.13

In 1937, however, Empire Day was eclipsed by the coronation festivities for King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, on May 12. The day began with services at the Cathedral of St. Mary and St. Nicholas, followed by two luncheons, one hosted by Gonsul-General Gerald Phipps for the governor- general and his top staff,and one hosted by Mrs. Phipps at the Seoul Club for the foreign community. In the afternoon there was tea for the children, then a radio broadcast of the coronation relayed from London, a buffet supper, and finally dancing and the singing of British songs to the piano accompaniment of Mrs. Kathleen Gorman.14

The American consulate was likewise located in Chong Dong in a modified Korean building originally purchased by U.S. Minister Lucius Foote in 1884 and then by the United States government. The post was normally staffed by a Consu-General, Foreign Service Officer Class 2, an American vice-consul, and a complement of Korean and Japanese interpreters and clerks, a gardener, a driver (originally a “jinricksha” man), and five coolies who served as laborers, watchmen, and messengers. With this staff the consulate maintained records and guarded the interests of the American business and missionary communities in Korea. The staff also collected and interpreted information on industry, finance,communications, transportation,and sometimes, but not usually,military affairs. This gave them the power of knowledge among members of the foreign community as well as social position.15

Seniority was another source of prestige in the foreign community. The longest residents invariably were Protestant missionaries. These included Bishop Cecil Cooper of the Anglican mission (1908), Nurse Esther Shields of Severance Union Medical College (1897), Chosen Christian College professors Arthur Becker (1930) and E. M. Cable (1899), YMCA Director [page 24] Byron P. Barnhart (1916), and churchmen M. B. Stokes (1907), Charles Sauer (1921), Bliss Billings (1908), and E. Wade Koons (1903), among many others. Children of pioneer missionaries were also growing numerous in Korea in 1937,often at institutions founded by their parents. The first Western child to be born in Korea, Alice Appenzeller (b. 1885), was nearing twenty years with Ewha; her brother Henry D. (b. 1889) was with Paejae Boys School; Horace H. Underwood (b. 1890) was President of Chosen Christian College, and Douglas B. Avison (b. 1893) and Ella Sharrocks (b. 1900) were at Severance Union Medical College. Each was recognized as a contributor in his or her own right, and each was listened to with considerable deference when it came to matters of Korea, its people, and its Japanese rulers.16

The business community, though much smaller, also had its senior, even legendary, members. One was James H. Morris, who came to Korea as a young engineer in 1899 to help build the Seoul, street railway and settled down to become the city’s leading Western businessman. Morris invested first in gold mining, then turned to importing hardware and building supplies, Goodyear tires, and Universal Pictures, among other things, and a variety of automobiles from Overland to Dodge. The sons of George A. Taylor, another mining engineer who came to Korea in 1898, comprised the first two-generation business family. The two brothers, William (“W. W.”) and Albert (“A. W.”) remained in Seoul after their father’s death in 1908 and set up an importing firm in Hasegawa-cho across from the Chosen Hotel. The W. W. Taylor firm handled a range of products for the foreign community as well as the general Korean market, including Columbia gramophones, records and movies, Underwood typewriters, Eversharp pens and pencils, and Huntley and Palmer’s biscuits.

W. W. Taylor also sold automobiles, and shortly after he switched franchises from Chrysler to General Motors in 1932, he was asked to represent G. M. in Manchuria. His brother A. W. then ran the family firm, maintaining the Hasegawa-cho office and living in Dilkusha with his wife Mary, their son Bruce, and Mary’s sistei Una Mouat-Biggs. Mary and A. W. had met in Shanghai when she. was on tour with a London theater group playing to audiences in British enclaves across the East. After marrying A. W. and moving to Seoul she presided over the Seoul Amateur Dramatic Club and assisted with the annual Shakespearean play at Seoul Foreign School.

A handful of British businessmen also sank roots in Seoul. Henry W. Davidson actually left enduring monuments in the form of Pagoda Park [page 25] and the Sokcho-jon stone hall in Toksu Palace. Originally from Aberdeen, Scotland, Davidson first worked in China with the international staff of the Imperial Maritime Customs Service. With the outbreak of the Boxer Rebellion he was transferred to the Korean Customs Service where he worked under the director, Sir John MacLeavy Brown. Brown, who was in charge of Korea’s modern port and navigation facilities, was assigned to plan other public works as well, including the park and the stone hall in which Davidson had a hand. Davidson stayed on, then, with the gold mines in Unsan and then in Seoul, where he settled down to the importing business. Like J. H. Morris and the Taylor family, he handled many products but was best known, perhaps, as the agent for Canadian Pacific, Sun Life, Simmons bedding, and the North British and Mercantile Insurance Company.

Like the missionaries, members of the foreign business and consular community developed family ties which bound them, if not to Korea itself, to the foreign community in Korea. Emile Martel was married to the daughter of the King’s German bandmaster, Franz Eckert, and their daughter was a Benedictine missionary. Lillian Joly, daughter of Henry Bencraft Joly, British consul in Chemulp,o during the 1890s, married Grant Whitman, who represented the Standard Oil Company in Seoul for nearly fifteen years. Una Mouat-Biggs, Mary Taylor’s sister, worked for Standard Oil for the same period, from the mid-twenties to the late thirties. Mary and A. W. Taylor’s son Bruce married Joyce Phipps, daughter of British consul-general G. H. Phipps. James H. Morris’s daughter Marion married American consul Charles H. Stephan. And the H. W. Davidsons,daughter Joan, who returned from schooling in England to work at the British consulate, married Horace G. Underwood in July, 1941. Missionary children, who referred to each other as “Korea Kids,” often married other missionary children, but they had the advantage of regularly-scheduled furloughs, periods of a year or so when their families were assigned to work in their home country. During furloughs they met many new friends without Korea backgrounds and regularly married outside of the “tribe” as well.17 Business families, on the other hand, did not generally leave their work to spend such prolonged periods in touch with home; and while many came and went over the years, the senior members of the business community over time lost touch with their hometowns and friends. Their roots in Korea, therefore, were often deep and permanent.

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THE EXPATRIATE WAY OF LIFE IN 1930S SEOUL

Except for homesickness and the frustrating slowness of communica-tions with home, life as a foreigner in Korea in the 1930s was usually not unpleasant. Most Westerners were here by choice, at least; and many of them enjoyed the exhilaration of shared purpose. Missionaries in particular had tasks and goals and considerable freedom within which to pursue their work. They managed their own time and met with enough success to be able to point with pride at what was being accomplished year by year. They also felt privileged, if not by the literal extraterritoriality enjoyed by foreigners in China, by the fact that special consideration was always being extended to them for their sacrificial mission, or their prestige as teachers, or their high social status as evidenced by their standard of living. Occasionally someone would accuse them of having come to Korea to live off the land and sweat of others allegedly because they had been failures in their own countries, but in most cases local people treated them politely.

Managing a Western-style household in Korea required considerable ingenuity. Supply lines for many of the barest essentials stretched halfway around the globe. The simplest furnishing—a faucet handle or a brass drawer-pull or a window shade—might be impossible to replace. Clothes had to be bought months and years in advance, from catalogs, or made by tailors and dressmakers from catalog pictures. Westerners ate Western food, both out of habit and for their health, so there was usually a vegetable garden next to the house and often a fruit tree, all carefully controlled as to seed and fertilizer. Food preservation was primitive, often in ice boxes, later in kerosene-burner refrigerators. Much of the diet depended on home canning and food that was dried or bought in tins.

In country stations Westerners pooled their food orders and had large case lots shipped in from Japan, Hong Kong, or America. Something as simple as a slice of breakfast toast, therefore, was an impressive accomplishment: made with bread from home-ground Korean wheat flour, baked in a Japanese oven, toasted in an American toaster, and spread with Australian butter and English marmalade.

Eventually, suppliers in Seoul began to stock favorite food items. The best store was E. D. Steward’s, named for its Chinese proprietor who once had waited tables on a British ship. “Steward’s” store, located on Taihei-dori (Taep’yong-no), was a godsend for the Western community, a cornucopia of such un-Korean goodies as Edam cheese, ‘‘KLIM” powdered [page 27] whole milk, Kellogg’s Corn Flakes, and Maxwell House coffee. Other stores took up the same business from time to time, but none of the upstarts had Steward’s stock or reputation. Steward sold house brands of staples such as coffee, along with locally-produced “Morning Calm” foods from the Northern Presbyterian Misson’s experimental farm near Pyongyang.

By the 1930s, the infrastructure in Korea was such that many Western necessities other than food could also be had in Seoul. Pharmaceuticals were made locally by Ilhan New, in what eventually became Yuhan Chemical Company. Coal, which got scarcer as the war approached, was sold in various forms by Woo Cho and You Shin Coal Companies. Stoves, hot water tanks, and plumbing and heating equipment could be had from Sugiyama Seishakusho Company in Takezoe-cho. Coleman lamps were sold by J. H. Morris. Rugs and mattresses could be ordered from the Anna Davis Industrial Shops on the Presbyterian compound in Pyongyang. The Methodist Mission’s training school in Songdo (Kaesong) supplied good-quality cloth, while the Salvation Army in Seoul sold ready- made men’s shirts. The Chinese Gospel Building Association at 26 Chong Dong made furniture to order. With foresight, funds, and Korean cooks, amahs, washerwomen and “outside men,” therefore, it was quite possible to maintain the Western style virtually anywhere in 1930s Korea.

The distance from home was underscored by the slowness of the mails. A month was the minimum time for one way communication to the United States or Europe. Cables, therefore, were necessary for urgent business. The American consulate-general sent entire letters and reports by telegram to Tokyo for forwarding to Washington. Private citizens used standard code books, typical of the era, to reduce common phrases to single words, which saved money. For example, “KAUDN” meant “Wire instructions immediately,” and “UQAHC” meant “Please inform relatives.” Nor was there much current news. Short-wave radios were forbiaaen in Korea in 1937, and there was little of significance in the only English language paper, the Seoul Press, published by the Keijo Nippo, the semi- official government paper. The Press was good for train and movie schedules, the Chosen Hotel guest list, the daily doings of the Governor- General and his staff, a little news from Japan, and occasional international stories about such things as the Hindenburg fire and Amelia Earhart’s travels. The Press also reprinted articles from overseas: a speech by Joseph Goebbels on the evils of Bolshevism took several columns every day for more than a week in April, but the community lost even this much [page 28] in May, 1937 after the Press’s editor, Frank Kim, died. The government wryly announced that there was no need for an English newspaper since so many foreigners had been learning Japanese.18 English newspaper subscribers after that were forced to wait several days for the Japan Advertiser and the Nippon Times to cross the channel from Tokyo.

Western children in Seoul attended Seoul Foreign School in Chong Dong. Seoul Foreign School had been begun in 1912 on property adjacent to Paejae Boys School by Ethel Van Wagoner before she married Horace H. Underwood. In 1923 the school moved to a new location in a compound a stone’s throw from West Gate which had been the home of the Plaisants, a family of French traders. In 1924, J. H. Morris made a donation of a 300-seat auditorium to be built onto the Plaisant house as a second story, after which the whole building came to be known as “Morris Hall.” Here the foreign community met for church services at 4:00 o’clock every Sunday afternoon.19 Here, too, the school children presented their annual play, usually a Shakespearean drama directed by Fr. Charles Hunt of the Anglican Mission with the help of Mary Taylor.20

In 1937 SFS also had a new principal, Lucy Norton, replacing Robert A. Kinney who had just moved on to the Peking American School. The staff of the school usually included five teachers covering grades one to twelve, with part-time assistance from the community. The annual tuition was $55.00 and the student body was drawn from business and consular families as well as missionaries, unlike the larger Pyeng Yang (Pyongyang) Foreign School (“PYFS”) up north, which was a boarding school for missionaries’ children from everywhere in Korea and from mission stations in Manchuria and China. A fierce rivalry always existed between Seoul Foreign School and PYFS. The PYFS student body was half again as large (about 120, in all grades) as SFS (about 80) and usually won in baseball and basketball,SFS’s only varsity sports. There was one famous occasion, however, when the Seoul Foreign School baseball team, woefully behind in the early innings of a championship game, pulled suddenly into the lead. R. O. Reiner, the PYFS principal, had already packed the trophy to take back with him on the train and had actually departed for the station when Seoul won the game. The triumphant team went en masse to the Seoul Railroad Station and confiscated the trophy from Mr. Reiner at trainside to cheers from the winners and boos from the losers.21

The memory of such triumphs loomed especially large against the fact that there were so few diversions in Seoul at the time. Recreational facilities were scarce. The foreign community had two clubs: the Seoul Club, in[page 29] Chong Dong, and the Seoul Union Club at No. 2 Izumi-cho (Sunhwa Dong), just over the city wall from Paejae Boys’ School. Of the two, the Seoul Club was the more cosmopolitan, with members from the business and consular community as well as leading Japanese and Koreans. Its building belonged to the former royal family of Korea and had been loaned by Emperor Kojong in 1907 to the foreign community as a place to gather and relax. Located next door to the American consulate, it had a bar, a library, a billiard room, and by the 1930s, occasional films and tea dances. This made for a very different atmosphere from the Seoul Union, which was frequented mainly by missionaries. Its main activities were sports and tennis teas, activities reflecting the mores of the missionary community which frowned on smoking, dancing, and the movies and absolutely forbade drinking alcohol in any form.

The Seoul Club and the Seoul Union met on the tennis court for tournaments several times each year. Ever since 1906, when H. W. Davidson won the Fox Dragon Trophy away from the Chemulpo Tennis Club, tennis had been a major avocation among the city’s Westerners. The Club had only one court while the Union eventually had five, but the competition was fairly even. In 1937 the Union lost the Tanaka Singles Cup to the Seoul Club, but in overall play Dr. John McAnlis of Severance, representing the Seoul Union, remained indisputably the city’s tennis champion. Leading members of the community continued to supply trophies to replace those taken out of contention by McAnlis and the other top players. In 1937 a new tournament was founded between Chosen Christian College and the Seoul Union, with the singles cup from C.C.C. president, Horace Underwood. The ultimate All-Korea Tennis Championship trophy was the Taylor family’s contribution, being traded back and forth between the clubs from year to year.

In 1937, members of the Seoul Union were enjoying their new swimming pool, 40 by 16 feet and seven feet deep under the diving board. The club building, finished in 1930,had also just acquired another unique feature: twin bowling alleys, moved in their entirety from the recreation hall of the Oriental Consolidated Mining Company in Unsan, where they had been little used. Outside, when the temperature dropped below freezing, the tennis courts adjacent to the building were flooded for ice skating, and with steam heat in the bowling alley and a kitchen and dining room upstairs, the Seoul Union was a pleasant place to be all year around.22

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LEARNING ABOUT KOREA

Belonging to Korea and learning about it occupied the attention of a good many foreigners in the 1920s and thirties. Some of them were accomplished scholars who did original research of remarkable quality and quantity in scientific and culturalfields. Much of this emerged in the form of papers read before meetings of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland. This branch, which was one of several in East Asia, was founded in 1902. Its annual volume of proceedings called Transactions became a series which continued long after the the Second World War. In the Transactions, for example hunter / mountaineers Jack Boots and Horace Underwood both published papers of enduring value on characteristic themes: Boots’s “Korean Weapons and Armor,” and Underwood’s “Korean Boats and Ships.”23 Other major studies pub-lished by the RAS included E. M. Cable’s studies of Korean bells and of early American-Korean relations, the venerable Bishop Mark Trollope’s “Corean Books and their Authors,” and W. W. Taylor’s down-to-earth “Korean Roads Past and Present.”24

The annual meeting of the Royal Asiatic Society on May 31,1937 at the Seoul Union Club marked the organization’s thirty-fifth year. Of the Society’s membership of 216, sixty were present to hear the annual report and to elect officers for the coming year. E. Wade Koons then read a paper written by his son-in-law G. St. G. M. Gompertz on the life of Archbishop Gustave Charles Marie Mutel (1854-1933), the pioneer missionary of the Societe des Missions Etrangeres de Paris and builder of the Catholic church in Korea.25

The same year saw the beginning of what was perhaps the Society’s most enduring contribution: the McCune-Reischauer system of romanizing the Korean language. The summer saw the arrival of George McAfee (‘‘Mac”) McCune, son of former Presbyterian missionary George S. McCune of Pyongyang, to work on his Berkeley Ph.D. dissertation.26 Then in September, Edwin and Adrienne Reischauer stopped off in Seoul. Ea, the son of Presbyterian missionary A. K. Reischauer in Tokyo, was enroute to Peking to work on his Harvard dissertation but got stranded in Seoul because of the outbreak of Sino-Japanese hostilities on the main-lands. While he awaited travel clearances, his two-month sojourn in Seoul turned out to be a valuable introduction to Korea, one which later helped him become an important advocate of Korean Studies at Harvard. It also presented him with a chance to wrestle with a research problem: the lack [page 31] of a standard system for romanizing the Korean language.27 With the help of Chosen Christian College linguists Ch,oe Hyon-bae, Chong In-sop, and Kim Son-gi, Mac McCune and Ed Reischauer eventually succeeded in inventing the romanization system which was adopted during the war by the American government and subsequently, in modified form, by the South Korean government in Seoul. The finished McCune-Reischauer System for romanizing Korean was published in the 1939 volume of the Royal Asiatic Society’s Transactions, which also included McCune’s demonstration of the system in the article “The Yi Dynasty Annals of Korea.”28

GETTING ALONG WITH KOREANS IN 1937: CULTURAL DISPARITIES

The language barrier was the most obvious reason for the social isolation of Westerners in Korea in the 1930s. Speaking Korean was a matter of degree: everyone could speak a little and many could do very well in social and professional situations, but none of the Westerners in Korea had been educated in the Korean or Japanese way and with the rarest exceptions29 there was none who could hold his own with an educated Korean on traditional subjects. Such knowledge was not necessary to teach an English or religion class, nor was it relevant to technical or business matters, but the lack of it isolated Westerners from the things which Koreans thought about a good deal of the time. They could read about current issues in the daily Seoul Press, but given their general disinterest in Japan and Japanese affairs, most missionaries especially were without the background to talk politics and current events with Koreans and Japanese.

The inability to converse effectively in sophisticated Korean made it difficult for many foreigners to be friends with Koreans of social importance. Missionaries, for example, were routinely limited to contact with persons in subordinate roles—i.e., students, employees, and proteges of various kinds. In the social context of Korea where hierarchy was so important, it would have been difficult to form intimate friendships across such social lines, but basic cultural differences also hindered development of real Western-Korean friendships in the 1930s. “Foreigners” were still foreigners, from different races and family backgrounds in unimaginably distant places. There were exceptions, particularly in the relationships between single women missionaries and their Korean counterparts (“Bile- women”) with whom they itinerated in the countryside and upon whom they relied for companionship on journeys which lasted for weeks and [page 32] months at a time. In the cities and towns, though local Koreans respected and even loved individuals on the compounds the foreigners as a rule were too distant in their thinking, too rich, too brash, and often, one suspects, too odd-looking for real intimacy. Understanding Koreans was so much more than a matter of language; it required a fund of sensory memories from childhood, of the aroma of kimjang and the smrokey smells of the Korean farmhouse; of listening to farmers singing in fields and makkoli houses, of the clanging of the yot candyman’s taffy scissors, or the scary presence of ghosts in the stories told by grandmother, or the local sha- maness,s kut, or the chanting of the neighborhood men as they practiced the rituals of the village funeral. Westerners and Koreans grew up in incomparably different worlds, and by the time they were adults it took a concerted effort to communicate across the chasm.

Koreans and Westerners who kept up Western-style social contact, therefore, faced certain difficulties. Entertaining always involved one side or the other making a choice. If it was to be a Korean-style evening, should the Western man bring his wife along? If it was dinner in a Korean home, would the Western wife sit at the table with the men or eat separately with the women? If the dinner was at a restaurant, would the Korean wives be present? Or if the evening was Western-style, should the Korean guest bring his wife? Would everyone be able to communicate? What kind of food would be served and would it be safe, or even edible? What kind of utensils would they use to eat, and what was the proper way to use them? To be sure, there were Westernized Korean couples who could both be comfortable in social settings with foreigners, but they were extremely rare. International marriages were rarer still.30

INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

On another level, however, there were many opportunities for close association among Westerners, Koreans, and Japanese. All the mission schools had boards of directors whose memberships were mixed. Church organizations had local pastors as well as missionaries in their decisionmaking bodies. The Hanyang Lodge of the Masonic Order, the Seoul Rotary Club, the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, the Keijo Chamber of Commerce, and the International Friendly Association all met regularly for social contact and planning development of the country. The International Friendly Association, for example, was founded in 1910 as a hospitality club for visitors to the city. Sponsored by the Govern-[page 33] ment-General, it included residents of all nationalities in Seoul and hosted receptions and lectures on themes designed to foster good relations between the foreign community and the colonial regime.31 There were also English clubs, where Korean students met with foreign teachers or colleagues to polish their language skills. The Good Life Society, included faculty members of Seoul’s best schools, mission and non-mission, who met to practice their English on many sensitive topics. As J. Earnest Fisher recalled, “If the Japanese Government-General authorities had known of our meetings and had heard some of our discussions, we might all have had to serve prison terms.”32 Some of its members went on to very important positions: Pyon Yong-t’ae, for example, became prime minister under Syngman Rhee.33

THE JAPANESE AND THE END OF THE PREWAR WESTERN COMMUNITY

On February 24,1937 in the Concert Room of the Chosen Hotel the Rotary Club of Keijo celebrated the thirty-second anniversary of Rotary International with a gala dinner party.34 The Rotarians and their guests were the ruling circle of Korea under Japanese control: Mrs. Minami was there, representing the Governor-General who was in Tokyo. Commanding General Koiso Kuniaki was the senior Japanese official present, followed by Mauor Yoshikuni. Fertilizer tycoon Noguchi Jun was there, and Miwa Kunitaro, the manager of Mitsukoshi Department Store was the master of ceremonies. Foreigners present included the British and American consuls- general Gerald Phipps and O. Gaylord Marsh, as well as leading businessmen such as J. H. Morris.

As they arrived, the guests were given unpainted raku bowls to decorate with glazes, to be fired during the party and picked up at the end of the evening. The decor was all cherry blossoms and Rotary pennants, with paper lanterns around the room for atmosphere. Each guest’s invitation card bore the name of a Japanese city, denoting tables where they were assigned to sit for dinner. When all had found their tables, the festivities began with the singing of the Kimigayo, the Japanese national anthem, and the Rotary Song, first in English and then in Japanese. The banquet was followed by speeches and toasts, a lottery drawing, and then a music and dance program featuring a number by part of the Seoul Philharmonic, some pop songs, a shakuhachi solo, and a nagauta rendition by Mr. Miwa. The party ended with three rousing cheers of “banzai” for Rotary. [page 34]

A visiting Rotarian from the other side of the world might have been impressed that night with the sophistication and harmony of the Rotary party He might well have been tempted to see Korea as nothing but a backwater being dragged into modernity by determined and talented Japanese, and there would have been no question in his mind that Korea was a part of Japan to stay. The Westerners living in Korea at the time, including those in the Concert Room of the Chosen Hotel that night, knew, however, that there was bitter resistance against Japanese rule on the part of the Koreans. Some of them knew that the Japanese already were driving themselves into military adventures which might well lead to a conflagration in the Pacific. By the next Rotary anniversary in Seoul, Japan was at war, Korea was under wartime mobilization and serving as a staging area for the war, and the resident Westerners were being pressured into selling their businesses and pulling out of missionary work. The next two years brought police harassment, the closing of schools, and estrangement between Westerners and Koreans over compliance with Japanese orders. By the end of 1940,fully a year before the attack on Pearl Harbor, the U.S. State Department concluded that Americans in the Far East should withdraw, and advice went out to evacuate all “non- essential” American personnel from areas under Japanese control. Other governments followed suit, and three-fourths of the Westerners in Korea left that winter. Only a handful remained by December 1941, and with the outbreak of war they were interned. Repatriation followed in the summer of 1942, and with that, the curtain fell on sixty years of Western activity in Korea.

CONCLUSION

When the Pacific War ended and Korea was liberated and divided almost in the same stroke, the terms of engagement between the West and Korea were dramatically changed The typical Western figure in Korea was no longer to be the gentle Anglican sister or the American missionary teacher but rather the young uniformed military policeman in a jeep. The occupation troops from the XXIVth Corps of the U.S. Army, who marched into Seoul in September 1945, are usually described as having known nothing about the country they were coming to rule, yet in their confused early months here they were forced to decide much of what was to become Korea’s modern history. It was an important assignment, complicated and frustrated by the Soviet presence in the north, and the[page 35] American occupation forces needed all the help they could get. While they made use of certain Western-educated Koreans and a small handful of Americans from the prewar missionary, business, and consular communities, the occupation was conceived and executed as a military venture, part of a theatre of operations under the command of General Douglas MadArthur in Tokyo, and in all important respects it was a sideshow of MacArthur’s occupation of Japan. The manifest failures of the Korean occupation are now much-discussed by Korea scholars who attribute them largely to American ignorance of the country, its people, and their psychology. It cannot be said, however, that no expertise was available.35 One can only stand back and find it remarkable that better use was not made of the pre-war expatriates. Many of them could have played a positive role in mediating between the military authorities and the Korean people in the effort to build the country’s future.

**Notes:**

1. Of the total,572,774 were Korean, 131,128 Japanese,and 2,114 Chinese and Manchus. Government-General of Tyosen, Annual Report on Administration of Tyosen, 1937-38. Keizyo (Seoul): Government-General of Tyosen,1938: 13. The total population of Korea in 1937 was 23,898,000. The Seoul Press 28 Feb. 1937: 2.

2. For the sake of historical authenticity, place names are given in Japanese according to usage in 1937, with the current Korean usage in parentheses.

3. The American Embassy annex,now occupied by the United States Information Service/ I American Cultural Center.

4. This was later the Bando Hotel, on the site of the present Lotte Hotel. The builder was Noguchi Jun. of the Chosen Fertilizer Company, one of Seoul’s leading businessmen.

5. Seoul’s moviehouses showed a combination of Japanese and Western movies. Among the features in 1937 were “Poor Little Rich Girl,” with Shirley Temple, “Le Vagabond Bien- Aime,” with Maurice Chevalier, and ‘‘The Jungle Princess,” with Dorothy Lamour.

6. These included shrines honoring Ito Hirobumi, the great Japanese statesman who was Korea’s first Japanese ruler and who was assassinated in 1909 by the Korean An Chung- gun, in Harbin, and General Nogi Maresuke, the military hero of the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95.

7. In this incident, the Korean Yun Pong-gil, threw a bomb at a party of Japanese officials celebrating the Showa Emperor’s birthday in Hung-k’ou Park, Shanghai, in 1932, and succeeded in killing and wounding several important Japanese diplomats.

8. Yongsin Ak’ademi, Han’guk-hak yon,guso, Choson chaeryu ku-mi-in chosa-rok, 1907-1942. Seoul: Yongsin Ak’ademi, 1981: 608-636.

9.Mining was the biggest business concern of foreign nationals in Korea, but the foreigners in mining generally lived on-site, in Unsan and elsewhere in the hinterland, leaving only a few in Seoul as office staff.

[page 36] 10. Yun Il-ju, Han’guk Yangsik konch’uk p’alsimnyon-sa: Haebang-jon p’ydn (History of eighty years of Western-style architecture in Korea: Before liberation), Seoul: Yajong

Munhwasa, 1965: passim.

11. According to Taylor family lore, the name ‘‘Dilkusha,” a Persian word meaning “Palace of Delight,’’ was taken from the name of a place in India which had been defended by one of Mary Taylor’s ancestors during a mutiny against British rule. Interview with Bruce Taylor, Santa Rosa, California, 9 Aug. 1989. Dilkusha and the gingko tree are still standing, on the ridge above and a few meters to the north of the Sajik Tunnel.

12. J. E. Hoare, The British Embassy Compound, Seoul. Seoul: Korean-BrUish Soc\ety, 1984.

13. Horace G. Underwood, Interviews in Seoul, May-June 1985.

14. The Seoul Press, 13 May 1937: 2.

15. Gregory Henderson, A History of the Chong Dong Area and the American Embassy Res dence Compound, Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, XXXV, 1959: 24-25. Dorothy Werner,The American Embassy Residence: A House of History, Women’s News, part 1: Apr. 1968 and part 2: May 1968. Charlene Hone, The Residence, A rirang XXVI:4 Spring 1990: 20-25. Also see Post Reports for Seoul/Keijo, National Archives and Records Service, Washington, D.C., Record Group No. 59, General Records of the Department of State, file number 125. 8534, for information on the development of the property.

16. Allen D. Clark, Protestant Missionaries in Korea, 1893-1983, Seoul: Christian Literature Society, 1987; J. Earnest Fisher, Pioneers of Modern Korea, Seoul: Christian Litera- ture Society, 1977; Donald N. Clark (comp.), Yanghwajin, Seoul Foreigners,Cemetery, Korea: an informal history, 1890-1984, Seoul: Yongsan RSOK Library, 1984; and, What Do Second Generation Missionaries Say? The Korea Mission Field Mar. 1937: 46-57.

17. ‘‘Korea Kids,” whether or not they married out of the ‘‘tribe,” have always maintained a remarkable’ cohesion, organizing periodic reunions such as the 1986 Pyongyang Foreign School reunion in Montreat, North Carolina, and forming the core subscriber list of the ‘‘Korea Klipper,” a monthly newsletter now approaching its fiftieth year.

18. The Seoul Press 30 May 1937: 2.

19. The hour was chosen to permit the missionary community to attend Korean church services at the traditional hour of 11:00 a.m.

20. Although in 1937 the tradition was not upheld: the school play was ‘‘The Runaway Song,” a musical extravaganza which involved every child in the school. The Seoul Press 20 Apr. 1937.

21. Horace H. Underwood, II, Seoul Foreign School, 1912-1978. Seoul: Seoul Foreign School, 1978.

22. Horace H. Underwood, The Seoul Union: Fifty Years a Community Center, 1889- 1939, Seoul: n.p., 1939.

23. John L. Boots, Korean Weapons and Armor, Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, XXIII:pt. 2, Dec. 1934: 1-37; and Horace H. Underwood, Korean Boats and Ships, Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, XXIII:pt. 1, 1934: 1-99, reprinted as Korean Boats and Ships, Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1979.

24. E. M. Cable, Old Korean Bells, Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, XVI,1925: 1-45, and United States-Korean Relations, 1866—1871, Transac-[page 37] tions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, XXVIII, 1938: 1-230; Mark Napier Trollope, Corean Books and Their Authors, Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, XXI,1932: 1-104; W. W. Taylor, Korean Roads Past and Present, and Report on Investigations: Development ana Trend of the Automotive Transportation in Chosen, Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic society, XV, 1924: 35-82.

25. G. St. G. M. Gompertz, Archbishop Matel: A Biographical Sketch, Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, XXVII,1937,55-132.

26. News Notes, The Korea Mission Field XXXIII Dec. 1937: 264. With McCune was his wife, Evelyn Becker McCune, daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Arthur L. Becker of Chosen Christian College. The couple stayed with the Beckers while ‘‘Mac” studied.

27. Edwin O. Reischauer, My Life Between Japan and America. New York: Harper and Row, 1986: 68-70. Romanization systems were on everyone’s mind at the time, because the Japanese had just abandoned the Hepburn system for a new system which turned ‘‘Chosen” into ‘‘Tyosen” and ‘‘Prince Chichibu” into “Prince Titibu,” among other oddities.

28. M. McCune and E. O. Reischauer, ‘‘The Romanization of the Korean Language Based upon its Phonetic Structure,” Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, XXIX 1939: 1-55; G. M. McCune, The Yi Dynasty Annals of Korea,” Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society,XXIX 1939: 57-82.

29. One of these exceptions was James Scarth Gale,whose knowledge of Classical Chinese and Korean civilization made possible his history of Korea, later annotated and reprinted as Richard Rutt, James Scarth Gale and his History of the Korean People, Seoul: Royal Asiatic Society, Korea Branch, 1972. However, Gale retired in 1928.

30. A notable exception was the marriage of Agnes Davis of Missouri to David Kim, documented in Agnes Davis Kim, I Married a Korean, New York: John Day, 1953.

31. C. I. McLaren, ‘‘The International Friendly Association,” The Korea Mission Field XXXV Mar. 1939: frontispiece and p. 63.

32. J. Earnest Fisher, Pioneers of Modern Korea, pp. 180-181.

33. In 1936 Pyon, who was an English teacher at Chung’ang High School, published a book of Korean stories in English which was reprinted in 1946 and again as Y. T. Pyun, Tales from Korea, Seoul: Shinjosha, 1956.

34. This account follows that which appeared in the Seoul Press, 25 Feb. 1937: 3.

35. A statistic: In a single station (Pyongyang) of a single American mission (the Northern Presbyterians), the 39 Americans present in 1937 averaged 26. 14 years in the field, making for a total of 1,019 man / woman-years of service. Although by 1945 a number of them were too old to serve, many were not; and yet to the best of my knowledge not a single one had anything to do with the planning of postwar American policy toward Korea.