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P. G. von Moellendorff’sPro-Russian Activities in Korea 1882-1885: Opinions of Russian Historiographers

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German, Oriental studies scholar and diplomat Baron Paul George von Moellendorff (1847-1901), Korean name Mok Rin-dok, was the first European in history to be invited by Korea for official service. From the end of 1882 until the summer of 1885, he worked in Korea in different high posts from that of Inspector-General of Customs to Vice-Foreign Minister (ch’amp’an). He actively participated in the most important political events connected with the opening of Korea to the outer world and its search for a new place in the system of international relations. In South Korean and Western historiography, he is usually looked upon as a pro-Russian politician, because his activities were aimed at making Russia the new “elder brother” of Korea instead of China in order to protect Korean sovereignty and security. This idea came to him after the military mutiny of the Imo year (1882), as he was indignant at the severe conditions of the Inch’on Treaty which Japan forced on Korea after the suppression of the mutiny. He consistently followed the policy of strengthening Korean-Russian relations until he was dismissed in 1885. Nevertheless, Russian historians do not consider Moellendorff’s activities as pro-Russian, The author shares their opinion. At the same time, almost every Russian historian who wrote on the subject usually gives his/her own interpretation of Moellendorff’s role in Korea. In this paper, the author presents a broad spectrum of the opinions of Russian historians and explains the reasons for her own conviction, relying on the latest research of South Korean historians and the book by Lee Yur-Bok West Goes East¹) that Mok Champ’an was not pro-Russian.   [page 32]

Russian historiography of the Soviet period mentions P.G. von Moellendorff rarely and usually negatively. From one side, it can be explained by the Marxist theory of the role of individuals in history which was prevalent at that time. According to this theory, the masses play the main role in the historical process while the role of individuals is insignificant. On the other side, it was a reflection of the typical suspiciousness towards foreigners at that period of Soviet history. especially toward such ‘ideologically alien elements” as barons from imperialist countries.

P.G. von Moellendorff’s name appeared in a Russian historical work for the first time in 1947. It was Mikhail Pak’s candidate dissertation “Sketches of the Korean History in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century”. It was not published and remained known only to a narrow circle of Oriental scholars.

In 1956, A.L. Narachnitsky introduced Moellendorff’s activities in Korea to Russian readers in his thorough book Colonial Policy of the Capitalist Countries in the Far East 1860 – 1895.²) Relying on the materials from Russian archives, he describes the German diplomat’s contacts with the Russian officials in the Far East from August 1884 until July 1885. Those Russian officials were: Mlitary Agent in Peking, Colonel Shneur, August 1884, Chefu; Consul in Nagasaki, December 1884; Secretary of the Diplomatic Mission in Tokyo, A. Shpeer, January 1885, Seoul; the head of the same diplomatic mission Davidov, March 1885, Tokyo.

Narochnitsky presented in brief and in chronological order the reports of the above-mentioned officials about their meetings with Moellendorff. He thus showed the development of the latter’s concept of the future Russian-Korean alliance from the adoption of Korea under a joint protectorate of Russia, Britain, and other European states to the creation of the bilateral Russian-Korean alliance and the invitation of Russian officers for the training of the Korean army.

Most historians presume that Moellendorff sought a Russian protectorate over Korea. It seems appropriate to analyze this to see if this was true not only from a political and historical point of view, but also from a cross-cultural perspective. Moellendorff was the first nigh-ranking official from Korea who ever made contact

1) Lee Yur-Bok, West Goes East. Paul Georg von Moellendorff and the Great Power Imperialism in Late Yi Korea; Honolulu,1988.

2) Narochnitsky A.L., The Colonial Policy of the Capitalist Countries in the Far East. 1860-1895; Moscow, 1956.

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with Russian officials. It was he who started a dialogue between two completely different cultures, Korea and Russia, which had no notion of each other and little communication. The little literature, which had been written in Korea about Russia and in Russia about Korea by the 1880s, provided too little knowledge. Russian diplomatic documents prove that Moellendorff’s first contacts with Russian officials took them by surprise and caused the Russian Foreign Ministry to send their representative to Seoul to get some information about Korea and the political situation. For Russian officials in the Far East P.G. von Moellendorff was a messenger from a completely unknown world, who tried to express the realities of that world by means of European languages. His contacts with Russian counterparts were mainly in German and sometimes in English and French in which those realities had no definition.

The achievement of Russian-Korean military cooperation was the most important part of Moellendorffs efforts aimed at preserving Korean independence. In modern diplomacy, such notions as military cooperation and independence are incompatible with the notion of protectorate. Russian military representatives supported this idea, as can be seen from Colonel Shneur’s report (see attachment), Russia did not have any intention of interfering in Korean affairs and did not speak about a protectorate. In 1854, the Russian Foreign Ministry elaborated an instruction, which envisaged the direction of Russian policy towards Korea for the future when relations with it would be established. The main content of that policy was preserving the status quo, that is China’s suzerainty over Korea, which was considered by Russian policy-makers as a guarantee of the stability of the Russian borders in the Far Eas t.3) This policy was implemented from 1860, when Russia acquired a common border with Korea and was consistently followed by Russia until the end of the war between China and Japan in 1895.

King Kojong had little knowledge of the realities of European policy and searched for a new “elder brother” in accordance with sadae, the traditional policy of revering the elder, that is, China, which embodied his notion of relations with a stronger neighbor. His main aim was to preserve the status quo, that is the position of the country as it had existed for many centuries. Thus it is certain that King Kojong could not ask for protectorate status which would have meant the loss of Korean sovereignty and the limitation of his absolute power. Moellendorff knew the difference of approach of the negotiating sides and had many difficulties while translating. This can be seen from the full text of his letter to the Russian envoy in Tokyo, Davidov, dated March 1885, and published in Narochnitsky. In this

*3) Pak B.D. Russia and Korea; Moscow, The Nauka Publishers, 1979; 34-35*.

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letter, Moellendorff, while avoiding the word protectorate, wrote that the Korean state “could normally develop only in case a third state - stronger than China and Japan - would take it under its protection. It is difficult to formulate the suggestions from the Korean side” wrote Moellendorff. “That is why the Russian government should define the contents of its relations with Korea and elaborate an agreement which would guarantee the neutrality and integrity of Korea”, “In any case it would be useful to increase Russian influence in Korea,” 4)he added.

Narochnitsky presumed that Moellendorff’s activities in 1885 demonsltrated some sympathy towards Russia by King Kojong, Queen Min, and a part of those representatives of the Min clan close to the throne. “This court and Kojong hoped that Tsarist Russia would be able to protect Korea from English and Japanese encroachments and also from China’s attempts to put the Korean court under its complete control. English diplomacy and press tried to use. Moellendorffs intentions to use Russian support as a counterbalance to England for involving the Ch’ing government and Japan in a controversy with Russia and for diverting their attention from Great Britain’s aggressive policy”, 5) Narochnitsky continued.

The two volume History of Korea (1974) mentioned Moellendorff only once in connection with the steps of the Chinese government after the Imo Military Mutiny (1882). The book described Moellendorff as a Chinese protege, who was sent to Korea along with Chinese officers and officials to strengthen Chinese political and economic influence.6)

Boris D. Pak who is considered the main specialist in the history of Russian-Korean relations in the 19th century, did not mention Moellendorffs name even once in that part of the famous book Russia and Korea (1979), in which he describes the conclusion of the Russian-Korean Treaty of 1884. Moellendorff appeared in that part of the book which was devoted to King Kojong’s attempts to regulate the complications which arose after the coup-de-tat of 1884 (Kapsin Chongbyong). “As China and Japan were increasing their military presence in Korea, Kojong and his court decided to ask for Russian protection in order to preserve the independence of the county through the services of a German, P.G.

4) Davydov’s report from Tokyo dated March 8 (February 24) 1885; Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire, Main Archive 1 – 9, 1885, page 3 and attachment. Narochnitsky

A.L, op. cit. 372 - 373.

5) Norochnitsy A.L., op.cit.,388-389

6) “History of Korea (from ancient times to modern days)”. In 2 vols. (Moscow: The “Nauka” Publishers, 1974), Vol. 1, 339.

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Moellendorff who was a foreign advisor to the Korea govenment,”7) B. D. Pak wrote. According to him, in general Moellendorff intrigued against Russia and protected not Korean interests but mostly those of Germany. ‘‘Proposing to the Korean king to turn for protection to Russia, Moellendorff decided to counterbalance Tsarist Russia with Japan, China, England, and the USA and to give an opportunity to Germany to give services to Russia and thus to share rights in Korea with it”,8) B. D. Pak argued.

Bella B. Pak, a recognized specialist in the history of Russian diplomacy in Korea in the 19th century, completely agrees with his opinion9)9

The above mentioned opinion seems ill founded if we take into consideration Baron von Moellendorffs attitude to the question of inviting foreign military instructors. Although the Chinese expressed the wish that Korea hire German military instructors to train the Korean army, Moellendorff himself never recommended it to Kojong. As Lee Yur-bok points out, “Moellendorff thought that whatever country provided military instructors to Korea should be the one that would play a dominant role in the diplomatic and political matters of Korea. In his

opinion, that country should be nearby Russia, not far away Germany.”10)

Boris Pak stresses that Moellendorff was, in the first place, the executor of King Kojong’s schemes, and that the framework of his official duties limited the degree of his independence in his actions.11) The Russian scientists refute the opinion of South Korean historians,12) who insist that during the stay in Seoul of Alexey Shpeer, the secretary of the Russian diplomatic mission in Tokyo in January 1885, Moellendorff tried to persuade the Korean government to conclude a treaty with Russia and to cede ten districts of Hamgyong Province to it in exchange for Russian’s obligation to protect Korean ports with its fleet. Dr. Pak relies on Shpeer’s detailed reports about his visit to Korea. There is not even a hint of such a treaty there.13)

7) Pak B.D., op.cit.,81.

8) Ibid, 256.

9) Pak B.B., Russian Diplomacy and Korea (1860 - 1888). Book 1 (Moscow-Irkutsk-St. Petersburg: 1998), 87-88.

10) Lee Yur-bok, op.cit., 93.

11) Pak B.D., op.cit.,91.

12) Sohn Pow-Key, Kim Chol-choon, Hong Yi-sup. The History of Korea. Seoul (1970), 203.

13) Pak B.D., op.cit. 91. 

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Dr. L. V. Zabrovskaya, specializing in the history of China of the new period, considers Moellendorff a mercenary, who had no intention of protecting Korea’s interests. She insists that he used his high position as King Kojong’s political advisor for his personal enrichment and secretly informed the representatives of foregn states in Seoul about plans of the Korean government concerning foreign policy and also about the projects of giving concessions to foreigners.14) Dr. Zabrovskaya claims that Kojong dismissed Moellendorff, because his activities “caused anger of all the states,”15) and this conclusion seems to contradict her previous estimation of him as a paid secret agent of those foreign states.

In the post-Soviet period, information on Moellendorft in Russian historiography became more detailed. In 1998, Bella B. Pak published, with insignificant reduction, the texts of the reports of Russian officials in China and Japan about their meetings with Moellendorff in 1884-1885. She published not only those documents, which were briefly introduced by A. L. Narochnitsky in 1956, but also presented new ones, for example, a secret telegram from Governor-General of the Amur region, Baron von Korff, dated May 30, 1885. In this telegram, the latter reported the contents of Moellendorff’s letter which he had received. In that letter, the Korean vice-foreign minister proposed to send four officers and sixteen sub-officers for the training of 2000 Korean soldiers.16) Also for the first time, Bella Pak introduced the contents of the instruction which was approved by the Tsar on June 1885, and then given to the first Russian Charge d’Affairs in Korea, Karl I. Weber. In this instruction, the Foreign Ministry expressed confidence that all Moellendorffs proposals to the Russian government had been produced by him under orders from the Korean king.17)

In spite of detailed information on a variety of subjects, B.Pak does not inform us that on October 16, 1885, Karl Waeber decorated P.G. von Moellendorff with one of the higher orders of the Russian Empire, namely the Order of St. Anna 2nd grade for his cooperation in the conclusion of the Russian-Korean Treaty of 1884. This event seems very important. It proves that the Russian government of that time highly appreciated the German diplomat’s activities and considered him neither a Chinese marionette nor a German spy nor a mercenary. It would be interesting to know which Russian officials recommended Moellendorff for the decoration and

14) Zabrovskaya L.V. Ch’ ing China’s Policy in Korea 1876 - 1910. (Moscow: The Nauka Publishers, 1987), 35-36.

15) Ibid, 42

16) 16 Pak B.B.,op.cit., 130.

17) Ibid., 152.

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what arguments were used. Unfortunately, the documents from the Russian archives concerning the matter have not yet been published.

The sketch of Russian historiography presented above proves that in Russia Moellendorff is not considered a pro-Russian politician. It can be explained by the fact that pro-Russian in the Russian language is perceived mainly as acting for Russian interests. Russian historians reason that the German diplomat in his activities in the rank of Korean vice foreign minister acted for other than Russian interests: Korean, German, or personal Lee Yur-bok explains that Kojong and Moellendorff “were proRussian in that they all believed that Russia might be in a position to help Korea to become truly independent of China.”18)

Western historiography usually represents Moellendorff’s position in Korea as independent enough and tends to exaggerate the degree of his influence on Kojong. Lee Yur-bok’s book, West Goes East, can be considered an example. The author praises the efforts of the German diplomat to protect Korean sovereignty highly, but expresses the opinion that his intention to rely on Russia was a misconception caused by lack of knowledge of Russia’s real intentions and opportunities, and that it was unfortunate for the future of the Korean people.19) Explaining the reasons which made Kojong agree with Moellendorffs secret proposal to make Russia the senior ally of Korea, Dr. Lee writes as follows: “Kojong, deeply resentful of China’s unprecedented interference in his country, clearly disappointed with the Japanese behavior towards his country during and after the coup, Kapsin chongbyong, 1884, and grossly misinformed about Russia’s capability and willingness to become involved in Korean affairs, and gave tacit but strong support to von Moellendorffs proRussian policy”.20) Dr., Lee stresses that it was von Moellendorff who had been mainly responsible for causing King kojong to become and remain pro-Russian.21) According to his logic, it can be concluded that Moellendorff’s misconception and misinformation laid the foundation for the Korean monarch’s proRussian sympathies, to which, as it is widely known, he held for about forty years until his death in 1919.

In connection with the above-mentioned Lee Yur-bok’s statements, it seems necessary to consider the three following questions: 1) What was the real degree of Moellendorffs influence on the “alert, flexible, and pragmatic,”22) kojong? 2) To

18) Lee Yur-bok, op.cit. 69.

19) Ibid., 95.

20) Ibid., 4.

21) Ibid., 5.

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what extent were Moellendorff, and consequently Kojong, misinformed about Russia’s capability and willingness to become involved in Korean affairs? 3) Why was Kojong’s decision to rely on Russia, which was taken under Moellendorff’s influence, unfortunate and fatal for Koreans?

Moellendorff was the first Westerner with whom Kojong personally met. As the Korean traditional distrust of Westerners and their conservatism are widely known, it is difficult to believe that the proposals of one of them, even of such an outstanding person as Moellendorff, could make the Korean king, within a very short period of time, decisively change the line of his foreign policy and confront not only its “elder brother” China, but also Western countries and many high Korean officials, who for diverse reasons, opposed establishing close relations with Russia. We should also not forget the great influence, although short lived, that the book by the Chinese diplomat Huang Tsun-Hsien, A Policy for Korea had on the Korean court and its foreign policy when Russia was described as a most dangerous and aggressive country. The recent research by South Korean historians supports the idea that, apart from Moellendorff’s influence, there were other more substantiated reasons which contributed to the Korean king’s and his closest advisors’ decision to rely on Russia to protect Korean independence and integrity.

The first literature, which touched upon Russia to some extent, appeared in Korea at the beginning of the 18th century. They were works by Kim Gi-hong, Pae Si-hwang, Lee Ik, Sun Nyuk, Lee Guyn-ik, Ching Won-yong, Yi Gyu-gyong and others devoted to the participation of the Korean detachments, 413 soldiers in all, in Russian-Chinese military clashes on the Amur River in 1654 and 1658 (nason chongbot). Those literary works were mainly of anti-Manchurian orientation, but at the same time they contributed to the formation of the Koreans’ alert attitude toward Russia.23) The diaries of the Korean envoys to Peking, who regularly met Russians there in the period from the end of the 17th until the middle of the 19th centuries, reflected the same alert attitude.

In 1860, when a common border appeared between Russia and Korea and real contacts between the two countries started, that alert attitude changed into fear of Russia (conno uisik).24) According to a historian from Seoul National University,

22) Ibid., 18.

23) Pak T’ae-kun, Bibliographic comments in Sin Nyu, Diaries of Service in the Northern Lands translated into Modern Korean. (Songnam: 1980), 27-47.

24) Choe Muh-hyong, The Ground and Conditions for Establishing Diplomatic Relations between Korea and Russia//”One hundred years of history of Korean-Russian Relations” (in Korean), 49 - 73.

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Won Jae-yon, that transformation was stimulated by western countries and Korean catholics. The former, China should be included, did not want Russia’s rapprochement with Korea as it could strengthen Russian influence on the Korean peninsula. The latter used the threat of Russian danger to Korea to speed up the conclusion of treaties with European countries as they hoped that such treaties would provide freedom of religion for them.25)

The real contacts between Russia and Korea, which started in 1860, began with the wide-scale immigration of Koreans to the Russian Maritime Province and the development of border trade. For the first seven years those contacts were illegal and were severely suppressed by the Korean government. The attempts of the Russian border administration to regulate those contacts were rejected by the Korean side. Toward the end of the 1860s and the beginning of the 1870s, we see the peak of the isolationist policy, proclaimed by the Korean government in response to direct aggression from western countries in 1866 - 1867. In 1869, Korean immigration to the Russian territories became extremely intensive: 6,543 Koreans crossed the border from Hamgyong Province because of hunger and high taxes. The Russian administration was not capable of accepting so many refugees who had no means of existence and implemented measures to restrict immigration. The decreasing numbers of their people worried Korean authorities, too. As a result, the Korean authorities had to violate their own ban, and for the first time in Korean history, agree to negotiations with a western country, Russia, namely with the administration of the South Ussouri Region.26) The first official negotiations between Russian and Korean border administrations were held in top secret in the town of Kyuonghun at the end of 1869 and the beginning of 1870. The result was that the Korean government, in order to prevent people from crossing the border en masse, undertook some measures for improvement of their material position and also for strengthening control of the border.27)

It should be mentioned that in 1869-70, Korea negotiated with Russia not through China but directly, as the Chinese Tsungli Yamen, the Foreign Office, refused to negotiate with the Russians on behalf of the Korean government28) As

25) Won Jae-yon. The Perception of Russia in Korea in the 19th Century and the Theory of Opening the Country// “Hangug munhwa (Korean Culture)” Vol- 23, 1999, 201.

26) Pak B,D., op.cit., 39; Pak BB., op.cit., 24-25.

27) Ching, Young Choe, The Rule of Taewon’gun 1864-1873: Restoration in Yi Korea. (Harvard University Press, 1972), 89-90.

28) Lee Yur-bok, op.cit.,12.

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Won Jae-yon points out, the pragmatism which the T’aewongun government showed when it began independent settlement of the emigration problem with Russia was a big achievement. Later King Kojong continued that independent policy towards Russia relying on information from border officials. The T’aewongun’s Russian policy was kept top secret, as officially his government was against opening the country to the outer world and stood for preserving the status quo and isolation. This was its main difference from the policy of Kojong who sought the opening of the country.29) A researcher from Kyujangak, the former Royal Library, now preserved at Seoul National University, Yon Gap-su, concludes that the absence of clashes at the Korean-Russian border for more than ten years after the negotiations in Kyuonghun, laid a firm foundation for the future development of Korean-Russian relations.30)

On the basis of the above-mentioned conclusions of South Koran historians, one can suppose that while planning his foreign policy in the 1880s, Kojong relied on the positive experience of the negotiations of 1869 with Russia, which were held not because of military threat or political pressure, but for objective social and economic reasons. Kojong also relied on the more than twenty-year long experience of peaceful relations with Russia on its border. It seems that his positive experience was the main reason Kojong agreed so quickly to MoellendorffI’s proposal to conclude an alliance with Russia.

Lee Yur-bok insists that Moellendorff’s opinion that the alliance with Russia was the best way of preserving Korean independence was fatal and unfortunate for the Koreans. While explaining why it was unfortunate and that Kojong was grossly misinformed concerning Russia, Dr. Lee calls Russia a paper tiger.31)

P.G. von Moellendorff was a Prussian aristocrat. For many years his native country had traditionally supported close dynastic relations with the Russian Empire. Thus from his childhood he held strong opinions about this state. Russia fell significantly behind England and other European countries as far as its economic and social development were concerned, but the fact that its army was the biggest in the world32) is evidence that Russia was not a paper tiger. During the Crimean War

29) Won Jae-yon, op.cit., 204.

30) Yon Gap-su. The Reply of the Taewongun Government (1863-1873) to the Challenge of the West and the Strengthening of the Army. Ph.D. Paper (in Korean), (Seoul National University, 1998).

31) Lee Yur-bok, op.cit., 95, 210.

32) In the middle of the 1880s, the Russian army in peace time consisted of 1 million 384 thousand people, while the French army consisted of 600 thousand and the German of 620 thousand. The Russian military budget was also the biggest in Europe (Brokhaus & Efron. New Encyclopaedic Dictionary. St Petersburg, 1981), Vol. 3. 630).

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(1853-1856), Russia alone fought on the three fronts against a coalition of European countries led by England and also against Turkey, In the Far East, however, Russian military strength was insignificant. Nevertheless, in 1858-1860, at the conclusion of Aihun and Peking Treaties with China, it could include the Amur and the South Ussuri regions among its possessions, making the biggest event in Far Eastern history in the second half of the 19th century. An American historian, G. Lensen, wrote that Russia at that time was “a surprising conglomerate of might and weakness’’.33)

When Moellendorff recommended that Kojong turn to Russia for support, he proceeded from thorough calculation and a balanced estimation of the international situation. He was sure that Russia, being a neighbor and being interested in preserving stability and peace on its borders, could become Korea’s new elder brother in international relations. Due to these calculations, he actively participated in the conclusion of the Russian-Korean Treaty of 1884 which China and England seriously opposed. In 1884 and the beginning of 1885, by order of Kojong, he sought to establish a kind of Russian protectorate over Korea which was envisioned analogous to former Korean-Chinese relations. In 1885, he was dismissed from all his positions and had to leave Korea after Kojong’s unsuccessful attempt to invite Russian military advisors for the mcxlernization of the Korean army thus creating the basis for a military alliance between the two countries. Moellendorff’s forced dismissal was a personal failure for King Kojong who did not possess enough power even to pursue an independent foreign policy.

There is an opinion that Russia only encouraged von Moellendorff by using highly obscure and diplomatic language and thus created the basis for his own and King Kojong’s unjustified illusions.34)Was it really so? From 1860 until 1895, Russia consistently followed the course of non-interference in Korean affairs. The meaning of that course was the preservation of the status quo, that is of Chinese suzerainty. The tsarist government considered it an obstacle to the subjugating of Korea by other capitalist countries which could threaten Russian borders and interests in the Far East. The non-interference did not mean indifference. When the situation in Korea was seriously aggravated after the coup-d’etat of 1884 and the

33) Lensen G.A., Balance of Intrigue, International Rivalry in Korea and Manchuria. 1884-1899. In 2 volumes, (University Press of Florida, 1983), Vol. 2, 5.

34) Lee Yur-bok, op.cit., 11.

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danger of its occupation by foreign troops emerged, Russia mobilized its military ships in the China Sea and the closest parts of the Pacific to demonstrate its readiness to protect Korean integrity.35) The tsarist government did not want to violate the status quo of the Korean peninsula and several times rejected King Kojong’s proposal for the establishment of a protectorate over Korea. At the same time, it immediately agreed to send instructors to train and modernize the Korean army. One of those instructors, Colonel Shneur, visited Seoul in July 1885 but had to leave at once because by that time King Kojong had been forced to give up the plan.36) These concrete steps of the Russian government refute the opinion that Russia confined itself to no more than encouraging Koreans with talk

As in the beginning of the 1880s, Korea turned into an arena of political struggle between the biggest capitalist countries and China, and because of the variety of opinions among the leading Korean political figures about the future of the country, Moellendorffs attempts to conclude a Korean-Russian alliance succeeded. That is why the opinion that his wish to protect Korean sovereignty by relying on Russia was a gross miscalculation unfortunate for the Korean people and can hardly be justified. The author presumes that it was more the failure of his projects that was fatal for Korea than vice versa. The statement can be proved by the behavior of the Korean soldiers in Kyongbok Palace on the night when Queen Min was assassinated, September 8, 1895. It showed that the retired American officers who had been invited by the Korean government to train the Korean army failed to teach them anything.

P.G. von Moellendorff was a man of the world, a representative of an elite bureaucracy. He worked for Kojong honestly and with dedication, trying to do his best in the most difficult situations. He was a prominent scholar of Oriental studies and an experienced diplomat, and his advice greatly helped Kojong adjust his political course to the constantly changing international circumstances. At the same time, his influence in the Korean court should not be exaggerated. He served an absolute monarch in an Eastern country. It is obvious that he could undertake actions only with the permission of the monarch. Making fatal decisions was not his prerogative.

P,G. Moellendorff is a tragic figure and did not receive due appreciation either during his life or after his death. He had many enemies among the Chinese, Japanese, and Korean high officials, as well as among the American diplomats. It

35) Pak B.D., op.cit., 82-83.

36) Ibid., 91.

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was inevitable as many of those people pursued their own interests, which differed from the interests for which von Moellendorff stood. His enemies intrigued against him, lied and spread rumors about him, openly interfered and placed obstacles in the way of his work Almost nobody believed in his sincerity, even those whom he tried to help. The variety of opinions about Moellendorffs political activities in Korea is reflected in documents and historiography, and it seems that they can hardly be reduced to a common denominator,

If, however, we leave politics alone and look at von Moellendorffs activities from a humanitarian aspect, we should admit that his achievements in Korea were really enormous and can hardly be over-estimated. The study of his unique experience of successful adaptation to an unknown and alien culture seems interesting, challenging, and extremely vital nowadays when people communicate extensively, and travel all over the globe, and international contacts are growing.