Korea and the Koreans in the Russian press of 1904–1905

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The importance of Russian-Japanese war of 1904 – 1905 for the actualization of the image of Korea and the Koreans in Russian public thought is hard to overestimate. It was at that time, on the threshold of the fight for the spheres of interest in the Far East, that the first quality reviews and studies devoted to Korea, including reports of research expeditions, appeared in Russia. In 1900, the Ministry of Finance published a fundamental “Description of Korea” in three parts with the total volume of 1250 pages that, according to contemporaries’ opinions, did not have a counterpart abroad. However, it was the war that turned Korea, “this strange country,” “the corner of the Far East we used to be mostly indifferent to” into an object of common interest for the mass reader.

The quickest to respond to this interest was the press which made Korean news a constant part of the news section. Right after the outbreak of the war, Korea was portrayed as a peaceful state suffering from the illegal and treacherous attack of Japan which broke the international conventions on the neutral status of Korea. There appeared articles about the negative reaction of Korean diplomatic missions to the events, about the Korean Emperor moving to the premises of the French Embassy, about the Koreans fleeing “to our lands”. The tone of the publications was set by the declarations and orders of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and

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the military authorities published in the official news sections. For example, on 6 February, 1904, a telegram by the acting commander of the Manchurian Army lieutenant-general N. P. Linevich said that “the Japanese are behaving in a hostile way with the Koreans”, while the “Koreans feel special confidence in us, see us as friends and say that the Russians are stronger than the Japanese”5.

However, this picture started changing soon. The modifications were predicated on the complexity of the international situation and the ambiguous policy of the Korean government in the conditions of the Japanese dictatorship, and on the other hand on the ideological and communicative context of Russia itself. Ideological differences that existed well before the war in writers’ and editors’ approach to the prospects of solving “the Korean question” became manifest. Liberal journalists focused on the modernization efforts of Japan and discussed the degree of “legitimacy” of the Japanese claims on civilizing Korea. The latter was contrasted to the “Europe-oriented” Japan as a country that had not “contributed anything to the life of Europe to make Europe interested in its existence”6. Conservative and “patriotic” authors tried to avoid such an opposition: “It is not Korea, not Manchuria, or Japan, or China, it is the white race opposed by the yellow race”7. A number of observers looked upon Korea from a purely utilitarian perspective seeing in it exclusively a base for future military operations by both Russians and the Japanese (“troop lodging is not convenient, resource collecting is difficult, cattle is scarce, horses are few but very good…”8 etc). The reports focused on military and statistic information, primarily on the availability and quality of roads.

At the same time, the great demand for information and the competition between publications (the censorship being pretty liberal at the moment) coexisted with the absence of independent and reliable channels of information on Korea. Consequently, the editors of rival newspapers and magazines offered more or less the same set of news borrowed from foreign media and news agencies. Many of their own stories (often reprinted several times by various publications) were also
often based on the borrowed information. What is even more important, so were the reports of the Russian telegraph agency and the Trade telegraph agency (later known as St-Petersburg telegraph agency), reprinted practically all around the country. Quality comments and reliability checks of the latest news were essentially impossible in this situation, as the foreign news messages appeared in Russian newspapers a couple of days after the original publication. As a result, efforts aimed at providing maximum comprehensive and urgent information resulted in a very eclectic and controversial picture of the events in Korea. According to the diverse and often “sensational” news reflecting different perspectives, Korea was in some cases seen by the Russian reader as a potential ally of Russia, as a country where a popular anti-Japanese informational campaign was underway, a country where riots broke out, “the Japanese were attacked by the population”, court conspiracies were devised against the occupation and sympathy was expressed to “the Russian warriors” 9. While sometimes, the country was seen as a state fighting on the Japanese side, there was even information on “Korean soldiers disguised in the Japanese uniforms in Manchuria” 10. The ambiguity was enhanced by reviews of the international press on Korea where journalists could often combine absolutely different points of view. The lack of appropriate education in Oriental issues but the willingness to be highly original led to flashy generalizations like the comparison of Korea to the dodo bird unable to fly, killed by mariners due to its helplessness 11.

Taking into consideration the specifics of everyday information on Korea that Russian readers received, especially valuable became the narrations of eye-witnesses, especially in the genre of travelogue. They could provide a more or less comprehensive picture for the audience which was interested but not sufficiently informed. Personal impressions could logically organize the material and allow avoiding the eclecticism of borrowed information found in books and the media. Naturally, under the war conditions, after the massive deportation of Russian citizens from Korea carried out by the Japanese, and considering the rapid retreat of the Russian troops from the northern part of the country, one could not hope
to receive up-to-date texts of that kind. Stories of the participants of the military campaigns in the Korean territory were scarce and often very specific, contradicting other published materials. Thus, an anonymous author, an officer from the detachment headed by colonel Madritov, which launched a two-month campaign in Northern Korea in the spring of 1904, writes about the “hostile” attitude of the local Korean population that “at night, set on fire the villages where we stopped, and tried bothering us all the time <…>, stole the cattle and fled” 12. He speaks about the “great joy” experienced by the soldiers upon their return to the Chinese territory, as thy were tired of “constant skirmishes with either Koreans or the Japanese”. However, the motifs of this “insidiousness” can easily be explained by the activities of the Russian side itself, which started the campaign by the sudden disarmament of the Ch’osan garrison. The general spirit of the participants of the campaign may be characterized by the lyrics of a soldiers’ song quoted by the author. The song was very popular at the beginning of the war; it was sung by the soldiers crossing the frontier river Yalu:

“We’re hurrying to Korea now,
We’re going to put the country of Korea
Under the command of our Tsar now!”

However, even the biased attitude to Korea including the nature of the country, reveals a shade of realization of being wrong: “Sullenly the rocky shore of Korea is looking at us, as if asking: why are you here, uninvited guests?”13. The issue of ill-considered and inconsistent relations with the local population, common for both Korean and Manchurian theaters of war, kept worrying most far-seeing Russian writers and officers. In April, 1905, the “Chronicle of the Russian-Japanese war” (“Hronika russko-japonskoj vojny”) published a passage which had already lost its topicality: “If we have set the goal to defeat Japan, we need to win the support of the population first. We must not forget that we are fighting in a foreign land and among foreign people, being unaware of their language, customs, and traditions… Now is the best and the last
chance in the campaign to become closer to the population.” (1905. № 17. P. 66).

But mostly, Russian periodicals had to confine themselves to publishing texts written by Russian or foreign travelers who had visited Korea before the beginning of the war. The quality of the publication to a great extent depended upon the nature of the periodical itself and its focusing on certain target audience. “Light” and entertaining publications may be illustrated by the example of the “Ogonyok” (“Small Light”), a popular “illustrated review of public and political life, sciences, and fine arts”. It published only brief extracts and adapted versions of travel notes modified to match the undemanding “salon and petty bourgeois” tastes. Thus, from the extensive study by A. Hamilton, “Ogonyok” borrowed only a couple of judgments barely consistent with each other and not representative of the author’s position; they were put together under the headline “Something new about the Koreans” (1904. № 5). First, the magazine quoted the characteristic of Seoul as “the most interesting and the cleanest Oriental city” with the mention of the telegraph, express train Seoul-Chemulpo, electric street cars, and generally bright prospects of the Korean capital which would “change beyond recognition within several years”. Then came the description of the “white clothes of the men” reminding one of the “first centuries of Christianity” (!) and “pleasantly surprising” every traveler. More detailed was the description of Korean hats, an indispensable part of all travel notes, especially the “mourning” hat. The publication also dwelt on the enormous influence of “the present empress, lady Om” upon the emperor, “a nice and progressive man”. The article was concluded by the overstated list of most exotic components of Korean cuisine together with the least common for a European reader ways of cooking them. The final conclusions goes: “It’s not surprising that Koreans suffer from gastric catarrh”.

Of special interest here, as in many other fragments, was the subject of “Korean women”, which is quite natural for a magazine which put a picture of a romantic young lady absorbed in reading on the cover of the 1904 collection of the periodicals. Most noteworthy is an article published
in “Ogonyok” under the headline “Korean woman” (1904. № 28. P. 222–223), which presents a salon conversation with an unnamed guest who “had just arrived from the Far East having lived for a long time in Korea” (of course, he ultimately had to answer an insidious ladies’ question about flirting with Korean women). Having “promised to the ladies” to “tell all he knows about Korean women”, the narrator mentions their “isolation” from men’s society and then proceeds with characterizing them as fashion-followers: “the main subject they are ... taught is the art of attracting men. Korean women like fancy clothes; they dress up with a lot of coquetry. A Korean woman uses lots of perfume, which makes British perfume-producers happy. «A woman is a flower», goes a Korean proverb. So, an ideal woman for a Korean man has to be pure, kind, and poetically-minded.” The editors were not worried about the contradictions between this text and fragments of the diary of a Frenchman R. Nivelle “With the Korean Emperor”, published earlier (№ 8. P. 58–63), which stated that “in this blessed country of simple morals, the issues of fashion leave indifferent both men and women”. Nevertheless, both publications, although in different degree, represent primitive and complacent eurocentrism. In fact, the Russian “specialist in Korean women” makes use of foreign customs in order to ironically speculate about the customs of his own country. Due to the unavailability of Korean women, “Korean retired captains don’t have anybody to chase, and Korean overgrown gymnasium students are forced to court Japanese geishas... <...> Koreans get married at an early age and every Korean has to get married without waiting till he grows completely bald as often happens in our country... The country of «Morning calmness» doesn’t know anything about dowry, that’s why there are no spinsters in Korea.” (№ 28. P. 223) The French clerk, having made several harsh anti-Japan remarks in his sad narrative of the Korean empress assassinated by Japanese agents in 1895, disdainfully portrays the 50-years old emperor as a charming but absolutely insignificant personality who is childishly eager to keep up with Europe but is hindered in these endeavors by the royal court ceremonies and environment: “Without an effort, I can’t imagine that I’m facing a descendant of a five
hundred years’ dynasty.” (№ 8. P. 62)

Such a superficial approach, characteristic of numerous publications and predicated on the “orientalist” stereotypes of the age, resulted in presenting the information on Korea as exotic periphery of the war chronicle, an optional supplement of the comprehensive information on other – “major” – participants of the conflict, namely Japan and China. Even the specialized Moscow magazine “War with Japan” (“Vojna s Japoniej”) instead of analyzing the prospects of the Korean war theatre, chose to publish an amusing legend about a wise Korean emperor who ordered using a large porcelain hat in order to improve the “troublesome nature of his people” in 1061, the hat was later transformed into regular headgear. The fear of breaking the hat turned each Korean into a specimen of prudence and self-importance; all hustle and noise in the streets disappeared, so did all harsh movements, and people became polite and tender.” (1904. № 8. P. 15) This “amusing” article, nevertheless, reflects two aspects important for both Russian and western public consciousness, i.e. the shift of the Korean discourse to the ethnic character study sphere and the recognition of the special importance of the reform issue in the Korean society.

Undoubtedly, the most noticeable material, filling the genre gap, was the series of travel sketches “The key of the Far East” by W. L. Seroshevsky. It was published by an influential liberal newspaper “Russkije Vedomosti” (“Russian Gazette”) in 1904 – 1905; later, slightly transformed and under a different title, it was put out in the book format in 1905, two editions at a time. Reprinted again in 1909, Seroshevsky’s sketches greatly influenced the formation of the Russian view of Korea at the time.

Besides the author’s experience as a member of the far-east expedition organized by the Russian Geography Society to Korea right before the war in 1903, the quality of the text was also predicated on the author’s outstanding personality. Waclaw Seroshevsky (1858–1945), a polish opponent to the tsar regime, was exiled to Siberia in 1880–1891 where he studied the life of northern ethnic groups and proved to be a gifted
ethnographer. His book “Yakuts: an attempt of ethnographic study” published in St-Petersburg in 1896 and widely commented by specialists, received a high praise even in the last edition of the “Big Soviet Encyclopedia” (Moscow, 1976. V.23. P.312) and was reprinted in Moscow in 1993 again. As a prominent fiction writer he published stories “of Chinese life”. The travel notes by Seroshevsky are characterized not only by the general focus on the issue of the role of Korea in the regional politics, reflected in the title itself. The notes are predicated on the one hand on the scholarly and artistic experiences of the writer and on the other hand on his political views.

An important factor was that right before his trip to Korea, Seroshevsky made a visit to the “Country of the rising sun”. Apparently, he returned as a consistent “japano-phile”. Being a convinced pursuer of progress and a polish nationalist who would join Pilsudski’s Polish Legion ten years later (Seroshevsky introduced himself as a Pole even to his Korean interpreter who was absolutely puzzled by that15), the author of “The key to Far East” could not share the anti-Japanese patriotic spirit. He saw Japan as an example of a state skillfully defending its own national interest and the progressive way of development. Among these praises, there are very few sarcastic remarks about Japanese counter-intelligence that was probably following him. Consequently, the contrast between Korea and Japan permeates the whole cycle; the countries are opposed to each other as different models of national and state self-realization – a successful and a failed one. From the very first lines, Seroshevsky refutes the “Korean legend”, i.e. a superficial idealization of a “wonder land” just waiting for capital investments. Even the shores of Korea at the first glance seem to him “very gloomy and ugly … after the lively shores of Japan. Japanese “spots of civilization” in the open ports of Korea startle him by their contrast with the extreme poverty of neighboring Korean settlements representing a “live picture of the Stone Age” (Russkije Vedomnosti [Russian Gazette], 1904. 66. P. 3). He marvels at “really Japanese accurateness”, organization, and entrepreneurship, attributing even the “discovering” of Korea for the outside world and
setting it on the path of progress to the Japanese. Corrupted Korean bureaucrats, “the evil of the country”, or local merchants, “narrow-minded, uneducated, and of modest means”, are not capable of pursuing these reforms (1904. № 66. P. 4; 1905. № 28. P. 2–3). It was the Japanese who established real banking business in Korea, while Korean banks “established with the assistance of the financial councilor K. Alexeev and vigorously supported by the Korean government and other entities hostile to «the Japanese and the British», should be considered political rather than financial institutions (1905. № 10. P. 2). Under the supervision of Japanese engineers and foremen, writes Seroshevsky about the construction of a port, “sleepy and slow Koreans moved quickly and in an organized manner” (1904. № 66. P. 4). The country of Korea, “dormant for years”, is seen by him as an intermediary stage of the Chinese influence on the way to Japan. Korea, according to the author, due to its geopolitical situation, always lacks any originality (1904. № 208. P. 3). In the natural landscape, people’s customs, religious beliefs, and the everyday life of the Koreans he constantly is looking for and consequently finding either Japanese or Chinese aspects or prototypes. As a result, “the whole of Korean regime” is presented as lacking energy and vigor of work … trusting its own self-improvement” (1904. № 140. P. 4).

According to Seroshevsky, only the influence of Japan and its successful war on China revived “awareness of their own decline and desire to become better” together with traditional respect for sciences in the best part of Korean population (1904. № 236. P. 4).

However, the substantial research experience, an ethnographer’s curiosity, and a writer’s attentiveness did not allow Seroshevsky turning his travel notes into a trivial and cheap ideological picture. His work has a great advantage compared with other descriptions of Korea, including travel notes, written by the contemporaries. The strong side of his book is the rich fact content and the professionalism of observations. (For example, we can compare “The Key to the Far East” with the “Korean Studies” by S. N. Syromyatnikov, who had visited Korea in 1897 and 1898, published in “Novoje vrema” (“New Time”) from February 14
Seroshevsky is trying to present a comprehensive, almost encyclopedic picture of Korean life. Of course, the Korean sketches by Seroshevsky can not rival his studies of the Yakuts which were the result of many years of field work, not a short trip. Many details about Korea were borrowed by the author from literature (mentioned above “Description of Korea” as well as some English language sources or «The Korean Repository» which published official data of the Korean government), however he always subjected the information to critical analysis and if possible compared with his own observations. Thus, he firmly refutes the opinion of W. W. Wilkinson about a corporation uniting porters and peddlers, noting that all the people he asked said this fact was wrong (1905. № 10. P. 2). At the end of 1904, in the XVI series of the sketches, Seroshevsky, as if tired of unveiling remarks, publishes a “page from a diary” for 28-30 September, 1903, where he suddenly acknowledges his open sympathy for Korea and the Koreans: “Now I know what the «country of morning calmness» is! An unhappy country, always looking for peace. An amazing country of carefully cultivated deep calm valleys between high barren windy rocks! (1904. № 331. P. 3). “A fairy tale land of the «White Dream» soft milk-white sun shines upon” (1904. № 334. P. 2). At this point the critical attitude of the author seems to be almost gone, his vocabulary is now enriched by positive epithets. Almost impressionistic nature descriptions appear with numerous picturesque details. The attitude to the cultivated landscape is also changing: “Ahead we see a cultivated valley covered with rice fields. <…> Men’s faces are shining, children’s faces are round and ruddy, the crops have been good this year. <…> Due to abundance of trees, the landscape looks more lively and beautiful…” (1904. № 331. P. 3). “More and more often we see little mansions with tile roofs, fashionable summer houses surrounded by nice orchards and accompanied by sturdy household buildings… <…> Talking and laughter…” (1904. № 334. C. 2). The descriptions of the Koreans as “weary people, suffering people, eager quickly to pass through their lives without thinking of the next day, wandering people…” (1904. № 152. C. 3) that we saw in the beginning, have disappeared. But
even in the very beginning, Seroshevsky does not deny the attractive sides of Korean life, even if they are connected not with the cause of progress but with traditional patriarchal and corporative structure of their society. Thus, he pays tribute to the respectable corporations of tiger hunters or peddlers which played a great role in the national history; he also praises the “magnificent and unified throughout the country organization” of the inn-keepers’ union with its ancient system of reciprocal payments which is “even smarter than the Cook’s cheques” (1904. № 78. P. 2; 1905. № 10. P. 2). The author speaks with respect about Korean peasants cultivating sheer mountain slopes, which “raised the border of cultivated lands in Korea much higher than in abundant Japan”. However, he adds: “It is strange that this persistent, courageous, and unbending Korean who won winds, frost, and snow, can not oppose the crimes of government officials” (1904. № 208. P. 3). However, portraying the patriarchal relations in a Korean family, Seroshevsky remarks: “as a matter of fact, the Koreans are known to be tender and kind despots, and their children – obedient and diligent subjects. <…> Having read many stories about the peculiar relations of Korean parents and children, …. I must confess I was pleasantly surprised by the simplicity and cordialness … which I witnessed and which did not differ at all from what we see in Europe” (1904. № 292. С. 2).

However different the positions of Russian authors were, they all have two aspects in common. First, all authors, regardless of their political and public orientation, refused to consider Korea as a real subject of world politics; they openly regarded the country as an object in the war for far-eastern spheres of influence waged by major world powers. Second, their ideas are characterized by explicit euro-centrism transferring the discussion into the sphere of the clash between progressive-liberal and conservative-traditionalist views. Third, neither the communicative aspect nor the ideological context of covering the events in Korea favored the formation of a stable unambiguous image of the “Country of morning freshness”.

Thus, the views of Korea and the Koreans presented by Russian media
in 1904 – 1905 are characterized by a great degree of ambivalence. However, this is a different kind of ambivalence than the one we find in the ways Japan and China were treated. In the case of Japan, the range of judgments included on the one hand “insidious treacherous Asians” heading the anti-European movement of the “yellow race”, and on the other hand the “chivalrous opponent” and “worthy students of the Germans” in warfare and industrial development. In the case of China, the views ranged from lamentations about the poor Manchurian population oppressed by the hostile parties, to the apprehensions about a possible “stab in the back” by a “hidden”, “possible” foe, just waiting to join the Japanese side. These fears were substantiated by the memories of the recent “boxing uprising”, called the “Chinese war” in Russia, by the “abominable hunhuziada” (as it was called by the “Harbinskij vestnik” (“Harbin courier”) newspaper, and by the place assigned to China in the concept of the “yellow threat” articulated by Vladimir Solovjov. Against this background, Korea was considered as the only country unjustly drawn into the conflict and unfairly suffering from the conflict. Thus, it was Korea that the Russian society could be most compassionate for.

This potential compassion found expression mostly in the genre of journalism covering the latest news of the day, in the stories of a well-forgotten today writer E. S. Wulfson, who used to specialize in popular sketches “on the lives of lands and peoples” 16, so popular in the beginning of the 20th century. The ambivalent nature of the image of a Korean is of a very specific kind here. On the one hand, it is Korean characters suffering from the “others’ war” who articulate the universal pacifist protest here: “Oh spirits of heavens! Strike the profane ones! Let him be cursed who first lifts his hand against his neighbor!”17; “Why do we need this war in the world, this cruel, merciless, and atrocious war? Do we have too few homeless orphans yet?”18

Peaceful disposition is considered as one of the core qualities of a “typical Korean”, intrinsic to him: “people’s wrongs deeply troubled him; and his peace-loving temper could not put up with the war atrocities” 19. More than that, the Russian character, a soldier who made friends with
the Korean from the city of Ŭiju, afterwards found it strange that “there is enemy in this peaceful town and he, Kuptsov, has to shoot at him”\textsuperscript{20}. On the other hand, this peaceful disposition was sometimes considered “redundant” by Russian authors. Some annoyance was expressed due to the Koreans’ passive patriotism and their failure to actively oppose the Japanese. It was attributed, among other things, to the Koreans’ religious traditions, their fatalism determined by the will of the “Great Okonshante”\textsuperscript{21} recorded in the “book of the fate”. “It must have been decided by the spirits of the heaven that we would always find ourselves in somebody’s way…” bitterly complains one of the characters\textsuperscript{22}. At the same time, an ethical opposition is usually highlighted: a Korean character versus the Japanese ones. The opposition often acquires a symbolic and “anthropological” dimension. Thus, in the story entitled “Coolie” by the author under the pseudonym Kiodai, the Japanese are presented by the character of the story as something deprived of any individuality, sometimes even hardly animate at all. They are “long lines of people in blue coats, small and stern, walking forward persistently and disappearing in blue canyons”. “Like waves”, they are capable of breaking any obstacle. They are “as cold as ice in the mountains and their language didn’t have a single sound for answering a greeting”. Meeting the Japanese, the character has “mixed feelings”: “hatred and fear, willingness to cajole them and at the same time respect for their bravery and persistence”\textsuperscript{23}. The Korean character that the reader can readily relate to, sadly walking home “nodding his head in a huge conic hat”, sees the Japanese as hangmen and that’s what they eventually turn out to be. Mobilized against his will, the protagonist is turned by them into a “beast of burden”. The loss of freedom and the prospect of perishing in a foreign land fill him with anguish which resembles a fire that “little by little eats up all of him”\textsuperscript{24}. Merciless exploitation of Korean coolie is portrayed by the author as an inhuman mechanical process. It makes the poor and uneducated Koreans start doubting the words of their own king who once put stones with an inscription “Do not argue with foreigners!” all around
the country. The “little man” keeps his dignity in insisting on his last will – to die in his own land, before he is forced to cross the Manchuria border. We may assume that some of the Korean plots reveal latent polemic with Tolstoy’s principle of non-resistance to evil by violence. It becomes evident in the finale of the story “Coolie”, where the scene of the protagonist is described: “His wish was fulfilled: his last blood was left in his own country. His own… For how long?”

The stories contained Korean phrases in Russian transcription with translation and cultural comments in the footnotes. The source of those could be “The description of Korea”, ‘The Key to Far East”, and other works published by that time; the emergence of these publications made it necessary for fiction writers to show an appropriate level of country awareness. For example, when a character sentenced to death by the Japanese dramatically remembers his little son helping him in planting rice, E. Wulfson provides detailed comments on the technique of Korean rice-growing. It is in the short stories that created the accumulated image of Korean everyday life that the Russian readers could understand and remember, gradually turning them into stereotypes and toposes (“poor Korean village” with “tiny clay fansas”, “snow-white clothes”, “wide-brim black hat”, “a long smoking pipe in the mouth”, “favorite rice”, a woman “respectfully kneeling before a senior relative”, “hair bundles” of married Koreans and braids of single ones, prayer before “funeral plates”, the dependence of a family’s prosperity on the “happy grave” of an ancestor, “ugly changchi” and “clumsy solmegi” by the road, “phun-coins” on a string, etc). However, this attention paid to the peculiarities of Korean life didn’t affect the total Eurocentric approach: both authors and readers tended to expect from Korea an “adequate response” which they understood in the context of their own culture and politics. It also shaped all the attempts of defining Korean national psychology.

The concept of the “weak” Korea is in a way reflected in the in the “Korean legend” narrated by E. Wulfson, a symbolic romantic fable about Koreans selling to the Chinese a wonderful work by a genius painter Kim;
this work contained “Korea’s happiness”: “And since that day, their country has become more and more poor while the Chinese are becoming richer and richer” 28. Obviously, the issue of giving up one’s national cultural origins was interesting to the Russians in the context of their own cultural tradition. The symbolic reduction of artistic principles of the “Korean” culture described in the story deprives the whole picture of realism and makes mentioning of Korea optional. However, it was this imagery balancing between “one’s own” and “the other” culture that was captured by mass consciousness creating the necessary context of benevolence towards “the other” and creating the preconditions for developing a more realistic image of Korea in the future.

**Key Words:** Russo-Japanese War, Russian Press, Image of Korea, Ambiguity, Fatalism

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**Notes:**


4. Ibid. № 8. P. 58.


13. Ibid.
18. E. Wulfson. Pered licom smerti: (Iz voennyh motivov) [In the face of death (from war memoirs)] // Vojna s Yaponiej [The War on Japan]. 1904. № 15. P.5.
21 E. Wulfson In the face of death. P.4.
24 Ibid.
26 E. Wulfson. In the face of death. P.5.
27 See, for example: E. Wulfson. In the face of death. P.4–5.
러시아 언론에 비친 한국과 한국인

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러일전쟁이 러시아 사회에서 한국과 한국인에 대한 인상을 부각시키는데 얼마나 기여했는지를 평가하기란 쉽지 않다. 한국 관련 연구서들과 학술잡지특보를 포함한 주목할만한 개설서들이 러시아에서 처음으로 등장한 것은 동아시아에서 서구열강의 세력권 확보를 위한 각축이 시작될 무렵이었다. 1900년 러시아 재무성은 1,250페이지 분량의 3부로 구성된 대형의 기초 연구서인 “한국記(Описание Кореи)”를 출간하였는데, 이는 당대의 여타국가에서도 유례를 찾아볼 수 없는 규모였다. 그러나 일반 독자들에게 거의 눈에 띄지 않았던 극동의 구석진 것에 위치한 “이 이상한 나라” 한국이 일반 대중의 관심의 대상이 된 것은 바로 이 전쟁 덕분이었다.

러일전쟁(1904-1905) 시기 러시아의 언론에 비친 한국은 교전 상대국 일본과 주요 전장이었던 만주를 묘사하면서 자연스럽게 언급되고 있었다. 그러나 그럼에도 불구하고 신문이나 자널에 남아있는 한국과 한국인에 대한 기록은 한국의 독특함에 대한 러시아 사회의 폭넓은 관심을 보여준다. 이 같은 독특함은 일본과 중국에 대한 묘사와 비교를 통해서만이 완전하게 평가될 수 있는 바, 그 차이점은 양면성이라는 특징이라 할 수 있다. 초기에는 교활하고 남의 흉내를 잘 내는 동양인의 모습과 의협심이 강한 일본의 적대자라는 양면적인 모습을 보여주었으며, 그 다음 단계에서는 무고하게 고통당하고 있는 평화로운 주민의 모습과 혼오스러운 마지막, 잠재적인 적국, 황화를 초래할 수 있는 가상의 적국 가운데 하나라는 모습 사이에서 진자운동을 하였다. 따라서 러일 전쟁 직전과 개전초기의 상황을 통해 나타난 러시아의 한국인식에 대한 전통을 고찰하는 것은 매우 중요한 의미를 지닌다.

전쟁초반 러시아 언론에서는 한국을 당연한 동일국가로 묘사하기 시작했고, 한국의 종합에 관한 국제적 협약(시모노세끼 조약, 영일동맹 및 러불선언의 조문들 1902년)
을 위반한 일본이 불법적으로 한국을 무력간섭함으로써 고통받고 있는 국가로 그리고 있었다. 이와 유사한 논조들은 육군성과 외무성의 공고문 및 혼령들을 개재한 공식적인 신문이나 저널에서도 찾아볼 수 있다. 이 경우 중국과 마찬가지로 대한제국 정부의 입장과 민중들의 성향간의 차이는 제대로 언급되지 않고 대체로 이들을 피해자로 인식하고 있었다. 러시아의 정기간행물에 소개된 1904년 2월 6일자 만주군 심사령관 린네비치 장군의 전문에는 일본이 한국인들에게 적대적으로 대하고 있기 때문에 한국인들은 우리에게 가볍게 신뢰와 호의를 보이고 있고, 러시아가 일본보다 강하다고 말하곤 한다고 보고하였다. 또한 한반도에 대규모 일본군이 상륙한 직후, 한국인 가운데 일부가 러시아 국정으로 달려와 러시아 육군지휘관들에게 일본군의 동정을 알려 주었다는 언론 보도 역시 이 같은 평가에 기여하였다. 이후 한국인들의 정보제공에 대한 기사들은 지속적으로 게재되었다.

그러나 1904년 2월 9일자 외무성 회람문에서도 강조되었던 바와 같이, 러시아정부는 일본이 한국을 불법적으로 점령한 상황에서 한국정부의 명의로 생산되는 모든 혼령과 공고를 무효로 인정하기로 하였다. 유력한 신문의 주필들 역시 유럽열강의 전함들이 제물로 파견된 면모가 되었던 무질서를 틀어막으며 이와 러일전쟁 직전부터 한국 정치상황의 총체적인 불안정성을 지적하고 나왔다. 더욱이 여러 차례 일본군 점차들이나 유격대원들이 한국인의 전통복장으로 갈아입고 그들의 임무를 수행해왔던 사실은 한국인들을 보다 조심스럽게 대하도록 만들었다. 또한 개별적으로 수집된 군사 정보 속에도 일본을 위해 간첩활동을 한 한국인에 대한 소식도 포함되어 있었다. 따라서 러일전쟁 초기 러시아 언론에 나타난 한국인식은 양면성이라는 특징을 보이고 있다.

그럼에도 불구하고 한국과 한국인들은 그들과 커다란 상관이 없는 외국의 분쟁에 휘말린 사례였기 때문에 전반적으로 러시아의 여론의 동정과 공감을 얻고 있었다. 이 같은 여론은 예술문화 관련 저널에 실린 기사를 통해 보다 확산되어 갔는데, 그 주인공들은 전쟁의 잔혹함에 몽고 부담된 평화로운 한국인들이었다. 특히 눈에 보일 듯이 전쟁의 일화를 묘사한 울프슨의 작품 속에서 한국인의 모습은 일본과 중국인들과는 달리 나름대로 평화로운 모습을 드러내고 있었다. 한국인들의 역할한 감정은 그들을 훌륭한 친절점 상호에게 평화에 효과적으로 만든 점과 일본에 대해 효과적으로 지향하지 못하는 그들의 무능함과 수동적 애국주의를 대비시키면서 분명하게 드러났다. 아울러...
그의 저서에서는 한국인의 무능함과 수동성의 기원을 종교적 전통인 숙명론에서 찾고 있었다. 특히 한국인 주민공이 일본인들에게 보인 도덕적인 저항과 이에 대한 강조는 하나의 상징처럼 여겨질 정도로 당연시되었다. 한국과 관련된 주제들을 예술적으로 묘사한 대부분의 경우들은 풍에 대해 폭력으로 저항하면 안 된다는 톨스토이의 원칙과 논쟁해야 할 잠재적인 여지를 남겨두고 있었다. 아울러 한국인 주민공들의 입을 통해 반전론을 얘기하기도 하였다. 그러나 중요한 것은 러시아 언론에서 한국의 역사와 문화에 대해 언급한 것은 멀리 떨어진 이상한 나라에 대한 소개에 그치지 않고 러시아 사회로 하여금 자신의 문화 전통을 되돌아보게 하는 계기가 되었다는 것이었다.

주제어: 러일전쟁, 러시아언론, 한국인식, 양면성, 숙명론