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Sven Hedin's visit to Korea in 1908: Knowledge, Power and Propaganda*

Introduction

In the Social Darwinian “civilization” discourse in late 19th and early 20th century East Asia, knowledge, and in particular “modern” knowledge imported from the West, was not only considered important for domestic reforms; being a marker of “civilization” it was also mobilized as a tool for international recognition in the imperialistic competitive world order. In its efforts to reposition itself in East Asia and to justify its control over Korea, Japan used such knowledge to define new terminology and direct discourses, particularly in relation to notions of sovereignty and international law. It was also important to create “knowledge” through propaganda, especially for an imperialistic late-comer like Japan (Tikhonov, 2010; Dudden, 2005; Lai, 2012).

Knowledge and the quest for international recognition, together with the need to spread propaganda about Japan's activities in Korea, provides the background for the visit that the Swedish geographer and explorer Sven Hedin (1865-1952) made to Japan and Korea in 1908. Hedin was a central figure in the scientific, cultural and political life of Sweden in the late 19th and early 20th century. His fame was not limited to his home country; he received honorary doctoral titles from Oxford, Cambridge, Heidelberg and München universities and his numerous books were translated into twenty-two languages. His fame derived from being “the last great explorer of Asia,” making three extensive expeditions to Central Asia, exploring such areas as the Taklamakan desert, Tibet and the Kunlun mountain range – by that time still largely uncharted territory for Westerners, drawing maps and discovering important remains.

Japan's invitation of Hedin was part of Japan's ambition to show the world that the country had an interest in science and culture, and the purpose of his visit to Korea was to bear witness to Japan's “civilizing

* This work was supported by the National Research Foundation of Korea Grant funded by the Korean Government (NRF-R-2017-01287).

efforts” on the peninsula since the country had become a Japanese protectorate in 1905. However, Koreans also showcased Hedin as an internationally renowned scientific personality, and his visit was significant not only for the Japanese efforts to seek international recognition for their control over Korea, but also for Korean attempts at reform and emergence as a “modern” state.

This article will use Hedin’s own writings together with newspaper coverage and Korean official sources to discuss the visit, Hedin’s description of the situation in Korea, and the significance of the visit for Japan and Korea. Hedin wrote about his visit to Korea in letters to his parents back in Sweden (Pilz, 1975) and later also in the chapters on the Resident-General of Korea Itō Hirobumi (1841-1909) and the Korean Emperor Sunjong (r. 1907-1910) in his collection of biographical essays titled *Stormän och kungar* (Great Men and Kings) published in 1950.

The protectorate, Korean protests and Japanese propaganda

Russia’s defeat in the Russo-Japanese War in 1904-05 meant that Japan emerged as the main power in the East Asian region. It had defeated Qing China in the Sino-Japanese War in 1894-95, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902 (and its revised 1905 version) acknowledged Japan’s interests in Korea, and the Portsmouth Treaty that concluded the Russo-Japanese War had been preceded by the Taft-Katsura Agreement. In this agreement the US Secretary of War William Howard Taft agreed with the Prime Minister of Japan Katsura Taro that the establishment of a Japanese protectorate over Korea would bring stability to the region. In November 1905, Japan made Korea a Japanese protectorate.

Emperor Kojong (r. 1863-1907) opposed the protectorate treaty, which in the end was signed by five Korean ministers. Kojong and members of the ruling group around him made continuous efforts to invalidate the treaty and regain Korean autonomy. While support was directly sought from Russia and the US, Kojong published a declaration of the invalidity of the protectory treaty in the Korean newspaper *Taehan maeil sinbo* and sent letters to various Western rulers requesting their support for Korean autonomy (Sō, 2007). In 1907, Kojong sent a mission to the Hague Peace Conference to gain international recognition for Korea’s cause. The Korean mission was, however, not allowed to participate. Given the importance Japan had placed on international law and the Hague Peace Conferences in its efforts to emerge as a world power, this last move by Kojong led the Japanese to force him to abdicate in favour of his son, Sunjong, and to force a new treaty on Korea that formalised

the control that Japan already had over domestic matters (Schlichtmann, 2003). At this juncture Japan felt a stronger need to justify their control of Korea. They translated into English the various treaties between Japan and Korea that had led up to the protectorate and had them published in the *American Journal of International Law*.¹ The Residency-General also started to produce annual English-language reports on “reforms and progress” in Korea that were internationally disseminated.

Background to Hedin's visit in Japan

Gustaf Oscar Wallenberg (1863-1937) was Sweden's first envoy to Japan, arriving in 1906 and submitting his credentials to the Japanese Emperor in 1907. Wallenberg, who tried to promote Swedish business interests in Japan, was frustrated by how unknown Sweden was (Edström, 2014: 223). He was going to be given an opportunity to change that, as he later described in a letter to his grandson, Raoul Wallenberg (Wallenberg, 1987).

According to Wallenberg, Japan was grateful for the economic support that Great Britain had given them during the Russo-Japanese War in line with the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902, but when Great Britain later wanted to translate this into influence over Japan's developments, the Japanese government objected. Japan was criticised in the British press, being called “the Prussia of the East” and a danger to humanity, interested only in war and naval victory.

During one of his meetings with Count Makino Nobuaki (1861-1949), the leading Japanese statesman told Wallenberg of the Japanese government's worries about the tensions with Great Britain. Makino asked if the Swedish envoy could find a practical solution to this situation. Wallenberg, who had been struggling to develop trade ties between Sweden and Japan, to put Sweden on the map, saw an opportunity.

I said to Makino: “If the English have persuaded the rest of the world that Japan is interested only in war, you will have to find a way to convince everyone of your interest in cultural matters and science and their practitioners. They can provide good publicity if you give them any reason to.” (Wallenberg, 1987: 66)

¹ These were published in the *American Journal of International Law* 1:2 (1907) under the heading “Documents Relating to the Japanese-Korean Situation, 1894-1905”. Later the Treaty Annexing Korea to Japan was also published in *The American Journal of International Law*, 4:4 (1910).

When Makino showed interest and asked him to elaborate, Wallenberg continued:

“Well, it seems fairly likely that Dr. Sven Hedin, who is currently in Tibet and who I know is about to go home, could be persuaded to pass through Japan and give some lectures here. Properly staged, they might afford you an excellent opportunity to demonstrate to the world Japanese interest in scientific questions and thus refute the English accusations.” (Wallenberg, 1987: 66)

Makino brought the idea to the Japanese government who reportedly were delighted and asked Wallenberg to implement it. He instantly wired Sven Hedin and got a positive response. Wallenberg relates how he later was visited by a delegation led by Baron Kikuchi Dairoku (1855-1917), President of Kyoto University, informing him that they had been appointed as a reception committee. They declared that they had been instructed to present Hedin with a cheque in the amount of 3000 yen. Wallenberg, realising that refusing this offer would deepen the obligation on the part of Japan, replied on behalf of Hedin that they were unable to accept the cheque (Wallenberg, 1987: 65-7).

After completing his 1905-08 expedition investigating the Central Persian desert basins, the western highlands of Tibet and the Trans-Himalaya, Hedin travelled to India. It was there that he received the invitation forwarded by Wallenberg from the Nippon Geography Association in Tokyo to come and give a lecture on his recent travels. The first Japanese delegation welcomed him in Shanghai² (Hedin, 1950: 48; Wallenberg, 1987: 67). As Hedin was making his journey to Japan, Wallenberg reported back to Sweden concerning newspaper coverage in Japan, saying that the country was full of anticipation, not only because Hedin was “the world’s biggest explorer”, but also because it gave the Japanese the opportunity to show that they were “just as interested in peaceful conquests as in military triumphs” (*Svenska Dagbladet* 1908/11/07).

From Shanghai Hedin travelled to Nagasaki and then to Kobe where he was greeted by another delegation, this time sent from the Abbot of the Buddhist Nishi Honganji sect in Kyoto, Ōtani Kōzui (1876-1948), a

² The Japan Times reports that he gave a lecture while in Shanghai, but that it wasn’t very informative and attributed this to “the sense of courtesy on behalf of Dr. Hedin who must have deemed it improper to deliver an exhaustive lecture in any other place before he spoke in Tokyo, where he had been specially invited.” “Dr. Sven Hedin,” *The Japan Times*, 1908/11/08, p. 3.

fellow of the Royal Geographical Society who himself had been involved in expeditions to Buddhist sites in Central Asia. From Kobe Hedin travelled to Yokohama where he was greeted by Gustaf Wallenberg and Baron Kikuchi (Hedin 1950: 48; *The Japan Times* 1908/11/10). Hedin stayed in Japan for a month, from 12 November to 13 December, having an audience with the Japanese emperor on 25 November. According to Wallenberg, Hedin was a big hit in Tokyo; the explorer giving multiple talks and receptions being held in his honour almost every day of the visit. He jokingly told his parents that the visit to Japan was more exhausting than the exploration of Tibet (Pilz, 1975: 11).

Hedin arrives in Korea

It is not clear how the visit to Korea was arranged. Itō Hirobumi was in Japan when Hedin visited the country (*The Japan Times*, 1908/11/14), but the explorer makes no reference to having met him there. Wallenberg states that Hedin “extended his stay”, indicating that the visit was planned when Hedin was already in Japan (and that the Swedish diplomat regarded Korea as part of Japan). In *Stormän och kungar*, Hedin himself mentions that he had planned to visit Beijing on his way back home from Japan, but that he in the end was unable since the Guangxu emperor had died on 14 November and the Empress Dowager Cixi on the following day (Hedin, 1950: 53). The only reference he makes himself is that while he was in Japan he wrote back to Sweden that he had been invited to Korea (Pilz, 1975: 12). In any case, on 4 December the Korean newspaper *Hwangsōng sinmun* reported that Hedin on his way from Japan to Manchuria was planning to stay a couple of days in Seoul.

This was not the only time Sven Hedin’s visit in the region was mentioned in Korea before his arrival in the country. Already on 15 November *Hwangsōng sinmun* had reported on Hedin’s arrival in Tokyo. More significantly, the magazine *Sonyōn* (Youth), launched by reformist intellectual Ch’oe Namsōn (1890-1957) the same year, dedicated one page to Hedin’s coming visit to Seoul. For a reformer like Ch’oe, Hedin represented the moral qualities of decisiveness, needed for smaller countries like Sweden, to survive and prosper in the Social Darwinian survival-of-the-fittest struggle of the early 20th century (Tikhonov, 2010: 110). The same issue also contained an article on expeditions to the Arctic, and such texts were to instil a “spirit of enterprise” in Korean youth (Yun, 2008: 228-9).

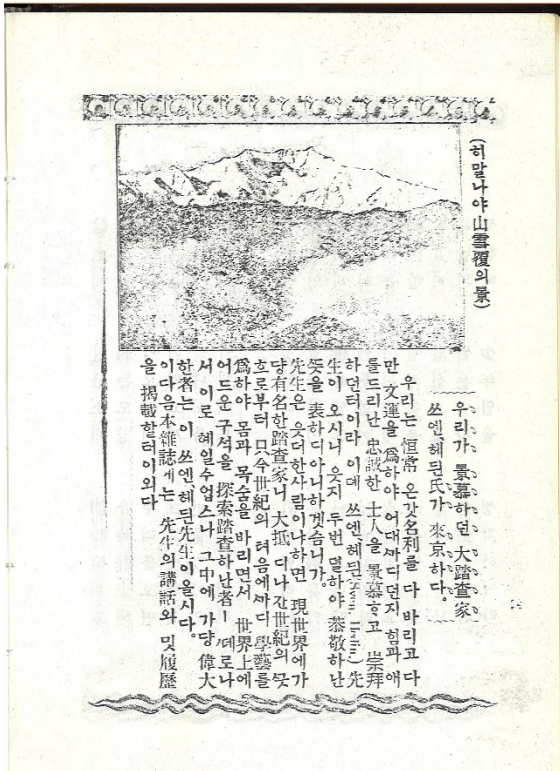


Illustration 1. The upcoming visit of Sven Hedin reported in the magazine *Sonyōn* (Youth) in December 1908.

Under an illustration of snow-covered mountains in the Himalayas, the *Sonyōn* text, titled “Explorer Sven Hedin whom we look up to and admire to visit Seoul,” read:

We have always admired and venerated those loyal gentlemen who throw away fame and fortune and exert all their power and effort for the sake of cultural progress. So now when we hear that Sven Hedin is coming, how can we but respectfully greet and express our admiration and respect. What kind of person is he? He is the most famous explorer in the world today, and from the end of the last century to beginning of this, he has sacrificed body and life for science and art, exploring the darkest corners of the world. (*Sonyōn*, 1908/12: 4)

After having travelled from Shimonoseki to Pusan, Hedin arrived in Seoul on December 13 and he was taken in at the Sontag Hotel, the first European hotel in Seoul (*Sonyōn*, 1909/01). Resident-General Itō, who

had returned to Korea before Hedin's arrival, left Seoul on 15 December for an official trip to Kaesŏng to inspect ginseng production there and returned to Seoul the following day (*Hwangsŏng sinmun*, 1908/12/15, 17; *Naegak ilgi*, 1908/12/15). Hedin refers to Itō's return, and from this we know that he gave a lecture to a gathering of Japanese and Europeans on the day of Itō's return. He describes how when he was sitting and talking with some friends in the hall after the lecture, they heard horses outside and saw a carriage pass. He was told that it was Itō returning from official business. He writes: "The conversation fell silent, my Japanese friends turned serious and stood up. You could feel that it was a dictator that had passed by" (Hedin, 1950: 65). Given the praise that he later gives to Itō, it seems that this was not a critical remark.³

Hedin had a busy schedule in Korea as well. He made a first formal visit to Itō at which the Korean Prime Minister Yi Wanyong (1858-1926) also was present as well as General Hasegawa Yoshimichi (1850-1924) and Vice Resident-General Sone Arasuke (1849-1910). The same day he visited the Kyŏngbok and Ch'angdŏk Palaces after which he in the evening gave a lecture to an audience of 1500 followed by a larger dinner party with eighty participants. The following day he was given a lecture by a Mr. Inouye on Korean history and Japan's policies and plans for the protectorate. He gave another lecture attended by the consul generals from Germany, USA, France, Great Britain and Russia, followed by a dinner with a number of Japanese dignitaries (Pilz, 1975: 12).

Formal audience with Itō Hirobumi

December 18 started with a lunch with the Russian Consul General Alexander Somov after which Hedin visited "Korea's ruler", that is Itō. Generals Murata Tsuneyoshi (1839-1921) and Akashi Motojiro (1864-1919), who both had been military attachés in Stockholm and carried their Swedish Orders of the Sword (*Svärdsorden*), were also present at the meeting⁴ (Pilz, 1975: 13). At the time of Hedin's visit, rumours were circulating in Seoul that Itō was going to return to Japan that very same month due to his advanced age (*Taehan maeil sinbo* 1908/12/13). Although Hedin praised him as a strong leader, the physical description he gave is not of a strong and powerful man. "The small, 68-year-old,

³ In an earlier remembrance of that evening, Hedin had called Itō a Caesar rather than a dictator. *Svenska Dagbladet*, 1909/11/04, p. 5.

⁴ Akashi had organised the Japanese military police in Korea, and later in 1918 became governor-general of Taiwan.

grey-bearded and yellow-skinned leader of Korea's fate enters" (Hedin, 1950: 65). After some pleasantries about his stay in Stockholm in 1873 and the hospitality of King Oscar II (r. 1872-1907), Itō got to the point of the purpose of Hedin's visit.

Moreover, you must have a look for yourself and judge. I have ordered these gentlemen to give you all the information you need. I ask you to take notes during your stay here and then write about Korea, not only for the Swedish people but for all Europeans, and afterwards ask them if my policies have not been justified, if any other Great Power in our position would have acted differently. (Hedin, 1950, p. 66)



Illustration 2. Sven Hedin with Japanese officials in Seoul 1908. To the far left of Hedin, General Akashi and to the right of him General Murata. To the right of Hedin is Kiuchi Jūshirō (1866-1925) who thought that Itō's policies in Korea were too soft. (With permission from the Sven Hedin Foundation.)

Hedin writes that he met Itō multiple times and that the Resident-General once jokingly said: "Japan shall conquer eastern Siberia all the

way to the Baikal Lake. But there is no need to betray this secret to the Times” (Hedin, 1950: 66). The “information” Hedin received was the propaganda the Residency-General was producing to legitimise Japanese rule over Korea, identical in content to the first *Report on Reforms and Progress in Korea*. In his text on Itō, Hedin praises the reforms the Resident-General was pushing through, as he said, “with more authority and power than any ruler ever has had, including even the Japanese emperor” (Hedin, 1950: 70-2).

Lecture at YMCA

During his stay in Seoul Hedin gave a number of lectures, but the one we have most information about is the one he held at the YMCA in their new building that had been opened earlier in the month (*Hwangsōng sinmun* 1908/11/17). This is what Hedin himself writes: “When the Koreans saw how the Japanese cared for me they probably thought that they should not let themselves be outdone and sent a delegation to politely invite me to give a lecture in the big hall of the YMCA” (Hedin, 1950: 67). This invitation was also reported in Korean newspapers. On December 18, *Hwangsōng sinmun* reported that to welcome Hedin who had arrived in Seoul a couple of days earlier, “interested gentlemen” had taken the initiative to send a request to him to join a welcome reception at the YMCA and to afterwards give a lecture on his experience as an explorer.

According to Hedin, there were complications, though. The Koreans had made the demand that no Japanese should be present. Hedin found this requirement somewhat confrontational and asked Itō how he should proceed. The resident-general answered that he saw no problems with this, but “his gentlemen” was of differing opinion and advised Hedin not to participate in any manifestation against the Japanese. Hedin therefore made the demand that at least two Japanese should be invited, which was reluctantly agreed to by the organisers. In the end the event was attended by Mr. Inouye who had given Hedin the lecture on Korean history and Japanese policies on the peninsula and a Mr. Hori (Hedin, 1950: 67; Pilz, 1975: 14).



Illustration 3. Another group photo from Hedin's 1908 visit to Seoul. Second from the left in the second row is Mr. Inouye who gave Hedin a lecture on Korean history and Japanese policies there. He was one of the two Japanese attending Hedin's lecture at the YMCA. The other was Mr. Hori, far right in the first row. (With permission from the Sven Hedin Foundation.)

This lecture was advertised in both the *Hwangsong sinmun* and *Taehan maeil sinbo* on 19 December. Under the heading "Lecture on Travelling around the World," the advertisement, sponsored by the educator Yun Ch'io (1869-1950), a younger cousin of the famous Yun Ch'iho (1864-1945), announced that on the same day at 4.30pm the Westerner Dr. Hedin was going to give a lecture at the YMCA on his 28 years' experience of being an explorer. It was promised that the lecture was going to be greatly educating and the advertisement wished that interested gentlemen and students would come and listen in great numbers.

The lecture seems to have been a great success. Hedin wrote to his parents that 2000 people came, all Koreans except the two Japanese and two Europeans. The hall was so crowded that late-comers had to sit in the aisles. Hedin commented that he only saw about fifty people in

Western clothing, the rest wore Korean clothes. He had an interpreter and spoke for two hours and afterwards there was a very crowded banquet (Pilz, 1975: 14).

Audiences

On December 20, both *Hwangsöng sinmun* and *Taehan maeil sinbo* reported that Hedin had an audience with the abdicated ruler Kojong.⁵ Unfortunately Hedin never wrote about this audience and there is no trace of it in official sources. Hedin's audience with Emperor Sunjong on the 21st is recorded, though,⁶ and Hedin dedicated a chapter to him in *Stormän och kungar*. "Emperor Lee Chouk of Korea".

There won't be many, if any, in the West that have heard the name of the monarch that I now will pay some attention to in this gallery [...] I gladly confess that I at the time of my arrival in Korea wasn't at all aware that the last emperor still existed. I had myself not thought about the fallen throne and no one among my Japanese friends had mentioned a word about the ruler whose power and authority had been taken over by Itō. (Hedin, 1950: 74)

After having thus confessed his own ignorance, Hedin relates how Itō raised the audience in their discussions.

But then one day when we were talking in his reception room, Itō suddenly said: 'Would it amuse you to meet the last emperor of Korea? It could after all be an interesting memory for you to have once in your life seen and talked to him – even if it only is for the curiosity of it. (Hedin, 1950: 74)

When Hedin answered that he of course would be interested in meeting the Korean monarch at the cusp of the new era that had descended on his country, Itō continued.

Well, you see, this will be the last opportunity. Even though the emperor might still be on his throne, his definite dethronement will happen tomorrow and afterwards he will become a private person, a political prisoner under my, that is, Japan's rule.

⁵ These notices refer to an audience with Taehwangje 大皇帝. When Kojong was forced to abdicate he became Taehwangje (太皇帝), the title for an abdicated emperor.

⁶ See *Sunjong sillok* 1, (1908)/12/21; *Ilsongnok Sunjong* 1, (1908)/12/21; *Kwanbo*, no. 4260, 23 December 1908.

(Hedin, 1950: 74-5)

Thereafter Itō explained how he, after he had been given authority over Korea, had not allowed the Korean emperor to have audiences with Westerners without his permission and that he also had made the demand that either he or his closest man, Vice Resident-General Sone should be present.

The next day, the 21st, Hedin thus went to the palace for an audience scheduled at 11.00 a.m. and was met there by Viscount Sone and General Hasegawa, the latter commander of the Korea Garrison Army. Both these were influential in Japan's rule over Korea. Sone was to become Japan's second resident-general in 1909 replacing Itō. General Hasegawa, in turn, was in 1916 to become Japan's second governor-general of Korea and was responsible to for harsh suppression of the March First Independence Movement in 1919.

The Japanese tried to belittle and ridicule Sunjong, but Hedin was an admirer of anything royal, and his description of the audience with Sunjong is full of sympathy for the ruler and for the Korean cause, seeing recent developments as an inevitable course of history.

Due to the political developments that by the time of my visit in the Far East turned the old kingdom of Korea into a Japanese protectorate, the last emperor appeared a tragic figure, a representative of an epoch that maybe indefinitely was sinking into the world of shadows to thereafter belong to the records of memories lost, that is, world history. (Hedin, 1950: 74)

Hedin's description of his audience with Sunjong gives a rather bleak picture of the Korean court.

Escorted by the two Japanese dignitaries I marched into the audience hall, a middle-sized oblong room, as unassuming as anyone could imagine. The white plastered walls lacked any kind of decoration [...] The floor was partly covered with cheap rugs and the only furniture in the room was the imperial chairs that formed a group at the far end. On one of them, all that was left of the throne now gone, was the former emperor Lee Wang Chouk, after the forced abdication called Chang Dook Kung, seated in what little was left of his past glory. (Hedin, 1950: 76)

If Hedin remembers correctly Itō saying that Sunjong was going to be dethroned the next day, Itō must have been speaking figuratively. Or

otherwise, as Hedin admits his ignorance of Sunjong when he visited Korea, and as he wrote his description years later gathering more information at that stage, he is confusing later developments. Sunjong's names given here are the ones he was given after he had been forced to abdicate in 1910. Then he was demoted to an honorary royal title and was called Ch'angdökkung Yi Wang after the palace in which he resided.

But in solitude he was certainly not lacking. He had been abandoned by God and the whole world, but maybe not by his own people. The fate that a couple of years later befell the man that seized the throne from him [Itō's assassination in 1909] was a manifestation of the Korean people's will and their desire to have their emperor back on the throne of his ancestors. The emperor was very simply dressed. He was wearing a long white gown with white sleeves and without any kind of decorations. He wore the usual Korean high black hat without brim or peak. I approached him and bowed in European manner. He stood up, friendly stretched forward his hand for a shake, and offered me to sit down in the chair opposite his. (Hedin, 1950: 76-7)

According to Hedin, Sunjong engaged in a knowledgeable discussion, but it is interesting to note that the situation in East Asia at the time seems to have been out of reach for discussion.

The emperor spoke in Korean to the Korean interpreter who translated into Japanese to the Japanese interpreter, who in turn translated the sentences into English to me. My answers of course went the reverse order. When a conversation goes through two interpreters, it takes three times longer than otherwise. And therefore, we could have no in-depth discussions. How has your trip been? For how long did you stay in Tibet? I have heard about the difficulties you had to overcome, especially cold weather and blizzards. I also know that you visited other parts of Asia. What part did you enjoy most? What route will you take back to your country? What are the best preparations for a journey in Tibet? And so, the conversation continued. Not a word about Korea, Japan or China. (Hedin, 1950: 77-8)

The Order of the P'algwae

In *Stormän och kungar*, Hedin described how he was awarded the Korean Order of the P'algwae (Eight Trigrams) on December 21 before his audience with Sunjong. "With feigned solemnity and sincere irony Viscount Sone declared that this was the last time in world history that the Eight Trigram Order would be bestowed upon a human being and hung on a

tailcoat” (Hedin, 1950: 75).

The award to Hedin had first been discussed at the Korean Cabinet on December 17. (*Naegak ilgi* 1908/12/17) The same day Prime Minister Yi Wanyong sent a letter to Yi Chaegük (1864-1927), the director of the Department of Medals and Awards (*P'yohunwön*) explaining how the Resident-General had mentioned Hedin's visit to Korea and asked the Cabinet to award him with the Order of the P'algwae of the first grade (*P'yohunwön naegömun*, book 2).

On December 21, the day when Hedin describes that he received the order before his audience with the Korean ruler, Yi Chaegük replied to Yi Wanyong with a prepared official document laying out the award to Hedin. The official reason for the award was exactly what the request from the resident-general initially had stated, reflecting the significance of Hedin's visit: “For his extensive knowledge of geography and extensive contributions to the world based on this scholarship” (*P'yohunwön naegömun*, book 10).

The award was reported in *Hwangsöng sinmun* on 22 December, so it must have been publicly announced, but is not mentioned in Korean court chronicles or the Cabinet's gazetteer until 6 January 1909.⁷ Remaining documents indicate that Hedin was given the order before proper procedures had been completed. On December 24, three days after Hedin had received the physical order, Yi Wanyong sent a reply to Yi Chaegük saying that they had checked the prepared document and since there was nothing they disagreed with they asked the Department of Medals and Awards to execute it (*P'yohunwön naegömun*, book 6). On the 28th Yi Chaegük wrote back to Yi Wanyong saying that following the request to start the process sent on the 24th, they had forwarded the award documents to the Emperor and received his orders. The final version of the award document was sent to the Prime Minister who now put it forward to be discussed at the Cabinet (*P'yohunwön naegömun*, book 10; *Ch'öngüisö*, book 2). This was approved by the Cabinet on 4 January (*Naegak ilgi*, 1909/01/04), and finally, on 5 January 1909, Yi Wanyong wrote to Yi Chaegük again saying that the Cabinet had approved of the final document and asked the Department of Medals and Awards to uphold the royal order and implement it (*P'yohunwön naegömun*, book 7). Hedin was presumably awarded the order before proper procedures had been completed since he was soon to leave Korea, but it is also an indication of the

7 For the official announcements, see *Sunjong Sillok* 2, (1909)/01/06; *Ilsongnok Sunjong* 2, (1909)/01/06; *Kwanbo*, no. 4271, 1909/01/09.

high-handedness with which the Korean court was treated by the Japanese - Hedin in fact wrote that it was bestowed on him by Itō.

Leaving Korea and afterwards

On the evening after his audience with Sunjong on the 21st, his last in Seoul, Hedin was invited to a reception at the American General Consulate together with Resident-General Itō and various high-ranking officials (*Hwangsōng sinmun* 1908/12/22). On the following day he left Seoul on the train from Namdaemun Station, being sent off by a large group of both Japanese and Koreans. He arrived in Sinūiju on the border to China in the evening, stayed one night and the next morning crossed the Yalu River to take the train from Dandong (Andong) to Shenyang. From there Hedin went to Port Arthur where he stayed for two days after which he travelled to Harbin to take the Trans-Siberian Railway to Moscow⁸ (Pilz, 1975: 22).

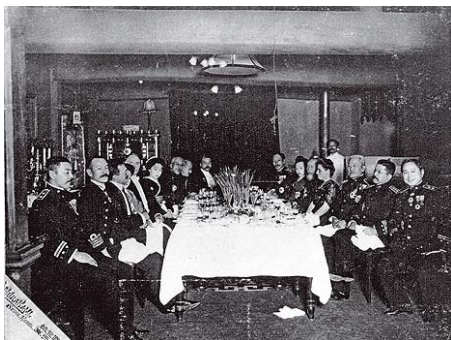


Illustration 4. Reception at the American General Consulate on December 21st, 1908, Hedin's last evening in Seoul. (With the permission of the Sven Hedin Foundation.)

Arriving in Moscow he gave his first longer interviews with European newspapers. The treatment he had received by the Japanese had indeed impressed him, and he acknowledged Japan's control of Korea, but beyond that he did not convey much of the Japanese propaganda. From his Eurocentric perspective, and considering Russia to be a threat, Japan's significance mainly seems to have lied in the fact that they defeated Russia in the Russo-Japanese War. The text below is from an interview with the *London Evening Standard*.

⁸ *Svenska Dagbladet* reported that Hedin passed Harbin on his way to Moscow on 29 December. 1909/12/30, p. 5.

I have received kindness everywhere, in India and in Russia, but never in my life have I anywhere experienced anything like the reception I got in Japan. I was received by the Mikado, but perhaps the honour which most impressed itself upon me was a banquet given to me by the Japanese General Staff, with all the famous men there who went through the war. And in the chair was General Oku, who is believed to have really won the fight at Mukden. I simply cannot describe you the reception. I can imagine nothing to equal it anywhere. I came through Korea, being entertained at Seoul by Marquis Ito – royally. Yes, Korea is practically a Japanese province now. And of all the comfortable travelling in the world, give me the Japanese section of the Manchurian line [...] They are a marvellous people, a wonderful nation. (*London Evening Standard*, 1909/01/15: 7-8)

Back in Sweden, Hedin made occasional references to Japan's rule in Korea during his many speeches. On January 23, 1909, for instance, during a speech in Stockholm to schoolchildren celebrating his return, he related a story about how when he visited the Japanese school in Seoul, a twelve-year-old Japanese boy, in a model show of patriotism, had addressed him in impeccable English and explained about Japan's peaceful intentions in Korea and that they just wanted to reinstate calm and happy conditions for the Korean people (*Svenska Dagbladet* 1909/01/24). In an ironic twist of fate, however, it was going to be the assassination of Itō Hirobumi by An Chunggūn (1879-1910) in October 1909 that occasioned Hedin to write the kind of full-fledged praise of Japanese policies in Korea that Itō had asked for.

In a long obituary published in *Svenska Dagbladet* on 4 November 1909, Hedin not only outlined Itō's life and described their meeting in Seoul, but also gave a long and laudatory account of the policies Itō had implemented as resident-general. He mentioned, among other things, reforms in agriculture and forestry, the establishment of primary schools, the establishment of Japanese courts (that Hedin said the Koreans preferred over the Korean counterparts), the establishment of a police force ("to end brigandage in the countryside"), and currency and fiscal policies. Hedin acknowledged that Itō not only was disliked by the Koreans, but that hawkish elements within the Japanese army also saw his activities in Korea as too mild, and he ascribed the policies enacted in Korea to Itō personally. After having praised Itō's life accomplishments, Hedin finished the obituary: "But Korea is an even prouder and more powerful monument, and when Korea is mentioned, the name of Itō will be remembered" (Hedin, 1909: 6).

Concluding remarks

So, the Japanese got what they wanted – they had shown the world that they were interested in culture and science, Hedin praised them in interviews with Western media, he acknowledged the country's control of Korea, and he later also gave accolades to the Japanese policies there. The Swedish envoy in Japan, Wallenberg, was also satisfied. Sweden became “famous overnight” in Japan. Four years later, he boasts, Sweden were third in terms of Japanese imports, behind only England and Germany (Wallenberg, 1987: 67).

What about Korea? Unlike many other Western visitors at the time, Hedin did not express condescending views about Korea but rather showed sympathy and respect for the country and its ruler. This might seem contradictory given how highly he praised the policies of Itō, but for Hedin it does not seem to have been a question of taking sides. He witnessed a great historical drama unfold, and the fall of an ancient kingdom like Korea touched him while he at the same time regarded the changes brought by the Japanese as inevitable progress given the tide of the times.

Also, Hedin's visit was important for Koreans and reformers like Ch'oe Namsōn. In the beginning of 1909, the magazine *Sonyōn* published a second text about Hedin. This lengthier piece not only gave a biographical sketch of Hedin and described his expeditions, but also detailed his visit to Korea. It stressed how the citizens of Seoul had welcomed him and cherished his visit. As for the Order of the P'algwae awarded to Hedin, although it was given on Japanese initiative as we have seen, it was meaningful for Koreans. *Sonyōn* argued that the Korean order had been awarded to someone worthy of it for the first time (*Sonyōn*, 1909/01: 8).

The article ends with warm well-wishes for Hedin's journey back to Sweden, urging him to look after himself as he travelled through cold Siberia. Sven Hedin's farewell to the Korean ruler, the ending of his chapter in *Stormän och kungar*, is equally warm.

This audience must have been embarrassing for the former emperor. There is no doubt that it must have been humiliating to be displayed as a faded star with no reflection of his former glory. He must have felt like a tiger in a cage overseen by his conqueror. But of that he showed nothing. He was dignified and sympathetic, acted very politely, and seemed to be listening to my answers with sincere interest. In the deepest corners of his mind he must have thought that I was the last to visit him for a formal audience. The old ways were lost, and his power and glory had been extinguished

by his powerful neighbours. There was a trace of sadness in his calm and settled face. I shall never forget the look of sorrow and solitude he gave me when he slowly and with dignity stood up to bid me farewell [...] Heavy and humiliating years awaited him. [...] When death finally knocked on his door, he must have greeted him like a liberator, a potentate far more powerful than the Japanese emperor, a saviour who in triumph would escort him to his ancestors on the other side. (Hedin 1950: 78)

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