

# **Language Barriers in Early Korean-American Contacts: The Case of 1883 Korean Mission to the U.S.**

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## **1. Introduction**

This paper examines the problems of interpretation for a Korean mission which was dispatched to the U.S.A by the Chosun government in 1883.

One of the obstacles that U.S.A and Korea faced, when they first came into contact in the mid 19th century, was a language barrier that arose because there was no one in the two countries who could understand the counterpart's language. I illustrate the point with two examples. In January 1853, the U.S whaler named *South America* drifted off the coast of Pusan. Officials of the Chosun government who heard about the drifted U.S whaler rushed to the scene in order to interrogate the sailors on board. However, the officials and the U.S sailors couldn't understand each other due to a language barrier. The officials then tried to communicate with the sailors with the help from interpreters of Japanese and Chinese. However, even with the presence of interpreters of Japanese and Chinese, they failed to communicate. The sailors on board introduced themselves to the officials as the people from America, shouting "We are from America" but their introduction was pointless since the officials of the Chosun government couldn't understand English at all. The U.S sailors of the *South America* then safely returned to U.S.A via Beijing in China. The officials of the Chosun government at that time transcribed "America" in "We are from America" shouted by the U.S sailors as *Myelikye* (美里界)<sup>1</sup>

The second example comes from incident that occurred in 1882, the year in which the Korea (Chosun)-US Treaty of Amity was signed. When the Korea-US Treaty

of Amity was signed in the place which is nowadays called Incheon (May 22, 1882), the representative of the U.S government, Admiral R.W. Shufeldt, brought to the scene two Chinese interpreters of English who would interpret what the representatives of the Chosun government would say in Korean into English. In other words, both Chinese and Korean were used in the process of interpreting English. If we were to imagine how the interpretation proceeded at that time, it must have been as follows: In order for the Chosun officials to understand what the US side said, English was first translated into Chinese, then another translator would translate the Chinese into Korean. When the Korean representatives spoke, the process happened in reverse: Korean was translated first into Chinese and then again from Chinese into English.

The U.S representatives	Chinese interpreter	Korean interpreter of Chinese	The representatives of the Chosun government
(English)	(Chinese)	(Korean)	

After the treaty was concluded, Admiral Shufeldt, having experienced many difficulties with the language interpretation, stressed the importance of English education and requested that the Chosun government dispatch Korean students to the U.S for language education.

One year after the Korea-US Treaty of Amity was concluded, the Chosun government dispatched the first Korean mission to the U.S.A. One of the biggest issues brought up at that moment was how to communicate with the U.S side. It was impossible for the Chosun government to find a solution to the language problem since there was no Korean interpreter of English in Chosun. In the absence of a solution, the Chosun government resorted to the method that the U.S side came up with at the signing ceremony of the Korea-US Treaty of Amity and resorted to the multi-step translation using Chinese as an intermediate step between Korean and English.

In the contexts described thus far, the objective of this paper is to investigate how the Chosun government communicated with Western countries (in particular, The U.S.A) in the mid 19th century. More specifically, we examine this issue in the context of the Korean mission dispatched to the U.S.A in 1883.

## **2. The dispatch of a Korean mission to the U.S.A**

In this section, we examine the contexts in which the Korean mission was dispatched to the U.S.A in 1883 of and the formation of the mission.

### **2.1. Contexts in which the Korean mission to the U.S.A was dispatched**

#### **2.1.1. US-Korea (Chosun) relations in the late 19th century**

Prior to the mid 19th century, there was virtually no contact between Chosun and Western countries. Furthermore, since the Chosun government adopted a policy of seclusion, there was little chance for contact between Chosun and the Western countries. However, since 1850, tensions increased because of policies on both sides. The foreign policy practiced by many Western Countries "Advance into the Orient" and the persecution of Christians by the Chosun government each created rifts between the two sides. Tensions were such that when the U.S merchant ship *General Sherman* which forcefully requested to trade, it was burnt down by the military and the civilians in July 1866.<sup>2</sup> Later, in September in 1866, the French navy invaded Chosun two times. In 1871, this time U.S navy fleet invaded Chosun and the tension between the U.S.A and Chosun mounted.<sup>3</sup> With the series of these incidents, Chosun's mistrust of Western countries was on increase and as a result, the policy of seclusion was tightened further.

Before 1860, there was virtually no or a little problem between Chosun and the U.S.A except for the drifting of the U.S whaler off the coast of Chosun. This can be seen from the chronological table at the end of the paper which lists incidents and events that occurred between Chosun and the U.S.A.

However, the incident involving the *General Sherman* and U.S invasion of Chosun two times aggravated the Chosun-US relations. Nonetheless, The U.S policy towards Chosun was to make Chosun open trade with the U.S.A so the U.S government kept asking Chosun to initiate trade with the U.S.A and establish an official trade relation between the two countries. To make its desires known, the US Government sometimes contacted Chosun directly and other times, indirectly with the help of China and Japan.

In April 1878, Aaron A. Sargent, the chairman of the committee regarding navy in the Senate, introduced a resolution that was strongly motivated by the fact that in 1876, the Japanese government made Chosun government to open trade with Japan. He explained the importance of concluding a treaty of amity with Chosun as follows: The first reason is an economic one. Opening trade with Chosun would open up a new market for the U.S agricultural and factory products. The second reason is a political one. Signing a treaty between Chosun and U.S.A was suggested as a way to block the Russian government's policy of southward advance. The third reason is to protect U.S ships drifted off the coast of Chosun. The fourth reason is to provide a way for youth in U.S.A to go out and to accomplish his/her goal of civilizing and modernizing underdeveloped countries. If the treaty between Chosun and the U.S.A were signed, the U.S youth group would go to Chosun in order to help Chosun to be civilized. He put forth four reasons illustrated thus far to justify his claim.<sup>4</sup> Despite his assertion, the treaty wasn't concluded right away. It was not until 1882 that the treaty of amity between Chosun and the U.S.A was actually concluded.

### **2.1.2. Chosun-US Treaty of Amity**

When the Chosun government opened its door to Japan by coercion in 1876, it experienced the cruelty of foreign diplomatic affairs and also saw the need to open a relationship with the western world. In February 1878, once the resolution moved by a senator, Aaron A. Sargent was carried, navy Admiral Richard W. Thompson dispatched

Admiral R.W. Shufeldt to Chosun and commanded him to negotiate with Chosun to open trade with the U.S.A with the help from the Japanese government.

Admiral R.W. Shufeldt arrived in Pusan in April 1880 and he met *Dangnae Pusa* (東萊府使-an official who governed *Dangnae*) in order to talk about opening trade relations between the two countries but *Dangnae Pusa* disregarded the U.S request to open trade. I speculate that at the end of 1880, the Chosun government changed its attitude towards opening trade or a port to the U.S.A. In October 1880, Hong-Jip Kim (1842-1896) gave to King Kojong a book titled "Chosun Chayklyak" (朝鮮策略) written by Zun Xian Huang, a councilor for a legation of Qing Dynasty in Japan, in which Hwang claimed that in order to block the Russian policy of southward advance, the Chosun government should team up with Japan and the U.S.A to cope with the situation together. After the Chosun government carefully examined the content of "Chosun Chayklyak", it came to the conclusion that maintaining the policy of seclusion would be impossible and started reviewing the possibility of opening a port to other countries. The Chinese government also recommended negotiating a treaty of amity between the U.S.A and Chosun since it did not like the idea that the Japanese government might play an important role as mediator in negotiating the treaty of amity between the U.S.A and Chosun. A minister of the northern ocean, Hong Zhang Li sent *Yeongjoongchwubusa* (領中樞府使), Yu-Won Lee a letter which expressed the Chinese government's support of a treaty of amity between Chosun and the U.S.A and its intention to mediate the signing of a treaty. Hong Zhang Li also informed the U.S government of the content of the letter sent to Yu-Won Lee. He also conveyed a message that the Chinese government would use its influence in the process of negotiation. In July 1881, the U.S government appointed Admiral R.W. Shufeldt as a military attaché to the U.S legation to China. In November 14, 1881, the US government promoted Admiral Shufeldt to the U.S ambassador to Chosun (to be more specific, Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary) and made him start negotiating with Chosun the opening of trade with

the U.S.A. The instructions from the US government to Admiral Shufeldt were as follows:

- Present the credentials of the president of the U.S.A to the Chosun government
- Conclude a treaty for rescuing drifted U.S ships and sailors with the Chosun government
- Secure the right of the U.S government in trade relations with Chosun government
- Secure the U.S citizens' right to travel without restrictions in Chosun and consular jurisdiction (領事裁判權)
- Exchange missions between Chosun and the U.S.A

Negotiation for opening up of Chosun to the U.S.A started in July 1881, while Chosun was also involved as one of participating parties but as a matter of fact, in actual negotiation, Admiral Shufeldt talked only with Hong Zhang Li, excluding the Chosun government. In May 22, 1882, Treaty of Amity and Commerce between Chosun and the U.S.A (朝美修好條約) was signed in Incheon.

### **2.1.3 Dispatching a Korean mission to the U.S.A**

In May 1883, one year later the treaty of Amity and Commerce between Chosun and the U.S.A was concluded, the U.S government appointed Luvius H. Foote as the U.S minister to Chosun (more specifically, Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary). The U.S minister Foote hired as his interpreter of Korean Chi-Ho Youn, who studied English while studying in Japan. He wanted to solve the problem of English-Korean and Korean-English interpretation by hiring Youn. However, he soon noticed that Chi-Ho Youn was not as fluent in English as he thought and then he soon hired Shuichi Sato as a temporary interpreter, who was at that time a secretary of a foreign minister of Japan, Kaoru Inoue. Shuichi Sato worked as an interpreter for Minister Foote for three months and then returned to Japan. The treaty between Chosun and the U.S.A came into

effect in May 19, 1883 once Chosun and the U.S.A exchanged the ratifications. Minister Foote opened a legation office in Jeongdong (貞洞) which was located in the center of Seoul, just right after the treaty was ratified and came into effect. Equality of both sides considered, the Chosun government should also open a legation office in the U.S.A as the U.S government did. However, the economic situation of Chosun was not good enough to open a legation office in the U.S.A. Minister Foote, who knew the Chosun's situation well, suggested an idea of dispatching a Korean mission to U.S.A rather than opening a legation office in the U.S.A. The Chosun government accepted this suggestion and came to send out the Korean mission to U.S.A. that is the topic of the present paper.

## **2.2. Makeup of the Korean mission dispatched to the U.S.A**

### **2.2.1. Issues raised in dispatching the mission to the U.S.A**

In July 5, 1883, Minister Foote met King Kojong of Chosun and said that if a mission of Chosun government were dispatched to U.S.A, it would be welcomed by the U.S government. This was how he officially suggested to King Kojong the dispatch of the mission. Given Minister Foote's suggestion, King Kojong decided to dispatch a mission of Chosun to the U.S.A. However, the Chosun government realized that prior to departure, there were many problems that must be resolved. The first eminent issue was that officials of the Chosun government didn't know modern diplomatic conventions because it was the first time the Chosun government had built up diplomatic relations with western countries. The second issue was that there was no one in Chosun who had visited foreign countries except for Japan and China. Moreover, the Chosun government had no means of transportation to U.S.A. Still, the language issue remained, since there was no one in Chosun who could understand English, communication between officials of the Chosun and US governments would be a problem.

The dispatched mission had two goals: (i) to deliver the credentials of the Chosun government to the president of the U.S.A and (ii) to negotiate with the officials of the U.S government for the issues to be discussed. In order to achieve these goals, a proficient interpreter was absolutely needed but there was no such an interpreter in Chosun.

The Chosun government explained to the U.S government the aforementioned issues and asked for a help from the US government. The U.S government promised to provide a ship for the trip to the U.S.A and to guide the Chosun mission's trip safely to the U.S.A. To secure guidance for the mission, Minister Foote sent a letter to the U.S minister in Japan, J.A. Bingham, asking Bingham to recommend an American guide who would accompany the mission of Chosun government to the U.S.A. Minister Bingham considered two people: Payton Jourdan and Percival Rowel, and picked Percival Rowel despite the Chosun government's preference for Payton Jourdan. Subsequently, Percival Rowel (an adopted Korean name: No-Weol 魯越) joined the mission of Chosun government to the U.S.A as a Foreign Secretary and Counselor.

They intended to resolve the issue of interpretation of English by hiring a Chinese interpreter of English, employing a two-step (two-part) interpretation involving Chinese and Korean. At that time, Paul G.Möllendorf (the adopted Korean name: Mokintek 穆麟德) who was recommended by Hong Zhang Li was working as an advisor to diplomatic issues for the Chosun government. When Möllendorf was dispatched to Chosun, he brought Li Tang Woo to Chosun as an interpreter of English. Li Tang Woo then worked at customs in Incheon. The Chosun government appointed Li Tang Woo as an English interpreter for the Chosun's mission dispatched to the U.S.A and accordingly, it also appointed Yeong-Chul Ko who was fluent in Chinese as a member of the mission.

### **2.2.2. Selection of members of the Chosun's mission dispatched to the U.S.A**

Yeong-Ik Min, who was an influential man in the Chosun government at that time, was picked as a minister of the mission (an exact title: Envoy Extraordinary and Minister plenipotenitiary) and Yeong-Sik Hong was picked as a vice minister of the mission. Kwang-Beum Seo was chosen as a secretary of the mission. In addition, Kil-Jun Yu, Yeong-Chul Ko, Su Pyeon, Heung-Taek Hyeon, and Kyeong-Seok Che joined the



mission as attachés. The members who joined the Chosun's mission to the U.S.A are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1. Name of members of the Korean mission to the U.S.A and their roles in the mission**

Rank within the mission	Name
Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary	Yeong-Ik Min
Vice Minister	Yeong-Sik Hong
Secretary	Kwang-Beum Seo
Attaché	Kil-Jun Yu
Attaché	Pyeon Su
Attaché	Yeong-Chul Ko
Attaché	Heung-Taek Hyeon
Attaché	Kyeong-Seok Che
Interpreter	Li Tang Wu

It seems that in the process of selection of the members of the mission, their experience, their language ability and their ability of work accomplishments were taken into consideration. Percival Rowel joined the mission as Foreign Secretary and Counselor just after the Chosun's mission arrived in Japan, and he soon realized that his work as a guide of the Chosun's mission would not be easy. Percival Rowel would expect many problems in guiding nine members of the Chosun's mission in their round trip to U.S.A. First of all, he would be expected to handle high demand of interpretation, to maintain the agenda of the journey, and to arrange opportunities for members of the mission to engage in sightseeing and participate in political and diplomatic events. Percival Rowel was concerned that the load of interpretation would be beyond Li Tang Woo's ability as an interpreter and hired Tsunejiro Miyaoka as his personal secretary because Miyaoka was fluent in English. As a result, there were a total of eleven members of the Chosun's mission.

Rank within the mission	Name
Foreign Secretary and Counselor	Percival Rowel
Interpreter (Japanese)	Tsunejiro Miyaoka

Although the total number of the mission was only eleven, four languages were used: English, Japanese, Chinese and Korean. The number of languages in use shows how complicated the issue of interpretation was for the Chosun's mission.

### **2.3 Schedule of events in which the Chosun's mission participated and its round of visits**

Next, we take a look at the route the mission took to the U.S.A and the schedule of events in which the mission participated.

#### **2.3.1. The route that the mission took on its way to the U.S.A (outward trip)**

The Chosun's mission took the U.S warship, *Monocacy* from Incheon to Yokohama in Japan and then it changed ships to the U.S merchant ship, the *Arabic* in Yokohama to cross the Pacific. The Chosun's mission then took a train from San Francisco to New York, crossing the continental US. The schedule of the Chosun's mission and the round of visits that they made are as follows.

July 16, 1883: The mission took the U.S warship *Monocacy* in Incheon and headed for Nagasaki. It changed ships to a ship which mainly carried mail and moved to Yokohama. The mission then stayed in Tokyo for about a month. While the mission stayed there, Percival Rowel and Tsunejiro Miyaoka joined the mission.

August 18, 1883: The mission took the U.S merchant ship *the Arabic*, heading for the U.S.A.

September 2, 1883: The mission arrived in San Francisco

September 4, 1883: The mission traveled to Chicago via the Central and Union Pacific Railway. There, the mission was welcomed by General Philip H. Sheridan, who was a hero of the Civil War.

September 15, 1883: The mission arrived in Washington D.C. It stayed in the Arlington Hotel.

September 17, 1883: The mission moved to New York, with Davis, an assistant vice-minister of the Department of State.

September 18, 1883: The mission presented the credentials of King Kojong to the president of the U.S.A, Chester A. Arthur (at the Fifth Avenue Hotel). On that day, the mission moved to Boston and visited the museum there.

September 20, 1883: The mission visited Wolcott Farm.

September 22, 1883: The mission met the mayor of Boston. It then moved to Washington D.C in order to bid farewell to the President, Chester A. Arthur before it returned to Chosun.

September 29, 1883: The mission visited the Department of State and spoke to the minister of the department. During the meeting, the mission expressed its wish to employ a U.S advisor for the Chosun government.

October 12, 1883: Farewell to President Chester, A. Arthur.

### **2.3.2. The route that the mission took on its way back home**

On its way back home, the mission was divided into two groups:

Group 1: Members of group 1: Yeong-Ik Min, Kwang-Beum Seo, Su Pyeon , George C Foulk (The secretary of reception). In November 19, 1883, the mission took the U.S warship Trenton and left New York. Group 1 returned to Chosun in June 2, 1884 after visiting London, Paris, Cairo, Rome, India, Singapore and Hong Kong.

Group 2: Members of group 2: Yeong-Sik Hong , Percival Rowel, Heung-Taik Hyeon, Kyeong-Seok Che, Yeong-Chul Ko, Li Tang Woo, and Tsunejiro Miyaoka. In October 6, 1883, the mission took the transcontinental train and it then took a ship departing San Francisco. In December 21, 1883, group 2 arrived in Chosun.

### **2.3.3. An attaché left in the U.S.A.**

One of the attachés, Kil-Jun Yu, remained in the US to study becoming the first person of Chosun to receive a state scholarship.<sup>5</sup> Kil-Jun Yu was introduced to a professor of biology, Edward S. Morse, who had worked as a professor at Tokyo University, by Percival Rowel. For a month, he studied under the guidance of Prof. Morse and in September 1884, he entered Dummer Academy, a private high school in Salem (a suburb of Boston). However, in December of that year, he learned from the U.S. newspaper that there was a coup (to be more specific, The Kapsin Coup) and he returned to Chosun. Although Kil-Jun Yu studied only about a year in U.S.A, at the time, he must have been the most fluent speaker of English in Chosun.

## **3. Proficiency levels of foreign languages of the members of the Chosun's mission dispatched to the U.S.**

In this section, we look at the proficiency levels of foreign languages of each member of the mission. I speculate not a few number of the mission improved their English, Japanese and Chinese after they got back from the trip to the U.S.A. But here I limit my discussion to their proficiency levels of foreign languages before they left for the U.S.A.

### **3.1 The proficiency levels of foreign languages of each member of the mission**

#### **3.1.1. Yeong-Ik Min (1880-1914)**

Yeong-Ik Min passed the state examination in 1877 and like other educated people at that time, he was proficient in Classical Chinese. In October 1882, he visited Japan, and from January to April in 1883, he visited in China. *The New York Herald* of September 28, 1883 had an article about Yeong-Ik Min's Japanese ability. Once the American interpreter spoke to Kwang-Beum Seo in Japanese, Seo interpreted what the American interpreter said to Yeong-Ik Min in Korean. However, Yeong-Ik Min seemed to understand what the American interpreter said in Japanese. It indicates that Yeong-Ik Min must have had some command of Japanese at the level of understanding Japanese

used in everyday conversation. Given the fact that he stayed in China for about three months, he must also have spoken basic Chinese. He went to Hong Kong as an exile in 1886 and stayed there for years. Since he had stayed in Shanghai from 1905 to 1914, the year in which he died, he must have been very fluent in Chinese by then.

### **3.1.2. Yeong-Sik Hong (1855-1884)**

Yeong-Sik Hong came of a noble family and was the son of Soon-Mok Hong who was a prime minister (領議政). Soon-Mok Hong was one of the most influential figures among the conservatives while Yeong-Sik Hong was a member of the radicals. As such, father and son had very different political views. He studied traditional Confucianism when he was young. He was brilliant enough to get a top score in the state examination in 1873. In 1881, he visited Japan as a part of an inspection party dispatched to Japan, and he studied the military system of Japan for about three months. From this fact, we can infer that he must have spoken Japanese used in everyday conversation.

### **3.1.3. Kwang-Beum Seo (1859-1897)**

Kwang-Beum Seo was a son of Sang-Ik Seo, who was a vice-minister (參判) and passed the state examination in 1880. Later he became the Attorney General. He was a member of the radicals and he visited Japan two times before he joined the Chosun's 1883 mission to the U.S.A. His first visit to Japan took place in December 1881. Seo was an attaché to Ok-Kyun Kim, who was sent out to Japan by the Chosun government for the purpose of looking into a political situation of Japan, and he stayed there for about five months. His second visit to Japan took place in September 1882. When *Soonsinsa* (修信使) Yong-Hyo Park was dispatched to Japan by the Chosun government, Seo accompanied Park as his secretary. He stayed in Japan for six months in this trip (till March 1883). Given the fact that he stayed in Japan for more than a year, we can infer that he must not have had any problem in communicating in Japanese. Before he joined the mission to the U.S. he didn't have a chance to learn English. Kwang-Beum Seo participated in the Kapsin Coup. When the coup failed, he came to U.S.A as an exile via

Japan. While he was an exile in the U.S.A, he learned English and in 1889, he acquired citizenship of the U.S. When the radicals came into power in 1894 after The Sino-Japanese War ended, he returned to Chosun and took office of the Attorney General for six months. After he resigned as the Attorney General, he was appointed as a minister to the U.S. When he was dismissed from the post due to a political reason in August 1896, he again came to the U.S as an exile.

#### **3.1.4. Percival Rowel (1855-1916)**

Rowel was born in Boston in March 1855. While he was in Tokyo, Rowel came to join the Chosun's mission dispatched to the U.S through the recommendation of John A. Bingham, who was the U.S minister to Japan at that time. He was a graduate from Harvard University and majored in Physics. He enjoyed traveling abroad and traveled Europe and the Middle East when he was young. He stayed in Japan for about ten years from 1883. While he was in Japan, he was fascinated by Japanese culture: in particular, Japanese way of tea-making, Shintoism, Japanese gardens, Japanese painting and literature. Furthermore, he published two books related to Japanese culture, "Soul of Far East" and "Occult Japan". He was a natural language learner and became fluent in Japanese in a short period of time. But we speculate that around the time that the mission was dispatched to the U.S.A, his proficiency level of Japanese was rudimentary because his recent arrival in Japan would have made it unlikely that he would have learned a lot of Japanese.<sup>6</sup> This speculation is supported his hiring Tsunejiro Miyaoka as his private secretary whose main function was as an interpreter of English. When the mission returned to Chosun, he also came to Chosun with Yeong-Sik Hong and stayed in Chosun for about four months. While Percival Rowel was in Chosun, Chi-Ho Youn worked as an interpreter for him, who was an interpreter of English for Luvius H. Foote, the U.S minister to Chosun.

#### **3.1.5. Kil-Jun Yu**

Kil-Jun Yu was born in Seoul. Although he studied Chinese classics from childhood, he did not take the state examination. He became a member of the radicals from the ~~early~~ beginning as he was fascinated by the Enlightenment Thought. When the Chosun government dispatched an inspection party to Japan in 1881, he visited Japan as an attaché of Youn-Joong Euh. After the inspection party went back to Chosun, he remained in Japan and entered *Kyeongungyusook* (慶應義塾) (the predecessor of (the present) Keio University) which was founded by Yukichi Hukuzawa. He became the first Korean student to study in Japan. While in Japan, he stayed at Hukuzawa's and was apprenticed to Hukuzawa. He lived in Japan for two years before returning to Chosun in January 1883. He was very fluent in Japanese by that time.<sup>7</sup>

### **3.1.6. Yeong-Chul Ko (1853-?)**

He was an interpreter of Chinese and passed the state examination in 1876.<sup>8</sup> In September 1881, he was chosen as a student studying in China by the Chosun government. Since February 1882, he studied in *Euhhakskwuk* (語學局) located in Tianjin (天津) and he studied Chinese and English there. However, since he already knew Chinese and Chinese classics (or classical Chinese), he mainly studied English there. He was the only Korean among the members of the mission who could speak English. After he came back from the trip to the U.S.A, he was in charge of training students at '*Dongmoonkwan*'(同文館), which was a language institute where students studied foreign languages.

### **3.1.7. Su Pyeon (1861-1891)**

He was born into a family of interpreters and his father was an interpreter as well. In March 1882, when Ok-Kyun Kim went on a mission to Japan, Su Pyeon accompanied him and stayed there for about five months. In August 1882, when Yeong-Hyo Park was dispatched to Japan as *Soosinsa*, Pyeon accompanied him and he stayed there for about seven months. It was known that he was a natural language learner and by the time that the Chosun's mission was dispatched to U.S.A, he had a good command of Japanese.

When the Kapsin Coup failed in 1884, he came to the U.S as an exile. He graduated from a U.S college and he became the first Korean to become a US government employee but he died of a car accident when he was young.

#### **3.1.8. Heung-Taek Hyeon (The years of birth and death are unknown)**

He was a military officer. In accordance with the custom of including a military officer in missions to foreign countries, Heung-Taek Hyeon was invited to join the mission. There is no document from which we could infer his proficiency level of foreign languages. Nonetheless, we expect that like ordinary officers of the Chosun government at the time, he must have known Chinese classics.

#### **3.1.9. Kyeong-Seok Che (?-1886)**

He joined the mission as a military attaché. It is generally the case that a military attaché shows his interest in the military system of the country that a mission visits and his main role is to protect the members of the mission. But Che was different. He showed his interest in issues of agriculture and visited many farms and agricultural facilities. After he returned from the trip, he tried to adopt the U.S agricultural system and devoted his life for the development of Chosun's agriculture. Nothing was known about his foreign language ability but like Heung-Taek Hyeon, he must have known Chinese classics.

#### **3.1.10. Li Tang Wu (?-1912)**

He was fluent in English and Spanish as a secretary of a legation of Qing Dynasty to Spain. His wife was a Spaniard. Paul G. Möllendorf brought him to Chosun when he was dispatched to Chosun, on the recommendation of Hong Zhang Li. Around the time that the mission was formed, he worked for customs in Incheon. After the mission returned to Chosun, he didn't return to China and decided to stay in Chosun. While he lived in Chosun, he became a rich man and his mansion still exists.<sup>9</sup>

#### **3.1.11. Tsunejiro Miyaoka (The years of birth and death are unknown)**



He joined the mission as a private secretary of Percival Rowel and he was 17 years old at that time. The list of names of the mission, which was submitted by Percival Rowel to the Secretary of State, didn't include his name. Given the fact, we can infer that he was not an official member of the mission. Since he was very fluent in English, he interpreted English into Japanese and Japanese into English worked while the mission was in the U.S.

### **3.2 The Classification of members of the mission according to which language they could speak**

Although the total number of the mission was eleven, the members used four languages (English, Chinese, Japanese and Korean). When we include Classical Chinese as a written language, there were five languages in use among the members of the mission. In this section, we review who had which level of proficiency with respect to these five languages. First of all, with respect to English, Percival Rowel was the native speaker and Tsunejiro Miyaoka and Li Tang Wu worked as an interpreter of English. Additionally, Yeong-Chul Ko had studied English but we speculate that he was not fluent in English. With respect to Chinese, Li Tang Wu was only a native speaker. Yeong-Chul Ko worked as an interpreter of Chinese. Although Yeong-Ik Min stayed in China for only three months, it is certainly possible that he could speak Chinese used in everyday conversation. With respect to Japanese, although only one was a native speaker, many members of the mission could speak Japanese. Among eight Koreans who joined the mission, five could speak Japanese and out of this five, three people (Kil-Jun Yu, Kwang-Beun Seo, and Su Pyeon) were fluent in Japanese. Although Yeong-Ik Min and Yeong-Sik Hong didn't reach the level that aforementioned three people reached, it is speculated that they also had an ability to have everyday conversations in Japanese. With respect to Korean, except for Percival Rowel, Li Tang Wu and Tsunejiro Miyaoka, the rest of the members of the mission were native speakers. And these three foreigners couldn't understand Korean at all. What has been discussed thus far is summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2. Language ability of the members of the mission**

Name	English	Japanese	Chinese	Korean	Classical Chinese (Chinese classics)
Yeong-Ik Min		○			
Yeong-Sik Hong		○			
Kwang-Beum Seo					
Percival Rowel					
Kil-Jun Yu					
Su Pyeon					
Yeong-Chul Ko	○				
Kyeong-Seok Che					
Heung-Taek Hyeon					
Li Tang Wu					
Tsunejira Miyaoaka					?

As can be seen in Table 2, for each spoken language, the number of people who could speak that language freely is as follows: English (3), Japanese (4), Chinese (2) and Korean (8).

#### **4. An issue of language interpretation of the mission**

##### **4.1. When is interpretation needed?**

When two parties speaking different languages don't understand the other party's language, interpretation is needed. As mentioned above, since the mission used four spoken languages (English, Chinese, Japanese and Korean) and while the mission was in U.S.A, they had to communicate with many native English speakers, interpretation must have been needed very often. We can easily imagine that since the goals of the mission was to present the credentials of King Kojong to President of U.S.A and to deliver the message of King Kojong that he would like to build up good relations of friend and amity

with the U.S.A, the mission must have attended many official and diplomatic events. In this section, we examine the issue of how a particular language was interpreted with which language in the situations in which interpretation was requested.

#### **4.2. Interpretation between languages (or Interlanguage))**

When we consider the make-up of the mission and their activities in U.S, we speculate that interpretation between languages may proceed as follows.

- English-Korean/Korean-English interpretation
- Japanese-Korean/Korean-Japanese interpretation
- Chinese-Korean/Korean-Chinese interpretation

Considering languages used within the mission, there is a possibility that there was Chinese-Japanese/Japanese-Chinese interpretation. However, given the fact that Li Tang Wu and Tsunejiro Miyaoka both were fluent speakers of English, this possibility is very slim.

##### **4.2.1. English-Korean/Korean-English interpretation**

With respect to English-Korean/Korean-English interpretation, two types should be distinguished: one within the mission and one outside the mission. With respect to the interpretation within the mission, we first consider the one between eight Koreans of the mission and Percival Rowel. Percival Rowel must have had many announcements to be made to the Korean members of the mission about the schedule of meals, travel, inspection, sightseeing and diplomatic events. Among Koreans of the mission, Yeong-Chul Ko could speak English but he was not fluent enough to do English-Korean/Korean-English interpretation without difficulty. If so, the alternative is a two-step (double) interpretation employing a medium of Japanese or Chinese. Taking this situation into account, we surmise that a two-step interpretation using Chinese or Japanese as a medium

might have been used for most of the important events). We visually present the situations of English-Korean/Korean-English interpretation in Table 3.

**Table 3 Methods used within the mission in English-Korean /Korean-English interpretations**

Percival Rowel    Yeong-Chul Ko    the Korean mission

(English)

(Korean)

Percival Rowel	Tsunejiro Miyaoka	Kil-Jun Yu, Su Pyeon, Kwang-Beun Seo	The Korean mission
(English)	(Japanese)		(Korean)
Percival Rowel	Li Tang Wu	Yeong-Chul Ko	The Korean mission
(English)	(Chinese)	(Korean)	

The method of interpretation used when Percival Rowel spoke to the Chosun's mission was that Rowel first spoke to Tsunejiro Miyaoka or Li Tang Wu in English and then, these two interpreted what Rowel said in English using Japanese and Chinese respectively. Finally, those who understood what these two said in Japanese and Chinese translated into Korean. When the Chosun's mission wanted to speak to Percival Rowel, interpretation proceeded in the opposite direction.

With respect to English-Korean/Korean-English interpretation, we can imagine that it must have been used in many varied situations: when the mission met Americans, attended official events and when its members delivered the speech in diplomatic events. As we can see in section 2.3, the mission had a tight schedule with many events. With respect to the interpretation outside the mission, the methods introduced in Table 3 were in principle equally applied. Differences between interpretation within the mission and one outside the mission are that first, other English native speakers came into the picture, and secondly, there is a possibility that an American interpreter of Japanese directly spoke to the Chosun's mission in Japanese. What has been discussed thus far is summarized in Table 4.

**Table 4. Methods used outside the mission in English-Korean /Korean-English interpretations**

Percival Rowel or other Americans	Tsunejiro Miyaoka	Kil-Jun Yu, Su Pyeon, Kwang-Beum Seo	The Chosun's mission
(English)	(Japanese)		(Korean)
American interpreter of Japanese	Kil-Jun Yu, Su Pyeon, Kwang-Beum Seo	The Chosun's mission	
(Japanese)		(Korean)	
Percival Rowel or other Americans	Li Tang Wu	Yeong-Chul Ko	The Chosun's mission
(English)	(Chinese)		(Korean)

The question at this point is which of these three ways of interpretation was used most often. The chances are very slim that an American interpreter of Japanese spoke directly to the Chosun's mission. It is likely that in most of the cases, the interpretation proceeded by Tsunejiro Miyaoka or Li Tang Wu. Granting this, an interesting question to ask is who, between these two, interpreted more often. For this raised question, I speculate that Tsunejiro Miyaoka interpreted more often than Li Tang Wu. This conjecture is supported by the following reasons: first, given the fact that Tsunejiro Miyaoka was a personal secretary of Percival Rowel, it might have been much easier for Rowel to ask Miyaoka to interpret. Secondly, out of eight Korean members of the mission, five members could understand Japanese. Considering the fact that many members of the mission could understand Japanese and moreover, the head of the mission, Yeong-Ik Min himself could understand Japanese, it is highly likely that Tsunejiro Miyaoka interpreted in the most occasions. In fact, in a diplomatic event of presenting the credentials of King Kojong to President of U.S.A, Tsunejiro Miyaoka interpreted. Another reason that I can think of is related to the situation in which a Chinese interpreter of English, Li Tang Wu faced within the mission. As aforementioned, Li Tang Wu was recommended by Paul G. Möllendorf. We can easily imagine that it was difficult for Möllendorf, who was recommended by Hong Zhang Li, to be free from the influence of Hong Zhang Li. Hong Zhang Li supported concluding the treaty between Chosun and U.S.A but was against the idea of dispatching Chosun's mission to U.S.A. Given this situation, the members of Chosun's mission was fully aware of the likelihood that Li Tang Wu was under the influence of Möllendorf and Hong Zhang Li. Furthermore, we have to pay attention to the

fact that China and Japan were competing for the upper hand regarding the issues of concluding the treaty between Chosun and U.S.A and dispatching the mission. China and Japan each tried to gain advantage over its counterpart. China wanted to get the upper hand through the issue of concluding the treaty between Chosun and U.S.A. On the other hand, Japan wanted to reduce the influence of China by being deeply involved in concluding the treaty between Chosun and U.S.A. It is conceivable that if Percival Rowel, who joined the mission through the recommendation by Japanese government and thus, was thankful to the government, were aware of this political competition between China and Japan, he must not have asked Li Tang Wu to interpret for important events. These reasons listed above notwithstanding, I would like to make clear that my claim is inconclusive for now.

#### 4.2.2. Japanese-Korean/Korean-Japanese interpretation

We speculate that Japanese-Korean/Korean-Japanese interpretation proceeded in the way described in Table 3 and 4. Alternatively, it could proceed excluding English native speakers. If Tsunejiro Miyaoka interpreted in most of the time, the amount of Japanese-Korean/Korean-Japanese interpretation would also increase accordingly.

When we look at real cases of interpretation in section 4.2.4, there also existed cases where an American interpreter of Japanese interpreted English into Japanese directly to the Chosun's mission. Cases of Japanese-Korean/Korean-Japanese interpretation are summarized in Table 5.

**Table 5. Methods used in Japanese-Korean/Korean-Japanese interpretation**

Percival Rowel or other Americans	Tsunejiro Miyaoka	Kil-Jun Yu, Su Pyeon, Kwang-Beum Seo	The Chosun's mission
(English)		(Japanese)	(Korean)
American interpreter of Japanese	Kil-Jun Yu, Su Pyeon, Kwang-Beum Seo		The Chosun's mission
(Japanese)		(Korean)	

#### 4.2.3. Chinese-Korean/Korean-Chinese interpretation

Chinese-Korean/Korean-Chinese interpretation is derived from English-Korean/Korean-English interpretation. Procedures of English-Korean/Korean-English interpretation are summarized in Table 6.

**Table 6. Methods used in Chinese-Korean/Korean-Chinese interpretation**

Native speakers of English (English)	Li Tang Wu (Chinese)	Yeong-Chul Ko (Korean)	The Chosun's mission (Korean)
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#### 4.2.4. Record of the real cases of interpretation

The record about real cases of interpretation is rare. In this section, I report real cases of interpretation that I have found till now. <sup>10</sup>

Example 1: Interpretation at the event of presenting the credentials of King Kojong (*New York Herald*, September 19, 1883)

Date: 11 A.M. September 18, 1883

Place: Grand reception room at the first floor of Fifth Avenue Hotel

The order of the ceremony:

- The Chosun's mission entered the Grand Reception Room in single file, where the U.S president Chester A. Arthur was waiting for the mission
- The Chosun's mission made deep bows to President Chester A. Arthur. President Chester A. Arthur greeted with a nod in return.
- Yeong-Ik Min, the head of the mission (to be more specific, envoy extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary), presented the credentials of King Kojong to President Chester A. Arthur.
- Yeong-Ik Min delivered speech in Korean and Kil-Jun Yu interpreted his speech delivered in Korean into Japanese and then Tsunejiro Miyaoka interpreted Japanese to English
- President Chester A. Arthur delivered a speech in reply in English. Tsunejiro Miyaoka interpreted the English speech to Japanese and Kil-Jun Yu interpreted Japanese to Korean.

We can see that at presentation ceremony of King Kojong's credentials to President Arthur, Japanese and Korean were used in Japanese-Korean/Korean-Japanese interpretation

Example 2: Record on the mission's visit to Governor of New York (*New York Herald*, September 28, 1883)

*New York Herald* had an article about interpretation of Japanese by an American. The article reported the news that an American interpreter translated what was said in English into Japanese to Secretary Kwang-Beum Seo. Seo then interpreted Japanese into Korean to Yeong-Sik Hong. Hong in turn conveyed this message to Yeong-Ik Min.

**Example 3: Articles about the mission's visit to City Hall of New York (*New York Herald*, September 28, 1883)**

The article was about news that the head of the Chosun's mission, Yeong-Ik Min read a speech note that he prepared in advance in Korean in reply to the speech delivered by Mayor of New York, Edison. The article also covered the news that second lieutenant Jorge C. Fouk who worked as Secretary of Reception to Yeong-Ik Min, interpreted Min's Korean speech to English. Since second lieutenant Jorge C. Fouk did not know Korean, we expect that he did not interpret Korean into English himself. It must be the case that someone translated Min's speech draft into English in advance and what Jorge C. Fouk did was just to read whatever was already prepared by somebody else.

## **5. Impact on English education in Korea (Chosun) brought about by the Chosun's mission dispatched to U.S.A.**

The dispatch of the Chosun's mission to the U.S.A had huge impact on Chosun politics and culture. I would like to illustrate the point with a couple of examples. First, it became a turning point in Chosun's attitude towards the U.S.A. At that time, Chosun was hostile to the U.S.A due to two incidents: one involving the merchant ship *General Sherman* in



1866 and the other involving U.S invasion of Chosun in 1871. However, as a result of dispatch of the mission, people of the Chosun government started considering the U.S.A as a country that loves peace, and this change allowed Chosun to become friendly towards the U.S.A. Next, with respect to influence on culture, the Chosun's mission was deeply impressed by the educational system, agricultural skills, and postal system of the U.S.A. Thus, after they returned to Chosun, they tried to adopt the U.S systems and its advanced skills. Soon (after), the Chosun government invited advisors for diplomatic issues, military instructors, and teachers from the U.S.A, and with the help from these in American guests, it tried to modernize Chosun politics, military and educational systems.

Among influences brought about by the dispatched mission of Chosun, this paper is mainly concerned with its influence on English education. As mentioned earlier, the interpretation of English was one of the important issues that the dispatched mission faced. In the absence of better solutions, the Chosun government tried to solve the problem of interpretation of English by hiring a Chinese interpreter of English. But as they used this method of interpretation, they realized that this method was not as effective as originally thought. Thus, the Chosun government realized the importance of training English interpreters and it founded an institute for English education. Koryo stressed education in foreign languages from very early on. In the late 13th century, Koryo established *Thongmoonkwan* (通文館) and Chinese, Japanese and Mongolian were taught there. Chosun, which was founded in 1392, established *Sayekwon* (司譯院) right after its foundation and this language institute trained specialists in Chinese, Mongolian, Japanese and the Manchu language.<sup>11</sup> This institute mainly taught north-eastern languages such as Chinese and it did not teach western languages such as English. As times changed, it became necessary to teach western languages such as English. The plan for English education in Chosun was carried out immediately. In September, 1883, while the mission was still in U.S.A, the Chosun government founded an institute of foreign languages, *Dongmoonhak* (同文學) which was a part of *Thongsangamoon* (通商衙門-the department of diplomacy and commerce in present days). *Dongmoonhak*, which was

modeled after the language institute in China, *Dongmoonkwan* (同文館), taught English and Japanese to students. As teachers of *Dongmoonhak*, two Chinese teachers and one British teacher were invited, who were recommended by an advisor of diplomatic relations to Chosun government, Paul G. Möllendorf. Specifically, the three teachers of *Dongmoonhak* were as follows: British electrical engineer, T.E. Halifax; Chinese Zhong Xian Wu (a graduate of New York Univ.) and Chinese Xian Wei Tang (a graduate of Columbia Univ.) The goal of *Dongmoonhak* was to educate people who would be able to interpret and translate foreign languages. The number of registered students was somewhere between 29 and 40.<sup>12</sup>

In September 1886, when a modernized national school, *Yukyeongkongwon* (育英公院-Royal English School) was established, *Dongmoonhak* was subsumed under *Yukyeongkongwon*. *Yukyeongkongwon* was established by the suggestion of Yeong-Ik Min, the head of the mission dispatched to the U.S.A. It was opened in September 23, 1886, much later than was originally planned due to delays caused by the Kapsin Coup.<sup>13</sup> Teachers of *Yukyeongkongwon* were invited from the U.S.A with the help from the U.S. legation to Chosun. Three teachers invited from the U.S.A were H.B. Hulbert (an adopted Korean name: Hwul-Beop), A G.W. Gilmore (an adopted Korean name: Kil-Mo), and D.A. Bunker (an adopted Korean name: Bang-Keo). Classes at *Yukyeongkongwon* proceeded in English and textbooks were written in English. There were two different classes at *Yukyeongkongwon*: One class was intended for young officials of the government and the other was intended for high-ranking officials' children or students recommended by the officials. The number of students in each class was around ten and the age range of students was between 15 and 20. At the beginning, the teachers and students were motivated enough to learn 3000 English words within a year. Nonetheless, due to financial problems and a problem in management, *Yukyeongkongwon* was closed in 1894. *Yukyeongkongwon* produced 107 graduates before it closed in 1894.

Given what we have discussed thus far, we can tell that English education in Chosun was closely related to dispatching of the mission to U.S.A in 1883.

## 6. Concluding remark

In this paper, we have examined the issue of interpretation of English in the context of the dispatch of the Chosun's mission to the U.S.A in 1883. We have inferred from evidence and reasons illustrated in this paper that a two-step interpretation was employed in the process of interpreting English for the Chosun's mission dispatched to the U.S.A and in most cases, a two-step interpretation proceeded using the medium of Japanese.

This paper is from a foundational study of my recent research on "Foreign language education and training of interpreters and translators of Chosun in the late 19th century". Issues that remain unclear deserve further research and scrutiny. As a future research, I would like to expand and instantiate my research reported in this paper with U.S diplomatic notes and articles of newspapers at that time.

### <A Chronological table which lists events and incidents that occurred between Chosun and U.S.A>

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| 1851 | The U.S whaler <i>South America</i> drifted off the coast of Pusan. Officials of the Chosun government wanted to interrogate U.S sailors on board with the help from interpreters of Japanese and Chinese or using Classical Chinese but failed. When the U.S sailors on board shouted "We are from America", the officials of the Chosun government transcribed "America" as <i>Myelikye</i> (旃里界). |
| 1855 | The U.S whaler <i>Two Brothers</i> drifted to the east coast of Chosun. Four sailors on board were saved and repatriated to Beijing. These sailors are the first Americans to set foot on Chosun. Writings about the conversation carried out with them remains and a note written in the Roman alphabet is also available.  |
| 1865 | 1865 Americans were cast away on the coast of Yeong-II bay   |

- 1866 The U.S ship *Sabulho* (士佛號) sailed to Pusan and requested to trade to the Chosun government but its request was rejected.
- 1866 In May, the U.S ship *Surprise* was cast away on the coast of Cheolsan.
- 1866 In July 11, the U.S ship *General Sherman* came to Pyeongyang and requested to trade. In July 24, the clash between both sides led to the burn-up of the *General Sherman*.
- 1866 In August 12, the French fleet led by Admiral P.G.Roze invaded Chosun. In August 22, the fleet retreated.
- 1866 In September 6, the French fleet led by P.G.Roze invaded Chosun again. In October 5, the fleet retreated.
- 1867 In April, the U.S minister of the Department of State Hamilton Fish ordered a military expedition to Chosun. The U.S navy fleet, *Colorado* led by Commander John Rodgers arrived at Jakyak island(勺藥島) off the coast of Incheon. Three officials of the Chosun government interrogated the reason of its expedition to Chosun.
- 1871 In June 1, the U.S fleet opened fire which invaded waters of Chosun. In June 10, the U.S navy landed on *Chojicin, Kanghwa* island and occupied the fortress. In July 3, the U.S fleet retreated.
- 1882 William E. Griffis published “Corea: The Hermit Nation”
- 1882 In May 12, Admiral R.W. Shufeldt came to Incheon in order to sign Korea (Chosun)-US Treaty of Amity. In May 22, the treaty was concluded.
- 1883 In April, the U.S government appointed Lucius H. Foote as the first U.S minister to Chosun. In May 13, Minister Foote arrived in Incheon to take office.
- 1883 In July 9, the Chosun government finalized dispatching its mission to the U.S.A.
- 1883 In July 16, the Chosun’s mission dispatched to the U.S.A took the U.S warship *Monocacy* in Incheon. It arrived in Nagasaki in July 21. It changed ships to a ship which mainly carried mail and moved to Yokohama.

- 1883 In August 18, the mission took the U.S merchant ship *the Arabic*, heading for the U.S.A. In September 2, the mission arrived in San Francisco. In September 15, the mission presented the credentials of King Kojong to the U.S president.
- 1883 In December, one of the attachés, Kil-Jun Yu, remained in the US to study becoming the first person of Chosun to receive a state scholarship
- 1884 In June 2, the second group of the Chosun's mission came back to Chosun.
- 1887 In November 12, Jeong-Yang Park, the first minister of Chosun to the U.S.A, left for the U.S.A in order to take office.

#### Reference:

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<sup>1</sup> This story was taken from Kim (2002:37-38). See Kim (2002) for further details.

<sup>2</sup> In July 11, 1866, the U.S ship *General Sherman* came to Pyongyang and requested to trade. In July 24, the clash between both sides led to the burn-up of the *General Sherman*.

<sup>3</sup> In 1871, U.S navy fleet invaded Chosun and the excuse of its invasion was the incident involving the *General Sherman*. Its hidden purpose was to make Chosun open trade with the U.S.A.

<sup>4</sup> See Won-Mo Kim (2002:132-133) for the detailed discussion.

<sup>5</sup> We refer readers to Lee (1985) for the detailed discussion on Yu's studying in the U.S.A.

<sup>6</sup> See Won-Mo Kim (2002) for the further details.

<sup>7</sup> With respect to the discussion on Kil-Jun Yu, it was taken from Yun (1998).

<sup>8</sup> In a book listing people's names who passed the state examination and their family background (譯科譜單 醫譯籌八世譜人), a following note on Yeong-Chul Ko is found: 高永喆 明允 癸丑 丙子式 鎭豐

<sup>9</sup> We refer readers to Kim (2002) for more detailed discussion on Wu.

<sup>10</sup> With respect to the interpretation of English for the Chosun's mission, record (or articles) on this issue is virtually inexistent in newspapers or books published in Korea. The U.S newspapers such as *New York Times*, *New York Daily Tribune* and *New York Herald* had articles for the issue.

<sup>11</sup> This information was taken from Lee (2006a and 2006b). See these articles for more detailed discussion.

<sup>12</sup> See Kwon (1997) for further details.

<sup>13</sup> With respect to foundation of *Yukyeongkongwon*, see Lee (1985) for more detailed information.