

## **Swedish images of Korea before 1945**

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This paper is a study on Swedish images of Korea before 1945 seen through the entry “Korea” in two Swedish encyclopedias published between 1884-1933, and through seven travel accounts written by Swedes who visited Korea between 1904-38. By the use of postcolonial theory, the purpose is to examine and identify Swedish images of Korea as a way of understanding the background to present day’s perceptions of the country and its people in Sweden. The first part is an introduction to postcolonial theory and the concept of Orientalism. The second part is an overview of the relationship between Sweden and Korean, and an examination of the Swedish encyclopedias. The third part is an examination of the travel accounts, while the fourth and final part summarizes both historical and contemporary Swedish images of Korea.

### **Postcolonial theory and the Orientalist imagery**

Postcolonial theory offers the perspective of the conquered and the colonized instead of the hegemonic master narratives of metropolitan West (Chambers & Curti, 1996). The field is influenced by Marxism, Feminism and Post-Structuralism, and has evolved since the 1960s as a consequence of de-colonization, globalization and post-modernism. Postcolonialism has been defined by its Swedish introducer Stefan Jons-son (1995: 117-158) as the time after colonialism and the situation in the former colonies, as a global condition after the colonial period, as a term denoting the relationship between culture and imperialism and as a theory investigating the postcolonial society

and its dual attitude towards itself and the West. However, the very concept of post-coloniality and its ambivalent association as a state of an infinite aftermath has also been questioned by Childs and Williams (1997: 1-25) and by Chungmoo Choi (1997) for Korea's case as the West still wields the political and economic power, pointing to the persistence of colonial thinking and reflecting global racial hierarchies.

John M. Steadman (1970) and Robin W. Winks and James R. Rush (1990) in their study on Asia in Western fiction have shown how the West's image of Asia is characterized by myths and stereotypes. Historically the geographical concept of Asia is very hard to define, and it is not possible to draw a clear line between Europe and Asia. Among myths, worth mentioning are "Oriental despotism", the "Asiatic way of production" as well as everything that can be associated with cruelty and decadence in contrast to Western rationality, liberal democracy, human rights and market economy. From ancient times the "Orient" has been the continent for the feared "Other" – the barbarians, the heathen and the primitive, and the "Yellow" (Confucianism), "Red" (Communism) or "Green" (Islamism) perils. The "Orient" is vaguely defined as extending from Morocco to Japan, and has sometimes even included Southern Spain and Italy, the Balkans, Russia and Greece. Thus, the borders of Asia fluctuate, but Western images of Asia remain intact and fossilized.

### **The relationship between Sweden and Korea and Swedish encyclopedias 1884-1933**

Korea has always been the least known country of East Asia for Westerners. Known in the West as the "Hermit kingdom" for its fierce and stubborn resistance against foreign intruders, Korea was the last country in the Chinese world-system to be opened up by

the imperialist powers at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first substantial knowledge about Korea came from Portuguese Jesuits stationed in Japan and China during the *Imjin* wars at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Lach & Kley 1993: 486-88, 1783-85). In 1654, the Italian Martino Martini wrote about the Manchurian invasion of Korea in his *De bello tartarico*, and his *Novus atlas sinensis* from 1655 contains a description of the country.

In 1668, the Dutch seaman Hendrik Hamel ([1668] 1994) published his diary *Journal* that was to be the standard work on Korea in the West for the next 200 years. Hamel had shipwrecked on Cheju Island in 1653 together with 35 surviving countrymen, and stayed as a captive for 13 years in Korea until he was able to escape by the way of Japan and return to the Netherlands where he wrote down his memories. Hamel considered the Koreans to be “thievish, lying, unreliable, feminine, cowardly and stupid”, and according to him it was “possible to delude a Korean into believing anything about the outer world”. Hamel also noticed that the Japanese and Manchurian invasions had completely devastated the country.

As a consequence of its strategic geographical location, Korea became a highly contested ground for the rivaling states of the region at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Deuchler, 1977). In 1910, after victories over China (1894-95) and Russia (1904-05) in wars that took place on the peninsula, Japan annexed Korea. During the colonial period (1910-45), the country was more or less closed to Westerners, and it wasn't until after liberation and the Korean War that knowledge about the country became more widespread in the West. This geographic inaccessibility created various contradictory myths about the country and its people. Korea was on the one hand an archaic and ridiculous copy of old China, a degenerated kingdom deserving its fate as a Japa-

nese colony, while on the other hand the Koreans were almost like the Japanese, namely intelligent and diligent. For many, Korea was simply the last “Oriental” fairyland, the least known, visited and explored, and among race theorists Koreans were rumored to be the closest to Whites. All these myths also had their proponents in Sweden.

In 1904, the newspaper *Aftonbladet* wrote in its editorial that if Japan was able to hinder Russia from conquering the rich but neglected Korea, it would be a blessing for human civilization (Burgman, 1965: 46). In 1910 professor Rudolf Kjellén, political scientist and the founder of Geo-Politics, commented when Japan annexed Korea: “Japan is such a great and noble nation, that it must an honor or even a pleasure to be killed by her!” (Kjellén, 1914: 13). Åke Holmberg (1994: 36) has noted that during the colonial period, the difference between Japanese and Koreans was blurred for many Westerners, a fact which is not surprising considering the harsh and in many ways effective assimilation policy. The leading Swedish race biologist Dr. Bertil Lundman (1946) at Uppsala University wrote about the Koreans: “Some have almost a Nordic appearance with high stature and light colors in eyes, hair and skin complexion, and these semi-European types who are numerous in Korea may speak a language related to Indo-European.” The same theory was proposed by the American Wladimir Mitkewich (1956) who argued that the Koreans originated from ancient Greece: “Koreans are White inwardly. So, let the Europeans and Americans accept Koreans, as brothers and sisters, on equal terms.”

The relationship between Sweden and Korea goes back to the 1720s when Lorenz Lange, a Swede in Russian service, met with Korean diplomats in Beijing and wrote a

report on Korea marking the first time when Swedes and Koreans had direct contact with each other (Utrikesdepartementet, 1999). At the same time another Swede in Russian service, Johan Philip von Stralenberg, produced the first Swedish map with Korea included. At the end of the 19th century, the first Swedish travelers went to China and Japan, and some of them also visited Korea. One was Amanda Gardelin who stayed at the court of king Kojong in the 1880s and cured a member of the royal family for which she received a valuable tea box as a gift. Others who passed through the Korean peninsula during the 1890s were Herman Trozig, Alexis Kuylenstierna and G.O. Wallenberg. During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, besides the seven travelers accounted for in this paper, contacts also took place on a royal level as in 1926 the Swedish crown prince, later king Gustav VI Adolf, went to Korea and took part in the excavations in Kyongju where he found a gold crown from the mound today known as Sobong Chong, the Swedish Phoenix. A year later, the Korean crown prince answered by paying a visit to Stockholm.

At the outbreak of the Korean War, the Swedish government sent a field hospital, Swedish Red Cross Hospital. In 1951 the first contingent which returned home to Sweden founded Swedish-Korean Society as a friendship organization. In 1954, the field hospital was transformed into the Swedish hospital in Pusan and closed down in 1957 after having seen one thousand Swedes serving there. After the armistice, Neutral Nations' Supervisory Committee was organized and stationed in Panmunjom with Sweden as one out of four participating countries. The committee is still active and in place, and since 1953 close to one thousand Swedish officers have served there. In 1961, officers from the committee founded the Korean association in Sweden - today the most important friendship organization between Sweden and Korea. In 1958 the

Scandinavian National Medical Center was set up in Seoul as the then most advanced hospital in the country. The hospital was given to the Korean state in 1968 after having seen the service of hundreds of Swedish doctors and nurses.

In 1950, the first Korean immigrant arrived to Sweden, and in 1963 Korean Association was founded for the Korean-Swedes who today count around 1,000 individuals including the first and second generation. In 1957, the first adopted child from Korea arrived to Sweden, and today the adopted Koreans dominate the ethnic Korean presence in the country with 8,500 individuals. In 1986, the Adopted Koreans' Association was founded as the organization for adopted Koreans in Sweden. From the middle of the 1950s, Korean has been taught at university level in Sweden, from 1968 at Stockholm University. In 1989 a professorship in Korean Studies was instituted, and since 1968 more than 500 students have studied Korean, the majority being adopted Koreans. Finally, in 1959, Sweden and Korea initiated diplomatic relations between each other, and in 1975 a Swedish embassy was also installed in North Korea. At the same time, trade exchange started to grow between the two countries, and today Korean Trade Council has an office in Stockholm and its Swedish equivalent an office in Seoul.

Encyclopedias can be said to reflect the images and values of a particular time period, and particularly perceptions about non-Western countries, peoples and cultures. From the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *Nordisk familjebok* dominated the Swedish market of encyclopedias with three different editions published from 1876, 1911 and 1929, together with *Svensk uppslagsbok* with its first edition coming out from 1933. Besides, between 1937-40 the first edition of *Kunskapens*

*bok* came out and wrote under the entry “Korea” (1938): “A Swedish expert on Korea, the explorer Sten Bergman, explains that in comparison with the Japanese, the Koreans lack the go-ahead spirit, energy and warlike temper. The Koreans dislike hard labor as they prefer to sit down smoking pipes and chatting with like-minded.”

In the 1884 first edition of *Nordisk familjebok* the Koreans are consequently designated as natives (“*infödingar*”), and crocodiles are said to exist in the country. The knowledge of the country is scarce and fragmented and the number of inhabitants is said to stand between 8.5 to 15-16 million. About the Koreans, the unknown author writes: “The people are very superstitious. The women have a low status. Polygamy is not permitted, but as in China an accepted institution.” The author is badly informed about Korea’s relationship to China and Japan, and obviously doesn’t even know about the 1876 Treaty of Kanghwa. Historically, Korea is described as a part of China until the 12<sup>th</sup> century, and as a tax-paying vassal of Japan from the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

The second edition from 1911 is more well-informed, with Dr. J.F. Nyström as author. Korea is now “Japanese territory”, and its geography and climate are accounted for in detail. However, crocodiles as well as monkeys are still said to exist in the country. This edition is filled with racial stereotypes as the Koreans are said to be more similar to the Japanese than the Chinese (illustrated by pictures), and many are said to have features resembling Europeans. Generally, the men are said to be strong, while the women are “seldom beautiful”. About the character of the Koreans, Nyström writes: “Unobtrusiveness, seriousness and dignity are typical traits, as well as a lively interest in foreign customs. They have a much stronger emotional life than the Chinese. The status of woman seems to be better than among their southern neighbors. The masses are poor, oppressed and uneducated and seem to have degenerated from an

older higher cultural level.” The Japanese rule is said to be positive for the country with modernization according to the Western model as the ideal.

Finally, in *Nordisk familjebok*'s third edition of 1929, the Sinologist professor Bernhard Karlgren has written the entry “Korea” and M.A. Elin Lenander is responsible for the entry “Koreans”. The Koreans are said to belong to the Mongolian race, but of an unknown origin, and they are again characterized as being “unobtrusive, serious and dignified”, but also having a “great indolence”. Furthermore, Koreans are said to have an “intensive hatred” for foreigners, and for the history of Korea after 1910, Karlgren refers to the entry “Japan” as Korea is “Japanese territory”.

The first edition of *Svensk uppslagsbok* from 1933 contains a text on Korea illustrated by four photos, and is written by the professors J. Frödin, Bernhard Karlgren and Gustaf Bolinder, M.A. Y. Löwegren and B.A. Gertrud Serner. Korea is defined as a “Japanese general government”, and Bolinder writes about the Koreans: “The Koreans are a mixed people, belonging to the Mongolian race. They are high in stature, even more compared to the Northern Chinese whom they look alike. They have a stronger growth of hair and beard than the Chinese and Japanese.” Karlgren writes about Korea from a historical standpoint as a “victim of the new Japan”, a historical fact said to be the result of a “general apathy” (“*försoffning*”). The anti-Japanese incidents of 1882 and 1884 are described as “Japanese hostile mob riots”, and Korea is said to have the same position in the Japanese Empire as Finland had in the Russian Empire.

### **Swedish travelers to Korea 1904-38**



Among the seven Swedes who traveled to Korea before 1945 and published travel accounts, the first group composed by William A:son Grebst (1912), Sven Hedin (1911; 1950) and Sten Bergman (1937) can be termed the explorers. Grebst visited Korea at the time of the Russo-Japanese War 1904-05, Hedin visited the country in December of 1908 and Bergman stayed for almost two years during 1935-36. In the beginning of the last century, William "Willy" Andersson Grebst who visited countries like Japan, Argentina, Samoa and Tahiti was one of the most widely read Swedes with his popular travel accounts. Grebst was at the same time the editor-in-chief of Sweden's leading Anti-Semitic paper *Vidi*, and also wrote poems and novels.

On Christmas Eve 1904, Grebst boards a ship leaving Japan and Nagasaki behind after having received permission to visit Korea. Upon arrival in Pusan, he is surprised by the number of Chinese and Japanese fishing boats, which for Grebst proves that the Koreans are the "world's laziest people" as they cannot take care of the riches of the sea themselves. As Grebst is taking a walk through Pusan, he is struck by the "ever-present filth", contrasted by the cleanliness of the Japanese area: "The expansion of the vital Japanese race makes the extinction of the Koreans almost necessary." The Korean women appear in the eyes of Grebst as "very ugly".

Grebst utilizes the passenger train to Seoul, and during the trip he spends time with a Japanese army captain who insists that the Koreans have "no future" and thus are "doomed to extinction". In Seoul, he hires a room at Station Hotel, owned by an English missionary, and is bestowed a Korean "boy" as his guide. On New Year's Eve, he is invited to the German Embassy where he befriends the famous Dr. Wunsch who works as a medical doctor for emperor Kojong's court. Through his acquaintance with Dr. Wunsch, he is invited to the funeral of the crown princess in January of 1905 and

gets permission to meet the emperor himself. The audience at Kyongbokkung is for Grebst like a “dream”, a visit at an “Oriental court” just like in the fairytale: “Oriental splendor and magnificence, a group of eunuchs and an army of coolies.” Grebst pities the emperor who is on his way of losing his country to Japan, while the crown prince is “ugly”, looking like an “evil pig”: “The last male offspring of a degenerated house!”. The struggle for independence is ever-present in the Korean capital as Grebst witnesses several meetings on the streets, and sometimes he even feels sympathy for the Koreans, the “childish, stupid and lazy people” . After four weeks in Seoul, in vain he tries to get to the theater of war north of the Yalu river, but the Japanese want him to leave the country. At the end of January, Grebst leaves Korea with a German ship after a last farewell dinner at the German Embassy.

The giant among Swedish explorers is of course the world-famous Sven Hedin, honorary doctor at ten universities, member of 15 academies including the Swedish one, and without doubt the most famous Swede and Orientalist of his time. Hedin organized nine expeditions to Western and Central Asia and made way for later explorers like Aurel Stein and Albert von Le Coq by mapping vast and remote areas. He brought back tens of thousands of artifacts in the forms of manuscripts and art works, published 65 books translated into 22 languages and left behind 145 diaries and 80,000 letters to the foundation which still bears his name.

Hedin’s ruthlessness in pursuing his own goals has been testified through numerous anecdotes (Svanberg, 2003). During a stay in Teheran in 1890 Hedin broke into a temple and cut off three heads from corpses of holy men as gifts to a Swedish race biologist, and in 1895 he forced his way throughout the desert of Taklamakan whereby two of his “coolies” passed away as a result of the hardships. The same hap-

pened to a “boy” some years later when Hedin, as many of his like-minded Westerners in those days of romantic Orientalism and crazy racial ideas, in vain tried to reach Lhasa. Politically, Hedin like Kjellén warned the Westerners of the “Yellow Peril” at the turn of the century, and in 1914 he played a crucial part in toppling the democratically elected liberal Karl Staaf government as the co-writer of king Gustaf V’s infamous speech. During World War I, Hedin as a romantic of Fascist violence and with his cult of the “purifying war” enthusiastically sided with the Germans, and he welcomed the Nazi seizure of power in 1933.

At the Summer Olympics of Berlin in 1936, Hedin was one of the opening speakers as he by then already had become a close personal friend of Hitler. In numerous articles in the National Socialist press, Hedin showed his strong support for Germany’s new leader and his Nazi politics. In 1943 he refused to do anything to save the still surviving Jews in spite of having direct access to Hitler’s ears after a desperate pledge from the Swedish archbishop Eidem. Instead, Hedin wrote back to archbishop Eidem that accusations that the Jews as “vampires and parasites had soaked German blood” were “fully justified”. Hedin was a member of the two most important pro-Nazi organizations among the upper echelons of the Swedish society, Swedish-German Association and the National Association of Sweden-Germany, and he gave financial support to *Dagsposten*, the daily newspaper of the Nazi party Swedish National League. Hedin was one of very few Swedes who after Hitler’s suicide in May of 1945 sent a letter of condolence to the German embassy in Stockholm and mourned “the loss of Germany’s great leader”. After the war and until his death in 1952, Hedin continued to publish articles in the Neo-Nazi German and Swedish press.

In November of 1908, Hedin visits Japan after his third Central Asian expedition, invited by the country's Geographic Society to lecture. During the visit, Hedin receives an invitation to Korea and leaves Shimonoseki on the 13<sup>th</sup> of December. After one night in Pusan, he continues by train to Seoul and stays at a German hotel. Hedin has strong pro-Japanese leanings, as he mentions "Japan's peaceful conquest of Korea". On the 16<sup>th</sup>, he meets with Ito Hirobumi, among the newly conquered and colonized Koreans a very despised man who later was murdered by a Korean patriot, and is strongly impressed by his visions, for Hedin like a "Caesar", "the leader of Korea's destiny".

Hedin is also greatly impressed by general Akashi Motojiro, known as "The Butcher" after his effective purges of the Korean resistance movement, and an inhabitant of Stockholm in the 1910s as an organizer of the Japanese espionage system in Northern Europe. Hedin writes that already 1,500 years ago Japan had conquered parts of Korea, a today much disputed historical problem that legitimized Japan's colonization. After a couple of days, he visits the court of the now powerless emperor Sunjong and is on Ito's demand bestowed with the Korean Order of the Eight Elements from the hands of the emperor. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December, Hedin starts the almost one month's long journey home to Sweden by the use of the trans-Siberian railroad.

Sten Bergman was a famous zoologist at Stockholm University and made expeditions to the Kamchatka Peninsula, the Kuril Islands, and New Guinea where he collected zoological and ethnographical material. Bergman published many travel accounts and went around in Sweden lecturing about his experiences for a wide audience. Between February 7, 1935, and November 28, 1936, he was "on expedition", stationed in Korea with the purpose of exploring the country's birds, mammals and

insects and collect as many species as possible for Swedish museums. Bergman brought with him conservator Harald Sjöqvist and the Japanese chef Kenji Fujimoto who both had accompanied him to the Kuril Islands.

Bergman takes the trans-Siberian railway through Finland and Russia, and arrives to Seoul after 13 days of travel. He is warmly welcomed by Japanese colonial administrators who will take care of him during the whole expedition. Bergman admits that Japanese rule is not popular among the Koreans, but he is assured that it is for the “best of the country” as Korea had been “too corrupted” before the Japanese takeover. In March, Bergman travels to Chongjin after having spent time with the Swedish missionaries in the capital. He is struck by the “filth” of the countryside and sincerely believes that the Koreans are “reluctant to take a bath”. He travels around in what is today North Korea, climbs Paektu-san and witnesses the Japanese military hunting down Korean rebels coming down from Manchuria. Bergman also comments that the Korean women are “not that beautiful”. He spends Christmas and New Year together with the Russian hunter Jankovski who has settled permanently among the “natives” (*“infödingarna”*) in northern Korea and gladly shoots “bandits” (Korean guerilla fighters) as well as animals.

The first half of 1936 is spent outside Sinuiju where Bergman finds many rare birds and collects traditional artifacts from the local population. During summertime, Bergman stays at Chiri-san where many of the Westerner expatriates in Korea use to spend their holiday. Bergman holds several lectures and enjoys the “civilized company of Whites”. He visits both Kumgang-san and Cheju Island before he returns to Seoul in September for more lecturing at Keijo University, Ehwa College and Royal Asiatic Society. In October, Bergman pays a visit to Japan meeting Japanese and Swedish

friends, and the next month he goes back to Sweden by train with all his collected material which today can be seen at the National Museum of Ethnography and the Swedish Museum of Natural History in Stockholm.

The second group of Swedish travelers to Korea are the missionaries Verna Olsson (1957) and Erland Richter (1915). Olsson, captain in the Salvation Army, stayed in Korea between 1911-38, while Richter as the editor-in-chief of Salvation Army's *Stridsropet* visited the country for a short period in 1914. Olsson traveled to Korea in December of 1911 together with Sofia Frick and Magda Köhler, two other young Swedish Salvation Army soldiers. Olsson was to stay in the country until 1938 when she was interned by the Japanese and transferred to Manchuria. In 1940, she was moved to Beijing, and finally in 1946 she returned to Sweden and wrote down her memories.

Upon arrival to Korea, the inexperienced girls cannot speak neither English nor Korean, and after barely three months Frick gets sick and dies. Olsson and Köhler go through one year of intensive language studies and are thereafter dispatched to Taegu where they start their missionary activity. However, after two years Köhler is infected by typhus and passes away, "dying for the salvation of Korea". Now left alone, Olsson moves to a small village where she sets up her base in a Korean "mud hut". She starts to fight the "heathen gods" by singing Swedish songs and playing the guitar at meetings. One of her biggest concerns is how to make the Korean men stop smoking their pipes and drinking alcohol, and she develops a way of preserving a "calm dignity" when meeting with the Koreans and their "superstitious behavior". After some years of successful service in the remote village, Olsson is called back to Seoul where she be-

comes the translator of commandant Annie Hoggard from England. With her strong Christian faith, Olsson writes long passages about all the miracles the Salvation Army are able to accomplish in Korea, and especially their struggle against the Korean “devil dancers”, female shamans. At the time of Buddha’s birthday, the army also organizes rallies against Buddhism. Now and then, Olsson has to visit the countryside where she reluctantly is forced to live the life of a “native” (*“en infödings liv”*).

During the 1920s, Olsson has advanced to chief of the first corps in Seoul and experiences the Koreans’ resistance against the Japanese: “Sometimes we were getting in trouble because of the aggressive attitude of the Koreans towards the Japanese. Occasionally they organized demonstrations and small uprisings.” During the next decade, even Olsson is threatened by the more militant policy of the Japanese introducing Shintoism as state religion and persecuting Korean converts who are put in jail. In 1940, Olsson gets arrested and is thrown out of the country and placed in Mukden, Manchuria. In 1940, she is forced to move to Beijing where all the Westerners in the city are put in camps except for the Swedes and the Germans. In 1945, for a time Olsson works for the Americans as a translator in Korean, and the next year she is finally able to return to Sweden by boat after three decades of missionary service in East Asia.

Major Erland Richter was the editor-in-chief of *Stridsropet* between 1907-18 besides publishing several travel accounts. In 1913-14 he was dispatched by the movement’s leader Bramwell Booth to India, Japan and Korea to collect material for a book on the missionary activity of the Salvation Army. When Richter was ordered to go to Asia, the “Orient”, he felt happy to be able to “study people who always have attracted the dreams of Westerners”. Under the slogan “To the heathen!”, Richter visits India and Japan and ends with a short visit to Korea in 1914. Richter’s first impression

of the Koreans upon arrival in Pusan is that they look “lazy” and “indifferent”. Richter soon understands that Korea is “one of the earth’s most interesting and lazy countries where Japanese visions and Christian deeds are on its way of transforming the values”. In Seoul, Richter is impressed by the modernizing efforts of the Japanese who are “rising the Koreans to a higher level”, something which demands “birth pains”, and it is evident for Richter that the Koreans always have been an “absolutely deedless, un-intelligent race”. Richter visits the headquarter of the Salvation Army before he returns home to Sweden by the way of the trans-Siberian railway.

The third and last group of Swedish travelers to Korea during the period is the journalists – Hjalmar Cassel (1906) from *Svenska Dagbladet* who went to Korea during the spring of 1905, and Jonatan Magnus Ollén (1921), editor-in-chief of Christian *Svenska Morgonbladet* 1918-45 who paid a short visit to the country in 1914. Cassel was a political journalist, an inventor and an author of several travel accounts, and went to East Asia at the time of the Russo-Japanese War.

Cassel sets out from Japan in early spring of 1905 and arrives in Pusan with a steamer. Cassel is well aware that “darkest Korea” is one of the least known countries of Asia, even more than “the inner of Africa”: “I will be the light of culture among these heathen”. When taking the train to Seoul, Cassel, siding with the Russians and hoping that Korea will become a European colony, gets to know an American who assures him that the Koreans are “animals”. In Seoul, Cassel is fascinated by the “genuinely Oriental” city in a country doomed to be colonized just like Egypt: “Isn’t it the same soulless reverence to the great, the same slavish respect for old and stone-hearted gods?” For Cassel, it is Confucius that has transformed Korea into a “carrion



among nations”. Cassel recapitulates the modern history of Korea and writes about Taewon-gun as a “typical representative for the tyrants of the Orient” with his “wild excesses and blood-letting”. When leaving the country after the short visit, Cassel finally suggests to his Swedish readers that Korea could become a Swedish colony: “The climate is healthy and fits us; the natives (*“infödingarna”*) are gentle.”

Jonatan Magnus Ollén visited Korea in 1914 to find material for his overview of Swedish missionary activities in Africa and Asia. Ollén was the editor-in-chief of *Svenska Morgonbladet* and had himself organized the Swedish mission in Mongolia. Ollén is happy for the success of Christianity in Korea compared to other countries in the region. Like so many of the Swedish travelers, he arrives in Pusan from Japan and takes the train to the capital Seoul. When seeing the Korean countryside, Ollén comments on the “filth” and “laziness”, while the women are either like “small dolls” or “extraordinary ugly”. The Koreans appear for Ollén as “children” as the country according to him is definitely in need of modernization under the leadership of Japan. Ollén visits all the different kinds of churches in Seoul including the Salvation Army where he meets with his countryman Verna Olsson to get material for his book. He is impressed by the number of converts which he explains is a result of the “slavish nature” of the Koreans.

### **The image of Korea**

With all this said, it is evident that Swedish images of Korea during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were strongly colored by Orientalist perceptions and thus did not differ in any substantial way from the general Western view on Asia and Korea. In accordance with Said’s theory on Orientalism, the “Orient” exists for the West, and is constructed

by and in relation to the West as a mirror image of what is inferior and alien, while the "Oriental" is depicted as feminine and weak. Said makes a difference between "latent Orientalism" and "manifest Orientalism" whereby the former is the unconscious way of thinking about the "Orient" and the latter what is consciously spoken and acted upon. Korea is for the Swedes a backward and primitive country, while the Koreans are "filthy" and "ugly", and above all the country is considered in urgent need of modernization under the guidance and leadership of the "civilized" Japanese. This Social-Darwinist thinking whereby it was seen as completely natural that the stronger ruled over the weaker ("Might is right") permeated the whole Western mind during the time of imperialism and didn't just included the Koreans.

Lena Olsson (1986) has examined how non-Western cultures are described and represented in Swedish schoolbooks between 1870-1985, showing how Western civilization and White people systematically are valued the most and placed on the top before Asians and Africans. In another important study on Swedish images of non-Westerners, Ulla Lindström (1992) has interviewed Swedes born between 1899-1973 on their first experiences with non-Western people which very often took place at circuses and museums during the 1930s and 1940s when living human beings from Africa and Asia including Chinese or Japanese were exhibited like exotic animals. Recently, studies have been published showing that 58 percent of the Swedes consider themselves as racists as Sweden has suddenly developed to the most racist country in the West in terms of racial discrimination and segregation and with the most dynamic Neo-Nazi movement in the world (*Dagens Nyheter*, June 12, 1997). I would at this point like to recommend an excellent and thought provoking study, Alan Pred's *Even in Sweden. Racisms, racialized spaces, and the popular geographical imagination*

(2000). Pred, a professor of Cultural Geography at the University of California, shows in a persuasive way how their self-image has stopped the Swedes from being self-critical and has resulted in a self-righteousness which today is going through a painful process.

Finally, are these images of Korea still prevalent for contemporary Swedes? To be able to answer the question in a complete and scientific way, it is necessary to conduct an extensive survey among a sample of Swedes of all walks of life, something which unfortunately hasn't been done yet. On the other hand, anecdotal evidence says that the knowledge of Korea in Sweden is limited to issues of student demonstrations, labor disputes, the North Korean nuclear issue and the adoption of Korean children as these are definitely the main subjects dealt with in the Swedish media at least for the past 40 years when referring to Korea. The Korean media is also painfully aware of the fact that this negative image of Korea in Sweden as a still war-stricken and impoverished Third World country has been influenced by the heavy adoption statistics judging from newspaper articles on adoption in Korea. Recently, the Korean government suddenly seems to have become aware of this negative image of the country not only in Sweden but in all Western countries as a committee for the improvement of the national image was established after the World Cup including measures such as phasing out adoption of Korean children as soon as possible (*Korea Times*, July 8, 2002). At least it is my personal hope that the image of Korea in Sweden in particular and in the West in general will be greatly bettered in the future!

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