ABSTRACT

Basil Hall's Account of a Voyage of Discovery to the West Coast of Corea and the Great Loochoo Island of 1818 is a valuable account of a British naval officer’s experiences which graphically illustrates the state of isolation of Korea at that time. It is also an important record because, being written just after the Napoleonic Wars in Europe, it stands chronologically on the cusp of historical events—Britain’s industrial development and imperial expansion. The views of Korea espoused by the Hall and his companions at that time are quite different from British views of Korea at the end of the nineteenth century.

Keywords: Basil Hall, Sir James Hall, Amherst Mission, Robert Broughton, Dunglass

Britain and East Asia at the Opening of the Nineteenth Century

At the opening of the nineteenth century, Britain was neither the great industrial power, nor the great colonial power that she was to become by the end of the century. The industrial revolution was in its infancy and a global British Empire was not even thought of. Colonial possessions at the beginning of the nineteenth century were overseas possessions largely peopled by persons of British extraction, not nations ruled by a minority British administrative elite.

For Britain, the early years of the nineteenth century were characterised by the Napoleonic Wars and their aftermath, and by the search for commercial and trading opportunities around the world. The world was still to be explored, mapped and charted, and commercial relations created. This theme continued the traditions of the eighteenth century, the era of the great voyages of discovery to all parts of the globe, symbolised by the adventures of such naval heroes as Captain James Cook(1728-1779), and the improvements in navigational technology. The account by Captain Basil Hall(1788-1844) of his travels in the Yellow and East China Seas in 1816 is perhaps the last British account of East Asia before the advent of full-blown Victorian industrial and imperial expansion. The large-scale industrialisation which was to come in the latter part of the century led to the search for resources and markets for industry and the creation of a great world-wide empire. But that was in the future. When Hall and his companions came to Korea not quite two centuries ago, Europeans were still in ‘The Age of Discovery’. The very title of his work, Account of a Voyage of Discovery, conveys the sense of excitement at exploring and describing the unknown. Indeed, one could argue that
Halls account of his visit to the west coast of Korea and to the Kingdom of the Ryukyus was the final phase of this age of ‘innocent’ European exploration. The visit to Soch'on County in 1816 was on the cusp of dramatic social, political and economic changes and developments, and for this reason Hall's account is especially precious. It provides a British account of a distant part of the world before imperialism.

The British squadron which arrived off Korean shores two hundred years ago was part of the diplomatic and commercial mission of the British government to the Qing imperial court, led by William Pitt Amherst (1773-1833), 2nd Baron Amherst. It was a rare and important undertaking. Lord Amherst's mission was the ninth formal attempt by various European courts and commercial traders to establish formal and equal trading relations with Qing China, and the second one conducted by the British government. At the time, these attempts were recognised to have been failures in ‘opening up’ China. Contemporary opinion held that the failure to accomplish this goal was due to political ineptitude and that it would have been more beneficial if merchants and commercial traders had been involved primarily in establishing trading relations with China and other East Asian nations.

The first British mission to China was the Macartney Mission of 1792-1794. Led by George Macartney, 1st Earl Macartney (1737-1806), it was an attempt to obtain a broader market for British goods, and to encourage the Chinese government to give up the tributary system for dealing with foreign nations in favour of a system of envoys and representatives. Because of the refusal of Lord Macartney to perform the complex system of bows in greeting the Chinese emperor (other European representatives in the past had also refused to do so), the mission did not achieve its aims. However, this mission had no contact with Korea or Koreans, nor had it made any attempt to do so.

The first contact of a Briton with Korea took place in 1797 when Captain William Robert Broughton (1762-1821) commanding the HMS Providence reached Pusan harbour in early October of that year. Not part of the Macartney Mission, Broughton was one of a group of British naval officers who had been commanded to explore and chart the coasts of northeast Asia and the north-western part of the American continent. The Providence explored the east coast of Korea and by 14 October had reached the area of modern Pusan. The reception given to Broughton and his crew in that area had been good enough for him to land, receive some basic provisions, and to have a look at some of the surrounding hamlets. After a stay of over a week, he left the Pusan area on 22 October, and proceeded amongst the islands of the Korea Straits reaching the vicinity of Cheju Island by 27 October. He left Korean territorial waters on 30 October heading for Macau.

In one way or another, Captain Broughton spent a month in Korean territory. This reflects his intentions as stated in a letter to the Admiralty upon purchasing a tender to accompany the Providence saying that it would be useful in exploring the coast of Corea and Tartary (eastern Siberia, JHG) with the Japanese islands. This indicates that Broughton specifically had a strong interest in clarifying the coastline of Korea by creating better charts of its territorial waters. The title of his book, published in 1804, reflects a sense of the excitement of exploration, A Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean, a sentiment which was characteristic of the age. However, in spite of the fact that Broughton spent a lengthy period of time in or around Korea, and wrote engagingly about what he had seen there and elsewhere in Northeast Asia, his book had very little influence and is now difficult to obtain. This lack of influence may be attributed in part to the time when the book was published, in the middle of the Napoleonic war years when British attention would have been focussed on military and political events in continental Europe and not on commercial and hydrological interests in distant parts of the world. Thus, although William Robert Broughton may have been the first Briton to touch Korean soil, his visit had little effect on Anglo-Korean relations.

The Place of Lord Amherst's Mission in British Contacts with East Asia

The mission of Lord Amherst to the Chinese imperial court in 1816-1817 was the second attempt by the British government to change the way in which trading and diplomatic relations were conducted by the Qing. Although this mission was no more successful than Lord Macartney's mission, it was different from the previous mission in that it combined diplomatic and commercial interests with scientific ones. Macartney's mission and the scientific explorations of naval officers such as Broughton had been separate endeavours, although they had taken place during the same period of time. Following upon the conclusion of the Napoleonic wars, Britain took a greater interest in the world beyond Europe for reasons of commercial trade. As a result of the enhancement of trade, a greater knowledge of the sea lanes, coastal areas, and characteristics of the people in distant nations became essential. Thus, a commercial and diplomatic mission would as a matter of course include persons capable of making sound geographical, nautical and scientific observations, as a consultation of the composition of the persons making up the mission would indicate. As we shall see, Basil Hall himself had considerable

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1 These included inventions by John Harrison (1693-1776) of a chronometer which compensated for differences in climate, and the most accurate method for determining longitude.

2 This view of all the European diplomatic missions was put forcefully in a review of the official account of the Amherst Mission which appeared in the Edinburgh Review in 1818. See the review of Ellis, pp. 433-435.


4 See his account of his travels in Broughton 1804. The visit to Korea is discussed on pages 323 to 393. The work also included a substantial vocabulary list of Korean, Japanese and Ryukyuan words. Broughton's account, however, is more nautical in focus and lacks the depth of description about the things which he saw compared with Hall. Hall is better at description and gives a better sense of his engagement with the people he encountered. This is a shame as Broughton was in Korea much longer and could have provided much more information. His account, I believe, failed to gain popularity in part because he failed to gain the attention of his reader in the same way in which Hall did.

5 Public Record Office (UK) ADM/1 vol. 1517 Letter Capt. B512.

6 See M'Leod 1817: 2-3.
scientific interests—geological, geographical and hydrological, which are reflected in the reports of what he saw in Korea and the Ryukyus which are written up in his book.

Unlike the Macartney Mission, there are three records of the Amherst Mission, which is an indication of the heightened interest which Britain was taking in the outside world in the second decade of the nineteenth century. The official record of the mission, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Late Embassy to China* (1818), was written by the Third Commissioner of the mission, Sir Henry Ellis (1777-1855). This report says nothing of interest to us about Korea as it focuses entirely on the work of the embassy to the imperial court. Contemporary critiques of the work, however, said that it had been written in haste and reflected the overall lack of preparation for such a momentous undertaking.  

The other two works are of great interest to us. John M'Loud (1777 or 1782-1820), the ship’s surgeon aboard the HMS Alceste wrote *Narrative of a Voyage in His Majesty’s Late Ship Alceste, to the Yellow Sea* (1817), an account of the voyage of the squadron to East Asia, its explorations through the Yellow and East China Seas, the rejoining with the Amherst Mission, and the eventual wreck of the ship off the coast of eastern Sumatra. Consequently, this book when compared with Basil Hall’s work, however, reference is made to Cliford’s powers of observation and his abilities to record what he had seen and heard. Hall praises the assistance which he received from him in making observations, in arranging the materials in the appendices, and for compiling vocabulary lists of the Ryukyuan and Korean languages. Hall’s regard for Cliford can be judged by the fact that his name appears along with Hall’s on the title page of *Account of a Voyage of Discovery*, and that the dedication page states that it is from the authors. Hall considered Cliford to be the joint author of the book with himself.  

John M’Leod is a somewhat murkier figure. Like Maxwell and Hall, M’Leod was a Scot. He was born in Dumbartonshire in west central Scotland. Having received medical training, his entire career was spent as a ship or naval ship’s surgeon. He was first appointed to the navy in 1801, but during the interval of the phases of the Napoleonic wars, and being without a job, he was for two years a surgeon on ships involved with the slave trade. Following the outbreak of war in Europe again, he was given a naval appointment, which in various forms he held until his death in 1820. In December, 1815, he was appointed to serve on the Alceste and was aboard her when she was wrecked in the Gaspar Straits. Following their rescue, on the return journey to Britain M’Leod composed his account of the voyage of the squadron taking the Amherst Mission to China. The success of that book subsequently led him to write up an account of his experiences on a slave ship.  

Of the four principal characters who appear throughout the narrative of events of the voyage of HMS Alceste and Lyra, it is Basil Hall who commands our attention because of the thoroughness with which he carried out his hydrological, cartographic, meteorological, geographic, and social scientific observations. Although the account of contact with the people of Korea was very short, his comments are acute and precise, and often warm-hearted. Hall was more than a naval officer. He had a good scientific mind which was exercised meticulously through a wide range of varying interests. Where did these interests arise, and how did Hall acquire his training in scientific methodology? To understand the way in which Basil Hall approached his encounters with the land and peoples of Korea and the Ryukyus, one must know something of his family background.

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7 See the review of the *Journal of the Proceedings of the Late Embassy to China* in Ellis 1818.  
8 See a review of M’Leod’s and Hall’s books in *Edinburgh Review* vol.29 1818:473-497, which stresses the value of Hall’s account. However, M’Leod’s account of the shipwreck of the Alceste and the conduct of the British crew was compared favourably with the account of the actions of a French crew following the wreck of the French warship Medusa in 1816. See M’Leod 1818.  
9 An indication of the enduring popularity of Basil Hall’s writings on his voyages is indicated not only by the number of times the books were reprinted but by the number of times they were translated into other languages including French, German, Spanish and Swedish. These works were reprinted or formed the basis of collections of naval writings, or seafaring stories for youngsters. See the Bibliography at the end of this paper for the variety of ways to which his works were put.  
10 ODNB vol.37:525-526. The ODNB in particular recounts his rash attack on Chinese shore batteries near Canton as he attempted to link up with Lord Amherst who was travelling overland to southern China on his way home.  
11 ODNB vol.35:816-817. See M’Leod 1817 and 1819 for details of these two books.
Basil Hall and His Antecedents

Basil Hall's family were members of the petty nobility (baronetage) of Scotland, and active members of the Scottish intellectual class. Because of its intellectual activity in the eighteenth century, Edinburgh—the capital of Scotland, was given the sobriquet 'Athens of the North' and the century itself is referred to as the era of the 'Scottish Enlightenment' because of the intellectual, scientific, literary and cultural ferment which took place at that time. This was a time when some of the most important Scottish thinkers were active producing some of the most significant intellectual ideas of the modern period. Basil Hall's father, Sir James Hall (1761-1832) was one of the most important and creative scientific thinkers and researchers of his time making major contributions to the development of the modern science of geology. Hall's younger brother James (1800-1854) was a noted portrait and landscape painter with a strong scientific interest in optics and light.12

Sir James Hall, 4th Baronet Hall of Dunglass, was born on the family estates and educated until his tenth year at home. After a period of study at a military academy in London, he attended Cambridge University before re-enrolling at the University of Edinburgh. Back in Edinburgh, James Hall benefited from family connections in the stimulation of his intellectual interests, as well as the scientific ethos of Edinburgh University at that time. His uncle William was a noted member of the Scottish intelligentsia and his maternal uncle Sir John Pringle was president of the British scientific association, the Royal Society of London. At Edinburgh, he studied under Joseph Black (1728-1799) who, through scientific experimentation, demonstrated the existence of gases other than air, and helped to establish the scientific methodology for the modern science of chemistry. Through Black, James Hall became a close friend of James Hutton (1726-1797), some years his senior, who was one of the founders of modern geology. After graduation from Edinburgh, he spent nearly three years travelling throughout Europe from Berlin to Italy. He took particular interest in the geological composition and structure of the places in which he travelled. He spent some time in Paris where he became well acquainted with Antoine Laurent Lavoisier (1743-1794) the discoverer of oxygen, who converted him to accepting the role of that substance in chemical processes—at that time a very novel idea. Following his return to Scotland and his marriage in 1786 to Helen Douglas second daughter of the 4th Earl of Selkirk, James Hall spent much of his time in intellectual discourse and experimentation.

In 1788, he gave three landmark papers at the Royal Society of Edinburgh which changed thinking in Scotland about chemistry. Moreover, he was one of a very few number of people who accepted James Hutton's theories about the origins of crystalline rocks. Hutton's ideas, now orthodox theory in geology today, was that these rocks were the cooled result of hot liquids which had formed deep in the earth. Orthodox theory in the eighteenth century said that these rocks were the result of sedimentary deposition from a primeval ocean. Hutton also argued that sediments which had been consolidated by heat at the bottom of oceans were in a subsequent period uplifted to form new land masses, an idea which is now orthodox thinking. James Hall's contribution to Hutton's theory was to provide experimental proof for his friend's theories. Among other extensive experiments which James Hall conducted were the artificial creation of crystalline rocks, the creation of marble and limestone from powdered carbonates, and an experimental demonstration of the folding of sedimentary rocks, leading to uplifted landmasses and folded rock strata. He conducted up to 500 experiments to demonstrate these geological processes and to show how variations were dependent upon changes in heat. In his experiments he used the latest scientific measures including Wedgewoods pyrometric scale and a new type of thermostat which he designed himself. His experimental work and John Playfair's (1748-1819) Illustrations of the Huttonian Theory of the Earth (1802) helped to establish Hutton's theories as the foundation of modern geological theory. James Hall was a member of the Royal Society of Edinburgh from 1784 (when he was twenty-three), its president from 1812 to 1820, and a Fellow of the Royal Society of London from 1806.

A novel thinker and experimentalist, James Hall had a significant impact on the scientific culture of early modern Britain and was typical of the educated elite of Scotland who were the precursors to modern science and modern scientific research.13

It was this family into which Basil Hall was born and grew up,14 an extended family of relatives and friends who were at the forefront of contemporary intellectual endeavour, lights of the Scottish Enlightenment. Basil Hall was born at the family home in Dunglass, southeast of Dunbar in eastern Scotland, as the second son of the family on 31 December, 1788. As we have seen, his home was one of both privilege and intellectual curiosity. After finishing study at the Royal High School, Edinburgh in 1802, at the age of 14 Hall entered the navy in which he served until 1823 when he was 35. From 1802 until the conclusion of the Napoleonic wars, Hall saw service in battle under some of the leading naval commanders. In 1808 he was made lieutenant and took command of his first ship HMS Illustrious in 1814. In 1815, he was appointed to the command of the 10-gun brig Lyra which was to form part of the squadron to be sent to China on the Amherst Mission along with the 38-gun frigate Alceste. Even while a serving naval officer he had established a reputation for himself as a scientific observer and had been made a Fellow of the Royal Society in March of 1816. On 5 November, 1817, one month after returning from East Asia, he was given the rank of captain, undoubtedly in recognition of his contributions to the mission.15

For the next two years aside from writing Account of a Voyage of Discovery, he appears to have travelled throughout Europe before being given the commission

12 ODNB vol.24:621.
13 ODNB vol.24:620-621.
14 A good overview and appreciation of Hall’s life may be found in Shannon McCune’s introduction to the reprint of Account of a Voyage of Discovery by Royal Asiatic Society, Korea Branch. See McCune 1973:2-6.
15 ODNB vol.25:595.
of commanding the 26-gun frigate HMS Conway in 1820. Until 1823, this ship was part of a group of British vessels patrolling the South Atlantic and eastern Pacific Oceans. While he was travelling along the South American coasts, he carried out a number of scientific experiments and observations which formed the basis of a scientific paper published by the Royal Society in 1823. Hall was released from the navy in that year, and married in 1825. After that time until his death in 1844, he led the life of a cultured intellectual writer on literary and scientific subjects.

In 1824, he wrote a description of Latin America based on what he had seen during his three years of service along the coast of the South American continent in *Extracts from a Journal, Written on the Coast of Chili, Peru, and Mexico in the Years 1820, 1821, 1822*. This work proved popular and was reprinted in 1825, 1826 and 1840. A French version appeared as early as 1825. In 1827 and 1828, he travelled with his young family throughout the United States, notes from which journey formed the basis of *Travels in North America in the Years 1827 and 1828* (1829). This book caused a storm of protest in the US because of its criticism of conditions there.\(^17\) In the early 1830s, he composed a series of volumes of extracts from his diaries and notes on his travels. Titled *Fragments of Voyages and Travels* it appeared in three volumes which appeared in three series between 1831 and 1833. Frequently reprinted and used as a source by other travel writers, this work proved to be immensely popular. In part it was aimed at a juvenile audience, but it attracted considerable adult attention because of its comments on the state of the navy.\(^18\) A later travel book was *Patchwork* (1841), being a description of travel in France, Italy and Switzerland. In his later years, he also took up novel writing, the result of which was *Schloss Hainfeld: or, a Winter in Lower Styria* (1836) which was published simultaneously in Britain and the United States.\(^19\)

However, Hall continued to maintain his scientific interests and to write on a variety of scientific subjects including a description of the thermostat which his father had invented, a geological description of the Rockall islet 300 miles from the Scottish coast, and improved nautical cartographic techniques.\(^20\) Hall was a member of a number of scientific societies including the Royal Society, the Royal Astronomical Society, the Geological Society; in addition to which he was a founding member of the Royal Geographical Society on the Council of which he served. Hall had three children. His eldest child Eliza Jane (1825?-1856?) was the mother of Basil Hall Chamberlain (1850-1935), who went to Japan in 1872 in the early years of the Meiji period (1868-1912) to become one of the foremost Western authorities on modern Japan.\(^21\) His son Basil (d. 1871) followed his father into the navy achieving the rank of captain.\(^22\) In 1842, Hall suffered a mental breakdown and spent the final two years of his life in Haslar Royal Naval Hospital in Gosport, near Portsmouth.\(^23\)

### The Value of Basil Hall's *Account of a Voyage of Discovery*

Basil Hall was not the great experimenter or scientific thinker that his father Sir James Hall was. Nonetheless, he acquired from his father a love of scientific enquiry, a meticulousness in observation, and the ability to describe in detail what he had seen. He would have witnessed his father's numerous experiments to prove various aspects of Hutton's theory, and would undoubtedly have heard him speak about his own ideas and observations. These skills were all put to good use throughout his naval career, the training which he received in the navy honing whatever skills he had received through his home environment.

In evaluating the value of Hall's account of his visit to the west coast of Korea, we can say that it is important for four reasons—it contains the earliest Western hydrological description of parts of the west coast of Korea; it provides the earliest Western description of the geology of Korea; it contains a description of ordinary life in rural Korea just before the impact of European imperial and commercial expansion, and it provides a graphic first-hand account of the political conditions of Korea at the close of the Choson dynasty.

To take each of these points in turn, it is important to remember that in the early nineteenth century, Europe was still in (the final stages of) the 'Age of Discovery'. Safe ship lanes were not fully known at this stage, and therefore, it was important that good, clear nautical charts be created. This simple fact can be graphically illustrated by the wreck of the *Alceste* itself on 18 February, 1817 on the return journey to Britain. Shipwrecks were not uncommon and so European governments were willing to expend large sums of money on charting the world's oceans. The charts which Hall and his crew drew up were very incomplete in their overall description of Korea's west coast. Nonetheless, they are the base from which everything else had to begin. The charts themselves are highly detailed in describing where the ship had gone, and what the crew had seen. In conjunction with this, the appendices in the 1818 edition of *Account of a Voyage of Discovery* provides detailed descriptions of the weather, sailing conditions and other observations of the crew. For the Briton curious about distant parts of the world, these hydrological and meteorological descriptions would have provided ample and interesting information for the armchair traveller and excited the interest to know more.

Following the custom of European explorers of the time, places marked on the map of Korea were given European (in this case English) names. This practice was also used with the Ryukyuan maps. Basil Hall tells us that Captain Maxwell twice named islands for people associated with the Hall family. The first group which they visited on 1 and 2 September was named the Sir James Hall Group, which Hall modestly tells us was ‘in compliment to the President of the Royal Society of Edinburgh’\(^24\) without mentioning that this person was his father.\(^25\) The
island which was visited on the 3rd of September was named Hutton's Island, 'after Dr. Hutton the geologist.' James Hutton, of course, was a close friend of Sir James Hall, and the two together were the leading geological theorists of their time. Other names which show a connection with the Hall family may have been given by Hall himself. The bay in which the ship anchored is referred to as Basil's Bay, clearly a reference to Hall. The large island off to the southwest of Basil's Bay is called Helen's Island, which must refer to Basil Hall's mother Lady Helen Douglas Hall (1762-1837). The straits off the penultimate island which they visited is called Murray Sound, clearly in honour of Captain Maxwell, while the whole group of islands is marked as the Amherst Isles for Lord Amherst. The final point at which they stopped is called Lyra Island in honour of Hall's ship.

Secondly, the geological information contained in Hall's account would also have been both interesting and important scientifically. On pages 8 and 9 of Account of a Voyage of Discovery there is an extensive footnote which occupies most of those two pages. This footnote contains both an extensive description of the rocks and rock strata, as well as theoretical musings as to how the rock formations had come to be. The text indicates that samples of the different rocks were collected. All of these actions reflect interests and skills which Hall would have gained from his father. More important are Basil Hall's musings on how the current geological state of the island had developed. He speaks of forces uplifting lower strata, geological extrusions, subterranean heat forces and so on. These ideas were new concepts at the time, and Hall's use of them clearly reflects the ideas of his father, Hutton, and Playfair. The graphic description given of how these forces acted on the landscape must reflect the fact that Hall would have witnessed numerous of his father's experiments to prove his theories and those of James Hutton. Indeed, we know that Basil Hall wrote up some parts of the experiments which his father had conducted. More than any other naval officer of his day, Hall would have been well equipped to examine, describe and explain the geological formations which he saw. This aspect of his writing would also have given considerable colour and interest to the reader.

The third value of Hall's book is its description of the people and culture of Korea at the end of the Choson dynasty. Although it does not tell us much that we do not already know, the account was important in its time because it introduced an unknown and undescribed people to the British and European reader. There is a meticulous description of clothing, decorations, homes, household implements, and tools paralleling the detailed descriptions of geographic and geological features, as well as some shrewd observations about social interaction. This would all have been of interest to Europeans who were now keen to know more about the outside world. Most people would not have had access to Hendrik Hamel's account, which any way was very old, and Broughton's account was difficult to obtain. Consequently, the descriptions of Korea (however brief) and of the Ryukyu kingdom which were virtually unknown at the time would have excited much interest. This is also reflected in the number of times which Account of a Voyage of Discovery was reprinted, edited, translated, and used as the basis for other works. However incomplete, it is a primary account of an early British encounter with Korea and her people.

The fourth reason for valuing this account is its graphic description of the Korean policy of excluding contact with foreign nations. The contrast of the reception (however cautious) of the squadron in the Ryukyus with the reception at the five places where the British actually landed in Korea is stark. Although the Koreans were personally warm-hearted and curious about the foreigners, there was a palpable fear that there would be severe punishment if the central government came to know of the British presence. Commoners, universally using hand motions indicating the slitting of one's throat, gave a vivid description of this fear, while the uncontrollable emotion expressed by the magistrate when the party actually did land indicates how strongly the policy of exclusion was enforced along the west coast. Vignettes of this sort give life to descriptions of this policy which we know about through governmental texts and edicts. At this time Korea and the Kingdom of the Ryukyus had very different policies towards foreign relations and trade. Whilst the former imposed a strenuous policy of exclusion, the latter had pursued for generations a trading policy which gave it a position not unlike modern Singapore or Hong Kong, a trading entrepôt.

**Concluding Observations**

In conclusion, we can say that Hall's Account of a Voyage of Discovery holds an important place in nineteenth century British records of East Asia because of its thoroughness of description, and because it was composed at the cusp of the change in European attitudes from the 'Age of Discovery' to the 'Age of Imperialism.' Hall's account still fits in the former period. In the nineteenth century, there were five key English-language works which introduced Korea to the British and European reader. The first was Broughton's Voyage of Discovery but this had little influence and was almost forgotten. The second, of course, was Hall's own account. The third was John Ross's (1842-1915) History of Corea: Ancient and Modern (1879), the first full-length history of Korea in any European language which situated her history firmly in that of Northeast Asia. It also includes extensive descriptions of customs and culture, but these are largely drawn from secondary Chinese sources, and the book itself was written after European imperialist expansion had begun. The fourth book was William Elliot Griffis's (1843-1928) Corea: The Hermit Nation (1882), which was widely read. It was reprinted and continued to be revised until 1905. Written after the beginning of the period of imperial expansion, Griffis's work is largely dependent upon secondary Japanese sources. The final book was Isabella Bird Bishop's (1831-1904) Korea and Her Neighbours (1898) which was based upon extensive first-hand observations over a three-year period. It provides

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26 Hall 1818, op. cit. p.12
27 ODNB vol 25:393
28 Hendrik Hamel was a Dutch sailor who along with other members of the crew of the Sperwer had been shipwrecked on Cheju Island in 1653. They remained in Korea until the late 1660s. Hamel's account of his time in Korea, published in 1668, is the earliest description of the country in a Western language. An English translation, An Account of the Shipwreck of a Dutch Vessel off the Coast of Quepaert, together with a Description of the Kingdom of Corea, was published in 1704.
detailed and engaging cultural and political descriptions of Korea in the period just before the nation was annexed by Japan. Comparisons between these five books is useful and interesting both for the similarities over a broad period of time which they depict and for the changes which they track. Basil Hall’s account is important because it is based on a personal encounter and is the last book before the advent of European imperialism. It is also important because of the great interest which it stimulated in East Asia as is evidenced by the number of times it was reprinted and reutilized—as were most of his other works.

Account of a Voyage of Discovery reveals the general sensitiveness which the officers and crew expressed towards a very strange and different people whom they were meeting for the very first time. In reflecting on the refined and cultivated manners of the magistrate, Hall remarks: ‘the incident is curious, as shewing, that however different the state of society may be in different countries, the forms of politeness are much alike in all.’ Likewise the ability of the non-commissioned crew to engage with the Korean farmers and fishermen whom they encountered caused some admiration on Hall’s part, as it should to us. He says, ‘We have frequently remarked during this voyage, that the sailors make acquaintance with the natives much sooner than the officers.’

However, Hall is quite frank that one of the reasons why their voyage throughout the seas of eastern Asia had not been not as fruitful as it should have been was due to a lack of proper preparation. This was especially the case with regard to Korea when having someone who could act as a translator, i.e. someone who knew written Chinese, would have enabled them to have been better understood by the magistrate. He says, ‘A future voyager would do well to be accompanied by a person who can write the Chinese character, and should have full leisure to overcome, by patient management, the distrust of strangers evinced by this unsociable people.’ This is an implied criticism of those who had responsibility for planning this important voyage, a point with which contemporary opinion concurred, as we have seen. He regrets ‘the scanty and disjointed nature of the information obtained’ and senses a lost opportunity. As one brought up in a family used to precise scientific work, he must have felt this lack very keenly.

The fact that Hall’s account is about two different but neighbouring nations adds poignancy to the Korean account. There is a very good description of the Ryukyus because the squadron was able to stay much longer there and to engage much more with the people of all classes. How much more could we have learned, how much more could the British of that time have discovered about Korea if the policy of exclusion had not been so fiercely pursued. Perhaps greater openness might have led to greater and more beneficial contact. Who can say, but it is one of the great ‘ifs’ of Anglo-Korean relations.

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