

■ 논문 ■

“The Western Leaven has Fallen” – the British  
Lady Traveller Isabella Bird as a Thinker on  
Globalization in East Asia

Klaus Dittrich

I . Introduction

Isabella Bird was an exceptional woman. She was born in Boroughbridge, a small town in Northern England, in 1831 where she grew up in an Anglican clerical household. Bird's husband whom she married in 1881 was ten years her junior and passed away only a few years after marriage.<sup>1)</sup> She never had children. Instead, travel was her passion and kept her busy throughout her life. Bird made a first trip to North America in her early twenties, an unusual exercise for an unaccompanied woman at this time. In 1872, she started a trip around the world with extended stays in New Zealand, Hawaii and the Rocky Mountains. In 1889, she was en route to India, Tibet, Persia, Armenia and Turkey. In the early twentieth century she travelled to Morocco before she died in Edinburgh in 1904. As a traveller, her endurance was indescribable; she progressed in all meteorological conditions, be it icy wind and snow, torrential inundations or the hot and sticky air of the summer. Bird published accounts of all her trips. This helped her to gain popularity and recognition, underlined – inter alia – by her admission as the first

---

1) After marriage Isabella Bird took her husband's name Bishop. Some of her books are published under this name. For consistency reasons I use her maiden name Isabella Bird throughout this article.

female member to the Royal Geographical Society of London. Bird was for sure one of the most famous Anglophone lady travellers of her time.<sup>2)</sup>

Bird travelled two times to East Asia. Her first trip brought her to Japan in 1878. Her book *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan. An account of travels on horseback in the interior, including visits to the aborigines of Yezo and the shrines of Nikkô and Isé* appeared in 1880.<sup>3)</sup> Bird visited East Asia for the second time in the mid-1890s. Korea was the main destination of this trip; due to the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, however, she also visited China, Japan and far eastern Russia. Her book *Korea and her neighbours: a narrative of travel, with an account of the recent vicissitudes and present position of the country*, published in 1897, was the major outcome of this trip.<sup>4)</sup> An additional volume on China entitled *The Yangtze Valley and beyond. An account of journeys in China, chiefly in the province of Sze Chuan and among the Man-tze of the Somo territory* appeared in 1899.<sup>5)</sup>

Her book on Korea counts as one of the most popular late nineteenth-century publications on the peninsula. Historians have published numerous studies of Bird's works on East Asia, which is

---

2) Olive Checkland, *Isabella Bird and a woman's right to do what she can do well* (Aberdeen: Scottish Cultural Press, 1996).

3) Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan. An account of travels on horseback in the interior, including visits to the aborigines of Yezo and the shrines of Nikkô and Isé* (London: John Murray, 1880).

4) Isabella Bird Bishop, *Korea and her neighbours: a narrative of travel, with an account of the recent vicissitudes and present position of the country* (London: John Murray, 1897).

5) Isabella Bird Bishop, *The Yangtze Valley and beyond. An account of journeys in China, chiefly in the province of Sze Chuan and among the Man-tze of the Somo territory* (London: John Murray, 1899).

why Bird is a well known person even today.<sup>6)</sup> Her books provide ample ethnographic details on daily life in Japan, Korea and China over one hundred years ago. Bird’s viewpoints have occasionally been shared by researchers as accurate criticism of actual circumstances. On the other hand, her works have also been criticised from a postcolonial perspective.<sup>7)</sup> These studies are all helpful in understanding Bird’s writings. However, I think that most scholarship misses one central point. When reading Bird’s books on East Asia, I realised that her observations and ideas are fundamentally related to phenomena of global interconnectedness. The late nineteenth century experienced an unprecedented wave of globaliza-

- 
- 6) Recent scholarship includes Michael Finch, “Western Encounters with Korean Culture. From Hendrik Hamel to Isabella Bird Bishop,” *Eon-eo-wa munhwa*, 3(2007), 1-24; Hakjoon Kim, “Seoyangindeul-i gwas-chamhan Joseon-ui moseupdeul (jae 3 hoe): Cheongil jeonjaeng balbal jikjeon-euro-buteo Joseon-ui mangguk-kkaji-ui sigi,” *Hanguk jeongchi yeongu*, 18(2009), 227-294; Hee-young Kim, “Orientallijeum-gwa 19-segi mal seoyangin-ui Joseon insik: Isabella Bodeu Bisypop-ui ‘Joseon-gwa geu iut nara’-reul jungsim-euro,” *Gyeongju sahak*, 26(2007), 165-181; Hee-young Kim, “Jegukjuui yeoseong Bisypop-ui yeohaenggi-e natanan Joseon yeoseong-ui pyosang,” *Donghak yeongu*, 24(2008), 145-163; Park-kwang Choi, “Oegukin-i bon geundae Joseon-gwa dongbuk Asia-ui gakchuk: Isabella Bodeu Bisypop-ui ‘Joseon-gwa geu iut nara’,” *Asia munhwa yeongu*, 15(2008), 253-280; Jonggab Kim, “Taja-ui balgyeong? Taja-ui balmyeong? Bisypop-gwa Kkeuriseuteba-ui yeohaenggi,” *Bigyo Hangukhak*, 20(2012), 219-247; Young-Ah Lee, “19-segi mal seoyangin-ui nun-e bichin Joseon sahoe-ui hyeonsil-gwa Donghak nongmin bonggi: Isabella Beodeu Bisypop-ui ‘Joseon-gwa geu iut nara’-reul jungsim-euro,” *Donghak yeongu*, 23(2007), 1-23; Hua-jeong Seok, “Race, Imperialism, and Reconstructing Selves: Late Nineteenth Century Korea in European Travel Literature,” Rotem Kowner, Walter Demel, eds., *Race and Racism in Modern East Asia: Western and Eastern Constructions* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 261-279; Moon-su Sin, “Dongbang-ui tacha: Isabella Beodeu Bisypop-ui ‘Joseon-gwa geu iut nara’,” *Hanguk munhwa*, 46(2009), 119-138.
- 7) On the tensions between enlightenment and postcolonial interpretations and possibilities to overcome them see recently Sebastian Conrad, “Enlightenment in Global History: A Historiographical Critique,” *American Historical Review*, 117(2012), 999-1027.

tion.<sup>8)</sup> The term globalization, in this context, refers to the process that intensified the circulation of people, ideas and commodities over national and continental boundaries.<sup>9)</sup> Because of the impact of globalizing forces on societies around the globe, recent syntheses conceptualise the nineteenth century as a century that saw the “transformation of the world” or the “birth of the modern world”.<sup>10)</sup>

Bird profited from globalization. Means of communication such as steamships, railways and the telegraph made travel faster and much more convenient. Bird travelled at a time when it had become legally possible for foreigners to travel in East Asia. Her trips would have been impossible without the unequal treaties which had opened China, Japan and eventually Korea to European travellers. She travelled on the infrastructures of British power. This reminds us that the period was characterised by power hierarchies which are usually subsumed under the catchword imperialism.

But Bird not only profited from globalization, she also observed how globalization transformed the East Asian societies. Based on her three books on Japan, Korea and China, this paper discusses to what extent Isabella Bird can be regarded as a thinker of globalization. Analysing how she articulated globalizing changes in East Asia, I put a special emphasis on the location of agency. In particular I want to show that, according to Bird, the active players involved in the transformation of East Asia were not foreign imperialists, but East Asian actors themselves. In the first part I focus on Bird’s observations. The introductory and concluding parts of her

---

8) Kevin H. O’Rourke, Jeffrey G. Williamson, *Globalization and History: the Evolution of a Nineteenth-Century Atlantic Economy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999).

9) Jürgen Osterhammel, Niels P. Petersson, *Geschichte der Globalisierung. Dimensionen, Prozesse, Epochen* (München: Beck, 2003).

10) Christopher Alan Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Malden: Blackwell, 2004); Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt: Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (München: Beck, 2009).

books offer ample material in this regard. In the second part, I will confront her ideas to early twentieth-century as well as current historiographical approaches to global interconnectedness which provide similar interpretative frameworks.

## II. Isabella Bird's View on Globalization in Late Nineteenth Century East Asia

Today, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the East Asian countries belong to the most prosperous in the world. This has not always been the case. The nineteenth century has been discussed as the period of the “great divergence”, the historically short period when Europe outperformed Asia.<sup>11)</sup> Moreover, the late nineteenth century was the high time of imperialism. During this period of imperial supremacy and arrogance, most European contemporaries believed that the hierarchy between a strong Europe and a weak Asia would be quasi-eternal. The dominant European nineteenth-century ideology of Orientalism regarded non-European societies as backward and uncivilized.<sup>12)</sup> On the one hand, racial theories from the first denied non-Europeans the ability to access modernity.<sup>13)</sup> On the other hand, these societies were potential and actual objects of civilizing missions carried out by imperial powers, involving violent interference with local social systems.<sup>14)</sup>

---

11) Kenneth Pomeranz, *The great divergence: China, Europe, and the making of the modern world economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

12) Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

13) Michael Keevak, *Becoming yellow: A short history of racial thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

14) Alice Conklin, *A mission to civilize: the republican idea of empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); Carey A. Watt, Michael Mann, eds., *Civilizing Missions in Colonial and Postcolonial South Asia. From Improvement to Development* (London/New York: Anthem Press, 2011).

However, when East Asian countries are prosperous today, they did not achieve this status through new genetic combinations or European civilizing missions. These ideologies proved to be misleading. Nineteenth-century Europeans over-estimated their power to transform the world. Instead, East Asian countries achieved prosperity through their own efforts. In this process, the ability to adopt innovations made elsewhere played a key role. Learning from abroad and usefully combining foreign elements with local ones was – and still is – a highly active and creative endeavour. In this perspective, not European imperialists but the agency of East Asian actors mattered most in transforming Japanese, Chinese and Korean society. In the following I want to show that Isabella Bird, already in the late nineteenth century of high imperialism, foresaw such a trajectory.

Most nineteenth century European travel accounts conveyed a worldview that implied the ideas of racism and the civilizing mission. According to Mary Louise Pratt, travel writers moved in “contact zones”, spaces of encounters “in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict”.<sup>15)</sup> Such a disposition was not absent from Bird’s writings. In her books we find indications of an orientalist perspective on East Asia. Bird, for example, referred to Korea’s and China’s “unreformed Orientalism”.<sup>16)</sup> Bird described many East Asian villages and cities as characterised by their mud, smell, filth and poverty.<sup>17)</sup> In her contacts with local people she sometimes showed a significant mental distance which makes it difficult to believe that she accepted them as her equals. The Orientalist dimension was an intrinsic part of her accounts and

---

15) Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial eyes: travel writing and transculturation* (London/New York: Routledge, 1992), 6.

16) For example Bishop, *Korea*, I, 14.

17) See for example her first arrival to Seoul, Bishop, *Korea*, I, 32–33, 36.

## “The Western Leaven has Fallen”

I do not intend to downplay its centrality. More in general, however, Bird’s writings on East Asia were more than “colonialist portraits”<sup>18)</sup>. One of the central points of her books is the fascination she developed for Japan, Korea and China. Bird considered the East Asian countries as of high cultural standing and was convinced of their ability to join an interconnected modern world on their own terms. In particular, she highlighted the East Asian societies’ ability to appropriate and make sense of foreign knowledge. Bird’s outlook was therefore fundamentally optimistic and forward-looking.

This disposition becomes evident in her book on Japan. “Old Japan is no more,”<sup>19)</sup> was one of the central messages of her introductory chapter. Bird addressed a readership which still imagined Japan as a country ruled by the shogun and hostile to foreign countries. But, Bird argued, all encyclopaedic knowledge on Japan was now out-dated. She therefore underlined that, since 1868, the country had embarked on a decisive project of adopting foreign knowledge. The Iwakura mission which left Japan to North America and Europe in 1871 as well as the abolition of feudalism best underlined these changes in Bird’s eyes.<sup>20)</sup>

Bird rationalised the appropriation of foreign cultural elements as a powerful process. “Many Europeans ridicule Japanese progress as ‘imitation’, [...] yet Japan holds on her course, and [...] I see no reason to distrust the permanence of a movement which has isolated her from other Oriental nations, and which [...] is growing and broadening daily.”<sup>21)</sup> With her critique of those Europeans who ridi-

---

18) Todd A. Henry, “Sanitizing Empire: Japanese Articulations of Korean Otherness and the Construction of Early Colonial Seoul, 1905–1919,” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 64(2005), 651.

19) Bird, *Japan*, I, 9.

20) The Iwakura mission was composed of high-ranking officials headed by Iwakura Tomomi. See Ian Nish, ed., *The Iwakura mission in America and Europe: a new assessment* (Richmond: Japan Library, 1998).

21) Bird, *Japan*, I, 9.

culed the Japanese appropriation of things foreign Bird rationalised the normality of transnational learning processes.<sup>22)</sup> Furthermore, Bird compared the appropriation of Western cultural assets with similar appropriation processes to Japan in the past, such as Chinese and Buddhist civilisation which further banalized intercultural exchange. Despite the imperialistic context, the “civilisation which comes from the far West in the nineteenth century” then appeared as just another aspect of cultural interaction.<sup>23)</sup>

The permanence of these changes was a central point Bird emphasised several times throughout her account. Many European observers expected that the appropriation of foreign cultural elements would be superficial and ephemeral. Japan, according to this opinion, would fall back in a state of barbarism after some quick and shallow reform experiments would have come to an end. Bird, however, did not see such a danger in Japan. She insisted: “With the impetus of the new movement, springing mainly from the people, and from within, not from without, we have undoubtedly two of the elements of permanence.”<sup>24)</sup> On the one hand, Bird saw support for reforms by large parts of the population as a sign for durability. On the other hand, and more importantly, reforms were successful because they were orchestrated “from within”. Foreigners did not play a significant role in reforming Japan, at least not primarily. Instead, Japanese actors themselves decided about the reform path Japan was to take. This emphasis on changes coming “from within”, and thus on Japanese agency, was paradigmatic for Bird’s writings.

This becomes particularly clear when Bird approached the issue of foreign employees in Japanese service. These foreigners played a

---

22)On this point see also Robert A. Rosenstone, “Learning From Those ‘Imitative’ Japanese: Another Side of the American Experience in the Mikado’s Empire,” *American Historical Review*, 85(1980), 572-595.

23)Bird, *Japan*, I, 10.

24)Bird, *Japan*, I, 9. Italics in the original.



## “The Western Leaven has Fallen”

crucial role in Japan’s transformation process.<sup>25)</sup> But Bird insisted that the Japanese closely circumscribed the activities of the foreign experts:

“It must be remembered that they are there as helpers only, without actual authority, as servants and not as masters, and that [...] the greater their energy, ability, and capacity for training, the sooner are their services dispensed with, and one department after another passes from foreign into native management. The retention of foreign employé forms no part of the programme of progress. ‘Japan for the Japanese’ is the motto of Japanese patriotism; the ‘Barbarians’ are to be used, and dispensed with as soon as possible.”<sup>26)</sup>

This quote exemplarily uncovers the mechanics of the Japanese transformation process. The Japanese decision makers have the agency over the reform programme. The foreign employees are the “servants” or “barbarians” who are working for the profit of Japan. Throughout her account, Bird provided numerous concrete examples of how Japan appropriated things foreign, including schools, the police force, prisons, railway lines and so on. The appropriation process could sometimes be clumsy, for example when Japanese men lacked the knowledge how to wear a jacket properly or when Bird experienced “Western”-style banquets as boring.<sup>27)</sup> Occasionally, Bird complained about the “many extravagances and absurdities” of the Japanese’ embrace of foreign knowledge.<sup>28)</sup> But, in general, she positively evaluated the outcomes of Japan’s reform process:

---

25) See also Edward R. Beauchamp, Akira Iriye, eds., *Foreign Employees in Nineteenth-Century Japan* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990); H. J. Jones, *Live machines: hired foreigners and Meiji Japan* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1980).

26) Bird, *Japan*, I, 10.

27) Bird, *Japan*, II, 202-204, 233.

28) Bird, *Japan*, I, 9.

“The extraordinary progress which the Empire has made justly claims our admiration, and, judging from the character of the men who take the lead in public affairs, and from the wisdom and sobriety which they have gained from ten years of experience, we may reasonably hope for the consolidation of reforms already inaugurated, and that those which are to come will be faithfully carried out with due regard for the interests of all classes, and with the honesty and solidity which alone can ensure permanent success.”<sup>29)</sup>

The 1870s, when Bird visited Japan for the first time, indeed saw the climax of the country’s fascination for the West. Her second trip to East Asia in the mid-1890s allowed Bird to re-evaluate Japan’s performance after one and a half decade had passed. In the meantime, Japan had won the first Sino-Japanese War and become a colonial power. This war gave rise to Bird’s perception of Japan as a potential threat. She formed her opinion on the basis of Japanese behaviour on the Asian mainland. When she heard about the murder of Korea’s Queen Min in 1895, Bird argued that “a heavier blow to Japanese prestige and position as the leader of civilisation in the East could not have been struck”.<sup>30)</sup> By 1899, Bird felt that Japan had “a corrupt people with a straight government,” a potentially frightening combination.<sup>31)</sup> This partial disillusionment and loss of sympathy for the archipelago shows that learning processes were open-ended. The outcomes were unpredictable and could go in a – for Bird – negative direction.

The East Asian country Bird liked most was China. She visited the Yangtze valley up to the Tibetan territories in Sichuan. China

---

29) Bird, *Japan*, II, 347.

30) Bishop, *Korea*, II, 71.

31) Bishop, *Yangtze*, 533. In China, in contrast, “the people are straight, but officialism is corrupt.”

“The Western Leaven has Fallen”

was the only country where Bird’s physical safety was in jeopardy, whereas Japan and Korea had been completely safe. Rioting mobs attacked Bird two times providing evidence of wide-spread anti-foreign feelings in China. Nevertheless, the language of her account cannot hide the strong fascination the British traveller felt for the Chinese Empire:

“Throughout the Yangtze valley, from the great cities of Hangchow and Hankow to the trading cities of SZE-CHUAN, the traveller receives very definite impressions of the completeness of Chinese social and commercial organisation, the skill and carefulness of cultivation, the clever adaptation of means to ends – the existence of local patriotism, or, perhaps, more truly, of local public spirit, of the general prosperity, and of the backbone, power of combination, resourcefulness, and independence possessed by the race.”<sup>32)</sup>

With this list of positive attributes, Bird told her readers that China was a country with a sophisticated and basically intact social structure. She repeated several times that the Chinese civilisation “is not decayed, [...] and has many claims to our respect and even admiration.”<sup>33)</sup>

In the nineteenth century, there was one new element in Chinese history according to Bird: “the FOREIGNER.”<sup>34)</sup> Although political reform was less pronounced in China than in Japan, Bird saw “indications for reform from within”.<sup>35)</sup> She harshly criticised those Europeans who promoted a bullying stance against China and wanted to impose their own patterns by force. Against such opinions, Bird argued that “irresistible forces are beginning to drive China out of

---

32) Bishop, *Yangtze*, 13.

33) Bishop, *Yangtze*, 11.

34) Bishop, *Yangtze*, 537. Capitals in the original.

35) Bishop, *Yangtze*, 538.

her conceit and seclusion.”<sup>36)</sup> Bird illustrated these “inner changes” with the dynamism of the Chinese economy. She observed, for example, that in a city as Hankou British businesses were not able anymore to compete with their Chinese counterparts.<sup>37)</sup> Furthermore, the demand for translations of foreign books was high. The literati class eagerly consumed these publications. These indications convinced her that Chinese would appropriate foreign knowledge for their own benefit. With the “Western leaven working”, Bird saw China “at the dawn of a new era.”<sup>38)</sup> She even saw the day coming when the Chinese would outperform the Europeans:

“It is not an effete or decaying people we shall have to meet in serious competition when it shall have learned our sciences and some of our methods of manufacturing industry. Indeed, it is not improbable that chemistry, for instance, might be eagerly adopted by so ingenious a race to the perpetration of new and hitherto unthought-of frauds! But if the extraordinary energy, adaptability, and industry of the Chinese may be regarded from one point of view as the ‘Yellow Peril’, surely looked at from another they constitute the Yellow Hope, and it may be possible that an empire genuinely Christianised, but not denationalised, may yet be the dominant power in Eastern Asia.”<sup>39)</sup>

This quote underlines the central role that learning processes played for Bird. However, she feared that learning processes could potentially lead to unwelcome outcomes, as her example of chemistry demonstrates. Chemistry can be used in beneficial, but also potentially harmful ways, as demonstrated by Japan’s eventual use of imported knowledge for atrocities – the murder of Queen Min

---

36) Bishop, *Yangtze*, 542.

37) Bishop, *Yangtze*, 64.

38) Bishop, *Yangtze*, 544.

39) Bishop, *Yangtze*, 13.

## “The Western Leaven has Fallen”

– on the Asian mainland. This testifies to the ambiguity of intercultural learning processes. Only nuances separated the threatening “yellow peril” from the “yellow hope”. But eventually her account was intrinsically forward-looking, stressing the potentials and opportunities. Bird was convinced that China would sooner or later start a thorough process of adopting foreign knowledge, a process that would be highly beneficial for the country.

Bird’s outlook on the third East Asian country was decisively more negative. Korea, in her eyes, was East Asia’s most problematic country. It lacked Japan’s eagerness for reforms and China’s buzzing economic life. She stated:

“It is into this archaic condition of things, this unspeakable grooviness, this irredeemable, unreformed Orientalism, this parody of China without the robustness of race which helps to hold China together, that the ferment of the Western leaven has fallen, and this feeblest of independent kingdoms, rudely shaken out of her sleep of centuries half frightened and wholly dazed, finds herself confronted with an array of powerful, ambitious, aggressive, and not always over-scrupulous powers, bent, it may be, overreaching her and each other, forcing her into new paths, ringing with rude hands the knell of time-honoured custom, clamouring for concessions, and bewildering her with reforms, suggestions, and panaceas, of which she sees neither the meaning nor the necessity.”<sup>40)</sup>

The quote shows that, according to Bird, reforms were not on their way and that, due to the international context, the agency of foreigners played a more significant role in the Korean context. As a result of the Treaty of Shimonoseki, Bird argued, Korea “has received from Japan a gift of independence which she knows not how

---

40) Bishop, *Korea*, I, 14–15.

to use”.<sup>41)</sup> That is why, in Bird’s opinion, Korea was “incapable of standing alone”.<sup>42)</sup> Bird therefore preferred reforms to be “carried out under firm and capable foreign supervision.”<sup>43)</sup> The lack of Korean agency or dynamism convinced her that foreign intervention, if benevolent, was admissible.

Bird’s view, however, did not incorporate a racial determinism that would regard Koreans as incapable of change. Her prove of the Koreans’ ability to adopt to new situations was her trip to the Korean communities in far eastern Russia.<sup>44)</sup> Korean emigrants to the Russian territories confirmed Bird’s opinion that Koreans could become enterprising and develop – as she expressed it – an “independence and manliness of manner rather British than Asiatic.”<sup>45)</sup> Despite the corruption and inapt social structures which Bird observed in Korea, she insisted on the Koreans’ ability to learn and to adopt to new circumstances. Korea’s “resources are undeveloped”, the country’s “capacities [are] scarcely exploited” and “the energies of her people lie dormant”, she argued, implying that foreign knowledge could make more efficient use of the country’s resources.<sup>46)</sup> The reforms carried out in Seoul in 1897 which led to crucial improvements of the capital’s material infrastructures also contributed to a positive outlook.<sup>47)</sup> But contrary to Japan and China, once again, she suggested that reforms should be supervised by foreigners. In the case of Korea, foreign imperialists – and not Koreans themselves – would be the main agents of change. This understanding reflects

---

41) Bishop, *Korea*, II, 294.

42) Bishop, *Korea*, II, 277. The British consul in Seoul Walter C. Hillier who contributed a preface to Bird’s volume blatantly stated that a “condition of tutelage [...] is now absolutely necessary for Korea to her existence as a nation”. See Walter C. Hillier, “Preface,” Bishop, *Korea*, I, vi.

43) Bishop, *Korea*, II, 282.

44) Byung-yool Ban, “Korean Emigration to the Russian Far East, 1860s-1910s,” *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies*, 9(1996), 115-143.

45) Bishop, *Korea*, II, 17.

46) Bishop, *Korea*, II, 278.

47) Bishop, *Korea*, II, 255-276.

## “The Western Leaven has Fallen”

the real and perceived diversity of the East Asian countries.

Coming from a clerical family background, Bird cultivated a close relationship to British missionaries in East Asia. In most treaty ports she stayed in missionary homes and discussed religious issues with her hosts. Three observations have to be made in relation to the role Bird attributed to Christianity in East Asia. Firstly, Bird propagated a thorough Christianization of the East Asian societies. She saw East Asian religions as superficial and stuck in formalism and superstition.<sup>48)</sup> Interestingly, the mission processes worked exactly in the opposite direction then the other changes. Not Asians appropriated cultural assets from abroad, but European religious leaders tried to impose their outlooks upon the local populations. Secondly, however, Bird urged that Christianity should be adopted to the national conditions of the East Asian societies. She called this a nationalisation of Christianity. On a chapter on Protestant missions in China Bird suggested that China has to be Christianised. This, however, should be carried out by the Chinese themselves.<sup>49)</sup> Bird in this context criticized missionaries who did not respect East Asian customs and manners. Thirdly, what if change does not go in the direction outlined by Bird? The impact of Christianity remained limited in nineteenth century East Asia. The outlook that the transformation of East Asia might not lead to Christianization was potentially frightening for Bird. This confirms the openness of globalization processes. A non-Christian model of modernity still seemed difficult to accept for Bird. However, such a genuinely East Asian form of modernity was in the making. Bird recognised that changes in East Asia would not lead to Westernization, that is a wholesale transmission of European models. Instead, she foresaw that something new, genuinely East Asian forms of

---

48) See for example Bishop, *Yangtze*, 524: “There is no resurrection power in any [of the East Asian religions].”

49) Bishop, *Yangtze*, 518-529.

modernity, would emerge.<sup>50)</sup>

As shown above, Bird wrote during the historically short period when Europe outperformed Asia. She presupposed that, for promoting “inner changes”, East Asian actors would refer to “Western” models, especially models of her own home society. She interpreted other society’s reference to European cultural assets in they way that these societies accepted her own culture. Such an arrangement involved an occasionally paternalistic perspective. Bird belonged to an imperial society and was proud of its presence in the world.<sup>51)</sup> In the economic realm, a belief in the beneficial contribution of free trade capitalism was inherent in Bird’s ideas. In the religious realm, Bird was convinced of the superiority of Protestantism. As her occasional appeals to British power prove, pride in Britain’s achievements as a colonial power was also a key component of Bird’s worldview. This could make here overlook the violence with which Britain and the other colonial powers fought for their interests. Bird criticized, for example, the murder of Queen Min by the Japanese, but British agents proceeded in similar ways throughout the world. It should furthermore be mentioned that a thorough transformation of people’s lives and practices was not specific to East Asia. Right in the European industrial centres of capitalist activity similar processes took place. Bird herself had published one book on the poor classes of Edinburgh where people lived in miserable conditions which did not significantly differ from those of East Asian peasants.<sup>52)</sup>

---

50) This resembles Shmuel Eisenstadt’s concept of multiple modernities. See S. N. Eisenstadt, “Multiple Modernities,” *Daedalus*, 129(2000), 1-29.

51) I use the term “imperial society” (*société impériale*) in the sense that Christophe Charle conceptualized in Christophe Charle, *La Crise des sociétés impériales: Allemagne, France, Grande-Bretagne, 1900-1940. Essai d’histoire sociale comparée* (Paris: Seuil, 2001).

52) Isabella Bird, *Notes on Old Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1869).



## “The Western Leaven has Fallen”

Beyond Bird's British, bourgeois and Protestant positionality, most striking is her belief in the capacities of the East Asian societies to adopt to new circumstances. Bird argued that not outside forces were crucial in the transformation of Japan and China. Instead, the Japanese and Chinese themselves profoundly transformed their own country as a consequence of the reinforced contact with the outside world. In this process the Japanese and Chinese decision makers consciously and systematically appropriated foreign knowledge. That is what Bird called “inner reforms” or “nationalisation” of modernity. These changes were orchestrated by Japanese, Korean or Chinese actors and correspond to the needs of their respective national context. Bird recognised that these “inner changes” were the only way to institutionalise reforms in an efficient and lasting way. Only exceptionally, as in the case of Korea, where she did not see the required drive for reform, did she approve of foreign intervention. She regarded the transformation of East Asian societies as a potentially open-ended process. Moreover, in Bird's eyes, no biological determinism limited the agency of East Asian actors. “The Western leaven has fallen” – East Asia was now integrated into the circuits of global flows. It was henceforth up to the Chinese, Korean and Japanese societies to make something out of it. According to Bird, they had good chances to succeed in this undertaking.

### III. Historiographical Views on Globalization in the Early and Late Twentieth Century

The idea that non-European societies appropriate foreign knowledge did not only appear in popular travel writing. Around 1900, historians as well started to think about global interconnectedness. In particular, Karl Lamprecht (1856–1915), historian and chair of mediaeval and modern history at the University of Leipzig in Germany since 1891, reflected upon questions of interactions between societies. Lamprecht was a specialist of cultural and social history.

He was harshly attacked and thereupon marginalised within German academia as a consequence of the so-called methodological dispute (Methodenstreit) that opposed him to more conservative proponents of political history.<sup>53)</sup> In the following I want to present Lamprecht's embryonic conceptualization of global interactions. I also want to show how today's historians, building on ideas first formulated by Lamprecht, elaborated concepts that help us to understand phenomena of cultural transfers. These concepts allow us to empirically analyse Bird's "changes from within".

Although Lamprecht did not travel as frequently as Bird, it was also an intercontinental trip that shaped his thinking about global interactions. In 1904, Lamprecht crossed the Atlantic en route to the United States on occasion of the International Congress of Arts and Sciences organized as part of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis.<sup>54)</sup> In his travelogue Lamprecht reflected upon contemporary global interconnections. The same year 1904 also witnessed the Russo-Japanese War which often came up in Lamprecht's account as it offered an opportunity to reconsider East Asia's place in world history.<sup>55)</sup>

Lamprecht challenged the common belief in European superiority and postulated the equality of all world regions. After some centuries of European dominance in the world, he predicted a return to

---

53) Roger Chickering, *Karl Lamprecht: a German academic life* (1856-1915), (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1993); Matthias Middell, *Weltgeschichtsschreibung im Zeitalter der Verfachlichung und Professionalisierung: das Leipziger Institut für Kultur- und Universalgeschichte 1890-1990* (Leipzig: Akademische Verlags-Anstalt, 2005).

54) A.W. Coats, "American Scholarship Comes of Age: The Louisiana Purchase Exposition 1904," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 22(1961), 404-417; Wolf Feuerhahn, "'(Euvrer pour l'unité de la connaissance humaine'. Le *Congress of Arts and Science* de Saint Louis (1904)," *Revue germanique internationale*, 12(2010), 139-157; Georg Kamphausen, *Die Erfindung Amerikas in der Kulturkritik der Generation von 1890* (Weilerswist: Velbrück, 2002).

55) Lamprecht, *Americana*, 5.

## “The Western Leaven has Fallen”

a more balanced distribution of power, as societies throughout the world creatively appropriated innovations made elsewhere. The capacity to learn from abroad, he argued, was one of the crucial forces in history. Lamprecht saw that the key to an understanding of global history is to be found in an analysis of global interactions.<sup>56)</sup> At one point he argued that “exchanges between similar but not too closely related peoples have always been the most fruitful in world history.”<sup>57)</sup>

Lamprecht’s stay in the United States comprised a series of five lectures at Columbia University in New York City.<sup>58)</sup> One of his lectures focused on interactions between societies and cultures beyond national histories. Lamprecht regarded processes when one society influenced another and lastingly changed the latter’s destiny as the most interesting phenomenon in history. He then suggested to analyse the paths and the media such influence had taken. From where to where took influence place? Who were the individuals or groups engaged in such processes? Which tools did they use? Lamprecht distinguished between the forced and voluntary quality of transmission processes which would largely condition the overall acceptance of changes. These two categories correspond to Bird’s categories of changes “from within” and “from without”. Lamprecht predicted that interactions between societies would be the dominant force throughout the twentieth century. According to the German historian, those societies that can learn from abroad would be successful in the twentieth century. As a consequence of

---

56) Lamprecht, *Americana*, 3–8.

57) Lamprecht, *Americana*, 85.

58) Karl Lamprecht, *Moderne Geschichtswissenschaft: 5 Vorträge* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Heyfelder, 1905), 103–130. An extract can be found online: Karl Lamprecht, “Universalgeschichtliche Probleme. 1904/1905,” *Themenportal Europäische Geschichte*, 2006, <http://www.europa.clio-online.de/2006/Article=53>, retrieved 10 May 2013. See also Matthias Middell, “Weltgeschichte um 1900,” *Themenportal Europäische Geschichte*, 2007, <http://www.europa.clio-online.de/2007/Article=134>, retrieved 24 March 2013.

this insight, Lamprecht founded a center dedicated to comparative world and cultural history (Institut für Kultur- und Universalgeschichte) at the University of Leipzig in 1909.

Scholars did not take over Lamprecht's ideas at the beginning of the twentieth century. At the end of the century, however, his ideas developed into the most innovative tools of historiography. From the 1980s onwards a group of French specialist of German culture headed by Michel Espagne and Michael Werner, started to develop the concept of cultural transfers (*transferts culturels* in French, *Kulturtransfer* in German).<sup>59)</sup> In the 1990s the Leipzig historian Matthias Middell became the most prolific German scholar in further developing the concept of cultural transfers, studying the relations between France and the German kingdom of Saxony.<sup>60)</sup>

The concept of cultural transfers provides historians with a tool to empirically analyse learning processes across borders. Transfer studies suggest to go beyond the "somehow magical category of influence".<sup>61)</sup> The notion of influence emphasises the giving context, neglecting what actually happened in the receiving context. Scholars of cultural transfers argue that the receiving context determines transfer processes. This insight was crucial in understanding agency in transfer processes. Actors in the receiving context control transfer processes which usually fit to their own agendas. Moreover, the appropriation of foreign cultural elements is an active and creative process. Cultural transfers are therefore not mere "imitation". The question of authenticity does not even matter. "A

---

59) Michel Espagne, Michael Werner, eds., *Transferts. Les relations interculturelles dans l'espace franco-allemand (XVIIIe et XIXe siècles)* (Paris: Editions Recherche sur la Civilisation, 1988).

60) Michel Espagne, Matthias Middell, eds., *Von der Elbe bis an die Seine. Kulturtransfer zwischen Sachsen und Frankreich im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 1993).

61) Michel Espagne, "Französisch-sächsischer Kulturtransfer im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert. Eine Problemskizze," *Comparativ*, 2, 1992, p. 100-121.

## “The Western Leaven has Fallen”

translation has no less legitimacy or originality than its model.” Misreadings and “erroneous” interpretations can even be highly productive in the new context.<sup>62)</sup>

Scholars of cultural transfers pay special attention to the empirically traceable sociocultural conditions, that is the instances of mediation. On the one hand, mediators are human actors, often migrants, interpreters, scholars, intellectuals, individuals with experiences abroad etc. On the other hand, the material supports of transfer processes are also key objects of study, for example books, journals or world exhibitions. Such vehicles were, for example, the Iwakura Mission mentioned by Bird as aiming at “investigating western civilisation and transplanting its best results to Japanese soil”<sup>63)</sup> and the Chinese literati’s interest in translated foreign books.<sup>64)</sup>

Cultural transfers can be divided into four phases. Firstly, actors become aware of a deficit in their own context. They perceive a certain backwardness of their own country. Secondly, they start to search for foreign models which have the potential to overcome those deficits. Thirdly, actors engage in a translation process. Such a process involves the transfer of key foreign elements from one context to another through intensive contacts with foreign actors, the translation of books etc. Fourthly, the foreign elements are fully implemented into the receiving context and, after a certain while,

---

62) Michel Espagne, “Comparison and Transfer. A Question of Method,” Matthias Middell, Lluís Roura, eds., *Transnational Challenges to National History Writing* (Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 36–53.

63) Bird, *Japan*, I, 9.

64) On the impact of the translation of foreign books in China see Mark Gamsa, “Cultural Translations and the Transnational Circulation of Books,” *Journal of World History*, 22(2011), 553–575; Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual practice: literature, national culture, and translated modernity – China, 1900–1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

are not perceived as foreign anymore.

In the European context, the study of cultural transfers has led to a reconsideration of the interactions between France and Germany.<sup>65)</sup> One of the central insights was that German nationalism was full of French references despite the antagonism between the two nations. On the other hand French nationalism had incorporated numerous German elements. France and Germany are similar countries that have many things in common. It has to be asked to which extent such a concept can also be applied to colonial or semi-colonial settings where power hierarchies were more pronounced. Empirical research on Southeast Asia, for example, has shown that the concept of cultural transfers provides innovates perspectives in this context.<sup>66)</sup> Also under colonial conditions actors struggled to import foreign knowledge for their own purposes, ironically often in order to resist the colonial powers.

During the last two decades the concept of cultural transfers acquired a high popularity, especially in the German context. It is a genuinely European forerunner of concepts that later gained prominence within the context of postcolonial history. Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe* brought up key ideas that are familiar to those acquainted to the concept of cultural transfers.<sup>67)</sup> The study of cultural transfer is one of the methods of global and transnational history.<sup>68)</sup> This field of history tries to make sense of global inter-

---

65) Michel Espagne, *Les transferts culturels franco-allemands* (Paris: PUF, 1999).

66) Harald Fischer-Tiné, ed., *Handeln und Verhandeln. Kolonialismus, transkulturelle Prozesse und Handlungskompetenz* (Münster: Lit-Verlag, 2002).

67) Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: postcolonial thought and historical difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

68) Matthias Middell, "Kulturtransfer und transnationale Geschichte," Matthias Middell, ed., *Dimensionen der Kultur- und Gesellschaftsgeschichte: Festschrift für Hannes Siegrist zum 60. Geburtstag* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2007), 49-72.

## “The Western Leaven has Fallen”

connectedness just at a moment, in the early twenty-first century, when the world once again experiences a wave of globalization.<sup>69)</sup>

Today’s research in global and transnational history was able to fine-tune and prove some of Lamprecht’s ideas of 1904. The concept of cultural transfers allows to empirically explain how “the Western leaven” has triggered changes “from within” in the East Asian societies. For example, the idea of the nation took a similar shape in East Asia as in Europe.<sup>70)</sup> As Andre Schmid has shown, the constitution of Korean nationalism was conditioned by the appropriation of some and rejection of other foreign elements, by an engagement with a global context.<sup>71)</sup> With regard to Korea’s discussion of foreign literary works, Ryu Shi-hyun has suggested the notion of “multiply-translated modernity”.<sup>72)</sup> The importation of concepts as “love” or “civilization” to Korea happened through the discussion of European models.<sup>73)</sup> The emergence of new models of masculinity and femininity in early twentieth century Korea are both emanations from Korean traditions and appropriations of for-

---

69) Dominic Sachsenmaier, *Global Perspectives on Global History: Theories and Approaches in a Connected World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

70) Anne-Marie Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales: Europe XVIIIe-XXe siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 1999).

71) Andre Schmid, *Korea between empires, 1895-1919* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

72) Si-hyun Ryu, “Multiply-Translated Modernity in Korea: Samuel Smiles’ *Self-Help* and its Japanese and Korean Translation,” *International Journal of Korean History*, 16(2011), 153-180.

73) Jungwoon Choi, “Importation of Love from Modern Europe to Korea,” Jörg Feuchter, Friedhelm Hoffmann, Bee Yun, eds., *Cultural Transfers in Dispute. Representations in Asia, Europe and the Arab World since the Middle Ages* (Frankfurt am Main & New York: Campus, 2011), 299-312; Young-sun Ha, “The Global Diffusion of the Western Concept of Civilisation to Nineteenth-Century Korea,” Jörg Feuchter, Friedhelm Hoffmann, Bee Yun, eds., *Cultural Transfers in Dispute. Representations in Asia, Europe and the Arab World since the Middle Ages* (Frankfurt am Main & New York: Campus, 2011), 283-298.

eign models.<sup>74)</sup> Many other examples of inspiring scholarship could be mentioned.

#### IV. Conclusion

Was Bird a theorist of globalization? Of course, the British lady traveller who was fascinated by Japan, Korea and China did not present a consistent theory or concept of global change. However, her observations present the transformations which were going on in East Asia in the late nineteenth century in an intelligent way. She experienced, observed and described changes in East Asia which can anachronistically be referred to as globalization. Bird tried to present her readers with an interpretative framework that made sense of these changes.

This article presented a possibly curious connection between Isabella Bird, Karl Lamprecht and those historians who today use the concept of cultural transfers. What brings these authors together is their emphasis on agency in transformation processes. According to them, not imperial inroads put forward globalization, but creative appropriation processes carried out by local actors. Of course, the context of imperialism shaped a structural condition that limited the agency of local actors. But to disregard these actors would mean to deny Japanese, Korean or Chinese agency. In consequence, one of the central matters historians can study in East Asia are not necessarily phenomena of imperial domination, but how Chinese, Korean or Japanese actors creatively, even under unfavourable conditions, appropriated foreign elements into their own contexts and put for-

---

74)Hyaeweol Choi, "'Wise Mother, Good Wife': A Trans-cultural Discursive Construct in Modern Korea," *Journal of Korean Studies*, 14(2009), 1-34; Vladimir Tikhonov, "Masculinizing the Nation: Gender Ideologies in Traditional Korea and in the 1890s-1900s Korean Enlightenment Discourse," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 66(2007), 10291065



“The Western Leaven has Fallen”

ward the complex and ambivalent process of globalization.<sup>75)</sup>

고려대학교, ragazzodelleuropa@hotmail.com

---

75) Transfer processes did not only take place on a one-way road from West to East. Around 1900, East Asia started to be a model for Europeans. In 1904, Henry Dyer, former president of the College of Engineering (*Kōbu daigakkō*) in Tokyo, urged his British countrymen to emulate Japan in order to stop the perceived British decline. See Henry Dyer, *Dai Nippon. The Britain of the East* (London: Blackie & Son, 1904), 425-426.

<초록>

“서양의 낙엽으로 물들었다”: 동아시아의 세계화에 관한 영국인 여성여행가 이사벨라 버드의 생각을 중심으로

크라우스 디트리히

본 연구는 영국인 여성여행가 이사벨라 버드 비숍(Isabella Bird Bishop, 1831-1904)의 동아시아 여행을 새롭게 조망했다. 비숍은 1878년 일본을 방문한 데 이어 1890년대 중반 한국, 중국, 동부 러시아 지역을 차례로 여행하였다. 비숍의 저작은 19세기 후반 세계화(globalization)에 대한 독특한 관점을 제공해 준다. 그는 동아시아 사회가 세계 자본주의에 편입된 결과, 어떻게 변화하게 되었는지를 관찰하였다. 다른 동시대의 저자들과는 달리, 비숍은 제국주의가 변화의 추동력이 아님을 지적했다. 동아시아 사회들 스스로 새로운 지식(foreign knowledge)을 적극적으로 수용하려는 노력을 취했다고 파악했다. 세계의 변화를 이해하는 비숍의 접근은 독일 역사학자 칼 람프레히트(Karl Lamprecht, 1856-1915)와 비교할 수 있다. 람프레히트는 해외의 지식을 학습하는 능력이 20세기에 국가의 흥망에 결정적인 것이 되리라 주장하였던 인물이었다.

본 연구는 1980년대 이래 프랑스와 독일에서 발전해 온 문화전파(cultural transfers) 개념을 도입하였다. 문화전파는 초국가적 학습 과정(transnational learning processes)을 실증적으로 분석하기 위한 방법론으로 유용한 틀을 제공해 준다. 비숍과 람프레히트 및 문화전파를 연구하였던 역사학자들은 모두 그들의 설명 모델이 수용 맥락의 중개자(agency)에 초점을 맞춘다는 데 공통적인 특징을 발견할 수 있다.

키워드 : 이사벨라 버드 비숍 ; 여행기 ; 칼 람프레히트 ; 세계화 ; 문화전이(transferts culturels), 세계사 주체

“The Western Leaven has Fallen”

<Abstract>

“The Western Leaven has Fallen” – the British Lady Traveller  
Isabella Bird as a Thinker on Globalization in East Asia

Klaus Dittrich

This paper sheds new light on the British lady traveller Isabella Bird's (1831–1904) trips to East Asia. Bird visited Japan in 1878. Subsequently she came to Korea, China and far eastern Russia in the mid-1890s. It is argued that her publications provide a unique perspective on globalization in the late nineteenth century. Bird observed how the East Asian societies were subject to major transformations as a consequence of their integration into the system of global capitalism. Contrary to other contemporary authors, however, Bird pointed out that imperialism was not the driving force of change. Instead, she saw the East Asian societies themselves engaged in efforts of transformation through the active importation of foreign knowledge. Bird's approach of understanding global change is then compared to the German historian Karl Lamprecht (1856–1915) who argued that the capacity to learn from abroad would be decisive throughout the twentieth century. The article then introduces the concept of cultural transfers which has been developed in a Franco-German context since the 1980s and which provides a methodological tool to empirically analyse transnational learning processes. Bird, Lamprecht and the historian who study cultural transfers have in common that their explanatory models focus on the agency of the receiving context.

Keywords: Isabella Bird Bishop; travel writing; Karl Lamprecht; globalization; cultural transfers; agency in global history.