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The Two Chivalrous Nations. Wacław Sieroszewski and the Japanese presence in Korea

ABSTRACT

The following article focuses on Wacław Sieroszewski's perception of the Japanese presence in Korea during his short sojourn in "The Land of the Morning Calm" in 1903. According to the author, his description of the Japanese people must be seen against the broader background of the nineteenth century anti-colonial and revolutionary movements. Sieroszewski, an engaged observer, was pursuing a clear, socialist political agenda at the time. For this reason, his perception of the Korean issue was devoid of objective detachment and can be interpreted, on one hand, in the light of the socialist revolutionary activities of the Polish intelligentsia before the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War, but also, on the other hand, in the context of a much broader Polish messianism and prometheism. The Japanese, and so the Koreans, the paper argues, were merely used as a convenient ideological construct for the sake of a larger political game.

KEYWORDS: Sieroszewski Wacław, Korea, Japan, modernization, messianism, revolution, prometheism, socialism

STRESZCZENIE

*Dwa rycerskie narody. Japońska obecność w Korei w refleksji
Wacława Sieroszewskiego*

Wacław Sieroszewski przebywał krótko w Korei w 1903 r. w drodze powrotnej z Japonii. Zafascynowany modernizacją japońską, patrzył z podziwem na aktywność Japończyków w *Kraju Porannej Ciszy* w przeddzień wojny rosyjsko-japońskiej (1904-1905). Niestety, jego niepokojąco optymistyczna analiza sytuacji przeczyła zarówno odczuciom prostych Koreańczyków jak i elity neokonfucjańskiej kraju, którzy już na wczesnym etapie interwencji japońskiej nie mieli większych złudzeń co do prawdziwych zamiarów „modernizatorów”. Postawę Sieroszewskiego łatwiej zrozumieć, jeśli weźmiemy pod uwagę jego własne doświadczenia życiowe (działalność w ruchach rewolucyjnych) oraz środowisko polskiej i rosyjskiej inteligencji, w którym się obracał, zdominowane przez rewolucyjny romantyzm, socjalizm i antykolonializm. Z tych też względów postrzegał on zaangażowanie japońskie w Korei poprzez pryzmat swej własnej krucjaty politycznej, która, rzecz charakterystyczna dla polskiej inteligencji owej doby, była pochodną trzech idei: narodowego mesjanizmu, antyrosyjskiego prometeizmu i europejskiego socjalizmu. W ostatecznym rozrachunku, pomimo imponującej obudowy faktograficznej, Japończycy jawią się w jego analizie zdarzeń jako wygodny ideologiczny konstrukt służący promowaniu określonej agendy politycznej.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Sieroszewski Wacław, Korea, Japonia, modernizacja, mesjanizm, rewolucja, prometeizm, socjalizm

The purpose of this article is to offer a critique of Wacław Sieroszewski's analysis of the Japanese presence in Korea, which was the outcome of his first-hand experience during a short journey through the central part of the Korean Peninsula in 1903. This was his only encounter with the Chosŏn Kingdom and he relates his observations in three texts, which belong to three different literary genres, that is: a description of a country, a traveller's diary and a historical novel. They were all printed in Warsaw within two years after he had returned from the journey and the dates of their publications are as follows: *To the Far East. Pages from the Journey* (Warsaw-Cracow: 1904), *Korea. The Key to the Far East* (Warsaw: 1905),

Ol-Soni Kisaeng (Warsaw: 1906).¹ The fourth text I refer to is entitled *Impressions from the Journey to Korea*, published by Sieroszewski about twenty five years after his Korean travels². Some selections of his eye-witness accounts related to Korea had appeared earlier and might have been reported live in Polish cultural magazines such as *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* [The Illustrated Weekly] and *Wędrowiec* [The Wanderer]. Some other references to Korea were scattered in his polemical texts, for instance in his philippic against Henryk Sienkiewicz.³

Sieroszewski hardly needs any introduction as he was a towering figure both in political and literary circles in his days. Born in 1858 of gentry stock, he enjoyed a long, turbulent life and passed away as octogenarian in 1945. A close associate, collaborator and confidant of Marshall Józef Piłsudski, and a founding member of the first socialist circle in the country, he was also one of the founding fathers of the Second Republic (1918-1939). As a prolific writer, the collected edition of his works consists of twenty volumes, he crowned his literary career as the President of the Polish Academy of Literature.⁴

Involved in political and revolutionary activity since his student years, what was so often the case of young hot-headed Polish gentry members, Sieroszewski was deported to the Eastern Siberia in 1880, where he spent about fifteen years as a political prisoner.⁵ During his exile he made his name in the field of ethnography and anthropology by studying the lives of the Yakutians. After his illegal return to Poland in 1895, he again took part in political activity and was arrested five years later, in 1900. This time, however, he avoided Siberia with the help of the Russian Geographic

1 The quotations in the main body of the article were translated into English by the author from Waclaw Sieroszewski, *Na Daleki Wschód. Kartki z podróży*, Warszawa 1904; *Korea. Klucz Dalekiego Wschodu*, Warszawa 1905; *Ol-Soni kisań*, Warszawa 1906. The complete edition of his works: W. Sieroszewski, *Dziela* [Collected Works], vol. 1-20, ed. A. Lam, J. Skórnicki, Kraków 1958-1967.

2 *Wrażenia z podróży po Korei*, in: *Dziela*, vol. 18, Kraków 1961, pp. 385-391.

3 Waclaw Sieroszewski, *Henryk Sienkiewicz, bandytyzm i marzenie socjalisty*, in: *Dziela*, t. 20, cz. 2: *Reportaże i wspomnienia. Publicystyka. Wiersze*, Kraków 1963, s. 183-197.

4 See his standard biography written by his grandson: A. Sieroszewski, *Waclawa Sieroszewskiego żywot niespokojny*. Z rękopisu wydał, opracował i uzupełnił Andrzej Z. Makowiecki, Warszawa 2015; see also: A. Lam, *Waclaw Sieroszewski*, „Polski Słownik Biograficzny”, vol. 37 (Warszawa-Kraków 1997), p. 345-351.

5 J. Billington, *Fire in the Minds of Men. Origins of the Revolutionary Faith*, New York 1980, p. 478-479; Jan Ciechanowicz, *Polonobolszewia. Jak szlachta polską komunizowała rosyjskie imperium*, Wrocław 2016, p. 37 ff; I. Sadowska, *Waclaw Sieroszewski – romantyk celów i pozytywista środków*, czyli o tym, że Polscy nie można wygadać, in: *Bojownicy polskiej sprawy: Waclaw Sieroszewski i Gustaw Daniłowski wobec myśli i czynu Józefa Piłsudskiego: wybór materiałów z lat 1898-1943*, ed. G. Legutko, I. Sadowska, Kielce 2007, p. 18.

Society and, in return, he agreed to undertake the expedition to Hokkaido, where, together with Bronisław Piłsudski, he spent the summer of 1903 carrying out anthropological studies among the Ainu people.

He departed from Warsaw in January 1903, and by the Trans-Siberian Railroad, through Moscow, Irkuck, Harbin, reached Port Arthur after a six-week journey. From there he set out on a Japanese steamship on 6 April and sailing along the south west coast of Korea reached the shores of Japan. His stopovers during the journey were at Nagasaki, Osaka, Yokohama, Hakodate on Hokkaido Island. He travelled then through the whole length of the country, from its southern end to the very north. Sieroszewski stayed in Japan until September, when, leaving Hakodate Bay, he set off back home by train from Aomori and Sendai to Nagasaki.⁶

He set his foot on the Korean Peninsula in Pusan on 10 October 1903, which was at the time one of the three major ports of Korea, opened to the West and Japan by the Kanghwa Treaty of 1876, and located on the very south-east end of the country.⁷ The other two were at Chemulpo (today's Incheon) and Wŏnsan (nowadays in North Korea). As we know the Treaty Port System established in South East Asia to advantages of the Western powers had wrestled from the local rulers a number of concessions, among them extraterritoriality and the control over the custom services. Korea was not different in this aspect and followed the same pattern. However, the open ports were also the reservoirs of foreign culture and technology, among them of Christian religion (as the source of hope and spiritual consolation) and newspapers (as the means of communication). The Japanese learned very quickly that the Westerners promote their political and economic agenda by the means of newspapers. Following this example, they began publishing the *Chōsen shinpō* in Pusan in 1881.⁸ In 1868, the year of the Meiji Restoration, Pusan was a miserable place, and most houses on the site of the old Japanese trading post during the Tokugawa period were in ruins. After the great Korean-Japanese War (1592-1598) the only trade exchange between the two countries was conducted through the Lords of Cushima and Pusan was the only outpost in Korea where that exchange was possible. For that reason it housed a number of Japanese civilians and a small military garrison. In 1875, there were only 100 Japanese there, but seven years on, in 1882, the town's population grew to 1800 persons with modern institutions, including a bank, a shipping company, hospital and

6 I. Sadowska, *Wacław Sieroszewski – romantyk celów*, op. cit., p. 21.

7 Sieroszewski, *Korea*, op. cit. p. 3.

8 Albert Altman, *Korea's First Newspaper: The Japanese Chōsen shinpō*, "Journal of Asian Studies", vol. 43/4, (August 1984), p. 685.

the newspaper. It was there where Sieroszewski arrived on board of the Japanese steamer on 10 October 1903.

The Japanese Quarter in Pusan – he writes – is small and numbers around 1000 houses; it is clean and well kept. It has a sewage and a water supply system, a branch of the Tokyo Dai-ichi ginko, a house of commerce, the consulate, a post office, a telegraph line and the *Chosen shimpo*, the first modern newspaper in Korea.⁹

From Pusan, he sailed along the east coast of the country up to the second open sea-port at Wõnsan, which had been formerly under Russian control and named Port Lazariëff. On the way he could see a whale hunting, presumably near today's Shinp'o.¹⁰ He disembarked at Wõnsan and continued a land journey on a horseback to Seoul. We can deduce from his diary, which is included in the book, that he arrived at Seoul on 30 October. His sojourn in the capital city of the country was limited to a few days and in the middle of November he was already back in Port Arthur, where he stayed for about a month. His whole Korean journey was then shorter than a month. The expedition started in February 1903 and was terminated by the end of the year due to the gathering clouds of the Russo-Japanese war.¹¹

His first real encounter with the Koreans started at Wonsan and he covered the distance from there to Pusan of about 500 li (250 kilometers) – Sieroszewski measures distance in Russian versts – on a horseback in about two weeks, accompanied by an interpreter and a guide. He must have travelled a historical high road from Wõnsan to the capital which was taken by Lord Curzon, the future Viceroy of India in 1893.¹² His interpreter spoke poor English and the conversations he had with the Koreans must have been very unsatisfactory, prone to guesses and conjectures. Yet, even though Sieroszewski blurs distinction between his own perception and the one of his Western predecessors in the “Land of the Morning Calm”, one thing is clear: contrary to his initial statement, that he entered the country without any preconceived ideas, he is very well-read in Korean history, culture and anthropology.¹³ It can be argued that the description of the land and the people he published a year later draws heavily from earlier reports and descriptions of the country, which were left, among others,

9 Sieroszewski, *Korea*, op. cit., p 4-5.

10 Sieroszewski, *Kartki z podróży*, op. cit., p. 247-265.

11 A. Sieroszewski, *Wacława Sieroszewskiego żywot niespokojny*, Warszawa 2015, p. 150-159.

12 Sieroszewski, *Korea*, op. cit., p. 40.

13 Ibid. p. 2.

by the American protestant missionaries writing for *Korean Repository* and *The Korea Review* (both periodicals were being published in Seoul at the turn of the twentieth century), a remarkable *The Description of the Korea* (published by the Ministry of Finances in St. Petersburg in 1900, which was a mine of information on Chosŏn, contained in two bulky volumes of meticulous research, filled with hard facts, charts and maps; it was the first in depth-study of the country published by the Russian government (the project was partly supervised by a famous Polish orientalist Władysław Kotwicz) and dealt with all important aspects (economic, social, political, cultural etc.) of a newly discovered neighboring country. Sieroszewski is also acquainted with *Korea and her Neighbours* (a seminal work of the Victorian lady Isabela Bird Bishop published in 1898) and the first major work *Korea. The Hermit Nation* (1882) by William Elliott Griffis, who was an American educator working in Japan. Sieroszewski's work is heavily footnoted and draws extensively on these works.¹⁴

But, it must be bear in mind that Sieroszewski was not an expert on Korea, and his knowledge and experience related to the subject was rather superficial. Being a skilled writer and an experienced anthropologist, he could try to make up for his limitations by applying his previously gained knowledge and expertise and was quite successful in doing it. However, in the end what matter was neither his sharp pen nor his knowledge about human nature. What determined the popularity of the book was the fortunate timing. On the eve and at the wake of the Russo-Japanese war everything related to Japan was a hot topic and could sell easily and even the Korean problem could electrify the public in Warszawa. At that time Korea was almost completely unknown in Poland and with his book Sieroszewski opened up the new field. However, he was not the pioneer in the Korean studies, because at the time of his arrival to Korea, the country had been studied and analyzed by his predecessors, such as Władysław Kotwicz and Homer Hulbert. He hardly adds any new relevant information to the already available corpus of Western knowledge on Chosŏn.

As for the statistics, there are 83 references to Japan and the Japanese in *Korea. The Key to the Far East* on 423 pages of the text. China is mentioned 40 times, Russia: 7; England: 5; USA: 6; Austro-Hungary: 1;

14 *Korean Repository* (a monthly journal: ed. F. Ohlinger, H.G. Appenzeller, G.H. Jones), Trilingual Press, Seoul 1892, 1895-1898 (Reprint: Paragon Book Reprint Series, vol.1-5, 1964); *The Korea Review* (a monthly journal: ed. H.B. Hulbert), Methodist Publishing House, Seoul 1901-1906; I. Bird Bishop, *Korea and her Neighbours. A Narrative of Travel, with and Account of the Recent Vicissitudes and Present Position of the Country*, Seoul 1970 (the first edition was published in Seoul in 1898); *Opisanie Korei (z kartoi) sostavlieno v kancelarii ministra finansov* (W. Kotwicz, D.M. Pozdneevev, K.M. Ioganson (eds). t. 1-3, Izdanie Ministierstva Finansov, Sankt Pietersburg 1900; W.E. Griffis, *Corea. The Hermit Nation*, London 1882.

the Europeans: 10; France: 8; Germany: 2, Poland: 2.¹⁵ At the time of Sieroszewski's arrival, the Japanese had been present in Korea for thirty years. Korea was forced by the Japanese government to open three ports (Pusan, Chemulpo, Wonsan) on 26 February 1876.¹⁶ Between 1876 and 1945, about 700 000 (seven hundred thousand) of Japanese civilians and military, representing all walks of life, left their homeland for a new life on the Korean peninsula. Now, even though their presence has vanished to large extent from the public memory in Korea, replaced by other hot topics of difficult contemporary Japanese-Korean relations, yet, it is so embedded in politics and burdened with heavy load of painful historical memory that it is worth studying. And it has been duly analyzed, among others, by Kimura Kenji, Peter Duus, Hilary Conroy, Patricia Tsurumi, Michael Robinson, Andre Schmid and Jun Uchida.¹⁷

In 1902 the Anglo-Japanese Treaty of Alliance was signed, which was the first treaty between a European country and an Asiatic power aimed against a Western rival and it gave the Japanese a free hand in Korea. This consequently led to a Protectorate Treaty in 1905 and a formal annexation of Korea in 1910. The emergence and early evolution of the Japanese settler community in Korea both before and after formal annexation is the subject of a recent magisterial study by Jun Uchida.¹⁸ He argues that

15 See Index to the first edition: Sieroszewski, *Korea. Klucz Dalekiego, Wschodu*. Warszawa-Kraków 1905, p. I-X.

16 Sieroszewski, *Korea*, op. cit. p. 258-259.

17 Kimura Kenji, *Settling into Korea: The Japanese Expansion into Korea from the Russo-Japanese War to the Early Period of Annexation*, in: *Japanese Settler Colonialism and Capitalism in Japan: Advancing into Korea, Settling Down and Returning to Japan, 1905-1950*, "Occasional Papers in Japanese Studies", Harvard University 2002-2003 (June), p. 1-10; P. Duss, *The Abacus and the Sword. The Japanese Penetration of Korea, 1895-1910*, Berkeley 1995; P. Duus, *Economic Dimensions of Meiji Imperialism: The Case of Korea, 1895-1910*, in: *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895-1945*, ed. R.H. Myers, M.R. Peattie, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey 1984, p. 128-171; E. Patricia Tsurumi, *Colonial Education in Korea and Taiwan*, in: *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895-1945*, op. cit., p. 275-311; M.E. Robinson, *Colonial Publication Policy and the Korean Nationalist Movement*, in: *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895-1945*, ed. R.H. Myers, M.R. Peattie, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey 1984, pp. 312-343; B. Cumings, *The Legacy of Japanese Colonialism in Korea*, in: *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895-1945*, op. cit., p. 478-496; Mizoguchi Toshiyuki, Yamamoto Yūzō, *Capital Formation in Taiwan and Korea*, in: *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895-1945*, op. cit., p. 399-419. See also: A. Schmid, *Korea Between Empires, 1895-1919*, New York 2002; A. Dudden, *Japan's Colonization of Korea: Discourse and Power*, Honolulu 2005; M. Caprio, *Japanese Assimilation Policies in Colonial Korea, 1910-1945*, Washington 2009; E. Taylor Atkins, *Primitive Selves: Koreana in the Japanese Colonial Gaze, 1910-1945*, Berkeley 2010; H. Conroy, *The Japanese Seizure of Korea 1868-1910. A Study of Realism and Idealism in International Relations*, Philadelphia 1960.

18 Jun Uchida, *Brokers of Empire: Japanese Settler Colonialism in Korea, 1876-1945*, Cambridge: Massachusetts 2011, p. 3, 93.

by industrializing the Peninsula, the home government in Tokyo was inclined to view Korea as a primarily agricultural colony from which resources could be extracted to facilitate the ongoing industrialization of Japan's homeland economy. The political behavior of Japanese settlers in Korea was inseparable from the imperial policy on the home islands, even though "most migrants were driven primarily by personal profit and only secondarily by national interest".¹⁹

Sieroszewski makes it clear that China plays a predominant role in Asia. Even Japan accepts that historical reality.

China is the cradle of our culture and – he quotes one of his Japanese travelling companions – the whole East loves and respects her, as you love and revere Italy and Greece. The recent war, which we waged against China is of no importance. What really matters is that China is sleeping now and somebody has to awaken her. The war against China was the war for the reforms in Korea. Young Japan must have an enlightened and progressive neighbors... Only the coalition of such countries is able to face the Western aggression... The West itself, I mean, the better part of it, which is neither warlike nor money-centered but humane and humanitarian, can only benefit from that awakening.²⁰

China is a sleeping giant and young Japan takes upon herself the role of the awakener of the East and – as he renders approvingly the explanation of one of his Japanese interlocutors – *a refreshing typhoon of revolution*.²¹

Both the Japanese poet and the Polish writer dream about the United States of Asia, with Japan as its torchlight, which will bring about peace and universal fraternity to all mankind in the future.

We were talking until late at night about the noble ideas, about Japan which can be the United States of Asia, and with its power and dignity can fulfil the dream of humanity, the dream about eternal peace, fraternity of nations, justice, equality ... a dream about the New Golden Age. Wars and revolutions are similar to typhoons which purify a stinky, polluted air over swamps.²²

Sieroszewski juxtaposes such terms as "sleep", "death", "conservatism", "stagnation", "apathy" with "life", "energy", "hope", "future". He uses the

19 P. Duus, *The Abacus and the Sword: The Japanese Penetration of Korea, 1895-1910*, Berkeley 1995.

20 Sieroszewski, *Taku-Tiensin – Pekin – Szanghaj*, in: *Reportaże i wspomnienia, Dzieła*, t. 20, p. 53.

21 Ibid. p. 53.

22 Ibid.

same literary convention which is applied by Stendhal in *Red and Black* for whom the black represents ancient regime, stagnation, Catholicism, Latin language, whereas the red symbolizes forces of progress, revolution, science, technology. Japan is on the side of life. Her task is to awaken the sleeping countries of the South East Asia: primarily China and Korea. This is how Sieroszewski describes a construction of a railway in Korea:

On the steep path, I saw the silhouettes of the tiny Japanese... they were quite distinctive among a large swarm of half-naked and sun-tanned Koreans. They were standing quietly with their maps and measuring equipment; those inconspicuously looking engineers were supervising the work and traditionally sleepy and indolent Koreans were moving briskly. Everything around was vibrant with life, the roar of blown up rocks, the noise of the railcars... Never before in Korea have I seen anything similar to that scene.²³

The Japanese have an immense impact on Korean agriculture and industry.

They are the pioneers and leaders and they benefit economically in Korea, while the Koreans can benefit both financially and spiritually from their presence.²⁴

At the early stage of his journey he meets a Japanese poet and through his poetry he sees a clear analogy between the suffering of Poland and a refined chivalric Japanese spirit the tradition of bushi-do

In his poem the suffering of Poland and the chivalric tradition of bushi-do were interweaved in refined rhymes.²⁵

He perceives Japan as a strong nation which serves the weak, protects the poor and imagines both countries as the two chivalrous nations having the same enemy. The West is corrupted, egoistic and money-centered. It will not permit the East to be reborn because that would go against one of the nineteenth century commandments: "*Thou shall not have other gods but money and commerce.*"²⁶ The Russians and the Germans are its worst representatives and the western settlement in Chankou embodies the corrupted West in its nutshell. The German settlers personify what is the

23 Sieroszewski, *Korea*, op. cit., p. 9.

24 Ibid., p. 257.

25 Sieroszewski, *Taku-Tiensin – Pekin – Szanghaj*, op. cit., p. 54.

26 Ibid., p. 21.

most shameful in the West. They lack English refinement and Japanese courtesy. They are noisy, pathetic and arrogant.

The German settlers in China ... sulky, arrogant, Teutonic faces... they neigh like horses, drink and gamble like crazy, they elbow their way ahead pushing and bullying others... The German policemen in their spiked helmets are all over the place.²⁷

Their intentions are also crystal clear:

Undoubtedly, a probable partition of China is only desired by and beneficial for the Germans.²⁸

In stark contrast to Germany, Japan is civilized and well-intentioned.

For Japan the partition of Korea would simply be a disaster. Japan has a deep respect for China and dreams about a huge federation of the Eastern nations, patterned on the enlightened European model, which could put a stop to insatiable greed of the Western barbarians... But, in order to divide China with impunity, Japan must first be crushed as soon as possible. That is why, on one hand, Japan has been continually turned against Russia and, on the other hand, we have been exposed to aggressive "speeches" of the German Emperor and symbolic pamphlets on which the European angel kills the yellow dragon. This is a part of the Teutonic heritage.²⁹

Japan is a smart student and does not follow blindly, as Korea does, Chinese tradition.

Whereas Korea is a blind imitator of China, Japan is its best, very clever and devout student.³⁰

However, what impresses Sieroszewski the most is the Japanese vivacity and energy, which inspires other Asian countries to follow their example. While old Korea lacks conviction, the Japanese are full of passionate intensity. He even seems to suggest that their enthusiasm turns traditionally distrustful Chinese and Koreans into friends.

27 Ibid., p. 56.

28 Ibid., s. 16-17.

29 Sieroszewski, *Taġu-Tiensin – Pekin – Szanghaj*, op. cit., p. 17.

30 Ibid., p. 20.

Everywhere in the East, these small islanders bring with themselves a vibrant energy of a new life. The Chinese and the Koreans trust them because they regard them as their brothers.³¹

Japan brings to Korea a sanitary modernity, which is the first stage of modernization. Whether it is a superb sea transport, symbolized by the Japanese steamship liner, a progressive model of education represented by the Japanese school, or an effective system of communication as embodied in the Japanese post office, they are all “clean, comfortable, elegant, refined and graceful”.³² Yet, what Sieroszewski does not know, or does not want to admit, is that the fathers of Western modernization in Korea were not the Japanese but the Christian missionaries. His visit to a Japanese school in Pusan is the best illustration of his fascination with Japanese *mission civilisatrice* in Korea:

I entered the building... and was struck with neatness and simplicity. The teacher speaks fluent English... unusual cleanliness, fresh air and plenty of sunshine. The atmosphere of warmth, cordiality and freedom. The classrooms superbly furnished: the western blackboards, portraits of famous people, maps and charts.³³

With their best schools, their best hotels, their best sea transport the Japanese are in the forefront of progress and civilization. They open banks, post offices, consulates, fire brigades etc.

However, both the Japanese residents in Korea and the state ideologists reinforced conceptions of Korean backwardness and Japanese modernity in which assimilation was encouraged by discriminatory rhetoric. In other words, in order to convince the Koreans that their future was intrinsically linked with the Japanese cause, they had to be persuaded that they were the members of the failed state and historically, culturally, mentally inferior to their new masters.³⁴ At the early stage it was done through the so called hygienic modernity. A dirty, stone age Koreans were badly in need of a good wash which could be only provided by the Japanese “bath attendants”.

A Korean village: a pile of rubble, behind them a group of distrustful savages ... and barking dogs. I was bewildered at the scene directly taken from the Stone Age.³⁵

31 Sieroszewski, *Korea*, op. cit., p. 13.

32 Ibid., p. 270.

33 Ibid., p. 6.

34 Uchida, *Brokers of the Empire*, op. cit., p. 201.

35 Sieroszewski, *Korea*, op. cit., p. 3.

Sieroszewski's *Korea* hundred and ten years after its publication strikes with its gullibility and wishful thinking about the real intentions of the Japanese presence in Korea. There is, in our opinion, some ideological darkening of the mind which leads to this myopia. His description of the Japanese people must be seen against a broader background of the nineteenth century anti-colonial and revolutionary movement. Sieroszewski says that his approach to the Korean issue is *sine ira et studio*, yet, it can be argued to the contrary.

The books were of little help. I was travelling to Korea free of any presupposed ideas. I only that due to its geographical location, size and shape the country shares the most similarity with Italy.³⁶

In general, publications from that time show a fascination with Japan in Poland. For instance, Roman Dmowski wrote in a similar vein in 1904 in the article entitled "Ex Oriente Lux":

Japan's victories are the ones of moral power over universally recognized material power.³⁷

There is, however, in Sieroszewski's *Korea*, presumably completely unintended by the writer, a sense of foreboding permeating through this optimistic picture. It is clear for the Japanese that whoever takes control over Korea will grab Japan by her throat³⁸. The country suffers from the lack of natural resources and the general policy of the government is to seize the Korean ones.³⁹ To make matter worse, the West plays anti-Russian card, and instead of promoting moderation, it tries to instil its bellicosity in the Japanese who by nature are endowed with a warlike spirit.⁴⁰ The Japanese play a double game: they fight against Korean bureaucracy, but once they have taken control over the country, they replace it with their own bureaucratic system, which brings about social anarchy and banditry.⁴¹ They have seized control over Korean gold, cheap Japanese products flood the Korean

36 Sieroszewski, *Korea*, op. cit. p. 2 His perception of Japan is well researched by Zdzisław Kempf *Orientalism in Waclaw Sieroszewski. Japanese Motives*. A book published in 1982.

37 R. Dmowski, *Ex oriente lux*, „Przegląd Wszechpolski”, 9: 625-653; 10:751, quoted by: Ewa Palasz-Rutkowska, *The Russo-Japanese War and its Impact on Polish-Japanese Relations in the First Half of the Twentieth Century*, „Analecta Nipponica” No.1 (2011), p. 20.

38 Sieroszewski, *Kartki z podróży*, op. cit., p. 212.

39 Ibid., p. 161.

40 Ibid., p. 161-162.

41 Sieroszewski, *Korea*, op. cit., p. 262; Sieroszewski, *Henryk Sienkiewicz, bandytyzm i marzenie socjalisty*, op. cit., p. 183-197.

market. They produce fake, cheap western goods to sell them in Korea. In the meantime, the Japanese brokers practice usury in Korea preying on poor farmers.⁴² While the political leaders perceive Korea as a “dagger thrust at the heart of Japan”, the settlers are primarily profit-oriented and treat the new place as a golden opportunity to enrich themselves.

The list of political aggression, economic exploitation and social deprivation can be extended and one does not have to have a sharp eye to see that nothing good can come out of it. And a hatred towards the Japanese is brewing. There have already been first victims. The anger of the the mob was directed against the Japanese during the Kapsin revolt (1884) and Tonghak rebellion (1894). And as during the revolution of 1905 in Europe, which Sieroszewski uses as the background to explain the political upheavals in Korea, the country is just a pawn in the hands of the great powers. In fact, any revolutionary activity does a lamentable disservice to the national cause and weakens the social glue, which is exemplified by the conflict between Kim-non-czi and his father.⁴³ Happy is the country – he pontificates – which can benefit from the spiritual richness of its neighbours. But that is not the case in Korea. The Japanese, as says one of his Korean interlocutor:

... are the worst of all. They are not only after our money and land, but also they want to kill our soul.⁴⁴

Sieroszewski is not convinced by this argument as he seems to believe that „the soul of the nation” cannot be destroyed by a foreign oppressor.⁴⁵ But is he intellectually fair by claiming that? Not once in history the external enemy was capable of posing a real threat to a cultural life of the country and a spiritual life of its citizens. To think otherwise is to stand in stark contrast both to a basic human awareness but to the Polish historical experience as well. For many Koreans it was exactly what was happening to them and their country at that time. For instance, a benevolent nation has covered the whole country with the network of spies, practicing what came to be called – as Hiroaki Kuromiya points out – “total espionage”:

With characteristic pertinacious care, the Japanese have for years pried into other nations’ affairs. With them espionage has been bred in their bones and

42 Sieroszewski, *Korea*, op. cit., p. 273.

43 Sieroszewski, *Ol – Soni kiseń*, op. cit., p. 222; Sadowska, *Wśród swoich i obcych*, op. cit., p. 122-124.

44 Sieroszewski, *Korea*, op. cit., p. 422.

45 Ibid.

fostered by custom, approved and rewarded by Government. They have collated information about all places, of late more especially about Russia... Officers of the Japanese army or navy thought it no shame to pass as barbers and photographers to spy out important and State secrets.⁴⁶

It is confirmed by Sieroszewski himself:

To my surprise, I met a two Japanese in a traditional attire holding umbrellas in their hands on a side road. They were very eager to know from my interpreter who I was and what I was doing in Korea. On their part they claim to be regular travelers, architects from Wonsan. Well, they can fool somebody else. One of them must have been an officer and we was wearing calf-length military boots never used by a common Japanese folk.⁴⁷

Professor Yu Ying-shih, a distinguished Chinese scholar, points out that since 1790 at least five major schools of radical thought have emerged in the West. These have been the atheistic rationalism of Voltaire, the romantic emancipation of Rousseau and his allies, the utilitarianism of the Benthamites, the positivism of Comte's school, the collectivistic materialism of Karl Marx, the social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer and the population control of Robert Malthus.⁴⁸ These ideologies had their roots firmly planted not only in China but in Japan and Korea as well. Sieroszewski was one of the most active founding members of the socialist revolutionary movement pursuing a subversive political agenda: which was, as he call it metaphorically, *the typhoon of revolution*.⁴⁹ There was a heated exchange between him and Henryk Sienkiewicz who attacked him and his acolytes in the novel entitled "The Whirlpools" (1906).⁵⁰ Tainted ideologically, Sieroszewski's perception was devoid of objective, scholarly detachment and must be interpreted, on one hand, in the light of his socialist revolutionary activities before the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War, but, on the other hand, in the context of Polish messianism and Prometheism of the time⁵¹.

46 H. Kuromiya, *The Promethean Movement in Japan's Diplomacy*, in: *Ruch prometejski i walka o przebudowę Europy Wschodniej (1918-1940)*, ed. M. Kornat, Warszawa 2012, p. 141.

47 Sieroszewski, *Korea*, op. cit., p. 109.

48 Yü Ying-shih, *The Radicalization of China in the Twentieth Century*, in: Yü Ying-shih, *Chinese History and Culture*, vol. 2, p. 184.

49 „Gdy pięćdziesiąt lat temu zakładałem pierwszą socjalistyczną organizację...”. Wacław Sieroszewski, *Odezwa do robotników w związku z planowanym zamachem na życie Piłsudskiego z 1930*, in: *Bojownicy polskiej sprawy. Wacław Sieroszewski i Gustaw Danilowski wobec myśli i czynu Józefa Piłsudskiego. Wybór materiałów z lat 1898-1943*, ed. G. Legutko, I. Sadowska, Kielce 2007, p. 267.

50 Sieroszewski, *Henryk Sienkiewicz, bandytyzm i marzenie socjalisty*, op. cit., p. 183-197.

51 I. Sadowska, *Wacław Sieroszewski – romantyk celów i pozytywista środków*, p. 250-251.

The Japanese in Korea, it can be argued, were, at least partly, used by him as a convenient ideological construct for the sake of a larger political game. His final admonition directed to the Japanese people was: “Try to be better than we were. You have a honorable role to play as the leaders of the East”.⁵² Tragically, such a noble task could not be fulfilled by the means of a holy terror and revolutionary typhoons which were proposed by Sieroszewski. Fifteen years after his book had been published, Homer Hulbert, one of the most knowledgeable Westerners in Korean affairs, summarized the Japanese presence in Korea as “the greatest blunder of all” aimed to deprive eighteen million people of their land, culture and language and “to seize and destroy all the historical works of a nation in the attempt to make the people forget that they have a past”.

The attempt to make the Korean people set aside their language in favor of that of Japan is equally foredoomed to failure. Russia’s failure to do the same thing in Poland should have warned Japan of the absurdity of such an effort.⁵³

Sieroszewski concludes with observations which sounds like vaticinum ex eventu:

The war followed me closely during my journey... It broke out two days after I had come back to Warsaw. I followed its course but had no doubts who the winner would be.⁵⁴

And then he continues in a prophetic tone:

The East will wake up as did Japan. Korea will be shaken out of her perennial lethargy by the loss of independence. But she will become independent again one day stronger and ennobled.⁵⁵

Writing twenty five years after his trip to Korea, Sieroszewski is less optimistic about the Japanese presence in Korea. Being still under the spell of revolutionary modernization he believes that the country is thriving economically, yet, he realizes that the people are suffering under the occupation which is not that different from the one his fellow citizens had

52 Waclaw Sieroszewski, *Na Daleki Wschód. Kartki z podróży*, Warszawa-Kraków 1904, op. cit., p. 244.

53 H. Hulbert, *Japan in Korea*, “The Journal of International Relations”, vol. 10/3 (Jan. 1920), p. 271.

54 Sieroszewski, *Tağu-Tiensin – Pekin – Szanghaj*, op. cit., p. 63.

55 Ibid., p. 63.

undergone.⁵⁶ After all, freedom and independence is almost as dear as bread worldwide.

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56 "The country has been growing and developing and, yet, the Korean nation is suffering, which is evident by the plots and commotions which every now and then have been erupting there: they clearly indicate that "man shall not live by bread alone". See: Sieroszewski, *Wrażenia z podróży po Korei*, in: *Dziela*, vol. 18, p. 390.

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