

Wayne Patterson. *In the Service of His Korean Majesty: William Nelson Lovatt, the Pusan Customs, and Sino-Korean Relations, 1876-1888.* Korea Research Monographs Series. Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 2012. xii + 193 pp. \$20.00, paper, ISBN 978-1-55729-100-4.

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Wayne Patterson has written a narrative of the career of William Nelson Lovatt in the then newly established Korean Customs Service from 1883 to 1886. He bases the work primarily on an unpublished collection of Lovatt's letters to his wife, Jennie Shaw Lovatt, and her letters to their daughter Nellie Lovatt, among others. Patterson also draws upon correspondence between William Lovatt, chief commissioner of Korean Customs Henry Merrill, and famed inspector general of the Chinese Imperial Maritime Customs Service Robert Hart, to complete the story of Lovatt's brief tenure as commissioner of customs in Pusan. With this publication, Patterson has provided an interesting addition to our understanding of nineteenth-century Anglo-American expatriate life in East Asia and of what we might deem the office politics of the Korean Customs Service in its earliest years.

In his preface, Patterson informs us that we are first to understand Lovatt's time in Pusan in the context of increasingly intrusive Qing interventions in Chosŏn affairs during the course of the 1880s and early 1890s. More specifically, Patterson maintains, these letters "allow an in-depth exploration of four related aspects of the late Chosŏn period." First, the Lovatt letters provide a "fresh look at conditions" in Chosŏn in the late nineteenth century (p. viii). Second, the letters offer a glimpse

of the inner workings of the Korean Customs Service in the 1880s. Third, they supply an intimate view of the Pusan expatriate life of the period. And fourth, they give new insights into the actions and attitudes of a number of important men, including Li Hongzhang, Hart, Merrill, and Paul Georg von Möllendorff. I will discuss each of these points in turn below with the exception of the third, expatriate life, which I will engage last for it is here that Patterson's work intimates its greatest contribution.

Patterson readily admits that Lovatt may not have been the most capable Chosŏn observer. Lovatt neither spoke nor read Korean, lived and worked entirely within the Japanese settlement at Pusan, and had very little experience of Chosŏn or its people during his tenure. Patterson suggests, however, that we would be remiss to dismiss Lovatt's observations purely on the grounds of his ignorance of the language, country, and people. Patterson reminds us that there were no Western experts on Chosŏn at the time, but it is unclear why that fact should lead us to lend weight to Lovatt's assessments: are we to accept Lovatt's observations as meaningful because he was just as ill-informed as other Western observers? Patterson further posits that Lovatt had lived in India and the Qing Empire and was fluent in Chinese after hav-

ing lived there more than twenty years. This experience, Patterson reminds us, rendered Lovatt “a seasoned observer of Asia” (p. viii). While Patterson leaves us to ponder what, precisely, a seasoned observer of Asia might have been, he later reveals Lovatt’s understanding of race and empire in such a way as to provide us with a clue. Patterson cites a letter to Jennie Lovatt, in which William Lovatt wrote, “Africa will have to be opened up, and the n*****s must go—this will have to be a white man’s world after all.” And yet, in the same paragraph, Patterson claims that Lovatt was somewhat more sympathetic to Asians and therefore was more capable of holding “a reasonably objective view of Korea and its inhabitants” (p. 39). This is unlikely. The evidence Patterson presents shows that Lovatt was a late Victorian white supremacist who spent nearly his entire working life in the service of empire. By no means should these facts lead us to ignore Lovatt altogether, but we would do well to consider the strong possibility, if not inevitability, that his thoughts on “Asia” may be more revealing of his own ideological commitments than of some external set of “conditions.”

Patterson suggests that the Lovatt letters give us insights into the inner workings of the customs service. The letters, however, reveal relatively little about the operation of the Pusan Customs but we do get occasional bits of interesting information on revenues; Lovatt was a capable administrator in comparison to his colleagues in Inch’ön and Wönsan and was called to cover for their deficits. Most of the inner workings revealed in the Lovatt letters, however, are not so much about the operations of the service but rather the state of office politics. Lovatt was a committed careerist and a great deal of his correspondence revolves around remuneration, rank, leaves of absence, and his severance package. Patterson’s narrative reaches its climax as Lovatt leveraged confidential information, namely, Hart’s politically sensitive intention to formally annex Chosŏn customs into the Qing service, to blackmail Hart and Merrill, forcing them to substantially improve the conditions

of his termination in 1886. Lovatt’s shrewd use of information to manipulate, if not extort, his employer is an aspect of expatriate work life in Chosŏn we do not often see, and while this may not tell us much about the operation of the customs service as a whole, it does show us what a man like Lovatt was willing to do to advance his interests within a particular institutional structure.

Patterson’s dependence on Lovatt is vexing. Despite his being patently ill-equipped to understand what he may have seen, we might value Lovatt’s observations if we had no one else to whom we could turn, no other portal into the time and place. We are fortunate, however, in that there is an abundance of primary source material and secondary research on the management of Chosŏn ports in general and on Pusan in particular in the 1880s.[1] These are especially well-employed in the work of Min Hoesu. In his superlative article on the evolving relationship between the Korean Customs Service and the local Office of the Superintendent (監理署) in the 1880s, Min draws upon a wide array of official documents including regulations and communications between various local government offices and the capital, many of which have long been published in the series *Kaksa tŭng-nok* (各司謄錄).[2] Moreover, Min draws upon the well-known diaries of Min Kŏnho (閔建鎬, 1843-1914), titled *Haeŭn illok* (海隱日錄). The Pusan Modern History Museum published the original Literary Sinitic edition of the diary in 2006 and a bilingual Sinitic/Korean edition in 2008.[3] Min worked in the Pusan Office of the Superintendent in various capacities from 1883 to 1894 and dealt extensively with customs matters, foreign merchants, and officials in Pusan. His diaries are of particular interest in that they include an account of both his official activities and his personal life, providing a picture of Pusan beyond the tightly circumscribed confines of Lovatt’s routine. Lovatt rarely left the Japanese settlement during his time in Pusan, and, in Patterson’s telling, he did not write about his work with the Pusan Customs be-

yond generalities; his letters reveal little as to how he and his office operated. If we want to know about customs operations or about general life in Pusan, we are fortunate to have these considerable materials that go far afield of the offerings in the Lovatt letters.

In addition to the extensive primary sources of the period, there is a considerable body of secondary research. In considering Korean-language research alone, we may turn to the journal *Hangdo Pusan* (港都釜山), a journal of Pusan history published by the Historical Compilation Committee of the City of Pusan. The committee began publication in 1962 and continued occasionally through 1969. The committee revived the journal in 1992 and has continued its regular publication ever since. I shall take note of three articles in this publication for the purposes for the current review. The first comes from the 1969 special issue introducing primary sources on Pusan history across different periods. The article is a summary and partial Korean translation, credited to the committee, of the notes of two Japanese travelers: the geographer Kaneda Naratarō and the journalist Suehiro Shigeyasu. Kaneda traveled from Tōkyō to Pusan, Seoul, P'yōngyang, and Wōnsan before returning to Japan in 1892. Kaneda wrote extensively on the physical and human geography throughout his field trip. In the same year, Suehiro traveled to Chosŏn, the Qing Empire, and the Primorsky Kray in Russia.[4] He wrote vividly about Pusan and Tongnae and provided all manner of practical information that would have been useful to travelers in the provinces at that time including the interesting fact that one horse was required to carry twenty-five Japanese yen worth of Chosŏn currency.[5] These are but two primary source materials, accompanied by critical introductions, included in the 1969 issue of *Hangdo Pusan*, suggesting that there was no shortage of sources and studies on Pusan in the late nineteenth century for scholars to consider, even in the late 1960s.

Second, in 2007, nearly forty years later, Kang Taemin published a critical historiographical essay in *Hangdo Pusan* on Korean-language research concerning late nineteenth-century Pusan. His analysis found 110 publications, including books, articles, theses, and dissertations.[6] Kang's article is one of twelve historiographical essays in this special issue covering research on periods ranging from the prehistoric era to the Japanese colonial period of the first half of the twentieth century. The issue ends with an overview of the activities of the several organizations and institutions devoted to the history of Pusan, including their sundry and extensive publication and translation projects.[7] It is clear that by 2007, contrary to Patterson's claims, there was a wealth of research on Pusan and its environs, not only for the late nineteenth century but also across all periods of Korean history from the prehistoric to the twentieth century and beyond.

Finally, Hwangbo Yonghŭi published an article in *Hangdo Pusan* in 2009 concerning the Qing concession in Pusan from the 1880s to the early twentieth century.[8] Hwangbo provides an overview of the establishment of the concession in 1883, the arrival of the Qing consul in 1884, Chosŏn-Qing negotiations over the concession, and the eventual formal Chosŏn recognition of the concession in 1887, nearly three years after Qing merchants had taken up residence and commenced commerce. Hwangbo's research, while brief, is a good introduction to the topic and to some of the important primary and secondary sources. For the present review, her work is of interest in that Patterson's work, putatively about Chosŏn-Qing relations in the 1880s from the Pusan vantage point, makes no mention of the Qing concession in Pusan. One might surmise this omission is the result of Patterson's overdependence on Lovatt's papers but even if this is the case, it is an odd omission that inspires further questioning of the suitability of Lovatt as an observer of conditions or a useful source of information on Chosŏn-Qing relations.

These three samples from *Hangdo Pusan* suggest that there is a very large body of research on the history of Pusan, the history of Pusan in the late nineteenth century, and even a body of work on the Qing presence in Pusan in the 1880s and beyond. There is no dearth of information on the Pusan of Lovatt's letters, and indeed, Lovatt's epistolary labors are but one source among many primary and secondary sources, the vast majority of which are far more informed and informative than anything Lovatt has to offer. Considering Lovatt's ignorance and racism in the context of this wealth of source material, Patterson's dependence on his observations is all the more puzzling; we need not seek to understand Chosŏn and the complexities of its relationship with the Qing Empire through the ideological myopia of this one isolated and ill-informed man.

The Lovatt letters, Patterson further maintains, tell us something about the actions and attitudes of men like Li, Möllendorff, Hart, and Merrill. While Patterson makes a number of references to Li in the narrative, we do not learn anything new about him or his thought processes from the Lovatt letters. In fact, it is not clear that Lovatt had any substantive contact with Li. One might modestly propose that an investigation into the thought processes of Li might start with his nine-volume collected works titled *Li Hongzhang quanji* (1997) and then move on to the numerous volumes of his communications with various fellow officials of the Qing government and his diplomatic interactions with the Chosŏn and Japanese governments. These are contained in the diplomatic communications between the Qing and Chosŏn courts edited and published by the Kuksa P'yŏnch'an Wiwŏnhoe as *Ku Han'guk oegyo munsŏ: Ch'ŏngan* (舊韓國外交文書: 清案 Old Korean diplomatic documents: Qing dossier) (1970), the Qing diplomatic correspondence with and about Japan and Chosŏn edited and published by the Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan Jindaishi Yanjiusuo as *Qingji Zhong-Ri-Han guanxi shiliao* (清季中日韓關係史料 Historial materials on China-Japan-Korea relations in the Qing period)

(1972), and the Japanese diplomatic documents edited and published by the Gaimushō Chōsabu as *Nihon gaikō bunsho* (日本外交文書 Japanese diplomatic documents) (1936-63), among many others. The writings of Li are so voluminous that there is scant need to comb through the Lovatt letters for marginal references. The Lovatt letters do show Lovatt and Möllendorff as close friends, but again, the correspondence does not tell us much about Möllendorff that we do not already know, with the colorful exception of his shabby treatment of Lucy Hoag, a woman who showed a romantic interest in him. Similarly, Hart comes across as a coldly efficient administrator but his terse bureaucratic utterances do not really provide much insight into the man or his motivations. We do get a more interesting picture of Merrill who repeatedly pleaded with Hart to treat Lovatt and the other commissioners at Inch'ŏn and Wŏnsan with greater generosity. Here Patterson succeeds in showing us the difficult position in which Merrill found himself, having to answer to both Hart and the Chosŏn throne under highly delicate political circumstances.

Patterson has framed the Lovatt letters as keen observations of Chosŏn conditions, as a window into the inner workings of the customs service, and as a font of insight into important men of the period, but in response to these tasks that he has set, the correspondence provides little of novelty. What they do convey, however, is something of different and of greater interest: the story of a marriage and a family played out over two continents. We must remember that William Lovatt wrote letters rather than, say, a journal for his own reflection (Patterson cites what might be a journal but one time [p. 5n4]). And he wrote the majority of these letters for his wife, Jennie Lovatt. He wrote in great detail, conferring with her on seemingly every decision of his professional life and how it might affect her, the raising of their children, and their life together. Indeed, his work proved to complicate life for Jennie as he was often indecisive about career changes, leaving her in limbo as she

did not know if or when she was to wrap their affairs in Minnesota for a life in Pusan and beyond. Although we do not seem to have her letters to William, he does mention her calls for him to quit the customs service to be with her and their children in Minnesota. What emerges from these negotiations is a partnership in which William and Jennie deliberated on family matters and the details of his professional trajectory in ways that we may not expect in a nineteenth-century marriage.

The fascinating quotidian details of their lives in Pusan are to be found in the letters Jennie wrote to their daughter Nellie, then a teenaged student in a Minnesota boarding school. She wrote of the adventures of their young daughter Mabel playing with the children of the Japanese settlement to which they largely confined themselves. Mabel was rapidly learning Japanese, Korean, and Chinese all at once and seemed most comfortable in Japanese clothing with her hair in the Japanese style of the day. Jennie wrote of her frustration in learning Japanese, of her interest in Japanese clothing and accessories, of her impressions of local food and music, and of her emerging friendship with Yamada Sumi, a Japanese girl similar in age to Nellie. They spent time together in language study, baking, and other pleasant diversions that Jennie came to deeply enjoy. While Jennie often wrote of her boredom and loneliness, her life in the Pusan Japanese settlement is often of greater interest and more humanly relatable than what her husband had to report. Jennie's observations, rather than William's, provide more of these kinds of personal details we rarely see in conventional histories of the period and they make for some of the most interesting parts of Patterson's work.

The core of this book is not the Chosŏn-Qing relationship. It is not the customs services. It is not the important men making decisions and implementing policies. It is not even William Nelson Lovatt, whose name and photograph adorn the cover; it is Jennie Shaw Lovatt, whose full name does not appear until we have read through twenty

pages of front material, preface, and introduction. Much of what we learn about William's professional machinations comes from the letters he wrote for Jennie to read. And most of what we learn about Pusan expatriate life comes from the letters Jennie herself wrote for Nellie. As a reader and a writer, she is the central nexus of this story, a story less about tributary relationships and imperial rivalries than about the unfolding journeys of a marriage and a family.^[9] Living in isolation in the Japanese settlement at Pusan, William and Jennie had little to say about Chosŏn, but if we place Jennie and her relationship with William at the center of the narrative we may learn a great deal more. We may learn about late nineteenth-century relationships between Anglo-American men and women, husbands and wives, parents and children, and the ways those relationships were formed and rent by the vicissitudes of empire. In reframing the Lovatt letters in this fashion, there is another entire monograph, a yet hidden history, waiting to be written.

The Lovatt letters are undoubtedly an important collection and could form the basis of valuable research, but there is a troubling aspect to this work. The main title is "In the Service of His Korean Majesty," but King Kojong makes no appearance in the text. The subtitle is composed of three elements. The first is "William Nelson Lovatt," but it is his wife, Jenny Shaw Lovatt, who is at the center of the correspondence. The second is "the Pusan Customs," but Lovatt hardly discusses the service beyond his career aspirations. The final element is "Sino-Korean Relations," and yet the Qing or Chosŏn governments beyond Hart, Möllendorff, Merrill, and Lovatt are absent. The question arises as to whose perspectives, whose voices matter in this work? The avoidance of Chosŏn source material not produced by Westerners and the slim engagement with Korean-language research suggest that Korean perspectives do not matter. The marginalization of Jenny in favor of her husband suggests that her perspective does not matter (as much). The total absence of Qing materials beyond

Hart suggests yet another perspective that does not matter. A great deal of the writings of the Qing and Chosŏn officials who researched, debated, and implemented the policies that enacted the relationship between the Qing and Chosŏn courts survive and have been available for decades; some, like Li's collected works, first compiled in 1905, have been available for more than a century.[10] There is a wealth of primary source material and yet in this work only Hart speaks for the Qing Empire, and the trio of Möllendorff, Merrill, and Lovatt speak for Chosŏn. Why should this be?

In his "Note on Romanization," Patterson declares that he wishes "to maintain the flavor of the nineteenth century" by employing obsolete Romanization systems and idiosyncratic orthographies (p. xiii). Latent nostalgia for the late Victorian is commonplace in Anglophone research on tributary practice and on late nineteenth-century Chosŏn-Qing relations in particular.[11] What is unusual in this work is that the author has made such an explicit declaration of this desire. It is perhaps this longing that has ensured that Patterson's work has gone beyond merely maintaining a particular flavor or a subtle hint of some bygone era. The privileging of white men and the English language are choices that make *In Service to His Korean Majesty* a work firmly in and of the long nineteenth century, and as such, it is most profitably read with both a critical wariness and an openness to the future possibilities a reframing might present.

Notes

[1]. Patterson did venture into some of the primary sources on the Korean Customs Service but did not find the material for which he was searching. He also notes that he could find no mention of Lovatt's 1886 dismissal in *Ŭmch'ŏngsa*, a diary of Kim Yunsik covering the period 1881 to 1883. See Kuksa P'yŏnch'an Wiwŏnhoe, "Mokch'a," in *Chongjŏng yŏnp'yo/Ŭmch'ŏngsa* (Seoul: Kuksa P'yŏnch'an Wiwŏnhoe, 1971), 9-10. For Patterson's

explanation, see *In the Service of His Korean Majesty*, 133n47.

[2]. Min Hoesu, "1880-nyŏndae Pusan haegwan/kamnisŏ ūi kaehangjang ōmmu kwanhal ch'egye," *Han'gukhak nonch'ong* 47 (March 2017): 241-71; and Kuksa P'yŏnch'an Wiwŏnhoe, *Kaksa tŭngnok* (Seoul: Kuksa P'yŏnch'an Wiwŏnhoe, 1981-).

[3]. Min Kŏnho, *Haeŭn illok* (Pusan: Pusan Kŭndae Yŏksagwan, 2006); and Min Kŏnho, *Haeŭn illok* (Pusan: Pusan Kŭndae Yŏksagwan, 2008). See also, Pusan Kŭndae Yŏksagwan, ed., *Pusan-hang kamni pangp'an Min Kŏnho wa kŭ ūi ilgi Haeŭn illok* (Pusan: Pusan Kŭndae Yŏksagwan, 2014).

[4]. Pusan Kwangyŏksi Yŏksa P'yŏnch'an Wiwŏnhoe, "Kaehanggi ūi Pusan sahoesang e kwanhan charyo," *Hangdo Pusan* 7 (January 1969): 373-79.

[5]. Suehiro Shigeyasu, *Hokuseiroku*, quoted in Pusan Kwangyŏksi, "Kaehanggi ūi Pusan," 379.

[6]. Kang Taemin, "Kŭndae kaehanggi Pusan chiyŏksa yŏn'gu ūi hoego wa chŏnmang," *Hangdo Pusan* 23 (May 2007): 330.

[7]. Hong Yŏngjin, "Pusan chiyŏksa kwallyŏn kigwan (tanch'e) ūi hwaltong hyŏnhwang," *Hangdo Pusan* 23 (May 2007): 419-44.

[8]. Hwangbo Yŏnghŭi, "Pusan Ch'ŏngguk chogyaji e kwanhan yŏn'gu," *Hangdo Pusan* 25 (May 2009): 411-25.

[9]. This review benefited greatly from a discussion with Jaclyn Van Lieu Vorenkamp who noted that Jennie appears to inhabit the epistolary center of the Lovatt papers.

[10]. See "Chuban shouming," in *Li Hongzhang quanji* (Haikuo: Nanhai Chubanshe, 1997)1:1.

[11]. Joshua Van Lieu, "The Tributary System and the Persistence of Late Victorian Knowledge," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 77, no. 1 (June 2017): 73-92.

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