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Colonial Period Korea

In 1876, Japan "opened" Korea to outside contact for the first time. What followed, was a period of sparring with the Chinese over the right of influence in Korea, a rivalry which culminated in the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-95. Following victory, Japan steadily increased its presence and interference in Korean matters until the outright annexation of the country in 1910. Korea would remain a Japanese colony until the end of the Pacific War in 1945.
The collection

This collection, drawn from the holdings of the C.V. Starr East Asian Library at Columbia University, New York, includes three groups of publications dating from this colonial period:

1. Japanese publications
2. Western (in most cases English) early impressions of Korea
3. Korean texts

1. Japanese publications
These are historical texts produced by Japanese diplomats, officials and scholars in Korea, presenting often surprising and under-researched insights into colonial Korea from the colonizers' point of view. They cover a broad range of subjects, from art and archaeology to the sciences, and include education, natural history, religion and rural conditions. A significant number of the publications pertain to Japan's involvement with Korea, as well as general works on Korean history and culture.

More than 62,000 pages

2. Western-language publications
From 1876 onwards Westerners could travel inside Korea for the first time. This resulted in a wealth of written observations on 'the Hermit country', its people, and its culture. Apart from one or two much earlier accounts, these are essentially the earliest Western impressions of Korea, its culture, history, religion, and the accounts are often in lively and captivating language.

More than 18,000 pages

3. Korean texts
This literature primarily represents resistance against Japanese rule. The use of the Korean language in publications was itself defiant in a period in which Japanese had been declared the official language of Korea.

Also to be found here is a unique collection of Korean classical novels, printed in old printing type, from a period which witnessed a surge of interest in Korean novels among the general public. These original documents reveal the many alterations which classical works were subjected to over this transitory period. These documents will fascinate students of Korean literature, and since some of the texts are written in an extremely ancient form of Korean, the collection will also be of great interest to Korean linguists as a source for archaic Korean words and writing styles.