INTRODUCTION\(^1\)

The Briton who has left the deepest impression upon the Koreans since the Anglo-Korean Friendship and Commerce Treaty (1884) is Ernest Thomas Bethell. Arriving in Korea from Japan, where he had been engaged in trade, he opposed Japan’s invasion of Korea through the *Korea Daily News* and its Korean sister paper the *Daehan Maeil Sinbo*, advocating a stand against Japan.

He published these newspapers from 1904, when the Russo-Japanese War broke out, to 1909, when he died. Japan had intervened in Korea by installing its Residency-General in Korea and appointing Ito Hirobumi, one of the leading *genro*, as its first Resident-General. The Japanese authorities in Korea censored the anti-Japanese press, but since Bethell was a British national and enjoyed the benefits of extra-territoriality he was able to evade Japanese censorship and his papers were able to give support to Korea’s nationalist movement.

Because the *Daehan Maeil Sinbo*, the Korean version of the *Korea Daily News*, reported, encouraged and instigated the activities of
Korean opposition to Japan, and since Koreans supported Bethell’s papers, the Japanese demanded that Britain should deport Bethell from Korea or shut down his papers. Diplomatic negotiations between Britain and Japan over how to deal with Bethell and his papers started in 1904 and lasted, after his death, until 1910 when Japan annexed Korea. Britain, deferring to Japanese demands, twice referred Bethell for trial in the consular courts. In 1908 a British judge and prosecutor stationed in Shanghai came to Seoul to conduct a four-day trial of Bethell at the British Consulate-General in Seoul. Sentenced to three weeks’ imprisonment, Bethell served the term in Shanghai and returned to Korea.

The move against Bethell was not unprecedented. In 1876, John Reddie Black, a British journalist in Japan, was stopped from publishing the *Bankoku Shim bun* after the Japanese authorities protested on the grounds that since Black did not know Japanese he did not know what was being published and Japanese press laws did not allow foreigners to publish newspapers. Although Sir Harry Parkes, the British minister, did not accept that Japanese law applied to British subjects, he agreed that it was not right that Black should be allowed to flout the law, and issued regulations banning the publication of vernacular newspapers. In two other cases, in Thailand and China, the issue had not been publishing in the vernacular, but in the first case, publishing attacks critical of the Thai government, and in the second, publishing comment on Russia’s behaviour that amounted to a breach of the peace.²

**BETHELL BEFORE KOREA**

Bethell was born on 3 November 1872 in Bristol and graduated from Merchant Venturers School (a predecessor of Bristol University). His father, Thomas Hancock Bethell, was originally a brewer’s clerk. Thomas Hancock went to Kobe in 1886 and ran Nicolle & Co., a small trading firm, along with a partner. He then returned to London in 1888 and established Bethell & Nicolle.

Bethell went to Japan in 1888 when his father returned to England. He first worked at Nicolle & Co. before opening a small trading firm, Bethell Brothers, with his two younger brothers. After he went to Korea as a journalist, his brothers continued to run the firm, with the older, Herbert, operating in Japan while the younger brother, Arthur Percy, was in charge in London.

Bethell lived in Kobe for sixteen years from 1888 to February 1904. Assisting in his father’s business, he first bought various oriental products such as antiques, ceramics, lacquer ware and accessories in Japan and shipped them to Britain while importing into Japan various British products. A quick-tempered man, he liked sports and enjoyed liquor, cigarettes and chess. He was talented in music and, despite a