Commodore Robert W. Shufeldt, negotiating the treaty in 1882, knew that Korea was so poor that it "promised but little in itself of commercial importance." When Congress ratified the Korean-American treaty and Americans entered the Hermit Kingdom, Shufeldt's verdict was instantly vindicated. Korea was in the eyes of policymakers in Washington too insignificant. However, it soon became, until Japan's active aggression began, the only country on the Asian continent where American influence, among Western powers, predominated. A key element behind this discrepancy between Washington's indifferent policy and America's great influence over Korea was missionaries. As U.S. citizens, missionaries were under the protection of their government and its representatives in Seoul. They were, on the other hand, private adventurers who were not in tune with Washington's policy. Besides, they were the people of deep religious convictions and hence were determined to follow "a higher law" than those on earth. The State Department's strategic indifference and missionaries' religious enthusiasm were thus in a precarious relationship. This article will show underlying elements, underpinnings, and workings of this odd relationship.

**American Interests and Policy in Korea**

It was commerce-minded Whig administrations that opened relations with China and Japan. Republicans, in power during most of the years after the Civil War, followed this principle of mercantile expansion as the norm of their East Asia policy. From the beginning, the primary
American motive in knocking on the Korean door was the humane treatment of shipwrecked American merchants. That is, Korea needed to be opened not for its own importance but for the protection and promotion of American mercantile interests in China and Japan. “While no political or commercial interest renders such a treaty urgent,” wrote Secretary of State James G. Blaine to American negotiator Robert Shufeldt, “it is desirable that the ports of a country so near Japan and China should be opened.” As Korea fell within the commercial route, Washington had to secure from it protection of American lives and property and coal supplies. With the signing of the treaty of amity and commerce in 1882, these primary objectives were accomplished.

The opening of Korea, and above all the dispatch of a diplomatic representative there, gave Americans an opportunity to explore the possibility of commercial advantages. The detailed instructions given to the first American minister, Lucius H. Foote, reveal the State Department’s interest along this line. Among the four specific objectives of Foote’s mission, the first two were related to ceremonial and general aspects of the Korean-American relationship. The remaining two involved commerce. The purpose was unmistakable; Foote understood that the “sole purpose” of his mission in Korea was to extend the influence of the United States and open new fields for commerce. On the basis of his initial observation, Foote soon dis-