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# A LANDSCAPE WITHOUT CHIMNEYS

## REVISITING SELECTED LOCATIONS OF WACŁAW SIEROSZEWSKI'S KOREA[1]

ABSTRACT The article explores the relevance of Wacław Sieroszewski's work, *Korea. Klucz Dalekiego Wschodu* [*Korea: The Key to the Far East*] (1905). It focuses on the documentation of selected significant locations, such as traditional villages, important cities, historical sites, etc. The analysis is conducted with an aim to determine to what extent, and perhaps also why, some locations treated by Sieroszewski with particular attention still prove to be significant indicators of Korean cultural identity. It is also an attempt to discover the fascinating interplay between Sieroszewski's practical and James Clifford's theoretical approaches to entering a new culture.

**Keywords:** *Korea. Klucz Dalekiego Wschodu* (1905), Korean cultural identity, cultural heritage, cultural encounter, cross-cultural perspective

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## INTRODUCTION[2]

The aim of this article is to explore the enduring relevance of Wacław Sieroszewski's seminal work, *Korea. Klucz Dalekiego Wschodu* [*Korea: The Key to the Far East*], written during his relatively short visit to the Korean Peninsula in 1903, and published in 1905 – approximately one year after his return.

By documenting key localities such as traditional villages, urban centres, and historical sites, Sieroszewski offers a window into the cultural distinctiveness of Korea at the turn of the twentieth century.[3] Through revisiting some of the places portrayed in his book, this study seeks to uncover the lasting impact and significance of Sieroszewski's observations, exploring cultural landmarks singled out by him, as well as recognizing the complex relationship between the past and present in shaping the Korean cultural identity.

Since the publication of *Korea. Klucz Dalekiego Wschodu* over one hundred and twenty years ago, the work has received relatively little academic attention, particularly in comparison to his other writings. Despite its insights into Korean culture, both material and immaterial, the book has not been the focus of extensive scholarly analysis. This article was written with an aim to address this gap by highlighting examples of Sieroszewski's keen observations of Korean heritage, which continue to hold relevance today, demonstrating the enduring significance of cultural values. Such a thematic approach – focusing on the long-lasting elements of Korean identity that Sieroszewski recognized – has not been explored in any previously published works. Consequently, the sources used for this research are limited to those that have proven relevant and useful for the specific objectives of this study.

## THE POINT OF DEPARTURE

In his two books dedicated to the subject of cross-cultural travel, *The Predicament of Culture* (1988) and *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (1997), James Clifford critically examines how knowledge about other cultures can be constructed. He explores the relationships between ethnography, travel writing, and other forms of cultural representation, focusing on the complexities and power

[2] The transliteration used here follows the Revised Romanization of Korean system (2000), officially introduced by the National Academy of the Korean Language (NAKL) and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Korean names are presented following traditional convention, with the family name preceding the given name.

[3] Sieroszewski's attitude to Koreans is not undertaken purposely, since there is a work dedicated exclusively to this subject. See: K. Golon, "Obrazy Koreańczyków w książce Wacława Sieroszewskiego 'Korea. Klucz Dalekiego Wschodu'", *Tutoring Gedanensis*, vol. 7, no. 1 (2022), pp. 180-185. Also, the subject of perceiving Korea and its people, especially with relation to Japan and the Japanese has already been discussed for instance in Lee, Yeong-Mi, "Korea: Klucz Dalekiego Wschodu (1905) and Wacław Sieroszewski's View of Korea," *International Journal of Korean Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. 3 (2017), pp. 127-146; and A. Wadas, "The Two Chivalrous Nations: Wacław Sieroszewski and the Japanese Presence in Korea," *Perspektywy Kultury*, vol. 4, no. 19 (2017), pp. 107-124.

dynamics characteristic to these practices, as well as showing how travel narratives play a role in constructing 'Western' knowledge about 'non-Western' cultures. At the same time, he recognizes that this knowledge production is not a neutral process, but it is shaped by power dynamics and ideological biases, being also well aware that travel writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries often approached other cultures with preconceived notions, leading to the reinforcement of stereotypes and simplified representations.

However, Clifford is at the same time rather strongly convinced that *facts do not speak for themselves; they are emplotted rather than collected, produced in worldly relationships rather than observed in controlled environments*, therefore he favors the opinion that *[e]lements of the 'literary' travel narrative that were excluded from ethnographies (or marginalized in their prefaces) now appear more prominently. These include the researcher's routes into and through 'the field;' time in the capital city, registering the surrounding national/transnational context; technologies of transport (getting there as well as being there); interactions with named, idiosyncratic individuals rather than anonymous, representative informants*.[4]

Clifford argues that travelers and scholars must engage in reflexive self-awareness, acknowledging their own perspectives and biases, as well as the historical and cultural contexts that shape their encounters with other cultures.[5] He also examines the ways in which travel contributes to the production and negotiation of cultural difference, focusing on the spatial and temporal dimensions of cross-cultural encounters[6], and refers to the early ethnographical tools, observing that *[c]omparative concepts – translation terms – are approximations, privileging certain 'originals' and made for specific audiences*. In his view, they can be recognised as symptoms of becoming aware *of limits, sedimented meanings, tendencies to gloss over differences*.[7]

When examining Wacław Sieroszewski's travel accounts in Korea, it becomes evident that ideas later articulated by Clifford hold significant relevance. Though Clifford and Sieroszewski belong to different times, parallels can be drawn between their approaches, suggesting that Sieroszewski's method was ahead of his time. Clifford's insights on the experience of encountering 'otherness' as an opportunity for self-discovery, and his view of culture as a dynamic interplay where components are transposed between cultures, resonate with Sieroszewski's approach. He strove to engage with foreign cultures enough to ease their strangeness through making the unfamiliar more accessible – a practice that mirrors Clifford's later theories on cultural exchange and reflexivity.[8] Thus, Sieroszewski's perceptiveness reflects a forward-thinking approach to cross-cultural understanding that aligns with Clifford's modern anthropological framework.

4 J. Clifford, *Routes*, Cambridge 1997, p. 67.

5 J. Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Cambridge 1988, pp. 21-54 et alia.

6 J. Clifford, *Routes*..., pp. 17-46.

7 Ibid., p. 11.

8 J. Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*..., pp. 165-174.

The few cases discussed further in the text come as an attempt to illustrate how the newfound familiarity of symbolic significance shaped Sieroszewski's perception of space, cultural mentality, and national identity during his relatively short stay in Korea. All the discussed cases were selected from the monographic travel account titled *Korea. Klucz Dalekiego Wschodu.*

## A FEW WORDS ABOUT WACŁAW SIEROSZEWSKI AND HIS WRITINGS ON KOREA

Wacław Sieroszewski (1858-1945) was a prominent figure in Polish political and literary spheres. Born when Poland was partitioned between the Russian, Prussian, and Austro-Hungarian Empires, then living through a turbulent period in both Polish and world history, he died at the age of eighty-seven, just a few weeks before the end of World War II. A close associate of Marshal Józef Piłsudski, Sieroszewski played a significant role in the establishment of the Second Polish Republic (1918-1939). He was also a key figure of the Polish earliest socialist associations, as well as the President of the Polish Academy of Literature, through the period of its short-term existence (1933-1939).

During his student years, Sieroszewski's involvement in political and revolutionary activities led to his deportation to Eastern Siberia in 1880, where he spent about fifteen years as a political prisoner. It was during this exile that he made a name for himself in ethnography and anthropology by studying the lives of the Yakutians. After returning to Poland in 1895, he continued to be involved in the movement against the oppressive rule of the Russian Empire and was again arrested in 1900. With considerable help of his friends from the Russian Geographical Society, instead of facing further imprisonment, he was allowed to undertake an expedition to Japan with a mission to gather objects of Japanese art and culture for Russian museums. Departing from Warsaw in January 1903, Sieroszewski traveled by the Trans-Siberian Railroad, eventually reaching Port Arthur and from there setting sail for Japan. He made several stops along the Japanese coast, traveling from the south to the north of the archipelago, and afterwards departed for Korea.[9]

From his own account of his journey to the Korean Peninsula it is possible to conclude that Sieroszewski arrived in Korea on exactly October 10, 1903[10], landing in Pusan – one of the major ports opened to Western and Japanese vessels by the Ganghwa Treaty of 1876. From there, he traveled again by ship along the east coast to Wonsan, where he disembarked and continued his journey to Seoul on horseback. His voyage from Wonsan to Seoul, covering about 250 kilometres, took approximately two weeks, and according to his own account, he was the first ever European to attempt such a perilous journey. Twenty-five years later, he recalls:

[9] Life and work of Wacław Sieroszewski has been discussed, with careful diligence, in two relatively recent books: A. Sieroszewski, *Wacława Sieroszewskiego żywot niespokojny*, Warszawa 2015; and A. Kijak, *Odkrywca innej Syberii i Dalekiego Wschodu. O prozie Wacława Sieroszewskiego*, Kraków 2010.

[10] W. Sieroszewski, *Korea (Klucz Dalekiego Wschodu)*, Warszawa 1905, p. 3.

*(...) my intention was to get to Seoul. I could do this either by sea around the Peninsula (...) or across the Peninsula by land. The first way was convenient and short. It would have lasted no more than three days; the second required travelling on horseback and could have taken from three weeks to three months... depending on circumstances!*

*– Nobody knows how it will turn out there!.... No European has yet travelled that road. And I do not advise you to do so. There are tiger hunters there, mountain tribes, wild tribes that have never seen a white man... There is no way to know how they will receive you... – I was warned by the aide of the 'Volunteer Fleet,' the acting Russian consul in Genzan [Wonsan – R.C.]. But it was the obstacles that tempted me.* [11]

Sieroszewski succeeded in reaching Seoul by land, although not without some difficulties, which he thoroughly reported in his travel journal. His time in Korea was as we know brief, with his stay in the capital lasting only about ten days or so. Already by mid-November, he returned to Port Arthur and started on his return journey. But even though his exposure to Korea was limited, *Korea. Klucz Dalekiego Wschodu* counts among Sieroszewski's most significant works. Apart from his own ethnographic observations, the book draws extensively from earlier works and existing studies, including reports of American Protestant missionaries and other scholars who had studied the region. Overall, the work is solidly footnoted and provides a detailed portrayal of the country during a time of significant social and political changes, as well as in the weeks of the increasing anxiety and unrest, preceding the Russo-Japanese War. It also captures the challenges Korea faced as it transitioned from a 'hermit kingdom' to a nation forcibly opening to both Western and Japanese influences.

## *KOREA: KLUCZ DALEKIEGO WSCHODU* AS SEEN THROUGH THE LENS OF JAMES CLIFFORD'S CONCEPT

Wacław Sieroszewski's writings, in general, make it possible to understand his increasing sensitivity as an ethnographer.[12] At the time of his visit to Korea he was already aware of how entering a different culture could become an enriching experience as well as an opportunity of self-discovery. This attitude brings him close to Clifford's view on the experience of encountering otherness as a possibility to discover new aspects of oneself. In his essay *Na progu* [*On the threshold*], first published in 1902, Sieroszewski observes:

*Among strange peoples, in foreign temples we would learn to respect ourselves, and we would see that blood and tears are of the same lustre and colour everywhere (...)*

[11] W. Sieroszewski, "Wrażenia z podróży do Korei," in: W. Sieroszewski, *Szkice podróżnicze i wspomnienia,* Kraków 1961, p. 385. Unless stated otherwise, all translations from the Polish into English language were provided by the author.

[12] For a detailed discussion on Sieroszewski's developing skills in his ethnographic works, cf. A. Zawadzki, "Język, tożsamość, narracja. Poetyka nowoczesnego pisarstwa antropologicznego (na przykładzie Wacława Sieroszewskiego i Bronisława Malinowskiego)," in W. Bolecki, R. Nycz (eds), *Narracja i Tożsamość*, vol. 1*, Narracje w Kulturze*, Warszawa 2004, pp. 165-175.

*Then we would have returned better and stronger, to once again take the burden of existence which needs to be rolled up the hill again and again, on our healed shoulders (...)*

*I am leaving with you on my mind and with you on my mind I will absorb the impressions of the world with all the power of my senses, so that in time I can tell you quietly all about what I have seen...*[13]

With such an attitude and equipped only with the 'innocent eye'[14] – as according to his own account, he *sailed to Korea across the lovely, golden-azure Sea of Japan, free of any recommended ideas*[15] – Sieroszewski reached the port of Pusan, ready to face a culture completely unknown to him.

As a result, a prominent part of his account on Korea is dedicated to his observations regarding the Korean countryside, encounters with Korean peasantry, experiencing Korean hospitality as well as traditional ways of life in Korean villages, characteristic for a collective society. Describing his journey to Seoul, he mentions many villages and hamlets, thirteen of them by name, describing them in greater or lesser detail. Later he supplemented his own observations with facts gathered from existing sources available to him on his return home and inserted them into his original ethnographic notes mainly as statistical data, either directly into the text or in the form of footnotes. In some of his countryside descriptions, he writes:

*Fields, endless fields... Reddish-brown fields and reddish-brown stubble, cut through by numerous ravines through which rapid streams run (....) above the streams always the same grey villages, cottages built of mud and stone, covered with straw thatched roofs.*[16] *(...) Domed, rounded thatches, protected from the winds by nets of straw ropes (...) a wicker fence surrounds them.*[17]

*The basis of Korean agriculture unconditionally throughout the country is the cultivation of rice. As far as I could see, rice fields occupy two-thirds, if not more, of the arable land (...) In places, I saw reservoirs for the collection and storage of rainwater and spring water to feed the fields.*[18]

The percentage of text devoted by Sieroszewski to descriptions of the Korean countryside, and his attempts to describe it by indicating only approximate similarities of farming tools, crops, simple dishes, which he was served in the villages[19], may be due primarily to two factors. Firstly, to the 'familiarity' of images of rural life, because Siero-

[13] W. Sieroszewski, „Na progu," in: W. Bolecki, R. Nycz (eds), *Narracja i Tożsamość*..., pp. 97-98.

[14] Cf. A. Zawadzki, "Język, tożsamość, narracja...," pp. 171-173.

[15] W. Sieroszewski, *Korea*..., p. 2.

[16] Ibid., p. 71.

[17] Ibid., p. 93.

[18] Ibid., p. 77.

[19] For example: "The Koreans consume cereals mostly in the form of groats of various kinds; they use truly little flour, bread is unknown in the villages (...), cakes are bland and sticky and made from starch. During the whole journey only twice, I saw small hand querns of very primitive workmanship. The Koreans obtain the flour by crushing the grain in the same wooden tars in which they pound the crumb" (Ibid., p. 104). In the quoted passage, Sieroszewski obviously recognizes traditional cakes made from beaten cooked rice as made of starch, however, for the sake of conveying the taste, texture as well as form of the cakes, the description proves effective enough.

szewski, as the son of a landowner, had the opportunity to observe life in the countryside from his earliest years. The second factor could be his awareness of the foremost importance of agriculture for the economy of Korea at that time (which also seemed akin or familiar, as it resembled the situation of Poland, which used to be a predominantly agricultural country).

**Ill. 1.** Traditional Korean homestead. Andong. Korean traditional village. November 3, 2023.[20]

**Ill. 2.** Rice fields. Andong. Korean traditional village. November 3, 2023.

[20] Unless stated otherwise, all photographs in the article were taken by the author.

Here, it is also worth mentioning that Sieroszewski's account is a testimony of his awareness about the composite nature of Korean villages which, according to a contemporary study,

*(...) consist of residential areas, agricultural land, and surrounding nature. In addition, residential areas are divided into three categories: social, personal, and spiritual. The area of such a village is represented by the boundary, shaped by the topography of mountain ridges and the entrance where a pavilion or sacred tree is located. The spiritual area is where ritual events are held, such as sadang or seonsan*.[21]

This is why, next to observations about crops, farming methods, animal husbandry, staple diets, etc., he included vivid descriptions of local landscapes as well as places and objects which he associated with local customs or religious practices. For example, remembering his early encounter with Korean Shamanism, he writes,

*We ascend not an extremely high pass (...) On the pass itself (...) there is a tree laden with offerings of coloured rags, threads, little pieces of paper, bunches of hair, old clogs and so on. I have already seen such a tree on the 7th li on the road from Genzan. (...) These are trees dedicated to the 'spirit of the place' and quite similar to such Yakutian trees. Definitely shamanism was and is the most deeply rooted and widespread of Asian religions. I have encountered it in full development or in remnants over vast expanses, ranging from the shores of the Caspian Sea to Sakhalin and from the Icy Ocean to the islands of the Japanese archipelago. These were always, even in detail, the same beliefs and practices of societies organising themselves to fight nature. At the core of them lies the notion of redemption*.[22]

**Ill. 3.** Six-hundred-year-old sacred Zelkova tree. Andong. Korean traditional village. November 3, 2023.

[21] Park, Hongyeol, Matsumoto Kunihiko, Sawaki Masanori, "The Impact on Traditional Village Conservation of Extensive Regional Tourism Development Projects in Korea," *Urban and Regional Planning Review*, vol. 10 (2023), p. 122.

[22] W. Sieroszewski, *Korea*..., p. 32.

Focusing on the traditional ways of rural life, Sieroszewski recorded the presence of sacred trees, or secret groves, several times in his account, as every hamlet or village along the way he travelled had its own revered places and objects. Leaving one of the villages where he found shelter for the night, he even *sat down under a large sacrificial tree, heavily covered with rags and strings hanged on it. It stood near the crossroads, where our path joined the wide, rolling road...*.[23] Obviously bearing in mind that religious places play a crucial role in every cultural tradition, he included several descriptions of places of worship in his book.[24] His attention was also drawn by a tradition of warding off evil spirits with objects of totemic nature, such as *sottae* – wooden poles with birds carved on their tops:

*I have also sometimes seen, at the entrance to and exit from the village, poles as tall as a man and higher, with ends carved in the shape of human faces, painted red, white, and black and often wearing Korean hats. (...) poles several feet high with wooden bird effigies at their ends, with straw strings hanging from the tails of these birds (...) usually stood in pairs at the entrance to the village*.[25]

**Ill. 4.** Modern sculptures influenced by the village tradition of sacred poles with bird figures. Keimyung University, Dongsan Campus. November 2023.

[23] Ibid., p. 124.

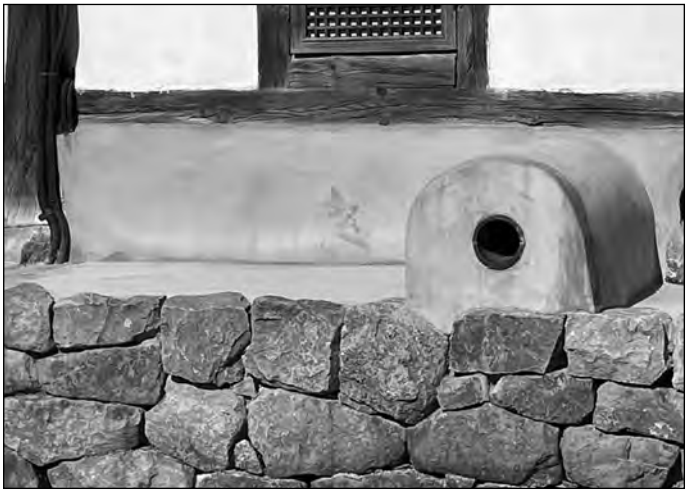
[24] Cf. ibid., for example pp. 33-41 and 60-65 (the detailed description of a Buddhist monastery).

[25] Ibid., pp. 46-47.

These traditional rural religious practices, still conducted in some places, involve – as rightly observed by Sieroszewski – erecting guardian posts, sacred poles, and ornamental embellishments, which not only function as directional markers and territorial boundaries but also symbolize spiritual safeguarding.

Sieroszewski placed special focus throughout the whole narrative about his visit to Korea on the technique and (overwhelming) efficiency of floor heating, which he had neither experienced nor heard of before. This unusual way of keeping houses warm while at the same time managing the passage of smoke from the level of the basement was – and remains until today – one of the components of Korean cultural identity.[26]

**Ill. 5.** An escape way for smoke in a traditional Korean house. Andong. Korean traditional village. November 3, 2023.



*In Korea, they do not know chimneys at all. [explains Sieroszewski] The smoke even in the imperial palaces and ministers' houses goes out either directly into the street through a hole in the foundation or is conducted a little upwards for human growth through small channels, pieced together from stones just inside the wall; sometimes there is one large jug or a whole tower of hollow pots stacked on top of each other instead.*[27]

And further triggering the readers' imagination, he described the rural technique of floor heating, basing his own understanding of the method on what he was able to observe and experience directly:

*I looked through a small window from the veranda and saw something like a dark ironworks or a foundry. In a spacious room, located much lower than the level of our floor, multiple blood-coloured glows were gushing from the openings of a furnace as big and as long*

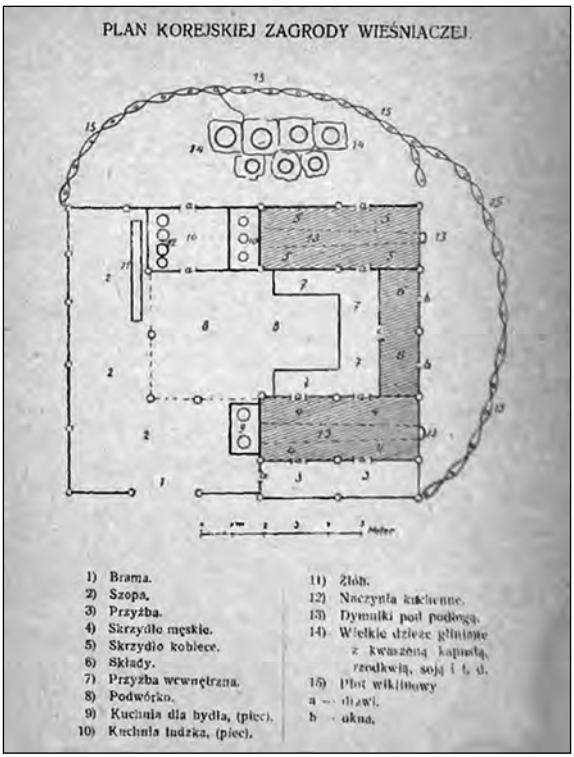
[26] For example, "At the end of the women's wing is the fitted kitchen, always almost quite spacious and boarded up. (...) Smokestacks (...) pass under the floors of the respective living rooms and heat them from below." Ibid., pp. 94-95.

[27] Ibid., p. 95.

*as the transverse wall of the house was. (...) I returned to my room (...) The floor became as hot as an iron. I pulled two mats under me and tried to sleep, hoping that putting out the fire in the kitchen would soon bring the temperature down. Vain hope!...*[28]

Similarly, the shape and organization of a traditional Korean homestead caught Sieroszewski's interest to the point that in the book a detailed drawing of its plan was included.

**Ill. 6.** Plan of a Korean village homestead. 1. Gate; 2. Shed; 3. Porch; 4. Men's wing; 5. Women's wing; 6. Storage spaces; 7. Ganek; 8. Yard; 9. Kitchen for animals (stove); 10. Kitchen for human beings (stove); 11. Manger; 12. Kitchen utensils; 13. Smokestacks; 14. Huge clay pots with pickled cabbage, radish, soya beans etc.; 15. Wicker fence; a – windows; b – doors.[29]




The attention Sieroszewski paid to the organization of Korean houses, villages and country life nowadays is being reflected by the systemic actions of South Korean government, undertaken to protect Korean rural heritage. The importance of preserving the memory of the Korean nation's agricultural roots for modern South Koreans is evidenced by the state's focus on supporting traditional farms and open-air museums, where the original character of rural homesteads is preserved, traditional farming and

[28] Ibid., pp. 99-101.

[29] Ibid., pp. 96-97.

animal husbandry methods are still used, and folk traditions and rituals are cultivated. These special heritage sites serve as a testimony to Korean cultural heritage, especially *[s]ince 2000* when *the notions of intangible values and public participation have been the main subjects of heritage discourses in Korea. The value of heritage lies not only in their legacy content, but also in the psychological basis they provide for the identity and pride of people*.[30]

Along with the rural landscapes, Sieroszewski's 'innocent eye' seems to keenly notice other features important for Korean cultural identity. His candid descriptions correspond with Clifford's views on the use of comparative concepts in ethnography, seen by him as approximations that reveal limitations and tendencies to overlook differences.[31] The description of his stay in Seoul, rather short in duration, provided in *Korea. Klucz Dalekiego Wschodu*, can be quoted as yet another example of ethnographic sensitivity being in line with Clifford's viewpoints. According to him, spending time in the capital to grasp the broader national or transnational setting, discussing transportation methods etc., is of great significance for a detailed ethnographic travel account.[32]

*Every day – Sieroszewski recalls– either alone or with an interpreter, I explored a corner of Seoul. Sometimes I would take a 'rickshaw,' the crowd of which was always in front of the hotel, at other times I would sit on the electric tram that runs from the East Gate to the West Gate, cutting through the oblong city along its largest axis. I preferred, however, to make excursions on foot, which allowed me to stop in front of the more interesting shops and peek into the winding, narrow streets of Seoul's old districts. The traffic on the streets was very lively, especially in the morning. (...) The most beautiful and busiest is Dzon-no Street, where the tram runs. Here are the best shops and bazaars ...* [33]

Among Sieroszewski's impressions about the capital city, 'Dzon-no' (or sometimes 'Dżon-no'; both versions provided by Sieroszewski refer to Jongno Street) street takes precedence over all other localities. It is described as the best shopping area. It is the street where, at Dongdaemun market which operates to this day, he saw 'mountains' of 'Chinese lettuce' and 'white, bitter radish', and was able to figure out for himself the basis of Korean staple diet.[34] It is also the street where he started to experience direct encounters with both Korea's political history as well as its current political developments.

One of the first detailed descriptions of heritage sites of today's Seoul refers to the historical meaning and a practical function of the bell placed at the junction of Jongno Street:

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30 Jung Hae-Joon, Ryu Je-Hun, "Sustaining a Korean Traditional Rural Landscape in the Context of Cultural Landscape," *Sustainability*, vol. 7, no. 8 (2015), p. 1231.

31 Cf. W. Sieroszewski, *Korea*..., pp. 30, 55, 63, 72, 93, 106, 158, 201, 252, 291, 406, 409 et alia. More about Sieroszewski's use of comparative approach in ethnographic description and his openness to "otherness" of unknown cultures, cf. R. Czekalska, "Among Strange Peoples, in Foreign Temples We Would Learn to Respect Ourselves – Images of Distant Cultures in Early Polish Accounts of Tibet, India and Korea –," *The Language and Culture*, vol. 15, no. 4 (2019), pp. 1-23.

32 Cf. J. Clifford, *Routes*..., p. 67.

33 W. Sieroszewski, *Korea*..., pp. 385-387.

34 Ibid., p. 82.

*I saw the famous great bell (...) whose voice was the signal of the bloody disturbances of 1884, and which, before that, every day at sunset, called the men of the neighbourhood to stay at home and to give the streets of the city until midnight for the exclusive use of the women, at other hours imprisoned after their homes by Korean custom. Only government goons and officials with special passports (...) were then allowed to pass through crowds of women; all other men were seized as villains. What a field for romantic adventures in the style of* One Thousand and One Nights*!*[35]

As Sieroszewski's narrative seems charming or at least captivating[36], the story of the bell provided by the National Museum of Korea as a description of the precious exhibit, deprives the bell of all its mystery. It states that *The Bronze Bell of Bosingak Tower was made in 1468 at a Buddhist temple called Wongaksa, which had once been at today's Tapgol Park in downtown Seoul. The bell was deserted at the temple site for some time even after the temple was closed and dismantled, and it was then moved to Namdaemun Gate and used to announce the time. The bell was then moved to today's Myeong-dong due to the outbreak of the Japanese Invasions in 1592, and to a bell tower newly built at Unjongga Street (today's Jongno Sageori) in 1619 to be used to tell time twice a day, the start (28 strikes at 10:00 p.m.) and the end (33 strikes at 4:00 a.m.) of curfew. (...) The bell was struck once a year to signal the arrival of the New Year until 1985, when voices were raised for preservation measures for the bell. It was replaced by a new bell in the following year and moved to the National Museum of Korea. (...) It is one of the rare Buddhist bells whose date of production is clearly known before the Japanese Invasions in 1592.*[37] Today, the restored, wooden pavilion with the replica of the original bell became a part of the city landscape, surrounded by office blocks and skyscrapers. It is however still a place visited by tourists despite a number of more engaging historical attractions.

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[35] Ibid., p. 388.

[36] I am grateful for the comment of the Reviewer pointing out the somewhat exaggerated image of Jongno after dark, given entirely to women of the night. In this context its worth mentioning that a similar view was shared by Korean early 20th century media, such as *Pyŏlgŏn'gon* (Another World), a popular monthly magazine in colonial Korea (1910-1945). According to Oh Se-Mi, its "Nightly reports differed from daytime urban investigative reports in their quest for uncovering the truth – what was going on beneath the surface appearance of a thing or an event. Their concern was with "suspicious" people and events, behind the walls, away from colonial surveillance, which made reporters employ covert strategies to investigate illicit nighttime activities and even disguised themselves to gain access. They spent the night in search of sensational stories of hedonism, gambling, and rendezvous, and ventured through the streets, alleyways, cafés, and boarding houses to find out how people spent time away from their regimented work hours. While roaming around places that were not immediately visible, the reporters became fascinated with suspenseful and erotic tales of the night. They exposed how an ordinary-looking house in actuality hosted a roomful of men who drank and exchanged jokes with prostitutes. The boarding houses were usually filled with female students – many with the popular chignon hairstyle and red fox fur – gambling with male students. The nighttime brought alive in these magazine pages was filled with vice." Further on in the text, the author cites several examples of such reports to justify the point. See Oh, Se-Mi, *City of Sediments: A History of Seoul in the Age of Colonialism*, Stanford 2023, pp. 172-173.

[37] Cf. "Bronze Bell of Bosingak Tower," *National Museum Of Korea*, at https://www.museum.go.kr/site/eng/relic/represent/view?relicId=4325, 12 V 2024.

The old site of the destroyed Wongaksa complex, known today as Tapgol Park, was the next landmark on Sieroszewski's map of Seoul. His candid description of the place reads as follows:

*I then saw, in the square intended for the future Seoul garden, a monument dedicated to 'enemies, the foreigners' on a giant tortoise, and a lovely thirteen-storey marble pagoda blackened by time and smoke embellished with precocious Buddhist reliefs. (...)*

*However, the pagoda is very neglected: its base is crumbling, falling apart, the bas--reliefs are deteriorating (...) The area of the future garden looks like an urban fallow ground, strewn with mountains of rubbish, rubble, sand, overgrown with poor turf (...)*

*Only in the middle a 'gazebo for music,' as the start of a garden, and a disgusting fence around it*.[38]

The account is accompanied by the author's photograph of the place, a testimony to his words.

**Ill. 7.** *Thop-kol, a place for a city garden in Seoul*.[39]

„Thop-kol", miejsce na ogród miejski w Seulu.

Today's Tapgol Park is still a significant spot on the map of Seoul, with its prominence further emphasized by events that occurred after the visit of Sieroszewski. It was initially conceived as a Western-style green space, and emerged as Korea's first modern public park, accessible to all since 1913. Today, however, it holds immense historical importance, stemming from the events of March 1st, 1919, when the Declaration of Independence was proclaimed there, catalyzing the Korean nation's resistance against Japanese colonization. Nowadays Tapgol Park functions as a quasi-museum, paying homage to both the independence movement as well as the surviving treasures from

[38] W. Sieroszewski, *Korea*..., pp. 388-389.

[39] Ibid., pp. 336-337.

Wongaksa. The 'giant tortoise' has been sheltered under a separate gazebo, and the pagoda protected by thick walls of plexiglass.

**Ill. 8 and 9.** Tapgol Park. November 11, 2023.

In his account of Seoul, Sieroszewski frequently mentions the Street of Ministers – another important orientation spot which has not changed its function since the outbreak of the twentieth century, even though its image has been considerably transformed. He is certain that *in the town itself* no one must miss *the street of Ministers, quiet, wide as a square, paved with smooth slabs, leading directly to the stone steps of the Main gate of the summer palace, a magnificent ancient monument,*[40] and he includes a photograph of a scene caught by his camera on this very street.

This very same place, formerly known as the Street of Six Ministers, is today's Sejongdaero – with its impressive Gwanghwamun Square – a central district in Seoul renowned nowadays both for its historical significance and modern allure. It leads to the main gate of the majestic Gyeongbokgung Palace, but it is also a vibrant public square hosting various events and surrounded by government buildings, museums, art galleries and coffee shops.

In Sieroszewski's narrative of early twentieth-century Seoul, he highlights several locations that continue to stand as iconic landmarks in today's bustling metropolis. Among them there is for example the Catholic cathedral in Myeondong with a tall

[40] Ibid., p. 394.

tower that he could have observed while arriving from the southern outskirts of Seoul (nowadays the trendy district of Gangnam) and entering the city through Sungnyemun, officially known as Namdaemun, the southern gate – one of the four great gates to the city. He supports his first-hand experience of the city with historical descriptions (not always verifiable) as well as with additional data obtained from the source materials most probably consulted after returning from Korea.

**Ill.10.** *Seoul. Korean oxen heavily burdened with wood on the Street of Ministers.*[41]


**Ill. 11.** Gwanghamun Square, November 13, 2023.


[41] Ibid., pp. 368-369.

This kind of approach seems to be rather typical for the author of *Korea. Klucz Dalekiego Wschodu*, especially when it comes to his accounts of a more modern Korea, including its most prominent cities. Just as his book includes his own impressions and observations – no matter how naïve or inaccurate from time to time – about Korean forests, hills, rice fields, villages, temples, houses or people he encounters during his journey, it is at the same time filled with facts and figures related to economy, industry as well as the descriptions of its largest cities. In this context, the detailed description of Pusan is particularly interesting, as Sieroszewski had not spent there more than two-three days, so it seems physically impossible for him to have visited all the places he so thoroughly described. However, it is apparent that he recognized the importance of this harbour town and wanted to provide his readers with all the necessary facts.

Today, it is difficult to relate these descriptions to the present reality, as little remains of the Pusan of the early 20th century, but the unique character of the city and its cosmopolitan nature as well as its immense importance as a major trading port remain. And while not much is left of the Japanese quarter described by Sieroszewski in such detail, it is still possible to dream of visiting Deer Island[42] while seeing it from Pusan harbour, to visit Dongnaeeupseong Fortress – *[a]ncient ruins of a Korean castle, on a high mountain pass, guarding the Fuzan road into the mainland*[43], or to enjoy the view from the beach on Pusan residential quarters.

**Ill. 12**[44] **and 13.** A view on Pusan on October 30, 1903, and November 9, 2023.


[42] For tracing the origins of the misconception of the name 'Deer Island,' collecting facts about Japanese Buddhist temples in early twentieth century Pusan, tracing the remains of the Japanese quarter and supporting my efforts to specify the actual position of Pusan harbour on Sieroszewski's arrival during a rather demanding walk around the area, I am deeply grateful to Ms Michelle Alexandra Jahja MA, at present a PhD student of Keimyung University in Daegu.

[43] Ibid., p. 10.

[44] Ibid., pp. 24-25.

## CONCLUSION: LANDSCAPE WITHOUT CHIMNEYS

Reflecting on Sieroszewski's depiction of Korea as a country where *they do not know chimneys at all,* it becomes evident that the cultural elements he deemed fundamental to Korean identity at the start of the twentieth century persist as defining features of 'Korean-ness' today. These enduring facets, recognized by Sieroszewski and echoed by Clifford's nuanced exploration of cultural negotiation, serve as vital components of Korea's cultural landscape. Clifford's insights into the spatial and temporal dimensions of cross-cultural encounters complement Sieroszewski's observations, shedding light on the complex dynamics at play in the formation of cultural identities as well as on the importance of understanding historical and cultural contexts in shaping our perceptions of other cultures. By observing and documenting places of cultural significance that have persisted over time, Sieroszewski's work aligns with Clifford's view that travel can reveal the long-term components of cultural identity. His recognition of religious sites, monuments, and traditions as key elements in understanding Korean identity reflects Clifford's idea that cross-cultural encounters should be approached with humility and openness to the layered histories and meanings within a culture.

Moreover, Sieroszewski's description of Korea as 'the key to the Far East' indicates his recognition of the country's strategic significance, positioning it as a gateway to the broader East Asian region. His portrayal of Korea as a land teeming with untapped potential and hidden riches seems to follow Clifford's suggestion of reflexive engagement in scholarly endeavors. Clifford's emphasis on recognizing personal biases and historical influences aligns with Sieroszewski's ability to uncover the overlooked treasures of a nation overshadowed by its neighbors. He invites his readers to reconsider their perceptions of cultures classified by the majority as 'marginal,' and appreciate the transformative power of cross-cultural encounters.

Sieroszewski's perspective offers an insightful understanding of the complex relationship between history, culture, and individual perception. His account demonstrates how deeply intertwined these elements are, reflecting the richness and diversity of human experience. *Korea. The Key...* encourages a nuanced approach to cross-cultural encounters – one that requires empathy, humility, and a willingness to engage in self-reflection. Sieroszewski's ability to identify key aspects of Korean cultural identity, such as enduring traditions, customs, sites, and monuments, shows his anthropological insight, which remains relevant today. These cultural markers, many of which still hold significance, reveal Sieroszewski's keen understanding of what forms the foundation of a culture's long-term identity, persisting through historical changes, political shifts, and modernization efforts.

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