Luigi Casati: from Alumnus of the Regia Scuola di Commercio to Last Italian Consul to the Great Empire of Korea

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Abstract  After studying Japanese language at Ca’ Foscari in the early 1870s, Luigi Casati spent most of his diplomatic career in Japan. Later, he moved to the Great Empire of Korea that, under the Eulsa Treaty of 1905, had become a protectorate of Japan. Casati was Italian consul in Seoul for about three years, and here he spent his final days with two of his daughters. Diplomatic records indicate that at the time Italy was trying to expand its economic presence on the peninsula through the acquisition of a gold mining concession and the increase of trade but, unlike his predecessors (one authored several books and articles and another was a favorite of the small expat community), little has been published about the Casati family’s daily interactions. Through the use of contemporary English-language and Korean newspapers and family history, this paper reveals the final years and resting place of Casati, who died in December 1909. A little over 8 months later, Japan annexed the peninsula making Luigi Casati the last Italian Consul to the Great Empire of Korea.

Summary  1 Casati in Korea. – 2 The Consulate. – 3 Interaction with the Foreign Community. – 4 Disease and Death.

Keywords  Luigi Casati. Early Italian-Korean diplomatic Relations. Yanghwajin Foreigners’ Cemetery. The Great Empire of Korea.

The diplomatic history of Italy with the Great Empire of Korea (Daehan-jeguk) is one filled with romance and tragedy – unfortunately a great deal of it is relatively unknown in South Korea. Although Italy had established a treaty with the Kingdom of Korea (Joseon) on June 26, 1884 (ratified

1  I would like to express my appreciation to Rosa Caroli for not only providing information from Japan but also for her infinite patience and enthusiasm. I would also like to thank Suk Ji-hoon for his assistance with the Korean-language newspapers and the histories of the legation/consulate buildings, An Sonjae (Brother Anthony of Taizé) for providing the images of the buildings and to John Wheeler, the great-grandson of Luigi Casati for providing pictures of his great-grandparents and his family’s history. It is a shame that the Italian embassy in Seoul does not have copies of its diplomatic interaction with the Korean government in the late 19th and early 20th centuries – those files are stored in the archives in Rome. Perhaps this paper will generate some interest and a scholar with better access will be able to complete (and correct my errors) the diplomatic history of these two peninsulas.
June 24, 1886) it was not until December 16, 1901, that a consulate was established in Seoul. Prior to this, Italian affairs were managed by the British legation.

The first consul was Italian navy lieutenant, Count Ugo Francesetti di Malgrà who arrived in Seoul in December 1901. He was a dashing and handsome young man, only 24 years old, and was extremely outgoing and popular – perhaps too popular.\(^2\) He was the centre of attention in the small Western community of Seoul and many were shocked and saddened at his sudden death on October 12, 1902 from typhoid. He was buried with great pomp at the Foreigners’ Cemetery at Yanghwajin – about five kilometres outside of the city gates and near the Han River – “music was rendered by a boy choir and the casket was flanked on both sides by a company of Italian men-of-wars men”.\(^3\)

The second Italian consul was Lieut. Carlo Rossetti – a friend of Count Ugo Francesetti di Malgrà – and assumed control of Italy’s consulate in November 1902. Rossetti was also popular in the Western community and wrote extensively about Korea – illustrating his books with his own photographs and those he purchased from Japanese studios in Seoul.

The next representative was Minister Resident Attilio Monaco who was appointed on July 28, 1902 but did not arrive and take control of the legation until May 1903. He was the first and last Italian Minister to the Great Empire of Korea and worked hard to develop the economic side of Korean-Italian relations including negotiating a gold mining concession. On October 16, 1905, he and his family left Korea for a leave of absence during which time Italian interests were left in the care of the British legation. Considering the number of audiences he had with Emperor Gojong prior to his departure, he may have had some knowledge that the political situation was about to change and that he and his family would not return.

On November 17, the Eulsa Protection Treaty was signed and Korean foreign affairs were turned over to Japan. There was no longer a need for an Italian Minister Resident in Seoul and the British legation remained in charge of Italian interests until Luigi Casati arrived.

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2 Women were especially fond of him and elicited jealousy – not only amongst the men but the women as well. Horace N. Allen, the American Minister to Korea, wrote: “The Collbran marriage ever a queer thing. She openly shows her disgust for Collbran and acts like mercenary if not more adventurous. She has made life unendurable for Christine Collbran, whom she wanted to have marry the Belgian Vice Consul, who asked for her, but the young lady, who is greatly esteemed by everyone, would not hear of it, she preferred Count Francesetti di Malgra, who showed her attentions in the interests of his friend Culvier. The step-mother wanted Francesetti for herself, and got so violently jealous of the daughter that Francesetti was drawn into the affair and was finally forbidden to come to the house”. Less than a month later, Christine Collbran was dead, a victim of the same disease. Cf. Horace N. Allen to Edwin V. Morgan, October 5, 1902, Allen Archives; Robert Neff, “The Empty Grave”, Korea Times, February 19, 2005. On Francesetti also see Ricaldone 1966.

3 “News Calendar”. The Korea Review, 2, October 1902, 459-60.
Much about Luigi Casati’s role in Korea is unknown – as is much of his personal history. One of Casati’s great-grandson’s has kindly provided me with the family history handed down through the generations but unfortunately much of it is incomplete, while other parts are incorrect. Casati was born on September 29, 1850, in Garbagna (Piemonte) near Torre Di Ratti. His education and subsequent employment in the Italian diplomatic corps in Japan is explained in another part of this publication by Rosa Caroli, therefore I will confine myself to the uncertainty surrounding Casati, his family and their time in Korea. Casati had four children: his son, Angelo, was born in Garbagna in 1889 but the birth places and dates of his three daughters, Margherita, Emilia and Ione, are unknown. Considering that Casati was living and working in Japan starting in 1880, it is difficult to explain how Angelo happened to be born in Italy. Perhaps Casati was granted leave during that year and returned home. We do not even know when he married and who his wife was as there are no references of him being married in Japan – except one. According to family history, when Casati was 32 years old, he married the 17-year-old daughter of the Chief of Police for Tokyo. She was Asako Yamada (later known as Asa Maria) and, according to the family, was the mother of Casati’s four children. Tragically, she drowned on August 13, 1902, after falling into a pond in Yokohama – she was only 32 years old and was carrying their fifth child.

Research has since revealed that much of this account is incorrect. If they married in 1882, when Casati was 32, Asa would have only been 12 years old. Casati’s children and grandchildren all appear to have only European traits. In all likelihood, Casati was married at least twice, Asa being his second wife. Concerning her death, a Yokohama English-language newspaper reported that she died at 1:30 p.m. at 45-G, Bluff, Yokohama – the same address as Casati, but says nothing of the manner of her death or that she was pregnant. A publication on Edoardo Chiosson’s testament, whose executor was Casati, claims Asa had only been married to Casati for ten days prior to her death (Beretta 2004, 23). Unfortunately the writer did not cite her source indicating that Asa had just recently married.

Following her death, Casati appears to have lived as a widower concerned only with his children but, because diplomatic despatches, official documents and newspapers rarely mentioned children or wives, we know little of their activities in Japan. The exception is Angelo who, in late 1905 or early 1906, applied for a position with the Chinese Imperial Maritime

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4 It is not clear which of the daughters is the oldest but we do know that Emilia was the second and circumstantial evidence seems to indicate that Ione was the youngest.

5 Email correspondences with John Wheeler, great-grandson of Luigi Casati, September 18, 2009 and in April 2018.

6 The Japan Weekly Mail, 16 August 1902.
Customs Service and was accepted in early January 1906. He promptly departed for China aboard the French steamer, Oceanis.7

Casati also appears to have left Japan – with at least two of his daughters – for a new posting in Seoul as the Italian Consul. Again, we are left with more questions than answers.

1 Casati in Korea

In late 1905, Seoul was a vortex of uncertainty. The Russo-Japanese War had recently ended and Japan had taken a very active role in Korean matters cumulating in the signing of the Eulsa Protection Treaty on November 17. Many protested and claimed that the treaty had been made under duress – some of these protests were extreme and personal. On November 30, Min Yeong-hwan – one of the most influential men in Korea – cut his own throat with a short dagger and died. His suicide became a symbol of the strong disapproval and contempt the Koreans felt for the treaty.8

Throughout early December, preparations were made for his funeral and even the Japanese embassy flew its flag at half-mast out of respect for him.

Protests were not confined only to the Korean peninsula. Emperor Gojong sent Homer Hulbert and others – including Min Yeong-chan9 – to Washington D.C. in attempt to elicit the United States’ support in having the treaty revoked. Hulbert was the editor of The Korea Review10 which was one of the most important English-language publications in Korea. It is not clear who wrote and edited The Korea Review while Hulbert was in the United States in late 1905 and early 1906, but Hulbert’s style and in-

7 The Japan Weekly Mail 1906, 293 (reference provided by Rosa Caroli).
8 Many legends sprang up around Min’s death. On the night of his suicide, “a large star fell from the western sky, and more than a hundred magpies gathered at the house and cried loudly for a while and then scattered” (Finch 2002, 173-9). In July 1906, bamboo was found growing from the spot where his bloodstained clothing had been placed – bamboo symbolised integrity.
9 Min Yeong-chan (1873-1947?) was the younger brother of Min Yeong-hwan (1861-1905) and a cousin to Queen Min (Empress Myeongseong) who had been murdered in October 1895 through the intrigue of the Japanese Legation in Seoul and her father-in-law, Heungseon Daewongun. Min Yeong-chan had served as Korean commissioner to the Paris Universal Exposition in 1900 and was dispatched to the United States in December 1905 to plead for American intervention – invoking the ‘good offices’ clause of the American-Korean Treaty of 1882 in revoking the Eulsa Protection Treaty of November 17, 1905.
10 The Korea Review was a monthly magazine printed in Seoul from 1901-06. In addition to articles about Korean culture and the expat society, it also reported current events and diligently noted the arrival and departure of visitors – especially diplomats and military officers – and steamship information. It is a valuable tool for researchers of this period.
sistence on accurately reporting the comings and goings was maintained.\textsuperscript{11} Except for the case of Casati, there are conspicuously no references made of him or his daughters in Seoul.

A postcard from Emilia Casati with the address of the Italian Consulate in Seoul and dated January 13, 1906 clearly indicates that Casati was at his post in January 1906 and possibly as early as late 1905.\textsuperscript{12} Was \textit{The Korea Review}'s failure to note his arrival a mistake or was it due to his perceived pro-Japanese sentiment and the decidedly anti-Japanese stance of the publication?\textsuperscript{13} It is a shame that Horace Allen was no longer in Korea - his propensity for gossip would have surely provided some insight into the Casati family’s life in Seoul.

\section{The Consulate}

When Count Ugo Francesetti di Malgrà, the first Italian consul, arrived in Seoul in December 1901, he stayed in a two-story Korean-styled building that had recently been vacated by Samuel F. Moore, an American missionary.\textsuperscript{14} After his death, word was received that the Italian government was elevating its diplomatic position in Korea and had appointed Attilio Monaco as Minister Resident and Consul General. As he and his family were in Brazil, their arrival was not anticipated until sometime in 1903. In the interim, Lieut. Carlo Rossetti was appointed consul and, shortly after his arrival in November 1902, managed to acquire the former Russian Vice-consulate in Seoul.\textsuperscript{15} It was a modern European-style building

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{11} Prof. Oak Sung-deok suggests that Mrs. Underwood may have been responsible. He notes that during this period many of the articles were written by her and cites Hulbert’s memoirs in which he wrote, “My magazine, \textit{The Korea Review}, had been carried on by friends during my absence in the United States” (Facebook correspondence with Prof. Oak Sung-deok, April 29, 2018). However, in Mrs. Underwood’s book, she credits her husband as the editor during the period Hulbert was in the United States. Cf. Underwood 1918, 234.

\bibitem{12} According to Rosa Caroli, in August 1906, the Yomiuri Shinbun reported that Casati had been nominated as Consul in Seoul, but the Emperor of Japan gave his approval to the appointment of Casati in November of the same year. It is not clear if he left for his post prior to or after the imperial approval.

\bibitem{13} When Plancon, the Russian consul-general to Seoul, was delayed, \textit{The Korea Review} printed the rumours that suggested it was a demonstration by Russia to show its reluctance to do business through the Japanese Resident of Korea. The magazine readily opined that Russia was morally correct to do so. When Plancon did arrive, it was carefully noted, as were the arrivals of the British, American and Chinese consuls.

\bibitem{14} “News Calendar”. \textit{The Korea Review}, 1, December 1901, 555.

\bibitem{15} Rossetti described how he acquired the building in his book \textit{Corea e Coreani: Impressioni e Ricerche sull’Impero del Gran Han} (1905); “News Calendar”. \textit{The Korea Review}, 2, October and November 1902, 460 and 508.

\end{thebibliography}
but, unlike the other European diplomatic buildings, was outside of the Jeongdong area and near Seodaemun – the West Gate. Rossetti seemed pleased with the building and likely thought it more befitting of a minister than the former Korean-style building.

Minister Attilio Monaco, his wife, Gemma, and their son, arrived in Seoul on April 29, 1903. He immediately introduced himself to the diplomatic community and presented his credentials to Emperor Gojong on May 6, thus assuming control of Italian diplomatic affairs in Korea. Gemma, however, was disappointed with their residence and isolated herself from the community for over a month. In a gossip-filled letter to a colleague, American Minister Horace N. Allen, wrote:

The Italian Minister - Monaco, has a beautiful and accomplished Circassian wife. They left a house of 36 rooms in Brazil and she was so disgusted here that for a month she would make no calls.

Her displeasure with the house probably grew. On October 20, a fire broke out in a lumberyard next to the building and burned so fiercely that windows were broken from its heat and preparations were made to evacuate the building. "Fortunately", declared The Korea Review, "the danger was averted". At some time after their arrival, the building received major renovations and the second floor was expanded, possible due to this fire.

Casati and his family more than likely lived in the consulate but at the end of May 1908, the legation was moved to another building in the area owned by an American missionary. Some of Casati’s personal property was stolen during the move and never recovered.

3 Interaction with the Foreign Community

We know that Casati entertained, but very little can be found in the social pages of the newspapers. On November 21, 1907, assisted by his third daughter, he hosted a large banquet in honor of Ito Hirobumi, the Resident
General of Korea. Unfortunately, other than the hosts and the guest of honor, we do not know who attended this party.

Casati’s young daughters associated with some of the young bachelors in the foreign community. In early 1909, the first steam-powered automobile was smuggled into Korea by Thomas A. Koen, an American engineer employed by the Korean imperial household. In a photographed published in the American newspaper, San Francisco Call, Koen; J.F. Manning, a mining expert; Gordon Paddock, the American Consul General; Casati and his three daughters23 can be seen sitting in the massive automobile surrounded by a crowd of curious Koreans.24

The girls also appreciated Korean theater. In mid-September 1908, Ione fell down a flight of stairs at Jang-an Sa theatre25 in Seoul and badly injured herself. Neither the nature nor the severity of her injuries are clear, but three months later, in December, a local newspaper reported that Casati and his two daughters were at Namdaemun Station boarding a train for Fusan26 where they would take a steamship to Nagasaki, Japan for “rest and treatment”.27 It is not clear who was in need of the treatment. Perhaps it was Ione and her injuries, or maybe it was Casati.

4 Disease and Death

Disease was always a major concern for the Western community and death notices in the English-language newspapers and magazines were all too common. Italian diplomats in Seoul seem to have been especially prone to fatal diseases. Count Ugo Francesetti di Malgrà died from typhoid after being at his post for only ten months. Monaco became extremely sick after only a few months in Seoul and travelled to Japan for a month with his family in order to recuperate. Casati was no exception.

22 “Il in gwan in cham yeon” 일인관인참연 (Japanese Officials at a banquet). Hwangseong Sinmun, November 22, 1907.

23 Apparently the eldest daughter was visiting her father and did not normally reside in Korea. According to a census taken by the Police Affairs Bureau and published in July 1909, there were only four Italians residing in Korea - three officials (Casati and two daughters) and one miner. Cf. The Seoul Press, July 9, 1909, 3.


25 Jang-as Sa theatre was established in 1907 and was dedicated to Korean traditional music, drama and dance.

26 Modern Busan – a major port in the southern part of the country.

27 “Sol yang hyang jang” 솔양향장 (Bringing Daughters to Nagasaki). Hwangseong Sinmun, December 22, 1908.
Figure 1. Luigi Casati in Japan, courtesy of John Wheeler
Figure 2. Asako Yamada (Asa Maria), courtesy of John Wheeler
Figure 3. Italian consulate in Seoul, circa 1902. Courtesy of Brother Anthony of Taizé (An Sonjae)
Figure 4. Italian legation in Seoul, circa 1903. Courtesy of Brother Anthony of Taizé (An Sonjae)
Figure 5. Italian legation, circa 1909. Courtesy of Suk Ji-hoon.

Figure 6. Postcard of the Fusan Port sent by Emilia Casati, circa January 13, 1906. Courtesy of Robert Neff
Figure 7 (up). Thomas A. Keon, is at the wheel; next to him is J.F. Manning, mining engineer; behind Manning is Gordon Paddock, American vice consul; Casati is in the back seat surrounded by his three daughters. *San Francisco Call*, April 22, 1909, 6

Figure 8 (right). *Petit Journal*, March 7, 1909 Courtesy of Brother Anthony of Taizé (An Sonjae)
Figure 9 (up, left). Luigi Casati
Figure 10 (up, right). Francesetti di Malgrà
Figure 11 (left). Joseph Aime Rondon
In early December 1909, he became seriously ill and was taken to the Taihan Hospital in Seoul. We do not know the nature of his illness; only that it appears to have been chronic. At some point Angelo was summoned to Seoul from China, so that he could be with his father in his final hours. Emilia and Ione were also present but Margherita seems to have been absent. According to The Seoul Press:

Viscount Sone on receipt of the news that [Casati’s] illness had developed alarming symptoms, sent Mr. Komatsu, acting Director of the Foreign Affairs Department, to inquire about his condition. Mr. Komatsu found his son and two daughters at his bedside and they expressed themselves highly grateful for the kindness of the Resident General. As Mr. Casati had no staff to whom to entrust the transactions of official business on his behalf, Mr. Komatsu was requested to notify this fact to the Italian Embassy in Tokyo. The acting Director left the hospital after signifying the Resident-General’s willingness to do all in his power for the consul.

A few hours later, at 2:30 a.m. on December 11, Casati was dead. Casati’s funeral “was solemnized in the Roman Catholic Cathedral” in Seoul at 10 a.m. on December 13. According to The Seoul Press,

There was a large and distinguished attendance including Mr. E. Ishizuka, Residency-General Councillors, other high Japanese officials and some of their wives, members of the local Consular Body and many ladies and gentlemen of the foreign community. Flags were half-mast at the Residency-General and foreign Consulates here throughout the day.

The Italian consulate was closed down in early January after Giovanni Rogadeo, the 3rd Secretary of the Italian Embassy in Tokyo, arrived in Seoul and made arrangements for the British Consul General, H.A.C. Bonar, to take charge of Italian interests in Korea. Once the preparations

28 According to Rosa Caroli, documents in the Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also report that only two women were present at his death.
29 Viscount Sone Arasuke (1849-1910) had succeeded Ito Hirobumi as Resident-General of Korea on June 14, 1909.
30 Komatsu Midori (1862-1942) was the Director of Foreign Affairs Bureau of the Government General of Chosen.
31 The Seoul Press, December 12, 1909, 2
32 The Seoul Press, December 14, 1909, 2.
33 Henry Alfred Constant Bonar (1861-1935) was a career diplomat who began as a student interpreter in Japan in 1880 and served in various places throughout Japan until the end of
were made, Rogadeo promptly left Seoul on January 6th and returned to his post in Tokyo.\textsuperscript{34}

As for Casati’s children, the Seoul Press reported that Emilia planned on going to Japan while Ione would leave for Shanghai.\textsuperscript{35} It is not a stretch of the imagination to assume that Ione travelled to China with Angelo and may have lived with him.

But things did not go as planned. It appears that Emilia was engaged to 27-year-old Joseph Aime Rondon,\textsuperscript{36} the proprietor of the French firm Rondon & Co.\textsuperscript{37} and their wedding took place on January 10, 1910, only a month after her father’s death, in the cathedral. According to contemporary Korean and foreign newspapers: “Owing to the recent bereavement sustained by the bride’s family the wedding was a very quiet one” with “60 eminent guests” including Min Yeong-chan and Yi Geonyeong\textsuperscript{38} and “most of the Consular Corps”.\textsuperscript{39} It is not clear how many, if any, of Casati’s other children were present. After the wedding, a reception was hosted by M. Poillard, the acting French Consul-General and entertainment was provided by Franz Eckert and the Korean Royal Military Band. It seems somewhat suspicious that there was no mention of her engagement to Rondon in the earlier articles following her father’s death.

The local directories suggest that for the next couple of years they remained in Korea. According to family history, Emilia and Joseph were soon blessed with two daughters – Emma and Lou – and were soon joined by a boy named Roberto\textsuperscript{40} but their bliss was short lived. On October 10, 1913, Joseph died of “chronic illness” at the Taihan hospital and was buried in

1896 when he was transferred to Tamsui, Taiwan and then returned to Japan in 1900 and on November 2, 1909, was made the Consul General in Seoul. He retired in April 1912. It is very likely that Casati knew him from Japan so it is strange that he did not seek his assistance.

\textsuperscript{34} The Seoul Press, January 7, 1910.

\textsuperscript{35} The Seoul Press, December 12, 1909, 2

\textsuperscript{36} Family history mistakenly gives his first name as Robert. Email correspondence with John Wheeler, great-grandson of Luigi Casati, September 18, 2009.

\textsuperscript{37} Rondon & Co., also known as Tah-chang 大昌, ran a general store and was known for its fine French bread and also served as an import/export agency.

\textsuperscript{38} He was the brother of Yi Ha-yong, the Korean Minister of Justice.

\textsuperscript{39} “Gyo dang hon lye sig” 교당 혼례식 (Marriage at the Cathedral). Daehan Maeil Sinbo, January 12, 1910; “Yang in hon lye sig” 양인혼례식 (Westerners’ Wedding ceremony). Hwang-seong Sinmun, January 12, 1910; The Japan Weekly Mail, January 15, 1910.

\textsuperscript{40} According to family history, Ione had an illegitimate son with Andreas Ferraga. The boy was named Roberto Casati and was sent to live with Emilia, “presumably to avoid a scandal.” Email correspondence with John Wheeler, great-grandson of Luigi Casati, September 18, 2009.
Foreigners’ Cemetery at Yanghwajin in Seoul – near Casati’s grave. What became of Emilia and her small family is unknown but most likely did not remain in Korea.

Very little physical remnants of Italy’s diplomatic presence in the Great Empire of Korea remains. The first Italian legation was later converted into a Chinese restaurant known as A-so-won (아서원) and was finally demolished in the early ’70s. The second legation building may have been used again as a consulate in 1919 when Italy re-established a diplomatic post here for about eight months. Afterwards, the building was converted into a Japanese paediatric hospital or clinic and was probably destroyed during the Korean War. As for the third building, very little is known – including its location.

The only other remains are those in the Foreigners’ Cemetery at Yanghwajin where the gravestones of both the first and last Italian consuls to the Great Empire of Korea are located but only one bodies lies in peace in its hallowed grounds. Shortly after Count Ugo Francesetti di Malgrà had been buried, his mother arrived aboard an Italian warship and had his remains disinterred and transported back to Italy. Luigi Casati truly was the last Italian consul of the Great Empire of Korea.

Bibliography


41 The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette, October 14, 1913, 232; Daehan Maeil Sinbo, October 21, 1913.
42 My appreciation to Suk Ji-hoon for providing information concerning the fates of the old legation/consulate buildings.