

# **Spanish Writers in Korea Under Occupation**

## The Contrasting Views of Vicente Blasco Ibáñez and Gaspar Tato Cumming

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**Abstract** This chapter examines the perspectives of Spanish travelers on colonial Korea, with a primary focus on the accounts of two writers who held opposing ideologies and presented contrasting views on the Japanese occupation of Korea. Introducing these two testimonies together suggest that in certain cases, accounts about East Asia were influenced more by the personal beliefs of their authors rather than by other discourses or ideas prevalent during the period.

**Keywords** Korean history. Modern Korea. Spaniards in Korea. Western perception of Korea. Travel literature.

**Summary** 1 Introduction: Visiting Korea During the Late Joseon Dynasty. – 2 The Travelogue of a Spanish Republican Writer in Colonial Korea. – 3 Manchukuo's Propagandist: Gaspar Tato Cumming. – 4 Conclusions.

### **1 Introduction: Visiting Korea During the Late Joseon Dynasty**

Throughout this chapter, I aim to rationalize the Spanish perception of occupied Korea based on available archival sources. It is possible to argue that the Spanish view on the geopolitical situation of the Korean peninsula has changed over time. Consequent-

ly, two main stages can be differentiated: Late Chosŏn and another period originating from 1905 during the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War. Within this context, in this section, I would like to briefly introduce relevant characteristics of the first period before focusing on the perceptions of colonial Korea of two writers with opposing ideologies.

While most of the twentieth century Spanish travelers visited Korea after its annexation by the Japanese imperialists in 1910, it is also possible to find curious cases such as the fictional account of Korea in Alfredo Opisso y Viña's book published in 1898. His ethnographic spirit and racist nuances can already be perceived in his book entitled *The Yellow Race. China, Japan and Korea: A Descriptive Trip through the Regions of the Celestial Empire, The Empire of the Rising Sun and the Korean Kingdom*. Opisso never traveled to East Asia; he used a variety of secondary sources to support the contents of his fictional travelogues. For this reason, it is possible to find several misconceptions through his accounts that represent the distorted and extended image of the East at that time.

His protagonist arrives in Korea on board a vessel traveling the Philippines route shortly before the Spanish-American War, a battle that resulted in Spain's loss of sovereignty over the Philippines and its acquisition by the United States. After depicting stops in Singapore and Hong Kong, he visits China and Japan and, at the end of the book, devotes a brief chapter to his trip to Korea. He arrives at Chemulp'o (today's Inch'ŏn) in a steamboat bound for Shanghai. In the chapter, he describes Korea as an agrarian country and emphasizes the value and popularity of its ginseng among the Chinese. He also describes Koreans as being taller and stronger in the north and similar to the Japanese in the south.

Additionally, he describes how Korea ends its tributary relation with China, owing to Japan's victory over China in 1895, becoming an independent country with three ports open to foreign trade from 1897. He describes Korean culture and its customs as being greatly influenced by Chinese culture. In fact, the perception of Korean culture as a 'copy of China' was common among travelers at that time and can be found in Isabelle Bird Bishop's book *Korea and Her Neighbors*, perhaps one of the most prominent western accounts of Korea (Bishop 1898, 22), among other resources. This may be related to the tributary status of Korea at that time. In fact, more than a decade before the publication of Opisso's and Bishop's accounts, the Spanish military magazine *Revista del ejército y la armada de Filipinas* (Philippine Army and Navy Magazine) still depicts the Korean Kingdom as part of the Chinese Empire (De Molins y Lemaur 1886, 82).

Opisso highlights, as most of the travelers in Korea did, the particularity of the Korean hat or *gat*. Regarding religions, he mentions Buddhism as the main religion, the Confucian teachings as followed

by the upper class, and affirms that the rudest people follow a sort of naturalist idolatry (referring to shamanism). However, perhaps the most interesting part of his account is the racist views that portray the mainstream line of thought of Westerners regarding Asian nations at the time.

The traveler portrays himself as a sort of wealthy explorer whose main interest is to acquire the best items from each country to add to his collection in Spain. His ethnographical interest in different races goes as far as to say that he would have liked to have brought two or three of those

idiotic soldiers he saw in Chemulp'o and who looked like they wanted to devour him (Opisso y viña 1898, 121)

as if they were commodities as well. In his depiction of social hierarchy, he is surprised to discover that monks belong to the lower class as opposed to the social status that priests enjoyed in the West. And, concerning the political future of Korea, he states the following:

It can be said that nowadays even though Korea is an independent country, it is under the influence of the Japanese. However, everything suggests that very soon it will become a province of Russia, especially after the Trans-Siberian railway that will cross Manchuria from north to south is completed. The Korean Kingdom is a very rich country, and it will be coveted by its neighbors, especially Russia, as they need ports to the Pacific. (123)<sup>1</sup>

Like most of the Westerners at that time, Alfredo Opisso believed that Russia, a traditional Western power, would demonstrate its superiority in the Pacific over the Japanese and the Chinese. The reasons for this lie in a racist perception of Asians inherited from the theories of prominent Western philosophers who believed in the superiority of Western civilization. Numerous examples of this opinion can be found in an article published in *Archivo Diplomático* (Diplomatic Archive) (1885-92) under the title "The Lonely Kingdom". The work is a description of Korea and the proposal for opening commerce with Korea made by the Governor General of the Philippines. It states that:

Korea's independence will only last as long as the Russian czar does not need to sacrifice it for the greatness and power of its imperial center, even though China and Japan covet it as well. (Salcedo 1888, 202)

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**1** All translations were made by the Author.

Leopoldo de Alba Salcedo was chief editor of the newspaper *La Patria* (The Homeland) and was sent to China and Siam as a diplomat in 1884 (De Laurentis 2008, 105). His article was published in the political context of an initial frustrated attempt to sign a commercial treaty between Korea and Spain. Salcedo was skeptical of the commercial potential of Korea. He took part in an expedition to Korea and criticized the lack of proper defenses in Seoul, depicting Koreans as “a race not suitable for war” (Salcedo 1888, 204). According to Salcedo, the “Havas Agency” had informed that Korea possessed a force of 500,000 soldiers, but during his stay, he could see that this information was far from reality and the number of professional Korean soldiers was scarce. He supposedly witnessed military training that he found rather comical as Korean soldiers struggled to emulate the German tactics of their Chinese and Japanese instructors.

The last portion of Alfredo’s fictional tour in Korea ends with a conclusion on the “yellow race”:

the yellow race, so numerous, could be a danger for the whites if they were not so superior in intelligence and bravery to the Asians. No, the yellows will never be a danger to the white race, and it is not to be expected that another Tamerlane will appear, though he was not able to do much on our continent either. Against the force of numbers there is a discipline, patriotic feeling, the law of honor, and above all the incontrovertible force which the superiority of Christianity over the religion of Buddha lends. The hegemony of the world will always belong to the white race, and never could the Japanese prevail over the Russians or the Chinese over Western Europeans. Our race carries the torch of civilization, and the civilization of the yellows is either totally different from ours, like that of the Chinese, or an artificial imitation like that of the Japanese. Only in one thing they are ahead of us, and the Count of Villanieve willingly acknowledged this: in their porcelain the Chinese, in their bronzes, in their hats (which would make our elegant ones envious) the Koreans. But in the world, there is more than all that. (Opisso y viña 1898, 124)

This conclusion introduces us to the concept of the yellow peril. The description of oriental inhabitants with yellow skin emerged in the nineteenth century and was coined by Kaiser Wilhelm II (1859-1941). Wilhelm II also created the famous illustration portraying Archangel Michael as an allegory of Germany leading other European powers against the Asian threat represented by a Buddha in the background.

The illustration [fig. 1] is interpreted as the anxiety about an expanding Japan. As Florentino Rodao García suitable expresses:



**Figure 1** Hermann Knackfuss's painting *Peoples of Europe guard your dearest goods*, is often regarded as an allegory of the anxiety about an expanding Japan. Extracted from: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Voelker\\_Europas.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Voelker_Europas.jpg)

The West could not afford to lose the monopoly of a skin color that signifies purity, virtue, and respectability and attributed a different one to the inhabitants of the Far East. Yellow is associated with the old and decadent and even with disease. Thus, this chromatic division gave an exclusive trait of superiority to the civilized and distinguished them from the barbarians. (Rodao García 2002, 20)<sup>2</sup>

However, it is important to emphasize that the concept of the yellow peril was not extensively used in Spain. The few references found in texts date from the latter years of the nineteenth century and are mainly related to the fear of Japanese annexation of the Philippines. However, after 1898, when Spain ceased to have economic interests that could enter into conflict with Japan's, the concept fell into disuse (201).

Nonetheless, Opisso's view is in line with this concept, and in his racial comparison it is also possible to find the influence of European philosophers such as Herder, who distinguishes between "schönen und hässlichen Völker" (good and bad folks) and believed that the best

<sup>2</sup> See the first chapter "Lo distinto y lo distante".

countries were between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (Hsia 2010, 52). He then proceeds to classify nations according to their proximity to what he perceived as the roots of European civilization. Another relevant concept in his philosophy is the *Volksgeist*, or folk spirit, which is different for every nation and can be defined as the creative forces that act unconsciously and manifest in the creations of every nation (literature, law, history, etc.). Herder glorified the *Volksgeist* of the Germans. For him, the Mongols were primitive and ugly predators of men. Moreover, he asserted that the Chinese originated from “vultures” who were ashamed of their body shape, especially their ears and feet. He affirmed that this deformation had an influence on their spirit and as a consequence their governments were despotic and their wisdom primitive. In his opinion, the Chinese and the Japanese had no chance of becoming noble. From these ideas, the Western perception of the Orient during the nineteenth century is rooted.

These stereotypes were politically useful for the European imperialists and were common in the accounts described by explorers. Some of them have even persisted in recent works such as, for example, the concept of the Japanese as mere imitators of Western civilization. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the result of the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05) had a great impact on these perceptions as it was the first time that an Asian power defeated a traditional Western power. The war generated much interest and coverage in the Spanish press even though it was a conflict that unfolded on the other side of the world. For example, the weekly magazine *Pluma y Lápiz*<sup>3</sup> (Pen and Pencil) devoted a few issues to the Russo-Japanese War. After the initial skepticism about the chances for the Japanese to win the war, their surprise attacks were praised by the Western media. In the next sections, I will introduce the most relevant particularities in Vicente Blasco Ibáñez’s and Gaspar Tato Cumming’s accounts of colonial Korea. Both accounts were written after the Japanese annexation of Korea and show how their own political views influenced their perception of Korea.

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**3** *Pluma y Lápiz. Semanario Hispano-Americano de Literatura y Arte*. Barcelona, 1904. See numbers 176 and 179 for detailed and illustrated chronicles on the Russo-Japanese War.

## 2 The Travelogue of a Spanish Republican Writer in Colonial Korea

Vicente Blasco Ibáñez (1867-1928) was a Spanish writer, politician, and journalist. He was a politically committed writer and an admirer of Victor Hugo's work. At the young age of sixteen, he founded a newspaper and later graduated with a law degree in 1888. In 1890, when the Carlist leader Enrique de Aguilera arrived at Valencia, he initiated a boycott using his newspaper and had to escape from persecution by going into exile in Paris. From 1892 to 1905 he returned to Spain, and became a leader of republicanism and anticlericalism in his hometown Valencia. However, later on, Blasco Ibáñez resigned and abandoned political life. He died in 1928, a few years before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War (1936-39).

Among his works there is an account of his world trip, *La vuelta al mundo de un novelista* (The Round the World Trip of a Novelist), published in three volumes in 1924. One of the chapters, "The Kingdom of the morning calm", recounts his one-week brief stay in Korea. Just like many other travelers, he arrives in Korea via Japan and depicts the difficulties of the journey in the first few pages. In comparison to other travelogues, Blasco Ibáñez is more interested in politics and offers additional insight into the political situation in the peninsula. It is possible to affirm that his account is better informed than those of other leisure travelers who write more superficial narrations about their experiences. He shares a boat with a Korean prince who is escorted by Japanese officials, a scene that he describes as follows:

The prince submitted to the Mikado and lost all his reputation in his former kingdom, but as no one can predict the future, they [officials] guard this heir without inheritance to ensure Japan's safety. (Blasco Ibáñez 1924, 322)

He disembarks in Busan and takes a train to Seoul. As he does not speak the language, he mistakenly believes that the Korean name for Seoul was Keijo and the name of the country Chosen. He believes that only whites use the names Seoul and Korea. The first thing that catches Blasco Ibáñez's attention is the attire used by the Koreans. As soon as they arrive, a few curious Koreans in traditional dress approach the boat. Blasco Ibáñez is surprised to see that they are dressed in white cotton dresses despite the severity of Korean winters. In his novel *Ramonchu in Shanghai* the Spanish diplomat Julio de Larracochea (1901-99) quoted two possible origins regarding the Korean traditional dress code: he sees the traditional white robes as a Korean way of mourning the loss of independence, but also argues that the Japanese believed that white *hanbok* (Korean traditional dress) was widely adopted in the seventeenth century after

five princes died in a short span of time and Koreans decided to keep white dressing even after the mourning periods ended (De Larracochea 1941, 212-13). Julio de Larracochea only traveled across the country by train but unlike other travelers he did not stay in Korea.

Returning to Blasco Ibáñez's travelogue, as it happens to many other travelers, he is particularly shocked by Korean hats. Blasco Ibáñez could not understand their practical use because, according to his opinion,

the hat is not useful at all. It cannot protect them from the sun or the rain, it does not even fit their heads and is worn in the way we previously explained; and despite all of this, the hats are cherished and modified according to the season. [...] Sometimes you can see a Korean using a different hat other than this little clown's top hat. (Blasco Ibáñez 1924, 325)

He also notices the distinct mourning straw hats and that Koreans carry long bamboo smoking pipes everywhere they go "like the antenna of an insect or the sword of a swordfish" (326). Blasco Ibáñez did some research on secondary sources to write his account as it is possible to deduce from the fact that he was aware of Gregorio de Céspedes's brief visit to the country in 1594. He also affirms that Koreans are the cruelest nation against the Christian missionaries and that they use mourning hats to hide their faces in their whereabouts around the peninsula.

It is interesting to discover how the Japanese victory over the Russians changed the Western perception of the former. For example, when comparing the Japanese and Koreans, Blasco Ibáñez claims that the Japanese are a disciplined, active, and dynamic nation. On the contrary, Koreans seem to be the opposite (paused and calmed), but their physical features show a majesty or elegance that he does not find in the Japanese. This was a common perception among travelers from other nations such as the English teacher H.B. Drake and the German traveler Benedict Richard Goldschmidt (Trigo Maldonado 2020, 188-9). Concerning Spanish sources, one can find an example of the Korean peninsula in Leandro Cubillo's extensive article published in 1914 in the magazine *Nuestro Tiempo. Ciencias y artes, política y hacienda* (Our Times. Science and Art, Politics and Fortune). His article presents the same dichotomy between the progressive Japanese and stagnant Koreans. Interestingly, following the introduction the article summarizes the contents of one of the illustrated annual reports that the Governor General of Korea published periodically in English (the author does not quote which one, but it is likely to be the third annual report corresponding to the years 1911-12, since the next report came up after the publication of this article and we can also find sentences that match this report). For example, Leandro quotes a sentence stating that



Their highnesses of Korea, Prince Li Junior, and Prince Li Senior, being set free from their political responsibilities or troubles are now enjoying a happier and safer life. (Cubillo 1914, 148)

This was translated from the introduction of the *Annual Report on Reforms and Progress in Chosen (Korea) (1911-12)*, and is compiled by the Government General of Chosen in December 1912. The author then makes an ironic remark that perhaps their highnesses think differently, but overall Cubillo's piece falls into many of the propagandistic aspects of the Japanese reports, such as, for example, the idea that since the cultures are similar, the Japanese are better prepared for exerting tutelage over Koreans (Cubillo 1914, 149). In any case, it is not clear whether this source was used by Vicente Blasco Ibáñez when writing his account or not.

In the next section of his travelogue, Blasco Ibáñez depicts the political situation in the peninsula as follows:

With the excuse to free the Koreans from the 'Chinese tyranny', the Japanese went to war with the Middle Kingdom in 1894, forcing them to recognize Korean independence. Later, as the Russians intended to influence the politics of the country, they also went to war with the Middle Kingdom in 1902 and defeated them; always intending to defend the independence of poor Korea. In 1910, so that nobody else could attack Korean independence, they simply annexed Korea declaring it a Japanese colony. Seldom in history has so much apparent generosity concealed such cynical hypocrisy. (Blasco Ibáñez 1924, 194)

Through these ironic remarks, Blasco Ibáñez refuses the paternalist rationality used by the Japanese to justify the annexation of Korea to their empire tracing back their ambitions on the peninsula up to a few decades before (ambitions that would eventually lead them to a war against China and another one against Russia). He explains that while Europeans have hardly any information about Korea, their neighbors, the Japanese,

being yellow could slide into the country and well aware of the richness of their mines and their abandoned agriculture could conspire to take over the peninsula using fake generosity. (328)

In relation to this, he also explains how Queen Myeongseong is assassinated because of her opposition to the growing Japanese influence in Korea. Afterward, when he visits the Korean royal palace, he asks his guides to be shown the exact place where the queen was murdered:

I wanted to see the hall where the queen was assassinated by the Japanese, but the different guides I asked about this, incredible polyglots a moment before, lost their capacity to speak and even to understand. They listened to me and if I insisted, they did not understand me. None of them know which queen I am talking about. (341)

This is an interesting passage because it is a historical reference that is not included in any other Spanish travelogues of the time. Blasco Ibáñez's account goes further to point out the cruelty and brutality that characterize the Japanese rule in Korea during its early years until (according to his opinion) Japan became the absolute dominator of Korea and adopted a different policy of industrial and agricultural development.

Blasco Ibáñez admits that Korea was achieving remarkable progress under Japanese rule and that they probably invested more in the colony than in other areas of their country. However, he continues to argue that it could be said that this progress was not designed to benefit the Koreans, but to favor the Japanese settlers who

fell upon conquered territory like a locust infestation, controlling everything with their absorbing and aggressive activity. (329)

It is an interesting observation because geographical proximity permitted a particularly high presence of Japanese people in Korea compared to other colonies. By the time of the annexation, the Japanese government was eager to encourage Japanese settlers to establish themselves in Korea. To achieve this, the image of the Koreans, who had been portrayed as ignorant and dirty savages, had to be altered using the creation of new propaganda aimed at potential settlers; one example of this is the work *Tokan no susume* (Encouraging migration to Korea).<sup>4</sup> In the late 1930s, nearly a quarter of a million Japanese served in Korea as bureaucrats, police, garrison soldiers, and other occupations. This entailed a number equal to the British working in colonial India, which had about twenty times the population of Korea at that time (Seth 2011, 301).

An interesting anecdote in Blasco Ibáñez's journey is that he had the opportunity to meet a Korean journalist whom he calls Dr. Lee. This journalist fights for Korea's freedom and travels to Geneva to expose the country's situation to the League of Nations. Blasco Ibáñez feels sympathy for his cause but finds him too naïve. Dr. Lee explains that he has been promised by Lloyd George and the United States

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<sup>4</sup> For a further description about its content and the image of Koreans promoted to potential settlers see Lee 2007.

that Korea would regain its independence in ten years. The author is skeptical and believes that before demanding that Japan should return Korea's independence, the United States should show an example and do something about other colonies such as Puerto Rico and the Philippines. However, he pretends to believe in these promises just to keep Dr. Lee satisfied.

### 3 Manchukuo's Propagandist: Gaspar Tato Cumming

Gaspar Tato Cumming (1906-2002) was a writer and a journalist. After the Spanish Civil War, he wrote a few propagandistic works about Asia that portrayed the Japanese Empire in a positive light, as it was one of the allies of Nazi Germany, a regime that had aided the Spanish fascists to achieve their victory in the war. He was one of the main propagandists of the puppet state Manchukuo in the Spanish language.

In his book *China, Japón y el conflicto chino-japonés* (China-Japan and the Sino-Japanese conflict), published in 1939, he wrote the following description of Korea as a part of the Japanese Empire:

From Shimonoseki, at the tip of the island, one can cross the narrowest part of the Sea of Japan through the waters where the naval battle of Tsushima took place and soon reach Fusan, the commercial port of Korea or Chosen (Corea in Korean), which has good train connections to Seoul or Keijo, the capital city.

Korea, today a part of the Japanese Empire, was previously a crossroad for the seeds of Japanese civilization. 'The land of the morning calm' has achieved several improvements in every area since its incorporation into the Japanese Empire in 1910. Manners and customs have evolved in contact with the dominant race of the country leading to japanization. There has not been much influence on how people dress and thus all of Korea is a parade of pale figures. White is still the main color and the men wear little hats with long straps that make them slightly resemble 'clowns' and carry a long bamboo pipe that they will never give up and that looks like part of their body. The race is taller than the Japanese and their features are closer to the West than those of the Japanese. (Tato Cumming 1939, 127)

Just like many other travelers, Tato Cumming compares the physical features of Koreans and the Japanese. Interestingly, his depiction of clothes and the bamboo pipes is almost identical to the one offered by Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, which makes the reader wonder whether the author had read his book or not.

Gregorio de Céspedes was the first white man to arrive in the land of the morning calm in 1594 and attempted at great peril to introduce the doctrines of Christ. Korea has always been a land coveted by the three empires (China, Russia, and Japan) that surround it. Russian ambition to gain influence in Korea led to the Russo-Japanese War that made Korea orbit around Japan, which restores to this cold and arid country the civilization that was taken from them in the past, *corrected and enlarged*.

It has been one of the most mysterious and unknown countries in the world and, until the nineteenth century, no European had been able to enter this land. This small kingdom passed through time quietly, just like 'a morning calm'. The villages are poor in their appearances and the houses are generally huts. (127)

Similar to Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, Gaspar Tato Cumming was aware of Gregorio de Céspedes's incursion in Korea. However, since information did not circulate as easily as today it seems obvious that he would not have known Hendrick Hamel's journey published in the seventeenth century, which constitutes a very particular insight into Joseon Korea from the eyes of a foreigner.

An interesting point of this description is that the original text uses italics to emphasize the terms "corrected and enlarged". In this regard, his description seems to follow the rationality used by the Japanese to justify their annexation of Korea. The portrayal of the Koreans as being passive and lazy and the Japanese as active and progressive can be found in many accounts of travelers and was an idea conveniently promoted by the Japanese. Sometimes the names of both countries, 'land of the morning calm' and 'land of the rising sun', were used to illustrate this opinion. Tato Cumming continues with a description of the Korean landscapes, though he mistakenly names Korean monuments by their Japanese names, probably because they were written this way in the tourist guides which he could have accessed:

The life in the cities shows a Japanese influence. Cosmopolitanism was a mixture of races, Mongols, Russians, Siberians, Jewish, Manchus, a lot of Chinese and Japanese, and some European, with Korea being the Asian country with the fewest Europeans.

Lots of rice paddies, plains, sparse vegetation, and rocky mountains. Little industry, but order and organization. The indolent Korean race moves under the impetus of the Japanese.

One trace of the Japanese presence is the famous 2468-meter mobile bridge across the Yahi River. Another is Seoul's capitol, the residence of Korea's Governor General.

Among the monuments preserved by the race are: The 'Keikaro' or 'banquet hall', the Keuifu Palace in Seoul facing a picturesque lake. The sumptuous Chosen with its long staircase opening on-

to a monumental stone Torii. And above the aridity of the country rise the imposing Kongozan or 'diamond mountains' that raise the ruggedness of their abrupt peaks to the skies. (128)

The main contrast between Blasco Ibáñez and Tato Cumming's view of Korea lies in the fact that the latter believes that Korea's status as a colony was the natural order of things while Blasco Ibáñez shows his sympathy for the Korean cause. Tato Cumming's praise of the Japanese spirit can often be found throughout his works. To give an example, in his book *A Trip Around the World* published in 1944, Tato Cumming goes as far as comparing Spanish and Japanese soldiers as follows:

The best soldiers of the world are the Spanish and the Japanese. Their temperance, their courage, and even their brilliant initiative in difficult moments take them to the top of the universal warrior mass. A tank comes out to the Iberian bullring and the small, sallow Spanish soldier *torea*<sup>5</sup> (fights) his way to dominance with his excellent and improvised inventiveness. Thousands of kilometers away, by spontaneous generation, human harassment against the tank also arises, albeit in a different form and execution. And there are no other nations with a better spirit than the Spanish and the Japanese.

'Don Quixote' and the 'Samurai' are equal problem solvers, one with a spear and the other with a sword. Two romantics of their time, but both portray the spirit of their nations. And so two countries separated by the greatest distance, seas and civilizations meet and begin to understand each other. (Tato Cumming 1939)

Tato Cumming was not the only author trying to establish a parallelism between Spanish and Japanese soldiers. While the connection between bullfighting and masculinity and courage seems more direct, the reference to Don Quixote is interesting. Even though he represents resilience, and Cervantes' novel is recognized around the world, he is still a character with parodic intentions. Whether he is trying to establish a parallel between Don Quixote and the situation of Samurai at the end of the Tokugawa shogunate is up to the reader's interpretation. Interestingly, the affinity and admiration of Japanese militarist values by Spanish far-right sympathizers have been perpetuated until today, and it is possible to find people who are fascinated by a distorted view of what they regard as Samurai values.

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**5** Meaning: 'bullfights'. In bullfighting the *toreros* are praised when they show their skill dodging and playing with the bull, so the author tries to link this with the character of Spanish soldiers.

While this is not a frequent phenomenon, it is possible to argue that it has been inherited from the relationship between Franco's dictatorship and Japan.

#### 4 Conclusions

While Korea remained largely an unknown country in Spain, some writers and officers had the opportunity to travel there and leave their first accounts of the country for interested readers. From archive searches, it is possible to find more accounts on Korea written by Spanish diplomats, but in contrast with the books published by writers, most of them were internal reports that could not be accessed by common citizens. Being a small and remote kingdom, Korea was generally just one among the several stops made by travelers during their worldwide travels. Therefore, most of the accounts available do not go beyond physical descriptions of what the authors perceived visually.

In the introduction, Alfredo Opisso's fictional account has been summarized to provide an example of how Korea was perceived in Spain before its annexation by the Japanese. It can be argued that before Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05), it was commonly believed in the West that no Asian power could compete with 'Western civilization', which was regarded as superior. However, the result of the conflict had a significant impact on this view.

Vicente Blasco Ibáñez only stayed for one week in Korea, but his account seems particularly well-informed about political affairs in several ways when compared to those of other travelers. He does not just describe his political views on Korea but also reflects on the fact that his guides are paid by Korea's Governor General and describes the racial tensions he perceives in colonial Seoul (for example, he alludes to the fact that business owners are Japanese and to the contemptuous gazes of a group of Japanese children at a group of Korean children). Moreover, he had direct communication with a Korean journalist, unlike other travelers who just depicted Koreans as part of the landscape.

On the other hand, Tato Cumming's account is mainly concerned with praising the presence of the Japanese in Korea. To understand his position on the Japanese, it is important to reflect upon the Spanish context at the time. Spain was a declining power that was stripped of most of its colonies overseas. In 1898, Spain lost its sovereignty over Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Guam, becoming a secondary power without a significant role in international affairs. On the contrary, Japan grew into a new imperial power that successfully expanded its territories. For this reason, it became a nation to emulate for the Spanish fascists who were dreaming of reestablishing the nation's past glories.

As a pro-falangist writer, Tato Cumming's account had to be pro-Japanese, and, as we have seen, he tries to establish parallels between Japanese and Spanish spirits and their warriors. It is important to note that he published this work right after Franco's victory in the Civil War, and as a propagandist of its regime, he could have not shown any sympathy for Korea's cause. However, after 1945, Spain would become the only remaining fascist stronghold in Western Europe, which had an impact on Spain's perception of Korea. Just as it happened with the Russo-Japanese War previously, the Korean War in the context of the Cold War would enjoy relatively significant attention by the Spanish press and would serve as a background to develop diverse anti-communist material.

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