

Special Feature

# Descriptions of the Baekdusan and the Surrounding Area in Russian and German Travel Accounts

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The crucial changes in the relationships between Korea and Western countries in the second half of the nineteenth century naturally had a significant impact on the scope and character of the literature dealing with Korea. While in the past only a few overviews with general descriptions of the country's geography, history, politics, and the Korean people and their customs had been published, by the late nineteenth century this kind of literature grew to a considerable quantity. On the qualitative side, improvements also appeared. Along with more in-depth overviews, specialized books like Dallet's *Histoire de l'Église de Corée* (1874) began to be printed around that time. As increasing numbers of foreigners had the chance to come into and travel around the country, travel accounts, too, changed their nature—becoming more individualized and localized. Step by step, new areas of the hitherto sparsely known country were explored and, eventually, the remote, thinly inhabited northern regions of Korea became an object of interest.

This paper will study the question of how and to which degree Baekdusan and the surrounding area in the far north of the Korean peninsula are depicted in travel accounts written by Russian and German travelers at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. The main focus of our research will be on the travel account of the Russian writer and engineer Nikolai Georgievich Garin-Mikhailovski (1852-1906), as it is one of the most comprehensive early reports on Baekdusan we have in any European language. Garin-Mikhailovski travelled to Baekdusan in 1898. Day by day, he carefully recorded all observations he made on his tour: about the geophysical conditions, the fauna and flora, the housing, and the daily life of Koreans on the route which he and his companions passed. Not long after his return to Saint Petersburg he published his records in a series of articles titled *Karandashom s natury* (Pencil Notices Drawn from Nature) in the popular scientific journal *Mir bozhii* (1899). Several years later, in 1904, Garin-Mikhailovski revised his records stylistically and printed them as a separate book under the title *Po Koree, Mandzhurii i Liaodunskomu poluostrovu* (Through Korea, Manchuria and the Liaodong Peninsula).

Garin-Mikhailovski was not the first Russian who wrote in detail about Baekdusan. The first was Ivan Ivanovich Strelbitski who was able to ascend

Baekdusan three years earlier and, as the first Westerner, even set foot on the shore of the volcanic crater lake. Strelbitski described his research of the Baekdusan area in the 1897 report *Iz Khunchuna v Mukden i obratno po sklonam Chan-Bai-Shanskovo khrehta: Otchot o semimesjachnom puteshestvii po Manzhurii i Koree v 1895-1896 gg.* (From Hunchung to Mukden and back through the Slopes of the Changbaishan Mountain Ridge: Report on Seven Months of Travel Through Manchuria and Korea in 1895-1896). Two years after Strelbitski's expedition, in May 1897, the geologist E.E. Anert also investigated the area of Baekdusan. After ascending the mountain he was able to move to the north side of the volcano and to go further to Girin. Anert's scientific results were published significantly later, in 1904, in the 35th volume of the *Papers of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society* (V.T. Zaichikov in Garin-Mikhailovski 1952:17).

While Strelbitski and Anert wrote their reports for scientists and certainly also for the political authorities, Garin-Mikhailovski's articles in *Mir bozhii* and his book were aimed at a wider public. Thanks to his highly developed skills of observation as well as his literary talent, the account of his travel in Korea, Manchuria and on the Liaodong peninsula gained great attention. In Russia and the Soviet Union his travel account was reprinted many times, either as a separate book or included in the author's *Collected Works*. The travel account of the Russian writer was even translated into foreign languages—into German (Garin-Michailowski 1954a), Czech (Garin-Michajlovskij 1952) and Hungarian (Garin-Mihajlovskij 1951). Maybe, in the 1950s, Garin-Mikhailovski's book was translated into other East European languages, too. Recently, in 2005, a reprint of the German translation appeared, testifying to the fact that the book still attracts great interest in our time (Garin-Michailowski 2005). Parts of the travel account had already been translated into Korean as early as the 1930s and introduced to the Korean readership through the newspaper *Donggwang* (Chun 2008:261-297). The interest in the book was apparently stimulated by nationalist motivations during the period when the Korean people lived under colonial power. A second "wave" of Korean translations (of parts as well as almost the complete book) appeared in 1980-81 (Chun 2008:268). In the last few years the travel account also has become a subject of study by Russian studies scholars in Korea, Lee Hee-Soo (2005) and Chun Seong-Hee (2008).

Besides Garin-Mikhailovski's book, this paper will study several travel accounts of Germans, which accounts appeared around the same time. Until now, German travel accounts of the late nineteenth centuries have not been checked in regard to the question whether they provided information about Baekdusan and, if so, what kind of information it was.

We will take into consideration that perspectives on Baekdusan and opinions of Korea in general may have depended largely on an author's personal weltanschauung (*sasang*) and his political and social ideas, above all, his view of foreign politics on the Korean peninsula and, related to this, his relationship to Korea and the Korean people on the whole. Where possible, we will include a brief investigation into the purpose of the respective author's visit to Korea, his aim in publishing the report about his travel and other points that might highlight the historical background and conditions under which the information about Baekdusan was given.

The central question of study will be if the author of the respective travel account was aware of Baekdusan's historical and cultural meaning for the Korean people and if he knew something about Baekdusan's place in their religious beliefs. In the case of Garin-Mikhailovski's comprehensive travel account, we will also research in more detail how he characterized the Korean people. A second important aspect will be what Garin-Mikhailovski reported about the living conditions of the people in the Baekdusan area, how he evaluated those conditions and what conclusions he drew from his observations. A third point will be to study the particularities of the folk culture in the Baekdusan area as they appeared in the eyes of the foreigner Garin-Mikhailovski.

## **The Travel Account of the Russian Engineer and Writer N. G. Garin-Mikhailovski**

### *The Personality of Garin-Mikhailovski, His Work and Weltanschauung*

Nikolai Georgievich Mikhailovski (pseudonym Garin) was born in 1852 into the family of an officer in Saint Petersburg. After he finished grammar school in Odessa, he began to study law at university in Saint Petersburg. Shortly afterwards he changed his specialization and studied at the Institute

of Transport. After finishing his studies and obtaining a diploma in civil engineering he was sent to Bulgaria as an engineer of the army, in order to build the pier and streets in Burgas. Shortly after, he was engaged in the construction of the port and railway in Batumi which, after the end of the Russo-Turkish war, became part of Russia. Under extremely hard conditions he also worked in the Urals and Siberia where he took part in constructing the Trans-Siberian Railway.

Garin-Mikhailovski was a dedicated engineer and researcher displaying extraordinary enthusiasm for his work. Being a passionate, enthusiastic man, he always was inspired to carry out various plans, for example, the construction of a cheaper narrow-rail railway and reform measures concerning the rationalization of agriculture. He tried to use new, more advanced and money-saving methods of construction, but often his innovative proposals were not welcomed as they clashed with the selfish interests of employers and contractors at the construction sites. Conflicts with his clients arose several times, leading to breaks in his employment.

In such a complicated situation Garin-Mikhailovski decided to dedicate himself to agriculture following the model of the *Narodniki*, Russian reformists who denounced their privileges and left the cities for the villages propagating the idea of “going to the people” (*khozhdenie v narod*). In 1881 Garin-Mikhailovski bought an estate in the district of Samara and tried to organize agriculture according to the ideas of the *Narodniki* whose utopian vision was based on the peasant commune as a new, ideal social order. Wishing to relieve the farmers of their difficult situation and to liberate them from their low social position, Garin-Mikhailovski, among other things, bought agricultural tools for them, gave them loans, and built a school for the farmers’ children. The village people, however, greeted Garin-Mikhailovski’s innovations indifferently, sometimes even with hostility. It turned out that in a period when most of the farmers were landless, and when the poor worked on extremely small holdings, there was no real chance for a significant improvement of the living conditions and increase of agricultural productivity in the villages (Yudina 1983).

Having lived three years in the village, Garin-Mikhailovski realized that the projects of the *Narodniki* were entirely illusory. He was forced to leave “his” village ruined by fires which were started by *kulaks* (more prosperous peasant farmers) who were unsatisfied with his reform activities

in the village. Garin-Mikhailovski rendered his experiences with the failures of *Narodniki*-style reforms in an essay which gained wide publicity in Russia. *Several years in a village* (Neskolko let v derevne, 1892) met the high praise of the famous writer M. Gorky and other social activists. With sharp criticism, not sparing himself, Garin-Mikhailovski unveiled the false beliefs of the intelligentsia in forcing their social concepts on the peasantry. Accurately, he depicted the deep mistrust which the peasants felt towards the intelligentsia, because they still remained lords, not partners of the peasants. In other works in the 1890s, like the collection of stories *Village panoramas* (Derevenskie panoramy), Garin-Mikhailovski continued to deal with problems of Russian rural areas writing with sorrow and anger about the peasants' poverty and lack of rights under the conditions of half-serfdom (Yudina 1969). Garin-Mikhailovski's observations of Russian villages, in particular his experiences with the failures of *Narodniki*-style reforms, it may be assumed, significantly influenced his views about people in foreign countries, including Korea.

After Garin-Mikhailovski gave up country life, he returned to his previous work as a civil engineer. It was his rich experience of important railway construction works which led him to be appointed as member of an expedition to Korea in autumn of 1898.

### *Purpose of the Autumn Expedition of 1898*

The Russian colonization of the Amur Basin and the Ussury region led to the establishment of a mutual border between Russia and Korea in 1860 on the lower Duman River. Around that time a mass immigration of Koreans to the Russian maritime zone began due to the social and economic situation in Korea (Pak 1993). The conclusion of a trade agreement and the establishment of diplomatic relations between Russia and Korea in 1884 ended the period when only illicit trading on the Russian-Korean border was possible and opened the way for Russian diplomats, merchants, businessmen and other persons to enter Korea. The strengthening of the Russian influence in Korea in the 1890s, in particular during King Kojong's residence in the Russian legation, brought a considerable number of Russian technical and military personal into Korea. At the same time, the systematic exploration of the Korean territory by numerous Russian expeditions began, with a major

focus on the northern part of the Korean peninsula which had not been explored before (Tyagay 1958:6). Besides the above-mentioned expeditions of Strelbitsky and Anert, the most significant were those of A.G. Lubentsov (1895) and V.L. Komarov (1897). The increasing rivalry with Japan over the issue of influence on the Korean peninsula and the expansion of the Russian influence in Manchuria, connected with plans to prolong the Trans-Siberian Railway to the Far East as well as the long-term leasing of the area around Port Arthur on the Liaodong peninsula beginning in March of 1898, enhanced the Russian interest in exploring Korea's northern part further. One of the important strategic points was that the Russian authorities felt the need to determine, and then construct, the shortest transport connection between the Russian territories on the Pacific Ocean and Port Arthur on the Yellow Sea. Therefore a large-scale expedition under the leadership of the young lieutenant A. I. Zvegintsov was launched in autumn of 1898 in order to explore of area along the border between Manchuria and Korea.

Until recently it was believed that this expedition was organized and carried out under the guidance of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society in Saint Petersburg which played a key role in the organization of geographical expeditions to poorly-investigated areas in the Russian state itself and around its borders. Also, the general view—repeated in a multitude of publications—was that Garin-Mikhailovski, who had already become a well-known engineer and writer, was planning a private voyage around the world (through Siberia to the Far East, the United States and Western Europe) and that he had joined the expedition at short notice. However, the findings in the family library of B. D. Syromyatnikov (a descendant of one member of the expedition) as well as documents in state archives revealed: first, the expedition was organized and carried out under the order of the highest state authority, the Tsar; second, the undertaking of the expedition was kept in strict secrecy; and, third, Garin-Mikhailovski did not join the expedition accidentally, but was included in the list of the second exploration group right from the beginning of its composition on June 25, 1898 (July 8, 1898 according to the Gregorian calendar) (Syromyatnikov 2005:97-132).

Readers of Garin-Mikhailovski's book learn that the expedition, under the leadership of A. I. Zvegintsov, was divided into three groups carrying out diverse investigations. The group which was led by Garin-Mikhailovski

is purported to have investigated whether the three rivers Duman, Amnok and Sungari really had their sources in Baekdusan, i.e. were supplied by Lake Cheonji. As to the exploration of the Duman, it is elaborated further that it was hoped to find out whether the waters of its upper reaches could be used to regulate the river in order to make it navigable in its lower reaches. Besides this main aim, it is explained that the group of Garin-Mikhailovski planned to find a way to the west of Baekdusan which would lead to the mouth of the Amnok and further to Manchuria. From frequent questions about the prices of land or remarks about the quality of timber and rafting conditions on the Amnok recorded in Garin-Mikhailovski's travel account a more careful reader would also be able to assume that there might have been other tasks as well. Yet, the author himself is not explicit about them.

The recently discovered documents in Syromyatnikov's family library, as well as those in state archives, prove that the autumn expedition of 1898 to Northern Korea indeed pursued more purposes than Garin-Mikhailovski revealed in his book. In fact, it was a multitask expedition with the broadest possible scope of investigation including the collection of cartographical and statistical materials, climatic and botanical observations, hydrological measurements, geological investigations, engineering inspections, studies of the economic situation and ethnographic observations in the region. Communication engineers, among them Garin-Mikhailovski, were instructed to lead investigations of the area with the purpose of finding an opportunity to build a railway between Vladivostok and Port Arthur. The members of the expedition also were commissioned to investigate timber resources in the northern part of Korea and to make conclusions about possibilities of developing strong trade in the region (Syromyatnikov 2005:121; Samsonov 2005).

The large staff of the expedition reflected the broad scale of tasks to be accomplished. All in all forty-six persons took part in the complex exploration of the northern region of the Korean peninsula. In addition to eleven Russians who had a civil or military rank and twenty-six lower assistants, Korean interpreters were recruited from the Korean immigrant community in the maritime region and a significant number of drivers were hired locally in Korea (Samsonov 2005). The expedition was composed of two groups acting under the leadership of Lieutenant A.I. Zvegintsov. These two groups were moving to Korea by two different routes. While the first

group went to Vladivostok by sea, through the port of Odessa, the second group, including Garin-Mikhailovski, used an overland route travelling on the Siberian railway and by ship and horse. The first group arrived in Vladivostok on July 21 (August 3), the latter one due to transportation difficulties only on September 5 (August 23), 1898. Because of the unusual duration of rain in the area, the departure of the whole expedition from the village of Novokievskoe near the Russian-Korean border was delayed until September 9th (22nd). Due to the delays in getting started the expedition was forced to conduct its survey in the rather difficult territory over an extremely short period of time. In order to cover more of the northern territory, therefore, the expedition divided into smaller units. The units were divided in two major directions: the railway engineers moved along the watercourses of the frontier rivers, from the mouth of the Duman to the mouth of the Amnok River, while the environmental-geographical group moved to the inside of the Korean peninsula. The leading members of the units were the vice-inspector of the Corps of Forest Wardens V.A. Tikhonov, mountain engineer Kishensky, the publicist and Oriental expert S.N. Syromyatnikov, the officer of special assignments Baron N.A. Korf and the engineers of communication [Garin-]Mikhailovski and A.P. Safonov (Samsonov 2005).

In its entirety, the expedition, under the leadership of Zvegintsov, lasted ninety-four days on the territory of the Korean peninsula. The members of the expedition explored the country using twenty-three routes comprising about 3200 kilometers and gathered abundant material for a map of Korea's northern region (Syromyatnikov 2005:121, 124-125). After their return to St. Petersburg, the participants of the expedition presented a few reports at sessions of societies such as the Imperial Russian Geographical Society and the Society of Adherents of Military Knowledge and issued a number of works marked as confidential (Syromyatnikov 2005:97-132; Samsonov 2005:169).

On account of the strict secrecy in which the expedition was wrapped Garin-Mikhailovski did not give full information about the composition of the whole expedition when publishing his private account of the expedition in the form of a travel account. Several persons are just mentioned by the initials of their names or described only vaguely. The reader of Garin-Mikhailovski's account only learns about the unit led by him personally.

Members of his unit were the civil engineer E. Borminsky, the sergeant I.A. Pishchalnikov, the three soldiers Pavel Bibnik, Fiodor Besedin and Abrosim Khapov, the Korean interpreter P.N. Kim and the Chinese interpreter “Wassili Wassiljewitsch.” Besides his own unit, Garin-Mikhailovski guided a second unit, the unit of the civil engineer A.P. Safonov. Safonov’s unit had the task of exploring the middle reaches of the Duman and determining the closest connections between the sources of the Duman and the Amnok (V.T. Zaichikov in Garin-Mikhailovski 1952:17).

Due to circumstances on the route in Korea (impassable mountainous terrain, difficulties of the climate and the attack of Chinese robbers) Garin-Mikhailovski’s unit had to operate independently from the main group, though originally it was planned that they meet during their tour. On September 14 (27), 1898, Garin-Mikhailovski and his companions forded the Duman at Krasnoe Selo and entered Korean territory. After investigating the mouth of the Duman they went through the cities of Gyeongheung, Hoeryeong and Musan to the Duman’s upper reaches. For the route from the Russian border to Baekdusan Garin-Mikhailovski largely relied on the report of his predecessor, I. I. Strelbitski, who already had been able to explore the eastern route to the mountain.

On September 30 (October 13), Garin-Mikhailovski’s group finally arrived at the foot of Baekdusan. After they climbed up to its summit, they made measurements of the volcano and the lake in its crater. Under extremely bad weather conditions (an air temperature of 3 °C and sudden gusts of winds) several men even launched a boat into the water and tried to sound the maximum depth of the lake. Through the investigation of the volcano and its surroundings Garin-Mikhailovski’s group found out that neither the sources of the Duman nor those of the Amnok were directly connected with the lake on Baekdusan. Only two of the investigated sources of the Sungari originated from the lake in the volcano’s crater (Garin-Mikhailovski 1952:172, 193). After accomplishing their tasks on Baekdusan, Garin-Mikhailovski’s group turned west, despite the Korean guides’ warnings that there was no path. Along one of the Sungari’s tributaries they went through uninhabited territory which still was not touched by the foot of any explorer. While in Manchuria they were attacked by Chinese robbers (*khungkhuzy*) who chased them over 100 kilometers, and only with difficulty could they escape. When Garin-Mikhailovski’s group arrived in

the Chinese city Linziang (Maoershan), they hired a boat and went from the middle reaches of the Amnok to its mouth. The city Euiju was their last station in Korea. On October 19 (November 1) Garin-Mikhailovski's group proceeded further to the Liaodong peninsula, to reach the final destination of Strelbitski's expedition. It took Garin-Mikhailovski and his companions thirty-five days to travel in the Korean border region from east to west, along the watercourses of the Duman and Amnok.

### *Garin-Mikhailovski's Perspectives on Baekdusan*

In the part of Garin-Mikhailovski's travel account where he describes the route approaching the Baekdusan area, scenes of wilderness and untouched nature prevail in his narration. Relying on his predecessor Strelbitski's information, Garin-Mikhailovski writes that Baekdusan is absolutely uninhabited within a radius of 200 *verst* (about 212 kilometers). Many times he speaks with pride about his and his companions' role as pioneers in exploring the *terra incognita*. In a more or less sensationalistic mode he refers to Baekdusan and Lake Cheonji as mysterious, as so little was known about them to foreigners at that time.

From what Koreans whom Garin-Mikhailovski's expedition met on the road said, the area around Baekdusan first and foremost appeared to be a dangerous region where tigers, leopards and the *khungkhuzy* (Chinese robbers) governed. For a man like Garin-Mikhailovski who already had been in dangerous situations while working at various construction sites in Russia, these warnings were not so shocking that they would have kept him from forcing his way further and further into unknown areas. Nevertheless, his thoughts, too, were often occupied by this question, as he was responsible for the safety of all participants in his expedition. He, for instance, remarked about a dangerous point on a narrow mountain path: "Cliffs are hanging over us, the river is roaring, low undergrowth on both sides. All of a sudden, from somewhere on the cliffs a leopard might be springing. [...] We are riding in a long line each after the other. *Khungkhuzy* shot the first, a tiger throws himself on the last while a leopard springs on everybody at random—so all places [in the line] are equally [endangered]. These three mighty ones of this world are claiming here power and right. The right is on the side of the mighty..." (Garin-Mikhailovski 1952:146-47).

The accompanying local Korean men were especially frightened by the idea of climbing to the top of Baekdusan. Garin-Mikhailovski was informed that even hunters (Chinese and Korean) who occasionally came to Baekdusan, hunted deer only on the slopes of the mountain and did not chase after them if the deer entered the area of the crater. Because of this fear, only with great difficulty was the Russian expedition able to find a local man who knew the road and who was willing to go with them as guide. But even the elderly man who finally agreed to guide them approached the summit with awe and prayed when he glanced into the crater.

On his way to Baekdusan Garin-Mikhailovski was told a lot of stories about the dangerousness of Baekdusan's crater. One eyewitness who had passed Baekdusan at a distance of 10 *verst* recalled that he heard "noise similar to thunder arising from the womb of the earth." "The waves of the lake make this noise," he opined. "The lake there is deep; one can see it if one ascends to the very top [of the mountain], but one should not climb up there, because immediately a terrible storm would arise, even if not a breath of air is stirring in the vicinity, and the fine dust of the pumice stone would blind the eyes. [...] This is because] the dragon which lives in the lake does not want anybody to see his place of residence" (Garin-Mikhailovski 1952:139). The reason for the Koreans' hesitation to enter the area of the crater, it appeared, was their belief that a dragon lived in Lake Cheonji. The image of the dragon was very frightening: "On the holy mountain, in the lake which is hidden from everybody's eyes, there lives an evil dragon, evil and terrifying: now he makes thunder, now hurls clouds up, now unleashes such winds which knock one over. If one provokes his anger, he would even do worse. Such a wild, stubborn creature may be angered by the smallest thing" (Garin-Mikhailovski 1952:169).

The belief of the Koreans in the dragon may have stemmed from the observation of a natural phenomenon which happened on Baekdusan, namely the eruptions of whirlwinds in Lake Cheonji. Garin-Mikhailovski himself saw this spectacular phenomenon when he finally arrived at the summit of Baekdusan: "Something like smoke was massing below, as if the surface of the lake heaved up, quaked and rippled. And now, with an awful howl this strange thing is already running towards us. [...] From the bottom of the lake a cloud is flying up to the sky in which all is included: a tangle of small stone splinters, dust and steam that there, in the lake, bubbling up

over its surface like in a suddenly boiling pot. This terrible mixture of steam and sand enveloped us. But in the next moment a delicate white cloud already rose high above the extinct crater to the sky taking the bizarre shape of a fantastic snake” (Garin-Mikhailovski 1952:171).

The view of the lake as the residence of a dragon was so dominant that Garin-Mikhailovski always just called the lake “Dragon Lake,” not Cheonji, in his travel account. In fact, all foreign travelers and researchers at the end of the nineteenth century, the Russians as well as the British, had to cope with the local people’s fear of climbing to the top of Baekdusan. In the case of Strelbitski’s expedition, the fear was dissolved by an act of the Russians which pursued another purpose, but unintentionally had the positive side effect of satisfying the religious needs of the accompanying Koreans and their compatriots in the surrounding area. To have some supply of food Strelbitski had taken some sheep and slaughtered a number of them on Baekdusan. The Koreans misinterpreted this act as a sacrifice to the dragon of Lake Cheonji (Garin-Mikhailovski 1957:696, fn. 214).

It is interesting to note that during Garin-Mikhailovski’s expedition only the local people showed this fear of the dragon, not the interpreter P.N. Kim who had been hired in Vladivostok and who was a second-generation Korean immigrant in Russia. Kim considered the belief in the dragon of Lake Cheonji a superstition and occasionally even loved to make jokes of his “fearful, superstitious” compatriots. The attitude of P.N. Kim stands in sharp contrast to that of the interpreter who accompanied the British captains Cavendish and Gould-Adams (1891). Interpreter Yeong [Yang], a young, educated man from Seoul had the same fear of ascending Baekdusan as the local people of low origin (Jo 2007).

Garin-Mikhailovski was well aware of the fact that Baekdusan is a holy mountain for the Koreans, but in his book he does not specify why. The holiness of the mountain just seems to be related to the belief in the dragon of Lake Cheonji and to the general belief of Koreans in spirits of nature. Actually, Garin-Mikhailovski does mention two shrines on top of a mountain pass which may stand in connection with the veneration of Baekdusan in folk religion and state ritual. The author himself, however, does not draw any connection between the shrines and Baekdusan. The shrines are described as located on the mountain pass before the expedition reached Tianpae, one of the last villages on the eastern route to Baekdusan.

One of the shrines on the pass, Garin-Mikhailovski writes, is dedicated to Okonshante (Okhwang sangje), the “Chief of Heaven.” The other shrine, on the opposite site of the slope, is “a state one (Won-nan) where twice a year prayers for the Emperor are said” (Garin-Mikhailovski 1952:48). The first shrine, it is said, is very popular in all of Korea. Garin-Mikhailovski just gives a very short description of the inside which, moreover, is very strange: “Of the paintings one showing a paradise bird attracts attention: a white stork, with black wings and tail, red feet and beak. The stork is painted very well. Next there is an unshapely head—Natkho—like our dolphins are painted in our fairy tales” (Garin-Mikhailovski 1952:48). This description, of course, leaves a lot of space for speculations about the images of the animals. As to the stork, an animal alien to Korean religions, probably Garin-Mikhailovski as a writer gave rein to his imagination. In other places in his travel account, too, he tries to compare things Korean with something familiar from his own culture. He may have (deliberately or not) confused the stork with the crane which usually appears as the companion of Daoist immortals. It is natural to assume it was a crane in a shrine dedicated to Okhwang sangje, who by name is a Daoist deity. As is known, Korean folk religion included this deity within its pantheon. Surely it is in this broader context that the Korean guide of the expedition said prayers “to Heaven” in the shrine for Okhwang sangje. Unfortunately, Garin-Mikhailovski did not leave any description of other images in the shrine, so we cannot make a judgment about possible additional objects of worship and there is no way to draw conclusions about the existence or absence of the shrine’s link to the veneration of Baekdusan. Concerning the second shrine, it should be noted that Garin-Mikhailovski neither gave any description of cult objects nor did he mention any link of the shrine to concepts about the origin of the ruling royal family in the area of Baekdusan. It also should be emphasized that in the entire book of Garin-Mikhailovski there is no mention of the mythical state founder Dangun.

Garin-Mikhailovski presumably heard about Baekdusan’s role in the geomantic concept of the Koreans or something else about the holy energy of the mountain. There is a passage in his travel account where he speaks about “rays of Baekdusan” which the mountains in the neighborhood receive. Eight *werst* after the travelers had passed the village Purgun-pau [Bulgeun bawi], the last inhabited place before Baekdusan, they saw the

mountain Tsyn-sani “which the Koreans considered holy. It has a strange form [looking like] the upper part of a human torso; [just] head and arms are hacked off. [...] On its summit there is a flat place about 300 *sashen* square. The Koreans say that there is a huge stone slab with a gigantic chessboard. There giants play chess during their leisure time. You can see this mountain from Baekdusan; also the next mountain Pun-poktoui in the east which resembles a huge face lying turned to Heaven. [Footnote by G.M.:] The Koreans say that both mountains receive the rays of Baekdusan and therefore are also holy” (Garin-Mikhailovski 1952:157). If we consider that Garin-Mikhailovski himself did not know the Korean language and had to rely on translations, we may assume that the word “rays” may have been a mistranslation for “energy” (*ki*). Then Garin-Mikhailovski’s explanation indeed would refer to the mountain’s energy which, according to the geomantic concept, spreads from Baekdusan to the other Korean mountains. Besides the possible geomantic context which may stand behind the explanation about Baekdusan’s rays, the cited passage also gives a hint to the Korean belief in immortals playing chess on a mountain in the vicinity of Baekdusan. Again, these immortals, probably Daoist immortals (*sinseon*), are indigenized by the author. Garin-Mikhailovski calls them by the Russian word *bogatyri* (giants, Herkules).

A substantial part of Garin-Mikhailovski’s account of his travel to Baekdusan is dedicated to the description of the nature he saw. He was amazed at the spectacular scenes which met his eyes. As he was an accomplished writer, he was able to describe Baekdusan and the surrounding landscape in very poetic language. Thanks to him we surely own the most picturesque descriptions of Baekdusan which any Western traveler to the mountain made. Almost like a painter Garin-Mikhailovski used an exquisite spectrum of color to describe how he saw Baekdusan from the distance: “Yesterday, in the sunset it was [dipped in a shimmer of] transparent white and milky green. Today, before sunrise, in the morning mist it began to emerge on the horizon as a huge, grey pearl-coloured round dome reaching out for the sky. Now the sight is so amazing. Its ravines are covered with snow that makes it shining white. In summer, however, it is black and only its rim on the top where pumice stone is looks a bit brighter” (Garin-Mikhailovski 1952:158).

Depending on the moment Garin-Mikhailovski had different visual impressions of the mountain, at times they were extremely positive, at other

times he thought it plain. At sunrise, around six o'clock, when he and his companions stopped on an elevation and admired the morning panorama, his excitement reached its climax. Again, he paid much attention to various colour images when he described the enchanting moment: "In the east on a vast space mountains tower up, all covered with a transparent blue veil. Through it one already sees the pale-red reflection of the rising sun. All is still enveloped in half darkness, only Baekdusan, completely transparent, already is illuminated by sun-rays and is blazing. Depending on the order in which every mountain flares up, one could determine its approximate height. Now two further mountains are caught by the sun and dressed a bloody violet. Every mountain wears his own [colored] robe; only Baekdusan, the king [lit.: *tsar*] of the mountains, is wrapped in a purple robe" (Garin-Mikhailovski 1952:165-66). The next moment offered Garin-Mikhailovski a different view: "But this fantastic splendour [lit.: parade] soon comes to an end; the elegant costumes [drawn] in the first sun-rays are taken off and Baekdusan, now fully illuminated by the sun, again looks unprepossessing: dirty-gray with white stripes of snow lying in its ravines. The same gentle shape like all mountains in Korea; the overhanging wild cliffs of the Caucasus are totally lacking. All here looks equally peaceful and quite like the area we have passed up to now" (Garin-Mikhailovski 1952:165-66). Garin-Mikhailovski loved to make comparisons between the Korean landscape and that of his native country and usually it was a complimentary one for both places. Yet, in the moment described his recollection of the rough, deeply fissured Caucasus was not favorable for his evaluation of Baekdusan, the "boring" gentle slopes of which did not stimulate his imagination anymore. Instead, other mountains began to attract his attention: "Much more beautiful than Baekdusan actually is that long mountain the top of which has the profile of a dead giant (*bogatyr*). Here is the forehead, the little nose—a little bit broad, the sharp mouth, the breast in armour, the legs. Beside him [lies] the helm. Or [take, for instance,] the holy mountain over there which is shaped like a torso without head and gets the rays of Baekdusan. Actually, even the Little Baekdusan is more interesting, because its conical figure can be surveyed immediately at one glance, whereas the [Great Baekdusan] here, at its bottom, for a long time gives the impression of something broad and confusingly arranged" (Garin-Mikhailovski 1952:165-66). Garin-Mikhailovski himself noticed the difference between his first exulted

impression about Baekdusan and the impression which he got later. It is interesting to note how he commented on the difference of the views: “So [the poetry of] the first short, but very mighty and very peculiar impression is quickly replaced by the prose of something ordinary, even something miserable” (Garin-Mikhailovski 1952:165-66).

Yet, Garin-Mikhailovski’s mood changed again when he arrived at the summit of Baekdusan. The scenery he saw when looking into the crater surprised him so much that he again fell into full excitement. Like previous depictions of nature, too, realistic observations of the volcano’s surface and the shape of Lake Cheonji are mixed with rich imaginary pictures. But this time Garin-Mikhailovski’s depiction of the scenery is a true fireworks of mixed fantasy and realism: “The picture which exposed itself to our gaze was amazing, overwhelming, shocking. Steep below us, at a depth of one and a half thousand feet, a green lake of about two *verst* was sparkling. Like the most beautiful emerald, this green, transparent, wondrous lake was twinkling; surrounded by black castles with sharp battlements or ruins of those castles. Dark walls with sooty smoke rose up vertically from below and ended in bizarre gigantic peaks that encircled the crater. An enchanting, peaceful silence lay on the lake. There [I felt] a completely different life. [Indeed, I experienced] a strong impression of life, exactly of life. It seemed that in the next moment all the inhabitants of those castles down over there would come out, dressed in festive garments; music would sound and colorfully decorated boats would sail over the lake, and there would start an alien life which had been forgotten like a fairy tale, a dream. At the same time, [however, I was] conscious that this corner of the earth is [the zone of] death, absolute death; [I was conscious] that on the bank of this lake Strelbitski had only found one [sign] of the organic world—a bone which a bird may have let fall here in passing. Death! The volcano itself died here, and this clear lake is nothing more than its magnificent grave. These steep black bastions—which are in sooty smoke as if mourning—are the walls of its grave. They rise up threatening and keep the secret of this grave” (Garin-Mikhailovski 1952:170).

This vision of the Baekdusan volcano being a zone of death is absolutely different from the Korean view of Baekdusan as the spiritual and energetic origin of the Korean nation—as the spot from where the earth energy spreads through the whole peninsula and the place from where mythical

and historical ancestors were born. Garin-Mikhailovski's vision obviously has its roots in his experience as an engineer and a natural scientist. His own observations on the spot as well as the report of his predecessor, Strelbitski, had revealed to him that the volcano showed no activity and there were no traces of life on the bank of Lake Cheonji. So he was convinced that the whole area of the volcano was a biologically dead zone. Actually, Garin-Mikhailovski's conclusion is in contrast to later scientists' discoveries in the lake, but this question is beyond the topic of our research. For us it is important to note that the seeming absence of any life, the absolute silence and calmness which reigned in the crater, the rough shape of the rock massif, the dark colour of the steep cliffs—all this conveyed to Garin-Mikhailovski the impression of a totally alien world and awakened in him an existential sense of life and death. His sensibility as a writer eventually drove him so far as to perceive the volcano as the zone of absolute death.

Having arrived at the summit of Baekdusan, Garin-Mikhailovski himself delved into the mysteriousness of the mountain about which he had often remarked on his route. Now it was not the *terra incognita* which made him perceive Baekdusan to be mysterious, but the features of the crater itself. In the very different, alien world of the crater the writer Garin-Mikhailovski experienced the feeling of a state where the flow of time has stopped and eternity and “the freshness of the moment” coincide. In this atmosphere the crater became a kind of romantic dreamland where he discovered figures of fairy tales and sagas. Take, for instance, the following depiction: “I admire the bizarre shapes of the rim which encircles the crater. Over there a giant bear has dropped his huge head and pauses in silence. And there a pointed tower rises. On the rock over there is the wonderful, lovely statue of a woman how she may appear in one's dreams. With one hand she supports herself on the brink of a rock and looks down to the lake. Her figure combines in itself the peace of eternity and the freshness of the moment. She seems immersed in thoughts, seized by compassion, doubt, wavering; so she is forever bound to this mysterious corner of a still not fully created world” (Garin-Mikhailovski 1952:170). While the bear image which the writer saw in a rock on Baekdusan may have been drawn from Russian fairy tale, the lovely, sorrowful figure of the woman is borrowed from the Western European literary tradition. The author himself said that the figure resembled Lorelei (the nymph of German ballades) or Sappho (antique

Greek poetess) (Garin-Mikhailovski 1952:191). Both of them are shrouded in the secret of mystic love, a breath of eroticism, despair and death and have appealed to a lot of romantic writers, poets and artists.

Garin-Mikhailovski's depiction of Baekdusan and the surrounding area appears to have been considerably influenced by the literature of Romanticism. In his narration the rational reflections of an engineer and the sensibility and imagination of a writer coincided, sometimes coexisting, sometimes struggling with each other. Eventually, however, the rational, practical thinking of the engineer always prevailed over the writer. In Garin-Mikhailovski's travel account, the lyric depiction of natural phenomena is often suddenly interrupted and his narration turns to unemotional, factual remarks about his scientific investigations and practical observations. So, he, for instance, concludes his romantic recollection of the two-day trip to the top of Baekdusan with comments about the productivity of the area stating that this "virgin land" still waits for its hunters and painters (Garin-Mikhailovski 1952:188-189).

### *Garin-Mikhailovski's Characterization of the Korean People and Their Living Conditions*

A remarkable feature of Garin-Mikhailovski's account is that he was very curious about the character and mind of the Korean people and showed keen interest in the living conditions of the people he met on his way. We should even say that he depicted the Koreans with extraordinary sympathy, laying special stress on their friendliness, hospitality and diligence.

Garin-Mikhailovski's sympathy for the Koreans is already felt when he describes the physical features of the Koreans: "The faces of the Koreans are suntanned and broad, with sparse beards. They look friendly and good-natured. There are also ugly ones, but many of them have very regular features reminiscent of Italian faces. They are elegantly proportioned and tall. I even would call them beautiful like an *ikona* (holy image)" (Garin-Mikhailovski 1957:137).

In principle, Garin-Mikhailovski wrote, Koreans are a peaceful people, not able to rise in protest even under the conditions of extreme exploitation and oppression. They are full of natural noble-mindedness and simplicity. Due to their credulous nature Garin-Mikhailovski often called the Koreans

“adult (great) children” for whom human relationships matter more than money. Though this kind of expression, i.e. the allegedly childlike character of the Koreans, can also be found in other Western travel accounts and reports about Korea, with regard to Garin-Mikhailovski the context is quite different. In other Western texts the expression is usually connected with the idea that Koreans are not able to take the fate of their land into their own hands, to modernize by themselves without the help of Western countries. In the mind of Garin-Mikhailovski, a former *narodnik*, however, the characterization of Koreans as “childlike” stems from his feeling pity for the poor people whom the wealthy and the intelligentsia should help to achieve a better life.

According to Garin-Mikhailovski’s conviction, Koreans would be able to withstand the threat of foreign powers and develop into a modern society if only they obtained western knowledge and techniques. He expressed this conviction many times in his talks with the local people on his route: “Koreans, too, possess a lot of natural resources in their country, but they lack technical knowledge. Without such knowledge one cannot become rich in these times.” (Garin-Mikhailovski 1952:112). Koreans, Garin-Mikhailovski emphasized, are a talented people and if they would began to study techniques they “would be able to catch up to Europe as quickly as the Japanese did” (Garin-Mikhailovski 1952:112).

As an engineer Garin-Mikhailovski believed in the possibilities of technical development to free poor people. Above all, he critically evaluated the value of old Chinese learning. When he met an aristocratic landowner of an estate in a valley covered with stones between which puny grain grew, he explained to him: “Once there will come the time when your valleys, too, will be greening gardens and vineyards, and man’s work will yield ten times more harvest than today. Then Korea will be rich. To achieve this, however, one should not go to China and learn its fruitless sciences; one should travel there where one knows how to lay out gardens and how to snatch the treasures from the mountains. Only then Korea will be able to gain wealth. Until this time here just will live good-natured, nice men who overstrain themselves being busy with [taking care of] their deceased; good men who again and again will only endure injustice from everybody” (Garin-Mikhailovski 1952:115). Though Garin-Mikhailovski found the old-fashioned *yangban* very sympathetic, he could not but remark satirically

that the man resembled Don Quixote de la Mancha in his outdated social position and manners: “A gaunt beanpole, treated by his neighbours in the village with courteousness, yet in a somewhat mocking way” (Garin-Mikhailovski 1952:115).

With special pleasure Garin-Mikhailovski noted the remarks of Koreans who expressed their hope that Korea would get knowledge from Russia or that Russia would help the Koreans to defend themselves against foreign powers. On such occasions Garin-Mikhailovski’s patriotic attitude manifested itself. Though in socio-economic questions he was critical of the Tsarist regime, when it came to international questions, he firmly stood on the side of his country. In his travel account, therefore, we find a considerable number of comments about the Koreans’ hope that Russia would protect them against the frequent raids of the *khungkhuzy*, prevent attempts of Japan to take power over Korea, or to ward off the threats of other great powers which tried to penetrate into Korea at the end of the nineteenth century.

Garin-Mikhailovski’s opinion about the Korean people stands in sharp contrast to that of his fellow writer I. A. Gontcharov who visited the East coast of the Korean peninsula on the frigate *Pallada* in 1854. Gontcharov’s impressions about the Korean people in general were quite negative. He wrote that the common people go barefoot, are uncombed and untidy, though, he acknowledged, the white clothes of the higher classes were clean. As characteristic national features of Koreans he mentioned laziness, stubbornness and lack of willingness to labor (Gontcharov 1899:101-102). Since Gontcharov’s visit in Korea, however, a lot of time had passed and Russian-Korean relations changed significantly. Russian travelers who visited Korea in the 1880-1890s saw the country quite differently from Gontcharov and showed a lot of sympathy for the common people who worked hard under extremely difficult conditions (Tyagay 1958). Yet, Garin-Mikhailovski’s sympathy for the Korean people went far beyond the views of his predecessors. His enthusiastic depiction of the Korean people and their culture was full of love and admiration, sometimes even to an exaggerated degree, and perhaps is just comparable to that of the Hungarian ethnologist Balogh Benedek Baráthosi (Baráthosi 2005). Whereas Baráthosi’s sympathy for the Korean people arose from his belief in a common origin of the Hungarian and Korean peoples (the Turan concept), Garin-Mikhailovski’s

friendly view stemmed mainly from the humanistic position and socio-political standpoint which he had as a former *narodnik*. Partly, of course, his manner of writing about Korea and its people was also influenced by the foreign politics of his country.

### *Folktales and the Culture of Storytelling in Korea*

Thanks to the fact that Garin-Mikhailovski, besides being an engineer, had a keen interest in literature, his travel account includes a very lively eye-witness report about the culture of storytelling in Korea at the end of the nineteenth century. While staying for the night in a farmer's house, Garin-Mikhailovski loved to listen to the folktales and legends which the farmers told sitting on the fire and wrote them down with the help of his interpreter.

Although a few other foreigners around that time also showed interest in Korean folk culture, Garin-Mikhailovski obviously towers above them in his attention to Korean folktales and legends. Even before his departure to Korea, Garin-Mikhailovski had invited a Korean storyteller to join his expedition (Garin-Mikhailovski 1952:86). Above all, on his whole tour in Korea Garin-Mikhailovski searched for new folktales and skilled local storytellers. Although Garin-Mikhailovski and his companions sometimes stayed the night at inns, for the most part of the journey his group slept in houses of ordinary Koreans. Of course, there was a practical reason for this choice of accommodation, as the group travelled in a scarcely-populated area where inns were found only rarely or not at all. The stay in farmers' houses brought a lot of practical inconveniences with it, but it was a fortunate opportunity for a collector of stories. When the group arrived in a new village and had made all preparations for the night, they usually spent the rest of the evening listening to a storyteller. In such moments the village people gathered in the accommodation of the Russian travelers and actively took part in the process of storytelling, correcting the storyteller or adding some new details to the story being told.

On his way through Korea's northern region Garin-Mikhailovski could observe that the culture of storytelling was a living tradition in all aspects—including the transmission of old stories, discussion of different versions and creation of new stories. In one village close to Baekdusan Garin-Mikhailovski witnessed how the foundations for a new story were being laid—based on

an actual event. This is a particular interesting case of Korean culture worth retelling in full. Several days before Garin-Mikhailovski's arrival in the village a leopard had attacked a young woman in broad daylight when she was washing cabbage in a stream. When the villagers began to cry loudly, the leopard let his victim go and swam in the stream. Despite of the cries, though, he did not flee, but continued to watch his victim, so a hunter had enough time to pick up his gun at home and shoot the leopard dead. As the villagers found the behaviour of the leopard strange, they began to talk about the possible reasons of his behaviour and looked for interpretations. They recalled that several years ago a poor man had proposed marriage to the woman, but her father had rejected the proposal. Thereupon the young man decided to gather ginseng in order to become rich and to marry the girl. Both pledged fidelity to each other. But the young man soon was killed by the *khungkhuzy* (Chinese robbers). Three years later the girl had to marry another man, but in the night before the wedding the dead man appeared in her dream and reminded her of their pledge. Now, when the young woman was attacked by a leopard, the villagers came to the belief that the soul of the hapless young man had settled in that leopard and come to pick his beloved one up. That's why, they argued, the leopard did not flee when he saw the hunter—in contrast to the ordinary behaviour of a predator. If the young woman would recover from her wounds, the villagers said, a shaman or *doin* would be called. After forty days the Jade Emperor, Okhwang sangje (in Garin-Mikhailovski's transcription: Okonshante), then would inform the soul of the leopard/young man about his decision whether he would transform it again into a leopard or another animal (tiger, bear, boar or snake) that would again come to the woman. Or, the Jade Emperor might say "enough" and take the soul of the young man to Heaven. Still another option, they thought, was that the Jade Emperor might transform the soul of the young man into a worm and the woman would crush it underfoot when on her way (Garin-Mikhailovski 1952:141, 145-146).

Living in an inhospitable natural environment in a remote, scarcely populated mountain region, confronted with the permanent threat of attacks by wild animals, raids of the *khungkhuzy* and other dangers, the Koreans developed specific beliefs and invented stories which helped them to gain spiritual comfort and master their difficult everyday life in seemingly helpless situations. Garin-Mikhailovski compared the culture of

storytelling in Korea with the times of Homer (Garin-Mikhailovski 1952:128). It reminded him of a tradition which, to his regret, had already vanished in his own country (and in the whole European hemisphere). In his admiration of the Korean storytelling tradition strong romantic feelings are apparent. They are connected with a longing for times past when man still had preserved his naivety and naturalness. Listening to a tale during a rest on the road, he, for instance, remarked: “The story is simple; the belief in it is of touching naivety. For these men all this is true, exactly in the same way as we are now sitting here on a high rock. ... For a few moments our presence here seems like a dream, like an enchantment which suddenly has transported all of us to the inscrutable depth of long-past millennia. Or it seems as if we have entered an arch and now see new horizons, another life which had disappeared even from our memories. Like children the adults here dedicate all their free hours to folktales and believe in them—one almost can envy them for their unshakeable belief. They believe in giant heroes (*bogatyř*) and dead men, in the possibility of finding a lucky grave site, and look their whole lives for that. Tigers, leopards, even such primitive living beings as centipedes—all of them are metamorphosed men” (Garin-Mikhailovski 1952:102-103).

Thanks to his interest in the folk culture of the Korean people, namely fairy tales, Garin-Mikhailovski could open ways to the hearts of the Korean people, for himself and the whole expedition. In general, Garin-Mikhailovski’s expedition was very amicably received by the Koreans. Actually, there was only one exception—the magistrate of Gyeongheung who instructed the guide of the expedition “not to say anything about the reality” in Korea (Garin-Mikhailovski 1952:100-101). The reputation of Russia in the northern part of Korea at this time and other facts, of course, also contributed to the friendly attitude of Koreans to the expedition, but the importance of Garin-Mikhailovski’s interest in inquiring about Korean folk culture and religion, his ability to be “close to the people” was a significant factor, too.

The stories which Garin-Mikhailovski heard from the people in the northern regions of Korea later were published by him in a separate book (Garin 1904). His collection *Koreiskie skazki* (Korean fairy tales) consists of sixty-four folktales, being among the first examples of Korean folktales introduced to the West. In fact, it was the most comprehensive collection of Korean folktales at that time. Perhaps influenced by the beloved folk literature of his native country Garin-Mikhailovski chose the term *skazki*

(fairy tales) for the title of the collection, though some of the included tales were actually myths and legends called *sinhwa* and *jeonseol* in Korean. As in this study there is no place for a thorough examination of the literary aspects of the stories, we shall leave this question for future study. Garin-Mikhailovski who already had proved to be an accomplished writer before he came to Korea was able to render the Korean folktales in fine Russian language. The high artistic level of the record as well as Garin-Mikhailovski's reputation among the literary circles in Russia surely contributed to the wide popularity which his collection of Korean folktales enjoyed. It was reprinted several times in Russia and the Soviet Union in the form of a separate book or as a supplement to his travel account. Besides, almost every collection of Korean or East Asian folktales in Russian contains one or more stories which take their origin from Garin-Mikhailovski's trove.

The significance of Garin-Mikhailovski's collection of Korean folktales goes far beyond his native country. As the Western world had only scanty knowledge of the Korean culture, his collection awoke great attention abroad. Soon after its publication in Russia, the first translations into other languages were made. In 1905 five of the tales were translated into Czech and published in the magazine *Svetozor* (translation by A. Drabek), others were published in the same journal in 1909 (translation by S. Minarik). Later translations into Czech were made by Spirhanzl-Duriš (1932) and Štechar (1954). Also, a Slovakian translation appeared (Mihal 1933; 1953).<sup>1</sup> The first translation into French was published by Persky as early as 1925. Translations were also made into German (Kotschubey 1948; Boettcher 1954; Böltz 1954) and were reprinted in the German translation of Garin-Mikhailovski's travel account (Garin-Michailowski 1954; 2005).

## **German Travelers' Reports of Korea, Baekdusan and the Korean Border Line**

The history of travel accounts about Korea written by Germans begins

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1. The author thanks Miriam Löwensteinova for providing the information on Czech and Slovakian translations.

quite late if compared to those of other European countries, including Russia. For a long time German readers (but not they alone) had to have recourse to foreign sources. As is known, for almost 200 years, the diary of the shipwrecked Dutch sailor Hendrik Hamel was the singular European work about Korea (published in the German translation in 1672). The readers could obtain some further knowledge from Korea-related passages in the books of de Mailla and duHalde. Fresh information on the turn of the eighteenth to the nineteenth century were obtained through the travel accounts of the French captain Jean-François de Lapérouse (published in German in 1799) and the British captain W.R. Broughton (published in London in 1804).

On the basis of the previously printed foreign travel accounts as well as maps drawn by missionaries in China the German writer and editor E.A.W. von Zimmermann compiled the Korean chapter in his *Taschenbuch der Reisen*. The eleventh volume of the *Taschenbuch* printed in 1811 dealt with Korea, Japan, Formosa, Tunkin and Cochinchina. Although von Zimmermann was never in Korea and did not add any new information to the few facts known in his time, the publication of his compendium deserves attention, simply due to the fact that in a period when Korea was almost unknown in Germany and Europe von Zimmermann tried to introduce this *terra incognita* to a broader readership, presenting the country in its regional context (1993:59-73). In comparison to the description of Japan (225 pages) relative little space is dedicated to Korea (32 pages), but here we find some material related to the topic of our research. Discussing the links of mountain chains and the origins and courses of rivers in Korea, von Zimmermann's book notably emphasized the White Mountains: "Especially famous are the mountains on the 41st degree of latitude, as one of the highest elevations of Asia. The Chinese call them 'White Mountains' because of the eternal snow [on them]" (Zimmermann 1811:13). It is noteworthy that in this remark the Chinese, not the Koreans, are said to refer to the Baekdusan area as the White Mountains (Compare the travel account of A. E. Cavendish (Jo 2007:55-64)). The *Taschenbuch der Reisen* then explains the significance of Baekdusan as the place of origin for the Yalu (Amnok) and the Tumen (Duman): "This highest part of the long mountain chain generates both rivers which are by far the most important ones—not only due to their massiveness, but also thanks to their usefulness

for the kingdom. The sources are next to one another, only separated from each other by the mountains themselves, approximately on the 41.5 degree of latitude” (Zimmermann :13). Further, the Yalu and Tumen are indicated as rivers forming the border “against the Tartars and Chinese” (Zimmermann 1811:14).

Several decades later German scholars tried to get more information about the still poorly known country. In 1832 Julius Klaproth translated Japanese texts about Korea (Klaproth 1832) and the physician and natural scientist Philipp Franz von Siebold published his monumental work *Nippon* (Siebold 1832) where he also mentioned Korea. Neither Klaproth nor Siebold, however, had ever been in Korea, although at least Siebold was able to receive firsthand information when he met Koreans, shipwrecked sailors, during his stay on Deshima.

The first German who, according to historical documents, set foot on Korean territory was Karl Friedrich August Gützlaff. Previously a Prussian member of the Dutch missionary society, he became a free missionary, initially working as preacher and doctor for Chinese settlers in Bangkok and then in China. In 1832 Gützlaff joined an expedition of the English East India Company which intended to open new trading opportunities in the northern part of China and Korea. The expedition reached its final aim, Korea, on July 17, whereupon a petition asking for trade contacts was sent to the Korean king. During their stay of approximately one month, while they waited for an answer from the Korean court, their ship anchored at several places on the west coast where Gützlaff had the chance to go ashore and to spread the Bible and other Christian scripts among the local population. After one month, however, the expedition had to leave the Korean coast having failed to achieve their purpose of opening the country for foreign contacts (Kneider 1996:19-49).

The next German who entered Korean land was the infamous Ernst Jacob Oppert, a Shanghai-based Prussian merchant. He made three attempts in 1866-68 to establish trading relations with Korea, which all ended unsuccessfully. The first two were undertaken in March and August of 1866, shortly before the expedition of the French Admiral Roze. During these trips Oppert carefully investigated the shipping route through the archipelago on the west coast of the Korean peninsula. Oppert's last blackmailing attempt in 1868 to force Korea to open its borders made his name enter

every history book on Korea. With over a hundred men, he sailed to Asan Bay on the west coast of Chungcheong province and then went inland to rob the tomb of the Daewongun's father. As is known, Oppert's and his companions' deliberate act of sacrilege resulted in the sad circumstance that Korea's anti-foreign policy and the oppression of Catholics were all the more intensified. For over a decade all efforts of foreigners to get into contact with Korea met harsh, unfriendly reactions from the Korean side, as, for instance, the German diplomat Max August Scipio von Brandt had to experience in 1870.

Oppert's book, published in 1880, was full of resentment against Daewongun's policy and was strongly influenced by the theory of Social Darwinism. Nevertheless Oppert's book provided European readers with new interesting information about the unknown country in the Far East. As Oppert himself only saw the territory in the middle of the west coast, he went into great detail in his description of the sea routes, the geophysical shape of the coast as well as the character and living conditions of the people in the provinces Chungcheong and Gyeonggi, including Ganghwa Island. In the introductory chapter for his book, Oppert, however, also gave an overview on the geography of the whole peninsula, knowledge of which he gained from previous publications of travelers and researchers. It is here in the chapter of the overview that Baekdusan is mentioned several times, but the given information is limited to the mountain's name, its geophysical characteristics and geopolitical importance in the region. The lengthiest passage where Oppert refers to the mountain is in the sub-chapter Borders and Islands: "In the north, the contemporary borders of the mainland of the peninsula Korea stretch from the northwest, the mouth of the Yalu river which forms the border line of the Chinese province Leau-tong, from the 40th degree of northern latitude in the northeast direction, till the 42°19' degree of northern latitude, where the Tumen or Tsinhing, constituting the most northeast border, flows into the sea. Besides, between these two rivers, the huge mountain chain of the Petheŭ-schan or Tschan-pe-schang, the White Mountains, which owes its name to its peaks eternally covered with snow, and the highest peak of which is said to be one of the highest in the world, also separates Korea from the Chinese empire. The Tumen constitutes the south line of the territorial parts of the East coast which previously belonged to China and in the last twenty years was ceded to Russia south of the Amur; like the Yalu it rises from the mountains of the

Petheŭ-schan” (Oppert 1880:12). Oppert was more interested in marking Baekdusan’s role in the border line between Korea and the neighbouring countries than in other characteristics of the mountain. In slipshod manner he dealt with the height of the mountain stating in one place that “according to statements of the aborigines” it is about 11 German miles high (Oppert 1880:12) while in another place he complained that it “still did not become known to European researchers” (Oppert 1880:21). It might be assumed that the reason why Oppert was more concerned with defining Baekdusan’s position at the Korean border lies in his preoccupation with the idea of pushing Korea to opening its gates to foreign countries. He stubbornly believed that Korea could be reformed only by foreign powers. As we can see from the preface of his book, this belief drove him so far as to happily draw the picture of an imagined Russian intervention into Korean affairs.

The ratification of the treaty between Korea and Germany on the 26th of November, 1883, which was made possible under changed internal and international conditions, finally opened the door for German citizens in Korea, and in the following period a few German diplomats, merchants, jurists, diverse technical specialists and scholars came to the country. Baron Paul Georg von Möllendorff took the most prominent place in the early history of the Germans’ activities in Korea. Yet, the majority of these German “pioneers” did not leave us reports about their experiences in Korea in form of travel accounts or other published books. Mostly they wrote their reports in their official capacity and sent private correspondence to their homeland (letters, reports to their institutions and the like).

At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century a few German journalists and travel writers visited Korea and published their observations gained in the country. Among them was Otto E. Ehlers who already had made a name for himself by his travel accounts in India, Indo-China and Samoa. His journey in East Asia, undertaken between 1892 and 1895,<sup>2</sup> led him to Hong Kong, Canton, Macao, Shanghai, Jifu, Tientsin and Peking. Then, after a short excursion to Mongolia, Ehlers spent four weeks in Korea. In Korea, Ehlers stayed for a while in the capital and then went

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2. The exact date of the journey is not mentioned anywhere in the book. The preface of the book’s editor is dated November 1896. In the chapter about Korea Ehlers cites statistics of 1891.

by ship to the port cities of Busan and Weonsan, referred to by the Japanese names Fusan and Gensan in his book. Ehlers' travel account *Im Osten Asiens* (In the East of Asia) is penetrated with the prejudiced views of the dominant white race against the seemingly minor races in East Asia (1990). Though, in comparison to his totally negative view on the Chinese, the Koreans are treated far better in his description. Baekdusan is nowhere mentioned in Ehlers' travel account. Only the Tumen River appears on the last page of his book where Ehlers discusses the geopolitical situation of the contemporary time (Ehlers 1990:390).

In contrast to the prejudiced views of the white man which we find in Ehlers' travel account and that of Ernst von Hesse-Wartegg (1895) and Rudolf Zabel (1906), the report of the journalist, travel writer and geographer Siegfried Genthe is characterized by relative impartiality and objectivity. Genthe, a longtime foreign correspondent of the *Kölnische Zeitung*, sailed from Tientsin, China, to the Korean port Jemulpo (today's Incheon) and arrived in Seoul on June 22, 1901. After a short stop there, he travelled through large parts of central Korea visiting, among others, the German gold mine in Danggogae. Then he wandered northwards to see the Buddhist monasteries in the Diamond mountains, the holy mountains as he called them. After a long journey of about 300 km through territories still almost not touched by foreigners, Genthe returned to Seoul. Finally, he ventured to climb Hallasan on Jeju-do, perhaps the first European to do so. First, Genthe's experiences in Korea were published in the *Kölnische Zeitung* from October 13, 1901 until November 30, 1902 (Bräsel 2005:xxvi). Later they were printed in book form titled *Korea: Reiseschilderungen* (Korea. Travel Accounts). In his travel account Genthe did not mention Baekdusan. Only the rivers Yalu and Tumen appear as contemporary border rivers in the north of the Korean state, and this information is only given as a side notice in a passage about the history of Buddhism in Korea (Genthe 1905:139).

## Conclusion

In the discussed travel accounts of Germans information about Baekdusan is very scarce, and there is little reference to the Korean border region at all. Unlike the Russians and British, the German travellers were just interested

in the geophysical conditions of the mountain. And, more importantly, they were concerned with the geopolitical position of Baekdusan as well as the rivers Amnok and Duman. Only in the handbook of von Zimmermann is the economic aspect of the rivers on the Korean border briefly touched upon, but this compendium does not belong to the category of travel accounts. In the German travel accounts there is no mention of the importance of Baekdusan in the system of Korean religious beliefs.

On the contrary, the travel account of Garin-Mikhailovski describes Baekdusan as well as the surrounding area in a multitude of aspects—the geophysical conditions, geopolitical and security questions, the fauna and flora, the habitat of the Korean people, their living conditions, and their material and spiritual culture. Garin-Mikhailovski was well aware of the fact that the Koreans venerated Baekdusan as a holy mountain. In his eyes, the holiness of the mountain was related to the belief in the dragon of Lake Cheonji and to the general belief of Koreans in spirits of nature. Quite different from the belief of the Koreans was his own view of the crater as the zone of absolute death. Garin-Mikhailovski's depiction of Baekdusan appears to have been considerably influenced by the literature of Romanticism. He got great artistic and spiritual inspiration from the sight of Baekdusan which is reflected in his description of nature. In his narration the rational reflections of an engineer and the sensibility and imagination of a writer coincided.

The different manners of depiction in the Russian and German travel accounts are equally the results of the different travel purposes and targets as well as the individual preferences of the travelers. Moreover, they seem to be influenced by the *weltanschauung* of the particular traveler. Also, it might be assumed with certainty that the traveler did not think and act completely free of his home country's geopolitical objects and strategies in those complicated times when powers from various corners of the world competed to gain supremacy over the Korean peninsula. It will be a task for the future to investigate the various influences of the Great Powers on the travellers' views of Korea more carefully than we could do in this small paper.

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## Abstract

The paper studies the question of how Baekdusan and the surrounding area in the far north of the Korean peninsula are depicted in travel accounts written by Russian and German travelers at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. The main focus of the research is on the travel account of the Russian writer and engineer Nikolai Georgievich Garin-Mikhailovski (1852-1906) who travelled to Baekdusan in 1898. Garin-Mikhailovski described Baekdusan as well as the surrounding area in a multitude of ways—the geophysical conditions, geopolitical and security questions, the fauna and flora, the habitat of the Korean people, their living conditions, material and spiritual culture. Garin-Mikhailovski was well aware of the fact that the Koreans venerated Baekdusan as a holy mountain. In his eyes, the holiness of the mountain was related to the belief in the dragon of Lake Cheonji and to the general belief of Koreans in spirits of nature. In contrast, in the discussed travel accounts of Germans there is scarcely any information about Baekdusan, or even about the Korean border region at all. Unlike the Russians and the British, the German travellers were simply concerned with the geophysical conditions and the geopolitical position of Baekdusan, and the Amnok and Duman rivers.

**Keywords:** travel accounts, Baekdusan, sacred mountains, Garin-Mikhailovski, folktales