

## Reluctant Travellers: Shifting Interpretation of the Observations of Hendrik Hamel and his Companions

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### ABSTRACT

The description of Korea by Hendrik Hamel(1630-1692) contained in the account of the thirteen years he spent in the country after his ship was destroyed in a storm off Cheju Island was originally written to inform Hamel's employers, the Dutch East India Company, of possible trade opportunities. Very soon, however, Hamel's *Journal* was commercially published in Holland to satisfy the curiosity of the general public about foreign climes. Before long the book was published in French, German and English and included in general collections of tales of travel, turning into a modest classic. In 1920 a Dutch edition was prepared based on the original manuscript, without all the distortions that had been the result of the complicated process of publication and (repeated) translation. Around this time the book also started to draw the attention of Korean readers. At present several translations are still readily available in Korean bookshops. This means that the book has almost continuously remained in print since 1668. Over the years, however, the reasons why the book was published and read have not always been the same. This article primarily aims to trace the publication and reception history of the *Journal*. Why was it thought worth publishing and what meanings have been discovered in the book over a period of more than 300 years? It also asks the question what the present value of the *Journal* might be, and suggests that it allows us some intimate glimpses of 17th century Korea that are unavailable anywhere else, while it also fosters awareness that at the time European attitudes toward Asia were much more characterized by appreciation and a sense of fundamental equality than in the 19th century, thus, in its own way, de-centering Europe.

**Keywords:** Hendrik Hamel, reception history of the *Journal*, European-Korean relations, travelogue, intercultural contacts.

### Introduction

The basic facts are well-known: when in 1653 the Dutch vessel *Sperwer* [Sparrow Hawk] was shipwrecked on the coast of Cheju Island, thirty-six men of the crew managed to reach the shore alive. Thirteen years later, in 1666 when only sixteen of them were left, eight men managed to escape in a little boat and reached Japan, where the Dutch East India Company had a trading post in Nagasaki. While he was waiting there to be repatriated, the bookkeeper of the *Sperwer*, Hendrik Hamel(1630-1692), wrote down an account of their adventures and a description of Korea in what now is known to the world as his *Journal*. It is a fairly brief text, which subsequently was published in many forms and became the subject of several studies.

It may seem superfluous, therefore, to pay attention once more to a text that is already so widely known: yet, there are various reasons to return to the *Journal*. The first is that there have been many complications in the reproduction and translation of the text, leading to all kinds of misunderstandings. This has made it more difficult to appraise the *Journal*'s value. A reassessment is necessary that is based on a full understanding of the true nature of the text. Another reason to subject the text once again to detailed scrutiny is that it was widely and regularly reproduced over a period of more than 300 years in Dutch, French, German, English, Korean, Japanese and yet other languages, and became in a modest way a classic. Whenever a text is read and published over such a long period of time, and even more so in different geographical regions, every age and every country will bring its own perspective to the text and will discover different things in the same words. Thus the reception history of the text by itself becomes a topic worth studying. Why did people in very different countries and different ages think the *Journal* was worth publishing or buying, and what did they read into it? What does its reception history tell us about the ways East and West have been looking at each other? Seen in this way, the *Journal* also invites us to search for a contemporary perspective. Of what present concern is the *Journal* to us, in this day and age? In this paper, I will suggest that one of the merits of the *Journal* is that it affords us insights in the problems of intercultural contacts and communication, issues that in the present, highly globalized world are of manifest importance. To lay the groundwork for a discussion of this aspect and to provide the necessary background I will address the other points mentioned above, and first review the nature of the various texts of the *Journal* that have been made available to readers all over the world between 1668 and 2004 and look for the motives behind their publication. Doing so, I will point out some of the problematic aspects of these editions. The discussion will not be limited to the *Journal* alone; I shall also refer to the information about Korea the shipwrecked Dutchmen presented to the Amsterdam scholar and burgomaster Nicolaas Witsen (1641-1717) for the second edition of his book, *Noord en Oost Tartarye* [North and East Tartary], which contains, among other things, the first list of Korean words published in Europe.<sup>1</sup>

### **The nature of the texts and the European editions of the *Journal***

That it is a mistake to call the book Hamel wrote a journal in the literal sense of the word will be clear to everyone who reads the text, even though this title was attached to it right from the beginning. It is not a day-by-day account written over a period of thirteen years, but a report composed during a limited period, probably no more than a few weeks at the utmost, while the Dutchmen who had escaped from Korea in 1666 were waiting in Nagasaki to set sail for Batavia (i.e. present-day Jakarta) in the Dutch East Indies. It has only been in 2003, however, that an important discovery was made public which explains the particular format Hamel chose for his description of Korea. The Dutch literary historian Vibeke Roeper,

who is a specialist in the history of narratives describing the maritime exploits of the Dutch in the seventeenth century, discovered that Hamel's account is structured by very detailed instructions provided by his employer, the United Netherlands Chartered East India Company (generally known by the acronym of its name in Dutch, *Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, as VOC).<sup>2</sup> This was a kind of check-list of items that VOC employees who visited unknown regions had to pay attention to. There were seven general headings; geographical characteristics, the organization of the state, commerce, agricultural products, the position of the VOC in the region concerned, and miscellaneous information, all neatly subdivided under sub-headings. It turns out that Hamel followed this model very closely, and sometimes even literally quotes the sub-headings. This is of importance for the interpretation of his remarks, a point I will return to shortly. In any case, the primary purpose of the description of Korea was not to satisfy the idle curiosity of a European readership thirsting for tales of adventure, but to enable the Directors of the VOC to judge whether Korea offered good opportunities for trading. Nor was the dramatic account of the storms the *Sperwer* encountered and the tragic shipwreck merely a tale of adventure. Hamel had to justify his actions and those of his companions. They had lost a valuable ship, together with its precious cargo, and needed to convince their superiors that they had done everything possible to prevent the shipwreck, or else they might be held personally responsible and punished.

The knowledge that the *Journal* was written to address quite specific questions the VOC had about the *terra incognita* of Korea, may significantly alter our interpretation of the text. The book has always been read as a general description of Korea while, as we have seen, in reality it is a systematic survey of the opportunities available to the Dutch East India Company to engage in trade there. This throws a different light on one notorious passage in which Hamel seems to judge the Korean people quite harshly. I quote from the most recent English translation: "... this nation is much inclined to stealing, lying and cheating. One should not trust them too much. Sharp practice is a matter of pride to them; it is not considered a shame."<sup>3</sup> Although this can in no way be interpreted as complimentary, it is important to realize that Hamel is not talking about the "Korean national character" in general (as the Korean translator assumed who added this heading to this section<sup>4</sup>), but more specifically about what one might call Korean "business culture." The VOC needed to know first of all whether contracts would be honored or not; that was what the question was about. Hamel counsels to be very cautious in this respect, because Korean standards were different from Dutch or European standards,<sup>5</sup> but

<sup>2</sup> The document was called "Memorandum to Traders and Other Officers: matters to which they should pay attention when writing their reports." See Roeper and Walraven, eds. 2003b:92-93.

<sup>3</sup> Roeper and Walraven, eds. 2003b:149.

<sup>4</sup> Hamel 2003a:130.

<sup>5</sup> The difference may have had something to do with the vast extent of international trade relations within Europe. Without a high degree of mutual trust, commercial relations with numerous business partners in many different countries, whom one could not all know personally, would be impossible. Self-interest dictated that one respect strict business ethics.

<sup>1</sup> Witsen 1705. For the word list, cf. Vos 1975:7-42.

he does not present a negative opinion about Koreans in general. In fact, in many places in his book he shows a highly nuanced and often favorable attitude to the people among whom he lived for thirteen years.

The original report by Hamel was of course written by hand and not intended for the general public; it was in principle only for the eyes of the Directors of the VOC in Holland, known as the “Seventeen Gentlemen”. Yet, very soon several manuscript copies were made, and it is one of those that nowadays is kept in the National Archives in The Hague and usually is referred to as the “original text”. Undoubtedly this copy is more authoritative than any other version of the *Journal*, but it is a copy all the same, as is suggested by a number of typical copyists’ mistakes.<sup>6</sup>

Copies of the manuscript were taken to Holland to be presented to the VOC Directors before Hamel himself returned. Some copies, however, went astray and fell into the hands of commercial publishers. This meant that the status of the text now radically changed. What had been a factual report serving the practical purposes of the VOC now turned into a tale of adventure to satisfy the curiosity concerning far-away, exotic lands of the Dutch public and quench their thirst for sensation. In itself the interest in such tales, which were very popular in seventeenth-century Holland, is a remarkable phenomenon. It underlines how outward-looking the Dutch were in this period, a fact that is confirmed by some of the adornments of the new Town Hall of Amsterdam, which was built between 1648 and 1665 (roughly the period Hamel spent in Korea). In the marble floor of the central hall there is a huge map of the entire world (including Korea!) and on the tympanum that crowns the façade one sees the figure of a woman symbolizing the city of Amsterdam, who receives products from all the four continents then known: Europe, Asia, Africa and America. The publication of books like the *Journal* was both an expression of the interest in foreign lands and a means to stimulate this interest among the public at large, making the commercial expansion of the Republic of The Netherlands an enterprise that was supported by the population as a whole. The particular nature of the VOC also contributed to this. It was one of the world’s first companies that issued shares, which everyone with some savings could buy. It is said that even wage labourers and housemaids in this way obtained a stake in the Dutch East India Company.<sup>7</sup>

In 1668 and 1669, within two years, no less than six editions of the *Journal* were published in The Netherlands, by three publishers, Van Velsen, Stichter and Saagman, while a summary of the adventures of the Dutch appeared in a book by Arnoldus Montanus about Japan.<sup>8</sup> With such cut-throat competition it was inevitable that the publishers tried to present the story as dramatically and

<sup>6</sup> For the supposition that the manuscript kept in the National Archives is a copy rather than written in the hand of Hamel himself. Vibeke Roeper adduces convincing evidence (Roeper and Walraven, eds. 2003b:93, note 29), although Hoetink, the editor of the first published version of the manuscript, thought differently (Hoetink, ed. 1920:XXV-XXVII).

<sup>7</sup> Gaastra 1991:34.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Hoetink, ed. 1920:130-144.

sensationally as possible. Hence Van Velsen and Stichter announced in bold type on the title page that the Dutch sailors “had spent thirteen years as slaves among the savages,” while the text justifies neither the use of the word slaves nor that of savages. Saagman, however, did much worse. To begin with, he added pictures he had used for earlier books, such as depictions of a banquet at the court of the Susuhunan, a local ruler, of Java and of crocodiles and elephants, and in the text inserted a passage claiming that crocodiles actually occurred in Korea in order to justify the illustration. This has damaged the reputation of Hamel to this very day. Very recently I have met a Korean historian who still dismissed Hamel as untrustworthy because of the passage mentioning the crocodiles.

Other changes introduced by Saagman were less obvious, and therefore more insidious.<sup>9</sup> To the description of the punishment for adultery he added several sentences. The first begins with the statement: “The men are naturally very amorous...” Whatever Hamel’s views may have been in this regard, he did not report them to his superiors in the original of the *Journal*. This addition is innocuous, but what follows is totally imaginary and misleading. It is claimed that when a man commits adultery with the wife of another, one of his nearest kinsman will have to kill him, if possible his father, and that the offender may choose in what way he or she will die, men generally preferring a dagger in the back and women to have their throats cut.<sup>10</sup>

These distortions of the *Journal* subsequently found their way into foreign-language versions of the book. Before long, the *Journal* was translated, first into French(1670), then into German(1672) and English(1704). In all these languages the *Journal* was reissued several times in the years that followed, with also a few editions in the nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup> This was of course due to the growing interest in Asia that was a consequence of European expansion. Unfortunately, translation always offers new opportunities for errors and inaccuracies, particularly when a translation of a translation is made, as happened with the English version, which was done from the French. Some mistakes in the translations are trivial, like the misreading of names, which were also partly adapted to the target language: Cornelis Caesar turned into Corneille Lesser in the French translation and Cornelius Lesser in the English version. Other mistakes, however, altered the meaning radically. In a sentence about persons who are not obliged to do serve in the army, Hamel wrote that this was the case with members of the nobility, *yangban*, and slaves, but the French and English editions speak of freemen[personnes libres(French)] and slaves.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> To account for the divergencies in various editions of the *Journal*, it has been suggested that Swaagman used another source manuscript, cf. Roeper and Walraven, eds. 2003b:97. The fantastic nature of the passages that can only be found in Saagman makes it more likely, however, that the changes were made by the publisher.

<sup>10</sup> Saagman edition of the *Journal* in the Royal Library in The Hague, Hamel 1668:21-22. Cf. Hoetink, ed. 1920:38, and for the translations, Ledyard 1971:212(English) and Yi Pyôngdo 1955: 320-321(in a facsimile reproduction of the 1732 French edition).

<sup>11</sup> E.g., Griffis 1885.

At the end of the section on punishments there is another addition that cannot be found in the original. It says that the people who are punished cry in such a terrible way that the onlookers suffer as much as the criminals. In part this seems to be inspired by a sentence occurring slightly earlier and left untranslated, in which Hamel states that the raucous shouting of the assistants of the magistrate inspires as much fear as the cruel punishments themselves, a much more realistic and less sentimental observation.<sup>13</sup>

At the close of the nineteenth century and in the beginning of the twentieth century The Netherlands saw a renewed interest in Hamel. This may in part be explained by the opening of Korea, but there was another factor at play as well. For The Netherlands, the nineteenth century was a time when in all kinds of ways the national identity was reinforced. The history of the Dutch as a seafaring nation was made one of the main ingredients in the national identity, which led to the systematic study and re-publication of travel narratives. In 1920 the manuscript in the National Archives was published in a splendid edition by B. Hoetink, who although he knew little about Korea managed to provide a wealth of informative background material. This of course opened the way to a much better scholarly understanding of Hamel's original observations on Korea, but also contributed to popularize the story. Children's books were an important medium in the propagation of the concept of Dutch identity as a nation of intrepid seafarers and the Hoetink edition led to the publication in 1929 about Hamel of a book addressed to a youthful audience: *De Ondergang van 'De Sperwer*[The Shipwreck of the Sparrow Hawk] by G.K. de Wilde. In the course of the twentieth century at least two other children's books would follow: *Hollanders op Korea*[Dutchmen in Korea] by C. Wilkeshuis and *De boekhouder van de Oost Indische Compagnie*[Bookkeeper of the East India Company] by A.G. Eggebeen. For adult readers who were unwilling to wrestle with the intricacies of seventeenth-century Dutch, H.J. van Hove provided a modernized Dutch version, which however in many ways is more like a paraphrase than an accurate translation.<sup>14</sup> His book leaned very much on the achievements of a much more scholarly work in English, Gari Ledyard's *The Dutch Come to Korea*, which had enriched Hamel studies by for the first time furnishing translations from Korean sources about the Dutch in seventeenth-century Korea.

There certainly was a need for a modernized version. The language of the original is not always easy to understand. Some passages are ambiguous and even in the seventeenth century could easily be misunderstood. Hamel states, for instance,

<sup>12</sup> This is correctly rendered in the Saagman edition, Hamel 1668:19. Cf. Hoetink, ed. 1920:35; Ledyard 1971:208-209; Yi Pyŏngdo 1955:314. The confusion probably was caused by the fact that in the original freemen are mentioned in a following sentence.

<sup>13</sup> Correct in the Saagman edition, Hamel 1668:23. Cf. Hoetink, ed. 1920:39, Ledyard 1971:213; Yi Pyŏngdo 1955:323.

<sup>14</sup> Hove 1989. The text of the *Journal* from this edition was reprinted by the city of Gorinchem, Hamel's home town, with some interesting additions about the Hamel's family roots, see Hamel 1997. From this it may be inferred that Hamel's family enjoyed a certain prominence, a supposition that is reinforced by the fact that another, but older, Hendrick Hamel, quite likely a relative, in the 1630s was one of the Directors of the West India Company. Good family connections might explain the preferential treatment Hamel received when he arrived in Java.

that in every town there was a place where the nobility would study. He obviously refers to the local schools, the *hyanggyo*. At these schools, he says, there also was a place where sacrifices were made to people who had died in the service of the government. The Dutch phrase he used, "dengen die om de regeringe om hals oft van cant geraect zijn," might also be interpreted as "those who had lost their lives *because of* the government. One of the Dutch editions (Stichter) followed this interpretation and slightly amended the passage for clarification: "because of *bad* governments." Nevertheless this is highly unlikely. At the *hyanggyo*, paragons of wisdom and virtue were worshipped, such as Confucius and Mencius. It was not the place to offer sacrifices to the disgruntled spirits of those who had died because of miscarriages of justice. For the latter category there were the *yŏje* sacrifices, which were performed at an altar outside the city walls.<sup>15</sup> It is also hard to believe that the government, which was in charge of the *hyanggyo* through the local magistrate, would in this way recognize its own shortcomings. The misunderstanding the Stichter edition introduced was unfortunately reproduced in the early translations, and compounded by other mistakes. The French translation, based on the editions of Stichter and Saagman, radically alters the meaning by leaving out any reference to sacrifices, stating instead that in these schools the young read about the "Condemnations of Great Men, who have been put to Death for their Crimes" (in the words of the Churchill edition, which follows the French).

In some cases the meaning of words in Dutch changed considerably over the centuries, obscuring what was meant to the modern reader. In the passage of the *Journal* about the examinations held to recruit new officials Hamel speaks of people who have obtained office "*inde politie*" and "*inde militia*". The Dutch word *politie* is still in use and in modern Dutch exclusively means "police." In the seventeenth century, however, it had a much wider semantic range and could also mean politics, polity or government. What Hamel meant, of course, was the latter. He obviously referred to the *yangban*, the two branches of officials, civil officials and military officials [*militia*]. The seventeenth and eighteenth century translations had no difficulty with this. The English edition speaks of "Civil and Military Commissions." In one modern, twentieth-century rendering into English,<sup>16</sup> however, the meaning of *politie* was misunderstood as meaning "police", and unfortunately the same happened in a Korean translation based on this English version<sup>17</sup> and again in what is one of the most recent additions to the "Hamel Library," an Italian version.<sup>18</sup>

### Korean editions of the *Journal*

For a long time Koreans remained unaware of the appearance of the first Western book about their country, but the Dutch sailors themselves were not completely

<sup>15</sup> Walraven 1993:71-93; Walraven 2001:247-264.

<sup>16</sup> Hamel 1994. The mistake has been corrected in the latest version of this translation, which is included in Roeper and Walraven, eds. 2003b.

<sup>17</sup> Hamel 1996.

<sup>18</sup> Hamel 2003c. The mistake is also found in a recent translation of the *Journal* into modern Dutch, Hamel 2003b.

forgotten. References to them can be found in the official dynastic histories, the *Chosŏn wangjo sillok*, the records of the Office for Border Defence *Pibyŏnſa tŭngnok* and the diaries of the Royal Secretariat *Sŭngjŏngwŏn ilgi*, and in the writings of Yu Hyŏngwŏn(1622-1673), Yi Tŏngmu(1741-1739), Sŏng Haeŭng(1760-1839), Chŏng Yagyong(1762-1836), Yun Haengim(1762-1801) and Yi Kyugyŏng(1788-?).<sup>19</sup> As the list of names shows, interest in the Dutch was sustained by the intellectual curiosity of prominent Korean scholars who wanted to know more about the world, possibly to apply this knowledge to reform their own society. Yu Hyŏngwŏn actually met some of the Dutch and discussed the use of coins with them.<sup>20</sup>

It was only in the twentieth century that the first versions of the *Journal* in Korean appeared. In 1917 an abbreviated version was published in the June issue of the magazine *Ch'ŏngch'un* of which Ch'oe Namsŏn was the editor. The historian Yi Pyŏngdo published a complete translation in the first three issues of the academic journal *Chindan hakpo*(1934-1934). For this he had a French and English translation at his disposal, but also the Hoetink edition of the Dutch manuscript, which somehow had found its way to the library of Keijō Imperial University, although for obvious reasons he could use the Dutch edition only to check the spelling of proper names. After liberation Yi Pyŏngdo revised his translation, mainly relying on the French text.<sup>21</sup> In his introduction to the revised edition, he suggests that one of the reasons why the text is of importance is that the advance of the Dutch to East Asia was an early stage of Western expansion. People of his generation, confronted with fast modernization along western lines, obviously felt a need to understand this process and the *Journal*, he felt, might offer a clue to this.

To Yi Pyŏngdo's translation several new translations were added in the decades that followed.<sup>22</sup> The most recent Korean interest, which of course comes from generations that have grown up in the period after Liberation, is motivated by considerations which differ significantly from those of Yi Pyŏngdo. As becomes quite clear from the two-part KBS documentary about Hamel that was broadcast in 1996, attention now has shifted to the way in which in the seventeenth century the Dutch, although a small nation of less than 2 million people, against approximately 12 million Koreans in the same period, managed to become a dominant economic

<sup>19</sup> For translations of the accounts of Yun Haengim and Sŏng Haeŭng, see Ledyard 1971:30-35.

<sup>20</sup> Palais 1996:886.

<sup>21</sup> Yi Pyŏngdo 1955.

<sup>22</sup> One of these is Kim Ch'angsu's translation, Hamel 1988. This edition claims to be a translation of the Hoetink edition, but this is most doubtful, because the translation contains some of the spurious additions to the Saagman edition that became part of the French and English editions. The translation is also unreliable in other respects. It says, for instance, that more than half of the population consists of slaves(p.94), although the original states that those who are exempted from military service (and who include both *yangban* and slaves) constitute more than fifty percent of the population. Also the fact that the translator claims(p.3) that Hamel returned to Holland in 1668 (rather than in 1670) makes it unlikely that he was really familiar with the contents of the Hoetink edition. The two editions prepared by Kim T'aejin, Hamel 1996 and 2003a, are based on the English version by Jean-Paul Buys. There is also a Korean translation of Gari Ledyard's book in a translation by Pak Yunhŭi, Ledyard 1975.

force world-wide in the course of only a few decades. The documentary makers above all wanted to retrieve the lesson that modern Korea could draw from this. While Yi Pyŏngdo looked for the roots of the problems and difficulties with which Korea was confronted in the first half of the twentieth century, forty to fifty years later progress in economic development had created a frame of mind that was much more positive. Now it had become imaginable that Korea would be able to follow the model of the "Golden Age" of The Netherlands and pull off the same feat as the Dutch three-and-a half centuries ago.

The most recent interest in Hamel in Korea has been stimulated by two other factors. The first is the general interest in The Netherlands generated by the unexpected success of Guus Hiddink, the Dutch coach of the Korean soccer team. The second factor is the growing importance of the economic relations of Korea and The Netherlands. This prompted businessmen and diplomats to take the initiative for a commemoration of the fact that Hamel and his companions first arrived in Korea, 350 years ago, by turning 2003 in a "Hamel Year," during which many cultural manifestations were organized both in Korea and The Netherlands. The Cheju National Museum, for instance, devoted an exhibition to Hamel and other sailors who were shipwrecked on the island and Yonsei University held a conference about the relations between Korea and the Netherlands in the seventeenth century. Yonsei University Press also published a book which contained, among other things, the first complete translation of the *Journal* that without any intermediary stages rendered the text of the original seventeenth-century manuscript into Korean.<sup>23</sup>

### A contemporary perspective

Above I have not only tried to show that the text of the *Journal* that was presented to the public has not always been the same, but also that the reasons for which the text has been read have been quite diverse. This leads automatically to the question why we should we read the *Journal* now: what value does the text have at the beginning of the twenty-first century?

First of all, it is a splendid and sometimes inspiring case study of intercultural contact. We see how a bunch of men who by accident have landed on totally unknown shores try to survive and find their place in a culture that is very different from their own. In spite of all the hardships and frustrations this involves, it also comes out clearly that even in such circumstances human understanding is possible. All through the narrative, Hamel furnishes instances of genuine friendship struck up with Koreans. The fact that he does not leave out the difficulties makes the *Journal* a true case study rather than an optimistic, rosy fable. A foreign businessman about to start working in Korea could do worse than reading (a well-

<sup>23</sup> The translation is included in Chi Myŏngsuk and Walraven 2003. In The Netherlands, too, the Hamel Year generated additional interest and resulted in the publication of two new renderings of the *Journal* into modern Dutch (one by Vibeke Roeper contained in a volume of essays on the background of the *Journal*, Roeper and Walraven, eds. 2003a, and one by Henny Savenije, Hamel 2003b).



edited and annotated edition of) the *Journal* with this angle in mind by way of preparation. His familiarity with an episode from Korean history that is widely known in Korea would also provide him with some cultural capital.

Another and related strength of the *Journal* is that it offers a corrective to the view that the expansion of the West from the outset was linked to a feeling of superiority of the West over other civilizations. That view is very much based on the form this expansion took in the nineteenth century. In the seventeenth century the relations between East and West are generally better characterized by the term partnership. When we read Hamel carefully, we note that his opinions concerning Korea are quite nuanced. Certain things he clearly rejects, like the way Korean men treat their women, but in many places his description of Korea betrays amazement and admiration. Korea's book culture and the way children are educated are cases in point. He also emphasizes the highly organized nature of Korean society, noting for example that weights and measures are the same all over the country (something which in The Netherlands was only achieved in the early nineteenth century). The high degree of Korean bureaucratic accuracy is illustrated by the fact that many years after the shipwreck of the Sparrow Hawk, in a place far removed from the place of the shipwreck, some of the hides that were part of the ship's cargo were returned to the Dutch. All those years the records made in 1653 on Cheju Island had been kept and the whereabouts of the hides were not forgotten. It should also be noted that in this case, quite remarkably, bureaucratic punctilio was combined with the humane impulse to help the Dutch in a moment of great hardship. Hamel's admiration for many aspects of Korean society, which does not fundamentally differ from the feelings of other Dutch travelers to East Asia around this time, contrasts sharply with the general attitude of Western travellers at the end of the nineteenth century with regard to Korea's ability to take care of its own affairs. This change may be explained by a decline in the situation in Korea itself, but the great changes in the West due to the Industrial Revolution seem to have been of greater importance. The Hamel *Journal* suggests the contingent, historical character of the feelings of Western superiority, which emerged at a certain moment and since the mid-twentieth century again have started to decline.

Thirdly, the *Journal*, together with the documents related to the adventures of the Dutch, shows an attitude to matters of race and nation that might be an example to modern times. Hamel and his companions were held against their will, but they were also integrated into Korean society, as their predecessor Jan Janse Weltevrete, also called Pak Yŏn, who had been in Korea since 1627, was to an even greater degree. If some of the Dutchmen had not tried to advance their repatriation by appealing to the Manchu envoys, they might all have become as well established in Korean society as Weltevrete. In the diplomatic correspondence with the Japanese that followed the escape of eight Dutchmen to Nagasaki in 1666, the Korean side in fact insisted that these men were "our people".<sup>24</sup> (Incidentally, the Japanese claimed the same because, they argued, the Dutch paid annual tribute to the *shōgun*.)

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Boot 2003:59-78.

One of the most lasting contributions of the *Journal* is the very intimate glimpse of seventeenth-century Korea it allows us, the thrill that we can actually share the sensation of being present on the spot. This effect is often created by small details that are the privilege of the eyewitness and cannot easily be found even in Korean sources. One of the most beautiful examples is the description of a royal procession, which among other things includes a graphic account of how on such occasions petitions were handed over by people who felt aggrieved by the government, who thrust them forward from behind a fence on a long bamboo stick, to be received by a royal secretary and put away in a small closed box he carried with him for the purpose. Another detail in the description of the royal procession equally provides us with the feeling that we come in direct contact with a moment from the long-gone past, but moreover, in conjunction with another travellers' report, suggests a significant change in *mentalité* during the last two hundred of the Chosŏn period. Hamel relates how the guards standing along the road with their backs turned to the pageant, hold a piece of wood between their teeth to prevent them from coughing. In spite of all the people in the procession, everything becomes deadly quiet when the King approaches: "It grows so silent that one can hear the hush of the people and the trampling of the horses." This does not only give the reader the sensation of being a witness of the event himself, but also bears an eerie resemblance to the description of the procession of the Chinese emperor in the travel *kasa* entitled "Yŏnhaengga" by Hong Sunhak, who visited the Chinese capital in 1866. Hong, too, emphasizes the solemnity of the occasion and the absolute silence observed by everyone: "not even a cough could be heard." Surprisingly, he prefaces his description with a few lines in which he stresses the noise and bustle that characterize the royal procession in his own country.<sup>25</sup> The conclusion that imposes itself is that in the relatively short span of two hundred years there was a remarkable change in the attitude of Korean subjects towards their monarch, a change that suggests a significant shift in social and political circumstances. The attitude toward public authority in the form of the monarchy seems to have altered quite radically by the second half of the nineteenth century, a fact with potentially wide-ranging implications, which without the *Journal* would have been difficult to retrace.

Other observations of the Dutchmen strike the reader by their frankness. As outsiders they could call things by name without having to worry about propriety and etiquette. Hamel's description of the way in which *yangban* go to Buddhist monasteries to enjoy themselves "with whores and other company," turning the monasteries into brothels and taverns (also, he adds, because the monks themselves have a predilection for "the liquid"), is difficult to forget once one has read it, particularly, I have to add, in the original Dutch, where Hamel's judicious choice of words adds considerably to the effect. A no less vivid image is evoked by the candid description in *Noord en Oost Tartarye* of King Hyojong's delight in his physical strength: "The King who ruled Korea when Mr. Eibokken [one of Hamel's

<sup>25</sup> Hong Sunhak 1976:161-162.

companions who became Witsen's informant, BW] was living there was a big and strong man. It was said that he could draw his bow by holding the string under his chin and drawing the bow with one hand.”<sup>26</sup> It is unlikely that any contemporary Korean would have dared to express himself about the King so freely.

Nearly 340 years have passed since the *Journal* first appeared. It owes its remarkable survival above all to the fact that succeeding generations in various countries have constantly looked at this slight booklet with fresh eyes, finding new elements that kept the text alive. In a sense it is wrong to think of the *Journal* as one book, not only because the differences between various editions are considerable, but also because in fact we are dealing with a whole series of related texts which meant different things to readers in different places and ages. In this paper I have attempted to show this ongoing process of rejuvenation of the *Journal* and also to contribute to it myself by presenting my personal perspective. It is up to the readers of future generations to decide whether the *Journal* will endure in the centuries to come.

<sup>26</sup> Roeper and Walraven, eds. 2003b:191.

## ABBREVIATIONS

VOC Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie

## GLOSSARY

Cheju	濟州	Pak Yŏn	朴淵/朴燕
<i>Chindan hakpo</i>	震檀學報	<i>Pibyŏnsa tūngnok</i>	備邊司謄錄
Ch'oe Namsŏn	崔南善	shōgun	將軍
<i>Ch'ŏngch'un</i>	青春	Sŏng Haeūng	成海應
Chŏng Yagyong	丁若鏞	<i>Sūngjŏngwŏn ilgi</i>	承政院日記
Chosŏn	朝鮮	Yi Kyuyŏng	李圭景
<i>Chosŏn wangjo sillok</i>	朝鮮王朝實錄	Yi Pyŏngdo	李丙燾
Hong Sunhak	洪淳學	Yi Tŏngmu	李德懋
hyanggyo	鄉校	yŏje	厲祭
Hyojong	孝宗	Yŏnhaengga	燕行歌
Keijō	京城	Yū Hyŏngwŏn	柳馨遠
Nagasaki	長崎	Yun Haengim	尹行恁

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