

Putting Korea back into Global Disciplines: Stewart Culin's *Korean Games* (1895) as Anthropology and as Encounter

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One of the reasons to go to a global conference like this, and frankly much of the appeal for me in flying two days to spend three in Asia, in the midst of a semester with much else going on, is that it shows what different scholars, differently located within the landscape of the world academy, are doing under the broad rubric of Korean studies. I think, if we are honest with ourselves, that we will perceive a disunity. We will see different ideas of what the task of Korean studies is or should be—there is no project of knowing Korea, there are only projects. Let me go further: I think this is a desirable state, to be encouraged and not to be overcome. This is meant to be at least a mildly controversial statement. There is a plausible argument that, given the youth of Korean studies as a field almost everywhere but in the Koreas themselves, we should be working together as much as possible to build from the ground floor up. There are certainly existing hierarchies of value that prioritize the big questions of social and political history (such as the social transformations of the Chosôn dynasty, or the origins of national division) and the study of pre-recognized famous historical and literary figures over other scholarly endeavors. I reject the legitimacy of these hierarchies; I think we can and should be working on the foundation and the windows of our little building simultaneously. Except, perhaps, where scholarship has a close relation to policy, the central question of Korean studies should not be whether a given topic is important, but rather whether the assemblage of topic and approach is interesting, revealing, or conceptually enlightening.

Another way of saying the same thing is to speak of means-ends relationships. We all, at some level, are engaged in the study of Korea, but is the reason for doing so self-evident—that is, “to understand Korea better” and to spread that understanding? Again, I do not think that is the relation that should automatically pertain. I think we increase the vitality and influence of our field by sometimes using Korea as a site, launching pad, or yes even excuse for novel engagements with other arenas of scholarly discourse. And this is meant, of course, as an introduction to the focus of this paper. I am presently working on a larger, book-length (just maybe two book-length) project on the American anthropology of Korea from the late 19th century through the 1960s or so. At the core of this project is a double marginality. In Korea and in the United States, the critical study of past anthropological discourses and regimes of knowledge production, for example in their interrelation with colonialism and imperialism, is a vital endeavor, but for obvious reasons the tendency of scholars writing in this vein has been to focus on the Japanese anthropology of Korea. Meanwhile, in narratives of the historical development and course of American anthropology, work on Korea has been almost entirely ignored. Statistically, Korea was seldom studied relative most notably to the centrality of Native Americans to the discipline, and those few U.S. anthropologists who did research Korea had minor careers relative to the intellectual heroes and heroines of the field. Nonetheless, I think there is some value in studying Korea as an anthropological object, precisely in its marginality, as it were *for* an engagement with this “dominant narrative” of American anthropology. The premise of what I am doing is that Korea illuminates *conceptual* lacunae and gaps in central historical and theoretical self-understandings of the anthropological discipline. So in other words, while I am doing a

“Korea project,” I am doing it with an eye towards an arena of academic discourse that tends to ignore Korea almost entirely.

I could offer several examples of the sort of illuminations I hope will result. It is a truism, for instance, that much of U.S. anthropology, with its focus on Native Americans, operated in a space of settler colonialism—that is, “Westward Expansion” within the North American continent. One product of this milieu was the hybrid Army officer-ethnographer; more generally, there is a sense that the military and scientific went hand-in-hand in this expansion and the problematics (for example, of administering Native American populations) that resulted. In Korea, towards the end of the 19th century, however, the first ethnographic collectors on the scene from the United States are naval officers, and likewise there is perhaps a broader sense in which their work exemplifies a different sort of intersection between knowledge and power, perhaps one centered on a survey (rather than administrative) modality of knowledge production. Ales Hrdlicka was a physical anthropologist and racist theorist, and also a scientific advocate of Korean independence, whose career I look at between the 1920s and 1940s. This was precisely the moment at which the larger American anthropological critique of racism and race theory was reaching its culmination, in response to both Nazism and U.S. anti-black racial discrimination. Hrdlicka was himself, in many ways, deeply racist—he made a scientific case in the U.S. Congress for the “nonassimilability” of Japanese, which helped build the case for the Immigration Act of 1924, the one that virtually barred Asian immigration to the U.S. until 1965—but at the same time his writings on Korea in particular help illuminate some of the political limits of anthropology’s antiracist

critique.¹ His concern was with the assimilationist racism conceptually imbedded within the colonial discourse of *Nissen dosoron*, for which the larger anthropological critique, focused on the more discriminationist (to put it mildly) practices of the Nazis, had no response.

In this paper, however, I want to center my discussion on the work of another, earlier individual, Stewart Culin. Culin was a founding member of the American Anthropological Association and published, in 1895, a candidate for the first anthropology book on Korea written in English. It was called *Korean Games*, and featured a compendium of the games and game-like activities not only of Korea but also of Japan and China as well.² Quite recently, it has been translated into Korean, as **한국의 놀이**, by 윤광봉.³ Now this is not a work of anthropology as we would recognize it today. It was not, for one thing, based on ethnographic fieldwork. Culin had never been to Korea, and would not go until 1913, and then only briefly. It is a product, rather, of Culin's work as curator of the Asian collection at the (then) new University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. Some of what *Korean Games* describes is now rather obscure, and insofar as this is the case it retains some folkloric significance. However, I want to make the case for a different sort of importance for this work in the history of the American discipline of anthropology, and in order to get there I am going to discuss two issues. First, why Korea—why is Korea front and center in the title of the book? And second, what did Korea, or Korean data, do within the larger realm of argument in which Culin participated? In short, I'm going to talk about how

¹ Robert Oppenheim, "Revisiting Hrdlicka and Boas: Asymmetries of Race and Anti-Imperialism in Interwar Anthropology," *American Anthropologist* 112(1), 2010, pp. 92-103.

² Stewart Culin, *Korean Games: With Notes on the Corresponding Games of China and Japan* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1895).

³ 스투어트 컬린, **한국의 놀이**, 윤광봉 역 (서울: 열화당, 2003).

Korean data became pivotal to a larger debate with a certain set of intellectual and institutional consequences.

First, however, some background is necessary. Culin grew up in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, as the son of a merchant. It seems he was not educated beyond high school. During anthropology's pre-professional era, however, neither of these factors were insurmountable barriers to an eventual academic career. Amateur learned societies, at the time, were a significant vehicle for the acquisition of social and cultural capital by the U.S. middle class, and Philadelphia in particular had a host of such societies that brought university-based researchers and people (mostly, of course, men) from wider society together. Culin was an active participant in several from the mid- to late 1880s, notably the Numismatic and Antiquarian Society and the Oriental Club of Philadelphia. There he encountered a figure who, according to Lee Baker, should be thought of as one of the three leading figures of late 19th century American anthropology: Daniel Garrison Brinton.⁴ Brinton held a position at the University of Pennsylvania and more broadly was an intellectual respected for the scope and depth of his erudition. He would become Culin's colleague and, it would seem, mentor, and would eventually assist him in his shift to employment at the Penn Museum after 1892.

Brinton was a textualist and a polymath who could hold his own in virtually any academic discussion, among the philological Orientalists of the Oriental Club, for example. But he considered himself an "Americanist." His passion was for things like Aztec (Nahuatl) poems, from pre-Columbian Mexico, and one interpretation of his career is that he sought, often futilely, to treat and to interest others in treating American texts

⁴ Lee D. Baker, "Daniel G. Brinton's Success on the Road to Obscurity, 1890-99," *Cultural Anthropology* 15(3), 2000, pp. 394-423. See also Regna Darnell, *Daniel Garrison Brinton: The "Fearless Critic" of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Department of Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania, 1988).

with the same respect that the Orientalists gave to Hebrew, Sanskrit, Babylonian, or Chinese writings. Given Brinton's position, it may seem odd that Culin, whom I've described as in some respects his follower, wrote his first articles based on ethnographic investigations of Philadelphia's Chinatown (mostly first-generation immigrants from the Guangdong region) of the 1880s. Culin, incidentally, was basically sympathetic, and he seems to have sought to counter the anti-Chinese sentiment that had led to the U.S. Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.⁵ The reason I mention this early relationship of their research, however, is that eventually Culin would argue for a position very like Brinton's Americanism, not *despite* his Asian research, but *through* and thus because of it.

From his general interest in Chinese-Americans, Culin came, at the end of the 1880s, to develop a specific concern with games. 윤광봉 connects this interest with a longer history of interest in play and the ludic, for example in Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens*.⁶ In a more institutional sense, it is worth remembering that in the late 19th century the divisions and subdivisions that would define the social sciences were still in the process of being formed, and "aesthetology"—the study of play and pleasure—was bandied about American anthropology as one of its possible subfields. But Culin's concern with games would also eventually access larger problems in evolutionary theory, to which I will turn below. Around 1890, in his work assembling and displaying collections at the University of Pennsylvania, Culin also began to show a specific interest in Korea. In this initial moment, he saw Korea as a site in which survivals of past Chinese customs might be uniquely plentiful—a refrigerator-space, in short, of the Chinese past. This combined quite conventional notions of Korea as a uniquely

⁵ Robert Oppenheim, "Fictional Displacements: Stewart Culin's Heaven and Earth," unpublished ms.

⁶ 윤광봉, "스튜어트 컬린의 놀이의식 고찰," *비교 민속학* 21, 2000, pp. 499-521.

conservative “hermit” country, and perhaps also the position of some Chosôn intellectuals that Korea preserved the civilization of Ming and previous Chinese epochs better than the semi-barbarous Qing themselves, with an emerging evolutionary anthropological doctrine of survivals as frozen crystals of past modes of social organization extant in but out of synchronicity with the present. Yet what I also want to note is that this initial framing of Culin’s evolutionary speculation was “culture-regional”; it was a linear, evolutionary reading of the then and now quite uncontroversial notion that Chinese and Korean civilization were interrelated. What we will see in a moment is the “scaling up” of Culin’s theoretical horizon, with Korea still at the center, but for a different reason.

This shift, and likewise the shift through which Culin began to participate in a more active intervention into the big ideas of evolutionary theory, with Korea as a crucial site, came at and through the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition held in Chicago. Owing to various successes in Philadelphia, Culin was tapped by the head of the anthropology section, Frederick Ward Putnam, to organize a large exhibit in the Fair’s Anthropology Building on “Religion, Folklore, and Games”—the last, on the top of the list of Culin’s personal interests, would also be in the lead in Chicago. In the course of the months-long event, Culin had two significant encounters that would lead to long-term collaboration and friendship. The first was with Frank Hamilton Cushing, one of the most famous, if also controversial, anthropologists of the late 19th century. Cushing was and is most well known for his work among the Zuni of western New Mexico, which for the time was almost uniquely participatory—to the point where he claimed membership of Zuni secret societies, the ability to intuit the prehistory of various Zuni customs, and

the ability to reproduce accurately Zuni artifacts for museums. Together, Cushing and Culin would co-develop a theory of the universal development of games of chance—dice, cards, and all the rest—from arrows used for divination. In Cushing’s hypothesis, it wasn’t much of a culture-historical leap from the arrow as piercing agent of fate to a regard for its fall as fate’s predictor. This theory would be amply on display in *Korean Games*. Meanwhile, Culin’s second great encounter at the Chicago Fair was with the small Korean exhibit set up in the Arts & Manufactures Building. This Korean exhibit, Korea’s first at a World’s Fair, has been reconstructed and discussed at length by Daniel Kane, 김영나, and at most length by 이민식.⁷ It is easily seen as a “move” in the informal diplomacy of a Chosôn under great pressure at the end of the 19th century. What I want to add is that it was also an important moment in the history of Koreanist anthropology. In this light, the most notable figure of the Korean exhibit staff was 박용규, who was not even an official member of the delegation dispatched from Seoul, but rather someone added by Commissioner 정경원 based on an interview in Chicago, largely because of 박’s good English skills.⁸ 박용규, in any case, took the lead in interacting with many American visitors to the Korean booth, including Culin and other anthropologists from the Smithsonian Institution, and in correspondence from 1893-95 he would become Culin’s lead informant on Korean gaming customs for *Korean Games*.

The key moment connecting these interactions came in mid-September, 1893, after Cushing had already left Chicago for Washington. At the Korean exhibit, Culin

⁷ 이민식, *콜럼비아 세계박람회와 한국* (서울: 백산자료원, 2006); 김영나, “‘박람회’ 라는 전시공간: 1893년 시카고 만국박람회와 조선관 전시,” *서양 미술사학회 논문집* 13, 2000, pp. 75-106; Daniel Kane, “Korea in the White City: Korean Participation in the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893,” *Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 77, 2002, pp. 1-57.

⁸ 이민식, *op. cit.*, pp. 143-146.

observed 박용규 demonstrating the game of 윗, in which thrown hemispherical sticks govern the movement of tokens around a playing board. Culin was immediately moved to recall Cushing's demonstration of two related Zuni games, *sholiwe* and *tasholiwe*, that also involve thrown sticks.⁹ As he wrote Cushing,

When Mr. Pak grabbed the sticks much has you might have done and made them sail up to the roof I was lost in surprise. They must fall | — | — | — | — one after another.¹⁰

Thus this Korean thing, 윗, became a lynchpin of their overall theory, a “missing link” between arrow divination and board games (like backgammon) played with cubical dice. It also didn't hurt that 박용규 was personally knowledgeable about Korean archery, apparently from his father (though his biography is murky), and thus himself embodied some of the connections Culin and Cushing were trying to make.

However, if to return to my motivating question we want to see what Korea and this Korean thing (윗) did within anthropological theory more broadly, we have to see the moves that Culin and Cushing's arrow divination-games theory made with respect to contentious issues of the time. For reasons of brevity, though I could say more, I will focus on a debate and a power struggle. The debate was between poles in evolutionary theory associated with the relative primacy accorded mechanisms of diffusion versus independent invention. Anthropological evolutionary theory was not homogenous, despite how often it is homogenized in retrospective secondary literature. When it came

⁹ See Culin, “Games of the North American Indians.” *Twenty-fourth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, 1902-1903*, W.H. Holmes ed. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1907), pp. 212-223.

¹⁰ Southwest Museum Archive, Braun Manuscript Library, F MS.6.BAE.1.16, Culin to Cushing 21 September 1893.

to the explanation of how (apparently) similar customs or material items had come to exist in widely separated regions, some posited long and often hypothetical pathways along which the items or practices had moved from some originary locus, while others, invoking the “psychic unity of man,” suggested that evolutionary laws had led to similar developmental courses taking place everywhere. By Cushing and Culin’s time, games were already strongly associated with one side of this debate: the leading evolutionary theorist E.B. Tylor had found in the uncanny similarity of Asian *parcheesi* and the Mesoamerican game *patoulli* a reason to argue for a long-forgotten diffusion.¹¹ In the connection of Korean 𪎠 and Zuni *sholiwe*, however, Cushing and Culin found reason to argue the opposite. The two games were widely spaced, and evidence for similar practices in the geographical area between was (supposedly) lacking. As a result, the relation came to occupy the cornerstone of their argument that their hypothesized divination-games trajectory had taken place entirely independently in Asia and the Americas, and hence also that the development was based on inherent evolutionary laws. In *Korean Games*, this aspect of their thesis is not as strongly expressed as it might be—until quite late, Culin was expecting that Cushing would write for him a more theoretical preface that would lay out the argument, but Cushing’s preface never materialized. Ironically, it is most explicit in the four-character Chinese phrase that Culin used on his title page, which obviously was lost on his English-language readership. 사해일가 (四海一家), “one family amidst the four seas,” was in fact an allusion to the “psychic unity of humanity” principle at the center of the independent inventionist position.

¹¹ E.B. Tylor, “On the Game of Patolli in Ancient Mexico, and its Probably Asiatic Origin,” *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 8, 1879, pp. 116-131.

Simultaneously, however, this same theory impacted an academic power struggle over the late 19th century version of the politics of area in scholarship and the hierarchical relationship of different area study traditions. Culin and Cushing's case for the autochthonous, parallel development of games in Zuni and Korea, America and Asia, was also a case for the independence and value of American studies in relation to the common attitude among scholars that New World phenomena could only be secondary or derivative from the Old—all those, for example, who had speculated that Mayan pyramids must have derived ultimately from Egypt, or that the Chinese must have had a hand in the advanced civilizations on the west coast of South America. In their correspondence, Cushing and Culin were quite explicit in their opposition to these “Old Worldly-ans.”¹² And here, perhaps, we come full circle to see how Culin's interest in Asia could simultaneously be supportive of a position like Brinton's, who had tried to articulate his “Americanism” while surrounded by Sanskritists, Babylonianists, Sinologists, and others who devalued anything that was not a classical literate civilization. So Culin, in short, while a pioneer of Asian (and Korean) studies, was also “Americanism's Asianist”; his Korea was part of a structural relation that built the theoretical universality of America. And if we want to see this value orientation play itself out, we only have to glance later in Culin's career. After Cushing's death and the turn of the century, Culin abandoned the argument for independent invention that they had held so central. Instead, he took up a diffusionist position that, against the tide of

¹² Stewart Culin Archive, Brooklyn Museum, 6.1.002, Cushing to Culin 25 February 1894.

hundreds of arguments going in the opposite direction, hypothesized that Asian civilization had derived from the Americas.¹³

Before this last turn, though, Korea had a brief history in late 19th century American anthropology as both the double of Zuni and the exemplification *par excellence* of the arrow divination-games hypothesis. *윗* occupied its place between arrows and dice; 박용규 pointed Culin to *척사점* and other forms of Korean divination using sticks; Culin claimed you could still see the markings sometimes found on Korean arrows in residual form on some packs of Korean playing cards. Cushing, the Zuni specialist in the pair, died before the invention of the current flag of the state of New Mexico; he doubtless would have been thrilled. In the event, however, when in the unpublished second half of his essay on “The Arrow” he discussed arrow divination, it was to Korea that he turned. The *태극기*, the new Korean flag invented by recombination of elements in 1882, to Cushing became “for un-numbered ages, the national emblems of the Korean people, and to them of the world and four seas.”¹⁴ The trigrams became arrows let fall onto a map of the four quarters of the world, to determine fate. In other words, for two anthropologists at the end of the 19th century, Korea was not only an important site for understanding a universal practical-cosmological history; cosmography was the basis of Korean nationality itself.

¹³ Culin, “America the Cradle of Asia,” *Harper’s Monthly* 106, 1903, pp. 534-40. Cf. Stanford M. Lyman, “Stewart Culin: The Earliest American Chinatown Studies and a Hypothesis about Pre-Columbian Migration,” *Color, Culture, Civilization: Race and Minority Issues in American Society* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1994), pp. 219-238.

¹⁴ Southwest Museum Archive, MS.6.BAE.4.1, section XIII, p. 1. On the origins of the *태극기*, see Andre Schmid, *Korea Between Empires* (New York: Columbia, 2002), p. 79.