Summary: The end of the nineteenth century was a pivotal period in the emergence of a globalised international system. Nowhere was this more consequential than East Asia, where expansionist Great Powers sought to extend their own conceptions of rights and international law, and encountered contestation by East Asian states, which advanced distinct visions of modernity, sovereignty, and universalism. At the nexus of these interactions were individuals with cross-cultural sensitivities such as John McLeavy Brown, the Irish-born Commissioner of the Korean Customs Service from 1893-1905. In his unique position, balancing the interests of foreign commerce against those of the Korean Crown, McLeavy Brown became a prominent advocate for Korean sovereignty and a close confidante of King (later Emperor) Gojong.

This symposium will take the lives of McLeavy Brown and others positioned between Europe and East Asia as a starting point to consider broader questions about the emergence of international norms during these critical years. We invite scholars from a broad range of disciplines and specialisations to contribute new insights about the experience of diasporas and professional sojourners at the nexus of changing ideas about modernity, nationhood, sovereignty, security, empire, commerce, rights, and citizenship. As in the aforementioned case of the interconnections between Korea and Ireland, we seek in particular to address Lynn Hunt’s contention that ‘small countries and states on the periphery of the Great Powers [had] a disproportionate impact… on the development of universalist conceptions of natural law and human rights.’

This symposium is intended to be the first of a two-part series, the second to be held at Yonsei University, Seoul, in 2025.

Deadline for abstracts: 1 September 2024
Submit to: LSweeney@yonsei.ac.kr

Call for Papers: Paper proposals are invited from historians of Ireland, Korea, or comparative studies broadly related to East Asia and/or the British Empire in the period 1850-1950, and may cover questions of cultural encounter, empire and diplomacy, the history of international relations, nationality and modernity. Prospective topics may cover, but are not limited to:
- Histories of cultural and artistic cross-currents between East Asia and Europe
- Expressions of modernity and identity in East Asian visual culture
- Tensions, crisis points, and debates at the intersection of nation, empire, and modernity
- Geographical networks of consuls, customs officers, and other professional or occupational migrants
- New approaches to Korean modernization and debates over modernity in the Korean context
- Asian cultural influences in the development of Irish nationalism
- Histories of international law, diplomacy, and rights in East Asia in the era of the Great Powers
- The role of cultural production, scientific research, and/or legal scholarship in shaping East-West relations at the turn of the twentieth century
- Experiences of encounter of Koreans abroad and/or Irish in East Asia

Illustration: John McLeavy Brown (5th from R) with the Chinese mission to the USA. Library of Congress.

Diasporas, Diplomacy, and Dreams of Modernity: 
Cultural Encounters in Turn-of-the-Century East Asia

University of Cambridge, 8-9 December 2024

**Introductory Speaker**
Dr. Kate Hill (Sotheby's Institute)

*John McLeavy Brown: A personal view of one family's 160-year connection between Ireland and East Asia*

**Keynote Speaker**
Professor Isabella Jackson (Trinity College Dublin)

*Foreign Office Imperialism: Managing Consuls in East Asia*