

# The “First Daughter” in Asia

## Alice Roosevelt’s 1905 Trip

By Benita Stambler

Adventure, romance and royalty, political intrigue. The 1905 diplomatic mission undertaken by Alice Roosevelt and others through Asia had it all, the uniquely personal combined with significant events on the world stage. Alice and her travel companions were witnesses to, and occasionally even participants in, incidents and decisions that affected the complicated diplomacy of that pivotal year. Fortunately for us today, the Smithsonian Institution has produced a website that includes two chapters from Alice’s autobiography with photographs documenting her travels. The website, *Alice in Asia: The 1905 Taft Mission to Asia*, follows the itinerary from June 30th through October 23rd of that year, providing the opportunity to glimpse some of Alice’s thoughts and activities.<sup>1</sup> The more than 250 photos included showcase Alice and William Howard Taft, at the time the US Secretary of War. He would become president less than four years later. The excerpts from Alice’s autobiography, *Crowded Hours*, provide her opinions of the major places and people that would become critical to US-Asia relations in the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup>

Alice was a lively personality, known for her exuberant spirit. But she was also a representative of the United States government in the person of its president, Theodore “Teddy” Roosevelt Jr., Alice’s father. Teddy had become president in 1901 upon the assassination of William McKinley, and was elected for a full term in 1904. Alice’s opinions on her trip provide the viewpoint of a young woman of twenty-one, not



1903 portrait of Alice Roosevelt. Source: Wikimedia Commons at <https://tinyurl.com/2p8k7hkm>.

much older than today’s students. Looking through her eyes provides an accessible glimpse of Asia and international relations on the cusp of change. Memoir entries, photographs, and souvenirs present her perspective in the context of an early twentieth-century diplomatic mission that would reverberate for many years to come.

In spite of her relative youth, Alice was not a naïve observer. In the very first sentence of her autobiography, she states, “I can hardly recollect a time when I was not aware of the existence of politics and politicians.”<sup>3</sup> Her impressions meld her experience in public affairs with an eagerness to embrace the unfamiliar, and thus provide a unique understanding. Yet she was not without preconceptions. She noted the gap between her expectations and the realities of her encounters: “At one large garden party, the last of the Shōguns was produced; a very old gentleman in unbecoming occidental clothes, not at all what a Shōgun should have looked like.”<sup>4</sup>

### The Global Context

Alice, Taft, and their entourage of about eighty people traveled to Hawaii, Japan, China, Hong Kong, Korea, and the Philippines, addressing US-Asia relations. One of the ostensible purposes of the trip was to set the stage for a treaty to end the Russo-Japanese War, which had broken out the previous year. Both Russia and Japan were drained by the fighting, and a formal ending needed to

Members of the Taft Diplomatic Mission aboard the *SS Manchuria*. Secretary of War Taft is seated in the center, second row from front, and Alice Roosevelt is sitting directly in front of him. Source: The Alice Roosevelt Longworth Collection of Photographs from the 1905 Taft Mission to Asia, 1905, FSA.A2009.02; Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives; Gift of Joanna Sturm, granddaughter of Alice Roosevelt Longworth, 2009; Photographer: Burr McIntosh, FSA A2009.02 2.04a.1





William Taft's shipboard table companions aboard the *SS Manchuria*. Alice Roosevelt is sitting in the center. Source: The Alice Roosevelt Longworth Collection of Photographs from the 1905 Taft Mission to Asia, 1905, FSA.A2009.02; Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives; Gift of Joanna Sturm, granddaughter of Alice Roosevelt Longworth, 2009; Photographer: Burr McIntosh, FSA A2009.02 2.02b.1

be negotiated. (The Treaty of Portsmouth was mediated by President Roosevelt and others and signed in September, 1905, while Alice was still in Asia.) Another purpose of the delegation was to make the included members of Congress sufficiently familiar with the Philippines to enact appropriate legislation to support its administration by the US.

This moment in time is significant because it connotes the transition of colonialism from the European model to the relatively new American imperialism. Early maritime explorations by Europeans, though competing at times with Muslim traders and the Ottoman Empire, had given way to outright control of far-off lands. While European countries had aggressively extracted resources from their colonies for centuries, such interactions had begun to change, particularly with the need to develop markets for manufactured goods. Burgeoning desires for self-governance in many of the colonies would explode into full-blown independence movements during the twentieth century. The US had just become a colonial power with the end of the Spanish-American War of 1898, while the new global rise of Asian countries was initiated by Japan's recent defeat of Russia. The ship that carried Alice and her group stopped in Hawai'i on the way to Asia. There, she was provided a very brief glimpse of America's new possession as it transitioned from independent kingdom to US territory, a preview of the expanding American sphere of influence that would be more fully visible later in the tour.

### Alice as a Young Woman

Alice's life began in 1884 with a tragedy, the death of her mother, Alice Hathaway Lee Roosevelt, when Alice was just two days old. Her father remarried and shortly produced five half-siblings for Alice. During her White House years she lived up to her "naughty girl" reputation through activities such as smoking and carousing, reveling in the many social events she attended. The sobriquet of "Princess Alice" was cemented through the royal treatment she received during her Asia tour as she met with the true sovereigns of Japan, the Philippines, China, and Korea.

Alice was on board the ship to Asia with a gaggle of elected officials including Nicholas Longworth III, a congressman from Ohio who was later to become Speaker of the House, his name memorialized by a building in Washington DC. Their romance

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blossomed during the trip; they were engaged barely two months after their return, and married another two months later.

On this journey Alice served as unofficial goodwill ambassador. Wherever they traveled, the Americans were feted with gifts and opportunities to view local traditional performances. Alice seemed singularly unimpressed by the sumo wrestlers in Japan, having spent so much time with William Taft, whose physique was similar. But she did relish many of her other experiences. Her father had hoped that such a trip would mature Alice, giving her a taste of conditions in the rest of the world. He also assumed she would be suitably exciting for the Asians, since she was the person most closely associated with nonexistent American royalty.<sup>5</sup>

### Japan at First

When Alice and the delegation arrived in Yokohama, Japan in July, they were met by "crowded streets hung with flags and jammed with cheering citizens, brass bands, and hundreds of Japanese banner-bearers."<sup>6</sup> The response to the Americans, particularly to Alice, was overwhelmingly positive. The delegation then took a



William Taft, Alice Roosevelt, and Japanese dignitaries arrive at the Imperial rest villa in Yokohama. Source: The Alice Roosevelt Longworth Collection of Photographs from the 1905 Taft Mission to Asia, 1905, FSA.A2009.02; Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives; Gift of Joanna Sturm, granddaughter of Alice Roosevelt Longworth, 2009; Photographer: Burr McIntosh, FSA A2009.02 2.09b.1

train to Tokyo to meet with the Emperor for a formal lunch, and had the rare pleasure of touring the Imperial Gardens.

Since the arrival of Admiral Perry's ships in Japan in 1853, US-Japan relations had been marked by contrasting assertions of power. Under its modernizing Meiji Emperor, the decade previous to this visit had been fraught with conflicts for Japan. The Japanese prevailed in the relatively brief first Sino-Japanese War that ended in 1895, gaining for the country influence over Korea and Taiwan. This was closely followed by the Russo-Japanese War, its treaty to be negotiated by Alice's father. The impending treaty would cement Japan's image of itself as an emerging world power. Alice arrived here like a rock star (before there were such celebrities), and the Japanese people turned out en masse for her.

Unknown to many, Taft and the Japanese prime minister met and recorded the results of their conversation. Known as the



Japanese children parading with Japanese and American flags to welcome the delegation.  
Source: The Alice Roosevelt Longworth Collection of Photographs from the 1905 Taft Mission to Asia, 1905, FSA.A2009.02; Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives; Gift of Joanna Sturm, granddaughter of Alice Roosevelt Longworth, 2009; Photographer: Burr McIntosh, FSA A2009.02.2.12a.4



Sumo wrestlers entertaining the American delegation.  
Source: The Alice Roosevelt Longworth Collection of Photographs from the 1905 Taft Mission to Asia, 1905, FSA.A2009.02; Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives; Gift of Joanna Sturm, granddaughter of Alice Roosevelt Longworth, 2009; Photographer: Burr McIntosh, FSA A2009.02.2.12a.2

Taft-Katsura Memorandum, it acknowledged that Japan was interested in Korea, the US in the Philippines, and each country would not interfere in the actions of the other.<sup>7</sup> While the impact and importance of this understanding are still debated, it was another step in attempting to codify US intrusion into Pacific Asia. While Taft negotiated, Alice went out shopping, taking tea, and partying with Japanese princesses. As they left for Kyoto, both Alice and Taft were cheered by crowds at the train station, in anticipation of a positive outcome for Japan at the conference to determine the end of the war.

## The Philippines

At the conclusion of the Spanish-American War in 1898, the US had acquired territory from Spain, including the Philippines, as well as Cuba, Guam, and Puerto Rico. The Filipinos objected to military rule and began their revolt against the Americans, who waged aggressive warfare. This conflict, known as the Philippine-American War, continued from 1899 to 1902. The end of the fighting resulted in discussion in both the Philippines and the US regarding how much independence was warranted.

William Taft had been appointed in 1900 to head the commission that represented the McKinley administration. He then served as the civilian governor-general of most of the country until the end of 1903. Thus, the period of the US defining itself as a new imperialist power and a force in Asia was underway. Fortunately, the Filipinos viewed Taft's efforts on their behalf as mostly positive, ensuring an enthusiastic reception when the group arrived. Part of the Philippines that was assumed to be included with the rest of the country was a chain of islands in the south that had been involved in various treaties in the recent past. This

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Alice Roosevelt arrives in Cebu, the Philippines, August 22, 1905.  
Source: The Alice Roosevelt Longworth Collection of Photographs from the 1905 Taft Mission to Asia, 1905, FSA.A2009.02; Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives; Gift of Joanna Sturm, granddaughter of Alice Roosevelt Longworth, 2009; Photographer: Burr McIntosh, FSA A2009.02.2.18a.3



Jamalul Kiram II (front, second from left), the Sultan of Sulu with attendants at Jolo. Source: The Alice Roosevelt Longworth Collection of Photographs from the 1905 Taft Mission to Asia, 1905, FSA.A2009.02; Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives; Gift of Joanna Sturm, granddaughter of Alice Roosevelt Longworth, 2009; Photographer: Burr McIntosh, FSA A2009.02.2.31b.3



William Howard Taft (seated center right, in white) with Alice Roosevelt (seated center left, with hat) as guests of the Philippine government. Source: *Britannica* website at <https://tinyurl.com/2nt3vdu4>.

## Timeline of Events Before and After the 1905 Trip of the Taft Delegation

1885	Madrid Protocol, an agreement to establish control of parts of the Philippines
1894	First Sino-Japanese War (ends 1895 with the Treaty of Shimonoseki)
1898	Spanish-American War ends, Treaty of Paris signed 1899, US acquires overseas possessions including the Philippines
1898	Hawai'i annexed by US
1899	Open door policy established by the US in China
1899	Philippine-American War (officially ends 1902)
1899	Boxer Rebellion (ends 1901), uprising against foreigners in China
1900	William Howard Taft appointed to Philippines as Governor-General (ends 1903)
1901	Theodore "Teddy" Roosevelt becomes US president upon assassination of William McKinley
1904	Russo-Japanese War (ends 1905)
1904	Theodore Roosevelt elected to his first full term as US president
1905	The Taft Delegation sets sail for Asia including Alice Roosevelt
1906	Massacre of Moros by American troops in the Philippines
1909	William Howard Taft becomes US president
1910	Japan annexes Korea
1911	Fall of Qing dynasty in China

archipelago had been at least nominally under the Sultan of Sulu's rule, on and off, since the mid-1400s. Centuries of conflict with Spain had ensued. The Madrid Protocol, an 1885 international agreement, ceded some control, but not full sovereignty, of the archipelago to Spain, while nearby North Borneo (which had also been part of the Sulu Sultanate) was placed under British control.<sup>8</sup> The Moros, a Muslim people of the Sulu islands, believed they were still autonomous, and so continued to fight against all outside powers. Thus, the visit of Taft (and Alice) came at a critical time.

Again, the delegation was feted continuously. Alice noted that 10,000 people participated in a parade to honor them. While on the island of Jolo, the Sulu Sultan was reported by the press to have proposed to Alice as they watched a performance organized for the visitors' entertainment.<sup>9</sup> (This rumor was not confirmed by Alice's account, although he did give her a pearl ring.) After this visit, the delegation toured other islands and provinces, even attending a ceremony to name a bridge after Alice at Sorsogon. In spite of these celebratory gestures, the Moros continued their conflict with the US, falling victim to a massacre by American forces the following year, and fighting for self-determination for many decades.<sup>10</sup>

### China

China's "century of humiliation" began with the two Opium Wars in the mid-nineteenth century and the unequal treaties that resulted from them. The Open Door policy, instituted by US Secretary of State John Hay in 1899, proposed that all countries have equal access to trade with China, giving the US an opening to expand its commerce, but serving to weaken China through additional international meddling. Recent losses in the first Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) contributed to the country's degradation. The Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901) was a violent attempt to restore some dignity to the country by attacking foreigners, with the intended result of limiting their influence in China. Again, the results were crushing losses, looting, and even more reparations as China's

sovereignty was further threatened. These conflicts paved the way for additional foreign meddling in the country and the weakening of the Qing dynasty, which was to fall in 1911.

After avoiding anti-American reactions in Canton (Guangzhou) that were part of this resentment, Alice traveled to Peking (Beijing). There she had an audience with the Empress Dowager Cixi, who ruled while her adopted nephew was too weak to resist her power. Alice was definitely impressed by her, exclaiming: "The Empress Tsze Hsi [Cixi] ranks with Catherine of Russia and Elizabeth of England, with the Egyptian Queens Hatshepsut and Cleopatra, as one of the great women rulers in history. . . . The character and power of the Empress were palpable and though at the time we met her she was over seventy, one felt her charm."<sup>11</sup> Alice acquired a portrait of the empress, given to foreign diplomats who visited. Further information about Cixi's portraits of this period, and a reference to Alice's audience, may be found on the *MIT Visualizing Cultures* website.<sup>12</sup> The newspaper article from the September 14, 1905 issue of *The Washington Times* that's included refers to the empress as "old, withered, and looking like one of the little jade gods in her Pagan temple" and "the terrible old woman," in contrast to the young and sprightly Alice, a comparison of the two civilizations in the personification of these two women.

### Korea

Both the first Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese War were significant for Korea, a land that was considered an important prize in these conflicts. The Taft-Katsura Memorandum, previously mentioned, assured Japan that the Americans would not interfere in Japanese governance of the peninsula. According to Korean Historian Donald N. Clark, Teddy Roosevelt expressed that "Americans had little interest in Korea and were inclined to 'let nature take its course.'"<sup>13</sup> The Japanese could exploit Korea without American objection, and they did so. Although Korea had tried to institute modernizing reforms in the 1890s, its position as a pawn in the rivalry among Asian powers had deleterious effects on the country's progress. An attempt by the Emperor Gojong and his son, Crown Prince Sunjong, to impress Alice at a lunch in the royal palace was unsuccessful, in spite of presenting her with their formal photographic portraits. Instead, she foresaw the decline of the country, the people unable to extricate themselves from their colonial predicament. As she noted, "Korea, reluctant and helpless, was sliding into the grasp of Japan."<sup>14</sup>

## June 30–October 23, 1905: Events and the Itinerary of Alice Roosevelt

June 30–October 23	Alice Roosevelt, William Howard Taft and others travel to Asia
July 14	Stop in Hawai'i on the way to Asia
July 25–August 1	Japan
July 27	Taft-Katsura Memorandum, codifying interests in Korea and the Philippines
August 5–30	The Philippines
September 2–6	Hong Kong and Guangzhou
September 5	Treaty of Portsmouth signed, concluding the Russo-Japanese War
September 5–7	Hibiya Park riots in Tokyo, protesting Treaty of Portsmouth
September 12–18	Beijing
September 19–October 5	Korea
October 5–13	Japan
October 23	Arrive back in US



Alice Roosevelt arrives at Incheon in Korea, accompanied by the American Ambassador to Korea, Edwin V. Morgan. Source: The Alice Roosevelt Longworth Collection of Photographs from the 1905 Taft Mission to Asia, 1905, FSA.A2009.02; Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives; Gift of Joanna Sturm, granddaughter of Alice Roosevelt Longworth, 2009; Photographer: Burr McIntosh, FSA A2009.02 2.42a.1

***“Since we had left Japan in July the Treaty of Portsmouth had been signed, and Americans were about as unpopular as they had been popular before.”*** —Alice Roosevelt

Alice was thus aware of the deteriorating political situation, reflected in several treaties with Japan that Korea was coerced into signing in 1905. These heralded the submission of Korea to Japan as a protectorate, with Japan controlling communication systems, waterways and foreign relations.<sup>15</sup> In just a few years, through further unequal treaties, Korea would be more fully subsumed to Japan, formally annexed in 1910, and occupied until 1945. Alice’s instincts provided a sense that the present, and possibly the imminent future, did not bode well for the welfare of the country. Her clues to this ultimate loss of national autonomy were based partially on two sad-looking photos and an uncomfortable meal, but the waning of Korean imperial power was nevertheless apparent to her. She described what she saw: “The whole people looked sad and dejected, all strength seemed to have been drained from them. Everywhere there were Japanese officers and troops, militant and workmanlike; a contrast to the poor abject Koreans.”<sup>16</sup>

### Japan Again

Although Alice and the mission had visited Japan early in their trip, the remaining delegation stopped again in early October on their way home. The group’s reception was very different this second time. In the interim, Teddy Roosevelt and others had negotiated the Treaty of Portsmouth to end the Russo-Japanese War, signed on September 5th. The Japanese people were of the opinion that they were the victors in their conflict with Russia. Yet, the treaty that was negotiated did not give the Japanese what they felt was their due, particularly in terms of the lack of indemnities placed on Russia. So, while the Americans were met joyfully on their summer arrival, by late fall their reception was more hostile. According to Alice, “Since we had left Japan in July the Treaty of Portsmouth had been signed, and Americans were about as unpopular as they had been popular before.”<sup>17</sup> Thus began the end of cooperation between the US and Japan, ultimately leading to major conflicts, in Asia and elsewhere.

To protest the treaty, damaging anti-government demonstrations broke out in Tokyo resulting in deaths. These destructive acts, known collectively as the Hibiya Park riots, marked the beginning of more than a decade of anti-government actions and labor disputes.<sup>18</sup> The police suppressed the riots domestically while the national government was intent on subjugating the Koreans across the sea. Alice, however, managed to go sightseeing without incident.

### The Effects of the Mission

While Alice alone may not have raised the status of the US in the world community, the overall effects of the mission that she was a part of may have had a positive effect on the country’s foreign relations, with certain exceptions. As mentioned, attitudes of Japanese toward the US changed in just a few months. These months were critical to the colonial policies of both the US and Japan, giving the two nations more prominent global roles.

The diplomatic journey also contributed to the international cult of celebrity beginning to surround Alice Roosevelt. *The New York Times* coverage of the delegation’s activities in the Philippines first states that the ball given in Manila to honor Alice was “the most brilliant and elaborate affair in the history of the city” before even mentioning trade policies that were under consideration.<sup>19</sup> In terms of engendering good will, any that reflected a positive view of the US might likely be attributed to Alice Roosevelt. She captured most of the attention and adoration that was accorded to the group. Certainly Taft, despite his high ranking position, did not cause the excitement that Alice’s appearances did.

### Additional Teaching Resources

The website *Imperial Exposures* uses photographs given to Alice on her journey as evidence of the ways in which Asian royalty chose to present themselves to Alice and to the world.<sup>20</sup> The Meiji Emperor and Empress wore Western clothes and were photographed in Western settings. Others, like the Chinese Empress Dowager, display the splendors of the remnants of a traditional China, holding on to the trappings that had signaled status and power. Those of the Korean emperor and his son seem to express their fading positions. The accompanying essay further draws attention to these visual clues and the political conditions that lay behind them.

Alice isn’t the only one who left evidence of a 1905 trip to Asia. Ernest Goodrich Stillman, then a student at Harvard, was on the same ship to Asia with Alice and Taft. Harvard’s Widener Library has created a website with many of the photographs he took and those he bought, along with information about the development of professional photography in Japan.<sup>21</sup>

The University of Cincinnati Library maintains an even more useful website with an accompanying book and analytical teaching guide of the photographs of Harry Fowler Woods, who accompanied Alice and Taft on their trip.<sup>22</sup> Its teaching guide includes several primary sources such as letters written by Taft, *New York Times* articles published during the trip, excerpts from an interview with Count Katsura (of the Taft-Katsura Memorandum), map exercises, discussion questions, and other classroom activities.

Alice’s escapades as a young woman were legendary, and she continues to exist in the popular imagination, including as the main character in a two-book series of mysteries by R. J. Koreto.<sup>23</sup> She’s also the subject of books for children and younger students, including an award-winning work by Barbara Kerley.<sup>24</sup> There are full biographies and anecdotes in family, political, and historical analyses of the period associated with her and her father.<sup>25</sup> She remained a stalwart doyenne of Washington society, an intrepid character to the end. ♦



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## NOTES

1. David Hogge, *Smithsonian Institution*, "Alice in Asia: The 1905 Taft Mission to Asia," accessed August 27, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/2p8fxwnf>. Click on "View the Travel Diary" at the bottom of the page for Alice's itinerary comments. See also *Smithsonian Institution*, *Smithsonian Online Virtual Archives*, "The Alice Roosevelt Longworth Collection of Photographs from the 1905 Taft Mission to Asia, 1905," <https://tinyurl.com/2p9xa9m2>, for the overview and individual photographs in the collection, with descriptions.
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