CARLO ROSSETTI

Korea and Koreans

IMPRESSIONS AND RESEARCH ON THE EMPIRE OF THE GREAT HAN

PART 1.

WITH 200 ILLUSTRATIONS FROM ORIGINAL PHOTOGRAPHS, 1 PLAN, 1 MAP
TRICHROMY TABLE BY P. A. GARIAZZO

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INTRODUCTION

Towards the end of October 1902, I was in Cefù on board the RN "Puglia", which had just received the order to return to Italy after an assignment of about eighteen months, brilliantly carried out, in Australian and Chinese waters. On the very day when the order was given, amid general rejoicing, to raise the "Homeward Bound" pennant - that symbol so dear to the hearts of sailors for whom it heralds the future joys of their distant home - I was unexpectedly instructed to leave the "Puglia" and board the RN "Lombardia", which was to take me to Korea, where the sudden death of Count Francesetti di Malgrà had left the post of His Majesty's Representative at the Court of Seoul vacant.

And thus, just as the shores of my homeland seemed to be coming closer, fate turned me away from Italy towards Korea, inevitably a very sombre prospect at the time. I still had very vivid memories of a long visit I had paid, throughout the previous July, to my good friend Francesetti, whom I had left in excellent physical and moral shape, bold, serenely confident at the age of twenty-five, full of plans and hopes. I was greatly saddened by the thought that not only would I never see my friend again, but that I would have to assume the office he had so admirably fulfilled, and move among the things that had been his, in places where we had spent long and unforgettable hours together. Even now I cannot fully express the infinite sadness of those distant autumn days.

There was talk then in China of a very fierce epidemic which was said to have erupted in Seoul. There were hundreds of daily cases of cholera and now it seemed that typhus was killing people too - it was typhus that had so cruelly snatched the young Italian Consul in Seoul from his friends, his family and his homeland.

The earth itself had something sad and gloomy about it at the time. Under the leaden sky of Northern China, the waters of the Yellow Sea, so aptly named, appeared even browner and muddier than usual.

The "Lombardia" was due to depart on 2 November, but that day a very violent sirocco wind was blowing, a sure sign that beyond the promontory of Shang-tung navigation would not be possible, and so we postponed our departure to the following day. The wind died down in the night, and on the morning of the 3rd the "Lombardia" left for Cemulpo, the Korean port closest to Seoul, where we dropped anchor on the evening of 4 November.

On the evening of the 5th, accompanied by the good wishes and farewells of my colleagues from the "Lombardia", I left that ship for good and set off for Seoul. The next day, taking delivery of the Consulate from Count Fecia di Cossato, a naval lieutenant like myself, who had been stationed there by the Commander of the RN "Lombardia" as soon as the death of Count Francesetti occurred, I assumed the office to which the Government had appointed me.

Thus began my stay, which lasted about eight months, in one of the strangest countries on earth, which has given rise to much debate for many years, but still remains one of the least known to Western scholars.

As far as my limited talents allow, I tried to take advantage of this fortuitous stay to study different aspects of Korea and its people, and I will set out the results of my attempts in the following pages. What I have written, simply and with no pretensions at all, is nothing more than a faithful collection of impressions and research on a subject of great interest, which certainly deserves a more thorough treatment. And here allow me to add that I was not expecting my book to be topical. Little was being said of Korea when I was rearranging my notes to put them into book form; all I had in mind was to work quietly and patiently on a book that would offer a faithful and complete picture of that distant Empire.

Then events crowded in upon us, and public attention was abruptly focussed once more on the Far East. Pressed on all sides, I found myself obliged to rush through the publication of a work which the multiple cares of my office did not allow me to carry out as I would have wished.

As a result my work is published today in a very different form from what I had initially wanted. These pages will contain nothing, or next to nothing, that has not been written already in one or other foreign language, but they constitute the first Italian book on the subject. It is a fact that until now very little has been published in Italian on Korea; apart from the translation of a German work, we have nothing but a very limited number of studies, some original, some mere compilations or more often

translations, scattered throughout the volumes of various journals or annals of scientific societies, and therefore available to a limited readership.

So, in writing these pages, I found myself not just taking the first step along an unexplored path - the first step, as we know, being always the most difficult - but having to tread a new and tiring path with the demon of haste constantly at my heels. I hope this will earn me the reader's indulgence.

If nonetheless this work can still lay claim to some merit, it is to be found in the abundant illustrations, for the most part original, which the Graphic Arts Institute, with the care and skill which are its hallmark, was able to produce from my photographs. I can say with absolute certainty that in this respect the work is truly innovative, for never, in Italy or elsewhere, has a book on Korea contained a greater number of illustrations.

I must therefore express my sincere thanks to that excellent Institute, which has taken such care with every detail of the artistic side of the publication. Before ending this introduction, I must also thank the talented painter P. A. Gariazzo, who produced the originals of the beautiful three-coloured illustrations which adorn this work; my only regret is that the demands of publication prevented the reproduction of all of the beautiful illustrations he prepared.

Finally, I must acknowledge the great help which a number of publications on Korea have given me in compiling the text, in particular the *Opisanie Korea* (Description of Korea) published by the Russian government, the *Korean Repository*, a monthly publication of inestimable value that was published in Seoul in 1892 and from 1895 to 1898, and its successor the *Korea Review,* which began publication in 1901 under the able direction of Prof. H. B. Hulbert, one of the most passionate scholars of Korea and its people.

SHORT PRELIMINARY NOTES.

Where is Korea? - First news of the Korean peninsula - Korea and Italy - Mountains, rivers and ports - Climate - Mines, fauna and flora - Korean anthropometry - Physical beauty and moral deficiency.

If I am to believe what I read in the preface of books, printed in England as well as in the United States, about Korea, it would seem that the public in both those countries does not have a very clear idea, generally speaking, of where Korea is to be found. Dr. Allen, in his *Korean Tales,* recounts that he was asked in Washington if Korea was not by chance a Mediterranean island, while others who talked to him were under the vague impression that it lay somewhere in the Coral Sea. Mrs. Bishop, in her *Korea and its Neighbors*, tells us that, as she was preparing to leave for Korea, some of her friends, guessing where it might be, placed it at the equator, some on the Black Sea and some in the Greek archipelago. Many other authors tell similar stories and use the excuse for a long and detailed lesson in Korean geography.

In Italy, God willing, we are not quite so ignorant. Although we constantly complain, not without reason, that the study of geography is neglected in our country, I do not think that nowadays even poorly educated Italians are unaware of Korea's location. I would certainly risk looking ridiculous if, for example, I were to say that the East Asian peninsula stretching from the 34th to the 43rd parallel north of the equator and from the 124th to the 131st parallels east of the Greenwich meridian, between the Yellow Sea and the Sea of Japan, is Korea.

However, it must be admitted that most people's general knowledge stops there, and so some limited geographical information might not be completely superfluous before continuing.

News of the Korean peninsula did not reach Europe until the second half of the seventeenth century, when the Dutch mariner Hendrik van Hamel published in Rotterdam the story of his captivity, together with several of his companions, in that distant land following the shipwreck of their vessel. However, his account was not very good, due perhaps to his station in life - Hamel was a helmsman on board the *Sperwer*, who certainly did not consider himself either a geographer or a writer - or to the very sad circumstances in which he had to spend his years in Korea, and his account was necessarily vague and incomplete.

The years passed and for almost two centuries the efforts of all navigators to unravel the mystery of those regions were unsuccessful. It is only in the second half of the XIXth century that we find for the first time, in the extensive Introduction of the *Histoire de l'Eglise de Corée*, published in Paris by Father

Dallet in 1874, a comprehensive and accurate enough account of the geography, history, customs and habits of the Korean nation, based on the reports of the apostolic missionaries present in Korea from 1835 onwards.

A few years later, in 1881, Professor Griffis, of the University of Tokyo, also published a work on Korea, *Korea the Hermit Nation*, making use of much of the material collected by Fr. Dallet, and only adding new material in its historical part, drawn essentially from Japan or derived from Japanese, Chinese and Korean sources.

For many years these two works by Dallet and Griffis contained the most exact written information available to Western readers on the Korean peninsula. It is a curious fact that neither of these authors had ever set foot in Korea, whereas subsequent works by travelers who had visited the country were very inferior.

Meanwhile, Korea was gradually opening up to trade with the West: an initial treaty was signed in 1883 with the United States, followed shortly afterwards by treaties with England, Germany, Italy, Russia and France, and geographical studies naturally benefited from the relations thus established with the "Hermit Nation".

Travel for scientific purposes across the peninsula gradually became more frequent, so that today Korea can be said to be fully known, although much remains to be done to ensure that our knowledge is scientifically accurate.

The current state of knowledge about Korea is admirably set out in the *Description of Korea* compiled by the Finance Ministry of the Russian Empire and published by the same department in Petersburg in 1900.

I will have several opportunities in the following pages to discuss topics of geographical interest in more detail, so in these preliminary notes I will confine myself to what is strictly necessary to help the reader gain a general idea of the country that concerns us.

The Korean peninsula is bordered in the north by Manchuria and eastern Siberia, from which it is separated by the two rivers Yalù (Am-nok) and Tumen; it lies between the Sea of Japan in the east and the Yellow Sea in the west; in the south, the strait of Korea separates it from Japan.

Its general shape is reminiscent of Italy. Like Italy, it is generally mountainous: the very high massif of Pek-tu San, "the white-capped mountains", puts us in mind of the Alps, while the chain which includes the Diamond Mountains (Tek San) and which runs the length of the peninsula could well be called the Korean Apennines. In the Tatong river we might see the Korean Arno; in the Han, the Tiber; and in the island of Quelpart, Sicily. Just as in Italy, there is a very marked difference between the western and eastern coasts of Korea: the former is very indented and full of good harbours, while the latter is uniform, monotonous and unsafe. Korea also has its Tuscany in the province of Ciulla Do, known as the Garden of Korea both for its fertile soil and its beautiful landscapes; and its Piedmont in the northern province of Pyeng-An Do, whose inhabitants are more familiar with the harsh conditions of war than the mildness of the liberal arts, and which still today supplies the nation with its best fighters, the celebrated braves of Pyeng-yang.

The peninsula is well watered by numerous rivers. In addition to the Yalù and Tumen, which from their source to their mouth form the northern border of the country, separating Korea from Manchuria and the provinces of eastern Siberia, we should note the Ta-tong, which flows into the Yellow Sea at the open port of Cinnampò; the Han, commercially the most important of Korea's rivers, which also flows into the Yellow Sea near the country's leading port Cemulpo, after passing a short distance from the capital Seoul; and finally the Nak-tong, which flows from north to south to its mouth in the Strait of Korea at the new and well-known port of Massampò.

The peninsula's lakes are few and unremarkable: the Tal-ti alone, near Pek-tu San, deserves a mention.

On the other hand, there are numerous ports and those now open to foreign trade are especially noteworthy: Cemulpo, Mokpò, Cinnampò, Massampò, Fusan, Wonsan (Ghensan), Kunsan and Song-cin. A serious drawback found in most of those located on the Yellow Sea coast is the very strong tide, sometimes as high as ten meters, which greatly limits the depth of water available for ships to drop anchor, forcing them to remain a considerable distance from the coast.

The climate varies considerably from one part of the peninsula to another: very mild in the south, where the influence of the warm current of the Kuroshiwo is still felt, and generally very cold in the north. In Seoul in winter the cold is intense and it is not uncommon for the thermometer to drop to 23

degrees below zero; these periods last for no more than fifteen days during which the Han river freezes as far as the estuary. Winters are generally dry; in March and April north-easterly and north-westerly winds prevail; fine weather begins in May and lasts until the end of June. July is the wettest month of the year, when the rains are incredibly, almost frighteningly, heavy. August is the hottest month, and in Seoul the temperature rises to 32° or 33°; in September the prevailing winds are from the south-east, and it is in this month that there is the greatest risk of typhoons, those violent storms that constitute one of the worst hazards of these regions. October, November and December are generally splendid.

The soil of Korea is very fertile and in some places in the province of Ciul-La Do there are normally two harvests a year. The country also possesses considerable mineral wealth, and although an exact geological survey of the peninsula has not yet been carried out, relatively large deposits of iron, silver, copper, tin, lead and coal have already been found in numerous places, in addition to gold which is the main product of Korea's mines and of which a fair quantity is already exported.

Korea's fauna is very varied and includes many species of animals of great value: above all tigers, but also numerous leopards, bears, deer, wild cats, foxes and wild boars. The horses are small and ugly, very similar to Chinese ponies and even hardier; on the other hand, the cattle are beautiful and constitute one of the riches of the country. Among the birds the pheasant is pre-eminent, but there are also a great many herons, ibis, wild ducks, pigeons, chickens, storks, and so on. Together they make Korea a true paradise for hunters.

Even the flora, if not as varied and rich as that of neighboring Japan, is also of some interest. Tall trees abound, and the forests of elm, pine and fir are very dense. On the other hand, fruit trees are few, and the fruit they bear is tasteless. Of particular note is a certain type of very beautiful pear: describing it, one writer says that it all depends on how you consider it - as a turnip it would be delicious. One plant apparently peculiar to the peninsula is gin-seng (*panax quinquefoglia*), which has a very high therapeutic value in classical Chinese medicine, and which seems to be found in the wild only in the dense forests of North Korea.

The people who inhabit the peninsula undoubtedly have some Mongolian features, but they are clearly different from the Chinese as well as the Japanese, being physically much more attractive than either. In all probability, they are to be considered as the product of the overlap of Mongoloid families with the original inhabitants of the peninsula, who, according to studies conducted by an able group of distinguished scholars from the Far East (among whom I must single out the venerable Dr. Edkins of Shang-hai, Professor Hulbert of Seoul and Professor Baeltz of Tokyo), were members of southern, Indo-Malay, or perhaps even Kanaka, tribes, who emigrated to the north, moving in the opposite direction to all other major human migrations.

Together with my excellent friend Emilio Bourdaret, an engineer with the Imperial House of Korea and author of a highly regarded study on Koreans published in the Annals of the Anthropological Society of Lyon, I tried to take advantage of my stay in Seoul to collect as many anthropometric observations as possible of Korean individuals. Unfortunately, while I was lucky enough in the photographs taken of the face and profile of a good number of subjects, the difficulties I encountered on the part of the natives, who seemed to see some kind of malicious black magic in these very innocent measurements, were so numerous that I was unable to make enough observations to reach any valid conclusions. More fortunate than I, Bourdaret obliged all the workers he employed on the construction of the Seoul-Songdo railway to be measured in advance, so that he was able to make at least a few hundred observations, certainly not enough to provide definitive conclusions, but sufficient to give an approximate idea of the physical characteristics of the Koreans.

Their stature is considerably above average. After measuring 113 individuals, Bourdaret found their average height to be 1.62 metres, the same result as Lubentoff obtained from 247 measurements made in the province of Ham Kyeng Do, and as Elisseyeff obtained. The average height of the Chinese, according to Deniker, seems to be 1.61 metres, while that of the Japanese is between 1.57 and 1.59 metres.

Koreans are brachycephalic. Their head is short: the average anteroposterior diameter is 177 millimetres and the transverse 148 mm. The cephalic index found by Bourdaret is 83.61, while Deniker, based on the observations of Elisseyeff, Koganei and Bogdanoff, gives an average index of 82.3 for living subjects.

Their skin is of a pale white color closely resembling that of the Japanese, although in the lower classes a brownish tint is frequently observed. In women of all classes, the skin is always very white.

The eyes, always black, slightly oblique, are much less so than those of the Chinese and Japanese, and cases of absolutely horizontal eyes are not uncommon.

The nose is often flattened, with an average width of 36 mm and an average length of 49 mm, but straight, regular noses, and sometimes even aquiline noses, are not exceptional.

The hair is always straight, thick and black. The beard is generally much fuller than in the Japanese and lighter in color than the hair.

Of robust constitution, hardy, and of more than average height, the Koreans undoubtedly constitute a fine race.

However, moving from the physical to the moral, we have the downside. Physical strength does not correspond to moral strength; the Korean is certainly endowed with excellent qualities, but over them all hangs, like a veil, the most excruciating apathy.

The product of the grafting of a southern people onto an eastern branch of the large Mongolian stock, the Korean people seem to be proof of the biological law which condemns the mixed descendents of very dissimilar races to premature extinction: if not physically, the Korean is now morally exhausted.

The last eastern bulwark to be penetrated by the West, voluntarily shut off for over thirty centuries from the rest of the world, the continual object of invasions by greedy neighbors eager to conquer its fertile valleys, the scene of endless wars, the empire of Korea and its people offer today a very sad spectacle of misery and squalor.

Yet Korea has also had its glorious past. There was a time when, its people having been drawn into the orbit of Chinese civilization, art and literature, practised with enthusiasm and honor, flourished in the peninsula, and Korean artists enjoyed an undisputed fame as far as the Great Middle Empire, where writers were pleased to call Korea "Little China". It was a time when the inhabitants of the then semi-barbaric Japan regarded Korea as a promised land, a cradle of all art, and a storehouse of all wealth.

Today little remains of that glorious past. To say however, as some do, that present-day Korea has nothing of interest to offer and nothing worth studying is a rash exaggeration.

THE FORMER KOREAN STATES.

The legend of Tan-gun, Lord of the Sandalwood tree – Ki-già, founder of the kingdom of Ciu-sen - Origin of Korean hats - The three Han - Ko-gu-ryu, Sil-la and Pak-gié - Ko-ryu - The descent of the Mongols - The Ming.

Translated into English by Jeffrey Russell

TWO THOUSAND three hundred and thirty-two years before our era, in the twenty-fifth year of the reign of the Chinese Emperor Yao, Prince Whan-ung, son of Whan-in, the Creator, appeared on the summit of Mount Myo Hyang San, in the Korean province of Pyeng-An, in the shade of a sandalwood tree, *pak-tal*, surrounded by three thousand heavenly spirits. Bored with the monotony of the skies and the stellar spaces, he had descended on our planet to found a terrestrial kingdom there which he first sought to govern with the help of three trusted lieutenants: the *General of the Wind*, the *Governor of the Rains* and the *Master of the Clouds*. For some time he believed he could retain his spiritual form, but the demands of government soon convinced him of the need to assume human form as soon as possible, so that his physical presence would give him the necessary authority to maintain the ordered existence which he desired for his people. To do this, the simplest method which that divine being found was to convert a bear into a woman, and when she felt the first desire for motherhood arise in her heart, he wrapped her in the power of his spiritual nature, and the woman's desire was satisfied. The boy grew up in the shadow of the same pak-tal, and, when he reached manhood, the people elected him king with the name of Tan-gun or "Lord of the Sandalwood tree."

Tan-gun taught the people the duties of subjects both to their sovereign, and to their fellow men, he instituted marriage and founded the art of cooking food and the science of erecting buildings, as well as teaching them to plow the land and cultivate it. He reigned over the Korean people for 1210 years, until Prince Ki-già came from China, whom the emperor had invested with the title of Lord of the Eastern Lands. Tan-gun then withdrew to mount A-se-dal, reassumed spiritual form and returned to the boundless fields of the empyrean. Twelve centuries of life on earth had sufficed to convince him of the sadness of this world of ours and to make him feel nostalgia for that other world which our religion also suggests is a better one.

This is the legend with which the Koreans recount the origins of their empire, and it seems to be an established fact nowadays that we should see in the character of Tan-gun a long series of rulers who ruled a part of the peninsula in prehistoric times under that name. It is certain that even today in Korea there are still very ancient monuments dating back to the Tan-gun era, and although legend clearly states that he returned to his heavenly abode, his tomb is pointed out to the traveler in the city of Kang-dong.

The second character in Korean history is Kì-già (in Chinese Ci-tze). This sage lived at the court of Ciu, the Nero of China, and was one of that Emperor's three advisers, together with Pi-gan and Mì-gia. The concubine Tal-gheui, always beautiful, but supremely charming when she smiled, held the emperor under her sway and thus, according to those ancient writers, prepared the ruin of the dynasty. The three councilors tried in vain to remove Ciu from the evil arts of that woman, and the people suffered the worst of tyrannies. However, one fine day, following a series of observations that would now be too long to narrate, Pi-gan realized that Tal-gheui was not a girl, but a white fox, who had assumed human form the better to satisfy his perverse desires. It is in fact known that the fox which manages to obtain and drink water that has been stored in a human skull for twenty years will acquire the power to assume whatever form best suits it. Tal-gheui had found this water! When she realized that she had been discovered, she tried to have Pi-gan killed and indeed succeeded, but not before he had been able to exorcise her and turn her back into a fox. But by then it was late, the enemies of the dynasty were already at the gates of the capital, and Pal, after defeating the forces of Ciu, assumed the reins of the empire under the name of Mu-wang.

Ki-già, as an adviser to the former emperor, was at first thrown into prison, but then, the fame of his wisdom having reached the ears of Mu-wang, he was asked by the new emperor to act once more as adviser, this time to him..

Ki-già declined the offer, because the oath of loyalty he had sworn to his former sovereign did not allow him to serve the usurper. Wanting however to show his gratitude to Mu-wang, he gave him the book "*Hong-bum*", the Great Law, which had been found inscribed on the back of the turtle that came out of the waters of the Nak river, in Hau-si's time, over a thousand and more years before. No one had ever managed to decipher the Great Law until Ki-già set about tackling the task. He therefore obtained Mu-wang's permission to leave the empire and move to the lands of the East to seek that calm which the poetic name of Ciu-sen, or Freshness of the Morning, seemed to promise.

Legend has it that Ki-già arrived in Korea on a white horse, accompanied by five thousand Chinese, many of whom were versed in literature, poetry, music, medicine and philosophy, and skilled in all sorts of trade and industry.

His first concern, on finding himself amongst the people who would henceforth be his own, was to establish the eight basic laws of the kingdom:

"You shall not kill - You shall pay for any injury you inflict in grain - The thief shall be reduced to slavery - He will be able to regain his freedom on payment of 5000 yang - You shall not spend money on marriage - You shall not commit adultery - You shall not have private fights - You shall not lie.".

The people Ki-già had come to live with were a violent and bellicose people: of all the eight laws, the one they found hardest to observe was the seventh, the prohibition of private fights. But Ki-già was a wise man, and what he had not managed to achieve by direct means he tried to obtain indirectly. A supplementary law forced everyone to wear a huge and fragile terracotta hat: every violation of the seventh precept was revealed at once by the fragile structure of the headdress, which in the clash of combat was immediately broken or damaged: a broken hat meant death or exile for its owner. In this way Kì was able to curb the warlike nature of the Koreans, and the terracotta hat, although transformed over time, remains of colossal size and still amazes visitors to Korea. As soon as it was no longer compulsory to use a heavy material like terracotta, the people, as if to compensate for the earlier imposition, hastened to choose the lightest possible materials; so no one knows today which is the more extraordinary, the vast size of Korean headdresses or their relative lightness - an ordinary Korean hat today rarely weighs more than 15 grams .

The kingdom of Ciu-sen, founded by Ki-già, comprised, according to Chinese historians, the whole territory between the Lìao-ho and Ta-ong rivers and the Ciang Pai Shan mountains, i.e. most of the current Manchurian province of Shong Cing and the two Korean provinces of Pyeng-Au, southern and northern. The capital was located in Pyeng-yang, which according to legend had already been the capital for the thousand-odd years of Tan-gun's reign.

The southern part of the peninsula was then divided into numerous states or rather, autonomous tribes, of whom the most prosperous and powerful were the three known collectively as the Three Han - *Ma-Han, Pien-Han and Cin-Han.*

The first of these states consisted of 54 tribes, while the other two each had 12. These tribes were completely independent of one another, they were governed by a patriarch and joined together only by the territorial bond. Habits and customs were the same in all three Han: the houses were built of grass sods and the door was in the roof - even today, the same word serves to denote both a roof and a door in Korean. They wore silk clothes and straw sandals, and adorned their ears and face with trinkets; unlike their descendants the world over, they did not value gold or silver; the men were distinguished by their daring and were very skilled with spear and bow.

Shortly before the kingdom of Ciu-sen passed under the control of the Chinese emperors, Keui Ciun, king of Cìu-sen, ousted by Eui-man, fled south. He was welcomed by the people of Ma-Han and soon became the head of some of their tribes. It seems that the tribe he encountered first were composed of Chinese fugitives who had left China to avoid surrendering to the new Han dynasty. This tribe was known as the *Pak-giè* , the Hundred Families. Keui Ciun, thanks to his energetic leadership, soon increased the power of the Pak-giè until they controlled all the tribes of the Ma-han. This entity, known as the *early Pak-giè,* soon became a very considerable state whose authority was recognized by the majority of South Korean tribes.

Following the vicissitudes of the Korean states during the first centuries of the common era is difficult and time-consuming. In the fourth century the kingdom of Ciu-sen fell and we find the peninsula divided into three independent states: *Ko-gu-ryu* in the north, *Pak-giè* in the south-west and *Sil-la* in the south-east.

The foundation of these three states on the ruins of the old kingdom of Ciu-sen and the three Han, is buried in a mass of legends which obscure historical truth, making it difficult to see what really happened. To give just one example, here is the account of the origins of the state of Sil-la to be found in the Korean text *Tong Guk T'ong Gam*:

"In the year corresponding to 57 B. C., we meet the founder of Sil-la; his family name was Pak and his personal name Hyu Gu Su. During the war in the north, many men from Ciu-sen fled south to save their lives and founded six districts. One of these fugitives, by the name of So Pul Gong, passing one day near Mount Yang, heard the neighing of horses. He turned around, but he saw no horses; approaching a tree from which the sound seemed to be coming, he discovered a colossal pumpkin-shaped egg at its base. So Pul Gong did not know to which animal that egg might belong, and he was greatly amazed when, on opening it, he saw a human child emerge. So Pul Gong took the boy with him and educated him. Over the years the boy grew in wisdom and virtue to such an extent that the people of the six districts chose him for their king with the name of Su-ra-pul, while the new state was called Sil-la. Pak's name, which his family kept, was suggested by the shape of the egg in which he had been found: the Korean word *pak* means pumpkin."

Of the three Korean kingdoms, the most advanced culturally was undoubtedly Pak-giè, where Buddhism had been established earlier than elsewhere. Some Pak-giè monks had introduced the first texts of this creed to Japan, and trained the first Buddhist priests.

From the fifth to the seventh centuries, the peninsula was the scene of constant wars between the various states and between these and the Chinese emperors, who sought to maintain their authority over them. The struggles were long and bloody until, around 642, the Chinese hordes having destroyed and plundered much of the peninsula, and laid low the two kingdoms of Pak-gìe and Ko-gu-ryu, the third kingdom of Sil-la, which had hastened to recognize Chinese sovereignty, extended its borders to encompass the entire peninsula, and the language of Sil-la became the official language of all Koreans.

That was the golden age for the Far East. The emperor Cing Kuan, better known by his posthumous name of Tai Tsung, ruled China. Wells is of the opinion that this Emperor can be favorably compared with Akbar and Marcus Aurelius, or better still with Charlemagne and Harun El Rashid, who were to ascend their respective thrones in the following century; and under the rule of the House of Tang, Chinese literature entered upon a period of splendor never before achieved. In Japan, at that time, under the rule of the Fugiwaras, Chinese characters were introduced, Buddhism was extended and became firmly rooted in the hearts of the people, while literature flourished anew, especially thanks to the work of the two schools of Akohito and Hitomaro, the two most famous poets of ancient Japan.

In Korea, the state of Sil-la prospered and its capital Kyong-gio accumulated new splendours and new wealth every day, attracting everyone in the peninsula who was versed in science and the arts.

For about two centuries the history of Sil-la is presented solely as a succession of sovereigns. Remembering the ancient adage that people with no history are a happy people, we must conclude that the people of Sil-la enjoyed a comfortable and prosperous existence.

But continuous peace was bound to weaken the spirit and character of the inhabitants of Sil-la, living when they did, surrounded by entirely warlike peoples. Their customs became increasingly refined and their prolonged well-being generated corruption.

The signs and oracles of the future demise of the state began to appear. Ciung Gang, who had ascended the throne in 886, had embarked on a journey south and on the voyage back the royal junk was suddenly enveloped in a very dense fog. Sacrifices were offered to the Spirit of the sea and, as the fog cleared, a mysterious being appeared to the terrified Court, and intoned a song proclaiming that many wise men would perish and the capital would change.

And in fact it was not long before Ciung Gang died, after reigning for only a year. During the reign of his younger sister Man, the Messalina of Korea, the corruption of the Court and the people increased still more.

The revolt broke out in the north, where a certain Kung-ye had founded a small state called Ma-gin. Infatuated with Buddhist ideas, Kung-ye soon took leave of his senses: he proclaimed himself a Buddha and committed endless acts of cruelty, until he was assassinated. He was succeeded by his former general Whang-gheun who was as much loved by the people as Kung-ye had been hated.

Whang-gheun completed the conquest of Sil-la and established the capital of the new state in Song-do, which took the name of Ko-ryu and included the whole peninsula. This was in the year 908.

It is from this name Ko-ryu, pronounced in Chinese *Ko-ri* or *Kao-li* and in Japanese *Ko-rai*, that the name Korea is derived - the name by which the peninsula is known in Europe.

The most striking feature of the Koryu period was the great honor accorded to the Buddhist faith, which was declared the state religion. Numerous temples were raised in the capital and other cities of the kingdom, and Buddhist monks soon gained immense influence in government affairs, an influence which was ultimately very damaging to the Ko-ryu dynasty and was to lead to its fall.

The arts and sciences, which had languished in the last years of the kingdom of Sil-la, soon flourished again with the establishment of Ko-ryu.

Peace reigned for several centuries, only disturbed by the invasion of the Kitan in the year 1005. However, the invasion was repulsed, and the northern border of the state was fixed on the Am-nok or Yalù river, which still marks the northern boundary of the current empire.

At the beginning of the thirteenth century Korea, like the rest of Asia, had to endure the invasion of the Mongols. Gengis Khan had made himself master of all the lands between the Caspian and the Pacific, and the king of Ko-ryu, fearing that his kingdom would be overrun by the Mongolian hordes, hurried in 1212 to declare himself Gengis Khan's vassal. But this act of submission did not save Korea from the disasters of war. The assassination of the Mongolian ambassador in 1221 provoked the anger of Genghis Khan. When the Mongols swept into the peninsula and seized forty cities, the king fled with his court to the island of Kang-wha, near the mouth of the Han River; Kang-wha remained the state capital from 1232 to 1270. The king of Ko-ryu then solemnly swore allegiance to Gengis Khan, which brought an end to this first invasion. However, the Koreans, irritated by their new masters, killed some Mongolian officials who had been left to govern the principal cities, and a second invasion of the Mongolian hordes took place in 1241. After that the king of Ko-ryu was forced to travel in person to the Mongolian court and make a public act of submission to Genghis Khan.

Gengis Khan was succeeded by his grandson Kublai Khan, who decided to conquer Japan. In 1281 the Korean army was forced to help the Mongols in the two unfortunate expeditions that followed, and the hitherto friendly relations which had existed between the peoples of Koryu and Japan gave way to a profound hatred which the Japanese have harboured ever since for the country which had helped the Mongols.

When the Ming dynasty ruled China after the Mongols, the king of Koryu inadvisedly refused to recognize the authority of the new rulers, and thus prepared the fall of his own house.

THE KINGS OF CIU-SEN

TAI GIÒ (1392-1309). - Buddhist monks' interference in the government of the state of Ko-ryu had reached unacceptable levels, and popular discontent was running high. Revolts broke out in several places, spearheaded by the king's son-in-law, the valiant general Yi Syon Hyè. After invading the capital and driving out the royal forces, General Yi hastened, in 1392, to send an embassy to the Court of the Ming in Nanking to ask to be confirmed as the new king. Unlike his predecessor the king of Ko-ryu, Yi unreservedly acknowledged their sovereignty, and the Ming agreed to his request. He changed the name of the state from Ko-ryu to the other very old name of Ciu-sen (Freshness or Calm of the Morning), he reorganized the armed forces, restrained Buddhist interference, gave a new impetus to Confucian studies and those of the Chinese classics, and moved the capital from Song-do to Seoul.

Thus began a new dynasty of Korean kings, which, in the person of the current Emperor, still rules the Korean peninsula today.

Yi Syong Hyè, known in Korean history as Tai Giò, the *Great Founder*, was undoubtedly one of the most enlightened rulers who ever sat on the throne of Korea. It is to him that the nation owes most of its laws - which he modelled on those instituted by the Ming in the Middle Empire (China) - and the flourishing of classical studies which heralded a new golden age for Korean literature. Tai Giò was also responsible for the introduction in Korea of Ming dress, which is still worn at the Korean Court today, and for the division of the state into eight provinces.

In 1398 Tai Giò abdicated in favor of his son Ceng Giong and died in 1309. His body was buried near Yang-giò, not far from Seoul. His tomb still attracts Koreans wishing to pay their respects to the Great Founder.

CENG GIONG (1398-1400). - Unlike what had happened in the four hundred and seventy-five years of the kingdom of Ko-ryu, Buddhism quickly declined in the Ciu-sen period and ceased to be the state religion. During the reign of Ceng Giong, primarily at the instigation of the prime minister, all Buddhist monks were expelled from the capital and forbidden to return, on pain of death. This ban remained in force until very recently.

This king spent the greater part of his two-year reign subduing the partisans of the old Ko-ryu dynasty, who were still numerous in the peninsula.

In 1400 Ceng Giong, who, according to the chronicles, had twenty-three children from his royal concubines, abdicated in favor of his younger brother. He died in 1411 at the age of sixty-three.

TAI GIONG (1300-1418). - During the reign of this sovereign, the previous king's younger brother, many reforms were introduced in the administration of the state: among others, the *hobo,* a very harsh tax on houses levied by the previous dynasty, was abolished, and a law was passed excluding the illegitimate offspring of nobles from high government office, a law which remained in force until the recent reforms of 1894.

Tai Giong, who died in 1418 at the age of fifty-one, also left a large offspring of twenty-seven children.

SE GIONG (1418-1450). - During the thirty-two years of his reign Se Giong continued the reforming work undertaken by his father. He particularly wanted to encourage agriculture and for this purpose he decreed special honors for old farmers. He also paid constant attention to public education; after decreeing that all children should begin their studies at the age of eight (his own son's age at the time), he wanted to set his subjects a good example, and sent his son to *Syon Kyun Kuon*, the College of the Temple of Confucius, where the inhabitants of Seoul could see the Crown Prince assiduously bending over his books every day.

The most noteworthy event of Se Giong's reign was the agreement reached in 1443 between the prefect of the Korean city of Tong-naì and the daimyo of the Japanese island of Tsu-shima, authorizing regular trading, at specific times, between Koreans and Japanese, in the current location of Fusan.

MUN GIONG (1450-1453). - In the brief reign of this prince, the eldest son of the previous sovereign, nothing happened of sufficient importance to be worth recording.

TAN GIONG (1453-1455). - Upon the death of Mun Giong, his son Tan Giong, an unfortunate boy of eleven, ascended the throne, but his paternal uncle, Prince Syu Yang, after centralizing in his person the highest offices of the state, dethroned him after about two years and seized power. In the chronology of Korean kings he is known as Se Giò.

SE GIÒ (1455-1468). - As soon as Se Giò had dethroned his young nephew, he conferred on him the honorary title of Tai Saat Uang, Great High King, then, in the following year, 1456, he degraded and exiled him to Kang Uen province. Two years later, to escape the executioners whom his uncle had sent with orders to poison him, the wretched Tan Giong committed suicide. He was then only sixteen, and his short and tragic life is the subject of numerous legends which the people still love to repeat today.

Se Giò's cruel conduct gave rise to fierce revolts and the greater part of his reign was spent putting them down.

YI GIONG (1468). - Se Giò's eldest son died while he was still crown prince, ang it was his second son, Yi Giong, who ascended the throne at his death. Yi Giong reigned for only one year before he too died, in the twenty-first year of his life.

Yi Giong, who was in reality the eighth ruler of the Ciu-sen dynasty, is considered by Korean historians to be the ninth, because his elder brother, the crown prince Ue Kyong, who as already

mentioned died before his father King Se Giò, was granted by decree the posthumous title of king, King Tok Giong.

SYENG GIONG (1469-1414). - The reign of Syeng Giong, Tok Giong's second son, coincided with those fierce disputes among the nobles (*Yang-ban*) that led them to split into two parties, *Tong-in* (eastern) and *Syo-in* (western). Like his grandfather, Syeng Giong personally protected learning and literature and various works of the highest value saw the light under his auspices. He devoted part of the royal income to the upkeep of poor students and he had the College of the Temple of Confucius properly rebuilt.

YON SAN (1494-1506). - Syeng Giong died at the age of thirty-seven, and was succeeded by his son Yon San, who was so hated by the people and the courtiers for his ferocity and unruly life, that he was dethroned and exiled to a small island at the mouth of the Han river. His name was removed from the list of sovereigns of Ciu-sen; as a result, while his predecessor is known as the 10th ruler, Ciung Giong, who succeeded him, appears as the 11th. Legend has it that Yon San was the son of one of Syeng Giong's concubines, who was exiled on a charge of adultery. As soon as he ascended the throne he searched out all the nobles who were involved in his mother's condemnation and exile; ignoring the special rules governing the trial of nobles, he had them all tortured and put to death in the most cruel ways. It is said that some of them were used as human pestles for grinding rice in large mortars, while others were crushed between large millstones. Not content with these acts of unheard-of cruelty, he was also guilty of the most shameless lust: having brought together all the fairest girls in the country in Seoul, he and his followers abandoned themselves to the most shameful practices in the holiest places.

The people's fury with this sovereign reached such a point that he was finally dethroned in 1506.

CIUNG GION (1506-1543), IN GIONG (1543 - 1544), MYENG GIONG (1544-1567). - Nothing particularly interesting happened during the reigns of these sovereigns, if we except the intensification of the infighting between the various parties of the nobles.

SEN GIÒ (1568-1607). - During the reign of this sovereign, whom Korean historians consider to be the 13th king of Ciu-sen, the most important event in the history of the peninsula occurred: the Japanese invasion launched at the end of the sixteenth century by the great Taikun Hideyoshi.

This celebrated hero, who was called the Napoleon of Japan, dreamt of reuniting all the lands of the Far East under his rule, and in 1591 he sent an embassy to the king of Ciu-sen asking for Korean assistance with the conquest of China. Sen Giò, however, informed the Chinese of Hideyoshi's plans, whereupon the Taikun despatched his two trusted generals Kato Kiyomasa and Konishi Yukinaga, the latter Christian, with an army of one hundred and fifty thousand men, to conquer Ciu-sen. Hideyoshi's soldiers landed at Fusan on May 25 of that year and at first carried all before them: the cities of the peninsula fell one after the other, the fortresses of Tong-nai, Sung-cin and Ciun-ciù were destroyed, and only eighteen days after the Japanese landed in Fusan, the capital Seoul itself was in the hands of the enemy.

As the Japanese host approached, the king fled north to Liao-tung, via Songdo and Pyeng-yang, asking for help from China. After various minor engagements and the destruction of the Japanese fleet by the Korean fleet, the Sino-Korean army and its two hundred thousand soldiers met the Japanese army in a fierce battle under the walls of Seoul. This was the bloodiest episode of the whole campaign, and despite the allies' greater numbers, the indomitable courage of the Japanese and their superior weapons earned them victory (March 1592). The Chinese and Koreans withdrew to the north, while the Japanese, exhausted by the losses they too had suffered, retired to the south of the peninsula. Hideyoshi initiated peace negotiations, but these failed because his demands were exorbitant, and the Japanese armies marched north a second time (1597). Seoul fell into their hands again, but the Koreans, who in the meantime had had time to reorganize their army and obtain fresh Chinese troops to help them, offered fierce resistance this time: the Japanese fleet was again destroyed, and the Japanese army was forced to retreat and finally abandon the peninsula.

On their march south the Japanese soldiers destroyed everything in their path, setting fire to entire cities and hundreds of villages, destroying temples and sowing death and destruction wherever

they passed. Worst of all was the complete destruction of the city of Kyong-giò, the ancient capital of the state of Sii-la, renowned for its riches and its wealth of temples and monuments of great splendor.

With the death of Hideyoshi in September 1598, peace returned at last. The only advantage gained by Japan from this ferocious eight-year campaign was to be able to maintain a small garrison in Fusan, where the Japanese were already allowed to trade with the local population at certain times on certain days by virtue of the agreement reached in 1443 between the prefect of the city of Tong-nai and the daimyo of Tsu-shima.

When they invaded Korea, the Japanese found a prosperous, flourishing land; after eight years of war, they left it in the most miserable state of squalor and neglect. They had ravaged the whole country with fire and sword, ruined the crops, destroyed masterpieces of art and reduced the population to discomfort and despair. Today, about three centuries after Hideyoshi's invasion, the traces of the vandals' passage through the peninsula have not yet disappeared, and the people still harbour a deep-seated hatred of the invaders - the most natural consequence of the invasion.

Sen Giò died in 1608 at the age of fifty-seven, leaving twenty-five children.

KUANG HAI (1608-1622). - Like King Yon San, Kuang Hai, a son of the previous ruler and the royal concubine Kim, was dethroned and struck off the list of Korean kings. His reign was one of terror, beginning with the murder of his older brother Im Hai and continuing in a frightening crescendo of cruelty and wickedness. Finally in 1622 a conspiracy was hatched by Prince Neng Yang, nephew of King Sen Giò, along with five nobles; the king was deposed and exiled to the island of Kang-wha, whence he was transported to Quelpart in 1640.

IN GIÒ (1622-1648). - The first act of this sovereign was to raise his parents, Prince Ceng Uen and Princess Ku, to royal rank, and so Ceng Uen is included in the chronology of the kings of Ciu-sen, where he appears as King Uen Giong, the 15th sovereign.

The people of Ciu-sen had still not recovered from the damage and the losses they had sustained during that period when a new danger threatened the peninsula. When the Manchu hordes invaded China, the Ming emperor in 1619 ordered the king of Ciu-sen, Kuang Hai, to come to his aid with 20,000 men and attack the Manchu forces from the rear. The Koreans assented to the Chinese emperor's demand, but when they realized that the Manchus were gaining the upper hand, they hurried to do homage to them, while secretly continuing to assist the Ming. The Manchus saw through the deception, and once they had settled things in China, they had time to deal with Korea. In 1624, during the reign of In Giò, they invaded the peninsula and marched on Seoul, while the king hurried to take refuge in the citadel on the island of Kang-wha. The Manchu invasion ended only in 1637, when Kang-wha, as well as Seoul, had fallen to the invaders. These barbaric hordes caused almost as much damage in the north of the peninsula as the earlier Japanese invasion had wreaked in the south. The king of Ciu-sen had to capitulate and recognize the sovereignty of the new dynasty now ruling China.

The treaty then concluded between the Manchu dynasty and the state of Ciu-sen, only partially mitigated in 1650 thanks to a young Korean woman who had succeeded in rising to the rank of sixth wife of the emperor at the Chinese Court, remained in force until 1895, when Korea was declared independent following the Sino-Japanese war.

Under the terms of this treaty, the king of Ciu-sen recognized the suzerainty of the Manchus, gave them two of his sons as hostages, and was obliged to send an embassy to the Court in Beijing every year with his country's tribute. This tribute initially consisted of 111 ounces of gold, 1000 ounces of silver, 10,000 sacks of rice, 2000 lengths of silk, 300 lengths of linen, 10,000 lengths of ordinary cloth, 400 lengths of canvas, 1000 rolls of twenty sheets each of coarse paper, the same quantity of fine paper, 2000 good knives, 1000 buffalo horns, 40 woven mats, 200 pounds of dyeing wood, 10 measures of pepper, 100 tiger skins, 100 deerskins, 400 beaver skins, etc. etc. Subsequently, with the changes agreed to in 1650, the number of sacks of rice was reduced from ten thousand to just one thousand, which meant that the tribute ceased to be a real burden on the people, for whom rice represented the largest part of their contribution.

Inevitably, the long series of struggles that Ciu-sen had had to endure radically influenced the country's policy. The foreigners with whom the Koreans had come into contact with until then - Chinese, Japanese, Mongols and Manchus - had all been powerful enemies likely to cause the country serious harm, and they naturally decided to try to keep them out of their homeland by every possible means. So

Korea inaugurated the policy of isolation which has earned it the nicknames of "Anchorite State", "Hermit Nation", and so on.

To achieve its aim, the Korean government did not copy China and build massive walls, as gigantic as they were useless, but erected a barrier between itself and the outside world by establishing military cordons along its frontiers and laying waste its coastal areas while equipping them with watch-towers, so that the capital was immediately warned, by an ingenious system of signal fires, of the approach of any foreign ship.

Foreigners who landed on a Korean beach, either voluntarily because they hoped to engage in some sort of trade, or involuntarily following one of those all too frequent shipwrecks in the stormy Korean seas, were taken prisoner at once and sent inland where they were strictly segregated and kept under guard for fear that, on returning home and reporting what they had seen, they would come back to Korea in greater numbers.

Between China and Korea, a neutral zone was established along the Yalù river where no one was allowed to live. It remained out of bounds until 1875 when Li Hung Ciang sent a company of soldiers to the area, which had become a den of thieves, and from then on the Chinese were allowed to live there.

For about three centuries, Korea's ties with China were limited to the annual despatch of the tribute to Beijing, as mentioned above, and to a market, which was also annual, held at fixed times on the Chinese bank of the Yalù. Chinese and Koreans were free to buy and sell each others' wares at this market.

Relations with Japan were even more restricted. Except for the fair that took place once a month near the Japanese settlement in Fusan, they consisted of formal exchanges between the two governments on the accession of a new Korean or Japanese sovereign, and to the despatch to Japan, once every ten years, of a Korean embassy bearing a tribute. These embassies continued until 1790, when Japan, which bore the costs they incurred, including all the associated travel expenses, requested a less expensive arrangement, and it was agreed that the Korean envoys would simply go to the island of Tsu-shima in future.

HYO GIONG (1649-1658). - King In Giò was succeeded by his son Hyo Giong who, while still young, had been left by his father as a hostage in the hands of the Manchus. The ten years of his reign, which passed quietly, without external disturbances or excessive internal struggles, were employed essentially in reorganizing the army.

An event of particular importance occurred in the reign of Hyo Giong - the shipwreck of the Dutch brigantine *Sperwer,* following which Hendrik Hamel with some of his companions was taken prisoner and kept in confinement for about fourteen years before successfully escaping to Japan, whence he brought the first news of this eastern country to Europe. Mr. G. Heber Jones quotes a fragment of the Korean work *Kuk-giò Po-gam,* which refers to this event and provides a proof of the veracity of Hendrik Hamel's account: "In the fifth year (1653) a ship sank offshore and was swept by the wind to Cin-do in the province of Ciul-la. We do not know how many were drowned, but thirty-six were saved. Their appearance was strange, nobody could understand their language and since it was not possible to communicate with them by means of Chinese ideograms they were left at the beach.»

HYONG GION (1659-1673), SIUK GIONG (1674-1719), KYENG GIONG (1720-1723). - No event of great importance occurred during the reigns of these three sovereigns, apart from a resurgence of factional strife among the nobles during King Siuk Giong's reign. Their infighting caused the former western party, the Sio-in, to split into two factions, the No-in (major) and Sio-in (minor) parties.

YONG GIONG (1724-1772). - Yong Giong, the sovereign who reigned for fifty-two years, longer than any other king of Ciu-sen, is remembered by Koreans above all for his barbaric treatment of Prince Ciang Hen, his own son. This young prince, named heir to the throne by his father after the death of his older brother Sa Do, possessed excellent qualities of mind and heart, but he found the constraints of Court etiquette irksome, preferring to spend most of his time in the company of his young peers. Fond of violent physical exercise, he was very good at archery, spear-throwing and fighting with a sword in each hand. He was dearly loved by the people, who admired his skill and courage. They called him "a tiger, son of a tiger", an allusion to his father's cruelty. Ciang Hen had a very high

conception of his country's destiny and cherished an ambitious project, the conquest of China. This, he believed, should be the sole ambition of a Korean prince. His father Yong Giong, who saw great danger for the Yi dynasty in the designs of his son, tried at first to divert him from his plans, but as Ciang Hen clung more and more tenaciously to his dream of conquest, the king became convinced that his son was mad and sentenced him to death.

Ciang Hen's very sad fate is the subject of many legends and popular stories. "The old king rose in great anger," goes one of these legends, " and ordered that a large chest be brought to him. The prince prostrated himself before his father and said to him: For your own sake, I beg you to reconsider the act you are about to perform, for it may cause you sorrow one day. Then Ciang Hen's little son, a four-year-old boy, came and prostrated himself in turn before the king, pleading for the life of his father, but the king kicked him away. The chest was brought, the prince was placed inside and the lid was nailed down. However, a faithful follower of Ciang Hen noticed a hole left by a knot in the wood of the chest, and managed to get food through it for the prince. But he was seen in turn by one of the courtiers, and the thing was reported to the king, who immediately had another board nailed over the hole. The prince did not die at once; every morning a courtier lifted one of the ends of the lid slightly and upon hearing the ensuing cry of pain, informed the king that the prince was still alive. On the sixth day no cry was heard; the courtier inserted a hand into the box and felt the prince's face. It was cold, and he informed the king that Ciang Hen was dead."

The cruelty shown by Yong Giong towards his own son is all the more inexplicable in that, apart from this act, he was in many respects one of the best of Ciu-sen's kings. We must suppose that the young prince's desire for conquest was not the only reason behind his father's treatment of Ciang Hen, but we do not know what other reasons there were. Among the main reforms introduced by Yong Giong, we should note the abolition of several barbaric methods of torture, such as torture by fire and branding. He also abolished the law prescribing exile for the families of condemned persons, reduced the tribute payable by male slaves and abolished the tribute payable by female slaves.

CIONG GIONG (1776-1800). - Between this king and the previous one, the Korean chronicles record another, the infant Sa Do, the eldest son of Yong Giong, who died in childhood. Ciong Giong raised him to the rank of king posthumously.

It was during the reign of Ciong Giong, in 1783, that Christianity began to make its presence felt in Korea. It spread quickly, attracting hostility and dislike in official circles.

SUN GIÒ (1800-1834). - This king's reign is of special importance in that it saw the first persecution of Christians in Korea. This persecution, which sprang from the hatred existing between the two parties No-in and Nam-in (the latter included many followers of the new faith, or Western Doctrine, as Koreans still call Christianity), was very harsh, and many Christians lost their lives.

In 1827 Sun Giò called on the crown prince, his son lk Giong, to help him govern the country. Ik Giong had been married at the age of eight, in 1818, to Princess Ciò, one of the most illustrious women who ever lived at the Court of Korea, and who only died recently, in 1890. Ik Giong, on the other hand, did not enjoy power for long, dying shortly after at the age of twenty-two, to the great sorrow of the people who held him in the highest esteem. However, he bears the posthumous title of king and is listed as the twenty-fifth ruler of the Ciu-sen dynasty.

HENG GIONG (1834-1849). - Sun Giò was succeeded by lk Giong's son, Heng Giong, to whom the second and no less ferocious persecution of the Christians is attributed. This time the victims included three Europeans, Father Maubant, Father Chastan and Bishop Imbert. After innumerable difficulties Father Maubant had succeeded in entering Korea and had facilitated the arrival of his two companions. This persecution provoked French intervention in Korea, but I shall discuss this in more detail in a later chapter on the Korean state's relations with the western powers. For now I shall merely recall that the ships sent from France to Korea to try to obtain freedom of worship, *La Gloire* and *La Victorieuse,* failed to reach Korea after running aground in the Yellow Sea.

CIEL GIONG (1849-1863). - When Heng Giong died heirless and without having designated his successor, the right of appointment passed to Queen Kim, King Sun Giò's widow, who chose Ciel

Giong. During his reign the European powers pressed harder and harder for permission to trade with the peninsula.

CURRENT EMPEROR. - Ciel Giong also died without direct heirs, and was succeeded, in accordance with the wishes of Queen Ciò, by the young Ik Syeng. Elected king in 1863, he changed his title to emperor in 1897. All the changes undergone by Korea are summed up in the history of this reign, which I shall have an opportunity to discuss at length in an appropriate chapter.

DOMESTIC INTERLUDE.

In search of a house - The Hôtel du Palais - Ma' Ch'un Yang *, polyglot servant - confusion of tongues* - Kishù *and* Mungighì *,a long story* - Mr. Yang Hong Muk *, interpreter - an Italian ship becomes a Belgian ship – The good Parodi and the small* musmè.

Translated into English by Jeffrey Russell

I had barely arrived in Seoul, when I had the good fortune, denied to my late predecessor, to immediately find a charming little house, small but comfortable, for my own accommodation. It was a real stroke of luck because, given the very limited number of Europeans who are currently in the Korean capital, and the very special positions occupied by them, there are hardly any European-style houses available to rent. The Westerners established here are all either members of the Diplomatic Corps, in which case they are provided with suitable accommodation owned by their respective governments, or employees of the Korean government who have come to work for several years and whose first thought on arriving in Seoul is to buy a piece of land and build a house of their own. As for the considerable number of Christian missionaries, both Protestant (the majority) and Catholic (together there were more than two hundred of them, out of a total of some four hundred Westerners), most also live in houses owned by their respective missions. So, if not the only one, I was one of the very few who had to find his own accommodation, and I owed my salvation to a providential decision which the Russian government had just taken to move its vice-consulate from Seoul to Cemulpo; as a result the house in Seoul previously occupied by the Russian vice-consul became vacant. It could be that my pro-Russian sympathies spring from this little event! At any rate Russia solved a real problem for me and I have been very grateful for it ever since. It is true that there is a small hotel in Seoul pompously called "Hôtel du Palais" , but, my God, I had spent one night there on my previous visit to Seoul and the memory of it was enough to discourage me from repeating the experience. They say *à la guerre comme à la guerre*, but, in the first place, I was not " *à la guerre* ", knowing that on this occasion I would be staying in Seoul for some time; and then there were many other reasons why the Hôtel du Palais was not right for me.

The lucky star that had allowed me to find a suitable home immediately continued to guide me in the choice of a servant. Foreigners in Korea generally employ Chinese servants, believing that Koreans are ill-suited to delicate domestic tasks; but I wanted to try using Korean servants, and I declare right away that I was very satisfied with them. Ma' Yang Ciun, who had been employed by my predecessor in another capacity, was raised by me to the confidential position of 'number one boy', an expression which, in *pidgin-english*, the very comic language spoken throughout the Far East, designates, especially among domestics, the servant who has precedence and authority over all the servants of a house. Ma' naturally spoke *pidgin english* to perfection, and he also knew some Chinese and Japanese, making him a genuinely learned person in the eyes of his peers. Lastly, after spending several months with me, he also acquired a certain stock of Italian words which he would use whenever a suitable opportunity arose. In short, he had a gift for languages and a marked penchant for displaying it. When I came to Seoul I brought with me, by permission of the admiral commanding the ocean-going ships of the Italian navy, one of the *Puglia's* petty officers, the excellent Parodi, to be my secretary; the poor man had to spend all day answering Ma's linguistic questions. Ma' wanted to know how this or that thing was said in Italian; when he got the answer, he would write it down in Korean characters in a little notebook he always carried with him. Then at the first opportunity - whenever the term in *pidgin-english* escaped him and he did not know the corresponding Italian word, replacing it with the Japanese word - he would come out with sentences like "*Master, stassera wantchi tabeu six o' clok* ?" or "*Master, oggi go out mettere pelliccia*?" As can be seen from these examples, the jargon that was spoken in my house in Seoul was somewhat out of the ordinary and was so full of unexpected phrases mixing words from four very rich languages that some mental gymnastics were often necessary to immediately grasp the idea that the speaker was trying to express. Yet I got so used to understanding this lingo and to using it, that I was often unexpectedly successful, especially latterly, in obtaining clarifications or information on local customs from Ma' that I had not managed to get from my official interpreter, the dignified Mr. Yang, of whom more later.

Ma' took it upon himself to find suitable people for the other household tasks, and in this too he fully repaid the trust I had placed in him. His brother Xia' Yang Sun took possession of the kitchen and proved to be an enviably good cook. Ma' then chose a certain Yi to carrry out in his stead all those tasks which in Korea were considered beneath his dignity, such as preparing water for the bathroom, lighting stoves, carrying letters around, etc. The staff of the consulate was completed by Ceu and Kim , both *kishù* and one more especially *mungighi*: strange titles with even stranger attributes dictated by local custom. The *kishù* is a kind of servant, who is placed lower than everyone else on the highly complex Korean social ladder; in fact he is not allowed to wear the white national costume and the ordinary hat of horsehair and bamboo, which together represent for Koreans something like what the toga represented for Roman men. Instead he has to wear a very curious outfit, peculiar to his class, consisting of wide black trousers with a red stripe, a jacket of the same color with metal buttons, a blue cloth scarf knotted at the chest, and a tiny hat of rough felt held in place with a length of twine. Nowadays the main task of a *kishù* seems to be to run before his master whenever he leaves the house, opening all the doors through which he might pass; after which he can spend the rest of the day philosophically smoking his very long pipe. In former times, when ordinary folk were absolutely obliged to stop and bow to any passing dignitary, these *kishù* served to announce to the populace the passage of an important person, and no Korean official would ever have taken a single step outside unless he was preceded by a good number of such heralds. The first European diplomats accredited to Korea, in order not to seem less important than Korean officials when appearing in public, also adopted the custom. Now that the wind of modernity is beginning to blow in Korea and the people no longer stop when officials pass by, there is no longer any reason to keep this custom; and I believe foreign representatives only continue to keep it for the convenience it offers when going out in the evening. The *kishù* are then provided with a large silk lantern, generally in the national colors, and they walk ahead to light up the road, a necessary function given the almost complete absence of any street lighting.

However, it was never my habit to be preceded in this way, except on rare occasions of official visits; and my *kishù* spent their time in blissful idleness, to the envy of all their colleagues.

The *mungighì* is not the same as the *kishù*: his standing is higher, and he does not wear a special uniform. He corresponds roughly to our concierge and, generally speaking, confines his activity to opening and closing the outer door of the house and pocketing the entry fee which it is customary for all merchants, street vendors, etc. to pay to enter the house. This fee is in addition to the monthly salary he receives from his master. I believed at first that I could dispense with the services of a *mungighi* and I had charged one of the *kishù*, the elderly Ceu, to act as *mungighi* as well. To my mind I was well within my rights to do so, given that the two *kishù*, whom I only retained because I was morally obliged to keep them on, were not exactly worked to death. But here I was up against the deep-rooted tradition, so widespread throughout Asia, that each servant should be entrusted with one, and only one, well defined duty. In no time at all I found I was short of a *kishù* as well as a *mungighi*, since whenever I happened to need the services of one of them old Ceu claimed to be only the other. To solve this dilemma I promoted him from *kishù* to the position of full-time *mungighì*. This new state of affairs did not last long, however, for a few days later an imperial decree ordered all Koreans to stop wearing white and adopt a black costume instead. Ceu, who had been quick to abandon his *kishù* uniform in favour of civilian attire, and now had no money to buy a new black suit, came to humbly beg me to let him wear his old uniform again. Of course I granted his request, and so Ceu remained to the end both *kishù* and *mungighi* at the same time, which is what I had wanted all along.

At this point I must say something about the senior and most authoritative, if not the most important, member of my household, Mr.Yang Hong Muk, interpreter. Always impeccably dressed in spotless white silk robes, with a very thin overcoat of light blue gauze and a gleaming hat which shone with seven reflections, as required by the canons of perfect good taste, he invariably wore a huge pair of glasses with tortoiseshell frames, symbolising his dignity as a man of letters, whenever he went out or received his compatriots in his study, and which he only removed, as a sign of respect, in my presence. The good *Mister* Yang, as he was usually called, was a typical Korean nobleman, a classic *yang-ban*. His position as the official interpreter of the Royal Italian Consulate did not impress him - I would even say he considered it to be way beneath his dignity. His true vocation was sweet idleness, and in the fulfilment of his duties he brought a strong personal note which was the sincerest expression of his vocation. I had met him on my first visit to Seoul and I remember an incident which depicts his character

very well. I had invited him on board the *Puglia* one day to show him round the ship. During the visit I had taken some photographs which I promised to send him as soon as they were ready, duly inscribed with his name and titles. He was very grateful for this little courtesy, thanked me profusely, and took his leave; but he came back shortly after to tell me it had occurred to him that I would not know all his titles and consequently would not know how to dedicate the photographs properly, and so had come back to spell these out. Thereupon he rattled off all his titles, which, according to what he told me, were the following: former private adviser (adviser to whom? Hmm!), former editor-in-chief of "Han Yang Sin Bun", former English teacher at Pai Cè School, and finally interpreter for the Royal Italian Consulate; but the latter did not matter much. I noted down all these details, and when I sent him the photographs I was careful to include all the former positions he had held and to which he attached so much importance. In exchange Mr. Yang promised to get the capital's newspaper to print an exact description of the *Puglia,* for which I had provided the details, slightly exaggerated - an essential ploy in those countries - to give the paper's readers the impression that our ship was the most powerful in the world. He duly wrote the article, but alas! either through his fault or the printer's, the article appeared the following day with an error in the Korean name for Italy (Tai Yi-Guk), and the readers learnt that our beautiful destroyer was a Belgian ship (Tai Pi Guè)! To think that I had taken the trouble to enhance all her excellent attributes - power, armament and speed!

How he managed to teach English in a school, even a Korean school, is beyond me. Although we used English to communicate with each other, he spoke it rather badly; his spelling was highly idiosyncratic and I only gradually got used to it. Still, given his limited duties, and above all the meagre salary he received in comparison with his counterparts in the other diplomatic missions, all in all I had little cause to complain about Mr Yang. On the contrary, I must say that, unlike some of his colleagues who were remarkably well paid but were always pestering their employers for pay increases, Mr. Yang never made the slightest mention of a pay rise to me; his ambitions were all confined to the field of honors. He dreamed of two beautiful jade buttons to wear on his headband, a mark of great distinction, and every time I had to go to the Palace, or call on some influential minister, he never failed to entreat me to obtain the imperial favour of the two jade buttons for him.

I sometimes asked him to explain certain essentially Korean customs and practices, but it was very rare that I got a satisfactory answer. While proud of his linguistic superiority, Mr Yang did not understand how one could take an interest in such things and he merely replied: "That nonsense! Stuff for ignorant people! It is not worth talking about!" There was no way to get more out of him; at most, he would sometimes digress to tell me about little intrigues or Court scandals, since he thought I would then see him as someone of importance who was well acquainted with secret things. Mr. Yang had once learned the name of Garibaldi, I do not know where or how, and whenever he happened to meet an Italian officer from one of our ships for the first time, he invariably brought Garibaldi into the conversation at the earliest opportunity, together with the most devout declarations of admiration for that great national hero. He had brought up Garibaldi when he first met me too, and I had been pleasantly surprised to find that this exotic character knew so much about our history; with the passage of time, however, I came to realize that all he really knew about Garibaldi was his name.

Before I left Seoul, he had a kind thought. For a long time I had been looking for a very rare book about Korean military tactics printed many years ago, but I had never succeeded in tracking it down. On the very day of my departure Mr. Yang arrived with a beautiful copy of the book, asking me to accept it and keep it to remember him by. I was all the more touched by this gesture as I was leaving Korea for ever and Mr. Yang could no longer expect anything from me.

This then was the Korean staff I lived with throughout my stay in Seoul, and whom I remember today with great satisfaction. Whether it was because I had had the good fortune to find particularly suitable people, or whether it was because my needs were very modest compared to those of other employers, it is a fact that all in all I had no cause to complain about my employees; on the contrary I had good reason to be satisfied with them, a very rare state of affairs in those countries, where Europeans complain continually and loudly about their native staff.

I cannot end these notes on my domestic life in Seoul, without remembering with gratitude the excellent Parodi, second chief helmsman in the Royal Navy, who proved a zealous and devoted subordinate on every occasion, and whose jovial character and quick intelligence were often a very precious help to me. During the first days after our arrival in the Korean capital, he immediately and tirelessly set about the job of organizing our residence as quickly as possible, with the sailor's typical

ability to adapt and get his bearings: with a couple of words of English, two of Japanese and many of Italian, he made himself understood by everyone and understood everyone. There was no difficult errand, in any language, that he could not carry out. How he managed it I could not say, but it is a fact that when I sent him to ask something of an Englishman, a Korean, a Frenchman, or a Japanese, he always came back with the answer, and, what was more important, the answer was always the right one. In. In no time at all he had acquired great popularity in Seoul's Japanese district, *Cin-ko-gai*, and when he passed swiftly through the streets in his smart uniform, with its gold braid glistening in the sun, more than one little *musmè* stopped to look at him with small almond-shaped eyes full of promises.

It was largely thanks to Parodi that I was able to get the house ship-shape and recruit the staff I needed in just a few days, and that, on 11 November, His Majesty's birthday, I had the satisfaction of inaugurating my residence with a reception for all the representatives of the other Powers and the Korean authorities assembled for the customary congratulations.

With the material side of life thus secured, I could finally get around to a more detailed study of this country, which until then I had only observed with the distracted eye of one who is preoccupied with other more urgent needs.

SEOUL.

The heart of Korea - Seoul and Sigul - The eight gates - Houses or huts? - Wood, mud and paper - Lively streets - Oxen and horses - The districts of Seoul - The Legend of Ciong Dong - District of Mud or City of Mud?

Translated into English by Jeffrey Russell

Like the whole nation, Seoul has its own distinctive features.

It is a strange place, to be honest. When I arrived in Seoul, I had the same experience as everyone who visits this city: you think you are going find something very like what you have seen in China or Japan, and instead you find that everything is essentially different. Anyone trying to describe Seoul, as alas I am, has nothing to compare it with: no other city in the Asian world is comparable or even similar to the Korean capital.

Seoul is to Korea what Paris is to France: the object of all Koreans' aspirations, the center which attracts everyone who wants to get on in life, the source of every novelty and every manifestation of the nation's activity.

One could almost say that Korea is divided into two parts: Seoul, the capital, and Sigul, the provinces, in the sense that our neighbors beyond the Alps use this word - for the French *la province* denotes everything that is not Paris. The name itself, Seoul, sounds like capital in Korean; it has almost come to mean the capital *par excellence*, and it has in fact been the capital of the empire for over five centuries, ever since King Tai Giò, the founder of the current dynasty, established his residence there.

"And yet, if you were to walk through the streets of Seoul now, it would never occur to you, I can assure you, that you were really and truly in the heart of one of those Eastern cities of your youthful dreams, a mysterious phantasmagoria of light and colour, luxury and splendour. You would find nothing here that even reflects the grandeur which the traveller can still see or imagine in Beijing, despite the Chinese capital's current state of decay and neglect; and there is no semblance or trace in Seoul of the thousands of art treasures that can be admired in even the humblest of Japanese villages. One could almost say that the sole purpose of the wars which for centuries the Chinese and the Japanese have fought in Korea was to appropriate for themselves everything in the way of good taste and artistic talent which nature must have bestowed on the Koreans as well, such is the city's squalor and, worse still, its lack of charm."

This is a passage from a letter I wrote when I first arrived in Seoul, and today, after a much longer stay, I find no reason to significantly change the opinion I formed from my first impressions. I should add that, if you look long enough, you can still find a few buildings and monuments that are typically Korean, but they are of historical rather than artistic interest, and all, without exception, merely copy old Chinese designs, with no sign of any original Korean input.

When King Tai Giò settled in Seoul, he had a high wall built, in imitation of the Chinese, all round his capital. This still exists today and forms an eight-mile circuit, with eight large gates giving access to the city.

These gates are all of very original construction; together with the imperial palaces they are the only buildings of any real architectural merit. The two largest ones, the South and the East Gates, are actually exact copies, apart from their size, of the corresponding Gates in Beijing. They all have extraordinary names: *Heng-in Ci-mun*, "the Gate that exalts Grace", *Ton Ei Mun* , "the Gate of Constant Loyalty", *Sang Ye Mun*, "the Gate of Exalted Education", etc., and it is only for the sake of brevity that foreigners call them the East Gate, the West Gate, the South Gate and so on. Until a few years ago all the gates were closed at nine o'clock in the evening and no-one was allowed to enter or leave the caital. Now, after the reforms of 1894, this custom has been abolished; the gates are still closed at night, but they are opened for anyone who requests entry.

On its northern side the city wall climbs up over Pu-khan, the mountain dominating the valley in which Seoul stands. A double ring of walls encircles the summit of this mountain, constituting the famous fortress where the kings of Ciu-sen used to take refuge in times of war, when the approach of an enemy army gave them reason to fear for their own safety. A secret road leads to it from the

old Summer Palace, which stands at the foot of the mountain, and the North Gate, giving access to it, is never opened except to allow the sovereign through.

I do not know whether in Tai Giò's day the city walls really separated the inhabited area from the countryside or whether he wanted to keep some space free to allow for future enlargements of the city; if so, his spirit would be greatly disappointed today, for the area covered with houses occupies at present less than one twentieth of the total area within the city walls - all the rest is deserted countryside.

I used the word *houses*, but *huts* would be a more accurate name for most of the dwellings. Lord Curzon, in his excellent book *Problcms of the Far East*, calls them a mixture of wood, mud and paper, and his definition, if not particularly clear, is certainly very accurate. The frame is made of wood; it is covered with mud to make the walls; and paper is used for everything else: to cover floors, interior walls and ceilings; paper curtains of the desired size divide the internal space into the required number of rooms; sheets of paper are used for windows instead of glass; the door panels are made of paper. In short, paper is used in a thousand ways in a Korean house, as well as for umbrellas, clothes, hats and an infinite number of other everyday objects which are always made of paper in this country.

To complete the list of the materials used in building the Korean house, we should add straw, which is usually used for the roof. Clay tiles are occasionally used, but only for the houses of the wealthiest and for government buildings.

The houses are all very low and only have one floor. There is not a single Korean house of two storeys or more in the whole city.

A special feature of the Korean house is the *kang*. Alone among all the peoples of the East, the Koreans have solved the problem of heating in a fairly ingenious and original way with the *kang*. Korean houses have no foundations; they are built directly on the ground. The stone floor is therefore built at a certain height above street level and the space in between - the *kang* - is used in the winter to burn wood or straw, thus heating the floor and consequently the whole house. A hole made almost at street level, on the opposite side to the stove in which the fuel is burnt, allows the smoke to escape from inside the *kang* - smoke which gets into the eyes of passers-by, doing nothing to enhance the delights of the streets of Seoul.

What can be said about these streets? Seoul, unlike all other cities in Korea and China, boasts four or five large arteries that cross it from one end to the other and which, although very wide, are relatively clean. It is a pity that they lack the liveliness and cheerfulness, so typical of Chinese streets, conferred by the rich, multicolored decoration of Chinese house fronts and the artistic originality of Chinese shops and window displays - which so often make you forget, while you admire them, the half meter of mud you are walking through or the dusty hole you have just fallen into.

The longest and most important of these streets runs in a straight line for over four kilometres from the Great West Gate to the Great East Gate, from which it takes its name, dividing the city into two almost equal parts: the "northern city" and the "southern city". This street, over sixty meters wide, is lined with many shops stocking the main products of the Korean market, especially pottery, grain, paper, and rope shoes. The electric tram now operating in the Korean capital runs along its entire length, and for several kilometers beyond both Gates.

About a quarter of the way along this street, starting from the West Gate, another much shorter but far wider street bisects it, leading north to the old imperial palace called *Kyung Pok* or Summer Palace. This avenue, three times wider than East Gate Street, is lined solely by government buildings housing the big state departments. Dubbed Ministry Street by foreigners, it also serves as a parade ground for the capital's garrison on account of its exceptional width.

Continuing along *Great East Gate Street*, just before its halfway point, you come to *Great South Gate Street*, the second most important of the capital's major thoroughfares, which, as you would expect, leads from the city centre to the Gate of the same name. It is also served by an electric tramline which, exiting through the South Gate, leads to Yongsan village, Seoul's river port on the Han River, four miles away.

About halfway between the start of Ministry Street and the start of Great South Gate Street, you come to another of the main arteries leading to the South Gate: this one passes in front of the new imperial palace called *Ciong Dong* Palace, the current residence of HM the Emperor. It is lined almost exclusively with Korean shops; this has given its name to the street, which the foreign residents of Seoul generally know as *Cabinet Street* in English.

Two other streets deserve a mention, not so much for their size as for their state of maintenance (which would be considered bad in any of our cities but beyond anyone's wildest dreams in Seoul). One leads from near *Ciong Dong* Palace on Cabìnet Street to the Great West Gate and the other leads from the same place to the Little West Gate. The first passes near the Legations of England and America and in front of the Russian and French Legations, and is consequently called *Legation Street*, while the other, for a similar reason, is now known as *Italian Consulate Street*.

But with the exception of these few broad thoroughfares, the rest of the city is a maze of narrow filthy streets where garbage piles up for eleven months of the year waiting for the great rains of July to sweep them away with the force of the water. It is difficult to imagine anything more superlatively unclean than these little streets, where the space for walking is restricted on both sides by the open drains, which often overflow, and which are sometimes so smelly that they upset the toughest constitution and the strongest stomach. The first few days of a stay in Seoul are naturally the worst; the whole atmosphere seems saturated with that nauseating stench and the mere thought of having to go through those side alleys would make you faint, were it not for the fact that little by little we grow accustomed to this as to everything else, our courage revives ..... and we end up laughing at the astonished faces and the disgusted amazement of the new arrivals. Not only that, but our initial dismay gradually gives way to the ever-increasing pleasure we take in the manifold picturesque and bizarre sights that the streets and roads offer in abundance: the whole pageant of Eastern and particularly Korean life played out under the eyes of the western passer-by, very varied scenes endlessly following one another, very strange costumes, never seen before, that suddenly attract your attention, and arouse your curiosity so that you never tire of observing them.

Those streets are incredibly full of life: from daybreak until late at night they continually swarm with people moving with that slow, dreamy, swaying gait peculiar to Koreans. They pass close by, bump into you, stumble, and move forward with vacant eye and uncertain step, as if obliged by some mysterious force to roam the streets forever. Where are all those silent people going? Why all this toing and froing of a crowd as compact as those that fill the most populous centers of our busiest cities, here, in Seoul, the capital of one of the most idle people on earth? In vain do you try to understand the reason for all this movement; you look around, you peer ahead as far as you can see, you are curious to discover what unusual spectacle is taking place to attract so many people. But do not search, for there is nothing to see; and above all do not stop, for then you will become the center of attention. As soon as you stop, for whatever reason - to admire an object or to look at your watch - a circle immediately forms around you and people look at you, scrutinize you, draw close to you, hem you in, silently: children bundled up in their pink clothes, young men with heavy braid loose on their back, serious men with stained white robes and traditional chimney-pot hats, venerable old men whose blue sleeveless overcoat gives them a certain dignity - but no women, there are no women in a Korean crowd. They all look at you - ten, a hundred, a thousand eyes are fixed on you, and not a word is spoken. You turn, you make a rather abrupt movement, the circle opens and all those people scatter, as if seized by a sudden terror, but the panic is over in a flash. You smile, you let them see that there was nothing hostile about your movement, and all the faces light up, mouths open in a loud laugh, and the crowd re-forms.

In the morning, especially in winter, it becomes even more difficult to get around Seoul because of the extraordinary number of oxen and horses bringing the firewood necessary for the great city's daily consumption. Every morning thousands and thousands of pack animals file through each of Seoul's eight great gates: the oxen, or to be exact the young bulls, generally carry large loads of big logs piled up in a pyramid on their back, while the horses - those small horses you only find in Korea, ugly, skinny, restless animals, a disgrace to the equine race - almost disappear under huge bundles attached to both flanks which they drag along the ground. They are all heading for Ministry Street or Ciong No, near the Great Bell, at the junction of Great East Gate and Great South Gate Streets, where the main wood market is held, before returning to the countryside once their load has been sold. This traffic generally lasts from dawn until around ten in the morning and while it is going on, navigating the streets of the capital becomes a real problem, especially in some of the narrow alleys that are barely wide enough for one animal to pass. Every time you meet one of them coming towards you, you have to retrace your steps until you find a side street or a doorway you can use to avoid getting crushed between the wood and the wall. The worst time is when, later on, the loads have been sold and all those young bulls are heading back to the city gates. Their drivers, faces hidden under the huge straw hats they wear in the countryside, walk carelessly with dazed eyes, like all Koreans in general, without looking where

they are going and, unfortunately, without attending to their animals. The beasts, relieved of their morning load, are seemingly disinclined to trot along gently on their own and may well butt you with their horns if they get the chance. As there are not many of us, we Europeans naturally seem to be the preferred butt of their playful little jokes, and I recall two or three occasions when the distance between me and the tips of the horns of one of those horrible animals had narrowed enough to make me fear that at any moment it could become negative; it was pure luck that I got out of trouble with no serious injury.

As in all eastern countries, each district acquires its own distinct character from the special shops located in it. In Seoul as in the other eastern cities, all shops selling the same item are generally to be found in the same district. The jewellers, for example, are all located near Ciong No, between the Kuang T'ong Kyo, the *Great Link Bridge*, and the Ciang Kyo, the *Long Bridge*; if you want to buy anything made of silver or gold, that is where you have to go. You will be spoilt for choice; there are hundreds of open-fronted small shops set about two feet above the street, in a long row. The shops are very narrow, with barely enough room for the craftsman and his stove. You stay out in the street, studying the few objects on display in a small glass case, while the imperturbable old artisan, his big glasses in their tortoiseshell frames stuck on his nose, continues his skilled and patient work. You ask the price of an item, the old man looks at it, examines it at length, turns it this way and that, thinks it over for a long time, and then picks up the abacus which he keeps near him and which no Korean merchant is ever without. You watch as he moves the little balls deftly between two fingers of his right hand, sliding them to every possible position, then stopping them, before moving them once more and stopping them again. His lips, closed until then, finally move and the old man tells you its price. It is enormous, at least ten times the value of the object. You try to lower it, you propose a more reasonable figure, but the old man no longer speaks: he retrieves the object, puts it back in the glass case and returns to his work. You move away and then the scene changes: someone runs out of the old man's shop - one of the many idle loungers who populate the streets of Seoul - with the object you want in his hand, runs after you and offers it to you at a lower price, let's say five times its value. You insist on your figure, the other lowers the price a little more and, if you stand firm and refuse to be swayed, you will end up buying the object at its true value. The same scene will be repeated whenever you want to buy something. At first this bargaining may seem amusing, but in the long run it becomes unbearable. If you are lucky enough to have a servant you can trust, the best thing you can do is ask him to do all your shopping. I ended up adopting this system; I went around with Ma', I showed him what I wanted and then I let him take care of it. Ma 'of course, as a good Korean, saw no point in losing a good half hour in vain talk, and I saved time and money, and above all avoided a nervous breakdown.

Not far from the jewellers' quarter, on the opposite side of Great East Gate Street, you find the district of the silk merchants, confined in a number of blind alleys. These are perhaps even dirtier than the rest of the city, but in them you can find all the most marvellous silks that a girl could ever dream of: very fine silk from Ciul-la province, heavy silk from Shangtung, delicate gauze produced in Ci-là, patterned damasks from Nankin and Shanghai, solid crapes from Japan, of all colors and all shades. Naturally, when they first venture out, the few western ladies drawn by their passion for travel to Seoul go to Ciong No, which is the only part of the city where you might meet any of the few ladies from the European community in the Korean capital.

On Ciong No square, near the Great Bell, the hat sellers display their wares, which are packed in large straw boxes covered with yellow paper. Further on, the hat repairers carry on their trade in the middle of the road, alternating with the sellers of sweets, the sandal repairers, the oxen laden with wood, the coal merchants bent under the high stacks of coal they carry on their backs. Further on, further along Great East Gate Street, your attention is drawn to some shops selling curious objects of turned wood painted red, a kind of candelabra, and little altars and sedan chairs - funeral objects, of the kind used for those gay Korean funeral processions. All the shops selling prints and paper objects are in the same street, on the opposite side. With a few *seu* you can get fantastic figures of dragons, tigers, hippogriffs or ancient warriors to stick on your doors to keep the evil spirits away. There are other prints, designed more especially for use indoors, depicting ancient sages, guardian spirits, or ancient myths, which you will find in any Korean house.

The city of Seoul is divided into 49 districts, known as *Pang*, each of which is divided into several *Tong* or *Dong*, neighborhoods or, more properly, villages. Naturally, each *Tong* has a different name and in a way this compensates for the fact that the streets are not named. The names of most of the *Tong* reflect the professions that are usually practised in them, or the objects that are sold in them; so

we have the *P'il Dong*, the Paintbrush District, *Ciu Dong*, the Printing District, *Yang Dong*, the Blacksmiths' District, *To Dong*, the Knife District, *Ciuk Dong*, the Dyers' District, *Mo Giung Dong*, the Gala Hats District, etc. Some districts, on the other hand, are named after special monuments that are located or were once located in them, such as *Sa Dong*, the Monastery District, so called because it was once the site of the largest monastery in the city, and *Uen Dong*, the Garden District, near the imperial garden called *Uen. Sang Sa Dong* , the Shrine of the Living District, took its name from a small pagoda where, at the time of the Japanese invasion, Koreans placed portraits of the two Chinese generals who were still alive then, Yi Yu Song and Yang Ho, who had effectively helped the Koreans to drive out the invaders.

Other neighborhoods derive their name from ancient and curious legends, some of which are very interesting. The *Mek Tong*, the Ink District, was so called because, in former times, a very famous literary man lived there, who spent his time writing a great number of Chinese characters very beautifully on a piece of cloth which he then washed in the stream near his home; and he wrote so many characters that the stream was perpetually as black as ink.

A widespread legend is connected with the name of the district where most of the foreign Legations are to be found and where the Palace of the Emperor, *Ciong Dong*, currently stands. In the old days before the advent of the present Yi dynasty, there used to be a well in the place where the English Legation now stands. One day a charming girl was busy drawing water from the well, when she saw a nobleman approach and ask her for a drink. She consented, but she picked a few small leaves from a nearby willow tree and slipped them in the water before handing the bowl to the stranger. The man drank avidly, but had to pause after every sip to avoid swallowing the leaves. Having quenched his thirst he turned to the girl and said sharply*: "What on earth do you think you are doing? A stranger courteously asks you for a drink and you fill his bowl with such filth?"* The girl, who had gone red in the face, replied humbly*: "I did it for your good. I realized that you were tired and in a hurry, and in such a state, you could have come to serious harm if you had drunk a lot of cold water quickly. So I put the leaves in the bowl to force you to drink slowly, a little at a time."* The stranger, who was none other than the famous general Yi, founder of the current dynasty, was greatly pleased with the girl's reply. He asked her name, inquired about her parentage, and learned that she was the daughter of poor but honest parents. When he had seized power and moved the capital from Song-do to Seoul, he had his servants look for the girl, married her and greatly honoured her. In her new position as queen, the beautiful Kang fully justified the reputation for wisdom which the answer she gave Tai Giò had earned her; for as long as she lived she was of great comfort and good counsel to her royal husband. When she caught a terrible disease and died, poor Tai Giò was inconsolable. Before dying, she begged the King, as soon as her spirit had departed, to take a large kite, write her name on it and throw it up in the air; then cut the rope and bury her body where it fell. The King willingly agreed to do so. After the Queen's death, the kite was released and it landed on the very spot where Taì Giò and the girl Kang had met for the first time. The Queen was buried there and the surrounding neighborhood was called *Ciong Dong,* the District of the Tomb. However, the tomb did not remain there long. Government rules expressly forbade burial of the dead within the city walls, and officials protested so strongly that they managed to convince the King that the tomb would have to be moved. At this point the spirit of his deceased wife appeared to Tai Giò and begged him, given the need to transport her remains elsewhere, to repeat the kite experiment, bury them again wherever the kite fell this time, and build a temple there to make a pleasant place to visit for the many people from all over the country who would go there in future. The spirit made one further request, that a small stream be made to flow near the tomb to cheer her with the murmur of its waters. All this was done exactly as requested: the remains of the late Queen were transported to *Ciong Naug*, where the kite fell; the temple was built, and the waters of the stream that flows nearby are popularly held to be miraculous and excellent for the treatment of certain diseases.

Next to each Korean tomb there is usually a rice field, and a rice field was undoubtedly planted near the Queen's tomb when it was still in Ciong Dong, in the area currently occupied by the so-called Cabinet Street. This explains, according to Dr. Allen, the exceptionally muddy state of that street.

All the streets in Seoul are so muddy that, in order to walk more easily, the inhabitants have had to adopt certain curious wooden clogs raised about fifteen centimeters above the ground. Their gait is even clumsier than usual in these clogs, which make them look like people walking on stilts. One of the city's districts is actually called *Ni Dong*, the District of Mud. I find it unjust that the name should be

used only for one particular district: it would be much more appropriate to use it for the whole city, rather than Nam Pyeng-yang, Puk Han-san, Kuang-neng, Namkiong or Han-yang, Seoul's former names.

THE SIGHTS OF SEOUL

The Great Bell - The Marble Pagoda – The White Buddha - The imperial palaces - A professional anecdote - The Summer Palace - The Eastern Palace - Ancient legends about the Mulberry Palace.

Translated into English by Jeffrey Russell

Until a few years ago there was a very curious custom in Seoul: at a given hour of the evening, eight or nine o'clock I think, every man had to return home. A big bell located in the center of the city gave the signal, and on the last stroke, any man found in the streets by the special patrols was arrested on the spot; at the same time all the women were free to go out and walk about the streets undisturbed. Now that this custom has been abolished, the men stay out at night as well as during the day, while women are denied even this harmless pastime.

The big bell that signalled the changeover (men back in, women out) is the most renowned object in the whole city and its location, Ciong No, is the true center of the world for Koreans. A curious legend is linked to it.

When Taì Giò, the founder of the current dynasty, ordered the great East Gate to be erected, a bell was found during the excavations for the foundations.The bell was hung at the entrance to the Eastern Palace, where it is still located. Tai Giò, enamored of its shape, thought of reproducing it on a much bigger scale and ordered all the provincial governors and prefects to collect as much metal as possible. Every inhabitant of the peninsula had to make a personal contribution, and special officials were charged with the collection. While this was in progress, one of the metal collectors came across a house in the An Eye district of KyenSang province, inhabited by an ugly old woman with a three year old child on her back. The hag said she had no metal to give, but if the man wanted to he could take the boy away as her contribution. The official believed he was dealing with a madwoman and went on his way, but he mentioned the incident later and it soon became known in Seoul .

Once all the necessary metal had been collected, it was melted down and the bell was cast but, as it cooled, it cracked.

The operation was repeated, but the bell cracked again. In short, there was no way the bell could be successfully cast and Tai Giò, when he realized this, promised a lavish prize to anyone who could solve the problem. One of the workers at the foundry went to the King and told him that in his humble opinion the melting and casting would never be successful until they accepted the offer made by the ugly old woman, who was undoubtedly a witch. The King did not stop to think it over - that was obviously the answer and it was strange that nobody had thought of it before. He sent for the child at once and had him thrown alive into the red-hot mass of molten metal: as was to be expected, the operation was successful this time and the bell was cast. But the victim's voice was not silenced and every time the deep, solemn sound of the bell is heard across the city, the people believe they recognize the cry of the poor child repeating in long cadences: *Ah mey la, ah mey la* : it's mommy's fault! it's mommy's fault!

Very close to the Great Bell, which goes by the name of *In Giun*, that is " the man decides himself, " meaning that when he hears it the man decides to go to bed, we find another of Seoul's sights, the so-called *Marble Pagoda*, the oldest and most remarkable of the city's monuments. A Korean writer recounts that in the middle years of the Korai dynasty, the dynasty that preceded the current one, King Ciun Su Yang married the only daughter of Sai Ciò, one of the rulers of the Mongolian Yuen dynasty which overthrew the Sung dynasty around 1269 and ruled China until 1368. It now seems that it was this Sai Ciò who sent the Pagoda as a gift to his daughter. In short, this monument is believed to be approximately seven centuries old. During the Japanese invasion which Korea endured from 1592 to 1598, it seems that the invaders decided to carry the pagoda off to Japan and actually removed the top three floors and the tip. However, when they found that the stone blocks were too heavy to transport overland, they tried to destroy the pagoda by lighting a large fire all round it. But that did not work either; the flames only succeeded in blackening the monument, which is still a dark colour today.

In the same enclosure where the marble Pagoda stands, there is a large memorial stone resting on a turtle-shaped base. This monument, of no historical importance, was erected in honor of a certain Wun Gak Sa by Kim Su On, a member of King Se Giò's court, about the year 1470. Like the Pagoda it

is also, albeit very indirectly, of Buddhist origin, since, as recorded in the *Yö-gi Seng-nam*, an authoritative Korean work written in 1478 by order of King Seng Giong, Kim Su On, when he had it built, had been driven out by the College of Confucius for his ill-concealed Buddhist sympathies.

These are the only monuments which recall the existence of the Buddhist religion in the city of Seoul. Outside the walls there are still several Buddhist vestiges - temples, shrines, monasteries - which include the so-called "white Buddha", although this is only very indirectly connected to Buddhism.

Leaving Seoul by the small Gate of the Master, and continuing past the hills that surround the northern side of the city, you come to a narrow, arid valley. It would be difficult to imagine a drearier, more desolate place: not a blade of grass, not a sign of life, nothing but lumps of bare and barren rock, a silent moonscape enlivened only by a small stream running through the middle. On the bank of this stream stands a small pavilion, under which, on a rock outcrop, a large white figure of a woman is carved.

The Europeans, who see a Buddha in every Eastern sculpture, christened this memorial "the white Buddha". In reality it does not depict a Buddha at all, but only the white figure of a poor woman, who lived a long time ago, an unhappy victim of the Korean peninsula's worst mother-in-law.

The legend goes like this: “At the time of King Myeng Yiong, there lived in Seoul a great personage by the name of Kim Su Dong, as wise as he was handsome. Misfortune struck on his wedding day: when his bride removed her face paint, he found himself looking at the ugliest woman that a man could imagine in his worst nightmare. Not only were her features contorted, irregular and clearly contrary to the accepted canons of Korean beauty, but her face was all pitted with the signs of smallpox, her eyes were large and perfectly horizontal - in a word, a horrible sight. The poor fellow, it must be said to his credit, made no complaint and was ready to endure his great misfortune with resignation - an attitude indicated by his wisdom and .... the prospect of a second wife. But his mother, her old mother-in-law, took a very different view: when she saw the little monster in front of her, she became a viper. The son tried in vain to make excuses for the poor girl, pointing out that after all it was not her fault that she was so ugly, but the old woman would not listen; instead, she spent every day thinking up new ways to make life unbearable for her son's wretched wife. Things went on like this for a couple of years, until poor Ha-su, Sea Water as she was called, gave birth to a son. The infant may have looked too much like his mother, and the old tyrant, taking advantage of Kim Su Dong's temporary absence, chased her and her little boy out of the house.

" Ha-su, who until then had endured everything patiently, was driven to despair by this new and greater injustice, and retired to a distant cottage where she decided to let herself die of starvation. Before she died, she found a way to send this message to her husband*: "I am dying, and I ask you as a last and extreme favor to bury me near some torrent, so that its cool waters passing by my body will calm the fever of my spirit. "*

“ Kim Su Dong paid no attention to this request and instead buried Ha-su's body on the side of a hill, as custom required. But after a few days his wife's spirit appeared to Kim and reproached him for not complying with her request. He pointed out that it would have been real madness to do so because, as everyone knew, if you bury your own dead by the bank of a stream, you run the risk that water might penetrate the grave, and then the least that can happen is the immediate death of all your relatives. But the spirit was so insistent that Kim decided to turn to the King and ask him for permission to depart from national custom. The King, informed of the whole affair, gave his permission, and Kim buried his wife by the stream that passes near the gate called Hong-wha, and had her likeness carved on the rock there."

From then on the place was called Ha-su, after the poor victim. When people no longer remembered its history it came to be regarded as sacred. Passers-by used to leave rice offerings for luck. One day, some Buddhist monks settled near the white figure, reconfirmed its sacred character ... and ate the rice. To compensate, they gave it a more imposing name, and it is now called Ha-su Kuang-han, or "Pavilion of the Peace of Sea Water".

When you have seen the Great Bell, the Marble Pagoda, the Turtle and the White Buddha, you have seen all the sights of Seoul except for the Imperial Palaces. These are numberless, since it is traditional for any house used by a sovereign, if only for a stay of a few hours, to be purchased immediately by the government and given the pompous name of imperial palace.

On the subject of imperial palaces, I recall an anecdote from my consular days. Discussions were in progress in Seoul between the representatives of the foreign Powers and the Korean government on

the eternal question of the right, enshrined in the treaties, of all foreigners to own property in the capital. The Korean government was endeavouring by all possible means to restrict this right. We were all invited to a conference at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to discuss the matter further. The Minister of the Interior also attended the conference. When the meeting had been opened, he delivered a speech which our interpreters translated word for word. He began his speech by declaring*: "In all the countries of the world a special respect is shown for the buildings that are or were the residence of the sovereign"* and he went on to ask us to approve the proposal he was submitting, that foreigners should not be allowed to own land or houses within a radius of 700 metres from all the so-called imperial palaces. This demand was indeed excessive, but everyone knows that each country has its own special customs, which must be respected as far as possible. We were already thinking that we would accept the proposal in principle, but with a significant reduction in the permissible distance, to 400 metres for instance instead of 700 metres, when one of us produced a plan of Seoul and we were all astonished to find that circles with a radius of only 300 metres drawn round each of the innumerable "imperial" buildings would cover the entire area of the city, even extending beyond the walls in several places. When we exclaimed, naturally enough*, "But then there is no free space left for us!",* the good Minister looked at us with the most naive air in the world and said gently: *"But that is exactly what we want!"*.

To come back to the palaces, there are only four which truly deserve the name. The two oldest, known respectively as the Old Palace and the New Palace, are both situated in the northern part of the city. The so-called Old Palace was built about a century after the one known as the New Palace. Neither is currently inhabited by the Emperor, who instead lives with his Court in an unimposing residence known as the Ciong Dong Palace, which he had built shortly after his famous escape to the Russian Legation. The fourth is the so-called Mulberry Palace, now completely in ruins, to which numerous popular legends are linked.

The New Palace, better known to foreigners as *The Summer Palace,* was built by Tai Giò on the advice of his assistant Ciung Ta Ciaug despite the opinion of Mu Ah, who predicted that, if it was built, great calamities would befall the country within the next two hundred years. Its Korean name, taken from the seventeenth book of the Classic of Poetry, is *Kyung Pok Kung*, “Palace of the Blessed View”. The great gate giving access to the palace from Ministry Street, *Kang-wha Mun*, the Kang-wha Gate, with its three high entrance arches, is deservedly famous throughout Korea. Guarding the gate are two large monsters, half lion, half dog, fantastic beasts from Korean mythology. They sit threateningly on their stone pedestals on both sides of the approach. They are there specifically to keep the God of Fire away from the Palace - that God of Fire who resides so near Seoul on Mount Kuan-ak (an old volcano?) and whose path across Seoul, as all geomancers are well aware, passes over the great South Gate near the Summer Palace. For the great South Gate, the Koreans provided for its defence by building a small lake nearby, and the Government takes care never to let it dry up: water of any kind has the same effect on the God of Fire as holy water has on the devil, and if, by chance, the deity should one day desire to descend from its mountain, on approaching Seoul it would be immediately repulsed by the mere presence of this lake, placed exactly on the path it would follow. To ensure that, if it found another way of entering the city, it would not damage the Imperial Palace, these two wild beasts, Ha-i'a, were placed at the Palace gate so that the deity, fearing the beasts, would keep out.

Passing through the Kang-wha Gate, you find yourself in a large courtyard containing two rows of small pavilions, which housed the sovereign's military guard when the kings of Korea resided here. You then pass through a series of doors, arches and untended gardens to reach the great Audience Pavilion, Keun-gieng-ciun, the most renowned building in all Korea, and without any doubt its most remarkable architectural work.

The Emperor used to receive his subjects here, and a similar pavilion was recently built in Ciong Dong Palace, where only Koreans are granted an audience. Another pavilion copied from this one can be found in the grounds of the Eastern Palace.

This building, which with its vast size and elegant lines is both imposing and harmonious, rests entirely on a double base of white marble; a wide staircase, also of marble, leads up to it, flanked by numerous small pillars carved in strange shapes, depicting dragons twisted in fantastic coils, legendary animals, or other similar motifs typical of oriental decoration. Today grass and weeds grow unchecked between the steps, around the pillars, and all around the pavilion; most of the carved friezes have fallen into disrepair, the bright colors that once decorated the exterior of the pavilion have blackened with the

destructive passage of time, and the original gilding has almost completely disappeared. The place has acquired an air of antiquity and an age-old stillness which seems to exude an aura of peace and repose.

Inside the pavilion, the passage of time has done less damage than outside: the huge room which fills it entirely is still a grandiose and evocative sight. Of all the monuments preserved today in Seoul, it is the only one that produces an impression of grandeur and reveals how very much better the circumstances of the unhappy Korean Court used to be.

In the middle of one of the long walls of the hall the imperial throne sits on a kind of raised dais, finely worked in red lacquer and gold. Three flights of five steps, one in the center and the others on either side, lead up to it. The floor of the dais, where the sovereign sat, is covered with the very finest mats, examples of wonderful workmanship, which only the renowned craftsmen of the island of Kang-wha can produce. Immediately behind the throne is a massive screen in gold lacquer, worked in squares, each of which bears the emblematic royal dragon - a dragon with seven claws, for only the Son of Heaven is allowed to use the dragon with five claws, and ordinary decorative dragons only have four. Further back, leaning against the wall, an enormous decorative panel depicting the sun and the moon, blue sky and green earth, snow-covered mountains and clear alpine waterfalls, symbolises the beautiful land of Ciu-sen.

Above the platform, between two massive columns lacquered in red, there is a canopy of openwork wood, lacquered in red and gold and attractively decorated in white and blue. Altogether this throne closely resembles the architecture of the minbar of Islamic mosques, and in fact many of those to whom I showed the photograph reproduced here mistook it for one of those Muslim pulpits.

The ceiling is just as attractive as the throne, but because it is difficult to photograph, and its multiple colours are impossible to reproduce, the accompanying illustrations do not do it justice.

Near the great Audience Pavilion, another of the most beautiful features of this ancient palace is to be found, the Lotus Lake. It is best seen in spring, when the lotuses are in bloom and the water is hidden under a floating carpet of flowers, some red as the blood of a wound, others white as mountain snows, all solemn on their rigid stems that rise from the center of the very large leaves - at this time of year the lake is a most delightful sight.

The so-called Eastern Palace, Tong-kuan Te-kuel, very similar on the whole to the Summer Palace, consists in reality of two very old palaces, the western one, *Ciang-duk-kung,* built by Tai Giò himself, and the eastern one, built by Seng Giong. The Eastern Palace is in an even worse state of neglect than the Summer Palace and the visitor cannot fail to be dismayed by the sight of its rapid decay.

The third palace, noteworthy above all because of the curious legends attached to it, is *Kyeng-hei'kung,* today almost completely destroyed; only a few pavilions are still standing within the vast enclosure. Mulberry trees were planted in its grounds some years ago, and it has come to be called the *Mulberry Palace* by Europeans. Legend has it that about seven hundred years ago, when the land now occupied by Seoul was simply an empty space in Hang-yang prefecture, Kong Min An had chosen the place where the Mulberry Palace now stands as the site of a future palace. Later, when Tai Giò moved to Hang-yang to look for a suitable site for his capital, he stopped at a place about ten li from the Palace's current location. He had almost made up his mind to choose it when a large stone table suddenly arose from the ground, on which it was written that it was not a suitable spot, and that Tai Giò should go on for another ten li. Tai Giò hastened to follow this mysterious advice and went on until he reached the place where the Mulberry Palace now stands. He would have adopted it there and then, but his adviser, Ciung Ta Ciang, a man highly versed in the mysteries of *Eum Yang* , immediately found that the place was subject to various evil influences and therefore not suitable. Although the new king's other adviser, Mu Ah, disagreed, foreseeing a very great misfortune (within the next two hundred years) if the palace were to be built elsewhere, Ciung Ta Ciang managed to convince Tai Giò to build his residence at the foot of Mount Pu Han. And Mu Ah's prophecy was not long in coming true, as before the end of the two hundred years the notorious Japanese invasion occurred, when Korea was ravaged by fire and sword.

A later king, remembering the earlier prophecy, and troubled by reports that the Summer Palace was inhabited by numerous evil spirits, ordered a study to ascertain the exact location of the site which Mu Ah had recommended, and built the current Mulberry Palace on it. When the building was finished, its name, as required by Eastern tradition, had to be inscribed on the main entrance. The choice of name, and the manner of its inscription, had to follow all the rules laid down in the old books of occult science.

A well-known scholar, An Suk Pung, was invited to perform this task. After fasting for a hundred days - days spent in meditation - he wrote the three characters *Kung Wha Mun* on the main gate of the palace, that is, the *Gate of Renewed Youth*; and no sooner had he finished his task than his right arm swelled so that he was unable to write anything for the rest of his life.

An even bigger surprise was in store: as soon as the inscription was unveiled, the moon stopped shining, but the road continued to be lit up by a mysterious light coming from the three characters on the gate. Greatly amazed by this supernatural apparition, the King called that road *Ya Quai* , the Way of Resplendent Light.

This light continued to shine for a long time, until the Manchus descended on Korea. Attacking the palace, they launched a projectile which stuck in the upper part of the ideogram \ Vha of the inscription and the light went out forever. The hole made by that bullet is still visible.

The King, however, did not stay much longer in the new palace. As soon as he believed the evil spirits had departed, he returned to the Summer Palace.

Only one other sovereign inhabited the Mulberry Palace, but he was not a member of the royal house of Ciu-sen - the well-known Yi Kual, nicknamed the Three-Day King by Koreans.

From birth Yi Kual had special lines imprinted on the palm of his hand, in which the Chinese ideogram three 三 could easily be recognized. One day he conceived the idea of adding another line to this ideogram, so that it would form the word for king; he cut his hand, with the idea that the wound, once healed, would complete the character. The blood gushed out abundantly. Pressing his hand against the wall to stop it bleeding, he was astonished to see that he could distinctly read the three characters 三日王, Three Days King, in the red handprint on the wallpaper.

From that day on he was ruled by his imagination and his ambition. He went to Pyeng-yanz, gathered a company of courageous young men, trained them well, collected weapons and marched on Seoul.

The terrified King took refuge on Nam Han, and Yi, who proclaimed himself King, went to live in the Mulberry Palace, where he actually reigned for three days before the royal troops dispersed his followers, and he was beheaded.

THE EMPEROR AND HIS COURT

The misfortunes of a sovereign - The pomp of an oriental court - Fleeting illusion – A very interesting dialogue - The Crown Prince – A Court peep-hole - A German conductor and a Korean band -- Ancient customs – A royal banquet – Infernal music - Dances of the ghi-sang - The singers of Pyeng-an Do.

The Emperor of Korea has no personal name: he is the Emperor. In European or American books and newspapers he is often referred to as Li Hsi, but this is merely the Chinese name of the royal house, since Li Hsi means Li's family, or Yi's family, as they would say in Korean.

He is the 28th monarch of the current dynasty and will certainly go down to posterity with the epithet –Giò. As can be seen from the official names of the different kings of Ciu-sen, this epithet is attached to the name of those monarchs whose reign was troubled by the disasters of war – and without a doubt there was never a reign in Korea so troubled by all sorts of calamities as the current one.

He was born in Seoul in the year Im-cià, corresponding to 1852, on the 25th day of the 7th moon. His father was Prince Yi, who had the highest rank of *Heng Sun Kun*, but is generally better known as the *Tai Uen Kun*, or Lord of the Grand Court.

On the death of King Ciel Giong, his grandfather's brother - adopted by Queen Ciò, who had the right to name his successor - the young Ik Syeng (the current Emperor) ascended the throne of Ciu-sen at the age of twelve. In view of his son's age, his father acted as Regent.

The Tai Uen Kun was Korea's true evil genius, and the direct cause of most of the misfortunes of his unlucky son. Active, energetic and bitterly opposed to everything foreign, he placed himself at the head of the reactionary party and, with the party's help, ruled the country for about ten years. He was responsible for the great persecution of Christians in 1866 and the consequent French expedition.

As soon as the regency came to an end, the young king opened the country to foreigners and signed the first treaties, but the Taì Uen Kun was firmly against the new policy and conspired in the shadows against his son. In 1876 the king of Korea was "invited" by his father to poison himself. Some faithful courtiers helped him to avoid obeying the paternal command and saved his life, but the Tai Uen Kun took revenge on them for this setback: for such a proud reactionary, he showed a truly surprising mastery of modern techniques by sending his enemies exploding boxes of sweets, thereby managing to despatch several of them to the next world.

In 1882 he tried to have the Queen killed and for about a year everyone believed that he had succeeded. In reality the Queen had managed to save herself with the help of her women, and after her funeral rites had been celebrated with due solemnity, she reappeared on the Korean political scene.

The Tai Uen Kun was finally caught, put on board a Chinese gunboat and sent as a prisoner to Pao-ting-fu in China.

Meanwhile, the country, in the grip of daily warfare, was occupied by Chinese and Japanese troops. In 1884 a new revolution turned Seoul upside down, new conspiracies were hatched against the King, and the unfortunate sovereign sought refuge by fleeing on the shoulders of a eunuch to the Chinese camp outside the city walls.

In 1891 the Tai Uen Kun returned to Korea and immediately the party opposed to him tried to blow him up by digging under his residence and laying a mine. However, the distance was miscalculated and the explosion only brought down the room next to the one occupied by the illustrious gentleman.

With affairs at this juncture, he wasted no time waiting for another opportunity. Shortly afterwards, the entire royal family had to attend an official function, a sacrifice in a temple located about ten miles from Seoul. The Tai Uen Kun, citing a slight indisposition, excused himself from attending this particular function. When the royal procession reached the appointed place, an underground mine exploded just a few paces from where the King, the Queen and the Crown Prince were standing. The explosion cost a minister his life, while the royals were only saved by the poor quality of the fuse which burned at the wrong speed.

These events took place in early 1895 and shortly thereafter the Queen fell victim, this time for good, to a new conspiracy hatched by the Japanese with the help of the Tai Uen Kun. She was murdered in the most barbaric way in a room of the Palace and her body was burned in the Deer Park.

Other disturbances and riots followed. Meanwhile, Japanese troops occupied the city and the Palace itself, where the King, if not openly then certainly in reality, was held prisoner. But he could not

forget the part played by the Japanese in the murder of his wife, and now that he was in their custody he feared more than ever for his own life. One fine morning, while all the guards thought he was still asleep, he left the Palace hidden in one of the sedans used to transport the ladies of the Court, and sought refuge in the Russian Legation. As soon as he arrived he ordered the dismissal of all the ministers of his former cabinet and had several beheaded. In this escape he was greatly helped by the two ladies Pak and Om; the latter, elevated from then on to the rank of *Whang Kui Pi*, the Sovereign's Private Consort, is the same *Lady Om* who gave Western journalists so much trouble - not knowing how to render the title of *Lady* when applied to a Korean, they described her at different times as American, Russian or Japanese.

The King remained in the Russian Legation for about a year waiting for his current residence to be built. He wanted the new Palace, Ciong Dong, to be built in the midst of the foreign Legations, for greater security.

Then in 1897, perhaps not content with having obtained the title of Independent King, and as if to compensate for past misfortunes, the king of Korea raised himself to the imperial dignity and changed the name of his state from *Ciu-sen*, or Kingdom of the Calm Morning, to *Tai Han,* or Empire of the Great Han - *han* being the generic name of the 13 large provincial divisions and the three ancient states of the peninsula, Ma-han, Pien-han and Cin-han,

Finally in February 1898 the Tai Uen Kun died, he whom a Korean writer so aptly described as a man *with iron bowels and a heart of stone*. But his death did not bring the misfortunes of the unhappy monarch to an end. In July of the same year a new conspiracy tried to force him to abdicate, and in September of the following year the imperial coffee was poisoned. Both the Emperor and the Crown Prince fell seriously ill but recovered later.

As can be seen from these broad outlines, the path of the Emperor of Korea has not always been strewn with roses, and new sorrows await him in the future. A Korean proverb says that some are born to smile and some are born for tears. Poor Emperor! He certainly has not had too much to smile about!

And yet, in the midst of all his misfortunes, he has always remained surprisingly serene of spirit, very good-natured and calm in a typically Oriental way. In this he is quite different from another equally unfortunate ruler, Sultan Abdul Hamìd, whose existence has become a real torture because he lives in continual fear of assassination. The Emperor of Korea, in contrast, has always remained calm and tranquil despite all the vicissitudes he has lived through, almost as if everything that has happened around him has not concerned him at all, as if all the manifestations of the outside world have had no effect on his spirit. This at least is how he appears, but who would dare claim to understand the hidden mystery of an oriental mind?

Intellectually the Emperor is reputed to possess an expert knowledge both of complicated Chinese characters and of indigenous *eur-min* writing, a rare combination. He is also credited with a profound knowledge of Korean history, ancient and modern, and it is said that whenever his ministers or courtiers are in doubt about some point of history or some ancient custom, it is always the Emperor who settles the question with admirable exactness.

Although he is not regarded by his subjects with that religious veneration which the sovereigns of other Asian states expect to be shown, he is universally loved by his people. Very often complaints are heard about this or that minister, about this or that official, and popular discontent with the government is certainly very great; but you only ever hear kind and affectionate things said about the sovereign. The Emperor can justifiably claim to have a place in the hearts of his subjects.

Simple in his habits, he works mainly at night, and the councils of ministers, which he generally presides over, are almost always held at night. The animation around the Palace always begins after sunset, and throughout the night the small square of Ciong Dong resounds with the clamor of a whole legion of servants, porters, riders and dependents waiting for the great officers of state summoned on government business to come out of the Palace.

In all matters of state he always takes great interest in the condition of the people, displaying the deepest concern for the well-being of his subjects, but unfortunately he has no energy at all. This allows his courtiers to take advantage of his good nature, to the detriment of the very people whose happiness he desires.

He has always been accessible to foreigners, and it has always been very easy, not only for diplomats but also for ordinary European residents and even for tourists passing through the capital, to obtain an audience with him. Unfortunately the tourists, with some exceptions of course, have taken

advantage of his accessibility to write a lot of silly nonsense about the Emperor and his Court on their return home.

Little protocol is required for these audiences, which are generally followed by a gala dinner offered in the name of the Emperor by the Minister of the Imperial House and the Grand Master of Ceremonies, but which the Emperor himself does not attend.

For diplomats or other representatives of foreign Powers, a company of soldiers is generally drawn up at the entrance to the imperial compound to render military honors. Guests are received on the threshold of the audience pavilion – an unimposing building of iron and stone, the work of a Russian engineer – by HE *Min Ciun Muk*, His Majesty's old master of ceremonies, who is now half-deaf and in his dotage, but basically a very good man. The senior Court officials are gathered around him: *Yun Ciun Ku*, minister of the Imperial House*, Ciò Ciung Ku,* vice-minister, *Ko Hi Kyong*, the young and alert Head of the diplomatic office of the Palace, his brother *Ko Hi Syeng*, chief interpreter in the office for ceremonial events, *Yi Keuk Yol*, official interpreter for relations with the Italian Legation, and many others, with whom guests exchange a series of bows and greetings. Almost all of them, with the exception of the elderly ministers, generally speak English, and while waiting in the large entrance hall for the audience to begin, sipping tea, guests are soon engaged in interesting conversation with all these gentlemen.

Once inside, you immediately notice something very odd which you certainly did not expect to find: there is nothing oriental about the furniture or the decoration. A red carpet on the floor, a dozen Viennese-style chairs, and a table in the middle with Egyptian cigarettes, Havana cigars, tea, biscuits, baccarat glasses and German cups: in other words the room contains nothing Korean, except for a magnificent screen standing against one of the walls, embroidered in silk, depicting a band of Korean knights hard on the heels of a company of Chinese warriors in full flight - a real jewel. There you are in your tail-coat sipping your tea in this middle-class Western setting, surrounded by all these gentlemen with their bizarre silk clothes and curious butterfly hats, talking to you in English or French, or perhaps Russian or German, and you wonder whether you really are within the walls of an Eastern Court and not at some fancy-dress ball. Sometimes HE *Min Yong Whan*, commander-in-chief of the Korean army, His Majesty's senior aide-de-camp and the late Queen's brother, also attends these receptions, a very dignified and, it must be said, elegant figure in his gilded European uniform, laden with medals and stripes which he is only too pleased to show you. If some of his young officers are on duty with him, dressed in their impeccable uniform, assuming all the different poses which have come to typify young soldiers the world over, then the illusion is almost complete: the only things missing are the pretty faces of young girls, bare shoulders, the rustle of silk ... but the girls are there, behind the windows, lots of them with their little white faces and strange headdresses! They peep at you through the glass, their small eyes full of curiosity, but as soon as they realize you are observing them they fly away like a swarm of butterflies and the vast hall echoes with their high-pitched trills. They are the famous *ghi-sang*, the Palace dancers who are getting ready for the show you will attend after the imperial dinner.

But they have broken the spell: you were thinking of other faces, imagining other female forms, sweet faces of blond madonnas, large sky-blue eyes as deep as the sea, dusky maidens with eyes that shine like the sun, not those little dolls with their porcelain faces and a dull vague look in their small almond-shaped eyes. How distant Italy seems, how far away we feel from the world we belong to! One by one all the miles that separate you from your own people seem to pass in front of you at this moment, and you realize how very far you are from them: yes, there is no doubt about it, you are indeed in Korea, at the Court of the Emperor.

At this point a chamberlain arrives and announces that His Majesty is ready to receive you. You rise and follow the interpreters through a long series of low passages and wooden galleries, all in a state of venerable neglect, to reach the august presence of the Emperor.

When Europeans are granted an audience, they are usually received in a modest room that is open on one side overlooking a courtyard, where some of the Palace servants are going about their business. The room has no tables or chairs, only a carpet on the floor. There is nothing impressive in it.

The Emperor awaits you at the far end of the room, leaning against a small round table, with the Crown Prince by his side. He wears a rich tunic of yellow silk - the imperial color, which he can only wear since the independence of Korea was declared - with large dragons embroidered in gold on the shoulders and chest. On his head he wears a kind of solid tiara in violet-coloured silk with two thin transparent wings at the back rising vertically from the lower flap. His facial appearance is just as you

expected: pale, plump, with two small slanted eyes, motionless and parted, and a few hairs, long and sparse, on the lips and chin. At first sight, his appearance is on the whole insignificant, but as soon as he turns to speak his face lights up with a pleasant smile, which produces a nice impression. Physically he is much smaller than the average Korean, and so throughout these audiences he usually remains upright, standing on a stool hidden behind the small table.

The Crown Prince is dressed like the Emperor, except that his tunic is red instead of yellow. In stature he is much taller than his father, but he does not produce the same pleasant impression on the viewer. An infinite number of stories are told about him and the moral of them all is that both physically and intellectually the august scion of the Imperial House of Korea is a true nobody. I cannot say to what extent this general opinion is true, but certainly seeing him does not encourage one to think differently.

A number of generals dressed in European style - or, to be more exact, in the style of the Japanese army, on which the Koreans have modelled their current military uniforms –, wearing their medals and stripes, are lined up along the sides of the room, their eyes fixed on the ground and their back bent in a continuous bow of respect and devotion. Behind the Emperor hangs the portrait of the tall, corpulent *Guardian of the Gate of Happiness*, the Grand Eunuch, whose enormous face seems to dominate the whole picture.

On entering the room you make the customary three bows and one by one you are introduced to His Majesty and the Crown Prince. The Emperor receives you with a smile and a bow and shakes hands only if you are a diplomat accredited to his government. On this point Korean etiquette is inflexible: there are nine representatives of foreign Powers in Seoul, and the Emperor shakes hands with these nine people and no-one else. There are no exceptions. It sometimes happens, at a change of representatives, that a diplomat who is leaving his post is received at the same audience as his successor; in this case the Emperor will shake hands with the latter and dismiss the departing diplomat with a graceful bow.

Once the introductions are over, assuming that you have been granted an audience as a simple courtesy and not to discuss official business, His Majesty, who only speaks Korean, leans towards the interpreter at your side and whispers a few sentences. The interpreter receives the august words with head bowed and eyes fixed on the floor, in an attitude of the greatest reverence, and then turns to you and translates them:

"His Majesty the Emperor wishes to know how you are".

You hurry to answer that you are very well and the interpreter immediately translates your words to the Sovereign, who smiles at you and with various bows tries to show that he is pleased.

Now it is the turn of the Crown Prince, who also leans towards the interpreter and raps out a sentence which is immediately translated:

"His Highness the Crown Prince wishes to know how you are doing".

The audience proceeds at this pace. You, of course, inquire first about His Majesty's health and then about the Crown Prince's, and so after a good twenty minutes everyone has exchanged information about the others' health. As can be seen, if the conversation cannot be said to proceed very quickly, it cannot be said to be very varied either.

After two or three more conventional remarks of similar importance, usually repeated each time by the Crown Prince, which means you have to make two identical answers, the hearing is over and you can withdraw. The strangest thing you remember about the audience is the curious figure of the Crown Prince bouncing on one foot, when it was not his turn to repeat his father's question, laughing occasionally, approaching you to observe a button or a medal with great interest, and communicating his observations to the four generals in the wings, who bend even lower on hearing the august words.

While I was in Seoul it happened that for the first time, the ladies of the Diplomatic Corps were invited to the audience held before the New Year's Eve gala dinner. After the audience, at which the Emperor received the diplomats and their wives together, the ladies were invited to go to the adjoining room, where the Crown Princess wished to receive them (following the death of the Queen, and since Lady Om has no official position in European eyes, the Princess is the highest ranking lady at the Korean Court). We men, not being admitted by etiquette to the presence of the august lady, were invited to leave the room.

There followed an amusing little scene: the husbands did not want to leave their wives alone with all those Koreans or, at least, wanted to wait for them in the same room, and said so to their hosts. Some confusion arose, with the chamberlain, the master of ceremonies, the interpreters and the generals each expressing their opinion and we diplomats, all lined up, looking at the Emperor. His Majesty, poor

man, turned this way and that, smiled at everyone and, as they say in Tuscany, clearly did not know which fish to catch. I no longer remember exactly what was finally agreed - whether we would wait for the ladies or they would join us in the waiting room - but I can still visualize the amusing little scene with all the to-ing and fro-ing and the raised voices of the courtiers in the presence of the embarrassed Emperor.

If the audience is to be followed by a dinner, you are led from the audience room to a vast veranda where, while waiting to be called to the dining room, you are entertained by the music of the imperial band - a real band of thirty players, perfectly attired in European dress, doing their best under the baton of a good German bandmaster, Herr Franz Eckert. This gentleman, after spending several years in Japan organizing their military bands, suffered the same fate as other European employees of the Japanese government, which fired them all one fine day. From Japan he came to Korea to offer his services. First he composed the Korean national anthem, and now, after a couple of years of hard tenacious work, he has managed to put together this band, which, after all, is no worse than many others making a lot of noise on the streets of Italy.

The musical interlude usually lasts for about an hour, giving you plenty of time to observe the curious clothes of the ministers, masters of ceremonies and interpreters who are always in attendance. The costume worn at the Korean Court is still the classic Chinese costume of the Ming dynasty. This was abolished in the Middle Empire with the advent of the current Manchurian dynasty, and an educated Chinese person, if he were to find himself in the midst of these Korean courtiers, would feel much as we Italians do when we attend official functions of the English Court, where we feel like a descendent who suddenly finds himself in the middle of a convivial meeting of ancestors who lived four or five centuries earlier. Of course, you are not an educated Chinaman and, we must admit it quite honestly, you know nothing of the history of these costumes and have no reason to indulge in flights of fantasy at the sight of such strange fashions. So let us just observe them: formal court dress is identical for everyone and basically consists of a large tunic of very fine silk gauze, usually dark green or dark blue in colour, open at the front and at the back, worn over a white silk garment which forms the collar, and fastened on the right side by a large knot to a flap of the same material as the tunic. A thin silk cord passed under the armpits and knotted over the chest indicates a degree of seniority, and only certain officials are entitled to this accessory. The highest-ranking officials also wear a rich metal belt, of interwoven silver strands or encrusted with square-shaped precious stones. This belt is held up by two invisible straps fixed under the arms, and is held in position around the chest and the back at a distance of some ten centimetres from the body. These belts are a very curious sight: they make you think of jugglers, holding a small hoop in their hands and demonstrating their agility by jumping in and out of it very quickly. Looking at these serious ministers you expect to see them jump out of their bejewelled hoop at any moment.

At one time Korean officials wore a sort of surplice over the front and back of the tunic – as still happens in China – embroidered with a tiger, an unicorn, a stork, and so on, according to their rank. Now that this sign of rank has been abolished, if you want to be sure of the correct rank of all these officials, you have to look closely at the buttons they wear behind the ears on the headband holding their long hair in place. Depending on their degree of seniority, the buttons will be of unworked jade, carved jade or gold. The hat in use at the Court is also different from the ordinary Korean chimney-pot hat, but it is just as original: in colour it is also black, it is made of very light silk and very thin bamboo fibre, and in shape it closely resembles the horn-shaped cap of the Venetian Doges. In addition, two small transparent wings are fixed to the back of the hat. They are curved forward, and as a result Europeans call it a butterfly hat.

The music finally comes to an end and around eight o'clock a chamberlain comes to announce that dinner is ready.

If you were expecting an oriental meal, as is customary in Beijing, you would be disappointed. If, on the other hand, you liked the idea of a European dinner better, I must say right away that your every expectation will be far exceeded, since of all the various public services in Korea, that of the imperial kitchen is without a doubt the best organized. All the credit for this must go to the good Miss Sontag, an Alsatian lady who came to Korea as companion to the wife of the Russian Ambassador, at the time of the sovereign’s escape to the Russian Legation, and then stayed on in the service of the Imperial Court as director of European-style catering.

The dinner, which, I repeat, is always excellent and without equal anywhere else in Korea, is

served entirely by Korean servants, impeccably dressed all in white. As for the diners, the Koreans are rather quiet during the meal. In their view every word spoken is a mouthful lost, and if they do not say much they certainly eat a lot.

Some things are the same the world over, and in Korea too the end of the banquet signals the start of the toasts. As soon as you propose a toast, one of the interpreters rises to translate it in Korean for his countrymen and translates the toasts proposed by the ministers into English or French for your benefit.

When dinner is over, you are escorted back to the veranda. The military band, which has continued to play for your entertainment throughout the meal, then retires and its place is taken by a band of native musicians, dressed in red, with curious black cardboard hats and a whole collection of infernal instruments. These produce a series of sounds so painful and deafening, that you need really strong nerves to survive them. How can I describe a Korean symphony? Imagine the howl of the storm, the hiss of the wind, the crash of lightning, the sound of chains dragged along the pavement, the creaking of rusty hinges, the chirping of cicadas, the screech of a fingernail on slate: all the loudest, most spasmodic noises that man can produce follow one another, double back, blend together, rise to the highest pitch, and then suddenly cease before starting again, shriller and more insistent than before. In a word, it is torture, real torture.

And now, to the sound of that music, the graceful *ghi-sang*, the charming girls with nimble little feet and modulated voices, accomplished in all the fine arts, move forward to begin their dances.

No ceremony is ever organized at the Palace without a troop of *ghi-sang,* with their multi-coloured costumes and strange headdress, consisting of a tiny golden crown, set with a thousand pearls and glittering sequins, on top of an enormous mass of hair, mostly false, curiously piled up on their head.

They advance ever so lightly, seeming to barely graze the floor, moving to a rhythm which they alone can discern in the din of the infernal music; they wave the wide veils they are holding slowly, rhythmically this way and that; they bow, they turn, they weave strange figures, and end up influencing you, attracting your attention. The music is still as loud as before, but gradually, helped by the rhythm of the dances, you too begin to discern a theme, a kind of *leitmotiv* which recurs over and over again, unfolds, seems suddenly to give way to another theme, only to reappear, insistent and monotonous, leading the dancers to repeat the same moves and the same weightless steps. They represent a succession of ancient myths, very old dances composed in centuries long past, regulated by precise rules, the subject of a whole literature; every step, every move has its precise meaning, and your hosts are stirred at the sight of them, uplifted, their faces alight with enthusiasm. They know the meaning of the dances, but you do not; for a good half-hour you also take an interest in the show, which is very original, but then you start to tire of it and after an hour – the usual length of the performance – you are frankly exhausted. In my case, I do not know by what strange association of ideas, those dances ended up putting me in mind of certain old passages of seventeenth-century writers, and made me sleepy.

The majority of these girls come from the province of Pyeng-an, which produces many beauties. They are the main ornament of every Korean festival, and the most beautiful among them are reserved for the service of the Court. Unlike the other women of the peninsula, who spend their lives in the seclusion of their home, these *ghi-sang* enjoy greater freedom, which they put to good use - their expensive company is highly sought after by the youth of the capital. There are naturally more of them in Seoul than elsewhere, but every provincial town, however small, boasts its troop of *ghi-sang* too. They correspond very closely to the famous *gheshe* of Japan, although they are far from possessing all the captivating femininity of their Japanese counterparts; and like them, they are the heroines of a thousand popular novels. Although they usually earn their living from their relaxed lifestyle rather than their dancing skills, quite a few end up making a good marriage.

After the dancing comes the singing, as planned in the programme for the evening. The dancers retire and with them the infernal music, and their place is taken by a dozen of the most famous singers of Pyeng-yang, tall serious men, who advance slowly in line, while one of them beats furiously on a long drum shaped like an hourglass, their strange and sole accompaniment. They sing in turn, one after the other, softly then shrilly, like all Orientals; their song is a slow, sad chant, with long drawn-out notes, occasionally making way for a lively, hurried chorus which they all sing together, making the fast drumbeats even louder. There is something liturgical and atmospheric about the solo passages, and it is a pity that the singing, like the dancing, generally goes on for too long, because, in smaller doses, it

could also be very pleasant.

After the singing, the ceremony is over, and you are finally free to leave. Depending on your temperament, your impressions of the evening spent at the Imperial Court of Korea may well vary, but there is one thing you cannot deny – everyone involved has gone to a great deal of trouble to make it an enjoyable experience which you will remember with pleasure. If they have not altogether succeeded, this is due, not so much to any shortcomings on their part as to the undeniable fact that Eastern art – music, singing, dancing – does not have the same emotional appeal for Westerners as for Orientals.

Meanwhile, as you set out for home, surrounded by twenty or so Palace servants carrying big lanterns which cast strange shadows on the walls of the sleeping city, the North Door of the Palace opens to admit the ministers on their way to Council. The Emperor can now get down to work.

STRANGE KOREAN CUSTOMS

A centuries-old hatred - The day of water and the night of silence – Child marriages - The Korean mother-in-law - Female dress - The fair sex in Korea – Korean names - Grammatical etiquette – Aristocratic parasites - The various classes.

It cannot truthfully be said that, on arriving in Korea, a European's first impression of this people is favourable; he would find it hard to believe how dirty these Koreans are!

The Dutchman Hamel, who was taken prisoner after his ship foundered off the Korean coast, and was the first to bring news of this empire to Europe, wrote in his account of his time in Korea, published around 1670, that Koreans hated water so much that their faces looked like the faces of mulattos. This hatred can now truly be described as age-old, and its roots must be really strong and deep to have survived and flourished for so many years.

The Japanese authorities, when they believed for some time after the war of '95 that they had become the undisputed guardians of Korea, issued a lot of ridiculous orders obliging Koreans to cut their hair, abandon the national white costume, stop smoking very long pipes and other similar stupidities. The strange thing is that it did not occur to the Japanese, so scrupulously clean themselves, to make a daily ration of soap and water compulsory for all Koreans.

Everyone in Korea dresses in white and should consequently feel the need for scrupulous cleanliness even more than other peoples.

Why the Koreans wear white is a mystery, since white is the colour of mourning throughout the Far East, as black is for us, and on the death of a sovereign all Koreans must stay in mourning for a period of three years. An old legend tells how at one time in Korea three sovereigns died in the space of ten years: the Koreans, finding the consequent continual change of clothes wearisome and not a little expensive, decided from then on to wear white all the time, so that they would always be ready for any national mourning. This is why nowadays, when a sovereign dies, the only change required to respect tradition is to wear a different hat.

Another theory is that they dress in white so that their womenfolk have to spend all day washing their clothes, leaving them no time for those long chats which women so love the world over. If this is indeed the case, who can blame the Koreans - they would be proving that they are much more astute than they appear to be at first.

It is true that the women, for their part, do not give it much thought: they do not do any washing and can always find time to chat. So those who come off worst are still their poor husbands, forced to go around in clothes that would make a Franciscan friar blush.

However, it would be an exaggeration to say that Koreans never use water for washing, just as it would be an exaggeration to say that women spend their entire lives in vain chatter. There is one day in the year when everyone uses relatively large quantities of water, just as there is one day in the life of every woman when she is obliged to stay absolutely silent.

The day when the use of water for washing is strictly prescribed is the Korean New Year's Day, which generally falls in early February. On that day the whole city seems transformed; in the streets you see nothing but snow-white clothes, and the fresh pink little faces of boys and girls dressed for special occasions in lovely little silk jackets with the most vivid colors – red, yellow, green and blue; a holiday mood pervades the streets, passers-by smile at one another and exchange deep bows; all day people hurry to the houses of their friends to congratulate them and exchange greetings.

The fact is that on that day custom requires every citizen, whatever their opinions on the matter, to wash from head to foot and change all their everyday clothes. For ceremonial attire, or clothes which are not worn every day, the collar has to be changed but that is all.

Once the day is over, it is goodbye water, goodbye spotless clothes, the subject is dropped for the rest of the year!

The day on which women are forced, again by custom - that tyrant of the Eastern peoples - to observe absolute silence, is their wedding day.

Koreans in general get married very young - fifteen is the average age for men, twelve for women. However, amongst the lower classes marriages generally take place at an older age, whereas in Korea's upper class it is not uncommon for the groom to be twelve and the bride eight.

I hasten to add that these child marriages do not imply that the very young couple will live

together right away. They will not become husband and wife in the full sense of the term until they have reached a more reasonable age, that is when the father and mother of the groom consider it appropriate. It should be understood that in a Korean wedding the people who seem to be the least involved in the proceedings, whose opinion nobody cares about, are precisely the bride and bridegroom.

Marriage, like any other contract, is always arranged through an intermediary. This person goes to see some girl's family and tells the parents that such and such a young man would do very nicely for their daughter, and then goes to the young man's family and says much the same thing. The terms are discussed by both sets of parents, but never face to face; the go-between handles everything, going out of his way to extol the merits of the other side, so to speak, until the marriage contract is finally settled. Only then do the parents announce to their son or daughter that on this or that day he or she will be marrying such and such a young man or girl, in much the same way that our parents would say to us: "Do you know what, tomorrow we will go for a picnic in the country."

When the day arrives, the groom, dressed for the occasion, mounted on a white horse, followed by his closest friends and a whole procession of people – bearers of large yellow paper umbrellas, servants, maids of honor, and so forth -, goes to the house of the bride whom, we must remember, he has never set eyes on until then.

It is not difficult to imagine what unpleasant surprises can await both spouses at that first meeting.

However, it is always the bride who comes off worst, since the man who finds himself married to a girl who for one reason or another does not match his ideal, will always be able, if he has the means, to procure a second wife and even a third, or a fourth, until he finds one who suits him. The woman, on the other hand, has no alternative resource – at least, no other official resource. She cannot even hope for premature widowhood, since until a few years ago fashion, and now no longer the law but custom (possibly even more rigid than the law), does not allow a widow to re-marry.

Meanwhile, in the bride's house, the poor girl has been bundled up for the occasion in a special dress of red brocade embroidered all over with large allegorical figures, her whole face has been painted white with two small blood-red spots on her mouth and forehead, and she stands there motionless and shy looking lost while waiting for her future lord.

When he arrives, she throws herself to the ground, prostrating herself five times in the most respectful of bows, while at the same time, as a sign of his superiority, the groom restricts himself to bowing only twice. With these seven bows the ceremony ends, without a word having been exchanged between the two unfortunate young people.

The girl then climbs into a sedan chair and is brought to the groom's house, where she is handed over to her mother-in-law and made to wait in one of the rooms at the back, while the groom and his friends remain outside enjoying a banquet which does not usually end until late at night.

When it is late enough for the bridegroom to leave without having to fear that his friends will make fun of him for being over-solicitous, he rises, says goodbye to all the guests, who generally stay on longer to drink and sing, and goes in to his bride.

She absolutely must continue to observe the most religious silence for the whole of the rest of the night. In this connection, there is a story about a young man who bet his friends that he could get his wife to say something on their wedding night. The friends, curious to see whether he could bring off this exploit, went and stood outside the bridal chamber. I mentioned earlier that the interior walls of Korean houses are made of paper, and so anyone standing outside could hear perfectly well what was going on inside – and perhaps someone, more curious than the others, had even poked a finger through the wall to make a peep-hole to spy on the newly-weds. Our young man did everything he could think of, used every device imaginable, but the girl did not utter a word. He was about to give up when he exclaimed: "Alas, that fortune-teller was right when he predicted that my future wife would be deaf and dumb." On hearing this, the girl could no longer restrain herself, she turned bright red and shouted: "Me deaf and dumb? You'll see if I'm dumb! " Her husband was overjoyed, his friends were crestfallen because they had lost the bet, when the girl hastened to exclaim: "The fortune teller I consulted was more truthful than yours: he predicted that I would marry an idiot, and I realize that he was perfectly right." It was the friends' turn to be overjoyed: they paid the bet, but the unfortunate husband was known as the idiot for the rest of his life.

The life of the Korean wife is certainly one of the unhappiest imaginable. Once she has left her father's home to go to her husband's, the woman immediately becomes a slave, the slave not so much

of her husband as of his mother. People who do not know what a Korean mother-in-law is capable of cannot really say they know what mothers-in-law are like. She is the true queen of the house. The folk lore of the peninsula abounds in anecdotes which paint her in the darkest colors; her every desire is law and as long as she lives it seems that her greatest delight, nay her true mission, is to make life unpleasant for her wretched daughter-in-law. In general, the daughter-in-law bears everything patiently, sustained only by the hope of soon becoming a mother-in-law in her turn and exacting her revenge on the future wives of her own sons. This also explains why marriages are made in Korea at such an early age: it is the mothers who want it this way, to become mothers-in-law themselves as soon as possible.

In no country in the world are the women kept in such strict seclusion as in Korea. Those who belong to the upper and middle classes never leave the house. When it is absolutely necessary for them to go out, they do so only in hermetically sealed sedans. The few women who are seen in the streets all belong at the bottom of the social ladder, and they too usually keep their faces hidden. In Seoul they wear a curious green silk surcoat on their head to hide their face; although this garment has sleeves, it is never worn as a coat under any circumstances. In the country the women wear a kind of white apron in place of the green silk surcoat, but its purpose is the same – to hide the face.

Nor is this the most curious detail of female attire in Korea. A glance at the photographs reproduced here is enough to see that for originality Korean fashion is second to none. Women who walk about with their breasts uncovered belong exclusively to the lowest class, *cil-ban*, and they are now a very rare sight in Seoul, as a result of the work of the English and American missionaries.

In the upper classes and among the *ghi-sang* who aspire to be the professional beauties of Korea, the bosom is not left uncovered, but flattened and compressed by the top of the full skirt, so as to keep the body as flat as possible by compressing each curve. And to think some people say ideas of beauty are not purely a matter of race! The beautiful lines of the Venus de Milo would be no more pleasing to Koreans than the wooden rigidity of a mannequin is to us.

It is a curious fact that everyone who sets foot in Korea for the first time thinks that all the young men in the streets are women. Several factors help to mislead the visitor - the almost complete absence of females in the crowds, the fact that the few who are out and about mysteriously hide their face, and the unattractiveness of those who do show their face and …their breasts, together with the regular, graceful features of Korean youths, their almost feminine clothing and their long hair done up in a thick tress at the back. I remember going on board one of our warships one day – it had just arrived in Cemulpo - and finding the officers completely amazed to see nothing but women at the oars and the helm of the numerous sampans crowding round the ship; in reality there was not a single woman in sight – the ones they had mistaken for women were only fifteen-year-old boys. This curious mistake has been made so often that Korean teenagers have come to be called "the fair sex of Korea."

The tress hanging down the back is worn by Korean males until their wedding day. Until then, whatever his age, a Korean is only a boy and is considered as such by the whole family, by his friends and even by the law, for his name is not even recorded in the registers of the population. He is allowed to enter the part of the house usually reserved for women, he can wear brightly colored clothes, and the name he bears, *ai-myong* or "childhood name," is not the one he will be known by in later life, but a kind of nickname that will be dropped for good on his wedding day.

Some of these childhood names, which are given to girls as well as boys, are very curious: *Mak-dongi*, for instance,"our last child", or *Pön-hio-ki*, "a mistake”; others are more poetic, such as *I-pu-ni*, "beauty," *Cin-giu*, "pearl," or *Su-pok*, "continuous blessing;" names of animals are also common, such as *Po-mi*, "tiger," *Su-kai*, "dog," and the endless series of "dragons," such as “blue dragon," "golden dragon," "flying dragon," etc.

When the time has finally come for a young man to marry, various ceremonies are performed before the actual wedding, two of which are especially important: the abolition of the tress and the imposition of the “legal name”, *kuang myeng*, that is the name he will always be known by for the rest of his life. Both these ceremonies are carried out with much help from relatives and even more from friends, as they are usually seen as an opportunity for a big banquet.

The young bridegroom’s hair is gathered in a knot on the top of his head and held tight by a frontal band of horsehair tied at the back by a thin silk cord wound round two buttons behind his ears. These are the buttons which, depending on the material used to make them, serve to distinguish the various ranks of the Korean hierarchy.

The boy who until then had to go about bare-headed, now has the right to wear the ordinary

chimney-pot hat made of horsehair and bamboo, and his clothes from now on will always be white, insofar his wife takes care to keep them clean.

It sometimes happens that the tress is abolished not at the time of his wedding but when he becomes engaged. In that case the boy, although his hair is raised, is not yet authorized to use the hat worn by adults, but will instead wear a curious white straw headdress, shaped rather like the ordinary hat and decorated with a few flowers arranged in a circle.

The "legal name" always consists of three syllables, of which only one can be chosen by the parents. The first syllable comes from the "family names," *syong*; these are very limited in number, since there are less than 150 of them in the whole of Korea. In fact they are usually thought to number only one hundred, and the Korean word for population, people, multitude, is precisely *pek-syong*, "the hundred names." The second syllable constitutes the so-called "generation name," *hang-yol-cià*, and is the same for all the members of a family who belong to the same generation. The third syllable, finally, is the only personal part of the name; the only conditions to be met when choosing it are that it sounds well in conjunction with the *hang-yol-cià* and that the two together form a meaningful word.

If I wished to continue talking about Korean names, I would have to go on for a long time, because the study of names is a real science in Korea, and many others are used as well as the ones already mentioned: the "family name," *cià-ho*, by which everyone is known amongst friends and equals; the "name of honorable distinction," which inferiors use to designate their superiors (for a younger brother, for example, it would be seriously disrespectful to use an older brother's legal or family name, so he will use the name of honorable distinction, *pyol-ho*); and then there is the "posthumous name," *cing-ho*, conferred *post mortem* by government decree on those officials who made themselves worthy of special consideration during their lifetime.

All this, of course, applies only to the male population, since women in Korea share with the Emperor the privilege of having no personal name. There is of course a difference: while the Emperor has no name because it would be a very serious lack of respect on the part of his subjects if they were to pronounce with impunity, even involuntarily, a word that was part of the imperial patrimony, women have no name because to Koreans, who deny them any individuality, it would be superfluous. In childhood, young girls are distinguished by one of those childhood names already mentioned which are devoid of any personal connotation; as soon as they are married, they lose even that semblance of a name and are referred to only as "Pak's wife" or "Kim's mother." An exception is made for the *ghi-sang*, who on the contrary generally have very poetic and graceful names, such as "white cloud," "bright star," etc.

The custom whereby an inferior will never pronounce the name of someone who is his superior, especially in family relationships, has its equivalent in another custom whereby a Korean father will never refer to his children or his wife otherwise than with derogatory euphemisms. If you ask him about his children, he will most likely reply that "the little animals are fine;" if the conversation leads him to speak of his wife - and it would not be in any way correct for you to ask after her - he would refer to her as "the old fool of his house," where "illustrious person" or " virtue perfected" would be more suitable expressions to employ to indicate the father or the mother.

Even in common speech there are marked grammatical differences - making it very difficult for foreigners to learn Korean - depending on the degree of respect you wish to show, or rather, you should show to the person you are talking to or of whom you are talking. On the subject of these differences, consisting mainly of special verbal forms, Korean etiquette is very strict. Using a form of lower language constitutes in any case a very serious offense, to erase which it is not enough to plead ignorance, or to say you were acting in good faith. This explains why so few foreigners venture to speak Korean – they can almost be counted on the fingers of one hand - and why there are so very many less of them than in other countries whose languages are nonetheless considered more difficult. The fact is that Korean has to be spoken with the greatest correctness, without which it is not possible to derive any of those advantages that the foreigner usually expects when he speaks the local language. A clear proof of these difficulties is the fact that while the interpreters of the various Legations in Beijing and Tokyo are all European, those of the Legations and Consulates in Seoul are on the contrary all Koreans.

And it is curious to note how alongside a country whose social regime is as profoundly democratic as China's is, in a people who has, so to speak, received from China all its structures, two of its three religions, its handwriting, its arts and sciences, in a people who are always looking to China and copying it in every detail, a society so full of social prejudices could have arisen, on the basis of

such a small aristocracy.

The people who really govern Korea are the so-called nobility, or class of *yang-ban*, which supplies almost all government officials. In theory government posts should be open to all, as is the case in China, but in practice, with a few exceptions, only the *yang-ban* are accepted.

The main characteristic of members of this class is aversion to any kind of work. Given this natural disposition of the country's governing class, the internal disorder which reigns in the administration of the state is not surprising. To this must be added that, since they do not produce anything, and never adapt to work, which would be singularly degrading, the *yang-ban* represent a real burden for the mass of the people who, directly or indirectly, are obliged to maintain them. Not even in circumstances of the direst poverty, and not a few *yang-ban* are reduced to such a state, would their dignity allow them to find some honorable occupation to earn their living; for a *yang-ban* it will always be more dignified to resort to the help of friends, to parasitism, to deception, perhaps even to fraud, but never to work.

The strange thing is that scraping a living in this way is not considered in the least dishonorable by the rest of the population. Every rich person – and this says a lot for the Koreans' sense of hospitality – is surrounded by large numbers of such parasites who in some way constitute his clients. Some of the wealthiest families in Seoul support up to three or four hundred people – family members, impoverished relatives, servants and aristocrats - who are all dependent on them for their material survival. No one will ever think of denying a *yang-ban*, however reduced his circumstances, any of those honors due to his caste, honors which are always denied even to the most powerful officials who do not come from the nobility. I remember, for example, that although the famous Yi Yong lk, the finance minister and the Emperor's favorite, was then at the apogee of his glory, none of my servants, when he came to see me, showed him half the deference they would have shown to any Court official who was a *yang-ban*. When Yi Yong Ik entered the room, none of the Korean dignitaries present showed the least inclination to stand up, which they did regularly on the entrance of every other person who, like them, belonged to the nobility.

After the *yang-ban* and the officials comes the *ciung-in* or middle class, to which all the merchants, artisans and petty officials belong. There was once a visible difference in dress between this class and the previous two: the aristocrats and the government officials used to wear tunics with long billowing sleeves which members of the middle class were not allowed to wear, but now this difference no longer exists. The right to wear the light sleeveless surcoat, generally of blue silk, is only granted as a special honor to members of the *ciung-in* class.

After the *ciung-in* comes the common, and last, class, the *cil-ban*, the pariahs excluded from the common rights, who are not entitled to wear a chimney-pot hat, a headband or leather shoes.

The seven categories of people who make up this class were laid down once and for all by Uang Hui, King Se Gìong's Prime Minister, and they are: the *po-ciul*, judicial executioners; the *koang-tai*, acrobats, buffoons, etc; the *pak-ceng*, butchers; the *kori-ceng*, basket-makers, because "to remove the bark from plants is fully equivalent to skinning animals"; the *mutang*, witches, fortune tellers, etc; the *ghi-sang*, dancers; and finally the *kel-pel-ci*, makers of leather shoes, who "because they handle animal skins must be classified with the butchers."

Now, however, butchers, and consequently shoemakers and basket makers, after addressing a series of petitions to the sovereign setting out their aspirations, have won the right to be assimilated to the common class, at the same time acquiring entitlement to wear the chimney-pot hat, the headband, and leather shoes and, what is more important, to be addressed in politer language – until then even a child who barely came up to their waist had the right to address them in the rudest way, while they were obliged to answer in politer terms. That was their greatest grievance.

CONFUCIANISM

Religions of Korea - Introduction of Confucianism - Korean mythology - Ancestor worship - The three souls and their fate - Funeral ceremonies

One of the most striking things about Seoul is the almost complete lack of temples or other places of worship.

In the centre of the city there is a so-called Altar of the Earth where, no more than once a year, the Emperor goes to sacrifice; a small Temple of Heaven, a reproduction on a smaller scale of the temple of the same name in the Chinese capital; in the northern part of the city, a so-called Confucian Temple where the tablets of Confucius and his disciples are kept; scattered here and there, three or four shrines dedicated to the Spirit of War; and that concludes the list.

These places, it should be added, all have, so to speak, an exclusively votive character; they are not associated with any liturgical practice.

Now one of the questions I am most often asked is this: What is the dominant religion in Korea?

My initial reaction would be to answer: None! But then, taking the word religion to mean more than just the regular practice of an established cult, it would be more accurate to answer that there are three dominant religions in Korea, superimposed one on the other: Confucianism (since by common consent it is counted as a religion, although in reality it is nothing more than a very pure agnostic moral code), Buddhism and Shamanism, comprising the whole shapeless mass of popular beliefs that form the true basis of the people's religion.

Confucianism is the moral foundation of the life of the nation. Korean society is in its inner essence distinctly Confucian; there is not a prefecture in the country which does not have its own little temple dedicated to Confucius.

Buddhism, after being greatly honoured in the peninsula for many centuries, was officially proscribed when the current dynasty was founded, leaving only an ill-defined belief in an after-life in the Korean soul.

Shamanism, with all its spirits and evil geniuses, is the true religion of the people. The Korean spends his life in the sole and perpetual hope of averting the influence of evil spirits, while procuring the protection of benevolent ones.

Of these three religions, the last is undoubtedly the oldest. Although containing many beliefs of Taoist and also Buddhist origin, Shamanism certainly originated in Korea, and in it we must recognize the disordered beliefs of the first inhabitants of the peninsula.

Examining each of these religions separately, it is difficult to establish exactly when Confucianism was introduced in Korea. However, we know for certain that the classic texts of this Creed were brought to the peninsula by Cioi Ci Uon, who lived around the year 70 BC.

Discussion of any topic referring to Korea always presupposes some knowledge of the civil and religious institutions of China, just as knowledge of the institutions of Greco-Roman civilization forms the necessary basis for any teaching in our Western countries. Such an assumption is even more necessary in the special case of Confucianism, which embodies the very essence of the Chinese soul. Therefore, before describing the special form of Confucianism to be found in Korea, a quick mention of the life and work of the great Chinese philosopher might be useful.

Confucius, or more properly Kong-fu-tze (in Korean *Kong-già*), the "Philosopher of the Kong family," was born in the small Duchy of Lu, in northern China, in the year 550 BC. As a child he showed wisdom beyond his years and an extraordinary thirst for knowledge. He married at nineteen and, at a very young age, undertook long journeys through the different states of the Chinese empire, staying at the Courts of the princes he hoped to convert to his political concepts and moral standards. But Confucius was a wise man, honest in character and intentions, and many princes on this earth have preferred the company of agreeable courtiers and false flatterers to the counsels of wise and honest men. His precepts accordingly gained few followers amongst the powerful, and he turned to private teaching, attracting large numbers of devoted and enthusiastic disciples from all parts of the empire. The master taught love for what is good, preaching the finest principles of moral virtue: filial love above all, brotherly love, conjugal fidelity, faith in friends, loyalty to the prince. "The doctrine of our Master, Kong-Fu-tzè" – we read in the *Lun Yu* (in Korean *Non-ö*, *Teachings of Confucius*) – "consists solely in this: to be righteouss of heart and to love one's neighbor as oneself. "

Confucius is held to be the true founder of ancestor worship, which he saw as an extension to the dead of filial piety, and not as a positive belief in a future state.

Some said, wrongly, that he founded a new religion: he was only a great, a very great teacher of ethics. He created nothing, but, being a profound connoisseur of the nature and history of the people he was addressing, he fashioned a coherent body of teachings from the age-old customs they were already observing, highlighting their moral side.

On the subject of life after death, he never committed himself. To a disciple who asked him for explanations of death and the after-life, he replied: "We don't know what life is, how could we ever know what death is?" To another who asked him how men should serve the higher gods and spirits, he replied: "When you are not fit to serve men, how could you serve their spirits?"

In the last years of his life Confucius devoted himself to revising the classics, compiling and arranging all those moral maxims he had come across or heard, but he never wrote any original works. He died at 73, having survived his wife and his only son.

The following summary of Confucian doctrine, as it appears in the preface to Dr Gabrieli's *Encheiridion Confucianum*, is taken from the Memoirs of Father Amiot:

″Man, being a reasonable creature, is made to live in society: there is no society without government, no government without subordination, no subordination without superiority. Legitimate superiority, prior to any particular privilege, comes only from birth or from merit: superiority from birth comes from the difference in age; superiority acquired by merit or talent consists in the art of winning the affection of others. Thus it is natural that the father and the mother rule the children, that adults rule those who are under age, and, in human society, that he who can so win the affection of his fellows that they obey him – a rare talent, a sublime science, which is believed at first to be the prerogative of a few privileged beings, but which in reality belongs to all mankind, since it is based on humanity and humanity is nothing more than man himself.

″Having more humanity than others means being more humane than others, and therefore worthy to command them. Humanity is therefore the foundation of everything, the first and most noble of all virtues. To love man is to have humanity, that is, to possess the virtue that the word Zen (man) brings.

″We must therefore love ourselves and love others. But in this love for oneself and one's fellow men, there is certainly a measure, a difference, a rule that assigns to each individual his legitimate share; and this is justice (*yi*).

″Humanity and justice are what they are, regardless of our will; but in order to practise them and apply them in an uniform way, established laws, time-honoured customs, and certain ceremonies are needed. Observance of these laws, compliance with these customs, and performance of these ceremonies, make up the third of the cardinal virtues, the one that assigns to each his particular duty (*li*), that is, *order*.

″To perform all these duties correctly without disturbing the system of *order*, one must know how to know and to distinguish, one must know how to apply this sure knowledge and this wise discernment opportunely; this correct application, this prudence, this wisdom, constitute *righteousness* of spirit and heart (*ci*), which causes everything to be examined without preconceptions, with the sole aim of knowing the truth, and which makes us hold fast to this truth in order to validate it or to regulate one's own conduct in accordance with what it teaches.

"*Humanity, justice, order, righteousness* can also falter at every step: therefore a faithful companion is required who never abandons them, a protective shield against self-love, personal interest and the whole crowd of enemies that unceasingly assaults them. This faithful companion, this safe shield, is *sincerity* or *good faith* (*sin*). Sincerity enhances our actions and gives them merit. Without sincerity, what appears to be virtue is only hypocrisy; what shines and gleams, is nothing but a flash of lightning, which the tiniest breath of the lightest passion is sufficient to extinguish.

″These five virtues are derived from each other and support each other. They form a chain that binds all men together, producing their mutual safety and happiness - a chain that cannot be broken without breaking the bonds and the foundation of society at the same time. "

This, then, summarizes the ethical part of Confucian doctrines, which are expounded in greater

detail in the *Sse-shu* (in Korean *Kyung Su*) or the Four Classics. The first of these books is the *Ta-hsio* (in Korean *Ta Hak*), the "Sublime Knowledge," by Tseng-tzè, a disciple of Confucius, who collected the teachings of the Master in it. Then comes the *Ciung-yung* (in Korean *Ciung Yong*), the "Doctrine of the Middle," collected by Confucius' grandson, Tse-ssè. The third classic is the *Lun-yu* (in Korean *Non-ö*), "Philosophical Entertainments" or "Teachings," which contains all the memorable sayings of Confucius and the answers he gave to his disciples on various questions. The fourth classic is the work of Mencius (in Korean *Mang-gia*), the second of the great Chinese philosophers and the greatest and most original of the continuers of Confucius' moral work.

These works are extremely popular in Korea, as they are in the whole Mongolian world. Equally popular are the Five Canonical Texts, *Whu-king* (in Korean *O Kyung*), in which Confucius collected the memories, customs and songs of his age. Until a few years ago, these Confucian texts even constituted the sole basis of Korean education, and the sole subject of the annual exams that were held in Seoul in the presence of the sovereign himself and which had to be passed successfully to have any chance of entering the civil service.

It is therefore no wonder that the foundations of society in Korea, as in China, rest essentially on the principles of Confucian ethics, while at the same time, in both countries, the teachings of that great positive philosopher, poorly understood by the common people, generated a whole chain of superstitions and external practices, expressed in ancestor worship, which is indeed a direct emanation of the doctrines preached by Confucius, but was certainly not instituted by him.

There is of course a great difference between ancestor worship as practised in China and its Korean form. The difference is attributable chiefly to the fact that each of the three dominant religions in the peninsula plays a part in the mythology of the country, and the rules and rites of each one are continually intermingled with the laws and practices of the others.

At the head of the Korean mythological system is *Ha-namin*, the Supreme Being, who is worshipped once a year by the Emperor alone. The Buddha, who in popular belief is considered inferior to *Ha-namin*, should be placed next; after the death of a relative, Koreans traditionally pray to him to send the soul of the deceased to the Supreme Being. Then come the Ten Judges of Avernus (Hell), *Sip-tai-wang*, who are kept accurately informed by their servants of the actions of mortals. When a man dies, one of his souls (the Koreans believe that every being has three souls) is taken by the servants of the Ten Judges and set before them in Avernus. After examining his conduct while he was alive, the Judges decide whether he is to spend the rest of his existence in the Buddhist heaven or in the Buddhist hell.

Then come the *O-ban-ciang-gun*, or Five Gods-Generals of the Sky, with their 80,000 Lieutenants, *Sing-giang*, each of whom heads a large cohort of other spirits. Next come the *San-sin*, or Spirits of the Mountains, since it is generally believed that every mountain on the peninsula is inhabited by a special spirit, and countless others. After them come the essentially malevolent Spirits: first of all the terrible *Ciok-toh-gabi*, the approximate equivalent of Satan in western and Christian demonology; and then the innumerable *Kui-sin* and *Sa-gheui*, demons whose power is very great and who can bring happiness or misfortune to poor mortals as they please. “Almost all women and three quarters of men in Korea” - writes Mr. D. L. Gifford – “live in continuous, deadly terror of these malevolent beings. At every level of the social scale sacrifices are offered to these demons using witches (*mutang*) or blind sorcerers (*hpan-sù*). People try to appease them in every circumstance of life: in the event of illness, of trouble or misfortune, before moving house, etc. Each house is said to have its own guardian demons, and I would go so far as to say that *Kui-sin* is Korea's main religion. "

All these Spirits or Demons are naturally part of the general system known as Shamanism (in Korean *Sin-do*) and sometimes also, but improperly in Korea, of Taoism (in Korean *Sun-do*), which I shall discuss in more detail later. However, I mention it now for greater clarity, before continuing with a description of ancestor worship as it is practised in Korea.

Of the three souls which every man possesses, the Koreans believe that after death one soul descends to Avernus (Hell), the second stays in the Tomb and the third takes up residence in the ancestral Tablet.

We have already seen how the first soul is brought before the Ten Judges, who examine what place in hell or in heaven is appropriate for it, depending on whether the deceased led a good or a wicked life.

Three *Sa-già*, lesser Spirits in the service of the Ten Judges, are charged with the translation of

the soul, and to ensure they are favorably disposed the family of the deceased provides gifts for them. Of course, only the spirit of things is suitable for Spirits, and the gifts consist of three bowls of rice placed on a small table at the entrance to the dead man's house, so that the fragrance of the rice will refresh the *Sa-già*, and three pairs of rope sandals which are simultaneously burned so that the spirits of the sandals can be worn by the Sa-già and so make their journey less tiring. A fruit, the hobak, is generally added, because the guardian of the prison of Avernus, to whom the soul will be consigned before being brought before the judges, and who lived two thousand and more years ago, is particularly fond of hobak.

While all this is done immediately after the person dies, the other two souls continue to wait in the body of the deceased; one of them will follow the body itself to the grave as soon as this has been chosen.

But choosing a grave is not an easy thing. Witchcraft comes into play and the work of geomancers is requested by the family to determine the location of the tomb and the most auspicious day for the burial.

Curious and countless are the rules for choosing a grave. It must first be located on a hillside, so that it can come under the protection of one of the spirits of the mountain. Secondly, it must face south, since the *Yi Kyunn*, the very old book which for three thousand years and more has established the good and the bad in all things, and the doctrines of the *Tai-guk*, the Absolute, and of the *Pal-gwa*, the Eight Diagrams, and of the *Eum-yang*, the Positive and Negative Principle of Life, all state that warmth and life emanate from the south, while the north brings only bad things, from frost to death.

And that is not all, for we must be careful not to place the grave anywhere along the back of the terrible legendary Dragon who inhabits the bowels of the earth, still less along the route followed by the God of Fire who covers the whole peninsula jumping from one mountain to another, as geomancers and sorcerers know well.

It must be remembered that if the grave is placed in such a way that the spirit who lives there is comfortable, he will reward his relatives with incalculable benefits, riches, happiness and male children, while a spirit who lives in an uncomfortable grave will inevitably vent his anger on relatives who have neglected in this way their most basic duty, and calamities will rain down on their heads with incredible abundance. It is therefore no wonder that Koreans, even those of the poorest classes, will spend a lot of money to obtain the wise advice of a *cing-uan* and buy the plot of land he has indicated as the only suitable one for burying their dead.

Although nothing similar to our cemeteries exists in Korea, or in China, because graves can be located anywhere, provided they are outside inhabited areas, it is however natural, with the system followed for choosing grave sites, that in the majority of cases some places are considered to be more favourable than others, and geomancers choose these for preference, so it is not uncommon to see whole hills covered with tombs in the vicinity of Seoul.

Korean tombs are in general very simple, visible only as a small hemispherical mound of earth covered with untended wild grasses. There are very few gravestones or funerary monuments, the latter erected in general only for princes or national heroes, and usually bearing little or no relation to the deceased; they are often just monstrous figures of legendary animals, or special deities who are supposed to have the power to keep evil spirits away.

Funerals usually take place towards sunset, and are one of the most characteristic spectacles to be seen in Seoul. Funeral processions may only pass through two gates, the *Small West Gate* and the *Water Channel Gate*; as the road leading to the first of these passes right in front of the Italian Legation, I often had the opportunity to watch these curious processions.

The procession is headed by torch-bearers who shake their torches in all directions, leaving a long trail of sparks behind them. They are followed by a great many lantern-bearers, two columns on both sides of the road, carrying large lanterns, some made of white paper and others of red and blue silk; the director of the procession follows on a white horse, behind which flutters an enormous unfurled flag inscribed with large Chinese ideograms indicating the name and titles of the deceased; then more flags with more Chinese signs, then a row of lantern bearers in a line across the road, and finally the coffin placed on a large litter surmounted by a brightly colored catafalque also decorated all over with Chinese signs.

The litter is carried on the shoulders of a group of bearers, whose number varies according to the importance of the funeral and the means available to the deceased's family; there are usually twelve

of them, but I once watched the funeral of a Min where there were no less than seventy-two litter-bearers. The leader of the bearers stands on the front of the litter; he conducts the march and the bearers obey his directions.

Then come the members of the deceased's family headed by the principal heir (the eldest son at the funeral of a father), mounted on a white horse or donkey. He wears traditional mourning dress and the other relatives and family friends are grouped around him. Other lanterns, flags, banners and symbols follow, whose number varies according to the case.

A little behind the group of relatives comes an empty sedan containing the ancestral Tablet, a piece of white wood inscribed with the name of the deceased and supposedly housing his third soul. Sometimes this sedan, called "the box of the Spirit," precedes the litter bearing the coffin, instead of following it.

It sometimes takes more than an hour for these processions to pass by and, leaving aside the cheerful colors on display, their main characteristic is certainly not sadness, which is inherent in the nature of all the peoples of the Far East, who like to hide their feelings. The coffin-bearers advance in step, cheering each other up, intoning popular songs that often arouse the audience's hilarity, while the friends who surround the relatives of the deceased try in every way to keep them cheerful with jokes and pleasantries that would seem very inappropriate to us.

Once the procession has arrived at the preselected site and the burial has taken place, two sacrifices are performed. The first, called *pyong-to cei-sa*, addresses the soul of the deceased: small tables are placed in front of the tomb and offerings of dried fish, wine and rice are placed on them: relatives stand in front of the tables and prostrate themselves five times, each time repeating a special formula wishing peace and tranquility for the soul which has reached its final resting place. The second sacrifice, called *san-sin cei-sa*, is addressed instead to the spirit that lives in the mountain where the tomb is placed: the same tables are set up not far from the grave, with the same offerings, and the spirit is called upon to offer protection and hospitality to the soul which has just arrived. If the relatives forget to do this, the Spirit of the Mountain could exact revenge, and make life bitter for that poor soul who in turn would take revenge on its relatives.

Once these two ceremonies are over, the wine thrown away and the dried fish and rice distributed among the servants, the procession makes its way back to conduct the third soul to the family home.

Every wealthy Korean's house has a special room known as the *Temple of the Ancestors*. When a member of the family dies, his name is written on a white wooden tablet which is placed in the room. This is the so-called ancestral tablet, in which the third soul is to dwell. In the homes of poor people, in the absence of a Temple of the Ancestors, the tablets are usually kept in a corner of the best room in the house.

As soon as the funeral procession returns, the Tablet is taken out of the sedan chair and set up in its proper place. A sacrifice is immediately performed in its honor. Offerings consisting of rice, wine, meat and various local pastas are placed on a table in front of the Tablet, so that the soul can enjoy their fragrance. All those present bow five times, then go to another room with the offerings, and eat them.

Of course it would be very difficult to sacrifice to all one's ancestors - even without going back as far as the blessed times of Adam and Eve, Koreans of all classes can easily trace their ancestry back for at least five or six centuries, and they would have to go to a great deal of trouble to perform sacrifices for all those ancestors. Usually the people sacrifice only to their father, grandfather and great-grandfather, but the upper classes often include one more generation, while the Emperor sacrifices to five ancestors.

When the father dies, the son goes into mourning for three years. If he has a government post he is obliged to resign, and for three years his main occupation must be to fulfil his filial duties to his dead father. He wears a special tunic of sackcloth and an immense bamboo fiber hat for the whole three year period. The hat comes halfway down his head, and he never goes out without covering his face with a screen of the same material stretched between two small sticks which he adjusts with both hands. Nowhere have I found an explanation of this strictly Korean custom, which has no parallel either in China or in ancient Japan. The most plausible explanation was given to me by my interpreter, who told me that it is generally assumed that the death of the father is caused by the sins of the son; being guilty of the most horrible of sins, the son is no longer worthy to see either the sky or the earth until he has expiated his sin, which takes three years; and the purpose of the huge hat and the canvas screen is to make sure that he cannot see them. This is what the dignified Mr Yang told me, and I repeat it here.

I have not mentioned this before, but I will now: all these practices concern only male ancestors, for nobody cares about the women. An exception is made only for the mother, for whom mourning clothes are worn for one year. It is written in the sacred texts that a year had already passed since the death of Confucius' wife (he had repudiated her) when the great philosopher noticed one day that his son continued to mourn the loss of his mother. He was greatly scandalized and offended, because it was not correct for a son to mourn his mother for so long when his father was still alive.

If the father and the mother die in the same year, the son observes only one three-year period of mourning, whereas a son whose father and grandfather are both alive, will mourn his father for three years if he dies first, and then when his grandfather dies, he will mourn him for another three years, since the grandfather has taken the place of the deceased father.

During these three years of mourning, a sacrifice is performed in front of the Tablet on the first and fifteenth day of every lunar month. Another great sacrifice is made during the night preceding the first and second anniversaries of death, called respectively *syo-sang* and *tai-sang*, the small and the big anniversary. These sacrifices are generally made around two in the morning, the hour of the spirits for Far Eastern peoples, like midnight in our western fairy tales.

On the anniversary, friends of the family come round to express their condolences and are often offered entertainment. It is also customary on these occasions to visit the grave of the deceased and repeat the sacrifices to the soul who resides there and to the Spirit of the Mountain.

After the third year, the Tablet is removed and placed with those of all the other ancestors. At the same time the sacrifices of the 1st and 15th day of each lunar month cease, while those performed at home on the anniversary of the death continue indefinitely.

In addition to all the sacrifices mentioned above there are many other obligations to be fulfilled in certain circumstances. On the two days of national mourning, which fall in the third and eighth lunar month, all Koreans usually visit the tombs of their close or distant relatives, offering sacrifices to their souls and the spirits of the mountains. Then there is New Year's Day, when at dawn sacrifices are offered to the ancestors in every house in the peninsula; if the family is mourning the death of the father, two sacrifices must be performed, one collective sacrifice for all the family's ancestors and a second sacrifice specially for the deceased parent.

These are more or less the practices which in Korea are known as the Cult of the Ancestors. Many people refer to them as the Confucian Cult, but we have seen that there is nothing Confucian about them except the respect shown for one's elders. Certainly the idea of the three souls is not Confucian, nor even Buddhist; it is a purely Korean idea. The common people attach much importance to the scrupulous fulfillment of all the practices required by this cult because they live in great fear of a possible revenge by the deceased. Educated Koreans see in these practices nothing more than a way of showing their respect and filial piety, and so giving clear proof that they are moved by good feelings: they accept that the dead cannot directly harm the living, but they also believe that a person who does not perform the prescribed sacrifices, and by not performing them fails to show the respect due to his own father's soul which dwells in the Tablet, will inevitably suffer indirect harm because his own reputation will be tarnished.

Now, I wonder, what would happen if a son were to show all due respect and filial piety to only one of his father's souls, completely neglecting the others; what would happen to the poor deceased father and what would become of the son if one third of the father's spirit took revenge on the son and the other third did him good?

I put this question too to the dignified Mr. Yang. He shrugged and was very proud to be able to say: *Corean people very foolish!*

BUDDHISM

Introduction of Buddhism in the early kingdoms - Buddhism in the kingdom of Ko-ryu and its decline under the Ciu-sen dynasty.

The existence of Buddhism in Korea was mentioned very briefly at the start of the previous chapter. This Creed had moments of great splendor on the peninsula, but it has been in a very poor state for as long as anyone can remember. The monasteries that are still to be found here and there in the mountains are almost deserted. The ancient temples that enjoyed such renown in their time have been destroyed. For five centuries Buddhist monks and priests have been barred from entering Seoul, on pain of death; and what remains today of the once flourishing Buddhist faith does not amount to much - a few monasteries, a handful of shrines, and here and there, vaguely present in people's minds, a certain number of legends and superstitions whose Buddhist origins can only be discerned by the initiate.

The introduction of Buddhism in Korea dates back to the fourth century of our era. In 371 AD, the second year of his reign, Emperor Ham An (Kan Mun), of the East Chin dynasty (Tsin), was the first to send Buddhist monks, idols and sutras to the kingdom of Ko-gu-ryu, which then extended from the Han River to the mouths of the Lia-ho. Ko-su-rim Hoang (Kubu), who ruled Ko-gu-ryu at that time, was greatly pleased with this initiative; he had the members of his house instructed in the canons of the new religion, and immediately sent an embassy to Cien-yeh in Kiang-su, the capital of the Cin, to thank the emperor for so great a favor. A few years later the two temples of Cyo-rmun-ì and Pul-lan were erected, where the Chinese monks Sun-to and A-to who first lived there are still remembered. Ko-su-rìm was succeeded by Ko-ku-kyang Hoang, who issued a decree ordering all his subjects to embrace the new faith.

Around the same time, in 383 AD, the king of Pak-giè (the southern kingdom founded by Eui-man), having been elected head of the hundred Chinese families who crossed the Yellow Sea to escape the domination of the Han, sent to Nanjing to look for wise men who were familiar with the sacred laws of the Buddha. When the monks Ma-ra and Nan-ta arrived in his kingdom, he received them with great honor at his Court and ordered a vast temple to be built for them. Buddhism soon gained a firm foothold in Pak-giè, and from there spread to Japan.

The Buddhist creed was introduced in Sil-la, the third of the ancient states of the peninsula, under less favorable auspices. Around 520 AD, a Buddhist monk, one Heuk-ho-gia, entered Sil-la from Ko-gu-ryu, and remained in hiding for some time, not daring to show himself openly for fear of persecution. When the Liang dynasty succeeded the Tsi dynasty in China, the king of Sil-la hurried to despatch an embassy to make a formal act of submission to the emperor Wu-ti. The emperor, well known as an ardent Buddhist in later life, sent the envoys back to the king of Sil-la with a great quantity of incense. The king of Sil-la was delighted with the imperial gift, but to tell the truth the product was unknown to him and nobody in his court knew what it could be used for. So he issued a proclamation throughout the kingdom, promising a lavish reward to anyone who could provide him with an explanation. The monk's hour had come; he emerged from hiding at once and presented himself to the King, explaining that if he burned it, the product would emit a very gratifying smell that was used to captivate and worship the Higher Beings, elevating and purifying the hearts of the worshippers and arousing in them the Sam-po, the Preciousness of the Buddha, the Law and the Priesthood. He further said that if incense was burned when a person ardently desired something, his wish would certainly be granted. As the King's daughter fell ill just at that time, the monk burned incense and prayed devoutly, and the princess was cured. So runs the Korean legend, which further says that following this and other favorable circumstances Buddhism soon spread among the common people, but educated men, imbued with the works and doctrines of Confucius, and almost all the ministers, were extremely hostile to the new faith. The King, not knowing what to decide, summoned the notables of both the Buddhist and the Confucian parties to a council. The Confucians won the debate, but then one of the ministers, a convinced Buddhist, approached the King and exclaimed: "Cut off my head and my death will decide the matter once and for all. I die for Buddhism, and if Buddhism is true, a sign will appear on my body." The King immediately gave the order to behead him, and when his head was cut off, the blood which flowed from the trunk was white as milk. No one dared to say anything, and so the Buddhists won in the end.

It was not long before Buddhist rules were promulgated in every corner of the realm. At the beginning of the sixth century we find Buddhism spreading throughout the peninsula.

In the tenth century, after the kingdoms of Ko-gu-ryu, Sil-la and Pak-giè were brought together under Uang-gheun to form the kingdom of Koryu, thus uniting the whole peninsula, Buddhism grew greatly in splendor and power. The Buddhist monk Hongìpem, who came from distant India, the birthplace of this religion, was received with great honors by Uang-gheun, who had left his capital, Song-do, to meet him. From then on Buddhist priests and monks became the Court favorites, and it was not long before they used their power to weave conspiracies and maintain their influence over the government. Song-do had very rich and famous temples; traces of these can still be seen today.

In the final years of the Ko-ryu dynasty the Buddhist priesthood became intolerable. The son of a monk, known as Sin-ton, usurped the throne, and his son Sin-ciang succeeded him. Sin-ciang was, however, soon ousted by the legitimate pretender, but the latter had been on the throne for less than two years when, following the Yi uprising, the state of Ko-ryu fell and the new kingdom of Ciu-sen arose on its ruins.

The golden age of Buddhism was over forever. The monks, disliked by the people and the government, were driven out of Seoul, the capital of the new state, where Buddhist temples, in the fanciful language of the Koreans, numbered “ten thousand and nine."

Some consider the author of this decree to be Tai Giò himself, the founder of the current dynasty, but it now seems certain that it was in fact issued by Kun Ciong. It is thought that Kun Ciong took this step at the instigation of his prime minister, Cio Ciung An, who, according to the chronicles of the time, saw all priests as “smoke in the eyes.”

All the temples in Seoul were destroyed, including the very large one that was located at the Marble Pagoda in the Sa-tong district, which was named after it. The destruction was later completed when the Japanese under Hideyoshi invaded Korea.

The very strict order banning all Buddhist clergy from the capital was rigorously enforced until very recently. Buddhist monks are now free to come to Seoul, but it is still very difficult to meet any. During my entire stay I never saw a single one on the streets of the city; the dignified Mr. Yang, questioned on the subject, told me that they still felt unsafe in the capital, and if they had to go to Seoul they always did so secretly and at night.

This rapid decline of such a profound faith, and its relatively rapid propagation in the peninsula, are, to my mind, clear proof that Buddhism was never accepted in Korea, or, to put it better, its ethical and philosophical side was never understood, only its formal, less important side.

Buddhism, like all other religions, has its own set of liturgical practices, superstitions, symbols, its dogmatic and mythological side, but underlying these practices and symbols is an ethical-religious system which is one of the most complex and arguably the most perfect of those which exist. It is the formal part, appealing to the ignorant masses, which should be fought if the outwardly visible symbols do not conceal a very elevated philosophical meaning which words are insufficient to express. This philosophical side, stemming from the land which gave birth to Buddhism and saw its rise and development, seemed almost to disappear beneath the formal side. Of all the peoples of the Far East, possibly the only race to have understood the inner essence of Buddhism, and to have impressed the canons of the Buddha's law on the hearts and minds of the masses, is the Japanese. In China the doctrine of Nirvana was misunderstood, the Atman of the Upanishads immediately became confused with the Tao of Lao-Tzè, and both always remained alien to the hearts and minds of the people, who only liked the shapeless superstitions that originated from the two systems.

When Chinese monks brought Buddhism to Korea, it had already been corrupted and bastardized in China. Only its dogmatic and mythological side attracted the people, for whom the new Creed merely added to the many superstitious practices deriving from the misunderstood doctrines of Lao-Tzè and to older national beliefs.

It may be that some solitary monk, immersed in meditation, understood the sacred texts and elevated his own spirit by following their holy precepts, but there is no doubt that, in Korea, the holy word of Gotham Buddha never touched the hearts of the common people.

SHAMANISM

Origins of Shamanism - Korean Pandemonism - The spirits of the home and the family - The spirit of smallpox and the spirit of indigestion - Mutang and hpansu - Monsters and chimeras.

We come now to Korea's third religion, the most important because the most widely understood and practised, Shamanism. I mentioned it briefly when talking about Confucianism, but the importance of the subject is such as to warrant, as far as is possible, a more extensive treatment.

Shamanism is the primordial form which mankind's religious feelings have taken from the earliest times. Trying to trace its history is like going back to the infancy of the world, to the origins of peoples, to the darkness of primitive chaos.

Prehistoric man, meditating on his condition, could not fail to notice the superior forces that surrounded him. His amazement when confronted with the first manifestations of the forces of nature would have given way, over time, to curiosity and then terror when his brain had developed sufficiently to allow him to realize his own weakness in the face of those external forces that dominated him. And man, when he started to use his mental faculties, viewed those forces as living creatures, gave life to his invisible enemies, attributed to them the forms of human behaviour, and spoke to the sun and the moon, the wind and the rain, the rivers, and the mountains, as to beings who lived a life which was certainly mysterious but very real, and who would understand him. When finally - it would be too long and well beyond the scope of this chapter to trace its origin now - the feeling of being able to dominate those forces, or in various ways to placate them, entered the human mind, man's religious feeling appeared in its elementary form. This did not consist, as some claim, in recognizing the existence of these superior forces and in feeling subordinate to them, but in the idea of being able to dominate them and win them over through human actions and practices.

The combination of those beliefs and primitive practices, the shapeless fabric of naturalistic superstitions, of invocations to invisible beings, to the spirits that give life to all things in the universe, is what makes up Shamanism.

In its modern form Korean Shamanism (see *Opisanie Korei*, Vol.II, pp. 1-23.) is founded on veneration of the Sky, the source, according to Koreans, of all good things on earth: the growth of cereals, the ripening of rice, the avoidance of disease, etc. In the Sky they see the Creator of all things in the external world, *San-gè* (Shan-ti in Chinese), who rules the Sky. Whatever calamity befalls them - drought, famine, floods, etc. - the Koreans attribute it to the anger of *San-gè*. To calm his anger, great sacrifices are offered, most of the time on the immediate initiative of the government.

In addition to venerating the Sky, Koreans venerate visible nature, and they believe that the air, the land and the sea are populated by spirits or demons. These live in the shade of every tree and at the bottom of every ditch, on the top of every mountain, in the depths of the valleys, and on the banks of rivers. They are to be found on every roof, under every beam, in the corner of every fireplace; there is no place in a Korean house that is not subject to demons.

They accompany Koreans in everything they do. A Korean's good luck or his misfortune depend on them. There are reasons to believe that in ancient times, in order to placate these demons, human sacrifices took place on the peninsula. However, such practices must be considered to have ceased, perhaps under the influence of Buddhism, many centuries ago.

To study what might accurately be called Korean pandemonism is very difficult, although highly interesting for the insights it provides into every facet of Korean life. The difficulty stems from the fact that Koreans do not like to talk about it at any length with foreigners. I have said elsewhere how every time I tried to get Mr. Yang to talk about these things, he refused to go into any detail, on the pretext that it was nothing but nonsense. All Koreans with whom one has more than a passing opportunity to talk react in the same way. The only people who might have a chance to get something out of them are the missionaries, who sometimes, after great efforts, receive the confidences of the odd convert. They are almost the only source of reliable information about this curious part of Korean Shamanism.

The innumerable legion of demons who in the Korean imagination populate the world, can be divided into two great hosts. To the first belong spirits whose nature has nothing human about it - they are bitter enemies of mankind, corresponding more or less to our western idea of devils - and the souls of those who died in poverty and pain, troubled souls, restless corpses, who roam the world sowing suffering and ruin in the path of anyone who did not satisfy their needs.

Any notion of goodness is lacking in this host of evil spirits, and the only thing poor mortals can do is to keep them neutral, by means of continuous offerings and by scrupulously making sure never to incur their displeasure.

The other host is made up of independent spirits, to whom the concept of goodness is not entirely alien, and the souls of those who led an honest and fortunate life, souls of the virtuous in whom any small infringement arouses anger and contempt. They too must be tamed by continual sacrifices, all the more necessary because they are valuable in procuring protection against the dark arts of the evil ones.

Earlier, when discussing Korea's religions in general, in the chapter on Confucianism, I listed the main spirits or demons of Korean mythology, mentioning the *O-ban-ciang-gun*, the lieutenants of the Sky, their dependents, *Sin-giang*, the spirits of the mountains, *San-sin*, and the evil spirits, *Tog-gabi* and *Kui-sin*, but they are not by any means the only supernatural beings whom Koreans fear all their life. There are many others, first and foremost the spirits that inhabit Korean homes.

Entering a Korean house, one is struck first of all by a paper sack on which various wooden spoons are hung: this is the fetish which represents *San-giù*, the guardian of the house and roof, the most important of the so-called family spirits. The number of hanging spoons represents the number of years since the house was, as it were, consecrated, and a new spoon is added every year. Further on, a piece of paper nailed to the wall of the fireplace is the abode of the spirit of the kitchen, *On-giù*. Beyond that, supported by three sticks, is a bundle of straw, the dwelling-place of *Ti-giù*, the spirit of the place where the house is built. In a corner of one of the best rooms a terracotta jug and a bowl of rice placed on two bulging sacks represent *Pa-mul*, the spirit of wealth, held in great reverence as the only dispenser of material goods.

On the door of the porter's hut outside the houses of the wealthiest, you can often see some old pairs of straw sandals, a few coins, and a few pieces of cloth, all put there for *Col-ip*, the demon servant of the house spirits, who uses them for the many little jobs which the other demons give him to do. Nor, speaking of this category of spirits, must we forget *Gio-nan*, the Spirit of the Big Dipper, whose altar is located in the courtyard outside the house and who is represented by a straw hut with a pile of rice covered with stones and paper inside.

Then there are the demons who protect the family, not the house. Prominent among these is *Gio-e-sek*, the grandfather of *San-gin Gio-e-sek*, the demon of birth, under whose protection children up to the age of four are placed.

All these spirits require special sacrifices on certain days of the month. For each of them special rituals must be performed, and every good Korean is careful not to shirk his duties to them.

Among the spirits who play a major part in popular superstition, the Spirit of Smallpox and the Spirit of Indigestion should be mentioned. The great popularity enjoyed by these two spirits is clear proof that smallpox and indigestion are among the most common diseases in Korea.

Smallpox in particular really massacres the population. Innumerable children die each year of smallpox, and it is very rare to come across an adult who does not bear the marks of this terrible disease on his face. Now, however, under growing pressure from foreigners, the government has opened a number of vaccination posts in Seoul, and they are continuously flooded with local people, who are beginning to understand that after all the spirits have little to do with the disease or its cure.

According to popular belief the direct cause of this disease is *Kue-yek Tai-sin*, the terrible Spirit of Smallpox. Once he has taken possession of an individual, the only thing to do is to resort to the services of a sorcerer who is familiar with him and kindly begs him to leave. Most of the time, however, the one who leaves is the sick person, who passes on to a better life. If by chance the person who has caught smallpox recovers, substantial sacrifices are celebrated to thank the spirit.

A very old tradition held that the disease could never attack a member of the reigning family, but this belief was recently dealt a serious blow, when last April the young son of the Emperor and Lady Om caught smallpox.

It is impossible to recapture the emotion that reigned throughout the capital. As soon as the prince's illness was declared, the door of the palace was hermetically closed and nobody could enter or leave. As a result most of the ministers found themselves prisoners in the Palace and so all the government offices closed too for about a month, leaving all business pending. Very strict orders were issued via the "Official Gazzette" to the entire population, suspending all building work, any work involving the use of a hammer, and transportation in sedans, all of which it was believed could upset the Spirit of Smallpox and cause the patient more pain. It is curious to note that in the treatment of this

disease the rules to be followed are addressed to the relatives and neighbors of the sick person, rather than to the sick person himself. Here are some of the main rules to be followed during the first twelve days of the disease: no member of the family must comb their hair, put on new clothes, sweep the house or bring any objects into it; the neighbors must not cut wood, which would leave the patient's face disfigured by signs of smallpox; planting nails nearby could cause him to go blind; none of the neighbors must roast broad beans, which could also cause blindness; if it is winter, and a drain happens to ice up, care must be taken not to break the ice; no one in the house must sew, which would increase the patient's suffering; no sacrifice should be celebrated either to the ancestors or to other spirits, since the latter, drawn to the house, would eat the food prepared for the Spirit of Smallpox; rice must be eaten pure without the addition of other cereals, which could blacken the patient's face; no animal must be killed, because the patients's blood would be harmed; and finally nothing must be washed inside the house, nor is it prudent to hang paper on the walls, which would also increase the patient's troubles.

As soon as he heard of the prince's illness, Dr Wunsch, the Imperial Court's titular doctor, hastened to the palace to offer his professional services. He was thanked for his kind thought, but was not admitted to the presence of the august patient, who was attended instead by all the most celebrated sorcerers of the peninsula, assembled at short notice. Over thirty thousand dollars are said to have been spent on sacrifices and exorcisms.

On the thirteenth day following the announcement of the prince's illness, the spirit supposedly departed, the patient was considered to be out of danger, and great celebrations were held. On the day the young prince was declared out of danger, a decree appeared in the Official Gazette of the Empire appointing a committee of very senior officials to accompany the dreaded spirit over the Han River, about four miles from the capital, and present him with the gifts which the Emperor was sending as a thank-offering. A procession was formed on the appointed day and five horses were seen laden with the imperial gifts - rice, silk, crushed copper, crushed nickel, silver and gold. In addition, special celebrations were decreed and for over eight days all the most celebrated surroundings of Seoul echoed to the sounds and songs of the cheerful groups who rushed to enjoy the entertainments offered by their gullible Emperor.

The Spirit of Indigestion, which I mentioned above, belongs to the lowest class of invisible beings: these poor *Sa-gheui* are the beggars, the pariahs, the outcasts of the Korean spirit world. In the popular mind they are the cruel spirits, the spirits who have committed some bad deeds and have been condemned by the superior spirits to wander the world continuously, always keeping to the middle of the road. When they stray from this middle line, it is to take possession of some unfortunate person who has abused the pleasures of the table, and to make him suffer all the pains of indigestion. The only thing to do in this case is to resort to one of the sorceresses known as the *mudang,* who, with suitable arguments, will convince the spirit to depart, or to one of the blind sorcerers who are very familiar with the highest spirits. The latter will not pray to anyone, but, after informing one of the Lieutenants of the Sky, will arrange for the *Sa-gheui* in question to be taken without more ado, put back in the middle of the road and forced to resume his wandering journey.

The prominent role played by indigestion in Korean mythology is a sure sign that the various forms of gastric trouble brought on by over-eating are very frequent amongst the people. Eating a lot is in fact a source of national pride, and bets to see who can eat the most are not uncommon, especially among young people. The voracity displayed in these cases is truly amazing and impossible to imagine unless you have seen it with your own eyes. With these natural dispositions of the Korean stomach, it is not surprising that the favorite pastime of the upper classes is organizing or attending a banquet, for which every event provides an excuse, from the celebration of a wedding to the anniversary of the death of a relative, not to mention the innumerable sacrifices celebrated in honor of the different spirits, which are always accompanied by more or less lavish feasts.

But to return to Shamanism, I have already mentioned several times the *mudang* and the *hpansu* and it is time to discuss these characters in more detail, given the major role they play in Korean life. The *mudang* and the *hpansu* are the true priests of Korean shamanism, and although they employ opposite methods - the *mudang* implore while the *hpansu* command - the purpose of both these classes of sorcerers is to use their own occult force to combat the malevolent actions of the evil spirits and to use their own power to encourage the actions of the benevolent spirits.

The *mudang* are all women of the lowest class. Although there are very rare instances of upper class girls taking up this profession, the mere fact of practising it means they are considered as belonging

on the lowest step of the social ladder. In general they are all married, but this does not in any way prevent them from obtaining substantial material support from their notoriously disorderly way of life. In recent years it has become customary for the daughter of a *mudang* to accompany her mother in the exercise of her profession, to learn her secrets and become a *mudang* in her turn, so this profession can almost be called hereditary. However, it is not one which you choose to embrace, but one which you embrace by vocation or by supernatural invitation. The woman who wishes to go down this road prepares the ground some time in advance: first she will tell her parents that she has dreamed of the dragon; then, that other extraordinary signs have appeared to her; and finally she announces to everyone that the spirit has taken possession of her and she has been called to become a *mudang*.

The functions that these witches perform are manifold and the cases for which their services are requested are usually divided into ten classes. Each of the different functions celebrated in each individual case receives a special name, but generically they are called *kut*. So we have the *kut* to heal the sick, to conjure up the souls of the dead, to chase the spirits out of a house, etc. In all these ceremonies the *mudang* appears dressed in red with a tambourine in her hand, which she plays while practising her exorcisms. She dances, cries, writhes, until she falls exhausted to the ground and the spirits then speak through her mouth, or she herself speaks to the spirits to explain her client's wishes.

Following some misfortune, sickness or for any other reason, it sometimes happens that the good spirits of a house go away, and in this case too Koreans call in a *mudang* to bring them back to the house. Naturally, she never fails to find the fugitive spirits hiding somewhere in the neighborhood and, waving a large oak branch, triumphantly brings them back to their proper place.

The *hpansu* perform functions very similar to those of the *mudang*, but they use substantially different methods. Only the blind may belong to this corporation, which boasts very ancient origins and exerts a huge influence over every branch of Korean life, and especially on government affairs, given the great influence that some of them exert on the mind of the credulous Emperor.

The main ceremonies they perform are predicting the future and cursing demons. There is no important act in life on which the *hpansu* are not consulted. Their methods of prediction are very numerous and extremely complicated, so it is rare that a *hpansu* knows more than a couple of them, which he will use, to the exclusion of all the others, on every occasion. The methods most frequently used include one called the box, *san-tong*, the most common, one using coins, *ton-gium*, and one which uses Chinese ideograms*, ciak-cium*. This last, the noblest method, is performed with the aid of a special book and it is not only the *hpansu* who use it, it is also in vogue among educated Koreans. According to a very interesting anonymous article published last year by the Korea Review, there are thirty-four different cases for which Koreans habitually resort to *hpansu*. Some of these are very curious, such as, for example, to find out whether or not to cut down a given tree, because of the spirits that might inhabit it; where and in what direction one should look for a new home; which day would be propitious for celebrating a wedding, so that maximum happiness will ensue; whether a pregnant woman should remain in her own house before giving birth, or whether it would be better - to placate the spirits, as always - to give birth elsewhere; to know where a given person is, when a certain job has to be started, what the future holds for one's own child, and so on.

Naturally, both the *hpansu* and the *mudang*, together with various other less important practitioners like fortune tellers, sorcerers, geomancers and enchanters, charge more or less heavily for their services, and Koreans spend considerable amounts on them every year – somewhere between eight and ten million annually is a fairly accurate estimate. For a poor country like Korea, this voluntary tax on superstition is not insignificant.

And now, to finish these brief notes on Korean Shamanism, a few words on the various fantastic animals which this people's imagination has created.

First and foremost is the dragon, the fantastic winged monster which figures in all the legends of the ancient peoples of both the East and the West. There are many species of this composite animal, which has the head of a camel, the horns of a deer, the eyes of a rabbit, the neck of a snake, the belly of a frog, the scales of a carp and the legs of a tiger. Some inhabit the sky, others dwell in the bowels of the earth, and four of the most important live in the depths of the sea. They come in all colors, but the yellow dragon enjoys the greatest renown and is used, both in Korea and in China, as a symbol of imperial power. There is nothing in the world that is impossible for one of these supernatural beings, and all the phenomena of nature, all the terrestrial and celestial cataclysms are merely the result of the wars that the dragons wage amongst themselves and against their enemies who

try to lay hands on the treasures of the sky, the earth or the sea.

Next comes the tiger, the terrible Korean tiger, the symbol of strength. Properly speaking, it should not be classed as a fantastic creature, because its existence is only too real in Korea, where it kills thousands of poor mountain dwellers in the provinces every year. But the Koreans, not content perhaps with the tiger's bad natural attributes, love to add others, making the tiger altogether worthy to figure among the chimeras that populate their imagination: it can therefore fly, and it is often depicted with wings by Korean artists; it breathes fire from its mouth, it can transform in any way, it can pass through flames unharmed, and much else besides. But alongside its many special aptitudes, the tiger fortunately has one great virtue - it keeps bad spirits away. This is why there is almost always a painting of a huge tiger's face, with very fierce eyes, on the inside of the doors of Korean houses – it is there to prevent those terrible enemies from entering.

After the tiger comes the *kirin*, another composite animal that embodies the five elements, fire, water, wood, metals and earth, and has the body of a deer, the legs of a horse, the scales of a fish and the tail of a bull. On its forehead is a single flexible horn, and it is said to be the most perfect animal in all creation. It has the kindest feelings for mankind, being well disposed to the human race, and only appears to truly superior men who scrupulously follow the path of justice and wisdom. The *kirin* is consequently the symbol of peace, honesty and loyalty.

Longevity, patience, strength and righteousness are symbolized by the tortoise, the tortoise that has existed for more than 10,000 years and first came out of the River Nak, bearing the "Great Law", which Ki-già interpreted, on its back, together with the eight diagrams of Eastern philosophy. It conceives through thought and has the power to transmute in successive existences. Like the dragon, the turtle is one of the favorite motifs in architectural decoration in Korea as well as in the other countries of the Far East.

The Korean phoenix, *fung-uang*, is no less endowed with the most marvellous qualities than the Arab phoenix. When a good ruler is born, the phoenix appears to his subjects, and in Korea it symbolizes order, good governance, friendship and marital fidelity. Its feathers are like those of the golden pheasant, its tail like that of a peacock and its song is held to be the most perfect of all.

These are the main supernatural monsters, but Korea has many others, which it would take a very long time to list in their entirety: great snakes that live in the sea, sirens and tritons, and tigers, and sea lions, and poisonous birds, whose shadow alone has the power to kill men. Every Korean lives his entire life in fear of these invisible enemies that nobody has ever seen, but whose existence no one doubts.

Because of its ancestor worship, China was defined by someone as "a land of living people ruled by the dead". With even more justification, Korea could be called a land of living people terrorized by a world of spirits, demons and monsters.