THE OPENING-UP OF KOREA Translated by Jeffrey M. Russell

*First religious persecutions - French intervention - New massacres and new interventions - Success of the Koreans – The* General Sherman *incident – An unsuccessful American expedition - The war with Japan - Li Hung Ciang wants treaties - Treaty with Japan - First treaty with the Western nations - Definitive opening of the peninsula to international trade*

The history of Korea's relations with the peoples of the West is a history of recent times. When discussing the Emperor and his Court in the first volume of this work, I briefly mentioned the most important political events of this unfortunate sovereign’s reign, in itself a summary of the contemporary history of the Korean peninsula. However, this historical period is, it must be said, of worldwide importance (as current events in the Far East prove), and as such deserves a more extensive treatment which should not be unwelcome to anyone who, after reading the first part of this work, is still sufficiently interested to read this second part.

The young Ik Syeng had just ascended the throne, under his father's regency, when, in 1866, a new persecution of Christians soaked the peninsula in blood and brought about the intervention of France.

A first wave of persecutions had occurred earlier, during the reign of Sien Gio [Sunjo 순조 純祖, 1800-34], followed by a second wave, in which three French subjects lost their lives, Fathers Maubant and Chastan and Bishop Imbert, [Pierre-Philibert Maubant, Jacques-Honoré Chastan, Laurent-Marie-Joseph Imbert] during the reign of Heng Giong [Heonjong 헌종 憲宗, 1834-49].

The French admiral Cécile, as soon as he heard of this second massacre in 1846, had stationed his squadron off the island of Ol-yen Do [???] and transmitted a letter to the local Korean magistrate, asking the government in Seoul to explain the assassination of the French subjects. It seems the letter, and especially the presence of the warships under his command, made a deep impression on the minds of the Koreans, but the Admiral left without waiting for a reply and returned to China.

This happened in June 1846, and in August of the same year Captain Lapierre, who had replaced Cécile, commanding the two frigates *La Gloire* and *La Victorieuse*, returned to the coast of Korea to seek the answer to the letter left by his predecessor.

The lack of reliable charts of the area caused the grounding of the two frigates on the island of Ko-Kem Do [Gogunsan-do 고군산도 古郡山島] and forced the crews of the two ships to land on the island, where they remained for about a month, without being able to contact the local population. Two officers commanding two of the frigates’ smaller boats were quickly despatched to Shang-haì in search of rescue and their mission, brilliantly accomplished, led to the departure for Korea of an English expedition commanded by Lord Marqu'han, and composed of the frigate *Doedalies* and two brigantines.

With the help of these ships the two French frigates were promptly refloated and on September 12, having completely failed to accomplish their mission, they left Korea for good.

Meanwhile, the Korean government, emboldened by the failure of the western barbarians, but still fearful that they might attack at any moment, decided to respond to Admiral Cécile's letter. To this end a formal note was sent to Beijing, in a haughty and provocative style, even describing the wretched missionaries who had been slaughtered as "rascals associated with rebels, impious and wicked".

Upon receiving this note through the Court of Beijing, Commander Lapierre replied, via the same channels, that the reasons given by the Koreans to justify the murder of the three French subjects could not be accepted, and announced that another warship would be sent to Korean waters in the early months of 1848.

But those were years in which the most serious events were happening in Europe, and France, where revolution had broken out, was facing far more urgent problems than the small Korean question.

For some time the Government in Seoul waited with great anxiety, but in vain, for the warship to arrive. Then, since it did not arrive, they became convinced that only fear could keep the *barbarians of the West* away, and the Korean government’s treatment of foreigners who tried to enter the peninsula and Christians who gathered around them grew ever harsher.

However, rumors of the successes achieved at that moment by British and French arms in China, striking its capital, the very heart of the Middle Empire, caused panic among the Koreans, who feared that their land would fall prey at any moment to the invaders from the West. This led them to adopt a prudent policy, so as not to attract the attention of the same foreigners to the peninsula who had entered Beijing victoriously.

But Korean memories are short. In a few months the Western feats of arms had been forgotten, and hatred of foreigners and Christians reached new heights in government circles in Seoul when the Tai Uen Kun [Daewongun 대원군 大院君 1820-99] came to power.

Another false move by Westerners was to bring about the crisis.

A Russian ship anchored near Uen-san (Ghen-san) [Wonsan = Korean / Gensan = Japanese pronunciation 원산 元山] sent a letter to the Korean government asking Korea to open the country to Russian trade.

This sudden appearance of the feared Westerners on their shores shook the Koreans, who, always faithful to their political tradition, replied that "Korea being a tributary state of China, they were not allowed to enter into any treaty without the prior consent of the Beijing government."

In this way, they tried to buy time while remaining deeply concerned about the possible consequences of their refusal.

Naturally they never expected that the Russian ship, satisfied with the reply received, would leave Uen-san, never to be seen again on the coast of the peninsula.

The Koreans firmly believed they had won a new victory and celebrated their success by launching a new and even crueller massacre, during which, in addition to various Korean missionaries and catechumens, the French bishop Berneux [Simeon Francois Berneux, Bishop 1814-1866] and the missionaries Ranfer, Beaulieu and Dorie were tortured to death on the orders of the Tai Uen Kun himself.

This took place on March 8, 1866.

A few days later, on the 11th of the same month, two other French missionaries, Petitnicolas and Pourthié [Marie-Alexandre Petitnicolas, Charles-Antoine Pourthié], were beheaded and finally on the 30th Bishop Daveluy [Marie Antoine Nicholas Daveluy 1818-1866] and Fathers Huin and Aumaitoc [Martin Huin, Pierre Aumaitre] suffered the same cruel fate.

Of the entire French Catholic mission, only three had managed to escape, among them Father Ridel [Félix-Claire Ridel], who was then Bishop of Korea. After fleeing on a native junk, Father Ridel brought news of the latest events on the Korean peninsula to Tientsin [Tianjin].

The Chinese government, shaken by the news, immediately requested explanations from the Seoul Court, but the Tai Uen Kun replied arrogantly that "it was not the first time that French subjects had been killed in Korea and no one had ever complained."

Admiral Roze, commander of the French squadron in the Far East, then decided to move to Korea and obtain prompt reparation for the wrong done to the French nation.

But this expedition produced no better results than the previous one conducted by Lapierre.

On 11 October of that same year 1866, the entire squadron composed of the frigate *La Guerriere*, the propeller-driven corvettes *Le Laplace* and *Le Primauget*, *Le Deroulède* and *Le Kien Chan*, and the gunboats *Le Tardif* and *Le Lebretton*, left Cefù [Zhifu / Chefoo, Yantai, China] and headed for the mouth of the Han.

Two days later the flotilla dropped anchor off Boisée island and on the 14th the landing squads occupied the island of Kang-wha [Ganghwa-do 강화도] without meeting any resistance.

This short-lived occupation was destined to be the expedition’s sole achievement, for when Admiral Roze ventured to send a body of 120 men to the mainland in order to occupy the village of Tong-tsin, they had to retire in the face of Korean fire [this is not historically correct].

A few days later, 300 tiger hunters, evading the vigilance of the French, managed to reach the island and fortify their position. Hearing of this, the admiral ordered an expedition against them, but this new operation was also unsuccessful. Unable to obtain any real result, both for lack of adequate means and scant knowledge of the country, Admiral Roze considered it more prudent to abandon the campaign; he withdrew his men from the island of Kang-wha, and on October 28 the whole squadron left Korean waters and returned to Cefù.

The Koreans soon had another success to add to this one, becoming increasingly convinced of their superiority over the Westerners as a result.

On 28 October 1867, an American brig, the *General Sherman*, loaded with various kinds of merchandise, had gone some way up the Ta-tong river in the hope of establishing trade with the inhabitants of those regions, but, stranded in the vicinity of Pyeng-yang [Pyongyang 평양] and attacked by the Koreans, the entire crew was slaughtered.

Four years later, in 1871, the United States sent a squadron under the command of Admiral Rodgers to Korean waters, but the Americans were no luckier than the French had been: they also occupied Kang-wha, but after waiting in vain for a few days for a response from the Seoul government, they too withdrew.

These French and American expeditions undoubtedly did little to enhance the prestige of Westerners in Korea. If, despite the sorry figure the barbarians of the West had cut in Korean eyes on these occasions, they finally managed to impose their treaties on Korea and lift forever the veil of mystery surrounding the Hermit Nation, this should be attributed, not so much to our own merits as to the influence exercised by China, which feared that the obstinate isolation of Korea could bring her trouble with the nations whose power and strength she had very recently experienced.

It was therefore China, and her representative Li Hung Ciang [Li Hongzhang, 李鴻章], the astute Viceroy of Ci-li [Zhili], who advised the Government of Seoul to sign the trade treaties which the various nations had been waiting for for so long.

Korea now found itself forced to sign a trade treaty with Japan for fear of a new invasion.

In 1868, the celebrated year of the great Japanese reform, when, after the collapse of the feudal system, all power was concentrated in the hands of the Mikado, and the glorious era of the *Meigi* [Meiji] began, one of the first acts of the restored power had been to request Korea to resume the annual embassy to Japan, a custom neglected by the Koreans since 1811.

The Tai Uen Kun replied contemptuously to this proposal, and when, in 1872, Japan sent a new embassy with the same request, his son, the current Emperor, having reached his majority, refused to receive it.

Such an affront provoked Japan's immediate declaration of war. And war there certainly would have been had the long years of internal strife not greatly exhausted the Japanese empire and inclined it to heed better advice. There was also the danger that China, which Japan feared far more then than now, might enter the scene, and so the Japanese decided to wait for a more favourable opportunity to resolve the conflict peacefully.

Meanwhile in 1875, when a Japanese warship approached the island of Kangwha to carry out hydrographic operations, the inhabitants fired on the crew.

In response to this new provocation, the Japanese government immediately sent an embassy to Beijing headed by Mr. Arinori Mori, and another to Seoul with Mr. Kusoda Kiotaka, the latter escorted by a small fleet consisting of two gunboats and three transports.

The mission of the first of these gentlemen was to ask for formal explanations regarding the conduct of the Korean government and the relations between the Beijing Court and that of Seoul; that of the second to ensure for Japan a treaty of trade with Korea.

Both these missions had the desired outcome. China first of all declined any responsibility for events on the Korean peninsula, thus giving Japan the right to consider Korea as a sovereign and independent state, and secondly, fearful as always of the possible consequences for the tranquility of its empire, promptly sent a messenger to the Seoul Court with orders to facilitate the conclusion of the treaty.

So it was that on February 26, 1876, on the island of Kang-wha, the Japanese-Korean trade treaty was solemnly signed by the Japanese minister Kusoda Kiotaka and Mr. Inouye Kaoru on the one hand and the Korean dignitaries Sin Hou [Shin Heon 신헌 申櫶, 1810-1884] and In Gia Syng [Yun Ja-seung 윤자승 尹滋承] on the other - the first step of the hermit nation towards a new civilization.

With the treaty of Kang-wha Japan recognized the independence of Korea and it was agreed that, in addition to Fusan, two other ports ( later designated as Cemulpo [Jemulpo, 濟物浦 제물포] and Ghensan) would be opened to Japanese trade.

It must be said in fairness that the happy outcome of the Japanese negotiations was largely due to the influence of the young King who, unlike his father the Tai Uen Kun, would himself have been very willing to open his country to international trade and put an end to its centuries-old seclusion once and for all, but the reactionary parties were constantly obstructing his work.

In the early months of 1880 some French, Russian and American ships, anchoring off different points of the peninsula, tried to establish relations with the Government of Seoul and lay the foundations of a commercial agreement, but all failed in the enterprise.

In August of that same year it was the turn of an Italian ship.

His Excellency the Duke of Genoa, commanding the pyro-corvette *Vettor Pisani,* had the honour of being the first to fly the Italian flag in the waters of that distant peninsula and the equally interesting honour of being the first European to establish cordial relations with the inhabitants and authorities of the ports visited. The letter he sent from Fusan [Busan 부산] to the prefect of the city of Tungnai [Dongnae 동내], in contrast with previous refusals, received a prompt reply from that official; and in September, when the *Pisani* stayed for a few days in the port of Ghensan, although his attempt to begin commercial negotiations failed, the Duke was very warmly received by the city’s magistrate, who accepted an invitation from him to visit our ship.

It was not much, admittedly, but they were the first and sure signs that the times were ripe.

In the following year, the British and French returned to knock on the door of the hermit state, but the result was no better. Yet the great day was near. China saw its influence continually wane on the Korean peninsula: the comparison between the serious losses inflicted on it by the allies and the successes the Koreans reckoned they had achieved against the westerners, made the Koreans increasingly proud of themselves and gradually led them to abandon that blind submission to the Middle Empire which their country had professed for so many centuries.

China’s influence was about to disappear. Li Hung Ciang saw the danger and reckoned that he could avoid it by fostering the development of new interests in the peninsula, so that the preponderance Japan was gradually gaining could be counterbalanced, and China’s position continually strengthened as a result of the conflict of different interests.

He himself went to Seoul as an imperial commissioner to closely monitor the work of the Koreans, and his first act was to recommend the conclusion of the treaty with the United States of America, which Admiral Shuffeldt had hitherto requested in vain. Li Hung Ciang hoped, in return for his good offices, to have a clause included in the treaty stating that the United States would recognize China’s tutelage over Korea, thereby largely nullifying the effects of article 1 of the Japanese treaty which proclaimed Korea’s independence. But Admiral Shuffeldt would have none of it, and then Li Hung Cìang, without insisting on this detail, thought he had found a solution by persuading the King of Korea to send a dispatch, on the day the treaty was signed, to the President of the United States by which the sovereign recognized his dependence on China; and a similar dispatch was always sent on the occasion of subsequent treaties.

The treaty was solemnly signed in Cemulpo on 22 May 1882. It guaranteed North American citizens the right to trade in ports already open to Japanese trade, and to settle in those ports with special privileges, enjoying a regime of extra-territoriality under consular jurisdiction. The two high contracting parties agreed to grant each other the right to maintain stable representations in their respective capitals, and so on. In short, the treaty was substantially similar to those which until then linked the western powers to China.

The great fact was accomplished, Korea ceased to be a closed country and a centuries-old mystery was forever revealed.

The treaty with the United States was soon followed by others: treaties were signed with England and Germany in 1883, with Italy in 1884, with Russia in 1885 and with France in 86, followed in recent years by treaties with Austria, Belgium and Denmark.

Each of them naturally contains the most favored nation clause and by virtue of them, various other ports besides Cemulpo, Fusan and Ghensan were opened to international trade.

To give an idea of the rights granted to foreigners by these treaties, which are very similar to one another, I reproduce in the appendix the text of the treaty signed with Italy.