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The Historic Town of Yo-Ju (驪州) Its Surroundings and Celebrities

By The Reverend Charles Hunt

The small country town of Yo Ju is situated Southeast of Seoul on the banks of the River Han in the Province of Kyengi some 65 miles from Seoul.

The name Yo Ju (驪 州) means the Town of the Fabulous Horse’ that can cover ten thousand li a day, or one hundred and twenty five miles an hour!

The town is approached by road from Seoul crossing the River at Kwang Naru (廣 壯 里) and passing through the towns of Kwang Ju (廣州) and Yi Chun (利 川) or via Su-Won (水 原) joining the Yo Ju road at Yi Chun.

There is a small motor-train railway from Su-Won to Yo Ju. At Yi Chun the main road to the centre of Korea passing through Chang-Ho-Won leaves the Yo-Ju road which goes on to Won-Ju (原 州) and so continues into Kang-Won-Do (江原道).

Approaching Yo-Ju the visitor is impressed by the fine range of mountains to the north over the River Han, of Yong-Mun-San (龍 門 山) ‘Dragon Gate Mountain’ in the district of Yang Pyeng (楊 平) and the small sugar loaf mountain stands out strikingly against the more distant mountains. In the immediate vicinity of Yo-Ju as one enters the town is a well wooded hill in the valley of which are to be found lovely specimens of lilies and especially quantities of lily of the valley in early May.

A well wooded area on the left as you enter the town locates the Royal Tomb of King Sei Jong (世 宗 大 王 ), the scholar who invented the Korean syllabary over five hundred years ago. At the immediate approach to the town on the left of the road stands the small Soh Won (書院) or College of Song Ou-Am (宋 尤 奄) the scholar statesman of Korea who lived in the early part of the seventeenth Century and died at the latter part of the same Century. Further down on the right hand side of the road, but practically hidden is the more famous pavillion erected to the memory of the same scholar.[page 25]

The town itself is typical of any Korean town except that it has on the banks of the river some fine old Korean tiled houses at one time inhabited by the old retired government officials for it would seem that Yo-Ju was rather preserved as a place of retirement, later to be full of decayed aristocracy of old Korea. The town has the usual civil offices, schools, at one time attractive old law courts, Korean Inns and at one time a Japanese Inn nicely situated with fine views of the river and mountains. The market place is of usual size with nothing distinctive about it.

Further up the river are some rapids which at times, when a number of Korean junks with their orange―San de Beuf coloured sails clustered together waiting to be hauled over the rapids, present an attractive picture.

American Methodists have a small church in the town and the Anglican Episcopal Mission the small hospital of St. Anne and attractive Church of Our Lady.

There are at least four historic and beautiful sites to see at Yo-Ju.

(1) The Buddhist Temple called Shin-Ruk-Sa (神 勒 寺) or “Brick Temple”.

(2) The Royal Tomb of Sei-Jong (世宗大王陵, 英 陵)

(3) The Pavillion (大老 祠) Commemorating the scholar Song Si Yul (宋 時 烈).

(4) The Soh Won or College of Song Si Yel (宋 時 烈 書院).

(1) The Buddhist “Temple of Spiritual Impressions” (神 勒 寺) or ‘The Brick Temple’ (甓 寺).

This temple is situated on the far side of the river at the East end of the town. You may cross the river at two points―in the centre of the town where the road across the Ferry proceeds to Yang-Pyeng, or at the East end of the town opposite the Temple. The name of the Temple Shin-Ruk-Sa ‘Spiritual Impression Temple’ or[page 26] more commonly called Puk Chul or Brick Temple. The Temple itself is situated on a rocky promontory jutting out into the river and it is backed by small well wooded foot hills. The river takes a bend beyond this rocky point and winds towards the rapids not visible from this point but to be found a mile or two beyond. Very prettily situated are the temple buildings, the chief feature bring the large main pavillion which enshrines the Buddhist Yak-Sa-Yerai (藥師 如來) or ‘Healing Buddha,’ a white figure. It may be that the King who patronized Buddhism and who himself was a leper, King Sei-Cho (世祖 大王) and who was, as I will show later, connected with the building of the Temple, chose the Healing Buddha as the chief deity for this shrine and placed him in the central shrine or Pep-Tang (法 堂) in the hope that a cure world be forthcoming for his leprosy.

There are a number of subsidiary shrines such as are usually found in any temple in Korea of any size such as the shrine devoted to the souls of the departed, Myeng- Poo-Chun (冥 府 殿) presided over by Ti-tjang-Posal (地 藏 菩 薩) the Bodhisattava or God of the dead supported by his assessors, the Ten Kings (十大王) of the nether world; and the two smaller shrines of the cult of the Constellation of the Great Bear (the Seven Stars) Chil-Sung-Kak (七 星 閣) and to the ‘Spirit of the Hill’ San-Sin (山 神), where sits the old sage with his tiger at his feet. The actual date of the erection of the temple is unknown. It would appear to have been built in the Koryo Dynasty, for it was to this temple as we shall see that the famous monk Na Ong ( 懶翁 ) came and was eventually buried there. Na Ong was a Buddhist monk of the Koryo Dynasty although he died at the Early part of the Yi Dynasty (李 朝). Another famous scholar of the Koryo Dynasty Yi Mok Eun (李 牧 隱) also lived and died there.

Another account gives the erection of the temple- perhaps a restoration of the same temple in Sei Cho’s (世 祖 朝) time. Sei Cho had a dream in which a suggestion was made to him to build a temple near his fathers tomb—his father being King Sei-Jong (世 宗). Trees were felled and materials were prepared and accumulated on the river bank at Yo-Ju, but a flood washed the materials away. Later in King Yei Jong’s [page 27] (容宗 大王) reign King Sei-Jong’s body was removed to Yo-Ju (A. D. 1467) and the temple being in the vicinity it was recommended as a suitable place for sacrifices to be offered on behalf of the dead king―the sound of the temple bells could be heard far away to where the Royal Tomb was built. The temple was repaired at the State expense. Later the Wife of Sei-Cho changed the temple’s name to that of Po-Eun-Sa (報恩 寺) but it reverted to its popular and original name very soon after the royal lady’s death.

In the Spring and early Summer there is a wealth of flowering trees and shrubs among which the azalea, the forsythia and cherry blossom are abundant. In the centre court before the great shrine (法堂) there is a fine specimen of the guelder rose.

A large tree, the Linden or the Lime tree, called by the Koreans the Yum-ju-na-mu (念 珠 樹), the sacred tree of Korean Buddhists, the Korean equivalent to the Bodhi Tree, stands near the central shrine. From the berries of this tree Buddhist monks make their rosaries, and this one at Yo-Ju is said to have grown from the walking stick planted there by the famous monk, Na Ong, in the 14th Century.

One of the chief items of interest is the Brick Pagoda which gives the popular name to this temple, Pyek-Chul (甓 寺) brick temple. This brick pagoda is not the only one of its kind in Korea although it is more usual to build pagodas of stone then of brick, but this brick pagoda is certainly a handsome one of mellowed reddish brick―not the dark grey of the old bricks of Korea. The bricks are for the most part if not all, carved or embrossed with a figure of a Buddha and it stands as a sinking monument on a raised eminence near the river but hidden rather by the trees surrounding it.

A little distance up the hill behind the monastic buildings is the chief monument of the temple, the tomb and lantern of the renowned monk Na Ong (懶 翁).

This tomb or Poo-Too may perhaps enshrine only the sacred Jewel found in the cremated ashes of the holy monk, or it may be that Na Ong’s ashes rest here[page 28] and the Jewel found in the ashes at his cremation is buried at Hoi-Am-Sa (檜 岩 寺) the Buddhist Temple near Wi-Jong-Poo (議 政 府) where Na Ong lived and where to-day can be seen a memorial to him. However we know that Na Ong died at the Temple at Yo-Ju and the tomb is shown with pride as well as the marble lantern beautifully curved―now a National Treasure. His foot prints in the stone rock near the river in the temple precincts and the socket holes for the support of the pillars of his summer house on the same rocks are also to be seen. Na Ong’s memory is revered to day although he lived some six hundred years ago―at the end of the Koryo Dynasty and at the beginning of the Yi Dynasty.

(2) Na-Ong (懶 翁) commonly called ‘The Lazy Old Man’ A.D. 1320-1376.

Born in the 7th year of Yun-Moo (延 武) during the reign of King In-Jong (仁 宗) of the Won Dynasty (元 朝)―or Mongol Dynasty, at Yong Hai Poo (寧 海 府), he was known under the name of Auh (牙) ‘tooth.’

At the age of 20 Auh was much distressed at the death of a dear friend and turned to serious thoughts, he asked his father and mother a satisfactory answer to the problem of death. No answer was forthcoming so filled with sorrow he shaved his head and entered a Buddhist monastery called Myo-Juk Sa. After a pilgrimage to many temples Na Ong found great spiritual refreshment and peace at Hoi-Am-Sa (檜 岩 寺) on Chun-Po-san (天 寶 山) about twelve miles north from Wi-Jong-Poo (議 政 府) being about thirty miles from Seoul on the Won San Road.

At this temple which is still standing Na-Ong met the famous Japanese Buddhist monk Sok-Ong (石 翁) who was residing there, and together they studied the Buddhist Classics. Later Na Ong went to China and Studied under the still more famous monk Chi Kong (指 空) who himself came to Korea and preached the Buddhist doctrine. In Buddhist Monasteries in Korea where there is a portrait gallery of the Abbots and other famous Buddhists, it is usual to find in the central place three portraits―those of Chi-Kong (指 空), Na-Ong (懶 翁), and Moo-Hak (無 學). [page 29]

Na-Ong wrote many books on Buddhist subjects and poems, two of his works being:—

Song of Praise.

Song of Buddhist Rosary.

A great seeker after truth he gave his time to diligent study of Buddhism and to writing. A work of his is to be seen at the temple in the Diamond Mountains, Yu-Chum-Sa (榆 枮 寺) and this book is one of the treasures of Buddhist Literature.

The three great monks who were contemporary and living in Korea, Chi-Kong (指 空), Na-Ong (懶 翁), and Moo-Hak (無學) were leaders at Court and Chaplains to the last King of the Koryo Dynasty and to the first King of the Yi Dynasty, Na-Ong became the founder of the Buddhist sect called Sun-Chong (禪 宗) and this sect or school is that followed chiefly in Korea to-day.

Na-Ong died at Yo-Ju at Shin-Ruk-Sa (神 勒 寺) in A. D. 1376 and his Poo-Too and the marble lantern are there today.

The beautiful marble lantern at the tomb is a national monument. It has on it superb carvings of angelic figures quite unusual and almost Indian in design. The Japanese tried to carry off this monument during Hideyoshi’s invasion in the 16th Century but failed to do so.

At the aforesaid monastery of Hoi-Am-Sa (檜 岩 寺) on Mount Chun-Hyang-San (天 香 山) “hill of heavenly incense,” about thirty miles from Seoul, there is to be found a famous tablet of stone on a three storyed pagodalike monument, recording the names and illustrious deeds of the three above named monks, the three ‘saints’ Chi-Kong (指 空), Na-Ong (懶 翁), and Moo-Hak (無 學).

This temple of Hoi-Am-Sa is easily approached from the railway station of Tok-Chong (德 亭) on the Won-San line and lies about three miles away from the station.

Na-Ong is said to have carved the colossal figure of Buddha known as Myo-Kil-Sang (妙吉祥), and the small bas reliefs near Pyo-Hoon-Sa (表 訓 寺) in the Diamond Mountains in Korea. [page 30]

 (3) The Royal Tomb of King Sei-Jong (世 宗 大 王 英 陵)

A. D. 1419-1451 In the opposite direction to the Brick Temple and about three miles by road, or two by boat down the river is the Royal Tomb of perhaps Korea’s greatest, certainly the wisest and most revered, King Sei-Jong (世 宗 大 王)―the Alfred the Great of Korea. In this lovely wooded spot rests a king who lived five hundred years ago. Sei-Jong was the son of King Tai-Jong (太 宗 大 王). It was not until his two elder brothers had proved incapable of ascending the throne that Sei-Jong came into the direct line of succession. His eldest brother called the Yang-Ryung-Tai-Koon (讓 寧 大 君) was a studious fellow but overhearing conversation in which they doubted his capacity to succeed to the throne, and although called Crown Prince he knew he would not succeed so feigned madness and gave his life up to dissipation and debauchery. The second brother thought that he would perhaps become Crown Prince but after a hint from his eldest brother he retired to a monastery in Kwan Ak San (冠 岳 山) near the Han River and became a Buddhist monk. The third brother therefore known as the Choon-Ryung-Tai-Koon (忠 寧 大 君) became Crown Prince and afterwards King Sei-Jong (世宗 大 王).

Sei-Jong was a scholarly man and surrounded himself with learned ministers and others of like mind. Nearest to him was perhaps the Prime Minister, Whang Heui (黄 喜) a scholar and statesman who undoubtedly helped the King to reign well. His favourite scholar was Pyen Key Yang (卡 季 良) who was Head of the Cunfucian College for over twenty years—a man of eccentric habits and of mean ways—he would do such things as lock up any gifts of food, take away wine bottles before the guests had finished drinking and even count the pieces of shreded pumpkin hanging out to dry.

Sei-Jong improved the movable metal type which had been invented before, in the early 13th Century―mentioned by the scholar Yi Kyoo-Bo (李 奎 報) who, in A. D. 1232, lived in Kangwha and mentioned in one of his writings that he had acquired twenty eight sets of Books of Ceremonies printed in movable metal type―perhaps of copper or brass. (Dr Gale maintains that these founts were made privately for two hundred years). It would seem that King Tai-Jong (太宗) set up a government [page 31] Printing House in A. D. 1403 and his type was made of brass.

King Sei-Jong also invented a Water Clock, Clepsydra, an instrument like a Cuckoo-clock.

In the Palace grounds in Seoul he built a Hall or ‘House of Wisdom’ called the ‘Chip-Hyen Chun (集 賢 殿) It was to this building that the scholars Hur-Cho (許 稠), and Kang Suk-Tok (姜 碩 德) were summoned by the king to compile and publish the Book of the Five Relationships known as the O-Ryun Haing Sil (五 倫 行 實) which was used so successfully to popularise the new Korean Alphabet. This book explained the “Five Relationships” and the text printed in Chinese, on one page , was printed in the new Oun-Moon (諺文)一Korean phonetic script on the opposite page , and a picture―wood block―illustrating each of the five subjects. The book was distributed gratis to those who would read and was an immediate success.

A Bureau of Korean Letters―Oun-Moon-Kuk (諺 文 局)was set up and the King with the assistance of four well known scholars, Song Sam Mun (成 三 門) Chung Ryn-Chi (鄭 麟 趾) Shin Sook-Choo (申 叔 舟) and Choi Hang (崔 恒) compiled an alphabet of twenty eight syllables. Everyone knows of this famous syllabary which we are told took four years to compile. It is probable that the King and his friends took as a basis the Chinese Musical Tones called the Koong-Sang-Kak-Chi-Oo (宫 尙 角 之 羽).

For this work the King is renowned and is best remembered by a grateful people.

King Sei-Jong compiled many other books including a work on Agriculture and a Book on the Phonetics of the East (東 國 正 韻).

Sei Jong’s reign was the golden Age of the Yi Dynasty. Expeditions were sent North to curb the unruly tribes. A settlement was made with the Japanese and a trade treaty signed in which it was stared that fifty Japanese ships would be allowed to enter ports in South Korea annually. Envoys were sent to Japan and great progress who made in every direction. [page 32]

Sei-Jong reigned for thirty two years and was succeeded by the scholarly king Moon-Jong (文宗) who in turn was the father of Tan-Jong (端宗) the prince murdered by the wicked uncle, afterward King Sei-Cho (世 祖 大 王) Sei-Jong had great affection and cared greatly for his mother. He had a large family of eighteen sons and four daughters. A man of gentle disposition, of few words, forgiving and a lover of peace and harmony. Sei Jong was industrious and up at the forth watch in the morning. He was interested in all the departments of his state, everything he touched he blessed. In the Summer he slept on the bare boards of his pavillion. His fame spread far and wide Ming Emperors were charmed with the reports they heard of the Korean King and sent him presents of books and gifts innumerable.

Sei-Jong died in the year A. D. 1451 and was buried by his people with sincere sorrow, but with proud appreciation and affection.

The Royal Tomb is situated in a beautifully wooded glade by the side of the River Han at Yo-Ju. The writer of this article has picked, many a time, lilies of the valley, wild bog orchids, azaeleas and other flowers in these woods, seen blue jays in the trees and heard and seen the golden oriole in the pine trees surrounding the resting, place of this good and illustrious king.

(4) The fourth ‘monument’ in Yo-Ju is connected with one of Koreans Greatest Scholars―Song Si-Yel (宋 時 烈) A.D. 1607-1689, better known by his pen name Oo-Am (尤 奄) “One cottage more”.

At Yo-Ju are to be seen the Pavillion Tai-Ro-Sa (大 老 祠) by the side of the river at the centre of the town and the “College of Song Si-Yel,” Soh-Won (書 院) at Wha-Yang-Tong (華 陽 洞) a village at the west side of Yo-Ju town and situated on the bank of the river.

The Tai-Ro-Sa (大 老 祠) has lost its former glory and has been made into part of some local office and school. Probably few people who use it know of its original purpose or in whose honour it was erected. [page 33]

The Soh-Won at the west end of the town is still of interest and consists of a few tiled buildings and a small pavillion which contains within a cupboardlike shrine a delightful portrait painted on a silk scroll and protected by a gauze curtain. The picture was probably painted by a Chinese artist some years ago and is probably a copy of an older portrait.

An account of Song Si-Yel is to be found in the late Bishop Trollope’s article―An Intruduction to Korean Literature Vol: xxi of the R.A.S. Transactions. Song Si-Yel was both a Scholar and a statesman. He was born at Un-Chin (恩 津) in Chung-Chong Nam Do in the year A. D. 1607—the site of the famous stone Buddha.

Educated by Kim Chang Sa he became a learned scholar in the Chinese Classics and studied especially the Commentaries on Confucius’ works by Chu-Ja (朱 子) of the Song Dynasty (宋 朝) of China. Chu-Ja’s works greatly influenced Korea. Song Si-Yel greatly emulated Chu Ja whose real name was Ho-Am (晦 奄) meaning ‘Twilight or dusky cottage hence the choice of his own pen-name Oo-Am which means” One cottage more.’

Song Si-Yel also did much to propagate the teaching of the Great Korean Scholar Yi-Yul-Kok (李 栗 谷), or Yi-Yi (李 珥) his correct name, whose works he greatly admired.

The King Hyo-Chong (孝 宗) the 17th of the Yi Dynasty invited Song to become a Minister of State and being mutual friends the office was accepted.

During the Manchu Invasion A. D. 1636-1637 Song Si-Yel shared the trials of the King In-Cho (仁 朝) in the mountain fortress city of Nam Han about twenty miles East from Seoul. After the surrender to the Manchus when Korea was forced to acknowledge the end of the Ming Dynasty and accept the new regime of the Manchus, Song Si-Yel refused to accept further office under King In-Jo. Political strife led to the exile of Song Si-Yel to Quelpart, Chei-Ju-Do (濟 州 島) by King Suk-Jong (肅 宗) the 19th King of the Yi Dynasty. This took place in the 15th year of the reign of Suk-Jong, but in the 20th year of the reign of the same king he was recalled and reinstated. [page 34]

There were two outstanding political parties, the West and the East (東人, 西人) and these parties were sub-divided into other parties, Song-Si-Yel founded the party called “Old Party”—No-Ron (老 論) a sub-branch of West-Party, while Youn Sung (尹 拯) founded the “young Party” So-Ron (少論) also a sub-branch of the West Party.

The quarrel began over the length of mourning for the King Hyo-Chong (孝 宗) and for his mother Cho Tabi (趙 大 妃) Three years of mourning were required for the King and in the Second year of this mourning the King’s mother died which meant another three years of mourning. Song Si-Yel objected to this and asked that the period of mourning be shortened. After a period of struggle Song Si-Yel was again exiled and taken to Chong-Eup (井 邑) where he was ordered by the King to end his life by drinking the hemlock. This he did facing the Capital and in obedience to a royal command, died like Socrates. Song Si-Yel was a most prodigious writer. His collected works were published thirty years after his death in fifty three volumes. Later more volumes were added, and in A. D. 1847 an Edition de luxe of One hundred and two volumes was published as the ‘Complete Edition of the Works of Philosopher Song’ (宋 子 大 全) So great was the esteem in which Song Si-Yel was held that his tablet was enshrined in the Confucian Temple among all the Great Chinese Scholars and disciplines of Confucius. His “Canonisation” in the Confucian Temple took place in A.D. 1756.

Song Si-Yel was buried at the age of eighty three after his death by self-administered poison, while in exile as already recorded, and he is buried not far from the town of Chong-Ju (淸 州) in Choog-Chong Puk Do.

It will be seen how interesting is the historic town of Yo-Ju with its associations with the Royal House in connection with the Royal Tomb of one of Korea’s greatest kings, and with the illustrious scholars Na-Ong and Song Si Yel and the Buddhist Temple and ancient College and Pavillion. Other and more historic and renowned towns and sites there are in Korea, but Yo-Ju can claim perhaps more than a passing interest, for it is connected with the resting place of the scholar king who gave to the Korean people one of the most-perfect phonetic syllabaries known in the civilized world.