

The Battle of Dragon with Dragon 용과 용의 대격전

by Sin Ch'ae-Ho 신채호

Translated by Brother Anthony of Taizé

1. The descent of Miri-nimⁱ

It is descending. It descends. The dragon Miri-nim is descending. Behold, the New Year has come, 1928ⁱⁱ, the Year of the Dragon has begun. Miri-nim is descending over East Asia.

Waves rise in the Pacific Ocean. Gales blow in the deserts of Mongolia. Five-hued clouds gather at the peak of T'aebaek-san mountain. Each and all of them declare that Miri-nim is descending.

At the report that Miri-nim is descending, all living creatures to the East of the Urals have raised their heads. The rich and powerful naturally prepare food in Chinese and Western fashion to please its tastes, make ready every kind of music—*kömungo*, *kayagŭm*, piano, etc—to delight its ears. But the wretched, naked, starving poor who have to pay their devotions to Miri-nim own nothing. All they have are their crimson, naked bodies. They have no choice but to let some blood and brew wine from it, weep tears with which to make rice-cakes, place those miserable, unappealing offerings, on the high altar and await the descent of Miri-nim.

At two in the morning of the first day of the first month, at the first cock-crow, without any fanfare, borne on a plane of clouds, Miri-nim comes near. The high and mighty welcome the sacred Miri-nim with singing and dances, while all the poor with one accord fall prostrate on the ground weeping. As they weep, they pray to Miri-nim:

“Your Lordship, Miri-nim! This year may taxes not be set too high. This year may we not have to give too high a share of the harvest. This year may we not see the inside of a prison. This year may none of us throw ourselves under a train for hardship. This year may none of us have to become a beggar wandering in other lands, other cities. This year may *** prosper.”

As they pray, they hold hands and arms high, ceaselessly rubbing their palms together in supplication.

But the sound of those prayers does not touch Miri-nim's ears, it only notices the miserable, unappealing offerings. On seeing them, Miri-nim grows furious. It opens its mouth and roars:

“Wretches! Death to those wretches who dare ask for blessings without showing devotion.”

Alas! Is that mouth Nolbuⁱⁱⁱ's gourd? Out of it come pouring an emperor wearing a dung tub on his head, a general wrapped in cowhide, a sleek-browed wealthy fellow, a landowner with the bowl of his pipe pointing backward, a stinking constable . . . every kind of frivolous hireling. Once out, they gobble up every one of the poor folk.

They gulp down the blood, gnaw the flesh, finally even crunch up the bones. If they don't want to be eaten they're destined to become bullet-fodder, or doomed to prison. Ah, hellish world . . . wretched people . . .

2. Victory banquet in the heavenly palace, fear of treason

The sound of the pathetic pleas and angry shouts of the people who were being put to death shook the ninefold gates of highest Heaven, reaching the inmost chambers. The supreme Lord of Heaven^{iv}, startled, awoke from deep sleep. He ordered a heavenly angel to find out what that noise was.

The angel replied:

“That is Miri killing humans who demand the right to live.”

The Lord of Heaven said:

“Ah, Miri is a wise and virtuous servant! If such aspirations increase they become insubordination, if insubordination increases it becomes revolution, so the people who aspire must indeed be killed! Ah, Miri is truly wise.”

Then he calls Miri, gives it a medal for killing people, awards it a higher rank. Summoning all the immortals in heaven, the ghosts on earth, the generations of sovereigns, ministers and generals, he offers a banquet in heaven.

On earth people’s stomachs are empty, so they die, while in heaven stomachs are so full they’re fit to burst. Lifting up then cradling his belly, the Lord of Heaven looks round at all the spirits.

“These things called humans are congenitally rebellious, they are all the time raising the flag of revolt, so what shall we do? Suppose we suspend a cannon in space as big as the Earth and shoot, we could kill them all, but once the world is destroyed and the human race abolished, there will be no blood left for us to suck, so that won’t do. Suppose we grant them their freedom and then they refuse to let us suck their blood, that won’t do either. How can we completely dry up those wretches’ rebellious nature, leaving them half-dead, so that we have no worries as we munch them up from head to toe, suck them dry from the outside in, devour their children and grandchildren and following generations ? You must each propose a scheme.”

The angel reported:

“We should equip them with nose-rings and halters like cows, whip them and crush them.”

“Ha ha, you are too naive! Are not the administrative laws they have more cruel than nose-rings? Ethics and morality more brutal than bridles? Are not the guns of the military and the swords of the police many times more terrible weapons than whips? Yet still they plot rebellion.”

“Then let’s summon all the doctors, manufacture an anesthetic, and put them to sleep for ever, so that we can devour them without their realizing we are catching and eating them.”

“Humph! I already tried that. I sent that Confucius fellow to write about Honor and Duty, fooling them that ‘the poor and lowly should accept poverty as their lot and obey the commands of the powerful, passing to future generations their reputation as faithful, loyal subjects,’ while I sent poor Shakyamuni and Jesus, fooling them that ‘even if people make you suffer, if you accept it without resisting, after you die your souls will go to heaven or the lotus flower podium. Where will you find better anesthetics than those? For over two thousand years now I have been enjoying the effects of that medicine but today its virtue is exhausted and those wretches are waking up, starting rebellions or revolutions, causing trouble.”

“Then since today is a period when science and literature enjoy high authority, I think we should seduce many scientists and writers and turn them into tools of the rich and powerful, the ruling class, ready to support by their theories the rights of the ruling class, glorify in poems and fiction the dignity of the ruling class.”

“Oh! I tried that recently and have seen remarkable results. But there are scholars who disobey my orders and go plunging among the masses, encouraging rebellion.”

3. The repressive measures devised by Miri

In this manner the Lord of Heaven worried endlessly about human beings with their entrenched spirit of rebellion; finally he sighed:

“In the human world there cannot be a winning strategy that continues to work for one

hundred years, so why should there be one that works for ten thousand years here in heaven? Let's just drink wine, eat meat, and let the years pass by; what use would it be if we kept worrying?"

Then he sang an ode without any refrain:

"Who cares if the gardens before and behind our palace collapse? What does it matter if the arrowroot vines on Mansu Mountain grow tangled?"

At that, Miri came forward and fell prostrate before speaking:

"Your Majesty is so august and dignified, all the hosts of living beings venerate you. Why do you speak such ominous words? The humans on Earth have a rebellious nature but I can subjugate them and confine them for ever in a living Hell."

The Lord of Heaven replied:

"Ah, you are a rare combination of wisdom and valor; if you have a strategy, tell me."

Miri continued:

"The populace of the world can generally be divided into two parts, one part being the populace of powerful lands, the other part being the populace of colonized lands. The populace of powerful lands have preserved a conventional form of patriotism that functions by force of habit and at the same time they have mistakenly come to think that the state belongs to the ruling class, taking patriotism to mean supporting an increase in the power of the ruling class, so that their patriotism has become a false patriotism. Therefore, if we grant the populace of the powerful lands things like the right to vote in general elections or increased wages, while promoting that false patriotism, which goads them to conquer the populace of small, weak lands and to oppress the populace of their colonies, allowing them to see themselves as the vanguard of the ruling class and capitalism, their hungry stomachs will be filled with these unprofitable vanities and they will not even notice the pain while we go on sucking their blood for decades more. The degree of pain suffered by the populace of the colonies may be thousands of times greater than their's, but with their groundless faith in good fortune those starving always hope for the luck of a feast, those freezing always hope for the luck of warm clothing, those being dragged to the gallows always hope for the luck of life. As a result, when they resist, they are unable to do so wholeheartedly. No people are as easy to fool as those who have been colonized. Railways, mines, fisheries, forests, fertile land, rich paddy fields, businesses, industries . . . take every right and source of profit away from them, increase taxation and sharecrop rents, exploit them to an appalling extent, if you then declare, "We are looking after your welfare," they are fooled. Apply whipping, clubbing, stabbing, branding, electrical shocks, or even such punishments as the xxx which are too dreadful to mention, mobilizing troops to tear women apart, bury children alive, slaughter whole villages, set fire to granaries . . . employ fearsome methods such as these, but then, if you simply allow the populace to have a couple of newspapers and proclaim, "Accept the benefits of our cultural policies," they are fooled. Restrict schools and abolish learning, forbid the use of national languages and literatures so that patriotism cannot arise, transplant the citizens within their own countries so that the original citizens have nowhere to live, destroy whole clans by harsh punishments and massacres, if you then make inflated statements about "friendship between peoples of the same race and culture," they are fooled. Tell them to forget words or terms like 'founding a nation,' 'revolution,' 'independence,' 'freedom' and such, making it impossible for them to be used in speech or writing, then say that soon self-government and political rights will be granted to them, and they are fooled. Just look. Those youths sucking at the sweet lips of female students in the love-stories produced by amorous literary circles that have performed memorial rites for the demise of the nation, how proud they are of themselves. Men robbed of their native land and exiled, who live as menial workers in remote foreign lands, if they once have a place to lie down, don't they start singing about the comforts of their second homeland? Independence fighters go running off in the wake of the communist party. In their play-acted beggar's government even the president's clothes are ragged. Since it is so easy

to fool colonized peoples, your Majesty, you can set your heart at ease. Even though you say that all the peoples of the world are waking up, at least the colonized peoples are still far from it. Even if we only devour the people of colonized lands, we have nothing to worry about for several decades.

The Lord of Heaven listened to his words, then said:

“Why, my child! I may be vicious, you are even more vicious than I am. How could I keep my throne without you?”

And he patted Miri on the back.

4. Jesus cruelly murdered, no hope of resurrection

“Dragon^v has come. Dragon has come. This is the last day of the Heavenly Kingdom.”

Ah, what voice is this? Where is this voice coming from? What voice is this, coming as the Lord of Heaven is frolicking, his mind relieved after hearing Miri’s reassurances. Now the Lord of Heaven comes tripping along, demanding to know where this voice is coming from, so all the subjects from Miri down, awestruck, go searching but there is nothing to be seen, only the voice crying:

“Dragon has come. Dragon has come. This is the last day of the Heavenly Kingdom,” keeps booming from somewhere, shaking the heavenly palace’s walls, roofs, gates, windows, pillars, floors and foundations. They recite all kinds of spells and prayers summoning the Buddha Shakyamuni from Paradise, but the voice only increases in volume, the heavenly palace only quakes more violently. Greatly alarmed, the Lord of Heaven stops the feasting, then sends all the spirits out and spends the night with the court ladies, but he is so worried that his spittle dries up.

What next? At dawn the next day the myriads of spirits in the Heavenly City were awakened by cries of, “Special edition! Special! Buy this special edition!” An angel on his way by carriage to have an audience with the Lord of Heaven glimpsed a copy, a special edition of the three-hundred-thousand-year-old *Heavenly Times* newspaper.

The main headline in large capitals was: “Tragic Slaughter of Lord of Heaven’s Only Son Jesus Christ” and in smaller capitals following it: “At Dragon’s Instigation.” The accompanying article read:

“The Lord of Heaven’s only son, Jesus Christ, was lecturing on the Lord of Heaven’s Way in a Christian chapel in a rural farming village when suddenly the village farmers, shouting, ‘Bastard! Cashing in on your Father’s name you’ve swindled yourself a living for nineteen hundred years and that’s enough; why are you still running around barking like this?’ and ‘Where have you put all the blood you’ve sucked from us poor folk over the past nineteen hundred years?’ and ‘You’ve deceived the West so much already, why have you come out to swindle the East as well?’ and ‘Do you want another taste of the nails from that day’s cross in Jerusalem?’ they attacked him with kicks and punches, chopped at him with their hoes, turning the body of Jesus Christ into a pulp and killing him with no further possibility of resurrection. The murderers were poor folk but the chief culprit is said to have been Dragon. Dragon is a monster of obscure origin, but it has been frequenting this region for many days, cursing the Lord of Heaven, saying he is ‘a villain who deserves to be butchered and eaten or worse,’ and denigrating Jesus Christ as ‘A more vicious rogue than his father,’ circulating a manifesto enumerating the crimes of the Lord of Heaven and Christ in ninety clauses, finally taking advantage of Christ’s visit that day to commit the outrage of murdering him, leading the populace on.”

There followed, on the same page, an editorial under the title, “Jesus Christ Incapable of Resurrection” that ran:

“Jesus Christ was the Son, wicked and vicious in character exactly like the Lord of Heaven

his Father. After his birth, at first he taught his Father's Way but then, when he was just over thirty, he joined the Jewish outlaws. But the Jews of those times, being slow-witted, let Jesus go free after they had caught him; he escaped carrying the cross behind his back, claimed to be 'risen from the dead' and fooled the people of Europe so that he united them all under the banner of that religion. After the Crusades, he launched great wars, such as the eastward Crusade and the Thirty Years' War, teaching ordinary people the art of killing one another, all the time lying that 'blessed are those who suffer, blessed are the persecuted,' fooling the populaces of ruined lands and the proletariat with holy words, so that they make them forget reality and dream of a false kingdom of heaven to the advantage of the powerful and rulers, so that his sanctity and grace remain eternally and are inscribed in history.

"It is not just that this time he has been slaughtered so cruelly, today the masses who have become aware and the youths of the anti-Christ alliance have acted in concert, killing Christ again with brush and sword, so that henceforth Christ has been slaughtered once and for all, he cannot return to life again. Since Christ has been killed once and for all, the Lord of Heaven, sunk deep in old age, is in a pitiful state too, for in whose name will Christians offer him prayers now?"

The angel, on seeing that special issue, did not read through to the end but pasty-faced went rushing into the heavenly palace and showed the paper to the Lord of Heaven, his hands trembling.

5. Dragon and Dragon: brothers but different

The Lord of Heaven glanced at the paper, then stared dumbly, as if he was out of his mind, at the angel who was standing before him, before collapsing onto the desk. The angel rushed to raise him.

"Your Majesty, this is an incident in which the very existence of the Heavenly Kingdom is at stake; how can your Majesty let go of your mind in this crisis? Your Majesty!"

He appealed to the Lord of Heaven in a hoarse voice, choking with sorrow, while all the spirits, high and low, from Miri down, came pouring in to comfort the Lord of Heaven.

Seeing Miri, the Angel cried, his eyes blazing fire, brimming with fury, his face crimson:

"You wretch! Aren't you meant to be his Lardshit the dreaded Bastion of the East? What has happened to the influence you are supposed to exert over the population, that you have allowed such an atrocious incident to happen, that his Majesty's impossibly almighty only Son Jesus Christ should be killed without any possibility of resurrection? You wretch! You should be beheaded . . ."

He thumped on the palace walls with his fists as he rebuked Miri, who sat there silent like a deaf-mute sick at heart, grimacing.

"Dragon has come. Dragon has come. This is the last day of the Heavenly Kingdom."

Once again, the voice shakes the Heavenly Palace. The angel abruptly falls silent, Miri opens his eyes wide.

The Lord of Heaven, who has been in a swoon, jumps up from his couch.

"Dragon! Dragon! That Dragon that killed my son Jesus! Catch that Dragon and sacrifice it!"

In peremptory and desperate tones the Lord of Heaven gives his severe command. At once troops of the Heavenly City's police and secret agents are mobilized and make a great fuss, but although the cry, "It has come, it has come, Dragon has come . . ." rings in all directions, there is not the least trace of Dragon to be seen.

Despite all the exertions of the Heavenly City's police and secret agents, not a clue could be found until Dragon's photo and history were published the following day in the *People's Newspaper*, the only paper in all the world, East and West, for ordinary folk. But on the front page, under the

heading “Dragon’s Portrait,” there was nothing but a large number of ‘0’s with an explanation in small 5-point print to the left of them. The explanation ran:

“Until the Heavenly Kingdom has been completely destroyed, Dragon’s form can only be expressed by ‘0.’ But Dragon’s ‘0’ is unlike the ‘0’ of mathematics. In mathematics, if you add ‘0’ to ‘0’, it is still ‘0’, whereas Dragon’s ‘0’ can become every figure, whether 1, 2, 3, 4 or ten, a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand. The zero of mathematics occupies a space but corresponds to no reality, whereas the Dragon’s ‘0’ can become every kind of terror, whether gun, sword, fire, or thunderbolt. Today Dragon is expressed as ‘0’ but tomorrow Dragon’s enemies may be reduced to ‘0’ so that empires become ‘0’, the Heavenly Kingdom becomes ‘0’, a capitalist becomes ‘0’, every ruling power becomes ‘0’. When every ruling power has become ‘0,’ Dragon’s original identity and form will be revealed to our eyes.” Then under the title “Dragon’s History” came the following:

“Who is Dragon? In the 5th year after the Lord of Heaven was enthroned as Supreme Being and began receiving superstitious worship from ancient humanity, in the midst of the void there arose a mysterious being, a monovular twin, one of them being Dragon and the other that renowned Miri-nim who is at present the Commander of the Guard of the Heavenly Palace and Governor of the East; Miri and Dragon are both written with the same Chinese character ‘Long’ 龍. Later, Miri grew up in lands such as Chosŏn, India, or China, becoming the dragon of the East, received passive education from Shakyamuni and Confucius etc, becoming a loyal servant of the Lord of Heaven, then was venerated as a model divinity for humanity by every religious or ethical leader who had found his vocation in obedience and so become a tool of the ruling class, and therefore the dragon was highly praised and associated with the Lord of Heaven in the myths of Chosŏn, the Confucian classics of China and the Buddhist scriptures of India. So the Lord of Heaven chose Miri and appointed it to be Defender of the East. Meanwhile, Dragon stayed in places such as Greece or Rome, becoming the dragon of the West, always keeping company with rebels and revolutionaries, enjoyed wicked games such as ‘revolution’ or ‘destruction’ and suchlike, never accepting the bridle of religion or ethics, so that in western history traitors and rebels were often given the nickname of ‘Dragon.’ In the modern world, Dragon has sympathized with Nihilism, practicing a more violent form of revolutionary action, finally becoming guilty of the murder of Jesus Christ.”

Every one of the courtiers of the Heavenly Kingdom, high and low, was amazed to learn on receiving this newspaper that Miri and Dragon were originally brothers.

6. The construction of the Terrestrial Nation and consternation in the Heavenly Kingdom

Being the Lord of Heaven’s favorite, Miri had for many millennia been Chief Governor of the East but now the rebel Dragon’s act of murdering the Lord of Heaven’s beloved Son had occurred in a region under his control and at the same time evidence that Miri was Dragon’s brother had been published in the *People’s Newspaper*, so that public opinion in the Heavenly City was widely inclined to suspect that Miri was a member of Dragon’s party and inevitably the Lord of Heaven was furious.

Therefore he took away Miri’s title of Governor of the East and instead dispatched the angel the same day with the order to arrest Dragon and slaughter the rebels.

The angel received his orders and after paying his respects before the steps of the throne he was about to set out when the Heavenly Kingdom’s minister of Communications came puffing in and handed the Lord of Heaven a message from the world below. The Lord of Heaven read:

“After the common folk of the Terrestrial Nation had killed Jesus, they made short shrift of Confucius, Shakyamuni, Mahomet, etc, beating to death all the founders of religions and ethical systems, burned all the books concerning politics, law, education which supported the rights of

rulers, destroyed the buildings housing churches, government offices, administrative offices, public buildings, banks, companies entirely rejected the past social system, and proclaimed the public ownership of everything in the world. All the members of the ruling classes mobilized troops in an attempt to subjugate the rebels, but the soldiers, who originally belonged to the common people, all deserted to the side of the people. They offered a large reward and tried to recruit new soldiers but no-one applied. They had piled up mountains of cannon, field guns, rapid-fire weapons . . . but were unable to fire a single bullet. Every member of the ruling classes had resolved to fight desperately, but not only were they far less numerous than the people, as owners of money, women, and all the other kinds of wealth they were unwilling to die in battle so they all fled into an impregnable fortress, where they were besieged by the people and starved to death, having nothing to eat. Among those who died of starvation, each one had a million Wōn on average clutched in their hands. Once the ruling class had been exterminated, the people renamed the world and called it the Terrestrial Nation, suspending all communication with the Heavenly Kingdom.”

Never mind all the other events, what struck the Lord of Heaven most forcibly was the phrase “suspending all communication with the Heavenly Kingdom.” Why? For tens of thousands of years past, the Lord of Heaven, his ministers and all the ghosts of the Heavenly Kingdom had not had to labor, being nourished and sustained by the tributes and sacrifices offered in the lower world.

Only now that the Terrestrial Nation had been established, and had proclaimed the suspension of all communication, tributes and sacrifices would no longer reach them. Which meant that all the ghosts would be forced to starve to death. The Lord of Heaven himself would be forced to starve to death.

The Lord of Heaven showed this message to all the ghosts, who were furious and demanded that the Lord of Heaven immediately issue a command ordering the slaughter of all the people. But the Lord of Heaven shook his head.

“While the people believed in us, we had power over them, but what power do we have now? Since we have no power, if we try to slaughter the people, we will simply be slaughtered ourselves. Slaughter the people? Those are vain words.”

At those words, all their fiery rage evaporated.

“Then let’s send an envoy to the Terrestrial Nation, imploring a resumption of communications and the continuation of tributes and sacrifices.”

However, the Lord of Heaven had plenty of experience of the ways of humanity, he knew that any mention of tributes or sacrifices would do more harm than good, merely infuriating the people more, so he said it would not be possible.

“Then what are we to do? Shall we just sit here and starve?”

The Lord of Heaven sat in silence for a while, then spoke:

“There is only one solution. It means sending a messenger to the people, requesting that they give us as many gourd bowls as there are ghosts in the Heavenly Kingdom.”

“What would we do with gourd bowls?”

The Lord of Heaven wept as he replied:

“We have no choice. We will have to stand outside people’s doors every day, tapping on our bowls, begging for a spoonful of rice from ‘our venerable people’ . . .”

His voice failed and he could not go on.

“But how could we . . . we ghosts . . . let alone your august Majesty . . .”

All the ghosts raised their voices and wept aloud. The immortals’ *paduk* games, the heavenly maidens’ *kōmunggo* tunes all ceased and lamentations shook the heavenly palace. Yet there was nothing to be gained, though they wept for a whole day, and the next day too, or for 365 days. Finally the weeping stopped and the suggested request for gourd bowls was approved.

7. Miri's departure for battle and the Lord of Heaven's anxieties

The Lord of Heaven asked the ghosts:

“Then who shall we send as the messenger to ask for bowls?”

The angel replied:

“Miri will be most suitable. As I heard from a dependable source yesterday, the common folk are not yet so strongly opposed to the Heavenly Kingdom, only our enemy, that wretch, Dragon, has gone inside their heads, and convinced them that since the power of your Majesty and those under you or the ruling classes among humanity only exists with the consent of the common folk, all our authority would turn into dead leaves in an autumn wind if ever the common people rejected it. It is only at his instigation that the people have started this kind of revolt. I believe that the people have more faith in today's Dragon than they had in your Majesty previously. If Dragon agrees, the people will probably give us bowls. Since Miri is Dragon's brother, I believe that it might be easier to gain Dragon's agreement if we send Miri.”

The Lord of Heaven accepted this and, summoning Miri from prison, grasped him by the wrists and spoke, weeping:

“I have been so foolish, I nearly had you killed, my faithful subject.”

He then explained in detail what had been decided concerning the gourd bowls.

“That's unacceptable. That's unacceptable. That's utterly unacceptable. Gourd bowls are used by beggars. Beggars holding bowl present themselves at the common folk's doors, saying, ‘Please give me a spoonful,’ and people give them rice out of pity. But if your Majesty comes along holding a bowl, they will point at you and mock you: ‘Yah, beggar-emperor, what's become of all the dignity you used to have?’ They will beat you with their fists, demanding: ‘Give back all the blood you sucked from us in times past!’ Far from putting anything into your bowl, they will smash your bowl. Forgive my frankness, your Majesty, but they may even set about your brow It's unacceptable. Asking for begging-bowls is absolutely unacceptable.”

Miri wept as he protested.

“Then what are we going to do? It would be better to commit suicide by throwing myself in front of a train, but where am I going to find a railway track in the Heavenly Kingdom? I could never kill myself with a knife”

“If I once open my mouth, kings, consuls, capitalists . . . and suchlike emerge. I will go down to the Earth and open my mouth.”

“Even if you vomit out kings, consuls, etcetera, today they don't have a shit's worth of power, the people won't be afraid of them. Your ideas are out of date.”

“Then I will go down and inspire patriotism in the common folk of powerful nations, so that they gobble up the people of their colonies, and among the colonized people I will spread false reports they are being given self-government and political rights so they allow themselves to be gobbled up by the advanced nations' common folk, then while they are eating one another I will restore the authority of the Heavenly Kingdom.”

“You think enlightened peoples will let themselves be taken in like that? Those are anachronistic ideas, too.”

“Yet it is completely unacceptable that your Majesty should take up a begging-bowl. At least, I will go down to the Terrestrial Nation, spy out the real state of affairs, then return. If it's worth fighting, we can fight; otherwise, all the inhabitants of the Heavenly Kingdom will just have to join hands and starve, but begging-bowls are out of the question.”

Miri then mounted a cloud-chariot and set off toward Earth while the Lord of Heaven and all the officials from the angel down, the immortals male and female, with all their kith and kin, all

clutching their starving breasts, followed it down to the topmost layer of clouds, holding up their hands and shouting with hoarse voices: “Long live Miri-nim!” as they acclaimed Miri, who was bearing on his shoulders responsibility for the future survival or destruction of the Heavenly Kingdom.

‘Miri-nim? Yesterday I was a villain in the Heavenly Kingdom and a hero down on Earth; today I’m a hero in heaven and a villain on Earth. Status in heaven and earth is so variable!’ As he pondered inwardly, tears flowed down Miri’s cheeks. He was not yet half-way down when the angel came panting after him and announced:

“You have to come back briefly. His Majesty has something more to say to you.”

Miri turned back and arrived before the Lord of Heaven.

“You are not to use violence against the incensed populace. You must entreat them with kindness and reason, appealing to their tender hearts. This may be the last thing I ever ask you to do . . .”

The Lord of Heaven squeezed Miri’s hand hard.

“Yes, your Majesty, you must not worry. I will go down to Earth and do everything with the greatest care.”

Miri quickly remounted his chariot.

8. Crisis in the Heavenly Palace, the Lord of Heaven’s flight

Once Miri has been dispatched, all the ghosts of the imperial court sit down together and begin to weep. They are not weeping over Miri’s departure, they are weeping at the imminent destruction of the Heavenly Kingdom. Or rather, they are not weeping at the imminent destruction of the Heavenly Kingdom, each of them is weeping over his own individual misfortune.

The one weeping with the greatest anguish is the Lord of Heaven’s favorite immortal maiden, Kokku.

The Lord of Heaven feels so sorry for her that he stops weeping for himself and starts listening carefully to the sound of her voice. He realizes that she is not weeping but repeating a curse:

“It’s come. It’s come. Dragon has come. This is the last day of the Heavenly Kingdom.”

The Lord of Heaven is furious.

“Wretched girl! What’s so good for you about Dragon coming?”

He draws his sword and cuts off Kokku’s head; alas, poor Kokku, her head drops off and she dies. Once he has killed her, the Lord of Heaven listens to the weeping of all the others and they are all Kokku. Just like her, they are saying:

“It’s come. It’s come. Dragon has come. This is the last day of the Heavenly Kingdom.”

“Ah! What is happening? Have all the members of the Heavenly Court turned into traitors and joined Dragon’s gang?”

Now he listens to the sound of his own weeping, only his weeping no longer sounds like weeping but cursing:

“It’s come. It’s come. Dragon has come. This is the last day of the Heavenly Kingdom.”

At this, the Lord of Heaven is obliged to stop weeping and issue a stern command:

“If anyone weeps inside the palace, they are to be executed.”

After which:

“Why did I kill my lifelong sweetheart Kokku? Why is there no news of Miri? What will become of me if the Heavenly Kingdom is destroyed?”

Regret, depression and distress keep rising in the Lord of Heaven’s mind until he has a

terrible headache. Holding his head in his hands, he enters the palace pharmacy to obtain medicine to relieve the pain but then, ah! how strange! There is nobody weeping in the pharmacy, yet it is ringing with the shrill cry:

“It’s come. It’s come. Dragon has come. This is the last day of the Heavenly Kingdom.”

Full of suspicion, the Lord of Heaven cautiously searches until he finds the origin of the cry in a bottle of *aqua fortis*. Furious, the Lord of Heaven draws his sword and strikes the bottle; the liquid, as it spills and flows, transforms into a sword of fire, battering the beams, the pillars, the roofs, smashing the plinths, until with a *crack-bang, crash-bang*, flames whirring and roaring, the entire palace turns into an inferno.

The Lord of Heaven orders the Rain Spirit to be called and told to make some rain to put out the fire, but he does not come, instead the Wind Spirit comes roaring in, blowing a great gale so that the fire spreads from the palace to the entire Heavenly City. No wonder authority vanishes when the tide of power has been displaced. The Lord of Heaven is obliged to flee the fire but the moment he emerges from the palace gate he is swept up by the great gale and goes flying off.

The angel attempts to save the Lord of Heaven but the wind is too strong and he is helpless.

“This is indeed the last day of the Heavenly Kingdom,” the angel cries.

But the angel is loyal to the Lord of Heaven, there can be no question of him changing course to follow the changing situation. He will follow the Lord of Heaven for better or for worse. He resolves to go seeking the Lord of Heaven wherever he may be, to the heights above the heights of heaven or the depths beneath the netherworld, so he dons canvas socks and straw shoes like the travelers of Chosŏn, working clothes like Chinese coolies, and goes seeking the Lord of Heaven high and low in all directions.

9. The Angel goes begging, the Sage’s divination

The angel thought: “If I want to find his Majesty, obviously I must go to the countries of Europe and America that have often turned to the Lord of Heaven as the only almighty God,” so he passed through London, Paris, Rome, Berlin . . . all the great cities.

But not only was there no sign of priests, ministers or suchlike, and when it came to emperors, kings, presidents, prime-ministers . . . there was no hearing of such names, and as for banks, companies, trusts . . . suchlike buildings were not to be seen, and there was nothing left from the old days, such as customs and traditions. But since the angel was incapable of thinking about anything except finding the Lord of Heaven, he just went rushing through at full speed and did not realize the situation. As he was passing Jerusalem, he met Paul and, thinking to himself, ‘Paul’s a sincere believer in the Lord of Heaven, he’ll know where he is,’ asked:

“Hey, Paul, where’s the Lord of Heaven?”

“You idiot, you must be mad! You’re looking for the Lord of Heaven nowadays? You’re crazy!”

He punched the angel’s cheeks until he took to his heels with a swollen face.

Reaching Beijing in China, he passes the Altar of Heaven located in a pine grove a couple of miles outside the southern gate, Zhengyangmen; there a crowd of spectators has gathered on hearing that the Emperor was going to offer the sacrifice to Heaven, wearing his crown and ceremonial robes.

“Ha ha, China is still a sacred nation! They have restored the monarchy and reinstated the sacrifices to Heaven!”

The angel hurries in and looks for the Lord of Heaven, but someone immediately holds up a restraining hand.

“You idiot, stop dreaming! This is a play commemorating People’s Day. The Lord of Heaven? What goddam Lord of Heaven?”

He too slaps the angel’s cheeks. Alas, faithfully serving the Lord of Heaven, the angel’s swollen cheeks have no chance to recover.

Rubbing his aching cheeks, as he heads for the Tian-qiao bridge he sees an elderly fortune-teller sitting at the roadside wearing his hair in a pigtail, wrapped in a Taoist towel. In front of him is a divination table to which is attached a paper bearing eight large characters: ‘Your questions all answered. Fee ten copper coins.’ He thinks:

“Ah, that old man’s a rare bird. He has not cut off his pigtail and still believes in Fuxi’s Eight Trigrams. The fee is only ten coins, all I need is ten coins before I ask him where the Lord of Heaven is.”

He turns his pocket inside out but the pocket merely lets off a fart: ‘You don’t have a clipped brass farthing, let alone ten copper coins.’ In such a situation, even an angel is reduced to tears.

“Before Dragon came, when I was in attendance at the Lord of Heaven’s side, I only had to put my hand in my pocket and out would come pouring diamonds, rubies, platinum, gold, American dollars, French francs, silver coins from China bearing Yuan Shikai’s head, but today my pocket refuses to give me so much as ten copper coins”

However, the angel is so eager to have his fortune told that he approaches the old Taoist smiling and makes a deep bow.

“Venerable fortune-teller, Sir, I beg you to tell me one thing. I am currently without money but, once this is over, money will be available and I will repay you then, not just ten coins but a thousand, ten-thousand coins, for sure.”

“Indeed? Money is useless in today’s world, of course, but I cannot forget the old tradition of being fond of money, so I just ask for it as a joke. What might your question be about? I will tell your fortune. Only tell me what the topic is.”

Fearing he will be given another beating if he mentions the Lord of Heaven, the angel hesitates a little.

“Well, it’s simply that I am looking for my master. I do not know where my master has gone”

“Ha ha, you mean there are still people looking for their master in today’s world? You are a loyal servant indeed!”

He shakes the case of fortune-telling spills and two divination signs emerge. He exclaims in astonishment:

“Ah! Oh! The first symbol is ‘heaven’ which means ‘ the Lord of Heaven’ and the second is ‘flight’ which means ‘run away,’ so I reckon the master you are seeking is no human being, you must be an angel looking for the Lord of Heaven who has run away.”

The angel could not help being surprised to hear those words. So he fell on his knees and humbly requested:

“Please, tell me where the Lord of Heaven is.”

The fortune-teller replied:

“The first portion of the ‘heaven’ symbol, ‘person,’ changes into the first portion of the ‘flight’ symbol, ‘Mercury,’ and then the ‘Mercury’ turns back and overcomes ‘person.’ In divining, Mercury is a dragon, and the person is a rat, so the Lord of Heaven has fled Dragon’s revolt and taken refuge in a rat-hole. In the old days, people used to say “ever since heaven was established” but today they say “ever since heaven was abolished.” Go and look for the Lord of Heaven in a rat-hole.”

10. X X X

Anxious to find the Lord of Heaven, the angel thanks the fortune-teller and sets off in quest of a rat-hole. Looking for a rat-hole he is startled to come across a shrine dedicated to the Dragon Spirit.

“Dragon is a nickname for Miri-nim and Miri must have come down here,” he reflects, and on entering the shrine he finds Miri, only this is not the Miri of former times who could produce or destroy at will winds, rain, lightning and thunder, but just a clay image of Miri. Its ears have fallen off, its eyes are missing, its brow has been smashed. There is not a single bowl of offerings lying before it; clearly it has retired here after being defeated by Dragon.

“Miri, you wretch, how could you leave the Lord of Heaven somewhere and come here all alone? I cannot forget the Lord of Heaven and I’m looking for him . . .”

The angel scolded Miri, who smiled coldly.

“Angel, you idiot. What’s the point of looking for the Lord of Heaven? The Lord of Heaven is Lord of Heaven when he’s in the Heavenly Palace; now the palace has been smashed, how can he still be the Lord of Heaven? If the Lord of Heaven exists, he’s a dead Lord of Heaven. A dead Lord of Heaven counts for less than a living rat. Let’s assume it was right for the Lord of Heaven to be destroyed; then surely you and I and the Lord of Heaven are all nothing but fabrications of the fleeting superstitions of the ancient people? As fabrications of their superstition, just think how much harm we caused the common folk. It wasn’t just the Lord of Heaven who pampered himself, surely everyone swindled the people of their money in the name of offerings and tributes to the Lord of Heaven? Surely there was no-one who did not make use of the name of the Lord of Heaven to act wickedly as an earthly emperor? During the recent Great War that killed so many common folk, did not the emperors, rulers and commanders of every country act in the Lord of Heaven’s name? Did not the wretches who swallowed up other countries and melted down the bones of their populations claim to be doing ‘the Lord of Heaven’s will’? Now superstitions have been smashed, and the Lord of Heaven with them. How could you and I, who used to be affiliated with the Lord of Heaven, not be smashed too? Billions of common folk have turned into cats and all the powerful of days gone by have turned into rats. If you’re looking for the Lord of Heaven, look in a rat-hole.”

Hearing Miri’s words, the angel thought it was a quite ungrateful wretch, but since its heart had already abandoned the Lord of Heaven, there was no point in saying anything more. Saying he would go on looking for the Lord of Heaven, he left the shrine and met people who had been mobilized to exterminate rats as pests. The angel suddenly remembered how the fortune-teller had said that the Lord of Heaven was in a rat-hole and wept as he begged:

“Please don’t kill the rats. The rats are the Lord of Heaven who has run away from heaven.”

He received no reply, but from all directions he heard ringing out a voice:

“It has come. It has come. Dragon has come. This is the last day for rats.”

ⁱ The first Dragon is designated by the Korean word ‘Miri-nim’ which is an honorific form of the native Korean word for dragon ‘Mirŭ / Miri.’

ⁱⁱ The Korean text has ‘mujin’ (戊辰) which is the combination of one each of the 10 ‘kap’ and the 12 ‘tti’ symbols used to designate the years on a 60-year cycle. 1928 was a ‘mujin’ year and the story was published in 1929.

ⁱⁱⁱ Nolbu is the wicked brother of kind Nolbu in a popular Korean tale. Having sown magic gourd seeds, he expected to harvest gourds stuffed with treasure as his brother had, but instead out poured all kinds of monster.

^{iv} The Chinese word for ‘the Lord of Heaven’ used in this text, 上帝 Shangdi (the emperor above), is the oldest Chinese name for the supreme deity, usually identified with Heaven. It has sometimes been used to translate the Christian “God.”

^v The second Dragon is designated by the English word ‘Dragon’ used as a name.