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 runnning 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 thatthe 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.