THE RESULT Translated by Jeffrey M. Russell

*Ko Teung Ciai's report - Narration of the events of October 8 - Embarrassment of two governments - The incident of November 28 - Baron Komura - Popular discontent - Escape of the King to the Russian Legation*

The judgment of the Hiroshima court was published on January 20, 1896 and became known in Korea in early February. It is easy to imagine what a profound impression it produced. It should be noted that this judgment, after establishing that towards dawn the whole gang (i.e. Japanese soldiers, *soshi –* members of a kind of anarchist sect, now fortunately extinct, which appeared in Japan around 1888 and provided many of the first Japanese emigrants to Korea - and others) entered the palace through the Kang-wha gate and immediately proceeded to the inner buildings, brings its recital of the facts to an abrupt end, adding with cheerful nonchalance that *these facts do not provide clear enough evidence to conclude that any of the accused committed the crime they were meditating.* But what is omitted in the Court’s judgment can be found in Ko Teung Chai’s report referred to earlier.

The Royal Palace is set in very extensive grounds surrounded by high walls enclosing many separate buildings, some of which are themselves surrounded by lower walls, closed by solid doors. The pavilion occupied by their Majesties the King and Queen on the night before the 8th of October is surrounded by a small garden and is situated about a quarter of a mile away from the main (Kang-wha) gate. The Japanese soldiers entering through the main gate proceeded rapidly to this building, quickly killing the few Korean soldiers they met on their way. When they reached the pavilion housing the royal couple, some of them were ordered by their officers to take up positions all round the garden and keep a careful eye on all the doors, while others, together with the *soshi* and the Japanese citizens, went inside with the horrible intention of seeking out and killing the Queen.

These Japanese *soshi*, thirty and more in number, under the orders of one of their leaders, burst into the building with their swords drawn, invading the private apartments of the royals, grabbing all the palace women they could find, dragging them by their hair and beating them to say where the Queen was hiding. These facts were witnessed by many people, the most important of whom was Mr. S. Sabatin, His Majesty’s Russian architect, who was in the garden at the beginning of the attack. He saw the Japanese officers who commanded the troops; he saw the outrages committed on the ladies of the Court and remembers that he himself was repeatedly asked where the Queen was and threatened with death because he refused to tell them. The evidence he gave to the Korean commission of inquiry showed beyond a shadow of doubt that the Japanese officers who were in the garden knew perfectly well what the Japanese *soshi* were about to do, and stationed their troops around the building for the sole purpose of protecting it while the crime was being committed.

After searching the different rooms, the *soshi* managed to find the Queen while she was trying to hide, and after grabbing her by the hair, they pierced her with their swords. It is not known whether she died instantly or was seriously injured; in any case she was placed on a table, covered with a silk cloth and carried out into the garden. A few moments later the *soshi* themselves carried the body to a pile of wood which had been prepared not far off in the so-called *Deer Park*, poured petrol over it and set it on fire.

Meanwhile, as soon as he realized that the palace was under attack, the King, who already suspected that the action would be mainly directed against the Queen, hoping to divert the attention of the Japanese and thus allow his august consort to hide or to escape, went to one of the rooms at the front of the building, where he could be seen perfectly clearly by the Japanese. Immediately many *soshi* did indeed burst into that room brandishing their swords, while others under the orders of officers guarded the doors of the adjoining rooms. A palace servant who was near His Majesty warned them that this person was the King himself; nevertheless His Majesty was subjected to many indignities and one Japanese even grabbed him by the shoulders and pushed him some distance away. In the King's presence, some of the palace ladies were mistreated and beaten, and Yi Kyun Cik, a man of noble lineage and minister of the Royal Household, was most barbarously murdered before his eyes. HRH the Crown Prince, who was in one of the inner rooms, was grabbed, dragged by the hair, and mistreated in a thousand ways, while they threatened him with their swords to reveal the hiding place of his mother the Queen.

As already mentioned, the King had sent a message that morning to Viscount Miura asking him to explain an unusual movement of Japanese troops that had been reported to him, and his message found Miura and members of his staff fully dressed and ready to go out. The Japanese minister told the royal messenger that he had heard from a Japanese colonel that other troops were expected at the barracks, but that he knew nothing about it. While they were talking, the first shots were fired in the vicinity of the Royal Palace, whereupon Miura ordered the messenger to return immediately to the palace, saying that he would go there himself at once.

Viscount Miura, accompanied by the first secretary Sigimura and an interpreter, then went to the palace as he had said. When he arrived the Japanese were still inside the palace grounds. Immediately after his arrival, however, the violence stopped and the *soshi* were dispersed. He promptly asked for an audience with His Majesty, who granted it and received him in the great audience hall called *Ciang Han Tang*. He was accompanied at this audience by the first secretary, the interpreter and several Japanese who had come to the palace with the *soshi* and whom the King had seen with his own eyes taking an active part in the nefarious enterprise. The Tai Uen Kun, who had come to the palace with the Japanese, was also present. During the audience Miura submitted three decrees to His Majesty: the first stipulated that from then on affairs of state were to be dealt with exclusively by the Cabinet; the second appointed Prince Yi Ciai Myung, one of the members of the conspiracy, to the post of Minister of the Royal Household in place of Yi Kyun Cik, killed by the Japanese little more than an hour before; and the third concerned the appointment of a deputy minister of the Royal Household. The King had no choice but to sign the decrees. The Japanese troops were then withdrawn from the palace, remaining on hand however to guard the Korean troops, the so called *kunrentai*, commanded by Japanese officers.

Later on the same day, the minister of war and the minister of police were dismissed and both were replaced by Cio Hui Yien, appointed minister of war and acting minister of police pending the appointment of Kuang Yung Cin to the latter post soon afterwards. Both of these men were believed to be privy to the conspiracy and loyal to Japan. In this way the King found himself for all practical purposes a prisoner of the Japanese, and every branch of activity in the country was forcibly placed under the direct control of officials, all of whom had been more or less involved in the conspiracies of 8 October.

The next day, the Queen, whom people were being encouraged to believe had fled, was degraded. Here is a copy of the translation of the relevant proclamation included in a special supplement to n° 145 of the *Official Gazette* of Korea:

“It is now thirty-two years since We ascended the throne, but our sovereign influence has not been fully asserted. Queen Min introduced her relatives to the Court and placed them beside Our Person, which clouded our judgment; she exposed the people to extortion, and brought disorder to our government by selling offices and titles. As a result tyranny prevailed everywhere and predators sprang up on all sides. Under such circumstances the foundations of our dynasty were in imminent danger. We knew the extent of the Queen's wickedness, but we could not dismiss and punish her for lack of help and for fear of her allies.

We now wish to curtail and suppress her influence. On the twelfth moon of the past year We swore an oath at the Temple of our Ancestors that neither the Queen nor her relatives nor ours would ever again be allowed to interfere in state affairs. We hoped that this would lead the Min party to change course. But the Queen did not abandon her wicked ways; with the help of her party she succeeded in surrounding Us with a host of base individuals, thus effectively preventing the Ministers of State from consulting Us. In addition, they falsified a decree which unlawfully dissolved our loyal militias, an act which led to an uprising. This done, the Queen fled as in the year Im-O (alluding to her escape in 1882).

We have tried to discover her whereabouts, but she is nowhere to be found. We are convinced that she is not only unsuitable to be Queen and unworthy of the position, but that she is guilty of extremely serious misdeeds. Therefore, since we cannot emulate the glory of our Royal Ancestors with her, we have stripped her of her royal rank and degraded her to the level of the women of the lowest classes.”

Signed: Yi Ciai Myon, Minister of the Royal Household

Kim Ong Cip, Prime Minister

Kim Yun Sik, Minister of Foreign Affairs

Pak Ciong Yang, Minister of Home Affairs

Sim Sang Hun, Finance Minister

Cio Heui Yon, Minister of War

So Hwang Pom, Minister of Justice

id. Minister of Education

Ciong Pyong Ha, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Trade

On the 11th the Cabinet sent a communication to all foreign representatives residing in Seoul, containing a copy of this edict transcribed in full, with the additional comment that *His Majesty had* *decided to take the measures provided for in the decree purely out of regard for the royal dynasty and the well-being of his people*.

The following day, in response to this circular, Viscount Miura sent a dispatch to the Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs in which, having taken note of the communication, he declared himself sure that the King’s august determination had been suggested to His Majesty by a respect for his royal lineage and the well-being of his people.

Dr Allen, the representative of the United States, replied with this single sentence:

*I cannot recognize this decree as the work of His Majesty.*

All the other foreign representatives, with one exception, wrote to the minister in almost identical terms.

About ten days later, the Japanese government, worried about the turn of events, recalled its representatives – Viscount Miura, Mr. Sigimura, various officers and others – and had them arrested. However, the Cabinet formed by the Japanese continued to handle the affairs of the Nation, depriving the King of any control.

Many decrees were promulgated, many proposals were made, and many measures were taken that aroused general discontent. Although all classes of Koreans, and all foreign representatives demanded in explicit terms that the events of 8 October be clarified and the assassins of the Queen put on trial, none of this was done, and all the while it was still falsely claimed that she had fled and could not be found.

In the end, the situation became so tense that the Cabinet too realized that something had to be done. Consequently, on 26 November 1895, the entire diplomatic corps and many foreign residents were invited to the palace, where, in the presence of His Majesty, it was announced that Cio Hui Yen, minister of war, and Kwan, minister of police, had been dismissed, that the so-called edict degrading HM the Queen had been cancelled and was to be considered null and void, and that the facts relating to the attack on the palace were to be investigated by the Ministry of Justice and all the guilty persons arrested, tried and punished. At the same time the death of Her Majesty the Queen was announced.

It was hoped that this measure would calm popular discontent, but instead, at the break of day on 28 November a certain number of Koreans, disgusted that nothing more serious had been done, and embittered at the thought that the guilty ministers continued to remain in charge of affairs and absolute masters of the person of the King, made an attempt to enter the palace, claiming that they were faithful subjects of His Majesty and intended to restore his former power to the King. This attempt was badly organized, and therefore came to nothing. While many people had gathered in front of the palace gates and around the walls of the palace, making a great noise, nobody dared or managed to get inside; a few succeeded in entering the Quagga, but were easily dispersed. No one was injured and as far as we know no foreigner, either Japanese or western, was involved in this affair, which compared to the events of 8 October was nothing more than an insignificant and rather ordinary incident.

To replace Viscount Miura, meanwhile, Mr. Komura had been appointed as resident minister. He remained in Seoul from 19 October 1895 to 31 May of the following year. The King continued to be a prisoner in the palace, and the country continued to be ruled by the revolutionary Cabinet inspired by Japan. The excesses continued, and in the months of December and January and in the first days of February several innovations were decreed by the Japanese-inspired Cabinet, all of which were extremely unpopular and contributed greatly to increasing the internal disorder. The remaining semblance of order collapsed with the publication on 30 December of the decree ordering all Koreans to cut their hair. The people, who until then had suffered more or less patiently, revolted at this new blow to their customs. The whole nation was in a state of violent agitation and rebellion broke out in many places. To better clarify the extraordinary effect produced by this decree, it is worth recalling that, as I already had occasion to mention elsewhere, Koreans are accustomed to wear their hair very long, gathered in a knot on top of the head; this knot has very great significance for them, which is not easily understood by anyone who is unfamiliar with the deep-rooted symbolism of these peoples of the Far East. For the Korean, the knot of hair on the head almost represents the symbol of his virility and his nationality. The day the young Korean stops wearing his hair down to his shoulders and ties it in a knot on his head, he ceases, as we have seen, to be a boy and becomes a man: his name is changed, he is inscribed in the roles of the population, in a word it is only then that he acquires what we would call civil rights. But, leaving aside the special significance that this custom has for Koreans, who could fail to understand quite clearly the absurdity of this decree, if he imagined for a moment the reaction that a similar law would produce in our own country – a law, for example, obliging our women to wear short hair, or ourselves to wear long hair?

Such was the ridiculousness of those decrees!

The King himself had to submit, together with the Crown Prince, to the regrettable operation. The population was informed of this and invited to follow the example of their sovereign. But the people did not want to know; the peasants in particular were bitterly opposed to the new decree.

In Seoul the order was carried out by force and police officers stationed at the gates of the city were instructed to do the same with all the peasants who came from the countryside bringing food for the daily market. Strict orders to this effect were sent to all provincial cities. Scuffles occurred at the gates of Seoul, until the peasants, knowing of the police order, refrained from coming to the city and Seoul found itself in danger of remaining without supplies.

At this juncture, the Hiroshima ruling was published. While acquitting the forty-eight Japanese of all charges, it revealed the true facts of the affair, and it became public knowledge that many of the Japanese who had been acquitted were on the point of returning to Korea to recover the same positions they had previously occupied in the Korean government.

It is easier to imagine than to repeat what happened in the provinces: the people rose up en masse, many officials loyal to the Cabinet were killed, and the rioters threatened to march on the capital.

The King began to fear for his personal safety, for the rumor had reached him of a new plot hatched against his person and that of the Crown Prince. He then resolved to make a decisive move, and on 11 February, eluding the watchfulness of the sentries at the gates of the palace, he fled with his son to the Russian Legation.

On the day of his escape, His Majesty published an edict by which all members of the Cabinet were dismissed, six of whom were denounced as traitors, and a new Cabinet was appointed, whose members were chosen from among people who had remained faithful to him.

With this escape, the King untied the knot preventing a solution of the problem, and calm returned to the country.

So Japan, after about two years of absolute dominance on the Korean peninsula, had achieved the remarkable feat of forcing the King of Korea into the arms of its feared rival, Russia. But, what was more important, its harmful influence went further than this, for together with the so-called reforms it had brought rebellion, disorder and the most barbaric murder to the Korean people.