**CH’OE CH’I-WUN: HIS LIFE AND TIMES.**

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THE dominant literary force in Korea for the past five hundred years has been Confucianist in its philosophy and teachings. Such literary activity as has prevailed has been influenced and controlled by the sages of China. This tendency in Korea’s literary development has given origin to a school of writers, numerous and industrious, who have enjoyed royal patronage, and have thus been able to exclude all rival or heretical competitors and to mould to their own standards the literature of the Korean people.

Though we have mentioned this school as belonging particularly to the present reigning dynasty, it is only in the sense that its supremacy as a school dates from the founding of the dynasty (A.D. 1392). It long antedates the period indicated, and though it is difficult to say who was the founder of it, still, as far as the present writer has been able to discover, that honour seems to belong to the Silla scholar, Su1- ch’ong (薛聰), who lived in the eighth century of the Christian era. Our reason for suggesting that Sul-ch’ong is the founder of this school in Korea is as follows ; It has been the policy of the Confucian school in Korea, following the example set by the great parent school in China, to canonize those of its most famous members who have made some note-worthy contribution to the development of Coufucianism in Korea. This canonization consists in the enshrinement by imperial edict of a tablet to the recipient of the honour in the great temple to Confucius, the Song Kyun Kuan (成均館) at Seoul, the spirit of the disciple thus being permitted to share in the divine honours paid to the Sage. At the same time imperial letters patent are issued conferring a posthumous title on the recipient, usually of a princely or ducal order. Sixteen Koreans have thus far been so honoured, four in the epoch from Sul-ch’ong to Chong Mong-jo (about 600 years), and twelve during the present dynasty, a period of 500 years. [page 2]

In making out this list it is reasonable to believe that the scholastic authorities would place at its head the one man who, in their estimation, was entitled to be considered as the Founder of the Confucian school in Korea. To have ignored him would have been to put a low estimate upon the introduction of the Confucian school of thought and philosophy to Korea. And as in their estimate this unique honour appeared to belong to Sul-ch’ong his name heads the list of the Illustrious Sixteen. Later scholars on investigation may be led to dispute this, but it appears to be the unbiassed judgement of former times.

If this conclusion is adopted it will be wise to mark certain inferences which are not necessarily to be deduced from our assigning the headship to Sul-ch’ong. First of all, it does not mean that previous to Sul-ch’ong Confucianism was unknown as a literary force in Korea. This by no means follows. As has been shown in Mr. Gale’s very able paper, \*from the time of Kija the writings which form the base of Confucianism were known among the peninsular people. Works were written in the Chinese ideographs by Korean scholars, and customs and institutions were adopted from the great kingdom across the sea. But a distinction may be made historically between Chinese civilization in itself and Confucianism. Chinese civilization even to-day is a composite in which Buddhist and Taoist elements, and survivals from savage and barbaric life have a part as well as Confucianism. And for the first few centuries after the death of the Sage, Confucianism had a chequered history in its land of origin, occupying a far different place from what it does now. So that, as appears to have been the case in certain periods between Kija and Sul-ch’ong, Chinese civilization was the vehicle to bring to Korea philosophies and economies vastly different from those for which Confucianism stands. In illustration of this we would instance Buddhism. Therefore in dating the introduction of Confucianism as a school of thought from Sul-ch’ong we do not touch the question of the introduction of Chinese civilization, neither do we deny the presence of Confucian influence previous to Sul-ch’ong. Only the latter was an influence ex-

\*”The Influence of China on Korea.” Vol. I. R. A. S. Transactions (Korea Branch).

[page 3] erted from without, a foreign influence, an exotic. It was the aim of Sul-ch’ong, Ch’oe Ch’i-wun, An-yu and their fellow-schoolmen to make the exotic indigenous.

The list of the sixteen canonized scholars of Korea is of much interest historically, as it puts us in possession of the verdict of a very important section of native litterateurs on the comparative importance of the labours of Korean scholars in the past. We must not fall, however, into the error of thinking that these are Korea’s only scholars. Their eminence is due to the fact that they best fulfilled the standard set up by the Confucian school for canonization. This list is as follows : — .

1 Sul-ch’ong 薛聰

2 Ch’oe Ch’i-wun 崔致遠

3 An-Yu 安裕

4 Chong Mong-ju 鄭夢周

5 Kim Kong-p’il 金宏弼

6 Cho Kwang-jo 趙光祖

7 Yi Whang 李滉

8 Sung Hun 成渾

9 Song Si-yul 宋時烈

1o Pak Se-ch’ai 朴世采

11 Chung Yo-ch’ang 鄭汝昌

12 Yi Eun-juk 李彥迪

13 Kim In-hu 金麟厚

14 Yi I 李珥

15 Kim Chang-saing 金長生

16 Song Chun-kil 宋浚吉

With this introduction we proceed to consider the life, labours and times of the second savant named in this list— the Silla scholar, Ch’oe Ch’i-wun.

He was born in troubled times. During the period A.D. 862-876 Kyung-mun (景文王) was King of Silla ; but of the events of his reign we know very little, many of the histories simply mentioning his name and the dates of his accession and death. All authorities agree that it was the period of Silla’s decline. A long line of forty-seven monarchs had already sat on the throne of Silla. The neighbouring kingdoms of Paik-je (百濟國) and Ko-gu-ryu(高句麗國), which[page 4] had once divided the peninsula with Silla, had more than two hundred years previously been obliterated from the map by the Silla armies aided by the Tang, and Silla had held sole sway over all clans bearing the Korean name. And now Silla, torn by internecine strife and faction, had become the prey of ambitious mayors of the palace and was slowly verging to her final fall.

It was about this time that two men were born in Korea who were destined to climb high the steeps of distinction, and yet whose careers present many contrasts. One of these was Ch’oe Ch’i-wun and the other Wang-gun (王建), founder of the Koryu (高麗)dynasty. It is indeed an interesting fact that these men were contemporaries and acquainted with etch other. The “man-child of the Wang family was born amid the pine forests of Song-ak, and legend, which ever paints in mysterious colours the birth and childhood of Asiatic dynasty founders, relates many strange stories of the marvellous portents and omens which heralded his entrance upon this world. These stories would have been in all probability transferred to Ch’oe Ch’i-wun had he, instead of Wang-gun, proved the Man of Destiny for Korea and obtained the throne, for which he had received a splendid trainin

Ch’oe Ch’i wun was born in the year A.D. 859, the scion of one of the influential families of Kyeng-ju (慶州), the capital of Silla. Of his ancestry we possess very little information. But it seems clear that his family, like that of Sul-ch’ong before him, belonged to the Tang partisans in Korea, who had lost confidence in Buddhism―still the state cult in Korea—and who looked westward across the Yellow Sea for light and salvation. As a mere lad Ch’oe grew up in contact with those educational forces set in operation by Sul-ch’ong a century earlier, which were already beginning to mould and shape the literary life of Korea. We pause for a moment to consider them.

At this time the tide of the Confucian cult was rising in Korea. The close connection which had existed for centuries between the Tang and Silla courts had undoubtedly prepared the latter to give a favourable hearing to the Chinese Sage, though Silla still held to Buddhism as the state religion. [page 5]

As far as we can gather from the history of the times, Con- fucianism had not become the dominant cult in Korea. It had influenced the thought and life of the people, it is true ; but this influence it exerted from without, from its distant centre in China rather than from the vantage point of a settled location in Korea itself. The forces, however, which later, under An-yu (安裕), were to bring the Confucian cult bodily to Korea and plant it there were already at work. As a sign of the times we are told in the Mun-hun-pi-go (文獻備考) that in 864, five years after the birth of Ch’oe Ch’i-wun, the King of Silla personally attended at the College of Literature and caused the canonical books of China to be read and explained in the royal presence. And with this we may correlate another statement that, sixteen years later, in 880 A.D., the following books were made the basis of education in Silla, viz :

The Book of History 書傳

“ “ Changes 周易

“ “ Poetry 詩傳

“ “ Rites 禮記

Spring and Autumn Annals 春秋

Former Han History 漢書

Later Han History 後 漢書

The History 史記 by Sze Ma-ts’ien ( 司馬遷)

Are we not justified in regarding the presence of the sovereign at public lectures on the sacred bonks of China as of some significance? We are inclined to believe that it marked the inauguration of a movement which was to place education in Korea on a Confucian rather than a Buddhistic basis And in this connection it is interesting to note that the Mun-hun-pi-go says: “At this time lived Ch’oe Ch’i-wun, who had gone to China and there become an official.” Thus showing that Ch’oe’s influence became a potent factor in the movement to popularize Chinese literature in Korea

Returning to the chronicle of Ch’oe’s life we find that at the time the king was lending the royal presence to public lectures on Confucianism, Ch’oe, a mere lad of five years, was just beginning his studies. For seven years he continued them under such teachers as could be found in the[page 6] Silla capital, but these at the very best must have been unsatisfactory. At the most he could hardly hope to obtain more than a start in Chinese literature. Then it was that his father ordered him to proceed to the land of Tang, and there, at the fountain head of Chinese learning, complete his education. The causes which led him to take this step are not given and vet it is not difficult for us to surmise them. It was not an unknown thing for a Korean to go abroad, even in those early days. Beginning with the custom of sending hostages to reside in foreign Courts, which had been done in Korean relations both with China and Japan, when this became no longer necessary,. a few Koreans had voluntarily crossed the seas to these lands in search of adventure or education. Of recent years, however, these had been confined to members of the royal house. It may have been that Ch’oo’s father was a leader among the Tang partisans in Korea and took this radical step to mark his devotion to the Chinese. But better still, it seems to me, is the explanation that the lad had already displayed such large promise that high hopes were based on his ability, which hopes could only be realized by an education abroad. Certainly the tradition that the father in parting with the boy gave him a limit of ten years in which to finish his studies and secure the Doctor’s degree, failing which the penalty was to be disinheritance,— this tradition certainly seems to agree with the latter view. At any rate, great was the confidence of the father in the son and high the value he set on a Chinese education when he was willing to send him at such a tender age to a foreign land.

Let us glance at the China to which young Ch’oe was introduced. The Tang dynasty still held sway over the land, one of the most powerful, brilliant and wealthy dynasties that ever ruled China. We may not be able to assent to the dic- tum of a noted writer\* that China was at this time probably the most civilized country on earth, but it seems true that under the leadership of the House of Tang she reached one of the highest levels in the development of her culture.

It was a period of great military activity. The Tang generals had carried the prowess of the Chinese arms far to the westward, almost to the borders of Europe. They had

\*S. Wells Williams in The Middle Kingdom.

[page 7] conquered the savage tribes to the north, had annihilated the warlike Kogurios in the north-east, and spent one campaign on the southern end of the Korean peninsula, helping Silla crush Paik-je.

Literature was not neglected. The history of the dynasty is marked by a great revival of the Confucian cult, a complete and accurate edition of all the classics being published. We are told that a school system was inaugurated and learning highly developed. Nationalism showed itself in a reviving interest in the past history of the peoples of the empire, and some of the most illustrious historical writers of China belong to this dynasty.

It was during the Tang dynasty that Christianity first made its appearance within the bounds of the Chinese empire. The Nestorians were permitted to settle in the land and pro pagate the faith, and during this dynasty they reached the zenith of their development, their converts numbering many thousands. At the same time Arab traders obtained a footing, introducing to the East the commerce and science of Europe and bringing the two continents into closer relations.

This is but an indication of some of the influences which were at work in the empire, but these few things—the widely extended conquest of foreign lands by the Tang armies, the revival of Confucianism and the resultant renaissance in literature, the spread of Christianity, and the inauguration of commerce with Europe―all united to give currency to new ideas and to force the nation to higher levels of civilization. What a change for a barbarian lad like Ch’oe, thus suddenly transported from his own land —which was no larger than an ordinary prefecture of China, where all was stagnation and gloom with no signs of new life,—to such an immense theatre as the capital of China and to be thrust out into the current of such a forceful life as then prevailed there.

Young Ch’oe took his departure for China in the year 870. It is probable he took boat from one of the ancient, ports on the southern end of the peninsula, either Fusan or Kimha, or he may have crossed the mountains into the territory of Paik-je―for that land now belonged to Silla―and found passage in one of the many trading junks that frequented Kunsan. From here he would secure a quick passage across the[page 8] uneasy Yellow Sea to the Land of Tang. He may have gone in the train of some embassy from Silla to Tang, or, which is the more likely, he went as the protege of some Tang ambassador to Silla. who, at the instance of the father, had assumed charge of the lad. Be this as it may, his subsequent career would indicate that his introduction to Tang must have been under very favourable auspices, for honours came thick and fast upon him.

From the accounts of his life it seems clear that young Ch’oe from the very first, spent his life in the Tang capital at Chang-an (長安) or Si-ngan (西安). Situated in Shensi, in the far interior, it is probably the most interesting city historically in China. Located near one of the branches of the Yellow River, Ch’oe’s party would probably reach it only after many weary weeks of travel in a junk. The following description of the city in modern times is of considerable interest:―

The city of Si-ngan is the capital of the north-west of China and next to Peking in size, population and importance. It surpasses that city in historical interest and records, and in the long centuries of its existence has upheld its earlier name of Chang-an or “Continuous Peace.” The approach to it from the east lies across a bluff whose eastern face is filled with houses cut in the dry earth, and from whose summit the lofty towers and imposing walls are seen across the plain three miles away. These defences were too solid for the Mohammedan rebels, and protected the citizens while even their suburbs were burned. The population occupies the entire enciente, and presents a heterogeneous sprinkling of Tibetans, Mongols and Tartars, of whom many thousand Moslems arc still spared because they were loyal. Si-ngan has been taken and retaken, rebuilt and destroyed, since its establishment in the twelfth century B.C. by the Martial King but its position has always assured for it the control of the trade between the central and western provinces and Central Asia. The city itself is picturesquely situated and contains some few remains of its ancient importance, while the neighbourhood promises better returns to the sagacious antiquarian and explorer than any portion of China, The principal record of the Nestorian mission work in China, the famous tablet of A.D. 781 still remains in the yard of a temple. Some miles to the north-west lies the temple Ta-fu-sz, containing a notable colossus of Buddha, the largest in China, said to have been cut by one of the emperors of the Tang in the ninth century. [page 9]

This statue is in a cave hewn out of the sandstone rock, being cut out of the same material and left in the construction of the grotto. Its height is 56 ft. The proportions of limbs and body of the sitting figure are, on the whole, good, the Buddha being represented with right hand upraised in blessing and the figure as well as garments richly covered with color and gilt.\*

Into this wonderful city the young Korean lad was introduced, and the effect on him could not have been very different from that which would be the case in any boy in modern times. It is certain that he gave himself up to study, and the time limit set by his father, with the heavy penalty attached, proved an effective spur. That he improved his opportunities is clear from the extended and valuable character of the literary remains which have come down to us and which date from the years he spent in China. He developed into a thorough Tangite. Removed from Korea and the Korean environment ill the tender years of childhood, his character was formed by the educative forces of China. Such time as he could spare from his studies was spent in taking in the marvellous scenes about him. He became thoroughly saturated with Confucian philosophy. He saw Buddhism in a new light. It may be that some account penned by turn to his father in Korea describing the Buddhist cave at Si-ngan and its colossus of Gautama may have been the inspiration from whence came Korea’s colossal Buddha at Eun-jin. He must often have stood in the presence of the Nestorian Tablet and read its testimony to monotheistic belief and Christian ethics. How powerful all these forces must have been in his character. To his mind the Chinese Court at Chang-an must have been, when compared with Korea, a veritable fairy land. Thus as years passed the Korean hills and the Korean life faded far away into the dim recesses of memory. But though we call this education, it was at the same time also a foreignizing process which must have changed the Korean into a thoroughgoing Chinese. And in this may possibly be the secret of his failure to inspire his countrymen with confidence when he returned to them a comparatively young man.

Ch’oe took his degree of Doctor at the Civil Service Ex-aminations in 875, after six years of faithful study and when

\*Williaim’s Middle Kingdom. Vol. 1, p. 150.

[page 10] but eighteen years of age. As we look back over his career it is evident that this was a crisis in his life. Had he then returned to Silla, as was the original intention of his father in sending him to Tang, and applied himself to the solution of some of the problems of his native country, he might have rivalled and even eclipsed the fame of that other young Korean with whom we compared him at the beginning of this sketch. It might have fallen to Ch’oe to set up a strong government, to guide the weak monarchs of Silla along the path of successful administration, or, failing in this, it might have been his fortune, rather than Wang-gun’s. to create out of the ruins of Silla a new and more glorious kingdom. But the opportunities were too great, and the call to remain in Tang too loud for him to turn back to Silla, He elected to remain in China.

The Emperor Hi-tsung(僖宗) had ascended the Dragon Throne the year previously [874-888] and with this Emperor Ch’oe became a great favourite. It is possible they had grown up together as students. The Emperor immediately bestowed on the young Korean a Court appointment―that of Si-u-sa (時御史) a kind of special commissioner in the palace. This was followed shortly afterward by the appointment as Na-kong-pong (內供奉) or Imperial Court Chamberlain. Surely it was a remarkable achievement for a young Korean to rise six years to be the Court favourite of the all-powerful Emperor of China. Certainly some unusual influence must have been back of Ch’oe to secure him these high posts in the rang Court, yet there must have been much bitterness mingled with the cup of his joys, for the Emperor’s career was an ill-starred and disastrous one.\*

For some years China had been in a very depressed and unsettled condition. Floods had prevailed in certain sections and brought widespread ruin. Other regions had suffered from terrible drought and the people were in a pitiable condition. As is usually the case in such times, robbers and brigands rose everywhere and inaugurated a reign of terror. Widespread brigandage gradually developed into organized insurrection, the leader in rebellion being one Wang-sien. He died in 878, but was succeeded by a more capable leader named

\*Vide Macgowan’s History of China, p. 335.

[page 11] Whang-ch’an (黃璨), Raising his standard in the south, he besieged and reduced in rapid succession Canton and the prin-cipal cities of Hu-kwang and Kiang-si. He broke the imperial power and defeated and scattered the imperial armies everywhere. There was nothing to stay his terrible inarch north ana in a short time Whang-ch’an was in possession of the two imperial cities of Lo-yang and Si-ngan. The Emperor barely escaped from Chang-an with his life. He was accompanied in his flight by his faithful Korean minister Ch’oe, who never deserted him. In securing possession of Chang-an (Singan), the rebel Whang-ch’an proclaimed himself emperor and ascended the dragon throne of the Tangs with the dynastic title of the Great Tsi.

The usurper was not destined to reign long. The Tang emperor fleeing for his life from his blood-thirsty foe issued an appeal to the loyal people of the country. And while the pseudo-emperor Whang-ch’an in Chang-an was beheading all relatives of the imperial House of Tang, and flooding the streets of the capital with the blood of inoffensive people, the movement which was to overthrow hint was slowly getting under way. And in this movement our Korean Ch’oe Ch’i-wan was playing a most honourable part. Among those who responded to the fugitive emperor’s appeal was Li Keh-yung, chief of the Sha-to tribe of Turkomans who lived near Lake Balkash. He was very old and very famous, but the snows of many winters had failed to dampen the fire of his warlike heart. Over thirty years previously he had rendered important service against the Tibetans, for which he had been rewarded by the House of Tang with permission to assume the honourable family name of Yi (Li). He now hastened to the succour of the unfortunate Hi-tsung, coming at the head of 40,000 of his tribesmen. They wore a black costume and were very savage in warfare, which won for them the title of “Black Crows.”

In the campaign which the Black Crows undertook against Whang-ch’an, Ch’oe Ch’i-wun served with distinction, acting as adjutant-general to their chief. In fact it is said that from his fertile brain emanated the plans which shattered the rebel power and restored to the Tang emperor the heritage he had almost lost. Legend of course has not lost the oppor-[page 12] tunity to cast a halo around the exploits of the Korean in this connection. It is said that when Chang-an was attacked by the Black Crows, Ch’oe Ch’i-wun addressed a letter to the usurper within its walls, couched in such terrible terms that as he read it be unconsciously crept down from his seat and crouched like a terrified beast on the floor! The power of the rebel was destroyed and he met his fate at the hands of his nephew, who slew him in order to curry favour with the House of Tang. We have thus gone fully into the coarse of this rebellion because it is reputed to have been the most terrible ever known to Chinese annals. It lasted for five years, 880-884. Popular tradition says that in its course no less than 8,000,000 lives were lost. And though we may reject this number as preposterous, still the terrible loss of life during the Tai-ping rebellion indicates how enormous may be the destruction wrought by warfare in a populous region like South and Central China.

Restored to his throne the Emperor Hi-tsong took up his residence in Chang-an. The rewards which fell to his faithful Korean vassal must have been of a high and honourable character. Among other things he was made Vice-President of the Board of War. Thus this Korean lad who had come from the hills of Kyeng-sang walked the courts of Tang, a man whose word swayed the destiny of millions. Surely history offers very few careers more strange and marvellous than that of Ch’oe Ch’i-wun. For a short time Ch’oe enjoyed his honours in China. Amid the busy cares of state he found time to write some treatises. Determining to return to Korea in 886, the Court of Tang conferred upon him the rank of ambassador and commissioned him as Imperial Envoy in the peninsula. He was then but twenty-eight years old according to Korean count.

The native biographies desribe Ch’oe as returning to his native land with high purposes and plans in her behalf. He believed that the prestige of his achievements in China and the imperial authority with which he was clothed would secure for him a paramount influence in Silla and enable him to institute reforms and bring order out of confusion. He was doomed to disappointment, and it proved particularly galling to his imperious nature. But Silla’s sad plight was [page 13] beyond his power to amend. He only met with opposition and unfriendliness.

King Heun-gang (憲康) was on the throne—a man to whom music and dancing were more congenial than the responsibilities of state. In the Court the king’s sister Man (曼 ) held sway, leading a dissolute life. Ch’oe was given an appointment, but hatred and jealousy were his reward. It is said that King Heun-gang returning from one of his pleasure excursions met a freak of a human being at a sea-port. This freak could sing and dance, so he became a great favourite of the king’s. Later four other “freaks” suddenly appeared in the road before the royal cart in which the king was proceeding on a pleasure jaunt. They are described as hideous in appearance and repulsive to look upon. They danced, singing a ballad the refrain of which was

Chi-ri ta-do

To-p’a, To-p’a.

The King railed to note the prophetic warning contained in these words, which declared the overthrow of his capital To-p’a. While men of this character who could pander to the king’s whims were installed in the king’s presence, a statesman and a scholar like Ch’oe Ch’i-wun was driven by royal indifference and neglect or even hostility into exile.

Silla had already sunk too low ever to rise again. Insurrection was rife in the provinces. The power of the royal government over the outlying clans, ever light, had really been destroyed, and adventurers were rising throughout the land spreading terror and confusion. Among the factors creating disorder in the land and bringing ruin on Silla, one of the chief was an outcast offspring of the king, named Kung-ye, whose deeds of violence and cruelty were of a most atrocious nature. Many circumstances thus united to render futile the career of Ch’oe on his return to Silla. The death of his imperial patron Hi-tsung in 888, shortly after his return to Silla, must have, in view of the intimate bond between them, sent Ch’oe into retirement for a time. The scandalous immorality of the Court, dominated as it was by the effronteries of the lascivious Princess Man, and the terrible disorder and confusion abroad in the land, made it impossible for a man like Ch’oe to obtains a hearing. [page 14]

Hardly any notices exist of his public acts. Once it is said he appealed to Tang to aid Silla to put down the internal insurrections from which she was suffering. Then again during the reign of Princess Man he addressed a memorial containing ten suggestions for the conduct of state affairs. These met with the same treatment that Korean royalty had ever accorded him, polite courtesy and indifference, veiled in terms of royal gratitude and inaction, more deadly to a patriotic soul than out-spoken antagonism.

Therefore, in all the accounts which we have of Ch’oe’s life after his return to Silla, he conies before us as the scholar and recluse. It is said that “he buried his surpassing talents amid the mountain cemeteries. He retired to his ancestral home at Kaya-san, and there gave himself up to literary pursuits, being confessedly the most learned and finished scholar of his times.

This was the period of his literary activity. He was an essayist, poet and historian, and his pen being a diligent one he must have produced many works which are lost to us. From the scattered notices contained in Maurice Courant’s monumental Bibliographic Coreenne we have collected the fol-lowing notes.

(1) Poems. The Odes of Remarkable Litterateurs. The Hyun Sip-ch’o si (賢十抄詩) contains a selection of Ch’oe Ch’i-wun’s poems. This work, compiled about 900 years ago, contained odes from those poets who took precedence in the first rank. Ten examples are given from each writer. This would indicate that Ch’oe was a poet of more than ordinary merit. Our knowledge of this work is derived from the Tai-tong-un-ko (大東韻考), no copy having came down to us. Of the poets thus preserved six were litterateurs of Tang and only four were Koreans, viz.: Ch’oe Chi-wun, Pak In-pom (朴仁範) Ch’oe Song-a (崔承祐) and Ch’oe Kwang-yu (崔匡裕). These men were all educated in China, the last three having probably been influenced to that course by the example of Ch’oe Ch’i-wun.

Ch’oe Ch’i-won also presented on his return from China in 886, to King Heun-gang, a copy of his poetical works in three volumes. These have disappeared.

(2) The Chung-san-pu-Koue-jip (中山覆簣集). This was [page 15] a work of five volumes written while in China, which we only know about incidentally as part of his writings presented by Ch’oe in 886 to the King of Silla. As it is lost to us we have no means of ascertaining its character.

(3) The Silla Su i-jun (新羅殊異傅). Narratives of the wonders of Silla. The character of the work can be gathered from its title. It is cited by the Tai-tong-un-ko, but I know of no existing copy. This is to be regretted, as it would be of great value to the student of archaeology

(4) The Ch’oe Ch’i-wun Mun-jip (崔致遠文集 The collected work of Ch’oe Ch’i-wun. This was the collection preserved by his family, but has become scattered and some of the works have been lost. We owe our knowledge of it to the Tai-tong-un-ko.

(5) The Che-wang-yun Tai-ryak. (帝王年代畧) The Chronicles of Emperors and Kings. This was a work on General History, and though lost to us, it is mentioned in the Tai-tong un-ko, and fragments of it may berecovered, from such historical works as the Yul-yo-geui-sul (燃藜記述)

(6) The Kei-wun-p’il-kyung-jip (桂苑筆耕集). This title may be translated The Furrows of a Chinese Pen in a Garden of Cinnamon Trees. It extends to twenty volumes and makes up the collection of twenty-eight volumes (the other two being his poems and the Chung-san-pu-che-jip) which Ch’oe presented to King Heun-gong in 886 on his arrival as Tang ambassador at the court of Silla. This work has survived the ravages of time and has been preserved to us. We are indebted to an old patrician family, named Hong, of Seoul, for a modern edition of it. Hong Suk-ju, who rose to the post of Prime Minister of the Left, caused a copy of the “Furrows” to be printed in 1834. From the preface we learn that Hong also tried to secure a copy of the Chung-san pu, to publish it at the same time but was unable to find any trace of it. The edition of the Farrows was based on a manuscript copy which had been preserved in the Hong family for centuries. It consists of reports, letters, and various other documents, official and private, of Ch’oe and is of great value as the testimony of a keen eye witness of the events of his times. A copy of the 1834 edition is found in the Bibliotheque de l’Ecole des Langues Orientales Vivantes at Paris. [page 16]

The romantic career of Ch’oe Chi-wun, rivalling as it does the fancies of fiction, prepares us for his end, for he disappears from our view not into history but into legend. The common belief is that after his retirement into Ka-ya- san he gave himself up to the pleasures of literature and music. His days were spent in literary delights with a few kindred spirits. He was an accomplished player on the Ku- mun-go or Seven-Stringed Lute, and this instrument plays a large part in the legends of his hermit life. Legend, how- ever, takes its wildest flight in asserting that he secured the Magic Jade Flute of Silla. Upon this he played until the powers of death and dissolution were charmed and compelled to halt at the threshold of his mountain retreat and to respect the sacredness of his person. It it thus said that he never died but was transformed into a spirit and disappeared into the blue ether above, taking with him the Magic Flute of Jade.

He secured a prominence in Korean literary life which can never be taken from him. His predecessor, Sul-ch’ong, left so few literary remains that collections of early Korean literature begin with Ch’oe rather than with Sul-ch’ong. Thus the great Tong-mun-sun (東文選), Selections from Korean Compositions (54 vols.), compiled by Su-gu-chung (徐居正) 1478, begins Korean literature really with Ch’oe. This was also the case with an earlier work of similar character by Ch’oe-hai, called the Tong-in-mun(東人文) which begins Korean literature with Ch’oe. The fact that these collections of Korean literature begin with Ch’oe Ch’i-wun would seem to confirm the tradition that he was the first Korean writer to produce books in the Chinese characters, a tradition, however, which we are hardly prepared to accept. But an examination of his works certainly introduces us very nearly to the fountain head of Korean literature.

We must close our sketch with a legend. Kung-ye (弓裔),the one-eyed monster who had been spawned by King Heui-gang, after a career of blood and rapine in which he had alienated all followers by his acts of atrocious cruelty, was approaching his fall. Among his officers the greatest in fame and best beloved because of his courage and generosity was Wang-gun, the “man child of Song-ak.” Gradually the[page 17] hopes of the people began to centre around Wang-gun and it was felt that he was undoubtedly the Man of Destiny for Korea. The prophetic eye of Ch’oe Ch’i-wun fell upon the rising general and from his retreat in Ka-ya-san he sent to Wang-gun one of those literary enigmas which pass for inspired utterances among Asiatic peoples. It was a stanza of two lines as follows :—

곡 계 鵠 雞

령 림 嶺 林

쳥 황 靑 黃

숑 엽 松 葉

Translated freely this means “The leaves of the Cock Forest are sear and yellow. But the pines on the Snow Goose Pass are fresh and green.”

This is a poetical metaphor which on the face of it by a flight of fancy is easily translated. Ke-rim (Cock Forest) is the ancient poetical name of Silla. That its leaves are sear and yellow means that the time of its decay and death has arrived. Kok-yung (Snow-Goose Pass) was the ancestral home of Wang, and the freshness and vigour of its pines indicate the prosperity of the young general.

Among Ch’oe’s descendants have been many litterateurs, some of them rising to high distinction. It was in the year A.D. 1021 that Hyun-chong, eighth monarch of the Korea dynasty, immortalized the memory of Ch’oe by decreeing him a place in the Confucian Temple with the title Marquis Mun-ch’ang.