NATIONAL EXAMINATION IN KOREA.

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The now obsolete custom of holding government exami- nations like those in China has played such an important part in the history of this people that it deserves to be carefully studied. The results recorded will form an essential chapter in the evolution of Korean civilization. The following page s consist mainly of a series of historical notices, chronologically arranged They form the background of the system. The mere enumeration of these notices will show how strongly the system affected the whole nation and gave both direction and impulse to its intellectual life.

The sources from which the information herein given was obtained are : first, that monumental work, the Moon-hun Pi-go(文獻備考);second, the Yi-jo Haing-jung-boo (說曹行政部) ; third, the Sung-kyung Il-geui (成均日記); fourth, the Hong- Moon- ji (弘文志); fifth, the Hyang-kyo Rok (鄉挟錄) and sixth, the Ye-ntoonrji (藝文志).

These, together with personal observation and conversation with Korean officials and others thoroughly conversant with the subject, form the basis of the following inadequate sketch of this important phase of Korean life.

The custom of holding literary examinations for the purpose of selecting candidates for official position did not originate in China until the days of the Tang Dynasty (618-906 A.D.). Before that time the distinctive word Kwa-gu (科舉) was not used. But from very early times, as far back as the Choo Dynasty (1122-255 B.C.), there existed a custom called Sun-gu (選舉) which means “ Select and elevate.” The second character of the word will be seen to be the same as that of the general term Kwa-gu by which all such examinations are now known. It meant simply the choosing out from among the people, of those that were judged best fitted for the positions to [page 10] be filled. The choice depended upon no literary examination, nor, in fact, upon any examination at all, but was made from a general or specific knowledge of the individual and his personal qualities. The custom called Sun-gu is said to have been brought to Korea by Keui-ja (箕 子) in ri22 B.C. He refused allegiance to the Choo Dynasty and came to Korea upon the eve of its establishment, so that, if the statement is correct that Sun-gu began in the Choo Dynasty, Keui-ja could scarcely have brought it to Korea. Scholars explain this on the theory that while the custom must have existed in some form before that time, it is not mentioned in historical works as having so existed In speaking of this, the Moon-hun Pi-go does not say that the name existed then but only the custom ;under what name does not appear. It says that in those times different terms were used, one being Pin-heung (賓典) or “ Prosperous guest.” This referred to the entrance of a young man upon the stage of public life, hence the term “ guest, A second term was Pyuk-so (辟召) or “ Summoned,” referring to the calling to high position of men who had already attained to an enviable reputation. A third term was Kong-kn (貢擧), or “ Tribute elevation.” This referred to the selection of men from the provinces, even as revenue or tribute was sent up to the capital and offered to the central government. These three terms are known to have existed then, but whether the term Sun-gu was used or not is conjectural. In China, as in all countries, there must have existed some form of selection and it is wholly natural to suppose that the terms in vogue in China were transplanted to the new field. But this, like all the traditions of the Keui-ja Dynasty, never gets beyond the point of probability, while at the other extreme it may be no better than fiction.

At some point in the Tang Dynasty the study of literature had made such advance, and political society had become so diversified or differentiated, that the term Kwa-je (科制) came into use, meaning “Curriculum rule.” The character kwa (科) referred to the different branches of learning and the [page 11] different lines of investigation and practice. They included poetry, philosophy, history, etiquette, ethics, archery, etc. etc., and, as the custom arose of choosing men for office in proportion to their proficiency in one or more of these branches, the term Kwa-gu (料擧) or “ Curriculum elevation” naturally was evolved When this development took place, the national examination as formerly existent in China, and as existent in Korea up to the year 1894 A.D., was practically in full operation.

The exact date when the system was introduced into Korea may be a matter of question, but it must have been approximately in the year 789 A.D., the 5th year of King Wun-sung(元聖) of Silla (新羅). The reader is well aware that the 6th, 7th, and 8th centuries of our era saw a marvellous influx of Chinese ideas into the peninsula, comparable in magnitude with the influx of continental ideas into England immediately following the Norman Conquest. The great scholar Sul-ch’ong (薛聰) had already passed off the stage, leaving as a result of his work, the study of Chinese in a flourishing condition. And now in 789 this rapid progress resulted in the establishment of the system of examinations.

There had long existed, in Silla, the custom of choosing out from among the people those who were pre-eminent for skill and bravery. We read that as far back as King II-sung (日聖王) 149 A. D. the government sent out and made a list of all the best men in the kingdom from which to select public officers. But, as we have seen, it was reserved for King Wun- sung to establish a permanent system.

He ordered that the securing of the first literary degree should rest upon the mastery of the books called (1) the Ch’un-ch’oo (春秋)，a historical work by Confucius ; (2) the Choa-si-jun(左氏傳) the Works of Choa, a commentary on the preceding work ; (3) the Ye-geui (禮記), Book of Ceremonies ; (4) the Non-u (論語), Dialogues of Confucius ; (5) the Hyo-keung (孝經), a eulogy, or song of an ethical character ; (6) the Moon-sun (文選), Poetical Selections. Those [page 12] who mastered these could claim a place in the first rank. Middle rank depended upon a knowledge of the Kok-ye (曲禮), etiquette ; (2) the Non-u (論語) and (3) the Hycykyung (孝經)- Rank of a lower order required only the Kok-ye and the Hyo- kyung. But above these there was special grade to be attained only by adding an intimate knowledge of the biographies and the literary works of by-gone scholars. This high point was not reached by examination but was honorary.

As for the kingdom of Paik-je (百濟) to the west of Silla it is probable that its method of selecting officials was that which had come down from the kingdom of Mahan, on whose ruins Paik-je was built ; and Mahan in turn is said to have taken its custom in this respect from Keui-joon (篢準) who fled from Pyengyang at the end of the Keiu-ja Dynasty.

The kingdom of Kokuryu (高句麗) can scarcely be said to be a lineal descendant of the Keui-ja Dynasty though it was the same soil. The short but turbulent rule of Wi-man (術痛) had intervened, during and after which the country was probably largely overrun by the more than half savage tribes of Nang-nang (樂浪)Ye-mak (穢貊), Eun-noo (挹婁), Mal-gal (抹鞨), Ok-chu (沃沮), Chol-bon (卒本), either one or more ; so, when Chu-mong (朱藥) out of this heterogeneous mass carved the kingdom of Kokuryu some two and a half centuries after the fall of the Keui-ja Dynasty, it was a pecple much lower in the scale of civilization than that which we are led to suppose occupied the same territory in the days of the Keui-ja rule.

It is believed that during the early days of Kokuryu intimate relations subsisted between that kingdom and China and afforded her a better opportunity to develop a higher system than any other Korean kingdom, but it is beyond doubt that later, say about the fifth century of our era, Silla had developed a civilization far in advance of anything else in the peninsula. It is safe to say that it was in Silla that the national examination first found a foothold, following upon the great influx of Chinese ideas in the days of the Tang Dynasty. At this same [page 13] time the term Kwa-gu was introduced. This differed from the old-time Sun-gu in that it was a genuine examination in the various branches of knowledge supposed to be needed in preparing a man for responsible duties.

It was only about one century from the time Silla adopted this custom until she fell a prey to her own luxury. She seems to have fed so voraciously upon the benefits of the borrowed civilization that she died of surfeit. The last century was one of pitiful decadence. Something more was needed than literary polish to hold that state together and we shall have to look to the more virile Koryu which followed to see any ad. vance upon the original idea as introduced from China.

We find that in the year 957 A.D., only forty years after the founding of Koryu, a Chinese scholar named Sang-keui (雙冀), of the rank of Hallim (翰林), came to Koryu. He was held in the highest respect by the people and interested himself in matters of government. It was he who introduced the important innovation called “Pong mi” (封彌) which means “Fold-Wrapping.” It consisted in folding the examination paper in such a way that the examiners could not discover the name of the writer until the merits of the paper had been passed upon. This, at least, was its intention. The purpose of it was to prevent fraudulent recommendation based upon favoritism. It prevented an examiner front affording felonious aid to a friend. That salutary law remained in force from 957 to 1894, almost a thousand years, though, as we shall see, there were many schemes whereby to circumvent its equitable purpose. This man also introduced the term Chin-sa (進士) which corresponds to a Bachelor’s degree.

We have mentioned three grades of examination that came down from the days of Silla but others have been added ; namely, examinations in medicine, in necromancy, in geography and in instrumental music. In fact, examinations became a fad so that almost every line of research had to have such a public test.

It should be remembered that it was not during the earliest days of Koryu that Buddhistic influence caused such a wide [page 14] spread and fundamental deterioration in scholarship and morals. Those first days were the golden days of Koryu, but already the worm was eating at the heart of the rose and it was not long before the intrinsic evils of the Chinese system began to manifest themselves. At first any subject of the realm had the right to try the examination and the one who succeeded received the prize of official position ; but gradually and inevitably the pride of letters ate its way into the Korean heart, as it had already eaten into the Chinese, and that most hopeless barrier between the classes began to be built. It takes leisure and competence to acquire the Chinese character and, as education spread, society gradually separated into the Yoo-sik (有識) and the Moo-sik (無識). The system of examinations fostered the evil, for it made the test of a man’s fitness for office not his genuine character, his sterling qualities of judgment and good sense, but his mere ability to juggle with a few thousand Chinese characters. It laid the foundation of a wall between the upper and the lower classes which has worked incalculable harm, for the basis of discrimination was not a moral or even an etnical one, nor, in the highest sense, an educational one, for the study of Chinese, while an acquisition can hardly be called an education, a leading out or development of the higher qualities of the mind Its subject matter is no more calculated to develop the power of insight into human nature and the handling of great questions of state than the study of belles lettres is calculated to do so in Europe or America.

It was in 987 A.D. that the subjects of poetry, hexameter aphorisms, questions of the times and eulogies were dropped from the list of requirements. In QQ3 the three grades of kap (甲) eul (乙) and pyung (丙) were established. These correspond to our a, b, and c grades. They continued clear down to the year 1894.

In 977 A.D. the custom was inaugurated of holding an examination of all men of Chin-sa rank, by the king in person. This was called the Ch’in-si(親試)or “ Personal Examination.” It made a man eligible to office. [page 15]

In 982 it was decreed that unsuccessful candidates at any examination could have another opportunity to try, a sort of “consolation race.” It was called Pok-si (複試) or the “Trying-again examination.”

In 996 it was enacted that even successful candidates must hand in monthly themes or poems or other literary productions.

In 1025 the law was made that three out of every thousand young students in the country should be sent to the capital each year to try the examination for the degree of Chinsa. This rule obtained for a long time, but eventually fell into desuetude and any young man could try his hand at it. This, of course, meant a gradual decline in the system and a diminution in the honour of the degree.

It was customary for the country students to pass local examinations in their schools. These were held at special times ; for this reason they were called Paik-il-jang (白日場)or “Special day field.” From this the candidate went up to examination at the provincial capital. Here were much severer tests called Hoi-si (會試) or “ Gathering examinations.” It was out of the number of successful competitors in these Hoi-si contests that men were chosen to go up to the Capital to try for Chinsa rank.

In 1037 A.D. it was decreed that all candidates for this degree must have passed all the “ Special Day “ tests for three successive years in the country.

In 1032 King Tok-chong instituted the Kook-ja Kant (國 子 監) or “Tutelage of the kingdom’s child.” It was a bureau for the direction of the education of princes. At their examinations other special candidates were admitted. This examination was called Kam-si (監試) or “Tutelage examination.” Other names for it were Sung-kyoon-si (成均試) and Nam-sung-si(南成試).

In 1055 it was decreed that no alien could try the examinations. He must first be naturalized and adopt a Korean patronymic. [page 16]

We are told by another authority, the custom called pong- mi was begun in 1064. We have already alluded to it as having originated in 957. There seems to be a disagreement in date here, and we simply state the fact without being able to settle the point. This law related to the doubling of the paper so that the writer’s name should not appear.

In 1075 it was enjoined that even the Crown Prince must attain the Chinsa degree.

In 1077 the rule was made that if a man from a district that had not boasted a successful candidate for fifty years should gain the distinction, he should receive a gift of seventeen kyul of rice land. If the district had not had such an honour for a hundred years, the gift was to be twenty kyul together with a slave man and wife.

In 1084 it was decided that the great government examinations of whatever grade should be held in the capital once in three years. These were the Man-in-kwa (萬人科) or “ Ten thousand man examination.”

In 1097 the mother of the great Kim Poo-sik, author of the monumental work Sam-gook Sa (三國史) received forty bags of rice in pursuance of a law that if a woman had three or more sons of Chinsa rank she should receive an annuity of ten bags for each son. She had four who attained to the degree.

In 1102 there was a celebrated decision given by King Suk-chong. A government detective had informed him that a certain man who had passed the examination was the son of a blind Buddhist monk and therefore ineligible. The king replied, “ You know that in the days of Confucius they used only red bullocks with perfect horns for sacrifice. Did it make any difference whether the bullock’s sire was black or white or red? No more shall it make any difference in this case, Though this man be the son of the Old Fox himself he shall have his chance.” That same year a Chinese came to Koryu and received from the king the degree of Pyul-too Kwa (別頭科) or “ Distinguished head degree.” Since then it has been conferred upon a few other men. [page 17]

In 1122 King Ye-joner called in all the courtiers and subjected them to a special examination called Moon-jong Si (文重試) or “Courtiers second examination.” Success in this meant that in case of banishment he would be recalled sooner and in case of crime he would be more leniently dealt with than the law required. It constituted in practice a sort of “indulgence” or forgiveness before the act.

In 1147 an examination called the Seung-pa-si (升賦試) or “ Rise wide examination “ was established. This was a necessary preliminary to the Kam-si or “ Prince’s examination” already described.

No more enactments are recorded until 1317, almost two centuries after the last one. The Kam-si was then discontinued and the Sak-si (朔試) or “First day examination” was instituted. It was so called because it was held on the first day of the month at the Confucian College, but three years later the name was changed to Ku-jai-si (舉材試) or “ Examination for the introduction of useful men.”

In 1366 an examination in astronomy was begun. It was called Choong-hyun-si (重賢試) “Examination for the Calling of Honest Men.” Its purpose was for the securing of competent men to take charge of the calendar and to correct its mistakes. It was believed, so the records say, that owing to a difference in climate between China and Korea the calendar for China needed rectifying before it would serve the uses of Korea.

In 1375 the famous scholar Yi Saik (李稱) was director of the bureau of examinations and had charge of all the provincial as well as metropolitan examinations. He inaugurated three new ones, namely, the Hyang-si (鄉試) the Hoi-si (會試) and the Ckun-si(殿試)The first took the place of the old time Hoi-si ; the second was the old time Hoi-si moved up to the capital, and the third was the examination of graduates held before the king himself.

In 1376 the first emperor of the Ming Dynasty in China sent an envoy to Koryu and suggested a new scheme of [page 18] national examinations. He enjoined upon the Koreans the careful study of the Kyung-su (經書) and the particular care of the body. It did not affect the existing Hyang-si and Hoi-si, but it enjoined upon the successful candidate the duty of going to Nanking and taking the examinations there. The same instructions were sent to Annam and to Chum-sung (占城), western China. Each of the two examinations called Hyang-si and Hoi-si consisted in a series of three tests, all of which the candidate must pass. In the first of these the subjects handled were (I) the O-kyutig (五經) or Five Books of the Sages in an essay of 500 characters or more ; and also the Sa-su (四書), or the Four Books of the Sages, which required an essay of 300 characters of an expository nature ; (2) the Ye-ak (禮樂), Rites and Music on which a 300 word essay was required ; and (3) the Si-moo-ch’aik (時務策), “ Questions of the Times.” which called for a 1000 character essay.

Besides these there were examinations in penmanship, arithmetic, and vocal music.

In 1377 a law was promulgated forbidding any man under twenty-five years of age to take an examination. The inference is obvious ; the examinations were overcrowded with mere boys, who, from what we know of the state of things in Koryu at that time, were doubtless discriminated in favor of by over-appreciative relatives or friends on the boards of examiners.

In 1380 it was ordered that no young man should take the preliminary examinations in any but his own county town and at the same time the age limit was reduced from twenty-five to twenty.

In 1389 there were three kinds of graduates: the To-gong (土貢), who comprised the young graduates of the Capital ; the Hyang-kong (鄉貢), since they had passed the Hyang-si (鄉試) ; and the Pin-gong (賓貢), which included all aliens who had passed examinations in Korea as well as Koreans who passed them in China.

In connection with Koreans going to China to try the [page 19] tests, we learn from the Moon-hun Pi-go that the first Korean to do this was Kim Un-kyung (金雲鄉); who successfully competed in China (at the capital, Loh-yang) in 821 A.D. Others secured the coveted honour at intervals for a period of 550 years, or until near the end of the Koryu Dynasty. Daring that time fifty-four men are said to have taken degrees in China. Of these the celebrated Ch’oi Ch’i-wun (崔致遠) was the second. He secured his in 874. Of the whole number, twenty-three were Silla men, nearly half the entire number obtaining it between the years 821 and 918. Silla averaged a graduate every four years, while the Koryu averaged only one in fifteen years. There are two ways to account for this discrepancy. The powerful Tang Dynasty in China encouraged this interchange and the enthusiasm of the Koreans amounted to almost a passion. After the Tang Dynasty fell in 906 there was less incentive from the Chinese side. The tremendous change which came with the fall of Silla diverted men from this form of enterprise, and the speedy rise and prominence of Buddhism in Koryu exerted a deterrent influence. After the first two or three reigns Buddhism obtained such a firm hold upon the people and the government that oftentimes it overshadowed everything else. There was a constant strife between Confucianism and Buddhism for political supremacy. There were long periods when the study of the Confucian Classics languished, because the Buddhist infatuation of the Government authorities gave no encouragement to study. We find that Buddhism emulated the example of Confucianism by establishing examinations of its own. It is not easy to discover the nature or subject of these examinations, but that they existed is clearly stated by reliable historians. This, in part at least, explains the failure of Koryu scholars to equal the record made by those of Silla, even though they lived at a later and presumably more enlightened age.

We now come to the beginning of the present dynasty which took place in 1392. Its fundamental idea was the freeing of the land from the thraldom of a corrupt Buddhism. [page 20]

In the year of King T’ai-jo’s accession the laws concerning examinations were overhauled. Many new schools were established in the country districts, but the general system of examinations that had existed before was in the main continued. Many needed reforms, however, were brought about.

In 1394 a new examination was established which conferred upon the successful candidate the title of Saing-wun (生員). This is very common even to the present day.

In 1401 another examination called Ching-kwang (增廣) was instituted. It was a special examination to celebrate the birth of a prince, or to communicate some noteworthy event.

In the 1407 the Moon-sin Choong-si (文臣重試〉was inaugu-rated. It was held only once in ten years, and was a revival of a former examination, though the ten years was an innovation.

In 1408 the custom of holding military examinations was revived. At these the subject matter was military literature.

In 1414 King T’ai-jong went in state to the Confucian School, and there before the Myung-yoon Tang (明倫堂) held an examination for men of Chin-sa rank. He called it the Al-sung-Kwa (謁聖科) “Examination at the Shrine.” Only ten men could pass it at one time. It was repeated at intervals all through the centuries and was called one of the most notable of such events.

In 1438 a new law was made in regard to diplomas. Before that time a red diploma had been given to every graduate of whatever rank but now only those who attained the full Kwa-gu or Tai-Kwa (大科) could receive a red diploma. All others were white.

In 1457 another pyul-gwa (別科) or special examination, was founded. It was held only in those years, the name of which contained the character pyung (丙). This, of course, meant once in ten years, as reference to the Sixty Year Cycle will show. For this reason it was sometimes called the Pynng pynl-si. This too, was a very high examination.

In 1477 the Ckeuk-il Pang-pang(即日放榜) or “ Same day [page 21] announcement examination” was begun. This was a low- grade test but was very popular because, as its name implies, the names of the successful men were announced on the very day the test was given. How the examiners could make a fair estimate of the relative powers of the contestants in so short a time is a matter on which the historian is discreetly silent.

In 1515 a new examination was begum The test consisted in reciting passages of the Classics from memory. This survived until recent years.

In the Confucian College of Seoul, called the Sung-kyoon Kwan (成均館)there were but twelve men. To become an inmate of that college was a very great honour. Three men were taken from the four great political parties called No-ron (老論), so-ron (少論), Nam-in (南人) and Peuk-in (此人). In the year 1533 a special examination for entrance into this school was inaugurated. It was called the To-keui Yoo-saing (到期儒生), which means almost literally “ The scholars who have arrived” to use a modern slang expression.

In 1572 the beautiful examination grounds in the rear of the Kyung-bok Palace were set aside for the National Examinations, but it was only twenty years later that the palace was burned upon the approach of the Japanese army of invasion. This put an end to their use until the palace was rebuilt in 1866 by the Tai-wun-koon, who was acting as regent until the late ruler should reach his majority.

In 1623 a special commission was sent to the island of Quelpart to hold an examination because it was so difficult for the scholars there to attend the examinations at Seoul, This proved a precedent which was followed for many years.

In 1624 the Chung-si (廷試) or “ Government examination” was established. The subject was invariably the denunciation of traitors.

In 1643, because of the sufferings of the people at the hands of Manchu invaders, the king sent and gathered a large number of scholars from that section, brought them up to Seoul and gave them a special examination. Since that time special [page 22] examinations have from time to time been held in both the northern provinces of Pyung-an and Ham-kyung. The first to be held in the latter province was in 1636.

After the burning of the Kyung-bok Palace in 1592 until its rebuilding in 1866, the regular Kwa-gu grounds were behind the “ Old Palace” or Chang-tuk (昌德) at a place called the Ch’oon-tang Tai (春塘臺).

During the last two centuries there have been a few changes, but, before taking up the question of the system as it was at the time the change came in 1894, it will be necessary to go back and give as briefly as possible a description of the military examinations which have played no small part in the history of the country.

In Silla days the use of the bow was the most important part of military science, and frequent tournaments were held to prove the relative skill of the archers, but no specific mention is made of an examination as such.

It was not until almost two hundred years after the founding of Koryu, namely in 1109, that a military school was established. Instruction was given in the use of the bow, the crossbow, fire-arrows, the building, defending and storming of ramparts ; intrenchments ; horsemanship ; the use of the sword ; the manufacture and use of armour and of traps and gins of different Kinds ; the use of poison ; the art of riding horses, changing from one horse to another while going at full speed, riding at full speed while standing on the saddle, riding upon a line drawn upon the earth, riding in a perfect circle ; the manufacture and use of the clepsydra or water-clock (used in timing the archers), the manufacture and use of musical instruments ; the use of flags for signals ; the science of fire signals ; the making and management of war boats ; naval geography, or, to coin a word, thalattography ; the placing of a “wall of ships about an island, or, in other words, the blockade ; the placing of obstructions in the water ; the making of military bridges and sand-bag stepping stones ; mountain observations and watch-towers. On all these topics there was literature to [page 23] be studied The great military examination was called the Mu-gwa (武科).

In 1134 there began a suicidal contest between the civil and military elements in Koryu similar to that between the Confucian and Buddhistic cults. This feud caused repeated revolutions in which countless people lost their lives. In this year the civil element predominated and all military schools and examinations were suspended. From that time on, the civil element was uniformly in power though there were many violent attempts to effect a change. It was not till 1389 that the military element again obtained the upper hand under the leadership of Yi Sung-ke 李成桂 who three years later overthrew the dynasty and established the late one. In 1389 the military school was again opened and examinations resumed. From that time on there was a great military examination, coming, in each case, before the great triennial civil examination called the Tai-gwa.

In spite of the fact that the founder of this dynasty was a soldier and had caused the predominance of the military faction, from the very beginning of the dynasty the military was subordinated to the civil administration. When he came to the throne he seems to have recognized the important truth that the civil is the more important side, and that the military must be its servant and not its master in any well-governed state.

Successful candidates in military examinations received the (Hong-pa”) or red diploma. In the great military tests only three men could obtain the degree of the first class, seven men the degree of the second class, and twenty-three men the degree of the third class. Military history and the biographies of great generals were important subjects handled.

In 1457 a law was passed that no man could try the military tests who could not draw a bow of 130 lbs. tension.

In 1467 the king went to O-da Mountain, the source of the Han River and held a great military examination ; the test consisted in mastering an unruly horse, and in drawing with ease a very stiff bow. [page 24]

In 1469 the custom was begun of giving the unsuccessful candidate a flag, but two years later this was changed to an umbrella. It was at that time that the parade ground in the eastern part of Seoul called Hoon-yun Wun (訓練院) was made. It was both parade and examination ground. Military examinations were also held in the provincial centres. The ajuns were also examined and if one of them could shoot three wooden arrows in quick succession a distance of 240 paces he received special honour Iron arrows of six ounces each, like large needles, were also shot 130 paces. Iron balls were thown at a target while riding at a full speed. Another military test was the Chun-si (殿試) or “ Palace examination” because it was held in the presence of the king.

In 1592, the year of the great Japanese invasion, a law was made that anyone who brought in a Japanese head would receive the Kvva-gu without further test. As a result many Koreans played the Falstaff trick and secutcd immortal fame by decapitating corpses. There were so many red diplomas flaunted in the breeze that the people, in dension, called it the “Red Rain.”

In 1593 a special examination was given in the use of fire-arms which the Koreans had captured from the Japanese and were beginning to use.

In 1596 the great admiral^ Yi Soon-sin(李舜臣) the inventor of the iron-clad, “ Tortoise Boat “ was ordered to hold a naval examination on Hansan Island where he had his naval station.

In 1602 naval examinations were held at Fusan, Koje Island and other places in memory of the great admiral. The graduates numbered 17000.

In 1620 the great Man-kwa (萬科) or “Ten Thousand Man Examination” was instituted, indicating the great enthusiasm in military matters which followed the Japanese invasion.

In 1636 “thousands and thousands” are said to have passed the military examination in Northern Korea. [page 25]

In 1638 A.D. 5500 men passed an examination at Nam-han the fortress south-east of Seoul.

In 1651 there was such a great examination in the Palace that it overflowed and there was not room enough to hold the multitude. It must be remembered that the Manchu Invasion which occurred about this time occupied the whole attention of the people and the Government.

The last great military test took place in 1676 when in the north and south 19000 men were graduated.

In 1684 was instituted the “Palace Mounted Guards examination.” Only men from Ham-kyung were eligible. This may have been due to the fact that the founder of the dynasty was brought up in that province and those people may have been considered exceptionally loyal to the reigning house. By this time the military examination had become so “popular” that upper class men would not attend. An attempt was made to check this movement by throwing open the military examinations to men of civil rank and they were urged to attend.

In 1712 was begun the Pyul-mu-sa To-si(別貿使都試) or

“ Special Examination of Military Scholars.” This included the special forces in the north recruited from the hunters.

In 1717 an attempt was made to revive the waning interest in military matters by holding and examination in Kang-wha on the topic “ The Great Value of Military Science and Practice.”

In 1727 a test was held in honour of the Government’s successful attempt to put down a great rebellion in the south which threatened the existence of the dynasty.

This finishes the historical notices of Korean examinations. But passing mention must be made of what was called “Chap- kwa”(雜科) or “Miscellaneous Examinations. The geo-mancers, physicians, necromancers examinations were begun in 998 A.D. ; and instrumental music came in for its test in 1018. In the days of Koryu there were examinations in the Chinese, Mongolian, Yu-jin, and Japanese languages. These were held both in the capital and in the country. During that same [page 26] dynasty there were tests in astronomy, meteorology, law ; and the Eum-yang (陰陽) figured in the double comma emblem on the Korean flag. Of these miscellaneous tests those in medicine, meteorology and astronomy survived the change to the present dynasty.

It remains to give an account of the system of examinations which prevailed during the 19th century down to the year 1894 and to describe the examinations as witnessed by the writer at the great examination grounds behind the Kyung-hok Palace.

The twenty year limit went out of use long ago and now any boy of fifteen years or more could try the tests. All that was necessary was that he should wear a topknot. In each country district the prefect held a examination once in a hundred days, when the prizes were paper, ink and pens, paid from government funds ; but no degree was conferred. The successful candidates went up to the governor’s place every three years and took what was understood as their first real examination. The successful ones received the title of Ch’o-si (初試) or ‘Beginning Degree.” At Seoul this was held at the Confucian College. About 200 men passed at each of these tests. The examiners were the Governor and a staff of local scholars called in for the occasion. Particular attention was paid to the rule of folding in the writer’s name on the edge of his paper. There was another country examination, but a more select one to which only specially favoured gentlemen were admitted. It was cailed the Pok-si (複試) or “ Covered Examination ,, because of its exclusive character.

The next higher examination was held in Seoul every three years, and only men of Ch’o-si rank could compete. The number of candidates was unlimited. Any Ch’o-si could attend. This was one of the most important examinations for it led to the degree of Chin-sa, which was supposed to constitute enroll- ment in the noble army of scholarship. Two hundred men were graduated each time. The subjects of test were two, the Ch’o (初), and the Chong (終) the first being poetical in nature and calling for pentameter, hexameter and heptameter verse ;[page 27] while the second was a prose exposition on some difficult passage in the classics. The subjects for the poetry were posted in full view of the assembled candidates. They were generally upon some historical event. The subjects for exposition were taken from (I) The Book of Poetry (詩條), (2) The Book of History (書傳), (3) The Canon of Changes (周易), (4) The Book Ceremonies (禮記), (5 ) The Doctrine of the Mean (中庸), (6) The Great Learning (大學), (7) The Dialogues of Confucius (論語) or (The Works of Mencius (孟子).

Having passed this obstruction in his upward course to literary fame, the weary but enthusiastic neophyte had to face the Tai-kwa (大科), or “ Great Examination” which would admit him to the happy hunting ground of official life. This was Held every three years at the capital.

According to law only Chin-sas could try this higher test, but strange to say, many others got in. This was a matter of favouritism and did much to degrade the system. It was customary to select thirty-three men as successful candidates ; but there were two grades, the first being the full Kwa-gu and the second the Tai-kwa Ch’osi (大科初試), or “ Great Examination of Beginners.” The subjects were much the same as those of the preceding examination but the test was harden The full degree was accompanied by a red diploma. The king always attended in person. The attainment of this degree corresponded in a way to the obtaining of the laurel wreath at the Olympian games in Greece. As the name of each successful man was called he would come in and bow low before the king and stay in that posture while the king spoke a few words of commendation, and indicated to the scribe at his side the office that should be given him. Each graduate was sure of immediate appointment and substantial recognition. The office usually bestowed was that of Chu-sa (奏書).

For the time being the names of the successful men were on every tongue. They were dressed in fantastic garb, their faces were daubed with ink and they were paraded through the streets on horseback with drum and fife to the accompaniment [page 28] of a crowd of boys, who helped to swell the chorus, to raise the dust, and to shed lustre upon the page ant generally. In this novel procession the young graduate was always accompanied by a former teacher, or some official who was supposed to have complete control over him for the time being, and would make him do all sorts of ludicrous things. For example a favourite piece of horse-play was to order the young man to get down and hunt for crabs in the ditch. He would have to dismount and scrabble in the ditch, pretending to be chasing the nimble crustacean. It was something like the initiation into a secret society in our colleges at home. Passing through this ordeal he would enter a friend’s house where food would be set out for the whole cavalcade. Then all would go to some pleasant open spot under the shade of the trees and seat themselves. The hero of the occasion would then rise, take seven steps straight forward and indicate the spot where his teacher or , mentor was to sit- When all was ready the teacher would call out some Chinese character and the young man would have to improvise a verse of poetry, the last syllable of which should rhyme with the syllable given. The assembled company would then take up and chant in unison the verse so improvised. This exercise was called pul-in-da. His next duty was to take his diploma home and read it aloud before his ancestral tablets in order to acquaint them with the fact that he was at last enrolled among the number of those who are destined to leave footprints on the sands of time.

His next step up the ladder was to receive the Ok-dang Kyo-ji (玉堂敎旨) or “ Jade Place Royal Diploma.” After that he received a new diploma with each grade of assent.

We must mention some of the special or irregular examin- ations. One was called the Ching-kwang (增廣) or “ Wide Increase.” It was held in honour of some great national success or good-fortune. Four of these were held after the event commemorated ; one in each of the four seasons. They were much like the ordinary Hoi-si or Tai-kwa except that the number of graduates might be different. When disaster [page 29] threatened the state, a special test called the Chung-si (廷試) or “Government Examination” was held. The subject was “ How to overcome the difficulty or avert the danger, whether it be rebellion or something else.” Between ten and thirty men were graduated according as the candidates were many or few.

There were a large number of small examinations in Seoul on special festivals like the third day of the third moon, the ninth day of the ninth month. They were called Kam-je (报制) or “ Orange Examinations because oranges formed the prizes. The Wha-je (花制) was at the time of spring flowers ; the O-je (梧制) at the time of O-dong flowers and Kook-je (菊制) at the time of the chrysanthemum.

There was a montnly examination at the Confucian College. It was called Seung-bo(升補) or “Promotion Addition.” Latterly the twelve examinations were all bunched together in the winter instead of being held in each individual month.

The Hak-je (學制) was an examination of students in the Four Schools in Seoul, namely the East, South, West and and Centre schools. There were 160 graduates. Then they had to pass the Hap-je (合制) or “ Gathering Examination.” there being only four graduates. These were then eligible for the hoi-si.

The Eung-je (應制) was a very high examination held at the sole caprice of the king. Sometimes there were ten graduates, sometimes one and sometimes none at all.

The Kong-do Hoi was a provincial examination held at each provincial capital and at each of the four “ gates of the capital.” or approaches to Seoul ; namely, Kang-wha, Nam-han, Soo-wun and Song-do. This admitted candidates to the Hoi-si.

The Korean examinations were not hedged about by any of those precautions observed in China. The aspirants for honours were not confined for days in little rooms or closets, nor were they subject to the rigid surveillance common in the neighbouring empire. Anyone could enter the examination grounds and wander about and look on at pleasure. In the centre there was a huge pavilion decked out with awnings and [page 30] flags and streamers. Hundreds of soldiers in their gay attire added to the general confusion of the scene. It was like an enormous fairground with a continuous picnic going on. The candidates sat on mats under huge umbrellas and plied their pens with feverish haste. They were not separated from the mere onlookers. The latter could wander about among the groups of writers, talk with them or carry messages for them at will. Half a dozen writers would be working under a single umbrella and there were plenty of opportunities to help each other. A man could easily secure the aid of his teacher in writing his paper. This utter absence of precaution against cheating showed to what a low point the National Examination had fallen. One is forced to inquire why anyone should attempt to pass. The answer is this. Out of a hundred possible graduates ninety were probably appointed by favoritism ; but the examiners knew that if some few of the successful men were not chosen at random, and from among candidates who had no “ pull “ whatever, there would be a storm of protests, so perhaps ten out of a hundred would be honestly chosen. It was owing to the possibility of being of this number that the crowds were attracted.

In front of the great pavilion where the king came to view the proceedings the soldiers made a circular enclosure by sticking their spears in the ground close together like a fence. When a candidate finished his paper he would roll it up and： throw it over the line of spears into the enclosure. From here they were gathered up by the servants and carried to the examiners, who sat in a side pavilion and worked continuously. This body of examiners did only the preliminary work. They sorted the papers making a rough selection of those that might possibly pass. These were sent up to a board of four examiners who made the final choice.

One is curious to know in what ways justice was cheated in these tests. There were several. In the first place one could carry in any number of “ cribs” or notes to use. As the subject of examinati6n was not announced till the last [page 31] moment, this form of trickery was not wholly successful but still it helped. Then again, as we have said, a man might have his teacher go in and write for him, append his name to the paper and so evade justice. Then again, there were professional paper writers who could be hired for a price to go in and bring one fame. Sometimes a man would go in and write three or four papers signing them with the names of his numerous brothers. In this way one of the prizes might fall to the family and good luck to one meant good luck to all. But, surest of all, was the trick of arranging with one of the examiners to put a certain mark on the paper, by which he should recognize it and give it recommendation.

A volume of stories might be told about the adventures and tricks of candidates and examiners. The following is a mere sample of these tales but it is a characteristic one which the Koreans appreciate highly.

There was once a high official who had attained his place by some signal service to the king but not by the ladder of civil service examinations. He was notoriously ignorant of the Chinese character and the contents of the classics. He was a strong and able man however, though he was decidedly moo-sik- hata, which means ignorant of letters, There had been some scandals in the board of examiners and the people were grumbling. As a great examination approached, this official suggested that he be put on the board. The king laughed aloud at the absurd suggestion but the man persisted and at last, as a sort of joke, the king appointed him. The Court was aghast at the unheard-of proceeding, but there was no appeal. The other examiners hastened to resign but the king would not let them. The day for the trial came and the examiners sat waiting for the papers to come in. When the first batch arrived the other examiners watched to see what this uncouth coadjutor would do. He picked up one of the papers and looked at it wrongside up, rightside up, sideways, and finally heaved a great sigh and said, “I declare I can’t make anything out of this. I regret that my education has been neglected but I am determined that [page 32] my sons shall do better. I will leave the selection of the successful candidates to you other gentlemen. To tell you the truth, the reason I came in was in order to get hold of some real good papers, say ten of them, to take home and let my sons study them. I wish you gentlemen would help me in this. If you will I will let you determine the names of the graduates to suit yourselves.” This they did and when the examination was over he took the ten papers to the king and said, “ If you want to know who are the really deserving men you will find their names here.” Later the examiners brought in their list but not one of these ten names appeared. The king stood forth and read the successful names but instead of being those that the examiners had given him they were ten that the honest but ignorant official had brought.