*Henri Zuber’s Day-by-Day Record*

An Unpublished Account of the 1866 French Expedition

Translated and edited by Brother Anthony of Taizé

**Jean Henri Zuber**

Born 24 June 1844 in Rixheim, Alsace, into the Zuber family, who were the owners of a factory producing a celebrated brand of painted wall-paper, (Jean) Henri Zuber studied in Strasbourg then Paris, before entering Brest Naval School in 1861. There he met the painter of seascapes Étienne Mayer, becoming his pupil from 1862 until 1863. Having received the rank of “aspirant” (midshipman), he embarked on the *Montebello,* then in 1864 he joined the frigate *La Thémis* which was to escort the Emperor Maximilien from Austria to Mexico. In January 1865 he embarked on the corvette *Le Primauguet* which was on its way to join the naval division of the China seas, a part of the French naval forces in the Far East based in Saïgon, whose Commander-in-chief at the time was the Admiral and Governor of Indochina, Pierre-Paul de La Grandière. During the long journey, Zuber made notes on and drawings of the places visited, reaching Saïgon in November 1865. From there the ship moved to Hong Kong before ending up in Yokohama in Japan, where *le Primauguet* joined the French squadron.

On 8 June 1866, *le Primauguet* received orders to set out for Shanghaï, where, under the command of Rear-Admiral Roze, a French expedition against Korea was being prepared. The immediate reason for this expedition was the news that early in 1866 nine French Catholic missionaries had been executed by the Korean authorities. The arrival on a small boat from Korea of Father Félix-Clair Ridel, the first of three missionaries who were able to escape, made a strong impression on the Europeans living in China. There was a strong feeling that “something should be done” and Rear-admiral Roze had as one of his tasks that of ensuring the safety of French nationals living in the region. He therefore decided that it was his duty to sail to Korea, confront the authorities, and demand reparations as well as the punishment of those responsible for this “massacre.”

Roze realized at once, however, that nobody knew where the capital of Korea was located or how to reach it. He decided to divide the expedition into two stages, the first a survey with a small number of ships, allowing him to locate Seoul and see what action might be possible with his limited forces. Then he would assemble all the forces at his disposal for the actual campaign. These two journeys took place September 18 – October 3, and October 11 – November 21, 1866. On the first, two shallow-draft ships found the mouth of the Han River and sailed as far as Yanghwajin, from where the walls of Seoul were visible in the distance. The Korean authorities showed clearly that they had no desire to discuss anything with Roze, so the French returned to China to prepare a military attack on the island of Ganghwa, at the mouth of the Han River, which offered a clearly defined small-scale target, whereas to attack Seoul would have required large numbers of troops and complex supply lines.

Given his artistic training, the young ensign Zuber seems to have participated mainly in the surveying and mapping of the coastline of Ganghwa Island and to have prepared a plan of the anchorage near l'île Boisée (Woody Island, Jakyak-do). He later prepared a map of the entire Korean peninsula using documents found during the expedition. He was, however, already senior enough to be one of the junior officers. Therefore, when Admiral Roze sent a force of some 120 men to see what the situation was at the fortress surrounding the temple of Cheondeung-sa, several miles from the main camp, on November 9, he was one of the leaders of the force. He describes briefly in his unpublished text what happened as they approached the fortress walls. They walked into an ambush and the French were lucky not to have had anyone killed. The incident marked the end of the French expedition to Korea. As they left, Roze set fire to the royal palace and government buildings in Ganghwa city, after removing a large quantity of silver and some three hundred large, elaborately illustrated books, the *Uigwe* or Royal Protocols, which were finally returned to Korea in 2011.

After the expedition Zuber spent several months in various ports of China, and made a considerable number of drawings and paintings which have survived. He returned to France via Java, Sydney, and New Caledonia. His notebooks are filled with drawings, sketches and caricatures. All through the long campaign, Zuber produced many sketches and paintings, particularly in China and Japan. Of Korea, however, all that survive are the engravings based on his drawings which were published in various magazines.

On reaching France in 1868, Zuber resigned from the Navy and entered the studio of the Swiss painter Charles Gleyre, determined to make a career as an artist and illustrator. He was admitted to the Salon des artistes français in 1869. In 1870-1871, Zuber was mobilised during the war with Prussia; he saw action in the defense of Paris and the battles at Mont-Valérien. He was demobilized in March 1871 and, Alsace having become German, opted for France and settled in Paris. On 20 July 1871 he married Madeleine Oppermann. They had 4 children. He set up a studio in the rue de Vaugirard in Paris in 1872.

In 1873 he published an article based on his participation in the 1866 expedition to Korea in the illustrated magazine *Le Tour du Monde,* produced by Hachette, a celebrated periodical consecrated to voyages and discoveries. Henri Zuber is the first French writer to produce an account of Korea accompanied by images drawn directly *in situ*. Some of his other drawings had served as the basis for engravings published in the weekly *L’Illustration* early in 1867. Instead of descriptions of the military action that he was intimately involved in, the article in *Le Tour du Monde* gives the priority to a more general description of Korea, with evocations of the life of the ordinary Koreans he saw, so deferential and childlike, and the magnificent autumn landscapes.

Henri Zuber moved south to Menton and Cannes on account of his wife's poor health but she died at Cannes in 1881. Remaining alone in the Midi, he mastered the techniques of watercolors. This brought him to the notice of English admirers. In 1883, Henri Zuber married Hélène Risler, with whom he had another 3 children. He was admitted to the Société des aquarellistes français where he exposed regularly each year. He later moved his studio to 19 rue Vavin; the building that housed his studio still exists today. In 1897 he became a member of the jury of the Salon des artistes français. In 1906 he was promoted to the grade of officer in the order of the Légion d'honneur. In 1909 Zuber died after an operation for a stomach ulcer he had been suffering from since 1883.

What follows below is the English translation of a text hitherto unpublished in any English or French publication, which was transcribed many years ago (with omissions) from a notebook which seems to have been in the possession of Henri Zuber’s grand-daughter, Jeanne Frey (1911-1993), by her cousin (at some removes) Henri Ernest Zuber (1901-1967), the father of Professor Roger Zuber, Professor Emeritus of the Sorbonne. It is translated and published here with the permission of Professor Zuber. A volume by a Korean historian published some years ago which is now out-of-print included the French text as an appendix, but without receiving any permission from the Zuber family.

The original seems to have been a letter written in the form of (or based on) a diary; it is probably addressed to a close friend or younger relative, the use of ‘tu’ suggests that the intended recipient would not have been one of his parents, who at the time would normally have been addressed with the more formal “vous.” Unfortunately, the original which was transcribed cannot now be traced.

This vivid record of the day-by-day course of the expedition offers a unique insight into the state of mind of a junior naval officer. Comparison with the article which Henri Zuber later published in *Le Tour du Monde* only serves to reveal how far that latter piece is from reporting the author’s direct experience of combat. Also intriguing is the difference between that article’s glowing, detailed account of the Buddhist painting found in a temple and the brief, scornful mention of it here. What is striking in both this and the published article is Zuber’s sharply critical, anti-imperialist attitude; he clearly had a very independent mind. The contents of the passages which are indicated as having been omitted may have been included almost unchanged in the article published in *Le Tour du Monde*. This might be the reason why they were not copied. Their absence is frustrating.

Chefoo, 12 September 1866

At the moment we are starting our expedition to Korea I must tell you the reasons for this campaign.

Nine French missionaries have been murdered in Korea under the following circumstances: The Russians who, as is far too little known in Europe, are inclined to a complete invasion of the East, had sent an ambassador to the Emperor of Korea to conclude a Treaty of Amity and Commerce. The Emperor, before answering, had the idea of consulting the Catholic missionaries whose presence in his territories he suspected; by means of multiple promises, he drew them out of their secret hiding-place and brought them to his court.

The missionaries advised him to refuse the treaty and, in case of difficulties, to address himself to France and England, countries which they represented as being the most disinterested among the world powers. The Emperor suspected a ruse, and after sending away the Russians by promising to consult with the Emperor of China, his suzerain, he beheaded nine missionaries. There remained a tenth in Korea, Father Ridel, who managed, thanks to the dedication of Korean neophytes, to reach Chefoo; from there he went to Beijing and made his report to the Minister of France. The Minister wrote to the Admiral, telling him that an expedition to Korea would be very timely and would correspond to the views of the French Government. It may be remembered, indeed, that the Emperor (Napoleon III) at the time of the occupation of Cochin, had regretted not being able to take control of a point in Korea. After some hesitation Admiral Roze thought this possible, and that is when we were called to Chefoo.

It is, alas! too easy to see that the moral value of this expedition is purely negative; it is just one more of those acts of theft, that are only too common today. Indeed, we have no treaty with Korea which, until now, has remained outside the movement. The Christian religion is abhorred there; therefore the missionaries who venture into this country can foresee the fate that awaits them; politics has nothing to do with their business.

Unfortunately many people consider the missionary as a kind of diplomatic agent, and so distort the character of the apostolic institution. Passions are brought into play on both sides and the Christian idea gives way to this detestable policy of invasion that characterizes the European in the Far East.

The force prepared for the expedition consists of:

- 7 ships, 66 canons

- 725 men, about 800 with the officers, for the landing forces.

As for me, I command a section of the mountain artillery. We intend to immediately attack Seoul, the capital. They say this city is not far from the sea, but we cannot establish its position exactly to within 70 leagues. Father Ridel, having only lived by night in Korea, could provide only very general information; we have no map of the coasts that are most dangerous, which means that the ships will often be in danger. The latest project is to send the “Primauguet” with the Admiral’s flag to explore the coast. When they have found the river that leads to Seoul, the other vessels will appear and the attack will take place. Our preparations are complete. Everything on board is prepared for a likely landing and in three days we will set sail. It appears that the Jardine company of Hong Kong, having sent several merchant ships to Korea, has made a reasonably good map that it has promised to give the Admiral on condition of secrecy, but that is hearsay.

The expedition that is about to start astonishes us for two reasons: it is being done without the help of the English and what is more, officially unknown to them, which seems to me to be contrary to the procedure adopted by the two powers in the Far East. Admiral Roze is engaging French arms without consulting his government, at a time when European peace is so troubled. What if we were to be engaged in a war with Russia or England? We would be caught in a trap, as the Russians and the British in the Far East have forces far superior to our own. Finally, there is a consideration of another order that should have influenced the decisions. We know that the climate in Korea is very rigorous, that the month of October is already cold and that the temperature in the month of December is on average minus 12°. What will become in this Siberia of men accustomed to the sun of China?

September 27, 1866: At anchor in the river of Seoul. (*Zuber seems to start writing on this date, and launches into an account of the first, surveying expedition, beginning with the departure from Cheefoo. He was on the “Primauguet,” which was ordered to stay behind near the mouth of the river leading to Seoul after it struck a rock on September 22, and so he did not sail up the Han River with the two small ships.*)

18 September: The “Primauguet,” carrying the Vice-Admiral’s flag and towing the “Tardif” and the “Déroulède” left the harbor of Chefoo. Nothing new until noon on the 19th. Then we saw a group of islands marked on the French map under the name of Ferrières Islands (Admiral Guérin, during his campaign on the “Virginie”, sailed along the coast of Korea and left behind a few attempts at charts that have been of some use to us). After the Ferrières came the “Islands of the Prince Impérial,” but here the chart was much less explicit and the two ships we had been towing until then had to be sent ahead to scout. We anchored at 10 pm after many twists and turns.

September 20: The “Déroulède” was charged by the Admiral to look for the entrance of the Seoul river. A difficult task indeed, since it was a matter of choosing between eight or ten estuaries, but much facilitated by the presence of Fr. Ridel and a Korean Christian who had accompanied the missionary during his escape. During the absence of the “Déroulède” we made a survey of our anchorage and the surrounding areas. This task took us to several charming, completely deserted islands. The prettiest flowers, red dog-roses, jasmine, etc. grew freely, while the beaches were covered with oysters and other shell-fish that were good to eat. Needless to say, our work did not prevent us from gathering enormous bouquets and eating our fill.

21 evening: The “Déroulède” returned after completing its mission with exceptional good fortune. Luck had enabled it to find at the very outset what it was searching for. It was resolved that on the next day the three ships would sail up the river as far as possible.

22 morning: We set sail and with our little escort leading the way, we engaged in the countless passes that lead to Seoul. On seeing us fight victoriously against currents that no junk could overcome, and so enter the interior of the country, the Koreans in their white robes gathered in groups on the hills and gazed, probably with a mixture of fear and admiration, at these fire-driven machines with such great power and such a new aspect to them.

Everything was going as our leaders wished and already we were 4 or 5 leagues from the sea when the crew of the “Primauguet” felt a very strong impact, immediately followed by a great lean to port. The poor ship had struck a rock and her false keel, broken by the shock, rose wretchedly to the surface of the water. Fortunately, the tide was rising: half an hour was enough to have the sloop afloat, but caution commanded that it should stop there; we anchored a little further down and it was decided that the “Primauguet” would wait to go further until the gunboats had sounded the river carefully.

September 23: The admiral raised his flag on the “Déroulède” and, accompanied by Commander Bochet, set off up river, while we headed for an anchorage which seemed excellent. Our anchor fell to a depth of 15 meters at high tide, and everyone thought of getting some rest, but at around 8:30 pm we found only 7 meters of water (and we draw 6!) It was becoming worrisome. Immediately we prepared to move off but before the engine had enough pressure we were stranded and the only thing to be done was to prop up the ship. The yards were quickly set up as crutches, we drew in the top masts and waited; at 9 o'clock there were no more than 4 meters along the side and you could see most of the copper. But then it was over: the water was rising. So the sea fell by 11 meters: it was really frightening! It is fair to say that we were at the equinox, at a syzygy**,** and near a lunar eclipse, all circumstances that determine the tides. Nevertheless, the highest tide at Brest, which is found to be considerable, is 7 meters.

The “Primauguet” fortunately suffered no damage; it had encountered only mud and easily came afloat again; it was taken to another place, the choice of which was determined by experience.

September 24: A senior Korean came alongside in a junk of miserable appearance; he was escorted by wretched-looking satellites in considerable numbers. We had part of the crew take up arms, placed sentinels everywhere, then brought the Mandarin and his escort on board. After some greetings he began to examine with curiosity the canons, guns, compasses, etc. then he presented to Mr. Laguerre, acting commander, a rather poor fan along with a piece of paper covered with Chinese writing. A Chinese cook in the service of the General Staff acted as our interpreter and translated into French the meaning of the Chinese characters traced by our visitors. They meant:

“Why are you here? What are you doing in Korea? How many armed men have you on board? Do you need food? You must go!”

The answer was not long in coming. Here's what the Chinese wrote in his best hand:

“We are here for our own pleasure. We have come to watch the lunar eclipse that will take place tonight. We have on board 200 armed men and 12 guns that fire with remarkable accuracy. We do not need food. We shall go when we deem it appropriate, but as long as you enjoin us to leave, we will stay.”

This reply, so clear, so neat, however, did not seem to satisfy the Mandarin; he nodded grimly and all the efforts that we made to show him the curious features of the ship failed to lighten his darkened features. He finally left, little reassured about the purity of our intentions. The lunar eclipse did not seem reason enough.

Despite this, the next day they sent us presents, a bull, chickens, eggs, salted fish, fruit, and finally a dozen fans: definitely the answer had its effect. The following day our relationship with the Koreans continued on the same footing. Even as I write there are a hundred on board, they are allowed to visit the deck but they are not allowed below

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(*Here a description of the costumes and manners in Korea*).

September 30, 1866

There is news. We were very worried these last days about the gunboats, whose prolonged absence seemed ominous. They were supposed to be back at the latest on the 26th and on the 29th we were still waiting. The Admiral had left no instructions. Our relations with the natives were beginning to grow tense; they ordered us to leave; more reason to stay, but their insolence did not allow us to receive them on board and our guns were ready to vomit shrapnel. It was decided that on October 1 we would head up-river, come what may, then this morning we saw smoke to the north, it was the gunboats! Here is what I learned about their expedition:

All went well until the morning of the 25th, the population seemed quiet and just a few mandarins allowed themselves to make remarks; they were politely dismissed and things stayed as they were. But at a given moment, about 4 miles from Seoul, the river was found to be barred by junks tightly bound one to the other. We ordered these junks to give us free passage, giving them an hour to maneuver; this order was accompanied by a threat that had to be executed. At 11:00 firing began. Some 30-calliber shells were fired at the junks, which immediately cut their cables and fled.

Meanwhile the natives assembled on the two banks fired many projectiles, most of which were lost somewhere; however, some fell near the gunboats without causing any damage; we responded with a hail of bullets and shells which soon dispersed our enemies. We then continued up the river all the way to Seoul. There a mandarin calling himself “the friend of the people” came begging the Admiral to cease firing, assuring him that our bullets had caused great misfortune and that they would no longer seek to hinder our progress. We promised not to shoot so long as we were not attacked and began to descend the river, slowly enough to be able to make a chart. When they reached the level of a town called Kangoa, the gunboats were greeted by a lively but not deadly fire; we replied while continuing to advance, but a serious accident brought grief to the “Déroulède.” Two men were seriously injured by the accidental detonation of a canon. One of these unfortunates was even thrown into the water by the force of the impact, but we were able to fish him out. These last events took place on the 30th at 9 am. At 11 am the “Tardif” and the “Déroulède” were at anchor beside us.

The maritime achievements of the gunboats were superb; the possibility of sailing up to Seoul is recognized, at least for small vessels; undoubtedly the “Tardif” and “Déroulède” ran aground several times, but these accidents had nothing surprising in a journey of exploration and the river remains easily navigable.

On setting out, the Admiral had published the following order:

“Officers and Crew!

“A great crime has been committed in Korea: several of our missionary compatriots were horribly massacred by the orders of the Government of that country It is up to us, who have received the noble mission of showing everywhere our country’s flag, of striking down those who have committed similar crimes, and showing a barbarian Government that the innocent blood of the children of France is forever sacred. So I am leading you to the shores of Korea. We will make our utmost efforts to reach the heart of this country and avenge the good men who have been put to death by those to whom they came to teach charity and truth. I have no need to appeal to your courage and dedication; I know them already; but in our just vengeance we will not confuse those who ordered the murder of our fellow citizens with the peaceful inhabitants who ask only to hold out a hand. We will prove ourselves worthy of France and our great sovereign whose magnanimous heart watches over her children wherever they are and drawing our inspiration from memories of the homeland we will march to the cry a thousand times repeated: Vive l'Empereur “

On his return, the Admiral issued a second order:

“The Rear-Admiral, Commander in Chief, hastens to express his appreciation to the Commanders, Officers and Crew of the “Primauguet”, the “Tardif” and the “Déroulède” as well as the officers of the General Staff who accompanied him.

“In the difficult exploration we have just undertaken, each of us has displayed the zeal, the intelligence and those higher feelings of duty which are the best guarantees for success. Thanks to you, Korea is now open and you can be proud of the success you have achieved.

“This order will be read to the Crew and displayed at the foot of the mainmast.

Signed Roze

Chefoo October 3

On the day of his return the Admiral, after some hesitation, decided that he would gather the rest of the squadron in Chefoo before starting a serious attack.

We have just learned from two Korean Christians that the crew of an American schooner, wrecked on the coast of Korea, was ruthlessly massacred. This story has reconciled me with our expedition, the official reason for which continues to seem to me no less iniquitous.

October 13 - Mooring off Woody Island

Tomorrow is the day when our military operations against Korea begin by the attack against the forts of Kangoa. Before I launch into new adventures I will give you an account of what has happened since I last wrote to you.

On October 10, the day before we left, the Admiral wished to undertake a final review of the expeditionary force. Consequently, at 6 am, landing companies, with all their equipment, were put ashore at the Island of Kung-Tung. The night before, an English vessel, flying the flag of a Rear Admiral, had anchored in the harbor. We were therefore not surprised to see Admiral King land on the same beach as us. Admiral Roze hastened to invite his English colleague to undertake the review of the sailors already in battle order. The presence of the Duke of Alençon, who sails aboard British ships as an amateur, lent to the visit a particular interest. This young prince, grandson of a French sovereign, must have felt strange emotions at the sight of these ranks from which he was forever excluded. Among the superior officers of the squadron many had known his father, whose name will always be well received in the French Navy, and were it not for their sense of duty, I do not know if they would have resisted the desire to give an expression of their sympathy to the innocent exile.

In the morning of the 11th, the whole squadron set sail and at 12 at night we anchored near Eugénie Island. This morning we crossed the few miles that separated us from Woody Island and at present we are making our final preparations for tomorrow’s affair. The four small boats, “Tardif”, “Déroulède”, “Kien-Chan” and “Le Breton” will sail up to Kangoa in the order I have indicated. The first has to protect the next two as they tow the small boats “La Guerrière,” “Le Primauguet” and the “Laplace.” “Le Breton’s” mission is to protect our rear. Once they arrive before Kangoa, the boats will drop their tows and row to shore to unload the landing parties. There is no denying that the plan is extremely bold, too bold if we were dealing with a serious enemy, because we have to pass through the fire of ten forts before arriving at our destination, but with people as unskilled as the Koreans, it is in my opinion by far the best.

On October 14, at 6 in the morning, everything being ready, our four small ships advanced, following the agreed plan. They were in full battle order, ready to cover with shrapnel both banks of the river at the first shot of the enemy. As for me, I commanded one of the boats towed by the “Déroulède.” We expected to hear a hail of bullets and balls come whistling over our heads. Imagine our surprise at finding all the forts quiet! The enemy was taken by surprise, fooled by our pretended flight. We saw many men dressed in white running about busily on shore, but no bullet, no arrow came through the air. So we arrived safely before Kangoa; there a few brave men tried to point the guns of a fort at us, but the number of attackers inspired in them a salutary terror and they abandoned their bloody project to find a more assured salvation in flight.

Soon there was nobody left on the bank but a mandarin who tried to soften us by salaams and multiple prostrations and thereby avert the storm about to fall on his homeland. His entreaties were in vain. The 600 men of the expedition soon set foot on the soil of the island of Kangoa and captured without resistance positions that a more vigilant enemy would have been able to defend for a long time. We settled immediately on the fortified hills at the foot of which extends the village that serves as the port to the city.

(*Here a description of the cantonment taken on shore by the troops*).



From Zuber’s article in *Le Tour du Monde* of 1872

But I nearly forgot to mention a characteristic adventure: at the height of the rain, a palanquin escorted by a dozen satellites, wearing huge cones of oiled paper, presented itself to our outpost. We immediately took the palanquin and its entourage to Commander Bochet, who could not restrain a burst of laughter at the sight of the singular outfit, of which the attached sketch will give you an idea. The Koreans were not disconcerted; they laid down their burden with care and there emerged an old man who began to gesticulate while articulating some raucous sounds. Since it was impossible for us to understand the mandarin, we brought him to the Admiral who, thanks to Father Ridel, was more fortunate than us. The old man in question told our leader such things and reasoned so tightly on the causes of our expedition, that we soon found ourselves with no answer. The Admiral then became angry and threatened the mandarin, but the latter, always keeping calm, replied that he knew well enough the European laws, to know that a negociator is always respected. He withdrew freely.

The next day, the sun rising in an opal sky, found me perched on top of the hill. I was waiting impatiently for the moment when the fresh morning light would light up the landscape that stretched at my feet ....

There was near me a pine forest so similar to that of Ferrette (\* *an estate belonging to the Zuber family since 1838 until 2011, where they spent the summers*) that tears came to my eyes. I went and sat down there and spent an hour recalling memories that date back at least two years.



First survey of Kanghwa City

During the day, the third column undertook a reconnoiter to the south, where they discovered a huge stock of gunpowder and a considerable stock of weapons, but no enemies. The first column was sent to Kangoa; they were welcomed near the walls by a relatively intense burst of gunfire, and not having the order to attack, fell back to the encampment that had been guarded by the second column in the absence of the others.

On October 16 the entire expedition, with the exception of two platoons, headed for Kangoa, which was taken without serious resistance. Some inhabitants, braver than the others, got themselves killed trying to defend a gate that was soon broken down, allowing the three columns to pass. The town was completely deserted; seeing so many enemies coming, the Koreans, who already knew the dreadful effect of our weapons, had fled, carrying whatever was most valuable and closing the doors of their homes. The second column occupied a large mandarin’s dwelling, located on a hill to the south of the city. The third column was placed in the center of Kangoa, finally the first settled in the official neighborhood. As the Admiral had not taken any measure to prevent looting, indiscipline soon broke out everywhere ... Then I remembered a German saying, “Welch eine Bestie liegt doch in uns” which I found singularly true.

(*Description of the city of Kangoa*).

The womens’ quarters are always well cared for; one can see silk cloths, tresses of hair, pots of rouge and ointments, and a thousand small items proving that female coquetry is exercised in Korea as elsewhere. Some specific indices, such as the shape of the clothes, and the shoes, seem even to reveal a great knowledge of the art of pleasing; for my part, I was struck by the charm of these small rooms which, without being luxurious, indicate elegant habits.

It goes without saying that the mandarins’ homes do not leave much to be desired in terms of comfort. First they are built of stone. In the Japanese manner, the floors are covered with fine mats and the walls with wallpaper. Light wood or paper partitions separate the apartments from one another. They are richly furnished. There are lacquers, bronzes, porcelains and silks galore.

October 22

I was forced to interrupt my letter to undertake a survey that I have just finished. We received news this evening from Kangoa by the “Kien-Chan” come to pick up our landing party. It seems that after we left Kangoa on the 18th, a senior military mandarin from Seoul asked to see the Admiral. The interview seems not to have been very peaceful and the mandarin threatened to send against us an army of 13,000 men. We are ready and waiting, it goes without saying, and it is likely that 13,000 Koreans will not have much success with us. . ..

October 23

Instead of starting out on my surveying, I have come back to Kangoa with my section. I prefer this and I am eager to fire some good boxes of grape-shot at the 13,000 Koreans who are coming to us.

*(Henri Zuber here stopped writing but seems to have continued to keep a day-by-day diary which he tells us he later copied to form the continuation of the letter, once everything was over*)

November 20, 1866 At anchor off Fernande Island (*Zuber waits until the expedition is over and the ships are sheltering from a storm off Incheon before writing what happened at the end of the expedition, including a brief mention of his near-escape at Cheondeung-sa*)

I am neither dead nor injured, although I have received such a baptism of fire as I shall remember all my life, as what I am going to write will prove. As for the emotions so often described that are supposed to invade one on such an occasion, I must admit that I have not felt them. At the moment when, not 30 feet away, I saw the enemy guns being aimed at me, my heart tightened, it is true, as I sent you a mental farewell, but as soon as the first shot was fired, the most complete composure came over me and I enjoyed perfect freedom of mind for the 5 or 6 minutes I remained alone exposed to the shots of a hundred enemies. Thanks to the wonderful shooting accuracy of the Korean gentlemen, not one of the 200 or 300 bullets that were intended for me served its purpose.

Our expedition is over and sadly over. At this point all the ships are still together but as soon as the bad weather that has kept them anchored for two days has passed, they will disperse to regain their former stations. I will copy out for you verbatim the journal that I have been keeping since October 23.

October 23

We sail up the river without difficulty. On arriving at the port of Kangoa the landing party from the “Primauguet” return to their former camp, but the artillery section that accompanies it and to which I am attached remains at the beach. My companion Chevalier and I install ourselves in a filthy room that does not bode well at first sight

October 24

The day is spent doing a complete clean out of our hut and getting a table, chairs, mats and paper to cover the walls blackened by smoke.

October 25

In a pagoda (*temple*) already devastated by the sailors we found a large painting representing a Buddha surrounded by allegorical figures of incredible ugliness, but among these tormented faces some are so funny that we do not hesitate to decorate a wall with our booty. In actual fact, the oriental people abuse the facility they have to depict expressions: they sacrifice everything to it and Art falls into caricature. Their gods alone, by a privilege of which it is easy to guess the range, possess traits of an unchanging stillness.

We can still see nothing of the enemy’s army which will soon, I think, appear. We are firmly expecting it, but there is no longer any question of taking the offensive and that is right. It is not with 500 men (the “Laplace” removed 100 men from our total force) that we are going to conquer 8 or 10 million people. After taking Kangoa, the enemy being taken by surprise, an attack on Seoul, though excessively bold, would not have been too much of a risk. The Admiral missed an opportunity that will never come again. It is to be deplored, as there is now no serious outcome to be hoped for. On reflection, we are even in a situation that leaves much to be desired. A flash of intelligence among the Koreans can destroy us. For example they would only have to block the river by sinking some junks and despatch an army to the island of Kangoa, something very easy to do since our means do not allow us to monitor a large tract of country, and we would undergo an inevitable disaster.



The ambush as seen by Zuber

October 26

Sad day. This morning as I was finishing my toilet, a sound of lively shooting drew me to the beach. Three of our small boats, carrying a division of 60 men, who were to undertake a reconnaissance on the other shore, had come under the fire of about 200 Koreans hidden in ambush behind a fortified gate and a few surrounding houses. In an instant five men, three mortally wounded, fell into the bottom of the boat. Meanwhile, the largest boat had landed. The men it was carrying rushed ashore and charged with bayonets fixed; soon twenty of the enemy were lying lifeless on the ground, the others fled in all directions, abandoning their weapons. We pursued them in vain, they ran like hares. The reconnaissance party continued to advance and came back to camp after having burned down the scene of the struggle. I cannot describe the emotion that seized me on seeing brought to land the dead and wounded. I will remember all my life long this sad spectacle, cursing war and its horrors.

We had just won a success but a useless success, even a fatal one, for twenty Koreans killed were not from a military point of view a sufficient compensation for our losses. It has at least been recognized that the Koreans are not as harmless as we thought. The soldiers of the regular army showed great bravery and almost all were killed at their posts

Around 3 in the afternoon a strong enemy column under the command of a mandarin on horseback advanced in good order from inside a gorge toward the beach located directly opposite us. My guns were immediately made ready and all steps were taken to receive in a suitable manner the enemies full of candor who were coming of their own free will to put themselves in our reach. We allowed them to come within 1000 meters then a fine burst of cannon-fire threw terror into their ranks. They fled, but not without leaving several of their number on the ground. My last shell was fortunate enough to reach the mandarin, who pitifully tumbled from his horse.

October 27

We buried this morning the three victims of yesterday’s confrontation. The sad ceremony caused a general emotion.

In the afternoon we blew up a huge stock of gunpowder south of Kangoa. Nothing could be more imposing than such an explosion, that shook the ground for more than four leagues around. . .

A Korean vanguard of about 150 men showed up in the morning on the other side of the river about a league from us. A shell from the “Tardif” exploded right in the middle of those poor people, who certainly did not suspect that at that distance they were still within our range.

Many men are harvesting their rice but we have not yet seen any woman. We have to beware of these peasants with their more or less false facial expressions; one of them tried to set fire to our camp: he was shot, it goes without saying, but the example may not be enough.

October 28

We continue to blow up powder magazines and burn the estates of the kingdom; a dark cloud of smoke has gathered above us and explosions follow one another relentlessly.

5000 Koreans are camping in a town 7 or 8 km from the river.

The local Christians tell us that in Seoul people are preparing 200 fire ships and a large number of junks destined to ferry troops to our island. These reports, of uncertain accuracy, deserve, however, to be taken into consideration . . . .

While awaiting developments, the “Tardif” and “Le Breton” have been sent further upriver to intercept any movement of junks.

October 29

Tonight our enemies devised a small “chinoiserie” doubtless intended to fill us with terror; the shore facing us was suddenly illuminated over a length of 2 or 300 meters. This show entertained us considerably and has not, I think, fulfilled the mission entrusted to it.

October 30

Distractions are not numerous and are reduced to hunting and archery. While hunting I made some very pretty walks. . .

I collected some observations about the lifestyle of the inhabitants. The Korean people seem to be exclusively farmers . . .

(*Here considerations about Korea*).

What proves best the primitive state of Korea is that in a town of from 20 to 30,000 inhabitants there is not one store or at least not a single store-front display. This fact, combined with the uniformity of houses and costumes (all Koreans who are not noble or mandarins, wear uniformly white clothes), singularly diminishes the interest of a country, which is otherwise very pretty. Education seems fairly widespread because it is rare to find a hut devoid of books.

November 6

During the last few days we have had weather here that reminds me very much of autumn back in my beloved home country. The temperature is reduced by a strong southerly wind that chases violently across the sky big round clouds and blows away the last leaves. . . .

If the Koreans do not consider us beaten, they are truly very modest. Since the events of October 26 we have not set foot on the other bank; with impunity we allowed the construction of defense works a few miles from us. It is now almost decided that we are leaving after the arrival of the “Laplace,” which will take place on the 15 or 16. We will all leave with very mixed feelings this ground that we were the first Europeans to tread, and which we will leave with only bad memories.

November 10th

On the 8th in the evening we received a report that 300 Korean soldiers had come from the mainland and were entrenched in a strong position 5 miles to the south of Kangoa. It was decided that a column would go the next day to attack this enemy. The landing company from the “Primauguet” and a division of the third column were designated and made their preparations accordingly.

Under the command of M. de Lassalle, lieutenant, I had to accompany the expedition as an artillery officer, the artillery not being used that day. We set off, numbering 150 men with little ammunition. On the 9th at noon we found ourselves in front of the designated area. We could see no one behind the walls and the gates were open; so we might have thought there was a complete absence of enemies, if the case of October 26 had not been there to make us suspect a trick. The position is a hill whose average height is 400 meters, topped by four peaks connected by crenellated walls about 3 meters high. With even a little defense this position, which is a veritable fortress, would be impregnable for as small a force as ours, especially without artillery. Once the pack animals were concealed in a hut, Mr. Lassalle and I were sent with one section to attack a bastion located on one of the peaks, while the rest of the column entered a sloping ravine facing the gate. So I walked with Mr Lassalle, followed at some distance by our section. We were walking in silence. Thirty paces from the bastion one of our men shouted to us: “Beware Gentlemen, you are being aimed at.” We raised our heads and saw twenty guns leveled at us. We barely had time to take cover before shots rang out and bullets whistled around us. At the same time the walls were suddenly covered with people and a terrible burst of shooting surrounded them with a belt of white smoke. We beat a hasty retreat and returned down the hill under a hail of bullets and shot that produced in the air a far from harmonious whistling sound and sent earth flying around us. My poor chief received four injuries, including two very serious ones; as for me, not even my clothes were touched. After rejoining my section, I ordered them to fight back but it was a waste of cartridges and meant unnecessarily exposing ourselves, for what could we do against an enemy ten times more numerous and protected by thick walls? I soon understood that and I continued to retreat, protecting the animals, that I had summoned, and joined the main column which, having advanced to within 50 paces from the gate, without seeing anyone, had suddenly been horribly strafed and were retreating like us, withdrawing slowly and answering fire with fire.

When the Koreans saw our retreat clearly under way, they climbed onto the parapets and gave a loud shout of triumph. Tears came to my eyes in rage. And without thinking I looked angrily at those 1500 enemies, so proud of their victory. Yet they had done their duty, and why blame them? Had our aggression been so right? Had the population of the area been wrong to join the 300 soldiers to defend their property? Certainly not. They attempted a sortie. That was all we needed in order to take our revenge. But they did not dare compete with us at such close quarters.

As soon as we were out of range of their bullets, a roll-call was made. 38 men, including five officers, were injured. One of those unfortunate fellows had received 11 bullets, many of them had their clothes riddled, but we had no deaths and not one weapon, other than a Defaucheux gun lost by chance by the train, fell into the hands of the enemy. There could be no question of renewing the attack and with our troops weakened by the obligation to divert 80 men to carry the wounded, simply regaining Kanghoa was a risky undertaking. Yet that was what we were forced to decide and we set off sadly, with only 30 men to protect the retreat, which fortunately was not troubled.

We had undergone a defeat, honorable to tell the truth, but disastrous in every respect. Indeed, the enemy was going to be emboldened to the point of troubling us, maybe seriously; then the population of the island, seeing that we were not invincible, would become a new force to be counted with; finally, our sailors would grow somewhat discouraged.

We cannot praise too highly the bravery of our sailors; they conducted themselves like old soldiers, and I could cite many who, though seriously injured, nonetheless continued to wield their weapons until the complete exhaustion of their strength. For sailors, unaccustomed to marching, to cover ten leagues in a day, fight, and then carry the injured for five hours without a single one falling behind, is a beautiful thing and shows great energy.

The sun had set when we arrived. It would be impossible to tell the impression our return produced; they had expected to find us all or nearly all healthy and happy with success; instead, a quarter of the men and half of the officers returned wounded, the others were full of sorrow. Now the evacuation will begin without delay

November 11th

At 2 am we started the embarkation in the deepest silence; the night was superb; not a cloud veiled the sky bright with myriads of stars, while the evening wind had completely fallen, leaving the water’s surface as polished as a mirror. A fire, no doubt started by chance, threw intermittent gleams on the beach and gave our movements a sinister air corresponding perfectly to our feelings. At half past five there was nothing left on the shore, the signal was given to set off and the four ships moved off just when the first gleam of daylight drew the abandoned village from the shadows.

The enemy had not yet entered the forts nearest to Kangoa but two leagues below the balls and bullets began their music. This time the Koreans did not have the advantage; disconcerted by the firing of our guns and our rifles, they shot quite badly and hit nobody; good luck also had something to do with it, because a lot of projectiles landed on board.

November 13th

During the night, five Korean Christians came aboard “La Guerrière” seeking refuge from the persecution to which they are subject. They announced that by order of King Toulipatou XXVII, people were massacring mercilessly all the Christians, men, women and children. This news should not surprise us: it was to be expected as the inevitable consequence of our intervention.

The outcome of our enterprise is a sad one; here it is: the death of 3 brave sailors, the mutilation of twenty others, the deaths of sixty Koreans, the total ruin of populations that were very peaceful until we came, a Korean St. Bartholomew’s Day, and finally the engagement of the French flag in a cause from which it did not emerge intact.

November 16th

The “Laplace” has just arrived and brought me three letters, what joy! The two missionaries that were believed lost were on board. After many vicissitudes they had managed to escape and gain the Chinese coast.

We will leave tomorrow or the day after tomorrow for Shanghai. So farewell, land of Korea: I do not regret you!

**The Buddhist painting Zuber found**

What follows is the description of the Buddhist painting from the article in *Le Tour du Monde*. It is very likely that the temple filled with military supplies in which it was found was that known at the time as Jinhae-sa, located in Gapgot-ri where the French were mainly camped. It was founded in 1691 and housed a group of *seung-gun*, martial monks, charged with protecting the nation. It seems to have continued to exist after the French expedition but there are indications that it burned down in about 1900, after which it ceased to exist until 1963, when the temple now known as Haeun-sa was built there. Stones from the foundations of the old temple litter the site. The painting seems to have been one depicting the “Yeongsan (Vulture Peak) Assembly.” The amount of detailed information that Zuber was able to give in 1873, compared to the very general (and negative) description in the 1866 text, suggests that he might have taken the painting back to France with him.

The village of Kak-Kodji occupies the base of a small cluster of hills, of which the side facing the river is covered with a very beautiful pine forest. At the very foot of the forest, in a most picturesque situation, rises a pagoda surrounded by warehouses that at the time of our arrival, contained powder and a large quantity of weapons. The pagoda was unremarkable externally and within no different from what we see in China: the same statue of Buddha in gilded wood, the same altar overloaded with ornaments of questionable taste, the same vases filled with huge artificial flowers, in a word, no clues that would suggest essential differences in worship. I found, however, in the temple an interesting object: it was a large painting on silk measuring about two meters fifty centimeters on each side. In the center, a seated Buddha was represented seated in oriental style on a lotus flower, with a nimbus round his head, of a very pure type, a large circle framed the body, which was tastefully draped in a red robe exposing a part of the chest and all the right arm. Around this main figure were grouped symbolically the busts of some forty characters, also adorned with a nimbus and probably famous in the annals of Buddhism. The heads, some of which wore a kind of miter-shaped headdress, were painted with meticulous care and did not lack character. Their expressions were very varied, from extreme ferocity to extreme softness. In sum, this painting was one of the finest I have seen in the Far East. It would have been interesting to have some certain information about its provenance, for the scarcity and the coarseness of paintings and sculptures in Korea leads one to believe that art here is far from having reached the level of relative perfection found in the neighboring countries.

**Zuber’s conclusion in 1872**

The final lines of the article published in *Le Tour du Monde* are as follows:

On November 22nd, the squadron of China and Japan finally left the coast of Korea and each ship returned to its particular station. The result we had hoped for the expedition had not been achieved, and a renewal of persecution against the Christians coincided with the departure of the squadron, and the Korean government broadcast a declaration rejecting and cursing any attempt to compromise with the European invasion. We could see that we had not been fortunate enough to make ourselves loved during our stay. Too often Europe shows itself for the first time to foreign nations with a character of violence and despotic pretensions. So long as a country has not been blessed with electric telegraphs, and the principles of its civilization differ from ours, we feel authorized to violate at its expense all the rules of human rights. It is especially painful to be brought to shed blood in the name of pure and lofty doctrines which, by their nature, should never require the use of that sad and questionable means of persuasion known as "force."

Come what may, in the present state of affairs Korea cannot long delay opening, voluntarily or under duress, to Western trade. Its position between two countries whose relations extend further every day and that seem to have finally abandoned the system of exclusion, make it almost a necessity. It is difficult for those of delicate feelings with a taste for art and variety, not to experience first and foremost, before any other reflection, a certain regret on seeing European influences of every kind penetrating everywhere. Surely civilization and science have everything to gain, but at the same time the character of the people disappears and their originality is lost. Are not Japanese nobles already dressing up in trousers and coats!

There is, no doubt, still a long way to go before uniformity reigns on earth, and unexplored lands are still numerous enough to fulfill all the desires of travelers. So let us leave aside these vain regrets of men of imagination and express a hope that France, renouncing too disinterested a role, will take a larger share of the European commercial movement which tends every day to spread further over the world.

Brother Anthony is the current President of the RAS Korea. He has lived in Korea since 1980.