A HISTORY OF KOREA

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For Charlotte and Leo
– the other half of your story

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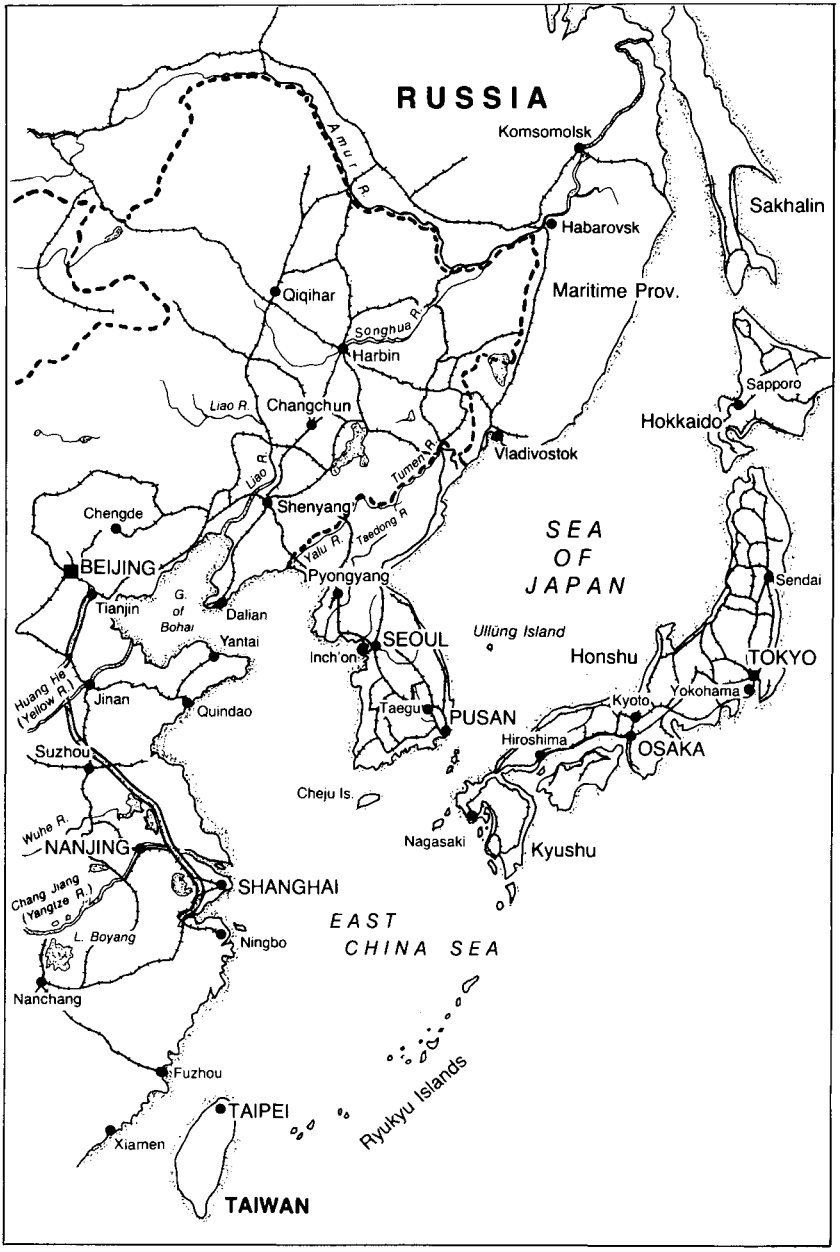
AUTHOR'S NOTE

THE romanization of Korean follows the McCune-Reischauer system except for a few people such as Kim Young Sam or places such as Seoul or Pyongyang that are already familiar in other forms. For Chinese, the Pinyin system is used and for Japanese the Hepburn.

For the sake of simplicity I have called Kings by titles that were not awarded until after their deaths, and where the names of places have changed I have used those that can be found on modern maps.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The Far East

INTRODUCTION

HILLS AND RIVERS

ALWAYS there are hills in the distance, backed by mountains, wreathed in mist, and always the sound of water. These are the things that have inspired the country's poets and artists and haunt the dreams of its exiles. An eastern backbone of sharp mountains has ribs that run westward and from these wooded hills flow the water that trickles through the rice fields. Climatic maps show it to be at the centre of a small area that is almost unique in its combination of cold dry winters and hot rainy summers. Most of its plants and animals are common to the temperate zone of the Northern Hemisphere but they are tested almost to destruction by seasonal alternations of Siberian cold and summer monsoons. In May the brown desert of winter begins to shimmer in a delicate veil of green which grows into a summer jungle and dies with glory in a long warm autumn of red and gold.

About 600 miles in length and 150–200 miles wide, it reaches out from the mainland like an oriental Italy, with China embracing it to the north and west and Japan only 100 miles away to the south and east. The northern border with Manchuria is marked by the deep valleys of two rivers that flow from the opposite sides of Paektusan, highest of the 'Long White Mountains', a snow-capped volcanic range. One, the Tumen, twists north and eastwards towards a short border with the Maritime Provinces of Russia while the Yalu goes south-west towards the Yellow Sea where its banks level off to provide a pathway to Beijing.

On the eastern coast the mountains are near and the sea is deep, while on the west alluvial plains slope down to shallow waters with countless islands, 3,000 of them large enough to be named on the map, while others come and go with the 20-foot tides of the Yellow Sea. At the south-east corner an arctic current meets warmer waters from the south to provide rich fishing grounds.

This unique combination of climate and terrain, mountainous, with the rivers full only in the summer and the death of vegetation in the winter, set its inhabitants certain problems for which they produced a series of elegant and interconnected solutions, a way of life that established in its essentials by the end of the Iron Age, would for its peasant farmers, change little over the centuries and in the country areas would survive until the period of rapid industralization that began in the 1960s.

It would be based on small villages built on the southern slopes of the hills, with terraced rice fields below and barley or vegetable patches on the higher ground. Timber-framed houses with earthen walls and thatched roofs provided insulation from both heat and cold. From as early as neolithic times there is evidence of the *ondol* system, the use of the kitchen fire to heat the living room by flues that pass between the floor stones. It would be found in every home, even the poorest, and made possible the continuation of a comfortable and civilized life through the period of bitter cold between January and March. It would serve to keep the rooms largely free of furniture other than mats or mattresses and also ensure that everyone took their shoes off before they came in. In the summer the doors could be thrown open and wooden verandahs provided a cool place to sit. In the nineteenth century the King would have one of these traditional houses built in the palace grounds so that he and his consort could retreat there from the comfortless rooms of the palace.

Village houses would huddle close, but each with its own walled backyard. In the background were the successively steeper wooded hills where dwelt tigers, bears, deer and a myriad birds and lesser creatures, notably foxes (which sometimes changed into wicked women) and magpies (a more honest variety than those of the West), which brought luck. Among a wealth of migrant birds the geese were the ones which carried messages to or from loved ones who were at war or in exile. The hills could be a base for bandits, or a refuge for escaping slaves or prisoners who might become professional hunters or slash-and-burn farmers. On the lower slopes there would be long potters' kilns or in a glade by a mountain stream a rambling monastery. Each mountain had its own spirit whose deep cry would occasionally be heard, benevolent but easily offended and in need of placatory offerings.

With little tillable land to spare and no winter pasture the only domestic animals would be poultry, pigs fed on household scraps, and oxen of a docile breed, rarely more than one per family, kept under cover in winter and fed with warm gruel. These animals, indispensable for ploughing the paddies, were never bred for meat,

nor was their milk thought suitable for human consumption. Dogs, as barely tolerated survivors from prehistoric times, were chiefly valued for *posint'ang*, a medicinal soup that preserved one's health through the hottest days of summer.

Burdens were mostly carried by women on their heads, and heavier ones, such as firewood, by men with a *chi'ge* or A-frame, a wooden frame with shoulder straps on which heavy loads could be carried with the body tilted forward to keep the centre of gravity over the feet. It suited the narrow banks between rice fields and the steep paths over the hills, where men were faster than horses. When the farmer took his ox to the paddy he carried the plough on his own back.

Their early culture was shared with the other Tungusic tribes of north-east Asia, as evidenced by the 'spirit poles' that still stand outside many villages and their still pervasive shamanistic beliefs, but from the second century BC onwards they were drawn ever deeper into the intricate web of a Chinese culture that, despite its periodic upheavals, had already amassed a dazzling array of political theories, philosophical insights, technical skills and stylized art. The peasant farmers who made up the majority of the population may not have been greatly affected by a culture that was for them locked up in mysterious ideograms but for their rulers it would provide the pattern for the growth of a sophisticated bureaucracy and prescribe the codes and fashions in every aspect of social life. It gave them a rich inheritance but it was a Faustian deal that would cost them half of their own souls. The adoption of Chinese as virtually the only form of written communication would curtail for another 2,000 years the growth of a vernacular literature. Not until the fifteenth century AD would an adequate alphabet be produced for their own language and even then the Confucianist elite, with all their intellectual capital invested in ideograms, would largely ignore it.

The language itself, thought to be of Ural-Altaic origins, does not appear to have suffered any significant change in its grammar or style from the influence of Chinese as the two are so utterly unlike, but there was a great influx of Chinese words, so much so that they take up more than half the space in a modern dictionary. In many cases the Korean equivalents have dropped out of use, but often, as with the Anglo-Saxon and Latin elements in English, the original language prevails in everyday speech while terms of Chinese origin provide synonyms and shades that are valued by bureaucrats and scholars. The way Koreans pronounce them is no longer generally intelligible to the Chinese.

Something of the gap between the two cultures can be sensed from the awkward juxtaposition of the nation's alternative foun-

dation myths. The earliest written versions are found in a history by the monk Iryŏn in the thirteenth century AD, quoting older sources. The first tells of Hwan Ung, a younger son of the Heavenly King, who came down on Paektusan, where he found in a cave a bear and a tiger which had been praying that they might be transformed into human beings. He gave them a stalk of wormwood and 20 cloves of garlic and told them to hibernate for 100 days. The tiger, being restless, wandered out but the bear remained and emerged as a woman who subsequently bore to Ung a son. Tan'gun, who became the founder of the nation. In the fiftieth year of the Chinese emperor Yao (2333 BC) he established his capital at Pyongyang and called his kingdom 'Chosŏn'.

Although this version has been fitted into a Chinese chronology and Hwan Ung demoted to a *younger* Son of Heaven, Paektusan was beyond the ken of ancient China, the tiger and the bear, who like the shaman can fast and dream, are Siberian animals and the difference in their habits of hibernation is accurately depicted.

The alternative founder is Qizi (pronounced 'Kija' in Korean), a Chinese nobleman of the thirteenth century BC who was exiled for refusing to recognize an Emperor who had usurped the throne. The Korean story, which has no support from Chinese sources, credits him with arriving there in 1122 BC to teach the people the fundamentals of civilized life. This legend cannot be traced back before the first century BC and the earliest Chinese reference to the cult of Qizi in Korea comes in the seventh century AD. A shrine for him in Pyongyang dates back only to the twelfth century, which was the period when Neo-Confucianism began to flourish and the scholarly elite were eager both to counter the influence of Buddhism and to persuade the Chinese to see them not as 'northern barbarians' but as the inheritors of an ancient civilization that had long followed the *Dao*, 'The Way'.

In Iryŏn's history the two accounts are reconciled by explaining that on the arrival of Kija, Tan'gun, having ruled for 1,500 years, agreed to abdicate, and returned to Paektusan to resume his former role as a mountain god. Here he would be left in peace for another twice times 1,500 years until in 1886 Sir Francis Younghusband, chiefly famed for driving the Dalai Lama out of Lhasa, became the first Westerner to plant his country's flag above the holy lake in its crater. In more recent times it has been a favourite spot for photo calls by the ruling dynasty of the People's Republic.

Before the Iron-Age settlements in the north came into regular contact with Chinese culture they reflected that of the Central Asian horsemen who founded or, more often, conquered them. As their

descendants moved southwards to impose themselves on the inhabitants of the valleys and eventually to be absorbed by them, horses would become increasingly irrelevant. The hills and rivers were virtually impassable for wheeled vehicles while the shortage of grassland and the lack of winter fodder made the animals an expensive luxury. Apart from the cavalry horses needed for defence the only common breed would be the tiny pack-horses developed by the mountain tribes of the north and known to the Chinese as *kwahama*, 'under the fruit horses', because you could ride one under the branches of a fruit tree. Quarrelsome, but shapely and surefooted, they were not strong enough to plough the wet fields or carry heavy loads and would play no part in village life, but merchants would use strings of them for long-distance haulage. They had to be provided with hot meals every night at the inns on the way and in later times the expense and the stubborn behaviour of both the ponies and their grooms would exasperate Victorian visitors. Indeed, the first professional explorer, Angus Hamilton, FRGS, ended up using his whip on his head groom, which started a punch-up in the courtyard of the inn and almost cost him his life. There were few roads wide enough for carts, and it would not be until the age of the railway and the car that the Koreans would find much use for the wheel.

Only the large island of Cheju, which lies in warmer waters to the south, and has thousands of acres of grass, is still the kingdom of the horse, and was developed as a breeding centre by the Mongols, some of whose terms and customs still survive. Its three ruling families of Yang, Ko and Pu claim descent from spirits that came from one of its great lava-tube caves. The Ko family's successes in the civil service examinations often won them official appointments in the capital. One of them served in the palace guards, and after an acquaintance had come back from an official visit to the island he asked him whether he had been to see the cave from which his ancestors came and was told, 'Yes, and I pissed in it'.

In the nineteenth-century a visitor would need several ponies to carry the strings of metal coins that served as currency. The weight of coins required to buy anything, even an egg, was a source of grievance, even of tragedy, for when the British Navy occupied a south-coast island in the 1880s and a Japanese entrepreneur brought some girls to an island nearby, a young sailor who fell out of the boat on his way over to them went straight to the bottom. In fact, money was another invention that they did not take to. For short periods – in the last days of Tang-dynasty China in the nineth century, the last days of the Yuan in the fourteenth, and the early days of the Qing in the eighteenth – there would be short-lived bursts of trade, travel and money, but, generally speaking, if coins

had any intrinsic value they were hoarded and if they did not they were not trusted, so either way it was hard to make them circulate – a general distaste for trade was part of the Confucian way of life. Up to the 1880s taxes and government salaries were paid in rice or rolls of cloth and even as late as the 1950s it was common for village people to take rice or eggs to market for the few manufactured goods that they needed.

Glass was another development in which they would show little interest. An attempt to set up a glass works in the 1890s suffered financial failure. Glass beads they had worn since the second century BC but for windows they preferred the privacy and insulation afforded by their translucent paper, which had been from early times an important export to China. It would not be until the seventeenth century that the Chinese discovered the trick of it, which was to use the inner bark of the mulberry tree. A waxed version provided an ideal fume-proof covering for their hot floors and was also used for conical throw-away umbrellas that could be placed on top of one's hat. A twelfth-century Chinese visitor noted their use of it for disposable tablecloths. They were slow to copy the Chinese idea of paper money, though by the seventh century they were using letters of credit, valued in ounces of silver, to finance students going to study in China.

There can be little doubt that woodblock printing began in China but, perhaps because of the quality of their paper, the world's oldest extant examples are Buddhist scriptures discovered in the base of a Korean pagoda that was completed in 751. They were probably the first to develop movable metal type, which they were using at the time of the thirteenth-century Mongol invasion. Paper was used not only for art, literature and insulation, but also as armour – the pen may be mightier than the sword, but 15–20 thicknesses of paper sown into a leather garment could resist the bullets from sixteenth-century muskets. It was also employed in kites, which had their military use as signals and later as wings for airborne troops, first used by General Ch'o Yŏng in an attack that drove the Mongols out of Cheju Island in 1374. The island is renowned for its high winds which served to lift them into the enemy's last cliff-top refuge.

Court dress began to conform to that of Tang China from the sixth century but the clothes used in everyday life would change little through the ages, beginning with the simple wide-sleeved hempen costumes common to that area of north-eastern Asia but modified in the thirteenth century when the marriage of Korean crown princes to the daughters of the Mongol dynasty in China led to their adopting the short jackets and voluminous skirts or baggy trousers of their allies, and these garments, are still known by their Mongol names.

The introduction of cotton at about the same time would change the texture but not the form, and in the summer months hemp would still be preferred for its coolness, while cotton padding provided winter warmth. The hair-style for men which required a boy's pigtail to be wound up into a topknot only when he married was common to much of the Far East but in later centuries would seem strange to visitors from China where it had been forbidden by their Manchu conquerors. This custom was deeply rooted in the Korean psyche and an attempt to enforce a Short Hair Edict in 1894 met such violent resistance that it would be quickly repealed and only an obsession with Westernization since 1945 has caused it to disappear. To match it came a distinctive hat, woven from bamboo or horsehair, in two pieces, an inner one to cover the topknot and an outer section with a large circular brim.

The peninsula is well endowed with harbours and islands and its waters with fish, but the élite, perhaps because of their Central Asian background and the influence of the Chinese, who preferred the calmer waters of their canals, never really took to the sea. Coastal defences were on a provincial basis with no separate naval ranks for officers – they were appointed indifferently to land or sea. There were one or two who appear to have been highly competent on both, notably Silla's seventh-century 'King of the Yellow Sea', Chang Po-go, the tenth-century 'Lord of the Hundred Ships', Wang Kŏn, who founded the Koryŏ dynasty, and General Yi Sun-sin, with his 'Turtle Boats', at the time of the sixteenth-century invasion by Japan.

Apart from fishermen and coastal defenders, the only people to have adventures at sea were those accidentally blown out there in the course of their duties. One famous example is Ch'oe Pu, who in the fifteenth century was caught in a storm while being ferried home from the island of Cheju, and after some days was washed up on the shores of China, where they found his insistence on the finer points of Confucian etiquette quite exasperating and were glad to send him back to Seoul. Two hundred years later, Yi Chi-hang, sailing up the east coast from Pusan, was blown as far as Sakhalin, and after adventures among the hairy Ainu came home via Tokyo, Osaka and Tsushima.

That Korean culture did not become entirely Sinified, despite the apparent victory of Kija and Confucius, may owe much to the counter-influence of Buddhism. Even though it was introduced largely through the medium of Chinese ideograms it first came to Korea from Central Asia as an essentially anti-Chinese ideology. In China itself Buddhism was taken up by warlords, Emperors' widows and

sometimes even by the Emperors themselves, but it never won over the Confucian intellectuals and consequently rarely attracted the deepest thinkers or the greatest poets and artists. In Korea, by contrast, from the fifth or sixth centuries AD until the close of the thirteenth, it was the state religion, and in the seventh and eighth centuries, when the dominant state of Silla was singularly united in fervent devotion, scholars were sent to explore its sources in India as well as to consult the leading monasteries of China, resulting in sophisticated works of Buddhist philosophy as well as magnificent murals and sculpture.

The area around what was then the capital of Silla, Kyŏngju, became thickly populated with Buddhist institutions. The most impressive of those that survive is Pulguksa, a complex of temples and pagodas built on stone terraces and containing two eighth-century buddhas, one representing Amita and the other Vairocana, heavenly powers of whom the Gotama was the fullest earthly emanation. Between this temple and the sea lie hills that look east towards Japan. In 1909, while climbing a narrow path across them to take letters to a village on the coast, a postman was caught by a thunderstorm and noticing what appeared to be a cave, crept inside. As his eyes became accustomed to the darkness he began to discern a great stone buddha looming over him, while on the walls around were other shadowy figures. Thus was rediscovered, after decades of neglect, the Sŏkkuram, an artificial grotto built in the eighth century to house what is perhaps the world's finest example of Buddhist art.

The central seated figure, ten feet high and carved from a single block of granite, has great simplicity and grace, while the figures in relief on the surrounding walls, chiefly 11 delicate bodhisattvas and ten muscular and earthy disciples, show the influence of their Indian and Central Asian sources with a combination of boldness and delicacy that is distinctively Korean.

The nation was unified from three kingdoms to one by Silla about 1,000 years ago, after which two more dynasties of roughly 500 years apiece, Koryŏ and Chosŏn, would carry it through to modern times. Despite incursions by the Mongols, the Manchus and the Japanese, the famines that a drought can bring to those who depend on rice, occasional epidemics and a too-rigid class system, with obsessive eccentricities of the kind that arise from geographical isolation, there grew up in these fertile valleys a complex scholarly culture. Their typical representatives can be seen as the farmer who as the sun goes down on a late summer evening sits cross-legged on his verandah listening to the chorus of the frogs and gazing with deep content on his terraces of golden rice and the scholar-official with a taste for

poetry, chess and wine, dressed in a long white coat and loose trousers tied at the ankles, a circular black hat perched on his topknot, and a fan to cool him as he sets off for the capital on a tiny horse led by a servant who chides him ironically in highly respectful language – an exemplar of elegance and virtue for almost 1,000 years, welcomed in China as the most literate and courteous of the Northern Barbarians, respected in Japan as one who could instruct them in the ways of civilization, but destined suddenly to wither under the cruel laughter of the nineteenth-century Westerner.

One of the more sympathetic of these superior visitants was the American astronomer Percy Lowell. He is chiefly famed for predicting the discovery of the planet Pluto, but as a young man he lived for a time in Japan and then went on to Korea, about which he wrote a book that begins by asking the reader to 'go with me to a land whose life for ages has been a mystery, a land which from time unknown has kept aloof . . . whose people might have been denizens of another planet'. Perhaps it was this experience that would make him so ready to believe that the 'canals' he observed on Mars were the marks of an 'intelligent but dying race'. The canals did not survive closer scrutiny while the Koreans would continue to escape it and seemed doomed to fulfil their predicted role as a dying race. Submerged under the colonial rule of the Japanese from the turn of the century until 1945, they were then divided and occupied by the rival powers of the Cold War and pulverized by their tanks and bombers in the 1950s, but they have a proverb that says that even if the sky falls in there will still be a crack to crawl through. They demonstrated it by surviving to produce in the 1970s an economic miracle, after which, in the 80s they hosted the Olympic Games with style and charm and in 1991 they avenged 20 years of *MASH* by sending a medical unit to succour the American casualties of the Gulf War: by the end of the century they can expect to be one of the leaders in a rapidly developing area.

In a longer perspective it is a return to the world stage rather than a debut, for by the end of the fourth century AD their northern kingdom of Koguryŏ controlled much of north-east Asia and went on in the seventh century to outwit the largest army ever assembled by the Chinese, while to the south, Paekche took Buddhism to Japan. In the next century the third kingdom, Silla, came to dominate the commerce of the Yellow Sea and as far away as the Middle East people learned of this legendary land of hills and rivers from which, it was said, no traveller ever wished to return.

In the thirteenth century they were, of all the peoples overrun by the Mongols, the only ones never to be completely subdued, though their sufferings were such that after they had been followed

by the Japanese and then the Manchus, they tended to see themselves as an endangered enclave with nothing but darkness beyond: the one thing needful was to keep the barbarians at bay. As yet the Western ones had not troubled them and they were hardly aware of their existence. It may be that a few Frankish mercenaries were there towards the end of the thirteenth century when Kubilai Khan set up his Field Headquarters for the Chastisement of Japan, and certainly Franciscans at the Mongol court took notice of the Korean diplomats because their dress reminded them of mass vestments and bishop's mitres.

Early in the sixteenth century the Portuguese established regular trade with Japan but it was not until 1577 that one of their ships, driven off course in a storm, caught a first glimpse of Korea. Fifteen years later, when a largely Catholic Japanese army was engaged in invading it, a Portuguese priest visited their bases on the south coast and among numerous Korean orphans taken back to be baptized in Japan a few were enrolled in the Jesuit college and some subsequently became martyrs. When the Italian merchant-explorer Francesco Carletti arrived in Nagasaki in 1597, on his way round the world, the persecution of the Catholics had just begun and he was taken outside the city to view the spectacle of 26 Christians, Western, Japanese and Korean, crucified upside down. He purchased five Korean boys, whom he set free in Goa, and one of them, baptized as Anthony, went back with him to Florence, the first of his countrymen known to have reached Europe.

Hideyoshi had once offered to make China a Catholic country if the Jesuits could provide him with enough Portuguese warships to defend the invading fleet, but the proposal was rejected, and after his successors had become more aware of what had happened to the native populations of the Philippines and Peru under Catholic rule they allowed only the Dutch to continue trading. On two occasions in the seventeenth century Dutch voyagers were washed ashore in Korea. The first provided the country with a technician who modernized their artillery, and the second involved a larger group, most of whom eventually escaped to give the West its first detailed account of the country. They included one Scotsman, Alexander Bosquet.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century ships from Europe and America were frequenting the Pacific but few of them touched Korea and as the names that appear on early maps seem to testify – Deception Bay, Insult Island or False River – not often with happy results. As the century wore on the Koreans were increasingly shocked by the treatment that the Chinese were receiving at the

hands of the Western pirates and resolutely dismissed requests for trade.

In the last two decades of the century, under a strong-willed but backward-looking regent, the Koreans tried on the one hand to shut out the West and on the other to imitate its technology, with larger cannons in their forts and amateurish efforts to build a steamship and even a bird-winged seaplane. They banned Catholicism and were surprisingly successful in beating off punitive expeditions from France and America, but they had no answer to the ruthless efficiency of the new Japan, which having defeated China in 1895 and Russia in 1904 found itself in control of the peninsula it had used as a convenient bridge for its mainland victories. Japan was now a Great Power, the only one in the Far East, and attractive as an ally to both Britain and America. They had no grounds for criticizing its annexation of Korea, and the appeals of its King, with whom both of them had recently signed treaties of friendship, went unheard.

By the 1930s, as they pursued their conquest of China, the Japanese came to see the peninsula as the natural site for the administrative capital of their future empire, and by enforcing their language on the Koreans, giving them Japanese names and preparing for them to be represented in the Japanese parliament, they hoped eventually to turn them into loyal citizens – what greater blessing could there be? By 1943 many leading Koreans who had suffered torture and imprisonment as patriots began reluctantly to cooperate with the Japanese in the hope that at least their children might find some happiness in 'Asian Co-prosperity', only to find themselves, two years later, again on the wrong side.

The story is a fascinating one, but how does one tell it in a mere 300 pages? Some attempts, understandably, have dealt briefly with earlier times and concentrated on the last 200 years, but mindful of Burckhardt's dictum that for the historian all generations are equidistant from eternity I have tried to give the earlier ages their due, though for the earliest, of course, the sources are scanty. It may be that in stone-age politics also, a week was a long time, but when only the stones remain whole millennia recede like distant galaxies, while with more recent events the choice of focus is, inevitably, highly subjective. My method has been to slow the pace a little for what seem to be decisive events – such as the Tang alliance with Silla that led to the country's unification, the Mongol incursions of the thirteenth century, the Japanese invasion at the end of the sixteenth, and the early exchanges with the Western powers – and every now and again to provide a closer glimpse of an influential figure, or recall one of

those trivial incidents that can convey the flavour of an age and give the abstractions of 'history' a local habitation and a name.

PART I

THE THREE KINGDOMS

CHAPTER ONE

BEGINNINGS

KOREANS like to boast of 'five thousand years of history', calculated from the birth of a legendary ancestor, born of a bear in 2333 BC. Much of their real prehistory still awaits the spades of the archaeologists. The earliest relics of *Homo erectus* to be found in the area are those of Lantian man who lived in the north Chinese province of Shaanxi about a million years ago. It was then warmer than today and there was forest and grassland that supported tigers, bears, elephants, deer and horses. The bones of 'Ryonggok man', thought to date from 400,000–500,000 years ago were found near Pyongyang in the 1980s. In the same area the bones of 'modern man' have been found in layers said to be from 40,000–50,000 years ago, along with a wide variety of animals. Fluctuations in climate and sea level must have affected these people and much of the area was inundated, but it escaped glaciation so that some continuity of the population is not impossible.

As the ice receded and warmer water rose to form the Yellow Sea, it shaped the coastline of the peninsula, isolating Japan and submerging the high ground that ran north-east from the south of China until at the other end it became the south-west of Korea, thus storing up for their potters the clay with which they would someday rival the Yue celadon of China. Although the sea did not reach its present level until about 5000 BC, there is evidence of both paleolithic and early neolithic groups from long before – hunters and gatherers moving through the wooded valleys of the larger rivers and, later, settling in pit houses near the seashore, where shellfish were plentiful. They have been linked with the Jomon people of Japan and like them they were making pots at least 10,000 years ago, which implies, if not agriculture, at least a settled life and cooked meals.

From about 6000 BC early villages with the incised pottery known as 'combware' are found and the rising sea-level may have provided

the stimulus to build boats, to venture out after larger fish, and to establish colonial settlements. By about 2000 BC villages with walled houses begin to appear on higher ground. They domesticated pigs, dogs and chickens and on fields below grew millet and other grains and eventually rice which, whether across the Yellow Sea or through Manchuria, presumably came from the south of China. They made, and broke, many pots, the changing styles of which may reflect local invention, migratory movements or primitive trade.

At this time new migrations across the now drying steppes were beginning – people who were accomplished horsemen and who probably came as aggressors demanding tribute from the sedentary settlements. They brought with them the skills and weapons of the militaristic semi-barbarian culture that spread from the fringes of the early civilizations in the Middle East. These cultures, identified with the painted pottery of what is known as the Lower Xiajiadian, appear first in Manchuria and seem to have spread south to Shang dynasty China. Pottery with similar patterns is found in North Korea, as are also the bronze daggers and mirrors of the Upper Xiajiadian culture of about 1500 BC.

This is the period in which the early Chinese states of Xia, Shang and Zhou were established and Chinese settlers would gradually extend their cultivation into Manchuria, but their earliest influence seems to have been across the Yellow Sea to the south-western side of the peninsula. The oldest bronze-age items are found in the north, but the quantity of tools, pottery and monuments from sites in the south suggests that for most of the last millennium BC the river valleys of these warmer areas were more prosperous and thickly populated. We find new styles of pottery and evidence of weaving and specialized craftsmen in wood and stone. Similar styles found in the Shandong Peninsula and on the south island of Japan indicate trade, and perhaps migrations, by sea, and there is anthropological and linguistic evidence to suggest, at some stage, a Polynesian influx. These southern tribes, who came to be known generically as 'the Han' (not in any way connected with the Chinese dynasty of that name) presumably provided the basic genetic pool of the Korean people, reflected in their retention through the ages of their self-identity as 'the People of the Han'.

Protected by natural barriers, they were not compelled to build walls, though villages had palisades as a guard against wild animals, forest maurauders or pirates, and these would still be used as outer defences even after they had grown to towns, which in the north at least, would need ever bulkier stamped-earth walls to resist the iron weapons of horsemen with chariots and compound bows. Stone was

still used for the majority of implements, but arrowheads and spears were of bronze, the weapons of the intruders.

From about 2000 BC, all over the settled valleys of the peninsula, the graves of the élite begin to be marked by dolmens with heavy capstones, often brought from distant sites, at great expense in labour. It appears to have been an indigenous development, presumably a kind of territorial marker or hieratic status symbol, which spread into the fringes of Manchuria, but can hardly have any connection, other than a similarity of social psychology, with the rather similar outbreaks that occurred in ancient Britain and other distant parts of Europe or Asia. In the peninsula something like 100,000 of them were erected over a period of about 1,500 years, associated with stone coffins or burial chambers and varied grave goods, few of which have survived, and the bones of sacrificial victims.

From about 600 BC the practice of erecting dolmens began to decline in the north, to be replaced by carefully constructed stone chambers with more elaborate grave goods, and covered by mounds or stone pyramids, probably indicating a new wave of bronze-age conquerors from Siberia, but perhaps only a new generation of enterprising funeral directors. From this period come vigorous Scytho-Siberian animal figures and belt clasps featuring tigers, deer and horses and over the next few hundred years these would be reshaped into forms that combine simplicity and realism in a distinctively Korean style.

This continuing influx of bronze-age invaders and immigrants and the resulting battles and alliances between tribal rulers in the north resulted in five distinctive areas mentioned in Chinese records of the fourth century BC: Puyŏ, Yemaek, Imdun, Chinbŏn and Chosŏn. The archaeological evidence suggests a ruling caste with walled settlements sometimes of a considerable extent, and no doubt, as in early Europe, the question of whether the walls were used to shelter those who tilled the land outside or as a protection against them will have varied from place to place and from one age to another.

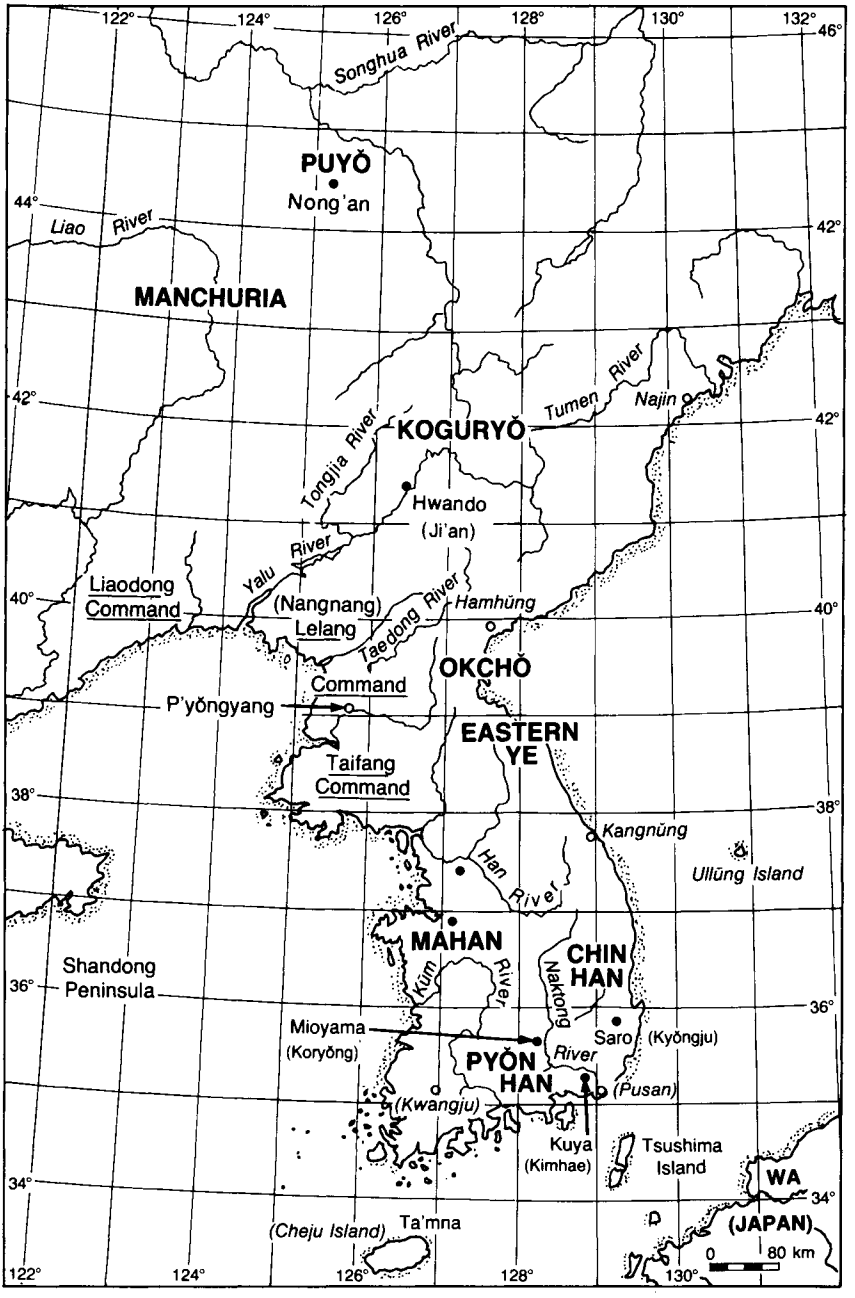
Of these groups the only one to have much historical substance is Chosŏn, which by the end of the third century BC seems to have had a rudimentary bureaucracy controlling, or at least exacting tribute from, most of the area from the mouth of the Yalu across to the east coast. It is referred to by China as a *guo* or 'dynasty', ruled by a *wang*, the title conferred on Kings who paid tribute to the Emperor. Kibu, the first to receive the title, claimed supernatural status as a descendant of the legendary Kija referred to above. Even after Chosŏn itself had fallen, its name would still be used, not only by the Chinese, but by the ruling classes over much of the peninsula

itself, to describe their origins. The Chinese represented it by two ideograms, *chao-xian*, literally, 'morning fresh', presumably chosen to express both the sound of an indigenous name and its geographical relation to China's position as the centre of the earth in the same way that Japan would be given the title of *nippon* or 'sun source'. Whatever their origins, the Japanese as the people of the 'Rising Sun' and Korea as the 'Land of Morning Calm' are phrases too firmly fixed in the minds of journalists and travel agents ever to be in danger of decline.

As the dominant power in the area, Chosŏn was able to control the peninsula's trade with the adjacent Chinese state of Yan, one of the warring states that followed the break-up of the Zhou empire and had its heartland north of the Yellow River where Beijing now stands. The extent of this trade is testified by the Zhou dynasty knife-money, weapons and implements found at numerous sites in the north of the peninsula. Although Chosŏn eventually established its capital on the Taedong River close to what is now Pyongyang it appears to have had most of its territory in Manchuria, and it was on its western marches along the Liao river that it came into contact with the Yan who wrote of them as 'arrogant and cruel'. Soon after this Yan temporarily succumbed to the Qin who were gobbling up states 'like silk worms eating mulberry leaves', while at the same time the next wave of mounted bowmen from the steppe, the Turkic confederation of the Xiongnu, were also driving refugees into Chosŏn.

With the collapse of the Qin in 207 BC Yan was re-established as a self-governing fief of their successors, the Han, but the whole region was increasingly threatened from the north and the west by the Xiongnu who were stretching their destructive power across the steppe from Europe to Manchuria, sending more refugees into the northern parts of the peninsula and forcing the rulers of Yan to become their allies.

Retaliation by the Han then brought in refugees from Yan, the most notable of whom was a war lord, Weiman ('Wiman' in Korean), who somewhere about 200 BC led his followers into the territory held by Chosŏn. According to Chinese sources, he adopted the local 'topknot' hairstyle and was appointed by King Kibu's successor, Kijun, as commander of their border defences. His success subsequently encouraged him to march on the capital and usurp the throne, and Kijun is said to have fled with his court to settle on the west coast south of the River Han. Over the next century Wiman's successors expanded to the north and to the east and as far south as the River Han, building fortified settlements to consolidate their territory, so that his grandson, King Ugo, was able to control



Chinese Territories and the Tribes
(Second Century AD)

the peninsula's overland trade with Han China, which continually increased as its inhabitants acquired a taste for the products of Chinese civilization.

This was a period when the Han, under their aggressive ruler Wudi, having developed their own light cavalry and driven the main body of the Xiongnu back across the Gobi Desert, were strengthening their borders on all sides. Chosŏn came under suspicion as their allies and a border incident in which a Chinese envoy was killed called forth a punitive invasion in 109 BC. A seaborne force said to have numbered 50,000 was launched across the Yellow Sea from Shandong, assisted by a local army from Yan. The Koreans held out for a year or more, and even after Ugo had been assassinated by a pro-Chinese faction in his own fortified capital, his loyalist minister, Sŏnggi, fought on to the death.

The Chinese then divided King Ugo's territory into three military districts linked to those that they had already set up in Manchuria, of which the chief was Lelang ('Nangnang' in Korean), centred on the south bank of the Taedong River not far from where Pyongyang now stands on the other side. The river is navigable up to this point and under the protection of their army the Chinese rapidly developed it as a centre of trade. By the beginning of the first century AD it had become an imposing city with brick-paved streets for its chariots and wagons, and a population that had grown to 350,000. Silk, brocade, lacquerware and implements and weapons of iron from China were exchanged for timber, salt, iron ore and, on a lesser scale, horses, furs and slaves. Its influence spread to the Yayoi people of southern Japan, whose first recorded envoys arrived in AD 57. Local ships brought iron ore, timber and other commodities from ports all round the coast, and the colony's wealth and sophistication came to be envied, condemned or imitated throughout the peninsula.

The officials lived luxuriously, and murals on the walls of their tombs and personal ornaments and lacquerware recovered from them provide some of the best surviving examples of Han dynasty art. They educated enough of the local people to fill their need for scribes, many of whom would probably go on to become the secretaries of local rulers, and they imposed a more complex legal system – there were now more than 60 'commandments' where before there seem to have been four, forbidding murder, theft, adultery and female jealousy of additional wives.

The Chinese saw themselves as missionaries of civilization, bestowing its benefits in return for the labour or materials provided by the local population, and in the areas beyond their direct control they won the support of the native leaders by awarding trade concessions and honorary titles and regalia. To this end, all business was

done within the formality of offering tribute to the Han Emperor, and vestments were kept at the border posts for visiting tribal leaders to put on before they entered Chinese territory. It was under the Han that in China Confucianism flourished, paper was developed, and the first great historians arose. Its refining influences would blend with the more militaristic Scythian traditions of the area to produce a distinctive local culture. The first historical records date from this period and Chinese ideograms are still referred to as 'Han writing', there being no evidence of an earlier indigenous script.

The natives did not always respond in the way one would have hoped and the Chinese record occasional raiding parties from the south, sometimes on a scale that threatened their very existence. The varied effects of Chinese culture and iron-age invaders and refugees on the social organization of the agricultural communities south of the River Han are difficult to assess and the interpretation of the archaeological evidence is still in dispute. They are thought to have formed three large tribal federations, traditionally known as Mahan in the west, Chinhan in the east and Pyŏnhan to the south.

In the northern areas conflict with China provides more in the way of historical records, and from this point of view the most prominent of the tribes in Manchuria were the Puyŏ. They were former nomads who had settled in the arable land on either side of the Songhua River without abandoning their horses or their weapons, and they were valued by the Chinese as allies against further incursions from the steppe.

The people of Koguryŏ who occupied the mountains to the south of them as far as the Yalu were more warlike, and often in conflict with them and their Chinese allies. Koguryŏ's foundation myths refer to ancestors from Puyŏ and describe their state as founded in 37 BC by Chumong, born of an egg sent down from Heaven. As Chumong would also be worshipped as ancestral spirit by the rulers of Paekche, a state yet to be founded on the banks of the Han by migrants from Puyŏ, the Chumong myth presumably originated there. Other dynasties in the area also acquired a family tree that went back a few generations to a supernatural ancestor from an egg, all of them dating from this period. It may be connected with the fact that this was about the time when they first acquired scribes and began to keep records in Chinese, though none of them survives other than in the versions edited by Kim Pu-sik for his twelfth-century *History of the Three Kingdoms*, or less reliably in Iryŏn's *Tales*.

The Koguryŏ myths also refer to war with the Malgal tribes who were the earlier Tungusic occupants of the area and would, after