



Old Stories of Korea

Foreign Languages Publishing House
DPR Korea
2026

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Preface

The Korean people have created a time-honoured history and brilliant culture since olden times.

The nation's 5 000-year history witnessed the wisdom and talent of their forefathers who brought about the early efflorescence of oriental civilization through their industrious and earnest creative labour, continuing from decade to decade, from century to century.

The book compiles part of the anecdotes, which are familiar to the Korean people.

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Tamjing's Masterpiece

Tamjing was not only a renowned painter of Koguryo (the first feudal state in Korea, which existed between 277 BC and AD 668) but also a technician who introduced to Japan how to make the black ink and paper.

At an invitation, he went to Japan, and taught the Japanese how to paint and make and use the colours.

One day the Japanese monks who built the Horyuji Temple called on him and requested him to paint a mural in the Golden Pavilion of the temple.

Tamjing gave them consent and immediately went to the temple, and made preparations. Months went by, but he still hesitated to start painting; when his preparation for the painting was at its height, he heard the news that Japan's millions-strong army invaded Koguryo.

Can Koguryo defeat such a huge army? If it fails, how miserable my compatriots will become, trampled underfoot by the foreign aggressors?

This thought haunted him, making it impossible for him to make colours no matter how hard he might try, and sapping energy from his fingertips though he endeavoured to paint.

He spent several months in solitary agony, and the number of sceptics increased among the temple monks who were unaware of what was inside his mind.

“Is that man really a renowned painter of Koguryo?”

“Is he not a good-for-nothing who wanders about, pretending to be a painter?”

“He must be a fake painter as he cannot still start painting.”

Such slanders reaching his ears were still insufficient to make him take up his brush.

His concern was that although he started against his will in the face of the monks' criticism, he could not perfect the painting, and even if the painting was completed, no one would treasure it when it was known to be painted by a member of the ruined nation.

One day the chief monk of the temple came to see him.

“Good news. I was told that the Japanese troops were all beheaded by the sword of General Ulji Mun Dok.”

“Is that true?”

Tamjing, who was lying in despair, rose to his feet.

He was overjoyed, and the following day he washed his body with clean water and soon began to paint with pigments and brush in his hands.

As the jubilation over Koguryo repulsing the invasion of such a huge army swirled in his heart and a passion surged in his whole body, his hand gripping the brush danced like a crane, producing a singular, impeccable mural in the pavilion.

The news of the completion of the mural spread, attracting a number of monks and other Japanese people.

“This mural is the rarest in the world. Tamjing's brushwork is singular, indeed.”

“The successful mural painting is due not to my singular finesse, but

to the soul of Koguryo embedded in it. You should be aware that this mural could be completed thanks to the soul of the Koguryo people who are so resourceful and intelligent, valiant and strong-willed as not to be defeated by any formidable enemy.”

The mural at the temple had since been treasured as a source of pride for Japan, until it was burnt down and ended up just in the memory of later generations.

With a Single Official

One autumn day the king of Koguryo called his subjects to the royal court.

“What do you think about the ceaseless uneasiness in the country caused by the frequent invasion of our border area?”

He urged them to advance measures to prevent the invasion.

The invaders were from a tribe neighbouring Koguryo on the northwest. They made frequent inroads into Koguryo, killing the local inhabitants and pillaging their wealth. Just three years before, in 293, they trespassed on the border area. The king led his army to the Walled Town of Sin to strike them. However, he had to withdraw to Kongnim in the face of the fierce counterattack by the enemy.

At the time Konoja, the lord of the Walled Town of Sin, and some 500 cavalymen under his command greeted the king and mounted a counterattack, saving him from danger and frustrating the invasion.

A few days earlier the tribe reinvaded and perpetrated such atrocity

as digging the tomb of the late King Sochon. However, some enemy soldiers digging the tomb died for unknown reasons, and the sound of a music from the open tomb, scared off the rest of them; they fled thinking that there was a God in it, and consequently there was no more damage to the tomb.

The king said, “If there’s any plan to prevent the invasion, please speak it out.”

A subject proposed stationing of more troops in the border area. Another subject opposed the idea, saying that drafting more soldiers and concentrating them on the border area might weaken the defence of the capital city and other parts of the country, plunging the country into a greater danger. Others agreed with the latter, saying that it was irrational to draft more soldiers for permanent stationing as the people were suffering owing to poor farming for several consecutive years and the national treasury was insufficient.

“Then is there no way to stop the invasion?”

Prime Minister Changjori took a step forward.

“I have got an idea.”

“What’s that?”

“Now that it is impossible to send reinforcements to the border area and the situation of the country disallows the conscription of more soldiers, I think the only way is to select and appoint one trustworthy official for the defence of the border area.”

“Only one?”

All others looked at him in surprise.

The king also asked him with a look of incomprehension:

“How can the country be saved from danger by appointing one

official?”

“To be frank, roofing a house requires a proper girder before rafters. No victory can be assured without a commanding general no matter how many soldiers may be recruited for reinforcement. I think it would be a good idea to select and appoint a man with wisdom and courage to defend the border.”

“You’re right! Whom do you recommend?”

The prime minister answered without hesitation.

“I think Konoja, the lord of the Walled Town of Sin, is suitable.”

“You mean the man who helped me in Kongnim at the time of the invasion a few years ago?”

The king immediately remembered Konoja.

“Yes, if he is entrusted with the defence of the border area and looked after well, he will give full rein to his wisdom and courage and your concern will be eased.”

A consensus was reached, and the king promoted Konoja to the magistrate of the Walled Town of Sin and gave him the task of preventing any further invasion.

Konoja, who had been full of dignity and won fame, tactfully dealt with political affairs and strengthened the defence of the border area, which helped him gain popularity among the people and made the aggressive tribe too dreadful to invade Koguryo again.

When the concern for the security of the country was relieved by appointing the fine man, a rumour circulated among aristocrats and people that Prime Minister Changjori was a masterly minister, and his name became more famous.

After Feigning Inferiority

Pubunno was a famous general of Koguryo.

One summer day the king got together with the generals including Pubunno and said anxiously.

“The invading tribe, with belief in its impregnable topography, does not want rapprochement with us. When the situation is favourable, they come out for pillage and when unfavourable, they stay still in defence. It makes big trouble for our country. How can you put an end to it?”

The other generals gazed at one another with no answer.

Pubunno took a step forward.

“In my opinion, we’d better apply the tactics of feigning our inferiority to the tribe.”

General Puwiyom objected to it. He was also a veteran general who performed feats in striking and annexing North Okjo at the time of King Tongmyong.

“I think it’s a shame. So far our neighbouring states surrendered to us as they were overwhelmed by the strong might of our Koguryo, and its prestige must not be tarnished.”

Still Pubunno stuck to his tactics.

“Now that the tribe offers formidable resistance with belief in its impregnability, our sole dependence on strength is not advisable for defending the prestige of our country.”

With the two opinions conflicting, the king asked Pubunno:

“You appear to have a premeditated plan. Now explain to me about your tactics.”

Pubunno came closer to the king.

“If the troops and equipment in our border areas look poor and at the same time our spy is sent to the enemy country to spread a rumour that we are bluffing and there’s nothing to fear, they will look down on us and slacken defence. A wait is needed until then, and an elite unit approaches stealthily close to the walls and lies in ambush. And a small unit of our soldiers are set in action to provoke them; the enemy will be sure to respond. When they pretend to withdraw after some fights, the enemy will not lose the chance to open the wall gate and chase them. Our soldiers in ambush shall enter the wall through the open gate and the walled town will be captured easily. The ensuing pincer movement will reduce the enemy literally to a mouse in a trap.”

The king agreed to his plan right away and announced that its implementation was entrusted to Pubunno.

From that day Pubunno made arrangements for applying his tactics. Above all, he moved most of the troops and equipment in the border areas to the depth of the country to make them appear almost defenceless, and infiltrated a clever subordinate disguised as a salt dealer into the enemy area.

It did not take long for the tribe to get relaxed and seek the chance for invasion into Koguryo after confirming the rumour spread by the “salt dealer” and the defencelessness of the border areas of Koguryo.

Pubunno then approached stealthily with a prepared unit close to the wall of the enemy and hid in ambush, and the following morning

the king set a small unit in action to provoke fight with the tribe and feigned withdrawal in the face of their counterattack.

After the king lured the enemy away, Pubunno broke through the open gate to seize the fortress in a twinkling.

Aware of such situation, the tribe attempted to turn back to regain their fortress but in vain; both the Koguryo soldiers within the fortress and the king’s soldiers without moved to a pincer attack.

The tribe had no alternative but to surrender and begged for their annexation to Koguryo.

A grand banquet was held in celebration of this triumph at the royal palace.

Pubunno approached General Puwiyom and said to him calmly:

“Do you still say no to the tactics of feigning inferiority to the enemy?”

“No.”

“As yet?”

“I’ll never make myself look weak before the enemy.”

“What do you mean?”

“Then, I would be defeated like the tribe.”

Hearing their conversation, the generals at the table burst into laughter.

“That’s right. Lessons grow more serious when one is defeated than when he wins.”

Paekkyol and *Pangatharyong*

Paekkyol was a famous musician.

He was too poor to have three meals a day, and his only clothes seemed to be made with a hundred strips of cloth, which gave him the name “Paekkyol” (a hundred strips).

However, the poverty scarcely made him depressed with despair, and he enjoyed composing and playing pieces of music with *komungo* (one of Korea’s traditional musical instruments). He depicted people’s feelings with the instrument.

His music made people happy and sad, angry and even dissatisfied.

It was on the eve of New Year’s Day. Ceaseless sounds of rice pounding rang out from the houses of his neighbours.

His wife, who could no longer bear the sounds, complained to him:

“Others are pounding rice for the holiday, and we are sitting in the room empty-handed. What is there for the holiday?”

He gave a smile, and said to her calmly:

“My darling, you are so envious of the sounds of rice pounding at the others’ homes, and I’ll comfort you by composing a miller’s song for you.”

He held up *komungo* and played it merrily, producing the sounds of pounding rice, rub-a-dub, rub-a-dub, which filled his house.

The neighbours pounded rice to the tune, and learned the song.

This is *Pangatharyong* (Milling Ballad), for which Paekkyol is still widely known.

Solchong’s “Remonstrance for the Flower King”

One summer day, when a cool breeze was blowing in the garden of the royal palace, the king, who was leisurely fanning himself, summoned Solchong.

“The rain has stopped and the wind is blowing gently today, but I don’t like drinking or listening to music. If there’s any unusual rumour you have heard nowadays, tell it to comfort me.”

Solchong answered after a thought.

“Yes, there’s a story I have heard.”

“What’s it?”

“It’s a tale of a flower king.”

“A flower king? Do you say there’s a king among the flowers? It sounds interesting. Go on.”

The king lent his ears to him with his eyes closed.

In a flowers’ land spring came, bringing all kinds of flowers into bloom. Among them, the flower king blossomed in the most charming way.

It was often visited by flowers from nearby and distant places; they all tried to curry favour with the king.

One day an amorously-attired rose appeared and said to the king, “I am the rose enjoying a fresh wind, washing the body in spring rain and looking at the face reflected in the sea as clear as white snow. Upon hearing about the virtues of Your Highness, I want to stay beside you.

Please do me a favour.”

It was followed by a windflower. The flower was staggering with the help of a stick.

“I am the windflower living at the foot of that high mountain. An old saying goes that it is a herb that invigorates you however many sorts of delicacies there may be, and the thick hemp cloth is not thrown away whatever good cloth there may be. Though awful in appearance, I can be of help for you, I thought.”

The rose and the windflower prostrated themselves before the king, waiting for the king to choose one of them.

One of the subjects took a step forward.

“Which one will you choose, Your Highness?”

Looking alternately at the pretty rose and the stooping windflower, the king said, “The windflower is right, and the rose is too beautiful to discard. What should I do?”

The windflower took a step forward.

“In general, it is said that it is rare to see a king who despises an astute one and doesn’t give a wide berth to a righteous and upright person. I have come to you at the news that our king is sagacious and has a sense of moral obligation, but the rumour was false.”

With a sigh, the windflower turned back to return home.

The flower king, who came to his senses, though belatedly, rose to his feet and apologized, saying “I was wrong. I’m sorry.”

The king decided to accept the windflower.

Solchong’s story ended, but the king appeared to be dozing off. A while later he opened his eyes to look at Solchong; a flush spread over his face.

“Indeed, your story has a profound meaning. It shall be properly recorded to serve as a remonstrance for the coming kings.”

This story helped Solchong to give his long-cherished advice to the king at last.

Afterwards, it was edited into a fine fable under the title of Hwawanggye (Remonstrance for the Flower King).

Solgo and His Painting

In his childhood Solgo was fond of painting. He often skipped meals because of poverty but never spent a day without painting.

At the time he reached the level of brushwork unexcelled by his contemporaries.

One day he received a request for painting a picture on the wall of the Hwangryong Temple built around AD 560.

His unusual art of painting produced an old pine tree which appeared to have lived for hundreds of years weathering storms—the stock covered with crackled barks and the green leaves glittering in fresh drops of dew. It just looked like a living tree.

The tree looked so lifelike that crows, eagles and sparrows tried to perch on it, only to fall after crashing into the wall.

The mural painting was handed down as a treasure of the country.

With the passage of time, the snow, rain and wind took their toll on the painting, and it began to fade away.

The monks of the Hwangryong Temple managed to get the original colours, and repainted it.

However, birds never flew to it later.

Solgo's skill of brushwork could not be imitated.

Uruk's Argument

Uruk invented and perfected the *kayagum* (one of Korea's traditional musical instruments), and created a number of musical pieces that can be played with the instrument.

The king ordered Uruk to teach his instrumentalists how to play the *kayagum*.

Uruk obeyed this order, choosing fine pieces of music for their practising and preparing a performance for the king.

Listening to the music with officials, the king grew rejoiced, moved by the rhythm of the instrument.

One day, a wicked official made an accusation against Uruk before the king.

"I think there is no need to encourage the music produced by the *kayagum* since the music has brought ruin to Kaya."

Infuriated at the remark, Uruk took a step before the king.

"The ancient people created music to convey and express joy and sorrow which could not be expressed by speech and behaviour. Why should it be a cause of the crumble of a country? If the music is a cause of the decline and collapse of a country, there should be no music for a thriving country but only for a country on decline. In my opinion, the rise and fall of a country depend not on music but on how to use it. I think a thriving country properly uses music whereas a collapsing

country does not."

The official remained tongue-tied with a flush, and the king affirmed his statement.

"You are right. The blame for the collapse of Kaya lies on its king who was corrupt, unprincipled and crude in administering the politics. It has nothing to do with music. How can one say that the rise and fall of a country depend on music?"

The king saw to it that Uruk's *kayagum* was widely used.

A Poet Born of Pyongyang

Jong Ji Sang (?-1135), hailing from Pyongyang, was outstandingly talented in composing poem during his childhood.

One day when he was three years old, he happened to go to the Taedong on the back of his mother, who was going to the river for washing clothes. Looking at the gulls hovering over the river, he composed a poem.

White gulls hover

They sing, their heads turned towards the sky

The white feathers float on the water

The red feet tread on the clear water

As an adult, he became famous, and Kim Pu Sik, who had been claiming that he was a literary giant, got jealous of him. The jealousy grew further after they had been to a temple. At that time Jong Ji

Sang wrote a poem.

*After prayers are offered in a temple
The sky looks as clear as glass*

Admiring the poem, Kim Pu Sik asked him to give it to him.

Jong Ji Sang only shook his head.

Now Kim Pu Sik entertained a thought of having Jong Ji Sang murdered.

Later an anti-government revolt took place in Pyongyang in 1135. Kim Pu Sik, capitalizing on this opportunity, reported to the authorities that Jong had kept relations with the masterminds of the revolt, and Jong was executed.

Later Kim Pu Sik composed a poem, which he thought was a masterpiece.

*One thousand willow branches are green
Ten thousand peach blossoms are red*

Elated, he recited the poem once again that night before falling asleep.

In a dream Jong appeared and struck him by the cheek, shouting, “Have you counted them? Are you sure they were one thousand branches and ten thousand blossoms? Is that a poem?” Jong then polished the poem.

Every willow branch is green

Every peach blossom is red

Reading the poem, Kim Pu Sik blushed.

It is said that later Kim Pu Sik lived in fear and discomfort for having a poet, more talented than himself, executed, and died in a toilet before his time.

Never Mind the Poverty

Ham Yu Il, a man of Koryo (a feudal state in Korea, which existed between 918 and 1392), rendered distinguished services as a deputy official while taking part in several rounds of fight against foreign aggressors.

His successive promotion as a military officer finally brought him to the post of defending the king’s palace.

One day the king, while on a tour out of the palace to inspect the martial arts training, held an archery contest of officers for a big prize.

This contest ended up with Ham taking the first place, and he was awarded the prize—nuggets of gold and rolls of silk.

His son and daughter, who heard the news on the street, rushed home.

“Mother, there’s a happy news!”

“A happy news? What’s that?”

“Father took the first place in the martial arts contest held in the presence of the king, and won gold and silk.”

“Is that true?”

“Now the whole street is astir with the story.”

“Weren’t you confused?”

“Nay. They were talking about our father. When they knew who we were, they were envious of us.”

“Is that so?”

“And can you guess what they said? They said, ‘Your father has been honest and diligent and knows nothing but military affairs. The God must have been so moved as to bless him with such honour.’”

“Moreover, a grandmother said, ‘Oh, now there’ll be nothing for you to envy in the world. So much gold and silk would be enough for several generations of you to spend.’”

As her son and daughter said in turn, Ham’s wife came to believe the news.

“At last fortune has favoured our family,” said the mother, shedding tears of emotion.

“You cry again, mum?” Her daughter asked, falling into her arms.

“Now I am crying out of happiness.”

“Fie! You’re a crybaby. Last time you cried, worrying there was no wealth for the brother’s marriage though he reached almost the marriage age, and today you are crying, hearing that there are gold and rolls of silk for us.”

“Yes, it seems I have become a crybaby.”

“Don’t cry anymore. Now there’s a wealth for the brother’s marriage.”

“All right. The wealth for marriage is not only for your brother but also for you.”

“For me, too? ... Thanks, mum.”

Her brother, seeing his sister frolicking on the mother’s lap, laughed absurdly.

“Do you think that the prize is for our marriages?”

He sounded like a grown-up.

“Mum, the prize must be used above all for making clothes for dad and you. I have felt ashamed of the shabby clothes worn by my father all the time. He is a court official, but what’s the reason for him not to dress himself as gaily as others?”

“Yes, you are right.”

“Moreover, let’s rebuild our house larger, keep several horses and buy land as others do.”

“I agree with you.”

“To tell you the truth, a fortune must be made while father is a court official. If we continue to live like this and if father is ill or kicked out of his post, we may be reduced to paupers.”

“When have you learned the worldly affairs?”

“Why not? The others do so.”

“All right. Let’s discuss with dad after he comes back.”

“There is no use for discussion. You’d better persuade him well, mum.”

“OK. Well, the sun is already setting. What am I doing now? Father will be back soon.”

“Mum, prepare many tasty dishes, please. Prepare chicken for dinner. I will clean the yard in the meantime.”

“Good idea. Let us greet father with delight.”

The son swept the yard, the daughter cleaned the rooms, and the wife cooked special dishes in the kitchen.

Ham entered the gate of the house at the twilight.

“There comes father.”

The son and daughter made a deep bow to him.

“Congratulations on your honour!”

“You seem to have heard the news.”

Ham embraced them in his arms.

“This is a great happy event for our family,” said his wife, coming out to the courtyard.

“This is a windfall for me.”

After they came into the room, his son asked him first:

“Your award is great, isn’t it, dad?”

“Yes. I have never won such a great prize. All the people envied and admired me.”

“When are you going to bring them home?”

“They are not for my family.”

“What do you mean, dad?” asked his daughter.

“They were given to me by the king.”

“Then why can’t you bring them home?”

“Oh, dear! They don’t belong to me though they are for me. I’ve decided to sell the gold to replace the outdated kitchen utensils in the army and sell the silk to provide the soldiers with military uniforms.”

Ham’s family members were struck dumb.

Noticing the sudden change in their mood, he asked:

“What’s the matter with you? You look unsatisfied with my decision.”

His wife replied in tears.

“It’s too much. Your children are anxious to make money for

household management in your lifetime, but you are not better than them in the family affairs.”

“Ha ha ha! ... I see. Look here, as you know I was born into a poor family and have lived so far without others’ help. As long as I can lead a diligent and honest life cherishing the love for my country and people in mind, the poverty doesn’t matter. What I am more worried about is not that there’s no wealth to be left for my children but that my idea may not be instilled in them.”

No one replied.

They must have spent that night in silence if his friends, neighbours and soldiers had not come to his house to congratulate him.

An Upright Couple

Yu Ung Gyu was the magistrate of Namgyong in the period of Koryo.

At that time the state of affairs of the country grew beyond description as the ruling circles spent months and years with empty talks and lived a dissipated life under the plea of pursuing learning. What was worse, every governor was bent on increasing his wealth by randomly wresting assets from the people out of personal greed.

It was hardly believable that even in those days there was an honest official like Yu Ung Gyu.

In the early days of his tenure of office, his subordinates were very enthusiastic to curry favour with him.

It was when one of them offered him some money.

“How much is it?”

“Not so much, but ...”

“To all appearances you must have taken the assets of the people by force and presented them to your superiors so far. ... If such a thing occurs again, you’ll not be excused. Do you understand?”

The officer withdrew in a hurry with the money, and since then there had been nobody who brought money to him.

Later there occurred another incident; the magistrate’s wife lost appetite after suffering from an illness, but the family had no money to buy even an ounce of meat or fish.

A quick-witted subordinate noticed it, and gave a pheasant to a servant of the magistrate’s home, asking her to let the madam have it by every possible means, and without revealing his identity to her at that.

The servant went into the madam’s chamber with the pheasant and lied that she brought it from one of her relatives.

When the servant was going out, the madam stopped her and told her to take it back.

The servant could not help telling the truth.

Smiling, the madam said, “I appreciate your care for me. I am more thankful for the giver’s sincerity. But you’re ill-advised to think that the pheasant can improve my appetite. Moreover, I can’t allow myself a moment of luxury to bring disgrace on my husband’s honest virtue that he has held to so far. So, you take it back.”

“This is not a present, but only a portion of a rare great catch. Is it so grave a fault to share foods among neighbours?”

“Were my husband not a magistrate, it wouldn’t be a fault to receive the foods from our neighbours.”

The servant had no other choice but to give it back to the officer.

The latter said to himself:

“Everything would go smoothly in the country if there were only ten officials similar to that magistrate!”

A Poet Sheds Tears

Kim Hwang Won, a renowned poet in the days of Koryo, toured many scenic spots, leaving poems that sing the praises of their beautiful scenery.

One summer day he came to Pyongyang and went up to the Pubyok Pavilion on Moran Hill. He was fascinated by the scenery—the blue water of the Taedong meandering by the Chongnyu Cliff and the walled city and a vast plain covered in a thin veil of mist.

“What a scenic masterpiece it is!” he exclaimed.

Learning that the famous poet had come to Pyongyang, the local officials and scholars went to the pavilion to see him.

They asked him to leave a poem about the scenery of their home town.

Looking at the poem-written scrolls hanging on the ceiling and columns of the pavilion, he twisted his face in a wry smile. He told the officials and scholars to remove the worthless scrolls.

After a good while of meditation with one of his hands on a column, he said he wanted a writing brush. With the eyes of the people focused,

he wrote on silk cloth:

*A river meanders along the long wall,
Hills are standing east of the plain*

He then stopped writing and looked at the sights under the pavilion again. He tried to continue writing, but his hand refused to work.

To look down at the river from the pavilion, he felt as if he were in a pavilion in the Dragon Palace in the sea; to look at the wide stretch of the plain shrouded in fog, he felt as if he were standing by a column at the Heavenly Palace floating on clouds.

The more he enjoyed the scenery, the newer its beauty looked.

Time passed with the two lines written, and only sweats from his forehead wetted the silk cloth. Disappointed, the people began to disperse one after another.

The sun set. Remaining alone in the pavilion bathing in the evening glow, he threw away the brush and cried, "Oh, I'm not talented enough to sing the praises of the scenery of Pyongyang."

He shed tears till evening before leaving the pavilion.

Later the local people hung the two lines of the poem on a column of the pavilion and then moved it to a column of the Ryongwang Pavilion, not only because the poem was a good work but also because they wanted to boast about the beautiful scenery of Pyongyang, which even the renowned poet failed to describe fully.

With an Arrow Stuck in His Lip

This happened when Choe Yong (1316-1388), a famous general of Koryo, was nearly 70 years old.

The Japanese raiders invaded Koryo by a sea route, murdering and plundering the local people in coastal areas. The government dispatched General Pak In Gyu, but he was killed and the battle was lost.

The aggressors grew arrogant, and the sufferings of the coast villagers increased day by day.

Gray-haired Choe Yong decided to take the field.

The king tried to dissuade him in consideration of his advanced age. But Choe dug in his heels.

Finally, the king gave him green light.

Upon arriving at his destination, Choe gathered the scattered troops and led them to fight. The enemy's resistance was formidable.

Soon Choe ordered his soldiers to charge.

But the soldiers hesitated to dash on the enemy's position, as the enemy showered arrows under the shield of woods and rocks.

Looking at them, Choe bit his lips.

It was true that the circumstances were unfavourable. It was possible to avoid a close fight temporarily and resume the operations when a favourable opportunity cropped up. However, he did not cancel his order. If the order was withdrawn, it would not only boost the morale of the brutal enemy but also allow his soldiers to develop a habit

of wavering under unfavourable situations; he was more concerned about this.

He shouted at his soldiers.

“Follow me!”

Riding the horse to the enemy’s position, he shot arrows at them.

Just then one of the enemy arrows whizzed and got stuck in his lip. Red blood streamed down.

However, Choe shot arrows, and every shot hit the target.

The enemy began to beat a retreat.

Seeing this, the high-spirited soldiers rushed into the enemy’s camp. Choe removed the arrow from his lip only after he saw the enemy run away.

After breaking through the first resistance of the enemy, he told his men as follows:

“How can the army fight against the enemy if it feels afraid earlier than the enemy?”

The soldiers could not raise their heads, but came to learn another secret of the ever-victorious general; he had possessed excellent tactics and at the same time was determined to shoot even one more arrow before the enemy could do, and with no time being spared for removing the arrow from the lip at that.

Called a “Sage” After a Decade

It was one September day in 1582, just ten years before the Imjin Patriotic War (the war the Korean people waged against the Japanese invaders from 1592 to 1598) broke out.

Ri I (1536-1584), a government official, gave a suggestion to the king.

“An abnormal situation prevails in the North as well as in Japan, and it is likely that a calamity will befall our country within less than a decade. It would be advisable to build up a force 100 000 strong.”

“A force 100 000 strong?”

The king asked with a dubious look.

At that time there were enthusiastic discussions over the “virtue” and “etiquette” advocated by the old saints, and Ri was proposing the theory of building up the army. Ri misunderstood that the king said so in order to acquaint himself with the details, and went on to say:

“We should build up a force 100 000 strong. The recruits should be given six-month training by turns. If the training is given by turns and the castles in the capital and provinces are defended like this, even a sudden crisis, if any, would not be difficult to handle by mobilizing the 100 000 strong trained army. Otherwise, if untrained men are dispatched to the front in haste in case of emergency, it would be too late.”

The issue was so unexpected that the king did not give an answer,

and asked the officials around him.

“Well, what do you think about his suggestion?”

Nobody dared to answer willingly. Silence reigned for a while.

“Then do you all share his opinion?”

As the king urged, an official stepped forward. That was Ryu Song Ryong (1542-1607).

“Ri’s suggestion is right, but as the saying goes that everything has its day, his theory is untimely as it is peaceful and safe now. If the work of training 100 000 soldiers is conducted all of a sudden in such a situation, this will cause trouble to the people across the country and bring a calamity instead.”

The king looked round, and found that others also seemed to consent.

“Ri’s theory can’t be approved as it is untimely,” the king said.

“Ordinary scholars who are buried in the archives cannot be blamed for the ignorance of the political situation, but how can you say that? Even the farmers look one year ahead, but you, being involved in the state affairs, don’t look ten years ahead. Shame on you.” Ri said to Ryu.

It was just a decade later in 1592 that the Imjin Patriotic War was unleashed by the Japs.

Ryu lamented, saying.

“Ah, Ryulgok (Ri I’s alias) should be called the very sage of today!”

The regret was more painful for him because Ri had already passed away.

Source of Leakage of Secrets

One day in 1437 King Sejong yelled with anger.

“What’s the matter with you? It is said that before a sealed report from the northern border area arrives at my court, its content is already in everybody’s mouth; and before a secret instruction from the royal palace reaches the military magistrate of Hamgyong Province, its details are already gossiped about throughout the northern border area. Is there any discipline in the country?”

Indeed the king might well give a yell in a rage.

At the time the feudal government saw that Kim Jong So (1390-1453) took steps to repulse foreign invasion and defend the northern part of the country.

However, when Kim sent a message about the movements of the enemy, the capital city was already flooded with rumours—that a lot of recruits would be conscripted and that a war would break out soon—before the king received it. And when the king’s secret order was sent to Kim to contain the enemy, the army men and people in the frontier were the first to learn it and whispered among themselves. Worse still, in some cases even the enemy heard it and escaped or took defensive measures beforehand. This was really a serious problem.

The king said, “If we are to prevent the state affairs from going wrong and also to establish discipline in the country, there’s no other alternative but to trace the leakage of secrets to its source and severely punish the culprit. Well, who can trace the source?”

There was no one who volunteered to disclose with confidence its source which God only knows.

As the king pressured them to answer, the ministers, looking at one another turned their eyes to Prime Minister Hwang Hui.

Hwang could not but step forward before the king.

“If you give me ten days, I will find it out.”

After giving his promise, he returned home without any discussion with other ministers.

The following morning he went to the toilet as usual. He then had breakfast with little appetite, abruptly wearing a worried look.

Unable to bear it any longer, his wife repeatedly asked him if anything was wrong with him and if he had something to worry about. Only then did he answer.

“When I sat on the stool, I found a blue bird came out of my belly and flew into the air.”

“A blue bird? Did it come out with your excrement?”

“Sure. It’s so queer! It would be not good if other people knew that a blue bird flew from the excrement of the Prime Minister. So you must not mention it elsewhere.”

“My goodness! I am the last one to tell it elsewhere. Never mind!”

That evening the madam was handling the laundry with her house maid. Suddenly, she burst into laughter.

Thinking that she was deriding her, the maid asked repeatedly what made her laugh.

“This is really strange. My husband said that a few blue birds were released when he sat on the stool this morning.”

“Good heavens! A few blue birds?”

“Don’t talk it to others!”

“Don’t worry. I know it is related with his reputation.”

That night the maid was on the bed with her husband. All of a sudden she burst into a giggle recollecting the story about the blue birds.

Doubting she giggled over the memory of an affair with another man, her husband began to pressure her to tell the truth.

The maid had to tell her husband the story.

“What? Four or five blue birds flew out of the arse hole of the Prime Minister?”

“Never talk it elsewhere!”

“I am the last man to tell it elsewhere. Never mind.”

In the afternoon the following day, the maid’s husband and his fellows dropped in at a pub in the market. While he was drinking with them, a sparrow alighted on the window sill and then whirred away. It reminded him of the story about the blue birds his wife had told about the previous night, and he laughed alone in spite of himself. Doubting he went crazy, his fellows asked what caused him to laugh alone.

As they got angry, he told them about the blue birds. “Is it true? More than ten blue birds flew from the arse hole of the Prime Minister?”

“Guys, pray don’t talk it to others elsewhere. Otherwise, it will be revealed that my wife is a rumour-monger. Then she would be doomed to a punishment.”

“Don’t worry. Faith is everything for us, the poor, and we’re sure to keep the secret.”

A few days passed.

Having ordered the prime minister to unearth the source of secrets’

leakage, the king used to send a eunuch out of the royal palace to keep up with the state of its progress, but he would come back without any news.

One night the eunuch reported the tale of the blue birds, a topic news outside the royal palace.

“What? Thousands of blue birds emerged from the excrement of Hwang and flew into the air?”

The king was surprised.

“What on earth is that! Why didn’t the prime minister report it to me?”

The king ordered to send for Hwang Hui right away.

When Hwang was present, he asked with fury.

“Why did you neither implement my instructions to find out the source of the leaked national secrets nor report the strange fact about thousands of blue birds?”

Hwang took a step forward before the king.

“I am much obliged to say but I think the source of the leaked national secrets has already been reported to you.”

“When did you do that? Have you come to the royal court even once during the time?”

“The blue birds are just the telltale of the source of the leaked national secrets.”

“What? The blue birds?”

Hwang Hui told the king about the story he had cooked up.

“Ah, you mean a blue bird multiplied to thousands within days, spreading throughout the capital city.”

“You are right. The leakage of the country’s secrets and the collapse

of the official discipline might be attributable to the fact that all officials in not only central but also provincial governments are giving birth to blue birds each day like me.”

The king wasted no time to arrange that the tale of the blue birds was conveyed to officials across the country, with the result that the leakage of national secrets did not occur thereafter.

Intelligence of Kim Si Sup

Kim Si Sup (1435-1493) is said to have been able to read letters for himself at eight months of age.

He was so intelligent that at the age of three he composed poems with an insight into the principles of things. Following is one of those he composed at that age:

*With pink peach blossoms and green willow leaves
March of spring has passed by
Beads sewn through green needles
Are dew drops on pine needles.*

The rumour about his cleverness spread far and wide, and the courtyard of his house was busy with visitors every day.

One day Ho Ju, a minister of the government, paid a visit to him upon hearing the rumour. Kim was five years old at the time. The child was romping about in the room. He jerked up the child and put him on his lap, saying:

“Let me see. I am an old man as you see. Please make a phrase about this elderly.”

The young boy gave a glance at the old man before taking up brush immediately and wrote down a line of poem at a stroke.

Flowers bloom even on an old tree.

It is young in heart, no doubt.

The prose was so amazing and enchanting that Ho looked at the child for a time with his eyes wide open. He spun with the child in his arms, exclaiming:

“I have never seen such a boy as this. You are really a prodigy, a genius.”

Enjoying such admirations from the people, Kim Si Sup came of age and became a monk in a mountain after giving up his ambition to seek careerism by passing the civil service examination.

Sejo, who took the throne after ousting Tanjong, sent for Kim Si Sup several times, imploring for his involvement in the political affairs of the country, but all in vain.

Among his messages to a friend of his about his intentions was the one which ran as follows:

“I and the world are at odds with each other as though a square stick is driven through a round hole. Therefore I have no alternative but to lead a life of wandering about the mountains and streams.”

After reading the note, his friends and other people exclaimed:

“We have so far known that his intelligence finds its brilliant

expression only in the prose and literature, and he is more brilliant in seeing through the corrupt world.”

A Five-year-old Boy Stopping an Official Procession

It was one spring day at the time of the reign of King Myongjong.

Under a solitary tree standing on a low hill by the road in a village, children were learning letters.

Presently, a magnificent procession of a high-ranking official approached them. The boys rose to their feet and went down to the roadside, vying for the lead in seeing the spectacular procession.

However, a little boy who appeared to be no more than five years old remained seated alone reading the book.

The sight of the boy was so praiseworthy that the official who was passing by descended from the sedan.

“Hey! Why do you stay alone while all others enjoy the sight of the procession?”

Looking up at the official, the boy answered.

“My father told me to concentrate on reading only.”

The official was too moved by his answer to leave him soon, and asked where he lived and who his father was and then met his father.

“Your son is extraordinary. I’m sure our country will have a brilliant scholar in future.”

The boy was Jo Hon. He was born in June 1544. From his childhood he was good-natured and extremely devoted. He preferred helping his

parents in managing household affairs to playing with his friends.

When he turned ten, his mother died. He was so observant of her funeral rites that all the villagers were deeply impressed. From that age, he learned under the guidance of Kim Hwang. Every evening he read under a fire brand in his room and during the day when he was working on the field, he read at break a book placed on a hook set on the ridge between the furrows.

He came of age and got an official post after passing the state examination. At the time angry with Japan growing arrogant, he sent up a petition to the Throne, calling for the breakdown of ties with Japan and the buildup of national defence capabilities, but he was sent into exile. During the Imjin Patriotic War he organized a volunteer army, and died a heroic death in the fight against the Japs.

Wife Persuades Husband

It was one summer day in 1588. Kwak Jae U (1552-1617) lay still in his room until the sun was in the middle of the sky.

For a man, there is possibly no greater humility than the vituperation or scornful finger pointing which his wife is subject to from the family members and neighbours. That was why he was in agony now.

After the death of his first wife due to sickness, Kwak remarried Ri in the winter of the previous year, at the age of 40.

For three days after her marriage, she led a regular life but from the fourth day she began to sleep all day long without skipping a day up to now; there was no finding fault with her for having a nap after lunch at

noon, but she went beyond the extent. She had no sooner removed the breakfast table than she lay on the floor and woke up with an effort at lunch time. After wolfing down a bowl of rice, she went to sleep on the spot with a snore, and there were days when she slept the whole day from morning till evening, skipping lunch.

Kwak was virile and chivalrous by nature and had many friends. From his youth, he thronged about with them, going on a writing and drinking spree. After his remarriage to Ri, his visit to her inner room was scarce during the day, and thus he could hardly find her to be such a sleepyhead. With the passage of time, he came to hear criticisms from his family members and gossips from neighbours for excessive sleeping.

Doubtful of such remarks, he deliberately went into the inner room only to find the ugly sight of her wife in sleep during the day. However, he kept mum about it out of the intention to wait and see her real purpose. On the hundredth day, his patience went out of control. He made up his mind to put an end to it either by curing her of the wicked habit or by sending her back to her maiden home.

When the sun reached the middle of the sky, the family members had already gone out for work and silence reigned on the premises. Kwak rose from his seat and went into the inner room. Sure enough, his wife was asleep again. With her face half hidden by a sleeve, she seemed to be too sound asleep to hear the creak of the door. Keeping down his anger, he shook her shoulders to wake her up. Then she looked up for a while with half-closed eyes to identify who was waking her up. The moment she recognized it was her husband, she got up swiftly and sat up.

“What is this?”

His original plan was to talk to her in a gentle way, but his voice became high-pitched as an uncontrollable fury surged in him.

“What do you want to make of the household, not caring for the disgrace to your husband?”

But she did nothing but adjusted her dishevelled bun of hair and attire.

Her indifference infuriated him more.

“Please answer me. Are you married to take care of me and other family members or to torment me to death and ruin my household?”

“What is wrong with me?”

“You take a nap, and you do not keep the house in good order nor do farm work. Is it right?”

“You are right that when a woman takes a long nap, she may bring about the ruin of her household. However, the maintenance of a household is possible when the country does not go to ruin, I believe. Is there any guarantee for the safety of a bird’s eggs in the nest which was already broken up?”

“What?”

“Now the country is on the verge of breakup owing to the imminent invasion by foreign aggressors from north and south, but nobody blames or finds fault with those who are wasting time, going on a writing and drinking spree without any worry. Then what’s the use of criticizing me for the collapse of a household as small as a bird’s egg?”

He said nothing in surprise at his wife’s unexpected answer. She was right. While he was milling about with his friends for recitation and drinking, the Japs were wild and rife for aggression across the sea.

However, he had regarded it as a job for nobody but the royal court to defend the country against the invasion of the foreign aggressors.

Within his knowledge was the fact that the wife’s long nap could lead to the collapse of his household but not the truth that the husband’s doing nothing but reading and drinking could bring about the collapse of the country. He withdrew from her, struck dumb.

From the next day, he quit drinking and gathered friends on the plea of get-together for farmers and hawking to practice martial arts through training.

From then on Kwak’s wife refrained from sleeping in the daytime, and helped her husband with combat preparations while doing by herself all household chores and field work from early morning till late at night. It was a few years later that the Imjin Patriotic War broke out owing to the invasion of the Japanese. During the war Kwak Jae U fought as a famous commander of volunteers.

“Treasure” for Korea

The following happened when Saint Songun (alias Samyongdang) went single-handedly to the enemy camp for negotiations during the Imjin Patriotic War.

The commander of the enemy, Kato Kiyomasa, asked him, “Korea is said to abound in treasures, and what is the most priceless of them?”

The saint replied with composure. “There are many treasures, but I think the most valuable of them is rather in Japan.”

“In Japan?”

“Don’t you know it yet?”

“What is it?”

“It’s just your head.”

“My head?”

“Why are you so surprised? There’s a huge bonus for your head in our country, and so it is the treasure of treasures.”

Kato turned black and gave no answer. From then, overwhelmed by the audacity of Saint Songun, he did not hold to his arrogant attitude at the talks any longer.

Pak Taji Defends Wangsong Rapids

The original name of Pak Taji was Pak Ok. It is said that he was nicknamed Taji for profound wisdom.

Pak was one of the ten warriors hailing from Pyongyang who fought in defence of the Walled City of Pyongyang during the Imjin Patriotic War. He became more famous for he rendered distinguished services by dint of his wisdom.

Here is a story about how he defended the Wangsong Rapids.

In June 1592, when the Japanese invaders closed in on the opposite side of the Taedong River, the Korean army and volunteers in Pyongyang planned first to defend the rapids of the river vulnerable to the enemy’s attack in order to foil its offensive. There were several rapids in the river.

The ten warriors of Pyongyang were tasked with defending the Wangsong Rapids.

Pak led an advance party to take up positions at the rapids now that sufficient preparations had not been made to fight the enemy. The other nine warriors armed themselves with arrows, spears and swords in the inner wall and went there later.

They were surprised that the colours were flying and parapets prepared in a place before a deep part of the river down the rapids instead of in a place before the rapids.

“Let me see, Pak. What is all this about?”

“Why? Do you think this is a wrong place?”

“Certainly! The Wangsong Rapids is over there, not here.”

“You think that I, a native of Pyongyang, am a stranger to it?”

“Then why have you laid the positions here?”

“To defend the rapids.”

“Then, is there any need to lay positions before a deep place of the river? The enemy will not cross the river through here.”

Hyon Su Baek, who was nicknamed Tangdol for a shrewd and free tongue, pressed Pak impatiently for an explanation.

However, in his usual humorous and imperturbable tone, Pak answered calmly:

“I have opted for this place, because the enemy might think the way you do.”

“What? The enemy thinks the same as me?”

Before Pak was able to take time to reply, there were reports here and there of the appearance of the Japanese invaders.

Sure enough, hundreds of Japanese troops were coming up in groups, raising dust, from the opposite bank down the river.

The warriors of Pyongyang, unable to advance to the Wangsong

Rapids, had to fight the enemy in the positions prepared by Pak.

They watched the enemy troops with uneasiness, worrying that the enemy might go up towards the rapids, passing by them.

To their great relief, the enemy troops stopped when they reached the opposite side to them and began to shoot firelocks towards the side where the colours were fluttering.

The volunteers shot arrows under Pak's command. The enemy fired more intensively, giving shrieks.

Pak ordered his men to shoot less arrows and make them fall in the middle of the river, not beyond the river. His intention was to pretend to be dispirited, scared by the enemy's shooting.

The enemy soldiers wasted no time to dive into the water, and swam across the river with all their strength.

When most of them reached the deep place of the river, Pak ordered all the volunteers to resume shooting.

The enemy troops, afloat on the water, were unable to avoid the shower of arrows, and began to sink under water one by one. Seeing all of them get drowned even before reaching the middle of the river, the followers gave up and took flight.

There were few of them who survived.

At last, the battle ended in the Korean volunteers' victory.

They gave a shout of victory.

Pak Taji said to Hyon Su Baek, "Did you see? The enemy guessed that we would surely be defending the neck of the rapids. Otherwise, they would not have opted for the deep water course defended by us."

"So, the enemy played into Pak Taji's hands this time again."

Volunteers and warriors heartily laughed in admiration of Pak.

Buying a *Kat*

One day Sin Jae Hyo (1812-1884) went to a mall with his friend to buy a *kat* (a traditional Korean top hat made of horsehair).

He asked a seller.

"Is it for sale, sir? How much does it cost?"

The man nodded, and named its price.

After choosing one of the best of them, Sin paid for it.

"Thank you, sir."

When Sin turned back, his friend asked him with a dubious look.

"How can you make such a mistake?"

"Mistake?"

"How can you, a famous nobleman, say so to a humble hat-maker?"

"Ha, ha. Are you accusing me of using a polite expression for him?"

In those days noblemen never used a term of respect for the lowly, and worse still, handicraftsmen were humiliated and maltreated as they were not treated as a human. It was natural that his friend came to be surprised after witnessing Sin's kindness to a humble hat-maker.

Sin laughed for a while, and answered:

"You should understand that it is not me but the absurd customs of our society to blame for it."

"Really?"

"Though they maltreat and humiliate the humble handicraftsmen, in fact, the noblemen are usually wearing the hat made by them."

Dumbfounded, his friend made a bitter smile.

Fair Judgement

It happened when a man called Ham Chi U worked as the governor of a province. One day two young brothers of the noble origin came to the provincial government office for a fair judgement. The content of the lawsuit was that they both claimed to the big one among the big and small woks but the dispute was not settled.

The governor asked them about the woks in detail. Their father suddenly died without leaving a will, so they agreed to share all the wealth equally, but the woks were of different sizes. The elder brother claimed to the big one because he was elder, and the younger brother also refused to yield to him because they promised to divide the wealth equally between them.

After listening to them to the last, the governor sighed.

“Ah! How can our moral obligations for the country be fulfilled as the sons of a nobleman behave like this?”

He shouted to the official clerks:

“Break those two woks and weigh them on the balance. Then distribute an equal amount of them to the men.”

Then, the two brothers looked at each other with their eyes wide open. They begged the governor to withdraw the judgement.

But the clerks did as they were ordered by the governor.

Seeing the iron scraps before them, the brothers wore a tearful face.

A Whole Laundry

One night, after spending a day for some business in the walled city, a man, called Jong Su Dong, found that he couldn't go back to his house because of the curfew. So he went to the house of his friend, surnamed Kim.

Kim welcomed Jong into his house with pleasure, but his face showed a sign of anxiousness.

“You are in a bad temper. What's wrong with you?”

“It has nothing to do with illness.”

“Then why do you look unsettled?”

“There should be a memorial service for my late elder uncle tonight.”

“Then why are you still here?”

“Well, I have known that the memorial service should be held on the day when he died. But a man told me that the memorial service should be held on the eve of that day.”

“Is that so? You must go at once now that you have known it!”

“I know I must go. But this is the time of night curfew. What should I do?”

“Of course, you should go.”

“But if I'm caught by the patrol, a severe punishment will await me, let alone the memorial service.”

“Don't worry about it. I think we may not encounter the patrol on the road because it is the first time you are breaking the law by chance and you have not so far been unlucky. If it occurs, I'll handle

it. Let's go.”

Encouraged at Jong's instigation, Kim went out of the house, carrying foods for the memorial service.

In the walled city under the misty moonlight, they ran through the alleys. They were running through the alleys to avoid encounter with the patrol. However, as the saying goes that evil-doing always catches up with you, they were confronted with the patrol combing the alleys.

“Look! The patrolmen over there are coming to us.”

“Don't move. I'll lure them into the way we have just come. Hide yourself at this corner for a moment and then go on to the house after they pass by you. Understand me?”

Jong turned back, and rushed along the way they had come, fluttering his white overcoat, making his footsteps resound through the once-tranquil alleys. Frightened at the sound, the patrolmen shouted:

“You, son of a bitch! Freeze!”

Five or six patrolmen chased him. Jong threaded his way among the alleys. When they were roaming about here and there, not knowing his whereabouts, Jong climbed up to the top of a fence around a rich man's house near the road and lay on his face there. The patrolmen who were chasing him finally arrived at the scene, but they could not find him; they whispered among themselves that they had certainly seen him coming here but it was quite strange that there was no trace of him.

At that time a patrolman pointed at Jong, shouting “What's that?”

“Where?”

“A white thing on the fence.”

“Get down!”

A patrolman touched Jong with his club.

Jong, for his part, got angry, asking in a loud voice:

“What's the matter with you?”

“Why are you lying on the face here? Stand up at once!”

“This is a laundry.”

“Laundry? Ha, ha! How can a laundry say?”

“This is a whole laundry.”

“A whole laundry?”

“Don't you know about it? I have no spare clothes. So while I was wearing them, I washed them, and I'm now drying them.”

“Then you had better find a dry place nearby. Why have you come a long way over here?”

“I say, no place in the walled city is better than this fence roofed with black tiles. They provide warm heat for drying the whole laundry tonight.”

“What?”

“If any, let me know a better place. Tomorrow morning I must go to the fields with dry clothes on. So I must spare even a minute.”

The patrolmen could not say anything more. When they went their way, Jong ran after Kim to attend the memorial service. There he told about the whole laundry. Upon hearing his story, the mourners held their sides with laughter. As a result, sorrow turned into laughter, it is said.

Mysterious Prescription

It happened when Ri Je Ma (1837-1900), a famous doctor of Korea, was treating patients in Hongwon, South Hamgyong Province.

One day a rich man came to see him.

Before the rich man told him anything, Ri felt his pulse. After looking at him in the face for a while, he said:

“You have a stomach trouble.”

“Yes, you are right, sir. I am suffering from indigestion.”

“But this disease is so protracted that no medicine will have effect on it, however efficacious it may be.”

“Really? You are a genius. I have suffered from this disease for several years. During the period I have taken all medicines including the wild insam and young antler and visited all famous doctors. However, the rumour about your medical skills has brought me from a distant place. So please help me.”

“There is a prescription agreeable to the trouble, but I’m afraid that it is difficult for you to put it into practice.”

“Never mind. There’s no wealth to be spared for curing the disease and no medicine to be given up halfway, however difficult it may be to take.”

“If you are determined, I’ll give you a prescription. Please try it.”

“Certainly I will.”

“It’s not so difficult. At daybreak every day go out to the field and pull out 50 corn stumps, and continue it for about a fortnight.”

“Pull out the corn stumps?”

“They can be found in any field as the harvest is over now.”

“And what medicine do you recommend in the meantime?”

“It’s unnecessary.”

Unable to understand him, the rich man refused to be dismissed.

“Come again after a fortnight of trying it.”

He could not help but go back home.

Returning home without any medicine from the doctor, he grew angry, and the prescription was also thought to be preposterous. However, he made up his mind to have a try as the prescription was given by a renowned doctor and required no expenditure.

Then it wrought a miracle. In less than five days after doing as prescribed by the doctor, an improvement was made in digestion; in ten days he began to feel hungry; on the 15th day his stomach did not ache however much he ate.

“It was really a good prescription.”

The rich man was so rejoiced that on the 16th day he went to see Ri with his servant carrying valuables and foods on his back. He wanted to express his thanks to the doctor for the mysterious prescription and at the same time to learn how the stomach trouble could be cured.

“Your prescription was really great, sir.”

“What do you think of it? Was there any effect?”

“Of course. The 10-year-long stomach trouble was gone like a magic within a fortnight. By the way, what medicinal effect do the corn stumps have at daybreak?”

“Medicinal effect?”

“Then, how can such a play cure the stomach trouble?”

“You see, the reason lies in nothing but this; the prescription was based on the fact that as the peasants who go out to the field to work from early morning are immune to the stomach trouble, so will you get better if you move and work as they do.”

The rich man did not say any more.

Old Stories of Korea

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Edited by Ri Yu Il

Translated by Choe Kwang

Published by Foreign Languages

Publishing House, DPR Korea

Issued in April 2026

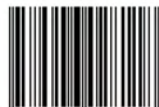
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<http://www.korean-books.com.kp>



ISBN 978-9946-0-2611-8



9 789946 026118 >

