

TALES TOLD  
IN  
KOREA



BY  
BERTA METZGER

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# TALES TOLD

# IN KOREA

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By BERTA METZGER

*Author of "Tales Told in Hawaii"*

With a frontispiece in colors and six  
illustrations in black-and-white by

ARTHUR Y. PARK



"I do not claim originality . . .  
I am a transmitter."

—Confucius

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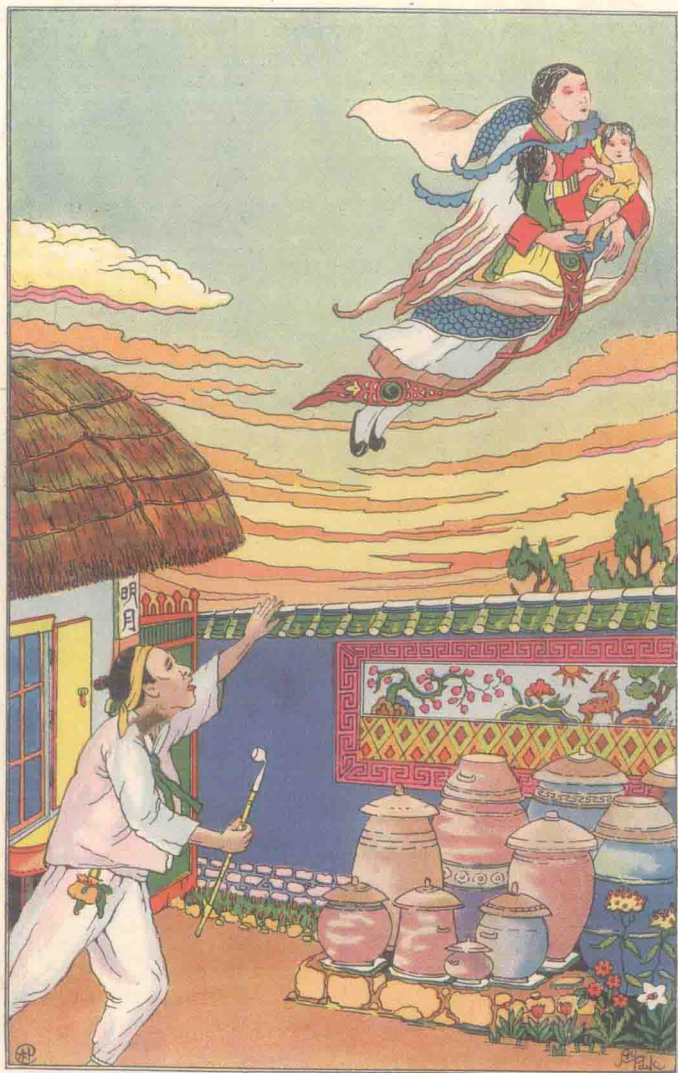
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"SHE FLEW UP AND UP."

DEDICATED TO  
DR. SYNGMAN RHEE  
FROM THE GARDEN OF WHOSE MEMORY  
CAME MANY OF THESE STORIES

## PRONUNCIATION

IN the Korean words used, the vowels have the following sounds:

a—*a* in father

e—*ee* in meet

i—*i* in hill, except in the words: am-i, Chang-si, Ki-ja, Kon-gi, Mi-ja, Pak-su-ni, Pat-gi, Pi-gan, in which cases the *i* is pronounced like *ee* in meet.

o—*o* in note

u—*oo* in food.

Words not covered in the above are: *Eig-go* ("Alas!" or "Oh!"), which is pronounced like our "I go"; the city of *Seoul*, like our word "soul"; *Pyeng-yang* (pe-ung-yang), with the *e* long and the *ung* like that in "sung," and then these two run together, giving a ringing sound, followed by the *yang*. While *Korea* (ko-re-a) has the accent on the *e*, *Ko-ryu* (ko-re-uh) has it on the *o*, and the *u* is like *u* in "sup," as it is in *Hong Pansub*. In *Mansai*, the *sai* is pronounced like our word, "say." The literal meaning is, "Ten thousand years," but it con-

## PRONUNCIATION

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veys the idea of, "May Korea live for ten thousand years!"

In Korean, the family name is always given first. William Sampson Smith would be spoken of here as, Smith William Sampson.

## FOREWORD

KOREA hangs like a jade pendant from the bosom of China, and, like many another precious jewel, she has a troubled and dramatic life. This pine-covered peninsula is about the size of Great Britain, and smaller than Italy. Her boasted antiquity of over four thousand years quickly emerges from the mistland of legend into century after century of recorded history.

We are concerned with the stories of Korea, and not with her history, and yet we should take note of the Sil-la dynasty, whose fifty-six kings reigned from 57 B.C. to 927 A.D. The Golden Days of Sil-la! How longingly Koreans speak of them! Such culture! Such artistry! Such kindliness! Surely it must have been only a poet's dream. But it was a reality, as the history, the literature, and the art objects prove.



In the British Museum is a Korean book printed from movable type which antedates the Gutenberg press. About six hundred years ago, the king commanded three scholars to invent an alphabet to take the place of the Chinese ideographs. The result was a phonetic alphabet so simple that an average Korean can learn to read easy stories in three days. But the educated men of the country, alas, looked down upon it as being too easy, and they went right on wearing out the years and their eyesight learning Chinese characters instead of becoming Shakespeares through the use of their own admirable alphabet. But to-day vigorous prose and beautiful poetry are being written in it.

The morning greeting of the Land of Morning Calm is, "Did you rest in peace?" The farewell is, "May you remain in peace." "Peace!" has ever been the deep inner cry of the people who praise not the soldier, not the man of wealth, but the scholar. Though there were many wars between the kingdoms of Korea before she was finally consolidated, but

once in her four thousand years has she invaded another country. And for this record, this war-weary world of ours should honor her.

You will find here stories of many kinds, and stories for all ages. It would be easy to compile one volume of Korean romances; one of historical stories; one of humor; one on tigers alone; and so on and on. The difficulty is not to find stories, but how to quit writing them.

Now, among the stories given here, you will find many which peep out at you like old friends masquerading in Oriental costumes. As indeed they are. And yet, many of them have been told in Korea for thousands of years. No doubt a few of them came from India long before they ever reached that barbaric land which was destined to become Europe. Later the Europeans who invaded and took over the Red Man's Land, carried these ancient tales along with them and retold them to their children and their children's children.

But the stories told in the Western World

are more or less fixed. Those of Korea are not, and I have yet to find a story told in just the same way by any two Koreans. If the teller is poor in invention and fancy—though I have met few such—he retells the story in a humdrum fashion. If the teller has a sense of drama—and most Koreans have—he will re-fashion his material before your eyes like the magician he is. Some of these tales were told to me as I gazed up at fairy peaks or down on dragon pools. Some were told by most learned scholars, with a gusto equal to that of their own professional story-tellers, while great men of the land sat about and listened with the eagerness of children.

This handful of stories gathered from the vast meadows of Korean story-land will, better than any words of mine, picture for you the vigorous, humorous, and lovable people of the Land of Morning Calm.

BERTA METZGER.

SEOUL, KOREA,  
*September 6, 1931.*

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# TALES TOLD IN KOREA

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## THE MAGIC FLUTE

**I**N the ancient days of Korea there lived a king and his general who knew war, and the suffering that war brings. And they grieved deeply that their loved kingdom of Sil-la must train its youth to kill their brothers in the Four Seas, in order to drive their war-like neighbors from their borders. And even with a great army, kept at immense cost to the workers of the land, their enemies ever and again invaded the kingdom, burned the cities and villages, tore up the fertile fields, and captured and enslaved the people. And deep in the hearts of the king and his great general was the desire that the kingdom might dwell forever in peace.

Years passed and the king and the general



died. And the new king, Sin Mun, built a beautiful temple on the banks of the Eastern Great Sea to commemorate his father before the gods.

Now, after the temple was completed, the Officer of the Seaside observed a strange thing. On the first of May a new, turtle-backed island appeared which moved with the waves, and it seemed to be slowly advancing toward the temple. The king was troubled by this and ordered Chun Gill, the Officer of the Weather, to divine its meaning.

Chun Gill explained it thus, "When your royal father died he became the Dragon of the Sea, and his general, who was the son of the Thirty-three Constellations of the Heaven, is his minister. They have a gift of great value which they wish to present to you."

The next day a violent earthquake made heaven and earth tremble, and the storm drove the island near the temple. King Sin Mun himself went down to the sea at sunset, and as he gazed at the new island, he observed two bamboo plants which looked like giant arms