# A New History of KOREA

Ki-baik Lee

Translated by Edward W. Wagner with Edward J. Shultz

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#### To the people of Korea

That the record of those enduring qualities of strength, and fortitude, and cultural creativity that so distinguish their long, proud history may become more widely known.

#### PREFACE TO THE TRANSLATION

As the author indicates in his preface to the 1967 revised edition, already at that time an English translation of *Han'guksa Sillon* (A New History of Korea) seemed to be a most worthwhile undertaking. A promise was made, in fact, to translate the new edition as soon as a busy schedule might permit. Even now it occasions considerable embarrassment to recall that more than a decade passed before a first step was taken toward fulfilling this commitment.

Yet, in the context of the late 1960's, there was every incentive to go forward with the planned translation without delay. No new English language history of Korea had appeared since that by an American missionary, Homer B. Hulbert, in 1905 and another by a Canadian missionary, James Scarth Gale, a generation later in 1927. Between 1969 and 1972 no fewer than five survey histories were to appear, three of them translations, but this could not be foreseen in 1967 and turned out to be, after all, no great embarrassment of riches. Meanwhile, academic interest was entering a period of substantial growth, and in history as in most other fields of Korean studies the need for a good, basic text was acute.

At the same time, if a Korean text were to be translated, there were excellent reasons why it ought to be Professor Ki-baik Lee's Han'guksa Sillon. As the years have passed, moreover, these considerations have become all the more persuasive. Because it first appeared in 1961, underwent major revisions in 1967 and 1976, and has been further improved in the course of numerous reprintings, Han'guksa Sillon is the only survey history of Korea to keep abreast of the mounting volume of monographic work being produced by Korean scholarship today. This process of continuous revision has resulted in a refined narrative structure that smoothly carries forward the author's descriptive and interpretive purposes.

Han'guksa Sillon also is noteworthy for its treatment of cultural history, which it skillfully interweaves with the narration of political, social, and economic history. In other words, the author presents cultural developments not merely as isolated expressions of the creative spirit of the Korean people, but as an integral component of the overall Korean historical experience.

Again, Han'guksa Sillon offers not simply a narrative but an interpretation of Korean history. The author has elaborated a comprehensive overview of the developmental process through which Korean history has passed, focusing on changes over time in the composition of the leadership elite and in the locus of political power in Korean society. Although some aspects of this treatment remain controversial, the interpretation nonetheless is innovative and it gives the book an overall integrity and thrust that distinguish it from other survey histories.

Finally, in the near quarter century since it first appeared, *Han'guksa Sillon* has enjoyed unparalleled acceptance among both an academic readership and the educated public. It is widely used as a college text, and it is clearly the general history of choice outside the campus as well. Both the 1967 edition and that of 1976 have been translated into Japanese, and a Chinese translation currently is underway in Taipei. An English translation, then, is indeed long overdue.

Although begun in 1979, the present translation relates closely to the most recent printing of *Han'guksa Sillon*, that of January, 1984. This is because the many changes and improvements the author made in the text during the intervening years were incorporated into the translation as they occurred. For the translation proceeded in close consultation with the author from start to finish. At perhaps as many as sixty separate sessions he answered questions, solved problems, offered background explanations, discussed issues, and provided fresh insights. Without his invaluable assistance the translation hardly could have been completed at all and certainly would have suffered much in quality.

The translation is, essentially, a full rendering of the text proper, with only an occasional bit of detail eliminated. The short introductory chapter ("A New Understanding of Korean History") and concluding chapter ("The Ruling Elite and the Course of Korean History"), however, have been omitted from the present translation with the consent of the author. The detailed and useful Classified List of References appended to the book also has not been translated, since this bibliography is principally concerned with primary source materials and secondary studies written in the languages of East Asia. Readers who command these languages may consult any recent printing of Han'guksa Sillon. Nor have the selections of journal articles appended to each topical subsection of the text been rendered into English, since these, too, are preponderantly in Korean or Japanese. On the other hand, with the needs of a Western readership in mind, a Select Bibliography containing book-length, English-language works has been appended. The Dynastic Lineages of the original work, diagramming lines of descent within the royal houses of the various historical Korean states, have been reproduced with slight modifications, in particular the addition of reign dates. The Index-Glossary attempts, as its principal objective, to include all of the names and terms found in the translation, with Chinese characters or han'gul provided wherever appropriate. In most instances the maps have been enlarged to show the entirety of the Korean peninsula, or to provide a fuller setting for the reader less familiar with the geography of Korea and Northeast Asia. The plates feature some of the same illustrations

that grace the original, but others have been especially selected for the English translation.

Han'guksa Sillon was written for a readership well acquainted with the course of Korean history, with the drama of its events, and with its dramatis personae. This has posed a problem for the translation, which attempts, at the same time, to meet the needs both of the serious student and of the informed general reader. A series of special footnotes was contemplated, but in the end it was decided to include explanatory phrasing in the text itself. No doubt some readers will wish that this effort had been taken a step or two further.

All readers surely will regret the fact that the author does not carry his narrative beyond the April, 1960, Student Revolution. Moreover, the coverage of the crowded years after Korea's liberation in August, 1945, is quite cursory in comparison with what has gone before. This shortcoming is particularly serious for the Western reader, whose prior knowledge of Korea and much of his interest often will be confined to the last thirty to forty years. Certain events of this period, however, make it difficult for the historian either to gain access to all the information he requires or to venture a balanced account of Korea's recent history. Fortunately, a large body of published material exists in English that will enable readers to educate themselves in this regard and form independent judgments.

Names and terms have been romanized in accordance with accepted norms in the English-speaking world, generally on the basis of the culture in which they originated. Those that are Korean are spelled in accordance with the prescriptions of the McCune-Reischauer system, happily now adopted as well by the Ministry of Education, Republic of Korea. For Japanese the Hepburn system is employed and for Chinese the Wade-Giles. Problems remain, principally the question of how to treat place names in those areas of northeastern China that once were ruled or contested by Korean peoples. In these cases the attempt has been to make the romanization accord with the contemporary historical situation.

The task of translation is never easy and often enough is thankless. A conscientious effort to produce an accurate and readable English translation of an academic text such as this will inevitably owe much to the skilled and generous assistance of a great many people. The primary obligation to the author, Professor Ki-baik Lee, already has been recorded. Also of great value has been the careful attention given the manuscript, in full or in part, by a number of colleagues in the field: Edward J. Baker, Jonathan W. Best, Gari K. Ledyard, and Karl Moskowitz most notably, but also Yong-ho Choe, Michael C. Kalton, Hugh H. W. Kang, Yön-ung Kwön, Mark Peterson, Michael Robinson, and Chae-ryong Sim. Less direct assistance came from several other specialists whose published works in their respective fields guided the translation through some of its most unfamiliar byways. Peter H. Lee for literature (to whom acknowledgement also is due for permission to use a translation of his) and Sang-woon Jeon for science

and technology must be mentioned first, but important contributions of this sort also came, however unwittingly, from Martina Deuchler, Chong-Sik Lee, Richard J. Pearson and, indeed, many others. Editorial assistance, and many useful substantive suggestions as well, were provided by M. Rebecca Bernen, Sherrill M. Davis, Milan Hejtmanek, Scott Kalb, Homer Williams, and Jeong-ro Yoon. Help in overcoming particular translation problems was sought in many places, but these and numerous other contributions, ranging from the ordinary to the inspirational, cannot well be acknowledged here. Those who collaborated in these respects will have been thanked directly.

Substantial financial support for the translation work was received from the U.S. Office of Education under its Fulbright program, from the Scholarship Foundation of the Korean Traders Association, and from the International Cultural Society of Korea. Certain costs related to the translation project also were borne by the Korea Institute, Harvard University. The obligation to each of these is recorded here with a renewed sense of gratitude.

Finally, appreciation must be expressed for the unstinting support given throughout the long and arduous translation and publication process by the Korean publisher, Ilchokak. The warmth of understanding of its president, Man Nyun Han, and the wholehearted devotion of his staff have been indispensable in giving life to this translation.

When all is said and done, of course, the translation must stand on its own merit. The debt owed to all those who have assisted in transforming *Han'guksa Sillon* into *A New History of Korea* can in some measure be requited only by the contribution it may make to a wider awareness of the nature of the Korean historical experience.

Seoul, Korea Spring, 1984

#### **AUTHOR'S PREFACES**

#### Preface to the 1967 Revised Edition

My initial work titled Kuksa Sillon (A New History of Our Nation) appeared in the spring of 1961, nearly six years ago. During these years study of the history of Korea has greatly advanced. It is not merely that explications of particular historical events have been put forward, but repeated efforts have been made to achieve a fuller overall understanding of Korean history. In the light of these new research findings it has become necessary to revise the original text in a great many places. Furthermore, it seemed to me the time had come to venture, however tentatively, a restructuring of the standard periodization of Korea's history, something I had not been able to do in the 1961 publication.

Fortunately, an opportunity to address the shortcomings of the original work soon arose. This came about when I received an invitation from the Harvard-Yenching Institute to spend a year at Harvard University as a research scholar. Edward W. Wagner had proposed to undertake an English translation of *Kuksa Sillon* and, if this were to eventuate, I was anxious that the translation be based on a thoroughly revised manuscript. It was to producing this new manuscript that, upon taking up residence at Harvard, I immediately set my hand.

Even though a revision of an earlier work, it was no easy matter to bring the new version to completion. Chapters and sections within chapters all had to be redesigned, while many new studies had to be read and evaluated. My pace, as always, was deliberate and, as I bemoaned the all too swift passing of each day, I found much of my short year at Harvard consumed by this task.

Through such travail was born this new, revised edition bearing the title Han'guksa Sillon (A New History of Korea). To be sure, here and there the reader will find passages identical with those of the original book, but overall the contents are so markedly different as to constitute a new work. That is why the book has been renamed and the type reset.

Having read and pondered the completed manuscript, I find more than an occasional ground for dissatisfaction. In particular, the pages devoted to the recent history of Korea need to be increased still further. Setting aside a short, separate chapter for the eventful years since Liberation in 1945 is, I realize, only a short step in the right direction. Still, I have en-

deavored there as well to perceive Korean history as an integral and ongoing developmental process.

With all its flaws and imperfections, if this book but serves as a single foundation stone upon which a genuine understanding of the history of Korea partially may rest, what greater fulfillment could an author ask?

Winter, 1966 Cambridge, Massachusetts

#### Preface to the 1976 Revised Edition

Han'guksa Sillon (A New History of Korea) originally was written in the conviction that its narrative might be so constructed as to channel the flow of Korean history into a coherent, directed current. If this bold design of mine has proved to be something of an engineering conceit, I nevertheless have been greatly encouraged by the favorable response of my readers to the attempt.

Still, it has been my constant thought that at some point I must make a further effort to more neatly systematize those elements of Korean history that earlier had fit but uneasily into the model I had fashioned. This was all the more required by the mountain of fresh studies produced in recent years by Korean historians. I resolved, therefore, to defer the gratifications of pursuing my own research interests and, instead, to force myself to undertake yet another thorough revision. The fruit of these labors, the present edition of *Han'guksa Sillon*, has been reworked most importantly in the following respects:

First of all, the introductory chapter titled "A New Understanding of Korean History" has been rewritten and a concluding chapter, "The Ruling Elite and the Course of Korean History," has been added. The purpose in both these instances has been to put forward with greater clarity my views on the successive developmental stages through which Korean history has passed.

Secondly, in conformity with this same objective, chapters and sections have been rearranged and their contents reshaped accordingly. As before, the overriding consideration has been to design chapters that reflect a scheme of periodization based on changes in the nature of the ruling elite, with the principal events in each period grouped appropriately under section headings and recounted in an interrelated sequence of subsections. The flow of the narrative, in turn, has been modified to better reveal this underlying and integrating theme.

Third, the bibliographical references appended to each subsection have been made selective rather than comprehensive, and in the process older works have been replaced by more recent studies. Since truly extensive bibliographical compilations, suitably annotated, now are available in the Korean studies field, a survey history such as this surely is freed from any obligation to be bibliographically all-encompassing. Nevertheless, in the substantial appendix entitled Classified List of References, brief explanatory remarks have been supplied as guideposts to those who may wish to pursue a topic further.

By and large, these three areas of change constitute the substance of the present revision. At first glance this may appear to have been a simple undertaking, but for me it has not been easy to recast the book in this fashion. To begin with, considerable effort was expended merely in absorbing the findings of the many important studies that have appeared during the past decade. Moreover, the impact of this new scholarship on the direction the revision should take had to be dealt with as each issue in turn arose, thus occasioning frequent delays in the progress of the work. No doubt I would have fallen even further behind schedule were it not for the considerable assistance rendered by the editorial staff of the publisher, Ilchokak.

As I now apply the final, finishing touches to this endeavor, I feel as if a heavy burden has slipped from my shoulders. My only wish, as it was on the occasion of the earlier edition, is that this work may serve as a single foundation stone upon which a genuine understanding of the history of Korea partially may rest.

Finally, it should be observed that this book stands upon the research achievements that have nurtured it, those many fine studies by my fellow historians who devote their energies to seeking new insights into the nature of the Korean historical experience. To all these colleagues I wish to express my appreciation.

Summer, 1976
Looking Out on Inwang Mountain

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