



**PYONGYANG SEEN  
FROM ANECDOTES  
AND LEGENDARY TALES**

**Foreign Languages Publishing House  
DPR Korea  
Juche 110 (2021)**

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## **PREFACE**

Pyongyang, which is the capital city of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and which has a 5 000-year history and brilliant culture, still hands down anecdotes and legendary tales of various themes and rich contents. Among them are those portraying the patriotic struggle of its people in defence of their native town against foreign aggressors and those highlighting the fact that Pyongyang was the capital city of Ancient Joseon, origin of the Korean nation and their first state, and their moral traits and beautiful manners and customs.

This book introduces some of the anecdotes and legendary tales related with Pyongyang.

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## ANECDOTES

### General Ondal

Among the anecdotes related with the struggle of Pyongyangites against foreign aggression in the period of Koguryo, the most widely known is the tale of General Ondal.

In a village outside the city lived a boy, named Ondal, with his blind mother.

He was sturdy and kind-hearted. The family was so poor that he had to beg for food for his mother. As he begged in this and that village in threadbare clothes and with bare feet, people called him Ondal the Fool.

King Phyonggang of those days had three daughters. The last one was given to crying from her early years, so the king was wont to say, “As you offend my ears by crying now and then, you cannot become the wife of a gentleman after you have grown up. I’m afraid I might marry you to Ondal the Fool.”

When the princess became 16 years old, the king thought of marrying her to a young man of nobility origin.

Aware of it, she said, “Your Majesty has always said I have to become Ondal’s wife, and why do you go against your words? Even a humble man does not make a lie, and how can Your

Majesty say otherwise? Your Majesty's words are not what they should be, so I cannot obey you."

At first the king took her words as a joke, but on learning that she meant what she said, he broke into anger.

"As you are not willing to obey me, I cannot see you as my daughter and you can no longer live here. You are not my daughter and get out of this royal palace at once."

It was a royal edict and, as she had had made a mind, she left the palace, taking with her a gold ring, a silver ring and a few wristlets which she had worn from her early days.

Though she was bold in leaving her home palace, she was not aware which was which outside of it, so she had to wander about before asking her way to Ondal's house.

In a hard-of-access hut in a mountain valley, she found the blind woman. She politely bowed to the woman and told her why she had come.

Surprised, Ondal's mother said, waving her hands:

"Your body emits refreshing aroma and your words carry humane tenderness. You must be someone. But it must be wrong for you to have come here, urged by a fool's advice. My son went to the mountain to cut the bark out of pine tree to allay his hunger. How can you, a young lady, marry such a humble boy? It does not make sense, so please go back."

Taking her chapped hands in hers, the princess said she would wait until Ondal came home.

However, Ondal did not come home soon. She decided to go to

find him. On the middle of the ridge, she saw a young man climbing down through barked trees with an A-frame on his back. Dishevelled hair, threadbare coat, feet bleeding from a cut by stone, large and rough hands—that is Ondal, she thought.

She rushed to him and bowed, telling him the story.

Dumbfounded at the sudden appearance of a beautiful and immaculately-clad girl, Ondal shouted, "This is not a place for women. You are not a human, but a witch. Get clear of my way."

Ondal hurriedly climbed down the mountain.

Feeling sorry for herself, the princess also climbed down the mountain, and spent the night in front of Ondal's house.

Next morning she saw Ondal and said in real earnest:

"I've none other than you to rely on. Please accept me. I'll support you and your mother to the best of my abilities."

Ondal became hesitant.

Reading his mind, the princess went on:

"Old sages said, 'Even a *mal* of grain and a yard of cloth can be shared.' If we share a common mind, castes cannot be a matter in our becoming one."

Moved by her sincerity, Ondal and his mother accepted her request.

From the next day the princess worked diligently in daytime, and at night taught Ondal alphabet. Soon Ondal learned the ABC. Reading military books by himself and learning martial arts with the help of a master, he became a warrior.

The princess realized that her husband now needed a horse.

She took out her gold wristlet and exchanged it with a horse for him.

In Koguryo it was a tradition to hold a hunting competition on the Rangnang Plain on every March 3 by the lunar calendar to choose brave warriors as generals.

The king himself participated in hunting, accompanied by ministers and other officials of the five ministries. As contestants in this competition were all their own heroes, it was next to impossible to distinguish oneself among them.

But Ondal, swift, strong and brave, excelled others in horsemanship, swordsmanship and archery, hunting more animals than others.

Looking at the game, the king asked Ondal:

“What’s your name?”

“Ondal from a village outside the Walled City of Pyongyang, Your Majesty.”

“So you’re Ondal the Fool?”

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

Ondal explained how he learned letters and martial arts with the help of the princess.

The king looked at the sky for a good while, before saying, “Today’s winner is you.”

Later, a neighbouring country invaded Koguryo.

Commanding the advance party, Ondal beheaded scores of enemy soldiers and, in command of his unit, raided many enemy positions. When the feats were evaluated after repulsing the

foreign aggressors, all said the victory ought to be attributed to the feats performed by General Ondal.

The king made a public acknowledgement of his meritorious service, received him as his son-in-law with due ceremony and conferred him the title of *Taehyong*. With king’s love for and trust in him growing, Ondal’s authority and prestige increased.

One day he said to the king, “Silla has occupied a part of the territory of our Koguryo and made its county of it. Its populace is very grieved for it. May I hope that you would give me some soldiers without reproaching my foolishness and imperfectness. Then I will surely win back that part of our country.”

While commanding battles, he himself went to battlesites, beheading the soldiers of Silla. While winning back the territory of the country inch by inch, he was seriously wounded when the war was coming to its end.

Amid the soldiers paying tribute to his memory, a funeral ceremony was held according to the customs and courtesy. When ten men tried to take his coffin to the grave, the coffin would not move, as if the sorrow over the death of a renowned general were so great.

This news was sent to the princess. Hearing that Ondal fell in action, she readily came to the battlesite. Unable to repress the surging sorrow, she cried, “Life or death has been decided. O please go to your place.”

Only then the coffin moved.

The whole country wept in sorrow, and it rained heavily that

day. More grieved were the people of Pyongyang, who had known him from his early days. They handed over the tale of Ondal down through generations.

### **Deer-footed Lady and Her Sons**

In olden days there lived in Pyongyang a lady with feet resembling those of deer.

Her two sons had similar feet. The lady used to tell them to practice martial arts in the courtyard of the house because their fellows in the village would make a mockery of them for their feet. But sometimes they would go outside. Once they beat the son of a landlord in a fit of fury, only to kill him.

Thinking that the landlord would not let them go scot-free, the lady took the sons to the seaside that night and got on a small boat. But she found that she had been in such a hurry that she had failed to take provisions with her. She anchored at a small harbour and ran to a nearby village after telling her sons to wait for her on the boat.

But the boat drifted to nowhere by a storm.

After losing her sons, she entered Mt Taesong and took comfort in raising deer.

When her hair began to turn grey, foreign aggressors invaded the country.

The authorities ordered General Ulji Mun Dok to repulse the aggressors.

The deer-footed lady called on the general, and asked him to enlist her, a woman as she was, to help the soldiers. While planning an operation to annihilate the enemy soldiers, the general went all alone to enemy position one day. He was determined to learn about the situation of the enemy. Fearful of his personal safety, the lady followed him without his knowing.

The commander of the enemy troops thought of detaining him, for he had been secretly ordered from his king before leaving his country to capture the Koguryo's general if he saw him. But seeing him, he was overpowered by Ulji Mun Dok's composure, majestic appearance and, moreover, by his logic argument. He decided to let go of him. But regretful of it later, he ordered his soldiers to pursue him.

At this critical juncture, he was snatched from the jaws of death thanks to the lady, who was waiting for him with a boat at the riverside.

Among the enemy soldiers there were two brothers renowned for fighting more bravely than others. They were said to be deer-footed.

Quite surprised, the lady, disguising herself as a granny, went to the enemy position and met them. She told the two young men to put off their shoes, herself putting off her shoes. The three were deer-footed.

After telling her sons what had happened after her separation from them, she said, "You are sons of Koguryo as well as mine. And yet you have levelled your swords at your

compatriots. Isn't this an act of treason?"

Remorseful of their ignorance of their true motherland, the two generals went over to the camp of Koguryo next day, repenting of their past in front of their mother and asking General Ulji Mun Dok to allow them to make up for their mistake in the fight against the enemy.

Later the two generals did their share in driving the aggressors out of the country and winning victory in the war.

## Othan

The water of the Taedong, forming one channel after passing Rungna Island, is divided into two channels by Yanggak Island. The channel on the side of the present Pyongyang Grand Theatre is called Othan, or Crow Ford in English.

The ford has been called so since the days when the Japanese aggressors invaded Pyongyang during the Imjin Patriotic War (1592-1598).

The Japanese invaders advanced as far as the Taedong, across which there was the Walled City of Pyongyang. But they failed to cross the river as the local people had already hidden all boats. They had to find out a ford. They tried hard, to no avail; everywhere the water was so deep that it was above the back of a horse and the height of a man.

When they were sitting on a bank of the river with nothing more to do, a flock of crows flew in the evening sky and alighted

on the middle of the river near Yanggak Island.

An officer of the enemy troops, who had been looking at the scene absent-mindedly, shouted, "That's it."

He was apparently reminded of the fact that crows, not wild ducks or wild geese, can alight on the river because that part of the river is so shallow.

He wanted to drive his men to the ford, but afraid of the Korean soldiers standing guard on the walls on the other side of the river, he had some of his men try to cross the river there after darkness set in.

Hearing from them that the water was knee-high deep, he ordered all his men to cross the river in the dead of night when the Korean soldiers would be sleeping.

He then waited for his soldiers shouting hurrah on the walls on the opposite side of the river.

At last shouts resounded and lights flashed on the walls. What he saw were his soldiers turning back in the midstream of the river. He shouted an order to continue the march and even drove those remaining in the camp.

The gunfire ceased at daybreak.

Thinking that his men must have occupied the town by now, the Japanese officer looked at the river and the walls, only to be surprised: The wall was as quiet as ever and the corpses of his soldiers were floating in the river.

*What happened? Where is the ford where the crows were walking?*

He was not aware of the action of the tides in the Taedong. It was at ebb tide when the crows alighted on the river, while it was at high tide when Japanese troops were crossing the river. The people of Pyongyang launched the counterattack at high tide, in the dead of night.

The Japanese officer was only dumbfounded in front of the mysterious river that had swallowed most of his troops.

Since then the ford has been called Othan, in the sense that crows lured the enemy soldiers to the ford, a snare.

### **Kye Wol Hyang and Temple for Woman Martyr**

This happened when the Japanese soldiers were temporarily occupying Pyongyang during the Imjin Patriotic War (1592-1598).

Kye Wol Hyang, a renowned entertainment girl in Pyongyang, discussed with a man in the city how to kill one of the most brutal and courageous Japanese officers so as to dishearten the enemy troops and facilitate the counterattack by the Korean volunteers.

To put the plan into practice, she strolled under a willow tree near the Ryongwang Pavilion frequented by the Japanese officers.

A Japanese officer, who happened to pass by the pavilion,

saw her. Attracted by her, he had her abducted and taken to his camp.

In the enemy camp Kye spied on the enemy in detail. One day, when the enemy was holding a party on the pavilion, she sent a letter containing the enemy movements to a commander of the Korean forces, General Kim Ung So, by means of a kite.

A few days later she guided Kim Ung So and helped him behead the Japanese officer she was attending to. When the two were about to come out of the wall with the enemy officer's head, the day broke. She urged the general to get out of the city, saying she would follow him later. She then lured the enemy soldiers on pursuit to another direction, before being arrested by them. She remained to the principle of patriotism to the last moment of her life.

When the enemy soldiers were at a loss after the death of the officer, General Kim Ung So, commanding the volunteers, attacked Pyongyang and liberated it.

After the war the people of Pyongyang built the Temple for Woman Martyr and handed down her patriotism and exploits to the coming generations.

### **Pyongyang Bell Is Rung**

The tales of Kim Sondal, alias Pongi, are widely known among the Korean people.

This happened after he had returned to Pyongyang. Before

coming to Pyongyang, he had raised an uproar in the capital city and even the royal court by making Ingyong, the national bell, toll in a wrong time. He was walked off to the king, but was set off.

The people of Pyongyang were delighted at the news, but the noblemen were unhappy with it; they were afraid that the naughty man, who had made fun of the strict rule of the country, would mock them by some dishonest means.

Every day they gathered and discussed how to drive him into a tight corner. Then one day, while holding a party under a willow by the Taedong Gate, they saw Kim Sondal passing by.

They stopped him.

“Hey, you were set scot-free even after having the national bell ring in the capital city in a wrong time. What about having the Pyongyang Bell ring in a wrong time here?” asked one of them, pointing to the bell.

“How can I refuse your request, sir? But you have to pay for it.”

“Pay? How should we pay you?”

“I’m not in a position to roll in money or property. I only want about five pots of wine to quench my thirst.”

“Five pots of wine? With pleasure. When can you have the bell ring?”

“Well... I can’t say when. But I will try my best.”

After drinking to the full, Kim Sondal took leave of them, the noblemen laughing behind his back.

From the next day they gathered in the same place with the hope of seeing him, but he never appeared for two months.

In the meanwhile, Kim Sondal went to Junghwa, a gate county to Pyongyang.

The Pyongyang Bell would toll at the time of opening the gate of the Walled City of Pyongyang in the morning and closing it in the evening, when an event of national importance took place and when a royal order was to arrive.

In Junghwa Kim Sondal waited for a royal messenger to Phyongan Province.

One day in the third month, he could see the messenger taking a royal edict to the Phyongan governor.

Through a man accompanying the messenger, he learned the time of the day of the messenger’s arrival in Pyongyang and hurriedly left for the city.

After crossing the Taedong on a boat and getting off near the Taedong Gate, he was about to go past the gate, when he saw the noblemen waiting for him.

“Where have you been to, Kim?”

“Hello, sirs. I’ve been to see my sick friend. His illness was serious, so I have attended to him to this day.”

“But you haven’t forgotten the promise?”

“Promise?”

“The promise that you will have the Pyongyang Bell ring.”

“Ah! I remember. I’ll do it, never mind. And you promised me five pots of wine?”

“You now remember? When can you manage it?”

“Tomorrow. What time do you think it is best? What about three in the afternoon?”

The time was when the royal messenger was to arrive in Pyongyang.

The noblemen gave him five pots of wine, and he shared the wine with old men and his friends.

When it was nearly three o'clock the next day, he went to the Taedong Gate, pretending to be forced by the noblemen.

He now and then cast a glance across the Taedong. As soon as he saw the signs of the messenger and his party appearing, he suddenly rushed to the bell tower, shouting, “Ring the bell! Ring the bell!”

Now the bell began to ring, resounding across the quiet city.

Kim Sondal was arrested and taken to the governor's office. The day before the governor had been informed by the noblemen that Kim Sondal was attempting to have the Pyongyang Bell ring as he had done with the national bell and swindled the king. The governor had his men lie in ambush to arrest him and punish him by invoking law.

The noblemen became highly spirited as the trouble-maker had been arrested.

“Why did you raise an uproar in the city by having the bell ring in a wrong time?” asked the governor.

“What do you mean by wrong time? I had it ring because a royal messenger is coming.”

“A royal messenger? Shut up. I know that you laid a bet for five pots of wine. Though I am in the office, I can hear and see what happens outside. Though you were safe in front of His Majesty, it would not be repeated in front of me.”

“Please do so after seeing whether your ears and eyes are right or this humble man's are right.”

There and then, an officer rushed into the office helter-skelter and said, “A royal messenger just passed the Taedong Gate, asking why the governor was not receiving him.”

The voices of the guards of the messenger clearing the road for him could be heard even in the governor's office. Dumbfounded, the governor could not but say, “What should I do?”

Kim Sondal said to him with composure, “This is because your eyes and ears are not better than this humble man's.”

He then walked out of the office.

## **Selling the Taedong**

There lived in a plain area in Phyongan Province a man, who had grown rich by bleeding the peasants white.

One day, with an ambition to get richer, he went to Pyongyang with a sackful of coins on the back of a donkey.

From his first day in Pyongyang he went here and there to see how he can gain more profit with less money.

Seeing that the people of Pyongyang loathed him, Kim

Sondal, alias Pongi, went to the market and borrowed a sackful of coins from a merchant. He then made around of the houses near the Taedong Gate; giving each house a coin, he said, "Please take this, and when you come to the Taedong tomorrow morning to fetch water, please give it back to me."

As they were aware that the man was going to make a fun of another miserly man, the people readily agreed.

Next morning the man from the plain area went to the Taedong to take a stroll. Enjoying the sunrise over the Taedong, he walked to the Taedong Gate, and saw a man with an open sack. More surprising was that people who were fetching water were putting a coin each into the sack at the entrance to the gate. Soon the sack became full.

The rich man thought, *That is really money-making business. The river flows all the year round and people in the city cannot live without drinking water. What a good idea!*

He approached Kim Sondal and said, "Please sell the river to me."

Kim Sondal refused there and then, saying the river was an asset of his family handed down through generations and it was the lifeline of his family members and relatives numbering a hundred.

Growing anxious, the rich man said he would pay any amount quoted. He then said he would give him all the money he had taken to Pyongyang with him.

After a good while of bargaining, Kim Sondal told him with

an air of reluctance to bring the sackful of money to him.

Happy with the thought that he bought the river, he made a large chest the whole night, and went to the river before the day broke. The people were fetching the river water as they had done the previous day, but none of them was dropping a coin into his chest.

Thinking that they were not aware that he had bought the river, he shouted, "Please drop your coins into this chest."

Still none of them cast a glance at him.

Furious, he blocked their way and said, "Hey, I am the master of this river. How can you fetch its water without paying a penny?"

"Master?"

"Sure. I bought it yesterday. So you have to pay for the water."

"What a man! The Pyongyang people are masters of the Taedong. When did you buy it from us? And what is your talk about paying when everyone of us has drunk its water for generations?"

"Are you going to make a fun of me? Yesterday you paid for fetching the water. The coins you dropped yesterday were for payment, weren't they?"

Only then did they understand Kim Sondal's witty play, and broke into laughter.

On learning that he had been swindled, he could not but return to his native village, and he had never appeared in Pyongyang again.

## A Poet Sheds Tears

Kim Hwang Won (1045-1117), a renowned poet in the days of Koryo, travelled many scenic spots, leaving poems that sing the praises of their beautiful scenery.

One summer day he came to Pyongyang and went up the Pubyok Pavilion on Moran Hill. He was taken aback by the scenery—the blue water of the Taedong meandering by the Chongnyu Cliff and the walled city and the Tongdaewon Plain stretching far and wide in 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 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 stretch of the Tongdaewon 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 became.

Time passed with the two lines written, and only sweats from his forehead wetted the silk cloth. Disappointed, 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 the beautiful scenery of Pyongyang, which even the renowned poet failed to describe fully.

## A Poet Born of Pyongyang

Jong Ji Sang (?-1135), hailing from Pyongyang, was outstandingly talented in composing poem since 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 laundering. 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 feather floats on the water  
The red feet tread on the clear water*

As he became famous after fully grown up, Kim Pu Sik (1075-1151), 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.

### **Pak Taji Defends Wangsongthan**

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 Wangsongthan.

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 fords of the river vulnerable to the enemy's attack in order to foil its offensive. There were several fords in the river.

The ten warriors of Pyongyang were tasked to defend Wangsongthan.

Pak led an advance party to take up positions at the ford now that sufficient preparations had not been made to fight the enemy. Other warriors including Ko Chun Myong, Kim Ja Thaek and Hyon Su Baek 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 ford instead of in a place before the ford.

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

"Why? Do you think this is a wrong place?"

"Certainly! Wangsongthan 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 ford."

"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 Wangsongthan, 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 ford, passing by them.

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

The volunteers flew 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 like you that we would surely be defending the neck of the ford. 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.

### **Tablet on the Ryongwang Pavilion—*The Most Beautiful Place in the World***

From of old, the Ryongwang Pavilion in Pyongyang was known as one of the eight scenic spots in the Kwanso area (the northwestern part of Korea–Tr) for a fine view it commands. It

had other names like Jeilludae (First Pavilion) and Manhwaru (Pavilion of Every Kind of Flowers).

The present structure is what was rebuilt in 1670.

The pavilion conveys a story about General Kim Ung So, who beheaded a commanding officer of the Japanese aggressor army in cooperation with the patriotic-minded woman Kye Wol Hyang during the Imjin Patriotic War.

When you go up to the pavilion, you can see a big tablet written with *The Most Beautiful Place in the World* in Chinese characters hanging on a beam of the ceiling.

Here is a story about how this tablet came to be hung on the beam.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century an envoy of Ming China visited the pavilion one day during his stay in Pyongyang.

Fascinated by the beautiful landscape unfolding before the pavilion, he frequented it ever since.

At last the day came when he had to return home. He asked a carpenter in the market to make a good tablet. And he wrote on it *The Most Beautiful Place in the World* in Chinese characters with sincerity.

He carried it to the pavilion and said to the people there:

"Although I have travelled to a lot of places in my life until today when my hair has turned grey, I have never seen such a beautiful landscape as this. Why can I not call this place the most beautiful place in the world? It's my earnest wish to have this tablet hung at the pavilion."

Thus, the tablet came to be hung on the beam of the pavilion.

Years later, one summer day a commander of foreign aggressors, who invaded Korea by surprise, climbed the Ryongwang Pavilion after the fall of Pyongyang.

Seeing the tablet he yelled.

“Remove that tablet at once. How can we say that a small country lying at a corner of this world boast the most beautiful place in the world?”

It was not until he saw his soldiers taking it off that he went up the pavilion and looked around it.

But he was mesmerized by the picturesque landscape in spite of himself.

In a depressed voice, he ordered his men to bring back the tablet.

He cut off the letters *in the world* with his sword from the tablet, and ordered them to hang what remained of the tablet in the original place.

When the soldiers hesitated, unable to make head or tail of it, he explained that although the letters *in the world* went against the grain with him, there was no denying the fact that this was the most beautiful place.

Only then did the soldiers hang it back on the original place.

After routing the invaders, the Pyongyangites felt sorry, but left the tablet devoid of the two characters as it was, for they considered that although the characters were cut off, the fact that even the invaders hostile to their country did not deny the superb

view of Pyongyang was worth a pride of Pyongyang.

For a long time since then, visitors to the pavilion could not help feeling sorry for the two characters missing whenever they saw the tablet inscribed with *the most beautiful place*. It is only recently that the two meaningful letters were restored.

Now the genuine meaning of the words *The Most Beautiful Place in the World* comes into more limelight thanks to the superb view of the shores of the Taedong River that have undergone a sea change today.

### **State Military Examination Held on Rungna Island**

In autumn one year in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century, King Sejo made a trip to Pyongyang and saw to it that a state military examination was held on Rungna Island.

Warriors of Pyongyang were all delighted at the news, because such examinations had usually been held in the royal palace; in addition, the participants were dominated by those from southern provinces.

Master Pak of the Taesongsan martial art training centre was more pleased than anybody else. Possessed of matchless martial art, he had trained a large number of warriors for decades. He was eager to send his disciples to the state examination and let them pass it with honour, and thus demonstrate the pride in being their mentor.

The examination day came at last, and Pak took his warriors to the island.

The island was already packed with warriors and spectators.

However, Pak's excitement gave way to disappointment.

It was because the king, declaring the opening of the examination, said that the examination was limited to those from Phyongan Province and that attendants from other provinces, if any, would be executed.

Consequently, his disciple surnamed Ryu who hailed from Hamgyong Province and was best at martial arts, was barred from the exam.

When the exam began, Ryu wept bitterly with his sword driven into the ground, while Pak beat his breast impatiently.

When the second group was preparing for the exam, Ryu said, "Sir, I can't stand it any longer."

He joined the group on horseback, defying death.

After cutting a brilliant figure and getting full marks in the horse-riding, swordsmanship and arrow shooting, he was the first to reach the finish line.

After the winners were announced, Ryu was called to stand before the king.

Master Pak was on pins and needles, for he knew Ryu would be executed if the fact that he came from Hamgyong Province was revealed.

While inquiring into his family background and home province, the king got angry.

"Didn't you know anyone who is not from Phyongan Province will be executed if he participates in the examination?"

"I knew it."

"Are you sure?"

"Though I was born in Hamgyong Province, I have grown up as a warrior training at the Taesongsan martial art training centre in Pyongyang. Today Your Majesty is here to see the martial arts of Pyongyang. How can I refrain from attending it, fearing death?"

"Then won't you complain if you are executed?"

"My mentor has taught me that for a warrior, the spirit of sacrificing himself for the country is more important than the martial arts and tactics."

"The self-sacrificing spirit?"

"Yes. I have nothing to regret even if I die now."

Rising from his seat, the king took him by the shoulder to stand him up, saying in admiration, "Today I have met a genuine warrior."

Then he recommended Ryu as the champion, giving him an award and promoting him to a military officer.

After the examination, a minister of the government aboard a sedan and escorted by scores of soldiers came to Pak's house at the martial arts training centre of Mt Taesong, and conveyed the royal edict that he was appointed as the drill instructor in the capital city. However, he declined it and stayed in Mt Taesong, training warriors.

## **Ryook and *Konghuin***

Ryook lived happily with her husband Kwakrijago at a ferry on the Taedong in Pyongyang in the period of Ancient Joseon. She was a talented folk musician who created *Konghuin*, a lyric song, and played it on the small *konghu* with 13 strings.

Her husband was a boatman, but she loved music very much despite her poor family life, and always enjoyed playing the *konghu*.

One day she played the *konghu* as usual, waiting for her husband to return home.

On his return, her husband told her the following story:

“It was early morning when I was oaring the boat across the ferry. A mad, gray-haired man jumped into the river, taking a bottle in his hand, and began to cross the river. His wife followed at his heels and shouted at him not to do it, but he went on and got drowned. The woman played the *konghu*, and sang the impromptu *Kongmudoha*. The song sounded very sad and painful. After finishing the song, she threw herself into the river and got drowned.”

After hearing the story of the tragic death of the man and the song, Ryook took the *konghu* and created *Konghuin*, mourning the drowned couple.

It is said that the song was sad and pathetic enough to move every listener to tears.

There is no knowing of the melody of the song as it has not been passed down, but only the text, a version of Chinese translation, has been handed down so far.

*Despite my opposition*

*You forded the river, and why?*

*Now that you have got drowned*

*What shall I do, my darling*

## **Ho Tuk Son, Father of Ballads of Northwestern Provinces**

Ho Tuk Son was a representative celebrated balladist who was active in the northwestern provinces centring on Pyongyang in the closing years of the feudal Joseon dynasty and a talented folk musician, who left his imprints on the history of national music as the father of ballads of northwestern provinces of Korea.

Bereaved of his father in his childhood, he grew up under the care of his blind mother, and later became a famous singer for drollery and humour by learning vocalism and the techniques of depiction.

He contributed to the emergence and development of the ballads of northwestern provinces by combining the lyrics of songs which were developing on the basis of the living background of the poor urban populace with balladic melody.

Sometimes he toured the capital city to spread the ballads and came to be known as the father of the ballads of northwestern provinces among the celebrated singers of the time.

He applied motions of hand and body to suit the contents of songs and performed even the comic dance with a pillow on his back, attracting the attention of the audience.

Consequently, his artistic activities were replete with interesting episodes. One of them is *The Royal Family Line Will Be Everlasting*.

Some years after the rehabilitation project of the Kyongbok Royal Palace was finished in 1868 (fifth year of King Kojong's reign), the feudal rulers arranged a concert in the palace, and invited noted singers from across the country. However, they neither recognized the balladists in northwestern provinces as celebrated ones nor included them on the list of invitation, pursuing the policy of discrimination against the provinces.

The only exception was Ho Tuk Son, and his invitation was aimed at giving him a try as he was a renowned balladist in the northwestern region.

The stage of that day's concert was mounted by celebrated singers from across the country. The audience comprised all government officials, civil and military, with the king at the centre.

At last Ho's turn came.

The lively and bold melodies of ballads of northwestern provinces woven with comic dance with a pillow on his back added zest to the concert.

In addition, when his horsehair headband moved up and down with his unusually big earflaps moving up and down to the rhythm of the ballads, the audience burst into laughter.

The king and civil and military officials rolled about with laughter over the scene.

In fact, the stage of that day's entertainment was monopolized by Ho Tuk Son, and the performer and audience were both so amused that the latter insisted on many encores.

At this juncture an incident happened in which Ho would have been executed right away on the spot.

His improvisatory melody and lyrics gushing out like a spring stopped short at the part of a verse from an old book he just set to melody.

It was the line to the effect that the spring grass grows green every year, but a royal generation, once gone, will perish.

In the past, when a ballad singing was held before the common people who cherished a grudge against the feudal rulers including the king, he sang proudly the line in the sense that there would be a time when the royal family line might break. He was so excited that he forgot the presence of the king.

However, the part *the royal family line* was already uttered, and if he continued with *might break*, he would be executed on the spot.

He was good at the improvisatory song, but his face grew dark at the moment.

Even the officials who had been laughing until now were

watching the behaviour of the king and Ho's mouth, wondering if the fool's head would fall down.

Now the line was repeated for the second time, followed by a pause and a bout of the comic dance, and ended with the shout of *will be everlasting*.

In a twinkling, the tension turned into sighs and acclamation among the audience.

It seemed like an excellent tactful art that brought the performance to climax, relaxing the strained nerves of the audience.

Satisfied with his remark that the royal family line would continue long, the king called Ho to his side, and had him served with liquor.

And he saw to it that the latter was promoted to the post of Chongsun, a military post of middle grade in the local army, as required by him.

After accepting the post, he returned to his native place, Pyongyang.

All of his villagers were taken aback when they saw Ho who returned home wearing a glittering sword and military uniform.

However, he resigned from the post, took off his military uniform and kept it in the wardrobe.

It was said that his request for the post was aimed at taking revenge on soldiers who had bullied his beloved blind mother one day in the market place. Thereafter, he was given the nickname "Ho Chongsun" by the Pyongyang citizens.

## **Paek Son Haeng**

Beside the Ryongwang Pavilion on the bank of the Taedong River meandering through downtown Pyongyang is the Paek Son Haeng Memorial Hall, a three-storeyed stone building.

Paek Son Haeng (November 19, 1848-May 8, 1933) was a patriotic woman who donated a huge sum of money, a fruition of diligence, frugality and the economy, to the righteous undertakings for the country and nation, remaining single until well over eighty.

Born as the eldest daughter of Paek Ji Yong, a poor scholar, on November 19, 1848, she lost her father at the age of 7 and suffered from poverty before she got married at 14, but her husband died when she was 16.

She had her blood from fingers fed to her husband on his deathbed, postponing his life for five days. She wanted him to live longer, but he passed away, leaving his young wife behind.

She had been called Widow Paek thereafter, and she accumulated wealth with diligent and unremitting efforts even in those dark days of Japanese colonial rule; she worked for decades like a day, weaving hemp cloth with a loom, spinning thread, dealing in bean sprouts, bean curds, hogwash and flowers and breeding pigs.

With the money she made like this, she bought at a cheap price an unattended stony mountain, and sold it back at a price

scores of times the cost to Onota, a Japanese who posed as a master in Korea under Japan's occupation.

Although she became one of the richest in the area of Phyongan Province, she worked diligently and led a simple life, and lavished her saved money on the righteous undertakings for the nation.

When the bridge before her village was damaged by flood, causing inconvenience to the traffic of the villagers, she unhesitatingly donated money for the building of a stone bridge. Thereafter they gave her an epithet Son Haeng (good conduct-Tr), and called the bridge Paekson Bridge.

Afterwards, she contributed to the national enlightenment movement and educational work for the rising generations by donating a large expanse of land to schools like Kwangsong Primary School, Changdok School and Sungui Girls School in Pyongyang and built a handsome public hall in downtown Pyongyang only for the Koreans.

The public hall is the present Paek Son Haeng Memorial Hall.

Today the building serves as an important place for education that instils patriotism in the people. Registered as a national treasure, it is now under the management by the state.

## **LEGENDARY TALES**

### **With the Time-honoured History of Pyongyang**

#### **Palace of Willows, Tangun's Palace**

The many legendary tales about Tangun, the founding father of the Korean nation, are all based on the conception of the Korean forefathers who regarded Tangun as a sacred being.

The story about Tangun's Palace is one of them.

It was the day when Tangun ascended to the throne after he established Ancient Joseon and set Pyongyang as the capital.

His subjects failed to build a royal palace in advance. Therefore, that night, too, the new king returned to his humble home on the sunny side of beautiful Moran Hill.

During the night the subjects discussed that now that he had established a country and become its king, he ought to be presented with a palace, and decided to suggest it to him.

Next morning, they headed to his home.

What a thing!

The path leading to Tangun's house from the Taedong River gave way to a long, wide and tidy earthen stairs leading to the

side of Moran Hill and a cosy palace surrounded by willows rose up on the site of his house; and there was a thick wood of birch trees on the close-grown grassland; and tigers, bears, deer, roe deer, cows and sheep were galloping.

The subjects were so surprised that they looked at it for a while before ascending the stairs to the Willow Palace. Tangun was strolling in meditation in the woods.

They asked him, "What has happened, Your Majesty?"

After patting the deer on the neck in front of him, Tangun answered, "I can't understand it, either. I only dreamed last night; in the dream, the heavenly god descended and said to me that as I became the king of the country I ought to have my residence, and then he disappeared. In the morning I woke up only to find that the former shabby house was replaced by this magnificent palace."

The subjects knelt down and said looking up to the sky.

"Thank you, thank you."

Apologizing for their failure to provide him with a palace beforehand, they kept bowing to the sky as an expression of gratitude to the heavenly god.

### **Palace for the Eldest Son of Heaven and Earth**

While managing the affairs of the state after establishing the country, Tangun used to ascend to the heaven on a Flying

Unicorn to report the state of his undertakings.

It happened one day when he went up to the heaven.

That day the Moran Hill of Mt Kumsu, where there was Tangun's home, was shrouded with a mist as white as the new crop of cotton.

From the misty-shrouded palace came noises throughout the night, voices of the people carrying things, sounds of dressing stones and cutting down trees.

Next morning, a grand palace that had risen overnight on a side of Moran Hill shone brightly under the morning sun.

Amazed, Tangun's men rushed there, and saw the palace made up of blue stones standing over one hundred feet high and a silvery plate inscribed with *Palace for the Eldest Son of Heaven and Earth* on the blue stone at the top of the gate tower of the palace.

Although rapt with joy, marvelling at the spontaneous emergence of a grand and sumptuous palace, they did not dare to step into it.

They were eagerly waiting for Tangun to descend from the heaven and occupy the palace as soon as possible.

One of Tangun's aides came out of the palace, and conveyed his instructions that they should come in.

"Oh! The king is already in the palace!"

They followed him into the palace.

The pillars, walls and floors in the palace were built of blue stones which were all well-dressed and shiny.

The costume of Tangun receiving them was also rare. Feeling as if they were in the heavenly palace, the subjects rubbed their eyes and lay on their hands and knees before Tangun for a while, looking up at him vacantly.

They asked Tangun, “When did you come back and where did this palace come from, Your Majesty?”

He answered with a gentle smile, stroking down his long beard drooping down his chest.

“I ascended to the heaven yesterday. The heavenly king said that now that a country was established and I was made the king, there ought to be a palace to preserve the national prestige, and took me to somewhere. There were many colourful palaces standing in rows. He asked me to choose one of them. I pointed to this palace, and the heavenly king wrote personally on the name plate and put it up at the palace. At his request, I opened the door, entered and looked around the palace during which it descended here of itself, as you can see.”

Upon hearing him, the subordinates again bowed to Tangun, and shouted.

“Our country will be everlasting thanks to the care of the heavenly king.”

It is said that the country thrived since the emergence of the palace, and even after the lapse of hundreds of years the neighbouring countries were so awe-stricken to see the palace in Tangun Korea, the one and only palace in the world, that they dared not to invade it.

## **Mt Hong**

Mt Hong is a low mountain rising at the end of mountains which run down to the southwest from Mt Taebak in Kangdong County.

From ancient times it has been called Mt Hong, or Red Mountain, because it is a bare mountain where trees and grass do not grow well.

Here is a legendary tale that tells why it became a bare mountain.

It was one early spring day when Tangun became 10 years old after birth as a son of the patriarch of the Paktal tribe.

His father called him, and saw him.

The son looked so precocious for his age in all aspects.

His father wanted to pat his face and hug his body.

But he did not betray his emotions even a bit; he said looking down at his son with a stern face.

“Ten years of age is not young for a man. Moreover, you should perform a great undertaking in future, so you must make redoubled efforts to qualify yourself.”

“I see, sir.”

“From now on you should train archery and swordsmanship not in the garden but train martial arts for one year, camping in the place I designated. But if the level of martial arts you trained does not satisfy me in autumn, don’t think of returning home.”

“I will bear it in mind.”

His father took him to the training site he had chosen before. That place was just the present Mt Hong.

It was a hillock sandwiched between the high Taebak Mountains standing up like a wall in the rear and a limpid river flowing in front, so it was very favourable for training martial arts.

From that day on he enthusiastically trained, camping in the mountain.

With a firm resolve to meet his father’s expectations without fail, he was engrossed in training to reach the level enough to astonish his father in autumn.

The people who saw his training admired at his performance in martial arts. At last he went to his father to show the result of his one-year training.

“I have returned to show you what have I trained for one year.”

“By the way I cannot evaluate your level correctly in the garden. We must go out to the training site.”

After inspecting it for a while, he ordered his son to stand before him.

“Why were you so lazy in training?”

He sternly asked him who was perplexed, “Was there any grass when you came here for the first time?”

It was early spring when Tangun came here for the first time. So the grass did not yet come up.

“None.”

“Why is this place overgrown with grass?” asked his father pointing at the knee-high grass on the training site.

He answered thoughtlessly that it grew in the period of training.

“So it means that your will was weaker than the grass. The grass grew to this extent even under the hoofs, so how can you say that you were not lazy?”

He could not reply to his father.

“The purpose of training martial arts is to develop not only talent but also valour and will.”

Understanding his father’s intention by then, Tangun bent his knees.

“Father, I made a mistake.”

He could not return home.

“I was labelled as lazy because I was weaker than the grass!”

It was really a shame.

He felt compunction and made a firm determination to prevent even a grass from coming up in the training place next year.

He did not stop training in horse riding even in the blizzards of winter, and from early spring he galloped the horse again and again stamping flat all the grasses which began to come up on the ridges and at the foot of the mountain.

He jumped out of the bed and rushed to the training site in the middle of night as he thought, while sleeping after a day’s

training, the grasses seemed to have sprouted just before. Even in midsummer not a blade of grass could be seen on the training site. Instead it was covered with red dust and white stone powder.

His untiring and unremitting efforts to train martial arts disallowed even a grass to grow on the site until autumn.

At last one day in autumn his father appeared again on the site to see his son's martial arts with his own eyes.

His face lit up with satisfaction and pleasure only when he treaded on the red mountain.

"I'm glad to see the mountain which turned red like this. Now I can see a little of your will."

Looking round the people, he said, "To see the growth of a person, the pillar of our tribe, is the greatest pride and delight for us."

That year, too, Tangun did not return home.

As he trained martial arts on horseback for several years to develop his will and ambition, the mountain was literally reduced to a bare one.

It is said that the mountain has thus been called Red Mountain or Mt Hong until today.

## **Lake Tangun**

Lake Tangun is not so large, and is situated in Kangdong County.

As a natural lake formed by a spring gushing out from a rock

cave under it, the water is cool in summer and is not frozen but warm in winter. And the volume of water remains always the same.

This lake, clear and deep, teems with various kinds of fish and is visited in all seasons by wild birds and animals flocking for water.

It is said that the lake was named after Tangun because he not only enjoyed boating in the lake but also worked out original artifices in the course of observing different ecology and life of animals around it.

Here is a story about it.

It happened when he was figuring out a stratagem to annex the neighbouring Magwi tribe.

He was quietly rowing the boat in the lake, lost in deep thought.

A flock of wild ducks were catching fish swimming in the lake, and the birds were chirping on the rocks and among the bush.

A general under Tangun's command was standing guard to ensure his contemplation and stop the people's traffic on one shore of lake connected to the road, and a hound Tangun loved was sitting beside him, her tongue thrust out.

The sun was already in the middle of the sky, but silence reigned on the lake.

Even the chirps of a small unknown insect could be heard from the grassland on the opposite side of the lake.

At this point a soldier came galloping a horse along the road leading to the lake.

The noise scared off the wild ducks, while the hound suddenly got up and barked loudly at the approaching horse.

The general rushed to the horse and checked it. He rebuked, “How imprudent you are!”

The soldier dismounted and said on one of his knees, “I have something to urgently inform the patriarch.”

“However urgent it may be, you must wait in the military camp or come over here quietly. How dare you make a noise?”

“I’m sorry. I only thought of my commander’s order to urgently inform the patriarch...”

While the general was calling the soldier to account, Tangun rowed the boat to the shore of the lake and approached them.

The soldier bowed to Tangun and said, “I have brought the news from Mago Fort. The patriarch of Magwi who smelt out our offensive plan against the Mago Fort is now making full preparations, it is said. My commander was at a loss what to do in this case, so he ordered me to ask you for a countermeasure.”

“Yeah, he must be. I was just thinking a plan.”

The general reproached the soldier again.

“Look what trouble you caused. My patriarch has already expected it, but you disturbed his meditation.”

“I am awfully sorry, sir.”

“Stop it. This soldier did not bother my meditation but taught me an original artifice.”

Tangun asked them, who were in a puzzle not knowing what was what, “Where did the wild ducks fly away and toward where did this dog bark when you just galloped the horse to this lake?”

The soldier hesitated for a while not knowing why Tangun asked it and then said as he saw.

“This hound barked running toward me and the wild ducks flew away to the north to escape the beats of hoofs.”

“Then what should you do to catch this dog and flying wild ducks?”

Only then he did answer with confidence.

“We should strike the pouncing animal from behind and shoot to the front of the flying animal.”

“That’s it. It is just the stratagem to smash the Magwi tribe which is preparing a frontal attack. That’s what you just taught.”

Thus Tangun could easily annex the Magwi tribe by surprising it from behind while pretending to attack the fortress in front.

His artifice was inexhaustible like the spring gushing out from the rock cave, so this small lake was given the name of Tangun.

## **Adal Spring**

Adal Spring, which gushes out in Mt Adal, has many stories related with Tangun, and among them is the following story.

After founding Ancient Joseon with its capital in Pyongyang as a hot-blooded youth, Tangun ruled over the country extending its territory to the south and the north. But with the lapse of time his hair also turned grey.

In summer one year he came to pass the Kangdong area with his subjects on the way back from inspecting the southern part of the country.

He stopped the procession for a while there.

And still on horseback he looked round with deep emotion the beautiful mountains and streams of Kangdong.

The low bare hill with a mountain at the back like a folding screen in the north was the place where he trained military arts in his childhood and the limpid Sujong Stream flowing in the south was the place where he would wash his body stained with sweat and dust after training.

Everywhere he saw was associated with his childhood.

It was his native place to which he had never paid even a visit for he was so busy founding the country and expanding the territory after leaving this town with great ambition in his young days.

So he could not easily pass by.

After looking round mountains and streams, he said to his subjects.

“This inspection tour is not so busy, and why not drop in at this place?”

Then he said looking at Mt Adal.

“There is a cool and sweet fountain under that mountain, so let’s go and drink it.”

A smart subject galloped his horse to the spring in advance, and poured its clear water in the green jade vessel before offering it to Tangun.

Tangun, refusing to take it, said, “Originally spring water tastes good when one drinks it with his own hands.”

He dismounted from his horse and approached the well.

Its water was as clear and clean as ever.

On one of his knees he tried to dip up water with a gourd and froze suddenly. The former rosy face full of youth that had been mirrored in the water before gave way to the face of a grey-haired man now.

Aware that the old man was none other than himself, he gave vent to a desolate sigh unawares.

“Ah, I have now become old, too. I did not realize now is the time I should leave the important affairs of the state to my son and leave this world.”

On his return to the capital, he could not sleep that night as he was worried about the future affairs of the state. He apprehended that even after he handed over the throne to his son the country might prosper and achieve harmony and all the people might make efforts for the country like now.

After staying up the night with this thought, he began to write from the next day articles one by one to be observed by the posterity for the country’s prosperity and development.

When leaving the world, he saw to it that the articles he wrote with great devotion were declared across the country. It is said this was the testament he left to posterity.

Its content is as follows:

As all of you share a mind, you shall brace up yourselves and rule over others, mirroring your mind on others'.

To respect your parents and hold up the country with the same mind is just loyalty and filial devotion, so you shall value the country bearing this in your mind.

If you bite the ten fingers, all of them give pain to you, so you shall love one another and not be jealous of others so as to keep the family in perfect harmony and the country in peace.

There is feed for cattle and horse respectively, so you shall concede and not take away other's things so as to make the family and the country rich.

As there is a pair in wild birds, men and women shall not be dissipated and a couple shall maintain their relations to the end of their lives.

The weak and the humble are all the people of the country, so you shall neither despise nor insult them.

In life I depend on you and vice versa, so you shall be neither cunning nor vengeful nor violent against others.

Mountains and streams, trees and grasses yield foods, things and draft animals man eats and uses, so you shall love all nature.

His testament has been handed down to posterity with the thousands-year-old Adal Spring.

## Horse Tomb

There is a large tomb called Horse Tomb in the Chonggye Valley of Mt Taebak.

It is said that this tomb is that of the Flying Unicorn used by Tangun. It tells the following legendary tale.

It was after Tangun's body was buried in Kangdong true to his will after his death.

On the night of the day when his subjects returned after days-long funeral, there was a commotion in the royal palace in Pyongyang.

The Flying Unicorn Tangun had loved so much in his lifetime fasted since the passing of its master, and vanished nowhere just on the night of the day when the funeral ceremony for him was finished.

Puru, who was the eldest son of Tangun and succeeded his father, lamented at this news.

*It is a treasure of the country as a rare horse in the world, and for all its distinguished services it performed in founding the country assisting my father...*

He summoned an official who was in charge of the horse and gave him an order to find it at once.

The official sent people to every part of the country and he himself, too, wandered from place to place in search of it.

One day, upon hearing the news that it appeared in the

Kangdong area, he headed to it.

According to the locals, it was out of sight in daytime and came down to the tomb at midnight and wailed scratching it with its forelegs.

Its neigh rived a lot of hearts.

The official had his subordinates build a makeshift stable for the horse, but it would not settle there.

One night after several days, a sad cry of the horse was heard again and after a while a blue flame flared up from the tomb of Tangun until daybreak.

After that its cry was heard no more at the tomb.

The official and his subordinates began to find out its whereabouts in Kangdong again.

Days later they discovered its bridle and saddle at the foot of Mt Adal east of the tomb.

Having realized that there was no more way to catch it, they lamented.

An old man in the village comforted them, saying, “I think it is unavoidable. Since the day when the blue light rose from the tomb the same light is seen at the top of Mt Adal every night. It implies that Tangun the Great became a mountain god and his horse also became a mountain god to hold him in reverence.”

They returned to the royal palace and informed the king of what they had seen and heard, and waited for his punishment.

“We have lost a treasure of the country for lack of the sense of

responsibility, so how can we beg your pardon for this crime.”

Puru, who was speechlessly looking down at the horse gear for a while, raised his head and silently opened his mouth.

“It is not your fault. How can we block the sincerity of the horse to esteem the great king even after its death?”

Then he saw to it that a large tomb was built near the tomb of the late king and the bridle and saddle of the horse were buried there.

Thus, on the king’s order the tomb of the horse was built in the Chonggye Valley near the tomb of Tangun.

Even after that, the blue light rose from the Horse Tomb to the top of Mt Adal every night. It is said that each night the soul of the horse hovering in the Horse Tomb would climb up Mt Adal to look round the country’s frontiers with Tangun.

## **Thunder over Mt Adal**

The Korean ancestors, who worshipped Tangun as a man sent down by Heaven, have handed down legendary tales that after his death Tangun became a mountain god to administer the affairs of the country and care the people.

In ancient times there lived an old farmer surnamed Pak in a village near Mt Adal.

While diligently doing farm work, the honest and upright tenant farmer looked after the tomb of Tangun and Mt Adal lest undesirable things happen to them.

One night, the old man woke up at the hum of the shaking floor.

He got up and looked round the room, but could not find the place from which the sound came. So he opened the door and went out.

He walked step by step toward Mt Adal, where the sound came.

The sound shook the ground and the dense forest.

He felt so strange that he was riveted in a place before the mountain.

At daybreak the cry stopped and silence reigned all round.

From olden times people in this town said that if the mountain cried, foreign enemy would invade.

When the day broke, Pak said to the other old men in the village that some defensive measures should be taken because there was every indication that foreign enemy would invade, telling them what had happened during the night.

The old men said they had also heard the strange sound, and proposed arming young people first in the village with implements of war and sending them to the town fortress.

When the whole village was astir with this, the landlord Hwang, appeared and scolded them for not going out to the field though the morning sun was already in the middle of the sky.

Pak explained the story to the landlord in detail, but the latter would not pay attention to it.

“Nonsense! Don’t you think I know what you are up to? If

you do not go out to work in the fields at once, I’ll confiscate your lands, and report this to the local government.”

His outrage prevented Pak and others from taking defensive measures.

That night, too, the mountain cried.

The next morning Pak shouted at the villagers, “Our priority is to repulse the foreign aggressors, not the concern over deprivation of our lands and torture on the rack, so let’s all go to the town fortress.”

At his call, all the villagers followed him carrying implements of war in their hands.

As they made preparations for action beforehand in the town fort, they could repulse the enemy in time.

After this happening, the landlord could not feel at ease.

He had never heard the mountain crying but his tenant farmers insisted that they had. The landlord who was groaning with a perverse idea, finally reported to the country magistrate that old Pak must maintain a secret contact with foreign enemy. He added that such a rustic ignoramus could not foretell foreign invasion.

The country magistrate immediately detained Pak.

“Do you keep secret contact with foreign enemy?”

“What do you mean? All I know is farming. How can I collude with foreign enemy?”

“Then how did you know that they would invade?”

“Mt Adal cried for several nights.”

At this moment Hwang who was standing beside him outwitted him.

“You swine! Say correctly. Do I not have ears?”

Hwang’s behaviour cut him to the quick because when the destiny of the country was at stake he did not care a straw about it but now he was trying to do harm to others.

“If you did not hear it with your own ears, I think perhaps Tangun does regard you not as his offspring.”

“What?”

“Why, then, did Tangun the Great let us, not you, hear it?”

All the villagers blamed the landlord.

The landlord boasting of being rich and powerful could not make any reply.

They say that Mt Adal would cry each time a war broke out in the country.

### **Origin of the Name of Hungbu-dong**

When you look down at the foot of a mountain in the north from the Choesung Pavilion, you can see a cozy little village nestled near the Taedong River before a hillock connected to Moran Hill. It is Hungbu-dong.

This village conveys the story as follows:

It was the time when Koguryo still had its capital in Kungnaesong (Jian) situated on the middle part of the Amnok River.

One day the king summoned an official and said, “We are going to move the capital to the south. According to a rumour, Pyongyang was the capital of Ancient Joseon, and it is the foundation of the territory of the country. It is also a good place for people to live in for its beautiful mountains and streams and fertile land. A long time has since passed, so I don’t know where it is today. You should go down to the south and find its location.”

The official immediately made preparations, and left for Pyongyang.

He crossed the Amnok and Chongchon, went over the rugged passes and traversed the fields to look for Pyongyang.

One day he climbed a hill to take a rest, but he could not contain his admiration—a wide and blue river was flowing down, the north was surrounded by mountains and there spread a vast plain before them. It was really a place rare to be seen.

*Isn’t this Pyongyang?*

He went down to the riverbank to look for a house.

He stopped before a house in a cozy village by the river and called its host.

He asked, “What is the name of this town?”

“This has been called Pyongyang from olden times.”

“Really? This is Pyongyang, right? Ah, at last I found it!”

The official was beside himself with joy.

The old man looked at him dubiously. The official, telling what he had experienced to look for Pyongyang, said that he

could not hold back his delight now that he found the city today.

Then he asked the old man for a bowl of water.

He brought a big empty cup, and said, "I have no other way to serve the guest of honour like you, but please drink the fresh water of that well with this cup."

The official took it and went to the spring in front of the house.

But what a miracle! What he drank was not water, but aromatic liquor.

It refreshed him and relieved his accumulated fatigue on the spot.

From the next day he looked round Pyongyang for days. Then he returned to Kungnaesong and informed the king in detail of what he had seen in Pyongyang.

Upon hearing the story about the aromatic liquor, the king was deeply moved and said, "Pyongyang is really a place worthy of a capital city."

After the moving of the capital, the village was named *Hungbae* (a cup of wine that excites the drinker—Tr).

Later there was a change in the pronunciation and it is now called Hungbu-dong.

### **A Peasant Plays a Trick on a Nobleman at the Tomb of King Tongmyong**

The tomb of King Tongmyong, founder-king of Koguryo, in

Pyongyang, has been preserved and kept well by the Korean people from ancient times.

But there was a time when the tomb was neglected by the rulers in the period of feudal Joson dynasty, who worshipped big countries.

Villagers around this tomb were most concerned over it.

One mid-day, when a peasant was weeding in the field around the tomb a nobleman on horseback was passing by the tomb, accompanied by his servants.

At the sight of it the peasant walked toward him carrying a hoe in his hand.

The servants cried in a loud voice, "Go away! Get away!"

But he did not care about it and approached the nobleman staring at him.

His abnormal behaviour sent the nobleman dumbfounded and tongue-tied for a while.

Social norms in those days required humble men to get out of the way and even keep close to the ground when a nobleman passed by.

"Hey, catch that fellow at once!"

His servants caught him.

The nobleman shouted at him, "You swine! Don't you know the rules of etiquette?"

"How to behave? Then do you know?"

"Is it the manners of humble men to pass by a nobleman in a straight posture glaring at his face?"

“Then is it the courtesy of a nobleman to pass by the tomb of the founder-king on horseback?”

“Tomb of the founder-king?” Only then did the nobleman look around.

“Well, look, that is the tomb of King Tongmyong, founder-king of Koguryo. You are worse than insects or ants. So how can you say about courtesy?”

“You rascal! You are too impudent.”

The nobleman jumped off the horse, and stepped up close to the peasant as if he would kill him at once.

“You swine! Say it again.”

“Did you observe the decorum better than them? The insects or ants dare not to approach it as this is the tomb of the founder-king, but you are passing by it on horseback?”

The nobleman was at a loss for words, but the insult made his blood boil. He wanted to retort upon the peasant, but he couldn't. So he looked up furtively at the tomb.

It was covered with beautiful turf, but the pavilion and tombstone beside it were surrounded by grasses and aged pine trees.

The grasses were exuberant enough to shelter a tiger with its young, and the heaps of pine needles might swarm with red ants, but the farmer said there were neither insects nor ants there. The nobleman thought that this must be a slip of tongue of the ignorant peasant.

“Do you still insist that there are no insects in the grass nor

ants in the pine grove? If I catch even an ant there, bear in mind that you'll be put to death by dismemberment on the charge of cheating the nobleman!”

“Ok. What will you do if you fail to catch it?”

“Then I'll admit I'm worse than insects or ants.”

Soon the nobleman ordered his servants to catch a handful of insects and ants each around the tomb.

They looked around the tomb again and again for a while, but they could not catch even one, and came back empty-handed.

“You fools.”

The nobleman, out of temper, personally combed the bush and heaps of pine needles. He tried to find them but in vain.

“This is really mysterious.”

He lamented sitting down on the ground.

“Not mysterious. It is because the insects and ants know well how to observe courtesy.”

The nobleman could not utter even a word, and took to flight with his servants following him.

It is said that after this rumour spread, the number of noblemen visiting the tomb increased and the government appointed and sent down an official in charge of keeping it; the memorial service was resumed there on holidays.

Even today no insects or ants can be found around the tomb.

The rumour has it that when Koguryo moved its capital to Pyongyang, the tomb of King Tongmyong was also moved here. At the time Pyongyangites changed the soil at the site with other

soil, which they had steamed, and planted poisonous grasses lest the tomb might infest with ants and insects.

### **Serpent Defending Ancient Tomb on Mt Taesong**

Once upon a time there lived a rich man near Mt Taesong.

He was so greedy that he did not mind doing anything if it was for increasing his household property.

Finally he came to think of stealing treasure, which was said to be buried in an ancient tomb from the days of the Koguryo dynasty.

A rumour had it that if one stole the treasure he and his family would be killed by the divine punishment, but he did not care it.

One day he and his servants went up to the hill where there were old tombs from the Koguryo dynasty.

After looking round this and that tomb, he finally approached a tomb in one corner of the hill which was thickly covered with pine trees. After the sunset the servants began to dig.

Soon a big stone gate appeared in the southern part of the tomb.

They opened it and entered the tomb. There were two chambers built with stones.

He looked round them with candlelight.

The watery walls were drawn with colourful pictures depicting beautiful women ascending and descending on a cloud,

young men on horseback competing with one another in martial arts and people having a holiday pastime.

The nobleman suddenly remembered the treasure, and began to search for it. Finally he discovered a case measuring more than one stretch of his arm. He personally opened its lid with care and looked into the case with candlelight.

Suddenly his eyes opened wide with joy.

Inside the case there were two golden swords and pearls between them.

He soon closed the lid, and bound the case with rope before having his servants carry it out of the chamber.

Back at home, he concealed it in the room.

*If I sell those swords, I'll certainly be the richest man in Pyongyang.*

He was so delighted that he stayed up all night. When the day broke and the sun streamed into the room, he could not repress his desire to see the treasure again.

After locking the room, he put the case in the middle part of it and opened its lid cautiously.

Something which was glossy and as thick as forearm made a quick rise from the bunch of pearls laid beneath the two swords and then wound his hands and bit his body.

He shook his arms in surprise, but it would not fall.

He fell flat on his back in panic. It was not treasure, but snakes.

He lost consciousness.

His family members and servants, who did not know what was happening inside, kicked the door open and entered the room at his shriek. Several serpents with shining scales were lying in a coil on the floor and his body was already swollen up with venom.

The rich man barely recovered his consciousness.

“Take away the case. Carry it back to its place.”

When the servants tried to lift the case, the snakes went into it by themselves.

They carried the case to the tomb, and put it in its original place.

Some days later the swelling went down, but he could not get up again and died after a long illness.

On the day of his funeral the villagers said, “So covetous of other’s property, he was finally punished by Heaven.”

“Since he did not know the way of the world, he was also punished by his ancestors.”

Later no one dared to touch the old tombs.

### **Mysterious Pothong Gate**

The Pothong Gate, the western gate of the Walled City of Pyongyang, had different names. One of them is Sinmun, or a gate of mystery.

They say it is from the period of the Imjin Patriotic War that the gate came to be called so.

One day Konishi Yukinaka, a commander of the Japanese invaders who temporarily occupied Pyongyang, summoned his subordinate generals in charge of the gates of the city to the command post.

The Korean volunteers encircling the city inflicted heavy casualties upon the enemy soldiers, attacking them from every direction, and the Japanese commander thought that his men were careless in guarding the gates.

“From now on he who fails to check the Korean soldiers and volunteers from entering the city through the gates will be beheaded. So, remember those who fail to guard the gates reliably cannot remain alive.”

The officer in charge of the Pothong Gate knelt down, and mumbled, “The Pothong Gate can’t be closed when it needs be closed, and can’t be opened when it needs to be opened. It is beyond my power.”

“What? Do you make an excuse to save your life? You, bastard! By nature, a gate is to be opened or closed as desired by a man inside. What is that only the man outside can open or close it?”

Konishi pulled out his sword, and threatened to cut his throat on the spot.

“No, it is not. I think the Pothong Gate is a mysterious one that can be controlled not by a man but by a demon.”

“You never say you are a coward, but insist that the gate is guarded by a demon. All right. Cutting your neck is not so

urgent. After I convince you the gate is not guarded by a demon, I'll behead you."

Konishi went to the gate to try the door personally.

However, he found himself also unable to open or close it as he desired.

As the provisions ran out, Konishi ordered to open the gate to gather rice.

But the gate would not open again, however hard they tried. They had to break part of the wall, but all the soldiers sent through it failed to return. The Japanese soldiers whispered among themselves that those soldiers died because they had gone out against the will of the demon guarding the Pothong Gate.

One day on receiving the report that the Korean volunteers may attack through the Pothong Gate, Konishi himself selected strong men and took them there; he closed the gate tightly.

However, the gate opened of itself the instant the volunteers approached it, shouting hurrah, and they rushed into the city.

That day, after a narrow escape from death by taking to flight on horseback to the woods of Moran Hill, Konishi ordered his men to set fire on the gate.

The enemy soldiers carried powder on their backs, piled it on the gate and tried to detonate it, but in vain; only smoke rose, filling the whole city, but the gate caught no fire. The pillars of the gate and its beautiful colourings glittered more brilliantly.

Witnessing this mysterious phenomenon, Konishi went back to his quarters, and sank down in a swoon.

He came to himself a few days later and summoned the gate guard leader.

The latter, guessing that Konishi must have summoned him to cut his head this time, said in a dispirited tone, "You said, sir, that I would be beheaded only when it was proven that the Pothong Gate was not guarded by a demon, didn't you?"

Konishi on his seat shouted, "You deserve death for not doing exorcism, while claiming the mystery of the Pothong Gate. You, bastard! Find out how to do exorcism within this day. Otherwise you'll not be forgiven."

The guard leader returned with a grey-haired Korean man when it was midnight.

Stepping out before the enemy commander, the old man said slowly, stroking his beard, "Originally there had been no demon at the Pothong Gate. As the name tells, it is literally no more than an ordinary gate. The reason why it looks so mysterious is that your Japanese demon haunts it. The Japanese demon looks down on Korea and, trapped in the Walled City of Pyongyang lured by the demon, you believe you have seized it. That is why the Pothong Gate seems mysterious to you. Figuratively speaking, it is like an inmate is complaining that the prison door does not open and close as freely as the door of his own house."

His grave rebuke set the enemy commander and his soldiers atremble.

Indifferent to them, the old man continued calmly.

“It is of no use to prepare sacrificial goods for exorcism to expel the demon. You have no alternative but to go out of the Walled City of Pyongyang tonight and go back to your country.”

After finishing his speech, the old man in white Korean overcoat went slowly out of the door.

Unable to make out whether he was an ordinary Korean or an immortal, the enemy commander and his men gazed absent-mindedly at him for a while.

Konishi came to himself, and roared, ordering to capture the elderly man.

However, he was nowhere to be found.

More enraged at the warning of the elderly man to withdraw from Pyongyang as soon as possible, Konishi tormented his men to keep staying in the city at all costs.

But things went contrary to his intention.

A little later one of the generals whom he trusted in as his right arm was beheaded by Kim Ung So, a Korean general, and Kye Wol Hyang, a renowned entertainment girl in Pyongyang.

In January 1593, the enemy troops pulled out of Pyongyang, leaving a large number of corpses in the face of the offensive of the soldiers and people of the city.

Since then, the people have talked about the struggle of the volunteers in the Pyongyang area, calling the Pothong Gate Sinmun (a mysterious gate-Tr).

## **Relocated Rungna Island**

Rungna Island sided by the Chongnyu Cliff and Moran Hill in Pyongyang boasts of many legends as well as beauty.

Representative of them is one about the relocation of the island.

It is said that the island had originally been situated in the middle part of the Piryu in Songchon, the upper reaches of the Taedong.

When it was within the boundary of Songchon County, the land was fertile, yielding bumper crops every year. This island drew poor peasants from its vicinity, who formed a big village. Although the fertile land brought them a bumper harvest every year, they were subjected to harsh exploitation. The local government plundered the peasants of rice, fruits and vegetables every year.

Owing to the exploitation on different names that increased year on year, the life of islanders got deteriorated and the resentment towards the authorities ran high.

The cruelest was the magistrate of the county, surnamed Pak. When he went to the island, he would take his subordinates with him and let them loose to take every grain of rice.

The islanders prayed that a tiger from Yangdok or Maengsan would come to take him off or that the island be moved out of the boundary of Songchon.

One year a sudden thing happened as if the heaven understood the wrath and wish of islanders. In the rainy season, black clouds gathered, and there was a downpour.

Finally the Piryu River overflowed with yellow water raging like a sea, and the island, driven by torrential water current, began to drift along the river.

It was somewhere in the middle part of the Taedong River before the Chongnyu Cliff at the foot of Moran Hill that the island anchored.

Looking round the environs, the islanders were overjoyed; they survived with the island and were moved to another world free from the rule of the cruel magistrate. They began a new life, repairing the houses damaged by rain and realigning the paddy and dry fields.

After the loss of the fertile island, the magistrate of Songchon urged all the people in the county to find out the whereabouts of the island. He heard a rumour after more than a year that the island drifted downstream to somewhere below the Walled City of Pyongyang.

On arriving there, he claimed that this island had been under the jurisdiction of his county and the names of the islanders were listed in the family register of his local government, demanding that the defaulted tax be paid.

The inhabitants of the island again had to suffer from exploitation of the magistrate of Songchon. Their trouble multiplied as they had to carry their products—crops, fruits and

vegetables—by boat, wagon or on their backs to Songchon. Worse still, if there was any delay in the payment or slight deterioration in the quality of the produce, the magistrate sentenced them to hard beatings, whatever the reason.

Such toil went on year by year, and at last the islanders could not bear it any longer. After discussing on how to alleviate their pain and toil even a little, they decided to lodge a complaint to the governor of Phyongan Province. They wrote that although the Rungna Island had been formerly within the boundary of Songchon, it now floated down in a rainy season to Pyongyang, and that was why it ought to come under the jurisdiction of Pyongyang, not Songchon, and they wanted to pay their taxes to the Phyongan Provincial Government, not to Songchon County faraway from the island.

The governor of Phyongan Province, who had been coveting the island, agreed with the complaint and soon sent a notice to the magistrate of Songchon, in which he wrote that the island should be placed under the authority of Pyongyang.

Seeing the notice, the magistrate flew into a rage. However, on arriving in the Phyongan provincial government, he could not refuse to obey the order of the governor, his senior in rank. Though he thought ill of him, he politely insisted that the island could not be transferred to Pyongyang, because it had long been belonged to Songchon County.

Seeing through his sinister design, the governor declared definitely.

“All right. As long as you are dead set against its transfer to Pyongyang, move the Rungna Island into the boundary of Songchon within this day. Otherwise, it will be the soil of Pyongyang from tomorrow.”

The magistrate of Songchon could not reply anything; though he was infuriated at the loss of the island, he was helpless.

At last he returned home, leaving the island to Pyongyang.

## **A City Renowned as a Beautiful Place**

### **An Angel Descends from Heaven to Moran Hill**

Moran Hill, the highest hill in Mt Kumsu, has been a pride of Pyongyang from ancient times for it is as beautiful as a bursting flower bud in shape and has a thick pine forest.

It is said that the towering hill swarming with all kinds of birds was frequented not only by fairies but also angels.

The angels rode the cloud to the pine groves around the Choesung Pavilion and played there all day long, and out of curiosity and envy for the life of peasants, mixed with them to have a good time together.

One day upon hearing that a daughter of a peasant living at the foot of Moran Hill was suffering from an unknown illness, an

angel flew down with the remedy which was used only by immortals in the heavenly world, and administered it to her.

She soon recovered from the illness, and her face became prettier than before. She was also able to do farming better in good health.

The angel fell in love with her, so he often called on her. Sometimes he stayed for several days to cultivate the field and visit the scenic Choesung Pavilion together with her.

As such things were repeated more often with the lapse of time, the King of Heaven gave him a severe scolding and forbade him to descend to the human world again.

After discovering that the human life of creating wealth through labour in a beautiful environment was more worthwhile and enjoyable, he could no longer stay in the heaven.

Thus he descended stealthily from the heaven, and called at the peasant's house.

He requested the latter to allow him to marry his daughter and do farming with her.

The peasant accepted his request with pleasure, and arranged a wedding ceremony for them.

He gave them a boat, saying that they should go to a place of their liking on the Taedong River and live there harmoniously.

It is said that they settled down in a beautiful place on the shore of the Taedong and led a happy life with their sons and daughters for a long time, doing farming and fishing.

## Fan Rock

When you stand on the shore of the Taedong River, where the Othan, mouth of the swift current, comes into sight, you feel refreshed in the sultry midsummer in particular.

This place is cool in summer but warm in winter. It is because the warm wind blown from the West Sea drives away the continental cold coming from the north.

Such natural phenomenon of Pyongyang gave birth to a legend about a mysterious rock, called Fan Rock.

In ancient times there was a big rock called Fan Rock on the shore of Othan.

It is said that such a name was given because if it was beaten the rock raised refreshing wind in summer and warm wind in winter from its bottom.

Farmers nearby cooled their body on the rock with the refreshing breeze while doing farming in the field in sultry summer days and warmed themselves with the warm breeze while going to gather firewood in cold winter.

The passers-by also had a rest on the rock in summer and in winter.

The rock was a treasure for farmers and passengers in the Walled City of Pyongyang.

The rumour about this mysterious rock spread to not only the

Walled City of Pyongyang but across the country, so it became famous to such an extent that there was nobody who did not know about it.

One summer day the newly-appointed governor of Phyongan Province paid a visit to the rock before looking round the city of Pyongyang.

He could not repress admiration at the mystery of the rock—the more he beat the rock, the more the refreshing breeze came from it. The greedy governor could not resist a temptation to make this rock his possession. He thought that if he built his house attached to the rock it would be a wonderful house rare to be seen anywhere else in the world as it would be cool in summer and warm in winter, so he started the project soon.

On the groundbreaking day, he came out to the construction site to watch laying the foundation.

But things went contrary to his expectation.

When day labourers were picking under the rock to dig a site for a cornerstone, suddenly the rock was lifted with a bang. Then a stormy wind gushed out from its bottom, blowing away stones and dust, the labourers and the governor into the air. The place around it was wrapped in thick dusty clouds, and it lasted all day long.

The next day the wind died down and the dust was removed. And a big pool was formed under the rock.

In the middle of it was seen a hole.

The governor who had his waist hurt failed to go to office

even a single day, and died some days after he returned to the capital city.

It is said that after the incident no wind has blown from the rock no matter how many times it is beaten.

### **Corner of Stripping**

In ancient times the Chongnyu Cliff was called *Tharuiu* (corner stripping a person of his coat) because people had to pass by it after taking off coat even in the cold winter days.

It is not clear when the corner was named so, but it was after the Walled City of Pyongyang was built in the days of Koguryo that it became widely known.

When a young man named Tulbo, who had been enlisted in the construction of the walled city, came back to his native place not far away from Pyongyang after the project was over, the villagers streamed to his house.

They asked him in detail about the topography of Pyongyang, the size and structure of the newly-built fortress and the life of people there. Construction of the big fortress in Pyongyang which was a little way from their settlement was a great delight to them, and they had heard that from olden times the rise and fall of a country and the harmony of its people depend on the geographical aspects of the capital city.

One evening a rich man named Thaksu called on Tulbo and asked him about the city in detail.

As he had done to others, Tulbo explained by words and gestures with relish about the mysterious corner as well as the structure and size of the newly-built fortress.

Thaksu said, “Your explanation is all plausible, but I cannot believe that there is a place where people pass without clothes in winter.”

“Why not? I often passed the corner while building the fortress.”

“You apparently did so because you sweated much carrying heavy stones, not because it was an exceptionally hot place. Am I wrong?”

He giggled looking around at the people in the room. They nodded their approval.

Tulbo, finding himself in an awkward situation, had no choice but to insist it.

So the storytelling switched over to a dispute over the existence of the corner.

The dispute ended with the conclusion that the two men should go there and experience in person.

Thaksu proposed to make a bet: If there was really the corner, the rich man would give Tulbo food for a month, and if not, Tulbo would work for the latter for a month free of charge.

The two left for the city on the winter solstice, when the Taedong was frozen.

They put on fur cap, thick overcoat and fur shoes over socks.

After looking round the city, the rich man was guided by Tulbo to the corner.

The rich man, who was entering the path running below the Chongnyu Cliff that struck its root into the river, could not repress a surprise.

The cold wind which was blowing into the city and the biting cold vanished suddenly, and his body got warm. He felt as if he were sitting in the warm place on the floor of a room nearest the fireplace. Overwhelmed by the mysterious climate, he looked all around for a while. Only then did he come to know that the mysterious climate was not groundless. The Chongnyu Cliff not only checked the cold north wind but also allowed the warm sunshine to directly heat the land around it because it was similar to half moon in shape. Though he travelled a lot in winter after his birth, this kind of journey was the first experience for him. Drops of sweat rolled down on his face and his body got warmer.

All those passing by him were walking with fur caps and overalls in their hands.

But the rich man could not do so because he made a bet. Though he felt so hot and suffocating, he tried to withstand.

Tulbo put off cap and overcoat, but the rich man of large bulk, still sweating and gasping, walked to the foot of the mountain past the corner without taking off fur cap and overalls.

When Tulbo said the path by the corner ended, the rich man heaved a sigh of relief, and said out of breath, "Well, look, I won the bet!"

"Yes, you did."

Tulbo could not but admit his loss to the rich man.

Tulbo who returned to the village had to work for the rich man's house free of charge from the next day.

When Tulbo called at the rich man's the next day, he was bed-ridden, so Tulbo came back without doing anything.

The rich man was confined to bed for over a month apparently because of stomach disorder or a cold caught while withstanding the heat.

One day Tulbo visited his house in the evening at his call.

The rich man prepared dishes as if he were arranging a party, and invited other villagers.

Those gathered were bewildered. They wondered whether the man was over-glad over the bet or he went a little crazy.

Having sensed such an atmosphere, the rich man said, "I looked round the Walled City of Pyongyang together with Tulbo. It is really a mysterious place as I have heard. Seeing the clothes-stripping corner, I learned that the Walled City of Pyongyang is just the centre of the country nearest to the sun in our country. That such a city has become the capital of our country signifies that the country will prosper and the people will live in peace, so how lucky and delightful this is! I invited you as I felt much during this trip and in fact it is evident that Tulbo won the bet."

Only then did the guests nod their heads. "To see that stubborn man, Thaksu, giving a treat to us, we can see Pyongyang is really great."

The rumour spread widely, making the corner in Pyongyang more famous.

### **Anchor in the Taedong River**

In ancient times the Taedong swelled and shrank owing to the influence of high and low tides of the West Sea of Korea. This often brought misfortune on Pyongyangites, flooding the walled city.

Such a caprice of the river gave birth to many legendary tales.

A tale on an anchor in the Taedong River is one of them.

From olden times the Walled City of Pyongyang has been equated to a boat.

The walls were long from south to north and relatively short from east to west, and there are the Hapjang in the north, the Taedong in the southeast and the Pothong in the west; the Hapjang and Pothong join the Taedong in the south.

So it is said that Pyongyangites made a large anchor and sank it under the Taedong lest their city, similar to a boat in shape, be drifted away to the sea. It was during the Imjin Patriotic War when the Japanese aggressors temporarily occupied Pyongyang that the existence of this anchor was disclosed for the first time.

The Japanese soldiers, who set their feet on Pyongyang, went combing out every corner of it in search of food; they had been suffering from starvation from the first days of their occupation as the Pyongyangites did not leave even a grain of rice and a drop

of soy sauce in the city when taking refuge.

The enemy had no other choice but to catch fish in the Taedong.

They soon gathered all fishing boats in the walled city and floated them on the river to do fishing.

One day, they found a large anchor in a deep place of the river and brought it out of water.

It was six metres long and about 30 centimetres in circumference, with three prongs and a round ring above the prongs.

They carried it to the walled city with cheer over the discovery of a rarest treasure.

Upon hearing this news, the old men and children who were left in the city rushed to the enemy's barracks with farm implements in their hands, and shouted, "Do you know what a terrible mistake you have made? Put the anchor in its original place right now! If not, the Walled City of Pyongyang will be sunk under water or drifted away to the sea. Do you want all of us to be drowned to death?"

Later, the enemy soldiers learned the origin of the anchor and put it in its place, it is said.

### **Chongnyu Cliff**

A legend has it that the Chongnyu Cliff with the Pubyok Pavilion standing on it suddenly came into being in ancient times.

There lived a kind-hearted and diligent farmer surnamed Sol in a village on the Taedong. He was more anxious than anyone else about the inundation of his village whenever a flood rose.

One day a heavy flood hit the village, and he found a carp pushed out by the flow of the river. He caught and set it free in the river.

Some days later, at dead of night when he was sleeping in a tent after repairing the destroyed house, a call for him was heard. He woke up and saw a child standing.

The child asked him to follow him because the Dragon King wanted to see him.

The Taedong split, revealing a broad path leading to the Dragon King Palace.

The Dragon King was waiting for him with a large party arranged.

Receiving him with great joy, the king said that he would satisfy all the man's wishes because he had snatched his son from the jaws of death.

The farmer said his village had suffered a great damage by the flood of the river in every rainy season.

Saying that he understood him, the king gave him hearty hospitality before sending him back to the village.

When he was returning home, there was a sudden downpour of rain and a thunder, giving rise to a wall-like rock which stopped the flow of the river.

It is said that the then rock is just the Chongnyu Cliff.

## **Stories about the Patriotic Spirit of Pyongyangites**

### **Flower Garden Around the Nam Gate of the Taesongsan Fort**

This story is not mentioned in the historical records, but according to a legendary tale there was once Kim Koe, a skilful diplomat in Koguryo.

As it adjoined several states, the northern part of Koguryo was subjected to frequent invasions by foreign enemy and often witnessed conflicts. Each time the difficult and complicated problems were all solved smoothly by Kim Koe.

This made him famous as a skilful diplomat.

As he grew old, Koguryo, with a view to preparing a successor to him, selected a young official and let him learn his diplomatic skills.

From that day the young official tried to learn his outstanding diplomacy, carefully watching his every behaviour.

Despite his efforts, he could not find anything special in him as compared with other diplomats.

He looked like a commoner as he had no imposing and majestic appearance and was little different from a warm-hearted old man as his face gave no terrible and sharp impression. He

also did not sit up all night studying how to approach his foreign counterparts or selecting logical words beforehand.

But once he began negotiations with them, his face turned stern and angry or sometimes brimmed with magnanimity, bringing them to obey his demand.

If there was anything different in him from other officials, it was his fondness of flowers.

Government officials who visited other states as envoys returned with cartfuls of exotic goods to increase their own wealth or give them to their relatives and friends. But in Kim Koe's luggage was only one or two flowering plants, and he planted them round the Nam Gate of the Taesongsan Fort, not at his house and in his government office.

Some of them died without striking roots in the ground, but most of them grew well, blooming beautiful flowers and adding beauty to the landscape around the gate.

Some government officials criticized him for being helplessly fond of flowers like women in spite of being a famous envoy of the country. One day the young government official, who saw Kim Koe planting flowers in the vacant ground before the gate, asked him, "For what benefit are you taking such troubles?"

"I want nothing from it. I just can't feel at ease when I think that the flowers blooming in other countries are seen nowhere in our country," he answered.

"Is that so?"

"Yes, I don't want our Walled City of Pyongyang to be

inferior to the capital cities of other countries because of flowers."

When the young official fretted over the lapse of time without learning particular diplomatic skills from him, Kim Koe died.

His remains were buried on the hill before the Nam Gate as was wished by him.

Some days later another conflict arose on the northern frontier.

To solve it the country dispatched the young official there as an envoy.

On the day of his departure the king said: "Now that you have learned Kim's diplomacy enough, I hope you will return after successfully dealing with the diplomatic matters as Kim did before."

The young official was at a loss how to answer him. But as he could not excuse himself before the king, he simply vowed to handle the matters properly.

The more he groped for a way to keep foreign envoys under his thumb as Kim Koe did, the more he missed the skilful diplomat.

It was the night before he had to meet his foreign counterpart.

As the evening wore on, various kinds of beautiful flowers which were blooming affectionately before the Nam Gate of the Taesongsan Fort came before his eyes as if sending him off and the remarks Kim had made while planting those flowers rang in his ears.

“...I don’t want our Walled City of Pyongyang to be inferior to the capital cities of other countries because of flowers.”

The young man, repeating his remarks, rose up.

“I’ve got it! His determination to disallow the Walled City of Pyongyang to lag behind the capital cities of other countries, his unswerving determination not to tolerate negligence or insult from a foreign country—it was just the secret of Kim’s diplomacy.”

The next day as soon as he met his counterpart of a neighbouring country, he strongly protested with a burning love for Koguryo and Pyongyang, against the unjustifiable provocations.

The latter mumbled a few words to make an excuse, but he was soon dumbfounded. He promised to take measures lest such things happen again in the border area, apologizing for the mistakes.

Upon hearing the news that the young official won in the talks, the king highly praised him as soon as he returned.

“You are really a skilful envoy who has inherited the diplomatic skills of Kim, a pride of Koguryo.”

“Your Majesty, I did not learn his diplomacy, but learned the mind of my teacher who loved and valued the country and the Walled City of Pyongyang.”

He said that Kim Koe had never carried home any specialties or expensive goods although he had been to many foreign countries during his tenure, but brought flowers which

were not native to the Walled City of Pyongyang and planted them in the vacant ground before the Nam Gate of the Taesongsan Fort.

The king and government officials who had heard his story said, “The secret of his flexible diplomacy was not the strategy or eloquence, but his love for his country and its capital city.”

People in and out of the walled city who had heard this story raised with utmost care flowers Kim had planted before the Nam Gate in his lifetime, and planted the evening primrose, the best-grown flower among them, around his tomb.

Later, the flower thrived at the foot of Mt Taesong, and envoys going abroad for the settlement of diplomatic issues as well as generals and their men leaving the Taesongsan Fort to fight the foreign enemy always defended the country’s honour and dignity, keeping the flowers blooming in Mt Taesong and the story about them in mind.

### **The Girl Who Defended Japanese Apricot Blossoms**

A girl named Ryo Ok lived with her widowed father in a village in the Kyongsang Valley.

She loved flowers very much, the blossom of Japanese apricot in particular.

She and her father planted different kinds of beautiful flowering plants around their house, and manured and weeded

according to seasons. So their little thatched house was buried in flowers in the blossoming season.

Some time later, not only her house but Moran Hill and every part of the Walled City of Pyongyang came to be covered with flowers.

One year the government gave the order to cut all the Japanese apricot trees planted in mountains and around houses across the country and to forbid the people to plant them in future.

It claimed that the flower was similar to the flower pattern worshipped as the symbol of the royal family, and that the flowers blooming in the residential quarters of commoners were an expression of ignorance of difference in the social status between king and people.

Thus there was an unprecedented racket of cutting all the Japanese apricot trees in all parts of the country, including Pyongyang.

If a Japanese apricot tree was found left, its owner was whipped and fined.

Ryo Ok and her father were most concerned with the charming and clean Japanese apricot trees on the verge of extinction.

*If what the local government is doing is left as it is, the Japanese apricot trees would disappear in Pyongyang.*

Ryo Ok discussed with her father, and secretly transplanted a Japanese apricot tree in the back yard.

Some days later, her house became a target of search. Government officials finally found a Japanese apricot tree in the recess of the back garden. They ordered the old man to cut it with his own hands at once, or else he would be subjected to 50 cudgels.

Thinking about his daughter, who might be weeping sadly in the room, he said:

“Well, I beg your pardon, sir, but this is not a Japanese apricot tree but an apricot tree. I’m afraid you mistook it.”

They looked at one another in bewilderment. Though they were good at depriving the innocent people of their property and humiliating them, they knew nothing about flowering trees.

The tree grown for several years was somewhat similar to an apricot tree and besides, it was buried in the snow, so if it was not examined carefully one could not distinguish it from an apricot tree.

After a good while, one of them asked.

“Can you prove that this is an apricot tree?!”

Ryo Ok came out of the room, and said:

“It will be proved in spring. Japanese apricot blossoms are white and apricot blossoms are light pink.”

“All right! You and your father would be executed if it opens white blossoms in spring.”

Stroking her shoulder, her father said, “You are praiseworthy. Even the sky will be moved by your strong love of flowers.”

Spring rolled in.

Birds twittered in the blue sky and brooks murmured along. Light green buds began to sprout out from the branches of flower trees.

Spring days passed by, and the swollen flower buds were also seen on branches of the Japanese apricot tree.

Everyday she rushed out to the back garden and said in agony, “Don’t you know my mind? Can’t you change your white flowers into pink ones? If not, you and my father and I must leave this world for ever.”

The next morning the Japanese apricot flower buds finally opened to the full.

But, what a surprise! The flowers were tinged with pink.

She shouted, “Father, the flowers bloomed in pink.”

Her father was also beside himself.

That morning government officials stormed into her house, only to see the pink flowers.

“Father, what on earth is the matter?” she asked.

“As the saying goes devotion moves even mountains. It seems that perhaps the heaven understood your mind and sincerity.”

From that day she tended the Japanese apricot tree with more care and each year planted its seeds and roots not only around her house but in all parts of Moran Hill.

It is said that the Japanese apricot trees now on Moran Hill are those the girl propagated.

## **General Ulmil and Ulmil Pavilion**

The Ulmil Pavilion was built as the northern command post when Koguryo built the Walled City of Pyongyang.

The pavilion conveys the following legendary tale of a general:

In ancient times there lived a general named Ulmil at the foot of Moran Hill.

He enjoyed high respect and warm affection from the Pyongyangites as he always rendered distinguished services in battles against foreign aggressors.

In his old age he taught martial arts to his son Narae and other young people. But things did not go as he had expected.

After discussion with some people in the city, he decided to send the young men to an old general in a mountain for their training in martial arts for three years and three months.

Narae entrusted the care of his father to his love Kobi before leaving for the mountain.

Two years after they left, foreign aggressors invaded the city.

Though not good in health as before, General Ulmil led the soldiers to turn out to defend the city. The battles were fierce, and Kobi, who was fighting in man’s clothes, repeatedly entreated the general to send for the young men.

As the situation became worse, the others were of the same opinion.

After a while, he said, “Should we give up our ambition for the purpose of getting through this momentary crisis? It is the disposition of us Koguryo people to put the security of the country and the people above our own lives. If you wish for the security of the country and posterity, follow me!”

He rushed on horseback to the enemy camp leading his men and mowed them down with his sword. Encouraged by him, all people in the city turned out. In a battle he was seriously wounded by an arrow.

Knowing that the general was in sickbed through their spy, the enemy soon pulled their forces together and rushed at the city again.

The people in the city raised a beacon fire and informed him of the news.

The general wore his helmet and armour, and went in a sedan up to the command post on Moran Hill. He ordered that the soldiers be deployed in accordance with the geographical features of the hill for a decisive battle.

Upon his command, men and women of all ages fought, risking their lives.

Seeing that the people in the city were in high spirits and the general appeared in the command post, the enemy lost courage for a while, but later made desperate efforts to occupy Pyongyang at all costs.

Fierce battles went on in the valleys in Moran Hill and on the Pothong Plain.

One day, while looking around the battlefield with Kobi, the general was fatally wounded by the enemy who secretly approached the command post.

His soldiers and Kobi annihilated the enemy, but the general fell unconscious.

At that critical moment, Kobi left for the young men in the mountain.

When she arrived at the military art training site they were taking the last exam before their master. The young men all passed the exam with high marks to the delight of the old master.

Kobi informed them of the tense situation in Pyongyang and then lost consciousness.

Narae and other young men instantly rushed for the city.

Arriving in the city early next morning, they felt rather relieved to look at the command post of the general. Though the invaders did not retreat, the flag of the general was fluttering and lances and swords were flashing there.

Narae and other young men mowed the enemy down with redoubled courage. After the end of the battle they climbed the hill.

They bowed down on their knees before the general.

“We have returned after carrying out the wish of the Pyongyangites,” Narae said.

He waited for his father’s answer but there was no reply. They looked up at him again.

Pale face and closed eyes—the general was already dead.

An elderly man said, “The general died two days ago. But before closing his eyes he told us to keep him here until the invaders retreated.”

Wailing for the general, the young men and other people of Pyongyang pledged to carry on his will without fail.

From then on hundreds or thousands of men grew up as another General Ulmil and defended their home town.

It is said that the people in the walled city built a pavilion on the site of the command post and named it after the general to convey his exploits to posterity.

## **Paegunthan**

Paegunthan means a silver-coloured ford.

It is the name of the ford, which had once existed between Rungna Island and Panwol Islet.

Now they are linked by a heap of sand to form an island, but in the past there was an independent islet called Panwol.

It is said that in ancient times there was a white rock under this ford, so the water flowing above it looked as if gems were rolling down.

In olden times there was a large and magnificent silver bell engraved with beautiful patterns on the summit of Moran Hill though no one knew who made it and when, people say.

This mysterious bell was the one and only treasure of the Walled City of Pyongyang, for it rang on its own accord when

foreign enemy attacked the walled city as well as when a happy event happened to the country.

The rumour about this famous bell spread across the country, as well as to the neighbouring nations; people came to Pyongyang to see the bell, and envoys of neighbouring nations also paid a visit to the bell before anything else when they came to Pyongyang.

Some countries even coveted the bell; a nation proposed exchanging it with a large amount of treasure while another country hatched a sinister design to steal it by enlisting military forces.

After discussion the local people decided to hide it under the water of the Taedong beneath the Chongnyu Cliff and install it in its original place after repulsing the sinister attempts of the foreign enemy and building up the defence capabilities of the city.

To their surprise, the bell which they had hidden under water vanished.

They combed the bottom of the river. In the course of it, they discovered a large black dragon swimming down along the river with the bell in its mouth from the whirl beneath the slope in front of the Ryongwang Pavilion.

The black dragon was living in the West Sea of Korea.

They fought it to take the bell back, throwing lances and swords, beating drums and gongs and crying.

But the dragon ran away to the west more quickly.

At this very moment a giant red dragon rushed down from the upper reaches of the river.

A showdown between the red dragon and the black dragon took place, and white sprays of water were formed over the river.

Pyongyangites fought with the black dragon in support of the red one.

The confrontation lasted three days.

On the third day the red dragon, making a quick rise to the water surface, bit off the exhausted black dragon. The black dragon drifted down the river, vomiting blood, and the red dragon put the bell back in its original place.

That day Pyongyangites arranged a big banquet near the Juam Whirl in celebration of the return of the bell and of exploits of the red dragon.

They decided to put the bell in its original place and place it under the red dragon's care.

The mysterious silver bell, a treasure of the Walled City of Pyongyang, became a permanent possession of Pyongyangites.

Later the bell turned into a white rock and shone brightly under the water of Paegunthan between Rungna Island and Panwol Islet, people say.

### **Pine Trees around the Ulmil Pavilion**

Among those, who fought to defend the Walled City of Pyongyang during the Imjin Patriotic War, was a young man

named Choe Chil Song.

As the battle against the enemy soldiers became more difficult, one day the young man dropped in at his house near the Pothong Gate; he was worried about his old father.

He asked his father to evacuate quickly as the battle may be fought inside the walled city as well.

His father lashed his son for thinking a retreat first without thinking over how to destroy the enemy soldiers.

After his son went back, the old man thought he could not sit with folded arms when the enemy soldiers would soon attack the walled city.

He soon called on his friend Pak, living behind his house.

He said, "We have lost our face. We were confined to houses, unaware that the situation inside the walled city is so dangerous. Let's hurry to the rampart."

The old men, who scarcely had gone outdoors in ordinary times, left with the help of walking sticks.

Looking toward Moran Hill from the top of Mansu Hill, they found the valleys already packed with the local people; smoke was rising from kettle sites built here and there to boil foods for soldiers, women were carrying water and the aged and children were carrying stones with soldiers.

The old men hurriedly climbed Moran Hill.

They met the commander of the volunteers, who was coming down after inspecting preparations for action made by soldiers and people. He asked them where they were going.

They asked for a spear or sword so that they could fight the enemy soldiers.

“Your faithfulness moves my heart, but how can you, old men, fight? The enemy arrows will hit you before you hit them.”

“I have nothing to regret even if my old body is hit by an arrow. Such a death means my body takes away an arrow from the enemy.”

“You get an arrow with your body? Then the soldiers around you will feel uneasy and it will affect the battle. Please don’t come up here.”

As they would not go down, the commander ordered his men to take them back to the village.

On their way back home they sat down on the grass to take a rest.

Pine trees thickly planted in Moran Hill came in sight.

“Only if all those pines would turn into our troops!”

Choe, lost in deep thought, slapped Pak’s knee suddenly.

“What about dressing those young pines like scarecrows so that the enemy may take them for our soldiers?”

“Excellent. Then the enemy will shoot arrows at them, and it will be easy to take away arrows from the enemy.”

“That is not all. It will discourage the enemy because our troops will look larger in number.”

They called on the commander, and told him what they had thought.

After hearing it, he instantly sent some soldiers and people

down to the city to collect worn-out clothes. He then saw to it that the young pines standing on the slope under the Ulmil Pavilion, which could be seen clearly, were clothed. Dummies linked at intervals by an arrowroot vine shook when the string tied to one end was pulled; they looked quite similar to soldiers moving in haste.

At dawn the following day the enemy fired matchlocks and shot arrows at random as they saw a large number of “soldiers” under the Ulmil Pavilion across the river.

But the Korean “soldiers” did not fall down. The enraged enemy went on a shooting spree for two days.

Not a single pine tree around the pavilion remained intact, but the pine trees took away more than half of the bullets and arrows of the enemy, and played a great role in frustrating their attack.

After ousting the enemy soldiers, Pyongyangites climbed the Ulmil Pavilion in spring and autumn each year, and tended the pine trees with great care.

## **Wangsongthan**

At the northern end of the Rungna Island, you can see a ford, called Wangsong.

The ford was named so according to the following story.

It happened long ago when the Japanese aggressors made inroads from south into Pyongyang.

Seeing the Tongdaewon Plain swarming with the marauders, the people of the Walled City of Pyongyang were panic-stricken for a while.

With a view to seizing Pyongyang in a blitzkrieg, the aggressors were just about to cross the Taedong River.

All of a sudden, black clouds gathered, and then it began to bucket down, causing the river to swell, making it impossible for the aggressors to cross the river.

“Even the sky helps us!”

The Pyongyang people made hasty preparations for battle. They reinforced the walls, sharpened spears and swords and prepared military provisions.

The rain ceased, but the swollen river would not subside for several days.

The soldiers and people grew nervous, for the enemy on the other side of the river, unable to attack the city, raided the houses on the plain, and plundered them of their oxen and pigs, exacerbating the wrath of the people.

The soldiers and people in the walled city boiled their blood with hatred and vengeance.

“It will be good to take advantage of the enemy’s lack of vigilance,” said a grey-haired elderly man meaningfully. “Our anger caused the river to swell, and it doesn’t shrink yet because it still keeps our wrath over the Japanese invaders. If the river is to subside, a young man will have to dive into the river and beg its pardon.”

At the moment a young man turned up on the wall and shouted,

“Citizens! I won’t spare my life if I can open the way to striking the enemy. I will ask pardon for allowing the Japanese invaders to close in on the vicinity of our beloved city. I ask you to do my share in the fight when the way is opened.”

The young man was Wang Son, a soldier hailing from Pyongyang.

After finishing his speech, he threw himself into the raging river.

Soon the earth trembled, and the swollen river began to subside and the riverbed revealed a stone bridge.

The soldiers and people of the city wasted no time in crossing the river all at once, dashing to the enemy position and annihilating the enemy.

After the battle was over, in order to hand down to posterity the feat of Wang Son, who laid down his life without hesitation to defend his beloved home town, the ford where he threw himself off was called Wangsongthan and later Wangsongthan with the change in pronunciation of *wangson* into *wangsong*.

### **Axe Warrior**

Going up northward along the upper reaches of the Pothong River, you can see a mountain called Mt Tokki (axe) or Mt Pu.

Following is the story about the origin of the name of this mountain, Tokki.

Long ago, a boy called Kwisong lived with his mother at a village in the Walled City of Pyongyang.

Bereaved of his father at an early age, Kwisong hewed out his living, dealing in firewood. Even when he came of age, he knew nothing but collecting and selling firewood, climbing up and down hills with an axe at his waist.

One day, feeling sorry for his plight, his mother said, "Dealing in firewood belongs to children or elderly people, but not to men of your age. I can no longer hear the villagers calling you a firewood collector with dishevelled hair."

She added that he ought to do a job as befits a grown-up, even if it did not arouse admiration from others.

Kwisong answered:

"From childhood, I have learned and trained in axing, and it seems to me that I can do nothing better than axing. I think it's alright if I can make a living by doing just one job. Should I quit my favourite job for fear of being on the tongue of other people?"

His mother could not say anymore. However, she felt sad at the thought of her failure to marry him to a girl.

Around this time the Imjin Patriotic War broke out.

The Japanese invaders made inroads straight into Pyongyang through the capital city to swallow up the whole country in a blitzkrieg.

At this news the Pyongyang people turned out as one in

preparation for fight against the enemy soldiers.

Kwisong told his mother that he would join the volunteers.

His mother agreed; standing up to the enemy in defence of the country was an obligation due to a citizen, but what was more proud for her was that his son would join the ranks of men as a full-fledged volunteer armed with spear and sword.

For some unavoidable circumstances, the Pyongyang volunteers unit had to yield the city to the enemy and take positions in mountains and the citizens, young and old, men and women, evacuate from the city.

It was the day when the volunteers were leaving the city through the Pothong Gate.

Oblivious of her evacuation, the mother rushed to the gate. She wanted to see in the long procession of the volunteers the dignified looks of her son.

Others who were around her spotted their sons and husbands, rushed to them and encouraged them to fight bravely.

Until the last cart convoy for cooking was about to pass before her, she couldn't find her son.

"Mother."

She heard his son's voice from behind.

The mother looked behind only to be embarrassed. Contrary to her expectation that he must be carrying a sword or a spear, he, with an A-frame carrier on his back, was holding an axe in one hand and driving an ox with the other.

"Shame on you. You still carry them even in the volunteers

unit?" she whispered for she was too ashamed to speak out.

"I volunteered to take the job. Nobody is better than me at gathering firewood and chopping the wood."

Standing absent-minded, she only looked at the back sight of her son gradually receding from view.

As soon as she parted with her son, she returned to her house, packed luggage and evacuated to a mountain outside the city. She did not wait for the news of her son any longer, for she thought she could not expect any good news from him as long as he collected firewood and built fire for the volunteers.

Kwisong who was responsible for cooking for the volunteers worked diligently. He chopped wood while the volunteers made weapons and trained in martial arts; he would climb the mountain with an axe to collect firewood when they went out to strike the enemy.

One day a tip came that a Japanese unit trapped in the Walled City of Pyongyang was moving to advance to the north.

The volunteers immediately lay in ambush at a bottleneck of a road.

That day Kwisong climbed a hill as usual with axe to collect firewood. He walked about in search of dry wood in the thick forest. All of a sudden, he could hear a sound of rustling.

Standing breathlessly and staring at the environs, Kwisong was taken aback; the enemy soldiers were clambering up stealthily among thick trees.

"You bastards! Where dare you climb?"

Shouting in a voice of thunder, he raised his axe and charged towards them.

With the sudden appearance of Kwisong, the enemy soldiers were taken aback. Now that they were in a forest of armful-thick trees that permitted only a man to slip through, their firelocks and long spears became useless; worse still, with poor knowledge of the mountain terrain, they could not counter him despite their superiority in number.

Informed by their spy among the volunteers defending the turn of the road, the enemy soldiers had been attempting to detour the road and stealthily slipped through the lush hill.

It was only after the enemy soldiers were annihilated by Kwisong's trenchant axe that the volunteers arrived at the scene. They looked round dubiously, unable to make out head or tail of it. Only after they spotted Kwisong felling a tree in the valley could they understand everything. They were struck with admiration when they realized that Kwisong, who had been doing nothing but cooking, was blessed with the strength, courage and valour of a warrior that could match a hundred, even a thousand foes.

After this incident, Kwisong was known as an Axe Warrior not only among the volunteers but also among the enemy soldiers. When he charged on horseback, wielding a large axe, the enemy soldiers got frightened and fled, crying, "The Axe Warrior!"

When the Pyongyang volunteers returned in triumph to the city

after routing the enemy soldiers, the local people stood in tiptoe in search for the renowned Axe Warrior. Looking at the warrior in glittering armour with an axe on his waist, they raised cheers.

His mother failed to recognize her son at first though she thought the countenance of the young warrior seemed more or less familiar with her. Only after hearing what others were saying, she looked at the warrior again; it was her son.

She elbowed her way through the crowds.

“Kwisong! So you were the famous Axe Warrior.”

The people lavished praise on her. An elderly man approached her and asked:

“Hey, how could you bring up such a brave son?”

“If a man devotes himself to a job in real earnest, whatever it may be, he can become a filial son for his family and a loyal subject for his country.”

Afterwards, the Axe Warrior accomplished feats with the Pyongyang volunteers until they routed the Japanese aggressors to the shore of the South Sea of Korea.

To convey to posterity the feats of Kwisong, the people of Pyongyang named the mountain, where he first annihilated the enemy soldiers with an axe, Tokki (axe in Korean).

### **Shrine Dedicated to Rats**

There is a flat space south of the Ulmil Pavilion on Moran Hill.

It is said that long ago there was a shrine dedicated to rats on one side of the place.

The following story tells why this shrine had been set up.

Long ago, the Chongnyu Cliff of Mt Kumsu was infested with rats. Their number was so great that they would overcrowd the valleys of the mountain when they moved in search of food.

This happened in summer one year.

Tens of thousands of foreign aggressors attacked the Walled City of Pyongyang, and a fierce fight lasted for days. Arrows ran out and soldiers were worn out.

One day the enemy’s offensive that started at dawn ceased soon.

Pyongyangites selected an agile young man, and infiltrated him into the enemy position.

There the young man was surprised at what he saw: the woods surrounding the enemy position were swarming with rats, their arrows had no bowstrings and the drums were stripped of their heads. He learned that the rats of Moran Hill flocked overnight to the enemy position and gnawed at the bowstrings and drumheads. Unable to attack any further, the enemy had to retreat from there.

The people of Pyongyang wasted no time in counterattacking the fleeing enemy.

Later they built a shrine in the open space below the Ulmil Pavilion in reward of the “feats” of the rats that played a big role in the fight against the foreign aggressors although they had kept

doing harm to their living in peacetime. On holidays they held martial arts games in front of the shrine, and kept the shrine in a good state of repair.

## **Legendary Tales of the Sense of Moral Obligation of Pyongyangites**

### **Urung and Sobi**

As an old fortress from Koguryo, the Taesongsan Fort still tells many stories of the people who bravely fought against foreign aggressors.

The legendary tale of Urung and Sobi is one of them.

It is said that from ancient times the Pyongyangites would train in martial arts here because the fort had deep valleys, thick forests and beautiful mountainscape and swarmed with various kinds of wild animals.

Once upon a time there lived a young man, named Urung, in a village in Pyongyang.

In the spring of one year, with a firm determination to defend the country, he left his house carrying a sword, his family heirloom, for the military art training ground in Mt Taesong.

When he was about to pass through the inner wall on horseback, a girl stood aside to give way for him. Urung felt his face flushed and his heart throbbing as he saw such a beautiful

girl for the first time. He dismounted the horse after riding some distance past her, and looked at her for a while. She was walking with some painting brushes in her hand. He soon discarded the plaguing thought about her and sprang on the horse again, and rushed for Mt Taesong.

Scores of days passed, but he could not forget her.

One day when he was passing on horseback under a cliff, he saw a girl drawing something on a painting-board near the stream meandering around the cliff.

It was a balmy spring day; mountains were getting green and various kinds of beautiful flowers were emitting strong aroma. The girl was painting in deep thought, her sleeves as white as the wing of crane waving lightly. She did not look like a common girl.

Out of suspicion and curiosity, he quietly drove the horse to her.

The girl turned her head around in surprise, and looked up at him. As soon as their eyes met, his heart was filled with surprise and delight. She was just the girl he had seen on his way to Mt Taesong.

She also seemed to have recognized him.

He took this opportunity to ask her who she was, where she was from and what brought her here.

She lived in Pyongyang and her name was Sobi. She lived with her old mother, as in her childhood her father had fallen in a battle against foreign invaders. When she had reached the age of

discretion, her mother had asked her to go to Mt Taesong to learn martial arts to take revenge of her father without fail in the future. When she had entered Mt Taesong, the master instructed her to learn how to paint first. So she was painting near the stream under the cliff to which animals flocked every day to drink water.

He told her why he came to Mt Taesong.

They talked for a good while, walking by the stream.

Around the time when the rose-coloured evening glow was setting, the boy asked her to promise to marry him.

She kept silence for a while, her head lowered. At his urge, she said they should obtain permission from their parents on the day when they would return after finishing training in martial arts, adding that she liked him but could not promise a marriage without her mother's consent.

He said he would wait until the day.

She also promised to do so.

The next day he went to the stream again, but she was not there. Thinking that she might be late for some reason, he practised horsemanship. The sun went down and the twilight set in but she did not turn out.

Four days passed like this.

He grew angry.

*Is she making fun of me? People say that girl's mind veers about like a weathercock. Is she such a sort of woman? Right, she is not the girl who will love me truly. Otherwise, she cannot disappear without leaving even a word.*

He made up his mind to forget her. His heart was broken but he could not get over her as his love became more fervent.

He thought for several days over how to meet her again.

A bright idea flashed across his mind. It was that she would wander somewhere in search of animals for painting.

He caught a little roe deer by means of a trap. He wrote a letter and attached it to its neck conspicuously.

From then on he poured his all energies into training. Finally he mastered horsemanship, and began training in archery. He began with fixed targets, and switched over to mobile targets, flying crows.

He came down to the foot of the mountain, where there were many crows.

He soon mastered shooting crows.

One day when he was returning with the game, he happened to see something wound to the leg of a crow.

It was Sobi's letter. It read:

I'm writing this as I could not but make a reply after reading the letter which had been tied to the neck of a roe deer. When taking leave of you, I had decided not to write a letter to you, because it would be difficult for two of us to achieve our great ambition if we met more often and fell in love with each other. So I had vanished withstanding the sorrow of parting. Please forget me until the day when we fulfilled the pledge we had made at the edge of the brook under the cliff.

Feeling remorseful, he made a determination not to meet her

again until he mastered martial arts.

Finally there came the day after three years and three months.

He went to attend the national martial arts contest, which was held on March 3 that year.

He beat his rivals in all events, moving to the finals; the winner would be the one who caught the largest number of animals.

He galloped his horse quite a long distance, but not a single animal was to be found in the hunting ground, so he went deeper into the forest. But he could not see animals there, either, and it was difficult for him to push his way through it.

*Perhaps I might return empty-handed.*

When he was looking with impatience, a yellow roe deer as big as a calf came into his sight. He shot one arrow after another, chasing it, but it threaded its way between trees.

His rivals, too, shot arrows at it. They gave up pursuit because they ran out of arrows.

Urung kept chasing, with sword in his hand.

*I must catch it at any cost. Otherwise, I may lose this game. Then I'll not be able to meet my parents and my love Sobi. She promised that she would appear again on the day when I succeeded.*

He drove the horse up to the top of a mountain.

The roe deer had nowhere to go farther.

Urung wasted no time to pounce upon it.

The roe deer jumped down the cliff scores of fathoms deep.

Without having time to think of danger, Urung leaped from the horse and threw himself down the precipice.

Falling on the heap of dead leaves, he found the roe deer after making his way through the bush with his sword. Caught in a tara vine, it was casting wretched eyes to him. He attempted to slash it with his sword, but could not kill it as it was staring at him in the face. He climbed up the cliff with the deer in his arms, and returned with it on horseback.

When he entered the playground with a live deer, onlookers raised a cheer.

His parents were seen at the entrance to the playground.

He watched if there was Sobi among the people while making round of the playground with great pride as a victor, but she was not seen.

*She might not be aware of today's success.*

He wanted to share this joy with her.

He approached the king to receive a prize. Bowing down on his knees before the king, he told his name. He rose up and made for the roe deer.

But there was not the roe deer, and instead a fairy-like girl was standing in the place.

The girl approached him.

He looked into her face dubiously. It was just Sobi. Forgetting that he was in front of the king, he ran to her and grasped her hands.

Sobi, who had learned the occult art of transforming herself,

appeared before the people as a roe deer that day.

The king granted a prize to Urung who came out first in the game and another to Sobi who mastered the occult art of transforming herself, and appointed them generals of the country.

Urung and Sobi paid a visit to their parents and told them their promise.

The parents readily consented to their marriage.

They got married and later rendered distinguished services in defending the country with Pyongyangites and lived happily bringing up their sons and daughters.

### **Gate of Happiness—Chilsong Gate**

The Chilsong Gate in the southwestern part of Moran Hill in Pyongyang has been called a gate of happiness from ancient times.

It is said that the gate was called so because of the legendary tale of a young man who fought in defence of his country.

Many, many years ago there lived a young man called Tolbom and a girl, Sinae in Pyongyang.

Though they lived in different villages, they often met as they used to climb Moran Hill, Tolbom for gathering firewood and Sinae for collecting edible herbs, so they were close to each other from their childhood. When they reached the age of marriage he proposed to her.

She also liked him for Tolbom with a stalwart body and a strong chivalrous spirit was thought to be the best in this world.

When he pressed her for an answer she whispered that if he wished it from the bottom of his heart, he should send a matchmaker to her house.

That night after hearing his words, his mother sent a go-between the next day.

To her surprise, the matchmaker, on her return from the girl's house, said that her father was not going to give her daughter to the guy who had not passed through the Chilsong Gate even if he might leave his daughter unmarried for ever.

At that time "the failure to pass through the Chilsong Gate" was used to indicate those who failed to learn martial arts or serve in the army in the frontier.

In fact he wanted to do so but for his old widowed mother he could not leave his house.

After giving much thought, he obtained permission from his mother, and promised to Sinae that he would return after three years.

On his arrival at the military art training place he told his master why he came there.

The master said, "You should learn the genuine martial arts for defending the country."

He trained military arts with persevering efforts.

It was nearly the time for him to come back home, when the country conscripted a large number of troops because the frontier

was often subjected to foreign invasion, but there was no man who could command them.

He went straight to the frontier and fought against the foreign aggressors.

After the end of battles another thing prevented him from going home. He was entrusted with the task of building a defensive position in the frontier.

Thus another two years passed.

One day, when he was engrossed in building defensive position, a man from his hometown conveyed the news to him that Sinae had married some days ago.

He felt dizzy.

After the project was over he was summoned to Pyongyang for his distinguished service.

Dressed in general's clothes and escorted by his men, he went to the Walled City of Pyongyang, took over a new post, and then went to see his mother.

His mother was weeding in the kitchen garden.

He got off the horse and called her.

She rushed out of the house.

“Look here, darling, he has come!”

Not knowing the reason, he casted his eyes to the house.

A woman came out of it. She was just Sinae.

They had an impressive reunion after five years' separation.

“What happened?” he asked.

She answered with a smile that there was nothing strange

as she was in her house.

His mother told him that his master had conveyed the news about him when he was to leave for the frontier, and that the girl's father had sent Sinae to her house so that they would live together.

They made a happy family and lived harmoniously with the old mother.

Afterwards Pyongyangites called on the young men who wished happiness to train in martial arts, passing through the Chilsong Gate, gate of happiness, as General Tolbom did.

### **A Soldier Becomes the Son-in-Law of the King**

Long ago, the king of Koguryo had a princess as beautiful as a fairy.

Before she reached the marriageable age, the king anxiously looked for a man to marry his daughter to. However, he could hardly find one who was a match to his daughter in personality and talent. He who was handsome lacked talent, and he who had talent was uncultured.

Sons of ministers who reached the age of marriage dressed themselves well, and circulated rumours that they had talents in writing and martial arts. However, they all failed to find favour with the king.

The princess, treasured by the king and adored by a lot of hot

-blooded young men, reached the age of marriage without any would-be husband.

One day, a great fire broke out in the royal palace.

The flame that started abruptly at midnight enveloped the whole of palace promptly.

The king, as if in a dream, was carried on the back of his subject out of the palace. He only gazed at the rising flame absent-mindedly. When he came to himself and realized that the palace was on fire, he began to inquire into the safety of all his family members. The precious princess was missing.

When he asked his subjects what had become of the princess, no one answered.

She was living in a solitary residence in the backyard of the palace. Even court ladies were denied access to the backyard unless necessary, and therefore the subjects in haste did not think of the princess.

Learning that the princess was sure to be trapped there, the king ordered her quick rescue.

However, all of them hesitated. As the roof tiles were breaking in the fierce flames and the interior of the palace turned into a crucible, they knew that there was no guarantee for survival in it.

Aware of the circumstances, the king refrained from giving orders and said, dispirited, "He who rescues the princess will be made my son-in-law."

A general stepped forward abruptly from among the quiet

subjects. He was handsome and well-built.

"I'll rescue her without fail."

After pouring water over his body, the young man rushed into the palace.

When he approached the hall in the backyard, its structure crumbled noisily.

"God damn! It's over."

Disappointed, he turned back.

Listening to the general who returned empty-handed with his whole body singed, the king wept helplessly.

When the king and his subjects were crying, a girl's voice was heard.

They raised their heads only to see the princess mounted on the horse led by a soldier.

"Oh, my dear daughter."

The king hugged her.

"How did you survive the flames?" asked the king.

Pointing to the soldier standing in distance with rein in his hand, she said, "That man."

"A soldier?"

"That soldier ought to marry her."

"How can a rank-and-file soldier be made the son-in-law of the king?"

The subjects whispered among themselves.

Paying no heed to what they were saying, the king approached the soldier.

“Have you saved the life of my daughter?”

The soldier with tanned face and robust constitution said to the king, bowing his head with both knees on the ground, “Upon hearing Your Majesty’s words that the princess was not rescued, I hurried there at once and rescued her when she was on the verge of being enveloped in the fire.”

“Then have you done that after hearing my words that anyone who would rescue my daughter would be allowed to marry her?”

“No, I have never heard that.”

“Then what did you want from me when you broke into the fire to save the princess at the risk of your life?”

“What can a soldier want from you, Your Majesty? I deem it a duty of a soldier to expel foreign aggressors at the cost of his life externally and defend the lives and property of people internally.”

“You have done that from a sense of duty, you say.”

“That’s right, Your Majesty.”

“Then you really deserve to be my son-in-law.”

The king pulled the soldier up by arms.

“I am awfully sorry, but how can I be Your Majesty’s son-in-law now that I’m the son of a humble man and a rank-and-file soldier?”

“You are wrong. No person even on state payroll went into the fire to save the princess, and only a man consented on the promise that he would be made my son-in-law. And how can I find my son-in-law among them all? If you marry my daughter

and assist me in state affairs, foreign aggressors will not dare to attack us externally and the people will have a peaceful time internally. Where else can I find my son-in-law like you? I want you not to decline it any longer.”

This is how a soldier who deemed it his duty to expel foreign aggressors at the cost of his life externally and defend people internally got married to the princess.

## Ungguk Bridge

Long ago, there was a low hill called Kaek (guest in Korean) in the area west of the Pothong River.

This hill was named so because it attracted a ceaseless stream of guests including those on trip from the west to the Walled City of Pyongyang who had rest or stayed overnight there, waiting for the opening of the gate to the city.

At the foot of the hill there lived a man called Jo Ung Guk with a son, called Jo Sok Un.

As Sok Un was his only son he had fathered late in his life, Ung Guk not only loved his son but also eagerly wished him to grow up to be a fine man. He always taught his son as follows:

“A man dies, but his name remains. Become an excellent man and gain fame without fail!”

One day in the year when he became some ten years old, the son told his father that he would leave the house to cultivate himself to be a world-renowned, great man.

Although he was worried about his precious son embarking on an unforeseeable path, the father readily granted permission.

On the day when he left home, the son made up his mind not to return home unless he gained prominence in the world.

Five years after his departure, the father would wait at the road every morning and evening in anticipation of his son's return.

While doing so, he found the road at the entrance to the village was so washed away that it got puddled by a little rain and flooded with rainwater during the wet season, causing extreme inconvenience to travellers and often blocking the traffic.

From of old, the hill behind the village was called Kaek because a lot of travellers would stay overnight at the village. However, Ung Guk felt guilty conscience, thinking that the blame for this went to the inhabitants of this village who failed to pave a good road.

At last he made up his mind to build a broad and durable bridge.

While he was at the roadside waiting for his son, he collected big stones, and he climbed the hill when he had spare time to fell trees. He prepared materials for building a bridge within a few years. He bought manpower at the cost of his family's wealth, and had a broad, long and good-looking bridge built within months.

Travellers would say thanks to him. Each time they greeted him, he felt happy at the thought that he had fulfilled his duty as a

man at a roadside village and he could proudly meet his son who would return through the bridge after gaining fame in the world.

However, the long-awaited son did not return home even after the elapse of a decade, and the father passed away before he could see his son.

After his death, not only his family members and relatives but also people of neighbouring villages and travellers who had enjoyed the benefit of the bridge paid homage to him, and decided to build a big monument dedicated to his beautiful deed at one end of the bridge and to change the name of the bridge, Kaeksan, which had been named after the hill over it, into Ungguk.

Meanwhile, his son went first into a remote mountain where there was allegedly a renowned drill ground for practising martial arts. Probably because of his comfortable life in childhood or lack of inborn talents, he found the training quite difficult and made little noticeable achievements in it.

Five years later, he participated in a martial arts game held in the Walled City of Pyongyang only to be in the cellar. He felt he had no face to return home.

His colleagues advised him, saying, "Pretty and modest as a girl, you are a man of civil-official type. What about trying studying even from now?"

That sounded reasonable. Sok Un headed to Mt Kumgang where men of letters allegedly gathered to cultivate their abilities. With a resolve to seek fame through studying within a

period of a decade he was engrossed in learning the maxims of renowned people by heart.

Six years elapsed.

One day he went to the Kuryong Falls for a break with his fellows. There he happened to chat with merchants who came on a sightseeing tour of Mt Kumgang.

A merchant was glad to know that Sok Un hailed from the village at the foot of Kaek Hill on the Pothong Plain west of the Walled City of Pyongyang.

“Indeed you have a good native place. We benefit a lot from the Ungguk Bridge at the village.”

“Ungguk Bridge?”

Merchants told in chorus how a man called Ung Guk had built a big bridge by dedicating his efforts and property to alleviate the inconvenience of travellers and how a monument dedicated to his deed had been erected.

Sok Un spent a sleepless night that day. He realized that despite his ten-odd-year-long trouble for cultivating himself, he had neither won prominence nor brought his father’s desire into reality.

The next day he gave up studying and returned to Pyongyang.

On arriving at his home village, he found a big bridge that had not existed before and a monument dedicated to the good conduct of his father.

Hugging the stele, he cried.

“Why haven’t you taught me early the true path of a man?”

His cry sounded so sad and his remarks were so strange that travellers and villagers soothed him, asking, “Where are you from and what makes you weep so bitterly?”

Sok Un stopped crying, introduced himself to them, and said.

“My father taught me when I was leaving home that a man should have his name remained in history. However, this unfilial son, unaware of the profound meaning of his words, has taken wrong paths for a decade, driven by a desire for fame. If he had said to me on my departure that when a man makes painstaking efforts to work for the country and people, whoever may say what, wherever he may go and whatever he may do, he can get his name to remain in history...”

Having realized, though belatedly, how to live, Sok Un dedicated all his energy and wisdom to teaching reading, writing and martial arts to young people.

The villagers praised him, saying, like father, like son.

His disciples who grew up to be outstanding men of letters and warriors, and other Pyongyang people conveyed his exploits for generations.

## **Mt Juam**

There’s a low hill called Juam at the end of a mountain range that runs along the shores of the Taedong northeast of Moran Hill.

It is said that this mountain was named so in the sense that it is

a mountain with a rock from which spirits gush out.

Once upon a time, at the shore of the Taedong lived a boy with his father after he had been bereaved of his mother at his early age.

His filial piety towards his father was praiseworthy. While doing farm work from morning till late at night he climbed the mountain between work hours and collected firewood to sell it, and bought rice and fish for his father. Though he ate gruel mixed with vegetables, he served white rice and fish to his father and got him whatever he wanted to eat at all costs.

One day, he was climbing down the hill as usual with a pack of firewood on his back. Feeling thirsty, he took off the A-frame carrier at a spring that trickled from crevices of a rock.

The spring smelt aromatic, and he felt refreshed yet stupefied after a few gulps.

He stood up, but he took only a few steps before collapsing as he felt dizzy and his legs gave way.

He decided to go home after a rest, and fell asleep.

It was already evening when he woke up. Learning belatedly that what he had drunk was liquor, not spring water, he felt a pang of conscience for having tasted it, unbeknownst to his father. He dropped in at a house at the foot of the mountain to borrow a jar. He filled it with liquor and took it to his father.

Seeing the jar brimming with fragrant liquor, his father was taken aback and refrained from drinking it, for he knew that it

was beyond their means to get that much amount of such fragrant liquor.

“Tell the truth! Where did you get this liquor from?”

The son explained to his father several times that the liquor was oozing from the crevices of a rock, and asked him to taste it, but his father would not believe it.

It was not until he arrived at the spring, guided by his son, and tasted the liquor that he admitted that what his son had told him was true.

Saying how he could relish this aromatic and mysterious liquor alone, his father asked him to fetch all the elderly in the village.

The elderly, after drinking the fragrant liquor to their fill, said:

“How can we say that this liquor comes up of itself from the rock? Heaven must have sent it through the rock because the boy’s filial piety towards his father is highly commendable.”

Since then, the rock was called Juam (Liquor Rock) and the mountain with the rock, Mt Juam.

### **A Girl Saves a Young Deer**

Long ago, at the shore of the Pothong River lived a girl, named Man Ok.

Having early been bereaved of her parents, she was sold as a slave to the landlord’s house, and spent each day under all sorts

of humiliation and maltreatment, looking after the baby and cooking in the kitchen.

On *Chusok* (the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the eighth month by the lunar calendar, a traditional holiday) one year, the landlord took his family members to the swinging and wrestling sites for sightseeing, and ordered Man Ok to collect firewood.

It was unfair, but Man Ok had no other alternative but to climb Mt Changgwang, carrying an A-frame carrier on her slender shoulders. Hearing the people enjoying the holiday afar, she kept gathering firewood. Tears trickled on the twigs of collected firewood.

When the firewood gradually increased to the amount enough to be a man-load of the A-frame carrier, a rattling sound was abruptly heard, and a young deer ran from there, gasping. When it saw the girl standing before it, it approached her closer as if to jump into her bosom; it appeared to be beseeching her to hide it.

Man Ok hid the deer in the bundle of firewood.

A little later a hunter ran up towards Man Ok and shouted, "Haven't you seen a deer?"

Pointing to the upper valley, she said it had just run towards it.

After the hunter was gone, Man Ok released the young deer, removed the blood stains from its body and let it go.

Extremely grateful to the girl for saving its life, the deer shed tears and pulled her with the skirt in his mouth.

Man Ok, suspicious, gazed at it for a while and went along as guided.

Where they arrived was a scenic place; there was a crystal-clear stream and an open field, and crimson flowers were in full bloom, emitting aroma.

The deer stopped her in the middle of the flower field; it seemed to be saying, "I just want to repay you for rescuing me. This is only a sign of my humble reward. This is a wild insam field. Please carry the roots of the medicinal herb as much as you can and free yourself from the fate of a servant of the landlord and repay your neighbours for their kindness."

After looking at the girl for a while, the deer vanished.

Mesmerized, Man Ok opened her eyes, and found that it was really a field of wild insam.

She dug the medicinal herb with care, carried home a load of it on the A-frame carrier instead of firewood. She distributed it to her kind-hearted neighbours and set herself free from the landlord's by giving the ransom asked by him.

Later, Man Ok led a happy life with the village people, helping one another.

### **Roe Deer and Snake Pay Back Their Gratitude**

Long ago an elderly man lived on the bank of the Taedong River in Pyongyang. His wife and son had died of diseases, and the man led a hand-to-mouth life by farming and catching fish at the Taedong.

This happened one summer day in the rainy season.

That year a downpour of rain never ceased for about a fortnight, causing the river to swell. The angry water overflowed the embankment, swallowing everything on the shores of the river.

People desperately crying for help while holding fast to a wood board or a log, screams of animals, and sound of home appliances breaking apart—the shore of the Taedong resounded with the cries and screams of people and animals.

The old man, watching this scene from the top of the Chongnyu Cliff after making a narrow escape, could not stand still. He had enjoyed respect from other people because he was kind-hearted by nature, regarded the pain of others as his own and had a high sense of obligation. He oared a boat into the stormy river to save the lives adrift.

The river water struck against the sides of the boat as if to crush it to pieces at a go.

The elderly man managed to throw ropes to the drifting people and rescued dozens of them.

When the boat packed with the saved people was on the way to the shore of the river, sudden screams of animals came from the front; a roe deer and a snake were adrift on a log.

The old man oared his boat to them and saved them, too.

Though they were animals, the roe deer and snake often turned their heads as if they would like to express thanks to the old man, before vanishing into the woods.

After sending off all of the rescued people, he turned back only to see a boy behind him standing still with tearful eyes. The child said that he was the son of a landlord living in a village in the upper reaches of the Taedong, and all of his family members were drowned in the flood, leaving him alone. The old man felt uncomfortable at the thought of feeding and clothing a son of a landlord, not a child of poor people, not to mention the dire situation of his household. For all that, he couldn't abandon the child. As he had no kith and kin, he decided to adopt the child and live with him.

The flood waters receded.

The elderly man lived on fishing and doing farm work with his adopted son.

Several months later, when he was about to leave home as usual to go to the field with a hoe in his hand, a big roe deer leapt into the garden.

Turning round him, sniffing and nodding its head forward and backward, it seemed to be expressing gladness.

The man realized that it was the very roe deer he had saved.

“Oh, what brought you here?”

He was so glad that he threw his arms around its neck.

The roe deer pulled the old man with his sleeves.

The man saw that it wanted him to go with it to somewhere else. He followed it into the woods for a while.

As if it would confirm that the elderly man was following it, it looked back several times while going; at last, they arrived at the

bottom of a big rock in a valley washed by a limpid stream.

The roe deer began to dig the earth below the rock with its hoofs.

Learning that it wanted to dig deeper, the man dug the earth with care. There was a big pot under the ground. Carefully unlifting it, he saw that the pot was full of gold, silver, pearls and jewels.

The roe deer nodded to him several times, and went away.

He dug out the pot with care, and carried it home. He evenly distributed gold rings, gold bracelets, and gold hairpins to his villagers and used the remainder to manage his household. Although the wealth he had obtained was more than enough for him to lead a comfortable life without working, he was still diligent, doing farm work and catching fish every day.

The adopted son, who had grown up comfortably in a rich family but had to toil after being adopted by the elderly man, indulged in a rowdy spree, spending money in profusion.

Displeased with his behaviour, the elderly man took a chance one day, and said:

“The foundation of man, dear, is labour, not money.”

Obsessed with the longing of the past life, he retorted, “Now that we have got much gold, why must we toil in sweat? Moreover, this wealth is not what you have earned by backbreaking labour. It’s a windfall for us, father and son, and so half of it belongs to me, doesn’t it? Is it wrong for me to spend my money?”

The son took it granted for him to waste the wealth.

The father said it was improper for him to do so.

The son turned his back and said, “I’ll leave home. Give half of that money to me.”

It infuriated the elderly man. He slapped the cheek of the son. “You are an ungrateful boy!”

The son, still furious, kicked the door open and went out of the house. In retaliation, he went to the local government and reported that his adoptive father became a millionaire overnight by stealing.

The elderly man was arrested by the local government and put behind bars. More heart-rending for him than his imprisonment on false charges was the fact that the adopted son he had saved from death, trusted and brought up betrayed him. Thinking this or that, he had a short and uncomfortable sleep before waking up at a rustle beside him. He groped around in the dark, and touched something chilly.

“Gosh! What’s this?”

He found a thick snake. When he tried to sit up in a fright, there was a sting at the back of his hand; the snake had bitten his hand and fled.

His body swelled rapidly; the whole body was in high fever, and the pain was unbearable.

When the morning came, a rustling sound of something was heard again.

A cold shiver ran through him, and he tried to escape but in

vain. He saw the same snake that had come last night; the snake brought green blades of grass on the bitten part of the body before retreating.

A short while later, he felt refreshed, the swollen part going down, and the pain was gone.

*What a mysterious herb it is!*

He wrapped up the grass blades.

At noon that day, the people outside the jail came and went busily, whispering something. The unusual bustle continued in the courtyard of the local government until the sunset.

“What has happened outside?”

Only when the elderly man asked repeatedly did the warden reply, “Last night the province governor was bitten by a snake and now he is on the verge of death. Although all of the renowned doctors were brought to see him, they could not treat him and there’s no medicine to cure him.”

His words instantly reminded the man of the blades of grass. He asked the warden to tell the governor that he could treat his illness.

At first the latter turned a deaf ear to him, thinking he had gone crazy. On hearing the news that the life of the governor hung in the balance, he conveyed the elderly man’s words to the governor.

Saying whoever could treat him made no difference to him, the governor called the elderly man.

At the residence of the governor, he attached the grass

brought by the snake to the affected part.

The governor, who had been hovering on the brink of death, was cured in an instant. The recovered governor asked him out of curiosity about the grass.

The elderly man told him in detail the story about the people, roe deer and snake he had saved from the flooding, the wealth he had found, his imprisonment, and the snake.

After hearing him out, the governor issued an order to jail the adopted son and release the elderly man right away. The ungrateful adopted son was sentenced to harsh punishment.

**PYONGYANG SEEN FROM ANECDOTES  
AND LEGENDARY TALES**

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