



Some Korean Customs and Notions

T. Watters

To cite this article: T. Watters (1895) Some Korean Customs and Notions, Folklore, 6:1, 82-84, DOI: [10.1080/0015587X.1895.9720282](https://doi.org/10.1080/0015587X.1895.9720282)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0015587X.1895.9720282>



Published online: 14 Feb 2012.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 2



View related articles [↗](#)

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 6th, 1895.

JOINT meeting of the Cymmrodorion Society and the Folk-Lore Society, held at 20 Hanover Square, Mr. Brynmôr Jones, Q.C., M.P., in the chair.

On the motion of Mr. Nutt, seconded by Mr. William Evans, it was unanimously resolved that a letter be written to the family of the late Lady Charlotte Schreiber (formerly Lady Charlotte Guest), the translator and editor of the *Mabinogion*, condoling with them in their bereavement, and expressing the high appreciation in which both Societies held her invaluable services to the study of Welsh romantic literature.

Professor Rhys read a paper entitled "The Story of *Twrch Trwyth*," and a discussion followed, in which Mr. Nutt, Mr. Gomme, Mr. Clodd, Mr. Edward Owen, and others took part.

SOME COREAN CUSTOMS AND NOTIONS.

BY T. WATTERS.

(Formerly in charge of H.B.M. Consulate-General at Söul).

ON the 14th and 15th days of the first month of each year, every man and boy in Söul, the capital, walks over three particular bridges in succession. By doing so, exemption from pains in the legs and feet is procured for one year.

There is another curious custom in Corea in connection with the above-mentioned days. All men and women born under the Jen or "Man" star make certain straw images on these days, and especially on the 14th. These images are sometimes dressed with clothes, and each one contains a number of the copper "cash" constituting the currency of the country. There ought to be as many cash in an

image as the person making it is years old, but the rule is not strictly followed. When the images are complete they are placed on the path outside of the house, and the poor people seize them and tear them up in order to get the "cash" which they contain. The destruction of the image, or figure saves the person represented from death for ten years. It is, accordingly, only once in ten years that the ceremony must be performed, but it seems to be observed every year, at least by some.

Small-pox is supposed by the Coreans to be the work of a malevolent demon, and hence its name among them, viz. Ok-Sin or Plague-God. When a child dies of small-pox its body is not buried, but is tied up in straw and hung on the city wall in Söul or from a tree. The body is thus hung up because it is believed that there is a chance of the spirit which had left it returning to it again. But some say that the deceased child is thus hung up in order to secure a longer life for the next-born. It is chiefly daughters, I believe, whose dead bodies are treated in the manner here indicated. The custom is explained as having arisen from an actual occurrence. On one occasion a young girl died in Söul and her parents were unable to bury her. They wrapped her up in paper and left her hanging from the city wall above the reach of beasts of prey. During the night a poor man, who had taken shelter near the spot where the corpse was hanging, heard it utter sounds. He found the body reanimated, took the girl down, and made her his wife.

If a younger brother dies of small-pox in a family in which there is an elder brother, the deceased may not be interred until after the lapse of thirteen days from the date of death.

The moon of the 15th of the first month is carefully and anxiously observed by the Coreans in order to obtain prognostics for the year. If the moon is what is called "thin," that is, dull and pale, the year will be a bad one. The crops will fail, trade will be bad, there will be much sickness, and things generally will go wrong. If the "thin-

ness" is only partial, the misfortunes will be confined to the districts lying in the direction of the "thin" part.

The 15th day of the first month is also the day specially set apart in Corea for the worship of ancestors with much solemnity and formality. On the morning of this day also all the members of the family meet together for a wine-drinking ceremony. On this one occasion the youngest member of the household, whether boy or girl, takes precedence in drinking. By doing so, it is believed, the child is secured against ear-ache for a year.

Fortune-telling, exorcism, and witchcraft are in great vogue in Corea. The professional fortune-tellers are of different kinds and use different means of divination. Some employ the carapace of the tortoise and some the mystic figure of the Chinese called Pa Kua. Many profess to read a man's fortune in his face, and many read it in his hands. In palmistry, the palm of the hand as usual is consulted. The base of the thumb is east and south, the part of the palm opposite that is south and summer, the part near the base of the little finger stands for west and autumn, and the part opposite at the base of the first finger is for north and winter.

There are also fortune-tellers, chiefly women, who profess to tell, not the future, but the present and the past. These women pretend to relate not only events in one's previous life, but also acts and experiences of former existences, and so to explain present events and circumstances otherwise inexplicable.

The witches and exorcists are much feared and generally hated. But nearly all Coreans believe in their great power and employ them in cases of severe long-continued sickness, runs of ill-luck of certain kinds, and other circumstances for which there is no apparent remedy. The exorcists may be either men or women, but the latter seem to be more in repute and more numerous. The women whom I have seen engaged in the work of expelling malevolent demons were dressed in fantastic garbs, and had an almost terrible expression of face,