



THE EMPIRE

There were once those who claimed that the kingdoms and empires of the Orient are but pale shadows of the dominant powers of the West, ripe for plunder and exploitation. Such foolish thoughts are only voiced by the arrogant and the ignorant, for the strength and mastery of the Empire has now been openly displayed in victorious battle. The Immortal Celestial Emperors have reigned supreme for nearly a thousand years, steeped in history, tradition, wisdom and strength. To think that such young nations might challenge the glorious Empire? United and determined, the realms of the Celestial Emperors are prosperous, advanced and ready for battle. We claim ten-thousand years of harmony with our Immortal Emperors!



[Compiled by Auger Matthias Konstantin – Enlightened Historical Archivist.]

The Celestian Empire is not so much a single entity but rather an enduring partnership of some of the most powerful nations in the Eastern hemisphere. Established by the famous Jade Pact of the late 14th Century, the Empire includes the Seven Realms of the “Immortal Celestian Emperors”: the Chinese Demesne, the Empire of Japan, the Joseon Kingdom of Korea, the Ayutthaya Kingdom of Thailand (Siam in Western parlance), the Toungoo Dynasty of Burma, the Empire of Dai Viet, and the Confederation of Madja-as.

These seven states remain distinctly separate countries, although are bound by incredibly rich cultural and commercial ties which have been carefully nurtured over centuries of isolationist co-operation. Recently forced to reappraise their approach to the world after the ill-fated Anglo-Russian Expedition into Korea, the Empire is considered a pre-eminent power by most dispassionate observers.

LEGACY OF THE GREAT KHAN

Centuries ago, the Mongolian tribes ceased generations of in-fighting to unite under the charismatic leadership of Genghis Khan. This immensely vast army then swarmed across the Gobi Desert to plunder and raid the rich agricultural lands of China. These raids soon became wars of conquest and, eventually, the Mongols established extensive dominions over not only Asia but westerly towards the Middle East along the overland Silk Road trade route.

The Mongols established their own Dynasty; one which ruled much of Asia under the regnal name of Yuan. But their power was

not to last forever and, ultimately, the Yuan Dynasty collapsed in the face of popular revolt and military force. One amongst the coalition that campaigned against the Yuan was the popular and dynamic General Ming, who upon victory, would be crowned Emperor of a new Dynasty.

Yet this newly-established Emperor had no intention of perpetuating the cycle of Imperial power that had afflicted China for so long. He desired instead to institute a permanent Dynasty, one that would outlast all that had gone before and shepherd the people firmly and justly. His righteous ambition and honourable purpose were lauded by sage and noble alike, although few believed his dream could ever be realised. It was then that a secret meeting changed everything in the region forever.

TIAN SHANG

A group of monks, led by a grizzled abbot, arrived in Ming’s capital one cold morning unmarked and unnoticed. The story of their visit is known to only a few, how they penetrated the Emperor’s private apartments without alerting anyone remains a mystery to this day.

In the young Emperor’s presence, the abbot introduced the monks as members of the secretive Tian Shang sect – those who guarded an enlightenment they claimed was far more tangible than that offered by Confucian and Buddhist scholars. With them, the monks had brought an artefact, discovered many thousands of years ago by the founders of their order. While the monks called it the gift of the heavens, it was later to be identified by the Empire’s scholars as one of several such shards of the Hex, an ancient extra-terrestrial entity.



This 'Celestial Gift' as it was known, had come to rest in Asia thousands of years ago; whereupon it had been discovered and guarded by the Tian Shang. Shielded from detection by the other shards by a cage of pure jade, the Celestial Gift had amplified the knowledge and the spiritual awareness of the monks. These blessings they now sought to impart to the new Chinese ruler, that his dream of a more perfect Dynasty could be realised.

Emperor Ming accepted the tutelage of the monks and the power that they offered without hesitation, and for many months remained closeted with them in the halls of his palace; permitting no entrance but to his closest relatives. After this period of enforced seclusion, Ming embarked upon an ambitious plan, with the Tian Shang at his side.

THE JADE PACT

First to receive the emissaries of the new Emperor was the Kingdom of Korea, once a tributary state of the Chinese Demesne. The Korean ruler, Sun Li, was greeted by Ming as an equal, not a vassal, and the two finally met after a year of negotiation at their mutual border.

At this meeting, Sun Li was introduced to the artefact by the Tian Shang and was quickly convinced of the benefits of Ming's plan and the knowledge on offer. These two rulers placed the first signatures upon the documents that would become known as the Jade Pact – pledging assistance and mutual support to one another in the face of foreign dangers and internal problems.

Ming's diplomatic endeavours did not end there. Travelling swiftly, his agents

contacted the rulers of Vietnam, the Khmer Empire, Thailand and Burma. Each was offered the chance to join the Jade Pact as equals; participants in a new order that abandoned vassalage for common partnership. The most difficult to persuade was the Empress Shinzua of Japan, who was only finally convinced by the phenomenal powers of the Celestial Gift.

Once imbued with a portion of the artefact's power, the seven rulers of these kingdoms were able to communicate through the Celestian Dream. In a meditative state, their connection to the Celestial Gift permitted a form of telepathic communication across vast distances. Nobody fully understood the process and yet the Dream was all the more beneficial for its side-effects.

[Archivist's Note: It is recognised that no lie can be spoken within the aura of the artefact which suffuses the Celestian Dream, and deception is all but impossible. Unable to dissemble or deceive, Emperor Ming and his allies could expect their proposals to be accepted at face value.]

The final member of the Jade Pact was coaxed into membership over many years, shepherded by the other powers to become a unified nation that benefited greatly from the partnership. The islands to the south of China had long played host to many different realms, each with cultural ties to different mainland cultures. With guidance and support, the seven other powers built up and supported a single power until it could unite the islands under one rule. The accession of the Confederation of Madjas brought the total number of Jade Pact signatories to eight.



THE IMMORTAL CELESTIAN EMPERORS

The eight individuals who signed the Jade Pact each knew that to ensure the longevity of their united nations they also had to ensure wise and consistent leadership. Relying upon the vagaries of chance and biological succession had historically been a disaster, nor could the people at large be relied upon to make decisions in the best interests of the nation at every opportunity. From this realisation was born the plan to “extend” their own reigns indefinitely, spreading their own policies into the distant future.

Under the guidance of the Tian Shang, each of the eight rulers began cultivating their own bloodlines – ensuring the birth of many offspring who could be trained and relied upon to further the goals of each house in perpetuity. Some of those raised within these exceedingly close families would serve as minor functionaries or close confidants of the rulers, whilst others would be implicitly trained from birth to mirror the thoughts, aspirations, gestures and identities of their progenitors.

When the time comes for a ruler to be replaced, due to old age or some other inability to fulfil their duties, the Rite of Celestian Renewal occurs. In each realm this rite is attended with its own special ceremonies – the old emperor enters a special chamber and is sealed in with great ceremony. Then, with similar pomp and circumstance, upon some auspicious sign, out strides the monarch once more – renewed, with the same personality, thoughts and memories as his predecessor.

To be “of the Blood” in these kingdoms is now a sign of great favour and great responsibility. Each generation of the Blood must carry on the wishes, aspirations and hopes of the previous; all the time deceiving their people as to the true nature of the system that guides them. Such a life involves sacrifice, in honest dealings with lower functionaries, as well as in their personal and private lives. Genetic purity must be maintained within the lines, requiring matches with close relatives, and freedom of thought and action are often curtailed by the harsh training and teaching that comes with the role.

All are aware of the stakes should this system fail even in just one of the nations of the Empire. Without a central guiding figure, such a nation would become prey to internal and external tensions and pressures that might derail the peaceful march towards a prosperous and self-reliant future. That said, the original rulers of the Jade Pact were willing to pay the price, even as they had no sure knowledge of how well this deception would work. Thus far it has done so with but one catastrophic failure.

[Archivist's note: Of course, human nature being what it is, there have been instances of the rules of purity being broken. Young people will often act with their hearts rather than their heads. It is rumoured that the royal bloodlines likely extend beyond the walls of their various palaces, but as of yet, no stranger has come to the gates demanding access to their birth right.]

THE DARK AGE OF KHMER

In the sixteenth century, the Khmer Emperor Jayavarman was reaching the respectable age of fifty-seven when it was



discovered that his designated heir suffered from a rare genetic condition brought on by the circumstances of his birth and parentage. The rest of the Khmer bloodline were either female (and therefore ineligible to succeed their father or grandfather) or else too young or too distantly related to maintain the deception of his ever-recurring renewal. Discussion within the Dream became more frantic as Jayavarman aged but, as the eldest at the time, it was to him that the deciding vote always fell – no course of action received his endorsement even as all the Emperors discussed the situation repeatedly.

[Archivist's Note: Some now suggest or maintain that Jayavarman himself may also have been unwell, thus explaining this uncharacteristic display of poor leadership from a caste trained since birth to rule their domains.]

As Jayavarman fell into a coma it was natural that his followers would carry him to the temple to undergo renewal. When this failed, despite a last-ditch attempt to delay the ritual by agents of the Celestial Emperors, there was great consternation through the Empire. A clever propaganda campaign attributed his death to the spirit of Jayavarman having unfinished business in the heavens and being unready to return. The body of Jayavarman remained in the temple, an honour guard in place until the longed-for day when Jayavarman renews. This, however, did nothing to quell the unrest in the Khmer state brought on by the shock of their "Immortal" ruler's apparent abandonment of his people. Within a decade civil war had broken out, one exacerbated by the sudden arrival of western explorers who used the breakdown

in central authority to gain a foothold in the Empire for the first time.

It was Empress Shinzua who enacted a necessary but brutal policy to stabilise the region. The last remaining dregs of Jayavarman's corrupted bloodline were extinguished entirely, falling in secret to the blades and poisons of the assassins of the Shinobi. The territory was then seized by forces of Burma, Vietnam and Thailand. The westerners were expelled by the oncoming military forces and the blot upon the Jade Pact extinguished. Nonetheless, the events of that time cast a shadow across the Empire's history. It is now common policy to train at least three or four worthy successors, and to keep many of them hidden from public view or despatched to far flung corners of the domain to protect against assassins or tragic accident. The priests and functionaries who oversee the bloodlines (many of whom are of the Blood themselves) have also doubled their watch against corruption and taint within the family lines upon which the Empire's government relies.

GOVERNING AN EMPIRE

To speak of a uniform government within the Empire is a misnomer, for no overall structure exists. Rather, a network of treaty obligations, unwritten agreements and competing commitments enforce a partnership between these seven different states, each with its own governmental structure, law and customs.

To examine all these in great detail in a single volume would be the work of a lifetime, but there are notable commonalities. Each nation is a monarchy, although in practice the degree to which the monarch



wields power individually over their dominion varies considerably. In China, for example, the Emperor and his Court are the originators of policy, and it is they who formulate the decrees enacted by the Imperial Ministries. By contrast, in Japan, the Empress Shinzua works with an elected government, to a certain extent allowing the people to influence domestic policy all the while calmly directing and manipulating events to support her own goals.

All the Empire's realms have extensive formalised bureaucracies, with entrance and rank based on study and professional examination. The most effective of these is to be found in Joseon Korea, where a State Council oversees the Six Ministries, with various separate departments (the Office of Inspector General, Office of the Censors, and Office of Special Advisors) ensuring efficiency and rooting out corruption. Many individuals from the Imperial bloodlines will serve with these ministries in positions of great power and influence, whilst others will take seemingly minor roles to monitor and gather information.

Likewise, each government maintains its own secretive societies dedicated to eliminating dissent and spreading propaganda and misinformation throughout their realm in order to support the government and keep their citizens quiescent. Such organisations are not above eliminating opponents of the regime, either publicly or in secret as the situation demands. Perhaps the most famous of these are the Japanese Shinobi clans who are long favoured of the Empress and known to operate worldwide.

None of these ministries and institutions, however, are the true powers within the

Empire's governments. That honour, of course, belongs the Celestian Dream that allows the seven Emperors to co-ordinate policy and enact it across a massive realm instantaneously. Even with the modern marvels of technology produced by the Enlightened and others, the advantage the Celestian Dream gives the Empire cannot be understated.

THE FORUM

The Celestian Dream is a constant state of metaphysical contact between the Celestian Emperors and it takes long practice and study to become used to filtering between listening to the conversations that take place within it and the day-to-day interactions required of a ruler. As such, it is only occasionally that all the Celestian Emperors will be present for a longer discussion, in a semi-formal occasion known as a Forum.

During Forum gatherings all the Emperors and their designated heirs (those who have reached the stage where they can join the Dream) must be present unless called away on urgent business and, even then, it is expected that one or both will be fully immersed in the Dream even as the other deals with whatever urgent situation has called them away. Of necessity, the presence of an heir waiting in the wings to take up the mantle once an Emperor dies is considered of paramount importance to the Forum – and the progress of each bloodline is frequently discussed in such gatherings.

It is during these sessions that the true hierarchy of the Empire is laid bare. Since the time of the Jade Pact, each monarch has wielded power over a specific area of expertise that has, over the generations,



become something of a national specialisation. Since that time these specialisations have altered considerably – as some have waxed with the new technology, others have waned or fallen out of favour with the Forum as it plans and prepares for the future.

- Emperor Ming – The Jade Mountain, Speaker for Works
- Empress Shinzua – The Blazing Sun, Speaker for the Fleets
- King Sun Li – The Cloud Dragon, Speaker for the Hunters
- Empress Do Thi Nguyet – The Veiled Moon, Speaker for the Manufacturers
- Emperor Anuman – The Crowned Garuda, Speaker for the Armies
- Queen Yadana – The Golden Lion, Speaker for the Scholars
- Datu Kalantiaw – The Serpent of the Sea, Speaker for the Traders

[Archivist's Note: The only area of responsibility that remains unfilled is that of the Speaker for Agriculture. With the absence of Emperor Jayavarman, there is no singular Speaker and the responsibilities are divided between Emperor Ming and Datu Kalantiaw at present.]

Each area of responsibility also explains the specialisations present in the economies of the seven member-nations. The Chinese Demesne boasts extensive fortifications along the Mongolian and Russian borders, and produces excellent architects and labour forces that can be found working on massive projects throughout the Empire. Meanwhile, the Empire of Japan is dotted with naval yards

and slipways to service the merchant and military fleets of all the states.

Some areas of responsibility, once considered minor, have now become positively vital in the new modern age. Sun Li, once speaker for merely the hunting and control of livestock, has since added modern aerial equipment to his portfolio – meaning that all of the Empire's air forces bear the stylised Cloud Dragon upon their fuselage. Meanwhile, the Scholars and Manufacturers in Burma and Vietnam are the lifeblood of the Empire's economy.

Most influential for the last few centuries, however, has been the Speaker for the Traders, the Datu of the Confederation of Madja-as. For more than three-hundred years the Celestial Empire has closed its borders to the outside world. The one exception to that edict is the Datu's island nation of Panay. Here the Celestial Emperors have permitted the development of specific ports for foreign traders to deliver 'barbarian goods' to the shores of the Empire. These trading ports have become bustling hives of activity, and it is through several such restricted ports that the Empire's only supply of potent RJ-1027 is imported.

During Forum gatherings, the seven Celestial Emperors and their heirs defer to each other based on age rather than any material order of precedence. The oldest reigning monarch takes a lead in discussions as First Speaker, and the others proceed in like fashion. The First Speaker holds several privileges, including determining which business shall be discussed, as well as casting the deciding vote on issues should there be a lack of consensus. In more recent times, the Forum has also chosen a Second



Speaker to deputise for the first, but also to act as something of a loyal opposition within the Celestian Dream. Ever since Emperor Jayavarman's period in office, none of the Celestian Emperors wish for the Forum to become paralysed by the weakness of its leader.

The First Speaker at present, Empress Do Thi Nguyet, is a formidable woman of advanced years, and it is her acid wit and sharp tongue that keep the others in some semblance of order. It is a matter of some disquiet to some that when Empress Nguyet is renewed, the First Speakership shall devolve to Emperor Ming, whose bellicose personality and aggression has thus far been tempered by the wise old Vietnamese ruler.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

The Empire was closed to foreigners within a century of the formation of the Jade Pact. Whilst initially travellers from abroad were welcomed into the realms of the Celestian Emperors (as long as they followed local laws and customs and respected the traditions of their host country) this was found to bring too many problems. Some foreigners, it transpired, were more interested in the illicit trade of banned substances than in good business, while others engaged in the smuggling of arms and equipment to rebel groups that threatened the peace and stability of the Empire. A number sought to abuse their position and exploit the labour of Asia for their own profit. Better to ban all than to allow just one of these unscrupulous characters disturb the peace.

More troubling, at least for the Celestian Emperors if not their subjects, was the

presence of individuals displaying a disturbing aura. This aura was visible only to those connected to the Dream. These creatures appear as a slick of foul oil upon the placid and cleansed waters of the telepathic network, tainting the pure energy of the artefact with something dark and horrific. Such beings were removed at once wherever they were found – even in the highest ranks of foreign dignitaries. Such trespasses have since become vanishingly rare, especially after the last incursion was dealt with summarily by watchful Shinobi agents. Whatever foul intelligence guides such creatures has surely learned that to enter the borders of the Empire is to invite death.

Only one region within the Empire has permitted free access to foreigners for any length of time, and even then, only to specific areas under close watch. These are the Merchant Ports – the cities and harbours in the Confederation of Madja-as where the wealth of a continent is bartered, bought, sold, traded and invested by the merchants of a hundred nations and more. Only trading houses with the wealth to pay the necessary fees and who possess the patience to navigate the paperwork can hope to hold down a presence here – but the riches to be made at this single opening in the Empire's curtain walls make it worth every penny.

The servants of the Datu are therefore considered as something approaching diplomatic experts within the Empire; it is their expertise which has periodically ensured that necessary resources (particularly RJ-1027, of which the Empire has no indigenous source) continue to flow into the wider economy. They have tense,



but close, relationships with a hundred merchant companies; in particular the Crown and their East India Company.

[Archivist's Note: The Merchant Ports are hives of intrigue even as they are patrolled by the harsh and vigilant members of the Citizen Watch. Not a month goes by without some alarming incident or brutal murder connected to the societies that function there.]

THE BEAR AND THE CLOUD DRAGON

Recent events have led to a shift in the Celestian Emperors' thinking. Despite the protestations of the Commonwealth's Mongolian subjects, the Tsar entered into a secret agreement with the British Crown to seize the tempting target of the "Hermit Kingdom", the domain of the Cloud Dragon, Joseon Korea. The Anglo-Russian Invasion initially met with success but was then brutally repulsed by the combined might of the Empire's united military. This was the first such action from the Empire in the Dystopian Age and the other major global powers took note that the Empire's long-held stance on isolationism appeared to be at an end.

This campaign, whilst vindicating the planning and approach of the Imperial armies, also made the Emperors reappraise their foreign policy. If isolation still invites attack in this modern age, they rationalised, then a more open but more guarded approach might achieve the same objective. The finest negotiators from the Confederation are now inviting their trading contacts to consider opening offices and warehouses in new Merchant Ports – one for each of the coastal powers of the Empire. This has the advantage of providing several other

opportunities for trade, but also exposing more foreigners to the true might and wealth of the Celestian Emperors.

Another point must be mentioned – the relationship between the scientists and scholars of the Empire with the worldwide organisation known as the Covenant of the Enlightened. There are those Burmese, Koreans, Japanese, Chinese, and Vietnamese scientists and scholars who are members of the Covenant. Free to travel beyond the borders of the Empire to learn and study from their Enlightened Peers, they are forbidden from returning with any assistants or counterparts from outside the Empire. These Empire-born Enlightened maintain Promethean Complexes of their own throughout the realms, in particular in Vietnam and Burma. They are, however, not closely involved with any of the wider organisations and groups, or major projects pursued by some of the Enlightened, instead applying what they know in service of the Jade Pact first.

[Archivist's Note: I must convey my thanks to several colleagues, who shall remain nameless, from these Complexes who helped compile this history.]

THE FORCES OF THE EMPIRE

The Imperial Armed Forces (IAF) is the most unified of all the branches of the Empire. From the time the Jade Pact was formed, each element of the military has been under the control of a single Immortal Emperor, the Speaker, whose Court and Bloodline act as the central administration for that branch even as they work across national boundaries. Each has its own national contingent and HQ branch, but supreme authority is



ultimately vested in the strategic councils of their chosen Speaker.

The Army, the largest entity (numerically speaking) within the IAF and one of the largest globally, is under the command of Thailand's Emperor Anuman. Whilst not the biggest contributor in manpower terms, Thailand boasts the most well equipped and well-trained forces within the Imperial Army and, as such, Thai troops function as the Empire's equivalent of elite guards regiments. The rest of the Army is predominantly Chinese, raised from the burgeoning populations of Emperor Ming's extensive domains. Specialist divisions are recruited specifically from other nations, such as Korea's famed artillery corps and the Japanese naval assault troops. Senior officers from all nations must meet the exacting standards expected of Thai troops, and many serve rotations with Thai formations before returning to their own units.

The Imperial Navy, meanwhile, is the brainchild of Empress Shinzua, who as Speaker of the Fleets quickly moved to control all aspects of nautical warfare in addition to her originally more prosaic areas of responsibility. The Empire is considered a global naval power, especially after their victories at Tsushima and Myeongnyang during the Anglo-Russian Expedition into Korea. All of the coastal nations of the Empire design, build, and crew their own warships, but all ultimately serve the Blazing Sun.

Imperial warships are a source of great pride within the Empire, and the chance to now use them more visibly with the borders opened has been welcomed by nobles and commoners alike. That said,

there is an element of friendly competition amongst the Celestial Emperors about their own nation's naval designs, with many considering their own warships far superior to their comrades'. Further tests in battle are unlikely to settle these disputes.

The Imperial Air Hunters are the preserve of King Sun Li, the Cloud Dragon. Originally Speaker for the Hunters, referring to literal hunters as well as cattle farmers and more, Sun Li has achieved unprecedented influence within the Forum since also claiming all air technology as his responsibility. As such, the Imperial Air Hunters are under Korean command. Once again, these are formed of the many different national air-forces, but all bear the sigil of the Cloud Dragon. Much to the chagrin of Empress Shinzua, the Forum decreed that the Cloud Dragon is also responsible for all aerial units and support elements wherever they operate. As such, all aircraft carriers and their support elements are officially part of the Imperial Air Hunters and not the Imperial Navy. This has become something of a bone of contention between these normally close friends – especially as Sun Li has begun commissioning combat vessels as “aerial battlegroup support units”.

LIFE IN THE EMPIRE

For peasant and commoner, life in all of the nations of the Empire is similar. Whilst the Japanese peasant is less at risk of being forcibly conscripted, either for military service or mass labour than his compatriots, all share a similarly harsh life of toil and obedience to their masters. To these toiling masses, their Emperors and Kings are semi-divine figures worthy of veneration or outright worship. Statues of their earthly



rulers sit alongside sages, philosophers and folk-gods throughout the provinces, and receive offerings and sacrifices to sustain them and to court their blessings upon villages and farmlands.

Within the new smoking cities of the industrialised portions of the Empire, new technologies are creating new wealth for those who seek it and have the patience and wit to survive in competition with their neighbours and new contacts abroad. Those who seek the patronage of the Enlightened walk a very fine line indeed even as they strengthen their home nation with the fruits of the new learning.

Those who serve in the ruling classes in the Empire venerate their leaders to an extreme degree. Whilst as happy to engage in plots and intrigues against one another as any ruling class, few amongst them question the suitability of the Blood to take the highest offices. The Confucian ethics of service are constantly at play amongst

these scions of the great families, and it is duty and honour that often calls the best and brightest to maintain the governments and forces of the Empire.

As with any great nation there are revolutionary and resistance movements within the Empire. Some of these are religious or political in nature, seeking a human utopia beyond the barricades of revolution; others are reactionary seeking to return to a lost golden age. Most who associate with such groups find themselves either ignored, or else quickly punished in an efficient manner that varies in brutality and duration. Such punishments are often meted out publicly by the Jade Hand – an organisation serving the Celestial Emperors the length and breadth of the Empire. Some of its agents are themselves of the Blood, and as an institution it is related, albeit distantly, to the monks of the Tian Shang – whose intervention made all this possible.

