Goho the Interpreter
by Shunkichi Akimoto

Goho was a son of a native of Fukien province, named Goshu, born on January 18, 1699 A.D., or 241 years ago. His father, Goshu, like many of his Fukien neighbors who came to Formosa in search of better fortunes, had early migrated to the island, accompanied by his wife and children, and the boy was among them. They settled in a district now forming part of the city of Kagi, cultivating virgin soil and plying barter trade with aborigines of Arisan district. Being thus brought up in a semi-barbarous island, far from the center of civilization, Goho had little chance of receiving regular school training. However, his father took care to instruct him in the elementary lessons of reading and writing, and for the rest his education was of a moral rather than intellectual nature. Goho often accompanied his father in his business journeys, going up the mountains to visit different aboriginal villages, so he acquired a good knowledge of their language as well as their manners and customs, and proved a useful assistant at his father's business.

At the age of 24, Goho, by reason of his proficiency in the native tongue and his knowledge about the aborigines, was appointed official interpreter. It was thought a remarkable appointment because of his young age and his lack of school education, for responsible Government positions were generally reserved for those who passed the official examination or older persons with mature experience of the world.

The post of interpreter in Taiwan, however, was not regarded as of high social standing. Its chief function was to act as go-between between aborigines and officials, interpreting the orders of the Government to the aborigines and conveying the wishes or petitions of the aborigines to the Government. As one who must often come into intimate touch with the aborigines who were, in the eyes of high officials, little better than barbarous animals, he suffered much, as if vicariously, in a social sense, even as dog-killers and grave-diggers suffered. But his actual duties were far from light or easy. As interpreter of the will of the authorities he was often hard put to it, trying to convince the savage minds of the meaning of various measures, not always magnanimous or even reasonable, and as often he found it difficult to obtain the sympathetic understanding of the authorities respecting such fair representations or legitimate demands as the aborigines sometimes made.

Moreover, the higher official circles in Taiwan representing their home government were more absorbed with their own welfare and interests and amusements than with those of the aborigines, being inclined to regard them either as ungodly, able devils to be left to their own devices or as legitimate dupes to be squeezed and victimized for their own benefit. They were content as long as nothing untoward happened to mar the serenity of their happy lot, or as long as they could live their lazy, luxurious, decadent life. The less direct transactions they had with the savages the better pleased they were. So the control and management of the aborigines was for the most part left in the hands of interpreters.

A Model Interpreter

Thus the interpreter's work as first-line fighter, so to speak, in the colonial rule of the island, was hard and complex. Also he had tempting opportunities of money-making. If he happened to be a self-seeking, unscrupulous man, as the interpreters of his time generally were, he could collect extra taxes and commissions, not provided for in the official regulations, over and above the legitimate ones, embezzling now from one side and now from the other, without either party being any the wiser for it because the two seldom came into direct contact. Therefore the interpreter wielded much authority over the savage populace under his jurisdiction, and they treated him with some show of respect as a species of local magistrate. So he must maintain some pomp and dignity appropriate to his office. The interpreter's job was altogether a very interesting and lucrative, if onerous, sometimes even dangerous, one.

Goho the interpreter was a warm-hearted, generous man, and was not like his brother interpreters who would cringe and crawl before his official superiors with an imbecile subserviency but would scowl on the aborigines like an angry Jove. He knew well the men he had to deal with, and treated them as he would treat his own countrymen, giving each person his due, neither spoiling them with over-benevolence nor estranging them by overbearing behaviour, but trying always in his amiable, good-tempered manner to promote the general welfare of the community. In short, Goho was a model interpreter such as never existed before or after him. And Goho served in the same post for 48 years till his last day on earth. The
The Formosan aborigines are divided into two general classes of the "wild" and the "tame" savages. Here are seen some of the domesticated savages in their war paint.

strange thing about his long career is that no record has been found in the official archives concerning either his character or his service. This was explained by the low status of the interpreter’s position which, as has been said, was not regarded as of sufficient importance to justify leaving any honorable mention in official records. Any achievement of outstanding merit, if done by such as he, would have to be ascribed to some higher official who had heard nothing about it. And yet it is extraordinary that not a breath has been officially breathed about the life of the sainted Goho who remained in his career for half a century and crowned it with a glorious act which will not be forgotten as long as Taiwan exists in the world.

The only reason one can conceive is that there had been nothing amiss in the relations between rulers and ruled during the period of Goho’s service. If, as Edward Gibbon says, history is a record of human crimes and follies, the absence of material concerning any epoch or ruler may be regarded as the best evidence of good government identified with that epoch or ruler. It becomes all the more significant because in the year before Goho took office there had been a bloody uprising of aborigines in Arisan district, causing a large number of casualties among Chinese and aborigines.

**Policy of Delay**

At the time Goho was appointed the old custom of head-hunting among the savages of Arisan was as rife as ever—a relic of the older and corrupter times when the unscrupulous exploiters, in order to avert calamities to themselves or to gain their private ends, were wont to send innocent victims into the mountains. So from time to time they must have new scalps with which to propitiate their deities, especially at their annual festivals when the gods must be worshipped with blood sacrifice. At such a time they would come down the mountain to ask of their interpreter the favor of a victim. If it was refused, he knew what would happen, so he oftener than not granted their request. A condemned criminal or some poor wight whose life was not wanted was sent up into the forest.

The new interpreter had not been in office long before he received, as expected, a savage delegation requesting a victim for their next festival. Goho proceeded to act as he had planned. He invited to a banquet all the principal savage leaders of Arisan district, and after good entertainment made an earnest appeal to their humanity, condemning as a great wickedness the old custom of head-hunting. To kill innocent human beings, he declared, was a crime the gods themselves abhorred and must repay with dire retribution. He went on to say that as long as they practised this barbarous custom so long must they bear their ancient stigma as savages, shunned and detested by all decent people. For their own sake, therefore, he implored them to give up this awful sin. But to discontinue all at once a practice of so ancient a standing must be difficult, he admitted, and he would make a bargain with them.

“How many old scalps have you in store?” he asked.

“A little over forty,” was their answer.

“Very well,” Goho continued. “Take each one
of these forty odd heads, and regarding it as a new trophy, offer it on the altar of the gods at each new festival. By this means you could spare yourselves this bloody sin for forty years and more. If you agree, I will arrange with the authorities to send you at each festival a handsome present—of wine and meat, and of hog and ox and silk and cotton cloths—wherewith to beautify the altar and to make more glad the hearts of men and gods in the joy of the festival.”

If, however, they spurned his suggestion, Goho promised, they should not only find it extremely difficult to get an innocent head, but the Government would visit all the guilty men concerned with the most horrible punishment they could imagine. He delivered this lecture, it is said, with a voice tender and passionate, broken by the tears, and the savage guests were so touched that they then and there promised to obey his advice.

The aborigines of Arisan proved as good as their word, as did Goho’s, and for over forty long years they faithfully abstained from their ancient rite of head-hunting.

Time flew, and so had flown the stipulated four decades. Meanwhile there had been grumblings among the more obstinate or conservative of the Arisan savages. If anything went wrong, or if their hunt after deer and boars proved barren of result they would attribute it to the wrath of their gods who had failed to see a human scalp so long. They were fast becoming an object of scorn and leering pity on the part of their neighboring tribesmen, and this was to them more painful than death by poisoned dart. Were they growing so weak, so unmanly, and so ungodly, too, as not to dare go out on the glorious head-hunt? O for the old days of scalp-hunting and flesh-and-blood sacrifice!

So upon one fateful day the savage delegates waited on Goho the interpreter. At last their long-suffering patience was rewarded, and now they were free once more to keep their ancient holiday in the real old spirited way! Which would be more convenient to the honorable Goho—for him to provide a scalp or let them take one in their own way? Goho again convened a general assembly and read them a long lecture on the unholy sin. This time he failed to impress as much as he did forty years before. No longer was Goho a young man. A patriarch of 70 years he stood, his head snow-white, his long gray beard descending gracefully down his bony breast. However, Goho persuaded them at last to give him a year’s grace at the end of which he would certainly not fail them. He thought perhaps that he might die before a year was out and be spared the ordeal of having to choose one of two crimes—to commit murder himself or to make them commit one. Fate decreed that he should survive to face another crisis. On the dreaded day he again bribed them off with entertainment, sermon and promise, persuading them to wait one more year. And so on for three consecutive years Goho succeeded in deferring them, now with entreaty and reasoning,
The Goho-byō as we see it today at Kagi, a few miles north-east of Kagi station.

and now with command and expostulation. Such was the high repute of Goho the old interpreter—so gentle, so unselfish, so uniformly friendly was he—that they found it hard not to listen to his words, however "absurd" they seemed to them. But even to their "inexhaustible patience" there was a limit, and so on the expiry of the third year they spoke up with a murderous glint in their eyes that no longer could they tolerate another postponement of his long-deferred promise.

The Old Debt Paid

"All right," Goho assented. "As you insist, so shall you have your wish. Tomorrow at the hour of the noon you shall see a warrior clad in scarlet robe and pink hood sauntering on the premises of Shokonsha office—(official outpost of the interpreter on the lower slopes of Arisan), and this is your victim whom you may treat in the way you deem fit. But here is my last warning: I have tried all these years to make you see the great wickedness of this custom, and if you will carry out your fell design on this innocent man tomorrow, its consequences, good or ill, you must suffer yourselves alone. Remember this and act as you will.

On the morrow at the appointed hour a band of fierce savages, armed with swords and spears, ropes and clubs, set out on their infamous hunt. They surrounded the Shokonsha estate and peered inside. Sure enough they beheld a warrior in pink hood and scarlet coat moving slowly among the trees. Out they sprang from their ambush, their weapons flashing, and instantly the poor victim lay dead. It all proved such easy work, slaying and beheading the unresisting victim. But in the next moment, when they uttered their joy of triumph, they found to their horror the head they had taken was that of their poor, old teacher-interpreter Goho himself. Gods help them! They dropped the head where they had killed, and took to their heels, pursued by a medley of fearful sensations: pity, remorse, fear, confusion.

The Sense of Mundane Obligation

Inextricable indeed was the dilemma in which Goho found himself. We who know something of the Chinese tradition of "mundane obligation," could understand how Goho felt himself compelled to pay with his own head such a debt, so long standing, so inexorable. The sense of "this worldly righteousness," so characteristic of the old-fashioned Orientals, impel them sometimes to acts of extreme self-sacrifice, which might escape the comprehension of those whose minds are more "rational" or modernistic. If they said the word under certain circumstances, they felt they must carry it out, however painful it be, even it were to sell their daughter into whoredom or to forfeit their own life. It was as binding as the obligation that awaited them at every year-end, when they had to pay all the bills of the past twelvemonth. Whether the debt was right or wrong, or the prices charged high or low, was not asked. The debt there was in white and black, and you had to pay it, if you were a man, without grumbling. If you had no money, then you must equally manfully expiate your sin, lying quiet, for instance, to be taunted, pitied and laughed at, "facing the music," as they say in the West. If under such circumstances you would liquidate your debt without actual payment, and change threatened disaster into honor everlasting, there was but one way—to die. Goho the interpreter knew he had stretched his savage friends' long-taxed patience to the limit.
where it must snap, and that the only way to stop it, and at the same time, if possible, to abolish the dread custom once and for all, was for him to give them his own head. There was no other way to save the situation, he felt.

Goho's self-sacrifice was a well-weighed act of inflexible determination. On the eve of the fatal day he called all his family around him and informed them of what he was going to do, so goes the story. His weeping family pleaded in vain, trying all manner of dissuasion to no purpose. "Do not come to recover my body for three days," he instructed, "lest the savages in hiding should do you harm. When you have recovered the body and hold funeral rites, make an effigy of myself in paper as a victorious warrior in scarlet robe, mounted on white horse with a drawn sword in the right hand and the enemy's head in the other, and let this effigy be burned before the eyes of all people. Then give out a story that the angry spirit of Goho has gone up in a smoke to tell the heavenly deities of what they have done to him so that divine wrath would surely fall on every one of them unless they gave up for ever their savage custom of head-hunting."

**The God of Vengeance**

At the funeral the surviving family did as they were instructed. Among those present was a little girl of aboriginal parentage who could understand Chinese tongue, and when she got back to her forest home, she told her people all that she had heard and seen at the funeral. It sent a thrill of horror through all the savage hearts, young and old. As the days passed, their terror mounted. Some men fell ill with mysterious malady; others went stark mad. By day they saw the terrifying image of the angry Goho on snow-white steed, riding across the vast dome of heavens; by night their sleep was broken by dreams and nightmares. Then followed dark, rainy days, the whole mountains drenched in continual downpours.

When the weather cleared it was only to give place to another and more dreadful visitation—the smallpox—which claimed hundreds of lives.

All this concatenation of calamities they imputed to the wrath of heaven and revengeful Goho, and they decided to pacify his soul. They prayed and supplicated at their family shrines, and then on a certain auspicious day they built an altar in honor of Goho's spirit, and placing upon it a stone of the size and shape of a human head as symbol of Goho's head, they worshipped it with offerings of wine and meat. Thus they prayed Goho's forgiveness, pledging themselves never again to practise head-hunting, which was the aim of his lifelong teachings and which was what he died for. The ceremony duly performed, their pledge to do no more head-hunting became the law of the entire Arisan tribes. So at last they found their peace of mind. Thereafter the pestilence ceased, the weather restored to normal.

**Goho Shrine as We See Today**

Such is the story of Goho the martyred interpreter, and it accounts for the fact that of all the aboriginal tribes of Taiwan those of Arisan, not the least doughty, were the only tribe who abhorred head-hunting, being never guilty of it for over two centuries since the time of Goho, and that this was, of course, due to the sacrificial act of the brave interpreter.

Soon after the tragedy a shrine was built by one Yohi, Goho's immediate successor, near the site of the murder and on the 10th of August every year a festival was held in memory of the hero. In course of years this shrine became very much weather-beaten, and in 1892 it was rebuilt, but this was again destroyed by the great earthquake of Kagi in 1905. In 1909 one Mr. Tsuda, the mayor of Kagi, deeply impressed with the story of Goho, had an exhaustive research made into his life and character, and the result was a biography, the first authentic tale of Goho seen in print. At the same time he began to collect funds, wide and far, for reconstructing the shrine, till in 1927 he succeeded in replacing the old one with a new handsome shrine. At the dedication ceremony held was present the then Governor-General Sakuma. In 1931 further improvement was made, the shrine beautified and the compound enlarged, the total area covering 4,600 tsubo, and this is the Goho-ryo that we see today at Kagi, a few miles northeast of Kagi station.

In the Goho-ryo stands at a picturesque spot near the pond a large stone monument upon which is carved an inscription—a tribute to Goho's life and character—written by the late Count (the then Baron) Shimpei Goto, who once held the post of Administrator-in-chief of Taiwan. Under the same roof of Goho Shrine are placed, together with the famous statue of Goho as vengeful warrior on white horse, that of his wife, Ryotoku by name, who was a very beautiful and clever woman, to whom Goho was indebted for the happy home life he had enjoyed to his last. They had two sons who, though both early died, left a progeny whose descendants are still living not far from the Goho-ryo.

Every year on the 10th of November—the anniversary of Goho's martyrdom, computed by the solar calendar now in use—there is held at the Goho-ryo a festival, at once solemn and joyous, which, it is needless to say, draws many people from all parts of Taiwan, renewing the old pledge, so to speak, never again to take the scalp of an innocent man.