



Itan Regional Packet

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Tales of Valor

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An Overview of Modern Day Itan

Compiled and scribed by Nikos Vallay from the Seraphina Gasslini translation of the notes of the Mad Quill.

It is the aim of this work to provide an unbiased look at the culture and people of modern day Itan. As always, looking at how a thing came to be is the first part in understanding it.¹ Before Unification, there were three distinct cultures and nations inhabiting the Island of Itan. These were The Kingdom of Min, The Akyko Shogunate, and the horse tribes of the Arma Steppes.

The Kingdom of Min

The roots of the Kingdom of Min can be traced back to the farming communities that sprang up in the incredibly fertile delta of the Lai River, on the northern end of the island now known as Itan. Historically speaking, these communities followed the standard historical model for sedentary, non-hostile farming communities. As these communities expanded and merged, their original bartering practices grew into a complex economy, and with this economy arose the merchant and bureaucratic classes. These individuals brought order to the jumbled farming towns and organized them into efficient, profitable communities. As time passed, and more levels were added to the bureaucracy, the whole region came together and united under the banner of Min Sukang, who, with the approval of his fellow bureaucrats, declared himself “Guo Wang” or king. After the founding of the Kingdom, the social mechanics of the bureaucracy became standardized and a new system of “Min Ji”, or citizenship grades, was set into place. Under this system, all members of the Kingdom were awarded a grade, based not on birth, but upon merit. Merit was established via a complex and highly competitive examination system. Grade determined what positions and titles an individual could hold, as well as determining what types of property and land they could own. Finally, it dictated what rights, beyond the basic, an individual was privileged with. All aspects of the society were governed by this system, and any position therein, including that of King, could be reached with sufficient marks on the exams and the filing of proper paperwork. A slight variation of this system is what is currently in use today in the Empire, and will be explained in greater detail later on.

Being a nation of politicians and merchants, the Kingdom quickly became very wealthy. In addition to the excellent produce grown in the delta, the Kingdom also sustained a very talented and well funded artisan class to supplement its income. The system also encouraged the development of philosophy, science, and medicine. What the Kingdom lacked, however, was a strong military drive. Though it had the largest

¹ This is by no means an exhaustive history, merely a device to facilitate understanding of the social situation. Both Antonius Aulus Agrippa’s *Histories* and Fionnlagh Donaidh’s *Path of the Ages* are both excellent resources for the history of Jhoril and its nations. For a more specific and detailed text on just Itan, Xiang Huo’s *Di Guo De Li Ming* (trans. *Dawn of an Empire*) is agreed to be unparalleled. If unable to read or acquire a copy of the original, Snorri Ketilsson’s translation is recommended.

population of the three regions, and as a consequence the largest army, the quality of the troops was only adequate. The Kingdom mindset encouraged conflict to be conducted and resolved with words and paper, not armed force, and this impacted their military performance. There was too much of an emphasis on rank and theory for the practical aspects of warfare to ever catch up. This proved to be the biggest block preventing the Kingdom from taking and holding the lands of its neighbors. It is interesting to note that the navy did not suffer from this same gelding. This is not all that surprising once the Kingdom's reliance on nautical trade is taken into consideration.

The Akyko Shogunate

The southeastern third of Itan is a land of hills and mountains. This area was a much less forgiving environment than the plains and valleys to the west. With arable land at a premium, the people who lived there learned to hoard what they had, to protect it fiercely, and to take what they could. The lucky towns conquered their neighbors, and as they grew in power were able to take even more land. Eventually eight states came out on top and were about equal in strength. These were the lands held by the Akyko, Misho, Gobun, Hotaru, Shin, Hajime, Shoge, and Kotoro clans. As was the custom of the time they sized one another up, but conflict was slow to come about because of the change in scale. A charismatic man and accomplished military leader named Ayato of clan Akyko recognized that when the fighting broke out, most, if not all of the clans would be devastated and unlikely to survive. Seeking to avoid this fate he called for a meeting between all of the clan heads. Though the other clans were reluctant at first, weeks of posturing and maneuvering paid off and the meeting was held. In this conclave he convinced the others that instead of fighting, they should band together and begin a campaign to take over the entirety of Itan. Initially only the Misho, Hotaru, and Shoge clans accepted his idea, but the others fell in line quickly after realizing that they would individually be unable to stand up to the new alliance.² Once the other leaders united under his banner, he declared himself "Shogun", or Grand General. Granting rank and privilege to his new "Daimyos", or Generals, Akyko swiftly molded the newly formed Shogunate to his will and design. Over time a rigid caste system was established, with the noble warriors or Samurai at the top of the order. After the Samurai came the ranks of the gentry known as the Kuge. Under the Kuge were the Bushi, or career soldiers, and under them were the artisans or Heimen. After artisans came the common laborer or Eta and finally, lower than even the Eta were the Hinin or non-persons. A person's caste was determined by birth and family line, and it was very hard to advance in the caste system, though promotions for excellent service certainly were not scarce. Hard as it was to move up, it was very easy to move downward. This caste system engendered a complex code of honor and behavior that all members of society were expected to follow. The higher up in the caste system one was, the more closely they were watched and the more they were

² There is some scholarly debate about this. There is a camp that believes that the conclave was actually Hotaru Rei's, the Hotaru clan head, idea and that she advanced it to Ayato hoping that he would take the fall if the plan failed. The camp continues that Ayato was aware that he was being manipulated and went with it as a means to seize power, knowing that his chances of success would increase by having the support of additional clans before negotiations began. Master Gamjee's notes are unclear on the matter and I am deferring to the commonly held historical truth.

expected to stick to the code. Another institution implemented by Akyko was that all citizens were required to serve in the military. Upon a child's sixteenth birthday they were enrolled in a reserve training program where they spent half of the year in the military, and the other half attending the schooling available to their caste. The nature of this military training was in turn directly determined by one's caste. Upon reaching the age of eighteen, citizens were removed from reserve training and placed into full time military service, where they remained until the age of twenty-two. At this time a citizen was allowed to choose to remain in the military or become a civilian. Even if someone chose not to stay in the military, all civilians were reservists and spent a quarter of the year in military service. As a result of this policy, nearly eighty percent of the Shogunate's population was proficient soldiers. A Shogunate reserve militia was equivalent in skill to the regular troops of most other nations.

Obviously the Shogunate's primary strength lay with its armed forces, but this focus cost their society in other ways. Non-military aspects of the Shogunate were average at best. This lack of diversity would prove to be a significant hindrance in the long run. Another social problem developed as an outgrowth of the mixing of the cultural history, the caste system, and the military focus: the overall mindset of the Shogunate slowly shifted to that of the hostile xenophobe. These factors, coupled with the smallest population of the three regions made efficient and sustained expansion an ultimately unreachable goal.

The Horsemen of the Arma Steppes

Inhabiting the steppes and plains of southwestern Itan were a tribe of nomadic horsemen. The Armanites³ are considered to be the oldest culture of Itan. Of the three indigenous to the island, they were the ones who changed the least over time, up to, and including, the Unification. They started as disparate groups of nomadic herders interspersed with a few hunter-gatherer communities. As time progressed the nomadic herders conquered and assimilated the hunter-gatherer communities. They also conquered and assimilated one another until six extended family groups, or "Ordu"⁴, emerged. Each Ordu was led by a "Khan", or King, and was identified by the Khan's name followed by the possessive suffix "-tai" (sometimes "-tae"). For example, Chagan Khan's Ordu would be called "Ordu Chagantai." A core of nine loyal warriors, known as "Batu", supported each Khan. These warriors were the Khan's "blood" brothers or sisters, bound not by relation but by a lengthy ceremony involving the exchange of blood. In addition to the Batu, three "Boge," or shaman supported each Khan. They provided spiritual guidance to both the Khan and the Ordu, in addition to performing all of the rites and ceremonies of import to the Armanite peoples. Boge should not be confused with mere practitioners of

³ Armanite is a term used by scholars to denote the horsemen of the Arma Steppes. They refer to themselves as "Tngri" which loosely translates to "divine beings." This term did not come into use until 3851 VR with the emergence of the Khakan and the Zaarin.

⁴ It is worth noting that most words in the Armanite language that begin with an open vowel are pronounced with a vocalized "h" sound which does not appear in the spelling. The word "Ordu" should be pronounced as if it were spelled "hordu" and is commonly believed to be where the word "horde" originated.

magic; all Boge use magic, not all magic users are Boge. Magic users in general are referred to as “Dharan”, with the term “Dharani” signifying the practice of magic.

Aside from the Khan, the Batu, and the Boge, there were no other positions of social rank within the Armanite culture until 3851 VR. The social hierarchy was based on age, the rationale being that with age comes experience, and those with much experience were to be respected. The exceptions to this system were highly accomplished “Bataar”, which roughly translates to “warrior”, and talented horsemen/herders. Individuals who excelled in one or both of these practices tended to be respected above all but the eldest members of the Ordu. As evidenced by this practice, martial skill and horsemanship were exceedingly valued skills, and all members of an Ordu were expected to be able to do both with competency. All of the Armanite people were taught these arts as soon as they were able to mount a horse or lift a weapon. Once a member could no longer fight, generally due to infirmity caused by age or wounding, he or she entered the ranks of the “Oyugun,” or wise. Once they could no longer ride, for similar reasons, the Boge performed a ritual of passing, called the “Takil”.⁵ Should a member be born crippled and unable to ride or fight from childhood, he or she was generally left behind. If the individual was destined to live, they would, if not then they wouldn’t, but the person was of no use to the Ordu either way.

Ownership of property followed both personal and communal conventions. An individual owned his or her weapons, armor, trophies, and in some cases their horse.⁶ A Ordu owned the herd, food, and supplies necessary to everyday living. Everything the Ordu owned was also, technically, owned by the Khan. In addition, the Khan also owned all of the land upon which the Ordu roamed. Property was acquired in one of two ways: it could be given as a gift, or it could be taken as a spoil of combat. Horses taken as spoil were considered taken by the Ordu, not the individual who actually captured them. The Boge had no possessions. Their raiment and tools were considered to be “owned” by the land and sky and merely on loan to the Boge, who would bequeath these items to his or her successor when the time came.

As the Ordu were extended family groups, it was considered taboo for members to marry one another or procreate. Spouses were always acquired by raiding other Ordu. Individuals captured in this fashion were essentially the property of their spouse, who was generally the one who captured them, but not always the case if the captive was given as a gift to another. Captives were only ever taken for this purpose, never to be used as slaves.

The six Ordu fought and raided one another for years. This practice stopped in 3851 VR. Armanite record indicates that at this time the Boge of all the Ordu urged their Khans to travel to a point by a large spring in the western portion of the steppes. As all the Ordu convened on the spot, the Khans were eager to do battle, but the Boge advised against it. The Khans reluctantly followed their shamans’ advice and restless peace was held. The Khans were told to wait with the Ordu one mile distant from the spring while

⁵ The Takil is a ritual wherein the Boge assists the participant to commit suicide. In this ritual the individual’s aura was supposedly passed into a vessel called an “Oyunbileg,” which roughly translates to “gift of wisdom.” It is said that the Oyunbileg could be channeled to provide insight and inspiration.

⁶ The Khan owned his or her own horse, as did each of the Batu. The Khan could gift horses to other members of the Ordu as a sign of great recognition.

the Boge advanced to commune with earth and sky. The eighteen Boge held conclave for nine days before returning to their Ordu. The Khans and their Batu were then called out and brought to the spring. When they arrived, in addition to the Boge were seven individuals. Six bore the raiment of the Boge. The seventh was mounted upon the finest steed and bearing the finest weapons and armor any of the Khans had seen. The Boge informed the Khans that the six were the "Zaarin," or Great Shaman. The Zaarin spoke at length to the Khans and informed them that the seventh was the "Khakan," or Great Khan. The Khakan and Zaarin went on to tell the gathered leaders that a new time had come upon the Tngri. Men and women would soon be emerging from the east and that it was the duty of the Tngri to conquer or exterminate these people.⁷ In a surprising event considering general historical precedence, the Khans listened to these seven, and major fighting between the Ordu ceased.

There was a definite shift in Armanite culture at this time. The titles and ranks of Khakan and Zaarin were added to their social hierarchy. Much like the Khans, the Khakan had Batu, but the Khakan had fifteen instead of nine. Since only Khans could become the Khakan, their Batu would remain in their service. In addition, each of the six Khans are also Batu to the Khakan. Another change was the creation of the group identity Tngri, which existed as the step above the Ordu. In addition, they built a city around the spring where the Boge conclave was held. This city came to be called Giz Kolockt. Instead of raiding other Ordu for spouses, marriage alliances were conducted instead. This did not preclude the acquisition of spouses through raiding other peoples, however. While most of the property conventions remained the same, ownership of the lands of all the Ordu shifted to become the possession of the Khakan. Before this time each Ordu roamed its own particular sector of the steppes. After the events at the spring, the roaming patterns of Ordu slowly shifted to encompass the entirety of the steppes, with each Ordu spending an equal portion of the year in residence at Giz Kolockt. The Zaarin do not roam and stay at Giz Kolockt. The Khakan spends an equal amount of time each year roaming with each of the Ordu. The rotation is always such that the Kakhan also spends one sixth of the year with one of the Ordu currently at Giz Kolockt.

There were particular ceremonies and practices when it came to entitling a member of the Ordu. When a Khan passed, the new Khan was chosen by the Boge and the former Khan's Batu. When the new Khan was named, he or she selected new Batu. At this point four of the old Khan's Batu would engage in the rite of Takil and join their Khan in the Judges' realm. Prior to the enclave at the spring, the remaining Batu would remain as respected members of the Ordu. After the enclave, only three Batu remain, while the other two go to Giz Kolockt to live out their days. When it was time to select a Khakan, all six Ordu would travel to Giz Kolockt. The Boge and the Zaarin would deliberate for nine days and then name the new Khakan. In regards to the Boge, it was said that each would be able to foretell when it was time to pass on his or her mantle, and they would always name and train their successor before that happened. The same was true of the Zaarin, though they almost always named one of the eighteen Boge as successor. The Boge would of course have known he or she would be leaving the Ordu,

⁷ It is a common misconception that the Armanite word for "stranger" is the same as their word for "enemy." In general, those not of the Ordu were referred to as either the "Khoonbish"(plural; Khoonbishi) which means "nobody", or the "Teyirang"(both singular and plural) which roughly means "evil outsider."

though not necessarily knowing the reason why, and would have already named and trained a successor of their own.

Despite some of the progressive changes that arose as a result of the conclave at the spring, the Armanites were still plagued by many of the same problems as other low industrial nomadic cultures. Their technological base was clearly inferior to both the Kingdom's and the Shogunate's. Though individually and in small groups the Armanites were skilled fighters, easily the best cavalry on the Island, they were unable to conduct themselves effectively in large group warfare. While their tactics worked fine for raiding, they were never going to be able to eliminate or conquer either the Kingdom or Shogunate forces without a major military re-organization.

The Foundation of the Empire

These three nations remained in a state of conflict for almost the entirety of their existence. Even before the clans of the Shogunate or the Ordu of the Armanites unified, those groups which resided close to what would become the national borders fought with both one another and the budding Kingdom of Min. By 3426 VR the Shogunate was a single entity and by 3851 VR the Armanites followed suit. This merely served to escalate the scale of conflict between the three groups. This state of constant turmoil; of constant raiding and the occasional war persisted for hundreds of years. Though the Kingdom's military was large and well equipped, it was neither capable of defeating Shogunate troops in their mountain home, nor able to catch the elusive Armanite raiders. Though the Shogunate's troops were more than capable of defeating either of its opponents' armies in the field, there simply weren't enough of them to both attack and defend their home. The Armanites could not match either the Kingdom or the Shogunate in military technology and, despite unification; they were unable to effectively coordinate the Ordu to make the most efficient use of their number. No nation could take and no nation could be taken.

It was the Kingdom that eventually broke this stalemate. Due to their massive merchant fleet, they had already encountered the residents of mainland Jhoril. Though trade had been lucrative, it was only a matter of time before the Taeru or some other major power turned their eye to the Isle. Fearing that the fractured nature of the societies of Itan would make them vulnerable to invasion, the Kingdom redoubled their efforts to unite the Isle under a single banner. The King at the time was a man named Suo Gingcai, an accomplished statesman and merchant. He began his campaign by initiating negotiations with the Armanites. What made these negotiations different from past attempts was that he treated the Tngri as equals instead of primitives. Significant trade concessions were made to placate the Armanites and a rough alliance was formed. King Suo then traveled to the halls of the Shogun, who at the time was a woman named Akyko Kanneka. He informed her of the new alliance between the horse tribes and the Kingdom and extended a similar offer. The Shogun refused. The next day he explained to her the Kingdom's concern for Itan's future, and once again she refused. Finally, on the third day, the King informed her that he would not hesitate in turning the new Alliance against the Shogunate. Kanneka knew the Shogunate could probably not withstand both nations attacking in unison and to her advisors' relief finally, if reluctantly, accepted Gingcai's offer. A few weeks later a conference was held in the Kingdom's capitol. In attendance

for the Armanites were the Khakan, three of his Khans, and all of the Zaarin. Representing the Shogunate were the Shogun and all of her Daimyo. The King of Min was of course in attendance, along with all of his Ministers. The convention lasted a week, and at the end of this time the Kingdom's politicians, led by Suo Gingcai, had outclassed and out maneuvered the leaders of the other nations. As a result, Gingcai became the Emperor of the newly formed Empire of Itan. New positions for ministers and cabinet leaders sprung up to accommodate the influential members of the Shogunate and the Armanites. The same bureaucrats, whose prowess enabled the Kingdom to rise to the top of the new Empire immediately, and with much zeal, began to work on the task of incorporating three distinct cultures into a smoothly running society. When the dust had settled, the three nations strengths meshed together and shadowed any weakness they had while apart. In 4639 VR the Empire of Itan was founded. With the Isle more or less united, the leaders of the new Empire turned their eyes outward.

As the political and cultural situation in the newly formed Empire stabilized, the one thing its leaders agreed upon was that Itan needed to become respected and recognized as a world power. As the politicians of the former Kingdom of Min were still largely dictating the Empire's policy, Itan sought to dominate politically as opposed to militarily. Trade routes were established to ports across Jhoril and embassies were founded wherever the Itanese politicians could gain a foothold. Cultural and mercantile exchanges became the most powerful weapons of Itan's foreign policy. In this new political climate, the Empire made fast friends with some nations and existed in a state of politely controlled hostility with others. Trade exploded with Dun Melea: The fiery Melean merchants found worthy competition in their shrewd and capable Itanese counterparts. Those Sidhe kingdoms that would treat with non-sidhe in the first place also developed a strong respect for the Empire's political machine, which was just as convoluted and complicated as their own. It was these two nations that Itan shared the strongest bonds with, though they made an attempt to connect with all the nations of Jhoril.

Things were always tense between Itan and the ancient empire of Taeru. The Taeru's expansionistic tendencies and tremendous military, coupled with their status as a world power, was a cause of concern for some members of the Itanese court, particularly those of Shogunate descent. While the two nations managed to avoid open hostilities of any sort, the two never really got along.

As the Empire of Itan possessed one of the largest nations on Jhoril, actual land expansion was kept to a minimum. With the exception of the island cluster off its northern shores, the Empire was by and large content with what it had.

The Shadow War

The unified Empire had been extant for a mere hundreds of years before the onset of the Shadow War. Although its cultural roots were long and deep, it was the youngest of Jhoril's national powers. Unlike virtually every other nation in Jhoril, Itan was not heavily involved in the Shadow War. Occurring as it did in central and northern regions of the mainland; the War never became a major threat to the island nation. That is not to say that the Empire ignored the war, but it largely played a secondary role in the conflict. Itan's primary involvement was through trade. Callous as it may seem, the merchants and politicians of the Empire recognized what an excellent source of profit a war could be, and exploited it as fully as they were able. Wielding trade as a weapon they sold cheaply and gave freely to their allies, while at the same time attempting to beggar those nations with who they were on unfriendly terms. As the War began to spiral out of control and the Shadow Prince's legions began their rapid outward expansion, the Empire began to send aid, in the form of troops, to their allies in the Dun Lands and Sidhe Kingdoms. In addition, a major project was implemented to strengthen and expand the Imperial Navy. The outpost at Diao Leung on Ko Island was quickly upgraded and established as a major naval base and shipyard. The Itanese fleet roughly doubled in size and a large portion of its military training programs shifted curriculum to provide sailors and marines for the expanded fleet. All of this was against the possibility of a nautical invasion by the Shadow Prince should his forces manage to punch through Taer, the Dun Kingdoms, or the Dhan Lands.

The Empire did join the Alliance of Light and continued to play its auxiliary role by supplementing Allied logistics and providing resources to the Alliance. Although the Itanese resources and troops provided welcome relief, the Empire was never considered a major player in the War. It is speculated that a mere six percent of Alliance forces were comprised of Itanese troops. Although they received little recognition and boasted few if any heroes at the end of the Shadow War, the Empire lost virtually nothing during the conflict and was the only world power with significant strength remaining. Shogunate warmongers felt that this would be an excellent opportunity to invade the mainland, but cooler heads within the bureaucracy prevailed and instead of taking an aggressive role, the Empire provided significant funds to assist in the reconstruction of the war ravaged nations in an obvious and successful bid to acquire vast amounts of favor and political currency.⁸

⁸ While accurate accounts of the Shadow War are scarce, some do exist. Farrik Tel'Thfalinde's controversial *The Prince's Rising Shadow* was written 25 years after the end of the war and is the only known Sidhe account of the war to achieve anything remotely resembling public circulation. It is one of the rarest books in the world. The memoirs of Alricht Devenor are supposedly an excellent source of information, although no copy has been seen in centuries elevating this text to the list of lost historical treasures. Finally, Thurston Wimbley's translation and compilation of the notes of Gamjee the Mad Quill, entitled *The Lost Perspective*, is perhaps the most accessible history of the conflict that can be considered comprehensive.

The New Era

The time between the end of the Shadow War and the Realm Wars of 1000NE were relatively peaceful for the Empire. It quickly adopted a position of strength emerging almost unscathed from the War, and it rode and exploited that strength for many years. It was common to see Itanese vessels in every port on Jhoril during this time. In addition, the Empire provided significant aid to the Sidhe Kingdoms, Dun Melea, and the Dhan Lands. Although they offered some aide to all members of the Alliance, those three nations received the bulk of Itanese support. The first two because of strong political ties from before the war and the third because of its close proximity and because it never hurt to earn the favor of another nation. There were but two major events to mar the peace prior to the Realm Wars. These were the Thirteen Tiger Uprising and the Tngri revolt of 856 NE.

In 176NE Shogun Hajime Goto assassinated Emperor Jian Du and took the Empire hostage. This event was the culmination of a 50 year plan set in motion by Goto's predecessor, Hajime Ichiri. Over the course of decades supporters of the Hajime Clan were slowly placed into positions of greater and lesser power throughout all levels of the Empire. This was managed through bribery, political maneuvering, assassinations, cheating on examinations, and the falsification of records. In addition to the Emperor, the majority of the Ministers and Daimyos still loyal to him were either assassinated or imprisoned. In one swift action, Goto gained almost total control over both the army and the navy, and over half of the Empire's Ministries. It is a testament to the complexity of the Itan political machine at the time that satellite portions of the bureaucracy had no idea that Goto seized power for over two years. Neither did the rest of Jhoril for that matter. During this time, Goto did his best to pacify and subjugate the Empire as quickly as possible. The sooner he could do that, the sooner he could turn his forces outwards and begin his campaign to invade the mainland.

Unfortunately for Goto, through the efforts of the Poppy Brotherhood, who were hired by fugitive Imperial Loyalists, those Ministers and Daimyos who were imprisoned were broken out of confinement and removed to a loyalist stronghold located deep within the Arma Steppes. Word got out to the rest of Jhoril and Goto was forced to use the navy to blockade the Island. Over the next 27 years a bloody war raged across Itanese soil as the forces of the Imperial Loyalists fought against the Shogun's armies. While the Shogun's forces were comprised entirely from the ranks of the Imperial Military, the Loyalist forces were a hodge-podge comprised of what troops the Loyalist Daimyos could regain control of, Peony Brotherhood mercenaries, Armanite horsemen, and a few Melean Condottieres.

In the end, a combination of Goto's inexpert control of the bureaucracy and the blockade he enacted to stifle outsider support of the Loyalists led to his downfall. As his ability to manage and receive resources waned, the Loyalist forces won battle after battle. A surprise assault from Loyalists within the navy broke a hole in the blockade and allowed for international support to make its way to western Itan. The Loyalist troops regained control of the Empire in 206 NE. Goto and his supporters were executed a year later. The event came to be known as the Thirteen Tiger Uprising and precipitated the restructuring of the Ministries in 210 NE. The Ministry of Imperial Success was a direct outgrowth of these events. In addition, the titles and lands of the Guardians of the Four

Directions were instituted. Many families were shamed and dishonored due to their participation in the Uprising, but none more so than Clan Hajime and its retainers. To this date, no member of that clan has held a titled position within the Empire's bureaucracy.

The Tngri Revolt of 856 NE literally came out of the blue to strike at an unsuspecting Empire. During the month of Harvest that year, Jebei Khakan declared war on the Itan Empire with no provocation. His declaration was the sacking of the western port city Wuhai and the destruction of the Imperial garrison there. During this attack the estates belonging to the Jade Tortoise, Guardian of the West, were razed to the ground and Genbu himself slain, along with all of his retainers. Initially only three of the six Khans supported Jebei Khakan, as he lacked the support of the Zaarin. However, as the Khakan enjoyed rapid and overwhelming success against the slight Imperial presence in the west, Ordu Buritei joined his cause. Finally, younger members of Ordu Altantai slew their Khan and took over the Ordu so they could follow Jebei Khakan. While the Boge of the three Ordu who initially sided with Jebei Khakan supported their Khans, those of the two Ordu who joined later did not. The Boge of Ordu Altantai were slain along with Altan Khan, while those of Ordu Buritei fled to Giz Kolockt after expressing their objections. The remaining Ordu, under the leadership of Jingei Khan, evacuated the Zaarin and other residents of Giz Kolockt and went to ground in the steppes. After quickly eliminating the Itanese presence in the west, Jebei Khakan began a series of rapid strikes into the interior of the island, each strike coming closer to the Imperial capital. The Lapis Dragon, Guardian of the North marshaled his forces, the Argent Typhoon Society, and spread them throughout the interior to act as rapid response reserves in support of the Imperial Army. At this point, Ordu Jingei began to harry the rear of the Khakan's forces. As the Khakan lost momentum, he also began to lose the support of Ordu Buritei and what once was Ordu Atlantai. As the full might of the Imperial Army was brought to bear, the Zaarin and Boge of Ordu Buritei were able to return the two wayward Ordu back to the Imperial fold.

At this point, Jebei Khakan ordered a full-out assault on the Imperial capital, urging his forces to push through and try to destroy the Emperor. The majority of his forces abandoned him once the news of his blatantly suicidal plan reached them. In the month of Flame, 857 NE Jebei Khakan pushed what remained of his forces in a ferocious assault on Feng Luo. Despite the loss of over seventy percent of his troops, he still had the support of all three Khans and nine Boge of the original Ordu that joined him. This force fought as if possessed and broke through every Imperial unit that got in between it and the capital. In the fields outside the capital Shogun Akyko Otomo and his elite force, the Wolves of Kiba met the unstoppable horseman invader. They were soon joined by Seriyu, the Lapis Dragon himself, and the best of his Argent Typhoon Society, as well as Jingei Khan, and the full might of the Zaarin. Despite being grossly outnumbered, the Khakan and his beleaguered forces dragged the battle on for four days, killing the Shogun, and critically wounding the Lapis Dragon in the process. Joint command of the defenders was taken by Jingei Khan and Otomo's second, Daimyo Gobun Shinchiro. The Khakan's forces were finally killed to the man at the end of the fourth day, just after they had set fire to the Verdant Gate. The Khakan himself was slain by the hand of Jingei Khan. Soon after Jingei became the new Khakan and he and the Zaarin worked very hard to re-establish a trusting relationship between the Empire and the Armanites.

The Realm Wars

In 1000 NE the Taeru Empire began a massive campaign of expansion on all fronts. The Emperor deployed his Legions to the east to invade the Dahn Lands, and to the west to invade the Dun Kingdoms. Finally, he sent the Legio XV Cuspis, under the command of Imperator Vibius Tablinuis Velox, to take the Taeran navy and attempt a nautical invasion of Itan.

Despite the success the Legions enjoyed in the land campaigns, the Taeran navy and the 15th Legion were tremendously outclassed at sea by the Imperial Navy. Daimyo Chi Ping, commander of the 3rd fleet met the Taerans north of the Diao Leung naval base. In a series of three engagements she sunk the majority of the Taeran fleet, eliminating over two-thirds of the 15th Legion in the process. The few remaining ships fled back to their port of origin along with the remnants of the 15th. Invigorated by the crushing success of Daimyo Ping, the Bureau of the Shogun immediately proposed a counter-invasion to take advantage of the weakened and demoralized Taeran forces. This time, the Emperor and the other ministers agreed that in this instance hostile action would best serve Itan. 9th battalion, under the command of Daimyo Kintaro Matsu, was mobilized and transported to Diao Leung. From there they were picked up by Daimyo Ping, and the invasion began. 3rd fleet annihilated all Taeran naval opposition and 9th battalion established a successful beachhead. From their temporary camp, 9th battalion invaded and captured the Taeran port of Lacis. While the Legio Cuspis put up a far better fight on land than they did at sea, reduced strength from previous losses and the numerical advantage possessed by the Itanese forces proved to be more than they could handle. The Itanese quickly established a colony at the site of the former Taeran port and began a campaign to take and hold the nearby land. The campaign was steady and methodical. Any military opposition was mercilessly destroyed, but non-combatants were given the option to flee or remain and be subjugated by the Empire. The Imperial Army encouraged civilians to flee, in hopes to create a steady stream of refugees moving inland towards the heart of Taeru and increasing the resource burden on the Taeran government.

Although the Bureau of the Shogun wished to continue a land engagement against the Taeran Empire, the Emperor at the time, Ci Rhu Ling, chose to restrain the Imperial Army, content that the necessary point had been made and desiring to return the conflict into the realm of the political. Though no further conquest was perpetrated, the 9th Battalion continued to harry and apply pressure to the Taeran's southern flank in order to help alleviate pressure being applied against the Dahn and Dun Melea. 9th Battalion engaged in quite a few skirmishes with Legio XIII, but no large scale engagements. The captured port came to be known as Bei Shui, and the surrounding land was heavily settled and fortified. Once leadership within Taer shifted and peace was sought, Itan was ready and willing to dispatch its diplomatic team to negotiate and wrench whatever further advantage they could. The Taerans "graciously allowed" the Itanese to keep what land they took as part of reparations owed Itan for the attempted invasion perpetrated by the former Emperor.

Modern Day Itan

The Itanese exist in a society where everything is based on merit. A person's station, his well being, and his rights are all derived from his personal abilities and talents. The current Itanese class system is an evolution of the old Kingdom of Min citizen grade system known as "Min Ji." In this system there are six grades of citizenship.

Citizens of the 6th grade are at the bottom of the society. They possess just enough skill to plow a field, pull a cart, or load freight onto ships. 6th degree citizens are not permitted to own land or businesses, hold title, or actively participate in the government. However, they are still citizens, and are protected by Imperial Law and the Imperial Military. Furthermore, so long as they are actively employed, they have the right to lodging, board, and rudimentary medical care.

Citizens of the 5th grade have exhibited basic comprehension of a particular skill, or at least a passing familiarity with a variety of skills. Like 6th Degree citizens, they cannot hold title or rank, nor can they participate in the government or own businesses. They are allowed to own small plots of land as well. It common for 5th Degree citizens to oversee work groups of Grade 6's, or to participate in the skilled labor force.

Citizens of the 4th Degree possess both learned skills and some degree of academic instruction. They may participate in the government, hold rank, own land, and/or own a business. Citizens of the Fourth Grade cannot hold title, and thus are not eligible for elevated positions within the government. The 4th Grade is the Itanese equivalent of a merchant or artisan class.

3rd Degree citizens boast all of the rights mentioned thus far, in addition to the ability to hold low to middle ranking titles and positions within the government. 3rd Grade citizens are diversely skilled and well educated.

The major difference between 2nd and 3rd Degree citizens is that 2nd Grade citizens can be promoted into the upper ranks of the Ministries.

The final Grade, 1st Grade is only held by the top members of Itanese society. In order to contend for the title of Emperor, Shogun, or to be considered for promotion to become one of the Guardians, requires that an individual have passed the test to become a 1st Degree citizen.

Technically an individual must be of the 1st Grade to become the Kakhan, but what has always happened thus far is that the Armanites select their Kakhan in the traditional fashion, and then he becomes a 1st Degree citizen. Grade is determined solely through competitive examination. Exams test all of an applicant's skills. The higher up the Grade, the more rigorous, stringent, and comprehensive the examination.

This system of Grades is strictly adhered to and determines where in the hierarchy of Itanese society an individual stands. To the Itanese, the higher a person's grade, the

better the person. Respect of those of higher standing is so mandatory and ingrained, that it isn't even a conscious social trait any longer.⁹

Visitors to Itan are subjected to rudimentary and comparably simple tests to determine an honorary Grade so that they may interact with the rest of Itanese society. In many cases involving important figures, these exams are waived and an honorary rank appropriate to dignitary's status is given in order to smooth political interactions.

Understand that a person need not be Graded to live in Itan. The only requirement for living in the Empire is registering with the Ministries. Those who do not test for citizenship are effectively Zero Grade citizens, and sometimes are referred to as such. They possess no rights, not even the basic ones possessed by 6th Degree citizens.¹⁰

The Examinations

Almost every aspect of Itanese society is dictated by the Examinations. The Examinations are in turn, controlled and regulated by the Bureau of Balanced Examinations within the Ministry of Imperial Success. This adherence to testing protocol is so severe that even the position of Emperor is one that can be tested for. It is theoretically possible that any person in the Empire can one day become Emperor. Examinations are held weekly in government maintained and operated halls. In addition to schools dedicated towards education, there are also prep schools designed solely to prepare individuals for the rigors of the testing process. The exams judge everything from a person's knowledge, to their vocational skills, to their physical fitness. The higher up in the system a person goes, the more comprehensive the examination process. Though the examinations are open to all, a hereditary system of rank does exist in a way. Those Citizens of higher grade have access to more wealth and connections, and are better able to prepare their children for the examination process than those of lower grade. Consequently, there are trends in the ranking system that follows familial lines. While have a high ranking parent does not guarantee a high rank for the child, it certainly improves the odds. Cheating is a capitol offence. The first offense is punishable by being stripped of all rank for five years. The second offense results in irreconcilable exile from the Empire.

⁹ Whether or not the person actually deserves the position, or even if someone feels that he is better, the fact remains that whomever it was passed the test and made the Grade, and that counts for a lot in Itanese society, because if nothing, else, the examinations are difficult and incredibly well regulated. *This note should probably be removed in the final version- Edt.*

¹⁰ A large majority of the residents of the Arma region are not actually citizens of the Empire. While the Armanites respect the meritocracy of the Empire's system, most of them have no interest in participating. One of the second generation Zaarin, known as Tenlat the Lawgiver, exploited a loophole during the opening negotiations with Guo, and managed to get the Armanite people classified as the property of Khans and the Kakhan, thus putting them under Imperial protection as the belongings of a high grade citizen.

The Tradition of Houses and Ancestor Spirits

The concept of Houses was one adopted by the Itanese from the traditional Shogunate clan system. Veneration of the elderly and the worship of one's ancestors have been a long standing set of Shogunate values. The shape of these values had always been dictated by bloodline. The adoption and continued practice of these traditions by large portions of the Empire has resulted in a situation where most extended family groups have patron spirits that provide guidance and knowledge in exchange for reverence. A peculiar custom developed by those of Kingdom descent was to form Houses amongst like-minded individuals, or those with a shared cause. These groups, united by venture and ideal instead of blood, began to generate their own "Ancestor Spirits" which were tied to the group's lineage and ideals as opposed to their own blood. Today, in addition to the eight major and numerous minor clans of the Shogunate, there are hundreds of Itanese houses, of both the familial and venture variety.

The Five Imperial Ministries

Itan is run by a structure known as the Five Fingers of the Uprturned Palm, or the Five Imperial Ministries. The Five Ministries are The Ministry of Harmonious Conflict, The Ministry of Imperial Success, The Ministry of Right and Proper Bearing, The Ministry of Advancement and Discovery, and the Ministry of Auspicious Action. Each Ministry is comprised of five Bureaus. Each Ministry is headed by a Minister, and each Bureau is headed by a Director. The structure of the Imperial Military is contained entirely within the Bureau of the Shogun, which is located within the Ministry of Harmonious Conflict.

The Guardians of the Four Directions

The Guardianships were implemented in 210 NE to provide a check against the kind of situation that arose with the Thirteen Tiger Uprising. The idea is that individuals who ascend to the position of Guardian aim to serve the land, people, and spirit of Itan, not necessarily the Ministries and the Emperor. When a person becomes a Guardian they renounce their former names and lives to take on the higher calling of the position. The Guardianship is a title and rank available only to citizens of the 1st Degree. The title comes with lands, estates, and a military force under the direct control of the Guardian that exists outside of the chain of command controlled by the Shogun. There are four separate positions with different titles. The estate in the west is held by Genbu, the Jade Tortoise, and his Iron Claw Society. To the east is Suzaku, the Carnelian Phoenix, and her Shadowless Palm Society. In the north lie the lands of Seiryu, the Lapis Dragon, and his Argent Typhoon Society. Finally, Byakko, the Pearl Tiger, and his Peerless Flame Society, reside in the south.

The Five Fingers of the Closed Hand

Existing in counterpoint to the Five Imperial Ministries, and even the regular structure of Itanese society, are the Five Fingers of the Closed Hand. These are five groups known as *tongs*¹¹. It is inevitable that when three nations which used to be enemies unite, that there will be some difficulty in getting the residents to integrate, regardless of how it looks on paper. The ranks of the dissatisfied and the lost swelled. United in their lack of direction, these people began to congregate based upon vocation. Small groups merged into larger, and organization became necessary. As these groups swelled in number, power, and influence, they began to interact with increasingly higher levels of the Empire's government. The politicians couldn't ignore these groups and so they responded to them in the way they responded to everything: they tried to make them part of the system. As a result the *tongs* were formed. The first acknowledged Tong was the *Jian tong*, or the Reed Brotherhood. The *Jian tong* is comprised of merchants and traders who sought to operate in non-government sanctioned markets. The next to form was the *Yang Liu tong*, or the Willow Brotherhood. This group was made up of radical thinking diplomats and bureaucrats who didn't quite fit into the current structure. Close on the heels of the *Yang Liu tong* came the Peony Brotherhood and the Lotus Brotherhood, or *Mu Dan tong* and the *Lian tong* respectively. The Peonies were all mercenary minded soldiers and the Lotuses inventors and craftsmen. Though they had been in operation long before the foundation of the Empire, the last group to be recognized decided that having government sanction would help rather than hinder their cause. This group came to be known as the *Ying Su tong*, or the Poppy Brotherhood. This group was organized by the most ruthless and powerful criminal leaders of the Isle and possesses considerable power and influence. Their "official" service is assassination, though that is by no means the only one they provide. Though recognized by the government, the Brotherhoods pay only lip service to the system. Perhaps the biggest departure from tradition that the Tongs perpetrate is the fact that Citizen Grade is irrelevant when it comes to holding a position within the Tong. Members are ranked and accepted based solely on skill and loyalty to the Tong. The services of any Tong can be purchased and the Tongs' only loyalties are to themselves.¹²

The Races of Jhoril and Itan.

The Empire of Itan is one of the most cosmopolitan regions in all of Jhoril. The reason for this comes from their system of meritocracy. Individuals, regardless of race or origin can find a place and be accepted within the Empire, because the only social standard is determined by the examinations. Those who cannot find a place within the Ministries can almost certainly find a place within the Tongs. The only place this is not true is in the west, on the steppes, but that is more because the Tngri feel they are superior to everyone, rather than a particular prejudice against non-humans. As a result of this it is not uncommon to find monsters, spirits, or even the undead publicly holding

¹¹ Which loosely translates to "brotherhood." This can be misleading, as translations can be at times, as membership is open to all genders.

¹² I recommend Sergio Benetti's *The Mercenary Traditions of Jhoril* as a resource for anyone interested in learning more about the history of the Tongs.

ranks within the Ministries and receiving due respect and recognition. As far as the indigenous demographics go, humans are by far the most numerous of the natives, although Itan is also home to a number of Drakkon Clutches and Tuan of the Sidhe.

Important Places

Feng Luo - The present day Imperial Capital and former capital of the Kingdom of Min. This magnificent city sprawls across the river plains of central Itan. When the city first became the capital of the old Kingdom, its architects built into its design the potential for growth, so as the city expanded, it had channels and directions to fill. It is a common characteristic of many larger cities that their history can be read in their architecture, like the rings of a tree. This is not true of Feng Luo as a result of the foresight of its designers. The city is laid out in concentric rings regularly connected by roads and streets, much like a spider's web. In the center lies the Imperial Palace. The city is circumscribed by a functional and impressive wall, which is pierced at four points by massive gates. These are the Crimson Gate, the Verdant Gate, the Azure Gate, and the Ivory Gate. The city is further ringed by a complicated system of irrigation tracts and canals, which help to direct and control the flow of water in the region. This prevents the city from taking damage in the flood season.

Kiba- Kiba is the site of the old Shogunate capital. It is the ancestral home of the Akyko clan. To this day the majority of the residents of Kiba can trace their ancestry back to the Akyko blood. Though small compared to Feng Luo, it is no less impressive. Kiba is essentially a massive fortress perched atop the mountain of the same name. Encased within ancient walls are precious agricultural fields and some of the oldest and most respected fighting schools in all of Itan. Kiba is also the home base of the Shogun and one of the most acclaimed military schools in all of Jhoril, the Uzuki Academy.

Giz Kolockt - Giz Kolockt has the distinction of being the only "city" founded by the Armanites. It is a simple, open aired place built around a lake on the highest of the steppes. There are very few permanent structures, and the city instead boasts massive grounds for the traveling Ordu to pitch camp. The city has changed very little since its inception and has managed to earn a reputation as a very spiritual and humbling place.

Diao Leung - Located in the island cluster off of Itan's north shore, Diao Lung is the seat of the Imperial Navy and the largest shipyard in Itan's control.

Bei Shui - Formerly the Taeren town of Lacis, Bei Shui is now a center of Itanese trade and commerce. The town was subjugated and annexed during the Realm Wars and has become steadily fortified in the years since. It bears the second largest garrison of the Imperial Military in all of Jhoril.

Important People

Emperor Ci Ru Zhi, Huang Di, Mikado, Sa Khan, the Divine Light, the Exalted Flame, Citizen of the First Degree, Perfected Administrator of the Five Imperial Ministries¹³ - The current Emperor is a young scion from the House of Itar¹⁴. Ci Ru Zhi is the youngest ever to pass the exam, doing so at the age of 22. Now 28, his six years of service have been very prosperous for Itan. The current Emperor is known to be a great practitioner and student of magic, in addition to having a reputation as a precocious scholar and deadly politician.

Shogun Hotaru Bato, Kiba no Ookami,¹⁵ Duelist, Citizen of the First Degree, Director of the Bureau of the Shogun, Ministry of Harmonious Conflict - A loyal son of the Hotaru Clan, Hotaru Bato is recognized as the finest swordsman in all of Itan, and is an esteemed member in good standing of the Guild of Duelists. He served as the Daimyo in charge of the garrison at Bei Shui before passing the examination to become Shogun.

Daimyo Cheren Kakhan, The Life Giving Wind, Citizen of the First Degree, Administrator of the Bureau of the Shogun, Ministry of Harmonious Conflict¹⁶ - Cheren is the 237th Kakhan of the Tngri. She has held the position for 16 years and the time grows near for her to be succeeded. She earned the title the Life Giving Wind for the years of prosperity enjoyed by the Armanites during her tenure.

Gan Zaarin, The Eye of Earth and Sky - Gan has served as a Zaarin for 83 years and shows no sign of flagging in his duty. He is a powerful prophet and spiritualist who never leaves the compound of the Zaarin within Giz Kolockt. In recent times Gan has been quiet and broody, has not uttered a public prophecy in seven years, and will speak to no one save the other Zaarin. Though his brethren have said nothing, many Boge feel that Gan has received an ill omen and are preparing for hard times.

¹³ These are only a fraction of the Emperor's official titles. Presented here are the Emperor's traveling titles; that is, the minimum of titles that need to be accredited without provoking insult. Title and rank were an integral part of the Kingdom's class system for determining social precedence, and this fondness carried through into the Imperial system.

¹⁴ The sons and daughters of House Itar have lead the Empire for the past 137 years.

¹⁵ Translates to "wolf of Kiba." The Wolves of Kiba are an elite society of warriors who can be called to assemble as the honor guard of the Shogun.

¹⁶ While Cheren Kakhan holds rank within the Ministries, she has yet, in the tradition of most Kakhans, to attend any Itanese political functions or meetings, and has not actively participated in the Ministries or the government beyond passing the requisite tests.

Da Shi Makarime Gotetsu, Grand Master Alchemist, Educator of Spiritual Design, 2nd Dan of the Ryojan School, the Darting Shrike, Brother of the *Lian tong*, Citizen of the Second Degree - Makarime Gotetsu is one of the seven recognized Grand Master Alchemists of Jhoril. Formerly a holder of rank in the Ministries and the official Court Alchemist of Itan, he has since retired and has been succeeded by his son. He now spends his days as a recluse, further mastering his arts and bettering his mind and spirit.¹⁷



¹⁷ A note about Itanese titling conventions: Standard practice is to start with the highest held title within the Itanese structure followed by the person's name. After that comes a list of ranks and titles acquired by the individual over time. The order is generally determined by the individual, with the titles he respects most coming first. After this list of titles generally come ranks or titles held in organizations which exist outside of the Ministries. Finally the individual's grade, followed by his official position, if any, within the Ministries is the last to be added.