

# The Story of the Monad



*Main Street of the Northwest*



*The Great Chinese Monad, Used  
as a Charm by the Chinese.*

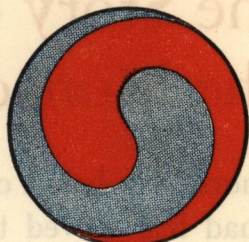
## The Story of the Monad

For more than half a century, the Monad has served to identify the Northern Pacific Railway. But this emblem is more than just an attractive design; it is taken from a symbol nearly 1,000 years old, and the ideas this symbol represents date back at least 4,000 years before that. The design is called the great Chinese Monad or the Diagram of the Great Extreme.



# How America discovered the Monad

At the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, E. H. McHenry, then Chief Engineer of the Northern Pacific, chanced to visit the Korean exhibit. Seeing the Korean flag, he was impressed by the simple but striking design it carried. Because at that time NP was searching for a suitable



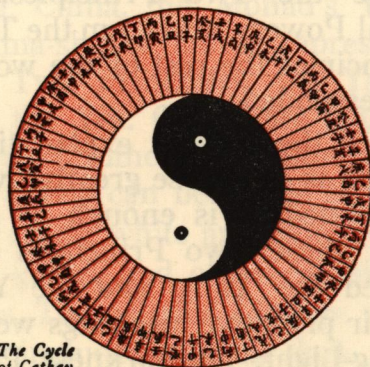
*Korean Tah-Gook*

trademark, Mr. McHenry realized almost immediately that this symbol could be adapted quite readily for that purpose. When he returned to St. Paul, he submitted his idea to Charles Fee, then General Passenger Agent, and together they worked out the emblem which today has become familiar to millions of Americans.

Curious about the origin of this symbol, Mr. McHenry began an investigation of its history. The information he sought was difficult to find, but from a number of sources—missionaries to China, students of the Orient and scholarly books of Oriental philosophy—a reasonably accurate history of the Monad was finally pieced together.

## What the Monad means

Although it is displayed on the the Korean Flag, the Monad symbol originated in China. Variations of it have been found in several other countries including North America, where the design has appeared in Pueblo



*The Cycle of Cathay*

The Chinese cycle consists of sixty years, each with a separate name. Their names are here ranged in the outer circle, and read from the top towards the left hand. The figures in the inner space are the dual forces, Yin and Yang.





*Sample of Bead Work of American Plains Indians, exhibiting crude resemblance to Monad and Tah-Cook.*

Indian pottery and in bead work of American Plains Indians. The more modern

form of the Monad was introduced in the 11th century by a Chinese philosopher, Chow Lien Ki. It was used by him to illustrate a 4000-year-old philosophy which he followed.

According to this philosophy, the primary force in the universe is a sort of impersonal "nature" rather than a personified deity or "god". These teachings hold that the Illimitable (probably "nature") produced the Great Extreme (the "creative" principle). From the Great Extreme came the Two Principles, or Dual Powers, and from the Two Principles the rest of the world is descended.

For the present explanation, which is of course greatly oversimplified, it is enough to say that these Two Principles are called the Yang and the Yin. Their primitive meanings were: Yang-Light; Yin-Darkness. Philosophically, they stood for the positive and the negative. Fur-



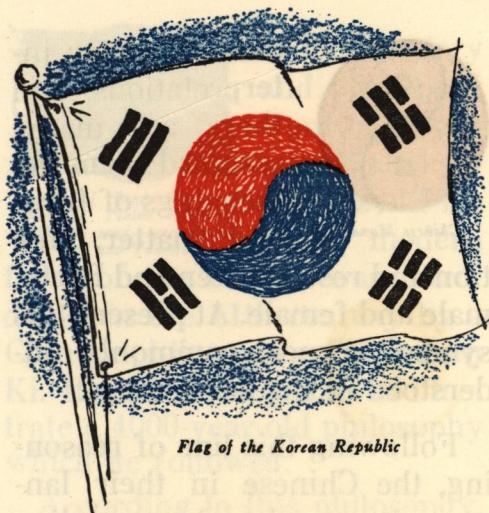
*Chinese Monad*

ther and later interpretations, and there are many, assigned them the meanings of force and matter, motion and rest, Heaven and Earth, male and female. At present this symbol is most commonly understood in the latter sense.

Following this line of reasoning, the Chinese in their language have assigned a masculine or feminine gender to every object in nature and to numbers as well. Fire, for example, is masculine. So are the sun, the day, and odd numbers. Water, the moon, the night, and even numbers are feminine.

In China, the Monad's two comma-shaped halves represent the Two Principles, the Yang and the Yin. Colors are apparently of minor importance, as the device can be found in red and black, white and black, red and green, and other combinations. The original Chinese version includes a small dark dot in the light portion and a light dot in the darker half.





*Flag of the Korean Republic*

## From Korea to America

In Korea, the Monad is quite similar to the original Chinese version, and has much of the same philosophical meaning. Its colors, however, are red and blue, and it is called the "Tah-Gook". A free translation of the Oriental name of this country, Chosen, is "land of the morning calm". To Koreans, red is the royal color and blue is the color of the East or morning. Thus the "Tah-Gook"—on the flag of the Korean republic which is recognized by the United Nations—means also "kingdom of the morning".

The four additional symbols carried in the corners of this flag are called the Four Figures. Derived from the same Chinese philosophy which uses the Monad, they have many meanings.



*Adaptation of the Tah-Gook, found in Anam.*

They represent the Father, the Mother, the Sons, the Daughters. They also symbolize the four points of the compass, and the four seas that bound the universe.

From the arrangements of the bars, a number of moral lessons may be drawn. The weaker (short bars) should be protected by the stronger (long bars); but the more precious (long bar) should be protected by the less valuable (short bars). Like should associate with like, as shown by the three long bars in one group and the six short bars in another, but tolerance should permit the mixture of the unlike, as in the two other groups.

The Monad symbol, with the variations of the Four Figures surrounding it, is quite frequent-



*Modification of Chinese Monad, as used in Japan*

ly used by the Chinese as a charm to ward off evil influences, and it is an important accessory to fortune-tellers and mystics.

Smaller Monads may be carried about, and larger ones are often hung over the doorways of homes or places of business.

The Japanese version of this symbol, the “futatsu tomoe”, is composed of three comma-shaped pieces inside the circle. The device is also used in that country as a good-luck token. It is most frequently made about the size of a half-dollar, and quite often is carried in the sleeve of a robe.

So it is, then, that in the Orient this ancient design has become the symbol of good luck. And in America—on Northern Pacific diesels, on passenger cars, freight cars, stationery, and traffic office windows—it has become the sign of good rail transportation.



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