



A typical peasant's house in Pinyang.

# THE GARDENS OF KOREA

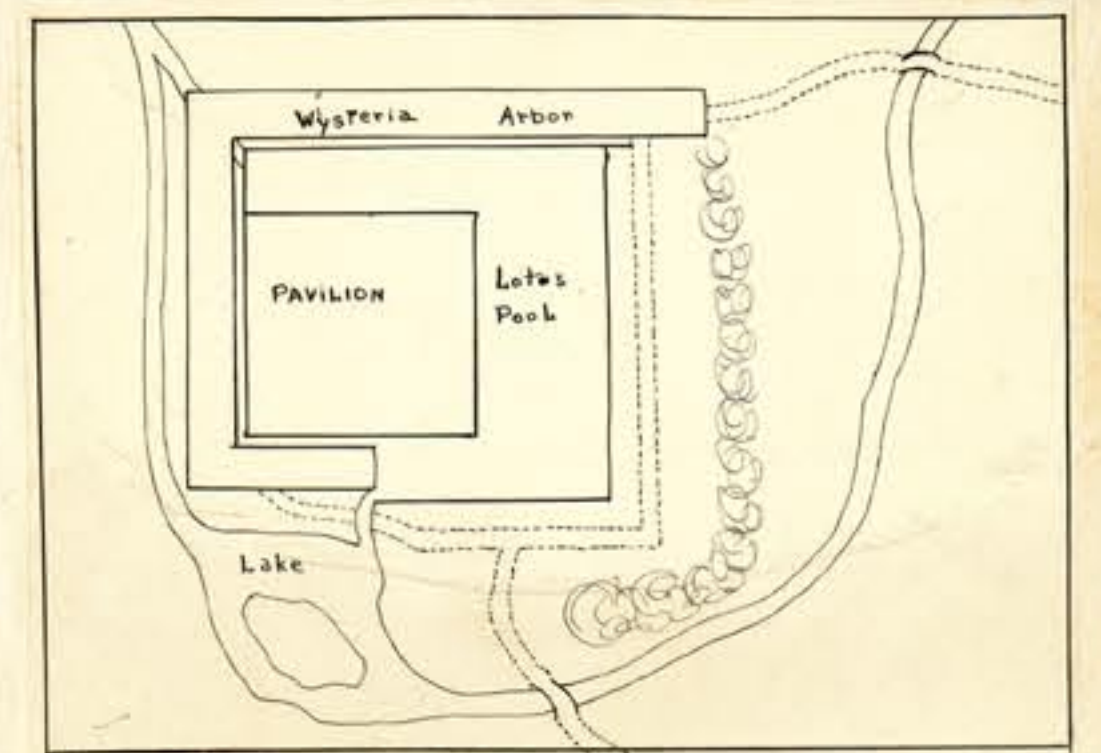
*Korea today is a most puzzling country through which to travel, for one is constantly striving to find the truly Korean, and rarely succeeding. In my survey of the gardens, of course, I met the same difficulty.*

ELIZABETH K. ROYS, 1926

Elizabeth Roys' study of the gardens of Korea is distinguished by her disappointment in failing to find an authentic Korean style. She notes that modern Korea is essentially Japanese, and that the "new" cities, buildings, parks, and gardens created since the Japanese conquest of 1907 are heavily inspired by the aesthetic of the occupying nation. She similarly discovers that everything old in Korea, including the most traditional estates and gardens, has been influenced by China.

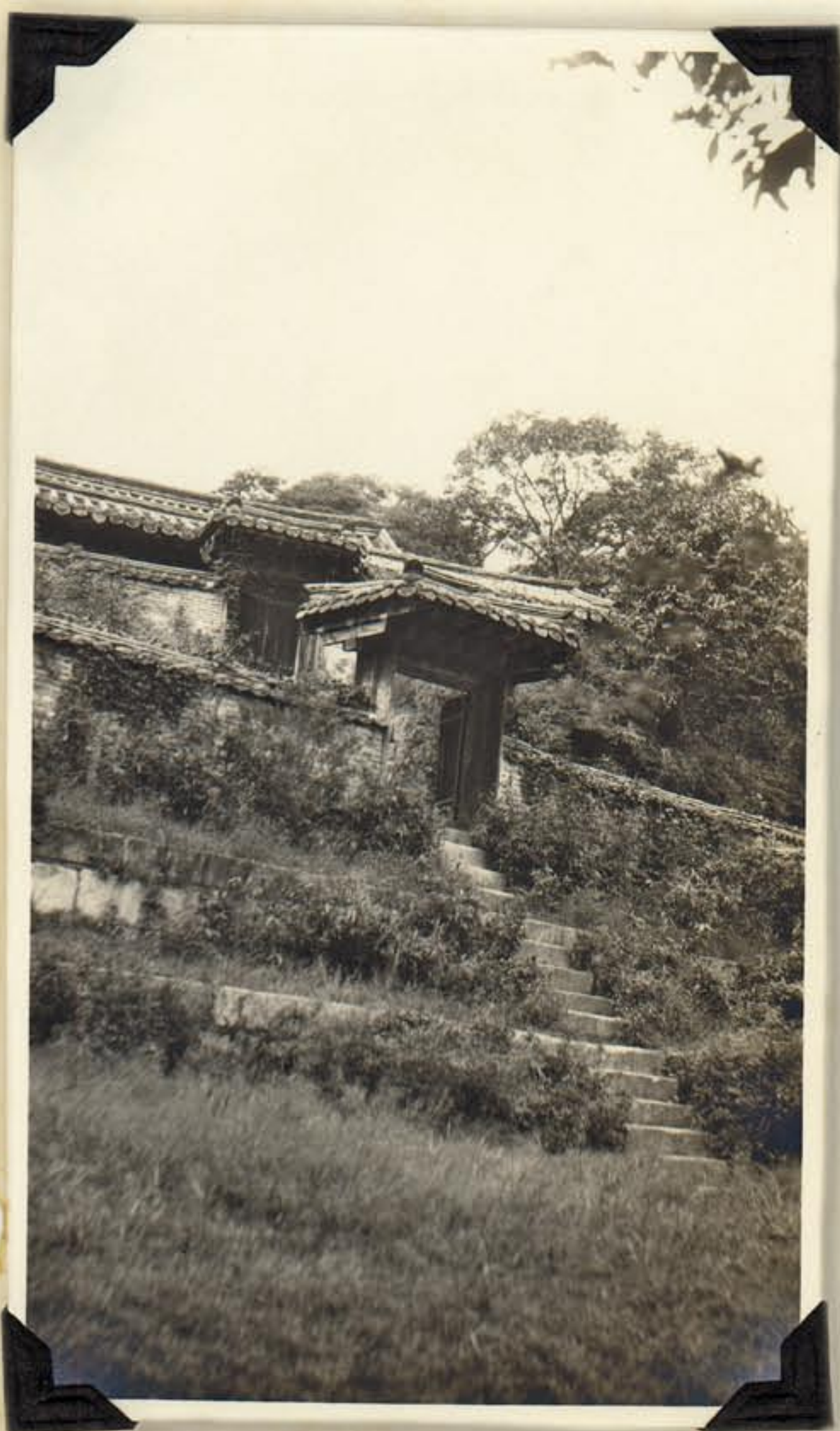


A view of the Lotus Pool, Prince Yi Estate, showing the wysteria above and the path following the edge of the pool.



A great portion of Roys' analysis is devoted to one garden—that belonging to Prince Yi, near Seoul. This is the best example she could find of a classic Korean estate garden, and it was one of very few such gardens remaining when she studied and photographed it in 1926. At that time the Yi garden was already over 500 years old and had been owned by one family since its creation. Roys praises its peaceful lotus pool, ancient wisteria vine, expansive mountain views, and pine-shrouded "Place of Meditation."

Ultimately, Roys is best able to capture the spirit of the true Korean garden through her observation of the gardening habits of the country's peasants. Restricted means and lack of space forced most Korean families to garden vertically on their houses. Training melons, morning glories, and red peppers to climb up walls and over roofs, they created beautiful villages glowing like vast flower beds in the sunlight.



The gates and steps leading up to the Ancestral Temple, Prince Yi Garden. Formerly, this was much more magnificent, but now it has been allowed to slowly go to pieces, since it costs too much to keep it in its old style.



[Postcard] A typical Korean village, with mud walled huts and thatched roofs, the houses huddled together, very few trees and those jealously guarded. There is no room in a place like this for extensive gardens.