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**SHAMANS, GHOSTS AND HOBGOBLINS**  
**AMIDST KOREAN FOLK CUSTOMS**

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## Shamans, Ghosts and Hobgoblins amidst Korean Folk Customs

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There is a story about a night spirit that sneaks into the house on the first night of the New Year and tries to put the shoes of the family on—if it finds a matching pair, it steals the shoes and the owner of the shoes suffers bad luck all year.

Thus families take all their shoes into the living quarters on that night, putting out the lights and sleeping early. To ward off this bad spirit, people hang a sieve outside the front gate. When the spirit comes to the house it begins counting all the holes in the sieve, and inevitably has to count again and again since it surely confuses what needs to be counted with what has been counted. This continues until the night grows long and the day breaks, and then the spirit must depart.<sup>1</sup> [東國歲時記, 야광이 쫓기6]

It is hardly the ghosts and spirits that haunt Korean customs, but rather it is the Korean vision of the next world that dictates a strong influence on what we can now describe as Korean folk custom. Today we will see an examination of Korean art and folk custom, but what does this tell of how Koreans lived and how they might have viewed the world? Perhaps more than a bit. If we lose our shoes on Söllal does that mean we are doomed to a year of bad luck? Having lost my own shoes once in Korea, albeit not on the lunar New Year, I wonder about such a situation and what drives such beliefs.

My own studies and interests led me long ago to pursue more knowledge in the customs of premodern Korea. Many of these customs are perhaps founded in the shamanic worldview, but just as many are also influenced by Buddhism and Confucian beliefs as well. One of the first things that stands out when examining the customs of the Chosŏn dynasty is how they tend to be a blend of numerous worldviews. Such a mingling of shamanic, Confucian, Buddhist and other worldviews might be inconvenient for a scholar today seeking to properly label a custom as this-or-that, but it certainly was not a concern for the people of past times. In fact, if we closely look at how major events in the peoples' lives were conducted, we will surely see that by the late Chosŏn a blending of various worldviews was the rule for most events. For example,

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<sup>1</sup>Hong Sökmo, *Tongguk sesigi* [東國歲時記 Seasonal customs of the Eastern country], 6.

funerary rites had various components that allowed Confucian, Buddhist, shamanic, and geomantic concerns to be met.

In today's talk, I would like to look at some of the more prominent aspects of Korean folk customs as those are related to shamans and their on-going battle with spirits from the next world. It is at these confrontations that we can find very essential aspects of Korean folk belief and how people of premodern Korea might have viewed their place within the cosmos.

### Shamans as Keepers of Order

I went down to see my son; Sukkil was uncomfortable and his diarrhea severe,  
purging his bowels five or six times. My daughter-in-law summoned a shaman  
(무녀) in order to save my son from his illness.  
목재일기 (1552-01-29)

In the above account from 1552, we can see one aspect of the role of shamans in past time. While there were certainly medical specialists in Chosŏn Korea and before trained in arts such as acupuncture, moxabustion, the use of herbal and other medicines and so on, for many consulting a shaman in times of serious sickness was also highly important. In Korean folk customs the idea that many serious illnesses were caused by injurious spirits was very strong, and a lingering illness was something that many believed required the intervention of a shaman. Such practices continued well into the twentieth century when the colonial government made a concerted effort to eradicate such "superstitions."<sup>2</sup> However, the strength of customs made such a program very difficult to enact as the age-old view of the cosmos was thoroughly ingrained in the customs of the people.

Perhaps before heading into the on-going battles waged by shamans with the spirits of the next world we should look at who these shamans were. Shamans, known in Korean by various names such as *mudang* and *mansin*, grace the pages of Korean history as far back as we can trace. Practices that we now conveniently lump together as shamanism are also as old as records of the people on the Korean peninsula and help us gain a good understanding of how life might have been thousands of years ago.

Various ancient documents inform us that shamanism once held a prominent place in early Korean societies. For example, the following passage in the "Dongyi chuan" of the *Sanguo zhi* [東夷傳 三國志 Section of the eastern barbarians, History of the Three Kingdoms; 3<sup>rd</sup> c. A.D.] allows us to understand early political leaders were expected to control the forces of nature:

An old Puyŏ custom dictates,  
Floods, droughts and irregular weather,  
Causing the five grains to not ripen.  
Whenever this comes about, the fault lies with the king.

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<sup>2</sup> The Japanese colonial government criticized the role of shamans in preventing the spread of modern medicine and hygienic practices as the people sought out shamans when ill rather than proper medical treatment. See Chijun Murayama, *Chōsen no fugeki* [Shamans of Chosŏn] (Keijō: Chōsen Sōtokufu, 1932), 521.

Some say it is appropriate to replace him,  
Other say it is fitting to kill him.

From records such as this, we can understand that the leaders of these early states were akin to shaman-kings. That is both political leaders and intervener with the forces of nature.

Such a situation seems logical as the early ruling families of ancient Korean kingdoms invariably claimed a link with the supernatural through divine founders. The ability of one lineage to rule over other groups was enhanced by the belief that the rulers had bonds with the supernatural, even if only through a distant ancestor. Thus, early foundation myths of kingdoms on and around the Korean peninsula tell of founders with supernatural powers such as Tan'gun (Kojosŏn 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE) the son of a god and a bear-turned-woman, Chumong (Koguryŏ 37 BCE – 668 CE) the son of a god and born from an egg, and Hyŏkkŏse (Silla 57 BCE – 935 CE) also the son of a god and born from an egg.

But fairly early on in history a separation between the specialists of the sacred and profane occurred in these states. Religious specialists appeared and it fell to them to control or predict the forces of nature. While these individuals might have been members of the royal family or in positions of power at the court, they were no longer political leaders but advisors. Historical works such as the *Samguk sagi* [三國史記 History of the Three Kingdoms, 1145] contain great details about the types of rites carried out at a countrywide level.<sup>3</sup> Of these rites, the most common were those to founders of the kingdoms, then rites for agrarian bountifulness, and finally rituals conducted to natural entities such as mountains, rivers, or astronomical phenomena.

Yet, after the defeat of Paekche and Koguryŏ by Silla and into the subsequent Koryŏ dynasty (918-1392), the import of what we can term shamanic rituals and practices gradually declined at the highest levels of the state, supplanted by new worldviews such as Buddhism and Confucianism. This is not to state that shamanic rites were not important in times of crisis: for example, the *Koryŏ sa* [高麗史 History of Koryŏ, 1451] is replete with records of rain rites (祈雨祭 *kiuje*) being held at the behest of the royal court. On some of these occasions as many as 300 shamans would be summoned by the court to conduct these important rituals.<sup>4</sup>

Beyond the royal court, shamanism was the worldview of the people. It was deeply ingrained in the culture of daily life and although it began to mingle with Buddhist and Daoist practices, it remained, quite simply, the culture that helped explain the world for the people. Shamanic myths explained how the cosmos formed, where illness and death arose from, and why harvests would either fail or be bountiful. Members of the shamanic pantheon protected villages, the young and those away from home, and were thusly honored with rites to petition for future benefit. With such a powerful bond to the lives of the people, shamanic practices

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<sup>3</sup> The bulk of an entire volume of this work is dedicated to the types of rites carried out in each of the Three Kingdoms. See Kim Pusik, *Samguk sagi* [三國史記 History of the Three Kingdoms], trans. to modern Korean by Yi Pyŏngdo (Seoul: Ŭryu munhwasa, 1997), 2.167-188.

<sup>4</sup> *Koryŏ sa*[高麗史 History of Koryŏ], 16: 26a (fifth month, 1133).

were not in danger of disappearing no matter what direction the ruling elites might have pursued.

By the Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910) the greatest portion of shamans were female and were one of either two varieties depending upon how they were initiated into their profession. Up until the early part of the twentieth century, the *mudang* found in the southern half of the Korean peninsula were largely composed of *sesŭp mudang* (hereditary shamans) while those found in the northern and central regions of the peninsula were *kangsin mudang* (destined shamans).<sup>5</sup> The co-existence of the two types of *mudang* in Korea is not unique and is seen in other areas of Siberia and Central Asia. At present, these regional distinctions have grown somewhat less strict, although the terminology for *mudang* in parts of the Korean peninsula does reflect the historic divisions.

*Sesŭp mudang* are known by various terms such as *tan'gol*, *mudang*, *hwarang*, *munyŏ* and *paksu* among others. The term 'tan'gol' refers to the shaman who has a prescribed area in which she has the exclusive right to practice (*tan'gol p'an*), and is generally reserved for female shamans. 'Mudang' is a generic term used for any shaman, while 'munyŏ' is used only for females and 'paksu' only for males.<sup>6</sup> The term 'hwarang' or 'hwarangi' is reserved for male shamans in the southwestern regions.<sup>7</sup> There are also honorific terms for *mudang* such as *mansin*; however, this term is not specific to *sesŭp mudang*.

*Sesŭp mudang* traditionally were mainly lowborn females who learned their trade from both their maternal mother and their mother-in-law. These young girls learned shaman songs (*muga*) by repeating songs after their mothers and then memorizing the song, one phrase at a time.<sup>8</sup> Through this arduous process, the young girls were able to memorize a sizeable repertoire of *muga* over a period of years. After marriage and moving to their husband's household, they would then learn the ritual processes for conducting various shamanistic rituals from their mother-in-law by accompanying her throughout her *tan'gol p'an* and acting as her assistant at the rituals.<sup>9</sup> Finally, after a number of years as her mother-in-law's assistant, the daughter-in-law would gradually assume her mother-in-law's *tan'gol p'an* as the mother-in-law slowly retired. The daughter-in-law would first perform the simpler shamanistic rituals without her mother-in-law and then progressively undertake the larger, major rituals.

Meanwhile, *kangsin mudang* are selected for their profession by the gods of shamanism through a sickness known as either *sinbyŏng* (spirit sickness) or *mubyŏng* (shaman sickness). This condition has been the subject of various studies, and while definitive conclusions have yet to be reached, some scholars suggest that past religious encounters, along with adverse life experiences play a role in this sickness.<sup>10</sup> Among adherents to shamanism, however, it is believed that this sickness can only be cured through the medium of becoming a

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<sup>5</sup> Kim In-hoe, *Han'guk musok sasang yŏn'gu*, 175.

<sup>6</sup> Keith Howard, *Bands, Songs, and Shamanistic Rituals: Folk Music in Korean Society* (Seoul: Royal Asiatic Society, 1989), 161.

<sup>7</sup> Yu Tong-sik, *Han'guk mugyo ūi yŏksa wa kujo*, 88.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 274-275.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Park Sun-hee, "An Empirical Study of the Physical Changes Exhibited in Korean Shamans during Spirit-possession," *Korean Journal* 37 (Spring 1997): 32.

shaman and serving the gods.

The symptoms of *sinbyŏng* are initially manifested with mysterious dreams, unusual eating habits and a gradual weakening of the body. As the initial symptoms intensify, other indications, such as visual and auditory hallucinations arise.<sup>11</sup> The only method for relieving the symptoms is holding a *naerim kut* (initiation *kut*), which inaugurates the one afflicted into the ranks of the *mudang*.<sup>12</sup>

Unlike *sesŭp mudang*, *kangsin mudang* are vested with spiritual power (*yŏngnyŏk*) which is directly bestowed upon them by their patron spirit. Thus, *kangsin mudang* have certain basic knowledge given to them by the spirits. This knowledge includes the performance of some shamanistic rituals and *muga*, and the ability to make divinations.<sup>13</sup> *Kangsin mudang* do, however, receive guidance in the performance of shamanic rites by a senior *mudang*, most often the one who had conducted their initiatory *naerim kut*, who further indoctrinates the novice. Moreover, novice *mudang* do not perform rituals alone, and instead serve a lengthy apprenticeship under their mentor. It is during this period that the novice *mudang* commits to memory various *muga* and ritual practices.

The performance of shamanic rituals by *kangsin* or *sesŭp mudang* are quite distinctive. The rituals conducted by the latter are more elaborate and with a greater emphasis on entertainment, since this is the manner in which they appeal to and appease the gods. The *kangsin mudang*, on the other hand, are charismatic and directly accept gods of the shamanic pantheon into their bodies during the course of the rituals. Hence, the need of the *kangsin mudang* to recite lengthy *muga* or perform elaborate dances is not the same as the *sesŭp mudang*, and accordingly these features are most often found in shamanistic rituals conducted by *sesŭp mudang*. Both varieties of *mudang* do, however, use *muga* throughout the performance of rituals as a means of contacting and honoring the supernatural realm.

In the Chosŏn dynasty, there were efforts by the ruling elites to eliminate the influence that shamans had upon society in general and women in particular. Various edicts throughout the dynasty established penalties for frequenting shamanic ceremonies and even banned shamans from living within the city walls of the capital. Yet despite such efforts, the influence of shamanic rites and shamans on the culture of the people never seriously waned. In times of illness, misfortune or death, shamans provided the greatest comfort to the people, regardless of their social status. As the following excerpt demonstrates, when people were confronted with major problems, shamans and those with other powers were among those consulted,

A little before I went to the lower house to see how my wife's illness was; at dusk I came back up and slept. There was expensive medicine (루노탕) for a curative, but not until the afternoon did she take it. At dusk it was again recommended that she have the bear's gall bladder liquid. A monk was

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<sup>11</sup> Kim In-hoe, *Hwangheo-do naerim kut* (Seoul: Yŏlhwadang, 1983), 78.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 78-79.

<sup>13</sup> Kim T'ae-gon, *Han'guk min'gan sinang yŏn'gu* (Seoul: Chipmundang, 1983), 212-213.

summoned and came at dusk. He said to use the bear's gall bladder liquid to cure the lack of vigor in her intestines; again I went to the lower house where she was and gave her a small dish of the bear's gall bladder liquid as medicine and went back [to my quarters]. The monk slept in the detached room. A shaman (무녀) prayed and praised the gods: this was because of the divination of Kim Chasu.

목재일기 (1551-04-04)

Shamans and the shamanic worldview continued to thrive in Chosŏn Korea because of the perceived efficacy of these practices. Despite the harsh criticism leveled at the customs of the people in the dynastic record, there are numerous accounts of the mysterious powers attributed to shamans as seen in the following account,

Song Sangin (송상인 1569-1631) had an upright and righteous character and greatly disliked shamans. When he was appointed magistrate of Namwŏn he did not even order the shamans to all wear tags on their feet, but rather ordered them to leave the prefecture and go to another place. One day as he was sitting at Kwangan Pavilion, a *mudang* leisurely rode by on a horse loaded with a *changgu*.

He ordered the *mudang* seized and to be brought before him; he shouted at the *mudang*, "I ordered that all the *mudang* be caught and killed—are you not aware of this order?" The *mudang* said he was aware of the order, but added, "there are real *mudang* and there are fake *mudang*; what my Lord caught and killed were all fake *mudang*, but I am unafraid and still living."

Song asked, "How can I know you are a real *mudang*?" The *mudang* said to give any test. Thus Song asked for him to call forth the spirit of a close friend who had died not long before. The *mudang* said he would do so and asked that liquor and side dishes be prepared, along with Song changing into old clothes and he would then summon the spirit.

Not long after that Song's friend appeared: the ghost spoke in detail to Song of what had happened since his death, of games that they played long before, of studying under the same teacher, and also about life as an official. He also spoke of things no else knew; with tears flowing, Song declared that his friend had really come and offered him the liquor and side dishes. Not long after that the ghost said he had to leave and vanished. Song knew the *mudang* before him was a true *mudang* and gave him a reward. After that, he gave no more orders

to eradicate *mudang*.<sup>14</sup>

A main function of shamans is to achieve balance between sacred and profane spaces. However the very act of conducting a shamanic ritual causes all sorts of sundry spirits to ‘visit’ the area. These unwanted visitors can cause great harm to the living so shamanic rituals necessarily begin with a purification ritual known as a *pujŏng kŏri*. This is necessary in order to create a chasm within the profane world where supernatural beings can enter without causing harm to the living. Before any benevolent spirits can be invoked, however, the *mudang* must first purge the area of any wandering or malevolent spirits that are present.<sup>15</sup> An examination of the opening lines of the *pujŏng* (purification) *muga* reveals the many types of impurity thought to be present:

The impurity beyond the baleful directions, the impurity within the baleful directions.<sup>16</sup>

The impurity arising from slaughtering horses, the impurity arising from slaughtering cattle.

The impurity of fire under the heavens, the impurity of water under the ground.

The impurity of fire, the impurity of the demon of the compost heap.

The impurity of killing winged beasts, the impurity of killing crawling insects.

The impurity of the butterfly-shaped white ribbon worn in the hair.<sup>17</sup>

The impurities of front and back, please expel all of these.<sup>18</sup>

The presence of these manifold impurities and uninvited spirits in the ritual space will render the *kut* ineffectual, and thus they must be driven away. This leads us to the next part of this paper, the abundance of ghosts, spirits, and hobgoblins and how they are to be kept at bay.

### Folk Customs, Ghosts, and Hobgoblins

It is an old custom in our country to put a talisman on one’s main gate on the lunar New Year with the names of *Sinta Ullu* (신다울루 神茶鬱壘) in order to drive off the multitude of evil spirits.<sup>19</sup>

The above account tells of the very common practice in past times of putting up a talisman of

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<sup>14</sup> *Ch’ŏnye-rok* [天倪錄 Record from the edge of heaven].

<sup>15</sup> Wandering spirits are those spirits not offered rites by their ancestors and are thus still present in the profane world.

<sup>16</sup> Baleful directions (*sangmun*) are those places from which evil influences are thought to emanate from.

<sup>17</sup> This ribbon was, and often still is, worn in the hair of women who were in mourning. Thus, the impurity referred to is that of death.

<sup>18</sup> Akiba Takashi and Akamatsu Chijō, 1:63.

<sup>19</sup> *Tongguk sesigi*, 7.

some sort to keep baleful spirits at bay. In the above, Sinta and Ullu are said to be brothers who lived long ago; as they possessed both great strength and brightly shining eyes, they excelled in destroying ghosts. Other common tales tell of the people of Silla and Koryŏ posting a likeness of Ch'ŏyong—the son of a dragon king—on their gates to keep the spirit of pestilence away and also of eating *p'at chuk* on the winter solstice since ghosts disliked the color red. All this and more anecdotal evidence clearly demonstrates the dread of the people at being plagued by ghosts and taking significant measures to ensure they can keep these beings at bay as seen in the following,

A Cheju custom dictates that for all the spirits of the mountains, marshes, streams, ponds, ocean, flatlands, trees, rocks and so on to have shrines erected on their behalf. Then from the lunar New Year until Taeborum shamans receive these powerful spirits and carry out rites in their honor. This is known as a *hwaban* (花盤 flower table).<sup>20</sup>

Why do we find such a morbid fascination with ghosts and spirits in premodern Korea? Unlike the present age, perhaps, in premodern Korea death was not always seen as a clear break with the physical world. Rather, the influence of the dead remained after their physical bodies had ceased to carry on life functions and such influence could be either beneficial to the living or harmful. The spirits of the dead were to be respected and treated properly lest one fall suffer a calamity.

In the shamanic worldview eschatological rituals (死靈祭 *sayŏng-je*) carried numerous functions such as marking the passing of the dead to the next world and allowing the living to grieve; however, the most important function of these rituals was aimed at eliminating the baleful influence of the dead (煞 *sal*) from the world of the living.<sup>21</sup> Within shamanic eschatological rituals we can find beliefs that spirits are potentially dangerous to the living if not properly honored and removed from the profane world; moreover, we can also note the belief that the spirits of the dead continue to regulate the conditions the living are confronted with in this world. Spirits not properly honored and sent off are thought to “wander angry and frustrated, venting their anguish on the living.”<sup>22</sup> The danger from these malicious spirits is understood to be manifested in misfortune and illness among the living.<sup>23</sup> Accordingly, an essential concern of shamanic eschatological rites is to prevent misfortune or illness caused by the spirits of the dead among the living.

In general, we find the belief of both good and bad ghosts in Korean history. Kim T'aegon wrote that the spirits of the dead can largely be classified as either deities (神 *sin*)

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<sup>20</sup> *Tongguk sesigi*, 6-7.

<sup>21</sup> Yu Tongsik, *Han'guk mugyo ūi yŏksa wa kujo* [The form and history of Korean shamanism] (Seoul: Yŏnse taehakkyoch'ulp'anbu, 1978), 215-216.

<sup>22</sup> Laurel Kendall, “Wood Imps, Ghosts, and Other Noxious Influences: The Ideology of Affliction in a Korean Village,” *Journal of Korean Studies* 3 (1981): 133.

<sup>23</sup> Kim Inhoe, *Han'guk musok sasang yŏn'gu* [A study of Korean shamanic thought] (Seoul: Chimmundang, 1987), 184.

which are beneficial to humans, or as ghosts (鬼 *kwi*) which are harmful to humans.<sup>24</sup> The deities that provide benefit to humans are mostly in the category of natural deities (自然神 *chayŏn sin*) and human-deities (人神 *in sin*).<sup>25</sup> Conversely, those that can harm humans are in numerous categories such as ghosts of those who have died while away from home (客鬼 *kaek kwi*), miscellaneous ghosts (雜鬼 *chap kwi*), ghosts arising from a place of a death (喪門 *sangmun*), ghosts of infants who died before being weaned (太子鬼 *t'aeja kwi*), ghosts of infants who starved to death after being abandoned by their mother (새타니 *saet'ani*), ghosts of unmarried men (몽달귀 *mongdal kwi*), ghosts of unmarried women (處女鬼 *ch'önyŏ kwi*), ghosts of those who drowned (水鬼 *mul kwisin*), ghosts that visit in one's dreams (鬼夢 *kwi mong*), and ghosts that arise from damaging a gravesite and the corpse therein (亡鬼 *mang kwi*); all of these ghosts fall into the subcategory of ghosts arising from unfortunate or untimely human deaths (人死靈 *insaryŏng*). Other injurious ghosts are in the subcategory of plague ghosts (疫神 *yŏksin*), such as the spirit of smallpox (손님 *sonnim*) and others that roam certain parts of the house such as ghosts that haunt the privy (ch'üksin *측신*). Finally there is the category of sundry spirits such as hobgoblins (도깨비 *tokkaebi*). We can easily see in these classifications that there were beliefs in numerous types of ghosts that were thought to cause harm to the living.

The main classifications of ghosts harmful to humans are those who have died under either bad circumstances or at a young age. It is the ghosts of travelers, those who die wrongfully, unmarried men and women, and infants that plague humans to the greatest extent and this is due to the unfulfilled nature of their lives. Such ghosts are said to have grievances that cause them to linger in the human world where they inflict damage on the living. Consider the following record transmitted in the *Tongguk sesigi* [東國歲時記 Seasonal customs of the Eastern country],

Every year on the twentieth day [of the tenth month] a great wind arises and is known as the Sondol Wind (孫石風). The reason for this is that a Koryŏ king was fleeing to Kanghwa Island and at that time a boatman named Sondol steered the boat towards a dangerous spot. The king was suspicious [of Sondol's intent] and in anger had him killed. However, due to Sondol's wisdom [of steering in that particular direction] the boat avoided danger. Due to these circumstance, this dangerous place is known as Sondol's Neck (孫石項). Specifically due to his suffering death, on this day alone his wrathful vigor (怨氣) arises [and causes the great wind].<sup>26</sup>

The above account demonstrates that deaths that were understood by people to be unjust would result in the spirit of the deceased having an anger or rancor that would not simply die with

<sup>24</sup> Kim T'aegon, *Min'gan ūi kwisin, Han'guk sasang ūi wŏnch'ŏn* [Ghosts of the people, origins of Korean thought] (Seoul: Pakyŏngsa, 1976), 98-126.

<sup>25</sup> The following enumeration of the types of ghosts is based on Kim T'aegon, 99-101 and Han Chaegyū, *Kwisiniyŏ ije taerorŭl hwalbohara* [Ghosts! Go now and strut about the streets!] (Seoul: Pukk'amp'u, 2004).

<sup>26</sup> *Tongguk sesigi*, 30.

their physical death. Rather, the ghosts remain in the human world and vent their anger for unjust or untimely deaths. Such a situation demonstrates a worldview that acknowledged a close connection between the cause of death and the ability of the deceased to move towards the next life. In short, one who dies unjustly or before his/ her life is fulfilled would not join the next world but rather remain in this world until the spirit was satiated. Such a view reflects a sense of supernatural justice or reciprocity among the living: the wrath of one unjustly killed would not simply die with the physical body, but rather remain in this world.

One of the most famous narratives of a ghost that will not leave the human world for the next because of an injustice is that of Arang. The beautiful, sixteen year old daughter of the magistrate of Miryang is murdered while resisting a man trying to rape her. As her body was hidden by the attempted rapist, it is assumed by her father that she had simply run away and he resigns his post in shame, returning to Seoul. The ghost of the young girl appears before a succession of new magistrates, but all are frightened to death; finally, an honorable man is appointed and when confronted by the ghost, hears her sad story and brings the guilty parties to justice. After this time the ghost is no longer seen.<sup>27</sup> It is notable that the shrine to Arang still stands today in Miryang and rites are offered to her spirit for three days every year beginning on the 16<sup>th</sup> day of the fourth lunar month.<sup>28</sup>

Other spirits or ghosts seem not to have human origins but rather come from elsewhere. Consider the following account recorded by Yi Ik (1681-1763) in *Sŏngho sasŏl* [星湖僊說 Insignificant explanations by Sŏngho],

There are many stories of trees and rocks being possessed by supernatural entities. Since trees are living things, many more ghosts depend on them and as many old trees are hollow inside odd entities are fostered there.

Recently a *sŏnbi* by the name of Sin cut down a tree near a grave and a ghost followed after him. Thus every night they slept together just like people and every attempt to drive the spirit off was unsuccessful. Sin inevitably became ill and died. This was undoubtedly the result of the 'ghostly love' of a fox. From long ago we can see that ghostly things (귀매) bewitch and sleep with people; ghosts (귀신) change into men and foxes transform into women.

Not long ago, the Duke of Wangsŏng, Yi Man (1605-1644) was made Governor (Kwanch'alsa) of Chŏlla Province. Within the city walls an ancient tree was cut down and from within the hollow of the tree appeared a hairless beast like a horse, but about the size of a cat. When the sun shone upon its body, it quickly died; if it had grown fully, it would have been some sort of supernatural being.

Other strange creatures include the *Tokkaebi*. *Tokkaebi* or hobgoblins can take a variety of forms and are thought to have great strength and be given to jealousy of the trappings of the human world. While ghosts live in the same areas as people, *tokkaebi* generally live in remote

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<sup>27</sup> Recorded in *Kogŭm so ch'ong* [古今笑叢 Collection of past and presents laughs], 9.28-30.

<sup>28</sup> Han Chaegyū, *Kwisiniyŏ ije taerorŭl hwalbohara* [Ghosts! Go now and strut about the streets!] (Seoul: Pukk'amp'u, 2004), 241.

areas such as forests, marshes, or in mountain valleys. They enjoy *makkōlli*, *ssirūm* matches, chatting, and songs, but dread the color red. Legends tend to show that they are not the brightest of beings, but can sometimes be tricked into giving riches to humans. While their outward appearance is said to be fearful, their foolishness often makes them objects of affection in narratives.

The fear of being bewitched or possessed by a ghost was quite strong and even inanimate objects that were very old—such as a wooden pestle—were thought capable of becoming possessed by a harmful spirit. Houses provided places for not only people to live, but also spaces for a legion of spirits to lurk. Virtually every part of the house is inhabited either by guardian spirits or a potential harbor for dangerous spirits. There are deities of the kitchen, soy sauce crock stand, main beam, the eaves, and even the privy. All of these are beneficial to humans as long as they are properly honored.

For example, the well-being of the kitchen, and thus the family, was regulated in the folk beliefs of premodern Korea by the kitchen god (*chowang kaksi*). That the kitchen was a woman's space can be further seen in that the deity of the kitchen was female. Keeping this deity satiated was an important task that the womenfolk of a household would attend to daily by simply offering a bowl of clear water and placing it on the kitchen hearth while praying a simple prayer. As the deity was believed to govern the fortune of the family, making such an offering was an event that was not neglected nor taken lightly, and generally the charge of the eldest woman in a household. The bond between food, in this case the place of preparation, and the fate of the family is seen vividly in the practices surrounding this deity.

We can also find more elaborate rituals to deities in other parts of the house that were thought to influence the well being of the family. One such spirit is the *ch'ūksin* (廁神, 변소신, 변소각씨)—the god of the privy—who is said to be temperamental and oftentimes wild, thus causing people to greatly fear her. As a result when repairing the privy one should do so with great care, and moreover, one should never use the wood from the privy for firewood in order not to anger this spirit. There is even a short shaman song that petitions this deity for her help,

Ch'ilmok kaksi,<sup>29</sup> in the outhouse,  
Let your fifty-*cha*<sup>30</sup> hair dangle down, and frolic as you please on the toilet  
boards.  
Please grant that the bowels and stomachs of our descendents are free  
from,  
Diarrhea, bloody stools and stomach pains.<sup>31</sup>

The fear of injurious spirits is not only something that can hurt people, but a fear that extended to the preparation of food and other activities. Many families even went so far as to offer small

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<sup>29</sup> Ch'ilmok kaksi is one of the female deities of the outhouse.

<sup>30</sup> A *cha* is a traditional unit of measure and is equal to .303 meters.

<sup>31</sup> Akiba Takashi and Akamatsu Chijō, *Chōsen fuzoku no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Osaka Yagō Shoten, 1937), 2.245.

rituals to the household gods when making soy sauce (*kanjang*) as a means to appease the gods and ensure a successful batch. Other customs such as hanging gold-colored thread, traditional socks, or red peppers—all thought to repel malevolent spirits—around the earthenware pots of *kanjang* were done to keep malicious spirits at bay. As these condiments were essential to the taste of a family's foods, so various customs were followed to protect the various condiments. Sometimes, a rope tied with charcoal and red chili peppers was wrapped around each jar; this was believed to keep impurities and malevolent forces away from the all important *jang*. Another custom was to cut a piece of white paper in the shape of a traditional sock and hang this upside down from the lid of the jar. As both men and women wore socks, such a symbol functioned as a barrier against the 'traces' brought back on one's socks from a place with bad or impure influences, such as a family in mourning or the home of a sick person. Such traces brought back to one's home would have a negative effect on his or her family. Hence, the upside down shape of a sock—a sock could not be worn as such—reminded those returning from outside to be careful of what they might be bringing near this important place.

We also can note customs designed to purge villages of various spirits performed in conjunction with other seasonal holidays. For example on the first full moon of the lunar New Year (Taeborum) in farming communities we can note the performance of Chisin palgi [지신밟기, Treading down the earth gods], a type of masked-dance played out with farmer's percussion music. The troupe travels from house to house throughout a community and urges beneficial spirits to protect homes while driving away injurious entities with their loud music and songs. By treading throughout the village it is thought that bad fortune will be likewise suppressed and only good fortune will visit the homes therein.

### **Keeping the Cosmos and People in Balance**

The shamanic worldview strives to maintain a balance, a balance between gods and humans, between harmful and beneficial spirits, and also between the individual and the community. Folk customs based on this worldview follow the same pattern, and strive to keep the cosmos in relative balance. Shamans are the primary keepers of the balance: they maintain harmony by satiating or driving away angry or harmful ghosts, encourage potentially beneficial spirits to give blessings, and help humans to understand how to best coexist with the supernatural. While some of their efforts to rid the human world of dangerous spirits seem almost superhuman, at other times their simple songs ask for the most basic of wants such as the following short song wishing a new mother well,

Birth goddess Chiyang  
ensure that the mother of the baby  
eats her soup properly,  
eats her rice properly,  
and that if she takes medicine,  
the medicine will have effect,  
so that the weariness of her body disappears

melts away like ice,  
melts away like snow.<sup>32</sup>

The harmony that shamans seek to achieve is mirrored in Korean folk culture as well. The balance between the wishes of the individual and the community are a continual meeting point for Korean folk customs. One only needs a cursory glance at the customs of past times to see the emphasis on fostering harmony in the community. The major customs of the Lunar New Year, for example, are heavily aimed at sharing and reciprocity. *Ogok pap* (five grain rice) or *yak pap* (medicinal rice) was painstakingly prepared and then shared with neighbors. Likewise, the copious confections prepared for a baby's one-hundred day celebration were in theory to be shared with one hundred houses as a means of spreading the good fortune of this auspicious event to the community. We also see the same reciprocity and harmony in other aspects of premodern Korean culture such as the communal labor pools (두레, 품앗이) and even the making of *kimch'i* in the fall (김장). The one was always a part of the larger whole.

Shamanic ceremonies are a microcosm of this attempt at harmony. While the clamor of the drums and gongs beginning a shamanic rite might be a call for harmful spirits to take leave, it is also a call for members of the community to come forth and take in the spectacle. Notwithstanding the reason for a *kut*, the community is an essential part of the process. The healing of an individual is related to the entire community, and thus the community takes part in such events.

The plethora of ghosts, spirits, and hobgoblins in Korean culture reflects the interrelatedness of the human world with that of the spirits. A world without these supernatural entities is not imaginable in Korean culture as their influences both explain hardships in human life and also auspicious events. The blending of spirits and humans is how the cosmos operate and for fortune and success one necessarily should pay homage to the other residents of this world.

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<sup>32</sup> Boudewijn Walraven, "Shamans, the Family and Women," in *Religions of Korea in Practice*, ed. Robert E. Buswell Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 309-310.