

Male and Female in Korean Folk Belief

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INTRODUCTION

This paper is concerned with the relationships between women and Korean shamanism in traditional society. It is well known that most shamans in Korea have been female, and even today shamanism still appeals primarily to women. One reason for this was that females were less educated than males, and therefore had fewer chances to come into contact with other higher religions, especially Confucianism, Buddhism, Christianity. Those tendencies remain today. I do not believe, however, that this theory fully explains female centered shamanism, because that shamanism also reflects Korean social structure. Shamanism has been so influenced by Buddhism and Confucianism that we are apt to confuse them. This influence is not oneway, however, but is reciprocal.

I believe that shamanism functions with other religions to make an interdependent and harmonious whole in Korean society (Ch'oe 1984: 336). The following will show how females relate to the three major forces in Korean culture: a patrilineal society, Confucianism, and shamanism.

Women can only be understood in the context of patrilineality, a phenomenon which has been elaborately developed in Korean society. In this system men are not required to change either their home village or their natal family, but obviously a woman must leave her home village and natal family in a patrilocal marriage. Women's membership in their patrilineal group, or natal family, cannot change, because they are born as members of a patrilineal natal family. Even after a woman has been married to her husband's house in the patrilocal principle,

she still cannot fully change her patrilineal membership during her lifetime. After death she will become a full member of her husband's lineage. Her status during life is as a marginal person with a certain sense of instability, a wanderer without a home, or a "married-out stranger" (*chulga waein* 出嫁外人) (Kendall 1979: 160). She can gain stable status only as an ancestor in her husband's line. So we can say accordingly that death is a married woman's entry to the ancestor world of her husband's patrilineage, and an exit from her natal patrilineage. Folk sayings declare that at death a woman can become an ancestress of her husband's house.

CONFUCIANISM AND WOMEN

In the Confucian ritual of ancestor worship *chesa* (祭祀), women are not allowed to perform in the ritual service for the ancestor or ancestress. They do, however, participate in preparing for and holding the offerings in sacrifices to the ancestors. Exceptions to this are widows who can participate by offering a wine cup to the ancestors if there are no men available, and in some areas the first son's wife who performs after her husband's wine cup offering. These are exceptions, though, because not all women have such rights. Even this right stems from her husband's status in the kinship relationship. Women's roles in Confucian rituals, are marginal and indirect, comprising mainly of preparations, with occasional exceptional offerings resulting from their husbands' status.

On the other hand, men are required by Confucianism to continue ancestor worship rituals from generation to generation. Succession in ancestor worship is by the male lineage (Lee 1977: 5). If there are only daughters in a family they cannot continue the ancestor worship of their natal family. In such case ancestor worship can be continued only by an adopted male, taken from near kinsmen following the prescribed kinship ranking of seniority and generation.

Those who die with no offspring and thus are not served become malevolent deities, or "muju kohon" 無主孤魂 regardless of sex—both husband and wife can have this fate. On the other hand, those who have worshippers will become benevolent gods for their offsprings. There is no difference or discrimination by sex in gaining status as an ancestor in the afterworld.

In traditional Confucian society, a childless woman is discriminated against by members of her family. Even if the reason for being childless is unknown, or if the husband is at fault in a biological sense, the wife only is looked upon as defective. Here we become aware of the contrast between the discrimination by sex in society and the non-discrimination

by sex in the afterworld which is found in Confucianism.

If a couple adopt a child because of the infertility of either husband, wife or both, the wife is considered a bad wife in the social context, but adopted children do serve both parents as their ancestors.

We can say that there is no sexual discrimination in the afterworld, but this fact is itself a product of the patrilineal society, and a dead woman must exclusively be served by her husband's patrilineage. This means that for women death is a rite of passage, by which they are transformed from their unstable membership in a patrilineage to a stable status as an ancestor god.

Women are buried in a separate tomb in an individual mound. The dead woman is served as one of a couple with her dead husband on her annual sacrificial day and at other sacrificial rites, and worship is shared with her husband (Janelli and Janelli 1982: 117).

In addition, as generations progress, women show an ever-greater tendency to lose their female personality altogether. In other words, the longer a woman is dead, the more she loses her female personality, and eventually she becomes an abstract neutral, or is considered to be a male god. For example, from the end of the mourning period through the fourth generation the senior child performs the ritual sacrifice (*kichesa* 忌祭祀) at his home. From the fifth generation and thereafter this ritual is performed seasonally at the tomb by other ranking members of the lineage (*munchung* 門中). Only the spirit of higher officials well known in their lifetimes can remain permanently to be worshiped in the house on the family level as "non-moveable" (不遷位).

The ritual for an ancestor can be extended to a larger descent group, or lineage. With increasing generations female ancestors become weaker by losing their personalities. There are two underlying principles in this Confucian ritual: one is equal coexistence, with no discrimination based on sex, and the second is that the female personality will in increasing generations become weaker and weaker until the woman has become a unified male ancestor or an abstract god with her husband.

SHAMANISM AND WOMEN

Shamanism stands in contrast with Confucianism. As was previously stated, the female is closely involved in shamanism. Female shamans numerically overwhelm male shamans, particularly in the case of shamans initiated by ecstasy. These are more indigenous to the northern areas than priestly shamans. There are many types of shamans differentiated by sex in this area. In middle and northern parts of Korea, a female is called "mudang" and a male "paksu mudang" or "paksu."

There are also differences between females and males regarding

their function in shamanism. There is a tendency, however, for male shamans to put on women's dress in the ritual and to use language consisting of everyday feminine expressions. This tendency underlines the fact that the majority of shamans are female.

In terms of both ritual and numbers, shamanism will continue to decline, primarily because of its female centeredness.

In the southern part of Korea we find a priestly shaman, a post not initiated by the gods but rather transmitted by inheritance from generation to generation. These shamans are restricted to endogamous marriages with in their professional priestly group. They usually make an action group from within their families or from close relations to serve in the rituals requested by village families. Husband and wife are also a good unit for performing these rituals. In these cases the husband acts as the wife's assistant. The role of husband is that of manager of the shamanistic ritual and profession. The income of the wife, who is the actual performer in the ritual, is ten times that of her husband, who assists. But the husband's role is important to his wife's work because he promotes rituals by creating opportunities to perform them, and arranges for action groups to join in the rituals. The couple has to cooperate with each other.

Here at least the female has the right to do her work, though she is discriminated against by her husband or other males. Only in principal is each male and female in this priestly, inherited shamanistic world equal in stature. Here we can find a conflict. Becoming a priestly shaman by inheritance rather than by initiation has no connection to sex, but even still the shamans' roles are differentiated by sex, with the husband performing as manager and the wife as the dancing, singing partner in the ritual.

Another important factor to keep in mind is that there are numerically more female believers than male in shamanism when compared to other contemporary religions. As mentioned above, in Confucianism there are only occasional opportunities for women to serve by making offerings of their wine cups. In shamanism, however, neither the sex nor the age of clients is considered important. Further, there are no taboos on the male. He is free to dance and sing on the floor in front of the sacrificial shelf or in the shrine. Some men keep face by avoiding participation in the ritual, pretending they are more intelligent and believe in Confucianism or other higher religions. A general lack of male participants has developed, but as a result of history and not because of shamanism itself.

Akiba Takashi maintained that Korean society is dualistic, with females adhering to shamanism and males adhering to Confucianism

(Akamatus and Akiba 1938: 193). Certainly he was correct in saying that there is a certain tendency toward sexual division, but this is not enough evidence from which to propound a fundamental principle. Theoretically there are no limitations or taboos on men. Most villagers gather, participate, enjoy, and pray together in the seasonal ritual (*pyolsin* 別神 *kut*) regardless of their sex or age. Sometimes these rituals are sponsored by male professional groups. On the other hand, Confucian village rituals are closed and limited to a few villagers and outsiders. Their ritual offering is made silently and calmly. Those rituals appear to have two levels, esoteric and exoteric.

In shamanism men can worship any spirit freely, without the conditions that exist in Confucianism. Remember that in Confucianism ancestor worship is conditioned by restrictions on participants and time. All spirits of the childless dead as well as dead children can be worshiped in shamanism, which is called a "ritual for dead" (死者儀禮), while in Confucianism this is called "ancestor worship" (祖上崇拜). Malevolent spirits such as female, children and the childless dead, who cannot be worshiped as ancestor, in Confucianism, are worshiped in shamanism and have close relationships with shamanism.

But this does not mean those malevolent spirits are worshiped only in shamanism. The main reason for worship of malevolent spirits is that they harbor regrets and ill will toward the social system and the sexual discrimination of this world. When a person dies with regret or resentment his or her spirit becomes harmful to the living, and not always only to members of his or her immediate family. Thus males and unrelated villagers must worship these malevolent spirits as guardian deities out of fear of harm or death.

Dead unmarried females are thought to be generally the most horrible of spirits. We can find thus shrines which worship goddesses in many villages. According to one folk tradition, a beautiful unmarried virgin once died at sea, and one of the shrines in Milyang, Kyungsang Bukdo, is thus for Miss Arang, a very pretty girl who was worshiped after her death by the villagers. This worship satisfied and calmed the regrets of her spirit and she thus settled down in the shrine.

In general, the term *han* 恨 means regret and resentment of injustice related to social contradictions, and *won* 怨 means resentment and vengeance mainly in individual relationships. Females generally have strong feelings of both in a patrilineal society. Women have a great deal of *han* in particular, and this is considered the major cause of unhappiness among the living. Shamanism attempts to satisfy and solve such malevolent spirits. In this respect it functions as a religion in favor of women.

Women often use this system as an indirect way of revenge. If a woman is unable to avenge herself against some man or woman on earth, she will hope her spirit can take revenge through malevolent acts. The dead are more active than the living in shamanism. We can compare this with a similar social structure in Japan. In Japan, both men and women must take revenge during their lifetimes. A Japanese wife is not so marginal in society, and after marriage changes her surname to that of her husband, taking a place equal to the daughter's position in a Korean family.

The Barigongju 捨姬公主 myth, narrated in the shamanistic ritual for the dead, symbolically reflects the role of women in shamanism. An abandoned girl is raised by the mountain god. Later—whether while still living or after dying is unclear—she went to the spirit world, married, and gave birth to three or seven sons, the stories varying as to the exact number. In this story an unstable female finally becomes stable by marriage and giving birth to sons. Being abandoned because she was a woman creates a feeling of *han*.

The story of Shimchung 沈清 tells about a daughter's piety to her blind father. It teaches two ideas of morality for each woman to emulate. First, even though she didn't receive affection or material help from her father, she unilaterally loved and served regardless of this aid. Secondly, she respected, served and worshiped her natal father, an act counter to the Confucian emphasis on the marriage family lineage.

CONCLUSION

It is common knowledge that Confucianism discriminates against the female, but as this article has stated this discrimination is not total. We see this discriminating influence as real, but primarily in the social context of this world. It seems less powerful in the afterworld. Ultimately even in Confucianism there is equality in ancestor worship between men and women. This is also a common trait in the shamanistic afterworld.

Shamanism must accommodate malevolent spirits, especially those of unmarried females. There is no discrimination based on sex, age or inheritance in shamanism. Most Korean women, especially in the rural areas and lower classes, believe in shamanism because of this equality. I certainly agree that this reason is one of the most important factors. Also, I can say further that the recently explosive popularity of Christianity can be partially attributed to its degree of equality between the sexes. I suggest one of the best ways to understand many religious movements or social phenomena in Korea is by understanding Shamanism.

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