

YOUNGSOOK KIM HARVEY. *Six Korean Women, The Socialization of Shamans*. St. Paul, New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco: West Publishing Company, 1979. Hardbound, 326 pp. Glossary, index, bibliography. US \$10.95. ISBN 0-8299-0243-0

The phenomenon of shamanism has been studied by historians of religion (Eliade) and by psychologists, psychiatrists and anthropologists (Bourguignon, Boyer, Deveureux, Hitchcock, Kiev, Lebra, Lee J. Y., Lewis, Opler, etc.). Most of them worked either with second-hand material or they concentrated mainly on shamanistic performances and not so much on the personal development of shamans. What makes Youngsook's book so unique is that she furnishes us with first-hand material on specific Korean shamans who are still alive and that she describes in detail the various components which prompted these individuals to accept the role of a shaman.

When Youngsook became interested in the role of professional women in Korean society, she started to collect the life histories of six Korean women who turned to shamanism. Soon she discovered the high diversity among shamanesses in Korea. (The reviewer can attest to diversities of similar dimensions in the cultures where she conducted fieldwork—Thai, Malay, Overseas Chinese, and Indian.) The six women in Youngsook's book are not only of different age and social background but represent almost the full range of Korean social structure. Although some grew up in nuclear families, all have, at one time or another, lived as members of patrilineal extended families. Two were born and grew up in cities and the other four moved to urban areas at different stages of their lives. Two had immigrant experiences, one in Manchuria and the other in Japan. Their education, furthermore, ranged from being totally illiterate to having gone to college.

Some scholars claim that shamanism has been the indigenous religion of Korea. Shamanism reached its peak during the period of the Three Kingdoms (about 400 A.D.). Even though Buddhism and Confucianism became the official religion of the Koryo Dynasty (918-1392 A.D.) and the Yi Dynasty (1392-1910 A.D.), they failed to displace shamanism. Frowned upon by society for six hundred years, the services of shamans are still sought and thousands of shamans continue to practice in present-day Korea where modernization has not been able to offer alternatives on the socio-psychological and spiritual levels.

With the majority of shamans being women, shamanism apparently has been an important vehicle of women to gain influence in Korean society. Over the centuries, Korean women had to face discrepancies between social expectations and their personal goals and interests as individuals. Transcending the culturally defined limits of being women, after they had become shamans, helpless housewives experienced a reversal in power position but they also found themselves in a double bind. Covertly they were manipulators of supernatural powers, publicly, however, they were not only women but social outcasts. Some of Youngsook's informants attempt to elevate shamanism to the level of a legitimate religion, others send their children to schools and colleges, hoping to launch their children's careers in highly respectable professions and thus protecting them from the stigma of their mother's occupation.

As diverse as these six life histories are, we find the three main criteria of shamans, conforming the traditional pattern, (1) shamans are selected by spirits who want to accumulate merit by being benevolent to the living (they are mostly ancestral spirits from the husband's side who want to draw attention to their plight, i.e., they don't have a body anymore to become active on this earth), (2) the selected individuals

are reluctant to assume the role of a shaman and illness occurs where acceptance is delayed, and (3) becoming a shaman, afflictions on themselves end and visitations of other family members are prevented. The family enjoys prosperity and health ever after.

The life history material is complemented by a discussion on women and family in traditional Korea (Appendix B) and a review of selected literature on shamanism—Western and Korean (Appendix A). Is a shaman a pathological individual or a healed “madman,” normal, even supernormal, providing clients with a new synthesis of world views? Lewis spoke of a conflict-torn personality who should be classified either as seriously neurotic or even psychotic. Wilken viewed the Indonesian shaman as mentally ill. Bogoras called the Chukchee shaman extremely excitable, hysterical and half-crazy. Devereux saw the shaman as a severe neurotic or psychotic who served his society as a “deputy lunatic.” Handelman was the first to point out that shamans have been judged predominantly by their role behavior. And, although Silverman observed no significant differences between acute schizophrenics and shamans in the “sequence of underlying psychological events that define their abnormal experiences,” he and Acknerknecht say that shamanism is not a disease but being healed from disease, admitting the range of variable personality types.

One of the first to hold the view that a shaman is a normal personality is Shirokogoroff. He maintains that the shaman must not only be in good physical and psychological condition, he must control his role performance. A psychopath is unlikely to maintain such a control consistently. Cultures distinguish usually well between an abnormal individual, a lunatic and a shaman who might even act as a priest. We lack reports that shamans deteriorated into serious mental disorder. Boyer, for example, finds in his biographical sketches of thirteen Apache shamans that none was marked early as a psychological deviant, concluding that shamans are innately creative individuals. Youngsook confirms that all her six shamanesses share (1) a high level of intelligence, (2) an above average capacity for creative improvisation, (3) an above average verbal fluency and persuasiveness, (4) a strong goal orientation, being self-reliant and self-directed, (5) a keen sensitivity to intuitive cures of others, (6) calculating and manipulative interpersonal skills, (7) a sharp sense of justice in terms of their own standards, (8) an above average repertory of aptitudinal and/or achieved dramatic and artistic attributes. All but one were attractive in appearance. She concludes that the innovative creative potentials of shamans deserve further study.

These extensive life histories of six Korean shamanesses are a welcome contribution to the study of shamanism in general and Korean society in particular. The data furnish a solid basis for classroom discussions in the fields of anthropology, sociology, psychology and psychiatry. Youngsook strikes a skillful balance between individual variations and elements these women have in common. The book may also be read on its own merits by the general reader.

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