

ESCHATOLOGY AND FOLK RELIGIONS IN KOREAN SOCIETY

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Introduction

Eschatology is best represented in practices of various folk ‘religions’ as well as mortuary rituals in Korean society. This paper analyses three of the most important Korean folk ‘religions’, namely shamanism, ancestor worship and geomancy, in relation to the Koreans’ tripartite view of the human soul.

The concept that a human being possesses three souls is prevalent in traditional northeast Asian societies.¹ In some of these societies it is believed that after a person’s death, his/her soul diverges into three; one soul goes to the other world, a second floats in the air near the home of the dead person, and the third stays in the grave.

This paper will examine whether modern Koreans also share the tripartite view of the human soul after death. Earlier students of Korean religions, such as Gifford (1892) and Clark (1932/1961), seem to confirm that a similar view existed in Korea. For example, Clark (ibid:113) states categorically that “Koreans believe that everyone has three souls.” More recently, however, the concept of three souls seems to be less universally known and believed in. Janelli and Janelli (1982:59), for instance, appear to doubt the existence of such a belief in contemporary Korean society. According to them, it lacked both “conviction and consensus” in a small Korean village where they conducted fieldwork. Their view is also reflected, albeit obliquely, in other books and recent articles dealing with Koreans’ views of death and of what happens to a human soul after death (O Hyönggŭn 1978; Kim T’aegon 1981; Chang Ch’ölsu 1995; Choi Joon-sik 1996; Lee Hyun Song 1996). My own field research would also indicate that many modern Koreans are not even aware of the concept of three human souls.²

I was therefore interested to come across an overt display of ‘three human souls’ in a *kut* (Korean shamanistic ritual) held for a man in his prime who died of a heart attack in his sleep. The *kut* was officiated by a group of *mudang* (Korean shaman) in Kangwŏn-do (Kangwon province), headed by a veteran called Kwŏn Mallye, a

long-term acquaintance and informant of mine. An analysis of this kut will be the starting point for interpreting the meaning of three souls among contemporary Korean people. First I will examine the eschatology reflected in *musok* (Korean shamanism), based on comparisons with mortuary kut from various regions. Next a comparison will be made between kut and mainstream mortuary rituals. Finally, I will discuss how the concept could be linked to other seemingly unrelated folk practices, such as ancestor worship and geomancy. I will conclude by addressing the question of why the concept of three human souls does not appear to be so prevalent in contemporary Korean society.

A Kangwŏn province kut for the victim of a sudden death

Mudang from Kangwŏn province claim that their kut are the most 'orthodox' of all. Although such boastful remarks are common among all Korean shamans, kut from this province seem to retain many traditional features that have largely disappeared in rituals of other regions. A kut performed for the dead (*chinogi kut* or *ogu kut*),³ particularly one held for the recently dead, called *chin chinogi kut*, contains paraphernalia and procedures which clearly reflect Koreans' popular views of death, dead souls and the afterlife.

I attended a classic kut of that kind on Thursday, 23 April 1998, held in Samgoksa, a commercial ritual hall (*kuttang*) situated on top of a mountain in Seoul. It was sponsored by the family of a 48-year-old man who had been found dead on early Sunday morning (12 April). He had been perfectly fit and well until the night before, when he had enjoyed cheerful conversations over beer with his son who had been on a weekend home visit. His son was in the army, doing his national service. Unlike most other kut, which are attended by mainly female members of the family, most of the close cognatic relatives of the dead man were present.⁴ Playing the central roles in the kut were the 72-year-old father, 21-year-old son and 44-year-old wife of the deceased, in that order in terms of hierarchy. His mother had passed away some years ago. Other participants were his wife's mother⁵, his wife's elder brother's wife, his wife's sister, his wife's younger brother, his elder brother's wife, his younger sister and her young son, and his father's sister. The kut was performed by the chief officiating mudang, Kwŏn Mallye (b.1950), together with other mudang called Ham Okcha (b.1934), Min Sungŭm (b.1946), Kim Ch'unja (b.1956) and Pak Okcha (b.1946).

The order of the kut was similar to that of other cognate kut from various areas.⁶ It consisted basically of: first, purification of evil spirits and unclean elements (*pujŏng*) and the invitation of all the spirits to the kut; second, entertainment and direct interaction with the Village Guardian Spirit (Sŏnang), the Mountain Spirit (Sanshin), the Seven Stars Spirit (Ch'ilsŏng), the ancestral spirits (*chosang*), the dead man's spirit, the Death Messenger (Saja), Taegam (The Official Spirit) and the General

Spirit, and finally the dead man's spirit again; and third, sending off the spirits and the final tearful farewells between the dead person and his family, and final feeding of the sundry ghosts.

The kut conformed to the usual pattern, but with a few extra parts. After the purification and invitation, the sponsors lit candles and joss sticks, offered wine to the spirits and reverently kowtowed to them several times. A brief discussion about the order of parts took place among the mudang at this point. The mudang then prepared the symbol of the dead man, which was the most interesting part of the kut for the current discussion. A small rectangular straw mat,⁷ measuring about 1.8 by 2.5 metres, was used to make the symbolic representation of the dead man. A new set of traditional Korean clothes was placed on it, on top of which Kwŏn put three white paper cut-out men, with the name and the date of birth of the deceased written on each one of them. The father and the wife of the dead man (his son arrived later) in turn poured spoonfuls of raw rice over each paper man, chanting 'thousand, ten thousand, a million sacks of rice'. Similarly, rice grains (or more rarely pearls) are put into the mouth of a corpse in Cheju island and other areas. I would interpret it as a gesture to give the dead man a means of spreading largesse on his difficult path to the other world, and obliquely to wish that he might bring great wealth to his surviving family in reciprocation. For the same reason, several 10,000-won notes were also deposited on top, after which the mat was rolled and tightly bound with three white pieces of cloth. Three pieces of white paper folded in triangular fashion were inserted through the binding cloths. Everything was done in threes, or in the triangular form, which confirms the importance of the number three in Korean shamanism.⁸ The colour used throughout in connection with the dead was pure white, which symbolises 'west', or heaven.⁹ The prepared mat looked as though it had a corpse inside it and was used throughout the kut to represent the dead man.

Then the spirits arrived in the order of the Village Guardian Spirit, the Mountain Spirit, the Seven Stars Spirit and the ancestral spirits. The ancestral spirits who appeared through Min were those of the dead man's great-grandfather, his grandmother, his grandfather and his mother. The scenes enacted between the living and the dead were reminiscent of psychoanalytic sessions. For example, his grandmother's spirit repeatedly attributed his untimely death to the family's regular eating of dog meat. His mother's spirit was severely rebuked by his still distraught father for "having so heartlessly taken her own son away". She defended herself against her husband's wrongful accusations, and they finally forgave and blessed each other. After venting all their grievances, grief, resentment, unfulfilled desires and such sentiments, everybody was reconciled with one another, and the spirits invariably ended up giving their promises of help to the sponsors.

After the ancestral spirits, the dead man possessed Min, who fainted on the ground in the front yard and was carried indoors by fellow mudang. When in the room, Kwŏn

castigated the spirit (the possessed mudang): “You unfilial person, how could you go so far away before your own parent?” The first thing he did, however, was to turn to his wife and ask for his wallet and passport. His wife replied, “Didn’t we send them all off to you by burning them?” He then knelt in front of his father, with his head touching the ground and sobbing uncontrollably. His father asked Kwŏn who it was, and the mudang explained that he was lost for words, because he had passed away so suddenly and unexpectedly. When the old man realised who it was, he burst into a rage, and shouted at him, “You bad wicked creature! The most unfilial wretch! How could you, how could you die before your own father!” The old man continued to call him all sorts of names, with tears streaming down his cheeks. The most ironic profanity that he threw at his son’s spirit was “*i chugil nom*”, which literally means something like “you rascal, you shall be killed!” This particular phrase, which is equivalent to “damn you!”, is employed by a person only on the greatest provocation. Its use in this context bears witness to the importance that Koreans put on life. The dead spirit could scarcely face his father and finally left the possessed mudang, who indicated the spirit’s departure by jumping up and down with the rolled mat (‘the body’) held high over her head. The wife then took the ‘body’, stood at the altar holding it for a few minutes, and placed it there.

Then Ham, the old mudang, recited a few passages from the Buddhist Scriptures, beating the wooden gong. Another mudang rotated a glass of wine and a pair of small knives (*shink’al*) round everybody in the room. The two mudang walked around the widow, beating the gongs loudly and waving lighted joss sticks all around her. The Buddhist Scriptures are believed to have the power to keep the evil spirits at bay, and wielding knives and making loud noises to frighten and chase away the evil spirits which have gathered around the widow.

Death is believed to be not only ‘pollution’ in itself, but also highly contagious, hence anybody who comes into contact with it is touched by its potently dangerous forces. The most vulnerable are the closest relatives of the deceased, particularly his or her spouse, who is believed through their horoscope to be responsible for the death, which occurred because a person is destined to be a widow or widower. The deceased spirit descended on the mudang several times, and talked to the other members of his family, sharing greetings, tears and food. There followed the mudang’s prayers for the wellbeing of the deceased spirit and the family. Ham chanted the prayers, which comprised passages from the Buddhist Scriptures and her own impromptu prayers.

Then the reciting of the ballad of Pari Kongju or Peridegi (the Abandoned Princess) took place. Min recited this story of the unwanted seventh princess of the King, who later owes his life to her. The princess, the epitome of unconditional, absolute filial piety, is an ideal guide of the dead on their difficult journey to the other world.¹⁰ Towards the end of the long recitation of the epic, the dead man’s son arrived and took his seat where his grandfather had sat before. A tender scene between the

'father' and son took place, the former giving various words of advice to the latter. The most emphatic advice was not to eat 'dirty things', i.e. dog meat. He said that his death was caused by his family eating it so often.

Now that the encounter between the dead man and his all-important son and heir had taken place, the former was ready to go on the long journey to the other world. Kwōn performed the distribution of the 'three souls' of the deceased. With the father, son and wife of the dead man seated on the floor around the 'dead man' mat, Kwōn unrolled it. A paper sailboat decorated with colourful paper cut-outs was brought in, and she put a large candle, a bowl of water, three triangular folded pieces of paper and some paper flowers into it. She lit some joss sticks and proceeded to transfer the money from inside the mat into the boat, using a pair of chopsticks and chanting "Chijang Posal", an invocation to Kshitigarbha, the 'Matrix of the Earth' and Guardian Bodhisattva of the Dead. She then picked up the three paper men with chopsticks, one at a time, dropping one each on to the knee of the father, the son and the wife of the deceased, in that order. After that she again picked up the paper cut-out men with chopsticks and burned them on the candle flame, one at a time. The ashes were placed in the bowl of water, and the family were told to water a flowering bush with it later.

This section of the ritual eloquently reflects Koreans' views of the dead soul and its journey into the next world. A boat of the dead suggests that the other world is far away from this world, separated by a huge watery obstacle such as a river or sea. Its path is pitch dark, hence a large candle to light it. A bowl of fresh drinking water is essential to keep the journeying soul alive. Paper money and flowers are needed to bribe the Death Messenger and many dangerous savage creatures that the dead soul will meet on the way.

More importantly, here we see clear manifestations of the three souls, represented by three white paper cut-out men. The three paper men can be interpreted as symbolising three human souls, signifying heaven, man and earth respectively. One is given to the father, who is often analogised to heaven, according to Korean folk beliefs. It could be interpreted as suggesting that one soul goes to the other world, which is often vaguely represented by heaven. The second is given to the son, the human heir who will carry on with ancestral offerings to the dead man. The second soul then could be interpreted as going into the ancestral tablet. The mudang gives the third to the wife, who personifies earth as in 'earth mother'.¹¹ Interestingly enough, my interpretations coincide in principle with Clark's view (1932/1961:113).

At long last, the time had come for the dead man to leave this world, but his spirit did not want to embark on his long, difficult journey to the other world. He bid a final farewell to his relatives, one by one, lamenting pitifully: "The path in front of me is so very lonely, and so sad. Do I have to go alone? I feel so sad I can't go. They say if I cry, the road to the other world is even darker, so I won't cry." The extreme reluctance

of the spirit to leave this world made this part very long. The spirit made all sorts of excuses to linger on. He even offered to sing for his father for the last time, and sang a song. His sister was startled to hear the song, which she claimed was the only one that her dead brother could sing reasonably well while alive. Apparently the mudang possessed by his spirit had not been told about it. This incident is an example of the mysterious coincidences that often occur in Korean shamanism.

Kwŏn performed various 'purifying' acts, such as tearing five differently coloured pieces of cloth and hemp to purify all sorts of evil spirits and forces. She also wielded a pair of small knives, symbolically 'killing' all the evil spirits around those present. Finally, the Death Messenger arrived to take the dead spirit away to the other world. Kwŏn personified the Death Messenger, wearing a hemp cloth headband and carrying a dried fish and three pairs of straw shoes. Dried fish apparently symbolise the dead; three pairs of straw shoes¹² imply the long journey that has to be faced ahead. The clothes bought for the dead man were taken outside in the yard and burned. It is believed that clothes and other possessions of a dead person are sent to him or her through burning them.

There followed a more cheerful part featuring fun-and-money-loving Taegam (The Official Spirit), who is the caricature of the Chosŏn-dynasty corrupt official, prone to taking bribes. This section eased the tension of the previous more serious parts, helping the sobbing relatives to dry their tears by briefly taking their minds off their tragedy.

Kim was then possessed by a series of General Spirits, which on this occasion included the spirit of Admiral Yi Sunshin.¹³ Under this possession, she smoked three cigarettes simultaneously. What is inexplicable is that in the ordinary state of consciousness, she cannot normally even bear cigarette smoke.

A prediction of the next reincarnation then took place. Three bowls, each piled high with raw rice, were brought in, and Kwŏn declared that the deceased would be reincarnated into a bird, after examining the patterns made on the rice.

Finally, having dispersed all the grudges and grievances of the deceased through open dialogues and gifts, the participants were ready to send the dead spirit away. Amid loud lamentations of the dead spirit (possessing Kwŏn) and the surviving family, Kwŏn tore through a long piece of hemp cloth, which symbolises the dead man's journey to the other world. The cloth represents the bridge over the great river which is believed to separate this world and the next.

The mortuary kut from Kangwŏn province, described above, contains elements which clearly suggest the existence of the concept of three human souls after death. But before going on to discuss how a similar concept is reflected in the other two folk 'religions', it is necessary to present a comparative study of regional variations, lest I get accused of basing my argument on an isolated case study.

Korean eschatology reflected in mortuary kut: regional comparisons

Today, mortuary kut constitute the most important part of shamanistic rituals in Korean society, as Hwang (1985:76) observed. With the advancement of modern medical technology, healing, which used to be the *raison d'être* of kut, is no longer the main reason for performing such a ceremony. Since inexplicable illnesses are often attributed to the recently dead or the victims of past disasters, mortuary kut often take the place of the classic healing kut. Death generates so much grief in the bereaved that when they face with it, particularly when it occurs unexpectedly, as well as performing the usual elaborate mortuary rituals, they sometimes turn to kut to seek consolation or explanation.

At a financially insecure time such as the one following the sudden collapse of the Korean economy in late 1997 (popularly dubbed 'the IMF Age'), the most frequently performed kut seem to be the mortuary rituals. During my stay at the Academy of Korean Studies between September 1997 and August 1998, these were the kut that I was most frequently invited to attend. What is interesting is the fact that during my previous research trip (from September 1993 to April 1994), mortuary kut accounted for less than 20 per cent of the kut I was invited to attend,¹⁴ although it was the most consistently performed ceremony with the least seasonal fluctuations (Hogarth 1998:62). Whilst rituals praying for good luck or community kut were noticeably less frequently held, in the event of a loved one's death, particularly an unexpected one, people did not seem to begrudge the huge expense involved. The importance of mortuary kut is well represented in the series of books published by Yöhlwadang (1983–93).¹⁵ Of 20 books describing various regional kut, eight, or 40 per cent, deal with mortuary kut.

It is considered fairly axiomatic that there are two types of mudang, namely an inspirational type called *kangshinmu* and a hereditary type called *sesümmu*. The main difference between the two is the issue of spirit possession and spirit descent; the former experience this, while it is absent in the latter. However, since the basic principles underpinning the ritual practices of both types do not differ greatly, I have maintained that there is no need to differentiate the two, or ignore one type in favour of the other, in discussing the basic ideology of Korean shamanistic rituals.¹⁶ I shall therefore put emphasis on the underpinning principles, rather than on any specific behaviour *per se* of the mudang in kut.

Although I have attended and recorded various kut from different regions, for the sake of objectivity, in this section I shall analyse the material contained in the eight books dealing with mortuary kut in the *Han'guk-üi kut*—Korean Kut—series published by Yöhlwadang. Four books (vol.5, *P'yöngan-do tari kut*; vol.8, *Hamgyöng-do mangmuk kut*; vol.17, *Hwanghae-do chinogi kut*; vol.20, *Seoul chinogi kut*) portray kut officiated by kangshinmu, and four (vol.4, *Suyongp'o sumang kut*;

vol.6, *Chöllla-do ssikkim kut*; vol.7, *Chejudo muhon kut*; and vol.14, *T'ongyŏng ogwisaenam kut*) deal with those performed by sesŏmmu. (Throughout the rest of this section, references in the text are to the relevant volume and page number in the Korean Kut series.)

All kut start with the purification of evil spirits and unclean elements, but it is considered particularly important in mortuary kut, because of the implication of pollution and danger connected with death. Mudang enact various ritual gestures of purification on and around the bereaved several times throughout the ritual. Malignant spirits are generally anthropomorphised, hence the substances that cleanse, disinfect, repel or kill humans, such as water, fire (in the form of ashes), salt, ground red pepper, arrows (see 14:52) and sharp knives, are employed to chase away or kill them (see 4:18–19; 5:35, 79; 6:33–5; 7:19; 8:42–3; 17:50–51, 56–7; 20:30–31). Loud noises and joss sticks are also believed to be effective in chasing away unclean spirits and purifying the ritual space. In the case of kut performed in Hwanghae province, officiating mudang stuff their mouths with *hami/hamae* (a piece of white paper folded into a triangle), to prevent pujŏng ('impurities') escaping or entering through the mouth (see 17:79).

The soul container, that is, the symbolic dead person, takes various forms in mortuary kut. The modern trend is to simplify it as a large paper cut-out ball resembling a brain, or a series of paper cut-out men (often three in number). The paper cut-out soul sometimes resembles a Confucian-style ancestral tablet (see 5:78). Paper cut-outs are sometimes tied on to a pole and placed on top of raw rice in a rice container for the spirit descent. A close relative holds down the pole, and it is believed that when the dead person's spirit descends on it, the pole shakes (see 7:29, 34–5, 106, 108; 8:44–5, 86). As we saw in the Kangwŏn-do kut earlier, in some areas, a symbolic dead body is made with a straw mat with the dead person's clothes rolled inside it (see 14:38–49). In Chöllla province, instead of a straw mat, straw is used to form a shape of a man (see 6:31–33) and is called *yŏngdon mari* (Hwang 1985b:87); in T'ongyŏng the shape is called *yŏngduk mari* (Chŏng Pyŏnggho 1989:91). A paper soul house, or a basket containing the paper cut-out 'soul', is also used in conjunction with various other representations of the dead person (see 6:35–7, 69; 14:26–30, 54–8).

The shape of the symbolic 'soul', which resembles the brain tissues, suggests that the human soul is believed to dwell in the brain and leaves the body after death. The straw figure or the straw mat, which contains clothes, the 'soul' (or the three souls in the Kangwŏn-do case), money and rice represents the mortal body. The impure 'body', which has suffered a highly 'polluting' death, has to be cleansed before joining the sacred world of the spirits and ancestors. This concept is dramatically enacted as repeatedly washing the symbolic body with water and herbal water in the kut from Chöllla-do and adjoining areas (see 6:33, 64–5; 14:42–5), hence the name *ssikkim kut* (cleansing kut).

The most important part of any mortuary kut is the direct encounter with the pole held firmly by a member of the sponsoring family; this is commonly called *taenaerim*, the spirit descent through the pole (8:44–5, 86; 17:29, 34–5, 107). Sometimes the spirit of the dead person is supposed to descend on a lotus flower (5:54–5). The meeting and venting of the pent-up feelings of all those concerned has a highly healing effect through catharsis, which has a parallel to psychoanalysis. This psychotherapeutic aspect of kut has been dealt with by many scholars, and is beyond the scope of this paper (see Yi Puyŏng 1985).

The most universally found concept is the bridge over the watery boundaries that separate this world from the other. In most mortuary kut, if not all of them, there exists a part enacting this concept. The bridge is usually represented by a length of hemp or cotton cloth, which the mudang cuts through. Sometimes the representation of the dead person, such as a doll or a soul container, is slowly pushed up and down the ‘bridge’, the movement symbolising the dead person’s journey to the other world (see 4:68–71; 5 *passim*; 6:36–7, 68, 101; 8:57–61, 89). Money is put on the ‘bridge’ for the dead person to ‘spread the largesse’ (*injŏngŭl ssŭda*).

Money, which preoccupies most modern Koreans, is thought to be needed for the dead souls to pay their way out of difficulties encountered on the journey to the other world (Im Sŏkchae 1985:86, 88).¹⁷ High-denomination notes, usually 10,000-won notes, are placed everywhere, not only on the ‘bridge’, but also on ritual foods, artificial flowers, paper cut-outs, the five flags representing the five directions, musical instruments, fans, and elsewhere.¹⁸ The ubiquity of these bank notes makes them appear to be essential props in contemporary kut. They are even stuck on mudang’s brows, cheeks and chins, held by their hat strings, when they get possessed by the General Spirit and the Official Spirit (see 20:24–7). The Death Messenger also wears them around its headband and other places (see 20:52–3). The Death Messenger appears in most kut performed by kangshinmu. The dramatic sketch involving the Death Messenger trying to snatch the dead person from his protective family can be said to be a means of reconciling them with the inevitability of the death that has already taken place. Also by means of lavish gifts of money and food, the family hope that the dead soul has a comfortable journey to the other world (see 5:48–50; 17:20–22, 28; 20:52–5).

Mun kut (‘door’ kut) is sometimes performed near the gate of the house, particularly in rituals held for victims of accidents away from home (4:33–5; 8:54, 55, 87; 14:28–32). Its purpose is to allow the person to return home one last time, and also signifies the opening of the door to the other world. According to Im (*ibid*:85–6), this ritual takes place to clear the way to the other world so that he/she could have a comfortable journey. What is interesting is that in mainstream Korean society, the body of a person who has died away from home is not admitted inside the household lest it should bring in highly polluting malignant spirits.¹⁹

The *han*, unfulfilled grievances, resentment and desires, of the dead are often represented as a series of knots made with a length of white cloth, called *ko*. Undoing the knots (called *ko p'uri*) represents dispersing the *han* that is thought to nestle like a large bundle of knots. *Ko p'uri* is conducted for ancestral spirits in all *kut*, but it is considered the most important in mortuary *kut* to dispel the *han* of the recently departed (see 6:27–9, 59–62).

Paranormal acts performed by *mudang* to display the powers of the spirits are essential in a *kut* performed by a *kangshinmu*. They take the forms of running a sharp blade on the tongue (5:35–7; 17:78), standing barefoot on sharp twin blades (17:80–83) or having the lower lip stuck on a large earthen rice steamer (5:39–41), etc. Incidentally, *sesŭmmu* just imitate the *kangshinmu*'s acts, in such gestures as briefly biting the rim of a basin before letting it go (see 4:56). The latter also test the spirits' satisfaction by standing an animal part (or a whole carcass) on a trident (see 5:43; 17:71; 20:29), called *sashil/sasŭl seugi*.²⁰

Reincarnation, which derives from Buddhist *samsara* (the Eternal Wheel of Death and Rebirth, called *yunhoe* in Korean), is another frequently encountered concept. Many mortuary *kut* include a section in which the *mudang* interprets the dead man's reincarnation through examining the patterns made on a pile of raw rice (see 17:47–9; 20:61–2). Most frequently the person is fated to be reincarnated as a bird, a butterfly, a baby or a snake. The snake reincarnation is abhorred, and another *kut* is often recommended to alter the dead person's fate. However, the reincarnation represented in a *kut* is not in any way linked to the dead person's merit in this life, an aspect that reflects the non-judgemental nature of Korean shamanism.

Burning is considered a means of sending tangible objects to the dead. In most mortuary rituals, dead people's clothes and personal belongings are burnt at the end (see 5:72–3; 6:39, 70–71; 8:64–6; 14:72–3; 17:96).

Although a mortuary *kut* is no longer universally performed by modern Koreans, the shamanistic view of death and the afterlife still exerts great influence on general Korean eschatology (Choi 1996:11). Conversely, Korean eschatology can be said to be directly reflected in *musok* by virtue of the latter's long history and significance in the ideology governing the Korean way of life. Since the essence of *musok* is the belief in the existence of the spirits, the mortuary *kut*, which is performed at the point of division between the living and the dead, has always featured strongly.

In sum, first of all, death is universally accepted as final and separating. This world and the other are separated by vast watery boundaries over which there is a bridge of no return that the deceased have to cross. The passage to the other world is sad, dark, lonely, long and difficult, therefore often symbolised by an arch called 'the Thorny Gate'.

Second, death is viewed as pollution. It deprives a community of one of its established members, disturbing its equilibrium. Since life is valued above all else,

the dead do not want to go to the other world, but wish to linger on in this world. Their envy of the living may cause them to wield a noxious influence on their descendants. The closest relatives of the newly dead are believed to be the most vulnerable. To avoid such harm, the newly dead should be safely guided to the other world to join the ancestors. Special arrangements are required for victims of 'bad deaths' who harbour *han* (unresolved grievances and grief, unfulfilled desires, and so on). Bad deaths are all manner of untimely deaths, other than 'good deaths' of aged people who lived and died peacefully, and have left behind legitimate male descendants, thus becoming benevolent ancestral spirits. Victims of 'bad deaths' are believed to cling to this life and exert a harmful influence on the living out of pure jealousy for them. It is therefore considered important to perform a *kut* for them, during which everybody present lends a sympathetic ear to their venting of *han* and coaxes them to leave the living and enter the world of the dead. If there is any hindrance to their becoming ancestral spirits, it should also be removed by arranging a spirit wedding with another dead spirit whose horoscope is compatible.

Third, death is not viewed as the extinction of an existence. Although separated from this world, the dead are believed to 'live on' in their own realm and have close interactions with their living descendants. Their spirits return to this world from time to time to receive *kut* and ancestral offerings. They also let their descendants know of their displeasure or discomfort by inflicting misfortune on the living. Therefore the living must make sure that the dead come to terms with their new state and console them and keep them happy though feeding and watering them at regular ancestral rites, choosing comfortable dry gravesites and entertaining them at occasional *kut*, if deemed necessary.

Eschatology reflected in the mortuary rites in mainstream Korean society

In discussing mortuary rituals in Korean society, it is important to remember that shamanism is practised only by a specific group of people, mainly women, and often covertly. It is necessary, therefore, to compare *kut* with what are more widely accepted 'traditional' mortuary rituals performed in contemporary mainstream Korean society. These are based on Confucian ideology, which puts the emphasis on this-worldliness and the continuation of a person's life only through his agnatic descendants. Human souls after death were beyond the scope of the original Confucianism. Confucius famously dismissed the idea of the existence of dead spirits. He allegedly rebuked his students for asking questions about an afterlife, when they had so much to learn about this world. When asked about ancestral rituals, he remarked that one should merely act as though the spirits existed.²¹

However, traces of folk beliefs, manifested in kut, can be traced in mainstream mortuary rituals. First of all, in a ritual called *pok* or *ch'ohon* performed immediately after a person's death, a close relative carries the dead person's jacket to the roof top and waving it about, says his or her name three times to call the soul.²² Calling the name of a newly-dead person three times is significant in that it suggests a belief in 'three souls'. Second, the body is ceremoniously washed after death, using three separate bowls of scented water, which again suggests the same belief. Han Chungsu (1981:148) describes this washing ritual and, third, the placing of a pearl or a bead in the mouth of the deceased (ibid:154), while Chang Chölsu (1995:153) describes a ceremonious pouring of raw rice into the corpse's mouth with a willow wooden spoon while reciting "Thousand, ten thousand and hundred thousand sacks of rice!" Sometimes money is put there as well. I have already discussed the significance of these ritual acts while discussing the Kangwön-do kut. Whether this act originated in kut or kut adopted it from the mainstream mortuary ritual is difficult to say categorically. However, it is fairly safe to say that the ideology underpinning it is of a shamanistic nature. Fourth, a coffin is usually placed behind a screen, which signifies the separation of the worlds of the dead and the living. Fifth, a brief ritual to the Mountain Spirit is usually performed as part of the funeral procedure (Chang, ibid:156,158). Sixth, a grave geomancer is usually employed in choosing an auspicious gravesite (Chang, ibid:156).

Conclusion

There is much phenomenological evidence to support Clark's remark (1932/1961:113) that "[a]t the funeral time, one soul stays in the dead body and goes into the grave; one goes into the prepared tablet, and the last one goes off to the realm of the shades ...".

In the Kangwön-do kut, we see clear manifestations of the concept of three souls, which are symbolised by three white paper cut-out men, representing respectively heaven (realm of the shades), man (ancestral tablet) and earth (grave). The three paper cut-out men are given to the father of the dead man (representing heaven), the son (responsible for the ancestral tablet), and the wife ('earth mother').

Korean eschatology is thus closely linked to the concept of three souls, and manifested in the three of the most important folk religions, namely shamanism, ancestor worship and geomancy of the gravesite. One soul goes to heaven, that is, to the other world, and thus falls into the domain of shamanism. A second resides in the ancestral tablet, the emblem of ancestor worship.²³ The third soul is believed to reside in the bones of the dead in the grave. Therefore it is important to keep the dead person comfortable and happy. Geomancy, which originally determined the

auspiciousness of the location of a building or a room, has been developed further and applied to the gravesite.

Nevertheless, it is true that there is neither ‘conviction’ nor ‘consensus’ among modern Koreans as to whether the concept of three souls exists. I would argue that the main reason is the fast disappearance of traditional Korean culture in the face of globalisation, or more specifically westernisation. Today, especially in urban settings, even family elders and mortuary specialists are not sure what the traditional funeral procedures are, hence the publication of books giving detailed instructions on the ‘correct’ procedures for the rites of passage.²⁴ However, the concept of three souls is clearly and overtly displayed in some kut, which often serve as a receptacle of Korean traditional culture.

Notes

1. Shirokogoroff 1935:52,134; Eliade 1951/1964: 216
2. During my fieldwork, three souls were not usually mentioned spontaneously by my informants. It was only when I ventured to suggest the concept that many of them would tell me that there is such a notion.
3. There are basically two kinds of kut for the dead. One is held soon after a person’s death, and the other some time afterwards. The former is called chin chinogi kut, and the latter, in the case of kut in Kangwŏn-do, *chosang haewŏn kut* (kut for dispersing ancestors’ grudges). As we shall see later, the names, as well as the ritual procedures, have regional variations.
4. Most kut are instigated and attended by women. Men sometimes take part, but usually with extreme reluctance and awkwardness.
5. His wife’s father was dead.
6. The order varies from kut to kut. For details, refer to Hogarth 1999:ch. 4.
7. Poor folk used to roll up a corpse in a straw mat for burial in the old days.
8. The number three has the same significance in shamanism in general, as well as in the cultures of the northeast Asian peoples (see Covell 1986; Hogarth 1998:27).
9. For colour symbolism in Korean shamanism, see Hogarth 1998: 29–30.
10. For full transcriptions of a Seoul area version of the ballad, see Hogarth 2003:251–66. The Kangwŏn-do version has some variations, but is essentially the same.
11. Kwŏn told me that the third paper man would have been given to the dead man’s mother, had she been alive. But I think the wife would have still received it. In contemporary Korean society, a man’s wife seems to feature more prominently than his mother on occasions like a funeral, particularly a shamanistic ritual for the dead. A man’s wife seems also to take on the role of his mother in due course. In fact, one often comes across a man calling his wife ‘Mum’.
12. Sometimes three straw shoes, rather than three pairs, are used. Some claim that it is because there are three Death Messengers (see Kim Inhoe 1985, Kut series 17:28).

13. Strictly speaking, Yi is an admiral, but the Korean word *changgun* does not differentiate between generals and admirals. Strangely enough, despite Yi's high profile in Korean history and society, in the main he features neither separately nor prominently in kut (see Hogarth 1998:83–87).
14. For details, see Hogarth 1998:62.
15. Although this series of books largely consists of photographs, they give readers vivid pictorial records of the kut performed in contemporary Korean society.
16. Hogarth 1998:92, 1999:225
17. For a discussion of the role of money in kut, see Hogarth 1998:66–7.
18. Pictures featuring money are in all the series volumes mentioned.
19. I have witnessed this several times. When a death occurs in hospital, the coffin is not allowed inside the house, but on the way to the burial site, the mourners take it to the house and let the dead person have a look at his or her home one last time.
20. For details of *sashil seugi* and its meaning, see Hogarth 1998:49,170.
21. In *Lunyu (Analects)*, cited by Choi Joon-sik 1996:23.
22. Han 1981:140; Chang 1995:150.
23. In traditional Korean society, ancestral tablets were housed in a special room of the household, and food and drink were regularly offered them by the descendants. Even today, in some households, particularly in rural settings, male heads regularly pay tributes to the tablets, and even report their daily events to them, as though they were talking directly to living lineage elders. Moon (1998:156–7) describes how a man, who had just been dismissed, reported the unfortunate event to his ancestral tablets: “In spite of your benevolent caring, it was my own shortcomings that brought my dismissal ...”.
24. For example, Han 1981:140; Chang 1995:150.

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