

LEE, Jung Young: *Korean Shamanistic Rituals*, Religion and Society 12, The Hague/Paris/New York: Mouton Publishers, 1981, XVI+249 pp., 63 plates, map; DM 75,00.

The table of contents of this book as well as the impressive list of scholars whom the author has recorded as having guided him in his research and of institutions that extended him financial support considerably pushed up this reviewer's expectations. They quickly became scaled down, however, after the reviewer had read a few pages of the book. Still, seen the – alleged? – endorsement of widely recognized authorities, he continued reading, being ready to ascribe his growing bewilderment not to the book, but to his incapacity of understanding what the author aimed at. Having forced his way up to around p. 130, he still had not found anything positive to report on, and still had not grasped the kind of misunderstanding that must have prevailed between the book and its author on the one hand and the kind and amount of support the author says to have received from so many authorities on the other.

The reviewer feels that nobody who will have browsed through a few pages of this book will have the desire to sit down calmly and do more extensive reading. Therefore, it may be superfluous to follow here the book reviewers' convention of first outlining the contents of a book and going into a detailed discussion after that. Suffice it here to enumerate a few of the most obvious shortcomings.

The author seems to be unaware of the existence of Laszlo Vajda's article „Zur phaseologischen Stellung des Schamanismus“, *Ural-Altäische Jahrbücher*, vol. XXXI, 1959, repr. *Religionsethnologie*, ed. Carl August Schmitz, Akademische Reihe, Frankfurt a.M.: 1964, pp. 265–295, and of much more of the comparative writing that appeared after Vajda's article. Had Professor Lee known that writing, he would have felt the need to say more about the relationship between Korean folk religion and shamanism than he does on p. 17 of his book. He would have felt the equally strong need to discuss the question in which sense, if any, the phenomena he has in mind can rightfully be called shamanistic. Such discussions cannot be left out in a chapter dealing with the origin and formation of Korean shamanism (pp. 1–26). It is difficult to say much more about this chapter, because its purpose somehow gets lost in the erratic and muddy argument that prevails here as much as in any other of the not merely descriptive parts of the book. The points the author apparently wants to carry home seem to be the idea that (a) shamanism once was the glorious religion of all of the Korean people and only, later deteriorated under the influence of Buddhism and Taoism and that (b) Tan'gun, the legendary founder of a Korean polity, introduced the faith in a monotheistic Heavenly Lord to the Korean people. The former view is in no way substantiated, and one is led to believe that the author would have been unable to substantiate it, even if he had decided to do so. As his mostly poor and unspecific historical comments in the footnotes show, he simply lacks much of the historical and other knowledge that one needs to measure up to the demands of probing into the history of shamanism. What do we have to think about his statement that there was no Korean language in use before the period of king Sejong (p. 3), that on p. 3 the term *mudang* is likely to be of Ural-Altaic origin, whereas on p. 4 it is not, of equating *samsin* with *sansin* (pp. 19, 62), of placing Shantung into Manchuria (p. 21), of making Chae Yong (the person referred to is Ch'oe Yöng, 1316–1388) a general of the Sila (!) dynasty (p. 50, note 32), or of missing the most obvious identification of Chesök (p. 60, note 77), and countless mistakes of the same order? Not all of these blunders can be as-

cribed to not having done a sufficiently thorough proofreading. The latter of the two propositions mentioned above is based on a simple intellectual strategem, viz., to use the philosophical tenet that everything is related to everything else as a scholarly hypothesis. The strategem results in indiscriminately lumping together everything that is strange, „religious“, and „mystic“ in Korea and considering the whole a contingent religious phenomenon.

There is not much to say about the second chapter of the book, that on the fundamental ritual of Korean shamanism (pp.27–39). It is not obvious why the ritual act (*kut*) in question is considered to be fundamental. Such a characterization is particularly irritating in view of the author's statement that it has nothing to do with exorcism (p.27), whereas exorcism is otherwise considered, by Professor Lee as well as other authors, to be a substantial element in shamanistic practices. Here as everywhere else in the book the author fails to do justice to the diversity of shamanistic practices in terms of time, region, and social class, a consideration that other authors hardly fail to make.

Even less can be said about the third chapter, the one containing the translations of songs, oracles, and prayers (pp.40–80). There is no way of judging on the quality of these translations, because the author did not provide Korean texts or otherwise indicate his sources. The translations seem to be based on the author's own tape recordings.

Another constant source of irritation in the book is the author's blatant lack of the mastery of basic scholarly working techniques and of a sound training in Koreanology. He is unable to properly distinguish and identify the sounds of his native tongue and to render them in transliteration by means of the internationally recognized system of McCune/Reischauer. This failure does not only produce confusion on the side of the reader, who will have trouble to realize the identity of terms and names that appear in different ways of transcription. It also accounts for the failure of producing an adequate index. For the author of the index, seemingly not a Koreanologist, is doomed to omit certain occurrences of terms and names if such terms and names appear in different ways of transcription. That happened to, e.g., the famous Ch'oe Namsŏn (1890–1957), who appears as Chae Nom Son on p.15 (note 37) and as Chae Nam Sun on p.18 (note 48); only the former entry is found in the index. Of a quite similar, though possibly even more revealing nature, is the author's inability to read and transcribe Japanese names and terms in a proper way. In the listing of the Japanese titles on p.226, chosen at random, the reviewer discovered 41 mistakes, including those of a more bibliographic order. Most of them are of a kind to suggest that the author either has no sufficient command of the Japanese language, or has not looked into the monographs and articles he listed and thus is not aware of what they are about, or simply has not taken upon himself the trouble of thorough proofreading.

The author fails to explain the etymologies and present meanings of several important terms, such as *tan'gol*, and he explains most of the others in a way that shows he is entirely unaware of the fact that most of the Chinese characters are used as phonographs. Such a usage discredits any attempt at explaining most of the Korean terms and names by reference to the ideographical meaning of the Chinese characters used to render them. The results of such „etymologies“ are either quite fancy and arbitrary explanations or explanations in the nature of unintended, stale jokes.

The book fortunately contains a host of instructive illustrations of shamanistic tools (pp.82–90), of charms (pp.187–192), and 63 plates of fairly well reproduced photographs. However, the Statement that this part of the book is a positive and informative one cannot be made without reservations. The author does not only again fail to make

distinctions with regard to region and time (only very few instruments can nowadays be discovered of as beautiful an appearance as they are portrayed here); some of the illustrations can be found in earlier publications and are simply taken over from them without the author giving any credit to the scholars and sources of earlier times.

In the light of the numerous and fundamental shortcomings of the book, one could have followed the common habit of altogether disregarding it and not writing anything on it at all, if it had not been for the fact that this book, according to the preface, is meant to be „... the first major attempt to introduce a comprehensive English language work on Korean shamanism to the Western world“ (p. VII). The book is neither the first attempt nor a major one, and it is anything but comprehensive. Within the cadre of this review it has not been possible to show in any greater detail in what sense the content of this book is incomprehensive, but the above listing of some of the shortcomings may already have been sufficient to create much more far-going misgivings. If the author's pretension went uncontested, the non-Koreanologist reader might all too easily be inclined to take the pretension at its face value and consider the book a summary of the knowledge of Korean shamanism as it is available at present, in spite of certain apprehensions that may have occurred even to the non-specialist while reading the book.

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