

(1-2, p. 13)

In studying Korean culture, it is important to acquire a knowledge of the Shamanic cult and folk art which underlies the cultural strata. The former is the ultimate spiritual base while the latter is the physical base of Korean culture.

In the past it has been the habit to consider the Shamanic cult merely as a primitive superstitious belief and the folk art only as a naive peasant art, disregarding their true cultural significance. Consequently, most of the historical literature covering the spiritual life of Korean people has been limited to Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism. Likewise, Korean art also has been interpreted in terms of Buddhist art or Confucian art with a reflection of Taoist ideals.

Recently, however, there has been a noticeable trend towards an understanding of the Shamanistic identity of Korean culture. Such studies include anthropological research of Korean Shamanism, literary translation of ritual songs and historical re-evaluation of the ritual paintings. These studies have been made by the collection of oral traditions of the Korean *Mudang* society, folk literature and folk art objects related to Shamanism.

The following constitutes the outline of an iconographical study of various deities in Korean Shamanism. Since the folk art relics used in this study are closely linked to the people's spiritual life, they may be treated as another form of literature which describes the secret of Shamanic belief.

### **Korean Shamanic Painting**

In general, Buddhist, Taoist, Confucian and Shamanic paintings are grouped together as religious painting, which appears under functional painting. More specifically, by Shamanic painting we mean the icon paintings of various deities used by Korean Shamans, commonly called *mudang* painting.

Shamanists painted not only what they saw with their eyes but also what they saw in dreams and what they felt in their hearts. According to the Shamanistic trinity (*samje*: heaven, earth and man) concept they painted the heavenly images: God; the spirit of the sun, moon, stars, cloud, thunder, wind, and rain; the four cardinal guardians; the twelve zodiac animals, and others that appeared in their dreams or imaginations.

They loved and worshipped nature. So, while painting mountains and water, they also painted the mountain spirit and the water spirit; while they admired the beauty of flowers, birds, plants, (1-2, p. 14) fishes, animals and insects, they also worshipped them as good symbols.

They painted men, human spirits and ghosts, their national founder, kings, queens, heroes, and made sketches of historical events and ceremonies.

As this primitive art evolved, the portion that loved nature was gradually turned into a form of fine art, while the portion that worshipped nature was transformed into religious ritual painting, particularly icons.

Thus when we study Shamanistic elements in Korean painting we may first begin with the tracing of Shamanic icon painting, then move to Shamanistic symbol paintings and Shamanistic ideals in Korean painting.

### **Heavenly Spirits in Icon Painting**

Korean Shamanism believes *Hananim* was the supreme ruler of the universe. According to folk literature he possessed supernatural power, wisdom and virtue. The name *Hananim* in Korean maybe interpreted as *hana* (One) *nim* (Honorific), or as *hanal* (One Egg) *nim*, or *hanwul* (One World) *nim*, or *hanul* (Sky) *nim*. In the old historical records it was read as *Han-In* and interpreted as *Hwan* (Bright) *Nim*.

Furthermore, *Hananim* usually takes the form of *samsin* (tri-god), the three being *Han-In*,

*Han-Ung*, and *Han-Keom*. *Han-Ung* is the son of *Han-In* and he is the one who descended to the earth to open the sacred country of *Shin-Shi* near White Head Mountain in North Korea. He then married a bear who turned into a woman after a hundred days of meditation in a cave. Their son, generally known as *Tangun*, founded the state of *Choson*, Korea in 2333 B.C.

The plastic art of the ancient Korean tri-god icons were lost long ago. *Samsonggak*, the shrine of the tri-god, which existed in Mt. *Kuwol* in Hwanghae Province, North Korea, had a set of the tri-god statues until about fifty years ago, but their present status is not known.

Korean Shamans often call the supreme God by one other name, *ch'onsin*, which means Heavenly God. *Ch'onsin* is a Confucian expression, as we find *ch'on* (Heaven) throughout the classical Confucian book *Sogyong*. *Ch'onsin* is of Chinese origin equivalent to Korean *Hananim*. Because Confucius himself emphasized very little of the Heavenly Being, many people think that he did not believe in God and Confucianism is the lack of a concept in God. However, this is incorrect, based on the classic side of Confucianism, ignoring the secular.

In Korea, there is a popular shrine of the Confucian cult called *Bokaedang* which literally means *bok* (Blessing) granting hall. In this small shrine a set of icon paintings of the heavenly spirits was discovered. It includes *Ch'onsin* painted on the middle portion of the Sun and Moon painting; the Taoist Jade God Emperor; *Chesok*, the Buddhist King of the Heaven; the Seven Stars; the Longevity Star Spirit; and a pair of door guardians. The name *Bokaedang* probably came from another Confucian literary classic *Sigyong* in which we find so much about *bok*. Surprisingly, we find the icon paintings of the Confucian God following the pattern of the Korean *Hananim* icon painting, which indicates that the old Korean ethnic Shaman God has been united with the Confucian God. And today Korean Shamans use more of *Ch'onsin* than their own *Hananim*, because in our daily conversation we use Korean words and the Korean pronunciation of Chinese words, it seems quite natural that the term *Hananim* and *Ch'onsin* coexist for one concept—the Supreme Heavenly God.

Consequently the icon of *Hananim* and the icon of *Ch'onsin* are united and appear as a graceful old man with a benevolent smile, sitting between the sun and the moon or between the Spirit of the Sun and the Spirit of the Moon. Often he is also painted as an old man with a long white beard, riding upon clouds. Although clear details of *Hananim* are lacking we can at least conclude that the icon of the heavenly god in ethnic Korean Shamanism takes the form of an ordinary human being and he is usually accompanied by the Sun and the Moon.

The evolution of *Hananim* did not end with his marriage to Confucian *Ch'onsin*, but it was further extended to one other form called *okhwang sancje*. This term, meaning the Jade Emperor of Heaven, was created by the Taoists who believe there is a huge spiritual being in the universe which they call *Won si cho'njon*. This original heavenly being is divided into three bodies: *musi*, *muhyung* and *bomhyung*.

In Taoist icon painting this heavenly being is usually depicted in the form of a tri-god, *samjon*. Each of the tri-gods is a graceful old man wearing the Taoist uniform with the designs of the *yin-yang* and the trigram of the change. One other charming feature is that each has his own vehicle, (1-2, p. 15) either a buffalo or a *Chi-Lin* (Sacred Unicorn). Often the last one, mounted on a buffalo, is interpreted as the spirit of Lao Tzu, which is actually a part of the Big Heavenly Being. Taoists believe that Lao Tzu was sent down to China in the form of a graceful Chinese and then later migrated farther west and appeared as Buddha. The tri-god of Taoism, probably evolved from the Shamanic tri-god, is the only Oriental tri-god whose icons have been preserved. This is because Taoism was formulated and expanded as an organized higher religion and much of the written material was developed while Shamanism remained a primitive cult.

*Hananim* changed when Buddhism came to Korea. Buddhism not only brought Buddha's teaching but it also brought numerous Hindu gods and their icon paintings. Like Confucius, Sakyamuni probably did not emphasize the existence of God, but the old tradition of Hindu belief in