

The Longevity Star Spirit

When a life is granted by the great spirit of the Seven Stars it is then handed over to the spirit of South Pole Star, who will decide the length of the life. Since this star has the power of longevity, it is commonly called *Su* (Longevity) *roin* (Old Man), *susong* (Longevity Star) *noin*, or *Namguk* (South Pole) *song* (Star). *Suroin* is a very popular spirit in the Orient, particularly in China where Taoism became an ethnic religion. Worship of the longevity star in Korea is not as intensive as in China. Therefore, *Suroin* cannot be taken as a typical heavenly spirit of Korean Shamanism. However, the benevolent old man plays an important role in Korean Shamanic icon painting.

The iconographic feature of *Suroin* is very distinguished. He is an old man with a long, snow white beard, and with an unusually long, potato-like head. His vehicle is a reindeer like the Western Santa Claus; and he often holds a sacred peach in his hand or he carries a basket filled with fungus, a symbol of immortality. His garment is usually white, especially when it is painted by a Korean artist. Sometimes he drags a turtle, another great symbol of longevity, or he may be accompanied by a young attendant playing a flute. *Suroin* holds a tall strange-looking cane with a goad filled with longevity tonic tied to the top. This Taoist-originated *Suroin* became popular among other religions of the Orient. So, we find his icon painting in Buddhist temples and in Confucian shrines, as well as in Taoist and Shamanic Shrines. He is also taken as one of the typical themes in Zen painting.

The Guardians of the Five Directions

The oldest directional guardians in the Orient are known as *sasin* (Four Guardian Spirits), namely the Blue Dragon of the East, the White Tiger of the West, the Red Bird of the South, and the Turtle-Snake of the North. These sacred figures are taken from a constellation in each area. A specific color is also designated to each direction—blue for the east, white for the west, red for the south, and black for the north. Though this belief is universal among the Oriental people, probably it has been more positively worshipped by (1-2, p. 18) Korean people, for we can still observe the living stream of this ancient cult in our daily life. The theory is closely connected to the orientation of a housing site and a grave site.



This base painting of the Heavenly God is typical of the line drawings used as guides for the colors that were layered on to form the basis of the design.

In the *mudang* tradition, however, they use more of the Five Directional Guardians (*Obang*, *changgung*, probably a modification of *sasin*) by adding another middle direction with yellow color. The Shamans called the east guardian *Ch'onje* (Blue King), the west guardian *Paekche* (White King), the south guardian *Chuje* (Red King), the north guardian *Hyonje* (Black King) and the middle guardian *Hwangje* (Yellow King). These five guardians are the most important generals of Shamanism which are equivalent to the *Sach'onwang* (Four Heavenly Kings) of Buddhism. Icons of the five guardians are not so difficult to detect, for we can count five generals in one painting. They are in most cases dressed with Taoist costumes, but often we find them in Korean military uniforms of old Korea like the one Admiral Yi Sun Shin used to

wear.

The Twelve Zodiac Guardians Besides the Blue Dragon and White Tiger concept, there is one other set of guardians that has lived with Korean people in their daily lives for many years. These are the guardians of *sibi chi* (Twelve Zodiac). Oriental civilization began by dividing a year into twelve months and dividing a day into twelve hours, thus taking the number twelve as the basis of time. In folklore each of these twelve divisions were designated with a specific animal, namely rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, rooster, dog and pig. All changes in the year, month, day and hour are governed by this order.

The Shamanic people believed that the fate of a living man as well as the fate of the dead soul depends on the combination of the twelve zodiac, based on the date of birth and the date of death. In spite of the fact that the idea of the twelve zodiac signs is so closely linked with everyday life, the painting or printing of them was done seldom and used rarely, except those found in the fortune teller's book. So we must trace icon paintings of the twelve zodiac guardians in Buddhist funeral decorations. Most of those ritual paintings have disappeared in the past ten years. However, there are about three sets of these icon paintings preserved in Korea today.

The icons of the twelve zodiac guardians are easy to determine for each guardian is dressed like a general, but has an animal head—one of the twelve animals. This style of painting is unique, and it looks quite humorous as most of the animalgenerals are shown in a dancing pose.

The Spirit of Thunder

As mentioned under the heading of *Hananim*, The Korean mythology contains a marvelous story of the heavenly man descending to the earth. The most fascinating scene in this mythology is perhaps the descent of three thousand monsters called *tokaebi* in Korean, who escorted the heavenly man. The group of *tokaebi* includes *Rae Kong*, the *tokaebi* of thunder, *Pung-Baek*, the *tokaebi* of wind, *Wun-Sa*, the *tokaebi* of cloud, and *Wu-Sa*, the *tokaebi* of rain.

In a strict sense this mythology belongs to the Kingdom of *Shin-Shi* which was founded long before the birth of Korea, China and Japan. Therefore we should take this interesting mythology with a much broader view and try to discover the icons of *Tokkaebi* throughout Oriental countries. Only by such effort can we assemble a package of all four *Tokkaebi* icons which have been lost for a long time.

Today we can no longer trace all of those *tokaebi* icons in Korean Shamanic painting. However, we have been fortunate enough to discover a number of the icon paintings of the thunder *tokaebi*, which Korean *mudang* calls *Pyorak changgun*, having a meaning more like "lightning general." The icon of the spirit of Thunder is usually depicted by the strange tools which he carries in both hands—a fire ball and a hammer or a huge drum and a hammer. He is often dressed like an old general, but the one in naked form looks more like the original *tokaebi*. His face is commonly expressed in the form of an angry monster similar to those masks we find in the monster tiles of the Silla dynasty.

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