

The Priest of *Han* as a Theme in Christian-Shamanist Interfaith Dialogue

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Preface

In the period in which the Korean *minjung*¹⁾ has struggled against the military dictatorship, Suh Namdong, one of the founders of Korean *minjung* theology, suggested that the church should be engaged in the *minjung* liberation movement and practice the priesthood of *han*²⁾ to relieve the

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- 1) *Minjung* is a Korean word for the people who are suppressed, exploited and marginalized in society. They seem to be silent and powerless, but under certain circumstances they clearly express their strong will to change their status quo from the bottom.
- 2) Cf., Suh Namdong, "Towards a Theology of Han," *Minjung Theology: People as The Subject of History*, ed. Kim Yongbock (Singapore: A CTC-CCA Publication, 1981), 54: *Han* is a "feeling of defeat, resignation and nothingness" on the one hand. On the other, it is "a feeling with a tenacity of will for life which

minjung from their *han*. He situated *han* as a central theme of theological reflection and so succeeded in shaping a very authentic form of Korean theology. But for many people who are foreign to Korean culture in which *han* is an underlying emotion it is somewhat difficult to understand his theology of *han*. Some have blamed it as uncommunicative.

Han and *hanpuri*, release from *han*, are favorite themes in various genre of modern Korean literature and culture like poetry, novels, drama, film, opera etc. At the sight of the positive response of the public to them, *han* and *hanpuri* remain still as a cultural code with which Koreans are very familiar. In *pansori*, traditional dramatic songs, and in mask dances, *han* and *hanpuri* have bound actors, audience and spectators together. *Pansori* and narratives in mask dances were differentiated from the narratives of village festivals, the original form of which was the shaman's epic. In this epic, which is recited in shaman rituals, people can find typical expressions of *han* and *hanpuri*. In this tradition one of the basic tasks of shamans was to liberate people, whether alive or dead, from their own *han* and this is still now the case. Therefore, without a deep understanding of Korean shamanism it would be difficult to approach the *han* which is prevalent in the emotion and mentality of Koreans.

If the thesis of Suh Namdong were valid that the church ought to practice the priesthood of *han*, then protestant ecclesiology and ministry would be deepened and widened. A study of shaman's *hanpuri* could be helpful in articulating new concepts in church and ministry.

In this article I will examine as a first step how influential shamanism still is in Korean society. In this connection, I will investigate briefly how this shamanism is incorporated in Korean protestantism. Second, I will explain *han* and *hanpuri* in the context of Korean shamanism. Third, I will examine how *Minjung* theology has employed the themes of *han* and *hanpuri*. Lastly, I will give some suggestions about spiritual formation for ministry.

The Influential Power of Shamanism in Korea

The current state of Korean shamanism cannot be grasped in official government statistics. The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism statistics

comes to weaker beings."

on religions have a certain category of investigation to which Buddhism, Protestantism, Catholicism, Confucianism, Won Buddhism, Cheondoism, other religious beliefs, no belief and no answer belong. There is no place for Shamanism in it.³⁾ It is very probable that the shamanistic devotees were categorized into “other,” “no answer” or “no belief.” In the religious statistics in 1994 Buddhists amounted to 21.6% of the population, Protestants 32.9%, Catholics 11.8%, Confucians 1.6%, Won Buddhists 0.5%, the Cheondoists 0.1%, other 0.9%, non-religious 30.2% and no answer 0.5%. In the statistics of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism on the religious state based on the data which each religious body has issued the *Daejongkyo*, worship of the national progenitor *Dangun*, was added, but shamanism left no trace here.⁴⁾

Even if the state of shamanism in Korea cannot be apprehended in governmental statistics, the influential power of shamanism can be estimated from a wide-spread phrase that people are Christians in the brain, Buddhists in the bosom and shamanists in the internal organs. This phrase indicates that shamanism underlies deeply the religiosity of Koreans. It could be said that shamanism forms the archetype of Korean religiosity. It has been emphasized that the shamanistic rituals have maintained their basic procedures without essential change from antiquity till nowadays.⁵⁾ It means that the shamanistic worldview and religiosity structure have been anchored deeply in the religious life of Koreans and successfully transmitted from generation to generation.

Although shamanism is not treated as an official religion in modern Korea, it exercised strong influences on the state and the community in some historical periods. Above all, shamans played a role as rulers in ancient society. In the *Gojoseon*, allegedly the first monarchy in the Korean Peninsula and Manchuria (2333[?] - 108 BC), rulers were named *Dangun*; the meaning of this is *shaman*.⁶⁾ In this point, *Dangun* can be considered as

3) That there is no place for shamanism in the governmental statistics is one of the important pieces of evidence that shamanism has been systematically excluded from the official sphere. I return to such a systematic exclusion later.

4) The religious statistics in 2002 are regarded as unbelievable because the total number of believers is twice the total population.

5) In-hoe Kim, “Korean Shamanism: A Bibliographical Introduction,” *Shamanism: The Spirit World of Korea*, eds. Chai-shin Yu and R. Guisso (Berkeley, California: Asian Humanities Press, 1988), 12.

a priest-king. *Gojoseon* was a theocratic society in which the ruler did not dominate the priesthood, but on the contrary the priesthood was superior to the kingship.

In the Record of Eastern Tribes in the Chronicle of the Wei Kingdom in the History of Three Kingdoms by Chen Sou (AD 233-297) there is a noteworthy record: "every year after the harvest, eastern tribes eat, drink and dance together all the night; in the dawn they go to the prison, open the prison gate and liberate prisoners." "Eastern tribes" in the quotation indicate forefathers of the Koreans in the northern area of the Korean Peninsula. "Dance" means certainly a shaman's dance, in which people danced together orgiastically. There is no doubt that such a shamanistic ritual created the primitive orgy in which the exhausted energy of life could be regenerated for the next year's agriculture and harvest and that community members were thus united in strong solidarity.⁷⁾ The recreation of life-energy through the shamanistic ritual had a political aspect also. From the description above it can be assumed that people full of life-energy destroyed the prison, letting prisoners free in order to integrate them in the communal life. Religion and politics were not separated from each other, but were interwoven together.⁸⁾ The shaman played a role of mediator and promoter for communication in nature, among the people, and even in politics; in a word, in all the dimensions of life.⁹⁾

In the period of the Three Kingdoms (4th-7th centuries AD) the relation between priesthood and kingship was reversed. Shamans functioned as advisers for rulers in the state affairs in the following areas: maintenance of kingship, personnel matters, settlement of the public sentiment, decisions on

6) Lim Jaehae, "The Political Function of *Gut* Culture and the Political Status of the Shaman," *Comparative Folklore* 26 (2004/2), 240. (Korean edition), *Gut* means a shaman's ritual.

7) Kim Taegon, *A Study of Korean Shamanism* (Seoul: Jipmoondang, 1981), 161ff. (Korean edition)

8) Cha Namhee, "Political Change and Shamanism in Ancient Korean society," *Korean Politics* 39/2 (2005/6), 311. (Korean edition)

9) The Chinese character for shaman is *mu* (巫). It symbolizes that the shaman mediates through ecstatic dance a communication between heaven and earth. If heaven and the earth communicate and cooperate in harmony, then all things live in fertility and prosperity. Such a communication is created also among the people through the shaman's ritual which breaks down blocked barriers.

war, prosperity in agriculture and harvest, fighting off epidemic diseases, flood, drought, etc. Some shamans were killed by kings because they were forthright to their rulers.¹⁰⁾ In the period of the Unified *Silla* (AD 676-935) and in the following period of the *Goryeo* dynasty (AD 918-1392) shamans practiced the state rituals. Especially in the *Goryeo* dynasty shamans led the *Palkwanhoe*, the highest state ritual, in which prayers were offered for harmony among all things on earth and under heaven, the prosperity of the state and the welfare of the people.

But shamanism was systematically expelled from the official sphere after the *Chosun* dynasty (AD 1392-1910) was founded and which employed Confucianism as the ruling ideology. This Confucianism dominated the whole official sphere. Legal codices were designed according to Confucian principles; the highest-level state examination to recruit ranking officials was based on the knowledge of confucianistic canons; the status system, the domination structure in the village, the patriarchal family structure were reinforced under the influence of Confucianism. The state rituals which had been practiced traditionally by shamans were abolished, Confucian-patterned state rituals were introduced and the ruling elite adopted the Confucian ancestral rite.¹¹⁾ Shamanism withdrew to the unofficial sphere and survived barely as a sub-culture but maintained its influence among the underprivileged and especially among women who were excluded from the Confucian family rituals. Shamans lost their dignity and formed the caste of the lowest ranking with slaves, tanners, butchers, pallbearers, monks and prostitutes.

The elite who had a strong will to modernize the state and society from the period of the falling *Chosun* dynasty regarded shamanism as the core of pre-modernity and asserted firmly on eradicating it.¹²⁾ In the Japanese colonial period (AD 1910-1945) shamanism was all the more severely suppressed by the authorities who would eliminate the national identity of the Koreans, because it was regarded as the very indigenous religion of

10) Lim Jaehae, *ibid.*, 254f.

11) Lim Jaehae, *ibid.*, 260.

12) Lee Yongbum, "A Study on the Negative View on the Shamanism in Modern Korean Society," *Studies on Korean Shamanism* 9 (2005/2), 163: "What is interesting here is that there is no reference to the positive aspect of the folklore religiosity in the newspapers published at the end of the *Chosun* dynasty and in the colonial period." (Korean edition)

Korea. The colonial officials and the Japanese folklorists considered shamanism as a barbarian custom and, what was worse, as superstition. Such a viewpoint towards shamanism appeared also among the American missionaries who came to Korea for the purpose of preaching the gospel. They regarded the shaman's rituals and ancestor rites as superstition and asked the Koreans to convert from them to the gospel. The negative perspective on shamanism as superstition or pre-modern heritage prevails still among the Korean elite.

Even though shamanism has been depreciated for a long time, it has exercised strong influences on the life of the *minjung* and especially on the sub-culture of women. In this tradition it has played a role in improving the well-being of the local community. Shamans have practiced the *maeulgut* (shaman's village ritual) periodically in order to pray for prosperity and peace in the community and to expel misfortunes from the village. The main figure in the *maeulgut* was usually the shaman who was regarded as the spiritual power, and who had her shrine in the village. The *maeulgut* has been practiced everywhere in the country, especially in the rural areas and in the fishing villages. Moreover, 80% of the population lived in these areas even at the beginning of the 1960s when the modernization process had not yet reached its full strength. Therefore it is no exaggeration to say that shamanism has shaped the core of Korean life culture. As for a shaman's rituals for individuals or a family it was customary that the shaman was invited to play a certain *gut* to let the dead go to a good place or to release the dead from the distress of their *han*; the shaman's rituals were practiced in order to wipe out diseases, to expel misfortunes from the family and to bring fortune to the family. But shamanism has sometimes deteriorated into a magical tool for imprecation or degraded to a machine for an infantile wish-fulfillment which is closely bound with greed and avarice.

Shamanism is still powerful and influential in the modern Korea in which a sort of modernization and individualization euphoria is dominant. As is evident in the governmental statistics, shamanism is still expelled from the official sphere. But the shaman's rituals have been flexibly adapted to the changed life circumstances of modern Korea.

All foreign religions have gained unique colors through the prism of Korean shamanism which has formed a deep layer of Korean religiosity. Korean Buddhism has amalgamated with shamanism, so that it has taken some elements foreign to original Buddhism. For example, there are

Samsingak and *Myongbujeon* in a Buddhist temple. *Samsingak* was originally the shaman's shrine for *Samsinhalmi*, the divinity of fertility and pregnancy and *Myongbujeon* the sanctuary for the ritual to lead the spirit of the dead to the Land of Happiness. Such a ritual is specific to Korean shamanism and the Confucian ancestral rite is in the background of shamanistic rituals for the dead and ancestors. In shamanism it is believed that the spirits of the dead or ancestors haunt and bring diseases and misfortunes if they are not properly treated and appeased. According to Ryu Dongsik, a famous indigenization theologian, who tried earnestly to make an interfaith dialogue with shamanism, Koreans could easily accept the Christian god in the first phase of evangelization, because they had the shamanistic concept of the supreme god in the sky. *Hananim* as the name of the Christian God in Korean resembles *Haneunim* as the celestial supreme god in Korea.¹³⁾

The influence of shamanism upon the protestant churches in Korea is very apparent. It has left unique traits in the belief and ritual practice of Korean Protestants. Lee Bock-kyu has investigated these traits and summarized them in the following ten theses:

- 1) Prayer-at-dawn is closely related to the worship of "Chowang," one of the house spirits.
- 2) The three-time calling of "Lord!" at some prayer meetings is related to the invocation of god in shamanistic practices.
- 3) Going to a mountain for prayer is associated with the shaman's practice of mountain prayer.
- 4) The expression of "to receive a prayer" is related to the oracle-seeking of folk religion.
- 5) The intentional tone variation of the minister at special prayer resembles the voice change of the shaman when she tries to get an oracle.
- 6) "Wish-fulfilling thanks donation" or "wish-fulfilling offering" resembles the give-and-take offerings of folk religion.
- 7) The rigorous rule of donation preparation is associated with that of sacrifice preparation in folk religion.

13) Ryu Dongsik, *Korean Religions and Christianity* (Seoul: The Christian Literature Society of Korea, 1965), 37. (Korean edition)

- 8) The invocation of blessing heard at donation prayers is related to that of folk religion.
- 9) The blessing-giving holy meeting at New Year's Eve is associated with folk religion's various forms of rituals at New Year.
- 10) The impolite speech of some famous evangelists is associated with the speech style of shamans that they choose when granting an oracle.¹⁴⁾

Such unique phenomena which are observed widely among protestant ministers and laymen can be explained from the assumption that the shamanistic machinery for wish-fulfillment has been accepted consciously or unconsciously. Korean protestants are inclined to consider the minister as a mediator who transmits their wishes like health, long life, success, promotion, admission, wealth and so on to God the omnipotent and who receives miraculous means of wish-fulfillment from God. Even some ministers seem to order God to fulfill their wishes which are submitted to him. They seem to take over the job of the shaman as master of the divinity. Therefore some protestant ministers are blamed for being shamanized. But such a shamanistic ministry is not my concern.

Toward a Proper Understanding of Shamanism and the Shaman

Korean shamanism is regarded as a branch of the shamanism of Siberia and Central Asia but the origin of the Korean branch has not been accurately investigated. However, some archeological findings and the Korean language, which belongs to the Ural-Altaic language family, indicate that Korean ancestors originated in the northwestern area of Siberia, moved through the area around Baikal to the Korean Peninsula, expelled the natives and settled there.

M. Eliade presented his classical study on the shamanism of Siberia and Central Asia in which he defined shamanism as "archaic techniques of ecstasy."¹⁵⁾ His definition started from the premise that shamanism has its

14) Lee Bock-kyu, "Unique Phenomena in Korean Protestantism and their Relationship with Folklore Religiosity," *Korean Folklore* 34 (2001/12), 165-175. (Korean edition) The summarized ten theses are the author's. (179f.)

15) Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, tr. from the French by Williard R. Trask (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1970), 4.

own intrinsic essence and structure before its historical development and transfiguration. Shamanism has appeared in various forms and shapes in different areas, but Eliade saw its essential and intrinsic distinction in ecstasy. It is beyond history and civilization. "There is no reason whatever for regarding it as the result of a particular historical moment, that is as produces by a certain form of civilization. Rather, we would consider it fundamental in the human condition, and hence known to the whole of archaic humanity."¹⁶⁾ The shaman is "the great master of ecstasy." It is true that magicians and medicine men experience ecstasy, but the shaman's ecstasy has a particular specialty. "The shaman specializes in a trance during which his soul is believed to leave his body and ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld."¹⁷⁾ Ascent to the sky and descent to the underworld amounts to the essential sign of the shaman's ecstasy. The shaman is chosen by the community, but in order to be recognized as a shaman, he must acquire the capacity for ecstasy. Without exception a shaman candidate is afflicted with a certain "initiatory sickness" in which he or she falls into the first ecstatic experience. All the ecstatic experience of a shaman candidate involves "the traditional schema of an initiation ceremony: suffering, death, resurrection."¹⁸⁾ In the first ecstasy the candidate has one or more of the following experiences: "dismemberment of the body, followed by a renewal of the internal organs and viscera; ascent to the sky and dialogue with the gods or spirits; descent to the underworld and conversations with spirits and the souls of dead shamans; various revelations, both religious and shamanic (secrets of profession)."¹⁹⁾ After such ecstatic experiences the shaman becomes an entirely new person. In the initiatory sickness full of suffering and affliction the shaman deeply apprehends human conditions. This initiatory sickness has not been overcome until the shaman acquires the ability to cure others. As Eliade puts it, "like the sick man, the religious man is projected onto a vital plane that shows him the fundamental data of human existence, that is, solitude, danger, hostility of the surrounding world. But the primitive magician, the medicine man, or the shaman is not only a sick man; he is, above all, a sick

16) M. Eliade, *ibid.*, 504.

17) M. Eliade, *ibid.*, 5.

18) M. Eliade, *ibid.*, 33.

19) M. Eliade, *ibid.*, 34.

man who has been cured, who has succeeded in curing himself.”²⁰⁾ It is noteworthy, so I think, that the experience of the initiatory sickness provides the shaman with the ability to sympathize with others in suffering and sickness and to be in solidarity with the weak and the afflicted. Without the ability for sympathy and solidarity the shaman’s healing competency could lose its proper direction.

It is true that Eliade’s understanding of shamanism as an archaic technique of ecstasy makes the fundamental structure of shamanism clear and distinct. But it is very problematic that his definition of shamanism has nothing to do with history, social structure and ideology. Therefore Eliade couldn’t explain in which social structure and in which ideological frameworks shamanism came into being, and under which historical and cultural conditions shamanisms are differentiated one from one another. Many scholars have made efforts to overcome such limits of Eliade’s theory. First of all, it was S. M. Shirokogoroff, the Russian specialist in Tungus shamanism, who paid attention to the tribal structure and the worldview which were, so he believed, the constituent elements of Tungus shamanism. Furthermore, he postulated that Tungus shamanism had changed contents and forms of belief under the influence of the Lamaism which had come to the area.²¹⁾

In contrast with M. Eliade who thought that the ecstasy is “a primary phenomenon”²²⁾ I. M. Lewis regards possession as the very element of shamanism and approaches this possession from a sociological perspective. He believes that ecstasy is a state of possession, that is, “seizure of man by divinity.” Therefore, possession is primary and ecstasy follows it. “Transcendental experiences of this kind, typically conceived of as states of ‘possession,’ have given the mystic a unique claim to direct experiential knowledge of the divine and, where this is acknowledged by others, the authority to act as a privileged channel of communication between man and the supernatural.”²³⁾ He doesn’t attempt to articulate a universal valid, and

20) M. Eliade, *ibid.*, 27.

21) S. M. Shirokogoroff, *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus* (Berlin: Schletzer, 1999). (Original text: London, 1935)

22) It means that trance and possession can follow the ecstasy as accompanied phenomena. M. Eliade, *ibid.*, 504.

23) I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion : A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession*, 3rd ed. (London/New York: Routledge, 2003), 15.

therefore abstract, definition of possession, but rather starts from the assumption that possession is “a culturally normative experience.”²⁴⁾ Therefore, “if someone is, in his own cultural milieu, generally considered to be in a state of spirit possession, then he (or she) is possessed.”²⁵⁾ In his sociological approach to shamanism he confirms two important facts. One is that shamanism is mainly accepted by women and settled as a sub-culture in the patriarchal society in which men are dominant in the official sphere whereas women are driven into the unofficial sphere of life.²⁶⁾ The other fact is that, after his overcoming afflictions during his initiatory sickness, the shaman has “a special predilection for the weak and oppressed.”²⁷⁾ It is noteworthy, so I think, that the shaman’s sensitivity to the suffering of the weak and oppressed is the basis for his or her sympathy with them and readiness for solidarity with them.

Ake Hultkrantz has examined thoroughly the studies and debates on shamanism after M. Eliade and attempted to reformulate shamanism as a complex of religious practices and belief which are integrated in a structure. On the ground of such a careful definition of shamanism he has analyzed and summarized the role of shamans by the following four points:

- 1) The shaman makes contact with the spiritual world through the technique of ecstasy.
- 2) The shaman acts as mediator between a human group and spirits for the sake of their welfare.
- 3) The shaman is inspired by her possession spirit as patron and becomes the master of spirits.
- 4) The shaman has ecstatic experiences.²⁸⁾

24) I. M. Lewis, *ibid.*, 57.

25) I. M. Lewis, *ibid.*, 40.

26) I. M. Lewis, *ibid.*, 80. In reliance upon I. M. Lewis, Laurel Kendall shows clearly that in Korea the shamanistic household rites are performed mainly by women while the Confucian rituals are practiced exclusively by men. For detailed explanation see Laurel Kendall, *Shamans, Housewives, and Other Restless Spirits: Women in Korean Ritual Life* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), 27f.

27) I. M. Lewis, *ibid.*, 64.

28) Ake Hultkrantz, “An Ecological and Phenomenological Approach to Shamanism,” *Shamanism in Siberia*, tr. Choi Gilsung into Korean (Seoul: Mineumsa, 1988). Original: *Shamanism in Siberia*, ed. V. Dioszegi, M. Hoppal

Korean scholars have studied shamanism in three different directions. First, some scholars have explored Korean shamanism from the perspective of Eliade. Such a study is represented by Ryu Dongsik. He believes that shamanism is the archetype of Korean culture and underlies it deeply. Shamanism has been transfigured variously by encounter with foreign religions, but its archetype has remained without essential change. The various historical forms in which shamanism has appeared are nothing but derivations of the archetypal shamanism or its deterioration.²⁹⁾

Other scholars approach Korean shamanism from the viewpoint of psychology of religion, depending mainly upon the analytic psychology of C. G. Jung. Yi Puyong sees the archetype of collective unconsciousness in Korean shamanism,³⁰⁾ whereas Kim Taegon regards shamanism as the archetype of Korean religiosity.³¹⁾ Modern shamanism is therefore an appearance form of the archetypal psycho-structure which lies in the layer of Korean collective unconsciousness.

Lastly, a group of scholars have assumed a critical position against the above mentioned two viewpoints. These viewpoints are not competent to explore the historical, sociological and ideological contexts in which shamanism originated, transfigured and developed itself. Kim Seongnae represents such a direction of shamanism study. She has employed the perspective of I. M. Lewis and A. Hultkranz and defined Korean shamanism as follows: "Korean shamanism is an ensemble of cultural knowledge about human beings, nature and cosmos which is acquired by Korean common people in experiencing and exploring the worldly reality of life and a structure of symbolical imagination about transcendental powers."³²⁾ Such a definition is very helpful for explaining the particularity of Korean shamanism. Kim suggests that unique characteristics of Korean

(Budapest : Akadémiai Kiadó, 1978). The original title of the article may be different from the title above.

29) Ryu Dongsik, *History and Structure of Korean Shamanism* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1975). (Korean edition)

30) Yi Puyong, "Illness and Healing in Three Kingdom Period," *Korea Journal* 21/12 (December 1981), 4-12.

31) Kim Taegon, *A Study of Korean Shamanism* (Seoul: Jipmoondang, 1981). (Korean edition)

32) Kim Seunghye, Kim Seongnae, *Christianity and Shamanism* (Seoul: Daughters of St Paul, 1998), 67. (Korean edition)

shamanism have been formed in the cultural frameworks in which Koreans have experienced and interpreted their everyday life. In so far as the cultural frameworks are endlessly changed, so shamanism is always transfigured. Korean shamanism as a religion is a model of reality used to conceptualize the relationship between person and society, between human beings and nature, and between human and supernatural beings. The model of reality changes as much as the reality. Modern shamanism has different contents from those of traditional shamanism; the former oriented to the prevailing individualism and materialism, while the latter was more community-oriented.

In order to end this brief and selective sketch of shamanism studies, I would like to emphasize the following three points. First, it is true that the distinctive mark of shamanism, regardless of its various appearance forms, lies in ecstasy and spirit possession. But it is very important to understand ecstasy and spirit possession as culture-bound and not as unhistorical. Second, I pay my attention to the point that the suffering and affliction which shamans have experienced in the initiation process makes them sensitive to the suffering of the weak and oppressed. Third, in patriarchal and class society shamanism has formed a certain sub-culture and exercised its strong influence upon the underprivileged, especially upon women.

Han and Hanpuri

Han is the central concept which helps to understand the characteristics of Korean shamanism and shaman. In her case study on six *mansin* (great shamans) Youngsook Kim Harvey comes to the conclusion that they were worn out with *han*.³³⁾ After they suffered from *sinbyong*, possession sickness, with their internal organs and viscera worn out with *han*, they became shamans. According to Seon Sunhwa, a feminist theologian, the shaman's ecstatic experience during possession sickness as well as during *gut* can be explained from her unconscious choice to be liberated from her unfortunate life full of *han*. Korean shamans cannot be released from their *han*, because the prejudice toward shamans is still extremely severe in Korean society. They live in the world, but they don't belong to the world.

33) Youngsook Kim Harvey, *Six Korean Women* (Minnesota: West Publishing Co., 1979).

Such an existence *sub contrario* in the world forces them to seek for freedom and transcendence.³⁴⁾ What is *han* on earth?

It is very difficult to explain what *han* is. Only one who *has* suffered from *han* can probably apprehend what it is and understand other people who also suffer *han*. Koreans are familiar with *han*, because *han* is an underlying feeling of the Korean people. Eun Koh, a famous minjung poet, says: "We Koreans were born from the womb of *han* and brought up in the womb of *han*."³⁵⁾ Sometimes *han* expresses itself as resignation, adaption to reality, nihilism etc. Sometimes it explodes in the form of revenge, protest, revolt and so on. The former is named *junghan* and the latter is called *wonhan*. In consideration of its various aspects *han* is conceived of as a complex of feelings. The Japanese and the Chinese don't know such complicated and nuanced connotations of *han*, although they use the same Chinese script for *han* (恨). In the Japanese context the word means simply grudge. In China the script has rather the meaning of repentance. From such comparison follows the consequence that *han* is culture-bound.

Kim Yulkyu has employed the analytic psychology of C. G. Jung in order to investigate *han* as a dominant feeling among Koreans. Kim regards *han* as a shadow which comes from the Korean collective unconsciousness. If *han* transfers positively, it is sublimated to the energy for a great achievement. But the negative transference of *han* leads to revenge. Such a transference mechanism is observed not only in the personal dimension, but also in the collective dimension. Collective *han* can express itself as the energy for revolution. The peasant war in 1896 is a good example of this. But collective *han* can evoke a vicious circle of revenge; examples of this abide in history.³⁶⁾

What is made of *han* in a shaman's *sinbyong* (initiator sickness or possession sickness)? Scholars have interpreted *sinbyong* variously. For psychiatrists *sinbyong* has been an interesting object of analysis. Kim Kwang-il, a competent psychiatrist, defines *sinbyong* as "god sickness" and diagnoses it as "culture-bound depersonalization syndrome."³⁷⁾ According

34) Seon Sunhwa, "How to see Shamanism from a Christian's Perspective?", *Christianity and Shamanism*, ed. by Kim Seunghye, Kim Seongnae (Seoul: Daughters of St Paul, 1998), 226.

35) Citation from Suh Namdong, "Towards a Theology of Han," 54.

36) Kim Yulkyu, *The Ore of 'Han' and the Stream of 'Won'* (Seoul, Joowoo, 1081), 21ff.

to him, shamans attain the ability to control trances and possession during *sinbyong*. These controlled trances and possession are categorized into the “transient regression of ego.” In trance and possession occur “the depersonalization of a person so that an ego faced with harsh reality enters another world - that of fantasy.”³⁸⁾ Shamans have the techniques to induce the audience in rituals to trance and possession. What people seek in the *naerimgut*, namely the shaman ritual for curing illness, is nothing but an infantile wish-fulfillment. *Gut* involves “a temporary escape from the reality for a period of time with a certain return to reality;”³⁹⁾ therefore the “transient regression of ego” sustains temporarily the healthiness of the ego. In a word, it has a hypnotic efficacy.

On the contrary, the folklorists consider *sinbyong* as a religious experience rather than a psychiatric symptom. They believe that the *sinbyong* results from the *han* which is accumulated in the mind of a person who desperately seeks eternal life in the world.⁴⁰⁾ For example, the sudden death of a closely associated person can invoke a disassociation of the ego and generate *han* in the deep layer of the mind.

In her analysis of the initiation process of six *mansin* with various personal-historical backgrounds Youngsook Kim Harvey confirms that their experienced *sinbyong* was an expression of *han*. Even though their *han* is difficult to generalize, six *mansin* remembered their possession sickness as a path from the impasse “between social expectations of them as women and their personal goals and interests as individuals.”⁴¹⁾ Such conflicts have remained for a long time unexpressed and their *han* has been accumulated as “a deep and abiding sense of having been morally injured as human beings.”⁴²⁾ For them there was no exit from such conflicts in a patriarchal society. Their *han* found at last an exit in the *sinbyong* and in curing their

37) Kim Kwang-il, “Sin-byong: A Culture-Bound Depersonalization Syndrome in Korea,” *Neuropsychiatry* 11 (1972), 233.

38) Kim Kwang-il, “Kut and the Treatment of Mental Disorders,” *Shamanism: The Spirit World of Korea*, eds. Chai-shin Yu and R. Guisso (Berkeley, California: Asian Humanities Press, 1988), 146.

39) *Loc. cit.*

40) Kim Taegon, *A Study of Korean Shamanism* (Seoul: Jipmoondang, 1981), 247.

41) Youngsook Kim Harvey, *Six Korean Women* (Minnesota: West Publishing Co., 1979), 237.

42) *Loc. cit.*

own *sinbyong* they obtained the capacity to master their *han* and, furthermore, to help other persons to be released from their *han*. This coincides with the assumption of M. Eliade, I. M. Lewis, etc. that the shaman candidates gain the ability to cure others in overcoming afflictions in the initiation process.

Hanpuri is the central device of shaman rituals. It has a variety of contents and patterns. Here I can present only a few limited examples. From a shamanistic perspective, illness is aroused by the spirit of the dead who is not at all free from his or her *han* or by the spirit of the ancestor who is not properly treated. In order to cure the illness, shamans must identify the *han* of the dead and release him or her from the *han*; shamans must suggest to the descendants the way to appease the spirit of their ancestor. A housewife bears *han* in her mind owing to the unsolvable conflict between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law or owing to her husband's mistress. She suffers a lingering illness. In such a case the shaman practices the curing ritual to expose the *han* of the housewife and bring it to speech. The shaman opens a channel for communication among the concerned persons and tries to establish peace and reconciliation among them. During the Korean War (1950-1953) many innocent people were killed in war crimes or massacred. For a long time people have been forced by authorities to ignore those killed in this way. In this period of enforced silence the *han* of the victims has been unceasingly brought into light through *Jinoguigut*. The shamans have stood in front of the remembrance struggle.

But the shaman's *hanpuri* is inclined to ignore the structure of evil from which *han* originated. Shamanistic *hanpuri* is inclined to patch up peace and reconciliation among the people in conflicts without solving the structured conflicts in the reality. How can the housewife be released from her *han*, if the patriarchal structure of conflicts remains unchanged? Probably her husband paid the *naringut* for curing her lingering illness. The comfort and catharsis which it brought her can be regarded as rewards for colluding in her oppression.⁴³⁾

Han and Dan

Minjung theologians have defined *han* as the internal reality of the Korean

43) Cf., I. M. Lewis, op. cit., 78.

minjung who has suffered from political oppression, economical exploitation, socio-cultural marginalization, etc. Their interest in the *hanpuri* practiced by shamans was so great to employ *han* and *hanpuri* as themes of theological reflection. But they have been critical of the shaman's *hanpuri* with the argument that it is inclined to be a catharsis machinery without seeking for a radical change of the reality which generated the *han*. They believed that *han* is not only rooted in the personal-historical context of a person, but also comes into being owing to the structured evils in the reality. In the case that there is no exit from the suppression and suffering which the *minjung* endures in these structured evils, *han* cannot be but accumulated. It is the collective *han* of the *minjung*. Minjung theologians have put their special emphasis on the collective *han*. Therefore they have distanced themselves from the one-sided psychological approach to *han*. They have rather attempted to interpret *han* from a political viewpoint.⁴⁴⁾ As David Kwang-sun Suh puts it, "the feeling of *han* is not just an individual feeling of repression. This is not just a sickness that can be cured by psychotherapy. This is a collective feeling of the oppressed. This sickness of *han* can be cured only when the total structure of the oppressed society and culture is changed."⁴⁵⁾

Earlier, Hyun Younghak, one of the founders of Korean Minjung theology, attempted a theological look at the mask dance in Korea. He focused on the ability of the *minjung* for critical transcendence and analyzed three aspects of this transcendence. First, the experience of critical transcendence gives the *minjung* the energy to live in the fallen world with humor and without falling into despair. They are sure that the existing world

44) Jae-hoon Lee points out that the political interpretation of *han* is rather short-sighted. He distinguishes the original *han* from the secondary. The former resembles the shadow in the sense of C. G. Jung. The latter is generated under the influences of various factors on the basis of this. But the original *han* remains still unchanged in the layer of unconsciousness, if it is properly cured. Jae-hoon Lee, *A Study of "Han" of the Korean People: A Depth Psychological Contribution to the Understanding of the Concept of "Han" in the Korean Minjung Theology*, Dissertation (New York: Union Theological Seminary, December 1989), 49ff.

45) David Kwang-sun Suh, "Minjung and Theology in Korea: A Biographical Sketch of an Asian Theological Consultation," *Minjung Theology: People as The Subject of History*, 28.

is fallen and rotten, and that they are standing over, against and beyond it. Because there seems to be no exit from it, they bear *han* in their minds. But they must survive. They bear the hardship of the world with good humor and satire. It is the wisdom of the *minjung*. "Without such a wisdom they could not survive as human beings with dignity in a world where their dignity is not recognized."⁴⁶⁾ Second, the experience provides the *minjung* with the courage to fight for change and freedom. Third, the experience of critical transcendence prevents them from self-righteousness. Therefore they can fight against the oppressors as well as against themselves. They can be free from self-righteousness so that they can change the existing world without seeking for revenge. Hyun argued that the experience of critical transcendence is the very basis for cutting off the vicious circle of bloody revenge.

In reliance on Kim Chiha's concept of the "dialectic unification of *han* and *dan*" Suh Namdong has attempted to reformulate what Hyun wanted to speak of with the concept "critical transcendence." *Dan* means literally cutting off. In the personal dimension *dan* is expressed as a resolute self denial, which leads to restraints from comfort and easy life and so on. In the collective dimension *dan* means "cutting the chain of the circulation of *han*." *Dan* is necessary for the transformation of the secular world and secular attachments. *Han* is fearful because it can explode as a destructive energy to create a vicious circle of evil. Therefore, the more *han* is accumulated, the more necessary *dan* is. As Kim Chiha puts it, "on the one hand, there is the fearful *han* which can kill, cause revenge, destroy and hate endlessly, and on the other, there is the repetition of *dan* to suppress the explosion which can break out of the vicious circle, so that *han* can be sublimated as higher spiritual power."⁴⁷⁾ *Dan* can happen because the bearer of *han* has the ability for self transcendence. In the experience of self transcendence he or she is no more tied to *han*, but rather free from it. Whoever indescribably suffers *han* knotted in their mind cannot fall into despair, but attain the tenacious life energy from the bottom. In Korea it is widely said that the *minjung* are like the grassroots which survive, even if they are trodden and trodden. The phrase indicates how strong and

46) Hyun Younghak, "A Theological Look at the Mask Dance in Korea," *Minjung Theology: People as The Subject of History*, 48.

47) Suh Namdong, "Towards a Theology of Han," 61.

tenacious the life energy of the *minjung* is. It is because of the life energy that they can see heaven in the bottom of despair. I think that the *minjung* is privileged to see a light of hope in the darkness.

In his lay 'Chang Il-dam' Kim Chiha describes very movingly how the bottom of despair is turned up to the heaven. "The butcher Chang Il-dam is a wanted man. Having escaped from prison, he hides in a back street where prostitutes live. He happens to see one prostitute giving birth to a child. She is dying. Her body is rotten with venereal disease. She has tuberculosis; and she is also mentally ill. Yet, she is giving birth to a child. At the sight of it, he says, 'Ah, from a rotten body, new life is coming out! It is God who is coming out!' He learns the truth of the world. He kneels down and says, 'Oh, my mother, God is in your womb. God is the very bottom.' And he kisses her feet."⁴⁸⁾

Such a bold imagination is possible, so I think, if one has a firm belief in the tenacious life energy of the *minjung*. It is because of the ability to see the sky in the very bottom that they experience the critical transcendence. They stand over not only against themselves, but also against the fallen world. They fight against the existing world as well as against themselves. I see the possibility of transcendence in the experience of suffering. The experience of suffering provides the *minjung* with sensitivity to the suffering of others and strengthens their capacity to sympathize with others in suffering and to be in solidarity with them. The experience of suffering lets them unite and share hope with one another. They hope together for a new world where the vicious circle of revenge is cut off, and where all people live together in solidarity, justice and great peace.

In order to articulate the priesthood of *han*, I return to the case of the shaman once more. I think that shamans are talented for sympathy and solidarity with others in suffering because they have suffered their possession sickness and in overcoming this sickness they could cut off the tie of *han* and could be cured. I interpret this as the shaman's self-transcendence. It is because of their ability for this self-transcendence that shamans can practice *hanpuri* and the shamans who are cured of this possession sickness and released from *han* can help others to be free from their *han*.

Suh Namdong has introduced Kim Chiha's concept of the "dialectic of

48) Suh Namdong, "Towards a Theology of Han," 62f.

han and *dan*" into a theological reflection on the role of the church and ministry. As Kim puts it, "The church ought to be the comforter to resolve the *han* of the *minjung* and to cut the vicious circle of violence, and to change it into a progressive movement. For this purpose, churches ought to accept limited violence, and ought to be a sanctuary for radicals and fighters who are progressing out of the dark."⁴⁹⁾

In their political hermeneutics of *han*, Korean Minjung theologians could pave the way to transform the energy condensed in *han* to the energy for justice, solidarity and peace. According to them, the priest of *han* should not seek for a false reconciliation and peace in the world where injustice and contradictions prevail. The priest of *han* ought to establish a reconciliation and peace based on justice. Only where the relationship among the people as well as among all the things in the world is straight and right, can there be enjoyed the fullness of life in justice. This is the great peace. The priest of *han* has a vision of a world in unity and solidarity. It is a vision and hope of a life in peace based on justice. Korean Minjung theology will present such a vision and hope to this world where injustice, disorders, conflicts and war dominate.

Conclusion

From the interfaith dialogue between Christianity and shamanism I would like to draw a few consequences. First of all, I suggest that the Christian minister should learn something from the attitude of shamans towards the weak and oppressed. They have "a special predilection for the weak and oppressed" (I. M. Lewis) and are ready to be in solidarity with others in suffering. Of course, the Christian minister need not suffer the initiation sickness like shamans, but they must be trained to attain a spiritual competency to sympathize and to be in solidarity with the little people in suffering.

Second, I think that the church should be earnest to the priesthood of *han*. It is not just the duty of the minister but the priesthood of *han* should be reinterpreted from the perspective of the priesthood of all believers. Only when all believers practice the priesthood of *han* can the church be engaged in the movement to change the existing world radically and to open the

49) Suh Namdong, "Towards a Theology of Han," 61f.

world in justice, solidarity and great peace.

Abstract

In the article I would see into the 'priest of *han*' as a theme which Nam-dong Suh, one of the fathers of the *Minjung* theology, has developed, and suggest how he has made a creative and critical encounter with the shamanistic *hanpuri*.

First, I examine in the first step how influential the shamanism is still in Korean society. In this connection I would investigate briefly how the shamanism is incorporated in Korean Protestantism. Second, I explain *han* and *hanpuri* in the context of Korean shamanism. Third, I analyze how the *Minjung* theology has employed the themes of *han* and *hanpuri*. Lastly, I give some suggestions about a spiritual formation for the ministry.

From the Christian encounter with the shamanism I draw a few consequences. First of all, I suggest that Christian minister should learn something from the attitude of shamans towards the weak and oppressed. They have "a special predilection for the weak and oppressed" (I. M. Lewis) and are ready to be in solidarity with others in suffering. Of course, Christian minister need not to suffer the initiation sickness like shamans, but they must be trained to attain a spiritual competency to sympathize and to be in solidarity with the little people in suffering.

Second, I think that the church should be earnest to the priesthood of *han*. It is not just the duty of the minister. The priesthood of *han* should be reinterpreted from the perspective of the priesthood of all believers.

Key Words

initiation illness, *han*, *hanpuri*, shamanism, Minjung theology, priest, suffering

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