

Dances of *Toch'aebi* and Songs of Exorcism in Cheju Shamanism

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This paper will describe the rite for the exorcism of *toch'aebi* and examine its symbolic significance in the wider social reality of Cheju shamanism. *Toch'aebi* is a stranger deity who visits Cheju randomly and tries to get on good terms with the people. However, this deity afflicts people, particularly women, wearing down their vitality and causing a kind of "madness" (*turida*). The exorcism ritual of *toch'aebi* requires a sacrificial feast of roast pig and several days of dancing by the possessed. For this reason, the exorcism ritual is called a dancing rite, or *ch'unun kut*. It is supposedly *toch'aebi* himself who has the desire to dance. Shaman's songs (*seouje sori*) are used to induce the *toch'aebi*, who is hiding in the patient's body, to dance and reveal his identity. The trance dance and singing are directed toward a dialogical construction of the demonic reality, which entails a romantic entanglement of *toch'aebi* and the possessed. By translating a history of personal suffering into the idiom of love, the shaman's songs develop a particular cultural logic of cure. Through an analysis of curing song texts, along with various modes of performance such as dance and comic play, this paper explores the transformative process in which a particular cultural logic of illness and cure are produced and enacted to reintegrate the patient into the social world. In practice, the analysis addresses the articulation of a personal case of madness that afflicted Sunho, a twenty-one year old female factory worker, whose social values and understanding are reflective of contemporary Korea.

Cheju Society and *Toch'aebi*

Cheju is a volcanic island, located some 80 miles south of the southernmost tip of the Korean peninsula. Traditionally, the native islanders depend on the sea and livestock raising on the slope of

Mt. Halla (approximately 6000 feet above sea level) for their livelihood. However, recent development of the tourist industry and commercial agriculture of tropical fruits have greatly changed the composition of the population and its social life. As tourist development continues to absorb local lands, more native farmers give up their land and move to urban areas or tourist resorts, where they confront newcomers from the mainland. Along with this transition Cheju people feel a crisis of loss of their cultural authenticity. The native islanders and shamans have eagerly participated in a series of government-sponsored revival projects to rebuild village shrines which were destroyed during the village modernization plan of the 1970s. However, their participation seems to be motivated by a rather different interest, that is, regaining their historical autonomy. Their traditional sense of separatism has intensely reasserted itself recently.

Originally Cheju was an independent tribal state, Tamna, ruled by an indigenous king and several princes. Tamna maintained political and cultural autonomy until the early twelfth century when it was politically subjugated by the mainland state, the Koryo dynasty. It lost its name Tamna and was given the name of a local province, Cheju. Its colonial status was exploited by the Chinese Yuan imperial armies when they occupied and directly controlled Cheju as a colony for over one hundred years (1275-1369), using it as a pasture to raise horses for military use. From that time forward Cheju, being a territorial and military border against foreign invasion, has been governed by bureaucrats from Seoul. In addition, this isolated island was used as an open air prison for the persecuted and as a hiding place for political exiles during the Chosun dynasty.

Although objective history portrays Cheju as a land of exiles and their descendants, the natives imagine Cheju as a land of ancestors and their shrines. Shrine deities are revered as the omnipotent rulers over the village land, holding the register of births and deaths of their people. Shamanism has inherited the legacy of indigenous belief in the shrine and shrine deities. People regularly participate in the collective shrine ceremonies, and shamans are active here. The village-appointed priestly shamans, *simbang* in the native term, preside over the shamanic ceremonies at the shrines.

Toch'aebi is also worshipped as a shrine deity at two places in Cheju. However, his divine identity has never been acknowledged in the shamanic pantheon. In the ritual context *toch'aebi* is never

directly called by his name, but by various titles such as the king-deity of a fishing boat (*sonang*), ghostly fire, night goblin, blacksmith deity, and *younggam* (high bureaucratic rank during the Chosun dynasty). In a word, the character of *toch'aebi* combines nonhuman and human nature. Because of this complex and ambiguous character, his identity appears inconsistent in the ritual. For example, in the exorcism ritual for Sunho, *toch'aebi* kept transforming his identity from that of a seductive bachelor to ghosts of her dead father and a fellow worker, and finally to the senile gentry man (*younggam*). Such an inconsistency is not only within the character of *toch'aebi* but, more importantly, conforms to the narrative strategy organized in order to defy the demonic reality. Although *toch'aebi* is invoked as a good-hearted deity and offered a sacrifice of a whole roasted pig, his destiny is that of a demon to be expelled. This paper follows the transformation process in which the exorcism ritual reveals the multiple identities of *toch'aebi*.

A Case of Madness: Sunho

Sunho was only seventeen years old when she left home for an export-industry factory in Seoul five years before. In the factory, Sunho made imitation pearl and bead jewelry. She was also responsible for the education of her four brothers and sisters (ever since her father had died, many years before). Her symptoms of withdrawal started after witnessing the accidental death of a fellow worker in the bathroom of the factory. This shocking experience plunged her into depression and she could not go on working. This state of incapacity and depression continued until she suddenly quit her job and returned home. The cause of Sunho's illness was diagnosed as *toch'aebi* possession. With the financial help of close relatives, Sunho's mother sponsored the exorcism rite.

Seouje Sori and the Trance Dance

The exorcism ritual for Sunho began on the afternoon of March 13 and lasted for four days and nights (until March 17, 1984).¹ *Seouje sori* is literally called *nae-nengkim sori*, the rhythm of overcoming waves. As the patient dances to this rhythm, her dancing may

1. This paper is based on the 18 months of fieldwork from 1984 to 1985 on Cheju shamanism. The dissertation research project was supported by the Social Science Research Council in the U.S. For a more detailed description of Cheju shamanism, see Kim (1989).

overcome the illness, and its suffering as if one were overriding a wave. During the course of the ritual, *seouje sori* was sung thirty times in total with a slight variation of content each time. It is sung in a folk rhythm, intended to inspire the patient's trance dance (*nonyom*). Varying from a minimum of fifteen minutes to a maximum of one hour, each performance of *seouje sori* is counted as a *kut ban-sok* (one performance of *kut*). If the singer *simbang* starts to chant *seouje sori* while beating the hourglass drum, the assistant *simbangs* sitting behind him sing the refrain (*uh ya uh young uh ya*) in imitation of the sound of a boat being rowed. The refrain always follows every rhythmic sequence of 4:4 syllables. (In the verbatim translation, repetitive refrains are omitted except for the first cadence.) The first *seouje sori* started as follows.

Uhgi yocha, let us play together and let our hearts melt to the sound of rowing.

Let us play to the rhythm of *seouje*. Uh ya uh young uh ya!
Uh ya uh young uh ya!

Pitiful maiden, 21-year old! Let us play here together, O pitiful maiden.
(Sunho appears on the dancing floor)

This text exemplifies the standard ordered pattern of *seouje sori*; the singer invites the deities to a dancing party; he sings a song of lament about the patient's life once the patient appears on the floor, and then fosters further fast-tempo trance dancing without the accompaniment of *simbang* singing. It is important for the singer to spur the patient to dance as she watches the dancing gesture. According to the *simbang*, *toch'aebi* hides himself in the deep folds of the body, such as under the armpits or sexual organs. Therefore, once the patient-dancer spreads both her arms horizontally and moves her legs back and forth (which are the typical motions of *toch'aebi* dance), the *simbang* acknowledges it immediately as the definitive sign of *toch'aebi* possession.

"You are a Bachelor, I am a Maiden": Dialogical Discourse

Once the patient shows an eagerness to dance, the *simbang* interprets this changed attitude as the sign of the awakening of *toch'aebi*. Then the *simbang* shifts to a new style of *seouje sori*, expressed as a dialogue between the patient and *toch'aebi*.

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Sorrowful maiden, O miserable maiden.
Due to a kind heart, [you] are possessed.
Due to a good appearance, [you] are possessed.
You are a bachelor, I am a maiden.

Do you intend to live together for over hundred years?
[You] are deeply penetrated to the bones and flesh.
[You] split [my] fine black braids into each individual hair.
Genuinely steadfast by heart is completely divided into pieces.

Where is it gone, my mind? Where is it gone, my mind? Did it go to the deep mountain?
O grievous maiden, was there no sun or moon when you were born?
Come here and play, O sorrowful child! Let us play until the night is over.

The recited story of misfortune and illness is in principle called a narrative myth of *toch'aebi*. In light of its content, however, this mythic narration actually constitutes an autobiographical narrative of the patient's life history, focusing on the emotional depth of her sufferings. Kristeva's notion of "dialogical discourse" (1980)² offers a tool for an insightful interpretation of the dual narratives of the patient and *toch'aebi*. A dialogical mode can be observed here in the alternations of the second person pronoun, *you*, between the patient and *toch'aebi*. Initially the patient as the first person starts to speak to *toch'aebi*; but as *seouje sori* reaches the peak of the trance dance, the subject of the narration is changed into *toch'aebi* himself, and the patient is referred to in the second person, *you*; "*You are a maiden, I am a bachelor.*"

This dialogical discourse publicly reveals *toch'aebi* as a person, in particular, a *bachelor*. It implies that the dancer is now *toch'aebi*, enjoying himself to the rhythm of *seouje sori*. The trance dance at this moment indicates a state of rapture or explicit demonic possession; or a mature dialogism in Bakhtin's sense of a semantic complex implying the dual existence of possessed and possessor, whose relationship remains nonexclusive and yet oppositional (cf. Kristeva 1980:71–72). In the *seouje sori* chanting, the state of rapture is translated into the language of "romantic commitment" (*uitakhada*). When the *simbang* narrates in the farewell song, "As the illness departs, the lover departs too. Let us separate forever!" we can see

2. Kristeva's work departs from the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin who was the first to explore this concept, particularly in *Problèmes de la poétique de Dostoïevski*, Lausanne, L'Âge d'Homme 1970, and in *L'oeuvre de François Rabelais et la culture populaire au Moyen Âge et sous la Renaissance*, Paris, Gallimard 1970.

clearly that *toch'aebi*, the agent of illness, is identified with a lover. This language of romantic commitment not only alludes to the delicacy of treatment of the dancer but also presages the difficulty of their parting. Indeed, their romantic dialogues are constituted by the patient's consistent appeal to *toch'aebi* to leave her forever, taking away her illness.

In spite of the romantic mood permeating the dance floor, the rhetoric of this dialogical discourse does not aim at consummate rapture itself; but at the *rupture* of romantic dialogue between the patient and *toch'aebi* – in other words, the break-up of their romance. The two speakers pursue an exchange of responses until cathartic consummation is achieved. In this state of rapture the mature dialogism only serves to mediate the transformation from its illusory pleasure into the truthful sobriety of its healing. The actual cure of the patient occurs at the point of rupture of the dialogical discourse, annihilating both authors of the narrative: a sickly person and an afflicting agent. Put differently, the healing power of *seouje sori* derives from this destructive aesthetics already anticipated in the dialogue. When the *simbang* sings the farewell song "You are parting as I am parting," the dancer accordingly changes the direction of the dance away from the altar toward the door that is open to the outside, as if *toch'aebi* is ready to leave the maiden.

Taekim Battum: the Rite of Interrogation

The rite of interrogation of the possessing agent, *taekim-battum*, confirms the rupture point of the romance.

- Simbang: Come up here! Tell me the reason why you are dancing.
Quickly! Why are you dancing if you have your own mind?
(The patient begins to cry.) The boat is waiting for you now.
(Striking her back with the branch of willow tree) What is the reason?
- Patient:
- Simbang: Look at this! You are again going to play
wicked, aren't you?
- Patient: I danced simply to get cured (barely audible).
- Simbang: Why did you try to get cured? How can your dancing
help the cure? Where and why?
- Patient: At Majangdong in Seoul.
- Simbang: Majangdong, Seoul. And where?
- Patient: My soul was lost in the bathroom. I also saw the dead person.
- Simbang: Um, you mean the dead person. Then is that seen in
dream or not? Isn't there anything else?

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- Patient: I keep thinking of the dead father.
Simbang: Anyway, is that *kwisin* going to leave or not?
Patient: It will go away.
Simbang: When? Tomorrow or the day after tomorrow?
Patient: Today.

There is an important change that takes place during this interrogation phase. The identity of the possessing spirit or *kwisin* is not referred to by a personal pronoun such as *he* or *you* as had been used in *seouje sori*; instead, it is referred to by non-personal, obscure pronouns in either singular or plural forms such as *it*, *that*, or *they*. The *simbang*-interrogator's strategy is to insult the possessing *kwisin* by means of a threatening tone of voice and gesture, thereby effecting its separation from the patient. Interestingly, the patient tended to give in to the *simbang*'s strategy. When she was asked if *that kwisin* would go away, she answered as the spirit ("I will go"). But gradually she adopted the *simbang*'s usage of the word, *it*, to indicate the spirit. She learned to separate herself from the spirit by objectifying it. By the end she was confident of her return to health as well as reminded of her remaining responsibility toward her family. In this way the patient would be able to restructure her new social self as well as her health. This procedure of *taekim battum* at the end of the last *seouje sori* does not aim at ascertaining the truth of the confessed name of the possessing spirit, but at assuring the patient of eventual cure by revealing in public the demonic identity of illness.

Paradise Imagery in the Farewell Song

Let us stop living together and depart now forever.
Let us play in order to let out the mounted-up resentments of the twenty-one year old.

In this farewell song, the *simbang* suggests the various images of paradise where *toch'aebi* can go. This imagery conjures up a magical, idyllic world of nature and social life where fresh leaves flower eternally (the green mountain, in Korean mythology), where flowers bloom fully (the flower mountain), where three thousand literary men (representing the dominant gentry class during the Yi dynasty) play idly, where ten thousand beggars (representing the hungry, wandering ghosts, *chapkwi*) gather for abundant food, where farming lands are plentiful, where single offspring and children are well cared for.

Then where is this mythical paradise, endowed with the qualities of eternal blessing and plenty? Where does the idle gentry class live, and where is the abundant food to serve the horde of beggars? It is Seoul, a highly capitalist and industrialized society. This is the place where the *taekamsin*, the deity of high officials, lives as the master deity of the factory and the slaughter house near Sunho's factory, and also where *younggam* chases "kind" and pretty women. *Younggam nori*, a comic mask play, is thus performed to dramatize this farewell scene at the end of the ritual.

Ironically, the paradisaical imagery of Seoul testifies to its counter-imagery in the reality of exploitation, poverty, and social alienation where Sunho got her illness. As it was translated into a romance in the *seouje sori*, her madness can be interpreted as the effect of the perverse allurements of a capitalist society. The focal image of this paradise is that of money. In the songs, various images are used to evoke experiences of sorrow in the inner landscape of emotions: for example, *money* (the patient's desire), *running water* (her tears), *burning coal* (her anguish), *boats floating on the sea* (the alienated state of her agony and also its prospective departure), and so on. These images vividly translate to the listeners' minds an otherwise utterly ordinary and ignored existence of sorrow. Out of the various images evoked, Sunho reacted most strongly to the image of money. Sunho burst into tears whenever the singer lamented the muteness of *money*: "Money! Money! You are mute! Following the way of money like the demon, you went to Majang-dong, Songbuk-ku, Seoul. Weep to the end although you have no money!". Money is the symbol of her desire as well as the cause of her madness.

The image of money is also used to conjure up the enchanted world of the carefree life of *toch'aebi*. His sexual desire could be compared metaphorically to the magical power of money reigning in the world of a capitalist city, Seoul. In *seouje sori*, the crystal beads Sunho made in the factory turned themselves into ghosts and "scattered everywhere." And these beads eventually became the brothers and sisters of *younggam* living in Seoul according to the myth of origin of *younggam*. The greed of *younggam*, who asks for the sacrifice of a whole live pig and a portion of all the food and other products of Cheju island to be loaded in a miniature boat, is manifested in the symbolic power of money. Such greed is preceded by, and is a model of, or result of, the greed of the capitalist economy that mercilessly absorbs all the energy of a young

woman. Sunho is trapped and dependent on money, the symbol of capitalism, which leads her into madness when she can not hold onto the proper function assigned by the system. Sunho's romantic love relationship with *younggam* represents this inescapable dependency.

Younggam nori: The Comic Mask Play of Exorcism

Younggam nori is usually performed at the shore. This is because *younggam* coming from the mainland by boat must be greeted there. In this phase, *toch'aebi* reveals his previously disguised identity (as a bachelor, and so on) in the concrete form of *younggam*, wearing a paper mask on his face. In shamanistic tradition, *nori* is a playful dramatization of the shamanic myth. In other words, *nori* is a method to guarantee the efficacy of the ritual by revealing visibly the mythical deity in reality.

According to the myth of origin of *younggam*, this deity originally had seven brothers, the sons of Huh *chungsung*, the three highest officials during the Yi dynasty, who lived in the village of Eating at the foot of Mt. Namsan near Seoul. After they grew up, each brother took charge of one of the great mountains of Korea. The last and seventh brother chose Mt. Halla. The *younggam nori* is performed so that the eldest brother from Seoul, together with his other brothers, come down to Cheju and take away the youngest one living in Cheju, who has possessed the patient. *Younggam nori* is therefore referred to as the play of "indirect exorcism" (Hyun Yong-jun 1966).

The *simbang* suggests a farewell feast before the seven *younggam* leave, offering them their favorite foods such as liquor, pork, and rice cake. Speaking like an old man, he complains that he is too old and has too few teeth to chew all the good meat, suggesting instead that the patient and the audience eat the meat. Following the *simbang's* suggestion, *younggam*, holding a straw miniature boat, invites the patient and the audience to dance together with him to the final rhythm of *souje*.³ Once the dancing is over, *younggam* asks the *simbang* to load the offerings onto the boat. The

3. Kendall (1985) has illustrated the similar phenomenon of possession dance or *mugam*, in the case of a shamanic *kut* in the Kyungki-do area near Seoul. In her case, the dancer is not a specific person as in the case of Sunho; it is the audience. Their possession dance is a momentary dance at a specific point of the ritual process when the audience is possessed by the deities such as *taegamsin*, the generals. But this does not continue day and night for several days solely for the purpose of a cure.

simbang loads what are actually quite small portions of each offering (such as rice, water, or famous products of Cheju like dried mushrooms, shells, and seaweeds) on the boat. Money for sailing is also collected from the patient and the audience, and loaded. Once the boat is filled, *younggam* carries it on his shoulder while announcing his farewell, "We are parting, let us go sailing by boat!" As the lover *younggam* leaves the altar, the illness should leave the patient. This is the reason why the *younggam* says *us* in plural. The boat sails off by itself from the shore. The *Ch'unun kut* ends.

The basic premise of the exorcism ritual described above is that *toch'aebi* possession is a bodily history of personal suffering and corruptive capitalism, and its cure is best achieved through the reworking and transforming of that history. The case history of Sunho showed how this bodily history was enacted to re-construct the demonic reality and then deconstruct its power through the media of trance dance and songs. However, the symbolic meaning of this exorcism rite is grounded on the much broader scheme of an articulation of colonial history and the cognitive structure of Cheju shamanism; the opposition between the indigenous and the outside intruder from the mainland, between the island and the sea, between the natives and the governors, between the divine (shrine deity) and the demonic (*toch'aebi*), and between the rich and the poor. All these oppositions are personified in the pair of the possessed human subject and the demonic possessor. *Ch'unun kut* aims at clarifying the cause of this paired relationship. This paper focuses on the specific problem of this oppositional scheme of articulation: how it is expressed in the mode of a romantic dialogue between the *toch'aebi* and the mad patient. It is more concerned with the question of the emotional and cognitive levels of ritual performance than with the technique of efficacy.

The irony in the exorcism ritual lies in the fact that the sorrow of madness is juxtaposed with a playful drama of romance within a single ritual context. As we have seen in the above shamanic recitation of the personal misery of Sunho, there is a certain mode of popular perception and expression of reality, i.e. the tragic one. In Korean shamanism the tragic sense of life is generally expressed in the notion of *han* or *wonhan*, an emotion of entangled resentment and unrequited grudge. This particular emotion is usually attributed to the spirits of the dead who have died by accident or without receiving proper funeral rites (Kendall 1981). *Wonhan* tends to

accumulate over a long period of time and then to take deep seat in the heart. Until it is heard and unraveled, this emotional state of *wonhan* will remain intact. Thus the shaman defines the healing ritual as *won-puri*, which means "the interpreting and unraveling of a grudge."

In the case of the exorcism ritual of *toch'aebi*, the ironical juxtaposition of a lamentful life story with a romantic dialogue serves as a narrative strategy to redeem unrequited resentments. The consummation of the romance between the patient and *toch'aebi* brings the deeply alienated pain of the past into recognition on the surface: at this point, healing begins. In the process of its intense commitment, this romance contributes to the construction of social imagery of *wonhan* in the present. Repetitively narrated and thus strengthened throughout the *seouje sori*, the symbolic association of *wonhan* with the images of 'polluted' rice and 'rotten' water, 'mute' money, burning coal without steam, and a boat floating on the sea, suggests the popular aesthetics of healing. As the patient returns to her 'familiar' water and rice at home, she can be cured. The (once mute) money can speak, curing her; once more she can work and help in her siblings' education. Such a dynamic of *wonhan* and *won-puri* is the principle of efficacy of the exorcism ritual. As Sunho goes through the exorcism rite, the resentments of the Cheju people can be repaid in a symbolic way that transgresses the existing hegemonic order of internally colonial (which means real at least to the separatist islanders) and capitalist system through a parody of exorcism.

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